

THE GREEK RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL

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HISTORY has a sphere and the world a place where Athens and Rome seem for ever linked together: civilization and Jerusalem! The civilization of the ancient world owed its spirit to Athens, and its law and order to Rome: both played a part, under the providence of God, in forming that world in which, in the fulness of time, the Word was made flesh. But it was from Jerusalem that both Rome and Athens received the faith of Christ—the faith which is now their life, and in which both were reborn. Since the time of the apostles, these two cities have looked to Jerusalem as the earthly shadow of their heavenly capital and the cradle of their common hope.

But if that common hope of theirs, in the person of our Saviour, were to return today to the holy city where he prayed and preached and suffered and died for love of us, in order to establish his kingdom in our midst, he would find there, alas, no greater unity than he found before. It would even seem that we have ignored his last wish that we should be one, and have multiplied, instead of healing, our divisions. Indeed, these affect not only God's people at large, but even the chosen group that constitutes his Son's mystical body. So if he who came back one evening to walk along the road to Emmaus were to appear again in those same surroundings, one can imagine that he would return to the place half-way up the Mount of Olives, where he went once before and wept, saying, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, still murdering the prophets and stoning the messengers that are sent to thee, how often have I been ready to gather thy children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings; and thou didst refuse it!' (Matt. xxiii, 37.)

Today, at last, Christian people appear to be paying more attention to this divine appeal. That is why, feeling that the times were ripe, our sovereign pontiff has launched an official call for reunion. The response from the Greek world has been immediate and widespread, and by no means unfavourable. An article by Mr Melissanthy, for example, stresses the oneness in spirit which already exists among us because of our common subjection to the

Holy Ghost, and concludes with these words of the apostle: 'There are no Greeks, no Romans, no Jews, but only sons and daughters of God'. Another Greek says, 'I do not think there is anyone who desires the union between Catholics and Orthodox more fervently than I'. For in Mr Louvaris' eyes, 'they belong to sister churches'. Again, in an article published in *Anaplassis* early last spring, Mr Moustakis begins: 'There are two things which forbid us to be pessimistic over reunion. The first is our Lord's own wish that all who believe in him should belong to one and the same fold. The second is the fact that, although actually separated from one another, we are already one in our common longing for unity. Never has this yearning been so strong, so manifest, or so fully acknowledged by the spirit of the time, as it is today. There is no doubt that prejudice and passion are gradually waning, and moving from the centre to the periphery. Instead a simple and essential urge is drawing to itself the eager and attentive concern of all spirits and souls. And that is what is required for union.'

But even earlier, in February of last year, the *Vima*, a major Athens daily paper, had published the views of the eminent theologian Professor Alivisatos. He too began by welcoming the pope's announcement: 'According to press reports, his Holiness Pope John XXIII has decided to invite an Ecumenical Council to examine the possibilities of reunion among the various Christian denominations, and in particular between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. This news has stirred the whole of Christendom, for the desire for union is universal. No wonder then that this move from Rome has provoked comment in every corner of the world, some of it favourable, some more critical. Several ecclesiastical authorities have already expressed their opinion on an action that of its nature stirs such great hopes in all those who long to see the leadership of Christendom unified, at a time when mankind is living in the midst of such spiritual chaos.'

But as far as the Christian religion is concerned, this chaos is perhaps not so bad as it might appear at first sight. For we may find that the unity we are longing for is already in existence, in those depths of our souls which the breath of the Spirit penetrates, and where he sheds the living light of faith in which we see the Saviour and adore him. This at least would seem to be what Mr Nico Trembellas is alluding to, when he declares that, despite the

schism between Romans and Greeks, the one Catholic Church, the *una sancta*, remains ever in being. It is this writer's conviction that the essential unity has never been broken, and never can be, so long as God allows both Churches to enjoy his divine presence, not only through the indwelling Spirit, but also in the sacramental presence of the eucharist.

A similar idea seems to be in the mind of Professor Braziotis, who openly declares himself opposed to any attempt to convoke a council in present conditions. These are his words: 'Before any Ecumenical Council meets, the minds and hearts of the faithful of each Church should be submitted to a long period of preparation. This period should consist of a number of meetings between the representatives of the Churches that are closest to one another, and especially between Greeks and Romans, to discuss points of difference. This period should also be marked by mutual exchanges of charity and courtesy between the Churches; and above all by constant prayer, both private and public, of clergy and laity alike. "Let us love one another, so that we may bear witness in the same Spirit", cries out the Orthodox Church in every holy mass.'

It seems then that there is in Athens the same feeling, the same urge for unity, as in Rome. Why should one doubt that this desire springs on both sides from the breath of God's love?

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But if so notable a Christian as Professor Braziotis sees no possibility at present of setting up a truly Ecumenical Council, it is evident that there are still serious difficulties in the way. The first and perhaps the greatest is that, because of the very fact of the schism, there is no commonly-recognized authority to convoke it. As long as this situation lasts, any council called by the pope can only be, in Mr Braziotis' view, a purely Catholic affair in which no other Church can take part. This opinion is by no means rare among the Greeks. In fact, fundamentally it is the position which all their theologians and thinkers would take. But the desire to get somewhere on the path towards reunion is so strong that some would be prepared to maintain this attitude in principle, while overlooking it in practice; rather as Rome does when sending observers, but not participants, to the sessions of the World Council of Churches.

Professor Alivisatos has some interesting suggestions to make

about this. In our present circumstances, he holds, there is no possibility of gathering a clerical assembly that would correspond to the Greek idea of an Ecumenical Council. Were all the Greek Churches to meet and the Catholics to be absent, this would not be an Ecumenical Council, but merely a general synod of the Orthodox Church. On the other hand, were representatives of the whole Catholic world to gather and the Orthodox to be absent, this would be a general Catholic synod, not an Ecumenical Council. Besides, an invitation issued by the pope to come to a council under his chairmanship could not be accepted by the Orthodox, as this would imply a submission to his authority on terms which are undefined, but which would involve, so the Greeks suspect, surrender of some of their deepest convictions. But this difficulty could be overcome by either of the following devices. The first is a meeting (without mention of the word 'council') of representatives of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches on as broad a basis as possible. The aim would be to clear the way and prepare the conditions for the sitting of the Fathers of both Churches in a proper council that could be fully recognized as such by both east and west. Alternatively, in the event of Rome wanting, for some reasons of its own, to go ahead with its present scheme, Professor Alivisatos suggests that the Orthodox reply to this friendly gesture by sending large delegations, not of participants but of observers, who, he believes, would be questioned on many points. So each side would learn better where the other stands, and perhaps we should find that we are not as far apart as we thought.

To go so far calls for both charity and courage. Mr Trembellas goes, if anything, further in the same direction. In his opinion the Orthodox Church, while emphatically denying the assembly contemplated by the pope any right to the title of 'council', should nevertheless accept the invitation and take part in the debates as a full member. He takes this unexpected line because of his conviction that in spite of the rift the *una sancta* continues to exist. Whether in visible communion with each other or no, the Fathers on either side belong on equal terms to this *una sancta*. For it is only inasmuch as they do belong to the one holy Church that priests are priests and bishops are bishops. Thus there is no reason why they should not sit together, in order to constitute automatically a *de facto*, if not a *de jure*, Ecumenical Council.

Deeply religious as this view may appear, it should not be supposed that it is shared by many. In point of fact, as things stand at present, it is doubtful whether there is any eastern bishop who would agree with the thesis of the writers quoted above, and be prepared to sail from the Piraeus, Alexandria or Constantinople to a council summoned by the pope. And certainly all would rather have their tongues torn from their mouths than utter words such as those spoken by the Armenian delegate when he came into the papal presence at Florence some five hundred years ago: 'You who are the head, be compassionate to the members! You who are the shepherd, gather together the flock! You who are the foundation, confirm the Churches! You who have the power of the heavenly keys, open to us the gates of eternal life!' (Hofman, Doc. M.)

But between such a full acknowledgment and the complete denial of the claims of Rome there is room for many shades of opinion.

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But even if these difficulties were overcome, and the council were recognized by all as ecumenical, it would only have begun to face differences in doctrine. We must not minimize these. All Orthodox Christians would agree that prayer is essential if reunion is to come about. They feel very strongly that only the grace of God can eradicate the prejudices and misunderstandings which have sunk their roots so wide and deep in the course of centuries.

The first doctrinal difference is over the position of the pope. The great majority of Orthodox thinkers and theologians would maintain that between the Greek and Roman Churches there is an organic or constitutional contrast similar to that which distinguishes the Athens of Pericles from the Rome of Caesar. According to them, the east is a democracy in religion, the west an absolute monarchy. Some think this difference cuts so deep that the cleavage is irreparable, and Romans and Greeks are destined to remain separate to the end of time. For those who share this outlook there can be no reunion except by some miraculous illumination both at the Vatican and in the constellation of the various patriarchal sees.

Professor Alivisatos observes, in his article in *Vima*, that the

respective conceptions of what a council is bring out very clearly the points of difference between east and west on the nature and extent of papal authority. For the east, an Ecumenical Council is the organism empowered with the highest authority in the Church. Not so for Rome, where since the theological debates of the fifteenth century, and especially since the proclamation of the dogma of papal infallibility, the sovereign pontiff is considered as superior to the council, and as having in his hands the supreme authority of the Church. 'Were the Greeks to accept such a point of view', writes Professor Alivisatos, 'the immediate consequence would be the unity of Christendom under one shepherd. But in their conscience and conviction, neither the Orthodox Fathers nor their flock can see this as a God-given truth.'

'But what might be considered possible', he goes on, 'is a return to the situation that preceded the schism. It is a well-known fact that the difficulties and differences which led to the schism existed long before the break actually occurred. So we need not hesitate to study, on a purely historical basis, the conditions of tacit co-existence and co-operation which enabled the Greek and Roman Churches to live in unity before; and then set about restoring the same situation. What this scheme would mean in practice is that the pope, while renouncing nothing of what he is, for and in the west, nor even waiving the universality of his claims, would nevertheless agree not to enforce these claims on the east, and be willing to let his relations with the Greek patriarchs remain as they were before the fatal break. This would be a first stage on the way to reunion. A framework would be provided in which the Holy Ghost might work, carrying even further and deeper among the souls in communion with him, that love and that light which alone can achieve the fulness of union.'

This idea of returning to the unity of the primitive Church step by step—which appears to be in keeping with what history teaches us of the ways of providence—is also to be found in the *Anaplassis* article already quoted. There Mr Moustakis writes: 'The primacy of the bishop of Rome is an indisputable historical fact. No scientific or ecclesiastical value can be attached to the attempts of the anti-papal critics to cast doubt upon this evident truth. The primacy therefore must remain. But whereas the west will keep it as it conceives it, in the east it will only exist to the extent and in the manner in which it is there understood and

accepted. . . . Hence the primacy as such should not be looked upon as an obstacle to reunion. Why should not the Catholic Church be considered by the east as one single and immense autocephalous Church, the head of which rules over his bishops just as does any primate or patriarch over his in the Orthodox world?’

Mr Moustakis goes on to make this remarkable statement: ‘Thus we are led to discover that within the very limits of our own eastern horizons, papal infallibility no longer appears as an intolerable claim. Does not history show us more than one example of dogmatic declarations to which final sanction was given by the pope? And are there not also several cases recorded in which, because of some dispute with one another, the eastern Churches turned to the pope as an arbiter? If the conscience of the early Church admitted such concepts and practices, and even had them defined in one of the fully recognized Councils, why indeed should we not say that the pope is infallible?’

These quotations from Orthodox writers suggest that papal authority would not be intrinsically unacceptable to the Greeks. Their view is this: it could remain in the west tightly fitted as it is; but could it not be thrown over the east in the manner of a looser garment? Were this possible, it might satisfy those who (like Mr Louvaris) feel that what they call the democratic organization of the Greek Church must not be destroyed.

But this opposition, which it is now fashionable to stress, between the democratic organization of the Church in the east and the monarchical form of the Church in the west, does not seem to go very deep. For as those who advance it themselves recognize, if it does exist it is merely because of historical antecedents. They point out, indeed, that while the eastern Churches have developed in lands penetrated with the spirit of Pericles, the Church of Rome has flourished where the leading powers were highly centralized monarchies. One may perhaps grant that such differences of environment may have affected certain external aspects of the two Churches; but no more.

How superficial this opposition is, one sees immediately on turning to any of the episcopal or patriarchal sees of the east; for each of them has the same monarchical features as the papacy has. And how splendidly regal they appear, those bishops and priests of Greece and the Levant, when discharging their religious

functions! And if this may be said of each parish, of each metropolitan and patriarchal see, why not of the Church as a whole? For surely in the Church, as in any one of its parts, we should see the same figure: that of Christ the King.

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There are several other doctrines besides papal authority on which Romans and Greeks disagree, and each of them will require careful examination. But, writes Professor Alivisatos, 'I cannot exclude the possibility that in the course of these discussions elements of unity and mutual comprehension might appear, even on those very points where we would expect to find irreconcilable opposition. This I conclude from my own experience at an international gathering of lawyers in Brussels last summer. I was developing the doctrines of our Orthodox canon law on marriage and economy, and to my great surprise I did not meet with the firm opposition I had expected from the Catholic canonists: on the contrary, I received their approval and support.'

But what are the other doctrines over which Catholics and Orthodox are likely to differ, and how far apart are they? To the best of my knowledge, little has yet been done to clarify the situation. This is not surprising, because to do so would be the very function of the projected gatherings. But Mr Moustakis has made a beginning in the April number of *Anaplassis*.

Mr Moustakis first considers the *Filioque*, and declares that he can see no reason there for a breach. As he observes, when this addition to the Nicene creed, which had already been in use for several years in the western Church, was given papal approval, this step caused no split in the unity of the ecumenical Church. If it did not cause a split then, why should it be insuperable now?

As for the dogma of the bodily assumption of the blessed Virgin, recently defined by Pope Pius XII, it is certainly not for the Orthodox Church to be perturbed about that. For, as Mr Moustakis observes, it was in the east, and as long ago as the eighth century, that the highest shoot of the rose and lily of Sharon and Jesse began to bring forth this new bud.

About the immaculate conception, which the Greeks do not hold as a dogma, because it was defined as such some thousand years after the schism, Mr Moustakis writes: 'It is a common tendency in the west to seek to enclose in the neat circle of a

precise definition every truth that is to be found in the stupendous abyss of the faith. This being so, it is not surprising that Rome has attempted to define our Lady's immaculate conception. As for us Orthodox, we certainly agree with our Roman brethren on the very essence of this belief. Although we do not express it in the same terms, we too hold the belief that the Virgin Mother was a creature so pure that she was absolutely free from any shadow of sin; and not only is she higher than every human being, but even above the angels. Could there ever be found any true Orthodox who would dare to deny that not the slightest tendency to evil could be traced in the Mother of Christ? Metrophanes must be quoted on this point: ". . . to great and wonderful ends was she destined. Is there indeed anything greater than to give birth to God? That is why she was granted the marvellous privilege of not knowing sin. And here we declare that never did she sin. This was a gift that she received from God."

But what of purgatory? This is another controversial issue of long standing, but again the differences are not so deep as is sometimes thought. The Orthodox doctrine is stated in this quotation from Dositheus: 'The holy catholic and apostolic Church believes that after death purification may be obtained by means of the divine sacrifice, of sacred vows, of prayer, almsgiving, and other holy practices performed by the faithful for the sake of departed souls. As for the actual cleansing and penance, the fire of purgatory or any other punitive and purifying flames to which souls separated from the body are submitted for the expiation of all faults committed during life, we forbid our thoughts and words to consider or mention them.' On the evidence of this passage, Mr Moustakis concludes that the outlooks of Greece and Rome on purgatory cannot be so far apart as to justify the schism.

It seems then that the fields which are regarded as most controversial are not without seeds of agreement. So the Greek writer C. Bastias may have been not just expressing a pious desire, but suggesting a truly practical programme, when he wrote that unity should be sought for simply in a common conformity to Christ; and that we should work out our oneness in this world by starting from where we already are one—in God; and then proceed from there, gradually, towards the sectors where disagreements have occurred.

So, looking ahead to that eventual and momentous meeting of

Fathers of east and west, one wonders: what would be the most suitable setting for such a gathering? To this question some of the Greeks, with a delicate courtesy, reply: Rome. Others propose one of the ancient monasteries of the Rhine. But most would certainly prefer Jerusalem. There, indeed, everyone would feel at home, since it is the Lord's own city and land, and there too our essential unity would appear all the more strikingly. For if the yearning for reunion is so strong within us, in west and east alike, the reason can only be that he who prayed that we should be one, and then shed all his blood for us, is always present with both, in the consecration of every bishop, in the ordination of every priest, in the bread and wine that hallows every altar.



THE FORTHCOMING COUNCIL OF THE ROMAN CHURCH

A RUSSIAN ORTHODOX ASSESSMENT

GEORGE FLOROVSKY

Fr George Florovsky is a Russian Orthodox theologian of repute, at present teaching at Harvard in the United States. We are happy to print here a translation of an article which first appeared in Russian in the Messenger of the Russian Christian Students Movement, and then in a French translation in Vers L'Unité Chrétienne, from which this translation is made. We thank the editors of both journals for permission to publish an article so remarkable for its calm objectivity and its understanding and appreciation of the Roman Catholic position.

THE Vatican Council (1869-70), by the reckoning of the Roman Church, was the last 'ecumenical council'. This council has never been formally closed. Its labours were only temporarily interrupted by the pressure of outside events, the occupation of the Papal States and the city of Rome by the troops of nationalist Italy, which at the time appeared to threaten the freedom of the council's decisions and even the freedom of the Church itself. The possibility still remained, tacitly implied, of resuming the council's sittings if circumstances became more favourable. This is why the council has never been officially