

highly coloured as it is, as the divinely chosen and adequate expression of that final consummation already predicted in the non-apocalyptic passages.

Russian Opinion

THE ORTHODOX AND THE COUNCIL

Last year, an article by Cardinal Bea in *Il Messaggero*¹ on the prospects for the forthcoming General Council came under severe criticism in the *Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*.² The Cardinal, who is, of course, the President of the Secretariate for Christian Unity in Rome, was censured in particular for his references to the Orthodox Church. He had referred, *inter alia*, to 'frequent internal quarrels' among the heads of the Orthodox Churches as a sign of their loss of true unity. In reply, the writer in the *Journal* naturally denied that misunderstandings are either frequent or serious, confessing with a sound plan for debate that those concerned are not therefore perfection incarnate.

There has certainly been some friction between Moscow and Constantinople in the last forty years, but it would be difficult to corroborate the Cardinal's remark as regards Orthodox Churches within the Soviet Union, since news of any serious dissension there would almost certainly be repressed by the Government as part of its present policy. As regards conditions within the Moscow Patriarchy alone, there were published recently in the *Journal*³ extracts from a circular on discipline, and there the faults listed for the bishops were hardly alarming: they inflict too severe punishments, which then have to be revoked; they try to palm off troublesome priests onto other dioceses; they employ too many officials; there is a tendency among the younger generation to easy living. Even if there were worse sins than these among the patriarchs themselves, it would still be difficult to prove that episcopal good manners are the exclusive or invariable privilege of those inside the Church, with for example Bishop Milner's behaviour in our own country to be explained.

More serious is Cardinal Bea's claim in this same article that the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are contained in Orthodox liturgy and are generally believed by the faithful. The Cardinal is speaking through-

¹Text in *Documentation Catholique*, 15 January 1961.

²*Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate*. 1961, 4.

³1960, 8, p. 52.

out of the whole Orthodox Church; the *Journal* is concerned to reply only on behalf of the Russian Church and denies that the belief in the Immaculate Conception has ever been a home growth.

Certainly, before 1854, belief in the Immaculate Conception was disputed in Russia at least as much as in the West, although to attribute its wide prevalence in the seventeenth century solely to Latin influence, as is the present custom with Russian writers, is quite exaggerated. In 1666, for example, a theological work explicitly containing the belief was sanctioned by the council of Moscow. However, in the following year the Council also approved a collection of writings of early Greek fathers, the *Skrigeal*, in one of whom a qualified belief in our Lady having been made immaculate at the annunciation had been written out in an unqualified form by the compiler. When this work was translated into Slavonic, the denial of the Immaculate Conception contained in it was made one of the reasons for the rejection of the authority of the council and its Patriarch Nikon by the Old Believers, who thus doubly proved the truth of the observation, *nullum schisma est quod non sibi aliquam haeresim confingat, ut recte ab Ecclesia recessisse videatur*⁴. In this case the heresy of the second schism, used to preserve its identity from the first, was a return to the true doctrine.

Since 1854, in reaction to the Pope's supposed arrogance in defining dogmatically and by his own right the Immaculate Conception, other views of how our Lady became immaculate, either at the annunciation or by her sufferings during Christ's passion, have been generally favoured by Orthodox writers. In the most recent work on the subject, a controversial booklet *On the Catholic Dogma of 1854*,⁵ the objection made against an immaculate conception is that it would either separate our Lady too widely from the rest of mankind, if her privilege were of its nature unique, or, if the privilege were applicable to others, it would make unnecessary Christ's suffering on the cross. St Bernard's view that our Lady was made immaculate in the womb, as we believe St John the Baptist to have been, is thereby also ruled out, although his objections to the Immaculate Conception in the same letter to the canons of Lyons are quoted extensively, in fact the author triumphantly concludes that by his definition Pius IX condemned as heretics St Bernard and all the other Fathers of the Church who questioned our Lady's immaculate conception, including St Thomas. It is rather difficult to know quite how to take this *esprit* since St Bernard's final words, which can hardly have been overlooked since his letter is quite short, are these:

'But what I have said has been clearly said without prejudice to whoever knows more clearly still'—there is a pun here, *absque praejudicio sane dicta sunt sanius sapientis*. 'But especially to the Roman Church, to her authority and

⁴'There is no schism that does not devise some heresy for itself, that it may appear to have had a reason for separating from the church'. St Jerome, *Epistle to Titus*, iii, 10. Quoted by St Thomas, *S.T. II - II*, 39, 2, ad iii.

⁵In Russian. A. S. Merzlyukin. Paris, 1960.

investigation, I reserve this whole argument and everything else that is of the like kind, prepared to correct my judgment if I think anything differently from her'.⁶

Nothing could be further from smell of heresy than this.

As regards Russian liturgy probably the most telling phrase is that found in the vespers for the Nativity of our Lady, 'We sing Thy holy birth, we honour Thy immaculate conception,' words which are now explained as referring to the birth of our Lady and her conception of Christ. It may be admitted that there is a certain ambiguity in speaking of 'our Lady's immaculate conception,' even though one would have thought that the chances of ambiguity were less with a reference to our Lady's birth immediately preceding. However, opposition to an immaculate conception for our Lady is the order of the day, and it can hardly be expected that popular belief can have run wholly counter to official teaching for over a century. Certainly devotion to our Lady as 'more honourable than the Cherubin and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim' is as strong as ever, but otherwise the most that can be said is that our Lady is universally held to be immaculate and by some special privilege, and that no specific version of that privilege seems yet to have won final or universal acceptance.

It is rather touching that the author of the booklet referred to, *On the Catholic Dogma of 1854*, is inclined to accept the authenticity of our Lady's apparitions to St Bernadette at Lourdes. Our Lady's words, 'I am the Immaculate Conception', as in the first version without 'the fruit of', he explains of course as referring to our Lady's conception of Christ. This generous attitude towards popular Catholic piety is often found in Orthodox writers, for whom the villain of the piece is always the Papacy, either the Pope himself, or in the case of the present Pope, who has so far given little cause for offence, the reactionary and wicked Cardinals who surround his throne.⁷ This view of Catholicism helps to explain how the Orthodox are sometimes inclined to treat the schism of the West as more official than real, and thereby also helps to explain their apparent uncertainty on occasion as to whether the West may not still be part of the one, true Church, or conversely whether the one, true Church may not in some practical sense be divided.

This last allegation is a dangerous one, since the Russian Orthodox express very clearly their belief in the indivisibility of the Church, especially since faced with the Protestant ecumenical movement. 'We do not admit', one archbishop has said, 'that the unity of the Church, and in particular of the visible historical Church, has been broken or lost so as to become the object for search or discovery'.⁸ 'Admit the possibility of the separation of the Church', another archbishop has said, 'and you admit the possibility of a victory over her of the

⁶Migne. *P.L.* 182, 336.

⁷cf. *J. M. P.*, 1960, II, p. 46.

⁸cf. *J. M. P.*, 1961, 3, p. 79.

Gates of Hell, or the possibility of a separation of Christ'.⁹ These words exactly represent the Catholic view. Catholic too is the recognition that *communio in sacris* is a proof of union, 'There can be no communion in sacraments where unity, the wholeness of faith is absent'.¹⁰ The Church in the fullest sense cannot therefore embrace both Orthodoxy and Catholicism. The Orthodox should then believe that they alone form the core of the one, true Church, from which Catholics are excluded, and this is indeed the more official view.

But especially to-day the occasional turn of phrase seems to reveal a recognition that this is not the whole story. Protestants are told that they must accept the teaching of 'the ancient *undivided* Church of the seven ecumenical councils in the course of the first eight centuries',¹¹ where 'undivided' can be used only in a loose and purely historical sense of the Church that is ever undivided. At Istanbul the Patriarch's spokesman said that the Orthodox churches were already united; at Athens, that union among the Orthodox churches would further agreement between East and West. He must have meant only more obvious, or more perfect union. An ecumenical council cannot be held 'without the participation of' the Orthodox, we read in the present letter to Cardinal Bea; but could the whole Church be only part of a council? Some expressions of this kind need not be incompatible with belief in the one, undivided Church of Orthodoxy.

But the decisive aspect of this present mood of Orthodoxy, which a Catholic could not share, is the uncertainty as to whether the Church can still define dogma. We may ask quite simply: could the Eastern Church hold an ecumenical council to decide a question of faith without the participation of the West? If not, then something essential has been lost from the unity of the Church, namely, the power of a living and complete body to give a definitive interpretation of its beliefs.

Something of the present Orthodox attitude to dogma may be seen in the remark of an American Orthodox archbishop on the subject of the Assumption, 'With us this is only tradition. We believe in this, we celebrate this, but we do not make a dogma out of it'¹² Here, as with many non-Catholics, dogma is seen on the way to becoming a word of ill-repute. In fact the idea of dogma, as a doctrine defined by the Church which must be accepted by those who are to be her members, is as essential to Orthodoxy as to Catholicism: 'The boundaries of individual freedom are precisely and clearly marked by the definitions of the Church. These definitions are binding for all, not only for those who are already members of the Church, but for those also who in the future may perhaps be united with her'¹³ What the Orthodox object to is not

⁹cf. *J. M. P.*, 1960, 8, p. 47.

¹⁰Declaration at the Lausanne Conference, quoted *J. M. P.*, 1960, 8, p. 49.

¹¹*ibid.*

¹²quoted *J. M. P.*, 1960, 8, p. 50.

¹³Declaration at the Lausanne Conference.

the idea of dogma as such, nor to its definition in the earlier stages of the Church's history, but to its continued extension to-day. The idea that a doctrine may be true, and yet that it may be inopportune to define it, has on its side the bishops of the minority party at the first Vatican Council, with the difference that inopportune of defining doctrine appears now as the settled view of the Russian Church and applies to all doctrine. This attitude is seen at its clearest in an emigré writer,¹⁴ who explicitly opposes the further encroachment of dogma into the field of *theologoumena*, opinion. He praises instead the freedom and permanent diversity of the Church's teaching as a 'theological rhapsody', an ideal which a Catholic might share for philosophy or much of theology, but which it would be difficult to apply to the *depositum fidei* without bringing the Church's active teaching life to an end.

The most natural expression of the Western view is the idea of a development or growth of doctrine, and it is significant therefore that the letter to Cardinal Bea refers to the idea of 'dogmatic progress' as the means by which western theologians justify their new doctrines, a means whose 'legitimacy is disputed' by the Orthodox. Progress is used by Catholics in this context, but taken alone the word has something of a scientific ring, as in the famous proposition 80 of Pius IX's *Syllabus* condemning those who think that 'the Roman Pontiff can and ought to be reconciled to, and come to terms with, progress, liberalism and modern civilization.' Progress in this sense, the now familiar description of scientific learning and its fruits as an advance from uncouth beginnings towards a goal ever newer and bigger and brighter, cannot be applied to Christ's once-and-for-all new and eternal testament. Growth or development, for both of which there are native Russian words, would have been a fairer title for this Catholic idea and would have given less colour to the accusation that we invent new doctrines. It is hardly necessary to point out that the addition of anything new must be explicitly precluded from any Catholic account of development. *Neque enim Petri successoribus Spiritus Sanctus promissus est ut eo revelante novam doctrinam patefacerent*,¹⁵ was part of the Vatican Council's prelude to the definition of infallibility. Doctrine may grow *in suo tantum genere, in eodem scilicet dogmate, eodem sensu, eademque sententia*.¹⁶ With this safeguard for the conservative character of doctrinal development, and with the example of the early 'undivided' Church before us, it is difficult to see what objection the Orthodox could really have to the Catholic view, unless they accept that the Church can now no longer exercise the functions that once she did.

DENIS O'BRIEN

¹⁴Bulgakov, *The Orthodox Church*.

¹⁵'For the Holy Spirit was not promised to the successors of Peter that by His assistance they might make known new doctrine'. *Vatican Council*, Session IV, cap 4.

¹⁶'Only in its own genus, namely in the same dogma, in the same sense and with the same meaning'. *Ineffabilis Deus*, 8 December 1854.