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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE MULTI-FACETED IMPACT OF
THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL UPON
CATHOLICISM AND BEYOND

by

Constantin-Valentin Popescu

Adviser: Szallós-Farkas Zoltán

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A STUDY OF THE MULTI-FACETED IMPACT OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL UPON CATHOLICISM AND BEYOND

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Name and degree of facultay adviser: Szallós-Farkas Zoltán, Ph.D.

Date completed: June 2023

The Topic

The research analyzes the development of Catholicism in the 20th century. After the First Vatican Council (1868-1870) and the promulgation of the dogma of papal infallibility and papal primacy, the Roman Catholic Church lost much credibility and influence with Christianity, becoming increasingly isolated from the developing modern world. In this situation, Catholicism needs a revival, a reconfirmation of its long-lost authority.

On the other hand, knowing that the Roman Catholic Church fulfills a very important role in biblical prophecies, we will observe, in this study, an adaptation of Catholicism to the modern world precisely to regain its credibility. In this way we will see how the papacy fulfills its prophesied role!

The Purpose

The purpose of the research is to follow the integration of Catholicism in the modern world through the Second Vatican Council, to analyze the “updates” that Catholicism makes at the level of dogma and mission and the multiple impact that Vatican II has on Catholicism and beyond, thus unfolding the biblical prophecy.

The Source

The research required both the consultation of specialized literature (historical documents, official statements, etc.), as well as biographical materials (for details on the lives of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, the two emblematic figures on whom the life of the Second Vatican Council depended). At the same time, regarding the work of Catholicism and the place it occupies in biblical prophecy, I consulted the Bible and testimonies of the writings of Ellen G. White.

Conclusions

The promulgation of the dogma of papal primacy and papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council produced discontent in the religious world, leading to the spiritual and political isolation of the Roman Catholic Church. Bible prophecy says, however, that Catholicism will have a very important role in the unfolding of the final events, but not anyway, but only if it regains its credibility and authority before the world. And the Second Vatican Council did just that: it changed the image of Catholicism by restoring it to a position of honor in the religious world. Vatican II becomes a landmark in the life of Catholicism, dividing time into two: before Vatican II and after Vatican II.

Spiritually, things will move in a direction thought by God, the papacy having a well-defined role, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church knows this... What will happen, we will soon see!

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL UPON
CATHOLICISM AND BEYOND

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fullfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Constantin-Valentin Popescu

2023

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of the study

In 2003, I was hired as a pastor in a district that was not very large numerically, which allowed me to study more and organize theological meetings, where I had teachers, engineers and priests as guests. As a result of these theological meetings, a special friendship was formed that I carried on for a long time with the Catholic priest, who lived in the same city. For a whole winter we studied Daniel and Revelation, and at the end the Catholic priest said to me: “If what I have studied is true – and I think it is – you, Adventists, are the best!” This fact led me to study Bible prophecy more to understand the role of the Church in God's final plan, and hence my openness to the history of Christianity, especially Catholicism.

The present work is a personal concern for a longer time and follows the evolution of the reformation process of the Church with the aim of adapting it to the mentality of a modern, constantly changing society. In this sense, I structured the work in three main chapters: the first chapter traces the political-religious framework in which Catholicism developed until Vatican II, and the second part analyzes the main events that took place during the Second Vatican Council. In the second chapter I analyzed the dialogues of the Catholic Church with other churches, emphasizing the importance of ecumenism, and I observed the doctrinal impact that Vatican II had on Christian theology and thought, especially on ecclesiology, as a method of “courageous” approach to the other Christian churches.

In October 2022, the 60th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council took place. On October 11, 1962, the works of this great church forum were inaugurated, noted as being, in fact, the greatest event that marked the life of the Roman Catholic Church and continues to be a point of reference both for its life and for Christianity in general, thing less known and studied. So the question from which we might begin this extensive study is: In what

way did the Second Vatican Council influence the Catholic Church's own life and thought? And, also, in what way did it impact the Christian world and thought, at large? In other words, do the changes that the Council brought about in the life of the Catholic Church affect the other churches...? (The Roman Catholic Church had a strong position in Europe, Christianity being led for centuries by this Church).

Methodology of the Research

The present research follows an historical-chronological method of study of primary and secondary sources, thus tracking the doctrinal and ecclesiological ideas developed by Vatican II. This method has been deemed the adequate one given the result of my sustained passion regarding the knowledge of the Scriptures and the prophetic books Daniel and Revelation, the history of Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular but also specialized books such as "The Great Controversy" by Ellen G. White or "Christianity Through the Centures" by Earle Cairns. We hope that the reader will be able to observe, after reading this study, how the Catholic Church will fulfill the divine plan regarding the realization of ecumenism, by "befriending" the other Christian and non-Christian churches.

Justifications of the Research

We know that the Catholic Church attracted the attention of the entire world through the two important events it created: the First Vatican Council (1869 – 1870) and the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965). After the proclamation of the dogma of papal primacy and papal infallibility in the fourth session of the First Vatican Council (July 18, 1870), the Catholic clergy and faithful believed that, for the future, it would no longer be necessary to convene a new

general council. That is why, when Pope John XXIII announced, on January 25, 1959, the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, it was a real surprise for the entire Christian world.

The Second Vatican Council was officially opened on October 11, 1962 in the presence of Pope John XXIII and over 2500 bishops and lasted, with some interruptions, until December 7, 1965, when it was declared closed by Pope Paul VI. It was the twenty-first general or ecumenical council of the Church. To a large extent, this council was convened, organized, and governed by a series of laws and processes that formed the basis of the First Vatican Council, but to an even greater extent, Vatican II is an echo of the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563).

The justification and importance of the current research stems from the fact that the Vatican Council II emerges from the study of several characteristic elements that place it first among the ecumenical councils that have taken place throughout the history of the Church. First, the total number of delegates participating in this council far exceeded the number of participants in the other twenty previous councils. If 737 participants gathered at Vatican I, at Vatican II, the number of those present reached almost three thousand.

Secondly – and perhaps most importantly – the council enjoyed a considerable number of foreign observers and men of culture, dominating Europeans and European missionaries to other continents.

Third, the Second Vatican Council was much more representative than the others in terms of non-Catholics and lay participants. In addition to the three groups representing the Russian Orthodox Church, sixty-three observers from outside the Catholic Church were present from the very first session, to which a total of eighteen guests were added at the end.

Last but not least, the Second Vatican Council was unique in its intentions. Here a direct attack on doctrinal deviations was used, strongly condemning heresies or any other thoughts that were not in accordance with the Holy Scriptures or the thinking of the Church. It should be noted that there was a slight tendency on the part of the Roman Catholic Church to unite all the

other churches: Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant. That is, in a word, the Second Vatican Council is unique in the history of the Church because it is the first ecumenical council.

For the Adventist researcher, the Second Vatican Council is important, first of all, because Catholicism and its actions are mentioned in the prophecies of the books of Daniel and Revelation, in direct connection with the unfolding of eschatological events. Then, the Second Vatican Council attracts the attention of the Adventist researcher because it is the first ecumenical council, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church knows, from the prophecy of Scripture, that the ecumenical movement is part of the list of events that precede the return of Christ.

Limitations and delimitations of the study

The delimitations that the author has imposed on this study issues from the fact that Vatican II needed to stay in the sole and exclusive focus of the research, without paying attention to other relevant issues, such as, how could the Council's outcomes be judged and evaluated from the perspective of the apocalyptic prophecies of the books of Daniel and Revelation. So, the author has kept in mind precisely the fact that the reader should be able to understand what happened from a historical point of view with the opening of the Second Vatican Council, the crises that the Catholic Church went through in order to realize the process of adapting to a world in change in order to restore relations with the other churches "broken" by Catholicism. This, to make us realize how important it is for the Vatican Church, to restore ties with "sister" churches.

1. THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE VATICAN COUNCIL II

In this first chapter we will follow both the political and religious events preceding the Second Vatican Council, but also the development of Catholicism in Europe, until Vatican II. In the second part of the chapter, we will deal with the main events that took place during the Second Vatican Council, but also the important role played by Pope John XXIII regarding this Council, which is considered to be the most important council of to the Roman Catholic Church from everything that had happened until then.

The Great Schism of 1054 led the Western Church on a path of glory but also dangerous, because the expansion of Catholicism in Europe and beyond, would place the Catholic Church in an authoritative position from where it would dictate the destiny of Europe, later. The glory that the Church would enjoy would be unprecedented, (the pope playing a particularly important role on the political-religious scene of the old continent), and from here to the moral and spiritual decay of Catholicism was only a step.

By 1798 Catholicism had gathered strength and enjoyed great prestige. With the French Revolution from 1798 until 1914, the Roman Catholic Church lost its secular possessions and a good part of its political influence. The shameful fate of the papacy during the French Revolution contrasted sharply with its success during the Counter-Reformation. After the Napoleonic wars, Catholicism partially regained its authority and prestige, which it maintained until 1870 (a year marked in the history of the Catholic Church by the Vatican Council I, during which the dogma of papal primacy and papal infallibility was promulgated). From then until the First World War, Roman Catholicism lost its prestige significantly, anticlericalism spreading more and more in European countries, the increasingly defective relationship between the universal papal Church and the national Churches contributing significantly to this trial.

The 20th century after 1914 was characterized by great political uncertainty in Europe. The disorder in international relations and the economic insecurity felt by the people were more and more evident, while more and more religious voices came into conflict with historical Christianity, causing a real religious crisis. All this happened due to the events that followed each other extremely quickly and that took both the Church and the civil society by surprise. In the face of the rapid succession of events, the Church had to cope without significant losses, although the year 1870 meant a heavy blow to the Vatican, with the abolition of the Papal State. Only in 1929, through the Lateran Agreement, the papacy regained its authority and the Catholic religion was recognized as the official religion of the state.

The political-religious context until Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council needed an animated context to facilitate its emergence and, subsequently, its development. In this section we will analyze the political-religious context that requires the existence of a new council after the first Vatican Council, because we will see that the Roman Catholic Church goes through good periods but also less favorable time intervals that require a reform to be able to cope challenges of modern society.

The development of Catholicism until the Vatican Council II

The French Revolution of 1789 and the liberal movements that followed in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, in all areas, placed the Roman Catholic Church in front of quite complex, even unprecedented problems, the solution of which was neither easy nor quick and not complete.¹ If in some aspects the Church managed to impose its point of view, in other respects it had to yield but, most of the time, it had to accept compromise attitudes. This can be

¹ Eusebiu Popovici, *Istoria Bisericească Universală și statistica bisericească*, vol. 4, (tradusă de Mitropolitul Atanasie Mironescu, ediția a 2-a, București, 1928), 18 – 22.

seen particularly from the analysis of the cultic and disciplinary life of Catholicism, as well as from its theological evolution in the last two centuries.

Due to industrialization, the phenomenon of secularization or laicization has taken considerable proportions in the countries of Western Europe, especially in the big cities. In this framework, the proletarianized life of millions of people in industrialized countries and especially in big cities could no longer be spiritually guided as in the 18th and 19th centuries, when people lived in villages and earned their living by working the land on which they owned it.

Christian piety could, however, be kept alive in countries with Catholic majorities because of the cult of the Church; of the Catholic *mass* (liturgy) which was still held with rigorously; of religious holidays that bring people together; but also of charity actions. However, we cannot neglect the contribution of important religious figures with special qualities who, through their spiritual influence, attracted a very large number of Christians to the church. Among them we mention the priest from Ars (diocese of Belley, France), named J. Marie Vianney (born Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney – 1786 – 1859), a simple man, without higher education, but a special example regarding pastoral work. This devoted priest attracted, by his sermons and his way of life, an impressive number of pilgrims from all over the world.² As another example of French Catholic missionary work, we mention Thérèse de Lisieux (1873 – 1897, full name Marie-Françoise-Thérèse Martin), who attracted thousands of believers through her example of life.³

In France, according to Catholic tradition, the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, revealed to a simple woman named Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes, in the Pyrenees (1858), and that opened a strong desire for popular piety that has influenced the Catholic Christian world to this

² G. Livet & R. Mousnier, *Histoire générale de l'Europe*, vol. 2, (Paris, 1980), 560 – 562.

³ J. Lortz, *Storia della Chiesa*, (Edizione Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo, 1987), 495.

day.⁴ This popular piety exists today in France and thanks to the cult of the French people for the Virgin of Orléans, Jeanne d'Arc (1412 – 1431), burned at the stake on May 30, 1431 and beatified in 1909 by Pope Pius X (1903 – 1914), then canonized in 1920 by Pope Benedict XV (1914 – 1922).⁵

It is true, however, that the propaganda of these religious events in the life of the Roman Catholic Church also had its downsides. Insistent pilgrimages to see the “shirt of Jesus” in Trier, Germany or the “house of Loretto” where Mary, the mother of Jesus, supposedly lived (without historical proof) are known, as well as abuses forms of piety harshly criticized even by the Catholic leaders.

Also in the 19th century, a lot of religious associations and congregations came into being in countries like Italy, France, Germany, Austria. In 1833 (according to some sources, the year 1844) it was established by A. Fr. Ozanam, “Conference of Charity” (Chonférance de Charité), also known as “Société de Saint-Vincent de Paul.”⁶ But during all this time there is a continuous and persistent struggle for the moralization of the whole society, although morality is not quite so flourishing as the Roman Catholic Church itself testifies, through its representatives of the time.⁷

Political orientations

The French Revolution of 1789 spread to almost all the countries of Europe its ideas embodied in the words: “Liberté, égalité, fraternité” and, at the same time, brought a radical change in social and political relations both through these ideas and through the proclamation of “human rights.”⁸ If the previous period is characterized by the attempt to maintain the

⁴ Ioan Rămureanu, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, vol. 2, (Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1973), 374.

⁵ Rămureanu, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, 376.

⁶ Gérard Cholvy, *Frédéric Ozanam*, (Fayard, 2003), 237 – 309.

⁷ J. B. Duroselle, *Les Débuts du catholicisme social en France*, (P.U.F., 1951), 119 – 120.

⁸ M. P. Harney, *The Catholic Church throughout the ages*, (Boston, 1976), 602.

ensorship of the Roman Catholic Church in the spiritual, political and social leadership of the world, the following period, that is starting with the year 1800 until today, is characterized, first of all, by a spiritual secularization in continues to grow.⁹

The period that followed the French Revolution of 1789 created a favorable framework for the establishment of the First Republic in France (1792 – 1804), characterized by strong political instability. This was followed by the creation of the French Empire by Napoleon Bonaparte (1804 – 1814), during which the modern institutions of France came into being, a model that many countries in Europe followed.

On the religious level, the French Revolution produced a rather deep wound to the papal power, greatly limiting its influence. In 1905, more precisely on December 9, based on the concordat concluded with Pope Pius VII (1800 – 1823) on June 15, 1801, France's relations with the Roman Catholic Church were regulated. Even now France decides to separate the Church from the State, we can say a successful starting point for the Church because, from this moment, the power of the Church begins to be felt again.

Approaching the political side of the events, the period immediately following the fall of Napoleon (it is about the years 1815 – 1848) is characterized by the restoration of the Roman Catholic Church in the situation preceding the French Revolution and the era of Napoleon. “Holy Alliance,” a coalition of the Russian Empire, Prussia and the Austrian Empire, created on 26 September 1815 at Paris by Alexander I of Austria (1804 – 1835) and Frederick William III, King of Prussia (1797 – 1840) and around which almost all European countries were grouped except for England and the Papal State, he pursued a reactionary policy against the progressive and nationalist spirit of the time. The policy of the princes led by Klemens Wenz von Metternich (1773 – 1859) and inaugurated at the Congress of Vienna from November 1, 1814 to June 9, 1815, sought to stifle and suppress any national political movement and any

⁹ Sébastien Fath, “Înceștinare și desceștinare,” în *Dictionnaire oecuménique de missiologie*, (Les Éditions du Cerf, Labor et Fides, Geneva, 2003), 46.

tendency to free thought.¹⁰ During this period the Papal State makes its power known. The Jesuits were called to almost all the states of Europe, beginning in 1814. Now every liberal idea is stifled by the papal Inquisition, which has been rehabilitated, it is true, for a little while.

Starting with the year 1848, a political and social crisis like no other since 1789 was felt throughout Europe. The technical inventions of the time also contributed to this. The steam engine, invented at the end of the 18th century, contributed to the increase of wealth, the number of factories increased a lot, but the workers were replaced, one by one, by the inventions of that time and lacked the security of tomorrow.

The 19th century begins with the first socialist movements. The French Count Claude-Henri de Saint Simon sees it possible to establish, through Christianity, an integral communism to be reached through the application of Christian love that abolishes property and any kind of exploitation. Robert Owen stated that life lasts on earth only where people can help each other and reach (according to J.J. Rousseau's theory) the abolition of marriage and property. Here he joins the Frenchman Pierre Joseph Proudhon who states that “property is theft.”¹¹

Cultural orientations

Culturally, the 19th century was very turbulent. Inaugurated by the rationalist criticism of Immanuel Kant's philosophy (which submits any problem to reason),¹² the 19th century knows many other philosophical, scientific and religious conceptions, some of them greater, but contradictory to each other. Starting from the skepticism of Kantian knowledge which nevertheless recognizes the law of consciousness as something innate to man, philosophers such as Br. H. Jacobi (1843 – 1919) but also the neo-Kantians J. Gottlieb Fichte (d. 1814), F. W.

¹⁰ Rămureanu, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, 335.

¹¹ Rămureanu, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, 337.

¹² Frank K. Flinn, *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, (Infobase Publishing, 2007), 10.

Friedrich Hegel (d. 1831), Fr. W. J. Schielling (d. 1854) and others asserted that man can be a heathen with reason but a Christian with heart.

However, most of the leading philosophers and writers of the first half of the 19th century returned to the problems of religion or at least to romanticism. Thus, Fr. René Chateaubriand (d. 1848), through his well-known work “Le Génie du Christianisme,” strove to present to the modern world the artistic, cultural and religious splendors created over the centuries by Christianity, reviving the modern world.¹³ Keeping this note, it can be said that Hegel's philosophy has a special influence. Hegelianism conceives history and reality as a whole that comes from the embodiment of an idea that, through its dialectical development, can lead to different contradictions.¹⁴

From a religious point of view, the world of the 19th and 20th centuries can be characterized as a period in which the relationship between the individual and the church is increasingly fragile, especially after the “positivism” of Auguste Comte (died 1857) seemed to give scientific form of development on the way to the “religion of the future,”¹⁵ which no longer admits anything but what positive science says. Darwinism seemed to confirm this truth when it supported the inclusion of man in the animal kingdom, in the circuit of nature, through the well-known theory of the evolution of species and the origin of man from apes. The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer saw the world as an irrational force in development, and man as completely powerless;¹⁶ man must save himself by suffering, by denying the desire for life and losing himself in non-being as in the Indian nirvana.

In most European countries, the political, social and cultural life of the 19th and 20th centuries has not entirely lost its Christian character, and this fact is primarily due to the vitality

¹³ Harney, *The Catholic Church throughout the ages*, 623.

¹⁴ Harney, *The Catholic Church throughout the ages*, 519 – 523.

¹⁵ Eugène Robinet, *Observație despre lucrarea și viața lui Auguste Comte*, (ediția a III-a, Paris, La sediul societății pozitivistice, 1891), 603.

¹⁶ *The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary*, “Schopenhauer,” (Oxford University Press, 1991), 1298.

and renewing forces of Christianity. Most of the writers of this period also dealt with religious themes in their works. Likewise, painters and sculptors (such as B. Thorwaldsen for the Danes; A. Canova for the Italians; G. Kaulbach for the Germans; Alex A. Ivanov for the Russians or Nicolae Grigorescu for the Romanians) left works of rare value, due to their Christian inspiration.

In this way, culture and art give Christianity, in the modern and contemporary era, sufficient reasons to believe that religion and the Christian Church still remain connected to the human soul.¹⁷ Even if some new currents like theosophy, freemasonry, religious indifferentism and other conceptions have sought to blame Christianity, man still has, within himself and on his side, the answers of the revealed truth.

The Roman Catholic Church in Western Europe

Starting with the year 1789, the Roman Catholic Church experienced a period of extensive decline as a result of which it lost its possessions and a large part of its political influence. The shameful fate of the papacy during the French Revolution contrasted sharply with the success achieved during the Counter-Reformation. After the Napoleonic Wars it regained its power and influence, which it retained until 1870. From then until the First World War, Roman Catholicism gradually lost its prestige and anticlericalism spread more and more in European countries, especially in Western Europe.

In the present section of our research we will follow the life and evolution of the Roman Catholic Church in this part of Europe, more precisely in Italy, in France and in Germany, because here Roman Catholicism received significant influences.

¹⁷ Yves M. Congar, "Papaute," in *Encyclopædia universalis*, vol. 12, (Paris, 1967), 485 – 487.

In Italy

The history of the Roman Catholic Church in Italy knows three very important moments after 1815, namely: (a) the political union of Italy in 1859; (b) the struggle for the abolition of the Papal State in 1870 and (c) the re-establishment of the Papal State on 11 February 1929.

(a) The papacy and the unity of Italy. As expected, in Italy the relations between the state and the Church took on a special aspect, as in no other country, because the interests of the papacy intersected with those of the Italian state. After the second defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the pope received back possessions and privileges even with the help of foreign powers (Turkey and Russia).¹⁸ The Italian state, divided into small rival states, sometimes under Spanish rule, sometimes under Austrian or French rule, prevented the people from being able to accept the state of social turmoil in which Italy had lived for so many centuries.

Since the unity of Italy was impossible to achieve through cultural means, Italian intellectuals divided into different groups acted revolutionary through the political group of the “carbonari” and through the organizations led by Giuseppe Garibaldi. The revolution of 1848 gives Italians hope. Revolutionary troops occupy Rome and declare it a Republic. Surprised by these events, Pope Pius IX (1846 – 1878) hastily retreats to the foreign territory of Gaeta, from where he returns in 1850. To raise the prestige of the papacy humiliated by the revolutionaries, Pope Pius IX proclaims, on December 8, 1854 through the encyclical *Innefabilis Deus, Immaculata conceptio beatae mariae virginis*, without consulting the synod, a fact that partly explains the proclamation of the dogma of papal primacy and papal infallibility, in the fourth session of the Vatican Council I, from 18 July 1870. In 1859 all of Italy, apart from a few papal territories, unites under the leadership of the king of Piedmont, Victor Emanuel II (1861 – 1878).

¹⁸ L. Girard, *Le catholicisme en Europe de 1814 à 1878*, (Centre de documentation universitaire, Paris, 1962), 94 – 96.

(b) Abolition of the papal state. The Papal State came into existence during the reign of Pope Stephen II (752 – 757) following the conquests of the kingdom of the Lombards in central Italy (754 – 755), by the army of the French king Pepin the Short (741 – 768). He gave the conquered territory to the pope, under the name *Patrimoniu Sancti Petri*,¹⁹ also known as the *Repubblica Romanorum*, a state that lasted until 1870.

On September 20, 1870, Giuseppe Garibaldi's troops entered Rome and abolished the Papal State led by Pope Pius IX, achieving the unity of Italy under Victor Emmanuel II.

(c) Reestablishment of the papal state. On February 11, 1929, through the Quirinal Convention (the official residence of the President of the Republic) and the Lateran Concordat, Pope Pius XI concluded an agreement with the Italian state recognizing the sovereignty of the new Vatican State.²⁰ Thus, under the name *Città del Vaticano*, with a territory of barely 44 hectares, one of the smallest states in the world was born. From now on, the Roman Catholic Church and the Italian state each consider themselves “independent and sovereign” in their domain, as stipulated in Article 1 of the new concordat: “Catholicism is no longer the official religion in the Italian state, and religious education is no longer compulsory in schools, but optional.”²¹

On June 3, 1985, Pope John Paul II concluded a new concordat with the Italian state stipulating that the Catholic religion is no longer the state religion in Italy, as the Lateran Concordat of 1929 provided. He signed on behalf of Italy, Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and from the Vatican, Cardinal Secretary of State Agostino Casaroli.²²

¹⁹ Gustav Schnürer, “States of the Church,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 14, (New York: Robert Apleton Company, 1912).

²⁰ James Brown Scott, “The Treaty between Italy and the Vatican,” in *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law at Its Annual Meeting*, vol. 23, (1921-1969, 24-27 April 1929), 13.

²¹ F. M. Marchesi, *Il Concordato italiano dell 11 febraio 1929*, (Neapole, 1960), 108 – 110.

²² *Lumea*, (13 iunie, 1985, nr. 24), 10 – 11.

In France

The first conflicts between the Papal State and France were those during the time of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, immediately after the French Revolution of 1789. Pope Pius VI (1755 – 1799) died in exile in France on August 29, 1799, and his successor, Pope Pius VII (1800 – 1823) was taken into captivity at Fontainebleau where he was forced to sign a concordat with Emperor Napoleon by which the Papal State was abolished, a fact that never happened again because, after his short 100-day reign Napoleon (March 20 – June 29, 1815), the pope returns to Rome. It is important to note that also in 1815 the Jesuit Order was established, but also a new restoration policy whereby the pope has priority in any issue,²³ which leads to an inevitable conflict in the relationship between the Church and society.

Starting from this moment, the French state knows numerous leadership changes that do not pass without affecting religious life as well. In these hostile conditions, a whole series of writers tried to bring a new prestige to the Church by which to make Christianity popular again. Some of them adopt a liberal position, such as Fr. René de Chateaubriand (d. 1848), A. Lamartine (d. 1869), Charles de Montalembert (d. 1870); while others treat the matter in an exaggerated, servile spirit, as did, for example, Joseph de Maistre (d. 1821), L. Venillot (d. 1883), etc.

The French loved freedom very much, so the brutal Jesuit style soon became odious. The first attack on the Church comes from the Republicans allied with the Freemasons.²⁴ As a result of this action, in 1873 Catholic universities were prohibited from awarding academic titles, and in March 1880 all Jesuit schools and groups were abolished. Cremation is introduced, the cross is prohibited when swearing in courts, divorce is accepted. By Émil Combes's law of December 9, 1905, the Roman Catholic Church in France was separated from the state, all

²³ Adrien Dansette, *Destin du catholicisme français*, (Press Universitaire de France, Paris, 1957), 18.

²⁴ William J. Whalen (Catholic University of America), "Freemasonry" in *New Catholic encyclopedia*, (Mc Graw-Hill, New York, 1967).

congregations were abolished, and religion was removed from the school curriculum.²⁵ Émile Combes' law was fought in the Vatican during the pontificate of Pope Pius X, but without success, as it still exists today.

In Germany

There have been numerous conflicts between the Roman Catholic Church and the German state, the most important of which are those in the years 1837 – 1840 regarding mixed marriages (also known as *the Köln dispute*), as well as “the conflict regarding education” or *Kulturkampf*²⁶ – the struggle for culture (1871 – 1877).

As for mixed marriages (when the spouses come from different religions and support different dogmas), things were not simple at all. In 1803, the Prussian government decided that in mixed marriages, the children should follow, as a rule, the religion of their father. In 1830, through an official document issued by Pope Pius VIII (1829 – 1830), Catholic priests were asked to stop officiating mixed marriages if the spouses did not declare that they would raise their children in the Catholic religion. Analyzing more deeply the aspect of the sacrament of marriage in the Catholic Church (where everything takes place on the basis of the declarations of the bride and groom to live together), the German government reached an agreement with the Catholic Church to leave it to the choice of Catholic priests whether or not to officiate these marriages. In the year 1835, the new bishop of Köln, Vischering and the bishop of Gnesen prohibit by circular the officiating of this type of marriage. The conflict was so strong that the two bishops were imprisoned, but released in 1840 under the new king of Prussia, Frederick William IV.

Kulturkampf (or culture struggle) is the name given to the movement in Germany which sought to bring all Church activity under state control. Also, the main target of the movement

²⁵ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, “Combes Émile,” (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1911).

²⁶ Brian Tierney, *Origines of papal infallibility*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 223 – 227.

was the systematic secularization of Church institutions, an action supported by the chancellor of Imperial Germany, Otto von Bismarck.²⁷ Finally Bismarck, seeing that it was impossible to secularize Catholicism, gave up. By the laws of May 21, 1886 and April 27, 1887, the Kulturkampf movement ceased to exist and friendly relations were reached with the Roman Catholic Church, during the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII (1878 – 1903).

Although the Roman Catholic Church in Germany has to struggle hard with some crises and is always in competition with the Lutheran Church, the Reformed Church and the Old Catholic Church, it still has a flourishing situation: over twenty-four million inhabitants of the population of Germany (which at present numbers a little over eighty-four million inhabitants) are Roman Catholic, and the rest are Reformed and Lutheran.

Vatican Council I – historical-religious importance

The First Vatican Council is recognized as the high point in the development of the papacy when, in the fourth session of July 18, 1870, the dogma of “papal primacy and papal infallibility in matters of faith and morals”²⁸ was proclaimed.

The realities mentioned so far (political, cultural, as well as the Council of Trent) supported the need for the formation of a new council in which to analyze first the internal, spiritual life of the Church, then its relations with the state.

Since the Council of Trent or Concilium Tridentinum (1545 – 1563) no other general council has been proclaimed in the life of the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, over the course of three hundred years, the rise of rationalism, liberalism, and materialism brought forth systems

²⁷ Rămureanu, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, 346.

²⁸ Tierney, *Origines of papal infallibility*, 308.

of thought that denied fundamental Christian dogmas as a possibility of divine revelation, as well as the existence of God.²⁹

The First Vatican Council was convened by Pope Pius IX (1846 – 1878), on December 8, 1869, without specifically saying that this convocation aims to proclaim the dogma of papal infallibility. The Pope stated that the purpose of the Council is, on the one hand, the fight against rationalism and materialism³⁰ (which he pursued since the beginning of his pontificate), and on the other hand, the Council will seek to achieve the adaptation of church legislation to the profound changes which took place after the Council of Trent.

The Pope intentionally avoided stating the true theme of the Council from the beginning because he knew, along with Catholic dogmatists and the Roman Curia, that this new dogma would completely change the ecclesiology and constitution of the Catholic Church in his favor. In the very act of defining this new dogma, it is placed in Article XI among other decisions of little importance.

Of the 1,050 bishops who had the right to participate in the First Vatican Council, less than 700 showed up, that is, only two-thirds of the total, and in the end only 535 participants voted. A number of 60 Eastern Rite prelates, united with Rome, were also present at the Council, most of them from the Near East.³¹ Also, Orthodox and Protestants were invited to the First Vatican Council, but they refused, rightly stating that this Council concerns only the Roman Catholic Church, being a local council.

Meanwhile, in the press of Western countries (we are talking here especially about France and Germany), some articles and studies appeared that had serious reservations about the propriety of proclaiming the new dogma. The renowned church historian from Munich, Ignaz von Döllinger publishes – under the pseudonym “Janus” – the work “Der Papst und das

²⁹ James Aitken Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, vol. 2, (Cassell & Company, Limited: London, Paris & New York), 113.

³⁰ *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Primul Conciliu Vatican," (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2014).

³¹ Rămureanu, *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, 349.

Konzil”³² in which he shows the groundlessness of the new dogma both in Scripture and in Church Tradition.

Wilhelm Emmanuel von Ketteler,³³ bishop of Mainz, in Germany, between the years 1850 – 1877, famous for his activity among the workers, also protested against the new dogma. Another example is that of the Croatian archbishop J. G. Strossmeyer who is said to throw himself at the feet of the pope begging him not to proclaim the dogma of infallibility which could disfigure the pure image of the Church. And when the archbishop of Bologna, Filippo Guidi, intervened saying that the tradition of the Church shows that the decisions of the pope are linked to the vote of the Council, Pope Pius IX said authoritatively: “La tradizione sono io. Io sono la chiesa.”³⁴

Before the new dogma was voted on, on July 15, 1870, the conciliar minority opposed to infallibility made a last effort to prevent its approval. Through six prelates the pope was asked to provide that pontifical infallibility could only be exercised with the consent of the episcopate, but their intervention remained without result. Seeing this, a number of sixty bishops wrote to the pope that they would leave Rome before the final vote, so as not to be forced to vote *non placet* before the pope, in a matter that directly concerns him. In the IV meeting on July 18, 1870, the decisive vote was finally obtained: five hundred and thirty-five bishops voted for, and two against (one Italian and one American).

The new dogma proclaimed by the encyclical *Pastor Aeternus*³⁵ grants the pope not only the supreme power in the Roman Catholic Church but also the *ex cathedra*, meaning spiritual,

³² Congar, “Papaute,” în *Enciclopædia universalis*, vol. 2, 327 – 329.

³³ *Enciclopædia Britannica*, vol 15, (11th ed., Cambridge University Press), 763.

³⁴ *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, vol. 2, (Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1993), 356.

³⁵ U. Bellocci, *Tutte le Encicliche e i principali documenti pontifici emanati dal 1740*, vol. IV, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano, 1995), 334 – 340.

supreme, infallibility to proclaim infallibly the truth in matters of faith, and this “*ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae,*” that is “of its own accord, not by the approval of the Church.”³⁶

This papal victory was, however, short-lived. The outbreak of the Franco-German war the very day after the proclamation of the new dogmas (July 19, 1870), the fatigue of the conciliar fathers as well as the heat of the summer prevented the debates of the council. On September 20, 1870, Giuseppe Garibaldi's troops entered Rome through the Porta Pia, and the Italian nationalists annexed to the Kingdom of Italy, under King Victor Emmanuel II, what remained of the Papal State, thus realizing the political unity of Italy so much desired by all Italians. Under these conditions, Pope Pius IX considered that the safety of the Council could no longer be guaranteed and declared it closed on October 20, 1870.

It is noteworthy that, while the worldly power of the bishop of Rome was disappearing from the arena of history with the political unification of the Italian state on September 20, 1870, the pope sought compensation by increasing his spiritual power affirmed on the occasion of the approval of the dogma of papal primacy and papal infallibility, power that increased excessively by the vote granted by the Council.

Through the new dogma enunciated, the entire ecclesiology and constitution of the Church was distorted, to the detriment of the unity of Christianity so much desired by all the churches in the world.³⁷ In the Roman Catholic Church, the fullness of supreme power is now held only by the pope, and the bishops and priests are his delegates.

This new dogma was not known in the history of the Church until 1870 when it was proclaimed in the First Vatican Council. It has since passed into the canons of the Catholic Church.

³⁶ Carl Mirbt, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums und des Römischen Katholizismus*, 4-e, (Auflage, Tübingen, 1924), 465 – 466.

³⁷ Tierney, *Origines of papal infallibility*, 309.

Formation of the Old Catholic Church

After the conclusion of the First Vatican Council on October 20, 1870, complaints against the new dogmatic decisions began to rage. As a result, several Catholic bishops and theologians in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Holland, England and America separated from Rome. Thus came into being, in 1871, the “Church of the Old Catholics” or the Vetro-Catholic Church.³⁸ The professor of universal history from Munich, Ignaz von Döllinger, played a particularly important role in the establishment of this church. The New Church united with the Church of Utrecht in Holland, also called the Jansenist Church, which had split from Rome since 1724.

The Church of the Old Catholics declared itself autocephalous on the occasion of the first national congress of the German Old Catholics, organized in Munich between September 22 and 24, 1871. On this occasion, the clergy and the liturgy are organized. Another center of the Old Catholics came into being in Bern, Switzerland, with Jacob Herzog as its first bishop, who contributed greatly to the establishment of a theological faculty, in addition to the University of the city, in 1874.

On September 24, 1889, the Old Catholic Church of Germany, Holland and Switzerland organized itself into the *International Union of Old Catholics* or the Union of Utrecht to which other churches in Europe and America also joined. The Utrecht Union chose as its superior governing body the International Episcopal Conference of Old Catholics, which still holds congresses every two years and in which the Orthodox Church also participated.³⁹

In our time the old Catholics are around 500,000 members, spread over Germany, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, England, the United States of America and

³⁸ *Istoria Bisericească Universală*, vol. 2, (Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1993), 376.

³⁹ *Confession of faith* of the International Conference from Utrecht, translated by priest Ioan Săbăduș in the magazine *Ortodoxia*, ch. XXIII (Bucharest, 1971), 650 – 657.

other countries.⁴⁰ In agreement with the Orthodox, Old Catholics reject the innovations of Catholicism such as papal primacy and papal infallibility, the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, etc. After 1970, several mixed Orthodox - Old Catholic conferences were held in which topics such as theology, Christology, ecclesiology, soteriology, eschatology, Mariology were debated.

The theological dialogue between the two Churches continues!

Churches separated from Rome in the 19th century

Movements similar to the Old Catholic Church arose in the 19th century in various Catholic states. So, we will briefly follow the consequences caused by the dogmatic decisions of the First Vatican Council, in the Roman Catholic Church. In Austria, at the end of the 19th century, the movement of separation from Rome, called “Los – von-Rom Bewegung,”⁴¹ came into being, while in North America there is a Polish Catholic Church separated from Rome, which had six bishops and almost half a million believers. Other such churches exist in France, Italy and Spain. Beginning in 1870, prominent bishops and theologians left Catholicism (such as Ignaz von Döllinger, renowned history professor, or the famous Vladimir Guette, historian and renowned French abbot, who left the Church of France because of the ultramontane spirit of the Vatican, switching to Orthodoxy – he explains his attitude in his work entitled “The Heretical Papacy”).⁴²

Another consequence (it is true, more distant) of the First Vatican Council and the too Catholic spirit of the Roman Curia will be the crisis of the modernist movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Modernism entered the Roman Catholic Church not as a heresy (as

⁴⁰ Karl Prüter, *The Old Catholic Church: A History and Chronology*, third edition revised and expanded, (San Bernardino, California: St. Willibrord's Press, 1996), 19 – 22.

⁴¹ “Los von Rom-Bewegung,” in: *Meyers Großes Konversations-Lexikon*, Band 12, (Leipzig 1908), 723 – 725.

⁴² Vladimir Guette, *Papalitatea eretică*, (Editura: Scara, 2010), 3 – 4.

some Catholic theologians and historians claim),⁴³ but as a current of cultural renewal with tendencies to embrace all areas of life's activity.

The modernist crisis erupted as a result of the clash brutal between the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church and the new religious disciplines that renounced traditional research methods in the desire for the progressive secularization of religious education. The modernist movement spread rapidly in Germany, France, Italy, England at the beginning of the 20th century and claimed that a change was needed in the teaching of religious studies that had lagged far behind compared to new scientific discoveries.⁴⁴

The main events of the Vatican Council II

Since the present study does not allow us an elaborate analysis of the events preceding the Vatican Council II, we will nevertheless note in what follows the main events that led to the decision to open the Second Vatican Council.

Objectives

The suspension of the First Vatican Council in 1870 had contradictory consequences. Indeed, on the one hand there is the hope of closing the issues that allowed, however, the treatment of all the ecclesiological aspects that left a huge void in Catholic theology but, on the other hand, the much-discussed problem of papal primacy and papal infallibility would be closed, in the view of some, forever the era of the councils, canceling the hypothesis of new convocations.

⁴³ Giovanni Vian, *Un mondo modernista? Note a partire dai rapporti a norma della Pascend*, (Edizioni Ca Foscari, Venezia, 2017), 265 – 296.

⁴⁴ Lancelot Sheppard, *The Church in the Modern World*, (London, 1967), 81 – 85.

From a general point of view, Catholicism was definitively isolated within its walls (which implied that it should be), and the rise of democratic society and the authority of parliamentary institutions seemed to be good reasons why the Church remained faithful to its authoritative system, thus consolidating through positive thinking his fundamental ecclesiological problems.

The great world conflicts of the first half of the 20th century created dramatic tensions internationally even though the Church resisted the reforming waves that hit it. The imposition of Marxism as a result of the Soviet revolution and the aggressive anti-Christian attitude gave rise to numerous discontents and retaliations in the ranks of Catholicism, affecting the ideology and even the theology of the Catholic Church.⁴⁵

In the period leading up to the Second World War, both the Church and secular society witnessed the spontaneous emergence of “movements” that promoted new experiences of Christian life both at the pastoral level (which now imposed a new liturgy as well as the awareness of the need for a re-evangelization), spiritual (which requires a return to Scripture), theological (return to the “sources,” the writings of the church fathers) as well as ecclesiological (the active role of the laity and the development of ecumenical consciousness).⁴⁶ These experiences, together with the new system of thought developed during this period gave birth to desires for change, sometimes timid – as in the case of biblical exegesis or liturgy,⁴⁷ but also contradictory – as in the case of theological thinking, sometimes confused,⁴⁸ painfully suppressed – ecumenism or modern theology.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Giuseppe Alberigo, *Histoire des conciles œcuméniques*, (Editura Cerf, Paris, 1994), 363.

⁴⁶ Alberigo, *Histoire des conciles œcuméniques*, 364 – 365.

⁴⁷ The encyclicals of Pius XII, *Divino afflante Spiritu*, of September 30, 1943, and *Mediator Dei*, of November 20, 1947.

⁴⁸ Pius XII, the encyclical *Misti corporis* of June 29, 1943, where we find the use with ecclesiological meaning of the images of the bodies of Christ, which leads to the identification of the one and true Church with the Roman Church.

⁴⁹ Pius XII, the encyclical *Humani generis*, of October 12, 1950, which condemns attempts to change doctrinal thinking with a modern one. On July 28, 1949, the pope condemned those Catholics who collaborated with the communists, by forbidding them to participate in sacramental acts.

The preceding period (1959 – 1962)

When, on January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII announced his decision to convene a new council, the news shocked both the Catholic and the Orthodox and Protestant worlds. At first, without benefiting in any form from the support of the cardinals, the pope strengthened his decision by limiting himself to communicating, for a few days, with one of his most influential collaborators, Cardinal Tardini, pro-secretary of state.

The position that the Church adopts under the pressure of convening a new council at the Vatican (and we are referring here to the Christian Church in general), can be understood from the totally opposite attitude of the three parties: that of the Catholic cardinals, that of the Christian Church and public opinion. The cardinals expected the promulgation of laws that would cement the Catholic position on the structure provided by the First Vatican Council (privileges given to the church at the time but which it did not fully benefit from due to the sudden interruption of the Council in 1870 and which caused a strong imbalance in the ranks Catholic believers following the pronouncement of the dogma of papal primacy and papal infallibility), while all other Christian churches wanted to solve, in one way or another, the problem of the unity of all Christians and the relationship between the Church and civil society (the Catholic Church and adopted the title of “Church of Christ, the true one,” living in perfect isolation from other churches and society).

The advanced age but especially the importance of this historical event led Pope John XXIII to speed things up. Thus, on May 17, 1959, the pope constituted the main commission to deal with this preparatory phase for the council. The secretaries of all the congregations were members of this commission, and Cardinal Tardini, the key figure of the Roman Curia, was appointed president.⁵⁰ The fundamental purpose of this commission was to collect the opinions,

⁵⁰ Alberigo, *Histoire des conciles œcuméniques*, 377.

information of Catholic bishops, universities and faculties as organs of the curia. Pope John XXIII himself expressed his desire for this preparatory phase to take place transparently, not behind the curtain, but rather to be the provocative object for all ecclesiastical courts, which contradicted everything that had taken place up to Vatican II. The Roman Church, in its entirety, was thus mobilized!

Pope John XXIII believed that the Holy Spirit could mobilize the Church to realize this great project, but at the same time, he knew that this was mostly the responsibility of the faithful. Having removed the suggestion to consult the episcopate on the basis of a questionnaire (which would have compromised spontaneity), on June 18, 1959, a request was sent to those interested by the president of the preparatory commission in which the point of view was communicated regarding the theme addressed by to the council.

Meanwhile, the pope paid personal attention to the outline of the characteristic features of the convened assembly. First of all, it removed any uncertainty regarding the relationship between the new council and the one of 1870. On July 14, 1959, Pope John XXIII communicated, through the secretary of state, that the new council would be called *Vatican II* and that, under no circumstances, it is not intended to be a continuation of the first Vatican Council.⁵¹ From this point of view, the goals of the Second Vatican Council were to create a support for the transition of the Church from one era to another (it is known that Catholic theology was attacked by some modernist currents, which required a careful revision of the doctrine).

⁵¹ Giuseppe Alberigo; Matthew Sherry, *O scurtă istorie a Vaticanului II*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 71 – 75.

Preparatory period (1960 – 1962)

The basic structure on which much was built in this period and on which the subsequent steps up to the actual Council phase depended was much more complex than that of the previous period. It included a main commission and ten other commissions for various fields, paying special attention to congregational relations within the Catholic Church.⁵² With much effort and subsequent appointments, the members of this commission were chosen with the consent of the *curia* to such an extent as to provide the possibility for all bishops to work in conditions of maximum efficiency.

In the absence of a stable plan, the efforts of the preparatory commissions (which had as their objective the drafting of texts approved by the main commission) dispersed into a multitude of other subjects, often of secondary importance. The recapitulation in various schemes of the doctrinal and disciplinary teachings of the last popes, including those of Pius XII, was preferred. In this sense, a swift development of things was ultimately foreseen, without tensions and rough debates. This is how, with a unique symmetry, the illusion that Vatican I continues!⁵³

In less than two years of work, the preparatory structure has produced about seventy schemes, often verbose and established, with the most rambling subjects. *The Motu proprio Concilium*⁵⁴ was elaborated by which, on February 12, 1962, Pope John XXIII fixed the beginning of the conciliar work (on October 11, the same year).⁵⁵

In the meantime, certain physiognomy features about the Council had begun to be specified, mainly in three aspects. First of all, it was increasingly concrete that the union

⁵² Antonino Indelicato, “La preparazione del Vaticano II,” in *Cristianesimo nella storia*, vol. 8, (Il Mulino, 1987), 121 – 130.

⁵³ Indelicato, “La preparazione del Vaticano II,” in *Cristianesimo nella storia*, 121 – 130.

⁵⁴ G. Sale, *Giovanni XXIII e la preparazione del Concilio Vaticano II*, (Roma, Jaca Book, 2012), 46-48.

⁵⁵ The formal convocation of the Second Vatican Council took place on December 25, 1961, through the apostolic constitution “*Humanae salutis*.”

between the divided Christian traditions was not attempted, as had been rumored, but Pope John XXIII repeatedly emphasized that the conciliar event was supposed to mark a change in the Catholic attitude regarding the ecumenical commitment. A second essential feature of the Council's character concerned its pastoral aspect, which wanted the dichotomous separation of doctrine – discipline in favor of a global existential consideration of the Church, both its own interior and in relation to society. Finally, the third characteristic of the Council concerns its effective freedom, the bishops being the center of activity, thus leaving the passive attitude that, especially before the decisions of 1870, characterized the Catholic episcopate.⁵⁶

Parallel to the institutional preparation of the Council, little by little, a growing interest is unfolding in the Church that urges the faithful to reflections, studies, prayers and countless meetings on the hierarchies. An action full of interest is also expressed for those who, for various reasons, have moved away from the Catholic Church, in order to reconcile them and, at the same time, to help them find the spirit of evangelization and witness. The idea of the Second Vatican Council also highlights missionary aspects.

A month before the opening of the works, a radio message from the pope emphasized that this council had arrived “at a good moment,” that is, at one of those “historic hours of the Church ready for a new momentum of ascent, to the highest peaks.”⁵⁷

After remarkable efforts, it was finally possible to present to the bishops a first package of seven schemes concerning the question of revelation, confession of faith, moral order, liturgy, family, social communications and church unity. At the same time, the regulation of the Council assembly was being prepared, following the model of the one applied at Vatican I which, although it was dated August 6, 1962, was published on September 5, the same year. The bishops were given lists of the very high number of participants in the Council, their geographical, linguistic and cultural diversity. The lack of synodal experience for the organizers

⁵⁶ Alberigo, *Histoire des conciles œcuméniques*, 367 – 368.

⁵⁷ A. Rimoldi, *Discorsi e scritti sul Concilio*, (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1983), 124 – 125.

as well as the working methods were of particular importance and, as it was quickly established, could condition the assembly to an extent that no one suspected. From a schematic point of view (regarding the organizational structure of the Council), the regulation provided for two levels of activities: in the plenary assembly (general congregations) and a work group (11 commissions plus two technical bodies), and finally, the decisions had to be approved in the solemn meeting.⁵⁸ Things were managed by a presidency council (10 then 12 cardinals) assisted by a general secretariat. The commissions were headed by a cardinal appointed by the pope himself, who in turn appointed equally a string of 24 members, two others being chosen by the council. The regulation also provided for the presence of experts with technical and advisory functions.⁵⁹

As early as the spring of 1960, Cardinal Augustin Bea raised the issue of a possible invitation from the Council, addressed to the Protestant churches, and the Orthodox Church, with observer status. His proposal was unprecedented. At the councils of Lyon (1274) and Florence (1439), the Orthodox Church participated as a kind of guest; at Trento (1545 – 1563), Protestants did not participate in impressive numbers and at Vatican I (1869 – 1870), both Orthodox and Protestants had ignored Pius IX's rather clumsy invitation. Now, on the contrary, the intense and wise activity of the secretariat for unity led to the insertion of an annexed chapter in the regulations that provided for the participation of the other congregations in the solemn meetings, but only with the role of observers.⁶⁰

The plenary sessions, opened by the celebration of *mass*, took place in the specially arranged Vatican basilica (the commissions had worked in various places but never outside Rome). The presence in Rome of millions of participants – not only church fathers but also

⁵⁸ Maureen Sullivan, *101 Întrebări și răspunsuri despre Vatican II*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2002), 17 – 18.

⁵⁹ Sullivan, *101 Întrebări și răspunsuri despre Vatican II*, 21 – 23.

⁶⁰ Xavier Rynne, *Letters from Vatican City*, vol. 5, (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 84 – 91.

officials (official or not), observers and countless journalists sent from all over the world – generated serious problems that required the creation of special spaces for them.

The official opening of the Second Vatican Council. The first session

The official opening session of the Second Vatican Council took place on October 11, 1962. In this suggestive, incomparable setting of the Vatican basilica, accompanied by the presence of thousands of people, experts and guests,⁶¹ Pope John XXIII presented the address inaugural (the critical text was edited by G. Alberigo and A. Melloni under the title “L’allocuzione Gaudet mater Ecclesia di Giovanni XXIII”).⁶²

The familiar, monotonous tone of the speech prevented the crowd from grasping its importance even as it expressed the exhausting efforts of the pope and the deep convictions that had given rise to this council. The first part was dedicated, by its very nature, to the convocation and preparation of the Council and framed in Christ's commandment regarding the needs of the Church in a unique historical moment. After evoking the central character of the councils in the life of the Church, the pope expressed the position of the Second Vatican Council according to the needs and possibilities of the respective era. Thus, the new council is “the solemn affirmation of the union between Christ and His Church,”⁶³ an occasion “for wider and deeper knowledge”⁶⁴ of the Church in relation to the society in which it develops. On this occasion, Pope John XXIII expressed his personal desire that “the Church, enlightened by the spiritual power of the Council, may grow in communion with God – the Father and the Son and look

⁶¹ The Second Vatican Council was attended by 1,041 bishops from Europe (almost half of the total number of participants), 956 Americans and over 300 Africans and Asians. The largest national episcopal group (belonging to the same country) was composed of Italians (397 participants).

⁶² Giuseppe Alberigo, A. Melloni, *Fede tradizione profezia. Studi su Giovanni XXIII e sul Vaticano II*, (Brescia, 1984), 185 – 283.

⁶³ Giuseppe Alberigo, *Il concilio della speranza*, (EMP Edizioni Messaggero, Padova, 1985), 97 – 130.

⁶⁴ Alberigo, *Il concilio della speranza*, 97 – 130.

fearlessly into the future.”⁶⁵ “I want to open the window of the Church so that we can see what is happening outside and so that the world can see what is happening to us,” said John XXIII.⁶⁶

This address culminated in the conviction that the whole of humanity was at a turning point in its history taking on, in its own sense and despite all expectations, a providential, transcendental significance. For those who know the history of the twenty Councils recognized as ecumenical, this will not be a surprise. Postconciliar times were almost always turbulent. But the Second Vatican Council represents a special case. Unlike previous Councils, it was not convened to eliminate heretical doctrines or to restore a schism; he did not proclaim any official dogma and did not even make express disciplinary deliberations. Pope John XXIII had a broader perspective. He saw a new era emerging, which he faced with optimism, with unwavering trust in God. He spoke about a pastoral objective of the Council, understanding by this an updating of the Church. It was not about a trivial adaptation to the spirit of the times, but about the call to make the transmitted faith speak today.

The second part of the opening session was dedicated to several essential points: the relationship between the Kingdom of God and human society, the reformulation of the “*Fidei Depositum*,” the promotion of the spirit of compassion and not that of severity, and the desire for unity among Christians. As for the *Fidei Depositum*, Pope John XXIII had made it the main task of the Council to better secure and explain the extremely valuable treasure of Christian teaching, in order to make it more accessible to all people. For this, the Council had to take care, first of all, not to condemn the errors of the age, but to rediscover with strength and serenity the values of the faith. “The lights of this Council” – he said – “will be for the Church (...) a source of spiritual wealth. Drawing new powers from it, she will fearlessly look to the future.

⁶⁵ Alberigo, *Il concilio della speranza*, 97 – 130.

⁶⁶ Alberigo, *Il concilio della speranza*, 99.

(...) We must undertake with joy, without fear, the work on which our age demands, following the path that the Church has been following for almost twenty centuries.”⁶⁷

The first session of meetings lasted from October 11 to December 8, 1962. The meetings were held in St. Peter's Basilica. For the first time in church history, eighteen non-Catholic churches accepted the pope's invitation and sent conciliar observers.

When, during the first General Congregation on October 13, 1962, the conciliar commissions had to be elected, Cardinal Achille Liénart de Lille⁶⁸ proposed postponing the election for a few days because, in the short time that had been made available to them, a closer acquaintance between participants. His proposal was accepted. The conciliar fathers first debated the *scheme* on the Liturgy, but after sixteen days they referred it to a committee.

A series of fairly large difficulties arose when discussing the scheme about divine revelation (*Dei Verbum*). It ran into the categorical opposition of almost two-thirds of the conciliar fathers and, despite the lack of a majority of two thirds of the vote, was rejected by the pope, who appointed a joint commission to draw up a new scheme. After the intervention of Pope John XXIII, the preparatory scheme was withdrawn, and the constitution was conceived anew. Experts on the new drafting committee included Yves Congar, Alois Grillmeier, Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger.⁶⁹

The third scheme discussed was that of means of communication. As this subject of debate was closely connected with the scheme of the Church, it was thought best to wait with the final debate until the scheme of the Church had been dealt with in general. But because the main scheme of the Church had not yet been discussed, it was decided to begin, at least, the discussion of the scheme in relation to the Church of the East.

⁶⁷ John XXIII, Opening Address of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, October 11, 1962: AAS 54 (1962), 788.

⁶⁸ Michael Davies, *Apologia pro Marcel Lefebvre*, vol. 1, (Devon: Augustine Publishing Company, 1980), 978 – 980.

⁶⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, “Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung,” in: Herbert Vorgrimler, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Teil II, (Freiburg, 1967), 501.

Debates concerning the Church

The last six general meetings of the first session (starting with December 1, 1962) were reserved for the debate of the scheme *De Ecclesia* (about the Church – *Lumen Gentium*) whose text, divided into eleven chapters, occupies almost eighty printed pages. This topic of debate was one of the most uplifting moments, thus proving that the conciliar spirit had passed the huge threshold imposed by the four months of intense activity and quite exhausting for the conciliar fathers to believe that the subject would, in the end, be completed.⁷⁰ However, the gathering was, from now on, in a position to freely express the urges of conscience and to find each one in the position of influential leader.

The debate on the Church was a precious occasion because the Council asked itself serious questions about the essential points that had been up to that point and realized, perhaps for the first time, that its (the Council's) duty was not to deal exclusively with the internal part of the Catholic Church, but should orient the Church towards its exterior, providing the opportunity for the relationship with the modern world, which would have a much greater importance.⁷¹ Thus, the new condition of the Church ready to meet people's needs, began to take shape more and more surely. A series of interventions shed light (from different but complementary points of view) on the fact that contemporary Christian thinking is characterized by features completely and completely different from those in the preparatory scheme.⁷² Cardinal Suenens presented the circumstances that gave birth to an alternative project, formulated in the environment of the University of Louvain.⁷³ The mystery of Christ's revelation to His Church (and through the Church, to all people) became, in Cardinal Montini's

⁷⁰ René Brouillet, "Mărturie despre Conciliul Vatican II," în *Conciliul Vatican II (1959-1965)*, (Roma, École française de Rome, 1989), 18 – 26.

⁷¹ Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Istoria creștinismului de la origini până în prezent*, vol. 12: „Războaie mondiale și totalitarisme (1914 – 1958)", (Paris, Desclée-Fayard, 1990), 488 – 522.

⁷² Philippe Chenaux, *Timpul Vaticanului II. O introducere în istoria consiliului*, (Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2012), 27 – 29.

⁷³ August Franzen, *Istoria papilor*, (Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice, București, 1996), 404.

view, the central point through which he works the renewed ecclesiological thinking of the Council. The Archbishop of Bologna, Giacomo Lercaro, emphasized the Church's need for simplicity, not as a moral condition, but as an example “in a world that refuses poverty as a profound sign of the relationship with Christ.”⁷⁴

Conclusions concerning the first session

The first efforts of the council led to an unstable situation; none of the schemes examined along the way were fully exhausted. And especially the liturgical reform, discussed in part, greatly influenced the activity of the council, which could not pronounce on any of the stated subjects.

The fact that none of the decisions taken in the first session were finalized and voted on might have given the impression that the assembly was not able to express its way of thinking but, on the contrary, it was found that, in fact, the first two months did not was but a period of accommodation for an episcopate unaccustomed to exercising so great a responsibility as might affect the Universal Church, all the more disoriented by the freedom which the pope had left to the council. Everyone was able to benefit from their own experience, culture and responsibility and contribute to developing mutual understanding and promoting teamwork.

Intersession (1962 – 1963). From John XXIII to Paul VI

The end of the first session was overshadowed by the serious and incurable illness of Pope John XXIII. As early as 1962 he realized the seriousness of his illness. At the end of the session, the pope came to St. Peter's Basilica only to give a closing speech. At the end of his

⁷⁴ Giancarlo Zizola, *Il conclave, storia e segreti*, (Roma, Newton & Compton, 1997), 237 – 238.

message, he said: “I am with you. Next year maybe there will be another pope.”⁷⁵ He would not survive the second session of the Council, dying on June 3, 1963.⁷⁶

The death of Pope John XXIII, although it caused heartache in the ranks of the Catholic Church, did not interrupt the work of the Council except for a short time, for the election of a successor to the Vatican See. On June 19, 1963, more than eighty cardinals gathered in conclave; the work of the Council had to continue and the Church needed a new pope. So, in the fifth round of voting, on June 21, the Italian cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini (full name Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria Montini) was elected pope, who took the name of Pope Paul VI and led the Roman Catholic Church until 1978, under the motto: *In nomine Domini*.⁷⁷

In his capacity as pope, Montini addresses, for the first time, the Catholic priests of Rome, on June 24, 1963, asking them to seek direct contacts with all people of every category, with all believers, and especially with those who they moved away from the church. Already on June 27, Pope Paul VI fixed the start date of the second session of the Second Vatican Council, on September 29, 1963.⁷⁸

In his message broadcast on June 27, 1963 and addressed to the Catholic world, Pope Paul VI confirmed his orientation when he declared that “the most important part of his pontificate will be devoted to the continuation of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, towards which the whole world is looking.”⁷⁹ Also on this date, the Secretary of State of the Vatican announces that the pope has finally decided on the continuation of the work of the

⁷⁵ Franzen, *Istoria papilor*, 441.

⁷⁶ Starting in 1963, the pope's health worsened and, after a hard battle with the disease, Pope John XXIII passed away on June 3, 1963, at 7:45 p.m. Few of his predecessors were so regretted by public opinion as was John XXIII. The unions in Italy, even the communist ones, decided to stop work for ten minutes on the clock when he was buried, as a sign of mourning. This decision was made throughout the country when, on June 6, 1963, the lifeless body of Pope John XXIII was laid to rest in the Vatican Grottoes, under St. Peter's Basilica, near the crypt of Pius XI.

⁷⁷ Franzen, *Istoria papilor*, 451.

⁷⁸ Philippe Chenaux, *Timpul Vaticanului II. O introducere în istoria consiliului*, (Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2012), 227.

⁷⁹ Rimoldi, *Discorsi e scritti sul Concilio*, 168 – 171.

Council, fixing the start date of the second session for September 29, 1963, the break between the two sessions being a blessed one holiday for the Papal See.

The experience of the first session led Pope Paul VI to bring up without delay the question of revising the regulations in order to increase the efficiency of the works. The most unsatisfactory aspect concerned the coordination of the debates (discussions on certain imposed topics) which the plethoric leadership did not handle with sufficient authority and caution.

Before resuming the conciliar works, the pope considered it opportune to give the Romanian Curia confidence regarding its competence, noting, at the same time, the reform that took place both internally (regarding the relations between the members) and externally (the level of involvement in the life of society).⁸⁰ Catching the pattern of the 16th century popes at the time of the Council of Trent, Pope Paul VI realized the effect of the reform and the cessation of causing discontent in the midst of the assembly.

The second session. The October crisis

In the run-up to the second session, Pope Paul VI's effort focused on correcting organizational and procedural issues that had not been closely monitored in the previous session. These changes included inviting additional Catholic and non-Catholic laity, reducing the number of schemes proposed for debates to seventy and canceling the requirement of secrecy that prevailed during the plenary sessions.⁸¹

Pope Paul VI mentioned in his speeches and actions preceding the opening of the second session, the importance of the Council to contribute to strengthening peace in the world. Thus, on September 15, 1963, addressing the faithful after the Holy Liturgy, he said: “The Council

⁸⁰ Pope Paul VI mentioned the reform of the Roman Curia in the *Regimini ecclesiae* of August 15, 1967. Before the opening of the second conciliar session, the pope decided to form a secretariat for non-Christians identical to the one for the unity of Christians.

⁸¹ J. Heraty, “Conciliul Vatican II”, în *Noua Enciclopedie Catolică*, XIV, (Facultatea Universității Catolice a Americii, I ed., New York: McGraw-Hill), 565 – 566.

must be a great prayer to God and, at the same time, a powerful weapon in the hands of people to achieve peace.”⁸²

On September 29, 1963, Pope Paul VI attributed to the Second Vatican Council, four goals: presentation of the theology of the church; internal ecclesiastical renewal; promoting Christian unity and, finally, the Church's dialogue with the contemporary world.

The fundamental principle of the projects from 1963 had to be realized through the scheme about the Church. The month of October was entirely occupied with the debate of the new redaction of the scheme *De ecclesia*, presented to the council on September 30 by Cardinal Ottaviani. On October 1st, the final vote accepted the text as the basis of the debate about the Church, which was to highlight the four major points of the scheme about the Church: baptism as the basis of membership in the Catholic Church; the scheme speaks of different degrees of union with the Church, an idea that has great ecumenical implications;⁸³ the Church is considered as the mystical body of Christ and all those who make it up form a universal priesthood; the papal primacy is reaffirmed, but – what is new and capital – within the episcopal collegiality (the idea of collegiality among the bishops triggered strong opposition in October); the Church, in its entirety, is considered infallible, as is the episcopal body; the role of the laity in the Church is specified, showing that they have the duty to contribute to the evangelization of the world; to live in the world of moral values; to sanctify themselves in their engagement in the problems of society.⁸⁴

The scheme about the bishops brought a heated debate, held around the ecclesiological status of the regional episcopal conferences. The reform of the Roman curia and of Roman centralism and the creation of a collegial episcopal body, around the pope, were requested. At the end of November, the scheme was discussed in 5 chapters about ecumenism (general

⁸² Barbu Ionescu, în *Ortodoxia*, (București, aprilie 1964).

⁸³ *Ortodoxia*, (București, 1962, nr. 3 iulie-septembrie), 4.

⁸⁴ H. Fesquet, în *Le Monde*, (din 2 oct. 1963).

principles; method of application, relations with the Orthodox Churches and ecclesial communities separated from Rome by the Protestant Reformation; the place of Judaism; and religious freedom). And this represented a revolutionary turning point: after centuries of isolating Rome in the complex of the one true Church and of intransigence in demanding the return to the Roman “stable” of all separated Christians and taxed as schismatics and heretics, the document recognized the full ecclesiality of the Orthodox Churches and those Protestants and proposed as a way to restore Christian unity not conversion by force (a method intensively used by Catholicism over the centuries of its existence), but dialogue. Heated discussions also promoted the chapters affirming the place of Judaism in the history of salvation as well as religious freedom, in which the statements also had disputed political implications. It was decided to detach them from the text on ecumenism and rework them as separate statements.⁸⁵

The session is also marked by the verbal conflict (although elegant, still quite intense) between Cardinals Joseph Frings and Alfredo Ottaviani. When on November 8, 1963, Cardinal Joseph Frings criticized the institution of the Holy Office (which before 1908 was called the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition), he got an impassioned response from his secretary, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani. This exchange of lines supported by the two cardinals is often considered one of the most intense within the Council.

The importance of the subjects covered highlighted certain shortcomings in the working methods. From all sides it was possible to see the impossibility of an authentic debate, because the priests had to sign up in advance and present a summary of their intervention and, on the other hand, according to an old custom, at each meeting the sequence of interventions of those who wanted to take the floor was not it followed the order of registrations but the ecclesiastical priority. But the impressive number of the conciliar assembly required the abandonment of this

⁸⁵ Fesquet, in *Le Monde*, (din 2 oct. 1963).

very complicated method, adopting, at the same time, a new rhythm in the debates of the themes.

The second conciliar session ended with the debates on ecumenism. In the solemn public meeting of December 4, 1963, the Constitution on the liturgy and the Decree on the means of communication were approved, being promulgated by Pope Paul VI “in communion with the venerable brothers.”⁸⁶

In the closing speech, Pope Paul VI had words of appreciation for the work done during this conciliar period, without referring to the controversial issues. He recalled, however, the very important and complex issue of the Episcopal Office, expressing his hope that this council would resolve, “in the best and appropriate way,”⁸⁷ the Mariological issues, so that Mary could be adorned with the title of “mother of the Church.”⁸⁸ The Pope expressly mentioned the scheme about Revelation, whose theses must defend “against error, abuse and doubt”⁸⁹ the truths discovered, but at the same time allowing theologians to investigate these truths “in fidelity against the magisterium of the Church and using the most modern aids.”⁹⁰

The Pope announced the establishment of the post-conciliar commissions and voiced the desire that the next session would bring about the happy resolution of the still existing problems. At the same time, Paul VI announced his intention to make a three-day pilgrimage to Israel; he wanted to see the country from which the apostle Peter had set out, a country where none of the successors to the Papal See had set foot until then. The papal trip began on January 4, 1964, being received particularly cordially in Palestine by the Arabs. While he was visiting the holy places, the crowd cheered him enthusiastically, the reception offered by the Israeli authorities being more reserved. In Jerusalem, Pope Paul VI met with the ecumenical patriarch

⁸⁶ Franzen, *Istoria papilor*, 445.

⁸⁷ Franzen, *Istoria papilor*, 448.

⁸⁸ Franzen, *Istoria papilor*, 448.

⁸⁹ Rimoldi, *Discorsi e scritti sul Concilio*, 135.

⁹⁰ Rimoldi, *Discorsi e scritti sul Concilio*, 136 – 137.

Athenagoras I. The decisive meeting between the two patriarchs of the West and the East who wanted to reconcile the two hemispheres of Christendom had the effect of sending official observers from Constantinople (Archimandrite André Scrima) to the work of the Council from the Vatican.⁹¹

The third session. The crisis of November

The third session of the Vatican Council II began on September 14, 1964 and was the culmination of the Council. In his opening speech, the pope stated that, for him, the most important issue is the scheme of the Church. He emphasized that the nature and office of the episcopate are the completion of the dogma on the primacy.⁹² The scrutiny on the scheme about the Church, especially the one referring to the thesis on episcopal collegiality brought an increase of votes against, up to three hundred, because many clerics saw in it a jeopardy of papal primacy. A harsh criticism was brought to the scheme about the pastoral office of bishops. The views of the conciliar fathers clashed even more violently in the discussions on *religious freedom* as well as regarding the statement about the Jews.

In November another crisis was reached. In the teaching on the episcopal college, the pope made an *explanatory observation (Nota explicativa praevia)*⁹³ which was to exclude any suppression of the papal primacy. A number of bishops saw in this an interference with the Council's authority. On November 19, when the vote on the declaration of *religious freedom* was rejected, the measure caused a great stir. The American bishops immediately submitted a petition to the pope with the request that, even before the end of this session, a vote be taken on *the declaration on religious freedom*. The petition, which obtained over four hundred signatures

⁹¹ *Revista Patriarhiei din Moscova*, (1963, nr. 11).

⁹² Jean Guitton, *Dialog mit Paul VI*, (Fischer Bücherei, 1969), 260 – 263.

⁹³ David Andreas Seeber, *Das Zweite Vaticanum: Konzil des Übergangs*, (Wien, Herder – Bücherei, 1966), 423 – 424.

of the conciliar fathers, was presented to the pope after the close of the general congregation by Cardinals Mezer, Ritter, and Leger, but they only obtained a promise that the *declaration on religious freedom* would be entered as the first point on agenda of the fourth session. Pope Paul VI also demonstrated his papal authority with the publication of the decree on ecumenism and the Eastern Catholic Churches. *The marriage scheme* was submitted to the pope.

In the interval between the third and fourth conciliar sessions, on June 24, 1965, in the speech addressed to the cardinals, Pope Paul VI declared that he intended to carry out *the reform of the Curia*, the new regulation of the law regarding mixed marriages, as well as the study on the issue of birth control.

The fourth session. Closing of the Vatican Council II

The fourth session of the Second Vatican Council began on September 14, 1965 with a solemn liturgy led by Pope Paul VI together with twenty-six bishops from countries where the Church was persecuted or where political unrest reigned. In the evening of the opening day, there was a procession led by the pope, which traveled the way from *Santa Croce* to the Lutheran basilica. During this time, Paul VI carried a relic of the Saviour's cross, thereby indicating, in symbolic form, the source from which any reform of the Church must draw its strength.⁹⁴

On September 15, discussions on religious freedom were resumed. The most significant interventions were those of Polish Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and Czech Cardinal Josef Beran, who had to endure a lot because of the rejection of religious freedom by the Nazis and Communists. At the same time, they claimed the return of all the rights of the Church by those who persecuted it over time and, at the same time, they recognized the mistakes that were

⁹⁴ Alberigo, *Histoire des conciles œcuméniques*, 394.

committed in the name of the Church.⁹⁵ Beran, in a more particular way, reminded those present of the teachings of the Bohemian reformer Hus, the confessionalist and authoritarian rule of the Habsburgs who made Catholicism a civil obligation and a support for the throne. He also emphasized that the violence exercised in the name of faith has humiliated the church by making it undesirable to many people.

In the period that followed, chart 13 on the Church and its role in the modern world was carefully reviewed by a commission that included the laity; deliberated on the extended scheme regarding the mission of the Church as well as on the conciliar project on the ministry and life of priests. Opposite the conciliar text on revelation, Pope Paul VI again presented several aspects that needed to be modified. Eleven projects could be validated during this closing period and then promulgated by the pope. The *Nostra Aetate* declaration is the subject of long debates as it reaffirms, in accordance with the Council of Trent, that “neither the Jews of the time of Christ nor the Jews of today”⁹⁶ can be held more responsible for the death of Jesus than the Romans or the Christians themselves.

The last day of the Council was marked by the visit of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I, being considered the culminating moment of the day. Both Pope Pius VI and the Patriarch express, in a joint statement, their regret for the events that caused the Great Schism of 1054, and solemnly lift the excommunication and anathema launched by their predecessors during it.

On December 7, 1965, the conciliar fathers met, for the last time, in the basilica of Saint Peter. In the closing speech, Paul VI summarized the aims of the Second Vatican Council in the words: “In brotherly love let us return today's humanity to God.”⁹⁷ The closing ceremony of the Council took place the following day, on December 8, in St. Peter's Square. Under the

⁹⁵ Alberigo, *Histoire des conciles œcuméniques*, 398.

⁹⁶ Chenu, *Timpul Vaticanului II. O introducere în istoria consiliului*, 232.

⁹⁷ Franzen, *Istoria papilor*, 454 – 455.

open sky, the pope celebrated mass and addressed messages to governors, scientists, artists, the poor, women, the suffering, workers and youth. The reading of the closing papal decree marked the end of the Second Vatican Council, and the bishops vowed to abide by the decisions that had been made there.

The role of Pope John XXIII in the life of the Vatican Council II

In the internal life of the Catholic Church, the fundamental initiative of Pope John XXIII was the convening of an Ecumenical Council. John XXIII announced his idea in January 1959 – in the midst of the Octave of prayer for the union of the saints – a few months after he had been elected. The announcement raised great hope but also consternation. The First Vatican Council was, indeed, the “Pope's Council”⁹⁸ and many let it be understood that the time of councils was past, and that they were no longer necessary from the date of the proclamation of the dogma of papal infallibility. But once announced, Vatican II appeared as a continuation and a complement to the Vatican Council I and therefore *the council of bishops*.⁹⁹ In the preparation of the schemes, which was very intensive, the leaders of the various Roman congregations had played a decisive role. During the sessions, however, the decisive role went to the bishops.

On Pentecost 1959, the first Preparatory Conciliar Commission was formed within which the pope declared that the Church must first adapt to the requirements of the time. When this theme is settled, she will be able, with better prospects and more certain success, to invite the separated brethren to unity. In a speech held before the members of the Greek Papal College, on June 14, 1959, the word “adaptation” (*aggiornamento*) came out of Pope John XXIII's mouth for the first time. When the church is modernized and rejuvenated, then it will be able to say to the separated brethren, “come with us!”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Klaus Schatz, *Vaticanum I. 1869-1870*, band III, (Brill, Schöningh, 1994), 226.

⁹⁹ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, (Word Publishing, 1994), 461 – 463.

¹⁰⁰ In the inaugural encyclical *Ad Petri Cathedram*, of June 29, 1959.

John XXIII's efforts to improve the relations of Catholics with other Christians cannot be separated from the Second Vatican Council, but it should be noted that good results had already been achieved when the Council opened. And so the reception from the other Christian denominations was very different from that which the First Vatican Council had received.

Conclusions

Analyzing a historical path that preceded and followed the Vatican Council II was not easy to achieve in this first chapter because Vatican II is not only an event in the history of the Roman Catholic Church and Christianity, but is one of the most important religious events of the 20th century that Christianity hosted. Being in a changing society, after going through two world wars and experiencing great cultural and social challenges, the Catholic Church, through the “Vatican II” event, usefully exposes itself to the world, coming out of the shadow of the historical Vatican city, offering it self, simply, for service.

After following, in the first part of the chapter, the outline of the political-religious framework prior to the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, in the second part of the chapter we could observe the unfolding of the thread of events within the four conciliar sessions but and the crises that arose during the theological debates. The most important event was marked by the death of Pope John XXIII, the one who initiated this event.

The role of Pope John XXIII was an extremely important one regarding the organization of the works. He studied the history of the Church's previous councils and made sure that everything was ready for the opening date, scheduled for October 11, 1962. Inside St. Peter's Basilica, 2,778 participants arrived. Pope John could not see the work of the council completed, as he died on June 3, 1963. The work of the council was concluded by his successor, Pope Paul VI, on December 8, 1965.

2. DIALOGUES OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH WITH NON-CATHOLIC CHURCHES

In the previous chapter we traveled a historical path that would lead the Catholic Church to a peak of its relationship with the modern world after the Second World War, a peak that historians call “Vatican II.” Placed in the list of ecumenical councils,¹⁰¹ the Vatican Council II is however different from everything the Church knew until 1962 because it brings a new breath, first of all, inside Catholicism.

Post-conciliar times have almost always been conflictual, but Vatican II is a special case. Unlike previous Councils, it was not convened to eliminate heretical doctrines or to restore a schism; it did not proclaim any official dogma and did not even make express disciplinary deliberations. Vatican II wanted to be a pastoral council willing to address the whole world.

In this chapter we will analyze the dialogues that the Roman Catholic Church opened with the other religions (Christian and non-Christian), after the Second Vatican Council.

The great openings of the Vatican Council II

In a general way, the Second Vatican Council wanted to be a pastoral council, eager to address the people of these times. Remaining deeply doctrinal, the council proposed no definitions or condemnations; he does not pronounce anathemas as the councils of the past did. “Promoting the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the main goals of the Holy Ecumenical Council Vatican II. Christ the Lord founded a church, only one, and yet, several Christian communions appear before people as a true inheritance of Christ: they all claim to be

¹⁰¹ Before the mediatised Council of Nicaea on 325, the history of Christianity saw a series of other synods, which are usually overlooked. (In fact, even the Ecumenical Councils after Nicaea are not recognized by all Christian churches: the Assyrians recognize only the first two, the ancient Eastern churches only the first three, the Lutherans only the first four, the Orthodox the first seven, while the Catholics recognize as valid 21 of ecumenical councils...).

disciples of Christ but they are not the same and walk on different paths as if Christ would have shared.’’¹⁰²

A theology oriented towards its origins

The Constitution on Revelation insists on the unity of revelation, that living tradition in which we have a duty to distinguish correctly between Scripture and Oral Tradition. The idea is supported that the revelation is not definitive, once and for all in a text, but it is preserved in the faithful people (the Church) through which they discover new values without ceasing.¹⁰³ The return to the Word of God wants a restoration of value, within of the Catholic Church, of some traditional aspects that were somewhat forgotten due to anti-Protestant and anti-Orthodox disputes. These are: the universal priesthood of the faithful, the Church seen as the people of God rather than a legal institution, and episcopal collegiality (the latter refers to the fact that, as long as they are gathered around the bishop of Rome, the bishops bear the collective responsibility of the faithful).

Opening to the non-Catholic world

The openness to the world, which the Council wanted to demonstrate, also implied a greater openness to other Christians, especially to Protestants. This was also unusual for the Catholic Church. Indeed, even at the beginning of the 20th century, the prevailing view among Catholics was that Protestants were to blame for almost all of Europe's ills.

¹⁰² Jean Comby, *Să citim istoria Bisericii*, vol. 2 (Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice, București, 2001), 202.

¹⁰³ Comby, *Să citim istoria Bisericii*, vol. 2, 202.

This is how the “Declaration on Religious Freedom” (*Dignitatis humanae*)¹⁰⁴ was one of the most difficult texts to develop because the debates were still weighed down by the burden of a much-disputed past, which still reminded of the constraints that the Catholic Church exercised in order to impose a religion that did not in any way express the character of Christ. Now the time had come for the Church to rehabilitate its position before the world.

Within the Council, the conciliar minority wanted to depart from the defense of the Truth and of Catholicism (as during the time of Pope Gregory XVI), the only religion declared to be the true one.¹⁰⁵ The majority, however, refusing this position, asks to depart, in the debate, from the human person and his inalienable rights, among others, that of freely accessing the truth recognized by one's own conscience. Consequently, freedom cannot be claimed only by Catholics when they are in the minority and persecuted, but it is also valid for non-Catholic minorities among Catholics.

The Decree on ecumenism brings a change of attitude in inter-Christian relations and requires that the different religious denominations look, first, towards the common aspects they share: Jesus Christ and the Gospel. “We must not accuse non-Catholic Christians of the sin of schism. Catholics must also recognize their shortcomings and responsibilities regarding schisms.”¹⁰⁶

From the first lines, the Decree puts ecumenism under the sign of unity and the uniqueness of the Church established and thought by Christ. Thus, the duty to work for the

¹⁰⁴ Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis humanae*) of December 7, 1965, as we find it rendered by Austin Flannery, in *Vatican Council II*, (New York, 1992), 800: “(...) The Second Vatican Council declares that the human person has the right to religious freedom. This freedom consists in the fact that all men must be freed from all coercion by individuals, social groups or any human power so that in religious matters no one is compelled to act against his conscience and no one is hindered to act according to his conscience, in private and in public, both alone and in association with others, within due limits. He also declares that the right to religious freedom is really based on the very dignity of the human person, as it is known from the revealed Word of God and the way of reason. This right of the human person to religious freedom must be recognized in the legal organization of society in such a way that it becomes a civil right.”

¹⁰⁵ F. A. Isambert, “Le sociologue, le prêtre et le fidèle,” in H. Mendras, *La sagesse et le désordre*, (Gallimard, 1980), 98 – 104.

¹⁰⁶ The statement given by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras on December 7, 1965, as found in Jean Comby, *Să citim istoria bisericii*, vol. 2, (Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice, București, 2001), 203.

restoration of unity is based on the fact that the Lord also built and wanted one Church. According to the statement on ecumenism, division among Christ's disciples is a scandal for the world, and the most important contribution, which the Catholic Church can offer it to ecumenism, is to loudly proclaim the ideal of unity and prevent the stopping of ecumenism.

The opinion of the theologians who participated in the works of the Council is that the text of the decree translates into deeds the spirit and will of Pope John XXIII, who, although he did not write a single line in this document, he is considered the first its author.¹⁰⁷ However, *the Decree on Ecumenism* is not a conciliar constitution, that is, it does not include much doctrine and does not have an immediate and decisive influence on the structure of the Church; The decree is a conciliar act, a disposition taken collegially and solemnly by the pastoral magisterium. The decree is addressed to Catholics, it represents an internal rule for the Catholic Church. This does not mean that it could not interest other Christians as well. In the its doctrinal parts, the Decree contains a true doctrine, and in the parts his practical, offers prudent, wise directions, in accordance with the Gospel. Through this conciliar act, the Catholic Church undertook to move forward following the path of ecumenism. Of course, there is no unanimity among the Catholic faithful in the way of seeing or understanding ecumenism. However, the Council wants ecumenism to gradually become an activity ordinary of the Catholic Church.

“The declaration on non-Christian religions” (*Nostra aetate*)¹⁰⁸ is one of the most recent texts of the Council. The council strives to discover the part of knowledge of God preserved in

¹⁰⁷ Yves M. Congar, “Introduction,” in *Concile Oecuménique Vatican II, Documents conciliaires. Décret sur l’œcuménisme “Unitatis Redintegratio,”* I, (Éditions du Centurion, Paris, 1965), 165 – 192.

¹⁰⁸ Declaration on the relations of the Catholic Church with non-Christian religions (*Nostra aetate*) of October 28, 1965, as rendered by Austin Flannery, in *Vatican Council II*, (New York, 1992), 738 – 739: “(...) Indeed, all peoples make up one community; they have one origin, for God ordained the human race to inhabit the whole surface of the earth; they also have one ultimate end, God, whose providence, whose evidences of goodness and plans of salvation embrace all, until the elect shall gather in the holy city, illumined by the glory of God, where all the nations will walk in His light. People look to the various religions for the answer to the hidden enigmas of the human condition, which, today as of old, deeply trouble the human heart. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of our life? What is good and what is sin? What is the origin and purpose of suffering? What is the path to true happiness? What is death, judgment and reward after death? Finally, what is that ultimate and ineffable mystery that pervades our existence, from which we draw and towards which we move? ... The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions.”

all religions, starting with the so-called primitive ones, up to those that have acquired the monotheistic revelation, Judaism and Islam. Pope Paul VI expressed his interest in Judaism by stating that “The Church deplores the enmities, persecutions and all manifestations of anti-Semitism directed at any time and by anyone against the Jews.”¹⁰⁹ This passage is the fruit of difficult elaboration given the heated context of fighting in the Middle East.

It must be stated that, at the beginning of the Council, no declaration was foreseen about the Church's relations with religions non-Christians, and the problem of relations with the Jews ended up being discussed only in during the second session. In this context, it was desired that the statement about the Church's relations with the Jews should be preceded by a brief mention on non-Christian religions. Thus, the declaration *Nostra aetate* was formed, which was promulgated on October 28, 1965.

Among the reasons that were the basis of this statement, we recall the fact that, already before the Council, many representatives of other non-Christian religions sought to connect with the Catholic Church. Then, the means of communication social and air connections have enormously reduced the distance between people and cultures. In addition, technical factors, the common dangers represented by unbelief and militant atheism gave birth to the first contacts between representatives of non-Christian religions and those of the Christian religion. Thus, the Catholic Church sees itself facing a great challenge, namely, that of creating links with other non-Christian religions, a fact that ultimately led to new positions and changes in attitude. In conclusion, non-Christian religions are becoming more and more present in life Catholic Church. The phenomenon of the emergence of new religious movements, especially of those who come from non-Christian religions and from a so-called humanism, constitutes a serious challenge to Catholics, who they must motivate their mission more deeply in the face of the present world.

¹⁰⁹ *Conciliul Ecumenic Vatican II*, (Arhiepiscopia Romano-Catolică, București, 1999), 224.

Openness to dialogue with modern world

The Church's dialogue with the modern world was carefully analyzed by the Council and reproduced in the Constitution *Lumen gentium*, where the Catholic Church was presented not anyway, but in the fullness of its mystery: the people of God called to sanctification, in which every man (clergy or lay) has its specific place.¹¹⁰ In the Constitution “The Church in the Contemporary World” – (*Gaudium et Spes*), the work containing the longest text of the Vatican Council II, the Church presents itself as being engaged in a dialogue with the modern world. It must take into account the changes that have taken place in the world, changes that, in the past, have been the basis of many conflicts and mistakes. It is also argued that atheism must be investigated carefully, with objectivity, seeking to discover its causes. At the same time, some issues of the current era are examined in a very special way: marriage and family, political society, culture and economy as well as the consolidation of peace in the world. Analyzing these aspects falls to the Secretariat for non-Catholics, established in April 1965.

The chapter on the Virgin Mary was the subject of the debate. At first, the plan called for a separate document devoted to Mary's role to make *Lumen gentium* more “ecumenical,” that is, less offensive to Protestants, who view Marian hypertulia with suspicion. However, the Synod Fathers emphasized, with the Pope's support, that the treatment of Mary should be in the Church's constitution because Mary's place is in the Church.

¹¹⁰ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*) of November 21, 1964, as rendered by Austin Flannery in *Vatican Council II*, (New York, 1992), 359 – 367: Chapter II - The People of God “Christ calls from among the Jews and pagans a crowd that will merge into unity, not according to the flesh, but in the spirit, and which will be the new people of God. Indeed, those who believe in Christ, born again not of perishable seed, but of imperishable seed, through the Word of the Living God (1 Peter 1:23), not of the flesh but of water and the Holy Spirit (John 3: 5-6), finally constitutes a "chosen nation, royal priesthood, redeemed people..." (1 Peter 2:9-10). That is why the Messianic people, although they do not actually include all people and more than once appear as a small herd, are nevertheless for the entire human race a very strong germ of unity, hope and salvation. Established by Christ in sharing life, love and truth, it is also used by Him as an instrument of the salvation of all and is sent to the whole world as light of the world and salt of the earth (...).”

For its part, the traditionalist group *Coetus Internationalis Patrum*¹¹¹ wanted the establishment of a specific document on the Virgin Mary and her place in the Church and not just chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium*. He was also in favor of proclaiming the dogma of “Mary, intercessor of all graces and co-redeemer.”¹¹²

The idea finally adopted was to give the Virgin Mary an important place in the document about the Church, that is, to take the role of evoking Mary through her place “in the mystery of Christ and the Church,” without proclaiming her “co-redeemer.”¹¹³

A new beginning

Many critics and historians shared the impression that a new era would soon begin for the Church,¹¹⁴ as the Second Vatican Council ended the period of the Council of Trent. Henceforth one speaks of “before the Council” and “after the Council.”¹¹⁵ It was believed that the Church, which had lived four hundred years under the Council of Trent, would live as long under the Vatican Council II, applying the decisions taken. In reality, however, things were not quite like that! The discussions made by the council, together with the crises of civilized society, did nothing but show the fragility of a Church in which divergences exist and are expressed quite well.

The doctrinal or theological problems that arise from this moment in the Church do nothing but speak of a Church in motion or create a bridge to launch any question coming from

¹¹¹ Richard Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, (Paulist Press, 2006), 220.

¹¹² Philippe Roy, “Le Coetus Internationalis Patrum au concile Vatican II: genèse d'une dissidence?” dans *Histoire@Politique. Politique, Culture, Société*, (Edition: Centre d'histoire de science, Paris, 2012), 43.

¹¹³ Roy, “Le Coetus Internationalis Patrum au concile Vatican II: genèse d'une dissidence?” dans *Histoire@Politique. Politique, Culture, Société*, 43.

¹¹⁴ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Vers un nouveau christianisme?*, (Cerf, 1986), 93.

¹¹⁵ Comby, *Să citim istoria Bisericii*, vol. 2, 205.

the Catholic faithful and a favorable time for “reconciliation with brothers separated from the mother Church.”¹¹⁶

The aftermath of the Vatican Council II

If the Council was, in itself, a unique event, the consequences desired by both the Roman Catholic and Protestant worlds were eagerly awaited. Through its declarations, the Second Vatican Council promised the modern world a new Church, adapted to changes, a Church that would come out of the shadows and serve society.

A promising future

The decisions of the Second Vatican Council are implemented quite quickly in the following years: the institutions are organized according to the texts of the council; episcopal conferences, the signs of collegiality, are established in all countries (in France, since 1966, the bishops' conference used to meet annually, in Lourdes).

Another aspect of the bishops' collegiality was the synod of bishops, which exists alongside the pope to help him lead the world Church. This synod was established in October 1967 and consists of 197 members, two-thirds of whom are elected by the episcopal conferences. The working meetings are a kind of break-in session whose program is a routine one: the dangers threatening the church and believers are analyzed, atheism is discussed, an analysis of mixed marriages is presented, observations are made on the reform of seminaries and canon law. Presbyterian councils are established, often with much more difficulty, in

¹¹⁶ Comby, *Să citim istoria Bisericii*, vol. 2, 214.

dioceses. Monks and nuns reorganize their constitutions and way of life in accordance with the “Decree on the Renewal and Adaptation of Monastic Life.”¹¹⁷

The Constitution on the Liturgy, adopted during the Second Vatican Council, constituted the foundation for the liturgical reform. Within this reform, it is mentioned that the liturgy will have to be celebrated in the spoken language of each country or area where the group of believers is located. Already in 1967, the liturgy could be officiated entirely in the national language of each state (the living languages, which excluded the use of Latin from the liturgy). Some Catholic theologians see in this fact an important achievement of the Council because people could understand the preached Word, while some nostalgics saw a desacralization of the liturgical moment by giving up the Latin language.

The church that speaks to the world

The dialogue that opens between the Church and the world in the process of secularization is intended to be lasting, as an expression of the fact that the Catholic Church is becoming a participant in the great problems of this world. The pope's travels, the attitude he has towards people, the meetings with the crowds, attract the sympathy of Christians as well as non-Christians. In 1965 the pope goes to New York; in 1967 he visits Portugal and Istanbul (where he meets Patriarch Athenagoras); in 1968, in Latin America; in 1969, in Geneva and Uganda; in 1970, in the Far East. Also during this period, Pope Pius VI establishes the central government of the Church, that is “the Roman Curia,”¹¹⁸ which means that, from now on, the Italian cardinals are in a numerical minority.

¹¹⁷ Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 624 – 625.

¹¹⁸ “The Roman Curia” is the administrative apparatus of the Holy See that coordinates and carries out the organization of the Catholic Church. It is the equivalent of the government (the executive of a sovereign state). In theory, the Pope is an absolute monarch who rules the Church, but in practice he is assisted by various “ministers” (cardinals) who together form the Roman Curia.

In the 1967 encyclical *Populorum progressio* (“Development of peoples”), the pope states that “the social problem has become world-wide.”¹¹⁹ Development must be complete, without bias, and encompass all three aspects: economic, cultural and spiritual. the pope also argues that international trade relations must be intervened in such a way that underdeveloped countries be protected against unfair competition. In the first part of this encyclical, the problem of the integral development of man is dealt with, questioning people's aspirations, colonization and colonialism, the growing imbalance due to the production of excess food, while others lack it completely, the growing awareness of different social conditions and of the scandal caused by these differences, the clash of different civilizations.

Disappointment and trust. The post-conciliar crisis

Although the results of the council were believed to have made the Church more attractive, however, religious life did not experience much change after the Second Vatican Council. In the following years, rather, there is a deterioration of spirituality and religious practices, especially in the Western world. We can use as an example what happened in France. According to a statistic made towards the beginning of the 80s, the following can be observed: in the 1950s, it was estimated that 30% of the French attended Sunday service, and in 1966, only 23%; France in the 1972s reports a percentage of only 17% regarding the attendance of religious services on Sundays, and for the beginning of 1980 it was estimated that those who will participate in the mass on Sundays will be only 12% of the total French believers.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Encyclical “*Populorum progressio*,” as rendered by Austin Flannery in *Vatican Council II*, (New York, 1992), 630: “Today, the major fact that everyone must be aware of is that the social problem has become worldwide (...). There are situations whose character is blatant. When entire populations, deprived of the bare necessities, live in a dependency that forbids them any initiative and any responsibility (...), there is a great temptation to reject with violence such insults to human dignity. Development is not just about economic growth. To be authentic, it must be integral, that is to say, promote every man and man in his entirety (...). It is about building a world in which every person – regardless of race, religion, nationality – can live a fully human life, freed from the servitudes imposed by people and insufficiently controlled nature (...). If the new name of peace is development, who would not want to work towards its achievement?”

¹²⁰ Jean – François Six, *Le courage de l'espérance. Les dix ans qui ont suivi le Concile*, (Seuil, 1978), 102 – 107.

The decrease in the number of those who attend religious services is important, but also the decrease in the number of clergy should be taken into account for a correct statistic of this period.¹²¹ Many Catholic clergy give up the priestly robe in exchange for socio-political jobs or to found a family. And the number of religious marriages is decreasing, instead the divorce rate is increasing, which is becoming worrying for the Church.¹²² In this context, Catholicism is facing an unexpected phenomenon that began to develop after the Second Vatican Council and the first question was whether I do not understand this is due to the very fact that the Church has accepted some dialogues and “religious negotiations” with modern society?

The conclusion of the statistics discussed so far indicates that the Church did not understand the new society that was structured outside its walls and was unable to cope with the changes it faced. The Second Vatican Council broke down the last wall, the one that isolated the Church from the rest of the world, but now it seems to be rebuilding on its ruins.

The skeptics also have their opinion: the spiritual decline of the Church actually begins around 1960, and the crisis is nothing but the effect of a failed initiative: the Council! People have lost faith in the Church because it has complicated access to the sacraments, turned the sacred liturgy into thick theological expositions that do nothing but promote the “intelligence” of the speakers, in other words people are excluded from the Church by the very attitude of the Church.

Others, who were active theologians during the Second Vatican Council, are of the opinion that the Council was misinterpreted and ask for a correct reception of it, admitting at the same time that the wave of crisis disturbing the Church is nothing more than the indirect

¹²¹ According to Jean Comby in *Să citim istoria Bisericii*, vol. 2 (Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice, București, 2000), 212 – 213, in 1965, there were 40,000 priests in the Roman Catholic Church, so that ten years later, in 1975, the number of priests decreased to 36,000, and in 1985, to 28,000. Annual ordinations that used to reach 1000 in 1950 drop to 500 in 1968 and even reach 100 in subsequent years.

¹²² According to Jean Comby in *Să citim istoria Bisericii*, vol. 2 (Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice, București, 2000), 212 – 213, in 1963 the divorce rate was 1 in 10, then, in 1979, it was 1 in 5, while in 1985, in the Church, one out of 3 families managed to divorce.

consequences of a global crisis of civilization. The Church lost part of its influence on society and Vatican II, by encouraging freedom of expression, allowed the development within the Church of destabilizing movements that, before the Council, did not have the right to assert themselves precisely through the harsh methods used by the Church. The question is rightly asked if the conciliar institutions were not established too quickly, for some insufficiently well-trained Christians? This is definitely an unprecedented crisis!¹²³

The road opened by the Council

Watched with great interest by the entire Christian world and beyond, the Second Vatican Council managed to convince (mostly...) that it does not wish to bring dogmatic changes to the Catholic world, but rather intends to prepare the Church for a dialogue religious in the long run. Thus opens the era of religious dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and the other churches, dialogues that pursue nothing but peace and spiritual collaboration. As we shall see, this initiative will not be a simple one – especially between Catholicism and Orthodoxy – but impressive progress will be recorded in the history of Christianity in this direction.

¹²³ Jean Delumeau, writing about “Une crise inédite” in *Le Monde* (June 5, 1979), wrote about a new crisis: “Confrontation with the past seems to show that the current crisis is new. Hence the need to bring the imagination to power in the Church and to accept heroic cures regarding especially the Roman power, the discovery of new forms of service and the complete rehabilitation of women. I do not hesitate to declare: today we must be Christians before we are Catholics, Protestants or Orthodox. For me, the future of Christianity depends on the success, at least partially, of ecumenism, without which the former will not regain its credibility (...). «The decolonization of the local Churches» becomes urgent. Something that can only be done by accepting a broad pluralism in the confession of the same fundamental creed.”

Orthodox – Roman-Catholic intertheological dialogue. The Uniatism

Uniatism, in general, is the name for the model of Christian unity, thought and applied by the Roman Catholic Church in the Eastern space.¹²⁴ Broken from the Church of the East, Rome arrogated its claim to the uniqueness of the true church and, with the increase of its power and of Western development, began to exert pressure to bring Eastern Christians into union with Rome under the canonical, universal jurisdiction of the pope. In general, uniatism represents a practice of the 12th – 17th centuries, but this conception, expressed more veiled, is also found in the last papal encyclicals.

Uniatism consists in the canonical attachment to the Holy See of a community emerging from an Eastern church¹²⁵ which, theoretically, kept the passions exercised by Rome for renouncing the Eastern way of life and worship. In fact, Uniatism is a form of ecclesiastical and political blackmail of Western Catholicism after the schism of 1054 which, rightly, represented, due to immeasurable human pride, “a spiritual, cultural and political catastrophe,”¹²⁶ with dire consequences to this our days. Byzantium, with its brilliance, eclipsed the West for a long time, and the fall of Byzantium can be considered a liberation of the West from this perspective, while it, reaching a political supremacy, also imposes the ecclesiastical, specific one, different from the oriental synodality. The Orthodox Church concludes that Rome imposes the individualistic, monarchical model of unconditional submission, not that of a relationship of love or mutual submission.¹²⁷

If uniatism is a black page in the Christian world in general and in Christian Europe in particular, it is serious that even today there are still tensions generated by these events of the past, fueled by reasons of Catholic supremacy. The Second Vatican Council adopted, to a large extent, the same rigid position towards the Eastern churches, calling them, in the nevertheless

¹²⁴ Florin Marcu și Constant Maneca, *Dicționar de neologisme*, (Editura Academiei, București, 1986).

¹²⁵ Jean-Claude Roberti, *Les Uniates*, (Editura Cerf, Paris, 1992), 7 – 8.

¹²⁶ Roberti, *Les Uniates*, 7 – 8.

¹²⁷ Gheorghe Petraru, *Ortodoxie și prozelitism*, (Editura Trinitas, Iași, 2000), 167.

forced expression of Martin Jugie, “autocephalous churches of the Byzantine rite” or “oriental churches,” and “uniatism, one of the most serious obstacles on the way to the rapprochement and restoration of Christian unity between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, was maintained and consolidated.”¹²⁸ Moreover, a separate decree was dedicated to the united communities, in which it is specified that they have the task special to promote unity with the Easterners, in other words being said, “to bring the Orthodox believers to the fold of Rome.”¹²⁹

Considered to be the most tragic event that happened within the Church, the schism of 1054 had decisive consequences for the subsequent configuration of Christianity, implicitly for Christian theology and spirituality. The second half of the 20th century – the century of ecumenism – shows major signs of rapprochement between East and West, the first step being the lifting and cancellation of mutual anathemas (pronounced more than nine centuries before), on December 7, 1965, by the ecumenical patriarch Athenagoras I and Pope Paul VI.

In order to implement uniatism and its full understanding, the two churches – Roman Catholic and Orthodox – hold together a series of sessions in which different themes are discussed. In Munich, for example, in 1982 the theological convergence document “The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity”¹³⁰ was developed, addressing fundamental elements of the teaching of the Christian faith. In 1984, in Crete (Kolymbari), then resumed in 1986 in Italy (Bari), the document “Faith, the Sacraments and the unity of the Church” was elaborated, a text of ecumenical relevance that can be considered “a step forward in dialogue and meeting of the two Churches.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ Martin Jugie, *Le schisme byzantin*, (Lethielleux, Paris, 1941), 62 – 64.

¹²⁹ Cezar Vasiliu, „Relațiile dintre Biserica Romano-Catolică și Biserica Ortodoxă de la înființarea Conciliului Vatican II (11 ianuarie 1959 și până în decembrie 1970),” teză de doctorat în *Ortodoxia*, (an. XXVIII, 1976, nr. 1), 14.

¹³⁰ Ronald G. Robertson, “Ortodox – Roman-Catholic Dialogue,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 763 – 764.

¹³¹ Petraru, *Ortodoxie și prozelitism*, 179.

The new understanding of Uniatism represents a major leap from Vatican II, which considered Uniatism a means of propagating Catholic dogma and thought. However, Uniatism was always perceived as a provisional state, considered to be, rather, a kind of “Trojan horse in front of the Orthodox people.”¹³²

We cannot fail to note the theological efforts made in order to de-tension the relations between the two Churches and in finding solutions to achieve full communion. As stated in the “Message of the Patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches” from Patmos, 1995, the witness of the Church is essential for any dialogue, as being in the world the full sign of the Christian truth, of the life of Christ.¹³³

A new road to ecumenism

Ecumenism is a religious movement that strives for the unification of all Christian churches into one. It appears as an idea, for the first time, in the middle of the 19th century in England and America, but it was born in the bosom of Protestantism of the 20th century.

Pope Paul VI is the first sovereign pontiff to visit New York, in 1965, when he declares himself an “expert in humanity:” “we have the cult of man...”¹³⁴ At the same time, the pope shows his interest in world problems through his travels and by defending justice and human rights (the national sections of the *Justitia et Pax* commission, created in 1967, deal with all these issues).

If his predecessor, John XXIII, inaugurated the opening of the Catholic Church regarding relations with the East, Paul VI continued this diplomatic path. Thus, relations with

¹³² Vasiliu, „Relațiile dintre Biserica Romano-Catolică și Biserica Ortodoxă de la înființarea Conciliului Vatican II (11 ianuarie 1959 și până în decembrie 1970)”, teză de doctorat în *Ortodoxia*, 14.

¹³³ „Mesajul Întâistătorilor Bisericilor Ortodoxe” (Patmos, 26 septembrie 1995), in *Vestitorul Ortodoxiei*, (nr. 142/16-30 sept. 1995), 5.

¹³⁴ Jean-François Six, *Le courage de l'espérance. Les dix ans qui ont suivi le Concile*, (Paris, Edit du Seuil, 1978), 257 – 270.

Yugoslavia are restored (1970), meetings are organized between Soviet leaders and the Vatican, and during his stopover in Hong Kong in 1970, Pope Paul VI greets China “for whom Christ is also a full of affection Savior.”¹³⁵ These openings allow an improvement in the situation of the Catholics in the eastern countries, where the pope can now again appoint bishops. But all the laborious compromises we talked about are limited, most often, to freedom of worship.

Analyzing all the arguments, we can say that the Second Vatican Council opened a new path for Catholics towards ecumenism. Paul VI meets with the leaders of many Christian churches (Patriarch of Constantinople, Archbishop of Cantebury, etc.). Catholic legislation on mixed marriages becomes more flexible: the non-Catholic life partner can no longer be humiliated or feel humiliated within the marriage, henceforth. Without being part of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church sends observers to the great meetings of the Council whose proceedings it carefully follows.

What we can observe very well is that, after the Vatican Council II, ecumenical attempts have contributed considerably to the creation of a spirit of collegiality and mutual acceptance in interfaith relations, but often these come down to politically correct actions and simple kindnesses. The Saviour's prayer, uttered with such power in favor of unity, still remains a desideratum. We shall see to what extent it can be attained... The unity for which the Savior prayed so ardently can only be realized by His faithful descendants when they are united with Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The final statement of the Decree on ecumenism promulgated by the Vatican Council II makes every Catholic believer responsible (in the first phase) to look with utmost seriousness

¹³⁵ René Girault et Jean Vernet, *Croire en dialogue. Chrétien devant les religions, les Églises, les sectes*, (Droguet-Ardant, 1979), 173 – 174.

at the obligations that fall to him in supporting the process of unity. The Roman Catholic Church thus becomes a church whose priority actions are to bring closer the “separated brothers.”¹³⁶

As a brief conclusion to this section, we can recall that the ecumenical movement has its roots in Protestantism which wanted a unity of the Christian mission and a closeness between Christians, as Jesus Christ prayed before the Father (John 17:21). After the First Vatican Council, Rome firmly condemned ecumenism through the encyclical *Mortalium animos*,¹³⁷ from 1928, an attitude that was preserved until 1964 when, on the occasion of the Second Vatican Council, the decree was promulgated “On ecumenism in which the Christian character of Protestantism is recognized, encouraging mutual relations, but without Rome entering the Ecumenical Council of the Church.”¹³⁸

Ecumenical perspectives

The differences between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church are much smaller than between them and the Protestant (neo-Protestant) churches; however, rapprochement for the reconciliation of the traditional churches seems to be far from being achieved. This is primarily due to existing conservative Orthodox groups and the Orthodox perspective on ecumenism, which sees unity in dogma, achievable exclusively through sacraments and the episcopate. The main difficulties in the process of the union of the historical

¹³⁶ The final statement of the Decree on ecumenism, as found in *Conciliul Ecumenic Vatican II*, (Arhiepiscopia Romano-Catolică, București, 1999), 133: “The Council exhorts the faithful to avoid any lightness or imprudent zeal that could harm the progress of unity (...). The Council strongly wishes that the initiatives of the sons of the Catholic Church go hand in hand with the initiatives of the separated brothers, without placing any obstacle in the way of Providence, and with total openness to the future inspirations of the Holy Spirit. In addition to this, the Council declares that it is aware of the fact that the holy desire to reconcile all Christians in the unity of the Church of Christ exceeds the powers and capacity of man. That is why he puts all his hope in Christ's prayer for the Church, in the Father's love for us, in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

¹³⁷ In the encyclical *Mortalium Animos* of January 6, 1928, Pius XI is of the opinion that Christian unity cannot take place as long as people are separated by their creed. For this, all must return within the Catholic Church. It was also forbidden for Catholic believers to participate in other liturgical events outside the Catholic church because a living religion cannot be preserved without the body of Christ (Catholic Church).

¹³⁸ Jean Baubérot, *Histoire du Protestantisme*, (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1987), 118 – 119.

churches, Roman Catholic and Orthodox, have to do primarily with the papal primacy¹³⁹ and the filioque problem.¹⁴⁰

A major problem of the Christian church from its very beginning was regarding the authority of the religious centers. After the Schism of 1054, they were reduced to two great powers: Constantinople and Rome, but the nature of the conflict increased, and the gulf between them seemed impossible to overcome. If the Orthodox Church accepted, from the beginning, to be part of the modern ecumenical movement, the Roman Catholic Church preferred to remain outside this ecumenical framework. Accepts to participate by representation in some meetings, but only as an observer. The motivation is the Catholic conception of sobornies and apostolic succession: the Roman Catholic Church does not accept the status of “sister,” but of “mother church.” For the Catholic Church, ecumenism is that time of waiting for the return of the lost sisters.

Until 1442, the Catholic Church was the one that initiated or sought the union with the Orthodox Church, but not in any way, but supporting the claim to be recognized as a higher authority. The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church, for a long period of time traditional-exclusivist, is influenced after the Vatican Council II by a new, modernist trend. The feeling of regret regarding certain miserable actions of the past, the recognition of “heretical sects” as brothers separated from the mother church, the defense of freedom of conscience, the separation of church and state, the affirmation of theistic evolutionism, etc. – all these liberal characteristics changed the image of Catholicism and created a suitable climate for the development of ecumenical premises. After the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church officially entered the world ecumenical movement, but not being part of the World

¹³⁹ The first of the bishops, the successor of Peter and the vicar of Jesus Christ on Earth.

¹⁴⁰ Proceeding of the Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father or from the Father and the Son.

Council of Churches, but organizing its own office: the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity.¹⁴¹

Ecumenism from the Protestant point of view (general approach)

Starting with Pope John XXIII, the Roman Catholic Church entered an ecumenical path. The Vatican's ecumenical goals surpassed those of Protestants by reaching out to Jews and non-Christian religions. In the Catholic vision, unity must be universal.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council describe the Church of Rome as “the only flock of God,”¹⁴² and of the “separated brethren” the Council declares that “those who believe in Christ and have been duly baptized are brought into some, though imperfect, fellowship with the Catholic Church.”¹⁴³ It is clear that, through ecumenism, the Vatican aspires not only to Christian unity, but also to the return of “separated brothers.”

Vatican II hopes that “all Christians will be gathered, through the common celebration of the Eucharist, in that unity of the one Church which Christ poured out upon His Church from the beginning. This unity we believe resides in the Catholic Church and we believe it will continue to grow until the end of time.”¹⁴⁴ Regarding salvation, the document declares that only through the Catholic Church can “the fullness of the means of salvation” be obtained.¹⁴⁵ Thus, the Vatican II replaces Christ as the only means of salvation. The ecumenical unity that Vatican II promotes is ecclesiocentric, not Christocentric, and this attitude can be understood as an antichristian tendency.

¹⁴¹ Starting on June 5, 1960, Pope John XXIII established the formation of a secretariat for the promotion of Christian Unity, in order to effectively prepare for the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The final name of this department of the Roman Catholic Church was given by Pope John Paul II in 1988.

¹⁴² *The Documents of Vatican II*, (London: Chapman, 1967), 344 – 348.

¹⁴³ *The Documents of Vatican II*, 348.

¹⁴⁴ *The Documents of Vatican II*, 349.

¹⁴⁵ *The Documents of Vatican II*, 346.

The Christian churches enjoy the attention that the Vatican gives them, without taking into account the fact that the papal Church has not given up the dogmas that caused the separation, and the closeness to other Christians is not achieved in the spirit of love, but rather in the desire to promote Catholicism as the only biblical dogma, left by God on earth.¹⁴⁶

Modern Protestants are willing to make dogmatic changes for ecumenical reasons, supporting the rise of the papacy without understanding the ecclesiological claims and eschatological mission of the Catholic Church (in Revelation 13). Some theologians, however, lament the “de-Protestantization of Protestantism” and still support the principle of *Sola Scriptura*.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, Catholics do not propose any dogmatic concession because (they argue) there is nothing more inappropriate and alien to the ecumenical spirit than a false approach of issues that could sooner or later damage Catholic doctrine or overshadow its true meaning.

Ecumenism from an Adventist perspective

What has been written so far highlights some reservations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding the relationship with ecumenism. Moreover, the understanding of biblical prophecy regarding ecumenism has determined a reserved attitude on the part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. History has recorded a long period of persecution from the papal power, which continued with discrimination and intolerance including from the state. Looking ahead, Seventh-day Adventists see the danger of Protestantism and Catholicism uniting and holding religious and political power in a despotic and potentially persecutory manner, which is not at all desirable. They see God's faithful church not as a numerous church, but as a remnant, which

¹⁴⁶ In the encyclical *De ecclesia*, reproduced in *The Documents of Vatican II*, (London: Chapman, 1967), 343, Pope Paul VI says that “Nothing changes in traditional doctrine. The Eucharist, through which Catholics want to celebrate unity, is one of the dogmas that caused the schism (...). He (Christ) instituted in His Church the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist through which the unity of the Church is signified and realized.”

¹⁴⁷ James R. White, *Answers to Catholic Claims: A Discussion of Biblical Authority*, (Crowne Publications, 1990), 4.

is faithful to the commandments of God (Revelation 12:17). They consider themselves to be the core of that remnant, unwilling to join the latter-day Christian apostasy.

Seventh-day Adventists involve themselves, along with God, in all that He does for the salvation of mankind. Taking over from the Savior, through His apostles, the mission of spreading the Gospel throughout the world and making disciples of “all nations” (Matthew 28:19), the Seventh-day Adventist Church joins God in fulfilling His purpose of exalt God the Son, so that the world may be saved through Him.

The principle that coordinates the relations of Adventists with other Christians is based on two inseparable aspects: truth and religious freedom. Ellen G. White stated this in “The Acts of the Apostles,” writing: “The standard of truth and religious liberty, held high by the founders of the Evangelical Church and by the witnesses of God during the centuries that have since passed, in this last battle, has been placed in our hands. The responsibility for this great gift rests upon those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of His Word. We must receive this word as supreme authority. We must recognize human authority as an ordinance established by God, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty within its legal sphere. But when her demands come into conflict with God's demands, then we must obey God rather than men.”¹⁴⁸

Seventh-day Adventists do not subscribe to the ecumenical movement – and they are not the only Christians who have taken this position – because ecumenism poses a great threat to doctrinal identity. At the same time, Seventh-day Adventists are not part of any syncretic grouping that could negate the importance of biblical truth. In maintaining the position it inherited from its predecessors regarding spiritual and doctrinal identity, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does nothing but recognize its prophetic role in human history.

¹⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Ediția V, Editura „Viață și Sănătate”, Pantelimon, 2014), 53.

Conclusions

The results of our research in this chapter touched on historical but also spiritual aspects, precisely for the reader to understand that the Second Vatican Council was not only an event in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, but was a historical moment that divided the time of Christianity into two: before the Council and after the Council.

After Vatican II, Catholicism, led by its spiritual leader, Pope Paul VI, effectively takes the Christian world by storm. The Vatican conducts papal visits on a large scale, relations with the East are restored, slowly but surely, and decrees of friendship are issued.

Vatican II, however, leaves a wound that is still bleeding, in terms of the rapprochement between the Vatican and the Eastern Church: it is Uniatism, which demands some dogmatic concessions from Orthodoxy, such as the acceptance of papal primacy and a certain autonomy from the Vatican . The Orthodox Church does not agree with these conditions.

In the last part of this chapter I discussed the issue of Ecumenism. The Second Vatican Council observes the desire of the Christian churches (especially the Protestant ones) to unite and uses this opportunity precisely to meet this social and spiritual need. It's just that, from a Catholic perspective, ecumenism means moving away from God and accepting political and religious compromises that have nothing to do with Scripture.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has distanced itself from the ecumenical movement from the beginning because it knows that accepting ecumenism means turning away from Scripture and accepting the compromise imposed by the demands of the Vatican, and Adventists will never accept that!

CONCLUSIONS:

In the conclusions of this research, we propose to analyze and see if our study managed to answer a question that is as simple from a literary point of view as it is complex from a theological point of view, namely: what were the influences of the Second Vatican Council on Catholicism and the Christian world in general? We will thus structure this section in two parts: the purposed objectives of the Vatican Council II and the achieved objectives.

Objectives

Historical objectives

I said in the conclusions of the first chapter that the analysis of a historical path that preceded and followed the Second Vatican Council was not easy to achieve in the present study, because Vatican II is not only an event in the history of the Roman Catholic Church and Christianity, but is one of the most important religious events of the 20th century that Christianity hosted. Being in a constantly changing society, having gone through two world wars and going through great cultural and social challenges, the Catholic Church, through the organization of the Second Vatican Council, usefully exposes itself to both the Christian and the non-Christian world, stepping out of the shadow of the historic Vatican City, and simply offering themselves to society for service.

In the 20th century, Catholicism was not in a favorable light. The promulgation of the dogma of papal primacy and papal infallibility during the First Vatican Council caused much dissatisfaction in the Christian world, therefore the Roman Catholic Church needed to regain its confidence. So the Second Vatican Council appears not only as a reconciliation between Catholicism and non-Catholic churches, but also as a reset of Catholicism.

Cultural objectives

There is also a cultural context that determined the existence of the Second Vatican Council. The 19th century becomes, from this perspective, very agitated. Kant's philosophy outlines a debut image in this important period of time for Vatican II and continues with influences such as those of Hegel, Jacobi or Fichte. The relationship between the individual and the Church becomes more and more uncertain, especially through the positivism of Comte who formulates a new religion, the one proven by science.

“The Kulturkampf” emerged as a cultural movement in Germany supported by the chancellor of Imperial Germany, Otto von Bismarck, which sought to bring all Church activity under state control. The main target of the movement was the systematic secularization of Church institutions. Finally, Bismarck, seeing that it was impossible to secularize Catholicism, gave way. Through the laws of 1886 and 1887, the Kulturkampf movement ceased to exist and reached compromise relations – called friendly relations – with the Roman Catholic Church, during the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII (1878 – 1903).

However, in most European countries, the political, social and cultural life of the 19th and 20th centuries did not completely lose its Christian character. Most writers or painters of this period also addressed religious aspects in their works. In this way, culture and art give modern and contemporary Christianity sufficient reasons to believe that religion and the Church are part of human life.

Achievements

Catholic theology before Vatican Council II

We must be very careful how we understand and apply the phrase “pre-Vatican II theology,” because at the beginning and then toward the middle of the twentieth century we are

dealing not only with a theology written in the form of laws or decrees, but we encounter a series of by theologians whose works have not yet been accepted as rules for the church, but who were, to a large extent, the basis of the formulation of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. This list includes progressive theologians such as: Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Henry de Lubac and the American Jesuit John Courtney Murray.

Catholic ecclesiology of the Vatican Council II

The interpretation of the Second Vatican Council regarding the nature and mission of the Catholic Church is the result of the application of some theological and pastoral principles, which we will enunciate below:

- a) The Church is, first of all, a mystery or a sacrament. This principle replaces the pre-Vatican II theory that the Church is viewed as the means of salvation;
- b) The Catholic Church is the people of God. This principle changed the pre-Vatican II theory that the Church was viewed as a hierarchical institution, where priests were viewed according to the position they each held. What the Vatican Council II brings is precisely the idea that even priests are colleagues and that there is no clerical hierarchy;
- c) The whole people of God (laity, clergy and all believers together) are called to participate in the work of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. Before Vatican II there was the “Catholic initiative” according to which the lay members participated only in the hierarchical mission, that is the one imposed by the Catholic Church;
- d) The mission of God's people includes diakonia, that is, involvement in people's needs socially, politically and economically; this means the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments;

- e) The Church is universally expressed. It is, indeed, the relationship between all the churches. Before the Second Vatican Council, there was only the teaching according to which there is only one Church: the Catholic one. The other Christian churches are fragments detached from the Universal Church, that is the Catholic one;
- f) Religious truth can also be discovered outside the “body of Christ,” – that is, the Church – and, in this case, must be respected regardless of where it was discovered. Before Vatican II it was believed that God's truth is revealed only within the Catholic Church, which is the “body” of Christ;
- g) The nature and mission of the Church are always understood in relation to and subordination to the Kingdom of God.

Christian ecclesiology after Vatican Council II

The ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council is Christocentric. This one, allows the Council to redefine the Church, in its legal and hierarchical form, while confirming its unique position and central in the mediation of salvation. Thus, one can talk about remaining on the side of Tradition, despite the changes brought by the Council.

For the Second Vatican Council, the Church is the “sacrament of salvation” because she represents Christ to the whole world. In this sense, the Second Vatican Council looks at salvation from a universal perspective. Through his double attachment to Christ and towards the world, the Church is understood as the means through which salvation is offered to all people, because it tends to gather all humanity to Christ.

Catholic ecclesiology.

Catholic ecclesiology after the Second Vatican Council II carried forward the fundamental perspective of this Council, having as its central point the sacramental aspect of

the Church. At the same time, the idea that the Church must be in a relationship of submission to the Kingdom of God is emphasized more and more. After Vatican II, we can see an increasing attention to the need for institutional reform, in order to fulfill the sacramental mission of the Church.

Protestant ecclesiology

Even if after the Second Vatican Council a clear approach to Catholicism is observed, Protestantism retains its specific characteristics that differentiate it from the Catholic Church. However, Vatican II has the tendency to “touch” the Protestant world through the dialogue that will become a reality for both sides. What benefits this rapprochement brought to Protestants, or how it influenced the Protestant world, remains to be seen.

The ecclesiology of the Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg is friendly to the position of the Vatican Council II, the theologian being of the opinion that the Church signifies first the unity of man with God, then the communion between human beings. Pannenberg claim thus an “ecclesiology of communication” where the Church is seen as an agent of political and social transformation, a transformation that should lead to the unification of humanity. Communion ecclesiology is a response to the Protestant emphasis on the local congregation, where the true Gospel can be preached and the Holy Mysteries properly administered. At least in principle, the ecclesiology of communion provides a common basis for ecumenical thinking about the church, but even so, several problems (which we will not mention here) still remain... However, the ecclesiology of communication developed by Vatican II is also taken up by Pannenberg's Protestantism and seen as a solution to the problems of modern society.

In agreement with the declaration of the Vatican Council II, Pannenberg believes that only unity with God can overcome the imperfections of the secularized society in which the church is called to fulfill its mission. It is this priority of communion between man and God

that distinguishes the Church from any other form of human community. The Church, according to her statement, is the communion of all those who share faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and are united in Him through Baptism and Communion.

Post-Vatican II ecclesiology and pastoral development

As a result of the development and application of ecclesiology after the Vatican Council II, a series of changes took place and continue to take place in the life and mission of the Roman Catholic Church:

1. First of all, the Church is understood under the aspect of “God's people” and not in a hierarchical sense, therefore, since all believers participate directly in the work of Christ through baptism, not only in the mission of the pope or the bishops, the Catholic Church now acts in conciliar style, emphasizing the importance of fellowship with other churches, inter-Christian and inter-pastoral dialogues, the importance of conferences for education and religion.
2. Secondly, the Church is understood as a communion between local Catholic churches and in no case a single church divided into organized parts, the responsibility of the bishops and the episcopal body being understood as a common side of the mission: the service of Christ and fellow men.

As for pastoral life, concretely, the dialogues between Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican priests have been encouraged, but a change can also be felt in the relations between Protestant pastors. The emphasis is seriously directed towards the joint celebration of the holy mysteries, especially the Eucharist (in this regard, special efforts are felt both on the part of the Roman Catholic Church and on the part of the other churches).

Aspects regarding the nature of the Church

There are at least three basic perspectives in modern ecclesiology (since the Second Vatican Council): the Church seen as an institution, a community, and a means of service to fellow human beings. (1) The first characteristic refers to the period before the Second Vatican Council when the Church was understood as a hierarchical structure, a visible society, the only way to salvation, the place where the sacraments facilitated the meeting of the divine with the human. (2) The second characteristic was the one proposed and encouraged by the Second Vatican Council and presents the Church as the people of God, formed by the totality of believers. (3) The third characteristic has its origin in the social movement of the 1960s and renewed by the doctrine of the Church after the Second Vatican Council (Church, agent of social changes).

If we define the Church as the group of faithful people who accept the Holy Trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in their full unity and collaboration both creatively and soteriologically and Jesus Christ is the central sacramental act), then this definition aims at Catholic, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants, with reference to both the universal and the local church. Following the dogmatic line of this definition, we conclude that the Church is actually the union of all churches.

For Catholics, however, this unity primarily means a connection with the pope and the episcopal body, because the leader of the Catholic Church is a direct descendant of the apostle Peter, the one through whom Christ founded His church on earth, entrusting him with a very special mission.

We mention, at the end of this subchapter, that what is presented here is a succinct account of the post-Vatican II Catholic vision regarding the nature of the Church (Roman Catholic and universal).

A New Catholic Vision of Mission

The mission of the Church is very important, therefore, within the ecumenical community, the interpretation of the mission has also changed considerably. Attention is directed less towards the traditional conception of mission as a simple preaching of the Gospel and more towards mission as a service brought to the world to overcome injustices. The Church is exhorted to focus on action rather than words, on actively engaged ministry rather than dogma, and not to limit itself to witnessing God's love to the world, but to witness it concretely. In some contexts where Christianity is visibly losing influence, the Church is faced with the immense challenge of proclaiming the Gospel in cultures that are indifferent or hostile to biblical religion. In these cases, the call for unity in the mission becomes urgent and must not be postponed, because the tensions and disputes between Christians threaten the credibility of their testimony before the world.

For the Second Vatican Council, the Church is the “sacrament of salvation” because she represents Christ to the whole world. The Second Vatican Council opens, in this way, towards a new, universal perspective of salvation. Through his double attachment to Christ and towards the world, the Catholic Church sees itself as the only instrument used by God for the salvation of all people, but through this it tends to gather all mankind under Jesus Christ the Savior.

The importance of the Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II

(analysis from a Catholic perspective)

If the Church, in general, is a sacrament through which God reveals His plan to the whole world, the Roman Catholic Church emphasizes the victory of grace over sin, the uniqueness of tradition, doctrine and continuity on a successional, apostolic line. The Roman Catholic Church is distinguished from other churches by its doctrinal convictions regarding the importance of the Petrine mission and by the authority it received from Christ.

The Church of Rome is indispensable to the world as the Church herself is wholly necessary, as a means of saving the world. She (the Catholic Church) is important for the entire “Body of Christ” as it possesses all the institutional elements necessary for the integrity of the “Body of Christ” as well as many values characteristic of Catholicism, which enrich and enhance its life and mission.

This understanding of Catholicism differs from the pre-Vatican II view of the Roman Catholic Church, which held that the one and only true church of Christ is the Roman Catholic Church. The deepest theological thoughts concerning the universality of grace and revelation are renewed and it is recognized that the Church is made up of the other churches that are not in relation to the bishop of Rome.

Catholicism around the world has gone through many changes since Vatican II. These changes are all the more remarkable since, after the French Revolution, the papacy tried to remain an isolated society, indifferent to the political, economic, social and religiously liberal changes in Europe. Today, the Catholic Church is no longer an absent church in front of modern society and all these openings to the world are in obvious contrast to the Church of the 19th century and even the beginning of the 20th century.

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