

EASTERN CHURCHES NEWS - LETTER

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Anglican and Eastern Churches Association*

*The General Committee does not hold itself responsible for every
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A PRAYER

O God, the unsearchable abyss of peace,
The ineffable sea of love, fountain of blessings;
Who sendest peace to those who receive it;
Open to us this day the ocean of Thy love;
Refresh us with plenteous streams
From the riches of Thy grace and
Thy love of Man.
Make us children of quietness and heirs of peace,
Kindle in us the fire of Thy love;
Sow in us Thy holy fear;
Bind us to thee and one another
In the one firm bond of unity.
Through Jesus Christ Our Lord,
Amen.

(from the Syrian Clementine Liturgy)

THE MORE RECENT ATTITUDE OF THE SOVIET REPUBLICS TO RELIGION

An intensification of hostility to religion whether Christian or Mahometan is noticeable in the Soviet Press at the present time, and in particular in material recently published by the State Publishing House for Political Literature. It is not necessary to say that this attitude is nothing new. The good Communist must shed any affiliation with religious belief of any kind, and believe that modern man must be made self-sufficient and without any reliance on an unseen world. What the Christian regards as the supernatural has not existence for him, and can only be reactionary and superstitious. The earlier attitude of direct persecution and suppression by force has, however, been abandoned and emphasis on scientific teaching with its insistence on the rule of cause and effect is now the main weapon. It is easy to understand, however, that in dealing with a mainly peasant population of gigantic proportions, the task of indoctrinating is no easy one. Local customs and feasts immemorial attitudes towards disease and the phenomena of nature impregnated for the last thousand

years by religious interpretation, will not yield easily to so-called natural explanations. Above all, the nostalgia for the old Holy Russia cannot be conjured away. We see the same situation in early revolutionary France, and the resulting impiety and anti-clericalism that a generation of the suppression of religion has left in that country to this day. In a certain sense also post-Reformation efforts in this country in the sixteenth century, show certain surprising parallels: the cutting down of Saints' days observance, the drive against the whole mediaeval system so deeply imbedded in the popular religion, the dissolution of the religious houses, the destruction of the national shrines and pilgrimages to them. In Tudor England, as in Russia today, it was despotic force exerted from above that sought to deprive the people of their old ways, with much resulting loss of belief and reversion to paganism. Yet, with this difference: Communism has all the marks of a religious system of its own, that presents itself as a rival interpretation of the whole of life, and whereas Christianity in this country has always been mainly urban in its strength, with those intractable difficulties that every incumbent of a rural parish is still faced with, Russia may well be differently articulated, and the overwhelming strength of the peasant and his attachment to old ways, far more deeply rooted.

So the Communist government sets itself to its task: the ignoring of religious holidays, the eradication of so-called 'sorcery', that is to say, the use of holy wafer, holy springs, relics, in sickness and disease, the influence of the priest in exhortation and religious teaching. The present malaise is almost certainly due to the comparative failure of scientific and atheistic propaganda, which allows little for the emotional power of the old religion, and is frequently very un-imaginative in its presentation of this Communist alternative. It remains to be seen what new efforts will be made, since it regards its work so far as inadequate. It should be noted that while Orthodoxy is the main problem, Old Believers and Baptists, as well as large communities of Moslems are necessarily included. While the task is almost certainly beyond the scope of government action, and will fail eventually, terrible spiritual havoc and destruction is bound to result. In the forty years of Soviet domination

that Europe has seen since 1917 this has already taken place. But we believe in the indestructible power of the Church of God, and our prayers must be for our Christian brethren in their long battle, whatever form their warfare takes.

30th JANUARY, 1649

The commemoration of the execution of King Charles I on the morning of 30th January 1649, no longer appears in our Anglican calendar with a special collect, epistle, and Gospel. This does not mean that many devout church-people do not commemorate this crucial event in this history of England, of the English Church, and of the course of affairs in Europe. Just as the violent events of the French Revolution and the beheading of their King and Queen directly foreshadows in more ways than one modern Communist revolutions with violence and bloodshed, so the deep-going effects of an event that caused universal horror throughout this country has made it possible for the British Isles still to have its crowned and anointed sovereign, and indeed to be alone in Europe to anoint and crown its monarch. Indeed the death of King Charles I made this unique state of affairs possible, made the return of the monarchy inevitable, and consecrated the deepest feelings of the English people in the continuation of the throne. The execution of Archbishop Laud, the cruel and barbarous treatment of Anglican clergy by the Commonwealth, many of whom were rounded up and sold into slavery in the West Indies and elsewhere, established the Anglican church in a way and to a depth which no legislation, nor terms of settlement could have done. It is strange to trace the development of Tudor despotism into the Divine Right of Kings as held so tenaciously by the Stuart dynasty, but behind the dangerous doctrine that the king can do no wrong lies a deep religious faith in the sovereign as dedicated and consecrated, and married to his people. The groan of horror when King Charles's severed head was held up to the sight of the people drowned the shouts of the soldiers, and the short-lived triumph of the regicides. Our church has indeed its martyrs, and during the period of the Commonwealth the

proscribed religion was sedulously kept alive by such zealous men as Bishop Skinner of Oxford, and a supply of clergy provided for the better days that were surely ahead.

NEWS

GREECE:

On the important question of the relations of the Orthodox Church with the World Council of Churches, there has been profound cleavage of opinion among the members of the Hierarchy of the Church of Greece on this matter. Finally it was decided by a large majority, that the Church of Greece should persist in its policy adopted two years ago of not being represented at the assemblies of the World Council by members of the Hierarchy or other ecclesiastics but that professors belonging to the Schools of Theology of Athens and Salonica Universities should be free to attend as best able to expound points of Orthodox dogma and the Orthodox Church's attitude towards other subjects.

The above decision was arrived at on the ground that many members of Protestant Churches participating at the assemblies of the World Council of Churches do not accept the doctrine of the Trinity and that this makes its difficult for representatives of the Orthodox Church to take part.

ANTIOCH:

THE NEW PATRIARCH OF ANTIOCH

The Metropolitan of Tyre and Sidon Theodoseos has been elected Patriarch of Antioch, and we ask for the prayers of the Association for him in his succession to this ancient See and the difficulties that lie before him, in one of the most troubled areas of the Middle East at this time. It is not necessary to remind readers that the pre-eminence of the Patriarchate of Antioch has always been its honour as a Petrine See, and in early Christian days the Bishopric of the great and splendid city of Antioch, from which so much influence flowed to Constantinople and Asia Minor, one of whose most illustrious sons was St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople. The new Patriarch was educated

at the University of Athens and completed his studies on Mount Athos, and has long been a source and centre of strength and wisdom to the Orthodox Church. In 1930 he represented the Patriarchate of Antioch at the Lambeth Conference.

THE ELECTION OF POPE JOHN XXIII TO THE PAPACY

It is a matter of close interest to all who are working for Christian unity that the Roman Catholic Church has a newly elected head who is deeply interested at first hand in the problems of reunion. His present Holiness during his diplomatic career was Delegate Apostolic in Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece. During that period he was deeply interested in the life and worship of the Holy Orthodox Church. While in Turkey he initiated friendly relations with the Oecumenical Patriarchate which were as much of an innovation as many of his acts since his coming to the throne. Those who know him (and the editor had that privilege for a considerable number of years while he was in Turkey) realize what a human, kindly and pastoral head the great Roman Catholic communion now has. His fresh interest in every kind of human life, his caring for people of whatever rank or station, his benevolence, and the ripe experience of so many years in contact not merely with Europeans, but the people of the Balkans, makes one hope that this great servant of God will be enabled to set forward the cause of reunion in Christ Whom, in his own faith, he represents to the millions of his co-religionists.

AT HOME:

Readers of the News Letter have already had a notice sent to them with reference to a projected visit to Greece, which is being organised in conjunction with the fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, for Orthodox Easter this year by Inter-Church Travel. Any member who has not been notified and is interested should communicate with the General Secretary at 25, Talbot Road, W.2.

A small book has been issued by Messrs. Mowbray and Co. Ltd., 4/6, which is a study of "The Orthodox Liturgy" by our Chairman, the Revd. Austin Oakley. It appears in a new series of studies in Eucharistic Faith and Practice, and should be of interest to members of the Association. A review of it will appear in due course.

SECRETARY'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. SUBSCRIPTIONS. Many members have not paid their subscriptions for some considerable time. Nevertheless the News Letter has been sent to them, and we are reluctant to delete their names from our list. To all whom it may concern, please let us have your subscription as soon as you can, and so help us to maintain our work.

2. LOCAL MEETINGS. The Association is willing to provide speakers on Eastern Christendom for both large and small groups of people — of parishes or societies. For information apply to the General Secretary.

3. NEWS LETTER. By an unfortunate oversight, we are completely 'out' of No. 5 of the News Letter — for May 1956. If any members still have this copy, and have no special further use for it, would they kindly send it to the Secretary?

THE ANGLICAN AND EASTERN CHURCHES ASSOCIATION, which was founded in 1864, exists to unite members of the Anglican and Eastern Orthodox Churches for the following objects:

To promote mutual knowledge, sympathy and intercourse.

To encourage the study of Eastern Christendom.

To pray and work for the restoration of the visible unity of the Church.

The normal annual subscription is 10/-, but 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 pay more will do so. All members are entitled to receive the *Eastern Churches News-Letter*, which is published quarterly.

Please note that all correspondence, subscriptions, etc., should be addressed to the Reverend H. R. Stringer, St. Stephen's Vicarage, 25, Talbot Road, London, W.2.