

Unity and diversity: Anselm of Havelberg as ecumenist

Anselm, bishop of Havelberg, unable to fulfil his duties as a bishop because his diocese was repeatedly laid waste by war, took refuge at the Imperial Court. There, his abilities as a scholar¹⁾ and perhaps already visible talents as a diplomat, made him Lothair's choice as ambassador to Constantinople in 1135. Anselm made use of his months among the Greeks to familiarise himself to some degree with the language and theological scholarship of the Orthodox tradition. The years 1136-42, spent partly in Italy with the Emperor, also gave Anselm the opportunity to become an intimate of the Papal Court. After a gap of two years, during which he endeavoured to rebuild the ecclesiastical life of his diocese, he was invited to take part in talks with Greek theologians at Tusculum in 1144. This was not to be his last ecumenical encounter. Frederick Barbarossa was to send him as ambassador to Constantinople in 1152, and on the voyage there he had talks with Basil of Achrida at Thessalonika. But it was after the Tusculum discussions that he wrote, at the request of Pope Eugenius III²⁾, perhaps the most remarkable mediaeval treatment of the complex of problems concerning the hierarchy of truths, essentials and inessentials, unity and pluriformity.

Anselm's *Dialogues* are fresh in their approach because he was the first in his time to see the interrelatedness of the questions with which they are concerned. As a student at Laon he had encountered Norbert, who was to become the founder of the Premonstratensian Order of Canons. Anselm himself did a good deal to foster the growth of the Order in his own diocese, where he was in fact consecrated bishop by Norbert, who was by then Archbishop of Magdeburg. He was thus a

¹⁾ On Anselm's studies at Laon, see Anselm of Havelberg, *Dialogus*, I, ed. G. Salet, *Sources chrétiennes*, 118 (Paris, 1966), Introduction. There is a bibliography in Salet, pp. 23-4. See, too, my article «Anselm of Canterbury and Anselm of Havelberg: the controversy with the Greeks», *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 53 (1977), 158-75. Anselm of Havelberg is curiously omitted from Dvornik, *Byzance et la primauté romain* (Paris, 1964), which traces in some detail events before and after 1054. (Cf. note 18).

²⁾ *Ibid.*

witness at first-hand of the power of missionary preaching and had the opportunity to learn a good deal about the winning of minds and hearts. At the same time, he saw in action at a crucial stage the force of the fissiparous tendencies of the explosion of enthusiasm for the new religious life in the many forms it was taking in the first half of the twelfth century. None of his contemporaries shared comparable experiences, and with them first-hand knowledge of ecumenical conversations.

The account Eugenius asked him to write was of his public debates in Constantinople with Nechites, Bishop of Nicomedia. He devotes Books II and III of the *Dialogues* to providing a record of what was said, as well as he can from memory³). But Book I forms a substantial introduction to what Anselm identifies as the underlying issues, and the problems of method and purpose which must be resolved before ecumenical conversation can see its way. It seems likely to have been added on reflection, after the completion of the Prologue and Books II and III, for the Prologue itself deals directly with the discussions with the Greeks, and runs on naturally into Book II. If we are to approach Anselm's account of his Byzantine conversations on the assumptions he himself would wish to make, then, we must begin with Book I.

People often ask, says Anselm, why there are so many novelties in the Church of God (*tot novitates*)⁴). They are prompted to wonder this by the proliferation of new religious Orders (*tot ordines*). This multiplication of modes of living the religious life was evidently causing enough disquiet elsewhere for it to be necessary for apologists to take stock of it, and provide a *rationale*⁵). Anselm defends it. In the midst of diversity (*varietates*); altered by what is new (*adinventionibus immutata*); disturbed by new laws and customs (*agitata*); tossed about almost yearly on the waves of change in rule and practice (*regulis et miribus fere annuatim innovatis fluctuans*)⁶), the Church shows the living power of the Holy Spirit working within her⁷). This has always been so. He devotes most of his first Book to a chronological account of the ages or

³) *Ibid.*, p. 30, Prologue.

⁴) *Ibid.*, p. 34, Book I.i.

⁵) See *Libellus de diversis ordinibus et professionibus qui sunt in aecclesia*, ed. G. Constable and B. Smith (Oxford, 1972).

⁶) Salet, p. 34, Book I.i.

⁷) Salet, p. 44, Book I.ii.

status of the Church⁸), to demonstrate the rule he seeks to lay down as the first principle in ecumenical problem-solving. There is and always has been only one faith, lived in many different ways (*semper unum una fide, sed multipliciter distinctum multiplici vivendi varietate*)⁹). Christians worship one God in one faith, even when they do so in different modes of life (*diversis modis vivendi*), and with differences of rite in the sacraments. (Here he has the Eucharist particularly in mind: *diverso sacrificorum ritu*)¹⁰). If we study the history of the Church we see the *fides catholica* gradually being firmly established (*radicata*), and then canons in the forms of precepts, prohibitions, dispensations, forming *diversae regulae*, that is, rules on a variety of issues, amongst which some will not be uniform everywhere, or in every age¹¹). Against those who think that flexibility is a recipe for decay¹²), Anselm argues strongly that it is a sign of the richness of the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit in the Church¹³),

The essential point in Anselm's view is that the faith must be one; when that is secure, pluriformity can confidently be seen as a positive sign of vitality in the realm of order. In framing his first book in this way, he could perhaps hope to achieve two things. He was providing a starting-point for his Western readers which would take them from a lively preoccupation of current debate, and thus form ground on which they felt familiar, into what must otherwise appear to them the foreign territory of the differences of Greek and Latin Christians. And he was encouraging them to take a grand view of the unfolding of God's providential plan in the history of the Church, which would enable them to put the schism of East and West into perspective in the whole story of the history of salvation.

In his Prologue Anselm explains that it became plain at Tusculum that there were differences both of *doctrina* and of *ritus* between the Greeks and the Church of Rome. On both topics he himself has had discussions in Constantinople, in private as well as in public. He is aware that many of the Latins are mistaken about the beliefs and

⁸) On the ages of the world and the prophetic future, see too the work of Rupert of Deutz.

⁹) Salet, p. 44, Book I.ii.

¹⁰) Salet, p. 48, Book I.iii.

¹¹) Salet, p. 82, Book I.ix.

¹²) *Omnem religionem tanto esse contemptibiliorem quantum mobiliorem*, Salet, p. 36, Book I.i.

¹³) Salet, p. 40, Book I.ii.

practices of the Greeks; the language difference is a barrier to understanding, and the Greeks are sometimes thought to affirm or to deny what they do not¹⁴). Book II opens with a description of the circumstances of his talks with Nechites. They were held, first near Hagia Irene, and later (Book III), in Hagia Sophia. Some Latins were present besides Anselm, of whom he names three as having a good knowledge of Greek. Of these three, James of Venice, Burgundius of Pisa and Moses of Pergamon, Moses was chosen to be the interpreter. Having given his Western readers a picture of the meeting, and an assurance that Western scholars were to the fore and competent to understand what was being said, Anselm skilfully sets the tone of the conversations. Because his purpose in eirenic, he is careful to eliminate any suggestion of the adversarial in the debates as he reports them. He wants his readers to be persuaded not only that the Greeks are not monsters and heretics, but also that they are, in essentials, one in faith with the Latins and entirely open and reasonable in their willingness to be of one mind with the West in all matters of substance. He reports his own opening words to this effect. He has not come *ad contentiones*, but to discover with Nechites their common faith (*de fide vestra atque mea*)¹⁵). He wants to see them «walk the way of charity together» (*simul gradiamur viam charitatis*), not contending arrogantly to score points in their reasoning (*non contendentes superba ratione*), but humbly seeking the truth together (*simul investigantes veritatem humili inquisitione*)¹⁶).

Anselm is sensitive to the difficulty over language, not only insofar as it concerns Greek and Latin, but also at the profounder level of the mutual misunderstanding which may arise from differences of style, approach and understanding in the very fabric of the lives of their respective Churches. «It is not fitting for us to squabble over words», he tells Nechites. He wants to see such an *interpretatio* held between them *in medio* as they talk as may take and expound (*excipiat et exponat*) the sense of each fully and exactly (*sermonem utrinque continuatim pleno et collecto verborum sensu*). In that way, he concludes, we shall be seen to be not sticklers for the words (*verborum observatores*), but enquirers into the meaning (*sententiarum investigatores*). Nechites accedes to the reasonableness of this, and so they begin¹⁷).

¹⁴) Salet, pp. 27-8.

¹⁵) PL 188.1163.

¹⁶) PL 188.1164.

¹⁷) PL 188.1164.

The topic to which Anselm gives his second book, the procession of the Holy Spirit, had not been in the forefront of dispute when the estrangement between Greek and Latin Christendom began to become serious in the eleventh century. When Leo, Archbishop of Ochrida, wrote to defend Greek rites in southern Italy against the intention of the Norman invaders to replace them with their own, on the orders of the Patriarch Michael Cerularius (1043-58)¹⁸, he made no mention of the *filioque*. It seems to have been prominently thrust into the debate by Cardinal Humbert in his dispute with the monk Nicetas Stethatos, and it is included in the list of points in the excommunication of 1054¹⁹. More pacific souls than Humbert strove after that to resolve the difference. In the East, Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrida, produced a moderate treatise at the request of the Patriarch Nicholas III, stressing that the *filioque* was unacceptable as an addition to the Creed²⁰. Peter Damian lists Scriptural and patristic authorities from which «from the Father» might be read as «only from the Father», and suggests that it is easy to see how the Greeks have come to their way of thinking. He argues that in these texts «and from the Son» may be understood, and he tries to deal with various difficulties which arise²¹.

Anselm of Conterbury's *De Processione Spiritus Sancti* illustrates perhaps best of all the sheer problem of mutual incomprehension which bedevilled even the most eirenic attempt to arrive at reunion. Anselm's biographer Eadmer describes the circumstances in which Anselm was brought to frame his solution. At the Council of Bari, he explains (1098), the Greeks took the initiative in «moving the question» (*mota est quaedam quaestio ex parte Graecorum*). They wanted to prove that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, and they claimed *evangelica auctoritas*. The Pope met them with various arguments, some of which he drew from Anselm's *De Incarnatione Verbi*. When these failed to convince them, he turned to the assembled bishops and called on Anselm to «fight for your mother» (*pugnans pro matre tua*), that is, to defend the Church of Rome against the attacks of the Greeks which impugn her integrity²²). This adversarial stance is not Anselm's; nevertheless, it perhaps implies a sense that here are two Churches at enmity,

¹⁸ F. Dvornik, *Byzantium and the Roman Primacy* (Paris, 1964 and New York, 1966), p. 132.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 140, and PG 126.22-149.

²¹ PL 145.633 ff., *Opusculum* 38.

²² Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, ed. M. Rule, Rolls Series (London, 1884), pp. 105-5.

and that it is not only the true faith but an ecclesial identity which is at stake. There is nothing here to match Anselm of Havelberg's later confidence that Churches may be at one in faith and vary in inessentials without a breach of unity. Anselm of Canterbury himself, in the *De Processione Spiritus Sancti* which he wrote a few years after he had given his view before the Council at Bari, says little of these ecclesiological issues. He looks to the common ground. The Greeks revere the Scriptures and they share the Latins' doctrine of the Trinity in all respects but this one. He knows that the Greeks will not treat the Latin Fathers as authorities. He himself had, as far as we know, little if any knowledge of the Greek patristic tradition²³), and seems not to have known the earlier literature of the current dispute about the procession of the Holy Spirit. He seeks to prove the Latin position by using the truths the Greeks accept, as the premises on which to demonstrate by reasoning that the Latin doctrine is correct²⁴). His appeal is to the common consent of reasonable people. But because of his ignorance of the style and special concerns of the Greeks, he could not couch the presentation of his case in terms which would capture their assent.

That is especially clear in the passage where Anselm tries to deal with the background issues about authority. He knows that the Greeks object to the *filioque*, over and above the question of its orthodoxy, both because it was added to the Creed, and because the addition was made without consulting the Greeks. Anselm responds by saying that the addition was necessary to make what was already implicit in the Creed sufficiently explicit to be plain to all. That it was indeed necessary is attested by the failure of the Greeks to recognise this truth precisely because it is not spelt out in their Creed. The Latin Church saw the need, found no reasonable objection to the addition, held it to be consonant with the faith, and so simply asserted the faith in making the addition. Not all that Christians believe is included in the Creed, as the Greeks themselves would freely acknowledge. As to the reason why the Greeks were not consulted: it would have been very difficult to bring all the Greek and Latin bishops together to discuss it, and the Latins in fact did no more than any local Church is permitted to do. «What Church is there», Anselm asks, which, extended throughout a

²³) Except insofar as this was indirectly mediated through the writings of Ambrose and others.

²⁴) *Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed, F.S. Schmitt (Rome/Edinburgh, 1938-68), II. 177-8, *De Processione Spiritus Sancti*, 1.

single kingdom, is not allowed (*liceat*) to rule that something which is according to *recta fides* should be read and sung at services? The word Anselm uses here for «ruling» is *constituere*²⁵). He thus treats the addition of the *filioque* as a liturgical variant which is legitimately at the disposal of local churches to determine. Here he again fails to recognise the force of the Greeks' objection to the addition, not to a form of service, but to the tradition of the faith itself, and to see that his solution could not hope to please.

If we return now to Anselm of Havelberg, we find perhaps more sensitivity to Greek sensibilities, for this Anselm knew the Greeks much better than his namesake. But there is still a strongly-marked Western character to the debate, as he reports it. This may be in part the result of the fact that he was writing his book to inform a Western readership. Nevertheless, it implies some failure of communication between himself and his interlocutor. He tries, as the earlier Anselm had done, to begin from common ground. Both sides can agree that there cannot be *duo principia* in the Godhead. The debate proceeds on a philosophical basis rather than on the exchange of authorities from the two traditions. Where Fathers are mentioned, they are mostly Western; the technicalities of logic and language bear the marks of recent Western work²⁶), although there is some discussion of Greek terms. Anselm of Canterbury's treatise is quoted²⁷), and his sentiment that it must be acceptable to add what is not contrary to the Gospel is advanced²⁸). Nechites is portrayed throughout as allowing himself to be, if not convinced, at least brought so to see the reasonableness of the Latin position that he is willing to agree to it if the Church as a whole can arrive at a common mind in a general Council. But we do not hear a great deal from him in Anselm's book of those subtleties and refinements of the Greek case which must have been fully deployed in the actual encounter.

It is at the end of his second and in his third book that Anselm begins to address the ecclesiological issues more or less systematically. It is agreed that those who love God must also love the unity of the Church. Nechites is portrayed as persuaded that the *filioque* ought to be accepted by the East, for the sake of that unity. Here it is clearly being

²⁵) *Ibid.*, p. 212, Chapter 13.

²⁶) E.g. PL 188.1177, *defectiva nomina*.

²⁷) E.g. Schmitt, II. 28.26, *De Incarnatione Verbi* 11, cf. PL 188.1171.

²⁸) PL 188.1197.

seen as a matter central to the faith, and not merely of liturgical *ritus*. But it is also going to involve an introduction into the liturgy, and Nechites points out that that could not be done suddenly, or it would prove a «stumbling-block to the people». We need, he says, a joint vote and equal consent (*communi voto et pari consensu*)²⁹). The issues raised by differences of rite are rather different, insofar as they touch on unity. Anselm explains that it is not to be expected that in *mores* and *consuetudines* all peoples should conform with the practices of the Roman Church, which is mother of all, but in the «ecclesiastical sacraments» (*in ecclesiasticis ... sacramentis*) there is no such freedom; there, there ought to be conformity with Roman usage. To judge from Anselm's description, this phrase refers to the celebration of the Eucharist³⁰), and it is indeed there that the bulk of the points of dispute over rites were focussed³¹). It nevertheless proved possible for Nechites and Anselm to say at the end of their conversation that the differences between East and West are not *in magnis sed in minimis*; they are of a sort which does not prevent the saving to souls, although they do not «build up charity» (*tamen charitatem non aedificant*)³²). The purpose of the proposed General Council will be to reduce to *concordia* all those matters of difference in *ritus*, so that the Greeks and the Latins may be one people under one Lord Jesus Christ, in one faith and one baptism and one Eucharist.

We need to go back now to look at some of the earlier discussion on *ritus* during the century or more of dispute which led up to and followed the breach of 1054. The issues of «rite» (or arguably of «rite») which arose in the controversy involving Humbert concern chiefly the use of leavened or unleavened bread, fasting on Easter Saturday and the marriage of priests. The arguments turn conspicuously upon the question whether variation in these matters rules out one or other side's claim to be the true Church. Humbert rages that to «eat with the Jews» is an offence which unfrocks a cleric³³). The use of leaven; the keeping of the Sabbath; the date of Easter, and not singing the alleluia in Lent and doing so only once at Easter, are all indications that the Latins are

²⁹) PL 188.1209-10. Cf. PL 188.1245 and 1247-8, as he presses for a *generale concilium*.

³⁰) PL 188.1211 and 1216-7.

³¹) But cf. PL 188.1245 on the principle that using oil to purify those who come over from the Latins does not constitute rebaptism.

³²) PL 188.1247-8.

³³) PL 143.988 and cf. 989, quoting «Paul with three canons of the Apostles».

in communion with the Jews, argue Michael, Patriarch of Constantinople and Leo Archbishop of the Bulgarians³⁴). Humbert replies that, on the contrary, the Greeks are infected with heresies and consort with heretics, and yet they dare to look, blind to their own faults, upon the Holy Roman Church and the whole Church of the West and claim that it is polluted with heresy and «Judaism»³⁵). The accusation on each side is that communion is being set at naught by the other. Theophylact wrote about the «ecclesiastical errors» of the Latins, which he sees as many and divisive. He concedes that there is nothing central to the faith in the differences of rite, but he suggests that they should still be regarded as divisive because they disturb the faithful and constitute a breach of charity. His list is longer: yeast, fasting on Easter Saturday, the banning of clerical marriage, no beards for the clergy, the wearing of gold rings and vestments of the wrong colours, monks who eat meat, kneeling at certain times. But his point is not that any of these differences of rite on its own is of huge significance, but that taken together they constitute a deliberate withdrawal of the Latins into another communion³⁶). It is this view which Anselm is contesting when he says that the diversity of rites in the Church is not a communion-breaking thing, but a gift of the Spirit.

Central to the question of uniformity and diversity was, and remained, that of the authority of Peter and his successors in the Roman see. For Anselm of Havelberg it is beyond question that the «holy Roman Church» is «mother of all the Churches»³⁷). Eadmer clearly thought so too, in making Urban II call on Anselm of Canterbury to «fight» for his «mother»³⁸). But there the thrust is subtly different. The Greeks are seen not as members of daughter Churches, but as outsiders impugning the very integrity of the mother (*cui suam integritatem vides Graecos istos conari adimere*)³⁹). The contrast is important because it underlines how fine was the line between a sense of the See of Rome as the focus of unity and its being thought of as supremely the Church is its own right, outside communion with which there could be no salvation. Anselm of Havelberg discusses the sisterhood of the ancient

³⁴) PL 143.929-32.

³⁵) PL 126.221.

³⁶) PL 126.224.

³⁷) PL 188.1209 and 1216-7.

³⁸) *Historia Novorum*, p. 105.

³⁹) PL 188.1217-22, and see Dvornik, *op. cit.*, for the history of Greek attitudes here.

Patriarchates, as he understands the Greeks to have argued for it. The question is whether the Bishop of Rome is the *summus sacerdos* or bishop of the *prima sedes* only. He knows that the Greeks say that they withdrew from the councils of the Romans because of the division of the Empire, that is, for practical and political reasons, not because they wished to fix a gulf between the Western patriarchate and their own. He himself would not say that the power to bind and loose was given to Peter alone, though he would argue for his having the position of «first» among the Patriarchs³⁹).

In present circumstances, that leadership shows itself, as it seemed to Peter Damian and to Anselm of Havelberg that it always had done, in Rome's being the proper court of appeal. The other Churches turn to the seat of the *magisterium* (*cathedra magisterii*) for a ruling on disputed matters of faith⁴⁰). Anselm of Havelberg agrees that the heresies in the East on the past were stamped out not by the Greeks themselves, but by the authority of the Bishop of Rome⁴¹). He believes that Rome has been granted two privileges by divine authority: that she should alone preserve the purity of the faith uncorrupted; and that she should have *potestas iudicandi*, that is, remain the court of appeal in matters of doctrine⁴²). Anselm of Havelberg says that the Eastern Churches have suffered some shipwrecks. Only the barque of St. Peter has sailed safely on. The holy Roman Church has preserved her virginity in right faith, and so by the generosity of God she deserves to be the mother of all the Churches⁴³). Peter Damian compliments the Patriarch of Constantinople on turning to Rome for an answer⁴⁴). Anselm himself describes the position thus: the Greeks say that the ancient patriarchates were sisters among whom the Roman See had primacy in the sense that she was called the first See and appeal was made to her by all the others in debated *causae ecclesiasticae*⁴⁵). All this would imply an ecclesiology of unity in which Rome and communion with Rome is the touchstone of orthodoxy of faith, but not necessarily, as the debates show, of right practice in every detail at least of liturgical form; on the other hand, the boundary between matters of faith, which are agreed to be issues on which there must be one mind in the Church, and rites, which may

⁴⁰) PL 145.634.

⁴¹) PL 188.1228.

⁴²) PL 188.1228.

⁴³) PL 188.1216-7.

⁴⁴) PL 145.633, *Opusculum* 38.

⁴⁵) PL 145.1217.

legitimately be diverse, is not easy to draw. It is not drawn convincingly in the treatises we have been examining.

Anselm of Havelberg, however, achieved a great deal. He did much to educate the West about the East, and to alter perception so that Eastern Christians could be seen not as enemies but as fellow-members of a richly diversified Body of Christ to whom particular gifts of the Spirit had been given. He presents them as reasonable and willing to come together with the Latins provided the whole Church can agree together in a Council on the disputed points. This was optimistic, as it proved. Nevertheless, this marks a new departure ecumenically. Above all, Anselm set out quite clearly the ecumenical importance of resolving the issue of essentials and inessentials, and the related question of the place of diversity in a united Church.

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