

# Voice of History Warns Europe: Unite or Die

By KAREL HUJER

Last summer our arrival in Istanbul, the former Constantinople, followed shortly the visit of Pope Paul VI to this Second Rome. His visit would have been matter of course had he not done the unprecedented—he prayed in Hagia Sofia. Politically this was a greater upset than the earthquake which shook Turkey just prior to the pope's arrival. In all stratas of society, the Turks were irked. The basilica Ayastia, or Hagia Sofia, once the second most sacred sanctuary of Christendom, became a sacred Muhammadan mosque May 29, 1453, after Mohammed II conquered Constantinople. It remained so until 1935, when Ataturk, the reformer of modern Turkey, converted it into a secularized museum. Yet Turkish citizens angrily commented "What business was it of the papal visitor to say a Christian prayer in what has been a Muhammadan mosque for half a millenium?"

This significant incident unexpectedly widened our experience in strategic Istanbul on the historic crossroad between Europe and Asia. Arriving from the fabulous Aegean Sea on a modern Russia ship (built in East Germany) and passing through the Dardanelles in early morning, we caught a first glimpse of this city beautiful on the Bosphorus in the full sunshine of early afternoon. Countless minarets reveal the impact of the Islamic conquest on that former capital of Byzantine Christianity.

The narrow gap between Scutari and Galata, the Asiatic and Eu-

ropean coasts, allows an excellent panorama, which displays the entire picture of Istanbul's rich history. Dominating the scene is the majestic Hagia Sofia, with its four minarets.

Some three or four miles north, just across the bay, stands the medieval bastion, Rumelhisari. Here Turkish sultans remained entrenched for almost a century, closely watching, awaiting the opportunity to conquer this sacred city of Byzantine Christendom. The right moment came with the advancing schism and the rupture of almost half a millenium between Rome and Constantinople, also the time when western Christianity was torn by rising Protestantism. This eventually ushered in the apocalyptic year 1453.

Our first steps in Istanbul inevitably led toward Hagia Sofia. One hears much of its magnificence and its superb mosaics. Externally the basilica has lost its original appearance through many additions and alterations. Entering through the side gateway below the uncovered mosaic of two Byzantine emperors dedicating the city and the sanctuary, we found ourselves under the majestic vaults of the sanctuary, perhaps second only to St. Peter's in Rome. Yet we had to search for the famous Christian mosaics. What is left are only scraps that escaped the fury of fanatic conquerors. Even these for several centuries were covered with mortar.

Six huge hideous wooden plaques with Arabic inscriptions about three yards in diameter are attached to the walls, greatly defacing the interior that once saw the

pure splendor of the work of great architects. One only realizes the sad impact and ruthless desecration that once overwhelmed this part of the Christian world.

Every major event in history such as the emergence of Istanbul-Constantinople as a second Rome, has an inevitable symptomatic bearing on the course of events of our age. When Constantinople fell in 1453 and became the capital of the Ottoman empire, this created the third Rome—Moscow.

Russian tsars became protectors and the supreme head of the Greek Orthodox church. It was in this atmosphere that religious zeal shaped the exclusive messianism of the Byzantine church.

When Pope Paul VI recently called on Athenagoras, the Patriarch of Istanbul, without waiting for a report of their discussions, Alexei, Patriarch of Moscow and of all Russia, expressed concern over what he depicted as false expectations about achieving Christian unity. Alexei evidently voiced the line of the present masters of Russia. The division that now exists in the Christian world of Graeco-Roman heritage, however, is not of a religious nature. In our age of materialistic apostacy, it has shifted into the secular political arena. It no longer is Rome and Constantinople. Today it is Washington and Moscow, both ardent devotees of the same holy science — the religion of the twentieth century.

And let us not forget that the Third Rome of the then holy, white-walled Moscow, accidentally coin-

cides with the Third International, whose messianic role today is: "Proletaries of All Nations, Unite!" Russia's traditional autocracy, whether tsarist or Communist, challenges Washington's democracy as once Sparta opposed Athens. The Marquis de Custine, after visiting post-Napoleonic Russia in 1838, recorded a significant comment that does not lose its timeliness: "And that kneeling slave nourishes in his mind the dream of world domination."

As the triumphant march and glittering pageant of a half century of October revolution will be trumpeted into the entire bemused world from Moscow's Red Square, let us soberly reflect on how schismatic Christendom was once overrun by the Turks, with even Vienna long under siege.

Today the divided Western World is witnessing a portentous rising power in the Far East. Also adepts of western ideas, they are feverishly dedicated to the same "holy" science, and have already constructed a thermonuclear bomb far ahead of all naive expectations (we particularly hail and honor optimistic illusions.) The first onslaught could aim at Russia, which has seen many Asiatic invasions. If the Russian general indifferently remarked when facing a loss of soldiers "There are many of us," then China won't mind losing one hundred million in any future conflict.

Our present times are fraught with incalculable portents of unforeseeable events. The voice of history calls firmly and imperatively upon schismatic, divided Europe to "Unite or die." Is such selfless union without reservation possible?