

# Preface

Yes, “a much needed discussion,” because as yet it has not been done. At least not adequately.

There has been much talk, actually too much, about the most recent Council. This, however, has not been done in the right way, or at least not always or primarily so. Up to now there has only been a grandiose, uninterrupted celebration: that of the “vanguard” and the back up forces in the frontlines of the apostolic ministry, that which is of an official character and pompously resounds from the chairs of the University or, at proper intervals, that of the commemorations, meetings, round table discussions, and prestigious publications. And there has never been lacking that repetitive voice of the “great, confused crowd of the committee” by those who always reecho, back up, and conform.

As a matter of fact, the Holy See and the Catholic Episcopate have not tired calling to mind over and over again the conciliar documents both in circumstances of particular importance and in the daily ones of pastoral service. This is so true, and has been done with such insistence, that it is legitimate to have the impression, or at least to suspect, that there is an exclusive intention. “Apply the Council” was and is the buzzword. At times it even seemed that everything had begun with Vatican II and that the other twenty centuries of preceding ecclesiastical history had vanished. However, since it was impossible to put such irrepressible monuments of history exceeding two millennia into mothballs, an occasional, passing reference was reserved for them, as if this were sufficient for rec-

ognizing the immutable and perennial reality of the Church. The accent almost never intentionally fell upon these; a comparison or analysis of the preceding ecclesiastical Magisterium was hardly ever placed in evidence to lend support to Vatican II. I do find praiseworthy exception to this in the essays of H. E. Most Rev. Msgr. Agostino Marchetto (*Chiesa e Papato nella storia e nel diritto. 25 anni di studi critici*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2002; and especially *Il Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II. Contrappunto per la sua storia*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2005): *rara* if not outright *rarissima avis*, above all because they are not even worthy of comparison with these or the few others that preceded these, with various tones and inflections. I am referring specifically to *Getsemani* (Rome, 1980) by His Eminence Cardinal Giuseppe Siri,<sup>1</sup> to *Iota Unum* (Naples, 1985) by Romano Amerio,<sup>2</sup> but also to the writings of the renowned and esteemed theologian and philologist Johannes Dörmann<sup>3</sup> which regard more John Paul II than the last Ecumenical Council.

In reality a veil (and sometimes even a blanket) was placed over the previous Magisterium with amazing superficiality. This impeded any observer from focusing on the past and on that Tradition which is a constitutive element of the Church and a firm foundation to Christianity. There was – and there had to be – solely the Ecumenical Vatican Council II, and this only in that practical way (even if not established as such formally) of looking at it in such a way as to remove from the horizon every other point of reference. This was not the conclusion arrived at by of the International Congress for the *Realization of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II* – I want to say *obviously*, but I limit myself to *at least formally* or perhaps *even in the intentions*

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<sup>1</sup> English edition: *Getsemani*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> English edition: *Iota Unum*, Sarto House, Kansas City, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> English edition: *John Paul II's Theological Journey to the Prayer Meeting of Religions in Assisi*, Angelus Press, Kansas City, 1994.

– when it convened at the Vatican in the beginning of 2000. This Congress considered it a “decisively misleading” idea to say that the Council wished to break ties with the past rather than place itself in the line of the constant Faith. Even in this case, however, nothing more than theoretical declamation was brought forward.

The uninterrupted celebration of the already mentioned daily, pastoral activities has given and continues to give rise to a patent credibility among Catholic *intelligentia*. The Universities and academic centers of the ecclesiastical Authority or those inspired by their dispositions, the Catholic press in all of its effective coverage, the official publications, the most varied initiatives – now interdependent and linked, now dislocated – in a word, the whole complex of the Catholic world with all of its articulated structures have nourished an uninterrupted and endless celebration of Vatican II. A *vulgar* interpretation has flown forth from all of this which, often deprived of even a residue of critical elaboration, has sounded forth and imposed the *key signature* of its current interpretation.

The *Storia del Concilio Vaticano II* (5 vol. edited by Giuseppe Alberigo, Il Mulino-Bologna, 1995-2001) is not misleading, given the impressionable apparatus upon which the work is based. Indeed, it is a monumental construction and not without due attention to the sources which, however, it interprets in support of just one idea: the *Council-event* which pushed beyond the conflict of the pre-conciliar Church with modern times. It was as if to say that the entire, variegated modern culture now has access to the Catholic Church whose modernization began with Vatican II; or rather, with Vatican II a new Church was initiated.

The celebrating machine to which I have been alluding has left its mark especially on the occasion of various anniversaries: the tenth anniversary of the Council, its twenty-fifth

anniversary, the anniversaries of the individual conciliar documents, and in various other circumstances which were not particularly linked to the “event” of 1962-1965. The fact is that every occasion became a golden opportunity for saying and repeating in every key and every language that we were dealing with a Council comparable to no other – unique in its originality, importance and efficacy in the ecclesiastical reform, in its treatment of problems, in its great number of conciliar Fathers (2,540), in the mark it left by its passage, in the global and historical impact of its message.

For almost fifty years now all of this has been repeated on all levels with a constant cadence. This habitual message, both spoken and heard, explains why there is such a lack of pathos anymore about its memory. In the contemptible way in which not a few today use this term, the talk has become a *rite*. And those who speak of it frequently give the distinct impression of reciting a pre-rehearsed part, although they throw in a few improvised hand gestures and facial expressions for effect.

The rite, executed exactly as mentioned, always concludes with incense. This produces a lot of smoke and is often done with great solemnity: one could say with “three double swings.” The dominant desire is not that of understanding through a critical-analytical approach of its texts so as to make it better understood, but rather the already monotonous *refrain* of faithfulness to the Council, of the appeal to its teaching, its application, and the realization of its reforms. Many times there is no concern even to specify it as Vatican II: it is the Council *par excellence*. And the incense finds its explanation here.

I can understand if the reader has trouble finding the connection between Vatican II and incense. Incense is part of the liturgical celebration and does not seem to have reference, at least directly, to the conciliar hall, notwithstanding the fact that even there incense was burnt in abundance during the liturgies which preceded and accompanied the work of the Council.

The Council itself, however, was not incensed; but rather the altar, the lectionary and Him in whose Name the Council was carried out. If, therefore, I speak of incense with regards to Vatican II, I do so in a metaphorical sense. I am transferring the analogy and applying to Vatican II a sense which properly regards an action done during the Liturgy and which belongs to it alone. In a word, I am performing a transfer of meaning with an extensive and analogical process: from the rite to which it belongs, to Vatican II which is not a rite at all. And as in a rite both persons (celebrants, servers, the people of God) and things (altar, chalice, offering) are incensed because of the dignity with which they are invested and the function which they perform, so Vatican II is being “incensed,” as it were, when it comes to be recognized for its importance and for the efficacy of its decisions.