

## *The Church of Serbia Permitted Anglicans to Commune in 1865*

(The below article is taken from an Anglican source)

### ORTHODOX PRECEDENT

Orthodox precedent for the admission of non-Orthodox in destitution exists as far back as the twelfth century, and was justified by the Orthodox canonist Balsamon, but no precedent exists, so far as is known, for the public admission for non-Orthodox not in destitution. Neither the Patriarch nor the Serbian Church is committed to any repetition of the action, nor is the Orthodox Church as a whole, nor is the Anglican Church committed in any way. But it has nevertheless no small importance. Evidently some of the Orthodox in Belgrade were not very happy about it, fearing it might be premature. The *Politika* said: "Although the manifestation of the relationship made so beautifully among us at the cathedral was both touching and praiseworthy, some people did not approve the action of the Patriarch because the Anglicans are not in formal communion with us."

Frank Steel, an attaché of the British legation, who was one of the eight communicants, writes a letter to the *Church Times* of which I give some extracts:

"As there is no English church or chaplain in Belgrade, a letter was sent to the Patriarch, asking if he would permit us to make our communion at the cathedral on Christmas Day. The Patriarch replied expressing his approval, and personally administered the Sacrament to four Americans and four English people, of whom I was one."

"I understand that no patriarch has ever officiated in this capacity before, but His Holiness insisted on administering the Sacrament himself. I hear that a large number of Orthodox priests have expressed their disapproval of His Holiness' action, and the newspapers have given diverse views on the matter."

It would be indeed interesting if Mr. Steel would give us some more details of what must evidently have been a very wonderful experience.

### A WAR PRECEDENT

Another letter has also been printed in the same journal from an English country parson who was communicated by a Serb priest during the war:

"It may be of interest to know that during the war, while I was stationed at Salonika, I was admitted to the Sacrament of Holy Communion by the express consent and with the utmost goodwill of the Serbian ecclesiastical authorities. There could be no question of destitution in this case, for English chaplains and services were well to the fore. I took it to be a grateful acknowledgement of the kindly feelings between me and the Serbians under my command, and who asked that I might communicate with them. I was not a chaplain."

This is indeed a remarkable letter. The sum total of the matter seems to be, whatever the theological issues involved may be, that the Serbs like the Americans and English and wish to share their religious experiences and privileges with them.

### INTERCOMMUNION SIXTY YEARS AGO

I am supposed to chronicle news in these letters, but perhaps I may be pardoned for once if I delve down into the files of the *Church Times* as far back as August, 1865, to find an occasion when a similar thing seems to have happened in Belgrade. The following is quoted from a correspondent signed W[illiam]. D[enton].

"When I mentioned in my former letter that I received communion in the Serbian Church at the hands of the Archimandrite of Studenitza, I forgot at the same time to point out the full significance of the act. The Archimandrite was one of the ecclesiastics consulted by the Archbishop of Belgrade as to my request for communion on Whitsunday, so that the administration was not the act of an individual, however prominent his position, but was the synodical act of the prelates and inferior clergy of Servia. I arrived at the monastery of Studenitza on Monday. I left it on Wednesday, and on Thursday I had another pleasant meeting with the Bishop of Tschatchat. I found that he knew all about the proposed administration to me by the Archimandrite. Leaving him, I had a few days' travel in the interior of the country and met all the leading ecclesiastics. Among others I had pleasure in meeting the Archpriest of Jagodina, whose acquaintance I had made while he was a resident of the monastery of Ruscavitza. I found on all sides the greatest satisfaction at my communion, and I heard the strongest desire expressed for closer intercourse with the English Church on the ground of its orthodoxy and the prominent position given to scriptural teaching in its formularies.

"I had the pleasure of staying with the Bishop of Schabatz and the opportunity of discussing with that able and large-minded prelate the question of intercommunion of the Churches of England and Servia. Referring to my communion at Studenitza he hailed me as a member of the Orthodox

Church. But he did more than this. I was accompanied by an English layman who intends to make a stay in Servia of at least two months' duration after my leaving. I mentioned that as he was accustomed to communicate in the English Church he was unwilling to be deprived of the same blessing whilst in a strange land. The bishop at once declared that there was no hindrance to his communicating in Servia, and at my request gave him a letter addressed to all the clergy of his diocese, directing them to administer communion to him, a member of the Church of England, if he desired to receive the sacred mysteries.

"There now remained the general question of the right of all members of the English Church to communicate simply as members of the English Church, and without any test beyond that of their loyal membership in their own branch of the Church Catholic: and your readers will be glad to know that on the production of a simple certificate of real and living membership, settled by the bishop and indicated to me, all such persons will from this time forth be received as communicants of the Orthodox Church of Servia. And intercommunion of one portion of the Orthodox Church cannot long precede formal intercommunion with the whole Eastern Church. Here is real intercommunion on the true Catholic basis, the beginning I trust of wider communion. There is no doubt much to labor for, much to pray for, much need of 'patience and confidence', but here surely is the dawn and promise; in part also to past prayers for unity, but especially may we, I trust, without presumption, see an answer to His effectual prayer, who, in the night of His betrayal, prayed 'that they all may [541/542] be one.' Who shall despair and say any longer that the unity of all Christian people is a mere dream, when in the person of the English and Servian Churches, the distant East resumes her intercourse with the separated West; and when what to most persons since the Council of Florence has seemed unattainable, has been done without human instruments by Him who in essence and attributes is One."

### *Church Times* OPTIMISTIC

This is an extraordinarily optimistic letter almost implying that reunion between the two churches was a *fait accompli*. But, whatever the rights and wrongs of the facts, very little seems to have arisen from them. The following is a portion of a leading article that appeared in the *Church Times* on August 26, 1865.

"The Servian Church has entered into full communion with the Church of England. This is the step to which we allude. The efforts of the 'Eastern Church Association' and especially the energy, perseverance, and personal popularity in Servia of one of the first originators of that association have

induced the ancient Orthodox Church in Servia to admit privately to Holy Communion, and to promise to admit to participation in the sacred mysteries any traveler, whether priest or layman of the Anglican communion, who shall bring with him certain letters commendatory, the form of which will be arranged and agreed upon by the Servian episcopate. Thus we really at the present moment are in communion with the whole Orthodox Church. For the Servian Church is an Orthodox branch of the great Slavonic communion, and is in full connection and communion with Constantinople. But the Servian Church has recognized our baptism, our orders, and our position, and has admitted our members into communion with herself: therefore now at last the Anglican and Eastern Orthodox Church are as one. What shall we say? The heart of every believer must burst into an irrepressible *Te Deum* at such a truly Christian triumph.

"The Servian Church which, perhaps, is little known to our readers as yet except through certain charity-breathing letters of its prelates, especially of Archbishop Michael, will soon be a household word in our mouths. We are bound to give the Servians the credit which is their due for their freedom of spirit and their intelligent and far-seeing charity. English Churchmen must reciprocate this mighty act of Christian brotherhood by all the means that lie within their power. The Eastern Church for a century past is a suffering Church. The Church of autonomous Servia has emerged from the fiery trial of persecution into a clear sky and a more peaceful dwelling place. English Churchmen in future will find it impossible to side with the infidel and the Mahometan against those with whom they have broken the Bread of Life and shared the Cup of Immortality. They are and they must vividly realize that they are one Church with them."

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