

SOLEMN OPENING OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN XXIII *

Thursday, October 11, 1962

Venerable brothers:

Today the Holy Mother Church is blessed because, thanks to a singular gift of Divine Providence, she has already dawned the day so desired when the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is solemnly inaugurated here, next to the tomb of Saint Peter, under the protection of the Virgin Most Holy whose Divine Maternity is celebrated liturgically on this very day.

Ecumenical Councils in the Church

The succession of the various Councils so far celebrated - both the twenty Ecumenical Councils and the innumerable provincial and regional councils, also important - clearly proclaim the vitality of the Catholic Church and stand out as luminous milestones throughout its history.

The gesture of the most recent and humble successor of San Pedro, who speaks to you, when convening this solemn assembly, has proposed to affirm, once again, the continuity of the Ecclesiastical Magisterium, to present it in exceptional form to all the men of our time, taking into account the deviations, demands and circumstances of contemporary age.

It is very natural that, at the beginning of the universal Council, we are pleased to look at the past, as if to collect their voices, whose encouraging echo we want to hear again, together with the memory and merits of our oldest or most recent predecessors, the Roman Pontiffs : solemn and venerable voices, through the East and the West, from the 4th century to the Middle Ages and from here to the modern era, which have transmitted the testimony of those Councils; voices that proclaim with perennial fervor the triumph of the institution, divine and human: the Church of Christ, which takes from Him name, grace and power.

Along with the motives of spiritual joy, it is true, however, that above this story also extends, for more than nineteen centuries, a cloud of sadness and trials. Not without reason the old Simeon said to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, that prophecy that has been and continues to be true: "This Child will be put to ruin and to the resurrection of many in Israel and as a sign of contradiction" [1] . And Jesus himself, already an adult, fixed very clearly the different attitudes of the world

towards his person, throughout the centuries, in those mysterious words: "Whoever listens to you listens to me" [2] ; and with those others, cited by the Evangelist himself: "Whoever is not with me is against me, whoever does not gather with me scatters"

The great problem posed to the world, for almost two thousand years, remains immutable. Christ, always radiant at the center of history and life; men, or they are with him and with his Church, and in such a case they enjoy the light, the kindness, the order and the peace, or they are without him or against him, and deliberately against his Church: they become motives of confusion, causing harshness in human relationships, and persistent dangers of fratricidal wars.

The Ecumenical Councils, whenever they meet, are a solemn celebration of the union of Christ and his Church and therefore lead to a universal irradiation of truth, to the right direction of individual, family and social life, to the strengthening of the spiritual energies, in ceaseless elevation over real and eternal goods.

Before us are, in the succession of the different epochs of the first twenty centuries of Christian history, the testimonies of this extraordinary Magisterium of the Church, collected in numerous and imposing volumes, sacred patrimony in the ecclesiastical archives here in Rome, but also in the most famous libraries in the entire world.

Origin and cause of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council

As for the initiative of the great event that gathers us here today, it is enough, with a simple title of historical orientation, to reaffirm once more our humble but personal testimony of that first moment in which, unexpectedly, our heart and our lips burst forth. simple word "*Ecumenical Council*". Word pronounced before the Sacred College of Cardinals on that very fateful day January 25, 1959, feast of the conversion of Saint Paul, in his basilica in Rome. It was an unexpected touch, a ray of light from above, a great sweetness in the eyes and in the heart; but, at the same time, a fervor, a great fervor that suddenly awoke all over the world, awaiting the celebration of the Council.

Three years of laborious preparation, consecrated to the broadest and deepest examination of the modern conditions of faith and religious practice, of Christian and Catholic vitality especially, They have appeared to us as a first sign and a first gift of celestial graces.

The Church enlightened by the light of this Council - such is Our firm hope - will grow in spiritual riches and, by drawing strength from them for new energies, will look forward to the future. Indeed; with timely "updates" and with a prudent order of mutual collaboration, the Church will make men, families, and peoples really turn their spirit towards heavenly things.

This is how the Council becomes the subject of a singular obligation of great gratitude to the Supreme Giver of all good, celebrating with a jubilant song the glory of Christ the Lord, glorious and immortal King of the centuries and peoples.

Opportunity for the celebration of the Council

There is, in addition, another argument, venerable brothers, that it is convenient to entrust to your consideration. To increase, then, even more Our holy joy, we want to propose - before this great assembly - the consoling examination of the happy circumstances in which the Ecumenical Council begins.

In the daily exercise of Our pastoral ministry, sometimes come to our ears, hurting them, certain insinuations of some people who, even in their ardent zeal, lack the sense of discretion and measure. They do not see in modern times but prevarication and ruin; they are saying that our time, compared with the past, has been getting worse; and behave as if they had learned nothing from history, that remains a teacher of life, and as if in the time of the preceding Ecumenical Councils everything had proceeded with an absolute triumph of doctrine and Christian life, and of the just freedom of the Church.

It seems fair to us to disagree with such prophets of calamities, trained to announce always unfortunate events, as if the end of time were imminent. In the present historical moment, Providence is taking us to a new order of human relations that, by the very work of men but even more above their own intentions, are directed towards the fulfillment of superior and unexpected plans; for everything, even the human adversities, it arranges for the greater good of the Church.

It is easy to discover this reality, when one carefully considers the modern world, so occupied with politics and economic disputes that it no longer finds time to attend to questions of spiritual order, of which the Magisterium of the Holy Church. Similar way of acting is not going well, and rightly so has to be disapproved; but it can not be denied that these new conditions of modern life have even the advantage of having made disappear all those innumerable obstacles, with which in other times the children of the world impeded the free action of the Church. Indeed; It is enough to go through, even briefly, the ecclesiastical history, to clearly see how even the Ecumenical Councils, whose deeds are consigned with golden characters in the pomp of the Catholic Church, they were frequently celebrated in very serious difficulties and bitterness, due to the undue interference of the civil powers. Truth is that sometimes the secular princes set out to protect the Church sincerely; but, more frequently, this happened not without damage and spiritual danger, because they were carried away by calculations of their political, interested and dangerous action.

In this regard, we confess to you the very intense pain we experience in the absence, here and now, of so many pastors of souls for Our dearest ones,

because they suffer imprisonment for their fidelity to Christ or are hindered by other obstacles, and whose remembrance it moves us to raise up ardent prayers for God.

But not without a great hope and a great consolation we see today how the Church, finally free of so many obstacles of profane order, so frequent in other times, can, from this Vatican Basilica, as from a second Apostolic Cenacle, make feel through you his voice, full of majesty and greatness.

Main objective of the Council: defense and revaluation of the truth

The supreme interest of the Ecumenical Council is that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine be guarded and taught in an increasingly effective way. Doctrine, which comprises the whole man, composed of soul and body; and that, to us, pilgrims on this earth, directs us to go towards the heavenly homeland. This shows how our mortal life is to be ordered so that we fulfill our duties as citizens of earth and heaven, and thus achieve the end established by God.

It means this that all men, considered both individually and socially, have the duty to tend without respite, throughout their lives, to the attainment of heavenly goods; and that of using, taken for that purpose, all earthly goods, without their use being a detriment to eternal happiness.

The Lord has said: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" [4] . Word "*first*" that expresses in which direction our thoughts and our forces must move; but without forgetting the other words of the Lord's command: "... and everything else will be given to you in addition" [5] . In reality, there has always been in the Church, and there are still those who, walking with all their energies toward evangelical perfection, do not forget to render a great utility to society. This is how, because of his noble examples of life constantly practiced, and because of his initiatives of charity, he receives strength and increase as much as there is more noble in the human society.

But for such a doctrine to reach the multiple structures of human activity, which concern individuals, families and social life, it is first of all necessary for the Church not to depart from the sacred patrimony of truth, received from parents ; but, at the same time, it must look at the present, at the new conditions and forms of life introduced in today's world, which have opened new paths for the Catholic apostolate.

For this reason the Church has not attended indifferently to the admirable progress of the discoveries of human ingenuity, and it has never ceased to mean its just estimate: but, even following these developments, it does not stop warning men that, over and above sensitive things, turn your eyes to God, source of all wisdom and all beauty; and reminds them that, just as they were told to "settle the earth and subdue it" [6] , never forget that they themselves

were given the most serious precept: "You shall worship the Lord your God and He shall only serve" [7] , whether it happens that the fascinating attraction of visible things prevents true progress.

Current modality in the dissemination of the sacred doctrine

After this, it is already clear what is expected of the Council, in everything related to the doctrine. That is to say, the Ecumenical Council XXI - which will benefit from the effective and important sum of legal, liturgical, apostolic and administrative experiences - wants to transmit pure and complete, without attenuations or deformations, the doctrine that for twenty centuries, in spite of difficulties and of struggles, it has become the common heritage of men; heritage that, if it has not been welcomed by all, constitutes a wealth open to all men of goodwill.

Our duty is not only to study that precious treasure, as if we were only concerned about its antiquity, but also to dedicate ourselves, with diligence and without fear, to the work demanded by our time, continuing the path that the Church has been following for twenty centuries.

The main task of this Council is not, therefore, the discussion of this or that theme of the fundamental doctrine of the Church, repeating diffusely the teaching of ancient and modern Fathers and Theologians, which is very well known to you and with the that you are so familiar with

For that, a Council was not necessary. However, from the renewed, serene and calm adherence to all the teachings of the Church, in its integrity and precision, as resplendent mainly in the conciliar acts of Trent and Vatican I, the Christian and Catholic spirit of the entire world awaits to go one step further towards a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciences that is in a more perfect correspondence with fidelity to authentic doctrine, studying it and exposing it through the forms of research and the literary formulas of modern thought. One thing is the substance of the old doctrine, of the "*depositum fidei*"; and another the way to formulate its expression; and of this we must take great account - with patience, if necessary - by adhering to the norms and requirements of a teaching of a predominantly pastoral nature.

At the beginning of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, it is evident as never before that the truth of the Lord remains forever. We see, in fact, when passing from one time to another, how the opinions of men succeed each other and how errors, after being born, vanish like the fog before the sun.

How to suppress errors

The Church always opposed these errors. Frequently he condemned them with the greatest severity. In our time, however, the Bride of Christ prefers to use the

medicine of mercy rather than severity. She wants to come to meet current needs, showing the validity of her doctrine rather than renewing sentences. It is not that fallacious doctrines, opinions and dangerous concepts are missing, that it needs to prevent and dissipate; but they are so clearly in contradiction with the right standard of honesty, and have borne such pernicious fruits that men, even by themselves, are prone to condemn them, especially those customs of life that despise God and his law, the excessive confidence in the progress of the technique, the welfare founded exclusively on the comforts of life. Every day they are more convinced that the dignity of the human person, as well as their perfection and the consequent obligations, is a matter of the utmost importance. What is most important is experience, which has taught them how violence caused to others, the power of arms and political dominance are of no use for a happy solution to the serious problems that afflict them.

In such a state of affairs, the Catholic Church, by raising through this Ecumenical Council the torch of religious truth, wants to show herself to be a kind mother of all, benign, patient, full of mercy and kindness for the children separated from her. Just as Peter one day, the poor man who asked for alms, she now says to the human race oppressed by so many difficulties: "I have no gold or silver, but I give you what I have, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk" [viii]. The Church, then, does not offer out-of-date wealth to the people of today, nor does it promise them an earthly happiness; makes them participants of the divine grace that, elevating men to the dignity of children of God, becomes a most powerful guardianship and help for a more human life; It opens the source of his vivifying doctrine that allows men, enlightened by the light of Christ, to understand well what they really are, their exalted dignity, their end. Besides that, using her children, she extends everywhere the breadth of Christian charity, which, more than anything else, contributes to uprooting the germs of discord and, more effectively than any other means, fosters concord, the just peace and brotherly union of all.

The unity of the Christian and human family must be promoted

The Church's request to promote and defend the truth stems from the fact that - according to God's design "that wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" [9] - men can not, without the help of all the revealed doctrine, to obtain a complete and firm unity of mind, to which are united true peace and eternal salvation. Unfortunately, the human family has not yet achieved, in its fullness, this visible unity in the truth.

The Catholic Church considers, therefore, as a duty of his to work with all activity so that the great mystery of that unity which with ardent prayer Jesus invoked the heavenly Father, his sacrifice imminent, is realized. She enjoys gentle peace, because she is aware of her intimate union with this prayer; and then he rejoices greatly when he sees that such an invocation increases its efficacy with healthy

fruits, even among those who are outside of his womb. And even more; If we consider this same unity, impetrated by Christ for his Church, it seems to shine with a triple ray of beneficence and celestial light: the unity of Catholics among themselves, which must be preserved exemplarily firm; the unity of prayers and ardent desires, with which Christians separated from this Apostolic See aspire to be united with us; Y, finally, the unity in esteem and respect for the Catholic Church by those who follow still non-Christian religions. At this point, it is painful to consider that most of the human race - despite the fact that men have all been redeemed by the Blood of Christ - do not yet participate in that source of divine graces found in the Catholic Church. . In this regard, they fit well with the Church, whose light illuminates everything, whose strength of supernatural unity is for the benefit of all humanity, those words of St. Cyprian: "The Church, enveloped in divine light, extends its rays on the world the whole and, nevertheless, it constitutes a single light that spreads everywhere without its unit undergoing division, it spreads its branches all over the earth, to fertilize it, while multiplying, with greater largeness, its streams; but the head is always unique, the origin is only, she is the only mother, copiously fertile: we have all been born of her, we have nourished her milk, we live by her spirit "[10] .

This is proposed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which, while bringing together the best energies of the Church and striving for men to welcome more and more favorably the proclamation of salvation, prepares in a certain way and consolidates the path towards that unity of the human race, which constitutes the necessary foundation for the earthly city to be organized in the likeness of the heavenly "in which the truth reigns, charity is law and extension is eternity" according to Saint Augustine [11] .

conclusion

Now "our voice speaks to you" [12] , Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate. We are already gathered here, in this Vatican Basilica, center of the history of the Church; where Heaven and earth unite closely, here, next to the sepulcher of Peter, next to so many tombs of Our Predecessors, whose ashes, in this solemn hour, seem to shudder with arcane joy.

The Council that begins appears in the Church as a promising day of shining light. Scarcely is the dawn; but already the first announcement of the day that arises, how softly it fills our hearts! Everything here breathes holiness, everything arouses joy. For we contemplate the stars, which with their clarity increase the majesty of this temple; stars that, according to the testimony of the Apostle Saint John [13] , are yourselves; and with you we see shining around the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles [14] the golden candelabra of the Churches that are entrusted to you.

At the same time we see the dignified personalities, here present, in an attitude of great respect and cordial expectation, arriving in Rome from the five

continents, representing the Nations of the world.

Heaven and earth, it may be said, come together in the celebration of the Council: the Saints of Heaven, to protect our work; the faithful of the earth, continuing in their prayer to the Lord; and you, seconding the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, to ensure that the common work corresponds to the current aspirations and needs of the various peoples. All this asks of you serenity of mind, fraternal concord, moderation in the projects, dignity in the discussions and prudence in the deliberations.

May Heaven grant that all your efforts and your labors, on which are centered not only the eyes of all peoples, but also the hopes of the whole world, abundantly satisfy common hopes.

O Almighty God! In You we place all your trust, distrust our strengths. Look benign to these Pastors of your Church. May the light of your heavenly grace help us, so in making decisions as in formulating laws; and listen for the prayers that we elevate you with unanimity of faith, word and spirit.

Oh Mary, help from the Christians, help from the bishops, whose love we recently had a peculiar test in your temple in Loreto, where we wanted to venerate the mystery of the Incarnation! Lay out all things for a happy and prosperous success and, together with your husband St. Joseph, with the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, with the saints John, the Baptist and the Evangelist, intercede for all of us before God.

To Jesus Christ, our adorable Redeemer, immortal King of the peoples and of the centuries, be love, power and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

* *AAS* 54 (1962) 786; *Discorsi-Messaggi-Colloqui of the Holy Father Giovanni XXIII*, vol. IV, pp. 578-590.

[1] *Lk* 2, 34

[2] *Ibid.* 10, 16

[3] *Ibid.* 11, 23

[4] *Mt* 6, 33.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Gen* 1, 28.

[7] *Mt* 4, 10; *Lc.* 4, 8

[8] *Acts* 3, 6.

[9] 1 *Tim* 2, 4.

[10] *De catholicae Ecclesiae unitate* , 5.

[11] S. Aug., *Ep* 138, 3.

[12] 2 *Cor* 6, 11.

[13] *Apoc.* 1, 20

[14] *Ibid* .

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