

The Separation of the Monophysites



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The Separation of the Monophysites

W. A. Wigram



2010
gorgias press

Gorgias Press LLC, 954 River Road, Piscataway, NJ, 08854, USA

www.gorgiaspress.com

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Originally published in 1923

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2010

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ISBN 978-1-61719-185-5

Reprinted from the 1923 London edition.

Digitized by Brigham Young University. Printed in the United States of America.

Series Foreword

This series provides reference works in Syriac studies from original books digitized at the ICOR library of The Catholic University of America under the supervision of Monica Blanchard, ICOR's librarian. The project was carried out by Beth Mardutho: The Syriac Institute and Brigham Young University. About 675 books were digitized, most of which will appear in this series.

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We are grateful to the head librarian at CUA, Adele R. Chwalek, who was kind enough to permit this project. "We are custodians, not owners of this collection," she generously said at a small gathering that celebrated the completion of the project. We are also grateful to Sidney Griffith who supported the project.

PREFACE.

THE fortunes of this book have been somewhat peculiar. It was commenced in the year 1910, to serve as a thesis for the author's degree of D.D. at Cambridge, and was largely written in Kurdistan, where the writer then resided. Some of the material used was, in fact, gathered during wanderings in the Jacobite monasteries of Jebel Tur.

In 1914 it was finished and the MS. was despatched, in the June of that fateful year, to Professor Swete at Cambridge, that he and his brother professors might pass judgment on it according to the statutes of the University. It was passed by them as sufficient for the Degree sought, and the official intimation of the fact, forwarded by the Professors to the writer, reached him when he was a civil prisoner in Turkey, and quite unable to take any action in the matter.

The writer did not return home till late in 1919, and then had the pleasure of finding that the MS. of the thesis had vanished, with much that was more valuable, in the general confusion of the war. Fortunately, the mass of the notes and references from which the book had been composed had survived, and from these the book was re-written, and submitted afresh to a new generation of Professors at Cambridge, who again honoured it with their approval. The question of its printing remained. To find a publisher, at the then rate of prices, for a book which is not in the least likely to make any popular appeal, was by no means an easy thing: this difficulty, however, was at last overcome by the enterprise of the "Society of the Faith," and by the generosity of the trustees of the "Hort Memorial Fund" at Cambridge, to both of whom the author wishes to make his grateful acknowledgments.

The book, having undergone these vicissitudes, is now submitted to the public, in the hope that it may fill what appears to the writer to be a gap in existing Church histories, and also may perhaps rouse some interest in the present descendants of those of

whom it treats, those "Jacobites" who are among the most innocent victims of the war.

In conclusion, the writer would wish to express his thanks to Professor Burkitt of Cambridge, who not only read the MS. as a part of his official duty, but who offered to the author many helpful criticisms and amendments on points of detail.

W. A. WIGRAM.

Athens.

October, 1922.

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CHAPTER I.

CHURCH AND STATE IN THE FIFTH CENTURY.

THE end of the fourth century saw Nicene Christianity the established faith of the Roman Empire, and it was a cardinal feature of imperial policy in the fifth and sixth century that "Orthodoxy" (by which was meant the type of Christianity that the court favoured) must be made the religion of the State, and of every subject of it. It was but a slight variation of an old rule: previously, readiness to accept Cæsar-worship had been the test of loyalty, and of fitness for state employment, but Christianity had fought resolutely against that tyranny, and had overcome it. Therefore, the empire now entered into partnership with the great organization that had vanquished it—the Catholic Church, and Cæsar's worship took the place of Cæsar-worship as a test.

This process of taking into partnership was begun by Constantine (whose Christianity perhaps can hardly be said to have gone farther than the conviction that the power that had been able to overcome the Empire must be somehow divine) and it reached completion when Theodosius made Paganism a penal offence.

The implied agreement ran much on these lines. The Church was to hold the Empire together, giving to all its subjects that universal religion which all men felt to be necessary, and which it had been proved that Cæsar-worship could not be: the Empire in return gave force to Church rulings, and high position and privilege to its officers, while it "restrained with the civil sword the stubborn," who were in this case the heretics.

The Church was perfectly willing to enter into this partnership, and to see, as sometimes happened, its Bishops acting as State agents for the repression of the crime of paganism.

It was, indeed, an axiom of all political theory at the time, that it was the duty of the State to assist all its subjects in the living of "the noble life," and that guardianship of the truth

and of true religion was the first duty of the Emperor. When all argued on this assumption, the question, "what is truth, and which is the true religion?" was bound to cause suffering: all men were persecutors in theory, it was only persecution of "the truth" that was so objectionable in each case.

We must own, however, that the conception was in itself supremely noble. Ideally it was a quasi-sacramental union of the spiritual and secular sides of life; according to it, the whole of the administration and the law-giving would be guided by the spirit of Christianity. That was an ideal that could captivate the minds of men; for its sake they would struggle, and, to preserve it, they might even shut their eyes to much that was unworthy of it. The ideal failed, but it did not fail because it was an ignoble one, but because it was too noble for the human instruments who strove to work it, to apply worthily; too great for them to hold in due proportion with other truths. Having failed, it was with this as with other truths, *corruptio optimi pessima*. But even so, it did not pass away quickly: both East and West did homage to it for many a century, and both made noble efforts to embody their ideal of a Christian, a "Holy Roman" Empire; it ruled the thoughts of men until, within one century, the Reformation rent the West asunder, and the last remnant of the Eastern Empire bowed to the Turk.*

Then, the ideal of a government that was at once imperial and paternal, caring for the spiritual and temporal needs of its subjects, passed away gradually, and one of *laissez faire* and liberty took its place. Thinkers proclaimed that he who would be a man, must needs be a Non-conformist; this conception was simply unthinkable to an earlier age, which would have held that it was the primary duty of every man to do his part in assisting the state to enforce the true and beautiful.

Now, there are signs that the tide in the minds of men has turned once more, and the drift of opinion seems to be towards the old ideal in a new form, and we are taught that it is the duty of the State to guard the interests of all its subjects, and to ensure them at least equality of opportunity! It is true that those who hold this often hold also that the State has, and can have, no religion. An attempt has been made to

* It may be said to have lingered even longer in the West, but in debased forms such as the "*cujus regio ejus religio*" and the like.

carry this to its logical conclusion in Russia, and to forbid the public practice of any religion whatever, and in fact, to persecute all alike. This is, however, an admitted aberration of over-logical minds, and we question whether the non-religious theory of the State is more than a result of ages of religious division. Supposing (*per impossibile*, perhaps) a religious synthesis effected, will it be always an axiom that the socialistic state that is to stand in a quasi-paternal relation to all its subjects, must regard their highest and most enthralling interests as a matter altogether outside its sphere?

We have for our subject the history of an attempt to apply the "State-church ideal" to facts, in the Roman Empire of the fifth and sixth centuries. We shall see its success, as regards part of the Empire, where it erected a bulwark of civilization, that endured for a thousand years; its breakdown, as regards others, where it encountered a spirit of nationality with which it had no sympathy, and which it could not overcome.

So we have, in our period, the beginning of an age of schism that lasts to the present day; schisms like those of the Novations and the Donatists had existed before, but almost all of these older divisions had ceased to be. This was partly because uniformity in the expression of faith had not yet become a craze with the church in their day, partly because they had failed to find the national *point d'appui* that was to give permanence to others. Now, we have the beginning of divisions that shall endure; divisions of Copt, Syrian, Armenian, Assyrian, from the Greek and from one another, under titles of Nestorian, Jacobite, and the like; these schisms are accomplished facts by the middle of the seventh century. Somewhat later, Latin Christianity splits off from Greek, and Teutonic from Latin, and the fissiparous tendency is indulged in, almost *ad infinitum*. Now at last there are signs of the turning of this desolating tide, and of a drift back towards union once more.

Yet, when this "age of schism" was beginning, the religio-imperial idea had a strong hold on the minds of men, and any that might revolt from the current attempt to embody it did not throw over the ideal, but would often (as was the case with the Latins, for example) set about attempting to realize it for themselves, in what they fondly hoped would be a better form, in a Holy Roman Empire.

In both cases, the Church benefited from the attempt, but suffered from the conditions under which the attempt was made. The great Empire that made it was inevitably breaking up, slowly but surely; and as each one of the two main divisions must needs have its own state Church, the Church was broken with the Empire, and the schism of East and West came into being. Human ambition and perverseness (the rivalry of the sees of Rome and Constantinople) might have brought about this result in any case, and as things were, they affected it in many ways.

Each part of the Church had its own trials. In the West the Empire itself broke down, and the absolute need for some machinery of order thrust secular power on the Church, and her officers succumbed to its temptations. In the East, the Empire survived and was able to assimilate the Church and make it practically a department of State; the system of Diocletian was extended in a Christian dress; heresy, like paganism, became an offence against State order rather than against Christian love and truth, and the Bishops were Imperial agents for its punishment, rather than right reverend Fathers in God. Truth became a thing for the Emperor to regulate and for disputants to sharpen their wits on, rather than a revelation from on high that should give life and freedom.

Further, the Empire that thus assimilated so large a part of the Church was itself decadent and tawdry. Its history, with all its brilliance (and its importance as a guard to human development has been much under-rated) is yet the history of a decline and fall, though it be one that took a thousand years to accomplish, and that was redeemed by many efforts at renaissance. Thus, the history of the Church in it is not, indeed, the story of a living man bound to a corpse, but that of a young life coupled to one slowly dying of creeping paralysis; one, fettered thus, acquires such ways of thinking and acting that, when at last the link is severed by the death of the partner, he has lost the power of thinking or acting as one that is free.

Finally, the Empire was Greek. By that is meant, not Hellenic, but what the Roman of old meant by "Græculus," and its citizens by "Romaic." Being Greek, its policy was to "Græcize" (if we may be allowed to express a barbarous

process by a barbarous word) all nationalities within it: this naturally commended itself to all Greeks, as obviously for the benefit of those concerned, even if they were misguided enough to object to it! It was like the project of "anglicizing the native," which was once a commonplace of benevolent thought in India, or the fetish of uniformity which, applied in other circumstances, has lost both Scotland and Ireland to the English Church.

The Church was the instrument by which this process of "Græcization" was to be effected, and the officials thereof, who not only took their own religion in a Greek dress, but who could not conceive of its existence apart from that expression of it, were very willing instruments of a policy that they entirely approved. This type of ecclesiastic survives in the Balkan States to this day.

There were, however, nationalities that resented this assimilation and, in resisting, these fought their battle on the religious field, taking sides in the doctrinal and ecclesiastical quarrels of the age accordingly. Had the embryonic national feeling of Syrian and Copt been allowed by the Emperor such expression as the Mussulmans were wise enough to permit it, the schisms of the Christological controversy might have been avoided, and the nations would have been content to remain in the Empire, instead of seeking for a recognition of their national existence and national faith under the rule of another religion.

The doctrinal question under discussion, and round which the battle of nationality was fought, was, of course, that known as the Christological. The doctrine of the full deity of Our Lord was fully admitted by the Church throughout the Empire, and that question was settled, though the fact that the various Gothic nations had embraced Arianism had introduced a sad complication into a great political problem of the day. Within the Empire, however—that is to say, within the Catholic Church—no abandonment of the Nicene decision was even thinkable. Its doctrine was the common heritage of, and its standard the authority invoked by, all the parties who disputed on the Christological question, "Given the full deity of God the Son, how is this divine being also man?"

Two schools of thought were striving to give an answer, but