

EXCURSUS I

Tracy Early on

The Third Rome

Two Romes have fallen, but the third stands. And a fourth there shall not be.—Philotheus (1511)

It may be fanciful to recall Philotheus and his concept of the Third Rome when Moscow anathematizes Santiago Carillo, but perhaps not entirely. Carillo does compare himself with Luther, and the Spanish party does complain of Soviet inquisitors. Some see excommunications at hand.

Philotheus, a monk of Pskov, pointed out to Vasili (Basil) III that the first Rome had departed into heresy, the New Rome of Constantine now lay under the infidel Turk and responsibility for leadership of the Orthodox Christian world thus fell to Moscow.

Despite a change of religions, the responsibility of leadership remains in Moscow, in the view of the Kremlin, and its Holy Office will uphold orthodoxy against heretics anywhere in the world.

Considerable evidence supported the theory of a Third Rome. Vasili's father, Ivan III, had thrown off Tartar rule, rendering Moscow the only Orthodox center able to operate independently. To symbolize his succession, Ivan married the niece of the last Caesar of New Rome. Vasili himself expanded and strengthened the Moscow principality-becoming-empire. And his son Ivan IV (the Terrible) took up the title Caesar (Czar) in 1547, later acquiring Siberia to give his empire a scope more worthy of the title. In 1589 the Russian church, already exercising de facto independence, became a Patriarchate, blessed by Constantinople. Meanwhile, Western Christendom was breaking apart. It is not difficult to see how the idea that Moscow had become a Third Rome could arise logically from historical reflection. The further assertion—"a fourth there shall not be"—emerged perhaps from the collective unconscious, if such a thing there be.

Whatever the source, a conviction that destiny has given Moscow a world role remains operative. And this conviction in Moscow gathers reinforcement not only from Russia's superpower status but from testimony of the faithful in other lands, and their visits of submission *ad limina apostolorum*. Not totally without reason, one concedes. Though critics speak of captive nations, the sight of more than a hundred ethnic groups living in peace with some degree of economic justice can lead others to give the sort of acclaim that once went to the *Pax Romana* of Augustus.

Originally the Third Rome concept was more political than religious. Philotheus addressed his remarks to the secular power, not the spiritual. The Russian church did (does) seek to maximize its role abroad, but "the see of Moscow, in spite of its great power and wealth, never formally claimed to supplant the ecumenical primacy of Constan-

tinople," writes John Meyendorff. Though legends arose to give the Russian church an apostolic foundation, its actual historical dependence remained too obvious for a claim to head the universal church.

That embarrassment ended with the 1917 Revolution. The new faith founded by Lenin was first planted in Russia, had Moscow as its Holy See, and preserved Lenin's apostolic bones for veneration by pilgrims. Elsewhere, the Leninist church has developed in dependence on Moscow, so the claim becomes more credible that adherence to the true faith entails remaining in communion with Rome III, which claims a universal primacy of jurisdiction and the power to define dogma infallibly.

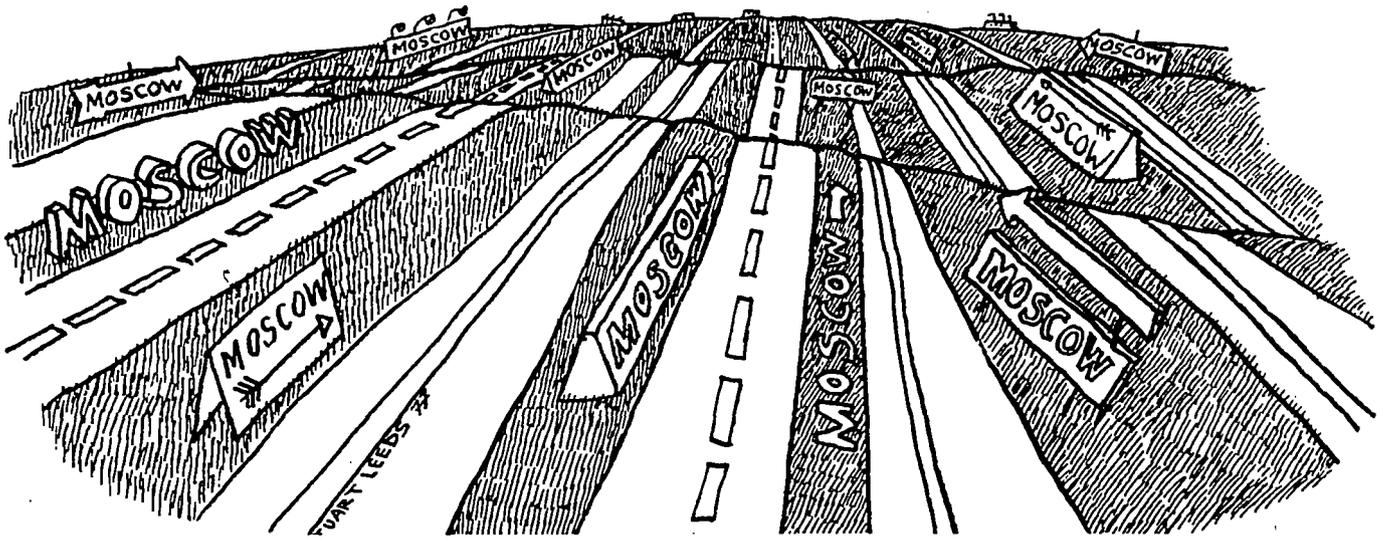
Fortunately/unfortunately, however, attempts to organize the world's political life from a single center always fail. If the earth's surface is not flat but more like a sphere, as modern scientists teach, it cannot have a center—or every spot can make itself the center. Yugoslavia will do that, at least for Tito's lifetime. And the rulers of Peking, now as in the past, consider their country the Middle Kingdom.

The great obstacle to every Roman primacy is the competing claim of tribe, nation, race. And many national parties now resist demands that they keep their movements in the Russian orbit. The heretic Carillo declares, "The world communist movement is no longer a church, and Moscow is no longer Rome." Western Communists speak of national interests and even of military defense. Should an attack come from the East, the world could see Communist killing Communist, just as Christian has killed Christian in national conflicts of the past.

Pleasing as Moscow's troubles appear in many circles in the United States, Americans should perhaps not view them with excessive self-righteousness, since they themselves have not always resisted the temptation to exalt Washington as the controlling center of the world. Hannah Arendt noted that the Founding Fathers sought to establish "a new Rome" and "consciously set out to imitate the Roman example and to emulate the Roman spirit." As before, this new Rome began in the spirit of a republic, overthrowing the kings, but grew to imperial dimensions. A favorite theme of native oratory has been the danger that unless America properly comport itself, it will fall like Gibbon's Rome—with the presumption that it is and ought to be a new imperial power.

From the religious perspective, Christians should not view the rebellions against Moscow with unreflective glee. Efforts to create a world community, whether given a name like proletarian internationalism, Holy Roman Empire, or whatever, carry an element of validity alongside their pretensions. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh," Reinhold Niebuhr liked to quote. But there is tragedy along with the comedy. Should anyone exult that a clash of Russian and other nationalisms has blackened a dream of the exploited throughout the world uniting to throw off their chains?

Charles de Gaulle predicted that claims of the



nation would ultimately prevail. If he is proved right, Christians with their own vision of international community, and their own conspicuous failures to achieve it, might feel moved to lament at least as much as they rejoice.

Tracy Early is a writer living in New York.

EXCURSUS II

Martin Green on **Literary Criticism and War**

Bookmen like myself tend to think we know all about the imaginative life. We identify the whole range of man's imaginative life with literature; and if it is the novelist and the poet who explore new modes of feeling, it is the critic and the scholar who patrol and administer them. Thus bookmen are in fact the legislators of mankind. And most other intellectuals assent implicitly to our claim. Only among anti-intellectuals am I aware of much resistance.

The idea is nonsense. Literature seen from this point of view (as an ordering and organizing activity within the imaginative life) is a cultural function that works against other cultural functions. It is not the imagination as a whole but one form of the imagination, and it is in polar opposition to other forms. Its opponents vary from period to period, though the opposition usually seems eternal and essential at the time. For instance, in earlier ages it was often said, with great plausibility, that sexual experience could not be put into literature. Our generation of novelists, helped by the general erotic movement of our culture, has disproved that. It was a big change, demanding moral, intellectual, and aesthetic effort. Mailer used to talk about a sexual frontier, which was where the action was for a writer. Now that frontier is settled.

But polarity is permanent. Literature is still hostile to certain kinds of experience; notably to war. Novelists are often interested in writing about war;

but critics aren't. In the individual novelist's mind "literature" acts as a drag on his enterprise. If we had a militarist movement in our culture, like the erotic movement, the polarity could no doubt be overcome; but we haven't.

These reflections are prompted by reading Peter G. Jones's *War and the Novelist* (University of Missouri Press), a survey of American novels about the Second World War, Korea, and Vietnam; and particularly prompted by the book's foreword by M.L. Rosenthal.

Rosenthal begins by quoting Whitman, who said about the Civil War: "The real war will never get into the books." Even *our* novels, says Rosenthal, which name much grosser realities than the books of the 1860's, soon lose their ability to shock. The fact is undeniable, but I doubt the implied explanation. What strikes me is not the dulling power of artistic conventions in general, but the social distance between the experience of war in particular and the literary experience. Rosenthal seems to have realized that distance and that opposition only in the middle of writing his foreword.

His language is highly emotional, and itself full of the imagery of war. "Compassion, like shocked dismay, flames up and then is muffled by the sheer number of demands on it, and the usual distance of most of us from what is happening." He protests (implicitly) against Peter Jones's objectivity of tone—the "clear intellectual perspective" in which he puts the novels, and against the way Jones "spreads the information about them before us." Jones is a professional army man, and that "puts him at a considerable remove from people who find it impossible to imagine using a gun or a bayonet." This disturbance of Rosenthal's—at war and at Jones's undisturbedness—produces some very turgid sentences. "On that issue of war's timelessness and universality depends the matter of whether humanity can at last act in its own interests rather than suffering abject subjection again and again to the 'policies' of governments trapped by set rituals of response and decision." This flurry of clichés—the reading man's protest phrases, worn thin by overuse, fluttering up like paper against the