

EASTERN CHURCHES NEWS - LETTER

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Anglican and Eastern Churches Association*

*The General Committee does not hold itself responsible for every
expression of opinion in the News-Letter*

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CONTENTS:

1. General News.
2. The Lambeth Conference.
3. English Spirituality — Dame Julian of Norwich.
4. Worship, Liturgy and Belief.

GENERAL NEWS

AT HOME:

The General Secretary has arranged a tea and Conversation for the Association at 4.45 p.m. on **Monday, June 30th**, at the **Church House Restaurant in Great Smith Street** to meet visitors to the Lambeth Conference and our friends. Notices will be sent to members later.

The General Secretary has also been able to fulfil in May of this year a great desire, many times postponed, of visiting Athens and Greece. The Editor has had several letters from him, and the next issue of the News-Letter will contain his account of his visit. We hope that he will be able to make many contacts, and strengthen our ties with the Church of Greece and its vigorous life.

RUSSIA:

During the month of May this year a Conference of bishops and clergy representative of the Orthodox world is being held in Moscow, at the invitation of the Patriarch of All the Russias. It is in commemoration of the forty years of the restored Patriarchate in Russia. The Ecumenical Throne is being represented by Archbishop Athenagoras of Thyateira and his suffragan the Bishop of Melita.

GREECE:

The Archdiocese of Athens announces a division of the diocese into fifteen sections with a senior priest over each to supervise the activities of the clergy and the work of the parishes. The Archbishop has further made it necessary for his regular clergy (as distinguished from the married parish priests) to learn to speak foreign languages and undertake courses in economic and scientific knowledge. Thus in the capital, a determined effort is being made to meet the needs of modern life.

THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE 1958

The Bishop of Peterborough, in an article in the "Official Year Book of the Church of England," gives the following important information with regard to the coming Lambeth Conference:

The first Conference was called together ninety-one years ago in 1867, and since then the Conferences have taken place about every ten years. The convener is always the Archbishop of Canterbury. The results of the deliberations of the bishops have no legal force as such for the Church, but are rather propositions that each bishop is free to apply in his own diocese, coming out of the communication of the fruits of the Episcopate's experience of local problems and special knowledge. Along with the invitations that are sent by the Archbishop, Metropolitans and heads of Provinces are invited to send their own reports and their comments on the agenda of the Conference. There is usually a general subject of the whole Conference. In 1948 it was "The Christian Doctrine of Man." This year it is "The Unity of the Church and the Church Universal" that will figure most prominently in the bishop's debates, but "Progress in the Anglican Communion," "The Pacification of Conflicts Among and Within the Nations" and "The Family in the Modern Society" are also to be debated. The Conference begins with a plenary Conference, and then in five commissions according to the agenda. The closing work of the Conference is again in plenary assembly, when the Commissions' reports are discussed and the resolutions of the Conference framed. It is usual for the Lambeth Conference to issue a "Message to the World" which summarises the more important resolutions.

This in outline is the Conference that will take place this summer. It is important for us as an Association to pray for all those who are taking part, knowing that much will be said and done that is of direct bearing on those problems of the unity of the Church that are our primary concern.

ENGLISH SPIRITUALITY — DAME JULIAN OF NORWICH

Five hundred and eighty-five years ago, on a Sunday morning in May, an unknown anchoress of the already ancient church of St. Julian, outside Norwich, had a series of revelations or 'shewings' of Our Lord Jesus Christ. These she recorded and commented on during the next twenty years. This record of mediæval piety has come down to us intact,

and all of the well-known books of England between the twelfth and fourteenth century is the most typical not only of the temper and climate of the period, but of English piety and spirituality.

It seems that before the Dissolution of the Monasteries by Henry VIII, there were many solitaires, both men and women, in this country. They were almost always attached to some Order and took their vows in it. Sometimes two or three lived together. Their dwelling was usually built on to a parish church and consisted of two or three rooms, since they had attendants, both for protection and service. They were often, as in Dame Julian's case, to be found on the outskirts of towns. One anchorite of especial renown and honour, lived in St. Benedict's Chapel in Westminster Abbey, where the remains of his cell is still to be seen. There was a steady succession of such enclosed people, one succeeding the other on death. In the Abbey, one of the special duties of the anchorite was to advise, prepare and shrive the sovereign, who spent the night in vigil before his solemn anointing and coronation on the following morning.

It is clear that this way of life was of the earliest days of the Church, the direct descendant of the hermits and solitaires of Egypt and Palestine and Thrace; those men and women who left all and went into the desert, the example of whose lives were frequently the inspiration and the conversion of those still living in the world. They cleansed the ancient world of the nightmares and chimeras of pagan times, and prepared the way for a Christian civilisation. But here, in cool, green England, their asceticism, although real, was of a quieter and more temperate kind, far removed from the fiery ordeals of the 'holy men' of the third and fourth centuries in Mediterranean lands who played such an important part in the popular religion of their day. The English recluse was taught to be careful about both appropriate food and clothing, to be clean in body, in a day too when cleanliness was not greatly set store by.

Such a person was Dame Julian, whose own name and family we know nothing of, but of whose outward circumstances we can reconstruct much. The anchorite's cell usually had three windows, one giving on to the church, where

services could be followed, the other communicating with the attendants, and a third, normally curtained, to which those who sought spiritual advice and counsel could come. In the revival of spiritual life in the traditional ways of the Church, it may be legitimately hoped that in a world of noise distraction and confusion, such lives may again begin to be lived, and serve the whole Church, as they have done in the past.

The manner of these revelations, of which Dame Julian had sixteen, is of necessity of her time, for ten of them concern the Passion of Our Lord, and the last six only, of the triumph of Christ in His Holy Mother and in the fruits of His redemption, in His everlasting rule in the Christian soul, and in the revelation of the Blessed Trinity. In contrast with Byzantine piety of the same age (if indeed a parallel in time of this kind is possible), the Rood, the Crucifix and the Passion was becoming increasingly prominent, whereas in the fourteenth century mosaics of St. Saviour in Chora in Constantinople, for example, there is no delineation of the Crucifixion. For the East, the glory of the Resurrection, the New Life and the deification of Man, was central; although the worship of the Orthodox Church on Good Friday in its intensity and realism, is a continual reminder that the contrast must not be made too sweeping or clear-cut.

What is so refreshing is the directness in the writings of this humble woman, who nevertheless was undoubtedly greatly influenced by traditional mysticism from Plato onwards, through the Neo-platonists, St. Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius the Areopagite, down to Dun Scotus and Eckhart of her nearer time. She makes few quotations even from Holy Scripture. She gives no stated rules for the ascetic life, nor deals directly with the great argument of the essential Deity or the Incomprehensibility of God. Yet her 'shewings' have the mark and authority of truth and reality and the freshness of the spiritual insight given her.

It would be difficult in a slight article such as this to give an adequate summary of her teaching. She had prayed, if it should be God's will, to feel Christ's dying pains that she might learn the divine pity and compassion for man. Yet the 'Shewing' of those pains introduced and accompanied

the revelation of God's Love, God's Goodness or Active Love. And this led her to a deep experience of joy — and that joy to the inner sight of the Blessed Trinity, "the joy that is in the blissful Trinity by reason of the Passion of Christ, the Father willing all, the Son working all, the Holy Ghost confirming all." And so she comes to her great saying "Sin is behoveable, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

WORSHIP, LITURGY AND BELIEF

To most of us these naturally belong to each other, are thought of together. Yet it has not always been so, at any rate among English people. Public worship at all times implies a way and method of worshipping, and the rites of the Church need the appropriate ceremonial to express them. The importance of the externals of public worship was for long overlooked in this country. This may be justly said to arise from a faulty and inadequate philosophy of life which blinded us to the great practical results of what is called ceremonial. The 'beauty of holiness' was thought of in an entirely personal and interior way, and the fact ignored that our human nature is such that both body and soul must be actively engaged in worship, because of the intimate dependence of each upon the other, and because of the oneness of the human personality which partakes of both the physical and the spiritual. Yet within the last fifty years there has been a veritable revolution in the seemliness, order and beauty of public worship. Our Orthodox brethren who join with us in worship are perhaps not fully aware of the extent to which this has operated, since it has always been their unbroken heritage and among them unconsciously taken for granted.

It is instructive moreover to realise that religious questions and controversies turn on what are sometimes lightly dismissed as 'externals'. The deep cleavages caused by the Iconoclast controversy is an example. Orthodox Christians persecuted by ikonoclast emperors fled to Italy and the West, where they were kindly received. But the most vigorous seeds of the final breach between the Latin and the Byzantine Churches (both at that time thought of as the

'West' in contradistinction with the Eastern Asian Church, that also embraced parts of India and Persia) may well have been sown by this quarrel. The controversy over the use of leavened or unleavened bread for the Eucharist, although at times only a symbol of deeper divergencies, will occur to the reader. And at the time of the Reform in England, as elsewhere in Europe, it was on the rite of Confirmation, the wedding ring and the sign of the cross in Baptism, that Churchman and dissenter parted company. The importance of external ceremonial is moreover strikingly illustrated by the fate of those religions which have never evolved any. The native religion of Persia, Zoroastrianism, sank into superstition and idolatry because Zarathustra established no ritual to embody his teaching. Much the same happened to Buddhism, that was soon engulfed in Hinduism, when the statue of Buddha was added to the heathen pantheon in India, or in Shintoism in the Far East. On the other hand the divine teaching of the Old Testament survived in Judaism, and indeed still survives, because it was enshrined in a hallowed ritual.

But there are always two grave dangers to be faced. The first is that through spiritual decadence, ceremonial becomes a substitute, an empty husk, for the religious vitality and inner richness it should express. That undoubtedly happened to later Judaism as we see it in the New Testament. The other is that indifference towards religion easily produces a temper of mind that regards ceremonial as a matter of taste, and divorced from any real meaning, and therefore of no particular importance, which seems to be a familiar enough modern trend.

But the externals of worship are of the deepest importance if they represent the humble and sincere desire of the creature to worship the living God with his whole being, and also express the life-giving beliefs of our Christian religion. It is a very superficial view which decries dogma and the dogmatic teaching of the Church as the enemy of true religion. Rightly understood, rightly imbibed and lived upon, the statements of our Creed are each one of them fountains of life, doors opened in heaven, the hidden secrets of God and His actions in the world unveiled. They are precious enough to shed one's blood in their defence, and it is no hair-splitting

that a single iota can make the all-important difference between the true worshipper and the false.

A.O.

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.