



One World, One Leader, One god

by Thomas Fleming

The unity of Christendom and the restoration of the American republic are themes that have intertwined their way through the numbers of this magazine, like the twin strands of the DNA double helix. The message does not always meet with approval. Recently, a man of wealth and influence told us that he was no longer interested in a particular nation like the United States or in a particular religion, namely Christianity. By implication, he would like to advance the goal of a world religion for a world-state. This is a man who passes for wise on Wall Street, and he has been intelligent enough not only to make huge sums of money on speculation but also to hold on to his fortune in good times and bad, a veritable Baruch (Bernard, that is, and not the prophet). Like too many men of business, however, he knows so little history (to say nothing of religion or philosophy) that he cannot see where his vision leads. A conservative by background and self-interest, he has given his mind (and the minds of his children and grandchildren) over to liberals who have licked it into shape like the proverbial she-bear and her cubs.

Ours is hardly the first age in which rulers have dreamed of uniting the world in secular government. Ever since the collapse of the Western empire, European rulers from Charlemagne to Hitler have used the trappings and symbols of Rome as justification for their expanding power, but even before Rome began its rise to world dominance, other Mediterranean races had claimed universal authority: Akkadians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians—each in its turn dominated the stage like a Vegas showgirl having her moment in the spotlight.

The prophet Baruch, apparently, lived in the time of the Babylonians, when the Lord's people were punished for their disobedience. Mingling with strangers in a polyglot Babel, the Jews had given in to the temptation to assimilate and to worship alien gods, which had neither physical might nor moral authority: "For as a scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers keepeth

nothing: so are their gods of wood, and laid over with silver and gold" (Baruch 6:20). A futile experiment in power politics had led to the subjugation of Israel and Judah, and the people paid in full the tragic wages of their error: the loss of their identity, their culture, and the religion that made them who they were.

For the Jews, Babylon became a symbol of earthly empire, as well as of their own desolation. Man's *libido dominandi*, the desire to subject the earth to one power, was exemplified in the construction of Babel, whose builders said, "Let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The result, as we learn, was the opposite of their intentions, and instead of securing the unity they sought, they were divided in language, and "the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth; and they left off to build the city." Their uncompleted city of the world remains the unfinished business of fallen man.

In the ancient Middle East, struggles between cities and nations were inevitably struggles between gods, and when my city beat your city, it meant that your gods were either destroyed or inducted onto a lower level of my god's pantheon. Religious unity—in any sense except a unity in adhering to the Truth—is the spiritual dimension of the world-empire that keeps ambitious men up late at night, plotting and scheming over peoples and territories that for them have little intrinsic worth. What an empire Mussolini coveted—Ethiopia and Albania, countries not worth the wig of a good tenor at La Scala! And when the World Council of Great Religions has its way, it will domineer over an empire of spiritual Albanias, welding United Methodists, Evangelical Lutherans, Reform Jews, humanitarian Muslims, and Daishonin Buddhists into a universal unfaith.

Universalism—whether of power, of religion, or of principles—is a chimera in both senses of the word: It is a monster as well as a myth. The persistent heresy that all souls—including

Satan's—will some day be reconciled to God finds its modern analogue in the theory (going back at least to Kant) that all moral principles, to be valid, must be applied universally. Like God, we are to be no respecters of persons, and if we have a duty to rear our children, that duty must be generalized as an obligation to all children; and if a man is supposed to help his neighbor, this means that he must be taxed for the benefit of complete strangers.

From a Christian perspective, this is all worse than nonsense. Both Scripture and Tradition enjoin particular duties which, while they do not exclude universal obligations on principle, make it impossible for Christians to adopt (much less to act on) such fantastic notions. When I say "Christian," I mean of course trinitarians—Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants who have the courage to accept the full force of the Incarnation. Of Unitarians, Mormons, Witnesses, and so-called liberal Christians, I make no criticism of what they are or what they do: They are often good people who believe what they believe, but they only confuse matters in calling themselves Christian.

The Trinity is not simply an irrational article of faith which we believe because we are told to—like not drinking wine or coffee—or a traditional ritual like the blessing of a fleet: It is central and definitive to a Christian understanding of the world. We are taught to say that Christianity is a monotheist religion, but I do not like to hear our faith called a religion, much less to have it included in a category. Islam is a "monotheist religion"; Christianity (so we believe) is adherence to the Way, the Truth, and the Life. God, as we and the Jews believe, is one. But He is also three. Setting aside the mysteries of the Holy Ghost, Christians have a view of life and politics profoundly different from strict monotheists, if only because our God condescended to become man, to eat what we eat, to suffer as we suffer—and more. In this sense, we are more like the Greek poet Pindar, who declared that the race of gods and the race of men were one, than we are like the Muslims.

"The philosophical source from which the slavery of man derives is monism." Berdyaev's *Slavery and Freedom* is not, perhaps, the most orthodox authority to invoke in an argument about the Trinity, but Chesterton made a similar point in opposing the Christian understanding of the Incarnation to the despotic Orient where the unbridgeable gap between God and man was only slightly greater than the distance between the ruler and his slaves. For Berdyaev, the mystery of Christ is "the mystery of the paradoxical union of the one and the many," because Christ represents all of humanity but is at the same time "a concrete individual man in time and space."

In Christ, the problem of the one and the many that obsessed the Greeks—the unity of truth in a plurality of phenomena—is resolved, and resolved in a fashion that clarifies what Aristotle was striving to discover in his account of universals—the absolute principles which (unlike Plato's forms) do not exist on their own but are inherent or immanent in the individuals of this world. Christ is both the universal God Who transcends all categories—in Whom there is no East and West—and at the same time the Word Who gives true meaning to the categories—without Whom there is no East and West, even in a literal sense.

What in America we call federalism—the recognition of sovereignty at every social level—is the product of a habit of thinking that is both Christian and Aristotelian. Our *E pluribus unum* discloses a deeper insight into the nature of hu-

man life than most of the Founders grasped. They lived, however, within a smoking cinder of Christendom that still retained some of the bright light of its youth: The Anglican colonists, for example, governed themselves in parishes under the jurisdiction of the bishop of London who was subject to the English primate, the archbishop of Canterbury, whose relations with his brothers were strained, to say the least, but an English episcopal church only made sense in the context of other apostolic churches. In *Religio Medici* (1642), Thomas Browne called it both "an unjust scandall of our adversaries" and a "grosse error" of his fellow Anglicans "to compute the Nativity of our Religion from Henry the eight, who though he rejected the Pope, refus'd not the faith of Rome."

Most Puritans rejected such logic, but in their own congregational organization they exemplified the lower-order federalism that would typify the early years of the American republic. However, even the most authoritarian church, the Roman Catholic Church after the Council of Trent, is a model of devolution compared with most European nation-states in the same period. Perhaps it is only accidental that the early Church, in taking over the structure of the Roman world, evolved into a loose hierarchy of parishes, dioceses, patriarchal sees, presided over (not ruled) by the Roman patriarch, but it is the same sort of accident that brought Christ into the world at the point where the revelations of the Hebrew prophets could be expressed and defended in Greek philosophical terms and spread throughout a world governed by Roman law and Roman political order.

The unity of the Church is the unity of free men in Christ and in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, not the monist and universalist empire of a divine pharaoh or of the caliph who speaks for Allah. In the Christian world, there is almost always a tension—an enduring conflict—between the claims of the Church and the claims of the empire and its successors. To make good their claims, emperors arrested popes, popes humiliated emperors, and while both spectacles are less than edifying, they are evidence of a separation of powers that persists in spite of the worst efforts of secularist bishops and sacrilegious rulers.

The schisms that have divided Christ's body—as the soldiers divided His garments—are the worst scandals in Christendom, worse, by far than dissolute popes, heretical sects, and the laxity of faith that is the chief characteristic of modern times. To obviate the usual arguments and exceptions, I am willing to believe most of what is said by all sides against each other: that Rome was poaching on Orthodox territories and inserting innovations into the creed, that the Byzantine Church had fallen under the sway of the emperor, that the Renaissance Church practiced the foulest abuses, that Luther was an egoist and an oath-breaker. There is enough blame to go around, as there is in any marriage, and after the shame of a divorce it may be impossible to think clearly or speak honestly of the ex-spouse—until, perhaps, one or both of them is dying. With Christendom in its death throes, I wonder if there is any chance of patching things up.

So far as most Western Christians are concerned, the answer seems to be no. One Western attitude toward Orthodoxy is summed up in a recent article in *Archaeology*, giving the details of several major cases of vandalism and theft perpetrated against Orthodox churches on Cyprus. It was bad enough that we have abandoned our Greek Orthodox brothers, once again, to the brutality of the Turks, but we have even learned how to make

money by looting their churches—perhaps the inevitable response of a consumerist society. “Ironically,” the dealer who turned on his colleagues and collaborated with the investigation was a descendant of both Rembrandt and Rubens.

After the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, Western churches rushed in, not to help the struggling Orthodox—oppressed by decades of atheist communism—to get back on their feet, but to poach on their territory. Rewriting history, Catholics are claiming the whole of the Ukraine as their possession, and in Bosnia the Catholic bishops appear content with the massive destruction of Orthodox churches and the expulsion of the bishops. On a recent trip, I spent time with two Orthodox bishops—one in Bijeljina, the other in Trebinje, both of them driven from their sees.

Confronted with evidence that Orthodox Christians are facing extinction in Kosovo, the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on International Policy has released a statement condemning the Orthodox Serbs for crimes against humanity “chillingly similar” to the ethnic cleansings practiced in Bosnia. Almost simultaneously, the Catholic News Service released a statement quoting a Muslim cleric to the effect that the Koran forbids the killing of the innocent. In other words, there are bad Muslims, who are terrorists, and good Muslims, who are not, but the only good Orthodox are dead Orthodox.

The American bishops’ lack of sympathy with the Orthodox seems to contradict the Pope’s stated desire to reconcile East and West. Comparing the Catholic and Orthodox Churches to the two lungs of the body, Pope John Paul II has even encouraged uniate churches (i.e., Eastern churches in union with Rome) to omit the disputed *filioque* in the Nicene Creed. Unfortunately the Pope, in making the difficult journey to unification, has made a diplomatic wrong turn by going to Zagreb for the beatification of Cardinal Stepinac. Although Stepinac appears to have acted heroically in resisting communism after the war, his initial enthusiasm for the Croatian Nazi government of Ante Pavelic, which pursued an official and announced policy of genocide against the Orthodox, has made him in the eyes of the Serbs—however unfairly—a symbol of the Catholic Church’s hostility to the Orthodox.

In the Balkans, where one does not expect fair play, it is somewhat surprising that the Bishop of Mostar (whose Orthodox brother lives, now, in the Republika Srpska) has unequivocally condemned the fraudulent “apparitions” at Medjugorje—phony miracles that have funded the Croatian war machine and drawn attention away from the scene of Croatian atrocities in World War II. Despite Bishop Ratko Peric’s statements and the conclusive investigative reporting of E. Michael Jones in his recent book, *The Medjugorje Deception*, the Vatican maintains a discreet silence on Medjugorje. Technically, the decision does belong to the local bishop; nonetheless, according to Cardinal Ratzinger, the Vatican was on the point of issuing a statement when the break-up of Yugoslavia complicated things.

The beatification of Stepinac, coupled with continued acquiescence in the racketeering Franciscans at Medjugorje, are “chillingly similar” to the Vatican’s cordial relations with Nazi Croatia in the 1940’s, and the Orthodox, understandably, are alarmed by what they see as evidence of a continuing Catholic conspiracy against their church. There are, however, less sinister explanations: Michael Jones argues that Pope John Paul II cannot help viewing Croatian anti-communists through a Polish lens. However, the Orthodox, who can only interpret the

Catholic Church’s recent actions in the light of their own experience, are in no mood for ecumenical dialogue.

Protestants have been, if anything, more predatory than the Catholics in recent years. Instead of sending missionaries to convert the anti-Christians who now inhabit the Protestant heartland—Germany, Switzerland, Britain, and Scandinavia—Protestants are using the allure of Western capitalism as bait for the downtrodden Orthodox. The implied message is “Forget about all those stuffy traditions and switch to the religion of jeans and coke and mutual funds.” The pitch reminds me of the atheist parody of a Pepsi commercial popular in the 50’s:

Christianity hits the spot.
Twelve apostles, that’s a lot.
Jesus Christ, the virgin too,
Christianity is for you.

To be fair, I do not think that these missionary groups have reflected upon their motives. When I asked one of their leaders if he worked through local churches in Russia, he told me, “Always.” But, asked if that included the Orthodox, he replied—without batting an eye—“Never,” as if it were inconceivable. I repeated this story to a Lutheran friend, who was quick to defend the missionaries: “Oh, but the Russian Orthodox are trying to exclude us.” I tried to explain that religious pluralism is not a Christian ideal but an invention of modern liberalism, and I sketched out a little of the heroic history of Orthodox churches in the Slavic world and explained what the Orthodox had suffered in the past few generations. Why should we treat them like heathens, I asked, simply because they are poor and vulnerable? Seeing that the lady, a good and compassionate Christian, was faltering, I put the question plainly: Are the Orthodox Christian or not? If they are not, there is a great deal of history that must be rewritten—going back to the days of the apostles—and if they are Christian, then how can we justify our treatment of them?

The Orthodox can give as bad as they get, and even from Greek and Slavic Americans, I am beginning to hear the paranoid fantasy of a vast Vatican conspiracy (in tandem with the Freemasons) to destroy Orthodoxy. Although some of the best Christians I know are Anglicans who converted to Orthodoxy, converts are generally more fanatical than cradle Orthodox. One of them recently told me that all Western Christians were heretics, and that Copts and Monophysites were more “Orthodox” than the regular “Byzantines”—the Copts really know how to keep their women in place, apparently, and this is a real plus for an emasculate American who is afraid of women. The next stop is Islam and a quartet of mail-order brides from the Philippines.

But even if all the obstacles and misunderstandings were set aside, the prospects for Christian unity would be far from bright, if only because most ecumenical projects have a queer smell to them. Schemes to unify the Church are exactly like proposals for world government, that is, thinly disguised imperialisms, which take the form either of Rome or Constantinople graciously condescending to admit the prodigal son back into the family (with suitable concessions to the poor fellow’s injured vanity) or, even worse, a blueprint for a universal church bureaucracy that would transcend all the sectarian hierarchies and, ultimately, reach out to Muslims, Buddhists, and who

knows what else. The only thing worse than schism would be a false unity based on power and self-interest.

My own latitudinarian views, which have succeeded in offending most of my serious Christian friends (whether Orthodox, Protestant, or Catholic), were inspired by English theologians as different from each other as Richard Baxter and Thomas Browne. The opening pages of Browne's *Religio Medici* ought to be read and reread by anyone about to engage in a controversy with Christians of a different tradition. Professing himself a good Anglican Protestant, Browne goes on to reserve certain questions to his own reason or humor. "I condemn not all things in the Council of Trent, nor approve all in the Synod of Dort." Although a sincere Protestant, Browne refused to engage in scurrility against papists: "There is between us one common name and appellation, one faith, and necessary body of principles common to us both." In Europe, he scandalized his English friends by attending Masses and processions, but, he insists, he could "never see any rationall consequence from those many texts which prohibite the children of Israel to pollute themselves with the Temples of the Heathens; we being all Christians."

Confessing to a certain fondness for superstitious ritual—"I love to use the civility of my knees, my hat, and hands"—Browne says that he wept at sacred processions, "while my consorts, blinde with opposition and prejudice, have fallen into an eccesse of scorne and laughter." He acknowledges the dangers lurking in the rituals of the Greek, Roman, and African churches, but they are ceremonies "whereof the wiser zeales doe make a Christian use."

An Anglican who could attend Mass and find good things to say about Calvin would inevitably attract the charge of deism, especially if he constructed a natural theology on the basis of his scientific research and his reading of pagan philosophy. Nevertheless, when Dr. Johnson reviewed the evidence, he concluded that "Browne was a zealous adherent to the faith of Christ, that he lived in obedience to his laws and died in confidence of his mercy."

Neither Johnson nor Browne ever seriously flirted with the Scarlet Woman; both were staunch Anglicans who occasionally took up the Catholic perspective and judged it fairly. Thomas More said that he would give even the Devil the benefit of law, and I hope he would have done the same for Martin Luther. Chesterton gave the Anglicans their due (perhaps more than their due), and a Catholic priest once reproached me for being too hard on the Pentecostalists for their emotional hysteria. God had been merciful, he said, in giving such emotional blessings to those who were deprived of the consolation of the sacraments.

I have met more than a few evangelicals who conceded that Catholics might actually be Christians, and there must be a few Pentecostalists who can match the generosity of my friend, the priest. We might all take a cue from a scene in Robert Duval's recent film, *The Apostle*. Duval plays an all-too-passionate Holiness preacher fleeing a homicide charge. Finding himself on the edge of a bayou in Cajun country, he watches as a Catholic priest blesses a procession of gaily decorated fishing boats. He smiles and says to himself, "You got your way, I got mine, but we both get the job done."

DICTATIONS

Parsing or Posing?

Bill Clinton has enriched the American political vocabulary in so many ways, giving us (along with jokes involving knee-pads and Buddhist nuns) such expressions as "I feel your pain," "conduct that was not appropriate," and "depends on what your definition of is is."

The last example, along with the President's celebrated quibbles on the meaning of words like "sexual" and "alone" inspired his more loyal followers to praise him for "parsing" his sentences carefully, by which they apparently meant choosing his words in such a way as to avoid a jail term for perjury. How persuasive these efforts prove will depend on how Americans will parse "parse."

When I went to school, the schoolmarms still clung to the definition given in the OED:

To describe (a word in a sentence) grammatically, by stating the part of speech, inflexion, and relation to the rest of the sentence; to resolve (a sentence, etc.) into its component parts of speech and describe them grammatically.

Parsing is an honorable, if stodgy, exercise that used to consume half of an intermediate Latin class. What Clinton was doing with his words would better be described by such phrases as "splitting hairs," "logic chopping," and "mincing words." But all those expressions, appropriate as they are, suggest that the Commander-in-Chief is being sneaky or underhanded and may even be dissimulating.

In other words, the President's friends cannot even be honest when they admit he is lying. The next step will be to issue a statement denying that Bill Clinton ever parsed a sentence in his life, which will be the first true statement made by this administration.

—Humpty Dumpty

The Great Schism

Grounds for Division,
Grounds for Unity

by Fr. Hugh Barbour, O. Praem.



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

In August 1994, I was happy to be one of the many Latin clerics who over the years, *in divisa* or *in borghese*, have made a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain of Athos, the Garden of the Mother of God. On the Feast of the Lord's Transfiguration, I was able to set foot on that peninsula where souls and bodies hidden from the world, but known to God and His angels, share still in the bright glory of the mystery narrated in the Holy Gospels. I made this pilgrimage with the blessing of my abbot after attending an international meeting of some clergy. On Athos, I expected to be refreshed and edified, and I was, after having had to breathe deeply the atmosphere of a sadly typical postconciliar gathering of ecclesiastics—some of whom were merely juridically Roman Catholic—for whom God and the things of God could scarcely be said to hold the primacy, and the Pope not at all.

In a shop by the docks at the little western port of the mountain, I found a postcard of an icon depicting a touching and curious scene: "The Lamentation over Constantine Palaiologos" written at the Old Calendarist hesychasterion of the Mother of God of the Myrtle Tree in Attica. In the icon, the emperor reposes on a bier with a candle as two women mourn on either side: one kneeling, written as "Orthodoxy," and the other, "Hellas," standing with her hand to her mouth in a gesture of reverence, calling to mind the original sense of the imperial Roman *adoratio*. A touching scene, because it brings to mind the magnificent "courage born of despair," as even the malicious Gib-

bon puts it, with which the last of the Roman emperors died leading the defense of his New Rome; yet still a curious one, since this Constantine XII died in communion with the see of Old Rome, having received the eucharistic viaticum that morning at a uniate liturgy, the last to be served in the Church of Holy Wisdom. Even more curious was the figure "Hellas," for nothing could be less Byzantine, less Orthodox, less imperial, than the use of this term to name the nation of Greek-speaking *Romaioi*.

To Orthodox Byzantium, "hellenic" meant secular, pagan, something worse than heterodox, to be anathematized in the synodikon on the first Sunday of Great Lent. At the time of the fall of the city, a "hellene" was one who, by promoting the Florentine Platonic revival, exceeded even the utilitarian impiety of the Florentine *latinophrones* (Greek latinizers). The figure of Orthodoxy, undoubtedly the most important in the image, was in very strange company indeed, with anomalies more than anachronistic. That this icon was the work of Old Calendarists who clearly intended it to be the expression of a rigorously Orthodox historical sensibility indicates a fact, more relevant than ever, which those of us who sympathize with the zealots, Catholic and Orthodox, must keep in mind. We must be vigilant to ensure that in our understanding and defense of right belief and right worship we do not adopt the ideological preoccupations of political and philosophical movements, sometimes those of our friends and allies, which are foreign to our faith and its tradition, lest we undermine the very thing we are striving to preserve. We must examine carefully the understanding and instincts of the best representatives of our twin tradition, East-

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