

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

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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

closed. There had been cases in the past of prolonged breaks in the work of councils. We have only to recall the break of ten years, from 1552 to 1562, in the labours of the Council of Trent. At this period things were confused and alarming; it was hard to foresee if the council would ever reassemble. Nearly a hundred years have passed, evidently, since the Vatican Council. It would be odd to 'resume' the interrupted sitting of the council now. In any case, because of the people it would be composed of, it would be quite a different council. And not only because of the people. Yet, in a certain sense, every new council will inevitably be a continuation of the Vatican Council, be it professedly so or not.

The Vatican Council broke up without completing its programme. Strictly speaking, to use the happy phrase of a contemporary historian of the Church, the Vatican Council did nothing but *begin*. An insignificant part, only, of the anticipated programme was finished. A great part of the material prepared for deliberation by the council was never touched: fifty-one schemas in all. Numerous documents were not even distributed among members of the council. And of the 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church' even, only a section, clumsily enough torn from the general context, was examined and adopted—'On the primacy and infallibility of the pope', the famous 'Vatican dogma'. In fact, the Vatican dogma was only a fragment of an incomplete whole, and this makes understanding it very difficult. The authority of the Sovereign Roman Pontiff has now received a strict 'dogmatic' formulation. The primacy of the pope and his infallibility are henceforth not only a historical and canonical fact but an 'article of faith' of the Roman Church. But dogma on the Church itself remained, and still remains, unformulated in a precise, clear way. Some Roman theologians even openly affirm that doctrine on the Church is still at an inchoative stage of discovery and expression—at a 'pre-theological' stage. The Church has not yet defined itself. By the hasty, perhaps premature, acceptance of the Vatican dogma, theological balance has been seriously upset in Roman doctrine on the Church.

The forthcoming council will inevitably have to return to the themes of the Vatican Council. The theme of the Church will undoubtedly be central in its programme. The council in fact has been convoked under the sign of Christian unity, of the unity of the Church. And before all, the council will have to give an

authentic interpretation of the Vatican dogma in the larger context of doctrine on the Church. In this context we may think that the Vatican dogma itself will look and sound different. The 'theological climate' has been perceptibly modified since the time of Pius IX, in the Roman Church as well as in the Christian world. Let us hope there will be no necessity for the hurry and pressure that seemed necessary (not to everybody, even then, far from it) at the time of the Vatican Council. It was prepared in an atmosphere of confusion and theological backwardness, in an atmosphere of political fear. The themes have remained the same as well as the problems. But they present themselves now in a more acute and peremptory way and their internal complexity has become even more evident, in the light of new historical and theological experience, than in the middle of last century. We have only to recall the revival of thomism, modernism, the contemporary liturgical movement, and the intense work performed in every domain of theological science at the heart of the Roman Church itself.

Preparations for the council will obviously take a long time. It is difficult to see it assembling in less than three or four years. Haste in the preparation would be grievously reflected in the success of the council itself. The character of the council will depend in great measure on the depth and soundness of the preparatory work. Those who are to take part in the council must prepare themselves carefully for their task, so heavy with responsibilities. We do not so far know how these preparatory labours will be tackled. An important part of the work, very likely, will be performed by the respective Roman Congregations. But it is to be hoped that wide circles of competent theologians will be called to share in it besides these. Naturally it is absolutely impossible to organize in a short time a serious theological enterprise on a grand scale, on a really 'universal' or global scale. The Roman Church is at the moment going through a period of unquestionable theological and liturgical expansion. But this new movement, symptom and pledge of a living creation, is still far from embracing the whole Church and has not yet penetrated into the whole mass. The preparation for the Council must be theologically impartial and 'non-party'—as, unfortunately, we cannot say was the case at the preparation of the Vatican Council. The preparatory work for the council should take place on the

level of contemporary theological thought at the very heart of the Roman Church. All the manifold forms and all the tension of contemporary theological thinking and spiritual experience, even beyond the bounds of this Church, should be taken into consideration, with wisdom and delicacy, in the preparations for the council. Through and through, a certain lack of unanimity can show itself in the Church itself. This disagreement ought not to be feared at the start. It often happens that a disagreement is inspired by sincere zeal for the faith, as was the case at the Vatican Council. Discipline does not exclude theological freedom, even when it limits it, and it must never crush it. We have in view here freedom in the faith, not freedom in unbelief or want of faith as in the modernist period. It is particularly desirable that the acquisitions of contemporary science in scripture and Church history, at the very heart of the Roman Church, should be reflected adequately in the preparations for the council. The council should not be 'lagging behind', either in its exegesis or in its understanding of the history of the Church. The testimony of the Fathers should receive a more important place in theological argument than was often the case in the time of scholasticism. The problem of tradition should be presented in all its depth, and that can require an extended commentary of the decrees of the Council of Trent. For such an enterprise great discretion of spirit is needed, of humility and of balance.

A certain amount of publicity can only help the preparatory work for the council. The themes of the council should be submitted to free discussions in the theological press. The entire Church should be inwardly 'interested' and, so to speak, consecrated to the problematic of the council. All the members of the Church should confess the faith in a conscious and responsible manner, of course in fidelity to the tradition of the Church and in obedience to lawful pastoral authority. The *consensus fidelium* does nothing but reinforce the faith and strengthen the Church. And at the council itself that interior freedom and peace of heart should be guaranteed of which the inadequacy and even the absence were so bitterly regretted, and with more than adequate foundation, by many eminent and courageous participants in the Vatican Council. 'I learn from my faults. . . .

At this preliminary stage of the preparatory work for the council there is room for meetings with the 'dissidents' and the

'schismatics', especially in connection with the fact that the 'ecumenical theme' will undoubtedly occupy an important part of the programme of the council. However, such meetings can only be profitable if they take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. It is not so easy for 'separated brethren' to meet and discuss together 'without anger or passion' the fact of the separation, its causes and its reasons. It is only possible at the highest degree of humility, obedience to truth, and charity. Otherwise exchange of views can easily degenerate into debates, which will no longer even be debates on the faith but a sterile logic-chopping which leads to greater estrangement and mutual obduracy. The principles of an asceticism of ecumenical contacts have not yet been worked out: even the problem of such principles has been recognized only by a few people. But on the other hand, this idea of ecumenical meetings is less novel than it may look. Theological exchange of views, at different levels of 'officialness', has already been going on for years between Catholic and Protestant theologians and church people in several European countries, in particular in Western Germany, and the results of such meetings are quite important and obvious. And it is also quite obvious, in the present case, that the inward success depends precisely on mutual trust, on spiritual seriousness, on awareness of responsibility before the Lord. On another side, it is evident that one must not expect from such ecumenical meetings what quite simply cannot happen. 'Equality of rights' or 'equality of value' of all the existing 'confessions'—that is, in fact, of 'all the heresies'—is an unhealthy dream, dangerous and absolutely sterile. And such 'ecumenical dreaming' can only damage 'ecumenical work'.

On certain conditions, Orthodox theologians might take part in a preliminary pre-conciliar meeting of this kind, with the knowledge and consent of course of the ecclesiastical authorities and only if they are 'competent'. For a 'union council', in any case, there is at present no ground or place. An invitation to bishops of the 'schismatic churches' ('schismatic' of course from the Roman point of view) to a council of the Roman Church, even as plain 'observers', could only damage the reconciliation of east and west. That would only be recalling the painful precedent of the Council of Florence and would lead to the same results, perhaps even worse. A formal 'meeting' of the Churches must be

preceded by a lengthy 'molecular' preparation at different levels of life and religious practice. For the moment, neither east nor west is ready, spiritually, for such a 'formal' meeting.

It belongs to the Orthodox, for the moment, before all to put the fundamental question to themselves and ponder it in all its tragic complexity. What is it, properly speaking, that happened in the year 1054, or even before that, or again even only after? Where is the substance of the 'schism'? Is this schism to be called 'Byzantine' or 'Roman'? What is the 'Roman Church' from the point of view of Orthodox ecclesiology? Has the 'Roman Church' retained, and in what measure, 'orthodoxy', that is, the 'true faith', or has it fallen hopelessly into 'heresy'? It is necessary to begin precisely with a question. It is obvious enough that on these themes there is no agreement among the Orthodox and the question is presented quite sincerely and openly. The Roman theory is simpler and apparently more consistent. From the point of view of Roman canon law, the Orthodox Church is a Church, though 'schismatic' and 'not entirely true'; the sacraments are validly performed in it, the Orthodox priesthood has not only the 'character' but even, within a certain limit, 'jurisdiction'. That is why, from the Roman point of view, one can talk about *Unia*,¹ that is about reunion to a single Church, essentially indivisible, of parts that have broken away from it. Many Orthodox theologians are ready to accept this way of putting the question, not always consistently however, underlining only that it is the Roman Church that fell into schism. Yet often enough, on the Orthodox side, by words or deeds, the Roman Church is denied all character of 'church-hood'.² If 'Catholics' becoming Orthodox have to be baptized, that very fact is a denial of the 'church-hood' of Rome. The invalidity of all that is Roman is accepted by many people as something obvious and all the evidence of a 'life of the spirit' unreservedly put down to diabolical inspiration, mental illness or illusion: Francis of Assisi, Joan of Arc, Theresa of Avila.

¹ *Unia* is a word used by Greek and Russian Orthodox to describe the relationship of Oriental Catholics or Uniates, such as the Maronites and Ruthenians, with the Roman Church; not usually a very complimentary word. (*English translator's note.*)

² This neologism translates the Russian word *cerkovnost'*, an abstract term expressing belonging to the Church (*cerkov'*), or, more generally, every character implying an intrinsic relation with the Church. The Russian language, having no article, can unfortunately not render the difference between being a Church and being the Church. There is the same difficulty in Latin. This gap in vocabulary perhaps explains an inadequacy common to our respective ecclesiologies. (*French translator's note.*)

Augustine himself, despite the warning of the patriarch Photius, is often crossed off the Orthodox calendar (though allowed the title, it is true, of 'blessed') because of his 'heresy'. One cannot ignore the fact of this acute disagreement among the Orthodox in theological matters. To invoke in this case the freedom of theological thought is beside the point. The theory of the 'economy' of the Church is little help here; it rather obscures and confuses the theological problem. Before judging the opportuneness of a 'meeting' with Roman Catholics from the exigencies of international peace and collaboration, Orthodox theologians and ecclesiastical authorities in the Orthodox Churches ought to put the question, openly and sincerely, of the very nature of the 'Roman Church' or of the 'Roman schism'. And that requires doctrine on the Church to be worked out in all its fulness and complexity.

Be that as it may, the convocation of a new 'general council', even only within the canonical limits of the Roman Church, is undoubtedly a new ecumenical fact, a great and important ecumenical event, whatever its immediate and closest consequences may be. As such, it calls for the sustained attention of Orthodox theologians themselves.



THE MOVEMENT FOR A BETTER WORLD

ROBIN ANDERSON

IN writing, not long ago, of what he has found in the Movement for a Better World, Fr Ludwig Tovini, Italian Dominican member of the movement's promoting group, referred, amongst other things, to an *equilibrium* between the grandiose wish to change the world and the realistically moderated belief in the possibility of change, and advocacy of it, without utopian optimism that would banish the existence of evil from the earth. Such equilibrium, difficult to maintain on account of continually having to avoid the danger of falling into one excess or another, is not so common, Fr Tovini went on to say, even in the Catholic field, ours being an age when 'whimsical hankerings after originality often lead to the taking up of unbalanced or eccentric positions . . .'