

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

IN RELATION TO THE OLD CATHOLIC CHURCHES.

BY THE REV. W. H. MACKEAN, D.D., Canon of Rochester.

THE Old Catholic Movement came into being because a number of Roman Catholic priests, including some of high distinction, who refused in 1870 to accept the new dogma of Papal Infallibility, eventually found themselves excommunicated. It began in Germany and Switzerland, where self-governing Churches gradually grew up ; it was joined by the famous Church of Utrecht in Holland, that had long been independent of the Papacy ; and from Utrecht it derived its episcopal succession. In 1889 these Old Catholic Churches were consolidated by a statement of faith, known as the Declaration of Utrecht, which was the result of a conference of their five bishops and chief theologians ; and the bishops undertook not to consecrate anyone to the episcopal office without the consent of the whole episcopate. The Old Catholic Church has now been in existence for nearly sixty years. In Holland the number of its members, though small, has steadily grown ; in Germany and Switzerland it has declined ; but on the other hand the movement has spread to other countries—to the Poles in U.S.A. and Poland, to Austria, Czechoslovakia, Croatia, together with a congregation in Paris. It has altogether thirteen bishops ; and omitting the Polish Church in America and Poland, whose numbers are uncertain, there are about 142,000 Old Catholics. It has appealed chiefly to the educated ; it has never won the enthusiasm of the masses ; and its early hopes have not been fulfilled. Holland is more conservative than Germany or Switzerland, and the country districts of the two latter countries are more conservative than the towns. The services are in the vernacular. There are no weekday services except on a few festivals, and the churches are kept closed. In appearance they are more subdued than Roman Catholic churches ; but they contain various images and pictures, sometimes two side-altars and confessional boxes. The organ and choir are in a gallery at the west end. The consecrated bread is reserved in either an aumbry or a tabernacle. The Mass Vestments are worn. The services at the chief Church in Utrecht, on the Sunday I was there, were Holy Communion at 8, High Mass with Sermon and Benediction at 10, Vespers and Benediction at 6.30. But in many churches of Germany and Switzerland a service is not provided on every Sunday of the month. The only service at Berne, on the Sunday I was present, was High Mass with Sermon at 9.30 ; yet even so, there were no communicants, as there were none at the High Mass in Utrecht. About a hundred people attended the latter, and sixty at Berne, excluding the choirs. Men sat on one side of the Nave, women on the other. A bell was rung at the consecration of both the bread and the wine ; and there

was much genuflecting afterwards by the priest and his attendants. The Filioque clause in the Creed is, I believe, generally omitted; but it appears in the German and is optional in the French Prayer-book. At Baptism salt and chrism are used, and the child is given a lighted candle to hold for a few seconds, but the service struck me as simple and informal. Chrism is also administered at Confirmation. Holy water is used, and incense on certain occasions. Private confession to a priest is not compulsory. Indulgences are abolished. The clergy are free to marry.

There is much in the Declaration of Utrecht with which we are in agreement; but is there anything implied in it which is contrary to the position of the Church of England? I will begin with section 5, which states, "We refuse to accept the decrees of the Council of Trent in matters of discipline, and as for the dogmatic decisions of that Council we accept them only so far as they are in harmony with the teaching of the primitive Church." Nevertheless there are various doctrines, and practices in which doctrine is involved, which the Old Catholics have retained. One of my authorities is a Catechism in French (*Catéchisme Catholique, Historique et Dogmatique*), which bears the approval of the Archbishop of Utrecht, who wrote that he found nothing in it which did not conform to the doctrine of the Catholic Church; it is dated 1905, and is on sale at the Old Catholic Church in Paris.

Take first the Sacraments. It states (pp. 88, 55) that the Sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ, that they are seven in number, but that Protestants admit only two. This is in accordance with the Council of Trent, the number of Sacraments having been fixed at seven in the twelfth century. There are two main differences between us: (1) One of these so-called Sacraments, Extreme Unction, has been entirely abandoned by the Church of England, and is described in the 25th Article as "having grown . . . of the corrupt following of the Apostles," for the practice mentioned in the Epistle of James was a medical remedy, intended for the purpose of recovery, whereas Extreme Unction is a rite, as the French Catechism (p. 98) explains, for the dying or those dangerously ill. (2) Rome and the Old Catholics say that the Sacraments are neither more nor less than seven and that they were instituted by Jesus Christ. The Church of England does not allow that they were all so instituted (Article 25), but (in that Article and the Catechism) limits the word to two rites ordained by Christ Himself, containing both an outward sign and an inward grace. Moreover, if this definition is not accepted, and Sacraments are regarded simply as sacred rites, there is no reason for limiting the number to seven. Archbishop Bramhall, a distinguished member of the Laudian School of thought, expressed the mind of the Church of England, when he wrote that it denied "the septenary number of the sacraments" (*Works*, i. 55; ii. 634).

Further it is the practice of the Old Catholic Churches of Holland and Germany, and of country districts in Switzerland, to administer the Communion in one kind. But it is possible for a com-

municant to receive in both kinds, though the Lambeth Report, in its account of the Archbishop of Utrecht's statement, does not add that in Holland special permission must be obtained from the Bishop. This custom, opposed to Scripture and rejected in Article 30, did not grow up in the Western Church before the twelfth century, and was based upon the medieval doctrine of Concomitance that Christ is received in His entirety under either species. This doctrine, which Archbishop Laud called "the fiction of Thomas of Aquin" (*Works*, ii, 338), was accepted by the Council of Trent and is approved by the French Catechism (p. 94) and Prayer Book (*Abregé de Liturgie Catholique à l'usage de l'Eglise des Anciens Catholiques de Paris*, p. 144).

The invocation of saints is also adopted by the Old Catholics. The Catechism, to which I have referred, states (p. 55) that the rejection of invocation is a feature of Protestantism, and says (p. 132) that those who are ordinarily invoked are the Holy Virgin, the Guardian Angels and the patron saints. The Salutation of Mary, which occurs several times in the course of this little book, ends as follows: "Saint Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, poor sinners, now and at the hour of our death"; and in the Litany of the Holy Virgin (pp. 164 ff.) the request "pray for us" is repeated many times. Likewise in the French Prayer Book (pp. 1, 164 ff., 177 f.) there is invocation of Mary and other saints. The practice of invocation is uncatholic: there is no evidence in Scripture that the saints are even cognizant of our prayers, and invocation was not countenanced until the latter part of the fourth century. The mind of the Church of England is clear. In the 1549 Prayer Book all invocations of saints were deleted, it is condemned in the Homily "Concerning Prayer" (part ii), and Article 22 states: "The Romish doctrine . . . concerning invocation of saints is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God."

Next, the Council of Trent commanded that images be retained and that due honour and veneration be paid to them. That is also the official attitude of the Old Catholics, whatever their practice may be. For in recognizing the Œcumenical Councils of the first thousand years, they accept the seventh, the Second Council of Nicaea, which was held in 787. (See also French Catechism, p. 45 ff.) It directed that images be set up and "treated as holy memorials, worshipped, kissed, only without that peculiar adoration (*λατρεία*) which is reserved for the Invisible, Incomprehensible God." The use of images was strictly avoided in the early Church, and their veneration was unknown for several centuries. Our Church has no doubt upon the matter. It is opposed to Holy Scripture, for the second Commandment forbids worship in any form being offered to images; they were swept away at the Reformation; all image-worshipping is strongly condemned in the Homily "Against peril of idolatry"; the Church of England has never recognized the Seventh Œcumenical Council; and Article 22 describes the Romish doctrine concerning "Worshipping

and Adoration . . . of images" in the same terms as it does the invocation of saints. It has, however, been disputed whether the term "Romish" in this article refers to official Roman teaching or merely to extreme medievalism. After a careful examination, Bishop John Wordsworth (*The Invocation of Saints and the Twenty-second Article*, 2nd edit.) showed that it signified the former. But while Dr. Bicknell, Dr. Gibson and Dr. Kidd do not accept this interpretation in their books on the Articles, they do not claim that there is any solid ground for believing that our prayers can reach the saints, nor do they support the worship of images.

Let us now turn to section 6 of the Declaration of Utrecht, which says: "We maintain with perfect fidelity the ancient Catholic doctrine concerning the Sacrament of the Altar, by believing that we receive the Body and the Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ under the species of bread and wine." This is ambiguous, for (1) though the expression "under the forms of bread and wine" is associated with Roman doctrine, it was very exceptionally used by some who strongly held Reformed doctrine (N. Dimock, *Euch. Presence*, p. 148 ff.); and (2) it is possible to draw a distinction between "receive" and "present" under the forms of bread and wine; for it can be maintained that many things, which are not present, are received under the form of documents, and that to receive one thing under the form of another implies the absence rather than the presence of the thing received. But the point is in what sense do the Old Catholic Churches understand it. There is no doubt that according to their faith the Body and Blood of Christ are really present under the species of bread and wine. That belief is stated in the French Catechism (p. 133), and it underlies the service of Benediction which is prevalent in Holland and the country districts of Germany and Switzerland. It is also implied by the observance of Corpus Christi Day, which under its German name Fronleichnam appears in the *Alt-katholischer Kalender* for 1931, and is one of the few days, other than Sundays, to have a special Epistle and Gospel. Further, Old Catholics regard the belief in the real presence under the species of bread and wine as of great importance, so much so that if a member of the Church of England wished to receive the Holy Communion in Holland, he would be asked whether he held this doctrine. That is what the Lambeth Report, in its account of the Archbishop of Utrecht's statement (p. 141) means when it says: "The Old Catholic Church is prepared to give Communion to Anglicans provided that they give notice to the priest beforehand and *satisfy him as to their orthodoxy as loyal members of the Anglican Church.*" [*The italics are mine.*]

But the belief in a presence of our Lord in or under the species of bread and wine by virtue of consecration is not the teaching of the Prayer Book or Articles. It was definitely repudiated by Archbishop Cranmer on behalf of the Church of England in these notable words to Gardiner:

"As concerning the form of doctrine used in this Church of

England in the Holy Communion, that the Body and Blood of Christ be under the forms of bread and wine, when you shall show the place where this form of words is expressed, then shall you purge yourself of that, which in the meantime I take to be a plain untruth" (*Cranmer on Lord's Supper*, p. 53).

Hooker made the well-known statement: "The real presence of Christ's most blessed Body and Blood is not to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the sacrament." This Old Catholic doctrine is opposed also to the teaching of the Caroline divines, for when Cardinal Perron referred to a real presence under or in the sacramental species, Bishop Andrewes, who held high sacramental views, replied: "The terms of *sous les espèces* or *dans les espèces sacramentales*, it would pose the Cardinal and all the whole College to find they were ever heard or dreamt of in S. Augustine's time, or many hundred years after" (*Minor Works*, p. 14). Nor again was it the teaching, as Bishop Gore agrees (*The Body of Christ*, p. 50 ff.), of Waterland in his famous book.

Then as regards the service of Benediction, is it not a mode of worship which the Church of England is determined not to allow even within its wide limits? Likewise the observance of Corpus Christi Day, dating only from the thirteenth century and intended to popularize the doctrine of Transubstantiation, takes us into a thoroughly medieval atmosphere. It was omitted deliberately in the First Prayer Book of Edward VI and has never since found a place in our Prayer Book.

The Declaration of Utrecht in the same section proceeds to the sacrificial aspect of the Holy Communion: "It is the act, by which we represent upon earth and appropriate to ourselves the one offering which Jesus Christ makes in heaven . . . for the salvation of redeemed humanity, by appearing for us in the presence of God." But the theory that Christ is continually offering Himself in heaven or pleading His sacrifice rests upon an unsound interpretation of Hebrews ix. 11, 12, 24 (*Wescott, Hebrews*, p. 230), and is unknown to the Book of Common Prayer and the Articles; and the other theory that the object of the Holy Communion is to represent the same offering on earth is also absent from the Prayer Book and Articles: in them, as in the New Testament, the Holy Communion is associated with the death of Christ, not with His life in Heaven, and the Communion Service, following the New Testament, knows only three sacrifices, of ourselves (Rom. xii. 1), our gifts (Heb. xiii. 16) and our praises and thanksgivings (Heb. xiii. 15).

Having considered sections 5 and 6, we are in a better position to understand section 1 of the Utrecht Declaration, which accepts the Vincentian definition—that is truly and properly Catholic, which has been believed everywhere, always and by all. "For this reason," it goes on to say, "we persevere in professing the faith of the primitive Church, as formulated in the Oecumenical symbols and specified precisely by the unanimously accepted decisions of the Oecumenical Councils held in the undivided Church of the first thousand years." But it is clear from the examination

of sections 5 and 6, that the Old Catholic Churches do not interpret the Vincentian definition of Catholicity, so as to give adequate value to what has been believed *always*. Holy Scripture is one source of their faith, but they also find in later tradition the source, e.g., of (a) the doctrine of the Holy Communion that results in Communion in one kind, the service of Benediction and the observance of Corpus Christi Day, (b) the doctrine of the seven sacraments, especially "the corrupt following of the Apostles" in Extreme Unction, (c) the doctrine underlying the invocation of saints, (d) their approval of image-worship that is directly opposed to Scripture. On the other hand, the position of the Church of England is laid down again and again in the Articles (6, 8, 20, 21, 34). It will not allow any necessary doctrine to be based simply on the traditions of the Church apart from Holy Scripture, nor does it countenance rites and ceremonies which are opposed to Scripture. The chief test of Catholicity lies in essential agreement with Holy Scripture.

Such is the Declaration of Utrecht. In it there is, we are glad to acknowledge, a Protestant element; but unfortunately it includes also important differences of belief and of practices, in which doctrine is involved, between the Old Catholic Churches and the Church of England. And yet in a memorandum in the Report of the Archbishops' Committee on Faith and Order, dated February, 1930, the writer says (p. 147): "It is so entirely in accordance with the teaching and spirit of the Prayer Book that it is difficult to see how any one loyal to that teaching and that spirit could refuse to accept it." Further, even the Lambeth Conference of 1930 in Resolution 35(c) makes the inexplicable statement: "*The Conference agrees that there is nothing in the Declaration of Utrecht inconsistent with the teaching of the Church of England.*" This is a matter of no mere academic interest, we are dealing with one of practical importance, for the Encyclical Letter (pp. 25 ff.) says: "The Conference has asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint Commissions of theologians to confer with similar Commissions, if appointed by the authorities of the Orthodox and of the Old Catholics, and it is hoped that these Commissions may find such a unity in faith and such a similarity in practice to exist between the Churches, that restoration of communion would become possible as soon as the appropriate assemblies of the various Churches can meet." And further, it was stated in the Report of the Committee (p. 142) "that there was to be a Synod of the Old Catholic Church held in Vienna in September, 1931, that the question of the relations with the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church would be discussed, and that it was hoped that a very close union between all three might be the result of that Conference. The hope was expressed that the Delegations from both the Orthodox Church and the Anglican Church would attend."

I come now to the subject of Reunion. In the first place, what is the Old Catholic attitude towards the Church of England? In 1925 the Old Catholic Church of Holland, with the agreement

of the other bishops, decided at last that Anglican Orders were valid. As regards the XXXIX Articles, it certainly dislikes and is repelled by them, as were von Döllinger, and the Archbishop of Utrecht who would not consecrate Bishop Cabrera for Spain because he had adopted them. Further, great importance is attached in Holland to what is considered purity of faith in a Church. And, as I understand it, it is the vast mass of English Churchpeople, who do not hold Anglo-Catholic views, that are a serious obstacle to reunion. But at the same time Old Catholics do not sympathize, I gather, with the Roman proclivities of Anglican extremists; naturally so, for while they at great cost were cut off and have gradually moved further away in thought and practice from Rome, they see a section of the English Church drawing closer towards it in doctrine and customs.

In the second place, what is our attitude to the Old Catholics? We admire this gallant little Church for its courageous stand against the powerful ecclesiastical organization of Rome. We appreciate its Protestant aspects. We are impressed by the determination which has inspired Old Catholics in the face of opposition, difficulty and disappointment. We readily acknowledge their high-mindedness, their love of religious liberty, their evangelical piety. We value the friendly relations which exist between us, and are ready to meet them and other Christians at the Lord's Table on the understanding that intercommunion does not imply uniformity of doctrine or practice. But it is rendering no real service to the cause of Christian unity to disguise the positions of the two Churches. With all goodwill and friendliness we must acknowledge that their standpoint is not ours. The *ἡθός* of the two Churches is different. The Old Catholic Churches stand midway between the Church of Rome and the Church of England. They are in our eyes semi-reformed churches. If union were achieved here and now, it could only be by their regarding one section of our Church as if it were the whole, and by emphasizing views which have recently found their way into the Church of England and are opposed not only to Evangelical Churchmanship, but to the historical High Church School in the English Church. Neither Old Catholics, however, nor we wish to compromise our Churches. We stand resolutely by our position as a Catholic, Apostolic, Reformed and Protestant Church; we cannot sacrifice that for the sake of union with a Church great or small; nor are we willing that association with a small Communion, remote from our ordinary life, should jeopardize our closer relationship with the great non-episcopal Churches at home, not because they are mighty indeed in numbers, but because living in the same country, speaking the same language, and sharing a common life, we and they are linked together by ties, racial, historical and spiritual.
