

ORIENTALE LUMEN CONFERENCE, May 2010

David Carter, Secretary, Theology and Unity Group, Churches Together in England, with additional material from Fr Mark Woodruff, Vice Chairman of the Society of St John Chrysostom

On Saturday 15 May, a conference was held at Heythrop College to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the issuing of the apostolic letter, *Oriente Lumen*, by the late Pope John Paul II, and to mark the launch of Heythrop's new Centre for Eastern Christianity under the direction of Anthony O'Mahony. The Conference was organised under the joint auspices of the new Centre, Minster Abbey and the Society of St John Chrysostom. Minster Abbey has been hosting East-West Monastic Meetings ever since the apostolic letter was issued and the Conference was thus preceded by several days of monastic dialogue and spiritual ecumenism.

In preparation for the day, I re-read *Oriente Lumen* and found it to be spiritually and devotionally moving as well theologically lucid and ecumenically stimulating. It reminds all western Christians, Anglicans and Protestants as well as Roman Catholics, that we have much to learn from the eastern Christian tradition - indeed much to re-receive that was so prominent in the church of the first few centuries.

The day was organised by Anthony O'Mahony, Dr John Flannery of Heythrop and Fr Mark Woodruff, with support and input from several of the Benedictine sisters of Minster, as well as Dr Marcus Plested, representing the Institute of Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge. Around a hundred people were present.

Archbishop Vincent Nichols gave an introductory overview of the day (since published in *The Tablet*), followed by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware who related the history of the international dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox churches, drawing special attention to the Ravenna Statement issued in 2007. Metropolitan Kallistos explained that, taking their cue from Apostolic Canon 34, the members of the international commission had identified three levels of authority within the Church: local, regional and universal. In all of these there was an identifiable *protos* (or first in dignity) without whom decisions could not be made but, equally, who was always bound to consult and act with his colleagues. Thus, for example, within each patriarchate, the bishops had to act in concert with the patriarch, but, equally, he could not act without them.

Metropolitan Kallistos said that the findings of the Commission were a challenge to both communions. Both tended to work with a two, rather than three, level structure of decision-making in the Church. The Orthodox had clear structures at local (diocesan) and regional (patriarchate or autocephalous church) level, but no structure at the universal level. The Roman Catholic Church was clear that the local church was the diocese under its bishop and was clear about the Petrine ministry at the universal level, but it was not clear about authority at the intermediate, regional level. On both sides this had developed and become institutionalised in the centuries of separation and so, rather than first dwelling on the problems for unity that currently present themselves as a result, he mentioned how the Commission had moved to retrace steps and study the very thorny question of the way in which the ministry of the Bishop of Rome had been understood in reality in the first millennium. Once a true view of the common history could be more generally recognised, then Orthodox and Catholics could move on to reviewing the subsequent developments in the light of it. He explained that this may be a slow and painstaking process, but that it was better than rushing ahead and falling, for lack of genuinely firm footings.

There were different ways of understanding key occasions on which the Bishop of Rome had exercised power. Metropolitan Kallistos instanced the fact that the famous acclamation of the fathers at Chalcedon, ‘Peter has spoken through Leo’ could be seen as attesting the then pope’s accord with the teaching of St Cyril of Alexandria, rather than as an *independent* exercise of the papal magisterium. Metropolitan Kallistos stressed that there were very difficult problems still to be solved and counselled patience, though (as he put it) an *impatient* patience, not complacency.

He then referred to Cardinal Kasper’s opinion that the main difficulty is our shared and different understanding of *communio*. I would add that this applies across the Christian spectrum and not just to Roman Catholics and Orthodox. One of the great gains of ecclesiological research and ecumenical dialogue over the last fifty years has been the acceptance of the centrality of the understanding of Church as communion within all the ecumenically engaged churches. It has, for example, figured in the writing of the Baptist Paul Fiddes no less than that of the Orthodox John Zizioulas (Metropolitan John of Pergamon). Where we remain divided is on the question of the nature of the structures needed to promote such communion and the appropriate nature of their exercise. We all agree that the Church needs to express both the *consensus fidelium* and to have a teaching office; but how these things are to be balanced and held in tension remains a complex issue. Much patience and hard, prayerful reflection is needed, both in teasing out the theology concerned and in the understanding of how our empirical ecclesial cultures relate to that ecclesiology.

Fr Aidan Nichols OP spoke next, stressing first that, in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the search for unity with the Orthodox was seen as a priority. The Decree on Ecumenism thus accepted the right of the eastern churches to be governed

according to their own rules but subject to the needs of the unity of the whole Church. Fr Nichols argued that a purely honorific primacy of honour at the universal level would be of no real help – as things had developed in the Latin Catholic context, the idea that the papal primacy could be subject to conciliar authority had been expressly overcome. Both were necessary (witness Vatican II, as well as Vatican I), but universal primacy, whatever its nature, role and jurisdiction, is vested in the office of the pope and is inseparable from communion with the Roman See. Catholics would not be giving up their belief in the ecclesiological necessity of the papacy; and clearly a universal primate was envisaged in some form by most if not all ecumenical partners. Unity could not be achieved by expecting Roman Catholics to give up this integral belief, or reverting to a conciliar or synodal structure if, indeed, that had ever really existed as the normal form of universal church government. Rather, what is needed is a serious appreciation of ecclesiological realities as they are on both sides, and dialogue as to how they might serve each others' requirements and understanding of the Church with integrity. This in some ways complemented what Metropolitan Kallistos said about the three-level exercise of authority in the structure of the Church and how, in separation, it functioned differently for Orthodox and Catholics as a two-level structure. How can these be reconciled and how can the universal primacy of the papal office serve the unity of the Church and especially communion between Catholics and Orthodox? This was a question addressed both in *Orientalis Lumen* and more specifically in *Ut Unum Sint*. How can what is a fact of ecclesial life for Catholics serve the needs and understanding of the Orthodox Church too? Fr Nichols then gave a detailed account of the methodology of the earlier stages of the international dialogue, highlighting the key influence, from the Orthodox side of John Zizioulas, and from the Roman Catholic of the late Jean Tillard.

There next followed, either side of lunch, two very interesting papers on local relationships between Eastern Catholics and Byzantine Orthodox in, respectively, Syria (Aleppo) and Ukraine, given by Archimandrite Demetrios Charbak of the Patriarchate of Antioch and Archpriest Iwan Dacko of the Centre for Ecumenical Studies at the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv. They stressed the many initiatives being taken to promote unity locally, the position being particularly complex in Ukraine where there are Latin as well as Greek Catholics and no fewer than eight separate Orthodox churches, stemming in part from conflicts resulting from the collapse of Communism and the break-up of the Soviet Union. It is not often one is able to hear of the local progress of ecumenism in other countries and these two talks revealed much that was encouraging.

After a tea break, Dr Simon Marincak, a lay academic of the Slovakian Greek Catholic Church community, from the Michael Lacko Centre for East-West Spirituality in Kosice, gave an interesting talk on the latinisation of liturgy and devotional practices that had occurred among Eastern Catholics, particularly in areas governed by Poland, after the Union of Brest in 1596. He explained carefully the historical and cultural background to these changes and the recent work of recovering and restoring an authentic Eastern Christian patrimony in union with the See of Peter, indicating how they can demonstrate the integrity of the Eastern Catholic Churches' distinctive tradition and of their unity with Rome at the same time. This can also show how unity between Roman Catholics and those who see themselves as Orthodox in communion with the Bishop of Rome does not necessarily mean a compromise or loss on the part of Orthodox Church in the event of restored Christian Unity.

The final main presentation was by Mother Nikola Proelsch, prioress of St Mildred's Priory at Minster Abbey, on Catholic-Orthodox relations in the

tradition of Vatican II, especially with regard to East-West monastic encounters sponsored at Minster and other monasteries in the UK. This was followed by a concluding summary and general discussion. It was at this point that an interesting and spirited discussion arose between Archpriest Iwan and Metropolitan Kallistos about the rightness of relations between the Ukrainian Greek Catholics and the variety of manifestations of Orthodoxy in Ukraine. Metropolitan Kallistos felt strongly that the cause of unity was not served when the Catholic Church conducts relations multilaterally both with the canonically recognised Orthodox Church in Ukraine and also with Orthodox whose canonical standing poses a problem. Besides, it is well known, he said, that the Orthodox Church as a whole is taking steps to overcome the problem of multiple jurisdictions in Western countries; so also it is taking pains to address the problems and disagreements about the nature of the Orthodox Church in historic lands where new political entities have emerged within the territory of existing patriarchal and autocephalous churches. This difficult process within Orthodoxy, he said, was not helped by other Christians coming in and seeming to challenge the canonical Orthodox Church, whatever the reasons. It would be far more ecumenical to leave the Orthodox Church to resolve its own affairs without additional complications from relations with other Christians. Archpriest Iwan recognised the force of the Metropolitan's canonical and ecumenical arguments, but stressed that the Ukrainian Catholic Church's experience was difficult because of the reluctance of the Moscow Patriarchate to engage in ecumenical relations with it. The practical realities of life in Ukraine mean that there were frequent encounters with the different Ukrainian Orthodox communities and that it was important, living side by side, to be on friendly terms with them all, not least where there was an interest in Christian unity. He hoped fervently that the question of Orthodox unity in Ukraine could be resolved and wanted to do nothing other than support such an outcome. But at the same time he hoped for an Orthodox recognition of the integrity of the

Ukrainian Catholic Church and the potential for ecumenical progress from a positive engagement with the historic Greek Catholic Church, discerned by some Orthodox but not, so far, all. In the meantime, he explained, his Church was simply responding to conditions as it found them. Metropolitan Kallistos posed an important question to both Archpriest Iwan Dacko and Archimandrite Demetrios – how is it that between the Orthodox and the Byzantine Catholics of the Middle East there have been such promising encounters, whereas this has not been possible to anything like the same degree in Eastern Europe? Does this say something about Orthodoxy in different cultures, histories, political or religious settings or climates – or about Catholicism?

It is a measure of the depth at which ecumenical dialogue has arrived that such a discussion could be accommodated in a searching and cordial way, enabling problems to be aired frankly and truthfully because they could rely on shared good will and a common overriding aspiration – the restoration of full and visible ecclesial communion between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church.

The Society was delighted to be involved in the development and staging of this Conference, especially as it served the inauguration of the new Centre for Eastern Christianity. Some of the addresses are gradually being published in *One in Christ*, the ecumenical review published twice yearly by the Olivetan Benedictines based at Turvey Abbey.