

## INITIAL REACTIONS TO POPE JOHN XXIII'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

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The Official Press Release

At 12:30 P.M. on January 25, 1959--thus before the Pope delivered his speech!--the Vatican press office released the following information about the Pope's visit to St. Paul's Outside the Walls:

On the occasion of his visit on Sunday to the basilica of St. Paul, the Supreme Pontiff, John XXIII, after attending the pontifical Mass, delivered an address to the Cardinals present at the solemn rite.

His Holiness dwelt on some of the more important points of apostolic activity suggested by the experience of these first three months of his pontificate and touching on his responsibilities as Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church.

As Bishop of Rome the Holy Father stressed the great growth of the city in the last decades, and the grave problems related to the spiritual assistance of its people.

As Supreme Pastor of the Church he cited the growing dangers that today beset the spiritual lives of the faithful: the errors spreading everywhere and the unrestrained lure of material goods which today has grown greater than ever with the progress of science and technology.

To meet the present needs of the Christian people, the Supreme Pontiff, inspired by the centuries-old customs of the Church, announced three events of the greatest importance: a diocesan Synod for Rome, an Ecumenical Council for the Universal Church, and the updating of the Code of Canon Law, preceded by the forthcoming promulgation of the Code of Oriental Law.

As for the Ecumenical Council, in the Holy Father's mind, it will not only aim at the edification of the Christian people but will also be an invitation to the separated communities for the search for the unity for which so many hearts in all parts of the earth are yearning today.

The next day's issue of the *Osservatore Romano* carried this information on its first page, but without comment and without the text of the Pope's address.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the speech was never to be printed in that Vatican journal and only became known when it was published, six weeks later, in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.<sup>2</sup>

The delay in the publication of the speech has been the object of some controversy. The Alberigos have interpreted it as part of "a whole gamut of negative reactions which ran from cool bureaucratic actions to rejections thinly veiled behind ritualistic formulae."<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Caprile has denied this accusation, arguing that the publication of the speech was delayed to provide time for the

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<sup>1</sup>*Osservatore Romano*, January 26/27, 1959.

<sup>2</sup>See *AAS*, 51 (1959), 65-69. This fascicle of the *Acta* did not appear until the third week in March; see *Tablet*, 213 (1959), 308; *ICI*, 93 (April 1, 1959), 27-28.

<sup>3</sup>Angelina and Giuseppe Alberigo, *Giovanni XXIII: Profezia nella fedeltà* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1978), p. 73. Carlo Falconi maintains that Cardinal Tardini had asked that the text not be published immediately on the grounds that it would arouse unreasonable ecumenical hopes; see *Pope John and the Ecumenical Council: A Diary of the Second Vatican Council, September - December 1962* (Cleveland and New York: World, 1964), pp. 46-47, and *The Popes in the Twentieth Century: From Pius X to John XXIII* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967) pp. 328-29.

Cardinals not present at St. Paul's to be informed about the announcement.<sup>4</sup> This could explain a delay of a week or two, but not one of two months, and it does not explain why, after simply reproducing the press release, *La Civiltà Cattolica* itself did not comment on the announcement of the Council for a full three months.<sup>5</sup>

### Initial Reactions to the Announcement

Pope John himself referred several times to the reaction of the Cardinals at St. Paul's. The fullest of these is found in his speech to Venetian pilgrims on May 8, 1962:

Humanly speaking, one would have thought that, after hearing our Allocution, the Cardinals would have pressed around us to declare their approval and good wishes. Instead, there was an impressive and respectful silence. Only in the days that followed did we have an explanation, when the Cardinals, coming for audiences, said to us, one by one: "Our emotion was so intense and our joy so deep for this gift, as precious as it is unexpected, which the Lord has given to his Church through the new Pope, that we couldn't find words to express our happiness and our complete obedience. We are ready to work."<sup>6</sup>

This may be an edifying and perhaps ironical explanation of the Cardinals' silence, because, as Caprile notes, perhaps half of them had already been informed of the decision.<sup>7</sup>

One anecdote about the reactions has been passed down by a participant in the meeting. Cardinal Confalonieri reports that when the Cardinals gathered around the Pope after his speech, "Cardinal Canali, who was quite familiar with the path chosen by the preceding pontiff, half-embarrassed and half-curious, asked if the preparation would also this time be entrusted to the Holy Office... The Pope stopped for a moment, as if surprised, and then, in a quiet but firm voice, replied: 'The president of the Council is the Pope.'"<sup>8</sup>

Other interpretations of the Cardinals' reaction have been given. Falconi, for example, reads into it a certain annoyance that they were being presented with a *fait accompli* without having been asked their views and out of fears related to the ecumenical dimensions of which the Pope had spoken:

The rigid silence of the Cardinals did not, in fact, arise from a paralysing emotion of a supernatural kind but from well-founded and serious perplexities, quickly translated soon after the Pope's speech into an explicit request to the Secretary of State, Tardini, that publication of the full text of the speech should be held up. A résumé of it had in fact

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<sup>4</sup>Giovanni Caprile, "Profilo di Giovanni XXIII," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 130/3 (1979), 392-98, at p. 394.

<sup>5</sup>The first article was entitled "Primi commenti all'annuncio del futuro Concilio" and appeared in the May 2nd issue of the bi-weekly (see Caprile, I/1, pp. 57-67). This account itself refers to "the rigorous silence of official sources" (p. 57). Olivier Rousseau takes this first notice of the Council in "particularly circumspect Roman reviews" as an indication of the time when Roman opposition to the Council was finally overcome; see "A la veille du Concile," *Irénikon*, 35 (1962), 213-35, at p. 217n; see earlier "Le futur Concile et sa préparation," *Irénikon*, 34 (1961), 5-20, at p. 8n.

<sup>6</sup>*DMC*, IV, p. 259.

<sup>7</sup>Caprile, V, p. 426n.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted by Andrea Riccardi, "Dalla Chiesa di Pio XII alla Chiesa Giovannea," in *Papa Giovanni*, p. 153, citing C. Confalonieri, *Momenti romani* (Rome 1979), p. 86.

been given in the *Osservatore Romano* following requests for a different version from that provided by the press agencies. But now postponement of publication of the full text was urged, at least until the Cardinals had been able to suggest to the Pope that while there might be good reasons for an internal Council, a Council directed towards union was a very different matter.<sup>9</sup>

Falconi maintains that on the night of the announcement Tardini requested that great care be taken in the official communiqué about the Council.<sup>10</sup> Cardinal Frings would later say that Tardini at first tried to put the brakes on the idea and so lived up to his name!<sup>11</sup>

### The Written Responses of Cardinals

In the speech in which he announced his intention to convoke a council, Pope John XXIII reserved to himself the task of informing the Cardinals who were not present at St. Paul's on January 25, 1959. Four days later, Cardinal Tardini sent the text of the Pope's speech to all the Cardinals. This contained the paragraph: "We would be grateful to each of those present and to those far away for an intimate and trusting word to assure Us of their attitudes of each and to offer Us any of their suggestions as to how to carry out this threefold project."<sup>12</sup>

There were at the time seventy-four Cardinals, twenty-three in the Curia. Nine of the Curial Cardinals and seventeen of the fifty-one others sent a reply to the Pope's announcement.

### *Cardinals in the Roman Curia*

Cardinal Confalonieri replied the day after the announcement, before Tardini's letter had been sent. After expressing how moved and enthusiastic the news had made him, he went on:

There is much to pray for, much to do and to prepare, with patience, order, and prudence. Thus the Church, in accordance with her mission, will give tone and spiritual direction to the world in this surprising crossroads of history and will bear the immense treasures which are manifesting themselves to their true goal, the glory of God. To draw attention and thoughts to these matters of the spiritual order is by itself medicine and comfort amidst the bitterness of wretched human conduct.<sup>13</sup>

Cardinal Tedeschini spoke of the brilliance of the Pope's ideas and of "the grand events" which he was preparing for the Church and the world and promised his service.<sup>14</sup> Di Jorio promised his "filial

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<sup>9</sup> Carlo Falconi, *Pope John and the Ecumenical Council: A Diary of the Second Vatican Council, September - December 1962* (Cleveland and New York: World, 1964), pp. 46-47.

<sup>10</sup> Carlo Falconi, *The Popes in the Twentieth Century: From Pius X to John XXIII* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967) pp. 328-29; it appears, however, that the official press release had already been distributed.

<sup>11</sup> *Für die Menschen Bestellt*, p. 247. The Italian word for "slow-moving" is *tardo*.

<sup>12</sup> *ADA*, I, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *ADA*, I, p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> *ADA*, p. 115.

adherence to the program of apostolic activity" announced by Pope John.<sup>15</sup> Roberti, Fietta, and Mimmi simply thanked Tardini for sending the speech.<sup>16</sup> Agagianian expressed his "profound and devout gratitude for the announcement of the three celebrations" and promised to send the requested observations later.<sup>17</sup>

Of the Curial Cardinals, only Fumasoni Biondi and Pizzardo had anything precise to say. The former indicated his own analysis of the problems facing the Church:

The problems are many and serious, but I think the chief one is promoting a knowledge of the Catechism. Having been Apostolic Delegate in India, in Japan, and in the United States of America, I found that Catholic formation takes place in Catholic schools and institutes. In Korea, Japan, Australia, and especially in North America, a parish is not considered effective if at least an elementary school is not connected to it. Vocations, both male and female, come from both these works. This seems to me an essential point for the religious reform desired in the world.<sup>18</sup>

Pizzardo's letter, although dated February 15, 1959, did not arrive until November 14, 1960 and so was not included in the first volume of the *Acta et Documenta*.<sup>19</sup> Writing as prefect of the Congregation for Seminaries and Universities, the Cardinal first reassured the Pope of the loyalty and attachment of the clergy of the world. After echoing the Pope's indication of the evils facing the Church today, he remarked that "where the life of faith is intense, in constant reverence for revealed truth, not subordinated to the changeable pretences of the theories of the day, the priestly and apostolic ideal shines forth in its integrity, along with an active zeal for the souls which are to be freed from error or from doubt or from the illusions which the modern means of propoganda make irresistible to the naive masses."

For the formation of the clergy and university students, Pizzardo went on, it would be supremely helpful for the Council to recall two great documents of Pius XII: *Humani generis* and *Menti nostrae*. "The twofold and most serious danger which threatens the very bases of revealed religion, indeed of any positive religion, are today naturalism and relativism, in both the doctrinal and the practical fields." *Humani generis* had identified the errors of "that 'eirenicism' which at times derives from weakness of thought and character, but which in not a few cases covers over a more or less conscious connivance with the denail of the divine teaching which the Church proposes to the faithful." In addition, he went on:

Naturalism and relativism, which are particularly insidious for minds still under formation, were acutely and precisely described by the Encyclical under the various aspects which they assume among those who boast of being "moderns," champions of the "new humanity" or of the "new Christianity." It is thus difficult to explain why so solemn a document is already, after a few years, forgotten by many Catholic churchmen, particularly among the regular clergy, whose writings and manuals often have a dominating influence on aspirants to the priesthood.

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<sup>15</sup> ADA, p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> ADA, pp. 117, 122-23.

<sup>17</sup> ADA, p. 133.

<sup>18</sup> ADA, p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> It may be found in *Acta Synodalia App.*, pp. 25-28. A sentence on p. 28 suggests that this letter was not written in February 1959, but after the *vota* of the bishops had been received.

The insistence of *Menti nostrae* on the ascetical-moral tradition that had always marked the priesthood evoked for the Cardinal a new problem to be addressed:

Many people, even among superiors of novitiates and religious scholasticates, are deploring the fact that in the field of everyday life, individual and common, not a few young people--encouraged by the old who are proclaiming themselves "modern"--are scorning the traditional forms of the spiritual life and the springs of supernatural life in order to abandon themselves totally to action, victims of the error condemned by Leo XIII in the Apostolic Letter, *Testem benevolentiae*.

The study and practical updating of both documents would provide norms for the needed reforms.

It is, unfortunately, lamentable that the most pernicious errors continue to be spread in new methods of education, based on a denial or a forgetting of original sin, and on an indiscriminate exaltation of man "as he is," with his morbid tendencies, on a justification of this man by the contingent "situations" in which he finds himself in accordance with circumstances of time and place, as if there did not exist an eternal, immutable law, anterior and superior to man.

Finally, Cardinal Pizzardo suggested a discussion of the nature of the priesthood, attention to the problem of coordinating the work of the secular and regular clergy, and attention to the reform of Canon Law, particularly Books IV and V of the Code.

Except from the letters of Cardinals Fumasoni Biondi and Pizzardo, therefore, not a great deal can be learned about the attitudes of curial Cardinals to the Pope's announcement or about their own ideas for an agenda. It is, of course, not easy to know what to make of the failure of the other curial Cardinals to respond at all to the Pope's request for comments. The following did not answer Tardini's letter: Micara, Ciriaci, Valeri, G. Cigognani, Tisserant, Canali, Cento, Chiarlo, Giobbe, Testa, Bracci, Jullien, Ottaviani, and A. Cicognani. The congregations not represented, therefore, were those of the Holy Office, Sacraments, the Council, Religious, Rites, the Oriental Church, and the Tribunal.

### *Cardinals Elsewhere*

Only seventeen of the forty non-curial Cardinals responded to Tardini's letter. Why the others did not respond is, of course, still unknown, except in cases where they are known to have been ill or under conditions making it impossible to reply (Mindzenty, Stepinac, and, possibly, Wyszynski).

Five of the eight *Italian* Cardinals responded. Montini (Milan) enclosed with his letter to Tardini the text of the communication he had put in his Catholic newspaper. It begins with an impressive paragraph:

The announcement given yesterday by his Holiness John XIII, the happily reigning Pope, about the forthcoming convocation of an ecumenical council, is resounding so profoundly and so powerfully in the Church of God, in the separated Christian communities, in the whole world, that it does not need our echo for everyone, priests and faithful, men of thought and of action, to welcome it with attentive and affected minds. An historic event, of the greatest importance, is occurring. It is not great with hatred or terror, as are terribly great wars; it is not great in the sense of earthly politics or profane culture, as are fleetingly great so many human assemblies; it is not great with scientific discoveries or temporal interests, as are doubtfully great so many facts in our civil development. It is great with peace,

with truth; great today and for tomorrow, great for human peoples and hearts, great for the entire Church and for all of humanity.<sup>20</sup>

Montini's letter goes on in this tone and appeals for prayers for the success of the Council.

This written reply from Montini indicates that he had overcome his initial surprise, if not shock, at the announcement of the Council. There is an apparently trustworthy report that when Cardinal Montini learned of the announcement, he called a good friend and said, "Have you heard the news? *Che vespaio!* [What a hornet's nest!]"<sup>21</sup>

Cardinal Ruffini (Palermo) wrote to the Pope himself:

You can imagine with what joy I learned of the august decision to call an ecumenical council. This was a desire which I cultivated twenty years ago and which I expressed long ago to your predecessor, Pius XII.

Prepared well, it could have material no less copious nor less important than that discussed at the Council of Trent. Such an event, which has already stirred universal interest, will truly offer a beneficial occasion for an invitation to the separated Churches to return at last to obedience to the Vicar of Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup>

The Archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Fossati, devoted most of his letter to the Pope to a description of the great problems of the day:

A hundred years now of Marxist doctrines and a half-century of enslavement to matter, with an absolute exclusion of the supernatural and the divine, a consequence perhaps not willed in its extension and intensity, but surely prepared by masonic liberalism, have been able to roil even the waters of doctrine and Catholic morality in the practice of the Christian life. I think that so powerful an affirmation of the Teaching Church will be an appropriate call back to the clear waters of the spring: that all the faithful, people and clergy, "may have life and have it more abundantly."

In fact, everyone laments a general disorientation, perhaps due to the effects and to the lack of preparation of the surprising conquests of science which are succeeding one another with a growing and incessant rhythm, perhaps due to the social questions cultivated with excessive interest to the detriment of, or better by prevailing over spiritual questions. Certainly it is caused by the triumph of materialism in all its forms, even the most disconnected: immorality has no brakes any longer, because it has no points of reference.

There surely exists a sensational crisis of Catholic discipline, that is, a crisis of obedience as a virtue, created by a misunderstanding of freedom, by an excessive cult of the personality, by a modern relativism, so that people are calling into discussion with the greatest indifference, indeed almost as an inalienable right of freedom, even the statements of the Pope with distinctions which imply little respect, and this is the least that can be said, for the infallible Teacher of truth. I also think that there is a precious patrimony of tradition and of truth on the correct interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures which must be reaffirmed. Perhaps today men are striving to seek to adapt the wisdom of God to the science of men and not, instead, vice-versa, as would be logical and natural. On the other hand, how often the science of men has had to change with regard to the same subject, because of new discoveries or even only because of experience, while God's wisdom remains forever.

The Synod of the Diocese of Rome, the diocese of which the Pope is Bishop, will be like a beginning of the ecumenical council. It will affirm also those basic truths which form or should inform the life of every Christian because they have their basis in the Gospel. Who knows, Holy Father, why in Catholic journals, in pulpits, so much is made so easily of the discoveries of modern science, and never or hardly ever is anything said instead about the virtues, about

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<sup>20</sup> ADA, p. 119.

<sup>21</sup> See *Giovanni Battista Montini Arcivescovo di Milano e il Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II: Preparazione e primo periodo* Brescia: Istituto Paolo VI, 1985), pp. 244, 252, 291; see also Hebblethwaite, p. 324.

<sup>22</sup> ADA, p. 124.

prayer, about purity of morals, about the efficacy of sacrifice and suffering for the salvation of the soul? They emphasize social claims, but don't have the courage to invite people to patience, to Christian resignation, to sweet conformity to the lovable will of the Lord.

Perhaps there also exists a crisis of faith about the essential values of the supernatural life and of grace, according to the spirit and the truths contained in the Gospel and left in the custody of the Church's magisterium. I would say that today there is so much human respect, even unfortunately in priests, in professing the existence of hell, of sin and its serious consequences, of the devil and his harmful and continuous activity to bring souls to ruin.

By the Lord's great grace we are not in the midst of the aberrations which brought the Church to the "Counter-Reformation." We must indeed recognize that the grace of the Lord is at work as always in the midst of our populations. But the internal search for an always greater perfection will be a powerful factor contributing to the unity of the Church, which is the chief scope of the ecumenical council, and it will be an effective reminder of the choicest graces and blessings of the Lord on humanity today, so that it will have to respond generously to the appeal of the common Father of souls.

And finally our prayer will be even more fervid and will take on the form of a more ardent plea that it will not be only the hearts of men that are thrown open at the ecumenical council, but also the doors of the nations, today so hermetically closed to God in the "Church of Silence" and beyond the so-called Iron Curtain, where surely the penetration of the Lord's grace and of the holy Church's beneficent influence is more necessary.<sup>23</sup>

Cardinal Urbani, who succeeded the Pope to the Patriarchate of Venice, wrote a long and warm letter of support. He recalled past conversations with the Pope on the updating of ecclesiastical laws and referred to the necessity and even urgency of the Council. Already the announcement had had a desirable effect, by drawing attention to the Church and to the history of past Councils. He then placed the Council in the context of the division of the world into competing blocs, unable to agree, and raising fears of an apocalyptic war. In such a context the announcement of the Council was a cause for joy. "The Church calls all those who, in the East or in the West, call themselves Christians in the truth revealed by God, of which the true Church is the depositary, and in the love which marks the true disciple of Jesus, not to constitute a bloc, but a community, better a center of light and warmth which might irradiate all over the earth and through a peaceful crusade of apostles promote the recomposition of the great human family."

On more specific apostolic questions, Urbani draws attention to the need for dogmatic clarifications on the "problems concerning relations between Church and the modern State, the development of science, technology, industry, and commerce, the defense of the family, the school, public morality, the examination of technology and its application to pastoral action with updatings that know how to combine *nova et vetera*." The parish also has to be reconsidered in the light of modern developments within and outside the Church. Other areas of concern are religious exemption, charity and social service, and the laity. Urbani concludes by restating "how necessary and urgent the Council is, both from the doctrinal point of view--against neo-modernism, naturalism, and Marxism--and from the disciplinary--updating and strengthening pastoral methods."<sup>24</sup>

Cardinal Castaldo (Naples) touched briefly on all three of the Pope's announced projects. On the Council, he had this to say:

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<sup>23</sup>ADA, pp. 129-30.

<sup>24</sup>ADA, pp. 134-36.

It is cause for great comfort to think of the universal mission of the Church and her maternal concern to gather all believers into unity of thought and action. This concern will manifest itself in the forthcoming ecumenical council where the common aims which will determine participation in it, the unanimous dedication which will sustain its work, and the purposes which will inspire its decisions can be a solemn affirmation of the unity and catholicity of the holy and apostolic Roman Church.<sup>25</sup>

The three Italian Cardinals who sent no reply were dalla Costa, Lercaro, and Siri. Lercaro, who appears not to have thought too much of the new Pope,<sup>26</sup> was quite unenthusiastic:

How dare he summon a council after one hundred years, and only three months after his election? Pope John has been rash and impulsive. His inexperience and lack of culture have brought him to this pass, to this paradox. An event like this will ruin his already shaky health, and make the whole edifice of his supposed moral and theological virtues come tumbling down.<sup>27</sup>

Six of the ten *Latin American* Cardinals wrote in reply to the Pope's announcement. Cardinal Barbieri (Montevideo) expressed his total adherence to the idea of a council: "*Digitus Dei est hic.*"<sup>28</sup> Copello (Buenos Aires), Caggiano (Rosario), and de Barros Camara (Rio de Janeiro) simply acknowledged receipt of the text of the Pope's speech.<sup>29</sup> Luque (Bogota) sent little more than a very brief summary of the Pope's three projects.<sup>30</sup> De la Torre (Quito) focused on the ecumenical implications:

The news of the forthcoming meeting of an ecumenical council has been received by everyone with applause: will it not be the means which, along with prayer, the Lord may use to make so many sheep, distant for so long, return to the sheepfold? Surely the grand spectacle of pastors come from all over the world, indissolubly united in the profession of the same faith and participation in the same sacraments, because subject to the same Head, will open the eyes of many and they will see that in the Roman Church and only in her shines that unity which Jesus in his priestly prayer asked for *His Church*, and aided by divine grace, they will direct their steps towards Rome.<sup>31</sup>

Three other Latin American Cardinals (Arteaga y Betancourt, da Silva, de Vasconcellos Mota, and Garibi y Rivera) failed to respond.

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<sup>25</sup>ADA, p. 140.

<sup>26</sup>Preparing to go to the Conclave of 1958, he is said to have told his secretary, "Do me a favor and don't make a reservation on the train from Venice. I wouldn't want to travel with that chatterbox Roncalli" (see Nazario Sauro Onofri, *Le due anime del Cardinale Lercaro* [Bologna: Cappelli, 1987], p. 81, where Onofri also argues that at the Conclave Lercaro was the candidate of the Pacellians and Roncalli of those desiring a change in direction).

<sup>27</sup>Hebblethwaite, pp. 323-24. Onofri maintains that very little notice of the Pope's announcement was taken in Bologna (pp. 82-84). For a discreet account of Lercaro's failure to reply to the announcement of the Council, see Giacomo Lercaro *Lettere dal Concilio, 1962-1965*, ed. G. Battelli (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1980), pp. 33-34n, and *Per la forza dello Spirito: Discorsi conciliari del card. Giacomo Lercaro*, ed. Istituto per le Scienze Religiose (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1984), p. 10n.

<sup>28</sup>ADA, p. 126.

<sup>29</sup>ADA, pp. 127, 139.

<sup>30</sup>ADA, p. 137.

<sup>31</sup>ADA, p. 144.

No other country was represented by more than one Cardinal. Liénart was the only French Cardinal, and he merely noted the great hope with which the announcement was received.<sup>32</sup> Feltn, Gerlier, Grente, Richaud, and Roques did not reply.

Cardinal O'Hara's assurance of his Church's prayers was the only reply received from the United States that was printed in the *Acta*.<sup>33</sup> Whereas it seems that Cushing and McIntyre did not respond, the Archives of the Archdiocese of New York contain the following copy of a letter from Spellman to Tardini:

Thank you very much for your note of January 29th, Prot. N. 7803, and for the copy of the address given by our Holy Father to the Cardinals in the Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls.

Since the Holy Father was gracious enough to ask for any information that we had available, I am enclosing herewith some items from various sources, Protestant as well as Catholic, so that His Holiness may learn of the immediate reaction to our Holy Father's invitation. I learn also that it will probably require two years to prepare for the Ecumenical Council and wish to assure you that the Archdiocese of New York will be pleased to cooperate in every way, and especially by prayer, in making the results of the Council all that the heart of our Holy Father so ardently desires.<sup>34</sup>

This letter says nothing about Spellman's own view of the calling of the Council apart from the promise of his Archdiocese's cooperation. The apparent coolness of the reply, which perhaps explains why it was not included in the *Acta*, may be explained by a conversation which Spellman had with a French diplomat in New York on the very day that he sent this letter to Tardini. According to the diplomat's dispatch, Spellman expressed some acrimony over having heard about the Council through the press; he thought the decision "premature, senseless and doomed in advance to certain failure." "Such meetings," he said, "are only conceivable after a very long preparation and prior consultation not only of the Curial Cardinals but also of all the Princes of the Church throughout the world."<sup>35</sup>

Neither of the two Canadian Cardinals (Léger and McGuigan) sent in a reply. Godfrey, the sole English Cardinal, simply expressed his willingness to follow the Pope's directives.<sup>36</sup> Cardinal D'Alton of Ireland did not reply. Cardinal Gilroy of Sydney offered brief comments on the three projects, noting with regard to the Council only that "we hope the Council can be completed in a

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<sup>32</sup>ADA, p. 125.

<sup>33</sup>ADA, p. 149.

<sup>34</sup>Spellman to Tardini, February 7, 1959, New York (copy); AANY. Tardini replied on March 14, 1959: "On January 29th, February 25th and February 28th last, you had the goodness to forward numerous newspaper articles and items concerning the forthcoming Ecumenical Council, and it is my pleasure to acknowledge their receipt.

"The Holy Father, to whose attention I brought the contents of Your Eminence's communications, noted with interest the reactions to the announcement of the Council, and He would have me express to Your Eminence His warm appreciation and cordial gratitude for your solicitude in placing this information at His disposal."

<sup>35</sup>Cited in Alberto Melloni, "Governi e diplomazie davanti all'annuncio del Vaticano II," forthcoming.

<sup>36</sup>ADA, p. 132.

brief time, since these days it is not convenient for bishops to be long absent from their sees. A wisely constructed agenda could make this brevity possible."<sup>37</sup>

Cardinal Tappouni, the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, described the joy and hope with which the news of the Council had been received. He concentrated on the hopes the Council could inspire for the unity of Christians. In part for that purpose, he proposed that the Council be held first, then the Synod, and only then the reform of Canon Law.<sup>38</sup>

The only other Cardinal to reply was Cardinal Tien, living in exile in Germany, and he made no mention of the Council.<sup>39</sup>

It would be of interest to know why so many Cardinals did not reply, at least not by letter. In Europe, in particular, we may note that the Belgian Van Roey, the Austrian König,<sup>40</sup> the three Germans, Döpfner, Frings, and Wendel, the four from Spain, Bueno y Monreale, de Arriba y Castro, Pla y Deniel, and Quiroga y Palacios, and the Portuguese Goncalves Cerejeira were silent. The one Cardinal in India (Gracias) and in Mozambique (de Gouveia) did not reply.

### Initial Confusion about the Ecumenical Purpose

In the first months after the announcement, there was a good deal of confusion about the ecumenical purpose of the Council. Writing a year later, Olivier Rousseau, OSB, said that public opinion had passed through three phases with regard to the ecumenical implications of the Council:

1. The Council's purpose is to realize what for a long time has been referred to as the "union of Churches." 2. The Council's purpose is not to realize the union of the Churches, but will work at a renewal of the Christian life in the world by an adaptation of Church discipline to the needs of our time. 3. Although its primary purpose is not the union of the Churches, the Council could, nevertheless, by its work and by the deploying of its resources, attract non-Catholics to it and in this way contribute to unity.<sup>41</sup>

While Rousseau concedes that these stages to some degree simply reflect the mistakes or rashness of the press, he also comments that "it is not certain that the movement of opinion does not correspond to changes in high places." He more than suggests that the first phase reflected the initial desires of the Pope himself and refers obliquely to "moderating interpretations by hesitant

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<sup>37</sup> *ADA*, p. 145.

<sup>38</sup> *ADA*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>39</sup> *ADA*, p. 138.

<sup>40</sup> In an interview, Cardinal König was asked his reaction to the news: "It was so sudden, new and extraordinary that I did not know what to say or do. It was difficult to imagine something which had not been done in the Church for almost a hundred years. And I kept asking myself: What does a council mean today? How does one prepare a council? How does it proceed? I had no experience whatever and I did not know what to do;" Cardinal Franz König, *Where is the Church Heading?* (Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1986), p. 20.

<sup>41</sup> Olivier Rousseau, "Les perspectives de l'Unité," *ICI*, 112 (January 15, 1960), 1-3, at p. 1.

commentators who would appear to be putting a faint-hearted damper on the Holy Father's initial great announcement."<sup>42</sup>

While at the present state of research, these are hypotheses impossible to verify fully, there is some evidence in their favor. The Vatican press release, for weeks the only official notification of the Pope's intentions, made the "invitation" to the separated communities one of the two chief aims of the Council. Particularly when read in the context of several remarks on Christian reunion which Pope John had already made and of the fact that he made the announcement at the end of the week of prayer for Christian unity, this led many people to believe that it was the Pope's intention that the Council bring about unity among Christians.<sup>43</sup>

Some confirmation of this view is perhaps given in the remarks on ecumenism which Pope John was quoted as having made on January 29, 1960 to the Roman clergy:

The Pope said that he was not unaware of the difficulties in implementing this program, also because it will be extremely difficult, he observed, to restore harmony and reconciliation among the different Churches which, separated too long, often are afflicted by internal dissension. The Pope intends to tell them to put an end to the discord and to come together without a minute historical trial to see who was wrong and who right. All parties could be responsible. Thus the Pope intends to say only: "Let us reunite." John XXIII then asked us to notice the undeniable fact that after the separation the Catholic Church became stronger and more united, which means that it possesses the truth.<sup>44</sup>

Shortly after an Italian press agency spread this report, the Vatican denied it and in a front-page article on February 1, the editor of *Osservatore Romano* commented on the matter:

When the Holy Father visited Sts. John and Paul, words were attributed to him which have no sense except to indicate the incomprehension of whoever it was who reported or invented them. They talk of "the faults of the Catholic Church," but there is no trace of this in the speech. It is another of the all too frequent examples of the irreverent superficiality of the hunt for the "sensational," simply because of the public's ever deeper and broader, excited interest in John XXIII. The faults, of which Catholics also are unfortunately not innocent, consist in their not having prayed enough that God smooth out the paths that converge upon his Church, in their not having fully felt such love, in their not having always exercised it towards the separated brethren, preferring the rigor of learned, probative, forceful argument to the generous love which has its own much more decisive fascination, in their having chosen philosophical and professorial austerity over the affectionate serenity of the "Controversies" of St. Francis de Sales. We can make a heartfelt *Confiteor* for egoistic contentment with our dogmatic certainties in the Catholic magisterium without feeling moved and eager to share them with those who envy them and do not yet know how to enjoy them; for the egoism of all those who, seated at the door of the quiet hut, see the storm-cloud which is settling far away on people who either do not notice it or are suffering from it, who nonetheless are struck by it. Our guilt consists in not having listened with apostolic

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<sup>42</sup>Rousseau, "Les perspectives," pp. 1-2. In a letter to Congar, 16 April 1959, Fr. Dumont, director of Istina, commented: "On the precise question of unity, it seems more and more clear that the Holy Father's idea is not to invite other Christian confessions, not even the Orientals, to the Council. This confirms the interpretation I gave in the Bulletin" (Congar Papers).

<sup>43</sup>See Olivier Rousseau, "Le prochain Concile et l'Unité de l'Eglise," *Irénikon*, 32 (1959), 309-33, at pp. 311-15; "Le futur Concile," p. 5; and "Perspectives oecuméniques," *La Revue Nouvelle*, 30 (1959), 558-67, at pp. 558-59; René Laurentin, *L'enjeu du Concile* (Paris: du Seuil, 1962), p. 98.

<sup>44</sup>For this incident see, Gian Franco Svidercoschi, *Storia del Concilio* (Milano: Ed. Ancora, 1967), p. 39.n, and Giovanni Caprile, *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, I/1, p. 107-108n. While Caprile notes that in its brief report on this speech, *Osservatore Romano* did not even mention the Council, he does not note that it was also absent from the report of this speech in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 110/1 (1959), 425, even though *Osservatore* had added it in a fuller account on the following day.

zeal and enthusiasm to the repeated appeals of the Pontiffs, as if they were a repetitious academic ritual instead of an insistent call as urgent as appeals for truth and peace.<sup>45</sup>

One is left wondering why, if Pope John had not spoken about "the faults of the Catholic Church," the editorialist spent so much time to explain what the phrase might mean, and why neither the editor nor anyone else made use of the simple expedient of publishing the full text of this speech.<sup>46</sup>

It is tempting to wonder whether something of the Pope's original intention may not also be reflected in the reply to the announcement of the Council sent by his good friend and successor at Venice, Cardinal Urbani. He expressed the hope that the division of the world into the two great blocs of East and West might be healed because "the Church is calling to an assembly all those who in the East and in the West are called Christians so that in the truth revealed by God, of which the true Church of Christ is the depositary, and in the charity which marks the true follower of Christ, they may constitute, not a bloc, but a community, or better, a center of light and warmth which might radiate over the whole earth and through a peaceful crusade of apostles promote the recomposition of the great human family."<sup>47</sup>

Laurentin quotes the remarks of Dr. Lichtenberger after an audience with Pope John on November 15, 1961: "The Pope told me that he had first thought that the non-Catholic Christian churches could be invited to the future Council, but that the difficulties which had arisen would require that they be asked only to send observers."<sup>48</sup> The initial responses from other churches to the announcement of the Council reflected the confusion about what the Pope really intended the Council to accomplish ecumenically.<sup>49</sup>

When in late March the text of Pope John's announcement was finally released, the ecumenical aim of the Council was discovered to be less prominent. It did not appear as among the chief aims of the Council, but at the end of the text, after hortatory references to prayers for the success of his three proposals "for the enlightenment, edification, and joy of the entire Christian people, for a renewed invitation to the faithful of the separated communities also lovingly to follow us in this search for unity and grace to which so many souls all over the earth aspire."<sup>50</sup> Only later

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<sup>45</sup> *Osservatore Romano*, 1 February 1959, pp. 1-2; see *The Tablet*, 213 (1959), 140. In *Irénikon*, 32 (1959), 59, in *Unitas* 11 (1959), 58, and in "Premières réactions à l'annonce du Concile," *Vers l'Unité Chrétienne*, 12 (1959), 17-30, at p. 19, the Pope's remarks are quoted from the original Italian press release as cited in *La Croix*, 31 January 1959, which would seem to be some indication that all three journals trusted the initial report. Also see Laurentin, *L'enjeu*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>46</sup> In *DMC*, I, pp. 575-79, there is only the longer third-person report given in *OR*. It is, of course, possible that the Pope spoke extemporaneously.

<sup>47</sup> *ADA*, I, p. 135; see also the remarks of Cardinal Fossati, *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>48</sup> Laurentin, *L'enjeu*, p. 188, citing *Informations Catholiques Internationales*, #157 (December 1, 1961), p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> For reviews of these reactions, see *The Tablet*, 213 (1959), 162-63; "Les premières réactions," *ICI*, #90 (February 15, 1959), 5-6; "Premières réactions," *Vers l'Unité Chrétienne*, 12 (1959), 17-30; Paul Leskovec, "The Forthcoming Ecumenical Council as Seen by Three Orthodox Theologians," *Unitas*, 11 (1959), 107-19; Caprile, I/1, pp. 57-85; Rousseau, "Le prochain concile," pp. 318-33; Augustin Cardinal Bea, *The Unity of Christians*, ed. Bernard Leeming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), pp. 129-53; Eugene Bianchi, *John XXIII and American Protestants* (Washington: Corpus, 1968), pp. 71-94.

<sup>50</sup> *DMC*, I, p. 133.

would it become widely known that the reference to ecumenism had been changed from the original text, which spoke of "a renewed invitation to the faithful of the separated churches to share with us in this banquet of grace and fraternity." The published text changes "separated *churches*" to "separated *communities*" and "*share with us* in this banquet of grace and fraternity" to "*follow Us* in this search for unity and grace." Falconi's opinion that these significant changes were the result of Curial pressures to play down the ecumenical dimensions of the Council<sup>51</sup> was echoed by the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Maximos IV:

The announcement of the Ecumenical Council..., of this "Council of union" elated the heart of all Christians. Unfortunately, it seems that the generous intentions of the Holy Father have not had the luck to please certain milieux, which have tried to play down the Pope's statements, to distort their obvious meaning, to the point that, to believe them, in this Council of union the question of union will not be raised. There is reason, the Patriarch added, for despair.<sup>52</sup>

This was a common interpretation placed upon the statements of Cardinal Tardini that the Council would be simply an "internal affair" of the Catholic Church.<sup>53</sup>

Another curial Cardinal, Agagianian, on the other hand, was arguing as late as March 12, 1960, that in Pope John's idea the Council would aim not only at the edification of the Church but above all at the search for the unity of the separated Christian churches.<sup>54</sup> One American bishop, Francis I. Schenk (Crookston), was so disappointed by the apparent deflation of the original ecumenical intention of the Pope that, writing in April 1960, he devoted his whole proposal of an agenda to a plea that the unity of Christians not be "relegated to a footnote," "but be given the careful and profound consideration it deserves."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See Falconi, *Popes*, p. 329: "Was it not perhaps to be feared that, if the separated Churches gave the same answer that they did to Pius IX at the time of the Vatican Council, the isolation of the Holy See would be intensified through the loss of prestige incurred from such a rebuff?"

<sup>52</sup> See *ICI*, 124 (July 15, 1960), 7, and *Irénikon*, 33 (1960), 199-200.

<sup>53</sup> Cardinal Tardini had already used this phrase on July 3, 1959 in his remarks to rectors of Roman universities; see *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II: Appendix* (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1983), p. 18. (This volume hereafter is referred to as *AS App.*) He repeated the point in his press-conference on October 30, 1959 (*ADA*, I, p. 154). See also *Irénikon*, 33 (1960), 201.

<sup>54</sup> Caprile, I/1, p. 135. Robert Rouquette, *La fin d'une chrétienté*, I (Paris: du Cerf, 1968), p. 65, interprets these remarks as representing the opposite pole to that represented by Tardini's comments.

<sup>55</sup> *ADA*, II/VI, pp. 302-305.