

# Vatican I and the Papacy

## 7: Reception and Revision

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Theological revision is taking place all the time. Theology *is* revision, in the sense that the faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) is constantly re-appropriated by a new generation, and in new circumstances, so that every fresh appropriation is inevitably a revision. There is no way of telling in advance whether you are seeing things in a new perspective – seeing (and saying) things differently, but still seeing (and saying) the same things; or whether you are simply saying something completely different from what previous generations have believed. In this respect the problem of interpreting the decrees of Vatican I is no different from the problem of interpreting the Christological affirmations of the Council of Chalcedon. *Some* reinterpretations will prove sooner or later to be distortions: illusory or even dishonest attempts to say substantially the same thing but in necessarily different language; but often it will take time for this to become clear, and in the meantime we must not fear to look again at what we have inherited.

To re-examine the decrees of Vatican I on papal jurisdiction and infallibility may seem peculiarly difficult because the papacy as an institution has clearly done as much harm as good, and the dark history may suggest that the Vatican I decrees should simply be rejected and that nothing can be salvaged. While Catholics should certainly seek to recover some of the highly critical attitude to the papacy which their forefathers displayed, and be ready to admit that much of the doctrine and the exercise of the papal prerogatives requires to be condemned and corrected, none can remain in communion with the church of Rome without having *some* vision of the Petrine ministry – and that must include *some* interpretation of the Vatican I decrees.

On the other hand, what Christian doctrine and institution has not had a sinister history of ambivalence? To accept the authority of Holy Scripture can be stultifying and constricting as well as saving and liberating. The doctrine of the divinity of Christ can easily degenerate into crypto-docetic views of Christ as a divine being in human form. The institution of the eucharist can easily become a superstition or a sham. For that matter, believing in God at all is a deeply ambiguous stance. Even a doctrine as apparently simple and straightforward as the command to love one's enemies can lead to a great deal of casuistry and silliness as well as to heroic

sanctity and martyrdom. There is no special problem about the papacy: it has been as great a pest as a blessing; but that holds, in varying degree, for many (if not all) Christian institutions and doctrines.

The decrees of Vatican I have long seemed to sanction and consolidate a doctrine of papal jurisdiction and infallibility which amounts, in Newman's phrase, to "a climax of tyranny" (Letters, XXV, 231). Re-reading them today, however, against the background of the long history of the papacy, one cannot but notice how *restrictive* the decrees are. Far from being the final irreversible declaration of an outrageous doctrine of arbitrary and despotic papal supremacy, the decrees of Vatican I rather mark a long overdue circumscription of papal prerogatives. This climax of tyranny (like many another climax) has proved a turning-point. Newman was clearly in two minds about it. He could write, in October 1871, as if he thought that a decree on the infallibility of the Church might have the effect of *extending* papal authority (Letters, XXV, 420): "If such a decree ever is passed, then doubtless God will give greater personal gifts to his Vicar — such as Popes hitherto have not had". Even in this somewhat desperate letter he envisages such an "extension" as bringing others which will "trim St Peter's boat" — assuming that he was nautical enough to take the metaphor in the sense of adjusting the balance of the ship by redistributing the passengers and cargo, arranging the sails to suit the winds, and so on. His instinct, however, was rather that "the definition will *limit* the Pope's power" (Letters, XXV, 170).

In an important letter to William Maskell, written in February 1871, Newman writes depressingly that if he were to publish his views he would no doubt be "reported to Rome, perhaps put on the Index", and goes on to predict that, in time, the decrees on papal authority must eventually be absorbed (Letters, XXV, 284): "We cannot force things. The Council cannot force things — the voice of the *Schola Theologorum*, of the whole Church diffusive, will in time make itself heard, and Catholic instincts and ideas will assimilate and harmonize into the credenda of Christendom, and the living tradition of the faithful what at present many would impose upon us, and many are startled at, as a momentous addition to the faith". Later that same year, still referring to the Vatican dogma, Newman wrote that "other definitions are necessary, and were intended, and will be added, if we are patient, to reduce the dogma to its proper proportions and place in the Catholic system" (Letters, XXV, 415). It may be doubted if he expected a century to pass, but the time seems now to have come when the dogma of papal authority may at last find its proper place in Catholicism.

As we have seen (*New Blackfriars*, April 1979), the general

perspective within which the apostolic primacy in St Peter was envisaged and presented at Vatican I is that of the papacy's being "the abiding principle of this twofold unity (*sc.* of faith and communion) and its visible foundation", *perpetuum utriusque unitatis principium ac visibile fundamentum*: a phrase taken up in *Lumen Gentium* (par. 23). This plainly leaves room for a principle of unity which is other than "perpetual" – such as, for instance, the frequently repeated but never continuous celebration of the eucharist; and it leaves room also for an invisible foundation of this unity – such as, say, the Lordship of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The papacy is not presented as the *only*, or even as the most important and fundamental principle of the unity of faith and communion. On the other hand, it is not presented here primarily in terms of authority and power, and even less in terms of being an absolute monarchy or the top of a pyramid or the supreme agent of initiative and control. As it stands, in fact, the text of the decree "Pastor Aeternus" places all the emphasis on the Petrine function as a quasi-sacramental centre of communion in faith. The role of the papal primacy is thus envisaged as making visible the unity of faith and of communion, no more and no less.

Passing over the first two chapters of the decree "Pastor Aeternus", as common ground in any foreseeable ecumenical dialogue involving Rome (Peter was the first of the apostles; the Petrine leadership has been transmitted in *some* sense), we examined the doctrine of universal jurisdiction which is set forth in the third chapter. While certainly not laying down in detail the limits with which papal authority may be exercised, the text nevertheless clearly indicates that the Petrine office is to maintain the rights and liberties of every local church and its bishop, while also enabling any who feel badly done by locally to appeal to an outside tribunal. The key to understanding the universal primacy ascribed to the bishop of Rome as successor of St Peter thus lies in the affirmation that "so far from being any prejudice to ... episcopal jurisdiction ... this power is really asserted, strengthened, and protected by the supreme and universal pastor". Far from being centralized in unchecked papal-curial despotism, ecclesiastical authority is envisaged here as dispersed in an interplay between papal and episcopal jurisdiction. The Vatican I decrees which have been employed to legitimize what Cornelius Ernst once described as "a ruthless curial papalism of terror" (*Multiple Echo*, p. 173), an extremely monolithic authoritarianism, in fact contain an embryonic or residual ecclesiology of papal and episcopal "power sharing". The authority of Christ in his Church is envisaged as mediated in a process of mutual interaction between papacy and episcopacy: "these elements together contributing by a

process of mutual support, mutual checking and redressing of errors or exaggerations to the many-sided fullness of the authority which Christ has committed to his Church" (to quote the Lambeth Conference 1948).

Many questions remain open and unsettled. In the forthcoming dialogue with the Orthodox Church, as we saw (*New Blackfriars*, May 1979), papal authority will have to be situated vis-à-vis the authority of ecumenical councils, as well as with respect to the patriarchates. In the Catholic Church we are only beginning to explore the relationship between papal authority and the principle of collegiality to which Pope John Paul II attached great importance in his first "programmatic" encyclical letter, *Redemptor Hominis*. He extends the principle of collegiality to cover not only national episcopal conferences but also national, provincial and diocesan synods (which he developed at Cracow). He writes of the idea of collegiality that "structures of this kind, with their centuries of trial by the Church, and the other forms of collegial collaboration by Bishops, such as the metropolitan structure not to mention each individual diocese should pulsate in full awareness of their own identity and, at the same time, of their own originality within the universal unity of the Church" (par. 5). This certainly suggests a commitment to dispersal of authority and to truly synodical discussion and decision making, rather than to mere "talking shops", "consultative" assemblies and the like.

Turning to chapter 4 of the decree "Pastor Aeternus" we saw that the doctrine of papal infallibility is not quite what many people often suppose (*New Blackfriars*, September and October 1979). It is the "infallibility" of the Church upon which, in his teaching, the pope may on occasion rely; but the nature of this infallibility remains an open question. While few of us would wish to remain in a Church whose proclamation of the Gospel we should consider "fallible", in the sense of being both misguided and misleading, we have to acknowledge that the Church's immunity from error operates in more complex ways than we have often imagined. Secondly, the papal "definitions" envisaged at Vatican I seem to be interventions called forth at moments of grave crisis in the Church. This brings into question the list of such definitions commonly proposed in theological textbooks – a list which has in any case fluctuated dramatically over the last hundred years. As Newman wrote in his Letter to the Duke of Norfolk in 1875: "Utterances which must be received as coming from an Infallible Voice are not made every day, indeed they are very rare; and those which are by some persons affirmed or assumed to be such, do not always turn out what they are said to be". We might even cite the Venice Statement (par. 19): "In times of crisis or when fundamental matters of faith are in question, the Church can make judg-

ments, consonant with Scripture, which are authoritative. When the Church meets in ecumenical council its decisions on fundamental matters of faith exclude what is erroneous. Through the Holy Spirit the Church commits itself to these judgments, recognizing that, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with Tradition, they are by the same Spirit protected from error". Need anything substantially different be said about papal judgments?

One thing more one might perhaps say. The definition of papal infallibility in 1870 has apparently put an end to infallible papal definitions. As Garrett Sweeney<sup>1</sup> has noted (*The Clergy Review*, October 1971, p. 751): "It may well be that the time for papal definitions has now passed ... Neither the declaration on the Immaculate Conception, nor that on the Assumption, were definitions in the Vatican I sense of ending a controversy ... If papal definitions should disappear from human history there need be no regrets. They belong only to times when the Church is sick, and torn by dissensions that cannot be cured by discussion and agreements. The Petrine prerogative is not a glory of the Church; it is a disagreeable necessity, like the skill of the surgeon. The desire for its use is ... a pathological condition". So, if there is no prospect of our ever agreeing on what papal judgments in the past have counted as infallible definitions, and if it is true that Paul VI himself struck out the phrase *infallibili auctoritate* from the draft of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, we may perhaps rest with John XXIII's famous remark: "I am not infallible; I am infallible only when I speak *ex cathedra*. But I shall never speak *ex cathedra*". According to René Laurentin (*Concilium*, March 1973, p. 97), it was actually the doctrine of Our Lady as mediatrix of all graces that Pius XII wanted to define, but, "thwarted by the objections of the Holy Office", he contented himself with the Assumption. Such were not the circumstances envisaged in the text of the decree "Pastor Aeternus" for a papal definition,

In the event, then, the awesome promulgation of the doctrine of papal infallibility on July 18th, 1870, during the famous thunderstorm which darkened the basilica of St Peter's at noon, marked the beginning of the end of the history of papal infallibility. The effect of the text that seemed to trace the zenith of papal authority has been in the end to reduce it to its proper proportions within the Catholic system. If popes ever have made decisions infallibly in the Vatican I sense, which is arguable, there is no reason to suppose that they will ever do so in future. It is not surprising that the Vatican commemorated the centenary in 1970 by reprinting a selection of very fine essays that certainly echo the

1 Canon Sweeney died on June 15th, 1979, aged sixty seven, having been in poor health almost since he retired in 1976 as Master of St Edmund's House, Cambridge.

“voice of the Schola Theologorum”, circumscribing the meaning of “Pastor Aeternus”. It cannot have been what Pius IX, or Manning, expected. But as Newman wrote in a letter dated March 5th, 1871, “I have no hesitation in saying that, to all appearances, Pius IX wished to say a great deal more (that is, that the Council should say a great deal more) than it did, but a greater Power hindered it” (Letters, XXV, 299). The definition of 1870, in retrospect, instead of *inflating*, has finally *limited*, papal authority in ways that emancipate the papacy for that “pastoral mission of leadership, service and fraternity” of which Paul VI spoke.

Far from consolidating the papal prerogative to produce dogmatic definitions infallibly in some arbitrary and uncontrollable fashion the decree “Pastor Aeternus” locates the papacy as the last hope, in a major crisis of faith, for a prophetic word that might save the Church. We have to imagine some all but unimaginable schism or heresy in which every other mode of ecclesiastical judgment and resistance has failed. In such an apocalyptic scenario the promise of the Lord to Peter might then have to be invoked (Luke 22:31): “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you (plural), that he might sift you (plural) like wheat, but I have prayed for you (singular, here and hereafter) that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren”. In such a time of diabolical sifting, and of widespread apostasy, it would fall to the Petrine figure to renew his faith and strengthen his brethren. In that all but unimaginable day it is difficult to believe that a council or a synod would not be summoned; but the prophetic discernment of the truth might well have to come from the custodian of the tombs of St Peter and St Paul. But, as Bishop Gasser pointed out in his explanation of the decree: “the proper occasion for such definitions comes when in some part of the Church there arise scandals concerning the faith, disagreement and heresy -- which local bishops are unable to eliminate either by individual action or by a provincial council. In consequence of this they have no other remedy than to refer the matter to the Holy See”.

That the assimilation of an ecumenical council’s decisions may take time, and have a complex history, is nothing unusual. The decrees of the Council of Nicaea (325) were accepted only after fifty years of imperial pressure, excommunications, exilings and lesser synods. Fifteen years after the Council the pope himself, Julius I, a great defender of Nicene orthodoxy against Arianism, seems not to have regarded the Council’s judgment as by any means definitively accepted. The process by which the Church at large came to think itself bound by the decisions of the first Council of Constantinople (381) is even more instructive. But the most interesting case is the fresh look at the decisions of the Council of

Chalcedon which is taking place in our own day. In a process initiated by Pius XII in his encyclical *Sempiternus Rex* (1951) the Roman Catholic Church has sought to read the decrees of Chalcedon so as to make them acceptable to representatives of the eastern churches which withdrew from the Catholic communion in the later fifth century precisely over the meaning of these decrees. Much else still separates the Coptic Church from the Roman communion, but in May 1973, for instance, Paul VI and Shenouda III, Pope of the Catholic Church and Pope of Alexandria respectively, made a common declaration, avoiding the words "nature" and "person" altogether, but confessing their faith in Christ as God incarnate. There may thus yet be, after fifteen hundred years, a "reception" of the decrees of Chalcedon by the Catholic Church - a reception that at last resolves the difficulties of those who could not accept Chalcedon at the time. The danger of an agreed statement that fudges the issue in deliberate ambiguities is obvious; but it seems that, in principle, conciliar judgments can be re-read so as to satisfy the minority who originally rejected them - without dishonesty or lack of integrity on the part of the others.

The problem about Vatican I is whether, in the light of the ecclesiology of "sister churches" developed in the exchanges between Rome and Constantinople in the past fifteen years, its decrees on the papacy can ever be accepted by the reunited Orthodox and Catholic Church. It will not do to say that no council is binding on churches which were not properly (or not at all) represented at its deliberations. For one thing there would be endless disputes about what counts as proper representation, and for another the Roman Catholic Church was not particularly well represented at any of the seven great ecumenical councils but would not wish to repudiate their doctrinal judgments. On the other hand, the difference between these seven councils of the "undivided Church" and subsequent councils in the west deserves, and is receiving, more and more recognition. It was not until the early twelfth century that any pope ever made a serious attempt to summon a council of the bishops of the whole Church and by then of course the breakdown in communion with the east had already begun. Callistus II held a council (the first Lateran Council) in the year 1123, largely to celebrate his victory over the emperor in the Investiture controversy but also forbidding the clergy to have wives and declaring the marriages of priests, deacons, subdeacons and monks to be null and void. The decrees of this council were issued in the pope's name; there were twice as many abbots as bishops present; and it is difficult to think of it today as any more than an echo chamber for papal triumphalism. The second Lateran Council (1139), forbidding *inter alia* the faithful to hear Mass celebrated by a married priest or by one living with a mistress, and forbidding the ordina-

tion of the sons of priests unless they take religious vows, was simply the stage for the degradation of bishops consecrated by the rival pope Anacletus II. The prelates present (again including at least as many religious superiors as bishops) seem to have been passive witnesses, hearing the pope's orders and watching him personally tear crozier, ring and pallium from each schismatic bishop.

Even the fourth Lateran Council (1215), which shaped Roman Catholicism more profoundly than any other single event, produced its massive volume of legislation in three weeks – which shows how little exercise of genuine conciliarity there can have been, and how easily the pope's proposals were endorsed. For that matter the decrees were spoken of as those of Innocent III and not published as those of the Council for more than three hundred years afterwards (by Johannes Cochlaeus, in 1538). It is hard to see any of the medieval papal councils as true expressions of conciliarity. They were important occasions for popes to consult bishops and other prelates, and to implement ecclesiastical reforms, but that is something else altogether. Ironically enough, the convoking of what became the Council of Trent, the first and greatest synod of the west in any way comparable with the ecumenical councils, was opposed by the popes for years.

The history of the reception of the Council of Trent offers at least one instructive parallel to what is happening now in the case of Vatican I. The decree on Scripture and tradition which Trent passed in 1546 was generally interpreted until 1957 as meaning that Catholics were committed to a “two sources” doctrine of revelation: the implication being that some truths of faith are to be found only in tradition, or even that revelation as a whole might be found in the tradition of the Church independently of Scripture. Against the Protestant principle of *scriptura sola* many Catholics held this doctrine that Christian revelation is to be found partly in Scripture and partly in tradition, as if these were independent sources. It was only in 1957 that the Tübingen theologian, J. R. Geiselman, pointed out that Trent had rejected this “partim ... partim ...” formula for a simple conjunction “et”, thereby *not* committing Catholics to a strong “two sources” doctrine, even if subsequent discussion has cast doubt on Geiselman's claim that Trent wished to leave open the possibility for Catholics to continue to hold some form of the *scriptura sola* principle (all truth necessary for salvation at least *materially* in Scripture). The “two sources” doctrine appeared in a strong form in the draft submitted in 1962 to Vatican II, but after a theological struggle the final text of the dogmatic constitution “*Dei Verbum*” leaves the question open. Thus there is a good precedent for re-reading an important conciliar text, starting from the erasures at the drafting stage, and recognizing how the final version was influenced by



those who opposed it all along as well as by those who accepted it – an important text which was almost immediately given a much narrower meaning than it actually contains.

The majority of the bishops in 1870 were in favour of a strong declaration about papal authority. Even allowing for extravagant rhetoric, some of the speeches at the Council, particularly by the Italians, favoured the idea of the pope as an inspired oracle, speaking independently of his fellow bishops and of the Church, on matters far beyond faith and morals. As we saw (*New Blackfriars*, July/August 1979), Manning's experience as an Anglican led him to fear Erastianism in every form ("the Church must obey Parliament as she would Nero; for no other reasons, and no further", he wrote to Gladstone in a letter dated January 20th, 1848, a reference which I owe to Dr Perry Butler), and to suspect that English Catholics such as Clifford were unwitting victims of Erastianism ("We should be overrun with worldly Catholics and a worldly policy without his meaning or knowing it")' Ignaz von Senestrey (bishop of Regensburg), on the other hand, the other great leader of the papalists, had been horrified by demands for academic freedom and the independence of historical scholarship made in particular by Ignaz Döllinger at the Munich congress in 1863, so that *his* interest in papal authority was as a weapon against what he regarded as rationalism. In the decade before the Council many Catholics, in England but particularly in the Netherlands and in Germany, as well as elsewhere, had developed a great sentiment of admiration for, and sympathy with, Pius IX as he struggled to retain control over the last remnants of the Papal States. It must also be remembered that the year 1870 was just before the great breakthrough in modern communications, which was to make the centralizing influence of the Vatican far more powerful than many of the more nonchalant bishops can have realized. Others, finally, such as the majority of the Irish bishops, wanted to go home with a doctrine that committed them to allegiance to a "foreign power". Thus a great variety of motivation may easily be traced through the speeches of the papalist majority: everything from sentimental devotion to the pope to a sense of the urgency of curbing rationalism and saving the Church from worldliness.

The motives of those who opposed the proclamation of papal authority were almost equally diverse. Many of the bishops were amateur historians and some were scholars of considerable eminence (Hefele certainly), and they were often anxious about reconciling the new papalism with the history of the papacy. Others, living in anti-Catholic countries, were worried about the hostility to their flocks which a solemn proclamation of papal claims would unleash, particularly under the influence of inevitably garbled ver-

sions in anti-Catholic newspapers. This fear, on the part certainly of many of the English bishops, proved justified: even Gladstone, in 1874, published a vehement attack on the Vatican I decrees, interpreting them in an extremely ultramontane sense. This at least had the benefit of enabling Newman to reply, in his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1875), and to criticize the ultramontane interpretation. But the difference between Manning and Clifford, for example, was surely finally over how they understood the place of the Church in the world. The continuity between 1870 and 1965 is that the attitude to the world which the minority showed in 1870 became the policy of the majority in the decree *Gaudium et Spes* of 1965.

No council in the history of the Church is ever concluded or rounded off. Everybody in 1870 had a strong sense of there being much unfinished business. The main underlying question – for which Vatican I was convoked in the first place – remained that of the place of the Church in a post-Christendom world, and the function of the papacy in that context. As Vatican II finally sanctioned a fresh approach to that question it inevitably reopened the question of the function of the papacy. This, in turn, has prompted a fresh examination of the Vatican I dossiers and a new understanding of the conflicting ecclesiologies of which the text of the decree “*Pastor Aeternus*” bears the traces. The text was passed by counting the heads of the bishops, but, in the Church at least (as the majority in favour of liturgical change in 1963 are beginning to realize), the opposition of the minority often eventually secures a certain justification. We have always known about the moderating influence of Cardinal Bilio, for example, who, as chairman of the *deputation de fide*, steadfastly sought, against Manning, to shape the drafts into texts that the opposition might be able to accept. Vincent Gasser, the prince-bishop from the Austrian Tyrol, himself an ultramontane, gave the most authoritative interpretation of the texts to the Council on behalf of the drafting committee, and we have seen how limiting his view of papal authority was. Joseph Fessler, another Austrian bishop, who was General Secretary of the Council, published a commentary in 1871, which gives an entirely different picture of papal authority from that conveyed by Manning’s 200-page-long pastoral letter of the previous year (Fessler’s pamphlet was published in English in 1875 in a translation made by Newman’s colleague and close friend Ambrose St John).

It is, however, not simply that it is becoming more commonly understood that the ultramontane interpretation of the Vatican dogma never was official or authoritative (though most Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Christians still think it was). The “re-reception”, as Yves Congar calls it (*RSPT*, juillet 1972), of Vatican I

involves listening to the voices of the minority then as the fore-runners of Vatican II. As we saw, in William Clifford, the English Catholic community had a spokesman who was not afraid to make two major objections to the passing of the definition of papal authority both of which would now be widely accepted as entirely justified. It was a mistake to treat papal authority in isolation from episcopal authority and from authority in the Church at large; only in the constitution *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II, and in such documents as the Venice Statement (thus with Anglican as well as Catholic authors!), have we begun to rectify that error. Secondly, as Clifford and Errington both said, the word “infallibility” was ambiguous, as the subsequent history of interpreting it showed, and (in English at least) it may well be wondered if the term can ever be rehabilitated. The effort by conservatives to make the word “infallible” usable is surely as doomed as the effort by progressives to introduce the word “myth”: there must be some other way of saying what is intended by these hopelessly rebarbative terms. In addition to that, with Clifford’s querying the function of the bishops at a general council in the first place (whether as “judges” or merely as “advisers”), we have a question about the nature of conciliarity (collegiality) which goes beyond even what Vatican II successfully resolved.

Cwiekowski’s account of the divided mind of the English bishops at Vatican I has been paralleled by a much more ambitious and more documented study of the German-speaking bishops (K. Schatz, *Kirchenbild und päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit*, Rome 1975). If they had been trained in Rome under such Jesuit theologians as Perrone they accepted the Roman drafts which treated the pope as *foundation* of unity and truth in the Church; if they had been trained at home, in the tradition of Johann Adam Moehler, they saw the pope as exercising a ministry of communion, and of unity, at the head of the episcopate, within a circle of local Churches – exactly the ancient ecclesiology which, since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has been seeking to recover. Similar work has been done, by Monsignor Joseph Hajjar, on the (again divided) voice of the eastern Catholic bishops at Vatican I (*Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 1970). The two speeches by Gregory Youssef, the Melkite patriarch of Antioch, voiced the tradition of the Orthodox Church – the element, precisely, which alone can bring the Petrine ministry back to its proper proportions and place in the Catholic system (to quote Newman, not that *he* ever showed much appreciation of the Eastern Church). After his important speech on May 19th, 1870 (Mansi 52, 133-137), in which he insisted that the primacy of the pope must be placed in the context of the authority of the patriarchs, Gregory Youssef was summoned to the pope’s private apartments and subjected to

violent abuse. Undeterred, he made a second speech, on June 14th, in the forlorn hope of getting the majority of the bishops to recognize their responsibilities to the ancient tradition of the undivided Church. He went home before the final vote, eventually promulgated the decree proclaiming the primacy of Rome but with the gloss that the Council of Florence had confirmed with equal solemnity the rights and privileges of the apostolic patriarchs, and did not return to Rome until after 1878. The new pope, Leo XIII, soon inaugurated a much more sympathetic and understanding approach to the Eastern Catholics, and Gregory Youssef (who lived until 1898) found himself listened to with respect. The Melchite patriarchal synod is the great obstacle on the road to the beatification of Pius IX.

The voice of the Orthodox was heard again at Vatican II, in the speeches of the next but one Melchite patriarch; but the time has now come to follow up the work of Pope Paul VI and the Patriarch Athenagoras I, as official dialogue begins between representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Orthodox Church. As far as Vatican I and the papacy are concerned it is now five years since the following proposals were made by Louis Bouyer at a conference organized by the *Pro Oriente* foundation of Vienna and the Orthodox Centre of Chambesey (cf. *Istina*, 1975, 113-115); it should be noted that Bouyer is a member of the pontifical theological commission, and increasingly "conservative" in his views (which no doubt fits in with much nostalgia for communion with the Orthodox, but that is another story ...).

"It should be recognized", so Bouyer writes, "that only the seven great councils of the undivided Church were able to make definitions *de fide* which cannot be revoked ... the apostolic see of Old Rome ought to make a declaration to the effect that the dogma of the primacy of that see and of the infallibility of the doctrinal decisions made by the pope as teacher of the universal Church must be understood, first with the complements that Vatican II has already added concerning the teaching role of the episcopate as a whole and the participation of the whole people of God in the witness perpetually given to truth in charity, and secondly in the light of the whole tradition of the undivided Church ... As for the papal definitions of 1854 and 1950 ... likewise the Holy See should, and easily could, make clear that these definitions are to be understood simply in the sense in which the Orthodox Church has never ceased to believe in the perfect purity of the Mother of God and in her close association, since her Dormition, in the victory of her Son over death ... As regards the supreme jurisdiction of the Holy See, it should solemnly declare that it never interferes with rightful local autonomy, except in the very exceptional case of violation of faith or order that the local

authorities cannot deal with, or in the case of appeals to Rome, which have always been recognized in the ancient Church, from a bishop and his synod to the metropolitan, from the metropolitan to the patriarch either to a general council or (if one cannot be summoned) to the first see. And as regards the ancient principle that the Holy See can be judged by no one it could also be stated that this does not exclude the possibility, if its occupant were to fall into heresy, that the universal Church might act, either by a council or by some other way suggested by providence if that proved impossible”.

Are Bouyer's proposals incompatible with the decrees of Vatican I at least if we can listen to *all* the voices that composed them?

## Past And Present

Peter Lee

Much recent theological writing has emphasised the changes in culture in different periods of history, and the way in which the expressions of the Christian faith which arose in different periods have been influenced by the surrounding culture. Particular emphasis has sometimes been laid on the changes in culture since the times when the books of the Bible were written and the Creeds and declarations of the ecumenical councils were drawn up. From this, different conclusions have been drawn.

One view would see the ancient formularies as needing to be repeated in different ages, and would stress the ecumenical nature of many of these formularies, particularly those drawn up before the final break between the Eastern and Western churches, though holders of this view would acknowledge with St Hilary that “We are compelled to attempt what is unattainable. . . . to speak what we cannot utter. Instead of the bare adoration of faith, we are compelled to entrust the deep things of religion to the perils of human expression” (De Trin. II, 2.4). A second view would value and keep in use the ancient formularies, seeing them as having abiding significance (given a similar proviso) but would wish to lay alongside them other expressions of the faith which aim to express the same basic Christian gospel but in terms more easily understood in our own day. A third view would lay stress on the