

A Scoto-Russian Church Conference.

THE present era in the history of Christianity must be described as the era of great oecumenical movements. The Christian world, divided as it is into numerous Churches, confessions, and denominations, has realised both its basic unity in faith in the One Redeemer and Lord, and the sin of such division. Various movements aiming at a rapprochement and at a mutual understanding have sprung up from this consciousness. Some of them are based upon practical co-operation, others upon a common study of doctrinal problems. All such movements, however, have a common source—a longing for a unity preserving complete faithfulness to the teaching and tradition of the respective Churches. This affords to the oecumenical work a basis of historical reality, yet it also naturally brings in some obstacles by introducing into the problem numerous principles which cannot be overlooked. In the overcoming of such obstacles a great factor is to be found in the meeting of *two* Churches, as in such more restricted meetings there is room for a more complete and deeper fellowship: the attention of the participants is not scattered in a great variety of experience, but is centred on a very definite and clear object.

Such an experience has recently taken place in Scotland. In November, 1936, representatives of the Church of Scotland met in four one-day conferences—perhaps for the first time in history—with representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church. These brief conferences were arranged by a Special Committee for Scottish-Russian Orthodox *rapprochement*, which was founded after the visit to Scotland of the Russian Orthodox 'Theological Students' Choir. The Chairman of this Committee is the Very Rev. Dr Charles Warr, and the Rev. W. S. Tindal is secretary. Following the very warm and sympathetic reception of Orthodox Church music on the part of the Scottish public, this more responsible encounter of members of the clergy and of theological scholars has been its logical result. It was organised by the Special Committee in the form of one-day conferences in Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews, and Aberdeen. The following participated in these meetings

from the Russian side :—Professors of the Russian Orthodox Theological Academy in Paris, the Rev. George Florovsky, Dr Nicholas Zernov, and L. A. Zander, as well as Miss Irene Doroshevsky. From the Scottish side there were outstanding Ministers of the Scottish Church, such as Principal Martin, Dr Marshall Lang, Dr Warr, Dr Cromarty Smith, and the Rev. W. White Anderson, together with many Professors, among whom were Professors Thomson, Hamilton, Manson, Baillie, Findlay, and Principal Cairns. There were also present numerous students and laymen. In Edinburgh the Conference was presided over by the Rev. Dr Millar Patrick ; in Glasgow, by the Rev. Nevile Davidson ; in St Andrews, by the Very Rev. Principal J. Harry Miller ; in Aberdeen, by the Rev. J. Wilson Baird.

As these conferences were meant as true meetings of Churches, they were not limited to addresses and discussions, but were framed by two brief services which gave a practical opportunity for the members on each side of the conference to witness the devotion of the other confession. The whole environing atmosphere was a truly ecclesiastical one : the members of the conferences were privileged to meet in Church buildings. In Edinburgh the meetings took place in St Cuthbert's Parish Church. In Glasgow the conference was held in the Chapter House of the Cathedral, and the services were as follows : the morning service (Scottish) in the Choir, and the evening service (Orthodox vespers) in the Lady Chapel. In Aberdeen the conference took place in the restored and most picturesque St Mary's Chapel, and in St Andrews in St Mary's College.

The Russian worship was of peculiar significance. (Orthodox vespers translated into the English language were chosen for the Orthodox service at the Conference). The peculiar significance lay in that the whole congregation made responses to the words of the officiating Orthodox priest (Rev. George Florovsky). Thus fellowship in prayer was not only a spiritual one, but bore a distinct liturgical form. It must be stated that this was a most successful experiment, for in it an alien form of worship did not present any psychological difficulties, and all the participants in these common prayers were deeply moved.

The conferences as such consisted of various addresses. Dr Zernov would speak of the nature of Orthodox worship as an expression of the spirit of the Orthodox Church. He especially insisted on the corporate element in Orthodoxy which is its very soul, but which is manifested within and

does not require outward manifestations. Hence the great freedom which is so characteristic of the Orthodox in their devotional life; hence the variety of forms and the differentiation of ecclesiastical life which, on the other hand, does not destroy the liturgical unity of the *whole* Orthodox world. As a response to this Orthodox address, there would come an address on the Communion Service of the Church of Scotland. Most of the Scottish speakers, in presenting this address, emphasised that the Scottish rite retained some of the most ancient elements of the eucharistic service (such as the Epiclesis and the Great Entrance) which have been almost universally lost in the Western liturgy, and that in this there lies a similarity to the Orthodox liturgy.

After lunch, in which all the participants of the conference would join, Father Florovsky would give his address on the Catholicity of the Church. In this address he presented the Orthodox teaching on the Church as a mystical body in which all its parts, all actions, and all times are organically united to each other. Out of this idea of an inner unity follow all the peculiarities of the Orthodox Church: its doctrine of the Sacraments performed by the prayer of the Church as a whole, the doctrine of the hierarchy acting by the power of the entire Church, the teaching on the organisation of the Church's life, which incarnates this idea of an inner unity. The address of Father Florovsky, so full of theological thought, invariably provoked a most interesting and fruitful discussion.

Following Father Florovsky, Miss Irene Doroshevsky would read a brief paper on the fate of the Russian youth in exile. The last address was usually that of Prof. L. Zander, who spoke of the life and task of the Russian Church in exile. He pointed to the destruction of the theological schools in Russia, and to the impossibility of carrying on the theological tradition within its frontiers. The primary task of the Church in exile, therefore, is to maintain theological work and the glorious tradition of Russian theology. This task is being carried out by the Russian Orthodox Theological Academy in Paris. The Professors of the Academy have, during the eleven years of the Academy's existence, published over a thousand different works. Another significant aspect of the work of the Church in exile is its contact with the Western Churches and its active part in the oecumenical movement, mostly through the Professors of the Academy. Last, but not least, there are the spiritual needs of the Russian exiles

themselves—training of new priests, production of religious literature, and so on. If we were to make a brief review of the life of the Church in exile, we would discover that the Church is now going through a period of peculiar spiritual renaissance. The extremely difficult living conditions of the emigration on the one hand, and contact with Western Christianity on the other, have resulted in the creation and application of many new ways and methods in Russian church life—home mission, youth work, social work of various kinds—all of which were but little known to the Russian Church public before. The Russian Student Christian Movement is an organ of this renaissance. To it may be traced almost all of the numerous religious, social, and pedagogical organisations of the Russians in exile, which can exist and carry on their work only with the assistance of Western brethren.

What have been the results of these four meetings of representatives of the two Churches? The benefit and significance of this encounter are clear to all its participants. A broadening of the view-point, acquaintance with the peculiarities and the depth of another Church, points of similitude and of divergence, discussion of theological problems—all these take on a new and exceptional significance as a result of such an encounter. It may be said, besides, that these conferences have been a source of real revelation to their participants. Representatives of the Scottish Church have come face to face with the Orthodox, of whom they had had little more than a theoretical knowledge; and the Orthodox had for the first time made the acquaintance of the Scottish Presbyterian Church, which is so deeply different from Continental Protestantism. This has been a genuine spiritual encounter, a real discovery of brethren in Christ—and we hope that it will bring about a great blessing in the future.

L. ZANDER.