

June 1976

DISGUISED PROTESTS AGAINST PERSECUTION OF RELIGION.

During the World Council of Churches in Nairobi the question was raised about the necessity of a protest against the persecution of religion in the USSR. The Secretary General of the WCC, Dr. Potter, tried to suppress it with various technical manipulations. The draft of a protest in a milder form was presented for purpose of discussion and publication to a smaller Committee which is expected to meet July 24 - 28, 1976. Meanwhile, the supporters of the Soviets are trying to make it even milder by broadening the subjects and involving other countries. In his report to the future Committee, Dr. Potter reminded them that some delegates of the Conference were concerned about the restriction of religious freedom and intellectual dissidence in the Socialist (he did not say Communist) countries of Eastern Europe, in particular the USSR. Yet the development of the debate led to the recognition of a close connection between human rights, as they are described in the World Declaration on Human Rights, and international agreements on human rights as they are formulated in the Helsingfors Declaration. Therefore Dr. Potter warns that the question of religious liberty should not be treated separately from the field of various other rights, or efforts to apply the criterion of one social system against the other without seriously taking into consideration entirely different social systems, which according to his words, rarely helps to protect human rights. In that way, the concentration of the question of the persecution of religion in the USSR is being put aside, and the way is opened for drafting a diffused resolution of a general character, which will be less offensive to the Soviets.

AFRICAN ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATION.

The influence of the All African Conference of Churches in Africa is growing rapidly. At its head is a very energetic Canon Burgess Karr. In opposition to him there is another organization, The Evangelical Association in Africa. The latter accuses Karr of a too deep involvement in politics. They are scandalized by his defense of a aggression as a permissible tool of Christian strategy. They say that he puts Africa before Christianity. The Conference is also accused of a lenient attitude toward such things as polygamy and witchcraft. Yet, the All African Conference is a very powerful organization and enjoys the main influence in all African matters in the WCC.

VATICAN EXPECTS UNION SOON.

From the answer of Pope Paul VI on Dec. 15th, 1975, to the Delegation of the Patriarch of Constantinople, it is obvious that the Vatican expects the decision of the Orthodox to establish liturgical communion with Roman Catholics, to be made very soon. The Delegation announced that representatives of the Orthodox Church for the negotiations have already been appointed. The reply of the Pope is published in a German magazine "Der Christliche Osten" #2 of this year. The Pope said: "I cordially greet you as the carriers of this great and good news, which moves us and fills us with deep joy. We see how there clearly appears on the horizon, the blessed and wishful day, which can be sealed by our newly found complete unity in the concelebration of the Holy Eucharist. We are entering a new phase of our reconciliation with the common wish for it to be decisive, and with deep faith, that the Spirit of God, Who started this deed within us and between us, will lead it to its accomplishment." In connection with this the Assistant Secretary to the Secretariat for Christian Unity, Fr. Pierre Dupre, wrote in L'Osservatore Romano the following: The time for words has passed...the hour of real words has come, the words of God."

ON THE ROAD TO A NEW PASCHALIA.

According to Roman Catholic sources, the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in agreement with the Vatican, is rushing the process of rapprochement. It seems that Constantinople is inclined to make some very important decisions which would precede union. They are expected to be accepted before the Pan Orthodox Council takes place. One of these problems is the acceptance of a new Paschalia. It could be an important practical move for an external union. The fact that next year Pascha will coincide in the West and the East will be utilized. It is considered as a convenient occasion to prolong the simultaneous celebration of Pascha for the coming years, but not on the date calculated by the Holy Ecumenical Councils, but as a fixed holy day celebrated simultaneously by all Christians.

According to existing information, Pope Paul VI wants to achieve union with the Orthodox during his lifetime. This is why he is pressing Constantinople, and quite a bit of progress has been made. Recently Patriarch Demetrios sent Metropolitan Meliton as head of a small delegation to visit all the Heads of the Autocephalous Churches in order to discuss the important steps toward union, even before the convocation of a Pan Orthodox Council. The question of the possibility of introducing the new Paschalia was discussed at the meeting of the WCC in Nairobi. It was resolved at that time, that everything possible should be done to find a solution to this problem, even before the convocation of a Pan Orthodox Council, in a preparatory meeting of the Pan Orthodox Conference, which is to take place this year and not later than next year. As per information from Geneva, this Conference "will be very important for the relations between the Orthodox and various non-Orthodox Churches, and in general for the cause of Ecumenism and Christian Unity."

ANNOUNCEMENT MADE BY METROPOLITAN MELITON.

The Senior Assistant to the Patriarch Demetrios of Constantinople, Metropolitan Meliton, visited New York in February. According to information from the Geneva bulletin of the Patriarchate, "Episkepsis" of March 15th, he made an official announcement in which he stressed the importance of an Archiepiskopia in America. He expressed the hope that the disagreement with the Church of Alexandria, in connection with its involvement in church affairs in America, might be happily resolved. The state of affairs worries Constantinople, which still hopes that "Alexandria's Patriarchate will show necessary wisdom." Questioned about the possibility of recognizing the autocephaly of the American Metropolia, the Metropolitan answered: "The state of affairs has not changed." "In the first place, it is requested that all of the parties honor the canonical order, resolve disagreements, and return to the pure canonical order and witness in the world of one united Orthodoxy." In reference to the dialogue with the Roman Catholics, Metropolitan Meliton said that in the near future the Ecumenical Patriarchate will mail to all the Churches involved, an epistle containing concrete suggestions for the meeting of the Iner-Orthodox Commission.

NEW ECCLESIOLOGY.

In March, at the Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambesi, Geneva, a Colloquium of the International Academy of Religious Knowledge took place, dedicated to the theme "Belonging to the Church". Prof. N. Nissiotis, a prominent ecumenist of the Constantinople Patriarchate, presented a supposedly Orthodox viewpoint. He developed the idea that membership in the Church cannot be limited by a narrow circle, defined by canons, but should be pictured as concentric circles around the Church, e.g. The Lord Jesus Christ. In the narrow sense, Nissiotis recognizes as church members, all those who participate in her Eucharistic life. In a broader sense, the Orthodox Church allegedly extends to other confessions which have unbroken Apostolic succession. Nissiotis, it seems, thinks that falling away from the Orthodox Church does not rupture the succession.) Further, Nissiotis ascribed to Orthodoxy, the belief in one more circle, which is Christian sects who consider themselves to be Churches because of their charismatic gifts.

And finally, the "cosmical dimensions of communion in Christ, which extends over all of humanity. In the same spirit of a broad concept of the Church, which annihilates all of her borders, a prominent Catholic theologian, Fr. Longar, considers all Christians not belonging to the Church to have the same status as catechumens, and in order to educate them religiously he suggests that they be admitted to a clearer and broader communion in the Sacraments, as the external sign of their belonging to the Church.

All of these reasonings, which practically disregard all Church borders, most probably serve as a preparation for the establishment of a unia between Rome and Constantinople.

JEWISH MANNER OF CELEBRATING EASTER BECOMES CUSTOMARY WITH CATHOLICS.

The widely distributed newspaper "The Daily News" reports that it is now customary for many Catholics to celebrate Pascha in the Jewish manner. On Holy Thursday of this year a group of Catholic nuns in Riverdale, N. Y. arranged a Paschal meal. They ate matzoh, drank kosher wine and sang Jewish hymns. It is also mentioned that in 1970, the notorious Jesuit Father Daniel Berrigan, well-known for his extremely radical-Left political views, attracted thousands of Cornell University students to a celebration of Pascha in the Jewish manner. The ancient rules of the Church, which forbid such deeds, are completely forgotten by the Catholic Church, being replaced conversely, by the longing for rapprochement with the representatives of the Jewish faith.

CATHOLICS AND MASONS.

The "National Catholic Register" of May 30th, 1976 points out the ambiguous position of the Catholic Church toward Masonry. On the one hand we have the words of Cardinal Cooke stating that he sees no objection to Catholics belonging to Masonic Lodges, which we quoted in our last Bulletin, and on the other hand Canon #2335 of the Code of Canon Law is recalled, which says: "Persons who have themselves enrolled in the Masonic sect or in other associations of the same kind which plot against the Church or the legitimate civil power, incur ipso facto excommunication reserved simply to the Apostolic See." In other words, their excommunication is processed without any special court rulings. Because of this, the conclusion is drawn that there are some lodges which take no part in any conspiracy against the Church, are not in opposition to it, and therefore membership in them is not restricted. There are some writers who say that the majority of lodges are in no opposition to the Catholic Church, mainly the lodges of the Scotland Rite. The defenders of Masonry say that, in general, the lodges are not hostile toward Christianity, they only consider it to be not obligatory. No one must believe in Christianity to "attain salvation and enjoy eternal happiness." Such a statement, as correctly noted by the Catholic Register, is a denial of Christianity, because in Masonry "Human reason becomes the only guide to religious belief and the Gospel of Christ stands on a par with the scriptures of Hinduism, the Koran and the Book of Mormons." "In practically every respect Masonry resembles the mystery religions and as such represents not Christianity but a return to paganism."

The National Catholic Register concludes that various problems have arisen which are a result of the much-cited letter of the Doctrinal Congregation to Cardinal Krol, of Sept. 18th, 1974, concerning permission for Catholics to be members of Masonic Lodges. This letter didn't even begin to answer all the bewildering questions in connection with these problems. Their importance calls for a definite and authoritative answer from Rome. We fear that such a document will be a long time coming. The Vatican has a tendency to use ambiguous formulas.

CATHOLICS IN THE COUNCILS OF CHURCHES.

Only a short time ago, Catholics were not permitted to participate in interconfessional organizations, and no where were they members of the Ecumenical Councils of Churches. Now the Ecumenical Press Service in its publication of May 13th, 1976 informs us that in America Catholic parishes are participating in six State Councils of Churches.

ECUMENICAL WEDDINGS.

The "New York Times" of May 9th, 1976 published a long article regarding the services in the interconfessional chapel of the United Nations. The article reports about several concelebrations of various faiths (Catholics, Protestants, Jews, etc.) and in particular, about the performance of many weddings. For example, there is a description of a wedding which was performed by a Catholic priest and a Jewish cantor. A Catholic blessed the ring and a cantor the wine. Both of them took turns in pronouncing the exclamations. The Cantor asked that his name not be published, as he was breaking the Jewish regulations. Yet the Catholic priest, on the contrary, stated that his Church permits such marriages. The service was performed at an altar on which there was a Crucifix, a Star of David and a Mohamedan Crescent and Star. Another wedding described was performed between a Roman Catholic and a Mohamedan.

GANG STEALING ICONS IS APPREHENDED.

Last year, the Soviet Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem reported the robbery of many icons and valuables from the Holy Trinity Cathedral. Now the Israeli police have rounded up a gang, which, it seems committed this robbery. As yet not all of the stolen property has been recovered, and some of the gang members could not be located.

BROAD ECUMENICAL PLANS.

The Magazine "Irenicon" #1 for 1976 has published a lecture given by the Greek Archimandrite Cyril Argenti, which he read at the conference in Nairobi, and which reveals the ecumenical plans of the Constantinople Patriarchate. The report concludes with the following words:

"In conclusion, let me express my wish, or better still my prayer, that, through the participation in the Ecumenical Council of all the Christian Churches, and in particular the ancient and very highly esteemed Roman Church, our elder sister, and all the Holy Churches which are in communion with her; through the deepening in Christ of all Church members, contemporary and future; through the action of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Unification, if not the 5th or the 6th or the nth assembly of the World Council of Churches, there will be one recognized by all Christian people as the Eighth Ecumenical Council of the One Ecumenical and Apostolic Church of Christ." (Underlined by us.)

In other words, the Orthodox theologian of the Constantinople Patriarchate, in this responsible lecture before numerous heretics, envisions the 8th Ecumenical Council, not as the Council of Orthodox Bishops, but as a meeting of representatives of various heresies.

EUCCHARISTIC HOSPITALITY.

In the last edition of our Bulletin we reported about the meeting of the West European Bishops of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Chambesi, Switzerland. "Irenicon" in #1 1976 reports one more detail. Metropolitan Meliton, who was the Presiding Bishop at this Conference, mentioned the subject of "Eucharistic Hospitality". This is the expression used to explain the communion of people who do not belong to the Orthodox Church. In the beginning, the Metropolitan expressed the Orthodox point of view, that "Communion crowns the unity, and is not the means of reaching it." Later on in his talk, he makes a completely contradictory statement. "It is unacceptable to undermine the zeal and thirst of a Christian who is asking for Communion in the Orthodox Church."

In this way, the doors are left wide open for the Communion of any kind of heretic. It seems that in his reasoning, the Metropolitan was guided, not by the canons and dogmas of the Church, but by his own personal "ecumenical" indiscretion.

STRUGGLE AGAINST TRADITION.

The new forms of the Mass which were introduced after the Vatican II Council quite often meet with disapproval of the faithful. Some priests do not wish to celebrate the new Mass and prefer the old Tridentine Mass. Yet the Catholic Episcopate insists on carrying out the reform and continues to persecute the priests who oppose it. The conservative Catholic paper "The Twin Circle" of June 13th, 1976 reports how Msgr. Raymond Ruscitto of California was persecuted by his Bishop for his refusal to renounce the old Mass. The Bishop believes that the Vatican has good reasons for insisting upon uniformity of rite. He himself admits that the new order helps very little.

"I must say, sometimes it doesn't seem so uniform. I, personally, can't stomach the dancers who tramp down the aisles, but then someone will show me a document demonstrating that dancing is permissible under the new liturgy."

NEW BLASPHEMY.

Beside the film "The Passover Plot", against which His Eminence Metropolitan Philaret has already raised a protest, the "National Catholic Register" informs us of the preparation of another film, "The Many Faces of Jesus" which is full of such blasphemy against Christ the Saviour, that we cannot even repeat how He is presented in it. This time the film is being prepared in Sweden, after the filming of it was forbidden in Denmark, and the showing of it was not permitted by the government after many protests were made. The head of the Swedish Lutheran Church filed a protest, describing the film as blasphemous and pronographic. Signatures were collected under the protest against this film at Easter time.

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