

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

Letter from Rome

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Philippine Studies vol. 11, no. 1 (1963): 131–141

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Survey

Letter from Rome

LAST Saturday, December 8, 1962, the Second Vatican Council came to the end of its first session with the splendid solemnity of a Pontifical Mass and the concluding paternal discourse of Pope John XXIII. There was joy and relief in seeing the Holy Father ascend the throne with his accustomed agility, unusual for a man of 81 who had recently been ailing. The Pope spoke with praise of the immense work already completed and with hopeful optimism of the Council's conclusion by Christmas 1963, and of a new Pentecost that would ensue. The Fathers in their purple choir robes streamed out of St. Peter's into the sunlit piazza, through the crowds and beyond, heading for home and their work as shepherds of souls. In one group of bishops stood the patriarch of them all, hundred-year old Archbishop Carinci, accompanied as often as not by the youngest of the prelates, thirty-four year old Bishop Mendoza Castro of Brazil. This was a symbol of the past accomplishments of the Council and hope for still greater success. This represented the union of the Old World with the New, of older generations in the Church with the younger, of traditional faith and rites with modern insights, aspirations, apostolates.

RESULTS AND OBSTACLES

The actual results of 35 meetings ("general congregations") of Vatican II might not at first glance appear to measure up to this roseate picture. About 1200 Fathers contributed ac-

tively to the discussions with either oral or written comments. Only 5 schemes¹ or draft decrees out of a total of 73 were taken up: on the liturgy, the sources of revelation, communications media, church unity (with the Orthodox), and the nature of the Church. On the last working day, December 7, the scheme on the liturgy was put to a partially definitive vote, with virtually unanimous acceptance for the proemium and first chapter. The draft for the communications media was accepted in substance, but sent back to commission for some emendation and rewriting. The theological schemes on the sources of revelation, the unity and nature of the Church met with a vigorous and consistent opposition that reiterated essentially the same fundamental objections. A general vote taken on the draft for the sources of revelation showed 62% of the Fathers completely opposed and in favor of total revision. To conserve precious time and to forestall lengthy discussions that might never have produced the needed two-thirds majority, Pope John recalled the draft, sent it for radical revision to a newly formed mixed commission representing the opposing views, under the joint chairmanship of Cardinals Ottaviani and Bea. No votes were taken on the two schemes concerning the unity and nature of the Church. On December 6 new directives and norms were received from the Holy Father for a total reworking and coordination of the original 73 schemes, now reduced to 20, under the direction of a supercommission that would be in session until the Council reconvenes on September 8. During the two months' activity, only a single decree was promulgated: the inclusion of the name of St. Joseph in the Canon of the Mass, and this was done by the Holy Father independently of the Fathers in Council.

To compare this performance to a session of congress which had not passed a single law is hardly justifiable. The last Council was held a century ago and the Council of Trent ended 300 years earlier; modern congresses convene somewhat

¹ The word *scheme* is used here by Father Calderone for the technical term *schema*, a draft decree. A scheme might be a proposed formulation of a revealed truth or an agendum recommending liturgical or disciplinary reform or simply a position paper.—EDITORS' NOTE.

more frequently! Besides, the large number of Fathers, almost 2500, varied tremendously in age, nationality, language, social and cultural and apostolic background. It took time for them to become acquainted with each other, with their mutual problems, with their different points of view. The official language, Latin, which was a second tongue for very few and not well understood by perhaps one-sixth of the Fathers, did not alleviate problems.

More serious obstacles had to be overcome: the tendency toward theological formulations, quite usual in Councils but possibly detrimental in Vatican II because of its avowed aim of paving the way for ultimate Christian reunion, and external pressures pushing for concrete results with the concomitant danger of immature and rash decrees. Father Hans Küng, an eminent Swiss theologian teaching at the Catholic faculty of Tübingen, believes the Council is already a huge success

because it did not fall into the traps of previous Councils. Theological statements that could have had a harmful effect were avoided. Dangerous proposals that could have scuttled the hopes of reunion with non-Catholic Christians did not succeed. The Council rejected all such initiatives. It also refused to bow to public pressures for tangible expression of its work.

The need for circumspect and mature deliberation became all the more apparent because of the constantly divergent opinions of two large groups within the Council.

DIVERGENT VIEWS

These have been variously called Curialists and Anti-curialists (supporting or opposing the members of the Roman Curia), Peterists and Paulists (an allusion to the apostolic controversy in Galatians 2, identifying those who favor close dependence upon Rome or more local autonomy), and more commonly Conservatives and Progressives. The conservative prelates would hold on to traditional expressions of doctrine and worship and to more customary methods of the theological sciences; the progressives would introduce new formulations of immutable doctrines and new rites, not for the sake of change but to render Catholic faith and worship more intelligible to

modern man, and would utilize modern scientific methods and results in the study of Theology and Sacred Scripture. Certain conservative theologians have expressed fear that the progressives' concern with modern solutions for modern problems and their use of modern methods approach a certain relativity of truth and rejection of tradition which pertain to the heresy of modernism; progressives tend to see the conservatives as unconcerned with the problems of modern man in today's world and busy with the abstractions of a textbook theology. One theologian defined these positions in terms of their views of the future: the progressive sees the future as a promise, the conservative sees it as a threat to the past. With greater accuracy and kindness Cardinal Liénart of Lille, a leader of the progressives, describes the supposed opposition between the two tendencies as being the opposition

of those who are concerned above all with avoiding error, with maintaining and affirming doctrine, and of those who are predominantly concerned with presenting this doctrine to the world, expressing it in a manner less technical, perhaps, but more understandable. These two tendencies exist, and this is perfectly comprehensible because they represent two duties of the Church; there is no reason to wonder that some are more preoccupied with the first aspect and others with the second. There is division only if these two tendencies are put in opposition instead of seeing them as they are, as complementary.

Some journalistic accounts of these different positions read like westerns, with one side or the other portrayed as villains, according to the writers' leanings. There is nothing unusual about differences of opinion in the Church and in Councils and they have always existed. In the first Vatican Council some wanted to say nothing about papal infallibility, since it seemed politically inopportune; others insisted on a definition that would make almost any utterance of the pope infallible. The Fathers worked out a moderate formulation that correctly expressed the traditional Church teaching of this revealed truth. The divergences in the Council of Trent were symbolized most vividly in a beard-pulling episode. There is nothing in all this of heresy. Individuals in heated theological debate have often hurled the epithet of "heretic". The famous 17th-century dispute on actual grace between Dominicans and Jesuits

was most vociferous; today theologians in both Orders tend to follow the Dominican Father Sertillanges who believes the reason for the dispute was a misstated problem. St. Thomas himself was twice accused by ecclesiastical courts of heresy for introducing pagan ideas, i.e. Aristotelian, into Christian philosophy and theology. The charges of heresy raised even today by a few conservative theologians against modern exegetes are to be ascribed more to ardor than to logic. Pope John has referred to the "providential explanation in bringing the truth into sharper relief and in showing to the whole world the holy liberty which sons of God enjoy in the Church."

It is not surprising, then, that there was vigorous opposition to many assertions in the different schemes prepared for the most part, it would seem, by theologians with conservative views. What surprised everyone, however, was the great strength of the progressives. The leading prelates in both wings are well known: on the conservative side, Cardinals Ottaviani (Curia), Ruffini (Palermo), Siri (Genoa), Quiroga y Palacios (Spain), Godfrey (England), McIntyre (Los Angeles); on the progressive side Bea (Curia, Germany), Liénart (France), Frings (Germany), Alfrink (Holland), Koenig (Austria), Suenens (Belgium), Leger (Canada), Ritter (St. Louis). It would be unfair to categorize all the Fathers. Many steer a middle course and many with progressive tendencies, as for instance in liturgical and social questions, might be conservative in theological matters. Since discourses in the Council are secret, only revelations by the Fathers themselves and their other public statements would indicate their positions with certainty. It is also clear that a large number of Fathers who at first seemed conservative later joined the ranks of the progressives. The most vivid instance is the vote for the draft decree on the liturgy. Many seemed unfavorably disposed to liturgical reform, the use of local languages in the Mass and sacraments, the reception of communion under both species. Yet the voting for the introduction and first chapter, which included these elements in a general way, showed practical unanimity. Only 11 voted negatively; 1922 gave unqualified approval, 180 approval with reservations. In the final tally

there were less votes against the scheme than there had been speakers against it.

The Fathers from Africa, Asia and India made a striking impression with their progressive and at times revolutionary ideas. Bishop Duschak of Calapan, Mindoro, became an international figure with his suggestion of an "ecumenical Mass". The Mass would be stripped of additions that have been made in the course of centuries, composed only of verses from Scripture and made as close as possible to the Last Supper, with easily intelligible gestures and language. He admitted the idea was perhaps too radical to be accepted but important enough to be considered.

BASIC OBJECTIONS

The progressive assault on the three proposed theological schemes revealed the same consistently recurring objections. The official bulletin in the *Osservatore Romano* for November 16 carried a substantial resumé of the debate on the scheme for the sources of revelation. "The Fathers who proposed a substitution for the scheme gave the following reasons: the scheme's excessively professorial and scholastic character; its lack of pastoral spirit; excessive rigidity in certain affirmations; the fact that theological studies have not arrived at a sufficient maturity on certain points; the danger of rendering the truth unintelligible to our separated brothers; omitting the problem of the salvation of men who lived before the Christian revelation and of the non-baptized after it; little encouragement given to scientific work in theology and (biblical) exegesis." The Fathers supporting the scheme raised the following points: "the basis of pastoral activity rests upon the clear expression of doctrine and there is no offence to the separated brothers in an exposition of the truth for which they are searching; the duty of the Council is to explain and conserve Catholic doctrine in its entirety."

Most of these elements reflected in one manner or other Pope John's opening discourse on October 11. There he laid down the guiding lines for the Council's activity. It was not to be concerned primarily with doctrine, but rather with the

means of presenting Catholic doctrine in a pastoral way so as to effect a renewal within the Church and to pave the way for an ultimate reunion with the separated brothers.

The objections raised against the scheme indicated that it did not square with the aims of the Council clearly set down by Pope John. Did the preparatory commissions disregard the Pope's directives in composing the schemes? Not at all. The schemes were completed and distributed months before the opening of the Council. Was the Pope, then, reproving the commissions for the work already done? Certainly not. The proposed schemes were preliminary drafts, tentative constitutions to be examined, discussed, amended, accepted or rejected by the Fathers in Council. Moreover, the Pope himself had sat in on many of the pre-conciliar work meetings, and was fully aware of the progress being made and the directions taken. But why did he not offer his corrections then?

AIMS OF THE COUNCIL

The whole attitude of Pope John towards the Council has been paternal and trusting. He has given full liberty to the Fathers of the Universal Church, before the Council in preparing the agenda, and during the Council in discussing it. Strictly speaking, as supreme head of the Church he could have issued proclamations pertaining to doctrine and morals on his own authority, but he has insisted on a truly ecumenical Council, a meeting of the Fathers of the Universal Church, to come to grips with the serious modern problems within the Church and to improve its relations with those outside the Church, first and foremost with our separated brothers. The authority of convoking a council and determining its scope rests with the Holy Father. Within the framework of a council dedicated to internal renewal of the Church and to ultimate reunion with other Christians, Pope John has allowed perfect liberty of expression. However, gently but consistently, he has emphasized the pastoral and ecumenical aims of the Council—when he first announced the Council in early 1959, several times during the preparatory period, in his discourse on October 11,

and again on December 6 in his directives for the work of the commissions before the second session.

The Fathers on the progressive side seemed attuned to the Pope's wishes. They rejected the scheme on the sources of revelation with 1368 votes and, of the 822 who were in favor of it, a large proportion merely wanted to use it as a basis for revision. The Fathers raised the same basic objections against the draft decrees on Church unity and the nature of the Church: that they were too rigid and technical, did not show sufficient understanding for the Orthodox and Protestants, did not adequately deal with the powers of bishops, the role of the laity, liberty of conscience and relations with the state. In effect, the proposed schemes were deficient in pastoral and ecumenical orientation.

In the first week of December Cardinal Montini raised a storm of protest because of his weekly "Letter from the Council" sent to the clergy and faithful of Milan. He sharply criticized the preparatory work of collecting and coordinating the numerous proposals for the Council. "The excellent and immense material, but heterogenous and of unequal value" stood in need of a "logical and organic preparation" dominated by a "central, architectonic idea"; it had missed the "focal point of the (Council's) program which fortunately had received a solemn and wise delineation in the words of the Holy Father."

A few days later the Fathers assembled in council were informed that during the nine-month recess the various commissions would reexamine and rewrite the schemes according to the ends of the Council already outlined by the Pope in his allocution of October 11, and that a supercommission under the Secretary of State, Cardinal Cicognani, would direct and coordinate these labors. In the words of Pope John: "The focal point of this Council is not then the discussion of this or that fundamental doctrine of the Church." This had been amply and admirably done in Trent and Vatican I. The authentic doctrine must be "studied and presented through the investigations and literary formulation of modern thought." This formulation of ancient doctrine "must be given importance by the teaching authority (of the Church) with its pre-

dominantly pastoral characteristic. Thus, the Catholic Church, raising the torch of religious truth by means of this Ecumenical Council, wishes to show itself a loving mother towards all, kind, patient, full of mercy and of goodness, also towards her separated children." Clearly the twofold "architectonic idea" that the Pope wishes to dominate the Council proceedings must be the pastoral and ecumenical concern that will effect the necessary inner renewal of the Church and ultimate Christian reunion.

This is not to say that the Holy Father has taken sides in the conservative-progressive dispute. Perhaps in general terms the aim and end of the Council as expressed by the Pope more closely approach the progressives' concern with presenting Catholic doctrine in palatable and intelligible form than the conservatives' interest in affirming the doctrine. But the concrete and practical means to the end, these Pope John has left up to the Fathers.

EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES

The most impressive tangible and positive result of the Council has been, according to many commentators, the emergence of effective episcopal conferences. The 1962 *Anuario Pontificio* lists 44 conferences, groups of bishops formed according to national, linguistic, and even continental lines. The first Episcopal Conference was approved for Ireland in 1882, the second for the U.S.A. in 1922. The conference of Philippine Bishops was officially approved under the title "Catholic Welfare Organization" in 1952. Most conferences received papal approbation in the 50's, but there are 19 not yet definitely approved. Certain groups are highly organized, such as the Dutch hierarchy. There was admiration for the cohesion of the African bishops, divided into French and English-speaking groups, a total of 299, who often expressed their unanimous views through a single spokesman. The almost 600 Latin American Bishops were similarly united, though not with the same degree of unanimity. It seems that the conferences have become absolutely indispensable for a profitable exchange of ideas and experiences between bishops

of different countries and cultures. During the Council certain episcopal conferences kept in close contact and were able to present a strongly united front on many questions. They displayed such a potent force that some believe the Church is passing into a "collegial" form of pastoral government, with the "college" of bishops exercising rule together with the pope. This could lead to a future reorganization of Church government in Rome. Certain Fathers are expected to propose the idea of an executive organ, composed of patriarchs, cardinals and residential archbishops, representing the whole episcopacy and having the pope at its head, with the Curial posts subordinate. There would be no encroachment on papal authority and this would truly be an international government for the Universal Church. Vatican I dealt with the powers and prerogatives of the pope but could not discuss the position of bishops because of its sudden disruption. Vatican II will resume the question and, it is hoped, will also define the status, role and authority of the episcopal conferences in the Church today.

There is no doubt about "the slow and solemn beginning to the great work of the Council," as Pope John said in his concluding discourse. While discussion on the first scheme concerning the liturgy dragged on for a month, the Fathers began to wonder aloud if this would be a second Trent running on for 18 years. An elderly English bishop was heard to remark that at first he did not expect to see the end of the Council; now he did not think his successor would see it. But the Holy Father was able to foresee a speedier second session closing by Christmas 1963. He had reorganized the working procedure for the coming nine-month recess, with the revision and rewriting of the schemes under the direction of the supercommission. The Pope would give general approval and then each draft would be sent to bishops throughout the world for further suggestions. A final revised draft would be presented to the Fathers when they should return in September. This preliminary work should facilitate and shorten the Council proceedings.

Undoubtedly differences of opinion will continue to crop up during the commission meetings and again when the Council resumes. If this were a political parliament, one might well despair of bridging the chasm between the opposing views. But with the Holy Spirit breathing peace and concord into the sacred assembly, the hope for substantial agreement on matters essential for renewal and reunion, the aims of the Second Vatican Council, is fully justified. With far more than optimism Pope John envisages a new outpouring of the Spirit.

There will indeed be a new Pentecost which will cause the Church to renew her interior riches and to extend her maternal care in every sphere of human activity; it will be a new advance of the Kingdom of Christ in the world, an elevated and persuasive reaffirmation of the good news of Redemption, a clarion call of God's kingship, of the brotherhood of men in charity, of the peace promised on earth to men of good will in accordance with God's good pleasure.

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* The author, presently at the Pontifical Biblical Institute on leave from San José Seminary, is connected neither officially nor unofficially with the Ecumenical Council and is occupied with other matters. However, while living in Rome during this historic event, one cannot avoid having a lively interest in proceedings that will continue to have a profound influence on the Church and on worldwide relations between Catholics and their "separated brothers", the Orthodox and the Protestants. The official press releases of the Council, printed in five languages, are supplemented by the press conferences given to reporters of certain language groups and by other channels of information. Thus from several sources innumerable items of interest find their way into Italian journals of every political hue and into many French journals. Those in Spanish and English that the writer has seen have not added anything substantially different.