

When these lines appear in print the third session of Vatican II will be in full swing and some crucial declarations of the Church's mind, which must have a vital bearing on the problems of Christian unity, will be in the making. Not least in importance among these is the revised *Schema de Oecumenismo*. It will perhaps be useful to examine the attitude of the World Council of Churches to what is happening in the view of representatives well qualified to speak for it.

This attitude may, I think, be summed up by saying that while there is generous recognition of progress there is also considerable doubt among a number of responsible non-Catholic ecumenists whether, in view of its well known presuppositions, the Catholic Church *can*, as such, engage in ecumenical dialogue on the terms now common to all the member-Churches of the World Council of Churches, including the Eastern Orthodox. This doubt is fairly widespread. It is expressed, for instance, by Dr Lukas Vischer, one of the World Council observers at the Vatican Council. Speaking during the Unity Octave in Zurich in 1964, just after Pope Paul's pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he said: 'The non-Roman Catholic Churches do not question the fact that the Roman Catholic Church must claim to be the one and only Church. But if a permanent conversation is to be established between the divided Churches, then a form of fellowship must be found which does not compel the non-Roman Catholic Churches to accept the Roman Catholic concept of unity and of union. Any claim to leadership can only be an obstacle to the development of the Ecumenical Movement.' (*Herder Correspondence*, May 1964, page 135.)

The key to his meaning lies in the last sentence. It is of the very essence of the Ecumenical Movement, as sponsored by the World Council of Churches, that no individual Church can act as leader in it, for any Church attempting to do so would be setting up its own conviction concerning the nature and structure of the true Church as the ideal towards which all the rest must move. That would be to destroy the movement by destroying its ecumenical technique.

The World Council of Churches is a family of Christian Churches, each maintaining its own particular convictions, but necessarily united with the rest at one point only, namely faith in Christ the Lord, as God and Saviour, in the unity of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Its technique is to prepare the ground by searching out what all have in common and so converging in a growing unity in faith, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. A clarification of this essential aim was made by the Secretary-General of the World Council, Dr Visser 't Hooft, in an address given on the North German Radio on May 16, 1964. The decisive question was, he said, where is the centre of the ecumenical movement? He showed himself disturbed by a recent statement of a usually objective observer that 'the centre of the ecumenical movement is about to shift'.

This statement implied, of course, that the Pope in going to Jerusalem on pilgrimage was taking the initiative of leadership in the unity movement, in the name of the Roman Catholic Church. It is undeniable that this was the line very largely taken by the press and other forms of publicity in many countries. Dr Visser 't Hooft went on to say that the only centre of the ecumenical movement is Jesus Christ our common Lord. To speak of a centre in any geographical sense is no longer ecumenism. The World Council of Churches has no such centre or function. Each Church, in its membership, is its own centre. The World Council exists to organize them for unity work, and would cease to exist when unity was achieved. (*Herder Correspondence*, Sept.–Oct. 1964, pp. 284–5.)

From the point of view of the World Council there is no reason why the Roman Catholic Church should not accept its membership; every member Church is entitled to retain in full its particular convictions, and the Orthodox Churches, which hold that there can be but one visible Church, have in fact been members from the beginning. Yet the Roman Catholic Church, by its abstention from membership, while at the same time participating in ecumenical encounter and dialogue, is in danger of creating a rival Roman Catholic ecumenism in competition with that of the World Council, which would be tempted in consequence to look upon this as a camouflaged technique of convert making.

We do in fact give a certain ground for this temptation by our ways of speaking, but it could be maintained that the Catholic Church is a convert maker only in the same sense that all other Christian Churches might claim to be. What Catholics believe to be essential to Christianity – essential, that is, according to the mind of Christ – they announce to the world in their proclamation of the Gospel, as do all Christian Churches, each in its own way and according to its own standards. Anyone who hears and believes must follow his conscience where it leads him. The Ecumenical Movement deals not with individuals but with Churches, as such. By participating in it the Churches join together to seek the way to unity.

Dr Nikos Nissiotis, another World Council observer, and a Greek Orthodox, has criticized the Council's schema on ecumenism because it seems to him 'deliberately to have ignored the major difficulty between the Roman Catholic Church and other Churches . . . by insisting on the unquestioned principle of obedience to the Roman See as the one centre of the organic unity of the Church. For the Orthodox this principle is unacceptable'. (*Herder Correspondence*, May 1964, p. 130.) This may be a valid criticism of method of approach, in ecumenical dialogue; it is not valid in itself, since in all ecumenical dialogue the truth as each Christian Church sees it must be fully presented and treated by all with the respect due to conscientious conviction. That is the uniting principle of ecumenism; to speak the truth in love.

The Orthodox belief that episcopacy in apostolic succession is necessary *jure divino*

for the life of the Church is rejected, equally with the papal primacy, by world Protestantism. It is indeed possible that the formal declaration of the nature of the Church, its life and its authority, with which the schema on ecumenism opens, belongs properly to the schema *de Ecclesia*. It may well be too that the opening of the schema *de Oecumenismo*, since it is concerned with the statement of ecumenical principles, should have given first place to a statement of the unity of all baptized Christians in Jesus Christ, as Lord and Saviour, sent by the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit, a unity more fundamentally important than anything else that divides Christians from each other. This criticism was indeed made in the Vatican Council debate, but it seems not to have been acted on in the revised schema. Had the schema been so rearranged it would have gone on to deal with what is constitutive of the one Church in its invisible and external life, showing how, and to what extent, the separated Churches, in differing degrees share in both these aspects, and what each lacks. This would lead on to the basic division between historic and Reformation Christendom. In this Rome, Constantinople and the East, sharing in apostolic succession, stand on one side, and the Churches sprung from the Reformation, which reject apostolic succession, on the other. The Anglican Church stands between the two in maintaining at least the outward framework of episcopacy. The papal primacy would then have come last, as a question domestic to episcopacy in the Church, upon which Rome and the East differ.

This method of procedure would have been more in accordance with the ecumenical technique of the World Council, in which a beginning is made with what is held in common; from this the differences that divide emerge and are demarcated. Misunderstanding is thus gradually cleared up and the true divergences are seen for what they are. Experience shows that by this method the gulf between is often narrowed, and that the ground is prepared for further advance towards unity, under the Holy Spirit's guidance.

In the present ecumenical dialogue it is of primary importance that Catholics should seek to promote unity between East and West. Doctrinally the Orthodox are very near us. In ethos, outlook, habit of mind, and even in their approach to religious truth, they are very different from the Latin West. They fear and sometimes even hate Rome, partly on this account but partly also because of our conduct towards them, particularly after the schism, and partly too because they have lived always under the care of their own patriarchs. They have experienced the rule of Rome mainly when the jurisdiction of the papal primacy had become identified in practice with the powers of the bishop of Rome as Patriarch of the West. The result was that some of the Popes' interventions in the East were rightly regarded as usurpation of authority, an encroachment on that of their own Patriarch.

Had the union of Florence in 1439 lasted, had the Turks been driven back out of Asia Minor and Egypt by combined Christian forces (a far-fetched supposition), Constantinople and the other patriarchs, while recognizing the universal jurisdiction of Rome, as they actually did when they signed the union, would have remained in semi-independence in the full exercise of their patriarchal powers. Could this general religious situation be brought back under happier auspices today, reunion with Constantinople and the East would come near to possibility. As Patriarch Maximos IV of Antioch has constantly reminded the Council, this is the first and most necessary step towards unity with the East, coupled with the assurance that their rights, customs, laws and their freedom to govern themselves can be secured, with due deference of course to the higher jurisdiction of the Holy See.

The exercise of this is more important in what it would involve in practice than in the fact that it is a universal jurisdiction charged with the ultimate care and service of the whole *Catholica*, which in effect, for the East, would be largely a remote control. The Easterns, as Patriarch Maximos has emphasized speaking as a Catholic Patriarch who is Orthodox in rite, mind, ethos and attitude, but Catholic by communion, would have little difficulty in acknowledging the authority of the Apostolic See, if the rights of their own patriarchates are secured as they were before the schism.

It is for this reason that the present debates and future legislation of the Council, in regard to the close relation between the papacy and the college of bishops, of whom the Pope is the head, is of primary importance; it is expected to make clear that the Pope, in and with the episcopate, is the ultimate governing authority in the Church and the source of its infallible teaching authority, and that this is compatible with the infallibility which resides in virtue of his episcopal office, in the holder of the Apostolic See, as Vatican I defined it.

The principles that apply to the Orthodox Churches in relation to the Latin West could apply also to the Churches of the Reformation. Humanly speaking it will be a very long time before any of these reaches a unity of faith comparable to that which already exists between Rome, Constantinople and the rest of the East. Yet if and when that should happen, the separated Churches may be sure that everything in their differing traditions of ethos, outlook, custom and habit of mind, apart from any element that would militate against what is held to be of divine ordinance, would remain theirs within the unity achieved. Even the conservative Cardinal Ottaviani has said: 'When truth has once been acknowledged, that truth to which the Church cannot make any concessions, all those who want to unite with her will find her as the mother, disposed to grant whatever she can, on the liturgical, traditional, disciplinary and purely human levels.' (Quoted in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Oct 7, 1961, p. 78.)