

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

POPE PIUS IX AND THE EASTERN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHS.

By the REV. C. T. HARLEY WALKER, M.A., B.Litt.

(The following study is mainly based on an article by Professor Teodor M. Popescu appearing in "Biserica Ortodoxă Română," November-December 1935, and another article by the Archbishop of Athens appearing in "Theologia," March 1936.)

PIUS IX stands out among the Popes for his impressive personality, for the length of his reign (1846—1878), exceeding that of any of his predecessors or successors, for the contrast between what he lost in temporal power and what he gained in ecclesiastical prestige. Through him the challenge of the Papacy to the modern world was expressed with all imaginable precision, administration was centralized, the Jesuit and Ultramontane ideal was fully realized, perhaps all the more so because of his earlier liberalizing tendencies. To a Jewish admirer he appeared as a kind of Messiah, to his biographer as "God's masterpiece." He is reported to have said of himself, "I am Tradition," "I am the Church," "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." He is remembered on account of the Syllabus, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and above all the Vatican Council. But to English people, of other communions at any rate, his relations with the East are less familiar. In 1848 he addressed an encyclical to Eastern Christians, to which, in the same year the four Orthodox Patriarchs issued a reply. Both documents are of permanent importance for anyone who wishes to understand the attitude of the Vatican to the Orthodox and that of the Orthodox to the Vatican. Perhaps if they had been better studied in England at the time and since, fundamental divergences between the different portions of Christendom would have been better appreciated. Neither side can be accused of failing to make its meaning perfectly clear. There is a lapidary impressiveness in both statements, which contrasts with the ambiguity too common in theological utterances, whether polemical or conciliatory, of the present day. This is no doubt partly due to the fact that both are occupied with well-worn themes and leave modern criticism and modern speculation out of account.

In order to appreciate the situation in 1848 we require to take into account the course of political and religious history before and since, and through it all working the subtle tenacious many-sided diplomacy of the Vatican, concerned to subjugate everything and everyone to its own aims, deterred by no rebuff, ready to adapt itself to any change of circumstances, prepared to circumvent all obstacles, largely unsuspected or only half understood at the time alike by friend and foe, but more clearly intelligible for future historians. Of course, for the

Pope and his subordinates this diplomacy was the work of God. Otherwise they could never have prosecuted it so tirelessly, relentlessly and elaborately. For other people its relation to the Providential scheme must cause grave searchings of heart and raises questions hard to answer. We each see it from a particular angle. It needs an effort to comprehend it as a whole. So it is helpful for a Westerner to see how it presents itself to the Eastern mind.

For several centuries the Popes had been primarily more concerned with Western problems. They had not forgotten Eastern Christendom, it is true. But while Turkey remained in the ascendant, the sphere for intervention in the East was restricted. The Orthodox had little chance of attacking the Pope, even if they had wished to do so, and little disposition to seek his protection. For them the theological divergences, which produced the schism, loomed larger than they do for most of us, preoccupied as we are with the issues of the Reformation and other later developments. The bitterness produced by controversy was greatly intensified by the atrocities perpetrated by the Crusaders at the sack of Constantinople 1204. What was then done formed a precedent for the horrors of the French and Russian Revolutions. Innocent III's comment on the Crusaders' exploit is quoted by the Archbishop of Athens (*op. cit.*, p. 6). After some strictures on their excesses he remarked, "The Lord wishing to console His Church took away the Empire from the boastful, superstitious, and disloyal Greeks and gave it to the humble, pious and orthodox Latins." Other horrors followed. People were burned alive in Cyprus. The pride of the Popes and the cruelty and sacrilege of their adherents left an indelible impression on the Eastern Orthodox. They preferred the clemency of the Turks. For them "Crusader" means "bandit." Their ruined churches form eloquent reminders of the Crusaders' work till the present day. The sacrilegious spirit of the Latins has not changed, it seems, with the lapse of time. General Bucov's guns smashed Orthodox monasteries in Transylvania in the eighteenth century: one of them has recently been restored. The Russian cathedral at Warsaw was demolished by the Poles in our own time. And an irredentist visitor is quoted as referring to that event and expressing his detestation of the new Orthodox cathedral at Cluj. Political and religious hatred are capable of producing a very odious combination.

Elated at the capture of Constantinople, Innocent III had dreamed of something like a repetition of the miraculous draught of fishes in the shape of a wholesale conversion of the Orthodox: but the dream was not fulfilled. Atrocities and abortive conferences went on for a time. Then there was a long informal truce.

For centuries the Popes contented themselves with encouraging the missions of a large number of religious orders in the East and the foundation of colleges for Eastern students. The Turks would have regarded general union between Rome and their Christian subjects as a threat to their Empire, and accordingly favoured anti-unionist candidates for the Patriarchate. But missionary effort was facilitated in their domains by the support of the French legation. The formation of larger Uniate bodies was effected outside the Turkish Empire.

In the nineteenth century, having weathered the storms of the Reformation and the French Revolution, the Popes were ready to go forward in the East. Missionary enterprise was intensified. The Jesuits even thought of establishing a school for Uniate monks on the Holy Mount Athos. Gregory XVI (1831-1846), Pius IX's predecessor, was known as "the great missionary Pope." The power of Turkey was waning, and the Christian nations were gaining ground. The advance of Russia gave prestige and support to Orthodoxy and caused anxiety to the Popes. But the frequent wars between Russia and Turkey prevented the Czar from giving continuous protection to the Orthodox subjects of the Sultan, such as the French ambassador assured to Roman Catholics. Certain Uniates in Russian territory were more or less forcibly converted to Orthodoxy. And on the occasion of a visit of Nicholas I to Rome, 1845, Gregory XVI made efforts to secure liberty of conscience for his adherents among the subjects of the Czar. These efforts were continued by his successor, Pius IX, without complete success.

A further matter of concern to the Popes was the enterprise of Protestant missions, particularly the Anglo-German mission at Jerusalem, 1842. It was felt that the "motherly and protecting wing of the Catholic Church," was needed to defend Orientals against this new threat.

Another development to be noted was the weakening of the power of the Ecumenical Patriarch. In 1830 the Uniates were taken from his civil control and put under that of a Patriarch of their own through French influence. Similarly Copts, Syrians and Armenians obtained an independent position. Things became easier also for the Orthodox subjects of the Sultan. They were however, suspected of nationalism and lacked outside protection. The diminution of prestige suffered by the Ecumenical Patriarch appeared providential for Rome.

The Russian threat probably contributed to produce a remarkable *rapprochement* between Pius and Sultan Mejid. Papal diplomacy having prepared the way for it, the Turkish ambassador at Vienna Shekib-Effendi, visited Rome, 1847, to congratulate Pius on his accession and addressed him as follows: "Just as of old the Queen of Sheba greeted King Solomon, so the envoy of the Sublime Port comes to greet Pope Pius IX in the name of his Sovereign. Considering that the marvellous and magnificent achievements of His Holiness not only fill Europe with glory, but spread far in all quarters of the Universe, my mighty Monarch has honoured me with the mission of presenting his most cordial congratulations to the Pope on His accession to the throne of St. Peter. Though for centuries there have been no amicable relations between Constantinople and Rome, my mighty Lord desires to live in friendship with Your Holiness. He has the highest respect for the Person of Your Holiness and will know how to protect the Christians dwelling in His vast domains." The Pope gave the ambassador his portrait. Archbishop Ferrieri of Sidon was sent in return to convey the Pope's greetings to the Sultan, to visit his adherents and inspect his missions in the Turkish Empire, with a view to their welfare and further to approach the Orthodox Churches. He brought medals,

and a bronze and gold replica of Trajan's column together with other presents for the Sultan. The Sultan in return gave him his portrait set in diamonds and other presents for the Pope. It was arranged, moreover, for Valerga, newly appointed Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, to act as Apostolic Delegate at the Sublime Port. The Pope wished to assume the position of protector to all Christians in the Turkish domains.

It is easy to understand the significance of the Crimean War in the light of the events we have been considering. A medal was struck in Paris with the inscription "Dieu protège le catholicisme, le protestantisme et l'islamisme"! According to the French Press, if the Orthodox erected a cross on St. Sofia, it would be all up with the Papacy. The Turkish government asked the Ecumenical Patriarch to declare Russia schismatic. But he refused to do so. Victorian England sacrificed much to help the Pope and the Sultan. Russia as a result of her defeat lost her protectorate over the Orthodox in Turkish territory.

The Pope's overtures to the East met with a certain amount of response. A renegade Greek professor from Constantinople, Jacob Pitzipios, who had quarrelled with the Patriarch, came forward with a grandiose scheme of an Eastern Christian society to promote Union and prepare the way for a general council under the auspices of the Emperor of France or Russia. His scheme was approved by the Pope, 1855. But later he broke with the Pope and expelled him from his society. A result of his activities was the formation of a special department of Propaganda to deal with Eastern questions. Special attention was given to prayer for the conversion of "Greek schismatics," one petition to Our Lady at the suggestion of a Russian Uniate, Shuvaloff, who had become a Barnabite, being indulgenced.

We may now proceed to consider the Papal encyclical "In suprema Petri sede" (Jan. 6th, 1848), which Archbishop Ferrieri took with him on his mission. Previous efforts had been disappointing in their results. A well-timed and carefully prepared direct appeal might realize at last Innocent III's dream of a miraculous draught of fishes in the shape of mass conversion. The encyclical begins by stressing the special interest, which the Pope, "raised by Divine Providence to the supreme throne of St. Peter," felt for the East, where our Lord and His Apostles had preached the Gospel and many great saints and theologians and martyrs had shed their radiance. There councils had been held, including general councils "under the presidency of the Bishop of Rome." Though the East had been subjugated by non-Christian peoples, and many Christians there had been separated from the unity of the Church, others had stood firm: and thereby a large number had been enabled to persevere in Catholic unity when times were less hard. He addressed himself to these Catholics in particular. Archbishop Ferrieri would visit them and plead their cause with the Sultan. He would also rectify abuses, which had crept in during times of stress. The Pope holds the Eastern rites in great esteem and promises to maintain them, in accordance with the practice of his predecessors, who had granted schools and other privileges to Orientals.

Later he addresses Christians not in communion with him, impelled by the love of Christ to seek them out as lost sheep by rough and inaccessible paths. He appeals to them, particularly to the members of their hierarchy, to reflect upon the unity of the Church mentioned in the Creed but disregarded in their mutual divisions, as well as in their separation from Rome. He refers to our Lord's High Priestly prayer and to the prerogatives of St. Peter inherited by the Popes, supporting his claims by references to St. Irenaeus, St. Athanasius, St. Chrysostom and St. Clement of Rome, and quoting the words uttered at Chalcedon, "Peter has spoken in these terms through Leo." Papal supremacy has always received conciliar recognition. He conjures them to return to communion with the Holy See. Let it be without delay. They have no excuse for remaining in schism. They should be ready to make any sacrifice for the honour of our Lord and the recompense of eternal life. He promises to receive them with fatherly benevolence and the warm love always characteristic of the Holy See. He imposes no harsh terms, only what is absolutely necessary, the deletion from their services of additions contrary to Catholic faith and unity made since the schism. If they respond to his appeal, they shall keep their positions and dignities. Their return will cheer his heart and set forward the missionary work of the Church. For it he prays and in anticipation of it he bestows his blessing on all Catholics in the East.

The reply of the Orthodox Patriarchs is longer than the Papal encyclical. They begin by observing the need for keeping the proclamation of the Faith uncontaminated. By the malice of the Devil heresies have arisen from time to time, flourishing for a season but destined ultimately to perish, smitten by the thunderbolt of the anathema of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. It is a mysterious disposition of Providence why they should be permitted to continue. But Popery, the modern heresy, will perish in time just like Arianism, the ancient heresy. Its origin was the addition of the Filioque clause in the Creed, which is to be condemned for a number of reasons. This addition is unsupported by Scriptural or patristic authority, it confuses the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, it violates the decrees of the Councils. Popes Leo III and John VIII repudiated it. It led to a number of other innovations and abuses, such as sprinkling instead of immersion in Baptism, the denial of the Chalice to the laity, the use of unleavened wafers instead of a single loaf, the disuse of the Epiklesis, clerical celibacy, Papal supremacy. It induced its supporters to falsify documents as well as to misinterpret Holy Writ in order to bolster up a bad case. The Eastern Patriarchs refused to be accomplices in Western error and maintained the Faith, as true history relates. They learned to their cost, as St. Basil had learned in his day, how obdurate and insensible to truth the people of the West are.

Popery has not ceased to disturb the peace of God's Church, making merchandise of souls by proselytism, corrupting the Faith, the demon of innovation having misled arrogant scholastics and ambitious masterful Bishops of Old Rome. But the Eastern prelates have preserved the inestimable heritage of their Fathers in spite of manifold

persecutions and by God's help will transmit it to posterity till the end of the world. Papists attack Orthodoxy, because it convicts them of error.

The present Pope has now launched a fresh offensive by his encyclical, "which has penetrated into our flock like a foreign pollution," slandering the ancient Holy Fathers of the Church, as though they would have admitted his claims, and "us, as though we were likely to be disloyal to their traditions," consequently maligning us to our flocks. "Monopolizing the Catholic Church of Christ as though it were his private property, on account of his holding, as he boasts, the episcopal throne of Blessed Peter, he thus wishes to trick the more simple into apostasy from Orthodoxy." Any properly instructed Orthodox Christian will perceive that his utterances, like those of his predecessors, express not peace and charity, as he pretends, but sophistry and deceit. He will not take them in. Cf. St. John x. 5.

The Patriarchs then proceed to controvert the Papal encyclical in detail from Scripture and Church history. St. Peter's throne according to the Bible was at Antioch, not Rome. Even there he was censured. The rock, on which Christ founded His Church was the confession, not the person of St. Peter. Popes of Rome like other high prelates have been censured by Councils.

As to Christian unity and charity, the Patriarchs stress their importance no less than His Holiness. Our Lord prayed that St. Peter's faith might not fail. If it be assumed that the Pope is the successor of St. Peter, that prayer may have reference to him also, if he were to weep like St. Peter and return to the faith. They do not dare to ask him to do this "without delay," as he has invited them, but after due consideration and advice from learned theologians, of whom there is no lack in the West.

St. Irenaeus would not approve modern Rome. His words with regard to the Epiklesis or Ekklesis condemn Papal practice.

The recourse to Rome of such Fathers as SS. Athanasius and Chrysostom for the settlement of disputes does not prove Papal supremacy. Similarly other Patriarchs have been consulted. If a solution is not thus attained, the secular power is informed.

Leo was only acclaimed at Chalcedon after a searching enquiry. If the present Pope would prove his orthodoxy like Leo, the signatories of the encyclical would say, "Let the holy hand, which has wiped away the tears of the Catholic Church be kissed." Let him thus show himself a worthy successor to Leo I and to Leo III, who inscribed the Creed without innovations on shields. In hope of this the Catholic Church has not filled the sees vacated by schism with nominal occupants (as the Pope has filled the Eastern sees).

The terribly distressing innovations contained in the Papal encyclical show to what a hopeless labyrinth of error Popery has brought even the most intelligent and pious Bishops of the Roman Church. The Pope asks the Orthodox to cancel innovations in their rites. He accuses them of doing what he has done himself, as any liturgiologist should know. Orthodoxy has kept the Church pure without any secular control, or as the Pope describes it, "sacred

supremacy," through the loyalty of love in the unity of the Faith. If Orthodox prelates attempted such innovations, the laity would not permit it. The Pope should be ready to make a sacrifice for unity by removing these abuses. Until he does so, his appeals must be rejected as much as the present encyclical.

The Patriarchs conclude with a moving appeal to their flocks to hold fast to the Faith. "For our Faith, brethren, is not from men and through man, but through the revelation of Jesus Christ, which the divine Apostles have proclaimed, the holy Ecumenical Synods have confirmed, the most eminent Doctors of the world have transmitted and the blood of the holy Martyrs, that was shed, has validated. 'Let us hold fast to the confession' that we have received in its purity from so great men, avoiding any innovation whatever as a suggestion of the Devil; he who accepts an innovation declares the Orthodox Faith, that is proclaimed, to be imperfect. But this is sealed as perfect, admitting neither diminution nor addition nor any change whatever: and he, who dares to make, propose or think of such a thing, has denied the Faith of Christ and of his own accord incurred eternal anathema for blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." This condemnation rests on Scripture and is not merely the utterance of the writers of the encyclical. It affects equally all innovators, who of their own free will put on "a curse as a garment," be they Popes, Patriarchs, Clergy or Laity.

The Orthodox flock is tended in the fruitful pastures of the mystical Eden not in "rough and inaccessible" regions, as His Holiness imagines.

"What shall we sinners render to the Lord 'for all His benefits to us'? Our Lord and God, Who is in need of nothing, Who has bought us with His own blood, asks nought from us but our sanctification from our whole heart and soul in the blameless, holy Faith of our Fathers, love and devotion to the Orthodox Church, that has regenerated us, not with innovating aspersion, but with the divine Laver of Apostolic Baptism, that nourishes us according to the eternal Testament of our Saviour with His own precious Body and bounteously, as a true Mother, gives us to drink of His precious Blood outpoured for us and for the salvation of the world. Let us then gather round Her deliberately 'as chickens round a bird,' in whatsoever part of the world we find ourselves, North, South, East or West: let us rivet our gaze and our thoughts on Her most divine and glorious face and beauty: let us grasp with both hands Her shining robe, in which 'the Bridegroom comely in splendour' arrayed Her with His own spotless hands, when He redeemed Her from bondage to the seducer and decked Her as His bride for ever. Let us feel in our souls the yearning mutual devotion that unites in love Mother and children, when wolfish men, that barter souls, plot and scheme to enslave Her or snatch away like lambs Her children."