

Anglicans and Old-Catholics

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Anglicans and Old-Catholics.

We publish two addresses, which were delivered at the meetings of the Society of St. Willibrord held at London on the occasion of the visit of Bishop Prins of Haarlem on the 7th of November, 1913¹).

Sermon of Father Puller S. S. I. E.

Father Puller preached from the following passages—Rev. III., 8, 10, 11:—“I know thy works . . . that thou hast a little power and didst keep My Word and didst not deny My Name. Because thou didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of trial, that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. I come quickly; hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown.”

These words, he said, addressed by our Blessed Lord through St. John to the angel or Bishop of the specially beloved Church of Philadelphia, are quoted by Dr. John Mason Neale at the conclusion of the last chapter of his “History of the Church of Holland,” a book which made known to many people in England, probably for the first time, the existence of an ancient Catholic Church in Holland not in communion with the Church of Rome. It is fitting to take this passage as the keynote of the sermon on an occasion when we welcome in our midst a Bishop and a priest of that illustrious Church who are joining in the solemnities of our worship.

There are many, he proceeded, to whom some account of that Church would be of interest. St. Willibrord of Northumbria, an Englishman, was its founder. He began to preach the Gospel to the Frisians in A. D. 689 or 690, being accompanied by other English missionaries. A few years later St. Willibrord was consecrated Archbishop, and set up his archiepiscopal throne at Utrecht on the Lower Rhine. Owing to the erection of Cologne into an Archbishopric, St. Willibrord's successors at Utrecht were Bishops, not Archbishops, until in 1559 Utrecht once more became an

¹) Vgl. unsere heutige Chronik, S. 85 ff.

Archiepiscopal See with suffragan Sees at Haarlem, Deventer, and three other places in the province. At the Reformation, when the United Provinces of Holland threw off the Spanish yoke and set up a republican form of government, political power fell into the hands of the Calvinists and Calvinism became the established religion of the country, Catholicism being associated in men's minds with the hated Spaniards. Thus the Church of Holland came to occupy the position of a dissenting body, though it still formed part of the Latin Communion under the leadership of Rome. It became very much impoverished, but its moral tone was heightened by adversity, and its general standard of life purified.

Vosmeer, Rovenius, and Van Neercassel.

In the seventeenth century the Church of Holland had some splendid leaders in the See of Utrecht. During the vacancy of that see between 1580 and 1602 Sasbold Vosmeer was created Vicar-General of Utrecht by the Chapter in 1583 and in 1592 he was made Vicar-Apostolic of the United Provinces by Pope Clement VIII. In 1602 he was consecrated Archbishop at Rome, it being arranged that so long as the Calvinistic Government of Holland objected to his taking the title of Archbishop of Utrecht, he should be styled Archbishop of Philippi *in partibus* to avoid giving offence. Later on, however, he assumed his genuine title, and was proceeded against by the Dutch Government for so doing. During his episcopate he was troubled by the action of the Jesuits, who desired to abolish the diocesan episcopate in Holland and substitute Vicars-Apostolic who should be entirely dependent on the Roman Curia. They were perpetually annoying and encroaching on the rights of the parochial clergy, who in the 17th century in Holland were a splendid body of men. Complaints were frequent as to the lax system of casuistry and discipline introduced by the Jesuits, the un-Christian character of which was made so clear by the great Pascal in his *Lettres Provinciales*. Vosmeer himself, in a letter to his brother, spoke out plainly with reference to this matter.

Dying in 1614 Vosmeer was succeeded by Philip Rovenius, who after some delay owing to the opposition of the Calvinistic Government was consecrated by the Papal Nuncio at Brussels. During his episcopate the Catholic Church of Holland made great progress; the laity increased from 200,000 to 300,000, and the clergy in much larger proportion. He also was troubled by the Jesuits who delated one of his books to Rome, but instead of being condemned it was approved. He died in 1651, and was succeeded by James de la Torre, who died in 1661. The next occupant of

the See was one of the greatest of all the Archbishops of Utrecht, John van Neercassel. During his episcopate the persecution of the so-called Jansenist party came to a climax in France. Both he and his clergy were no doubt in sympathy with the so-called Jansenists of France. They were quite ready to condemn the five theological propositions condemned by Pope Innocent X. in 1653. but they did not believe that these propositions could be found in Jansenius' book.

Van Neercassel died in 1686, and three years later was succeeded by Peter Codde. Twice he was delated to Rome by the Jesuits for Jansenism and twice acquitted; but five months after the second trial he was suspended from all exercise of his office by the Pope without reason stated, and a Dutch priest, Theodore de Cock, was appointed Pro-Vicar-Apostolic of the United Provinces. Great sympathy was felt for the victim of this arbitrary action by many of the dignitaries of the Roman Church, including the great canonist, Hyacinth de Archangelis, the General of the Dominicans, and many Cardinals.

Apostolical Succession Secured.

The clergy of Holland, for the most part, refused to acknowledge the iniquitous action of the Pope; but the Archbishop himself retired into private life. The See was vacant from that time (1702) until 1723—21 years. As there was no Archbishop and no suffragan Bishops in the province there could be no ordinations of priests or deacons. The elder clergy were removed by death as time went on, and the position began to be very critical. In 1715 or 1716, however, the Romanist Bishop of Meath in Ireland, Luke Fagan, was persuaded secretly to ordain twelve priests. But it was not until 1724 that a Bishop could be found courageous enough to confer episcopal orders. The name of this Bishop was Dominique Varlet, who, on becoming Bishop of Babylon, went to Amsterdam to take ship for Russia to proceed to his remote diocese in the East. Here he was visited by Jacob Kryszewski, one of the ablest supporters of the Church of Holland, who explained the miserable position of the Church and persuaded the Bishop to confirm some 604 persons in Amsterdam. This action was duly reported to Rome, and soon after the Bishop reached his diocese a Jesuit messenger came to him with a document suspending him from all exercise of order and jurisdiction. The Bishop returned to Amsterdam and was warmly welcomed by the Church of Holland.

That Church now determined to make an effort to obtain an Archbishop. On the 27th of April, 1723, the Chapter of Utrecht

assembled at the Hague, and elected, by a majority of votes, Cornelius Steenoven, one of their number, to be Archbishop of Utrecht. Great efforts were made to obtain two more Bishops to join with Bishop Varlet in the consecration. But this proved to be impossible; and so finally, on the 15th of October, 1724, Cornelius Steenoven was rightly and canonically consecrated Archbishop of Utrecht by Bishop Varlet, and thus the succession was secured for the Dutch Church.

Varlet lived on in Holland, and consecrated three other Archbishops of Utrecht, the last of whom was Meindaerts, one of those men who had been ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Luke Fagan.

In due time Bishops were consecrated for Haarlem and Deventer, and thus the succession has been preserved to this day. And in our own days, after the Vatican Council in 1870, at which the false claims of the Papacy were finally ratified, and in a way legalized for the Roman Communion, when many noble and learned men, such as Döllinger and Von Schulte and numbers of others refused to accept what they knew to be untrue, the Dutch Bishops were able to consecrate Bishop Reinkens for Germany and Bishop Herzog for Switzerland; at a later date they have been able to consecrate similarly three Bishops for the Mariaviten in Poland; and so a way has been provided for a purified Catholicism to be established in various parts of Western Christendom, which will, we hope, prove to be an ark of refuge, when, as must in time be the case, the Papacy as we know it, the Papacy of the forged Decretals and the Vatican decrees, and the whole system connected with that Papacy, disappears.

We of the Church of England made our protest nearly two hundred years earlier. We too, by God's great mercy, have been enabled to preserve the apostolic succession in the line of our Bishops, and the canonical jurisdiction in our dioceses and provinces.

We cannot but rejoice and give thanks when we hear of how God has enabled our brothers in Holland and elsewhere on the Continent of Europe to follow, perhaps without knowing it, in our footsteps.

Long before the age of the English Reformation the great orthodox Church of the East had followed along a similar path. Inspired by the example set by its own great saints—St. Athanasius, St. Meletius, St. Chrysostom, and hundreds of others—it asserted on a large scale the truth that it is far better to be outside the Roman Communion than to accept the Papal claims.

May God in His own good time grant that these three branches of His militant Church—the Eastern, the Old Catholic, and the Anglican—may be re-united in the sacred bonds of inter-Communion ; and may He draw into that reunited fellowship all that is really living and well-pleasing to Him in the Roman Communion, and all that is capable of accepting the fulness of the Catholic Faith in the sects outside. For this let us pray this morning when the Holy Sacrifice is being offered here in this assembly. And may all these things be brought about in God's good time.

Address of Bishop Prins.

Mylord! Ladies and Gentlemen!

When I received the very kind invitation from the Committee of the Society of St. Willibrord to attend a public meeting in November, I hesitated for a short time, because I could not express myself sufficiently in your language. But I am so greatly interested in the principles of our Society, as finally to think lightly of this rather great difficulty,—relying upon your indulgence.

Well then, I was very greatly delighted to have the privilege of setting foot, for the first time, on English soil, on the country of St. Willibrord, the great apostle of the Netherlands, my native country, where his name continues to live in blessed memory of the Protestant as well as of the Catholic Church. For he is to the Netherlands what St. Paul, the apostle, is to the whole of Europe, namely the bearer of the Gospel, the minister and witness, sent to the Gentiles by our Lord Jesus Christ “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Him”. (Ac. 26, 16, 18.) Just as in a vision a man of Macedonia appeared in the night to St. Paul, there might have appeared to St. Willibrord a man of old Frisland, who “prayed him, saying: Come over into Frisland, and help us”. (Ac. 16, 9.) And as a true servant of Christ he listened to this divine call. So it is his great honour and, as to the Netherlands, it is a reason of thankfulness towards God and his apostle, that St. Willibrord might rightly make his own this word of St. Paul's to the Corinthians: “Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel”. (1 Co. 4, 15.) I considered it my duty, firstly of thankfulness towards God and our apostle, and secondly of fraternity, to speak this word in remembrance of the said apostle of the Netherlands.

And now, my dear Brethren in Christ, I wish you to understand that I think myself very fortunate to have the opportunity of giving you many most hearty and fraternal greetings from the Old-Catholic Church of Holland, particularly from the archbishop of Utrecht and from the bishop of Deventer, who is President of the Dutch branch of the Society of St. Willibrord, and whose representative I have the honour to be at this assembly. Considerations of health prevented him from attending the meeting, but you may be sure that his spirit is among us. He has written to me:—

“From the very beginning I have greeted the Society of St. Willibrord with great sympathy. The object: an understanding, a preparation of unity, between Anglicans and Old-Catholics is, in my opinion, beautiful. For the discord, existing between the different churches, is a shame on Christendom and paralyzes the Gospe .

“All that may contribute to terminate that discord,—or, where this seems to be unattainable for the present, at least to deprive it of its bitterness, its sharp edges,—deserves in my opinions the support of all Christians.

“When we meet, we must not in the first place face each other, for exemple, as Anglicans and Old-Catholics, but as brother-Christians, as pupils and disciples of our Lord Jesus, who as a result of various circumstances do not live in the same house, or the same town, but can nevertheless be good neighbours, loving citizens of the world.

The more we do that, and treat each other in that way, the easier it will be to clear these points of controversy, to reduce them and to remove them partly or completely, and, while the peculiarities of each one are preserved, a unity might be effected between the different churches, that is not built on juridical ideas, but on the principle of Christian charity.

“To this the Society of St. Willibrord can contribute.

“I shall be pleased, if you will greet the assembled friends from me and interpret to them, what I have written to you”.

Yours most affectionately

N. B. P. Spit.

Moreover you may even be assured of the fraternal disposition of the whole Old-Catholic Church of Holland towards foreign Churches in general, although an evangelical union has not yet been effectet. But she feels especially attracted by the Church of England; and this not only, because the Dutch Christian Church

owes to her its apostle, but also, because we can state another very joyful fact, namely that since the second half of the last century a more intimate acquaintance and increasing mutual interest is, thanks be God—observed between the Church of England and the Old-Catholic Church of Holland. I remember an English Churchman, who has aided very much to this effect, namely the late Warden of Sackville College, Rev. John Mason Neale. By his work “A History of the so-called Jansenist Church of Holland” (published at Oxford in 1858), he drew the attention of the Anglican Church to the Church of Utrecht, which already from the beginning of the eighteenth century was suffering from the oppression of Ultramontanism. And this, he has done so sympathetically, that it certainly has aided greatly in laying the foundation of our present mutual fraternal interest. In remembering his work, I pay a debt of gratitude in memory of him; and I do this in the name of the Church of Utrecht. After having fully described the history—as he calls it—of its afflictions and its endurance, he writes towards the end: “It is impossible to close my tash without wishing for the knowledge of a prophet, as to the future fate of that communion”. (P. 379.) As to his expectations I wish to draw your attention to the concluding portion of his work: “It seems to me”—he says—“that the little remnant of this afflicted Church are reserved for happier days. Wherever and whenever that Oecumenical Council may be, or wathever other means God shall employ to restore the lost unity of Christendom, the labours, and trials, and sufferings of this communion will not be forgotten”. Allow me to quote the following passage from his book, which will give you some idea of the hard struggle of the Church of Utrecht: “Marvellously raised up as she was when human help seemed at an end, marvellously preserved through five years of extreme danger in the present century, her existence once hanging on the steadiness of the gripe by which a drowning prelate was held above water, she can scarcely have been thus maintained, that her end should be without honour, that she should dwindle and dwindle till her last spark is extinguished. She can scarcely have been held up, from her protest against the *Unigenitus*, till she has had also protested against the more dangerous *Ineffabilis*, that, after these struggles for the truth, she may be permitted to fall. Surely not for this did Steenoven, and Van Erkel, and Broedersen, and Van Heussen, and Meindaerts write, and strive, and suffer; surely not for this has the steadfast piety that has distinguished this communion for a century and a half, sent up so many earnest prayers to the Supreme Judge to vindicate its innocence, and make known the righteousness of its cause”. Thus far the author, whose name, I am sure, is still living

forth in the hearts of us all, and on whose grave I yesterday laid down a wreath as a sign of respectful esteem of his work by the Church of Utrecht.

Dear Brethren in Christ! The signs of the times are encouraging. Since the Vatican Council of 1870, the little Church of Utrecht is no longer lonely and comfortless. For defenders and partisans have got up in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, America and Russian Poland. Moreover here in London, a little community has been formed by Rev. Bollmann, who is looking after the Old-Catholics, settled in England.—With the Russian Orthodox Church, the Old-Catholic Communion has entered into such friendly and fraternal correspondence, as to have a promising prospect of reunion.—And what about the relation with the Church of England? Our answer can be no other than this: both Communities are on the most friendly terms. Touching instances of mutual regard and love are: the visits, that English and Old-Catholic Clergymen pay to each other,—the hearty correspondence between them,—the mutual invitations to congresses and conferences, where always a ready welcome is found. Really, the signs of the times are auspicious to the object we have in view, namely: *the unification of the Christian Church*. At present the Christian Church is divided dreadfully. But this cannot possibly be the ideal answer to the prayer of our Lord and Saviour: “Holy Father, that they may be one, as we are” (John 17, 11);—“that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe, that thou hast sent me”. (John 17, 21.) We all know that, amid the present confusion and alienation, it is extremely difficult to find the way to the unity we have at heart. But where there is a will, there is a way. And God will pave the way for us. Shall we be witnesses of the ideal fulfilment of the Saviour’s prayer?

Dear Brethren! When the apostles asked of Jesus: “Lord, will thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israël?”—what was his answer? “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth”. (Ac. 1, 6—8.) As to us then, who must be witnesses unto the “Prince of Peace”, we have to set ourselves the task of “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit into the bond of peace”. (Ef. 4, 3.)—“For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace”. (1 Cor. 14, 33.) And now, let me conclude with one of your hymns (604):

And we, shall we be faithless?
Shall hearts fail, hands hang down?
Shall we evade the conflict,
And cast away our crown?
Not so: in God's deep counsels
Some better thing is stored;
We will maintain, unflinching,
One Church, one Faith, one Lord!
