

Russian Thought in Europe

RECEPTION, POLEMICS,
DEVELOPEMENT

HUMANITAS

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**RECEPTION, POLEMICS,
DEVELOPEMENT**

Edited by

Teresa Obolevich

Tomasz Homa

Józef Bremer

Akademia Ignatianum

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Victor Chernyshov

Poltava Yuri Kondratuk National Technical University (Poltava, Ukraine)

Quest for the Catholic Church. Between Constantinople, Russia and Rome: William Palmer's Response to Alexis Khomyakov's Letters

The second and third quarters of the nineteenth century are undoubtedly recognised as the Golden Age of the Russian culture. At the very core of it, by this time, along with success in the realms of poetry and literature, there is an intense struggle of two opposing streams of the Russian thought – between the Slavophiles and Westernizers. The latter, as immediately evident from their name, looked forward to changing the Russian lifestyle in the western manner, whereas the former, in their turn, endeavoured to cleave to the traditional principles, reviving and preserving the traditional Russian lifestyle. Therefore, the natural base of the Slavophile Movement was the Russian Christianity in its most traditional form of the Eastern Orthodoxy.

However, it would be rather untrue to regard the situation of the opposition, represented in Russia by Slavophiles and Westernizers, typically Russian. The situation was a concrete reflection of the general state of many European countries at that time. German romanticism as a cultural reaction against rationalism, and the foreign nature of the *Siècle des lumières*, an intensive struggle between liberal Wigs and the conservative Tories in the Victorian England, and suchlike. But as the Russian Slavophiles acted to preserve and revive the Russian traditions based upon Eastern Christianity, at the other end of Europe, in England, another significant phenomenon of religious and cultural life came into existence and power; it came to be known as the Oxford or Tractarian Movement (1833–1845). Though the Oxford Movement is in itself interesting, it gave rise to another phenomenon in the life of the Anglican Church, which is known as the Anglican

Spiritual Revival.¹ Still, the focus of the present paper is not on this issue. Both the Russian Slavophiles and the representatives of the Oxford Movement took a keen interest in ecclesiology. Or to put it even more plainly, the idea of the Catholic Church, though understood rather differently, lay at the very core of the ideology of both the Slavophiles and the Tractarians.

Interestingly enough, the paths of both the outlooks crossed, as we can see in a unique document of the epoch: the correspondence between the leader of the Russian Slavophile Movement, a philosopher, lay theologian Alexis Khomyakov (1804–1860), and an Anglican deacon William Palmer (1811–1879), a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and a representative of the Oxford Movement. And it is even more interesting to learn what effect the Slavophile arguments can have on an individual who has similar interests, but comes from outside Russia. Though the correspondence has many a time been examined by scholars, their focus was chiefly on the analysis of Khomyakov’s “belief system” with a view to examining “how it led to his two-layered concept of the Church.”² The only exception we have been able to find is the book by Robin Wheeler,³ whose focus is chiefly on William Palmer;⁴ the book is beautifully written, but the examination of the correspondence is rather historical in its purpose.

So the aim of the present paper is to examine the peculiar features of the dialogue regarding the teaching on the Catholic Church, focusing on the response given by William Palmer. At the very core of the correspondence is the quest for possible ways to achieve the Christian unity, as well as for the Catholic Church as a real and visible manifestation of the Christian unity, so the main task of the paper is to examine this topic, finding its connections to other related subjects which are also to be examined.

The letters of Alexis Khomyakov to William Palmer are one of the finest examples of the Russian religious thought of the mid-nineteenth century. The correspondence is in itself an example of dialogue between Christians, representing different – eastern and western – parts of Christendom. In its

¹ For instance, see C.H. Spurgeon, *Spiritual revival, the want of the Church*, “Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit,” vol. 44, <<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2598.htm>>.

² See, e.g. M.J. Soroka, *Sacred East, Dying West: A Study in the Slavophile Ideology of Aleksei Khomiakhov*, The Ohio State University, A Senior Honors Thesis, 2006, p. 61.

³ R. Wheeler, *Palmer’s pilgrimage: the life of William Palmer of Magdalen*, Oxford 2006 (and Pieterlen 2007).

⁴ His PhD thesis is also dedicated to the subject, but it does not deal with the correspondence, as focused of the Palmer’s “Anglican career.” See R.S. Wheeler, *Between East and West: the Anglican career of William Palmer of Magdalen, 1811–1849*, Durham University PhD thesis, 2003, <<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3139/>>.

present state the correspondence includes eighteen letters (as many as were preserved, perhaps, there were some more): twelve by Alexis Khomyakov, and six by William Palmer.⁵ The main subject of the correspondence, which lasted a decade (1844–1854), as it has already been stated above, is a quest for the ample grounds and ways to achieve a Christian unity.

The initiator of the correspondence was Alexis Khomyakov. The history of the correspondence begins in 1844, when professor of the Moscow University Peter Redkin, who was obviously an early acquaintance of Palmer, showed to Khomyakov a letter and an English translation of a poem written by Khomyakov himself in 1839, on the death of his two eldest children.⁶ The translation and letter were by William Palmer, and the letter talked of ways to achieve a Christian Unity.

Khomyakov's first letter to William Palmer, dated 10 December 1844, is at first sight merely a letter to express gratitude for the translation and the best sentiments it raised: "(...) It is indeed a great joy for me to have met with your sympathy, and the more so as I have met with it in the highest of all regions, in the communion of religious sentiments and convictions."⁷ On the one hand, it is obvious that he is sincerely moved with the fact that his poetry has been recognised and appreciated. On the other hand, no less natural is Khomyakov's amazement at how a protestant could translate a poem which plainly tells of the sign of the Cross and the communion of prayer between the living and the dead; i.e. the poem which bears the doctrines that are not only generally disapproved, but rather rejected by most protestant churches. Khomyakov cannot hide his amusement: "In one respect it is even more than I could have anticipated, [inasmuch] as the sign of the Cross and the belief in a communion of prayers between living and dead are generally rejected by the over-cautious spirit of the Reformation. You are, methinks, very right in approving of them. (...) The Episcopal Church of England seems in the last times to have adopted that principle."⁸ These "last times" are very demonstrative.

In his letter to Professor Redkin, William Palmer touched on a very sensitive problem, which was also of keen interest to Khomyakov: the

⁵ See W.J. Birkbeck (ed), *Russian and the English Church during the last fifty years*, vol. 1, London 1895; it can also be found in translation into Russian in A.C. Хомяков, *Полное собрание сочинений*, vol. 2: *Сочинения богословские*, Москва 1907.

⁶ See W.J. Birkbeck (ed), *Russian and the English Church during the last fifty years*, pp. 2-3.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

problem of the Christian Unity. Khomyakov charges the West the responsibility for the lack of unity among Christians, so the correspondence could not but to be continued.

Palmer's reply to the first letter, addressed to him by Khomyakov, took the form of a small volume, privately printed and entitled *Short Poems and Hymns, the latter mostly Translations*, printed by T. Shrimpton at Oxford, 1845.⁹ The book commenced with the *Letter Dedicatory* to Mr A. S. Khomyakov, which in fact is Palmer's reply to Khomyakov's first letter.

In his first letter to Alexis Khomyakov, William Palmer admits that he agrees "both with your belief, your feeling,"¹⁰ i.e. the salutary use of the sign of the Cross and belief in communion of prayers between the living and the dead, but at the same time he observes that not every member of the Anglican Church will agree upon the same. Palmer splits the Anglican Church in two: "the Anglican Church *in herself*" and "*in the prejudices of her members.*"¹¹ So, the members do not always and necessarily follow that which the Church requires of them. The position is almost identical, though expressed in other words, with that of Khomyakov: "We can only request and expect that the Faith which we hold may not be judged by our actions."¹²

It seems Palmer is rather indulgent not only to the "prejudices" of his Church fellow-members, but also to Christians of other denominations. The only instruments "for the union of all," as Palmer sees it, are fervent prayer, and hard everyday work over oneself and no less fervent and hard missionary zeal for the salvation of others: "Still, setting politics aside, I must confess that I think both we in England and you in Russia will do well to say as little as possible about the faults of the Roman Catholics, at least till such time as we ourselves shall set them a better example, either by a general spirit of prayer and intercession for their improvement and reconciliation, or else, if we really think them external to the true Church, by an active zeal for their conversion."¹³

Though Palmer reproaches the Eastern Catholic, or Orthodox, or Greek Church for the lack of missionary zeal, "as it has pretended to be since the Schism, *the whole of the true Church*, that it alone and exclusively is

⁹ Ibidem, p. 12.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 14.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 15.

¹² Ibidem, p. 29.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 16.

the depository of the True Faith, the Ark of Salvation, this of itself ought always and under all conceivable disadvantages to be a sufficient motive for the most unwearied energy, both in prayer and action, and for the most confident and unbounded hope of success in the work of evangelising the unbelieving world, and bringing back all heretics or schismatics, whether Romanists, Anglicans, Lutherans, or Calvinists, into the true Fold.”¹⁴ So, if the Eastern Church believes indeed to be “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church,” in this case, it must necessarily proselytise, reveal its ardent missionary zeal for the salvation of souls of those who perish. But if the members of the Eastern Church “do not feel quite sure” that their Church is the whole of the true Church (Palmer regards this position as merely theoretical), they should either leave the things as they are, simply awaiting the Lord’s Second Coming, which is obviously at hand as the signs of the last days are evident, or must eventually submit to Rome, or – as the third alternative of the three possible – must come “to think of a fair reconciliation on whatever terms it may be effected.”¹⁵

Thus, there are – Palmer supposes – three alternatives, depending on how the Church does feel in itself. First, if it really and indeed believes to be the whole universal Church, it must really and indeed be militant, strive for salvation of those who can be possibly saved, to convert the world. The other two should be pursued if it rather feels to be a part of a whole. The second alternative, though Palmer does not say it directly, if in the deep of its conscience the Eastern Church realises that its present state is nothing else but a schism, and it is consequently a schismatic part of the Universal Church. In a case like this, it must confess its sins, return and submit to Rome.¹⁶ The third one – if the Eastern Church feels itself to be a part of the whole tragically divided with the other part (forming the whole) through misunderstanding, or whatever else the reason might be.

Therefore, there are only two ways to achieve the unity, which come from these three alternatives: it is either conversion or reconciliation. It is for the Eastern Church to decide, where it stands. The conversion is for atheists, heathen, infidels, schismatics, and heretics. Within the Christendom, depending on what the real state of things is, it may be one of any either: the Roman Catholic to Orthodoxy, if it is really blinded with heresy,

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 18.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 19.

¹⁶ Later this position will be discussed at length in the book written in French by Fr Ivan Gagarin SJ, a Russian convert to the Roman Catholic Church. See P.J. Gagarin, *La Russie sera-t-elle catholique?*, Paris 1856.

or the Eastern Church to the Roman Catholic, if the former is a schismatic church. The reconciliation is possible only for brethren who once contended and were at odds with each other, but since then have acknowledged their faults and sought reunion.

Palmer rejects as unjust Khomyakov's thesis that the Roman Church is a state,¹⁷ which the true Church ought not to be, and as a state, on political grounds, it admits a conditional *union*, instead of insisting on the necessity to achieve a vital *unity*, grounded on the unity of the Orthodox Faith. The existence of both Ultramontanism and Gallicanism is tolerated by the Roman Church rather than approved dogmatically and canonically, as well as the ancient form (i.e. without the *Filioque*) of the Nicene Creed in the Uniat Church of the Polish provinces (i.e. the Greek-Catholic Church in communion with Rome), with which Rome deals as a superior with inferior ones.¹⁸ The Roman Church acts not as a state, but as the Catholic Church, since "the Pope tolerated the prejudice or weakness, as he would deem it, in the merely external point of form. And as for Gallicanism, that again is viewed as an evil tendency in an inferior and particular Church, by no means recognised as of right, but distinctively condemned by the superior authority, and not only tolerated *de facto* within certain limits, so long as not fully developed to its consequences."¹⁹ And the same in England, as the Oxford Movement was not born of desire of a hollow, political, or conditional *union*, but prompted by the keen and vital crave for the Unity of the Christendom.²⁰

The nearest perspective for the Anglican Church is to achieve unity with the Eastern Church, but the ultimate end is the unity of the Christendom, which is unthinkable without the ultimate union with Rome: "I am persuaded," Palmer writes, "that the declaration of *unity*, not the negotiations of any political or conditional *union*, with the Eastern Church is much more possible and much more desirable at present than with the Roman: though God forbid that I should ever think or speak of any such thing otherwise than as a step both for us and for the Eastern towards ultimate union with Rome."²¹

This nearest union for the Anglican Church with the Christian East is not an easy task either. It will demand of both the Anglican Church and the

¹⁷ See W.J. Birkbeck (ed), *Russian and the English Church during the last fifty years*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁸ See *ibidem*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

²⁰ See *ibidem*, p. 22.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

Eastern Church to strive freely, but hard for the unity. However, it is not the way of compromise, but the revelation of the truth about the self and the neighbour. "I do not suppose – Palmer writes – that the Eastern Church ought either now or at any future time to alter one jot of her doctrine in favour of any prejudices or reasonings of Anglican bishops, nor that she should admit the Anglican Church in her present state, or any of her members to her communion (...). Still less I suppose that the Anglican Church or her members could ever gain any good thing by becoming professors of Greco-Russicism or Orientalism."²²

Though to make herself ready, the Anglican Church is to purge herself of those elements and tendencies that seem to be (or indeed are) heretical: "I am perfectly sure – Palmer states – of the existence in the Anglican Church of an element of faith and doctrine not only *like*, but *identical* with, the faith and doctrine of the Eastern Church: so that though union with the present Anglican Church, which is made up of conflicting and undeveloped tendencies, partly orthodox and partly heretical, is out of the question, union with the orthodox element of the Anglican Church, whenever it shall have asserted its own exclusive ascendancy, and expelled its heretical antagonist, will be perfectly natural and easy, and scarcely need any negotiation or conference, except for merely subordinate matters of discipline and ritual."²³

Khomyakov was wrong, opposing, quite unjustly, the *union* and the *unity* as contraries. Palmer's belief is that the true union is possible only as the direct consequence of the undoubted unity. Yet, it ought to be noticed that an obstacle to unity may arise not only of the difference of faith, but of the difference of its expression. To illustrate what is meant, Palmer invokes an example of the Armenian Church: "The Armenian Church, which seems, in like manner with the Anglican, to have had a double existence from a very remote period. Now, though union with the Armenians without explanation or change on their part would be union with heresy, still, if that Church were to do again what she has already done more than once, that is to say, explain her heretical language in an orthodox sense, and formally reject and disuse the language as well as the spirit of heresy for the future, Unity being thus declared and received, Union would be no longer objectionable."²⁴

In his first letter to Palmer, Khomyakov states that "the great and invincible obstacle to Unity"²⁵ is the question of the addition of the words

²² Ibidem, pp. 23-24.

²³ Ibidem, p. 24.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ Ibidem, pp. 8-9.

Filioque to the Creed, even supposing that since the time it was added “the Western communities have nurtured a deep enmity and an incurable disdain for the unchanging East.”²⁶ So, in Khomyakov’s opinion, the question of *Filioque* is an initial point of separation between the unchanging East and the West that changed.

Realising that the question of *Filioque* is one of the most complicated theological questions that have ever arisen between the East and the West, and which can hardly be solved at once, Palmer prefers to avoid giving a direct response that might be rather unjust. He realises that in order to answer this tough question, much hard theological work has yet to be done, as in many other theological and moral issues. His suggestion to Khomyakov in this case is that “for the present it will be enough if you on your side seek daily to realise more and more within yourselves that faith, which is indisputably the tradition of your Church.”²⁷ So, to solve this question we have to more and more immerse ourselves not in “an ignorant and bigoted tradition, which neither seeks to understand its own faith aright, nor to estimate rightly the error of the heretics, nor sighs with charity for their return to the truth, nor seeks diligently to remove all unnecessary obstacles, whether on the one side or the other,”²⁸ but in the true Tradition of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, based upon the real and true religious experience of the Catholic Church.

Though a direct response to the question of *Filioque* could hardly be given, the question itself induced Palmer to formulate his (as we may call it) “Golden rule” of an ecumenical dialogue: “We should be constantly trying to make progress in the knowledge and appreciation of our own faith on this point, constantly trying to discover what stumbling-block there may be in the way of our separated brethren, which prevents them from agreeing with us; while, on the other hand, we should be jealously fair and charitable in ascertaining that we do not misrepresent or calumniate their belief, and so wilfully make a difference where there need be none, or, where there is one, make the difference greater than it really is.”²⁹

Next, Khomyakov wrote to Palmer on August 18, 1845, from Smolensk, as we may suppose, almost right after receiving Palmer’s book with the *Latter Dedicatory*. Palmer’s reply was prepared and sent with delay, partly because by this time he had been suffering from an eye disease, but also

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 8.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 25-26.

because the letter was of considerable length and it took time to prepare the answer. So, Palmer's second letter to Khomyakov was sent from Oxford, July 1, 1846. Then, the four following letters were sent, correspondingly: the third – Sunday of St Thomas, 1849 from Magdalen College, Oxford; the fourth – September 22 (October 4), 1851 from Constantinople; the fifth – July 5, 1852 from Magdalen College, Oxford, the sixth – April 5 (N.S.), 1853 from Finmere, near Buckingham.

The exchange of the first letters served to acquaint the correspondents with each other, their arguments and the way of argumentation; the following letters immediately show the positions and persuasions of both correspondents. Being unsatisfied with the present state, William Palmer, in his longing for the true Catholic Church, makes an inquiry. The key question of the correspondence, as we suppose, is the question about the status of the Eastern Church: whether the Eastern Church represents the fullness of the Catholic and Universal Church. Alexis Khomyakov argues that it does indeed. Palmer does his best, endeavouring to make the situation clear.

Though it seems that they have agreed not to contend about doctrinal matters, and avoid entering upon any particular doctrinal discussions so as to concentrate on the matters of morals, the doctrinal issues still occur throughout the correspondence from time to time. As we can notice, these occur in topics which lie at the intersection of dogmatics and morals, representing themselves vital principles of the Church life. Mostly, and it is of great relevance today, Palmer's arguments and his entire approach to the matter are rather moral and practical, giving a brilliant example of ecumenical dialogue, whereby he discusses "all that relates to Christian morality, mutual edification, and to those first principles which common sense and common feeling tell us lie at the very foundation of Catholic or Orthodox Christianity and about which all ecclesiastical authorities are agreed all such topics as these may very well and very profitably be treated of even between private individuals."³⁰

Khomyakov explained the lack of missionary zeal in the Eastern Church for the conversion of Westerns – which was noticed by Palmer – for historical reasons (e.g. the Mohammedan yoke). Palmer interprets it differently, explaining that the real reason is "that the Eastern Church herself knows in her own conscience that yours is only a particular Church, not exclusively the Catholic Church; and that the West, though it may have erred, yet has not vitally and essentially apostatised from the Faith. On this being

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 43.

allowed, it is very natural and very reasonable that the Eastern Church should have little zeal or charity to convert the Latins nay, that she even, as a particular Church, should be deficient in energy towards the heathens.³¹ Thus, the Eastern Church is rather a particular Church, but not the entire Catholic Church.

If the Eastern Church is not the whole Catholic Church, it is not the Universal Church either. The *Filioque*, which was raised previously, should not to be added to the Nicene Creed: "I allow and confess most freely that the West did act in a lawless and immoral manner in making the interpolation; and that this is so far, no doubt, a prejudice against the doctrine itself which was interpolated,"³² Palmer agrees upon it. But the fact of addition does not mean yet that the Latin Doctrine on the Procession of the Holy Spirit – taken in its proper way – is a heresy. Yet, it is not the crux of the matter, as it is not to be considered in itself, apart from the whole life of the Church: "Whether the Latin doctrine be in fact a heresy or not, (...) if you think common people, laymen, or even priests, nay, if you think that even learned Bishops and Divines will for ever be content to rest their convictions upon such a point as the Controversy of the Procession upon their own private judgment concerning the intrinsic merits of the question alone you are, I think, very much mistaken."³³ In other words, the "by true faith alone" is not a saving principle, but false.

Therefore, the so-called "problem of *Filioque*" is rather an inessential one, and it is better that it is not touched upon: "I say that, under the circumstances of the case, a reasonable man, so far from allowing himself to test the controversy by theological arguments alone, would be only showing his good sense, and his piety, if he utterly refused even to enter upon the question: and this, even if he were competent and learned; and much more should all common and simple people perceive the voice of God Himself in the relative circumstances of the two contending parties."³⁴

To consider the question of *Filioque* as a real obstacle "even to the idea of unity," as Khomyakov does, is nothing but a mere exaggeration. The very similar case is with the statement of the Eastern Church being alone true and Catholic: "In exactly the same way," Palmer writes, "I say that the man who (not being bred in the Eastern Communion) could for one moment suppose it possible that the Eastern Church alone was the true,

³¹ Ibidem, pp. 43-44.

³² Ibidem, p. 44.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem, pp. 44-45.

and had alone preserved the true faith, and that the Latin Church had erred fatally and essentially, I say that such a man would seem to me at least to be wanting in common-sense to be not far short of a madman."³⁵

Thus, Palmer completely disapproves the "exclusive pretensions" of the Eastern Church, at least refusing "to acknowledge her as the sole true Church, on account of any conviction of my private judgment (if I could arrive at such a conviction), that she was right in taxing the Latin Church with essential heresy on the point of the Procession."³⁶ It is true, that "certain habits of mind (as well as certain circumstances) when they are very general or universal, impress a character on the Body, and are no longer mere individual defects,"³⁷ but it is true also that the true Catholicity is necessarily manifested in zeal and action for salvation of souls. Thus, the excuses and explanations drawn from the local and other particular circumstances of history indicate that it is a heretical or schismatical body, or even a particular Church which is not heretical or schismatical, "but being only parts [it is] not bound to exhibit all the necessary marks and notes of the whole: but such excuses, joined with exclusive pretensions to be the whole, only make the error more apparent, and the madness, because unconscious, the more pitiable."³⁸

"But – Palmer continues – when there is, side by side with that Body, which pretends to be alone the true Church, and yet is wanting in some essential characteristic, another greater Body in full possession of that which the first wants, it is no longer merely the defect of the one which proves that it is not what it pretends, but also the comparative contrast presented by the other."³⁹

Comparing the *modus vivendi* of the Eastern Church and the Latin Church, Palmer comes to the conclusion that the latter is rather to be recognised as the True and Catholic Church, at least judging from the general disposition and actions of its members, bearing the distinctive proof of its superiority: "the Latin Church presents not one only, but many and notable points of such superiority, when contrasted with the Eastern. Her own children, in common with all other Christians, disbelieve her exclusive claims; even when they most try to do otherwise, they still in some way or other

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 45.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Ibidem, pp. 46-47.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 47.

³⁹ Ibidem, p. 48.

show this.”⁴⁰ Seeing the things in this light, he writes to Khomyakov on account of the Eastern Church: “You are either a nullity, or at best only a particular Church.”⁴¹

The truth is not “to be distilled out of the corrupt mass by private reason following the rule *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*. This is certainly a very common notion and a very false one indeed heretical: that is, if the errors spoken of be supposed to be essential, whether in doctrine or practice.”⁴² The true Church is holy and infallible, but it does not mean there are no “secondary errors or abuses which do not subvert the faith, or amount to heresy,”⁴³ with these “particular Churches, or even the whole Church, may at times be more or less infected with such abuses and errors. (...) Thus, in the Roman Communion the sale of Indulgences and thus, in your own Russian Church the uncanonical rebaptizing of Christians already baptized, was for many years prevalent, and even sanctioned by local Canons.”⁴⁴

In addition to this Palmer points to the inconsistency of the Eastern Church, being in communion with the supposedly heretical Latin Church a lot of times throughout the history of the Schism.⁴⁵ Thus, there are two ways for the Eastern Church to correct herself to make it consistent in herself: either to acknowledge it was wrong to communicate with the heretical West, or to have done wrong “in pretending so long to be the whole, when we have not the necessary attributes of the whole, and know very well that we are only a part: we have done wrong in calling the Latins heretics, and their doctrine Heresy, when we knew all the time that they were not, strictly speaking, heretics, and that if they corrected themselves in a point of form, we might communicate with them freely: for the future we will do so no longer: we confess that the Latin Church is a living part of the same Universal Church with ourselves; that it has preserved the same faith essentially with our own.”⁴⁶ Here again, as some time before, arises the dilemma consisting in the problem of choice between the *reconversion* and *reconciliation*, and the two lines of conduct, dependent on either of the cases.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem, p. 49.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 53.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ See ibidem, p. 50.

⁴⁶ See ibidem.

Palmer suggests action anyway, whatever line of conduct be chosen, as this will bear on the recognition of the Church as active and alive: "I care not which you think right and which you think wrong, provided you only are serious and zealous enough to do either the one or the other. The only thing which I do really dread for you is the continuance of the present apparent insensibility and inaction. If you seem dead, you may be sure that you will exercise no influence upon us: we shall look more and more to Rome, which is evidently active and alive. If, on the contrary, you show signs of life, signs, I mean, of a returning sense of duties (of some kind or other) due to the whole Church, to the whole world, then we shall at any rate begin to feel an interest in you we shall respect you, even though your energies seem to be directed against us."⁴⁷

Palmer gradually drifted towards the Roman Church. The Eastern Church was more and more disappointing and discouraging to him as he made an ever closer acquaintance of it; now and again new stumbling blocks cropped up on his way to the communion with the Eastern Church.

The greatest obstacle in Palmer's way to joining the Eastern Church was a different practice of reception into the (full) communion: through baptism, as suggested by the Greek Church, or by chrism only, as it was done in the Russian Church. He tried to solve the question to remove the obstacle, he was even ready to be baptised conditionally, but all was without success: the contradiction seemed to be obvious and invincible: "I have been addressing in modern Greek a question to the Patriarch of Constantinople. (...) – he writes to Khomyakov – It is on the subject of Rebaptism, the Russian Church now admitting as valid, though irregularly administered, Western Baptisms, and the Greek Church rejecting them as nullities and rebaptizing all proselytes who have been so baptized. (...) I am to receive an answer to this question to-morrow, and, from conversations I have already heard, know pretty well that it will leave the difficulty unremoved. My question was this: whether the Greeks, considering the contrary doctrine and practice of the Russian Church, could not rebaptize me conditionally instead of absolutely; thus: 'The Servant of God N., if he is not already baptized, is baptized, etc., etc.,' or at least permit me to receive and understand their act of rebaptizing me as being virtually, even if not explicitly, conditional."⁴⁸

The question was of great importance to him not only because "Baptism, past or future, is, or must be, the beginning of my Christianity; and

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 51.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, pp. 109-110.

the first practical question for me in seeking any communion is this: Have I already been baptized, or must I now seek to be baptized,"⁴⁹ but also, and first of all, because the question directly affected the question of the Church Unity: "I do not agree with you – Palmer writes to Khomyakov – in thinking that a declaration that the existing difference does not affect the unity of the Church would be a possible solution; because this would amount to a decision that is unnecessary for proselytes to know whether they are baptized or not."⁵⁰ The very matter of the question is whether it is necessary to be baptized at all, and as the answer is "yes," all the other questions arise. On the other hand, it is not to be ignored that obviously one of Palmer's most intimate wishes was the desire to be recognised as a Christian by the Eastern Church; this also proved his ecclesiastic theory that he defended and promoted. This was the thing he deeply believed and intensely struggled for.

That was "the last drop," Palmer thought. He had already been ready to join the Eastern Church (as part of the whole Catholic Church), as he wrote, "till I found the two parts of the Eastern Church split asunder on the first preliminary question and step. And after this, whatever they may be in themselves, or abstractedly, to me they must be regarded as separate and divided, till they speak to me with a single, and not with a double voice. There may indeed be underneath the double and discordant voice only one being, or Church, which ventriloquises, and thinks it of no great consequence so to mock and perplex individuals with a double voice. But I feel no sort of divine call upon my conscience to become a party to such trifling."⁵¹

He will not join the Eastern Church because it lacks unity in itself: on the one hand, the Greeks will not admit him without rebaptism, which is unacceptable for him; on the other, he is very unwilling to seek the communion of the Russian Church "otherwise than as a mere part of the Eastern or Orthodox whole that is, the undue supremacy of the Civil Power."⁵²

Though the problem with the rebaptism required by the Greek Church was important, it was not the only obstacle for Palmer on his way to join the Eastern Church. The other was the problem of political and social as well as ecclesiastical kind: the lack of religious freedom in Russia, and the relations between the civil and ecclesiastical powers within the Russian Empire.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 146.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, pp. 149-150.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 147.

⁵² Ibidem, p. 148.

Palmer regards the present state of the Church in Russia as unacceptable: "The difficulty – he writes to Khomyakov – which with me seems insurmountable, is this: that the present relations of the Spiritual and Civil Powers within the Russian Empire are such as to be inconsistent with the due exercise of the Apostolic Office."⁵³

At first glance, this unacceptability is rather of personal sort; it is the state of things unacceptable for a Westerner, whereas for a Russian it is simply unalterable: "In Russia itself the administration of the Government and the Censorship keep all things quiet as they are, so that individuals neither perceive the true nature of many questions, nor the inevitable developments and consequences of principles which have once been admitted (...). But to a Western seeking to join the communion of the Russian Church the case is very different. If I join the Russian Church, I must be able to defend myself to my own conscience, and to reasonable men (whether Protestants or Roman Catholics) in the West, for acting in a manner so contrary to their idea of reason."⁵⁴

But Palmer sees things differently; the *Holy and Ruling Synod* as a replacement of a personal Primate is unacceptable: "I admit – he writes to Khomyakov – your distinction between an undue subservience to such influences in fact only, or also in principle: and I am far from imputing to the Russian Church the latter. The excesses or thunderings of censors, or other subordinate agents of governments, are matters of secondary importance. What I find fault with is, not the undue timidity or subserviency of a Metropolitan or Patriarch or a Synod, but the permanent existence of irregular institutions calculated and introduced by the Civil Power expressly to transfer to itself upon the whole, and by virtue of the system, a large portion of that power which belongs essentially to the Apostles. (...) The canons of the Universal Church require a personal Primate (he might indeed be assisted by a Synod) in every Province and Nation: and the four Patriarchs of the East had no more right nor power to legitimatise the Synod (...). The admission of such machinery into the permanent institutions of the Church is the indirect admission of a principle subversive of the Apostolic mission and authority."⁵⁵ He regards the present state of the Church in Russia as such that affects the very definition of the Catholic Church, more and more growing in his inclinations towards the Roman Church: "the points of weakness or difficulty in the Russian Church are

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 117-118.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 150-151.

such as affect the definition of the Catholic Church itself, but the points on which I now differ from Rome are points of detail, capable of being ruled by the definition of the Church."⁵⁶

He intended to go and to "study at Rome, with the hope of learning something there to enable me to change my mind and submit to her claims, since I can no longer defend the Anglican, nor find a satisfactory entrance to the Eastern Church if, after all, I should not be able to get rid of my present doctrinal agreement with the Eastern Church, then (as I could not profess to believe what I do not believe) I should have nothing open to me but to wait for any possible change which time might produce either in the Levant or in Russia, and, in that case, I might probably live a good deal in the Levant, perhaps at Mount Athos."⁵⁷

Thus, eventually, Palmer decided not to seek the communion with the Eastern Church any more. Though the decision was taken, it felt like a sacrifice rather than a normal state of things, as he loved the Eastern Church: "But having made this sacrifice, I have no feeling of pain or despondency at finding difficulties to lie in the way of my joining the Eastern, rather than the Roman Catholic Church, for I have no sort of reason to wish to find the lesser section of Christendom right rather than the greater, the Eastern than the Western, or Constantinople than Rome. Of course, so long as my personal opinions and belief agree on points of detail rather with the Easterns than with the Westerns, I am forced by the duty which I owe to truth and sincerity to avow this; and I cannot, to please Rome or to obtain her communion, say that I believe, or will believe, what I do not believe."⁵⁸ He eventually decided to submit that this was his will and his wish: "But I can say this and do – Palmer continues – that I would wish to agree with Rome rather than with Constantinople, and that, seeing great and increasing reason to doubt the conclusions of my own understanding when they agree with inferior authorities against superior, I will listen attentively to all that the superior authority can say to me, and will do my best to find out that it is right, and that my individual mind and the inferior authority, with which at present I rather agree, is mistaken."⁵⁹ He still wavered between Rome and Constantinople at heart, but the circumstances were all against him; however, at any rate, Rome eventually prevailed in 1855.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 120.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 152-153.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

To conclude this brief overview of the correspondence between Alexis Khomyakov and William Palmer, let us summarise all this we have been trying to demonstrate on the basis of the very source, i.e. the texts of the letters.

First, it should be noted that William Palmer was one of those who were deeply affected by the tragedy of schism and separation of Christians, believing that it could be healed. He accepted the task to strive for the Christian unity as his own, personal one, but unlike the rest of the Oxford Movement, in his hopes for the reunion of the Christendom, he looked rather towards the East and the Oriental Churches. Bearing this purpose in mind, in 1840–1841 he went to Russia, for he hoped to obtain from the Russian Imperial Synod such a recognition of his right to the Graeco-Russian Sacraments, which would be an irrefragable proof that the doctrine of the Anglican divines was no mere theory, and that the Anglican Christian was *ipso facto* an Oriental Orthodox also.⁶⁰ Despite the fact he was not recognised as a true orthodox Christian, and the permission to receive the Sacraments of the Eastern Church was granted neither by the Russian Synod nor by the Greeks, for almost fifteen years William Palmer kept knocking at the door of the Eastern Orthodox Church, after which he eventually had to turn to Rome.

Second, the correspondence between Alexis Khomyakov and William Palmer of Magdalen College, Oxford is one of the brilliant documents of the deep and sincere spiritual quest for the Catholic Church that took place in the middle of the nineteenth century both in the Russian Church and the Anglican Church. Our belief is that the quest was prompted not by a mere interest, but rather by a deep, vital and lively craving for the Unity among the divided brothers. And the correspondence itself is a brilliant illustration of it.

Third, at the very core of the correspondence lies the idea of the Unity of the Church. Both Alexis Khomyakov and William Palmer are ardent supporters of it, though their understanding of it is radically different: Khomyakov represents the traditional vision of the Eastern Church, whereas Palmer endeavours to find the answers to the toughest questions of ecclesiology almost exclusively with the help of his own intellect, intuition, and common sense, as well as by means of the Grace that Christianity may offer for individual use, e.g. prayer and devotion.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. vii.

Fourth, Palmer's inquiries in quest for the Catholic Church resulted in the creation of an authentic ecclesiological outlook. A system of oppositions and quite subtle distinctions made by Palmer in his letters to Khomyakov is of no little relevance today. Thus, Palmer speaks about the opposition of "the Doctrine of the Church – prejudices of Church members," which, as we suppose, follows from the traditional distinction between the dogmatic and the moral teachings of the Church. Of some interest are his views on different ecclesiological statuses of religious communities: "the Catholic Church," "the Universal Church," "the Orthodox Church," a Particular or Local Church, "small community." "The Catholic Church," "the Universal Church" and "the Orthodox Church" are synonymous, but not identical,⁶¹ as they represent the three necessary characteristics of the true Church: catholicity, universality and orthodoxy. All the three are not to be separated one from the others as they are the three necessary characteristics of the whole we call the Church, in the highest sense. The main and defining, substantial feature of this true and Catholic Church, as Palmer states, is the ardent zeal to proselytize and to bring all and the entire World to the perfect state of the Catholic Unity. A "Particular" or "Local Church" is the *true Church as far as it possesses these three necessary characteristics; if it is lacking in anyone of them, it becomes "schismatical" (if ceases to be the Universal), "heretical" (if ceases to be the Orthodox)*. A "small community," as Palmer calls it, is a Church-like group that does not possess any necessary characteristic of the Church, and therefore may be called church, but nominally. There are two ways of the reunion of the separated brothers as individuals, as Palmer presents them: either conversion (of heathens, heretics, infidels, atheists), or reconciliation with brethren (schismatics). However, there are three ways to reunite the Bodies: 1) conversion (of the outward into the body), 2) submission (of the smaller or less important to the bigger and more important, or a schismatical to the Catholic), 3) reconciliation (between equal schismatical parts).

Fifth, despite the fact that the answers to these questions provided by Palmer quite often fall short of satisfying today's reader, it must be admitted that the achievement of Christian unity itself in quite a great measure depends on the answers to these questions. In spite of the fact that the *most intimate and dearest wish* "to praise God in the same Church" has never come true (Khomyakov stood his ground, and Palmer, after such a long

⁶¹ Frequently enough, that these characteristics have been confused, both in the 19th century, earlier and in our days. For such confusion in Palmer's time, see the work of one of his friends: J. Gagarin, *Réponse d'un Russe à un Russe*, Paris 1860.

personal strife for the true and the Catholic Church, found his rest, being admitted to the full communion with the Roman Church), the correspondence reveals a certain number of controversial, but crucial points between Christians, belonging to the eastern and western parts of the Christendom in their outlooks on the same Christian Tradition. However, the greatest response to Alexis Khomyakov's letters William Palmer could make was not with ink and paper; the final and ultimate response was made in life itself: it was Palmer's conversion.

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