

**THEOLOGY IN THE RUSSIAN DIASPORA: CHURCH, FATHERS, EUCHARIST IN NIKOLAI AFANAS'EV, 1893–1966**, by Aidan Nichols OP, Cambridge University Press, 1989, Pp. xv + 295. £30.00

N. Afanas'ev is one of the most prominent theologians of the diaspora of the Russian Orthodox Church. After the defeat of the White Army he went into exile in Serbia, and it was there that he studied theology. Subsequently he became a lecturer at the newly-founded Orthodox Theological Institute at Paris. Yet even today a considerable portion of his writing is still unpublished.

In this book, after describing the historical and theological context of Afanas'ev's work, Father Aidan Nichols summarizes his theology. Living, as he did, in the diaspora, it is not surprising that Afanas'ev's main concern was ecclesiology. He began his life as a theologian by studying the ecumenical councils. He saw the ultimate criterion for deciding whether a council was 'ecumenical' to be its reception and the 'assimilation' of its decisions. Early, then, he had a non-legalistic understanding of the Church. He believed that the Church, as the Body of Christ, springs from an inner order which reflects her very essence, and that there is not a single ideal form of the Church.

Afanas'ev affirmed that 'where the eucharistic assembly is, there is the Church, and where the Church is there is the eucharistic assembly.' Strongly confirming the sacerdotal status of the faithful, he believed that there could be no celebration of the sacraments without them, and therefore he criticised the introduction of the *ikonostasis* in the Orthodox liturgy. Furthermore, he urged that the consent of the faithful is part of the process of deciding whether something is a genuine part of Tradition.

While believing that the ideal of the Church is not to have one eucharistic assembly with a universal bishop at its head, and criticizing the concept of 'collegiality' of the Second Vatican Council as too juridical, he protested against the ecclesial separatism of the Orthodox Church.

My main criticism of Nicholas's discussion of Afanas'ev's theology is that he overlooks Afanas'ev's emphasis on the place of the layman. So he can make the strange remark that the organ for recognizing that the reception process has taken place is found in the papacy, as if there were not many problems about the reception of papal statements. His interpretation of Afanas'ev is, then, more clerical than it should be; furthermore, he uses none of the writings on church authority of theologians of the last fifteen years or so, and there is no reference to the WCC discussions on the ministry. He compares Afanas'ev's position with the dogmatic constitution of Vatican I *Pastor Aeternus*, but without mentioning the modern debates on the papacy and infallibility. He does not even pose the question whether theology in the Catholic Church could gain something from Afanas'ev's critical observations.

Nevertheless, the book is a good introduction to the work of this remarkable theologian, which may have a role in the future in which the Russian Orthodox Church will, for the first time in her history, be free.

ANDREW LASCARIS OP