

THE EASTERN CHURCHES AND THE PAPACY

by

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CHAPTER VII

THE MELETIAN SCHISM—S. BASIL AND S. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

WE must now retrace our steps somewhat. The "unprincipled ambition"¹ of Eusebius of Nicomedia inspired him to turn his activities towards Antioch and against Eustathius, its bishop of unblemished orthodoxy.

It was a craftily planned campaign that the Arians waged against the bishop with ridiculous charges of Sabellianism, immoral conduct, and want of respect to Helena, the Emperor's mother.² Their schemes, helped unfortunately by the other Eusebius, the historian-bishop of Cæsarea, were successful. Constantine was influenced as they desired; and Eustathius was deposed (330) as being a centre of general turbulence and unrest, and sent into exile, first to Thrace and then to Macedonia. In truth his banishment was due solely to his orthodoxy and to the unceasing scheming of the Eusebians.

Probably the reason why he did not appeal to the pope,³ as Athanasius, Marcellus, Theodore, Ignatius and the rest in like cases did, was that death speedily overtook him. After his deposition he passes into oblivion and disappears from history, for when, after the death of Constantine (337), exiled bishops are recalled, the name of Eustathius is not found in the list of those who return. And this brings us to the Meletian schism, a complex question, which is well described by a present-day writer as one of the most thorny in the Church history of the fourth century, but which, though it means a certain amount of digression, has factors of importance in our present investigation.

Briefly, the origin of the schism may be stated thus :

¹ Newman's *Arians of the Fourth Century*, p. 26. Eusebius had the joy of the consummation of his ambition in being translated (339), in spite of Canons xv and xvi of Nicæa, to Constantinople. He died 341. See also Chapman, *Art. cit. Downside Review* (August, 1925), p. 95.

² *Athan. Arian*, iv. P. G., xxv, 697.

³ But see Chapman, *Art. cit.* p. 108.

The Arians set up Eudoxius to replace Eustathius.
The Catholics for the most part accepted him.

But a few still clung to Eustathius and formed a Eustathian party.

Eudoxius dies and the Arians appoint Meletius bishop of Sebaste in Armenia to succeed him.

To their surprise, disappointment and disgust, though consecrated by the Arians he proves to be a Catholic "Nicene." In less than a month they have trumped up the usual charges, got rid of him, and have put Euzoius in his place.

So there are three parties: the Eustathians and Meletians, both Catholic, and the supporters of Euzoius, Arian. But things became more complicated still, when now Lucifer of Cagliari comes, and, though he has no commission or jurisdiction in Syria, consecrates Paulinus as successor of Eustathius.

One understands this step, though one finds difficulty in excusing it. The consecration of Paulinus was a huge misfortune, for it perpetuated the schism and gave it official countenance. F. Cavallera does right to say that Meletius and his flock must be put outside the question; they did their duty, and it is absurd to call by the name of "Meletian" schism an intrigue in which the Paulinians, their adversaries, played the principal rôle. The election of Paulinus was made in violation of canonical rules known everywhere, and if the awkwardness of the Meletians provoked later the recognition by Egypt and the West of a *fait accompli*, one can only blame the primary act.⁴

All the same, since Eustathius was confessedly the legitimate bishop, the attitude of the Eustathian party to their exiled bishop cannot be said to be wrong. The trouble arose when Lucifer consecrated Paulinus.

It is a tangle, and it is possible to condemn the delay and hesitancy of Rome, but it is difficult to see what else she could do. It is, however, a Roman Catholic writer who says, *a propos* of this schism at Antioch specially: "We must confess that Rome had sometimes given these Eastern Christians cause for discontent. Of course, nothing can justify schism; they had so often protested that at Rome still stood the Rock on which Christ had built his Church, they had so often acknowledged the pope's right as supreme judge. Still, the most rightful judges have made mistakes; if we look for the cause of anger against Rome which made the schism possible we shall have to

⁴ See Cavallera, *Op. cit.*, p. 115. F. Cavallera's sympathies are with Meletius. cf. Appendix VIII.

put, at any rate, some of it down to the account of Rome itself." 5

But then this was hardly a schism *from Rome*. For Meletius himself always claimed to be in communion with Rome. Meletius and Paulinus each looked upon the other as the intruder. The affair, painful as it is, *does not tell against the primacy of Rome but for it*. All the personages concerned were anxious to get the approval of Damasus. What is all the history of the schism but the history of the efforts of the Paulinians and the Meletians—either party—to obtain, to the exclusion of their adversaries, the Roman recognition? 6 And Rome never declared that Meletius was cut off from the Church, for she knew that he was a Catholic. 7 What she did do was because of influences which were brought to bear on her—Athanasius and Peter of Alexandria, and Alexandria withheld recognition from Meletius and accorded it to Paulinus. And Basil and the East generally, which supported Meletius, were certainly never out of communion with Rome.

What made Basil so angry and so vehement was that the pope was misinformed and misled, and acted accordingly.

Rome, indeed, supported Lucifer's action, i.e. acknowledged the "Eustathian" succession, while the East as a whole supported Meletius.

When Meletius died Flavian succeeded him, and Paulinus was followed by Evagrius. The double line of bishops continued eighty-five years after Meletius' death, when the survivor was acknowledged by all as legitimate bishop.

It was the exile of Meletius really which marked the critical point of the controversy, for the two Catholic parties, the Eustathians and Meletians, hardened towards one another, and definite schism ensued when the Eustathians refused 8 the proposals of the Meletians to form a single Church. They were influenced by the fact that Meletius, although himself a Catholic, had received consecration from partly-Arian sources.

In Antioch the Arians took possession of all the churches, and the Catholics of both parties had to content themselves with meetings in houses.

Athanasius, who had always been in communion with the

5 A. Fortescue, *The Orthodox Eastern Church*, p. 90.

6 Grumel, *Echos d'Orient* (1922), p. 291.

7 S. Meletius is commemorated in the Roman Church on February 12. The Greek Church likewise makes mention of him on Feb. 12, and on the 23rd and 24th August. See Nilles, *Kalendarium*, i, 90, and Delehaye, *Synax*, pp. 459, 917, 920.

8 Theodoret, *H. E.*, iii, 2.

Eustathian community, though he had not yet recognised the succession of Paulinus, warmly desired the communion of Meletius. For some reason or other the latter delayed taking steps to communion, and in the meantime Paulinus, having accepted Athanasius' Council of Alexandria, was recognised by Athanasius as the bishop. Wherever in this controversy of Antioch one's sympathies may lie, the conclusion that the latest authority on the subject comes to is fully justified. "*Le conflit créé par le Schisme d'Antioche resta en réalité purement disciplinaire.*"

"*Quelque idée que l'on se fasse de son importance dans l'histoire des relations entre l'Orient et l'Occident, ce serait singulièrement le méconnaître que d'y voir, comme on l'a fait quelquefois, le prélude du schisme photien.*"⁹ But the significance and importance of the controversy are not slight. Great Eastern Fathers were concerned in it—Athanasius, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen; questions of imperial policy were mixed up in it; and for a time it may be said to have been the pivot of relations between the Catholics of East and West.

Had the schism arisen in any other place it would not have attracted so very much notice, but the importance lay in the fact of Antioch being the capital of Syria and the third of the "patriarchal" sees. And while Alexandria and Athanasius were the bulwark against Arianism protected by the imperial power,¹⁰ Antioch was the citadel of anti-Nicæanism: and Antioch was now full of intellectual activity while Alexandria was somewhat on the decline.

BASIL

S. Basil, the ardent and loyal supporter of Meletius, used his good offices with good effect with Athanasius. But the death of Athanasius soon after put an end to any negotiations for the peace of the Church in Antioch. Peter, who succeeded Athanasius, was an uncompromising opponent of Meletius, whom he looked upon as a heretic.

S. Basil, Bishop of Cæsarea, an apostolic see,¹¹ the greatest of the Cappadocian Fathers, was, like Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Chrysostom, not baptised till adult years. It was

⁹ F. Cavallera, *Le Schisme d'Antioche*, p. 322 (1905).

¹⁰ As one studies this schism, one sees perpetually complications caused by the intrusion of the imperial power into the ecclesiastical domain. From Constantine's time, the East increasingly, without mistrust and gladly, welcomes the supremacy of the secular powers. But this intrusion cuts both ways: if in some directions it aids the Church, in others it hinders and weakens her. The same Constantine who banished the heretic Arius (325) banished his Catholic opponent Eustathius of Antioch five years later (330).

¹¹ Acts ii, 9; 1 Pet. i, 1.

in 357, at the age of twenty-seven, that he received baptism at the hands of Dianeios, Bishop of Cæsarea. Dianeios, as Batiffol reminds one, in his article "L'Ecclésiologie de Saint Basile"¹² had had a career somewhat unsympathetic towards Rome and the West. He signed the haughty address from the Council of Antioch to Pope Julius, supported Gregory of Cappadocia against Athanasius, and signed the manifesto *in encaeniis*. At Sardica he sided with the Easterns against Pope Julius, and signed the Arian formula at Ariminum which Constantius had forced on the bishops. Batiffol says, "*Dianeios est arien malgré lui.*"

Besides being baptized by Dianeios Basil had been ordained reader by him, and always professed the greatest veneration for him.¹³ Dianeios' signing of the Arian formula compelled Basil to renounce communion with him, but before he died Dianeios, who pleaded "simplicity of heart" and unwavering attachment to the Faith of "the 318 holy bishops" (Nicæa), was reconciled and in communion with Basil. It was from the next bishop, Eusebius, that Basil received the diaconate and the priesthood.

There is, as a matter of fact, little in actual words in the writings of S. Basil relating to the authority of the Apostolic See. And the part taken by the great Bishop of Cæsarea in the Meletian question still to-day gives rise to a considerable amount of discussion. The Pope, Damasus, was influenced by the information of affairs at Antioch which he got from Alexandrian sources. This was how he came to recognize Paulinus.

S. Basil was very much perturbed and gave expression to his feelings in strong terms.

But there is no contesting of the primacy of Rome. His complaint is that the West has not functioned as it ought, owing to its being wrongly informed.

Basil writes to his friend Eusebius of Samosata, and he is very sore and annoyed at the pride of the Westerns. After quoting Homer, he says :

"Proud characters, when they are honoured, generally become only more disdainful. If God becomes propitious, what have we need of more? If His anger continues to burst on us, of what assistance will Western pride be to us? . . . I would wish to write to their coryphæus outside the ordinary form and only to speak of ecclesiastical affairs in so far as it is

¹² *Echos d'Orient*, 1922, pp. 9-10.

¹³ *De Spir. Sanct.*, 71.

necessary to insinuate that they do not know the truth of what is happening here and refuse to take the road by which they might come to know it, and that in general it is not necessary to affront those who have been tried by temptation, nor to take for dignity pride, a sin capable in itself of making us enemies of God."¹⁴

Mgr. Batiffol, in an article already referred to,¹⁵ agrees with an earlier writer, Fialon,¹⁶ in refusing to see any recognition of Roman primacy in the efforts taken by Basil towards peace in the schism of Antioch. They only see a demand for help. The pope, according to their reading of the situation, is invited to try where others have unfortunately failed.¹⁷

But though there is indeed little in the actual writings of S. Basil which emphasises the authority of the Roman see, there are these negotiations, and they presuppose certain principles. Sometimes "actions speak louder than words."

I think that on the whole a much more reasonable deduction is drawn from the history of the schism by another French writer, who says :

*"De Saint Basile nous n'avons rien en paroles qui relève l'autorité du Siège apostolique, mais nous avons des démarches, et il nous signale les faits. Ces démarches et ces faits nous prouvent l'impuissance de l'Orient à se suffire en matière de foi, la nécessité d'un accord avec l'Occident, accord à effectuer sur l'autorité de Rome, la prépondérance et la primauté de Rome dans l'enseignement de la foi, son autorité effective jusque dans les régions les plus éloignées de l'Orient, la nécessité de son intervention pour guérir les grands maux de l'Eglise. De tout cela, saint Basile ne s'est pas fait encore une fois le docteur formel, mais il en reste du moins le témoin et l'attestateur très précieux, comme le montrent très nettement les rapports que les circonstances ont rendus nécessaires entre lui et le Siège Apostolique."*¹⁸

¹⁴ P. G., xxxii, 893. Ep. 239. But cf. Ep. 69 and 265.

¹⁵ L'Ecclésiologie de S. Basile.

¹⁶ Etude littéraire sur Saint Basile, Paris. 1869.

¹⁷ Cardinal Marini (Appendix, *Il Primato*, p. 357, "Apologia di S. Basilio il Grande per la sua condotta verso i Romani Pontifici") protests that these writers are too absolute and unbalanced in their assertions, and that they would have done better for their case to have shaded off their thought somewhat. cf. Paul Allard, *S. Basile*, chap. vi. "Les Rapports avec l'Occident," and V. Grumel, "Saint Basile et le Siège Apostolique," in *Echos d'Orient*, 1922.

¹⁸ V. Grumel, Art. "Saint Basile et le Siège Apostolique," in *Echos d'Orient*, No. 127 (1922), p. 292. cf. Ep. 69, "We thought it expedient to