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Hyacinthe Destivelle, O.P. *The Moscow Council (1917-1918): The Creation of the Conciliar Institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church*. Translated by Jerry Ryan, edited by Michael Plekon and Vitaly Permiakov. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015. xviii + 447 pp. \$40.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-268-02617-2.

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In the chaotic and creative atmosphere of the revolutionary year of 1917, the Russian Orthodox Church convened in Moscow for its first council since 1667. Between August 1917 and September 1918, 564 delegates, the majority elected and over half of them laypeople, undertook a wholesale examination of church life and administration with a view to complete reform. On November 5, 1917, just days after the Bolshevik seizure of power, the council took its most significant and lasting step: it restored the patriarchate, which had been abolished under Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725). Although the council was unable to take up many important issues raised in its commissions before political and financial exigencies forced it to adjourn in September 1918, it nevertheless discussed and adopted wide-ranging decrees addressing the organization of the church, pastoral activity, and the relationship between church and state.

In this valuable volume, Hyacinthe Destivelle, a theologian, Dominican priest, and author of a major book on theological studies in late imperial Russia, offers an analysis of the decrees of the council and their reception. English translations of these decrees, and of the statute of the council, are also provided as useful appendices. Although the work of the council was incomplete and the decrees were adopted in haste, Destivelle argues that three main concerns can be discerned: a desire to reorganize the church on the principle of conciliarity, the renewal of pastoral activity and the reform of church discipline, and the rethinking of the relationship between church and state. The council's most significant legacy, he asserts, was not simply the restoration of the patriar-

chate but the very renewal of the institution of councils in the life of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Destivelle begins by exploring the intellectual and organizational origins of the council. He suggests that the church found itself in a paradoxical situation in the early twentieth century, one that combined structural paralysis and spiritual renewal. In spite of the abolition of the patriarchate and the church's administrative incorporation into the state structure by Peter the Great, by the nineteenth century the church was also enjoying a monastic renewal and increased social role through missions and the parish school system. Destivelle focuses in particular on how interest in a revival of church councils emerged from the failure of attempts at reform and, especially, from the idea of *sobornost'* developed by the Slavophiles. The Slavophiles coined this term, with its roots in the Russian word meaning both council and church building (*sobor*), to enunciate the essentially collective nature of the church, the "unity in diversity" of laity, clergy, and bishops. The term, Destivelle points out, was taken up both by those advocating a democratization of the church and by those who focused more particularly on the conciliar root of the word, in order to assert that councils of bishops should hold supreme power in the church.

When the revolution of 1905 suddenly raised acutely the question of church reform with the Decree on Religious Tolerance (Ob ukreplenii nachal veroterpimosti) in April and the October Manifesto's declaration of freedom of conscience, calls for a council were heard in various

quarters. At the end of December of that year, Nicholas II (r. 1894-1917) decreed the beginning of preparations for a council. There followed twelve years of frustration, for a council was not called, but also of extensive preparatory work. As a result, many of the key issues for discussion had been identified and the critical question of whether members of the parish clergy and the laity would participate had been resolved in favor of their representation before the Provisional Government announced the convocation of a council on April 29, 1917. In the end, the Preconciliar Committee (*Predsobornyi sovet*) would go beyond the statute proposed by the prerevolutionary deliberations, introducing a formula that gave the clergy and laity a deliberative (rather than merely consultative) vote in the general assembly, while at the same time reserving a veto (requiring three-quarters of votes) for the Conference of Bishops (*Soveshchanie episkopov*). This model, Destivelle asserts, provided a successful balance between the assembly of the whole church and the bishops' authority. The council, he argues, then functioned essentially as a "constituent assembly" aiming to reorganize church life on the principle of conciliarity (p. 73).

The heart of the book is Destivelle's close analysis of the actual decrees of the council, approaching them primarily from a theological perspective. Although he refers to debates inasmuch as he needs them to explicate the council's decisions, he does not address in detail the extensive discussions that took place in the committee and council meetings of that eventful year so much as their results. (Those materials were made available to researchers only in the dying days of the Soviet Union and run to the thousands of pages. Scholars have tended to be more interested in these discussions.)[1] One debate to which he gives some attention is that between the conciliarists and the patriarchists over whether or not to elect a patriarch—and thus over differing conceptions of *sobornost'*. The resulting decision represented a compromise between the two, establishing a patriarchate, while asserting that the patriarch would be simply the first among equals and accountable to the council. In Destivelle's view, this model tended more to a "parliamentary" than a "presidential" vision of the patriarchate. He then traces the council's attempt to reorganize church life based on the principle of conciliarity. This included introducing the elective principle into the synod and giving bishops more authority and autonomy by having them elected in their dioceses rather than appointed by the synod. Particularly important, according to Destivelle, was the reform of the parish to give it more autonomy and strengthen the role of the elected church wardens

(who could, moreover, be women). This, he notes, would help parishes to survive the years of persecution ahead. Similarly, monasteries were restructured along conciliar lines, thereby given greater autonomy, but also encouraged to participate more fully in the life of the church.

Beyond the reorganization of the church, Destivelle points to other important innovations introduced by the council. These include establishing a pathbreaking Commission for Church Unity (*Otdel o soedinenii Tserkvei*) to open up dialogue with other Christians, in particular the Old Catholics and Anglicans; a deep focus on preaching and evangelization; and innovative resolutions to promote the participation of women in the running of parishes if not in liturgical roles. The council also made many pronouncements on its relations with the state and society. These, according to Destivelle, were perhaps less well considered and frequently constituted knee-jerk reactions to the decisions of the Provisional and Bolshevik governments. As he shows, in 1917 the church asserted its independence rather than separation from the state, envisioning a "symphony of powers" model that could not cope with changing external circumstances (p. 140).

Perhaps the most original and thought-provoking section of the book is Destivelle's discussion of the afterlife of the council. The canonical authority of a council, he asserts, depends on both its composition and on how its decisions are implemented and evaluated by posterity. As he points out, the intensifying Soviet anti-religious campaigns meant that the church was focused more on survival than reform in the decades after the council. Nevertheless, he asserts, several of the council's essential reforms survived, including the office of the patriarch, some continued functioning of church councils, and the relative autonomy of semi-clandestine parish communities. Destivelle's real contribution is an analysis of the various local councils, in particular of 1945, 1988, and 2000, with a view to understanding the long-term impact of the council's decrees. These councils' decisions made only rare reference to the decrees of 1917-18, but Destivelle demonstrates that, in their concern for conciliarity and in numerous identical formulas, they reveal the Moscow Council as a source of inspiration. At the same time, he argues, important divergences can be discerned in the new Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church published in 2000. The jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow is now conceived in multinational terms, extending beyond Russia's borders, unlike in 1917. And the role of the Council of Bishops (*Arkhieiereiskii sobor*) is greatly expanded at the expense of that of the laity. The place where the governance model of 1917-18 was more

thoroughly implemented, Destivelle shows, was in the Archdiocese of the Russian Orthodox Churches in Western Europe.

Destivelle looks not just at the practical application of the council's decrees but also at how theologians have assessed them. Here, he reveals that there has been surprisingly little such theological reflection (indeed, his analysis of Alexander Schmemmann's views is based on a "brief but suggestive footnote" [p. 180]) and what there has been has been somewhat critical. He examines the theological reservations of Nicholas Afanasiev, the canonical ones of Schmemmann, John Meyendorff's criticism of the council's failure to grapple systematically with the question of church-state relations, and Georges Florovsky's view that the council was too much marked by a spiritual crisis for its decrees to constitute the final say on key issues.

The book first appeared in 2006 in French, as a reworking of the author's 2002 MA thesis. The translation retains a few Gallicisms but overall it fluidly conveys Destivelle's clear style. Alas, Destivelle makes little or no reference to significant English-language studies that would have enriched his analysis significantly. For example, attention to the work of Gregory Freeze on church-state relations, on pastoral mission, and on the institutional history of the parish clergy before 1917 or that of Paul Valliere on late imperial Russian theology would have helped him to contextualize his work more effectively and to define better what was really new in the council's decrees in the pastoral realm, and would have saved him from sometimes believing his sources—for example, when he repeats the church's view that it had been placed "in a situation of inferiority with respect to other confessions" in 1905 (p. 187).^[2] This volume's editors have added a valuable list of "recent scholarship" (primarily English-language studies from the 1980s-2010s), and Destivelle's work can be read profitably in conjunction with such works as Vera Shevzov's exploration of conceptions

of *sobornost'* and of the place of the laity in the church in late imperial Russia.^[3] This caveat aside, this is a very useful work whose translation into English will be welcomed by specialists and students alike.

Notes

[1]. Published as: *Deianiia Sviashchennogo Sobora Pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi Tserkvi, 1917-1917*, 6 vols. (Moscow: Izdanie Novospasskogo monastyrnia, 1994-96). For a helpful recent survey and bibliography of studies of the council, see Nadezhda Beliakova, "Pomestnyi Sobor Rossiiskoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi 1917-1918 gg.: opyt izucheniia v Rossii i za rubezhom," *Gosudarstvo, religiia, tserkov' v Rossii i za rubezhom* 4, no. 1 (2016): 379-403. See also Catherine Evtuhov, "The Church in the Russian Revolution: Arguments for and against Restoring the Patriarchate at the Church Council of 1917-1918," *Slavic Review* 50, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 497-511.

[2]. Oddly, none of Gregory Freeze's fundamental works on the late imperial period are included in either the original or the supplementary bibliography. Particularly relevant to Destivelle's topic are: Gregory Freeze, "Handmaiden of the State? The Church in Imperial Russia Reconsidered," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, no. 1 (January 1985): 78-103; and *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Crisis, Reform, Counter-Reform* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983). See also Paul Valliere, *Modern Russian Theology: Bukharev, Soloviev, Bulgakov* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000).

[3]. In addition to the first chapter of Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), see also Vera Shevzov, "Letting the People into Church: Reflections on Orthodoxy and Community in Late Imperial Russia," in *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice under the Tsars*, ed. Valerie A. Kivelson and Robert H. Greene (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 59-77.

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