

POPES PIUS XI AND PIUS XII AND THE IDEA OF AN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

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In the nineteenth century, even before the definitions of papal supremacy and infallibility at Vatican I, a good number of Catholics believed that the age of Councils had passed. At the beginning of the century, Joseph de Maistre devoted two chapters of *The Pope* to arguing to the superiority of the pope over a council. He recalled "the immense inconvenience of those great assemblies and the abuse to which they were subjected in the first ages of the Church."¹ He cited Gregory of Nazianzen's unfavorable view of councils:

I never saw a council assembled without danger and inconvenience.... To speak truly, I must say that I avoid, as much as I can, assemblies of priests and bishops; I never saw so much as one concluded in a happy and agreeable manner, and which did not tend rather to increase evils than to remove them.²

De Maistre concluded with an argument for their irrelevance today:

Hume has made a brutal remark on the Council of Trent, which it is worth while, nevertheless, to take into consideration: "It is the only general council which has been held in an age truly learned and inquisitive. No one need expect to see another general council till the decay of learning and the progress of ignorance shall again fit mankind for these great impostures."

If you take from this passage the insulting and scurrilous tone from which heresy is never free, there remains a good deal that is true: the more enlightened the world becomes, the less will a general council be thought of. There have just been twenty-one the whole time since the origin of Christianity, which would give about one general council to each period of eighty years; but we see that for two centuries and a half religion has done very well without them; and I do not believe that any one thinks of them, notwithstanding the extraordinary wants of the Church, for which the Pope will provide much better than a general council, if men only understand how to make use of his power.

The world is become too great for general councils, which seem only to have been intended for the youth of Christianity.³

It is ironic, of course, that it would be an Ecumenical Council which would fifty years later define the sovereignty and infallibility of the pope which de Maistre was defending so zealously. When Vatican I was announced, one bishop asked, "Don't we have the Pope? Doesn't the Pope have the power to decide all questions?" And after the Council was forced to close, Bismarck argued that the dogma of infallibility had made councils unnecessary.⁴ When, as we will see below, Pope Pius XI inquired about reconvening Vatican I, Cardinal Billot cited de Maistre while arguing that "the age of

¹ Joseph de Maistre, *The Pope Considered in his Relations with the Church, Temporal Sovereignities, Separated Churches, and the Cause of Civilization* (London: Dolman, 1850), 12.

² de Maistre, *The Pope*, 19. Nazianzen's text became a stock passage for anti-conciliarist attitudes. It has recently been cited by Cardinal Ratzinger in a generally negative evaluation of the impact of Vatican II, "A Review of the Postconciliar Era - Failures, Tasks, Hopes," in *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 368.

³ de Maistre, *The Pope*, 20-21. Later, de Maistre would put it more brutally: "Why talk of a general council, when the pillory is sufficient?" (218n).

⁴ See Yves Congar, "Regard sur le Concile Vatican II," in *Le Concile de Vatican II: Son Eglise, peuple de Dieu et Corps du Christ* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 51-52n, where several other authors are cited.

Ecumenical Councils is now closed and terminated."⁵ This view found its way into common consciousness, popular and scholarly,⁶ and several of the participants at Vatican II were to say that they shared it.⁷

Nevertheless, as Alberigo has pointed out, there is also evidence throughout the first half-century for a good deal of interest on the part of Catholics and the Orthodox in the idea of an Ecumenical Council.⁸ In several interesting articles Giovanni Caprile has described the general character of the discussions about convoking an Ecumenical Council which were initiated by the immediate predecessors of John XXIII, Popes Pius XI and Pius XII.⁹ Both discussions provide some useful historical and theological background for the history and drama of the Council which it was left to Pope John XXIII to convoke, Vatican II.

⁵ See Giovanni Caprile, "Pio XI, la curia romana e il concilio," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 120/2 (1969) 121-33, 563-75 (included as an appendix in Caprile's *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, V [Rome: Ed. "La Civiltà Cattolica," 1969], 681-701), cited from the latter, 692. Earlier Caprile had summarized Billot's view: "Providence itself, in his opinion, took it upon itself to close the Vatican Council by means of a series of well-known events. It thus appears to have wanted to make us see that, with the definition of pontifical infallibility, the age of Councils is terminated, since they are 'so expensive, so inconvenient, so full of difficulties and dangers of every sort'" (683).

⁶ See examples in Congar, "Regard," 51-52n, and in Giuseppe Alberigo, "Giovanni XXIII e il Vaticano II," *Papa Giovanni*, ed. G. Alberigo (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1987), 211-43, at 212.

⁷ See Rock Caporale, *Vatican II: Last of the Councils* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1964), 26-28 (bishops), 162-63 (observers). Joseph I. Schade, "Will the Vatican Council be Reconvened?" *Ecclesiastical Review*, 92 (1935) 14-20, reviewed the program of Vatican I, noted that it was able to issue only two dogmatic decrees ("*Non multa, sed multum*"), and concluded: "It is true that there are only two decrees, but these embrace virtually the entire program of the Council. The questions that remained unsolved could be decided easily and with equal efficacy by the Pope, who was declared to be and is Infallible" (18).

⁸ Alberigo, "Giovanni XXIII," 212; see also Caporale, *Vatican II*, 28-30, for Vatican II bishops who had given the idea some attention even before John XXIII convoked it. To Alberigo's examples may be added, Henri Rondet, "In margine al Concilio: Un documento profetico?" in Caprile, *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, I/2 (Rome: Ed. "La Civiltà Cattolica," 1966), 715-22, Pelopida Stephanou, "Il Patriarcato di Costantinopoli di fronte al problema dell'unione," *Ibid.*, 723-32, and G. Caprile, "La 'preistoria' del Concilio," in Caprile, V, 702-705, at 702, where both Teilhard de Chardin and Archbishop Vagnozzi are cited. In the January 1959 issue of *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, George Dejaive reviewed a book by a Greek Orthodox layman proposing an ecumenical council to end the schism between East and West and said that the idea "will for the moment appear, without doubt, chimerical" (81 [1959] 86).

⁹ "Pio XI e la ripresa del Concilio Vaticano," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 117/2, (1966) 27-39; "Pio XII e un nuovo progetto di Concilio Ecumenico," *Ibid.*, 117/3 (1966) 209-27 (included as the first two chapters of Caprile's *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, I/I (Roma: Ed. "La Civiltà Cattolica," 1966), 3-35); "Alcune osservazioni su 'Pio XII e il Concilio,'" *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, I/II (Rome: Ed. "La Civiltà Cattolica," 1966), 687-89; "Pio XI, la curia romana e il concilio," art. cit. The article on Pius XII has been enlarged and republished as "Pius XII. und das zweite Vatikanische Konzil," in *Pius XII. zum Gedächtnis*, ed. H. Schambeck (Berlin, 1977), 649-91. References to the Italian articles are to their republication in *Il Concilio Vaticano II*, cited as "Caprile, vol." There is a convenient summary of Caprile's research in François-Charles Ugnet, "Les projets de Concile général sous Pie XI et Pie XII," in *Le deuxième Concile du Vatican* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1988), 66-78.

Pope Pius XI

The possibility of reconvening the suspended First Vatican Council was mentioned by Pope Pius XI in his inaugural Encyclical, *Ubi arcano* (December 23, 1922):

Recently you afforded Us new and striking evidence of your zeal when...you came in great numbers, from every part of the world, to the Eternal City, to the tombs of the Apostles, on the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress and of the celebration of the Centenary of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda. The assemblage of a body of Pastors so renowned and so authoritative suggested to Us the idea of summoning to this city, the capital of the Catholic world, at an opportune time, a similar solemn assembly for the purpose of discovering suitable means to repair the ravages consequent on the terrible upheaval in human society. For the success of this project the auspicious approach of the Holy Year inspires in Us increased confidence.

At the present time, indeed, We could not attempt to resume the sessions of that Ecumenical Council which, as We Ourselves remember, was inaugurated by Pope Pius IX of holy memory. In this, though only partially completed, he succeeded in accomplishing work of the highest importance. The reason We do not resume it now is that, like the renowned leader of the Israelites, We await in suppliant attitude of prayer the moment when the good and merciful God may grant Us a clearer manifestation of His will.¹⁰

Four months later, the Pope had an inventory made of the archives of Vatican I and then authorized a study of the topics which that Council had intended but was unable to treat. In a secret consistory on 23 May 1923, he requested the views of the Cardinals on whether it was useful to convoke an ecumenical council to conclude Vatican I and whether it might be held in the Holy Year of 1925. These inquiries were repeated in a letter from Cardinal Gasparri shortly afterwards.¹¹

Caprile has discovered 29 responses to this letter, all from Curial Cardinals, written between May 27 and July 4, 1923. Three of them are quite against the idea (Billot, Fruhwirth, and Boggiani), the rest in favor. Among the chief reasons against reconvening Vatican I are: that the 53 years that have passed make it inappropriate to call a new council a continuation of Vatican I, that with the definition of papal infallibility, Councils are no longer necessary, are too expensive, and too full of difficulties and dangers, that there were no matters which either had not already been dealt with by the popes or could not be dealt with by them in the future, and that the unsettled state of the Roman Question made it unwise to hold a Council, which would demonstrate the ability of the pope to carry out his task even without the temporal power.¹² Other reasons advanced against the idea of the Council included the political and psychological conditions of the world (particularly nationalism among the hierarchies), certain dangerous tendencies among the bishops and clergy (modernism,

¹⁰ *Social Wellsprings: Vol. II: Eighteen Encyclicals of Social Reconstruction by Pope Pius XI*, ed. Joseph Husslein (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1942), 20-21; for an earlier draft of this passage, see Caprile, 4.

¹¹ Caprile, V, 681.

¹² Caprile, V, 682-86. Caprile, it seems, regards the last of these reasons as decisive for Pius XI.

democracy, episcopalism),¹³ a lack of theological preparation and skills,¹⁴ the technical and financial difficulties, and the fear of how the press would exploit a Council.¹⁵

Among the arguments in favor were the rise and spread of new errors which need condemnation, advantages for vocations, the missions, the clergy, and families, a strengthening of the bonds between bishops and pope, an affirmation of the role of bishops in the Church, a demonstration of super-national unity which would give a great lesson to a fractured world, the opportunity to bring remedies to the world's problems, and the great contribution it would give to the return of other Christians to the Church.¹⁶

Among the topics recommended for treatment were questions of fundamental theology, social theories, education, marriage, Church and State, the discipline of clergy and people, catechesis, and the Eastern Catholic Churches. The three Cardinals who mentioned it declared that they thought it inopportune to define the Assumption and mediation of Mary.¹⁷ There was no agreement among the Cardinals as to when the Council should be held. Several said that it should not last very long so that the bishops would not have to be away from their dioceses too long.¹⁸

The arguments against reconvening the Council must not have been considered decisive, because on October 22, 1923, a letter was sent to all Cardinals, residential archbishops and bishops, prelates and abbots *nullius*, asking them to indicate whether they thought it opportune to reconvoke the Council. The recipients were told that the Council would certainly not reconvene during the coming Holy Year, and that the topics to be discussed should it be reconvened would be

¹³ Cardinal Billot said: "Finally, here is the most serious reason, the one which would seem to me absolutely to militate for a negative reply. Resuming the Council is desired by the worst enemies of the Church, the modernists, who are already getting ready--as quite certain indications reveal--to profit from the estates general of the Church in order to make revolution, a new '89, the object of their dreams and hopes. They will not succeed, of course, but we would see again those very sad days of the end of the pontificate of Leo XIII and of the beginning of that of Pius X; we would see things even worse, and it would annihilate the happy fruits of the Encyclical *Pascendi* which silenced them all." Billot was also especially fearful that "the proportion, considerable both in numbers and in means of action, of the Irish-American element in Council, would introduce procedures of discussion and propaganda more in accord with democratic usage than with ecclesiastical traditions." Cardinal Bonzano was concerned about "the danger that a certain number of bishops, especially foreigners, would try to emphasize their own rights, in opposition to the prerogatives of the primacy of the Supreme Pontiff, under the pretext that Rome centralizes too much" (Caprile, V, 688).

¹⁴ This was the concern of Cardinal Ehrle, who decried the inability of the strict disciples of St. Thomas even to understand the views of any other theological traditions or writers, making the required theological discussion at a Council almost impossible (Caprile, V, 689)

¹⁵ Cardinal Merry del Val asked: "Would it really be possible to prevent the world press from disturbing and confusing the work of the Ecumenical Council? In 1870 the Pope was master in his own house and the press did not yet have the ability it now has to penetrate everywhere, to spy, and to set traps. Would it be possible to prevent it from acting more or less openly within the Council itself, stirring up people, creating dissension, inhibiting the work, and compromising the result of the debates in the Council itself? (Caprile, V, 691).

¹⁶ Caprile, V, 691-95.

¹⁷ Caprile, V, 695-98.

¹⁸ Caprile, V, 698-99.

communicated to them in good time. They were not asked to suggest themes themselves. 1165 responses were received, over 900 of them in favor of reconvening Vatican I, 63 asking for a delay, and only 34 clearly opposed to the idea.¹⁹

Meanwhile, in 1924, the Pope received sets of proposals of topics which had become urgent since the close of Vatican I. Caprile gives the following summary:

I. DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON THE FAITH. 1. The Most Holy Trinity. 2. The creation and nature of man. 3. The elevation and fall of man. 4. The mystery of the Incarnation of the Word. 5. The grace of our divine Redeemer. 6. The universal mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. 7. The bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven.

II. THE TRUE CHURCH OF CHRIST. 1. The nature of the true Church of Christ. 2. That the Church is a perfect, supernatural, visible, necessary, infallible, universal society. 3. The doctrinal, sacramental, legislative, judicial, coercive power of the Church. 4. The relationship of the civil power to the Church. 5. The social reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

III. AN INTERNATIONAL CODE. 1. Criteria for preparing an international code. 2. What are the inviolable principles of the law of nations. 3. The fundamental laws by which peace and war must be carried out. 4. What is licit and what illicit in war. 5. Within what limits must nationalism be confined. 6. The right to use one's own language. 7. The law of plunder. 8. Indemnification or Reprisals.

IV. THE SOCIETY OF NATIONS. 1. The concept of the society of nations according to the principles of the Catholic Church. 2. Its goal. 3. Its duties. 4. The criteria which should govern it. 5. The disease of socialism and communism.

V. CATHOLIC ACTION. 1. What is understood by Catholic Action. 2. In what way it is to be understood. 3. What basic principles should govern it. 4. Whether it should have a so-called confessional character. 5. How it depends on ecclesiastical authority. 6. What activities it includes. 7. The relationship of workers' associations to faith.

VI. SCHOOLS. 1. What principles should govern the religious education of children in schools. 2. How religious instruction in schools should be imparted. 3. Mixed schools and co-education. 4. What principles should govern schools of arts. 5. Universities.

VII. THE DUTIES AND ROLES OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY. 1. Whether and which roles and duties in society belong to women. 2. In what way women should fulfil the duties appropriate to their status.²⁰

Despite the overwhelmingly positive response which he received both from the Curia and from the bishops, Pius XI never reconvened the First Vatican Council. Caprile suggests as reasons the Pope's preoccupation with the Holy Year of 1925 and especially the initiation of the negotiations that were to settle the Roman Question in 1929, an event which itself required major organizational problems within the Holy See.²¹ The materials collected by Pius XI remained in the private papal

¹⁹ Caprile, I/1, 9-10, gives the text of this letter and a breakdown of the figures of the responses.

²⁰ Caprile, I/1, 8. This text conflates two distinct texts prepared by Edward Hugon, Vice-regent of the Angelicum, and by Alexis Lepicier.

²¹ Caprile, I/1, 11. Soon after the signing of the Lateran Pact, an ecumenist wrote: "If he considers it opportune, he [the Holy Father] could again exercise his mission in the most solemn form known in Church history, by convoking a council which would resume and complete the program inaugurated by the Vatican Council but interrupted by the tragedy of 1870. The resumption of that solemn meeting was the spontaneous and eager hope of the faithful when the Lateran Pact was signed" (D.F. de Wyels, "Le Concile du Vatican et l'Union," *Irénikon*, 6 (1929) 366, cited in O.

library, where, Caprile says, they were consulted by Pope John XXIII sometime after his announcement of Vatican II.²²

Pope Pius XII

Information about the idea of an ecumenical council during the reign of Pope Pius XII was revealed late in 1959 by Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini. On October 28, 1959, in a lecture on the first year of Pope John's pontificate, Ruffini wrote:

Twenty years ago, at the feet of Pius XII, I, the least of all priests, dared to call for an Ecumenical Council. It seemed to me to be urgently required by the circumstances, and that there was as much material to treat as the Council of Trent had had. The venerable Pontiff did not reject the proposal and took note of it, as he used to do on important matters. I know that he later spoke about it with other prelates, but Divine Providence reserved to his successor the difficult and arduous enterprise.²³

Ruffini's comment places the appeal for a Council in the very first days of Pius XII's pontificate.²⁴

During the interregnum between Pius XI and Pius XII, Celso Costantini prepared a *pro-memoria* on the state of the Church which included a proposal for an ecumenical council.²⁵ As Butterini summarizes the argument, the following reasons were advanced:

The time was ripe, the new Code insufficient, the ordinary administration of the individual pontiffs inadequate. An ecumenical council was necessary. The tradition of the Church and its needs call for it, as do also, above all, so many of the faithful and the world itself, full of sympathy for the Church. Such requests cannot be met by new dogmatic definitions or by further condemnations; instead greater room has to be opened for charity.²⁶

In March 1948, Monsignor Alfredo Ottaviani, Assessor of the Holy Office, discussed the subject with Pius XII, urging the need to clarify and define certain doctrinal points because of the growing number of errors in philosophy, theology, morality and society, pointing as well to problems about communism, modern warfare, the updating and reform of Canon Law, matters of Church discipline, culture, Catholic Action, etc., and mentioning, finally, the desired proclamation of the

Rousseau, "Le futur Concile et sa préparation," *Irénikon*, 34 (1961) 5-20, at 6-7) In 1935 an American author noted that "from time to time newspapers and magazine articles speak of the possible reconvening of the Vatican Council;" Schade, "Will the Vatican Council be Reconvened?," 14.

²² Caprile, I/1, 9, n. 12.

²³ Caprile, I/1, 15. The full text of Ruffini's address was printed as "Il Santo Padre Giovanni XXIII nel primo anno di pontificato," *Divinitas*, 4 (1960) 7-28.

²⁴ Caprile dates Ruffini's audience February 24, 1948, but does not explain how this is to be reconciled with Ruffini's statement that it took place twenty years before 1959.

²⁵ This document has now been published, with an introduction, in Giuseppe Butterini, "Per un concilio di riforma: una proposta inedita (1939) di Celso Costantini," *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, 7 (1986) 87-139, at 95n; *idem*, *Alle origini del Concilio Vaticano II. Una proposta di Celso Costantini* (Pordenone, 1989). There are earlier references to this document in Olivier Rousseau, "Le prochain concile et l'Unité de l'Eglise," *Irénikon*, 32 (1959) 309-33, at 309, and in *Unitas*, 48-49 (1959-60) 14; see Antoine Wenger, *Vatican II: Vol. I: The First Session* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1966), 16.

²⁶ Butterini, "Per un concilio di riforma," 88.

dogma of the Assumption. The Pope stated some of the difficulties about calling a Council, but authorized some initial preparatory work, to be carried out secretly and within the Holy Office, to identify topics to consider and then to choose people to be asked to join eventual preparatory commissions.²⁷

Two weeks later, on March 15, 1948, Ottaviani presided over a meeting of six consultors and informed them of the pope's charge. The commission met four more times before the end of May, during which they proposed establishing five preparatory commissions (for dogmatic and speculative theological matters, for practical theological matters, for disciplinary and liturgical matters, for the missions, and for Christian action and culture) and a Central Commission, whose members would be chosen from the Roman Curia, to coordinate the work of the different study-commissions.

Ottaviani's commission also began a study of topics for the Council to consider, reviewing the agenda of Vatican I and the acts of the Holy Office. Caprile gives a summary of the topics proposed by this commission and makes the pertinent remark that they indicate that certain problems that emerged after Vatican II were already perceived and known in Rome.²⁸

The commission also considered who should be invited to take part in the preparatory commissions. They drew up a list of 36 persons, and then proposed that the members would be chosen from among the consultors to the Roman congregations, with the addition of a non-Roman, chosen after consultation with papal representatives and some bishops of important dioceses. (Pius XII himself decided that it was unnecessary to consult more widely, and the commission was asked to propose names of non-Roman experts.) As for the proposed Central Commission, this would be composed of members of the Roman Curia, while members of the Commission would also preside over the various preparatory commissions.²⁹

In February 1949, Pius XII established the Central Commission or Special Preparatory Commission, with Monsignor Borgongini Duca as President and Pierre Charles, of Louvain, as Secretary. The Commission met six times between February and May, 1949. They proposed sending a letter to select bishops (65 of them in some thirty countries) soliciting their proposals for the Council. Although a later plenary session of the Holy Office was to postpone a consultation of these bishops, the letter drawn up is worth quoting for the indications it gives of the spirit and purposes of the preparatory Commission:

²⁷ Caprile, I/1, 16.

²⁸ Caprile, I,1, 17-18. Here I will quote only the topics proposed for the speculative theological commission: "False philosophies (idealism; existentialism; new gnosis). -- Relationship between the Church's Magisterium and Tradition. -- Theological method, particularly with regard to dissidents (dogmatic minimalism; convergence of dogmas; equivalence between the dogmas of Catholics and those of the heterodox). -- Origin of the jurisdiction of bishops. -- Original sin and polygenism. -- Errors about the Mystical Body. -- Inerrancy of Holy Scripture and the literary genres of the ancient oriental historians. -- The 'Co-redemption' of Mary does not seem mature enough to be proposed. -- The Assumption of Mary."

²⁹ Caprile, I/1, 18-19. In the end, no expert from outside Rome was ever invited to take part in the preparatory work, except for Pierre Charles, who was chosen as General Secretary.

The flood of surging errors and the dangerous conditions in the Church and civil society, which eighty years ago were the reason for the convocation of the Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, not only has not receded or been diverted but has indeed become more serious.

But since for the most part the problems which forced Pope Pius IX to suspend the Council have now been removed, the present Pope, Pius XII, considers it most opportune and quite appropriate to his supreme pastoral role and concern that the Council again be restored and be brought at last to its mature fulfilment.

Our most holy Lord's soul is moved by charity and by the command of Christ to shepherd and defend the flock and also to bring the other sheep to the one sheepfold and to the one Shepherd, so that all may together safely enjoy the very abundant fruits of Redemption.

Of the materials concerning faith and morals which were prepared in the Vatican Council, few, although important ones, were defined, many were deferred, of which some are no longer pertinent, some have since been provided for by decrees of the Apostolic See, while others still demand their solution.

To these must be added new and most serious matters which today from all sides assail and attack Christ, his teaching and the Church.

For that reason, Your Eminence (Excellency), it has pleased His Holiness through me to ask your opinion particularly about those matters which, considering the conditions today of the Church and of human society, you believe should be examined and resolved in the next Ecumenical Council, should it be God's will that it be convoked.

You should indicate frankly, in the Lord, what you think it appropriate to submit for the future Council's examination and, if need be, definition with respect to the following: doctrinal matters, practical questions, moral, juridical or social, matters concerning the discipline of the clergy and Christian people, matters concerning the spread of the Kingdom of God through the missions. Please do so in a few and clear statements, keeping most strictly the secret of the Holy Office.³⁰

The Preparatory Commission also considered the topics to be discussed at the Council. A review of the unfinished agenda of Vatican I concluded that there was not enough there by itself to justify calling a Council, but this judgement was offset by the conclusion that enough material had been accumulated in recent decades to keep a Council busy. The Commission was able to reach unanimity on the following judgement about doctrinal issues:

With regard to doctrinal errors collected by the Commission, it would perhaps be possible to prepare one or two documents which would crush the center from which they spring, that is: the disparagement of the human mind and will in favor of feeling, and hence the denial of the supernatural by the most radical affirmation of naturalism. -- It would also be necessary to prepare a document on the interpretation of Sacred Scripture, directed at new, more or less heterodox, forms of biblical exegesis.³¹

There was also agreement that the Council should limit its attention to matters of universal interest for the whole Church, that a solid basis for its work could be found in the forty or so Encyclicals published since Vatican I and in the Code of Canon Law, and that "under present world-conditions, in proposing topics, anything should be avoided which could provoke open disagreement among the Fathers in the Council."³² Caprile offers his own synthesis of doctrinal elements in the prospectus prepared by the Secretary General:

³⁰ Caprile, I/1, 22.

³¹ Caprile, I/1, 20.

³² Caprile, I/1, 22.

I. GOD AND HIS SUPREME DOMINION AS SOURCE OF EVERY ORDER. a) *On the knowledge of God through reason* (against those who deny the ability of the human mind in this regard; against existentialism; against a false conception of the relationships between Revelation and theology; against those who despise St. Thomas and the Scholastic teachers). b) *On the knowledge of God and divine realities through faith*: the dignity and nature of Sacred Scripture; Revelation and faith (against many errors in this field; the nature and authority of Tradition should be determined). c) *Errors and dangers which flow from neglect of God's supreme dominion* (totalitarian systems; liberalism and moral individualism).

II. THE NATURE AND END OF MAN: a) *The excellence and duties of human nature* (against the various forms of existentialism, materialism, paganizing humanism, naturalism). b) *Human society*: the family (errors about the primary purpose of marriage; birth control; artificial insemination; the claimed primary right of the State over the family and the Church in the field of education); civil society (against those who deny the essential rights of the human person; who deny the social question or want to settle it with violence; against those who in public life make agreements with non-Catholics without any consideration of the rights of the Church; against those who are inspired by Communist doctrines, regarding the social doctrine of the Church as antiquated; against those who support the class struggle, etc.; the need to state the social doctrine of the Church as it is contained in the papal Encyclicals); international society (the urgent need to promote an association of all States for the common good and to avert wars; against those who want to have recourse to war to resolve disputes among nations; against proponents of total war with all its consequences; state the Catholic teaching of love towards all creatures).

III. THE NATURE AND ROLE OF THE CHURCH: revive what had been prepared for the Vatican Council, especially against those who maintain that every "sincere" person, even without baptism and without visible dependence on the Head of the Church, is *vere et proprie* a member of the Church; against those who claim that dissidents differ only in name from the faithful (Ecumenism); the suitability of saying something about the role and power of the Church over the unbaptized. -- It also seems suitable to speak solemnly about the spread of the Church and about the teaching on the missions: the purpose and formal object of the missions; means of evangelization; the appropriateness of receiving into the patrimony of the Church whatever has not been vitiated by sin; the obligation to help the missions which falls on the whole Church and all bishops.³³

After July 1949, the Central Commission met rarely. But the subcommissions continued to meet and by the end of 1950 they had prepared so much material as to make the Secretary General wonder whether a single Council could deal with it all.³⁴ Perhaps because of the abundance of material, a difference of opinion arose within the Commission as to the organization and tasks of the Council. One group wanted a brief Council, giving a solemn witness of unity and unanimity so that adversaries could not exploit whatever differences of opinion might appear. On the other hand, all appearance of manipulation of the Council must be avoided. The only way to obtain a real and spontaneous consensus would be to prepare "a conciliar profession of faith, capable of winning unanimous consent, but at the same time allowing, indeed encouraging full freedom of discussion, emendation, addition, and proposal. The Commission, therefore, should prepare a brief and complete text, in which are clearly and positively proposed the principal truths professed by the Church and considered of greatest importance for the contemporary world; the text should prescind from all controversy, so that it will be unanimously acceptable to the Council, indeed preferably by acclamation." At the same time, there should be a separate list of errors to be condemned and reforms

³³ Caprile, I/1, 23.

³⁴ See Caprile, I/1, 25, for a brief description of the documents prepared. According to Butterini, it was as part of these investigations, that Costantini revised his 1939 *pro-memoria* ("Per un concilio di riforma," 92).

to be enacted, which also could be emended, added to, etc. After the Council, decrees on these matters could be drawn up by the pertinent dicasteries of the Roman Curia *ad mentem Concilii*. The advantage of this agenda was that it would not require great preparation and would not require a long Council.³⁵

Another, larger group within the Preparatory Commission, however, argued that the Council should proceed in accordance with tradition. This would require a long period of preparation and would mean that the length of the Council would have to be left to the free judgement of the Fathers who at all costs must not get the impression that everything had been arranged beforehand by the Roman Curia. Here the great problem was following the traditional conciliar practice with so great a number of participants. Various proposals were entertained, among them one which would send out various questions to the bishops, on the basis of their suggestions prepare a doctrinal draft, send this out for observations, and on this basis prepare final texts to be submitted to the Council. Another proposed that the Council meet in various sessions, once every one or two years, lasting about a month, to which perhaps one bishop per province would be invited. These would be working sessions. At the end of these, a solemn session would be convened, with all bishops present, to issue the dogmatic definitions prepared in the working sessions and to approve definitively all the work of the Council.³⁶ This disagreement within the Preparatory Commission was referred to Pius XII in January 1951.

It was while these discussions were going on that Cardinal Ruffini repeated his appeal for a Council:

The conviction that a Council would be highly useful grew in me when, in the summer of 1950, received in audience at Castel Gandolfo, I opened my heart and said, "Most blessed Father, I want humbly to offer you heartfelt congratulations..." "Perhaps," he interrupted me, "for the Encyclical *Humani generis*." I timidly answered, "Yes, Holy Father, for that splendid document too." "It was quite necessary," Pius XII replied in a resolute voice, "everything was being lost!" The remark was like a sharp sword entering me; I was familiar with many errors, theories more or less subversive in matters of faith and morals; but I wouldn't have come to make a judgement so disconcerting. "I must admit," I said to myself, "the evil is much greater than I thought." The Encyclical, *Humani generis*, was intended to set things straight and to remind professors and writers to be careful of certain extremes and to be more cautious in accepting new theories which are in conflict with traditional teachings. From the Vatican Council down to today, the Supreme Pontiffs, Leo XIII, St. Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XI and Pius XII, day by day followed the developments of civic and social life in every area, intervening at appropriate times, with wondrous wisdom and heroic courage, to enlighten the minds and strengthen the wills of the shepherds of souls and of the faithful. The coming Council--should it believe it opportune--could stamp their principal teachings with that definitive value which would place them above and beyond all discussion.³⁷

³⁵ Caprile, I/1, 26-27. It is tempting to relate this proposal for an initial profession of faith to the effort made during the preparation of Vatican II to compose a new formula of faith which would be approved by the Pope beforehand and professed by all the bishops at the beginning of the Council. See Antonino Indelicato, "La 'Formula nova professionis fidei' nella preparazione del Vaticano II," *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, 7 (1986) 305-40.

³⁶ Caprile, I/1, 27-28.

³⁷ Ruffini, "Il Santo Padre," 14-15. Ruffini also alluded to his proposal when he replied to Pope John's announcement of the Council: "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 a good while back to your

Another figure who urged a Council on Pius XII was Riccardo Lombardi, the famous founder of the Movement for a Better World. His first, rather apocalyptically drawn proposal dates from 1948 and prompted the Pope to ask for a fuller statement of the case. Lombardi drew up a proposal of 60 pages which included suggestions for a reform of the papal court and ceremony, a renunciation of Church wealth, and changes in the election of the pope. The Pope's reaction was cautious, but he did authorize the discussions described above.³⁸ It may perhaps be assumed that Lombardi's ideas about a Council were those expressed in his book published in 1961, much to the displeasure of Pope John XXIII.³⁹

Riccardi places the proposals for a Council in a larger project of Pius XII:

Two moments in the great mobilization of the Catholic world are the Holy Year of 1950 and the Marian Year of 1954. In the gloomy end of the 1940s, when a worldwide conflict did not seem out of the question, Pius XII intended to present the Church as "the light of the world" during the unfolding of the Holy Year. In this project, this Year would be solemnized by an Ecumenical Council in Rome, where all the bishops would condemn the enemies of the Church and proclaim her victory by the dogma of the Assumption. Father Caprile reveals that the project of a Council ran aground because of fears that during the Council "some open disagreements among the fathers" might be expressed. Despite the undoubted agreement of the bishops around the Pope, there were fears that the Council would not be able to be controlled. Basically, the convoking of a Council, even if it were pre-determined and restricted by an agenda, would be an important structural decision because of the role which bishops would inevitably assume in matters hitherto reserved to the Supreme Pontiff. Vatican I itself, despite having been pre-determined by the Curia and the majority of bishops, had raised more than a few problems of orientation. The Pope contented himself, therefore, with an individual consultation of the bishops and with the solemn proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption.⁴⁰

Jean Daniélou gives this account of the discussions under Pius XII:

The decision to convoke a Council has often been presented as an inspiration of John XXIII. In reality, the thought had been present in Roman circles for some time. From 1948, soon after the war, the idea began to appear. An assembly of the universal Church seemed needed in order to confront the revolutions in society and the ideological currents which were appearing.

predecessor, Pius XII, of happy memory.

"Prepared well, the Council could have material no less copious and no less important than that treated at the Council of Trent. Such an event, which has already aroused universal interest, will offer a providential occasion for an invitation to the separated Churches to return at last to obedience to the Vicar of Jesus Christ" (*ADA*, I, 124).

³⁸ For this, see Giancarlo Zizola, "Roncalli e padre Lombardi," *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, 8 (1987) 73-75; *idem*, *Il microfono di Dio: Pio XII, padre Lombardi e i cattolici italiani* (Milano: Mondadori, 1990), 133-74; Andrea Riccardi, *Il potere del papa da Pio XII a Paolo VI* (Bari: Laterza, 1988) 122-23.

³⁹ For Pope John's actions to repudiate Lombardi's book, *Concilio: Per una riforma nella carità* (Rome: Ed. APES, 1961), see Zizola, "Roncalli e padre Lombardi," 83-93; *Il microfono di Dio*, 450-71. Zizola does not attempt to compare the document Lombardi prepared for Pius XII with the book he published under John XXIII, but Andrea Riccardi, relying on a scholar who has access to the Lombardi papers, says that "the volume on the Council is only an amplification of the manuscript on the reform of the Church personally presented to Pius XII;" see Andrea Riccardi, "Governo e 'profezia' nel pontificato di Pio XII," in *Pio XII*, ed. Andrea Riccardi (Roma-Bari: Ed. Laterza, 1984), 31-92, at 62, and 90, n.127). Riccardi also refers to V. Rotondi, *Padre Riccardo Lombardi, una vita conquistata da Cristo* (Castelgandolfo, 1980).

⁴⁰ Riccardi, "Governo e 'profezia,'" 59. In his *Il potere del papa da Pio XII a Paolo VI*, 48, Riccardi says that the idea of a Council was set aside because of fear of disagreement among the conciliar Fathers.

Commissions were established at the time and topics chosen. But the differences were too great on what orientations to follow, and the project was abandoned in 1951. In 1954 the question was posed again. Certain members of the Curia were in favor of a rather rapid convocation. But Pius XII was opposed to it, believing that a long preparation was necessary. And Cardinal Tisserant seemed to have been of this view. The announcement by John XXIII, on January 25, 1959, of the convocation of a Council must have surprised him as well as the rest of the members of the Curia.⁴¹

Various reasons have been proposed for why Pius XII did not convene a Council. Some appeal to his age and state of health,⁴² and others to his psychological make-up,⁴³ which would not have made it easy for him to deal with an institution and event like a Council.⁴⁴

According to Caprile, Pius XII brought the conciliar preparations to an end in 1951, and the materials assembled over almost three years of investigation were deposited in an archive of the Vatican. There they remained until 1959, when the Antepreparatory Commission for Vatican II, learning of their existence, gained Pope John XXIII's permission to review them.⁴⁵

For the sake of the record, however, it should be noted that some people thought that the idea remained alive during the last years of Pius XII's reign. Daniélou, as quoted above, spoke of a revival of the idea in 1954. Lambert Beauduin wrote about the possibility to Bishop Charue in April, 1957:

I wonder, Excellency, whether the Holy Father plans to resume the work of Vatican Council and to define the doctrine of the episcopacy which was one of the projects of the council. It is the most definable question in the whole of theology.... The age of the Holy Father might make one hesitate, but Pius IX was eighty years old in 1870 and Pius XII is possessed of a valor and courage that nothing can discourage. A solemn and ecumenical manifestation should

⁴¹ *Discours de réception de S.E. le Cardinal Jean Daniélou à l'Académie Française et réponse de M. Wladimir d'Ormesson* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1973), 34-35.

⁴² See Caprile, I/2, 687-88, where Pius XII invokes his advanced age. Virginio Rotondi reported that two years before he died, Pius XII said, "This Council is now urgent for the Church; but it needs a young pope" (Zizola, "Roncalli e padre Lombardi," 75), a remark that he made several times, according to Raimondo Spiazzi, interviewed in *Processo a Pio XII*, ed. Emilio Cavaterra (Milano: Pan, 1979), 81-82. See also the brief remarks of Francis J. Weber, "Pope Pius XII and the Vatican Council," *American Benedictine Review*, 21 (1970) 421-24.

⁴³ Caprile, I/1, 28n, quotes the comments of a Cardinal who knew Pius XII well: "He said that to implement the Council was needed a man like Pope John, with his courage and decisiveness. Perhaps, he said, Pius XII would never have convoked it because his character would not have been suited to have alongside him an organism with the powers and influence of a Council." See also Caporale, *Vatican II*, 44-46.

⁴⁴ Caporale, 48, quotes the Pope's private secretary, Fr. Lieber, as adducing in explanation Pius XII's age, temperament, and the international situation (citing Beat Ambard, "Das Konzil: das grosse Anliegen Papst Johann XXIII," *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, February 7, 1960). Colman Barry comments: "Pius XII had thought of convoking a council, but World War II and the problems of the postwar years, as well as his own personal indecision and general approach to the papacy, had combined to delay the decision" (see *American Nuncio: Cardinal Aloisius Muench* [Collegeville: St. John's University Press, 1969], 276, where Barry also claims that Aloisius Muench was being considered during the deliberations under Pius XII to fill the role of secretary general of the projected council). Muench fully supported Pope John's decision to call a council.

⁴⁵ Caprile, I/1, 28.

not make him draw back. *Fiat! Fiat!* The Bishop of Namur should play the role of Cardinal Dechamps of Malines there.⁴⁶

In 1955, Otto Karrer expressed his hope "in a future general ecumenical council" and he repeated the comment three years later.⁴⁷

In the last year of Pius XII's pontificate, two proposals for an ecumenical council were briefly made in an Italian journal, *Palestra del Clero*. The first occurs in an open letter from an Italian priest, proposing that at a forthcoming international theological congress some attention be given to "the hidden desire of the last generations of theologians, that is, that the reopening of the Vatican Ecumenical Council be considered."⁴⁸ A year later, in the June 1, 1958, issue, a review of the crises that have marked the history of the Church identified the contemporary crisis as a potentially apocalyptic and catastrophic confrontation between West and East.⁴⁹ The author noted the circulation of ideas about the internationalization of the Holy See, including the possibility of a non-Italian pope, and the convoking of an ecumenical council:

In this hope and in this orientation of effective zeal, preparations have been underway for some time in the Apostolic See for a universal Council to resume the work of the Vatican Council interrupted in 1870 by the capture of Rome. Every Christian, who, let us not forget it, is a member of the Mystical Body of Christ and who is great by reason of his faith which moves mountains and conquers the world, has the right to send his own well-founded proposals to the preparatory commissions through his own bishop. We limit ourselves to one hope: that the new Council, when it pleases the pope to call it, will take up by preference the tradition of the first Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, which addressed the great questions of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Body of the Lord, and the divine Maternity of Mary, and will address today the great problems of a new Catholic synthesis, choosing as the site of its free and wise deliberations one of the great metropolises in the missionary areas: Manila, Melbourne, Ottawa, Leopoldville, Capetown, or even Tokyo. It would be a spectacle without precedent to see the bishops of the five parts of the world come together in Council at the boundaries of the Church, while from Rome the pope would be present in his apostolic and infallible primacy, with his voice and figure transmitted by radio and television.

The hour is dark and dangerously confused. The same reasons which saw the non-Catholic League of Nations fail under the blows of Fascism still exist and may cause the failure of the non-Catholic United Nations under the attacks of Bolshevism. The only hope lies in a renewed springtime of Christianity and in its expansion in the direction indicated in this essay. If three of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse have the power to sow pestilence, famine, and

⁴⁶ Sonya A. Quitslund, *Beauduin: A Prophet Vindicated* (New York: Newman Press), 233.

⁴⁷ Otto Karrer, "Wie stellt sich der katholische Glaube in der Wirklichkeit des Lebens dar?" *Una Sancta*, 10 (1955), 24-34, at 26; "Autobiographisches," in *Begegnung der Christen*, ed. M. Roesle and O. Cullmann (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1959), pp. 13-24, 24; see Liselotte Hofer, *Otto Karrer, 1888-1976: Kampfen und Leiden für eine weltoffene Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1985), 282.

⁴⁸ Luigi Lombardi, "In vista del Congresso Internazionale di Teologia: Lettera aperta al Direttore di 'Palestra del Clero,'" *Palestra del Clero*, 36 (1957) 393-94. According to Rousseau, "Le prochain Concile," 310, this letter was echoed in *The Tablet*, June 1, 1957, 526.

⁴⁹ Giacinto Scaltriti, "La crisi nel cristianesimo," *Palestra del Clero*, 37 (1958) 522-36, 561-70; see 561: "In effect, the rationalistic, Enlightened, liberal and masonic world which has created the vast capitalist civilization of the West today confronts an equal colossus which has mobilized the world of the needy around the idea of scientific socialism." Notice of this article was taken in both *Informations Catholiques Internationales*, 1/9/58, 7-8, and in *The Tablet*.

the sword, the fourth comes in victory. This is the One who said, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church," the One of whom St. Paul said, "Christ yesterday, today, and forever."⁵⁰

Rousseau notes that both of these proposals were made in a review published in Rovigo, a small diocese near Venice, and thinks it likely that they would have been known to John XXIII.⁵¹

Finally a not entirely trustworthy source suggests that the need for a Council was among the papers Pius XII left for his successor:

As a matter of fact, when Pope Pius XII died, and Pope John was elected and took over the reins of government, he found on his desk the papers of Pius XII. In those papers Pius XII had written out in his own hand three things. He had written out the information he knew about the centralization movement within the Church in the administrative center here in Rome. He found, secondly, a hand-written document (which I hope will soon be published by some historian) in which Pius XII analyzed the world situation and his prognosis of how it is going to develop. Thirdly, he found Pius XII's plan for dealing with these problems and here Pius XII had written under his plan the words "*concilio ecumenico*."

In one of the footnotes, Pius XII had written (because he meant to publish this document for private circulation) his definition of the word "ecumenical." Pius XII's concept included not only Christians but non-Christians. It included relations with Jews, Moslems, and all unbelievers in the world. Now it is quite obvious to you or to anybody else that the Pope, coming after Pius XII, found this was true and called an ecumenical council. This is a matter of much more than mere coincidence. Pope John is the faithful implementor of Pius XII's idea but, of course, in his own inimitable manner.⁵²

If nothing else, all these testimonies at least indicate that the idea of an ecumenical council had not died with the apparent official end of Pius XII's project.

Concluding Remarks

The history of these two attempts, particularly the second, is useful background for the development of the pre-conciliar and conciliar debates of Vatican II. Only eight years separate the suspension of the preparations under Pius XII from those undertaken under John XXIII. Two of the men who urged Pius XII to call a Council (Cardinals Ottaviani and Ruffini) also appear to have urged the idea upon Pope John.⁵³ Two of the figures most responsible for the preparation of Vatican II had served on the earlier Preparatory Commission, Cardinal Ottaviani and Fr. Sebastien Tromp.

⁵⁰ Scaltriti, "La crisi," 570. Scaltriti here indicates that he believed the preparatory commissions established by Pius XII still to be in operation.

⁵¹ Rousseau, "Le prochain Concile," 310. René Laurentin (*L'Enjeu du Concile* (Paris: du Seuil, 1962), 108) goes even further, wondering whether the idea did not come in some way from Roncalli himself. On the other hand, it appears also that Scaltriti, was at least sympathetic to Fr. Riccardo Lombardi's Movement for a Better World (see "Le crisi," 522-23, and his later article, "Per un mondo migliore," *Palestra del Clero*, 37 [1958] 1087-89, 1145-51), a movement with which Pope John did not much sympathize. Rousseau's comments are perhaps worth taking seriously, since his pioneering confrère, Lambert Beauduin, is known to have discussed the possibility of a Council with Roncalli.

⁵² See Vincent A. Yzermans, *A New Pentecost: Vatican Council II: Session I* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1963), 297-98. In a telephone conversation, September 2, 1988, Yzermans identified his source as Malachi Martin.

⁵³ See Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII: Shepherd of the Modern World* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 283 and 306.

Caprile frankly points out the differences between the proposed preparation under Pius XII and that actually carried out under John XXIII, particularly, the very narrow consultation of the episcopate and the confining of theological advice to consultors to the Holy Office. He also mentions the predominantly defensive and condemnatory character of the proposed documents.⁵⁴ He fails to indicate, however, how many of the draft-documents actually prepared by Vatican II's preparatory commissions were marked by the same tone and purpose. Indeed, it could be argued that the proposals of the Holy Office for Vatican II and the orientation of the doctrinal drafts prepared for the Council are a later implementation of the plans envisaged years earlier under Pius XII. Here, in fact, is perhaps the most interesting thing about the preparations made under Pius XII: that they show the presence and the power within the Roman Curia of an understanding of the state of the Church and of the purposes of a Council which was in fact largely to prevail in the preparations of Vatican II down to the day on which it opened.

⁵⁴ Caprile, I/1, 2.