

DOCTRINAL REASONS FOR THE INSTRUCTION*

The Instruction just published propose to explain the doctrinal reasons for the regulation of the Church as outlined in the Conciliar Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* and in the first part of the Ecumenical Directory which was published on 14 May 1967. It is intended as a help to the bishops in the concrete decisions they have to make in regard to admitting to eucharistic communion Christians not in full communion with the Catholic Church.

The doctrinal reasons for the regulation made by the Church are to be found-briefly expressed in the two documents mentioned above. It seemed useful, however, to give a more ample exposition of these reasons in order to facilitate the application of a regulation which touches on certain basic points of our faith.

On the one hand there is a close bond between the mystery of the Eucharist and the mystery of the Church, and on the other hand the Eucharist is a spiritual nourishment whose effect is to join the Christian in person with Jesus Christ and to bring him yet more deeply into Christ's Church.

These two statements are of equal importance and have both to be safeguarded, whatever may be the pastoral decisions which pastors are called upon to make in particular circumstances. As it is, generally speaking, on the second statement that those who ask for "eucharistic hospitality" in the Church base their request, the Instruction aims to remind those concerned what may not be done at the expense of the first statement in which the indestructible bond between the Eucharist and the Church is underlined.

The regulation itself in regard to this matter, however, changes with the times. That brought in by Vatican Council

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It offers somewhat more of a welcome than the one in force previously. But the profound doctrinal reasons remain unchanged, because these are bound up with the very nature of our eucharistic belief.

Less stringent for Eastern Churches

The Instruction does not simply take its stand on a general question of principle. It shows how the two statements can be safeguarded at the same time, and are in fact safeguarded, in the actual regulation laid down by the Church. Those called upon to express their views on this matter must constantly be concerned not to sacrifice the one statement in favour of the other.

We have no intention of repeating here what can be found explicitly stated in the Instruction. We wish simply to underline one point which this document puts very clearly. To ask a Catholic priest for the Eucharist, a member of another Christian community must feel "a serious spiritual need of nourishment from the Eucharist" (cf. 4b and 6). That sets the problem on a high level, that namely of profound spiritual needs.

The regulations laid down for admission to eucharistic communion are less stringent in the case of those belonging to the Eastern Churches, not in full communion with us, than they are in the case of other Christians. Why this discrimination? The reason is to be found in the first of the two statements mentioned above. On a question of profession of faith, of the Sacraments and of ecclesiastical structure, the Eastern Churches are very close to us, and so the risks of obscuring the essential bonds between the Church and the Eucharist are notably less. The Instruction recalls the Holy Father's recent declaration as to the "communion almost total, though not yet perfect" between the Orthodox Church and our own.

Referring to the Directory

On the particular point of belief in the Holy Eucharist these Eastern Churches hold a faith conformable to ours *in virtue of the profession faith made by the same Churches*. On the occasion of being admitted to Holy Communion, therefore, their members will not be asked for a personal profession of faith in this Sacrament "as instituted by Christ and in accordance with the tradition of the Catholic Church."

The Instruction ends with a brief comment from n. 55 of the Ecumenical Directory. It recalls first of all the extent accorded by the Directory itself to the authority of the bishops in applying the general criteria to particular cases. It then makes it clear that the two cases mentioned as examples in n. 55, namely deprivation of freedom and conditions of persecution, are not the only ones in which there is to be discerned a great spiritual need for the reception of the Holy Eucharist. It is clear that a need of this kind can be felt even apart from situations of suffering and danger. The case given of the *diaspora* (groups of non-Catholics settled in a Catholic country) is illuminating on this point.

The Instruction is, then, an expansion of certain points of the 1967 Directory, which itself still remains in force. We may recall that this Directory was the work of a "plenary meeting" of the Secretariat for the Union of Christians (this "Plenary" is the annual session on the part of the members of the Secretariat, composed of 7 Cardinals and 24 Bishops), to meet a need already made manifest in the Council. It was produced with the active collaboration of experts from different countries, of Episcopal Conferences throughout the world, and of various organisations pertaining to the Roman Curia, such as the Sacred Congregations for the Eastern Churches, for the Evangelization of the Peoples and for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Directory was approved by the Holy Father during an audience granted to the "Plenary" of the Secretariat on 28 April 1969.

A more or less similar procedure was adopted and followed in the case of the present Instruction.

— In February 1968 a mixed commission was set up, chosen from the Secretariat for the Union of Christians and from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to study the interpretation to be given to certain norms laid down in the Conciliar Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* and in the Ecumenical Directory on the question of "*communicatio in sacris*".

— In November 1969, the "Plenary" of the Secretariat was informed as to the conclusions arrived at by the commission, and then discussed the whole problem on the basis of a document prepared by a committee of its own Consultors. The "Plenary" requested the Cardinal President to set up a commission limited to three bishops to pursue the study of the whole matter.

— As a practical result of this resolution there was a meeting of the three bishops concerned from May 30 to June 2, 1970, in which the question was studied, use being made of nine considered opinions given by as many specialists (biblical scholars, historico-patrologists, theologians). This commission produced a report which was submitted to the "Plenary" of 1970.

— In 1971, a new mixed commission, chosen from the Secretariat for the Union of Christians and the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, determined the line to be followed in the production of a new Pastoral Instruction. This commission worked on two basic documents: the conclusions of the first commission (1968-69) and the report from the meeting of the three bishops (May-June, 1970).

— Along the lines determined upon, a sample Instruction was worked out, which the Cardinal President of the Secretariat for the Union of Christians submitted to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with a view to agreement and possible observations. A definitive reply was given by this Congregation on 8 February 1972.

— On being submitted to the Holy Father, the present Instruction was approved on 25 May 1972.

With this approval of the Holy Father the present Instruction is now offered to all those who have need to formulate exactly the motives for the practice adopted by the Church, whether it be in pastoral directives, or in preaching, or in teaching, or in catechetics. Both the faithful of the Catholic Church and also the other Christian brethren who read it can judge how clearly our mode of action in this matter flows from our most profound religious convictions. We feel sure that this text will be studied by all with the same anxious desire for truth, for understanding, and for fraternal charity, as that which has inspired all those who have contributed to its production.

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for the Union of Christians