

THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC (OLD CATHOLIC) COMMUNION.

The Official Records of Synod during the period 1910 - 1920

PART I 1910 - 1915

PART II 1915 - 1920

Edited from the Original Documents at the Headquarters of the Liberal Catholic Church, Drayton House, 30 Gordon Street, London, W.C.I.

by the Rt. Rev. E.J. Burton, M.A.

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PART 1

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By the Rt. Rev. E.J. Burton, M.A.

FOREWORD

The increasing role and expanding activities of our Church make it desirable that its official position and basic principles be more widely known, especially in a period of change and development in all Christian Churches.

Accounts of our Church so far available have relied largely on letters, hearsay, and sometimes tendentious individual interpretations. This has seemed of little moment in the past, since those within the movement and (equally) those who met them and worked with them felt amusement, or sometimes irritation, at the accounts given. The situation is now somewhat different. The Liberal Catholic Church is uniquely equipped to meet the needs of many seekers in contemporary society and communities, both in Britain, overseas provinces, and the "new nations". Complete catholicity, validity of Orders, the careful guidance and painstaking care which necessarily accompanied its "liberality", must not merely be asserted but also demonstrated, to ensure satisfactory relations with other churches and to give confidence to Christians who may feel drawn to work with our communion or alongside its members and centres.

Its official actions, relevant documents and decisions, must be kept distinct from the (excusable and inevitable) diversions and individualisms of some members. Such statements and actions were accompaniment of the complete freedom in interpretation of dogma which was allowed. Time has shown the value of such liberalism. The experiences of our life in Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have produced recognition, freely accepted, of essentials, which cannot be shaken. Alongside freedom of "interpretation", (inevitable if we are to ensure true faith and belief, for words are inadequate, needing constant change and adjustment) there was insistence on maintaining the historic ministry and sacraments, matters of Christian life and experience the Body of Christ. Again, the Liberal Catholic Communion has been vindicated in this firm traditional emphasis.

Relevant documents, actual statements, need to be made available. That has been the editor's task. He hopes they will not seem merely dull records, but rather a way to life and brotherhood within the whole Christian community. They should be a means of assuring other areas of the church, the Catholic Church of mankind, of the sense of responsibility and sincerity which are foundations of the Liberal Catholic Movement, and which underlie its continuing witness.

The first stoutly bound Minute Book was started when Bishop Mathew realised that valid records must be kept of proceedings within the English mission of the Old

Catholic Church. It was fortunate that he did (at least) this.

The fly leaf of the book bears (in large and strong handwriting) the title "Minutes of the Chapter of Our Lady and St. Willibrord". Through the lettered index pages the various matters that arose during the ensuing period are entered, with page references to later meetings and minutes.

Entries are as follows; (my editorial comments are in brackets, thus.

+James)

A) 1910, Ap. 28. The first Chapter was held on this day. Four Canons were invested by the Right Rev. Arnold Harris Mathew. Regionary Bishop for the British Isles and de jure Earl of Landaff of Thomastown, Ireland, at the temporary church of St. Willibrord, River Street, Canonbury, London N. , at a Pontifical High Mass celebrated by the Bishop. All the new Canons received Holy Communion.

After luncheon the Chapter assembled at the residence of the Bishop, No. 151 Fellows Road, Hampstead.

Present:

Bishop Mathew, Presiding.

Canons Herbert Frances Bacon
 Frank Cuthbert Hinton
 Lambert (sic)
 Seaton (sic)

Bishop Mathew read a letter dated Ap. 26 from Mr Holford Stevens of New Barnet suggesting that the Society of St. Willibrord take over the Barnet Courier as their organ. It was decided to ask Mr Ham of the Croydon Guardian to write to Mr Stevens on the subject.

The bishop read a paper on the difficulties of fasting communion for the clergy. It was agreed after discussion that no alteration from the Church's law was expedient for the movement, but that in case of urgent necessity the Bishop might be asked to dispense temporarily for such exceptional case,

The bishop urged the formation of a trust for the purpose of acquiring and holding property. Canon Bacon said he would write to Mr F. Fenton of 4 Paper Buildings, Temple, and ask him to attend to this matter, and if possible act as legal adviser to the Chapter.

It was agreed that Chapter Masses should be celebrated every three months, the next to be on the last Friday in July.

After considerable discussion in which all present took part it was thought advisable to elect a Dean. This was done by each of those present writing on a small piece of paper the initial letter of the surname of the Canon to be preferred for this Office. These papers were collected in an urn by Canon Bacon and when opened the result was four votes for L. and one for H. Canon Lambert was then unanimously elected

Dean of the Chapter. Canon Bacon was then elected as Archdeacon and agreed to act as the Secretary of the Synod.

The Rev. James McFall of Belfast was then elected as the fifth Canon and the day's proceedings were brought to a close with the Bishop's blessing.

(These minutes were signed as correct on 9th July, 1910 by Archbishop Mathew and endorsed by W. Noel Lambert.)

(This occasion was perhaps almost as important as later developments towards a self-governing and independent communion within catholic order, since it enabled those developments to take place. Mathew had seen that he must establish his Province to provide a framework of organisation and permanent policy. The establishment of this Chapter, however much Mathew might vary in his own views and policies, enabled the communion to act and to continue effectively on his later submission to Rome. The plan, now that "Roman" Churches were no longer available as in the first flush of the Old Catholic revival, to acquire church property, was the start of another task which is still with us.)

B) P. 6. At a Chapter Meeting on Saturday, July 9th, at 151 Fellows Road, N.W. it was unanimously resolved that;

- (a) On all great Festivals the principal mass may be said or sung in Latin.
- (b) On all other days if laity be present the mass must be said in the vernacular.
- (c) At private masses when laity are not present any language understood by the celebrant and server may be used.
- (d) The service of Benediction of the B. Sacrament may be said or sung in Latin or the vernacular. It is to consist of (l) Salutaris, and appropriate hymn or anthem, or the Lit. of the B. Sac. or of the Holy Name, followed by the Tantum Ergo, versicle and respond and collect as in the English version of the Old Catholic Missal.
- (e) The Divine Promises when recited must be as printed in the Old Catholic Missal.
- (f) No deviation from the foregoing may be made by any priest except under the express and written authority of the Bishop.
- (g) A copy of these rules to be sent to the clergy.

A letter was read by the Bp. from Canon McFall asking for the title of Arch Priest. Negatived.

A letter from Mr Fenton accepting the post of Registrar of the Chapter and announcing that after careful study he found that while R.C. processions of the Host in the public streets are forbidden by law statute, yet these prohibitions do not apply to Old Catholics, who have therefore the right to hold them and are entitled to police protection for these.

C) A chapter meeting was held at 151.Fellows Road, N.W., on Sat. Dec. 2nd 1910 after a Mass of the Holy Spirit had been said. It was concerned to discuss whether or not a man be consecrated to the episcopate for the purpose of giving security to the succession or whether to establish a hierarchy and in the latter case to formulate rules for election.

After the Minutes of the last meeting had been signed, the Archdeacon read the

notice convening the meeting and a note from Canon McFall agreeing to its terms and from Fr Christie urging his views as to the desirability of organising by means of a Hierarchy and a letter from Mr A.J. Rickerby of Croft House, Steyning, protesting that against the rules of the Chapter that all candidates for Holy Orders must believe in and use the Sacrament of Penance and accept the decrees of the Synod of Jerusalem. Bp. Hathew read a letter from Canon McFall resigning all connection with the movement and the Church, and returning all his papers and strongly animadverting upon the Conduct of the Archdeacon.

After some serious remarks from Fr Scott-Hall who had been asked to be present the Bp gave his views at some length, reviewing the progress of the Old Catholic Church on the Continent and summing up in favour of the Hierarchy. Each of the Canons spoke in turn all but Canon Lambert being in favour, with the result that the Chapter, Dean Lambert dissenting, voted in favour of the establishment of a Hierarchy of four bishops and an Archbishop and agreed to empower Arch. Mathew to select the four men.

(The movement to make the Old Catholic Church independent and self perpetuating was now gaining definition and momentum, whether or not the Archbishop recognised this. At the same time, certain laity who wished to be associated were voicing views of greater liberality, and desiring that the Church should become less insistent on particular dogmatic rules.)

(The plans made were acted upon. Dean Lambert, already a dissident, resigned.)

D) P. 10. A Chapter was held in a private room of the Royal Societies' Club, St. James' St. on Saturday afternoon, Jan. 7th, 1911.

It was officially announced that Dean Lambert resigned his Office. There being thus two vacancies it was proposed that Canon Seaton become Dean, and as a consecration of four bishops had taken place in the morning those of them who were not members of the Chapter should be added to it.

For the present this chapter will be the governing body of the Church.

The new bishops are Archdeacon Bacon, Canon Hinton, the Rev. W.E. Scott-Hall, and the Rev. F.C.C. Egerton, whose dioceses are the E.W.S. and N. of England respectively. It was agreed that the Right Rev. A.H. Mathew be henceforth known as Catholic Archbishop of London.

(This meeting is minuted (as above) in the writing of the departing Lambert.)

(On page 11 is a copy of a letter, welcoming into communion Mathew and his movement, from the Orthodox Metropolitan of Beyrouth^o

"Priant Dieu de benir vous et tous ceux qui nous viennent avec vous, nous vous benissons au nom de sa Beatitude le Patriarche et du Saint Synode d'Antioche, votre collègue et Frere en J.C. + Gerassimos Messaraux, Prince Archeteque et Metropolitte Orthodoxe de Beyrouth."

This is endorsed by Mathew.

Quite sensibly, Mathew saw in the Old Catholic movement a focal point for reunion of east and west. Since the jurisdiction of the Roman Bishop was not accepted by the Old Catholics, they (as the Anglican Church both earlier and later) saw the opportunity for a moving together of other separated communions of the Catholic Church. More, of course, than mere jurisdiction was involved. It was not until the Old Catholic movement developed into the Liberal Catholic "fulfilment" that basic qualities of catholic Christianity, emphasis on divinisation, glorification, resurrection, the restoration of all things, integral to eastern (and indeed all fully apprehended) Christian life could be grasped, and a way to unity in liturgy and working be effectively contemplated.

The intercommunion thus established has never been rescinded. Bishop Wedgwood accepted this as part of the Church's responsibility. The letter is dated the 5th of August, 1911.)

E) Page 12. A Synod and Chapter Meeting were held in the Church of Our Lady and St. Willibrord, Canonbury, London, N. on Monday 27th May, 1912. After Mass had been said by His Grace the Archbishop of London, His Grace read the letter convening the Synod and the Minutes of the last two meetings of the Archiepiscopal Chapter were read and confirmed. Rev. W.N. Lambert and Rev. James McFall were co-opted as Canons of the Chapter.

His Grace the Archbishop addressed the Synod at some length explaining events since the decision to found a Hierarchy was arrived at. The gift of a Church and house; recent suspensions and the happy reconciliation of the Rev. W.N. Lambert.

The Archbishop desired to make public not only the withdrawal of the suspensions against bishops Bacon and Hinton but that all allegations were withdrawn also and that he had acted upon mistaken information.

Resolutions were unanimously carried;

- (i) To send a telegram of thanks to the Right Honourable the Baroness von Uxkull for her munificent gift to our body.
- (ii) Of unabated loyalty to his Grace the Archbishop and in his leadership and an emphatic denial that he had withdrawn from the Movement¹.
- (iii) To undertake the formation of a Society such as the Order of Corporate Reunion. This was placed in the hands of Bishops Bacon and Hinton.
- (iv) To consider and report on the desirability of conferring degrees.

The conduct of Bishop Scott-Hall was then brought to the notice of the Synod. Bishop Hinton was nominated to act as his accuser and Bishop Bacon as his advocate.

The following resolutions the Dean was requested to send to Bishop Scott-Hall, the Rt. Honourable the Baroness von Uxkull, and to her ladyship's legal advisers;

- (i) That the Bishops and Clergy of the Catholic Church, Latins and Orthodox United, assembled in Synod this twenty seventh day of May, 1912 at the Church of Our Lady

¹ That the Movement did not depend on Archbishop Mathew was tacitly admitted and established by this phrasing.

and St. Willibrord, River Street, Canonbury, London N. desire to place on record their unabated confidence in his Grace Archbishop Mathew and his leadership and an emphatic denial that he had withdrawn from the Movement.

(ii) That the Bishops and Clergy agree unanimously that the co-operation of the Right Reverend William Edmund Scott-Hall is no longer required in the Movement Catholic Church, Latins and Orthodox United, and that his Lordship's services are hereby definitely declined and that this resolution be communicated to his Lordship, the Rt Honourable the Baroness von Uxkull and to her ladyship's legal advisers,,

(The suspicion - that Mathew might leave the Old Catholic Church - which his somewhat sporadic leadership and activity had occasioned was lessened by this affirmation of loyalty. Mathew had every opportunity to develop a steady and strong movement. The addenda to the name of the movement were simply a logical consequence of widening attitudes. In the next Chapter and Synod, Mathew's leanings were perhaps marked by his recognition that his body was also the same as the "Old" Roman Church, which had, before the separation of east and west, acted within the whole catholic church. This Mathew saw as essential for the Old Catholic Movement. He did not want to isolate himself from the Roman communion. In this he was sensible. The adjustment of names did not change the legal terminology of the movement. It was meant to indicate the scope and authority (in esse) of the movement. But it did seem to support a suspicion (coupled with other people's fears) that Mathew was veering back to Roman allegiance. In so far as any church is "old" Roman Catholic, the existing Liberal Catholic Church may claim the title. The subsequent new body formed by Mathew, when he again left Rome after his submission, has no claim to the title at all; it is not Roman Catholic. Much less "old" Roman Catholic. Its Orders, derived from Mathew are valid, but its bishops are necessarily without jurisdiction.)

F) P. 15. A meeting of the Chapter and Synod of the Old Roman Catholic Church (Catholics and Orthodox United) was held at 33 Esmond Road, Bedford Park, Chiswick, London W. on the eighth day of June 1912. Present: His Grace Archbishop Mathew (who presided), the Right Reverend Francis Bacon, the Right Reverend Cuthbert F. Hinton, the Very Reverend John B. Seaton (Dean), the Very Rev. Noel W. Lambert, and the Rev. W. Benedict Lamb. It was resolved that the Synod here assembled confirm that the two resolutions of the last Synod held on the Twenty seventh day of May, 1912.

The archbishop produced a draft of the proposed Deed of Settlement of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Carlton Hill, St. John's Wood and the house No. 70 Carlton Hill, which after being read and considered the Synod resolved that such draft be approved, and declared that it did approve such draft, but in clause 9, line 6, after "Hereby" insert the words "with the approval of the Synod" so that it reads "or being in Holy Orders shall be suspended by the Archbishop or any Bishop with the approval of the Synod² shall be absolutely disqualified to be appointed as a trustee." It was further resolved that in the event of any alterations or additions being hereafter made or suggested in the draft that the Most Reverend Arnold Harris Mathew and the Right Reverend Herbert Walter Francis Bacon be and are hereby appointed a. sub-committee to consider and assent to and adopt such alterations and additions on behalf of the Synod in the event of its assent thereto being sought or

² A significant rider.

required.

It was further resolved and declared by the Synod that it would be desirable and expedient for the Church House to be vested in five persons as trustees and that those five persons should be The Most Reverend Arnold Harris Mathew, The Right Reverend Cuthbert Frank Hinton, The Very Rev. John Briggs Seaton, The Very Rev. William Noel Lambert, all of whom had expressed their willingness to act as trustees of the properties.

It was also resolved that the services of J. Gissing Skelton, Esquire, Solicitor of 1, Lincolns Inn Fields, London, W.C. be retained in the interests of the Synod.

(Page 18 contains particulars of members of various churches, including a Syrian Archimandrite and Mgr. Albert Rene de Liguieres and his following in Paris, who seek to come under Mathew's care and become part of the movement.

Curious now to consider how, if Mathew had really worked and walked carefully, he might have developed ecumenism within the Christian Church. These notes were endorsed 3rd February, 1914.)

(Page 19 records the present state of the Chapters the faithful John Seaton serves throughout as Dean. His loyal and persevering ministry bridges the whole-period under consideration, on into the formative years of the movement under its new legal title, the Liberal Catholic Church.)

The Chapter now comprised the following: John B. Seaton, D.D., M.A., Dean, and Canons Williams, Farrer, King, McFall, Wedgwood and Willoughby. Since the last meeting of the Chapter the Rev. the Prince de Landas and F.S. Willoughby have been raised to the Episcopate by his Grace the Archbishop of London. At the latter, the protocol was read by the Dean at Bromley, Kent, prior to the Consecration, 28th October. The votes at the latter election were as follows: The Rev. Fathers aged thirty and upwards were Reginald Farrer, Rupert Gauntlett, Arthur Willoughby Henzall, James McFall (Canon) and Henry Wormhurst, who each received one vote; John Briggs Seaton (Dean) and Joseph Bensley, who each received four votes; James Ingall Wedgwood (Canon) who received six votes and Frederick Samuel Willoughby (Canon) who received ten votes. The Prince de Landas was consecrated Auxiliary for Scotland, the Rt. Rev. F.S. Willoughby Bishop Auxiliary for the London District, Titular Bishop of St. Pancras.

(Again the development and organisation were quite logical. The hierarchy had failed, though the bishops concerned continued some activities of their own; their subsequent careers were noted later in the official church documents at the time of Wedgwood's consecration to "clear the record" and to indicate Wedgwood's resulting sole jurisdiction. More important, this record indicates distinction between the continuing Old Catholic movement and illegitimate, purely individual, off-shoots.)

Page 20. Minutes of a Meeting held at No. 1 Upper Woburn Place, W.C. December 16th 1914.

Present; The Most Revd. Archbishop Mathew, D.D.,
 The Rt. Revd. Bishop Willoughby, M.A.,
 The Very Revd. Dean Seaton, D.D.

The Very Revd. Canon Carter
The Very Revd. Canon King
The Very Revd. Canon Williams
The Very Revd. Canon Farrer

At twelve o'clock the Most Rev. the Archbishop celebrated Mass in the private chapel. With the exception of Canon King, all the above named were present as were Miss Barnby and Miss Oppenheimer, who retired before the meeting.

The minutes of the last meeting were read by the Most Reverend Chairman.

It was resolved that all reference to the Abbot (Dom Francis) O.S.B. and community of Monks of St. Benedict's Abbey, Waukegan, Illinois should be deleted from the minute book.

(This community was amongst various bodies who desired to work within the Old Catholic movement. The minute was not deleted, or the relevant correspondence, but I have not thought it worth while to insert the note. There is nothing of importance, scandal, or other interest.)

(iv) It was proposed by Dean Seaton, approved by the Most Revd. Chairman, and unanimously agreed, that the Very Rev. Canon Farrer be asked to hold the Offices of Treasurer, Registrar, and Secretary of the Old Catholic Church of England; Dean Seaton having expressed the opinion that these offices should be filled by some person resident in London.

The Very Revd. Canon Farrer accepted the appointment.

(v) The Most Revd. the Archbishop signed the formal letter of appointment of the new Canons³.

(vi) It was decided that the robes to be worn by Canons should be similar to those in use by the Roman Catholic Chapter of Westminster or as an alternative by the R.C. Chapter at Aix-la-Chapelle, the choice of Canons between these two was to be free.

(These minutes were signed by Reginald Farrer, Registrar.)

(Once again, despite his seeming inability to govern his province effectively and firmly, Mathew was again in a position to further the church; once again, and this time finally, he "ran away", and, indeed, fled to the Roman Church. At the back of his mind, there was always the desire to secure acceptance of his province as within the Roman Church.

At this very moment (December 16th 1914) he had written to the Pope offering complete submission and placing the entire movement under the Pontiff's authority. In that letter, "prostrate beneath the feet of Your Holiness", he formally abdicated jurisdiction over the Old Catholic Church in the Province. Yet he continued to act as if he had such power. He was particularly worried that liberalising trends in the interpretation of the church's faith would create an obstacle to its impending reception by the Roman Church. In his letter he had stressed complete conformity with the then Roman standards of orthodoxy. The presence of clergy, whose interpretations might seem otherwise, would invalidate his claims and his own

³ Important in the view of later events.

position. He was obviously hoping to continue in power in a Uniate order within the Roman Church. He therefore issued an interdict against certain clergy. Although they were unaware of the fact, he had at this time already abandoned all authority in the Old Catholic movement; their action in resisting him, justified canonically in the course of events, was legitimate even before the true position was known.)

Page 22.

(The following statement is now inserted)

On August 6th 1915⁴ Archbishop Mathew issued a Pastoral letter in which he required all adherents of the movement who were members of the Theosophical Society to sever their connection with that society, A long discussion and exchange of correspondence ensued. Canon Wedgwood, who returned from Australia at the end of September, represented that it had been distinctly understood prior to his Ordination that there would be no interference with his membership and work in the Theosophical Society and the same was understood of those members who had been ordained by the Archbishop or his Auxiliary Bishop. Canon Wedgwood explained that before Ordination he had sent to the Archbishop a book and various papers expounding theosophical views, had explained that they represented substantially his beliefs, and had further asked the Archbishop if he was entirely satisfied and offered to answer any questions put to him. During the correspondence now referred to, the Archbishop testified that there had been no deception practised in this matter.

The Archbishop also dissolved the Chapter on the ground that the canons had never been properly installed.

(What curious blend of "reason" and ecclesiastical misunderstanding was here involved is almost impossible to assess. See "Chapter" in The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, and preceding minutes in which it is distinctly stated that the "chapter" shall be the governing authority in the Church. The chapter as reconstituted had already, under the chairmanship of Mathew, enacted business and decisions on behalf of the Church, If it was not properly constituted and had no power to act, then unfortunately his own work with it and through it, and even the position which (he claimed) enabled him to dissolve it, were also non-operative.)

Two meetings of the Canons and Clergy were held to discuss the situation. These took place at No. 1 Upper Woburn Place, W.C., and were presided over by Provost Seaton. At the first, a document was drawn up pointing out to His Grace that the Chapter had formally transacted business, so that the reason assigned for its dissolution could not be accepted as valid unless all its previous proceedings, entered in the Minute Book, were to be regarded as farcical and invalid. The clergy also supported the action of those clergy who regarded the Archbishop's demand as subversive of the agreement under which they were ordained and therefore declined to comply with them.

At the second meeting on Dec. 10th, 1915, the clergy elected Canon Wedgwood to the episcopate and petitioned the Archbishop to consecrate him.

⁴ He had written his letter of submission to the Pope in December 1914. It is proposed to issue a collection of such "official" letters as a third document when time and funds allow.

Eventually the whole of the clergy actively associated with the Movement in Great Britain, with the exception of Canon Williams who had not been active and had not been invited to these meetings⁵, resigned - it being understood and in the case of Canon Wedgwood expressly stated in writing to the Archbishop that this was tantamount to a declaration of independence⁶. This step was rendered necessary by the impasse that had been reached but the clergy had in mind also the unwise administration of the movement by Archbishop Mathew which was wrecking its prospects of success - e.g. the letter to the Anglican Bishop of London, offering him re-ordination, reconsecration and recognition.

Archbishop Mathew a little later offered his unconditional submission to the Roman obedience being "absolutely and irrevocably convinced of the necessity of actual union with the Roman See and accepting without hesitation or doubt the infallibility of the Pope". (This he had already done a year previously. But now he made the matter public.) A letter over his signature from which these quotations are taken appeared in The Universe Dec. 31st, 1915 and The Tablet.

Canon Wedgwood was elected to the Episcopate unanimously by the clergy and certain representative laity. (The reader will recall that he gained second position to Bishop Willoughby in an earlier "election".) A deed of election, duly subscribed, was read "intelligently and audibly" in the presence of the congregation after the usual mass in the Church of the Holy Spirit, Red Lion Square and again prior to the ceremony of his consecration to the Episcopate.

The further records of the movement are entered in a new book. (These minutes are signed by Reginald Farrer, Priest-Registrar.)

⁵ Sic.

⁶ (Independence, that is, from Mathew, repudiation of his jurisdiction. This was perhaps unfortunately phrased, or would have been, had it not been de trop. Mathew had already left them, had they known it. But their loyalty to the Old Catholic Church was unbroken; there was no claim to independence in this sense; indeed they sought help from Utrecht, as later entries indicate. They wished Mathew himself to give the further episcopal succession. Their way was cleared and the situation regularised publicly almost at once, as the following entry shows.)