

Since the 1931 meeting of the Joint Commission no Pan Anglican-Pan Orthodox discussions have taken place. In 1935, however, discussions took place in Bucharest between Anglican-Romanian Orthodox delegations and agreement was reached on a number of points.

In 1956 an Anglican delegation visited Moscow under the chairmanship of the then Archbishop of York and had theological conversations with a delegation appointed by the Patriarchate of Moscow. On this occasion a number of topics were discussed but no authoritative conclusions emerged.

In 1967 the Oecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I visited England as guest of the Archbishop of Canterbury. That visit was the occasion to put forward the hope expressed by both Primates that the Joint Doctrinal Discussions might be resumed. The Orthodox Church had already approved such a suggestion at a Pan-Orthodox meeting in Rhodes in 1966 and the Lambeth Conference gave its approval in 1968.

Commissions have been appointed by either side and each Commission has had meetings to discuss questions posed to it by the other, as well as to discuss papers on subjects relevant to the dialogue.

What follows is two papers presented to the Anglican Theological Commission which have been discussed and approved by them, together with the Anglican answers to four questions posed to them by the Orthodox Commission on various occasions. The Anglican Commission has submitted to the Orthodox a paper by the Revd A. M. Allchin on the Thirty-Nine Articles as the answer to the Orthodox question No. 4. These answers have been sent to the Primates of the Anglican Communion, and, as no adverse criticism of them has been received, may be taken as having "unofficial" Anglican authority.

Representative Anglican and Orthodox sub-Commissions met at Chambèsy, near Geneva, in September of this year, in an atmosphere of marked cordiality, and prepared the programme for future work. If the authorities of the Orthodox Church approve, it is intended that a meeting of the full commissions should be held in England in July 1973.

### *Comprehensiveness and the Mission of the Church*

A. M. ALLCHIN

The concept of comprehensiveness is one whose meaning and value seem self-evident to the majority of Anglicans. The word is used to describe the legitimate diversity within the Church. When it is used in conjunction with the word mission, it clearly speaks of the inclusive character of the family of God into whose unity all mankind is to be called. Indeed, in this

context comprehensiveness becomes almost synonymous with Catholicity, and speaks of the universality of the Church's mission to people of all times and all places.

It is when Anglicans come to meet Christians of other traditions than their own, by no means only Orthodox, that they are forced to examine their position more closely. For they find that the idea of comprehensiveness is by no means as easily accepted as they might expect. The word itself seems to be of comparatively recent usage in theological contexts, though the idea of "comprehension" already appears in the latter part of the seventeenth century in relation to the attempts to keep together Anglicans and Protestant Nonconformists within a single national Church. Again the word is not easy to translate into other European languages, and the idea of *doctrinal* comprehensiveness is one which has been strange to most other Christian traditions. Thus, we are forced to ask, is this doctrinal comprehensiveness, which is now so widely regarded as the characteristic feature of post-Reformation Anglicanism, only a product of the last century, or is it typical of the whole of Anglican history since the sixteenth century onwards? It is evident that there are very large historical and theological problems here, which we can only begin to consider in a paper like the present one.

## I

Before beginning our brief historical enquiry into Anglican comprehensiveness, we ought to recognize that the fact that it is natural for an Anglican to begin in this way is in itself of great significance for our relations with the Orthodox. On the one side it suggests a certain similarity between our two traditions, in so far as in both, what the Church does, in worship and in common life, and what the Church has done in the past is vital for the discovery of the meaning of its faith and teaching. But on the other side, it also suggests one of the major reasons for difference between our two traditions. It is not only that Western and Eastern Christendom have very different historical experiences, but that more profoundly they have a different relationship to the historical development of the worlds in which they are set. One of the major reasons for the apparent untidiness of the Anglican Churches in doctrinal matters is their very close involvement with the currents of historical development in the English-speaking world. Anglicans are involved in history and *open* to history in a way which seems scandalous to many Orthodox. The Orthodox seem withdrawn from history, standing apart from its vicissitudes in a way which seems scandalous to many Anglicans. When everyone in the West speaks about *aggiornamento*, the Orthodox have the impression that we are all modernists. When in the Orthodox East everyone speaks of tradition the Western Christian has the impression that Orthodoxy is caught in a kind of immobilism.

This difference of emphasis between East and West – for it is one of the

points where all Western Churches would be united – has been remarked upon by theologians of many different Churches. If, as some Orthodox theologians admit, the Orthodox line has within it the danger of sclerosis, at the same time it also has great strength. There is a certain immediacy of contact with the Gospel, with the sources of Christian faith and life, which continues under the Orthodox Church's elaborate exterior, and which constitutes one of its most powerful attractions for many non-Orthodox Christians. In some ways the Orthodox East seems at its heart to have a more direct and intuitive grasp of the central realities of the Christian tradition than either of the two main families of Western Christendom. On the other hand in the practical working out of the implications of that faith, and in the intellectual analysis of its meaning, it seems as if the West has attempted and achieved more. Some of the greatest theologians of Anglicanism, a Joseph Butler, a William Temple, or in our own day an Ian Ramsey, have given themselves to the exposition of the faith in the terms presented by their own times. Hence comes part at least of our doctrinal comprehensiveness, of the untidy and open nature of our theological tradition. But Anglicanism, like the rest of the Christian West, has had, and increasingly will have, its problem not only of being related to the contemporary world, but also of being related to its Gospel origins. If Orthodoxy has the danger of sclerosis and rigidity, the West, particularly perhaps at the present moment, has the danger of dispersion and assimilation by the world. It may be that the term "comprehensiveness", at least as we commonly understand it, will provide only part of the answer to this problem of interpretation and tradition, of how the one faith is translated into all tongues, and of how the Church while being wholly in the world and for the world yet remains the sacrament of the presence of a kingdom which is not of this world.

We have been thinking here of comprehensiveness, i.e. of diversity of theological system and teaching, as it results from the Church's openness to the developments of the world around it, and the demands which follow for re-interpretation and re-statement. But the doctrinal comprehensiveness of the Anglican Communion has in the past been more obviously linked with the Church of England's comparative openness to both sides in the great sixteenth century division within Western Christendom. It has moved more obviously on the Catholic-Protestant axis, than on the Liberal-Conservative one, and been conditioned more by the divisions within the Christian family than by its relationship with the outside world. But both elements have always been present, and though Orthodox theologians will certainly want to ask how it is that two mutually conflicting doctrines of the sacraments and the ministry can exist within one Church, it may well be that they will be even more anxious to know how those who hold to old formulations, and those who feel impelled to abandon them, can really be confessing a common faith. We shall certainly have to consider both aspects of the problem.

## II

We must turn now to a brief consideration of the history of this question. The comprehensiveness of the Church of England, and then of the Anglican Communion, can only be understood within the context of the development of Western Christendom as a whole since the sixteenth century. In a situation in which the old unity of the Western Church had disintegrated, it was evidently to the advantage of rulers to comprehend as many of their subjects as possible within the boundaries of a national church. If possible it was desirable to include in such a unity both the reforming Catholics and the more moderate Protestants; such at least seems to have been the aim of Elizabeth I in England, as it was of John III in Sweden.

It would be wrong to see the policy of Elizabeth as the sole factor lying behind the nascent comprehensiveness of the Church of England, but it would also be impossible to ignore it. While her hopes of including all in one institution proved unrealizable, it would probably be true to say that the Anglican settlement, as it existed in the first half of the seventeenth century, was slightly but significantly more comprehensive doctrinally than were the corresponding Protestant settlements in say Holland or Scandinavia. Already in the Anglicanism of this period one can see the beginnings of what were later to become the three main tendencies, schools or parties which have characterized its subsequent development. There is a strongly Reformation element, a tentatively Catholic element, having still some links with the Reformed Catholicism of Henry VIII, and an Erasmian humanist element, which begins again to make itself known, though the extent to which these differences subsequently developed would have greatly surprised the theologians of this period. However in the largeness of view of a Richard Hooker or a Lancelot Andrewes, which refuses to follow out the increasing strictness of Calvinist developments and which turns to the Fathers and the consensus of the first five centuries in an attempt to disentangle essential from inessential matters of faith, one can already see something which is recognizably typical of later Anglican developments.

This eirenic policy of distinguishing between fundamental and secondary matters, whether of faith or practice, and insisting only on the former, reflected the moderation of the Anglican formularies themselves. The Prayer Book and Articles, though not intentionally ambiguous, were moderate in their demands. They did not define more matters than contemporary controversy demanded. And even such definitions as they made were, for the most part, only imposed upon the clergy, as the teachers of the Church. The laity were not required to assent to more than the Creeds and the catechism.

The Civil War came as a blow to this limited comprehensiveness. The violence of the controversies of the Commonwealth period led to a reaction in 1662, which had the effect of limiting the inclusiveness of the

Church of England considerably. Neither in 1662 nor in 1689 were the proposals for "comprehension" accepted. It may well be that the exclusion first of the Puritans and then of the Non-Jurors was one of the major factors which led to the weakness of the Church in England in the eighteenth century. It certainly seems to be linked with the Church's failure to "comprehend" John Wesley, in whose formation both Puritan and Non-Juring influences had been strong.

If, towards the end of the eighteenth century, comprehensiveness again begins to characterize the Church of England, the credit must largely go to those Evangelicals who stayed within its borders, and insisted that their then unfashionable Calvinist interpretations of the Prayer Book and Articles were correct. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that their position was finally secured, and by that time the development of the Oxford Movement and the beginnings of liberal, critical theology, were making openings towards a comprehensiveness greater than any known in earlier Anglican history.

The century from 1850 to 1950 may be said to have marked a high water mark of Anglican comprehensiveness in the form in which it is familiar to us. At times the different schools of thought have organized themselves into something like political parties, and the opposition between Catholic, Evangelical and Liberal movements has often been intense. The bounds of comprehension were enlarged, and at times it seemed as if the Church could hardly stand the strain.

It may well be important for us to point out that the differences within Anglicanism, even when they were at their most acute, never became so absolute as they sometimes appeared to outside observers. There is, and has always been, a large body of clergy and lay people in the centre, willing to learn from the various movements in the Church, but unwilling to be wholly identified with any one of them. Moreover for the great majority of Christian people these differences have been experienced more in matters of worship and devotion, and in questions of Christian life, than in strictly doctrinal issues. On the one side there has been and is the Evangelical love of the Bible, which leads to a whole personal religion built up around the use of the Bible, its study in private or in small groups, its meditative reading as the basis of prayer. Together with this, there is the Evangelical insistence on the necessity of personal experience and personal decision, the free commitment of faith to Jesus as Lord. If we are truly Christian there must be some conscious knowledge of the grace of God. With this goes a belief in the importance of lay initiatives within the Church, and a readiness to find God speaking in unexpected places. On the other side there is a piety centred on the liturgical worship of the Church and the frequent participation in the sacraments. Here there is a much greater stress on the authority of tradition and on the reality of the corporate life of the whole Church. We find ourselves as Christians as one of a great company, we are caught up into the Communion of Saints.

Here there is a correspondingly higher regard for the position of the ordained ministry within the Church and a stronger sense of the corporate character and the historical continuity of the Church's life. How far these ways are contradictory to one another, how far complementary, is a question to be explored. The majority of Anglicans now would probably be of the conviction that they can and should complement and enrich each other.

For there are a good many signs that the former situation of Catholic and Evangelical opposition and rivalry is altering radically, and that it is often difficult to know where or how to place people in relation to the old controversies. This development within Anglicanism is, of course, closely linked with changes of a much larger kind in Christendom as a whole.

The old concept of Anglicanism as the Bridge-Church between Catholicism and Protestantism has to be modified at a time when the broken dialogue between Rome and the Reformation is being taken up everywhere along the line. It is notorious that ideas and practices often thought in the past to be exclusively Catholic are re-establishing themselves in much of Protestantism (rediscovery of liturgy, rediscovery of the monastic life, e.g.). It is even more evident that the corresponding process is taking place within Roman Catholicism, with extreme rapidity (emphasis on justification by faith, on the role of the laity, etc.). To many it seems as if the outstanding issues of the reformation period are on the verge of being resolved. It may well be that Anglicanism, with its longer experience of an internal Catholic-Protestant dialectic, has something particular to contribute in this new situation. It certainly has no longer any kind of monopoly of the dialogue. Doctrinal comprehensiveness of the Catholic-Protestant kind is becoming characteristic of other Western Churches beside the Anglican.

But while the tension between Catholic and Evangelical is manifestly diminishing in the Anglican Communion, there are some signs that the tension between those who look to the past and those who look to the future, whatever their background, is increasing, and will increase. As the rate of change in human society at large accelerates, so the problem of adaptation becomes urgent and ever more difficult for all Churches. There are at least three large areas of theological concern which touch all Churches and which are tending to strain the comprehensiveness of all of them. They are areas vitally related with Christian mission:

(a) the relation of the divine revelation to the images and thought forms in which it is expressed in Scripture and in the classical Christian Creeds;

(b) the nature of the inspiration and authority of Scripture, and the question of the authority and irreformability of the Creeds;

(c) the possibility of the transposition of the Church's faith, worship and life into other cultural forms, both in relation to the other great

religious traditions of mankind, and also in relation to the developing technological and scientific civilization of our own century.

Here again the Anglican experience of comprehensiveness may be valuable in helping ourselves and others to see how things apparently contradictory are often complementary. But here again neither the situation nor the predicament are exclusively Anglican.

### III

When we come to examine the words "comprehend", "comprehensive", "comprehensiveness" more closely, we find in them a shade of meaning which too often we allow to remain undeveloped. To take some of the phrases from the definitions of the *New English Dictionary* for "comprehensive", we find "comprising or including much; of large content or scope", or again "embracing many things, broad in mental grasp, sympathies or the like", or again "containing much in small measure". This last suggestion, of much in little, brings us back to the root meaning of comprehend, which, after the sense of grasp or understand, seems to be to sum up, or bring together into one. Here is an element of comprehensiveness which we have not greatly stressed in the past, but which may be useful both in trying to understand it for ourselves and also in explaining its meaning to theologians of other Churches. The word "comprehensiveness" implies unity as well as diversity; it suggests inclusiveness and largeness of sympathy as well as mere variety of view; it suggests a movement of gathering and bringing into one.

This unity can be founded in nothing less than the unity of God. There is one Father, one incarnate Lord, one Holy Spirit who gathers together the one People of God. At the very heart of the Gospel there is the assurance that this mystery of unity is a living, working, reconciling thing, making men to be at one with God, at one with their fellow men, at one within themselves. If there were no true unity of faith, there could be no true unity of the Church, but only sets of divergent opinions, whose holders might, for a variety of reasons, agree to work together for practical ends. What is more, there could be no saving, life-giving knowledge of God, if all that we had was our own view of what God had done in Christ, and no God-given knowledge and love of him. Without the faith of the whole Church, the whole Christian Community, the faith of the believer could be no more than an individual opinion, an individual conviction. But the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes to see Jesus as Lord and enables us in him to stand before the Father, is also he who unites us with one another in the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, liberating us from the narrowness of our own conceptions into the largeness of the kingdom of heaven.

It is of the utmost importance in our relations with other Churches, and in particular with the Orthodox, that we should clearly make this affirmation of the necessity of unity in faith, which is strongly implied by

our constant and universal liturgical practice, and in particular by our use of the Creeds in worship, but which sometimes remains as an unspoken assumption in Anglican theological writing. If we fail to do this, our doctrinal comprehensiveness could too easily appear as a mere tolerance of divergent positions, a pragmatic indifference to questions of truth. Every Anglican who has taken part in ecumenical discussions will be aware that this is how our tradition looks at times to even friendly observers from other traditions. And we should surely be less than honest with ourselves if we did not acknowledge that there is a real danger in our tradition at this point, the danger that our comprehensiveness should become static and complacent.

It seems that considerations of this kind were in the mind of the Committee of the Lambeth Conference of 1968 on Anglican-Orthodox relations. In the paragraph devoted to comprehensiveness, it says,

“Comprehensiveness demands agreement on fundamentals, while tolerating disagreement on matters in which Christians may differ without feeling the necessity of breaking communion. In the mind of an Anglican, comprehensiveness is not compromise. Nor is it to bargain one truth for another. . . . Rather it implies that the apprehension of truth is a growing thing: we only gradually succeed in ‘knowing the truth’. It has been the tradition of Anglicanism to contain within one body both Protestant and Catholic elements. But there is a continuing search for the whole truth in which these elements will find complete reconciliation. Comprehensiveness implies a willingness to allow liberty of interpretation, with a certain slowness in arresting or restraining exploratory thinking. We tend to applaud the wisdom of the rabbi Gamaliel’s dictum that if a thing is not of God it will not last very long (Acts 5: 38-9). Moreover we are alarmed by the sad experience of too hasty condemnation in the past (as in the case of Galileo). For we believe that in leading us into all the truth the Holy Spirit may have some surprises in store for us in the future, as he had in the past.” (*The Lambeth Conference Report, 1968, p. 140 f.*)

It could be wished that signs of this continuing search were more evident in our Communion, and that when controversy breaks out on some well-worn theme, the arguments produced on both sides were less stale and stereotyped. It might be easier to commend “comprehensiveness” to other Christians if there were more evidence of this search for reconciliation.

But if there are factors in our actual practice of comprehensiveness which are somewhat discouraging, it is on the other hand an extremely encouraging fact that the last century of Anglican history, which has been the period of greatest comprehensiveness, has also been the time of the greatest Anglican activity in the spheres both of unity and mission. We have in the life of our Church the basis for an understanding of comprehensiveness as a dynamic, reconciling reality, and of the positive value of tensions contained within one body, and it is this which we must now examine.

The comprehensiveness of the Church and of the Church’s faith reflects at one and the same time the richness and fullness of the mystery of God’s



acts of redemption in Christ, and also the richness and diversity of the world which God has made. The wisdom of God is many-faceted, so that there are many different aspects of the divine truth to be seen, and men may approach the mystery with many different gifts and experience. The unity of the Church is a unity of life and faith and worship in which all these different gifts and experiences are able to cohere but which no one man or system can comprehend.

In Anglicanism, the unity of life is fundamental and precedes all other unities. Anglicans are those who are willing to live together in one Church on the basis of a unity of faith, which they believe is not specifically Anglican, but simply the faith of the whole Church. This faith is defined in terms of the Bible as interpreted by tradition, and in particular by the first four Councils and the "Catholic Creeds set in their context of Baptismal profession, patristic reasoning and conciliar decision". The basic Christological and Trinitarian definitions of the early Church still have authority for us, even though there are many who are rightly seeking their re-interpretation. Why do we regard these dogmas as essential and these councils as authoritative? First because they provide the way of approach to Scripture, the hermeneutical key, if you will, which enables us to discern the proportion of faith as the Bible bears witness to it; and they represent the first, crucial and, in some sense, typical transposition of the Biblical *kerygma* from one cultural world to another. Secondly, the dogmas defined at that time touch the very heart of the Christian mystery, the activity of God in Christ; they are saving truths. Their whole intention is soteriological. Thirdly, the first four Councils represent the consensus of the whole of early Christendom, and have been consistently received by the Churches ever since.

This last statement must at once be qualified, particularly with reference to the Churches which never accepted the definitions of Chalcedon. It is surely highly relevant to our own discussions with the Byzantine Orthodox, that in recent years (Aarhus 1964, Bristol 1967, Geneva 1970) there should have taken place discussions between their theologians and those of the non-Chalcedonian Churches, and that at the meeting in 1967 they should have reached such a remarkable degree of agreement. "Ever since the fifth century," they declared, "we have used different formulae to confess our common faith in the One Lord Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man." (The report is contained in *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, XIII, 2.) Here is a remarkable example of doctrinal comprehensiveness, and a readiness to acknowledge that there may be identity of faith behind apparent differences of formulation.

This unity of faith is expressed and maintained in Anglicanism, through a common tradition of worship and confession. It is the liturgical worship of the Church which has carried the faith of the Church, and it is in part for this reason that the laity feel so intensely about changes that are made in it. The place which in European Protestantism is occupied by the

theological professor, and in Roman Catholicism by the Papacy, is in Anglicanism given to the Church's tradition of worship. Here again we have diversity and unity. At the present moment it is not so easy to define what unifies the different Anglican rites as in the period before liturgical revision and reform, since the Prayer Books of the various Provinces are developing, to some extent, independently of one another. However the Lambeth Conference of 1958 suggested certain principles of liturgical revision which would characterize all Anglican attempts at reform in this field. The liturgy must be biblical, both in its doctrine, and in its constant use of the Scriptures. It must make proper provision for the ministry both of Word and of Sacraments. It must be thoroughly congregational. The whole movement of liturgical revision in Anglicanism has been based not only on the need for adaptations to new circumstances, but also on a concern for the restoration of the true proportions of the Church's tradition of worship. (*Lambeth Conference Report, 1958, 2. 79-81.*)

This common tradition of faith and worship and life is, of course, structured around a common church order. Anglicans have made this point with such insistence during the past century that it is hardly necessary to underline it here. But again we see how a given structure allows for diversity of expression, and variety of interpretation. The Lambeth Conference of 1948 sought to describe our position on this question thus:

"Authority, as inherited by the Anglican Communion from the undivided Church of the early centuries of the Christian era, is single in that it is derived from a single Divine source, and reflects within itself the richness and historicity of the divine Revelation. . . . It is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of the saints, and the *consensus fidelium*, which is the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit through his faithful people in the Church. It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralised authority, having many elements which combine, interact with, and check each other; these elements together contributing by a process of mutual support, mutual checking, and redressing of errors or exaggerations to the many-sided fullness of the authority which Christ has committed to his Church. . . . This essentially Anglican authority is reflected in our adherence to episcopacy as the source and centre of our Order, and the Book of Common Prayer as the standard of worship. Liturgy, in the sense of the offering and ordering of the public worship of God, is the crucible in which these elements of authority are fused and unified in the fellowship and power of the Holy Spirit. It is the living and ascended Christ, present in the worshipping congregation, who is the meaning and unity of the whole Church. He presents it to the Father, and sends it out on its mission." (*Lambeth Conference Report, 1948, pp. 84-6.*)

Here we have a concept of the unity in diversity of the Church's life which it would be highly interesting to discuss with our Orthodox colleagues. With its stress on the role of the Holy Spirit, with its insistence on the centrality of worship, with its refusal to locate authority precisely in one place it has much in common with the Orthodox way of handling this question. Is there, beneath the so evident superficial differences of Anglicanism and Orthodoxy, the untidiness of the one, the strictness of

the other, the liberalism of the one, the conservatism of the other, an underlying affinity in a belief in an authority which serves freedom, and a truth which liberates? Are both sides seeking to bear witness to the life in Christ, to a gift of the Holy Spirit, which is greater than any attempt to capture it in words? "The only authority in the Catholic Church which can ultimately preserve the truth is the power of the Holy Ghost to guide the theologians in the end to a true understanding of the faith." (E. Milner-White and W. L. Knox, quoted in *The Lambeth Conference Report*, 1960, p. 141.)

It is interesting to compare the statement of 1948 with what was said on this theme in the Conference of 1968, in relation to the Thirty-Nine Articles.

"The inheritance of faith which characterizes the Anglican Communion is an authority of a multiple kind and . . . to the different elements which occur in the different strands of this inheritance, different Anglicans attribute different levels of authority. From this foundation arises Anglican tolerance, comprehensiveness and ordered liberty, though admittedly it makes Anglican theology variegated rather than monolithic, and informal rather than systematically deductive." (*Lambeth Conference Report*, 1968, p. 82.)

After speaking of the place of the early Creeds and the Reformation formulae within this inheritance the Report goes on to speak of

"the authority given within the Anglican tradition to reason, not least as exercised in historical and philosophical inquiry, . . . To such a threefold inheritance of faith belongs a concept of authority which refuses to insulate itself against the testing of history and the free action of reason. It seeks to be a credible authority and therefore is concerned to secure historical support and to have its credentials in a shape which corresponds to the requirements of reason." (*Ibid.*)

In this insistence on the rights of reason in relation to faith, especially as exercised in philosophical and historical inquiry, and on the fact that the authority of the faith cannot insulate itself against the testing of history and the free action of reason, we have a striking illustration of the Anglican openness to the development of human thought and civilization which we spoke of at the beginning of this paper. Here is a place at which many apparent differences between ourselves and the Orthodox may arise. How, we may be asked, can we permit the critical intellect to pry into the heart of the mysteries of the faith? How, we may respond, can the Eastern Orthodox Church appear so unaffected by historical and critical inquiry?

Here again, having registered the differences, we shall have to probe deeper and ask whether underneath there is a real but less apparent similarity. It has been customary among Anglicans to attribute our more optimistic view of the role of human reason to the influence of the Greek fathers. Is there foundation for this? Have the more speculative and critical activities of Anglican thinkers been in true succession to the work of the Christian authors of the centuries before the schism of East and West? How far will the Orthodox Church own the free religious thinking

of a Solovyov or a Fyodorov, certainly no less daring than the most prophetic writings of the West?

These are not questions which we can answer in advance. But I believe that as Anglicans we shall approach them with a conviction of the positive value of diversity in the Church, even in questions of doctrine, and an experience that diversity need not in itself be divisive. This does not mean that the experience of tension and disagreement within the Church is not, at times, extremely painful. There are occasions when we do not see our way forward through questions of controversy, when individuals may be deeply troubled by conflicting tendencies, and when for a time, we go forward together on an agreement to disagree, rather than on any profound vision of unity. But this experience, difficult though it is, is consistent with a corresponding conviction that "truth is great and will prevail".

"We believe that the best answer to deviant beliefs and practices is not to try to suppress them but to bring them into the open and, by free criticism, to show what is mistaken in them as well as learning something of the truth that is hidden in every error. No doubt there is a risk in this permissiveness, but we believe that it is a risk worth taking if there is to be progress in theological understanding, and in the practical application of the faith. Furthermore it can be argued that willingness to take this risk shows a fundamental confidence in Catholic truth and in the capacity of this truth to survive in the free market of ideas. One may recall the words of St Irenaeus about the false teachers of his day: *Adversus eos victoria est sententiae eorum manifestatio.*" (John Macquarrie, in *Concilium*, vol. 4, no. 6, April, 1970.)

Where we have confidence in one another and in God, where we have patience, mutual forbearance, and a profound conviction that the truth of God is something larger than any of our ideas of it, then the way opens up to new and reconciling ways of understanding. The whole development of the theological dialogue in the last fifty years witnesses to this.

Furthermore as Anglicans we share a conviction that the only unity of faith which is lasting and valuable is a *free* unity of faith. A uniformity, whether in belief or in practice, which is imposed by some external, coercive authority is a stifling thing, which in the end destroys the life which it is meant to safeguard. There should be, of course, a proper respect for authorities in the Church, and a true concern not to disturb unnecessarily the faith and devotion of the mass of the people of God. But this is something different from a blind submission to a superior authority. In the deepest part of our tradition we can perceive that it is only in the power of God the Holy Spirit that the free unity is to be found, in which the Gospel can be proclaimed to men of every culture and every situation.

"The work begun by Christ was to be carried on by those who had learned from him; but it was to be carried on under every variation of time and place and circumstance. Each act of true apostleship would lead further away from the original external conditions, and render more indispensable the interpretative office of the Spirit."

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As the Church obeys the command to preach the Gospel to every creature, so the necessity for the Spirit's work of interpretation becomes ever more urgent. But this work of the Spirit by which the Church's tradition and proclamation is constantly made new, will never draw men away from the unchanging truth of Christ. In the power of the Spirit past and present, identity and development are made one.

"The Truth given in Christ will need from age to age the Spirit's expounding to unlock its stores; but the faith in the Spirit and in his office in the present will never loosen men from the Gospel given once for all, or draw them away from the eternal Father. . . . Standing fast in the unchanging Truth, and an endless progress in taking knowledge of it shall be indissolubly united." (F. J. A. Hort, *The Way the Truth and the Life*, pp. 19, 59.)

#### IV

The mission of the Church of Christ is now a planetary operation, in the sense that the Church is now in some measure present throughout mankind, in the sense that in most places it finds itself in a minority and missionary situation, in the sense that the world becomes ever more conscious of itself as one place. One of the greatest limitations of our Western Churches, even in their missionary implantation beyond the Western world, is their identification with the culture of the North American-Western European area. At this level alone the reconciliation of the Western Churches with the Christian East is a matter of the greatest urgency. The Eastern Orthodox Church with its capacity to penetrate deeply into the life of very diverse peoples, Greek and Syrian, Slavonic and Romanian, has something special to teach us here. And if a reconciliation with the Oriental Churches is brought about, they with their age-old identification with Asia and Africa will have a further vital contribution to make, in revealing that the Christian faith is not to be identified with any one culture or civilization.

But the question goes deeper than that. How is the Church to retain its identity and yet adapt itself and grow into the changing world of the twenty-first century? Is it possible to change and yet remain the same? Is it possible truly to remain the same unless one changes? Will the Western Churches survive their present moods of violent self-criticism without further schisms, or through them will they even be able to move towards unity? In the providence of God has Eastern Christianity with its long history of persecution and oppression been forced back upon itself, so as to preserve, at its heart, some secret of the inner identity of the Spirit's work through the centuries, some essential element of the unifying aspect of the Church's comprehensiveness? Have our Western Churches been led out into contact with the world, in order to discover how God himself in Christ is at work in varying ways in all the religions and cultures of mankind, so that we have to offer an equally essential element of diversification to the unity of the whole? Is there some real complementarity of function between Christian East and West at this point,

something which God could show us if we would together approach him in faith and expectation? If there is, then the Anglican-Orthodox conversations which we are preparing might prove to be of greater importance than we have yet recognized, and indeed of significance for the whole Christian world, and the whole of mankind.

*A Marginal Note on Comprehensiveness*

R. P. C. HANSON

I

This paper is complementary to that of the Revd A. M. Allchin, not contradictory nor critical of it. The paper might be regarded as an elaboration of Mr Allchin's statement (in section I) that "Anglicans are open to history and involved in history". It is an attempt to explain further what this means.

The first point to be observed is that, somehow or other, the Anglican Communion as a whole has since about the year 1800 had a remarkably good record as regards schism. If we survey the history of the Anglican Communion since that date, we shall be surprised to see that there are absolutely no records of a major schism within the Anglican Church and very few of even minor schisms. In Africa, of course, there have been schisms to form African sects, but this is a phenomenon which no Church in Africa has been able to avoid. In South Africa a schism took place, but it cannot be regarded as a very important one. There was one "Evangelical Church of England" formed in the last century, but it is now reduced almost to nothing. Consider on the other hand some of the pressures towards schism which the Anglican Communion met during that period. The American Civil War in the middle of the last century caused almost every single non-Roman Catholic body to split, but it did not cause a schism in the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America. The Australian Church, divided into high-church and low-church dioceses, has avoided allowing this division to grow into a schism. Above all the Church of England itself, torn in bitter and long-continued strife between Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical, when many on both sides thought that the others were betraying fundamental truths and that all was at stake, surprisingly produced no major schism. The Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869, which was an entirely new experience and a great shock, at one time appeared to be threatening a schism in the Church between the extreme Protestants and the central Churchmen, but this danger was averted. If we compare the Anglican Communion with any other major Communion during that period - even with the Church of Rome, when we remember the Old Catholic