

THE CHURCH IN CRISIS: the twenty great councils, by Philip Hughes; Burns and Oates; 35s.

No one could have made this piecemeal subject more than a concise reference-book without Monsignor Hughes' pungent mind and keen pen. Written with an eye to putting the public of the twenty-first century of our era in the picture for the twenty-first council in the series, it could so easily have been 'popular history' without an edge; 'the space', a lesser historian would have said in his space-consuming preface, 'does not permit more than an outline of the events . . .' What Mgr Hughes has done is to tell us in plain language why each council was summoned, what it enacted, and how it proceeded, with a clarity and eye for the relevant that few larger-scale histories attain; (of which good examples are his explanation of the real issues of iconoclasm, p. 124ff., his spotlighting of the combined dangers of lay investiture and clerical marriage in the tenth century as 'efforts to make some of the great sees hereditary', and his insistence on the comparatively small importance of the infallibility decree in the Vatican council). But to all this he has added something of his own: an ability to make the subject glow with life, a forthright and usually sound judgment (and no fear of judging), and a linking-together of the scattered and familiar events into a pattern charged with meaning.

This derives from the simple fact that these far off events matter now. He does not have much sympathy for that prodigious infant of our academic age, 'the new type of scholar who is only interested in the event for its own sake' (p. 163); he sees, rightly in my opinion, that some historical events do not matter (for the present purpose at least) and others do—obvious perhaps, but a golden maxim that makes and unmakes the readability of history books. How refreshing it is to read about 'bad men' and 'good men' (p. 165); and how much more humanly true is the history that writes about them. There are things, too, that Mgr Hughes shows in a very new light; e.g., 'How that great crisis that opened in the year 1789 found the Catholic religion everywhere in chains . . . its vitality low indeed after generations of captivity to the Catholic kings, is one of the commonplaces of history'—is it a commonplace, though?—and again we learn how the issue of freeing sees from lay appointment was first thrown into the limelight by the fourth council of Constantinople (869–70), which I have never seen mentioned in histories of the Investiture contest. Have we heard before how it was the same bishop who started the campaign against Nestorius in 429 and against Eutyches in 448, Eusebius of Dorylaeum? And there are happy phrases that characterize for the public what so many have discussed learnedly enough: tenth century Christianity was 'delicate, barely adolescent'.

Of course the great weakness of this book (I hope this does not come too harshly after what may have seemed like adulation) is lack of continuity. This is to some extent remedied by the unified theme-pattern of the councils. One of the impressive features of the councils which emerges from this book is the

extraordinarily logical order of their subject-matter, and also of the crises of growth in doctrine which occasioned them; at the first two the Trinity is discussed, at the next four the Incarnation and the Theotokos, at the next two the veneration of the saints and of images, and after that the 'status' and 'liberty' of the Church, the sacraments, and so on. Their acts could almost be made to read like an ordered *Summa theologica*. The other link is the developing relationship between the councils, the patriarchs and the pope, and the way in which the general council began as an organ of the *imperial* church, but was never dictated to by an emperor in what it defined, and depended from the earliest days on papal confirmation. The term patriarch, we are told, first appears in conciliar canons in 870. What is *not* adequately dealt with is the view held by the councils, and by people in general, of the pope's relation to tradition. The sixth general council wrote: 'we have followed (the pope's) teaching, and he the patristic and apostolic tradition'. After the council of union at Florence, the different interpretations put on the passage in the decree which speaks of the pope and tradition were the chief cause of later disunity; and in the Greek Orthodox theory it is the supremacy of tradition rather than of a council or of the episcopate which makes the pope's claims seem intolerable. Much more could have been made of this theme.

At times, Mgr Hughes is just a little too eager to press the papal case. His interpretation of Pope Honorius' supposedly heretical letter seems to give the pope all the benefit of every doubt; and why he needs to call the condemnation by a council of this (advisory and not teaching-the-whole-church) papal letter for its heresy a 'grim moment in the history of councils' I do not understand. Examples of this sort of glibness could, I fear, be multiplied.

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SIENA: THE CITY OF THE VIRGIN, by Titus Burckhardt; translated by Margaret M. Brown; Oxford University Press; 50s.

Siena must be the most perfect surviving example in Italy of the medieval city. Assisi too, no doubt, still looks much as it did in the fourteenth century; but Siena is larger and more beautiful. Its beauty is extraordinary. Here the taut Tuscan Gothic has a colour and a springing grace that you will hardly find elsewhere. The Renaissance only just touched Siena, and by then the city was past her prime, declining as the power of Florence rose: left high and dry on her sunbaked hills—'three ranges of hills spread out like the veins in a leaf', as Dr Burckhardt puts it—Siena is essentially medieval. She is perhaps the most striking record left in stone of the culture of the Italian Communes—of that living synthesis, apparently so natural and so vital, of Christian piety and disciplined freedom expressed in the common life of a free republic.

These basic elements in the Siense achievement—the civic feeling, the unconscious virility, the equally unconscious piety—Dr Burckhardt brings out extremely well in his warm, sensitive, yet scholarly account of the city's history