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Ways to Church Reunion.

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As long as divided Christianity is merely concerned with a preliminary discussion of the whole problem of Reunion, the real practical difficulties which obstruct the way are not perceived. But whenever a practical approach is made to this problem difficulties emerge which are insuperable. They will remain insurmountable as long as the main postulates, of the whole, problem are not radically reconsidered in an attempt to liberate them from a mistaken hierarchical and dogmatic maximalism, which so frequently dominates this whole realm. These obstacles to Reunion emerge, firstly, in the sphere of theological doctrine, in so far as this tends to regard itself as compulsory dogma; and, secondly, as a result of hierarchical centralism, which identifies the body of the Church with the central organ of the hierarchy. Such an approach to the problem is, in its very essence, Roman. It cannot be justified outside the limits of the Roman Catholic Church and, in our opinion, even in that communion it can be

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considerably moderated. Such an approach to the problem is illustrated by the Florentine Unia (1439). The more important hierarchs of the East and of the West with the Pope and the Patriarch investigated all the dogmatic differences which then existed, and after achieving (apparent) agreement, recognized the highest hierarchical organ in the person of the Pope. The agreement was then sealed by Communion from the same Cup. The Union was proclaimed by a corresponding edict (a Papal Bull and an Order of the Emperor) to the whole Christian people,

who in the East, however, simply refused to accept it. From the Roman Catholic point of view the procedure was more or less congruous, for every Reunion in the Roman Church can only be interpreted, dogmatically as an *absorption* through submission to Papal authority. From the Orthodox and generally speaking the non-Roman Catholic point of view, however, such a conception does *not* correspond to a true understanding of the Church, where the hierarchy does not command, but merely gives expression to the ‘soborny’ consciousness of the Church.

Nevertheless, even up to the present day, the whole course of Church Reunion (in particular the relations between the Anglican and the Eastern Churches) still follows this same path. Here also it is taken for granted that Reunion may be accomplished by an agreement achieved merely between the higher organs of the hierarchy, without any active participation of the people of the Church. Such an approach is no less utopian than it was in the fifteenth century.

On the other hand it is not only a complete agreement in dogma which is sought, but agreement also in *dogmatic doctrine*. This, as a matter of fact, does not even exist within the limits of the same Church. Whenever theological thought develops with intensity *different* theological movements are bound to emerge. This happened at the height of the Patristic age (*e.g.*, in Alexandria and Antioch). In practice even within the fold of the Roman Church there is no dogmatic unanimity, although this may be disguised by an iron discipline and the enforced silence of the dissentients. This fact is unexpectedly observed here and there. In our search for dogmatic unity, therefore, it is necessary to fix a dogmatic minimum, which comprises an *essential* condition for Church Reunion. This should not only be done according to external factors (*viz.*, the dogmas of the ancient undivided Church), but also according to their inner significance for Church Reunion. But then the question arises, how can we separate this living *minimum* from the *maximum*, which can only be attained to in some distant future, and is thus the last and not the first step along the path of Reunion?

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All dogma is characterised by the fact that it is not only a norm of teaching, but a basis of life, not only theoretical doctrine, but a quality of religious life. It is from this *living* power of the dogma that we should proceed in our definition of the required dogmatic minimum at the beginning of Reunion. The life of Grace which flows in the Church in its *Sacraments*, pre-eminently in Baptism and the Divine Eucharist, represents the universal and basic fact which fulfills and sums up the dogmatic teaching of the Church. The division of the Churches not only gives rise to- the spirit of heresy *ἄρεσις* — which stands for discord and one-sidedness of teaching, but similarly to a heresy of life, which results in the fact that the Christian world in a light-hearted and painless way reconciles itself to a separation before the Holy Chalice. Somehow or other it has become a self-evident fact [which one should note here has never been proved by anyone] that *dogmatic* agreement is the *prius*, and the *eucharistic*, the *posterius*, a sort of result of the first. The call to unity which springs from the Eucharistic Chalice itself, remains unheeded. In spite of this, actually, the divided Churches are united by the oneness of the Chalice, which cannot become a reality to them. This constitutes the paradox of Church divisions. The efficacy of the Sacraments is mutually recognised by the divided Churches, at least by Orthodoxy and Rome (for the moment I put aside the question of Anglicanism). The Sacrament of the Eucharist is also regarded as effective: it is valid, but not effective beyond the limits of one’s own Church for the members of the divided Churches. Of course if we absolutely deny the validity of the sacraments outside a particular confession (as is the case still with certain Orthodox theologians who are of this opinion, *viz.*, the Metropolitan Anthony and others) then the very question of any union in the Sacrament falls to the ground. But if we recognize the validity of the Sacrament, which is in fact the case both with the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches, then the question arises, may not this efficacy of the Sacrament become real in actual Intercommunion; and, if so, what can this Intercommunion represent both dogmatically and canonically? Here, of course, it is no longer a question of complete unanimity on all the dogmatic points, in all their local and historical

peculiarities, but precisely in the dogmas without the recognition of which the Sacrament of the Eucharist cannot be contemplated.

It is not difficult to make clear the primary assumptions on which the Sacrament of the Eucharist is based. Firstly we must recognize the *real* (and not the symbolically-significatory or the subjectively-reminiscent) character of the Sacrament. In it we have the *praesentia realis*, the true Body and Blood of Christ

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through the changing of the bread and wine. One may add here that the actual *theory* of the change — “transubstantiation” or any other — does not constitute a dogmatic postulate for the efficacy of the Sacrament. This is obvious from the fact that the early Church throughout the first 1,000 years of its existence had no Eucharistic doctrine at all. But belief in the actual change, or the *praesentia realis* — without which the Sacrament loses all meaning and power — already takes for granted faith in Christ as the Son of God and the God-man. In other words it comprises all the Christology of the Church, and further, as a necessary link, also the doctrine of the Trinity. (It is completely incompatible of course with any liberalism or unitarianism which deny both).

But such a condition *de facto* implies the acceptance of all the Seven Œcumenical Councils in their fundamental *Christological* definitions, outside which there can be no question of a true Christian faith. (Of course the same is not true of some of their special definitions, which have no dogmatic significance, but only canonical value. The Seventh Œcumenical Council we can also view as a Christological one, because of its insistence on the divine-human nature in Christ.) The demand for an acceptance of the deliberations of the Seven Œcumenical Councils is usually founded on the fact that their definitions stand for a *common* confession of the one faith of the ancient Church. The Eucharistic foundation in our opinion is more essential than this chronological basis, because apart from the Christology of the Church there can be no true Eucharist.

Another dogmatic-canonical postulate of the truth of the Eucharist is the efficacy of the celebrators as of the hierarchy of the ‘apostolic succession’ — in other words the existence of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The apostolic succession of the Church is a tradition of the Church which has been voluntarily broken by Protestantism. As a result of this Eucharistic life within Protestantism has been destined to diminution and to a certain weakening, if not to direct ineffectiveness. The Eastern and the Western Churches were never divided in their recognition of the necessity of the hierarchy, and even now the hierarchy of the divided Church is mutually recognized. The Anglican hierarchy occupies here a special place for its destinies were involved in the general turmoil of the Reformation, as a result of which its validity came to be questioned. However, the Anglican hierarchy, which is not recognized by Rome, finds growing recognition by the Eastern Churches — at least in so far as its hierarchy is concerned, and consequently the Eucharist which it celebrates.

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The laying on of hands by the bishop is absolutely essential for the validity of the Eucharist, and consequently the Eucharist celebrated by pastors, who have not received an episcopal laying on of hands, is not a true Church Eucharist (even if we do not deny its possessing a certain kind of Eucharistic significance, a more precise definition of which is outside our immediate scope). Therefore if Protestantism really wants to enter into the bosom of the United Church, it must overcome the results of the Reformation at this point, and re-establish within itself the sacramental priesthood of “apostolic succession”. It must do this in the name of tradition namely also of Church love, so as not to separate itself in such an essential fact from the whole of the Christian world. (I am not speaking of sects here which are born of a spirit of sectarian particularism, for historical Protestantism does not desire to be a sect, but it becomes a sect in so far as it persists in rejecting the episcopal laying on of hands.)

As things stand, three branches of historical Christianity fit into the scheme we have outlined — Orthodoxy, Roman-Catholicism, and Anglicanism (assuming that we recognize the validity of

Anglican orders), and have a dogmatic and sacramental possibility of uniting before the Holy Chalice. Let us, however, consider the dogmatic and canonical difficulties which stand in the way.

There is no doubt that in the course of ages quite a number of dogmatic differences have emerged between the Western and the Eastern Church, although all these are not of equal significance. There are the questions of Filioque, of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, of Purgatory, of the Pope, and all the other dogmatic definitions of a doctrinal nature which have come to be accepted by the Catholic West (and following in its steps, to some extent, by Orthodoxy), in its struggle with the Reformation. In this Roman Catholicism is distinguished by the greatest dogmatic maximum in so far as it attempts to transform every thesis of theological doctrine into dogma (an example of which may be seen in the Council of Trent). In such a method all doctrinal postulates acquire equal significance. One should learn to abandon such dogmatic prejudice when striving towards Reunion, if one ceases to interpret it, of course, as absorption of individual Christians either by the Orthodox or the Roman Catholic Church. In the general context of dogmatic differences which exist between the Churches, we must learn to discern the essentially important dogmatic teaching which

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finds its expression in Eucharistic dogma, and contrast it with other dogmatic assumptions which should be set aside as calling for further consideration and elaboration as theologumena. And we must also have faith that a union in Eucharistic love before the Holy Chalice will give us greater power to overcome them, than tournaments between theologians which will *never* result in complete union, for the “human”, the all too human, always dominates them.

It is also unfortunate for the Church that from the most ancient times it has acquired the method of stating dogma in the form of anathemas against those who think differently, whilst a hasty anathema always represents an unnecessary further obstacle to discussion. The idea of a dogmatic agreement *in necessariis* for the purpose of Eucharistic union, which precedes complete dogmatic agreement instead of succeeding it, does not by any means imply dogmatic indifference. But in the question of dogmatics a certain hierarchy of order should be maintained, by virtue of which things should be put in their proper places. One cannot, for instance, assign to the doctrine of transubstantiation the same compulsory significance as to the Christological and Trinitarian dogma. (The same remark would be true of the majority of the definitions of Trent, which so obviously bear the imprint of Medieval Western Scholasticism). We have a whole series of dogmatic definitions which really possess only the significance of theological doctrine. They are valuable in their intention, but certainly not in the form of their expression. In relation to these, for the time being, the principle of *in dubiis libertas* should be applied.

But we may find that some may argue that the drawing of such distinction between dogmas, their classification as Eucharistic and non-Eucharistic, the more important and the less important, would serve to undermine the infallibility and self-sufficiency of the Church (*infallibilitas or indefectibilitas*), in which all is equally important and valuable, by introducing an intolerable relativity. Such an objection is based on an abstract Roman interpretation of *infallibilitas*. This should really be understood not as a formal abstraction, but as something historically concrete. The Church possesses *indefectibilitas* in the sense that the Church is *complete* or self-sufficient. In this sense with a divinely inspired infallibility it meets the needs of its dogmatic consciousness in every epoch. Thus Early Christianity, notwithstanding all its dogmatic simplicity and the fact that dogma had not been expressed, was

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no less *indefectibilis*, than the later dogmatic epochs, each of which has its own particular style. This style is comprised not only of the postulates which are of abiding value (such as Christology) even when they are expressed in the dogmatic language of a particular epoch, but also of those propositions which minister *par excellence* to the specific requirements of that age. Revelation, generally speaking, is concrete and historical, but it certainly does not represent a mechanical

dictation of infallible truths, nor a sort of automatic script. Therefore it is absurd to accept an abstract *equipollence* of all the parts of dogmatic teaching in accordance with a formal stamp of “infallibility”, because the former is conveyed to us “at sundry times, and in divers manners” (Heb. i. 1).

In Roman-Catholicism the main barrier to the establishment of such a preliminary dogmatic minimum — the Eucharistic dogma in the extended sense — is represented by the Vatican dogma of Papal infallibility. This dogma in itself constitutes a sort of dogmatic microcosm of Roman Catholicism, a criterion for all Roman dogmatics, which attributes *its own* peculiar significance to *any* dogmatic definition. In practice this dogma constitutes the main barrier to Reunion, for it turns Reunion into a simple absorption by the Roman Church. Its rejection makes reunion with Rome impossible, while its unreserved and unconditional acceptance is impossible for the non-Roman Catholic. Therefore the destinies of Reunion with Rome depend on how far the Roman Church would wish it and would find it possible to consider its Vatican dogma among those which should be subjected to a *soborny* investigation as regards its relationship to the whole of the Universal Church, even on the condition of its preservation within the limits of the local Western Roman Church. In relationships between the Orthodox and the Anglicans, of course, this Vatican barrier is non-existent.

There still remains one other point, namely, that of the *canonical* nature of any Reunion achieved through Eucharistic fellowship. There is a firm conviction that Reunion can only be the act of higher ecclesiastical authority. Possibly this may be true as regards *complete* Reunion of entire Church bodies, a reunion which is as yet outside historical reality. Even so, such a Reunion from above, a so-called diplomatic Reunion, would have to acquire sanction from the body of Church people, which may even refuse to accept it. Generally speaking, the above point of view can only be applied logically to the Roman-Catholic Church, in which one can say that the voice of the Pope is the

voice of the Church, but otherwise such a theory is quite out of place both, for the Orthodox and the Anglican hierarchy. Within the same Church we find different sections and people, who even differ from one another dogmatically (as in the Anglican “comprehensiveness”). Even to a greater extent is this true of theological thought and cultural level. To expect, therefore, complete uniformity before Reunion is possible would be completely fruitless and unnecessary. Why cannot separate parts or groups belonging to the different Church bodies — Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican — unite in Intercommunion, if this actually expresses their true dogmatic and Church relationship?

One more objection might be raised here which has become stereotyped in the course of centuries and has turned into a real dogmatic superstition — viz., that Eucharistic fellowship with the non-Orthodox impairs the priesthood and Sacraments of the entire Church, if any members of that Church enter into such communion. This would be even more true in a case of communion say with the Anglo-Catholics, for *through them* the Orthodox would enter into Intercommunion with the Evangelicals and the Modernists, in so far as all the members of the Anglican Church are in communion with one another. Therefore, it is argued, such intercommunion would be impossible for the Orthodox. We feel that such prejudice is exaggerated if not absolutely incorrect. Actually the entire Christian world in a certain sense is in communion in so far as this concerns the Sacrament of baptism, which is recognized by all. Nevertheless, through this its priesthood is not impaired. One must interpret the power of priesthood in a much deeper and bolder way, so as not to be able to fear its being impaired through Eucharistic intercommunion with those of the non-Orthodox who can truly participate in it sacramentally. Therefore, group or partial intercommunion does not threaten the integrity of priesthood in the participants, as it never impaired the priesthood of the Orthodox, who remained in intercommunion with Roman Catholics for a long time after the schism of 1054. But this type of communion can only be *canonically* justified through the consent and blessing of the appropriate ruling bishop, for the

fulness of the Sacraments is concentrated in the bishop, and no priest can celebrate the Sacraments who has severed the link with his bishop. Actually the Church is a union of bishoprics, but every "cell", that is diocese, lives also with its own special life, though in contact with the others. Consequently, it is all a question of *fact*. Will a diocese be found in which the corresponding groups of persons could enter into Eucharistic Communion, within the realm of Orthodoxy

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and Anglicanism, and also of Roman Catholicism? It is a question of the limits of Church centralism. Do the bishops form independent centres, though ones which are co-ordinated with one another? Or, is there only one centre, the *episcopus episcoporum*, the Pope, who may be one person, or a collective? (The last two alternatives are the same for our particular problem.) A partial, or local union of different Church bodies in the Eucharist, their organic merging, might serve as a mystical and religious *foundation* for the Reunion of the Churches, which is vainly expected along the paths of canonical and dogmatic Church diplomacy alone. Meanwhile it is important to make a beginning with Church Reunion in those points where it is possible, and so ultimately to carry the problem forward beyond the existing deadlock which our sinful fear and indifference has produced.

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