

## POPE JOHN XXIII CONVOKES THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

This is a translation of the Apostolic Constitution, *Humanae salutis*, with which Pope John XXIII solemnly convoked the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council on 25 December 1961. The official Latin text may be found in *AAS* 54 (1962) 5-13; the original Italian text may be found in *ADP* I, 139-43.

### *Introduction*

The divine Redeemer Jesus Christ, who before ascending into heaven conferred on the Apostles the mandate to preach the Gospel to all peoples, to support and guarantee their mission, made the comforting promise: "Behold, I am with you all days even unto the consummation of the world" (Mt 28:20). This divine presence, which has been alive and active in all times in the Church, is noticeable above all in the gravest periods of humanity. Then it is that the bride of Christ shows herself in all her splendor as the teacher of truth and minister of salvation, then that she deploys all her power of charity, prayer, sacrifice and suffering, invincible spiritual means, the same ones used by her divine Founder, who in his life's solemn hour declared: "Have faith, for I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

### *Painful Considerations*

Today the Church is witnessing a crisis underway within society. While humanity is at the threshold of a new age, immensely serious and broad tasks await the Church, as in the most tragic periods of her history. It is a question in fact of bringing the perennial life-giving energies of the Gospel to the modern world, a world that boasts of its technical and scientific conquests but also bears the effects of a temporal order that some have wanted to reorganize by excluding God. This is why modern society is characterized by great

material progress but without a corresponding advance in the moral sphere. Thence a weakening in aspirations towards the values of the spirit; thence the tendency to seek only the earthly pleasures that technological progress brings so easily within the reach of all; thence also a quite new and disturbing fact: the existence of a militant atheism operating all over the world.

### *Reasons for Confidence*

These painful considerations remind us of the duty to be vigilant and keep our sense of responsibility awake. While distrustful souls see nothing but darkness falling upon the face of the earth, we prefer to restate our confidence in our Savior, who has not left the world he redeemed. Indeed, making our own Jesus' recommendation that we learn to discern "the signs of the times" (Mt 16:4), it seems to us that we can make out, in the midst of so much darkness, more than a few indications that enable us to have hope for the fate of the Church and of humanity. The successive bloody wars of our times, the spiritual ruins caused by many ideologies, and the fruits of so many bitter experiences have not been without useful lessons. Scientific progress itself, which has given man the ability to create catastrophic implements for his own destruction, has raised anxious questions; it has forced human beings to become thoughtful, more aware of their own limitations, desirous of peace, alert to the importance of spiritual values; it has accelerated that progress of

closer collaboration and of mutual integration of individuals, classes and nations toward which, even amid a thousand uncertainties, the human family seems already to be moving. All this facilitates, no doubt, the Church's apostolate, since many people who in the past did not realize the importance of her mission are today, taught by experience, more disposed to welcome her teachings.

### *The Present Vitality of the Church*

If we then turn our attention to the Church, we see that she has not remained a lifeless spectator in the face of these events but has followed step by step the evolution of peoples, scientific progress, and social revolution. She has decisively opposed the materialistic ideologies that deny the faith. Finally, she has seen the rise and growth within herself of immense energies of the apostolate, of prayer, of action in all fields, first on the part of a clergy ever better equipped in learning and virtue for its mission and then of a laity which has become ever more conscious of its responsibilities within the Church and especially of its duty to collaborate with the Church's hierarchy. To all this should be added the immense suffering of entire Christian worlds, through which an admirable host of bishops, priests, and laymen are sealing their adherence to the faith, undergoing persecutions of all kinds, and displaying a heroism that equals that of the most glorious periods of the Church. Thus if the world seems to have changed profoundly, the Christian community has also in great part been transformed and renewed: that is, it has been strengthened in its social unity, reinvigorated intellectually, interiorly purified. It is ready for any trial.

### *The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*

In the face of this twofold spectacle-- a world which displays a serious state of spiritual poverty and the Church of Christ, still so vibrant with vitality--we, at the time when, despite our unworthiness and by an act of divine Providence, we ascended to the supreme pontificate, felt at once the urgent duty to call our children together in order to give the Church the possibility to contribute more effectively to the solutions of the problems of the modern age. For this reason, welcoming as coming from above an inner voice of our spirit, we thought the time was now ripe to offer the Catholic Church and the world the gift of a new ecumenical Council, as an addition to and a continuation of the series of twenty great Councils which throughout the centuries have been a real heavenly providence for the increase of grace and of Christian progress. The joyful echo aroused by its announcement, followed by the prayerful participation of the whole Church and by a truly encouraging fervor in the work of preparation, as well as by the lively interest or at least the respectful attention of non-Catholics and even of non-Christians, have shown most eloquently that the historic importance of the event has not escaped anyone.

The forthcoming Council, then, will meet happily and at a moment in which the Church has a more lively desire to fortify her faith and to contemplate herself in her own awe-inspiring unity, just as she feels the more urgent duty to give greater effectiveness to her healthy vitality and to promote the sanctification of her members, the spread of revealed truth, and the consolidation of her structures. This will be a demonstration of the Church, always living and always young, that feels the rhythm of

time, that in every century beautifies herself with new splendor, radiates new light, achieves new conquests, all the while remaining identical to herself, faithful to the divine image impressed on her face by her divine Bridegroom, who loves her and protects her, Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, at a time of generous and growing efforts being undertaken in various areas to reconstitute that visible unity of all Christians which corresponds to the will of the divine Redeemer, it is quite natural that the forthcoming Council provide the premises of doctrinal clarity and of mutual charity that will make even more alive in our separated brethren the desire for the hoped-for return to unity and will smooth the way to it. And finally, to a world which is lost, confused, and anxious because of the constant threat of new frightful conflicts, the forthcoming Council is called to offer a possibility for all men of good will to turn their thoughts and proposals toward peace, a peace which can and must come above all from spiritual and supernatural realities, from human intelligence and conscience enlightened and guided by God, Creator and Redeemer of humanity.

#### *The Council's Working Program*

These fruits, which we so eagerly expect from the Council and on which we like so often to dwell, entail a vast program of work which is now being prepared. It addresses the doctrinal and practical problems which correspond more to the requirements of perfect conformity to Christian teaching, to the upbuilding and to the service of the Mystical Body, and to its supernatural mission: that is, the Scriptures, the venerable tradition, the sacraments, prayer, Church discipline, charitable and

relief activities, the lay apostolate, the horizon of the missions.

But this supernatural order must also reflect its effectiveness onto the other, the temporal, order, which unfortunately is ultimately the only one that occupies and preoccupies man. In this field also the Church has shown that she wishes to be *Mater et magistra*, to use the expression of our distant and glorious predecessor, Innocent III, spoken at the Fourth Lateran Council. Although she has no directly earthly ends, she cannot in her journey be disinterested in the problems and worries of here below. She knows how beneficial to the good of the soul are those means which render more human the life of those individual men who are to be saved. She knows that by giving life to the temporal order by the light of Christ, she is also revealing men to themselves, leading them, that is, to discover in themselves their own nature, their own dignity, their own purpose. This is why the living presence of the Church today extends by right and by fact to international organizations; this is why she elaborates her social teaching on the family, the school, work, civil society, and all the related problems, so that her teaching office has been raised to the highest level as the most authoritative voice, the interpreter and champion of the moral order, the defender of the rights and duties of all human beings and of all political communities.

In this way the beneficial influence of the conciliar deliberations, we profoundly hope, must succeed to the point that it imbues with Christian light and penetrates with fervent spiritual energy not only into the depths of souls but also into the whole realm of human activities.

#### *Convocation of the Council*

Our first announcement of the Council, on 25 January 1959, was like a little seed that we planted with anxious mind and hand. Supported by heavenly help, we set about the complex and delicate work of preparation. In the three years since we have day by day seen the little seed develop and become, by God's blessing, a great tree. As we look back on the long and tiring journey, a hymn of thanksgiving to God rises from our heart that he has been so generous in his help that everything has unfolded in a suitable way and in harmony of spirit.

Before we decided the topics to be studied in view of the forthcoming Council, we wished first to hear the wise and enlightened opinions of the College of Cardinals, of the worldwide episcopate, of the sacred dicasteries of the Roman Curia, of the superiors general of the religious orders and congregations, of Catholic universities and ecclesiastical faculties. This work of consultation was carried out over a year, and from it emerged clearly the points that had to be submitted to thorough study. We then established the various preparatory bodies to which we entrusted the arduous task of drawing up the doctrinal and disciplinary schemata among which we shall choose those that we intend to submit to the conciliar assembly.

We finally have the joy of announcing that this intense work of study, to which Cardinals, bishops, prelates, theologians, canonists, and experts from all over the world have made their valuable contributions, is now nearing its end. Trusting therefore in the help of the divine Redeemer, beginning and end of all things, in the help of his holy Mother and of St. Joseph--to whom from the beginning we entrusted this great event--we believe the moment has come to convoke the Second

Vatican Ecumenical Council.

Having considered, therefore, the views of our brothers, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, by the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and our own, we establish, announce, and convoke for the coming year 1962 an ecumenical Council which will be held in the Vatican Basilica at a date that will be established when Providence gives us the opportunity.

We consequently wish and order that to this ecumenical Council, established by us, must come from everywhere all our beloved Cardinal sons, our venerable brother patriarchs, primates, archbishops and bishops, whether residential or only titular, as well as all those who have a right and duty to attend the Council.

#### *An Invitation to Prayer*

And now we ask everyone of the faithful and the entire Christian people to continue their common and most lively prayer so that it may accompany, enliven and adorn the final preparation of the great event. May this prayer be inspired by ardent and persevering faith. May it be accompanied by that Christian penance that makes it more acceptable to God and more effective. May it be strengthened by an effort at Christian life that will anticipate the firm readiness of each of the faithful to apply the teachings and the practical directives that will emerge from the Council itself.

We address our appeal to the venerable clergy, both secular and religious, throughout the world and to all categories of the faithful. But in a very special way we entrust its success to the prayers of children, knowing well how powerful with God is the voice of innocence, and to the sick and the

suffering, so that their pains and life of sacrifice may, by the power of Christ's Cross, be transformed and rise in prayer, in redemption, in a source of life for the Church.

To this chorus of prayers we also invite all Christians of Churches separated from Rome, so that the Council may also be to their advantage. We know that many of these children are eager for a return of unity and peace, in accordance with the teaching and the prayer of Christ to the Father. And we also know not only that the announcement of the Council was received by them with joy, but that more than a few of them have already promised to offer their prayers for its success and hope to send representatives of their communities to follow its work at close hand. All this is for us a cause of great comfort and hope, and it was precisely to facilitate these contacts that

we established some time ago a Secretariat for this precise purpose.

May there thus be repeated in the Christian family the spectacle of the Apostles gathered together in Jerusalem, after the Ascension of Jesus to heaven, when the newborn Church was completely united in communion of thought and of prayer with Peter and around Peter, the shepherd of the lambs and of the sheep. And may the divine Spirit deign to answer in a most comforting manner the prayer that everyday rises to him from every corner of the world: "Renew your wonders in our time, as though in a new Pentecost, and grant that Holy Church, united in unanimous and intense prayer around Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and guided by Peter, may spread the Kingdom of the divine Savior, a Kingdom of truth, of justice, of love, and of peace. Amen."