

EASTERN CHURCHES NEWS - LETTER

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THE PROSPECT FOR 1955

For a society such as ours, which is concerned not with official relations and schemes but rather with what may be called the spade-work of Christian reunion, the present time abounds in opportunity. There has, on the one hand, been a phenomenal increase within the last ten years in the number of Orthodox communities dispersed throughout the western world; while, on the other, the liturgical movement and a renewed preoccupation with patristic studies have quickened the interest of many a western pastor and theologian in a Church which has manifestly never ceased to live by the liturgy. It has, however, long been evident that the Association is at present sadly ill-equipped for grasping new opportunities. We have had during the past year to face a grave financial crisis, and it is plain that we must set our house in order without delay if we are not to become a society which celebrates an annual festival but shows nothing of that readiness to tread new and unfamiliar paths which so notably characterised its early years.

The first of several measures which we hope will begin to bear fruit during 1955 concerns the terms of membership, which had remained unchanged since the first decade of the century and were unnecessarily complicated. They have been drastically simplified. As from this year *all* members will be asked to pay an annual subscription of ten shillings, due on January 1st: though none will be excluded from membership solely on account of inability to pay this amount, while it is hoped that those who can afford to give more will do so. *All* members of the Association will receive the quarterly *News-Letter*, which takes the place of the *Broadsheet*. We have decided with great reluctance that publication of the *Christian East* must for the present be suspended. I would ask all those who have subscribed to one of our periodicals but who have never become members of the Association to

complete the enclosed form of application for membership.

There is at present a vigorous local branch of the Association in Ireland. I hope that 1955 may see the formation of other local branches—particularly in English towns which have acquired a permanent Orthodox community. A list of such towns, together with the addresses of Orthodox clergy and places of worship, will be published in the April issue of the *News-Letter*.

I should be glad to hear from any members of the Association who would be interested in taking part in a small and informal conference in Greece in the spring or early summer of 1956. Arrangements are as yet very tentative, and it would be of considerable help if I could have some idea of the number of those wishing to take part. Every effort will be made to keep the cost as low as possible.

Another matter which will be occupying our attention during the next few months is that of relations between the Association and the Fellowship of SS. Alban and Sergius. There is a widespread feeling that much closer collaboration between the two societies is urgently desirable, and a small committee will shortly be appointed to make specific recommendations. Here, as in other matters, I believe the time is ripe for a new and positive approach to the problems which face us, and I would ask the prayers of all our readers that the Association may again become an effective instrument for the reintegration of Christ's people.

PETER HAMMOND

THE RUSSIAN CHURCH AND THE COLONISATION OF RUSSIA

About the year 1300 a great part of European Russia still awaited the axe and the plough of the colonist. The centre of gravity of Russian life lay somewhere near Moscow, but the land was divided among many bucolic princelings all of whom were prostrate before the Tartar power. The Church alone expressed national unity and it was to the interest of the Church to strengthen every focus of that unity, for the Church alone owned land all over Russia and the Church was the biggest trader of the age.

The strength of religious influences is always open to doubt. Russia is large and evangelisation was slow; some of the clergy were corrupt and oppressive; the old Slavonic gods were tenacious of life; they were not quite dead in the last century; formal conversation was not always accompanied by any adequate grounding in the new faith, so that old beliefs and superstitions might survive after baptism.

But when every allowance is made, the Russian Church

in the fourteenth century was a power in the land. It brought many thousands to Christ; it helped to civilise the great mass of half-believers, and those of the clergy who led truly Christian lives were deeply respected and their teaching was held in veneration. The greatest of these leaders was St. Sergius of Radonezh, a humble monk who became a great national figure and was able to compose the feuds of princes by the force of his holiness, and to give armies courage in their hour of need.

In those days many Russian monks worked the land to keep themselves alive and their efforts to find ever more remote 'wildernesses,' in which to cultivate the land and lead a godly life produced a great movement of colonisation. Some man of God, such as St. Sergius, would seek out an unknown corner of some forest where he could fend for himself with perhaps one or two chosen companions. Unremitting labour in that healthy climate would give tone to his body, and prayer would direct his thoughts and feelings. Before long other kindred spirits would discover the secret hiding place and join the little community, which would soon grow into a small monastery of simple-minded, laborious monks.

At this stage peasants and their families would begin to settle nearby in order to enjoy the protection of the monastery. Little by little the world obtruded upon the hermits' life and the monastery came to enjoy a worldly eminence. The peasants, who had settled nearby, almost inevitably became the tenants of the monks who forgot their former industry when there were others to work for them.

At this point some pure, bold spirit among the monks would feel himself called on to seek out some new 'wilderness' yet further from the habitations of men, and the cycle would begin once more. This process, repeated hundreds of times in the later middle ages, brought the Russian faith and the families of hardy Russian peasants to the shores of the White Sea and to the approaches of the Ural mountains.

But curiously, the purest efforts of the Russian Church to escape from the world involved the Church even more closely in the affairs of the world, as each new monastery grew to be a centre of wealth and power. At last the Russian Church and Russian society became to closely intertwined that to many Russians they seemed to be one and the same.

By about 1500 Muscovy had become a great power, uniting all Great Russia under one ruler, and in these new circumstances the Russian Church was confronted with a new form of what we should now call the problem of the Christian frontier. Should Christians remain in the world, like leaven in bread, even if this means compromise with the forces of

this world, or should they withdraw into holy communities of men and women, who may still hope to influence the world by their prayers and their example?

The growing point of church life was the network of monasteries throughout the land, and with each generation the monks had become more deeply involved in landowning and trade. They provided the best educated part of the ruling class and had become a necessary prop to a powerful state. The Church preached humane behaviour to slaves and serfs, but it accepted serfdom and slavery as institutions. Some of the best monks, seeing that the Church was involved in much evil, tried to break free and contended that religious houses should own no property. They were opposed by men of sincerity who maintained that monasteries must hold property in order to relieve poverty and misfortune, and that they must be comfortable enough to attract men of good family so that the state, as well as the Church, might be served by a never failing stream of well born and educated monks. The issue seemed in doubt, but with support from the Tsar the 'possessors' prevailed in the end, and in so doing they bound the Church to the fortunes of Tsarism. Four hundred years later the Russian Church paid a bitter price for its political connections. But had the Church remained aloof we should have criticised her rightly for her lack of care for things which concerned the happiness of ordinary men and women.

JOHN LAWRENCE

THE ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF THE ASSOCIATION

The 90th Annual Festival of the Association was celebrated on Thursday, November 4th, 1954. The Bishop of London presided at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in the Church of St. Thomas, Regent Street, at noon. The Metropolitan of Thyateira was also present attended by Father James Virvos, who read the Epistle in Greek. The Mass was sung to Vaughan Williams' setting in D minor. The congregation then crossed Soho to St. Anne's House in Dean Street, where lunch was provided, followed by the Annual General Meeting. The General Secretary presented a report on his first year of office, the substance of which is embodied in this issue of the *News-Letter*. After the business had been dispatched, Brother George Every, S.S.M., read a paper entitled *Reflections on a pilgrimage to Greece and the Holy Land*.

A CONFERENCE IN LONDON

During the summer of 1954 the Association organised a one-day conference on the subject of *The Shape of the*

Ministry. The proceedings began with a Sung Mass at the Church of St. Thomas, Regent Street, and after lunch at St. Anne's House three speakers—two Anglican and one Orthodox—dealt with various aspects of the subject. The Revd Peter Hammond, after some general reflections on the relevance of the re-discovery of Eastern Christendom to our own problems, described the pattern of the Church's ministry to be discerned in a rural diocese of Greece. The Revd Patrick McLaughlin and the Revd Antony Bloom proceeded to consider the relevance of this pattern to the contemporary western situation—the first speaker in terms of the Church of England, the second of the Orthodox diaspora. A lively discussion followed. The conference was extremely well supported: those present included many of the Orthodox clergy in London and Oxford—Greek, Russian, Rumanian and Serbian. It is planned to arrange two or three similar conferences during the course of 1955.

THE KHRUSHCHEV DECREE

On November 11th, 1954, a decree of the Soviet Government entitled "Concerning Mistakes in Anti-religious Propaganda" was published in a prominent place in the official newspaper *Pravda*. This decree is considered by many as the most important official pronouncement about religion in Russia since the war, and announces with a degree of official authority and public prominence a new government attitude towards religion and the Church in Russia. It is signed by M. Khrushchev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, a position formerly occupied by the late Marshal Stalin. M. Khrushchev has hitherto been regarded as mainly responsible for the large-scale anti-religious campaign that was launched in *Pravda* in July of 1954. It would appear that the nation-wide activities against religion at that time have had unexpected repercussions, both in excesses committed thereafter, and also in the revelation of the strength of religion among Russians who were believed to be little more than out-dated remnants of a dying allegiance.

The importance of the decree is mainly in its implications. For the first time since the October Revolution, the Church and its clergy are specifically mentioned, and their existence recognised. It admits that a believing Christian can be a good citizen; that even in capitalist countries some members of the clergy may be commendable people, even from a Soviet point of view. Further, there is a recognition in the decree that that religion is an ideology, to be contrasted with the materialistic ideology of official Communism, however mistaken or belonging to an out-worn world-view.

PATRIARCH ALEXIS RECEIVED IN AUDIENCE BY MALENKOV

Pravda for December 12th, 1954, carried this notice on its front page: "On the 11th of December the President of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, G. M. Malenkov, received in audience the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Alexis. Present at the audience was the representative of the Council for Orthodox Church Affairs attached to the Council of Ministers of the USSR, G. S. Karpov."

The capital importance of this event is emphasised by the manner in which it was presented in the Soviet press. Hitherto personal notes of this sort have appeared only in *Izvestia*, a newspaper, not officially a Party organ. This was the case when Patriarch Sergius was received by Stalin, during the war, the only event comparable with this meeting of Malenkov and Patriarch Alexis. On the day following, *Komsomolskaja Pravda* (the young Communist organ) reprinted the notice in the same corner of its front page. This prominent notice in the two Central Party organs is unprecedented in Soviet history. The notice appeared in all other central Soviet papers as well.

Thus far no other information about the meeting save the bare statement of fact has been published, and only the future will reveal its full significance. That it marks a new stage in Church-Government relationships is almost certain. When Patriarch Sergius was received by Stalin it was the beginning of a new and tolerant attitude by the Government towards the Orthodox Church. To fight a war, Stalin had to have the backing of the Church, and to secure it he promised to create the relatively favourable atmosphere in which the Church organisation has so greatly developed during the past decade. Many observers think that the new meeting between Patriarch and Premier must presage important new developments in this sphere.

The chronology in this connection is interesting. The Patriarch's reception by Malenkov took place just a month after the publication of the Central Committee's decree announcing new official attitudes towards the Church. But on the day before the audience *Izvestia* published a statement by the Patriarch entitled "The Voice of the Russian Church." This declaration states that it is necessary to take a stand at a moment when "hopes of peaceful co-existence among the nations are clouded by the sinister shadow of the London and Paris accords which aim at re-arming Germany to the teeth."

"The Russian Orthodox Church, which guards and transmits to its faithful the great heritage of Christ the Saviour,

is always ready to proclaim peace. This is why the Russian Orthodox Church with its thousand years of experience in proclaiming and defending peace, blesses the peaceful enthusiasm of the participants of the Moscow Conference of eight European countries, and is determined to support the action of its people to protect themselves against aggression."

This declaration was made during the Moscow Conference of Satellite states. Rarely, if ever, has the Russian Orthodox Church made a pronouncement so closely connected with the diplomatic procedures of the Soviet Government. Did this have any casual relationship with the Khrushchev decree or with the reception by Malenkov the following day? The next few weeks should bring some clarity on these points. Incidentally, one wonders whether *Izvestia* has ever before printed a testimonial, even self-awarded, to the Church's "one thousand years of experience in guarding the heritage of Christ the Saviour."

A PAN-ORTHODOX LITURGY

On December 27th, 1954, a Pan-Orthodox Divine Liturgy was celebrated at the Russian Orthodox Church of St. Philip, Buckingham Palace Road, by the Orthodox President of the Association, the Metropolitan Athenagoras of Thyateira, and representatives of the other Orthodox Churches in Great Britain. Archbishop Athenagoras was assisted by Bishop Matthew of the Polish Orthodox Church, Bishop Nicodemus and Father George Chermeteff of the Russian Orthodox Church, Father James Virvos, Dean of the Greek Cathedral, Father A. Gramartins of the Latvian Orthodox Church, Father N. Hindo of the Estonian Orthodox Church, Father F. M. Galdau of the Rumanian Orthodox Church, and Father Miloye Nikolic of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Bishop of Gibraltar, Dr. F. M. T. Craske, preached at the Liturgy and several Anglican clergy were present, amongst them the Dean of Westminster, who shared a place of honour with the Bishop of Gibraltar. The responses were sung by a Russian choir.

LAMBETH PALACE LIBRARY

Dr. Dodwell, the Librarian of Lambeth Palace, is anxious to make good the severe losses sustained during the war, and, in particular, to build up a first-class reference library which can be used by those working on every aspect of Christian unity. The Association has already lent many of its more valuable books to the library in order that they may be more readily accessible, and we would commend this matter to our readers. Dr. Dodwell would be grateful

for offers of books on Patristics (especially Migne), Church History, Church Relations and Foreign Churches, Palaeography and Bibliography; but books should not be sent without first writing to him.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS IN LONDON

Saturday, February 19th

The Orthodox Liturgy will be sung in English at the Church of St. Thomas, Regent Street, at 10.30 a.m.

The Revd Austin Oakley will read a paper entitled *The Sign of the Temple in the Old and New Testaments* at 3 p.m. at St. Basil's House, 52 Ladbroke Grove.

Thursday, March 10th

A. & E. C. A. meeting at St. Anne's House, 57 Dean Street, W.1, at 6.30 p.m. The Revd Gordon Phillips, Church of England Chaplain to the University of London, will speak on *Word and Sacrament: some reflections on practical experiments*. Supper will be available at a charge of 2/-. Please make a note of this date, as individual notices will *not* be sent out.

Saturday, March 19th

Dom Bede Winslow, Editor of the *Eastern Churches Quarterly*, will speak on the Roman Catholic conception of priesthood at 3 p.m. at St. Basil's House.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF SS. ALBAN AND SERGIUS

The Annual Conference will again be held at St. Helen's School, Abingdon, this year from July 30th until August 15th. The general subject of the conference will be *The Communion of Saints*. For details apply to the Secretary, St. Basil's House, 52 Ladbroke Grove, London, W.11.

THE ANGLICAN AND EASTERN CHURCHES ASSOCIATION was founded in 1864.

The normal annual subscription is 10s., and members may compound as life members by a donation of not less than 10 guineas.

All communications should be addressed to *The General Secretary, A. & E. C. A., St. Anne's House, 57 Dean Street, London, W.1*. Bankers' Orders should be sent to Barclay's Bank Ltd., 208 Regent Street, W.1.