

Comment

On his recent visit to the Phanar to celebrate the feast of St Andrew with the Patriarch of Constantinople, Pope John Paul II renewed the Catholic Church's commitment to reunion with the Orthodox Church and went so far as to hope that communion might be restored by the end of the century: "Surely the time has come for us to hasten our attempts to achieve perfect fraternal reconciliation, so that when the third millenium begins it will find us standing side by side in perfect communion".

In his reply, Patriarch Dimitrios confirmed that the two churches "had emerged from their isolation and their alienation — not to say their hostility", adding that "our ultimate goal is not simply the unity of our two churches, but the union of all Christians in the one Lord and in participation in the same cup". The conviction of the Catholic Church, according to the Pope, is that "the re-establishment of full unity with the Orthodox Church is fundamental to the ultimate progress of the entire ecumenical movement".

At this point, then, with twenty years to go until the end of the century, and twenty years gone by since the establishment of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity by Pope John XXIII, it certainly looks as if further movement towards reconciliation between Rome and the Anglican Communion, and all other traditions that spring from the Reformation, must wait for reunion to be established between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox.

The Pope's addresses frequently display his profound opposition to the twin materialisms and the intertwined militarism of the liberal democracies of the west as well as of the popular democracies of the east. It looks as though his idea of ecumenism is a reunion of the Catholic Church with the Orthodox Church which would extend the spiritual freedom of Orthodox Christians living in the totalitarian societies of the east and at the same time strengthen the spiritual discipline of Catholic Christians living in the hedonistic societies of the west. Indeed, in his address at Ankara, the Pope offered the Catholic Church as an ally with *Islam*, "to protect and to promote together social justice for all men, as Vatican II demanded, moral values, peace and freedom". It was the Ecumenical Patriarch, following a somewhat different line, who alluded to "a return to the age of religious fanaticism, religious wars, and the self-destruction of men and their faith, all in the name of God".

If it were simply a matter of uniting the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church in a great campaign against the evils of liberalism in the west and of totalitarianism in the east perhaps twenty

years would be long enough. There are, however, some may think fortunately, deep differences over Christian doctrine which will surely take longer than that to resolve. If reunion with the Orthodox is now the Vatican's priority, the current campaign to bring liberal Catholics and liberation theologians to heel begins to make more sense. The ancient churches of the east pride themselves on having preserved the apostolic faith unchanged for centuries and many of them, in recent decades, have suffered severe harassment by communist governments. It will be strange for Rome to have to face scrutiny by the Orthodox for her orthodoxy, but evidently the Pope needs to be able to assure them that Arianism does not flourish unchecked in the Catholic Church and that, where Catholics are allied with Marxists, they are not all abandoning the gospel.

It was of Arianism that Edward Schillebeeckx was accused on Vatican Radio a few days before his 'interview' at the Holy Office last December, and by none other than Jean Galot S.J. one of the interviewers. The Pope was accompanied to the Phanar by Cardinal Jan Willebrands, who has been for many years the chief Vatican go-between with the Orthodox. On his return to the Netherlands, ten days later, Cardinal Willebrands declared his confidence in Schillebeeckx's orthodoxy. But the contradictions in Catholic ecumenism show more dramatically in the case of Hans Küng. While part of the charge against him is that the Christology in his recent book *On being a Christian* seems distinctly Arian, the gravamen of the case is his sustained attack over many years on the doctrine of papal supremacy as defined at Vatican I. In a statement in 1973 Patriarch Dimitrios declared that there could never be reunion unless Rome reverted to the style of papal primacy which was exercised in the first thousand years of the Church. That condition has evidently been accepted by Rome, at least implicitly; but some of the consequences would need to be examined more openly. For one thing, it would mean an understanding of papal primacy differing very little in substance from the one which Hans Küng proposes. The worst that can be said of him on this particular issue is surely that his aggressive and provocative approach to the problems left by Vatican I has made it far more difficult to tone down some of our more exaggerated ideas. But if reunion with the Orthodox Church is a serious commitment, as we must trust that it is, then some candid reassessment of papal supremacy is unavoidable. And then the churches of the Reformation, and certainly the Anglican Communion, must be involved. In the meantime, however, liberal Catholics and liberation theologians must not be afraid to stand their ground.

Fergus Kerr O. P.