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Communion
Reflections for an intra-ecclesial
dialogue



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Introduction

What is the objective of this paper and how should it be read

The following pages aim at suggesting some ideas for discussion about what today is perceived as a crisis. At the dawn of the 21st Century, various levels of crisis seem all to be emerging in the World: there is certainly a general economic crisis; a crisis as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic; a social crisis (for example that caused by the growing loneliness that is offset by digital technology or social media); and, of course, there is also a political crisis.

Today there is a feeling of crisis in our society, as regards both the democratic model of 'Western' countries, but, also, in different forms, all the other alternative models, such as monarchies, post-communist and totalitarian systems, and other forms of state with limited citizen participation. Both the historical idea of the nation state and the more recent one of government inspired by ideologies, or other models not based on the sovereignty of a specific country, such as the European project, seem all to be experiencing a profound crisis.

Perhaps what we are actually facing is a crisis for our personal identity. Many people no longer even ask themselves existential questions, or they put them off until they have achieved other goals (although these may be perfectly legitimate, such as a minimum standard of well-being or solving urgent problems). All of this spills over into other contexts (politics, economics, religion and philosophical ideas), almost as if everything could be seen in the present and in the material World, with no more apparent interest, at least in the public debate, in long-term perspectives. This reduction of future prospects to a 'hic et nunc'

influences everything else, actually changing our economic situation, our ability to influence the future, and in many ways worsening, for example, the human impact on the environment.

One question that arises is whether it has always been this way, or whether it is something specific to this period of history.

The first impression, at a very high level, of what we know about the evolution of human history, we should in actual fact conclude that we are experiencing a 'unicum' compared with all the other moments in the past. In fact, the past of mankind, not only in the West, is characterised by the constant presence of long-term and all-encompassing visions with respect to the life of the individual: this is well summarised by the concrete impact of religions over time, but also by what in classical Greece, for example, is represented by philosophers and the birth of democratic forms of government, and by the role of philosophies and religions in Asian countries too (China, Siam and India) and the role of Islam. The history of the West shows us, on the one hand, the dominance of Christianity and, more recently, of various ideological positions that have combined reason and state, economics and law, in models that are apparently all-embracing, but are in fact secular, and hence not inspired by higher visions. Nevertheless, what we are living through today is a historical moment in which, perhaps for the first time, everything seems to be relativised and to have shifted to the short term, with no forward-looking perspective.

If we think about the role played by ideas over time, as regards how man has defined human society and his impact on the World, what we now see, perhaps, could lead us asking ourselves why it now almost seems as if this had never been the case.

The case of the United States of America is of particular relevance today, since the paths taken in that country traditionally have a great impact on the Western World and on the World as a whole.

In the following pages, we will therefore propose some general, high-level considerations and some questions, for which it is perhaps not yet the right time to find unequivocal answers.

Part 1
Europe and the United States
at a crossroads for democracy

by Angelo Federico Arcelli

Note to the reader

In proposing the very wide-ranging themes briefly mentioned in the few pages of this part, the intention is not to deal with them exhaustively, nor to propose answers or conclusions – something that is extremely difficult at present – but simply to propose some reflections and pose some questions.

The link between the various sections of this part is the fact that we find ourselves in a World where the economy still plays a greater role than politics, and where the agreements made between States and the recent history of Europe and the United States of America have led us, for the better or the worse, to create the society in which we live.

However, in Europe, and particularly amongst the members of the Eurozone, it is now clear that important steps lie ahead: the European Union, or at least a large part of it, must consider the issue of relaunching its project. Indeed, the persistent uncertainty over time has been and is still probably the main cause of the problems of economic growth and imbalances within the Union that we have seen for years. A choice between a path towards a political aggregation (whatever that may be) between the member states, or, at the other extreme, a reduction of the Union to a simple common market are still possible options. Yet uncertainty comes at a great cost in terms of economics and prospects.

The recent project for a European Recovery and Resilience Plan, with its attached conditions, could be a way to launch important reforms and the convergence between Member States, but – and this is the issue we would like to address here – without

shared long-term objectives and values, it could be reduced to yet another technocratic exercise with no real future.

In the United States of America, we see that the recent changes in the American society have led to a polarised situation that seems to contradict the common principles and values on which the Union has been founded since the Declaration of Independence.

We therefore ask ourselves how we can find, between similar areas of the World such as those on either side of the Atlantic, a common future path based on values and a democracy that is not reduced to empty words. One hypothesis, which is not so far removed from the American historical experience, is that of rediscovering the common roots represented by religion, and in particular by Christianity, also given the topicality of the Second Vatican Council and the resulting mission of the Church in the contemporary World that it highlighted. However, perhaps it has not yet been possible to bring it to life in a secular context, so that it is not only linked to religion.

The fact remains that today we can only ask questions, yet it is from questions that answers and proposals come, sooner or later. The purpose of these few pages is, therefore, to raise such questions.

*Europe is facing the challenge of rediscovering
its roots and redefining its future*

The European Union is going through a delicate phase. The recent conclusion of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union is probably not the final part of this evolutionary phase, but merely a symptom of the need to radically reconsider the European pact.

When the European Convention, led by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Giuliano Amato, attempted to draw up a constitutional treaty in the years 2002-2004, which would represent the long-term outlook for the European Union, the final agreement (which was perhaps disappointing and was later rejected by some member states, thus never entering into force in such form) had more divisive points than points of contact. However, almost two decades from those discussions, the question of what the European Union will be in the future (a federal state, an aggregate of sovereign and independent 'peers', rather than a simple common market with some shared institutions, or something else) is more topical than ever.

A no less important issue is the perception of the markets: for example, the sovereign debt risk of a single European state/federation would be extremely low, as it is for the United States, while the perceived risk on the various national debts, taken separately, highlights differences that have a material economic impact. Today, in the context of the pandemic crisis that started in 2020, this is perhaps hidden by the ECB's policy of supporting the economy.

An interesting case for comparison is that of the state of California, which is almost as large in terms of population and

economy as Italy, but is part of the United States of America, and so for the markets it is perceived as a sub-sovereign risk of the United States. California has an extremely high state debt, but the interest rate it pays is not very different from that on the federal debt, because the market bets on the fact that a state of the Union will never fail “(and, actually, the last case of a US state defaulting was Arizona, in 1933, in the middle of the Great Depression). The fact that the United States is a single sovereign entity is therefore a sufficient guarantee for markets to consider the failure of a major component of that State as a remote possibility. In Europe, where we share a common currency and a central bank, but are not part of a single sovereign ‘State’, or another equivalent sovereign form, the market ‘punishes’ this different perception of risk, with spreads that have differed, also significantly so, in the past. An immediate consequence could be that differences in the cost of money can become obstacles to growth and create inequalities between economic operators, thereby damaging the possibility of growth in some areas and favouring it in others within the same common market. It is therefore fair to say that clarifying – or not – the political horizon has a not insignificant monetary and economic cost.

It is, therefore, not anachronistic to talk about values and about what we have in common in Europe, and thinking that we are all – for example – aligned to the values of the French Revolution is perhaps a little reductive compared with the history of European countries (and perhaps with the fact that the Revolution has been a model of values over time, and also a political model – the right/left contrast was, for example, born in that context – but a model that today is in enormous difficulty: what is the ‘right’ and the ‘left’ nowadays?)

Discussing religious aspects too, even if interpreted secularly – as it was the case with don Luigi Sturzo’s attempt with the Popular Party in 1919 – is perhaps not wrong: let us think of the model represented by the United States, where the presence of ‘God’, in a somewhat ‘deist’ sense is so essential in the Constitution of the Union that we even find it on their banknotes (‘in God we trust’).

In fact, an interesting case at the time of the debates on the European Convention was that which saw various European delegates discussing and contradicting one another over the famous article that was going to mention 'Christian roots' or 'Judaeo-Christian roots' in the treaty and that, in the end, was never adopted. That debate led to the emergence of differences and misunderstandings over what each person perceived as being 'European' values: specifically, there was strenuous French opposition to articles involving religious references, in the name of the principle of the 'secularity' of the state. The curious thing about this debate was precisely the fact that the French position was probably the only one to be truly rigid and decisive, given that the theme of the article on 'roots' was definitely not supported by a majority; it had a weak consensus of government representatives from traditionally Catholic countries, including Ireland and Italy, but with no strong or prejudicial positions. It was rather the case that the individual delegates at the convention, who represented the whole of the political spectrum, tended to be left to have their say.

Today's Europe is, however, certainly a more complex and less theoretical affair, so it is perhaps safe to imagine that the spark that will trigger change will come from economic issues. Indeed, faced with post-pandemic challenges, and in the need for a solid framework to relaunch the economy and the 'convergence' process at the heart of the European Union, we can imagine that the economic policy of EU Member States will increasingly have to be a common and coordinated one in future if a credible path towards a political plan (of any kind) is to be resumed as the ultimate goal of the European project. If the conditions for a stable and credible economic recovery are to be created, it is now highly unlikely that there will be much room left for any great decision-making autonomy within the sovereignty of the individual member states.

This will of course also depend on the degree of agreement on the model for integration, at political level too, that the EU will show itself willing to achieve in the medium term. Giving up all ambitions will certainly come at a price. However, at

present, even if the objectives of the treaties already signed are only achieved gradually, the integration of economic policies seems inevitable.

Given this situation, perhaps the codification of some politically ambitious agreements in a possible new ‘Treaty of Rome’ could be of great importance. Indeed, the treaties currently in force between the Member States of the European Union have placed a number of constraints on the economic and fiscal policy instruments available to governments, constraints that some consider to be too restrictive. In the economic sphere, the advantages of the single currency and the growing integration in the common market are undoubtedly offset by less flexibility and national governments being less able to intervene incisively in matters of more obviously ‘local’ interest.

This impatience with the ‘constraints’ imposed by European agreements, which are, and, moreover, have always been ratified by the competent and sovereign political bodies (governments and parliaments) of the various Member States, could today be seen by the general public as adding to the growing unease about the ability of the Union’s current institutions and its members to respond effectively to the problems created by the persistent economic and pandemic-related crisis.

This is not a new phenomenon, given that the political space for a more ‘national’ vision compared with the European project has expanded in recent years in several member countries, to the point that parties that openly question the idea of Europe as a political hypothesis have become increasingly prominent. This brings us back to two basic systems: the first is the economic one, which is immediately understandable in times of crisis, and the second is that of shared values, which is the long-term perspective that ties the history of European countries together.

As regards the economic side, the current debate is above all on the effectiveness of the convergence parameters set at the time of the introduction of the Euro – with the implicit promise that such a scheme would go hand in hand with sustained and substantial growth – and the inability of national governments to react to the economic crisis. In fact, since the birth of the

single currency, it has no longer been possible to use monetary levers – which implicitly poses a problem of ‘governance’ with regard to the European Central Bank and its statutory objective of controlling inflation – since, in practice, the ‘monetary lever’ has already been ‘sterilised’ by the single currency. Moreover, in the medium to long term, the ‘fiscal lever’ is essentially neutralised by the competitiveness constraints created by the agreements on the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour. The road towards an ever greater integration appears to be obligatory.

Indeed, attracting productive investment and risk capital is unthinkable if the tax burden in a given country is significantly higher than in its EU partner countries. This is of course unless there are such significant comparative advantages (e.g. excellent infrastructure, much lower labour costs or other relevant factors) that the higher tax burden is then acceptable.

However, in a mature economy, such as those of all the leading EU Member States, it is difficult to imagine being able to maintain any significant competitive advantage in any sector in the medium to long term, since the pressure of the common market will tend to ‘level out’ such differences. As a result, in the medium to long term, we should therefore expect a significant equivalence between the tax systems of the larger countries. This could even become an additional reason for accelerating competition among the larger countries through a ‘war of conquest’, economically speaking, in those areas that might be less easy to defend, before the reallocation processes caused by competitive pressure affect the delicate balances of the more mature economies.

The introduction of the single currency, the Euro, in most EU countries has, in fact, confirmed their relinquishing of their own monetary policy. In practice, the countries participating in the Euro have chosen to enjoy the benefits of a stable currency that can be spent beyond their borders – and, looking ahead, that will be an international exchange currency that is competitive against the US Dollar – but they have deprived themselves of the possibility of adjusting the exchange rate of a national currency

to foster the competitiveness of the national system. The case of the 'competitive devaluations', which Italy used extensively during the 1980s and 1990s, can therefore be considered a closed book. It is not and will no longer be possible – and this was well known – to use the exchange rate to recover export competitiveness when system inefficiencies make the products of a given country less attractive on the market, as has been gradually happening over the last few years.

Moreover, countries such as Italy are the most penalised: they are also heavy importers of raw materials, still mainly paid for in dollars, and used to have an implicit advantage when the US currency was weak – because they could import oil, for example, at cheaper prices, while they mainly exported to Europe, and therefore to the German Mark area, a currency that was usually stronger when the US dollar was weak.

Indeed, in the pre-Euro past, when the US currency happened to be strong, the exact reverse effect of what has just been described did not occur – a double disadvantage – because geographical constraints, especially in a Europe 'limited' to Western countries, made the demand for products exported by single market partners less sensitive to monetary shocks, at least in the short term. Nowadays it should not be forgotten that countries like Italy suffer when the US Dollar rises against the Euro because of the 'oil bill', but they have all lost the implicit advantage on the export side within the European Union. Among the various EU members, Italy is probably – because of the relatively large size of its economy – the country that suffers most from restrictions on its competitive options due to the constraints imposed by the treaties.

In fact, in a system in which there is freedom to relocate production within the European Union with respect to the main outlet market – which could also be just one of the current national markets – it is clear that every competitive factor must be carefully weighed when making important investment and/or business decisions. It is, therefore, natural that staying in the Euro area gives guarantees from the point of view of monetary risks and provides certainty in terms of the comparative profit

and loss account, but the Euro does not mean entrepreneurs can dispense with evaluating the most competitive options for their investments – from a certain point of view, it actually incentivises them.

As well as being a strong obligation on all the countries that are members of the EU, but do not have the Euro, to plan to join the single currency in the medium term, it also means that the competition between systems is now shifting to the area of comparative efficiency. Thus, the ability of members to implement their own independent fiscal policy on their territory is actually subject to the constraint of not allowing their industries, capital and skilled labour to flee to other countries where more favourable rules apply.

In actual fact, when a country system's ability to attract resources and development is threatened, or even risks seeing large 'haemorrhages' towards more competitive systems, it has no choice but to adapt its fiscal policy to that of the more 'dangerous' competitor system.

This means that systems with a history of inefficiency, such as the Mediterranean countries or Italy itself – which has a high level of outstanding debt and chronic infrastructural inadequacies that make the system less competitive – are at serious risk of having to make economic policy choices that increasingly reduce the public resources available for investment in favour of the need to resolve structural weaknesses. If this is not done, companies in Italy and in 'weak' countries will have no choice but to relocate or convert in the medium term in order to regain competitiveness. In view of how, in the medium term, national governments will be subject to such severe constraints on economic policy management as to suggest that strong coordination at European level is necessary, it may be appropriate to raise the issue of the need to codify the rules and forums where this coordination, if not the actual economic policy decisions, will take place.

The path taken has entailed (although perhaps not as explicitly as it should have) and will continue to entail a considerable transfer of 'sovereignty' from Member States to supranational bodies. Nevertheless, while the latter will have the power to

influence the choices of individual governments, at least in the short term, they will not be political or intergovernmental entities, in some way subject to the control of the electorate, but will more likely be technical bodies.

The only current example of this is the European Central Bank (ECB). It was created as the 'banks' bank' and works in close cooperation and synergy with the old central banks of each Member State. However, after an initial phase in which the ECB seemed to have a role on a par with the other Eurosystem central banks (as was perhaps mistakenly thought in some capital cities), the current phase is one in which all real decision-making power is increasingly being centralised in Frankfurt and the role of national governors is being reduced to participating in some executive ECB councils.

To all intents and purposes, given the need to safeguard the independence of the central bank with respect to political power in the European context too, the European Central Bank is a 'technical' body but one that has real power. The ECB actually controls the monetary leverage in the Eurozone countries, in principle on its own and autonomously, albeit within the limits of the statute and the inflation target. All this emphasises the need to define the areas and competencies for decisions that risk affecting the interests at everyone's heart, even if clear criteria cannot necessarily be applied to all countries.

It has been pointed out, for example, that a low inflation rate is a positive element in strong and mature economies, but is not necessarily the best option for high-growth economies, presumably such as those of recent or new member countries, to be able to close the gap with the current EU members. In these countries, a higher inflation rate could foster greater dynamism and faster development – which EU members with mature economies would like to see – while making them adjust to the low and stable inflation of more established economies could curb their growth.

Similarly, applying the convergence criteria in the same way for everyone is by no means the best choice. Perhaps the future will call for forms of coordination in the fiscal sphere and to promote development policies; one can imagine them being in

the hands of the Commission or even with new ad hoc inter-governmental bodies.

In practice, member countries will have to decide together how to regulate competitive conflicts to the benefit of all, and how to orient development priorities. This cannot be limited to deciding how to spend EU funds, but will definitely have to be considered on a more general level, including the effects of policies for reallocating resources at national level. In addition, given the importance of this issue, it should be added that it is difficult to imagine leaving such choices to bodies that are neither legitimised by an elective mandate nor by an explicit bond of dependence on national governments that are in turn obviously bound to the trust of their voters.

This poses the problem of redefining, also by means of a specific treaty valid at constitutional level, the EU's future decision-making bodies and the bond that binds them to the representation conferred by national electorates or to the governments the latter elect. Otherwise the risk would be to 'abdicate' any active role for politics in Europe's economic sphere, which would be to the advantage of technical bodies. Given that the role of politics is increasingly reduced to economic choices nowadays, this would implicitly mean that it is preferable to leave the basic choices to the market rather than to the electorate.

If we play devil's advocate, however, it could be argued that the market reflects the real preferences of the end users of politics and the economy, i.e. ourselves, much better than the ballot box does. This, however, poses a problem of substance as regards the true legitimacy of the choices to be made in the coming years, and, above all, makes us reflect on the form that the European (and perhaps Western?) democratic model will take at the end of the integration process, or at least what it will aspire to, and also on what will legitimise such a model.

Nevertheless, there is also another possible – and probable – scenario for a model of cooperation to aspire to among EU members. Perhaps among national or local governments we could imagine structures similar to the 'State-Regions

Conference' in Italy, and organizations for development that borrow the objectives (if not the model) of the extraordinary intervention in the 'Mezzogiorno' in Italy. This system should be different from the current one, in which everything is decided among those who seem to be 'peers'.

The Commission would probably have to become a real 'government' with executive powers, for which forms of electoral legitimation would be necessary, though without a political union. One model could be – despite its instabilities – that of the French governments of the Fourth Republic or those in Italy in the first forty years of the Republic, i.e. executive governments often lasting one or two years and subject to continuous pressure and no-confidence motions by the parliament (the European one?). For this too, however, it would probably be necessary to modify the treaties. This would facilitate political control over final decisions and would preserve a still significant role for national governments – and, therefore, for politics – even if it might risk making the European machine increasingly complex, and therefore not always able to respond promptly to – or to foresee in time – the needs of today's global market.

The need for a debate on the rules is imperative, and we must make sure that the pace of events does not outstrip that of our intentions, and that the road ahead is not already laid out, perhaps not in the best way, by the needs and constraints imposed by the economy on politics. However, and we would do well to remember this, the Economic Union is founded precisely on the idea that the various national economies will converge, and this assumption would therefore exclude any preference for implicitly non-convergent options.

Is this a sustainable position in the medium to long term? And above all, is it really reasonable not to open at the very least a serious debate on the rules and limits of economic sovereignty? Faced with the possible risk of having to ask European citizens to make more sacrifices, perhaps an initial answer will come from the need to identify the reasons why such sacrifices will be required. The example of German unification in 1990 has taught us that people are happy to commit themselves if they

can clearly see the objective, which for the Germans at that time was national unity.

Looking ahead, if a scenario for the future of the Union that is also political is desirable for the good health of our economies, it is clear that it will have to be based on common and shared values, at least nominally.

It is therefore possible that the issue of what the European Union will be in the future, and how it will be able to represent all citizens, and therefore, the introduction of a debate of values in an honest way, for example on the American model, is one of the solutions to the problem.

The economy cannot be the driving force behind a political perspective, even though a serious and persistent economic crisis will undoubtedly have political implications, first of which is the risk that, if we do not find valid reasons to renew the EU, its very existence will come under threat. If the 'United States of Europe' ever come into being, will they perhaps in their turn need banknotes that recall the presence of God?

America and the spirit of the 18th Century

The United States of America were born with the Declaration of Independence of 4 July 1776. The text of the Declaration was the manifesto of the spirit of the Founding Fathers, and contained the *summa* of the values that laid the foundations of the new state.

A glance at the text reveals all the elements that have defined American democracy and made it great, and also made the identity of this new nation quite unique, based on principles and not on a national concept of a people. On the contrary, the United States was born from a melting pot of various nationalities, so much so that one of the topics of discussion was the language to be used, and English only won by a narrow margin.

One particular aspect is of great importance: in the vision of the founders of the new American state, if on the one hand the role of God, the superior entity, as a beacon of the new democracy is clear, on the other hand, it is not seen according to the rigid model proposed on the Old Continent, where the Catholic Church had always been the reference point, both for Catholics and for the various schismatic or Protestant denominations that had sprung up over the Centuries.

The God that the founding fathers were thinking of was predominantly that of Christianity (mainly of Anglican/Episcopal and Protestant origin), but has blurred and absolute contours, thereby becoming acceptable to the new Americans, whatever their origin and faith, who would in time become part of the people of the new state.

These principles are not so distant from the well-known principles of the philosophical visions that emerged in Europe in the 17th and 18th Centuries, based on the Enlightenment (but not only) and that also spread in a formal way across the Atlantic, with various forms of association and of proselytes. Yet the 18th Century American tradition provides an important background. The only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence was Charles Carroll of Carrollton, and the climate of the first Century in the life of the United States was not generally pro-Catholic.

This has had two consequences: religiosity is widespread in the United States: everyone believes in 'one' God – except for a minority of atheists who are still almost marginalised, at least according to what people say – but they do so in a generic way, and may even change their religious denomination more than once in the course of their lives. However, being American even today seems to presuppose that one must be a believer; then – and this is part of the country's history – in the United States, the role of what were called secret societies in Europe in the 18th and 19th Centuries was very different and not at all secret (given the millions of current members and the widespread adherence to somewhat loose forms of similar associations from university onwards) and it has favoured a progressively more open view of the precepts of faith. In more secular, or 'European' terms, one might perhaps dare to say that a certain 'deism' is generically inherent in American culture.

It must be said that the various Christian components, mostly non-Catholic, of the American society have always been traditionally rather open, while Catholicism, mainly linked to immigration from some European countries and from Latin America, has always been divided between a majority made up of less well-off classes and minorities – therefore with a more devotional than doctrinal practice of faith – and a smaller set, perhaps more linked to German and, to a lesser extent, French emigration, which is far closer to the Anglo-Saxon group and more traditionally strict.

This is, of course, a generalisation that may not respect all religious sensibilities, but it might facilitate the understanding

of the political impact of religion and of Christianity in the USA, both yesterday and, more importantly, today. Moreover, if we place this context in relation to the role of the Catholic Church, which is still an important community in the USA and a majority in continental Europe, we cannot help but notice that the evolution of a common feeling in the advanced areas of the World, especially the United States, could translate into substantial repercussions because of being a 'church' or a community of believers. Perhaps the same could also be said of every religious denomination in the US compared with the rest of the World, given the leading role that mass culture in that country tends to play in creating models that are then exported.

This is not an irrelevant issue, because it is linked to an international situation in which there is an ever greater gap between the innovative and progressive positions, also expressed by different religious areas – if not exactly 'confessions' – in the United States and Western Europe – also and almost to pursue the outflow of the faithful in these countries – and what we see in emerging countries, where religiousness (and not only in the Catholic Church, far from it!) is expanding and tends to be more traditional.

The difference between the advanced part of the World and the emerging countries, also in the religious sphere, is a significant issue in political terms.

Indeed, to return to American history, it is clear that the American cultural tradition, which places God at the centre of a democratic political project, is at a point where these assumptions are being challenged by the present context, even though they are still largely part of America's national identity.

The context is perhaps different in Europe, given that the dominant democratic model on the Old Continent, historically inspired by the values of the French Revolution, is definitely undergoing a crisis, yet a crisis that seems entirely parallel to that of European citizens' perception of religion. On the contrary, in Europe, the image acquired by the Catholic Church, thanks to the innovative and reforming stance of Pope Francis, has

led to a phase of growing interest and a renewed focus on the Church. Although we can all acknowledge that even today, even if unease about political institutions is widespread in Europe, it is not a foregone conclusion that religious (Christian) values would garner sufficient consensus to be made the basis for any new European pacts.

The recent evolution in American politics

On 21 January 2021, Joseph (Joe) Robinette Biden, Jr was sworn in as the new President of the United States of America. Biden never made a secret of his Catholic faith in the past, and is now the second Catholic President after J.F. Kennedy (1961-63); on the day of his inauguration, he went to Mass in the same church in Georgetown that Kennedy used to go to.

The current historical moment seems to highlight an underlying division in American society, following a divisive election campaign and an outgoing administration that had pursued a policy of confrontation within the country on a number of issues, also regarding values and morals, not least with its attempt to use religious faiths for blatantly partisan political purposes, and perhaps drawing more inspiration from the context of American Episcopal Christians.

This conflict, which led to doubts among the defeated Republicans (including non-Trumpians) as to whether the elections were rigged, as well as feelings of disappointment among the Democratic winners – even to the point of assuming that the pre-election polls were right and Biden would have won by a lot more without so much pressure – has, in the end, only led to a clear defeat of the idea of democratic representation. This could have serious consequences if we are unable to achieve a reorganisation of our shared values over the next few years that avoids any extreme polarisations, although this is not an obvious scenario.

The search for common points of synthesis and shared values, which remain at the basis of the idea of democracy as we

know it in the West, is a sensitive issue in the rest of the World too, because the US elections are in any case a decisive moment, the consequences of which are also significant for all countries that are more or less allies and friends, and an issue that 'enemies' cannot ignore either.

Assuming that most US citizens are still Episcopalian or Protestant Christians, the case of Catholics in the United States is of great political significance. Catholicism is still the second most important religious denomination in the United States after the Episcopalians, and is credited with a share of around 20-25 per cent of the resident population. However, unlike other denominations, the share of politicians in the US Congress declaring themselves to be Catholic, seems to be substantially divided according to recent polls – almost equally divided – between the Republicans and the Democrats. These two camps, which are today very distant and in competition, perhaps as never before in American history, also clash on issues that touch on the values of faith and interpret them in a way that is often diametrically opposed.

For this reason, while US politics will find it hard to reconstruct a vision of common interest, it could also be added that, now more than ever before, the ability of the Catholic Church to find ways to mediate that not only preserve the unity of the faithful but may also help to cope with these difficult times would be appreciated, and not only in the US.

This cannot be ignored, because the social reforms implemented in America then come to Europe and are often proposed to the rest of the World as propositions of 'values'. Yet in Europe, this could have a major influence on the possibility of returning to religious values as a possible foundation for the ideal benchmarks for a hypothetical new constitutional treaty.

Therefore, what is happening in the United States has a marked effect on us here in Europe, and not only because of the economic and geopolitical aspects, but also because the debate on the values that hold the West together has actually already begun, and the answers we will find are essential for the future of the Transatlantic understanding that has guaranteed global stability and, fundamentally, peace since the last World War.

American democracy therefore has perhaps an even more difficult task today (less vital politically, maybe, but nevertheless significant) than that of managing to mend its own internal divisions of recent years, which are still very much present, or rather that of allowing religious freedom, which has always distinguished the United States, to once again be a driving force for the basic values at its heart. This is especially so now that the presence of non-Christian components is growing (Asian or Muslim immigration, for example) and that a debate on atheism seems to be emerging in the United States as well.

In light of these new scenarios, it is impossible to forget how many social issues are important – for example, the tension between ‘pro-life’ Christian Catholics, a position in line with Rome, and those who support the ‘pro-choice’ or abortionist view, mostly among the Democrats – and this is reflected in the inter-party debate.

It is quite likely that every Democrat politician is faced with a dilemma. Indeed, given the multi-faith nature of the American electorate, the average voter expects their president, but also their representative, to be a devout believer (according to their faith) but also to be open to other opinions (and faiths), a trait that has always distinguished American democracy. This has often translated into compromises and proclamations about one’s individual responsibility (fully consistent) and the duty of political representation (which must therefore be open to different positions).

It is clear that the prevalence of positions on social issues that could lead to a marked divergence from the line taken by the Catholic Church will, however, have a twofold effect: on the one hand, it will lead to many Catholic politicians keeping their distance, even formally, from positions that their electorate would not understand, which would mean distancing themselves from the Church, and on the other hand, to the birth of a debate on these issues at international level, which will have implications for Christian messages that may be politically significant and for how the Church itself will deal with them. Without going into too much detail, it is likely that any changes in social spheres

in the USA could have an impact in Germany, and therefore in Europe, although this is not a given.

It should be added that this is not just a matter for Catholics, but, significantly, also for many different denominations (Muslims and Jews in America have often found themselves in similar positions to Christians on issues relating to values). This is all important if religion is seen as a possible glue to hold values together in the future, and not only in the United States.

However, it should not be forgotten that certain values are, by their very nature, universal, and that significant interpretative developments in the West, therefore also have sometimes global consequences. Nowadays in Asia, and therefore in that part of the globe that should be the greatest missionary objective for traditional religions and in particular for the Catholic Church, the more traditional positions, also because they are the most normal ones in the economically poorer areas, are and will probably remain prevalent. This trend is exactly the opposite of that in European countries and the United States. It is therefore possible that one important issue in the future in the context of dialogue (or confrontation) between the various areas of the World will once again be that of religious freedom with respect to the rules of civil coexistence.

Rediscovering values to rebuild democracy

A fair question today, looking at the prospects, which are not only economic, is also that of the shared values that underpin the European project. In fact, the lack of a truly constitutional treaty and of a concrete political outlook for the European Union has resulted in a large grey area with respect to what identifies the Union itself.

We take certain benefits for granted nowadays, such as freedom of movement and being able to work in different countries, rather than the fact that peace has been guaranteed for a very long time compared with what happened in Centuries past, and that, at least between EU Member States, this peace, which is surely of great importance, will be preserved.

It is perhaps less clear to European citizens what the 'state' is today than it used to be. In fact, the end of ideologies has limited the role of politics, and in recent years the ideas of 'state' and 'economic system' have almost come to overlap. Hence one might think that a 'Europe market' is deep down what we want (and have). However, judging by the growing electoral consensus for the 'sovereignty' parties, there is an attempt to counter this vision, which is necessarily poor in ideals, with a possibly anachronistic return to values of a cultural nature and of national traditions, or in any case that are highly critical of the current vagueness of the European project.

Now, more so than in the past, it would be important for Europe to return to shared values. European democracy should rediscover the value of dialogue between different positions, to find a balance between secular propositions, of Eighteen-Cen-

tury or more Hegelian inspiration, which are very widespread nowadays, and at the same time to make it possible to overcome the historical opposition of a part of the once progressive movements (the 'left' whose identity and boundaries are so hard to understand today) to those religious values that have transmitted so much to the history and culture of the European peoples. This is not to say that we should think of maximalist models in the political sphere: the experience of [don Luigi Sturzo's](#) first Popular Party was that of a secular party inspired by Catholic Christian values. It was not a model for transforming those values into civil law, far from it, and it would also have been contrary to the spirit of the faith and the idea of a Kingdom 'not of this World': it was, in effect, the promotion of the humanistic aspect of what had been our history for Centuries in most of Europe, and which had left the fertile ground on which modern democratic states were born.

Today, taking inspiration from religious values could help us to find together those common paths that seem to have faded in the whirlwind of the events of recent years. The Catholic Church could certainly play a role here, especially if, given the crisis of secular models, of the economy and of identities, it were to succeed, in its turn, in overcoming the various divisions that are emerging today, by clearly presenting principles that should not be aimed at merely earthly aspects, thereby leaving the mediation of values to secular men and women.

The future of Europe cannot be based solely on agreements of an economic nature. In fact, going back to 1998, if we could put ourselves in the shoes of an observer at that time, the creation of the Euro would seem to be a giant step. Above all, it had seemed that the birth of the single currency would make the process of European political aggregation irreversible. Today we see that the United Kingdom's choice to stay out of it represented for that country the capacity to keep an option that others no longer had (as we know, the United Kingdom has chosen another path that it could also afford to take, unlike the members of the Euro area), a politically informed decision.

However, perhaps it should be considered that, if the 'two-speed' Europe that some people were advocating had been chosen in the past, the free trade agreements might have been revised to the detriment of those countries that did not belong to the 'hard core' (the Eurozone), in order to avoid any crises in competitiveness generated by monetary manoeuvres. For these same reasons, the United Kingdom might have been able to reposition itself differently without finding itself in the situation that prompted it to exercise the option of leaving the Union. It is likely that the future of the Union also depends on how to find a new balance in future relations with the United Kingdom, which is still the gateway to the Anglosphere at World level and the privileged channel for US foreign policy in Europe.

The scenario created by the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union will have medium and long-term consequences. The first, the effects of which can already be seen, is the loosening of the Transatlantic bond that everyone in Western Europe had always taken for granted in the years following the Second World War. It is clear that over the next few years, the Anglosphere will gradually move towards political and economic lines more in keeping with its cultural background. This is not necessarily a good thing for the countries of continental Europe; on the contrary, it is probably a division that we should try to address by finding new areas for enhanced cooperation and by leveraging the US interest in maintaining a strong relationship with European countries (and vice versa).

This scenario opens up a further phase of reflection on what holds us together. It is clear that representative democracy, the political model of Western countries, is being challenged by the current crises. Although the market economy is still the reference model, it is experiencing a phase in which there is no shortage of criticism: indeed, the correlation between freedom, democracy, the free market and economic growth is being called into question at a time when there are growing doubts about the sustainability of democracy in the absence of sufficient widespread prosperity. In addition, the vision of Asian populations regarding the public role is probably more receptive to state

interference in the private life of citizens than would be accepted in the West.

It seems clear that at a time when there is a vacuum, the search for common ideas becomes topical again. At the present time, the values represented by the Christian faith in most Western countries could be a point of contact. Nevertheless, for this to happen – and this is to the credit of the current pope, Francis – faith must not be perceived in the political arena as being partisan (or rather as an element in favour of positions that are sometimes pro-conservative, but sometimes drift towards socialist positions). The model represented by the values of faith is not related – even in [don Luigi Sturzo's](#) original vision – to a hypothesis of political design referable to the state, but to a model of personally interpreted (witnessed) values. It is not therefore necessarily linked to positions that were once labelled 'right' or 'left' (to use the canons held dear by the French Revolution).

This system of positions, now perhaps overtaken by history, remains the basis for Western democracies. Yet it is precisely this system that has undergone a serious crisis, at least since the end of the USSR (1989-1991), when the 'left' side lost its maximalist reference and the 'right' side failed to clarify the role of the market with respect to the state, in a World no longer governed by blocks. Today people think we can, perhaps, return to having conflicts between different areas of the World, including for ideological reasons (this can be seen in the context of the tensions between the United States and China). Yet these are scenarios which cannot last if they lack ideas and long-term models, or worse, they risk plunging the World into forms of conflict, at least at economic level. It is, perhaps, for this reason too that the values of faith, and above all their 'secular' application in Western societies, could be what binds a renewed Transatlantic partnership together.

However, both in the USA and in Europe, the Catholic Church (but also the Protestant churches) is now, as never before, going through a period of delicate transition and internal debate, and thus seems unable to make the contribution that would be so necessary. Yet it is not a matter for politicians, and

it is not politics that should heal the divisions in the Catholic Church in the United States and elsewhere. In the democratic system, the parties are concerned with their short- to medium-term set-ups for electoral purposes, and a return to full adherence to ethical issues dear to the religions to the 'detriment' of the 'civil battles' waged by most parties does not seem feasible in the US or anywhere else.

Maintaining open and equidistant positions with respect to cultural and religious differences is a hallmark of Western democracies. The role of the laity is significant even if – as the history of European countries shows – they have sometimes acted in politics inspired by religious values (interpreted secularly in the context of the state), as in the model of Christian democratic parties in various EU countries. In Islamic countries, the rare experiments with 'secular' parties are almost all examples of models inspired by 'left-wing', even socialist values, and have mostly had limited success (think of Iraq or Syria and what has happened there), while the traditional model of Islam is not as open to the secular vision as the European traditions are, and secularism, child of the Enlightenment, will eventually succumb in the face of ideas supported in the future by a democratically elected majority, or even a solid parliamentary representation, inspired by Islam. This is always assuming that we want to maintain the principle of democratic representation, but the mere fact of reflecting on this issue does not bode well for the future of Europe's history.

However, it cannot be denied that the emergence of forms of direct democracy fostered by digital platforms and by the use of the internet has challenged the concept of democratic representation, just as the emergence of cryptocurrencies and digital currencies could challenge the established view of the monetary economic system to which we are accustomed.

So how should we view the future of Europe in relation to the Transatlantic axis? History will tell us how it might turn out after events have taken place. However, if we were to make a wish, it would probably be better if Europe maintained strong ties with the US and the Anglosphere, because this has both

economic and geopolitical implications. The Western democratic model is also the one that best guaranteed individual freedoms in the past. Essentially, it is a question of upholding the dignity of the human person, the leitmotif of *Gaudium et Spes* (see especially its first part, chapter one, which effectively summarises the debate that took place during the Second Vatican Council on these issues).

Part 2

Intra-ecclesial dialogue is needed for
evangelisation and the integral promotion
of human beings

by Agostino Marchetto

Introductory guide

The initial reference to a recent event, exemplary in the diversity of opinions found also within the Catholic hierarchy and among the people of God in the United States of America, which may also reflect differences in party affiliations, but that manifest the need for intra-ecclesial dialogue in the positions taken by the Magisterium and the relative timing, could bring us to the conclusion that the evaluation criteria, as well as each person's different perceptions and priorities, also depend a great deal on different hermeneutics (=interpretation) in relation with the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and on the ensuing Church-World relationships, involving Catholic morals and the Magisterium.

This problem of a concrete conciliar interpretation, is found everywhere in many people, even though in the United States it is revealed to a greater extent because of the 'consistency' of the Catholic Church to this day in that country and because of the forces supporting those who formed a majority and a minority in the Council, but who found, also thanks to the extraordinarily effective mediation of Paul VI, an inspiration used by the Holy Spirit, the grace to approve all the documents almost unanimously. In order to explain the use of the word 'dialogue' in the title of our paper, I will immediately add that it was in fact Paul VI's Encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* on this topic that made a vital contribution to the Council in resolving the deadlock created by the debate on *Gaudium et Spes* (Church-World relationship).

However, this happy conclusion to the Great Synod – as I have always called it – unfortunately almost immediately ran

into difficulties in continuing with this approach of 'koinonia' (Communion) for a service to the human family, in any case remaining the 'Catholic Church', an identity that is necessary not only for itself but also for the ecumenical movement. Cullmann reminded his Lutheran brethren of this by mentioning the 'genius' of Catholicism, that of knowing how to bring together (*et...et*) realities that for others remain *aut...aut*, that is *the one or the other* (see Agostino Marchetto, 'The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: For a correct interpretation of the Council', p. 324, end of footnote 8).

There were those who even thought that the divisions arose among the people of God because of the Council in question (cf. J. Ratzinger, *Opera Omnia*, vol. VII/2, pp. 433-500). Regarding the fact that, since the Council the faithful have been less united than before, the eminent theologian set out the situation as follows: for some, the Council has still done too little and has lost its momentum everywhere; this has resulted in a combination of prudent compromises, a victory of diplomatic tactics over the impetus of the Holy Spirit, which does not want complicated summaries, but rather the simplicity of the Gospel. For others, it is instead a scandal, a yielding of the Church to the evil spirit of an age in which the obscuring of the meaning of God is the consequence of its uncontrolled attachment to what is earthly (p. 433). These terms were already outlined by Ratzinger in 1966, who added that: "Here we can only try and understand a little more precisely, in some points, the malaise that we have established as the current situation in the Church after the Council, thus formulating more clearly the task imposed on us by the present times" (p. 434).

* * *

After having indicated the areas of malaise, our work addresses the core of the Catholic Church's mission to achieve evangelization and integral promotion of human beings. This requires an intra-ecclesial dialogue between its two equally legitimate tendencies, in themselves, one more sensitive to loyalty

to the Word of God and to the Sacred Tradition and one more focused on the incarnation, so to speak, in the World of today, but which must both be and remain in communion with the Catholic Church.

This means applying the correct hermeneutics, finally expressed as the reform “not in rupture and discontinuity but, of the renewal, in the continuity of the one-subject Church”.

This implies, first of all, the need to overcome the historical and ideological gaps in the post-conciliar work of the ‘School of Bologna’ (see the first history of the historiography of the Council: Agostino Marchetto ‘The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: A Counterpoint for the History of the Council’, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 2005, p. 407), both with regard to the private Council Diaries, but above all because it was carried out without the support of official Documents that are fundamental for understanding the Great Synod, such as the Acts of its Governing Bodies and of the General Secretariat. Nowadays, we can also make use of Pope Paul VI’s extraordinary source of knowledge, the Diary of Felici, Secretary of the Council, a publication that I edited. A recent article of mine on the conciliar minority bears witness to this, as confirmed by the ‘Diario Felici’, of the General Secretary of the Vatican II (see *Annales Historiae Conciliorum*, Heft 1, 2020, p. 113: Agostino Marchetto, ‘The Minority in Vatican II from the ‘Diary’ of Pericle Felici, the Secretary General’).

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One of the topics most subject to discussion in the Council and outside was the Declaration on Religious Freedom: it is the one to which the last part of my intervention is dedicated, which is rather long, but necessary if we want to clarify many things.

After having illustrated the valuable contributions to the conciliar discussion, especially those of Courtney Murray, Pietro Pavan and Monsignor Wojtyła, the conclusion summarises the issue and highlights the relevance of the theme even today,

thanks also to the words of Archbishop Paul Gallagher, particularly in relation to the 'new rights'.

This is followed by a call for a clarifying discourse, for all Catholics who wish to remain so, about the 'reception' of Vatican II, with reference to the First Vatican Ecumenical Council and with a report on our part about a document (initially a secret one) of Bismarck that had misled, if not deceived.

The current historical context and the Church's position

In order to properly explore a subject that means a great deal to me and, that I hope will become of concern and a task and commitment for you, dear reader, I begin by recalling a recent experience of the Church in the USA, on the occasion of the election of the Catholic Joe Biden to the Presidency. I refer specifically to the message of welcome for the new Head of State on the part of the President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop J. H. Gomez. Furthermore, on this occasion, he indicated some areas in which “policies that will advance moral evils are expected and will threaten human life and dignity, more seriously in the areas of abortion, contraception, marriage and gender”. Yet these worries are certainly a Catholic characteristic and, for example, we can consider the topic of abortion, and the strong words used by Pope Francis in his latest Speech to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See (Vatican) at the beginning of this year.

However, the choice of tone and of when to speak about this, i.e. when the new President assumed his high office, has created some unfavourable impressions in the US, but not only there, including among some members of the American Catholic hierarchy. This underlines the need for intra-ecclesial dialogue to avoid divisions as much as possible, particularly when it comes to taking important positions, especially on peculiarly delicate matters, from both an ecclesial and a civil point of view, in the relationships that can be identified as the State-Church relationship. This is a topic that we will analyse in the final part of our respectful paper, aided by the reflection on the *Dignitatis Hu-*

manae declaration or religious freedom, to which an American, J. Courtney Murray, made a significant contribution.

The initial reference to a recent event, exemplary in the diversity of opinions found also within the Catholic hierarchy and among the people of God in the United States of America, which may also reflect differences in party affiliations, but that manifest the need for intra-ecclesial dialogue in the positions taken by the Magisterium and the relative timing, could bring us to the conclusion that the evaluation criteria, as well as each person's different perceptions and priorities, also depend a great deal on different hermeneutics (=interpretations) as far as the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council is concerned and on the ensuing Church-World relationships, involving Catholic morals and the Magisterium.

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I limit myself, however, to only pointing out the areas of 'malaise', that is to say, first of all, "the situation of liturgical renewal", "which for many has become a sign of contradiction", and I allow myself to quote only a few expressions, namely the exhortation "not to forget that celebrating the Lord's Supper by its very nature means making a feast" (p. 444) and to remember that "there is a law of continuity which cannot be transgressed with impunity", something which "requires a high degree of tolerance..., forbearance towards one another, and the longsuffering nature of love within the Church, since the most authentic liturgy of Christianity is love" (p. 445).

Professor Ratzinger includes another area of 'malaise' under the heading 'Church and World', "an area in which the new mentality of the Council can clearly be perceived" (*ib.*). Here it is established that "contrary to what the optimism of the idea of incarnation had sometimes explicitly guaranteed, the theme of

the cross clearly has precedence over the theme of incarnation in the New Testament; in fact, the theme of the incarnation is already in itself a theology of the cross in the Bible, since incarnation means God's giving of himself, and is therefore the first and decisive step towards the cross (p. 449). There was a simplification here that "leads to a theology of hope that seems almost on the verge of naive optimism", which became "a fundamental reason for spiritual confusion that not infrequently leads to the Council being misunderstood" (p. 451). One thing must be said on this subject, however, adds Ratzinger: "if the Church turned to the World in a way that represented its turning away from the cross, it would not lead to a renewal of the Church, but to its end". (*ib.*) "To put it another way: the Christian faith is a scandal for mankind in every age, the scandal that the eternal God is concerned with us men and knows us, that the Elusive has become perceptible in the man Jesus, that the Immortal has suffered on the cross, that we mortals are promised resurrection and eternal life: believing this is a disconcerting task for man. The Council could not and would not eliminate this Christian scandal. But we must add: this primary scandal, which cannot be eliminated if we do not want Christianity itself to be eliminated" (p. 452).

The last area of malaise is the "ecumenical turning point" (p. 454). In this area too, Ratzinger wonders: "Who would have dared to hope that such a passionate search for opportunities for closeness and understanding would have emerged, such a lively willingness to review what until then was obvious and seemed the only thing possible, to find a way to go beyond the pure and simple request for a return and thus to achieve the possibility of a union that would not mean absorption, but a real encounter in the truth and love of the Lord, who is above us all and embraces and sustains us all?" (*ib.*). The theologian goes on to say: "It is natural, however, that in everyday life these things encounter difficulties. There is a certain distrust on the Protestant side. And of course there is also that naive haste that declares controvertist theology to be exhausted, that no longer wants to see any differences, that trivialises everything,

bringing everything back to pure and simple misunderstandings behind which the great underlying understanding now suddenly emerges; this naive haste now sees too simplistically only the plural 'the Churches' and forgets to take seriously the difficult claim that the Catholic Church, even while adopting the plural form, nevertheless dares and must dare the paradox of attributing to itself, in a unique way, the singular form, namely 'the Church'. This uncritical progressivism in turn reawakens its counterpart, namely fundamentalism, which suspects ecumenism of not being Catholic and finds adherents more easily, the more superficially the ecumenical question is treated here and there (p. 455). "And so here too, the tangible form of gratitude must continue to be patience. It is the daily form of love, in which faith and hope are present at the same time" (p.456).

Lastly I would like to recall a collection of value judgments made by Professor Ratzinger in the Church-World conciliar relationship, which are that: "Sectarianism cannot be accepted, but neither should that necessary examination of conscience be avoided, especially with regard to an ever greater fusion with what is known as 'progress'" (pp. 495-496). When the spirit of the Council is turned against its own word and is only vaguely distilled from the process that leads towards the Pastoral Constitution, that spirit then becomes a phantom and leads to absurdity. The destruction that such an attitude has caused is so obvious that there can be no serious discussion about it. In the same way, it has become clear that the World in its modern configuration has long since ceased to be a unified reality. The progress of the Church, it must be said once and for all, cannot consist in belatedly embracing modernity: this is what the theology of Latin America has irrevocably taught us, and here lies its right to cry out for liberation. If the critical description of the last ten years leads to these conclusions, if it makes it clear that it is necessary to read Vatican II in its entirety, that is to say oriented to its central theological texts, and not vice versa, then this reflection could be fruitful for the Church as a whole and help to consolidate it with sober reforms.

It is not the Pastoral Constitution that relinquish the Constitution on the Church, nor is this the intention, considered in isolation, of the opening paragraphs, it is rather the contrary: the spirit of the Council is in fact only the whole, properly centred. Does this mean that the Council itself is to be annulled? Absolutely not. It only means that the authentic reception of the Council has not yet begun. "Of course we cannot go back to the past, nor do we want to. And yet we must be willing to reflect once again on what, as times change, it is that truly sustains us. Searching for it in a determined way and daring without discounting the folly of the truth with a joyful heart seems to me to be the task for today and tomorrow: it is the true essence of the Church's service to the World, its response to the 'joys and hopes, the sadness and the anxiety of the people of today'"(p. 500).

History, hermeneutics (interpretation) and conciliar reception (acceptance and realisation)

Before dealing with the more exact subject of conciliar knowledge, I must point out that for me, a thorough examination of this great ecclesial occurrence, in itself and for the World (I do not use the word 'event' for the historiographical reasons that I have set out in my books on several occasions), comprises three steps, none of which can be omitted. They are its history, as objective and faithful as possible, its correct interpretation (let us call it a hermeneutic question) and finally its reception (reception, acceptance and realisation).

This gradually brings us to the fundamental point of the post-conciliar discussion or tribulation, namely to the hermeneutic interpretation (or we could say explanation) of the great occurrence. This is the second of the three steps of conciliar knowledge. The first is its history, the second is the hermeneutics and the third is the reception (realisation and acceptance). These are three steps, none of which – I said it before and I say it again – can be omitted.

With regard to the first step, of the history of the Church, there remains, however, the serious initial historical-ideological conditioning of the vision of Vatican II as an 'event' (see the French historiography, for a point of view on this, especially after *Les Annales*, let's say), which leads the correct interpretation astray. In this respect – as I was able to present in a better way in the first history of the historiography of the Council (see 'The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: A Counterpoint for the History of the Council', *Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2005*, p. 407), it turned out that the work of the 'Bologna

School' – which is unfortunately still in vogue, especially based on certain hermeneutical tendencies – was mostly published with large historical and ideological gaps, both as regards the private Conciliar Diaries, but above all because it was carried out without the support of official Documents that are fundamental for understanding the Great Synod, such as the Acts of its Governing Bodies and of the General Secretariat. Nowadays, we can make use of Pope Paul VI's extraordinary source of knowledge, the Diary of Felici, General Secretary of the Council, a publication that I edited. A recent article of mine on the conciliar minority bears witness to this, as confirmed by the 'Diario Felici', of the General Secretary of the Vatican II (see *Annales Historiae Conciliorum*, Heft 1, 2020, p. 113: Agostino Marchetto, The Minority in Vatican II from the 'Diary' of Pericle Felici, the Secretary General).

I add to this and explore the question further; from my studies (as well as the volume quoted previously, see also the volume entitled 'The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: For a correct interpretation of the Council', Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2012, p. 380) I effectively draw the conviction that even those who recall other hermeneutic tendencies and praise them, such as the ones of Peter Huenermann, for example, or of John W. O'Malley, of Gilles Routhier, or of Christoph Theobald, in reality carry polluted hermeneutical water to the same Bolognese mill. (This strongly negative opinion is based on my analysis of their positions as found in 'The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council: For a correct interpretation of the Council', *op. cit.* p. 154-207; for Huenermann, see the other volume, the Counterpoint, *op. cit.*, pages 156, 157, 159, 255, 256, 258, 360 and 373). In fact there is a tendency to pass from the claimed factual reception of the great Synod to its correct acceptance, leaving out the intermediate step of hermeneutical reflection, perhaps thinking, erroneously, that 'cosa fatta capo ha' (what has been done, cannot be undone).

As a matter of fact, I believe that the current 'crisis' the Catholic Church is undergoing has been caused precisely by the question of the correct synodal hermeneutics being abandoned,

those of all the conciliar and post-conciliar Popes, announced with final precision by Pope Benedict XVI, and therefore not “of rupture and discontinuity, but of reform and renewal in the continuity of the one-subject Church”.

Nowadays in this regard there is silence on the need for non-rupture (accepted instead by the extreme positions that radicalised after Vatican II, with the weakening of the intermediate interpretation – by this I mean the *et...et* of hermeneutics, that is to say, of the so-called “traditionalists” – a very different category from those who are called “traditionalists”), and furthermore, little importance is also given to the ‘continuity of the one-subject Church’. This is not a question of little importance but of being and remaining Catholic. In the Church there is of course even the possibility of a development of the dogma, but it must be organic and homogeneous, i.e. with no rupture.

Undoubtedly the texts finally approved in the Council and confirmed by the Bishop of Rome are fundamental for history, although we can talk about a Vatican II spirit, which is based upon them and does not contradict them. What I have always maintained, and my studies bear witness to this, is the need for it to be the spirit drawn from the Council documents. What I have always disapproved of is supporting the event (and I have already spoken about the risk historically linked to this word) by devaluing the conciliar text, the fruit of a dialogue, despite everything, between the conciliar majority and its minority. In the past I have stated that nowadays, little weight or attention is given to the ‘continuity of the one-subject Church’ of the correct Benedictine formula of conciliar hermeneutics. This is due in particular to the introduction of ‘new parameters or of ‘new ecclesial pragmatics’, which do not give much weight to this necessary and correct continuity, thanks also to the exorbitant evaluation of the ‘signs of the times’. This would be worthy of a long discourse, and of a reminder, for example, of the position of Monsignor Wojtyła within the Synodal Commission *Gaudium et Spes* (let us call it that).

As a matter of fact, they cannot be considered as if they were a new and additional Revelation. Here we find the great

question of their interpretation (discernment), in fact, in the end we could say of the Church's problematic relationship with modernity, or rather with the contemporary World, with today. In other words, I believe we should examine whether the proposed 'new' is in line with the 'reform and of the renewal in the continuity of the one-subject Church' and is not a 'break in discontinuity' instead.

Universal human rights: religious freedom

In this respect, one of the most debated topics has been and remains the Declaration on Religious Freedom. Let us therefore speak briefly here – and it is essential to do so – about universal human rights: religious freedom.

As an introduction, it might be useful to read the contribution (see various authors, *Vatican II. La Liberté religieuse*, Paris 1966, p. 47) by Y. Congar, entitled: ‘Que faut-il entendre pour déclaration?’ and go through the history of its text, written by J. Hamer (*ib.* p. 53-110), starting with the ‘Freiburg document’, and then moving on to the preparatory period and the subsequent six drafts (the number is a sign of the difficulties encountered).

The content of the subsection entitled ‘L’évolution homogène de la doctrine pontificale’ (p. 65-69 and then 79, 91, 99), also merits our particular attention; however, we can be guided on this important subject by an expert helmsman, decisive for the fate of religious freedom in the Council, John Courtney Murray – who has returned to the media spotlight following the recent election for the Presidency of the U.S.A.- in an essay entitled ‘Vers une intelligence du développement de la doctrine de l’Eglise sur la liberté religieuse’ – *ib.* p. 111-147).

Indeed, the declaration is interesting because it represents a genuine problem in the development of the doctrine, ‘a step forward in the progress of civilization’, progress in the Catholic doctrine but, as the author is quick to point out, along the line of non-contradiction. In fact, to quote Pius IX and his *Syllabus*, the notion of freedom of conscience derived from the first premise of naturalist rationalism as set out in the *Syllabus*: “Human rea-

son, without any reference whatsoever to God, is the sole arbiter of truth and falsehood, and of good and evil; it is law to itself, and suffices, by its natural force, to secure the welfare of men and of nations". To state that the conscience is free was therefore to state that there is no moral order that transcends man, whose imperatives are binding in conscience. This is the theory of the 'lawless conscience' later condemned by Leo XIII. As regards the notion of freedom of religion in society, it derived from the concept of government described in the *Syllabus* as follows: "The State, as the origin and source of all rights, is endowed with a certain right not circumscribed by any limits. By making freedom of worship a legal institution in society, the State was also asserting its own legal omnipotence, its fundamental power to positively authorise the existence and exercise of all religions in society on an equal legal footing". (*ib.* p. 112-147).

I have lingered over this quotation because it seems to me to be very clear in showing that its pronouncements are linked to the *Sitz im Leben*, and effectively to the difference between the ideological liberalism that I would call European and that which we can instead define as American.

Let us proceed, however, to the conclusion of the paper of the Jesuit in question, which sums up well what he initially analyses extensively, including for the pontificate of Leo XIII, about whose thinking Courtney Murray goes so far as to state "if we consider the doctrine of Leo XIII, it is fair to say that the essential doctrine of the Vatican II Declaration (on religious freedom) is contained implicitly, though still quite obscurely, in the work of Leo XIII". (*ib.* p. 126).

Having also analysed the thinking of Pius XII and of John XXIII (with the inclusion of freedom, alongside the 'traditional values of truth, justice and charity'), here, in the construction of peace, important is the conclusion of the speech, that is: "The doctrine of *Dignitatis Humanae* is fully traditional. However, it is also new, in the sense that tradition is always a tradition of growth and progress".

There had therefore been affirmations by Popes of the right to religious freedom prior to the Second Vatican Council. Leo

XIII stated it as follows: “In the State, man has the right to follow the will of God according to the conscience of his duty and to carry out his precepts without anyone being able to prevent him from doing so. This freedom, the true freedom, the freedom worthy of the children of God, which so gloriously protects the dignity of the human person and is above all violence and oppression, has always been the object of the Church’s vow and of her special affection”. (*ib.* p. 145).

“Pius XI in his turn declared: the believer has the inalienable right to profess his faith and to practice it as he sees fit. Every law which oppresses or impedes the profession or practice of this faith is in contradiction with natural law”. Pius XII drew up a list of the fundamental rights of the person that included the right to worship God, both privately and publicly, including charitable action, and John XXIII affirmed that “everyone has the right to honour God according to his upright conscience and to profess his religion in private and public life” (*ib.* p. 146).

These statements may seem clear, yet they are still clouded by a doubt, a leftover from the violent 19th Century conflict between the Church and sectarian liberalism, the European one. Courtney Murray writes that this doubt crept into the council debates, for example, in the question of how it is possible that a man may have the right to worship God, in a way that is not, or is not fully in accordance, with divine law. The text of the Declaration answered this and other similar questions by accepting a new ‘status quaestionis’, the fruit of history, placing itself in a new perspective and making the necessary distinctions that had not previously been made. Progress in the shape of a doctrinal development was made in this way, which was the fundamental problem underlying other issues dealt with in the Council.

It has become clear that the Church is not guilty of archaism, of having stopped at a certain stage in the legitimate evolution of thought (patristic, medieval, modern or contemporary), and does not reject theological development or even dogma, provided it is homogeneous. A prime example of this is ‘Dignitatis Humanae’, and for this reason it has perhaps encountered more opposition than other declarations. “This declaration is in fact a sign of the

growth of the Church's historical consciousness of the human dignity of man, of the ecumenical consciousness of its ministry of reconciliation and above all of the evangelical consciousness it has of itself and of the Word entrusted to it by God, a Word not only of truth, but also, and this is the exactly same thing, a Word of freedom. In the end, the Declaration is one of the most important of the Council's texts, as Paul VI pointed out, because – and the author attempts to demonstrate this in the second part of his text – it is a temporal extension of the 'message of liberation' announced by Paul at Antioch" (*ib.* p. 145).

* * *

With the help of our Monsignor Pietro Pavan (from Treviso), one of the artificers of the the Declaration as regards the *acceptio rerum*, as I call it, let us now examine some of the points in his text (namely the essential elements of the right to religious freedom: *ib.* 149-158) starting with the nature, the object and the subject of this right.

Point 2 of the Document begins with the words "This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom". This is the most important and solemn statement, I would even say declaration, of the text, the one that gives it a truly historic importance, both in the life of the Church and in that of the human family. Yet what is the nature of this right that the Church has proclaimed? It is clearly a natural right and not a positive one in the sense that civil power grants it. Indeed, "today it is a universal conviction that rights do not have as their subjects, either immediately or formally, spiritual values such as truth, moral good or justice, since the subjects of law are persons and only persons, physical or moral. Consequently, the relationships between persons and spiritual values are not juridical". (*ib.* p. 150.). Implicit in this conception, however, are certain requirements of truth that are valid at all times. Moreover, it is on the nature of the person that the right to religious freedom is founded, the exercise of which cannot be impeded, except for reasons of just public order (cfr. D.H.2).

Thus, most of the Fathers were oriented towards the concept of religious freedom as a natural right, or a fundamental right of the person, and were eventually almost unanimous. "This right of the human person ... must be recognised and sanctioned in the juridical order of society in such a way that it constitutes a civil right". (D.H. Point 2).

The object of this right, however, is not formed by the content of the various religious beliefs. Moreover, the object of the right in question has a 'negative' content: it is immunity from coercion, it is not acting and it is a ban on using coercive means. It is also a matter of social and civil reality, two adjectives that were added when the fifth draft was made that eventually led to the Final Document. Immunity from coercion is also an honest object, fully in keeping with the dignity of human beings as persons: beings who are intelligent and free by nature and therefore naturally inclined to act responsibly.

Here I must point out that with regard to the use of the adjective 'just', to public order and to the call for responsibility, a number of additions were introduced into the text upon the proposal of the Polish episcopate, mediator Monsignor Wojtyla, one of which I will now examine: "Moreover, immunity from coercion has a twofold meaning; the first is not being forced to act against one's conscience and the second is not being hindered, within due limits, from acting in accordance with one's conscience. In the first meaning, this immunity, at least at doctrinal level, has always been accepted in the Catholic sphere, and this is above all taking into consideration the doctrine relating to the very freedom of an act of faith. In the second sense, however, this immunity from coercion, as an individual right, has only been accepted in modern times". (*ib.* p. 151).

Immunity then concerns coercion by individuals, social groups and public authorities. With regard to the 'space' of these freedoms, I refer the reader to Point 2, which states that this right governs the whole of life, while the moral obligation to seek the truth remains. Point 4 in any case indicates the 'space' mentioned above, namely 1) religious life in its proper sense, 2) the communication and spreading of religious faith and 3)

the religious animation of activities and institutions with a temporal content, and therefore, the “freedom to hold meetings or to establish educational, cultural, charitable and social associations” (D.H. Point 4). Furthermore, everyone is a subject of the freedom in question, believers and non-believers, and religious communities, subjects with rights and duties, distinct in their juridical personality from that of their respective members, whose families also have the right to choose which religious education to give their children (D.H. Point 5), though recognising that parents cannot impose religious faith on them. In fact, it must become a personal conviction.

But let us return to the basis of this right, which is the dignity of the human person, considered from a threefold point of view, i.e. as it manifests itself in history, “the object of an ever-clearer awareness” (D.H. Point 1), as it affects the legal order of political communities (therefore a civil right) and as an exercise in responsibility. This dignity is also considered in its very roots, in the constituent elements of human beings themselves, who are intelligent and free and have responsibilities, that is to say, a conscience (cf. D.H. Point 2), which also means moral rectitude, even if the problems relating to true or erroneous conscience are not considered in our Declaration, since they are problems of a moral and not a juridical nature, concerning the relations between persons and the truth, not those between persons.

This aspect of the dignity of human beings runs like a red thread throughout the Declaration (see Points 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 11 and 15), which also finds this dignity in the connatural relationship with truth, as a value to which people adhere freely and without pressure. “Moments and acts that are knowledge and even more so love and action ... [with] a responsibility or as a duty and love towards the truth in the soul itself, postulates freedom as a right in social relations, that is to say, as immunity from external constraint on the part of individuals, social groups and public authorities”. (*ib.* p. 161).

The religious field is effectively the one in which human beings commit their responsibility to the highest level, protected

from any unjust pressure exerted on them by the social environment (cf. D.H. Point 2). It is a question of “the supreme dignity of the human person” (see Second Draft). It was in the third draft, however, that the question was phrased in new terms, which remain essentially the same in the final Document. Here, the starting point is the establishment of a fact: the growing awareness that today’s human beings have acquired dignity as persons; this consciousness has a universal value, in part because it corresponds better to the psychology of modern man and is therefore more accessible. However, this dignity, which every human being derives from their divine vocation, is equally present in the final Document. “Truth,” it states, “must be sought and be firmly adhered to” (D.H. Point 3), consciously, freely and responsibly. Yet human beings are inherently social and therefore they are by nature ‘forced’ to bear witness to their religious faith.

The next step in our proceedings is the relationship between religious freedom and the public authorities. Monsignor Pavan begins his analysis (*ib.* p. 165-167; see also A. Marchetto/D. Trabucco, ‘La libertà religiosa tra Stato e Chiesa’ (religious freedom between State and Church), Conference Proceedings, edited by M. De Donà, Santa Giustina, Belluno, 2013) by presenting, starting from *Pacem in terris*, the constitutional, democratic and social State, the object to which political communities aspire.

Their public authorities are obliged, just as individuals and social groups are, to recognise and respect the right to freedom in the religious domain for human beings, whether they are citizens or not (see D.H. Point 6). This ‘reserved’ area appears in the light of the following principles: subsidiarity (see D.H. Point 7), the interior nature of religious acts (see D.H. Point 3), their transcendence (cf. D.H. Point 3), personal responsibility in religious acts (see D.H. Point 2), positive divine law (see D.H. Point 11) and positive human law (see D.H. Points 1, 2, 13 and 15), (*ibid.* p. 187), which more and more solemnly proclaim religious freedom as a human right, and this is also reflected in international documents (see D.H. Point 15).

Monsignor Pavan continues with an analysis of the 'legal protection of the right' in the legal organization of the public authorities and the relative reference to Points 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 13 and 15 of our Declaration (*ib.* p. 181-187).

The study continues with the 'promotion of the right' by the public authorities (D.H. Point 6), without discrimination, even though it may be the case that, because of "the particular circumstances of certain peoples, a special civil recognition is legally granted to a given religious community" (D.H. Point 6), to achieve a 'limitation on this right' because it is exercised within the limits indispensable for an ordered, worthy and fruitful social life, that is to say for the common good (cf. D.H. Point 7).

In this regard, the Council Fathers were presented with two contrasting stumbling blocks, both of which to be avoided: that of individuals who, under the pretext of religious freedom, commit acts with impunity that are detrimental to citizens or societies, and that of public authorities which, under the pretext of the present requirements of justice, arbitrarily limit the right in question. What criterion should be adopted to skirt these two obstacles? Over the course of a long process for drawing up the Document, the first criterion proposed was precisely that of the common good, which was then replaced by the objective aim of society. This, however, proved to be a somewhat fluid concept for the Fathers, and so they fell back on public order, which was finally adopted, though with certain important clarifications, such as the following essential elements, namely safeguarding the rights of citizens, maintaining public peace based on true justice, and protecting public morality (in keeping with the objective moral order).

Bearing the above in mind, it may be concluded that "the state model to which our document refers is certainly not a secularist or neutralist one, but a constitutional, democratic and social state, and therefore a state that considers it its right and duty to take positive action with regard to religious belief, but in a manner appropriate to its nature". (*ib.* p. 187).

Conclusion

Human rights, of course, and not only their enunciation, and with a particular focus on the right to religious freedom analysed so far, especially in its conciliar roots (of Vatican II) which is its architrave, but also paying attention to the so-called 'new' rights proclaimed today, which are anything but that, and that actually weaken the fundamental so-called first generation rights. In this regard, I would also like to cite another piece of my work, on the Declaration 'Dignitatis Humanae', much disputed by some. The title is already significant, and has a final question mark that I hope will whet the reader's appetite; it is 'The Declaration 'Dignitatis Humanae', rupture or reform and renewal in the continuity of the one-subject Church? (A.H.C. 48 (2016/17) p. 377-395). A scan of the study shows the following titles: "Introduction. Correct conciliar hermeneutics: the Council as an event or an occurrence?; Homogeneous evolution of papal doctrine; New 'status quaestionis'; Essential elements of the right to religious freedom; Relationship between religious freedom and the public authorities; Education in the exercise of religious freedom; In the light of Revelation; and Notes on the series of 'Dignitatis Humanae'".

* * *

Archbishop Paul Gallagher recently spoke on religious freedom nowadays (www.agi.it 30/9/20: scintille-pompeo-gallagher-cina-9806342), stating that being free from a religious point of view is also important from the point of view of international relations; it is in fact a *conditio sine qua non* for the respect of the human person and one of the priorities of the Holy See. Yet it is the champions of the so-called new rights that are also endangering this essential condition, as they show that they have no understanding of or interest in the ontological reality of the human person or in the essential dimension of their transcendental dignity. This is an attack on society itself, which is also carried out through the ideology of political correctness,

in the name of tolerance and of non-discrimination. This leads to laws being passed that go against freedom of conscience and of thought in the name of an attitude that can be summed up in the phrase 'do what you want'. This is what is at stake, and if we are talking about the role of religions in respecting everyone's freedom, we should also think about the Document on Human Fraternity signed by Pope Francis in 2019 with the Muslim religious authorities in Dubai.

In order to conclude this discourse, I now return to my starting point by remembering a 'call to justice' formulated by Cardinal J. Ratzinger in these final terms, on the occasion of the Eucharistic celebration during the international Symposium on 'The legacy of *Gaudium et Spes* 40 years later' (*Opera Omnia* VII/2, *cit.* p. 584 s.). This was in the Basilica of St Peter, on 18 March 2005: "It is certainly true that today, when the Church commits herself to works of justice on a human level (and there are few institutions in the World which accomplish what the Catholic Church does for the poor and disadvantaged), the World praises the Church. But when the Church's work for justice touches on issues and problems which the World no longer sees as bound up with human dignity, such as protecting the right to life of every human being from conception to natural death, or when the Church confesses that justice also includes our responsibilities toward God himself, then the World not infrequently reaches for the stones mentioned in our Gospel today... Only if we Christians grasp our vocation, as having been created in the image of God and believing that "the form of this World is passing away... and that "God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide" (*Gaudium et spes* p. 39) can we address the urgent social problems of our time from a truly Christian perspective". In this context, the question of those who believe that religion is about each man's 'breath of eternity' and not about supporting a form of government must be addressed. In fact, it could be binding for the exercise or not of religious freedom. Looking ahead, this raises the question of combining the obligation of faith and civil interests.

Let us return to the Council, however, which is a vital issue since, as Pope Francis recently stated in a meeting on 30 January of this year with Members of the National Catechetical Office of the Italian Bishops' Conference, "Those who do not follow the Council are outside the Church"; these are "words aimed at the extreme conservative and progressive wings", wrote Corsera on 30 January 2021. The Pope added that "the Council is the magisterium of the Church", and went on to say "either you are with the Church and therefore you follow the Council, or if you do not follow the Council, or you interpret it in your own way – according to your desire – you do not stand with the Church. We must be demanding and strict on this point (This therefore underlines the binding nature of Vatican II)." The Council is not to be negotiated: No, the Council is as it is". At this point, the next historical quotation made by Pope Francis becomes significant: "It makes me think of the groups of bishops and lay people who, after Vatican I (1869-70), left to continue the 'true doctrine' that was not that of Vatican I, saying 'we are the true Catholics'. Today they ordain women".

And so we return via Vatican II to the first Vatican Council, quoted in Note 27 of the *Lumen Gentium*, with reference to the *Pastor Æternus*, about the primacy of the Bishop of Rome, with reference to the collective Declaration of the German Bishops in favour of Pius IX in relation to Bismarck's post-Council accusations against the Pope and his grateful reception of the Document. Quite rightly, it focuses on the relations between the Bishop of Rome and the College of Bishops, as well as with the various particular and local Churches.

At the time of the discussions that originated with the Dogmatic Constitution '*Pastor Æternus*', in Germany, Bismarck actually issued a dispatch, on 14 May 1872, which remained secret until 1874, in which it was claimed that the first Vatican Council formulated the following assertions:

- *The Pope has arrogated episcopal rights to himself in every diocese and this arrogation of rights substitutes episcopal power with papal power*

- *This arrogation absorbs all jurisdictions*
- *Accordingly, this assumption places the entire plenitude of episcopal rights in the hands of the Pope*
- *This arrogation also concerns civil rights*
- *By virtue of this, the Pope enjoys an authority and infallibility that no existing monarch can ever have. See 'Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum', (D.S. NN. 3112-3117).*

The response of the Bishops was certainly a sign of hierarchical communion with the Successor of Peter, who is the great gift of the existing charity and of the apostolic succession for the Good of the People of God and the salvation of the whole human family.

In this regard, however, the situation in many cases today is that the communion is not ideal in its essence and realisation. The theologian J. Ratzinger pointed this out in 'Ten years on from Vatican II' with 'Thesis on this topic' (*Opera Omnia, cit.* pp. 501-504) and in 'The post-Council outcome: failures, tasks and hopes' (*ib.* pp. 505-522).

For that 'unity of the one-subject Church', the final part of Ratzinger's formula of correct hermeneutics, fully deployed on his arrival at the supreme pontificate, he testified to the fact that "Vatican II today stands in the twilight. It has been considered completely outdated by the so-called progressive wing for a long time now, and consequently as a fact of the past that is no longer relevant. On the contrary, it is considered by the other side to be the root cause of the current decay of the Catholic Church and is judged to be a repudiation of Vatican I and the Council of Trent: it is suspected of heresy. As a result, some call for its revocation or a revision that is tantamount to revocation. With regard to both positions, it must first of all be pointed out that Vatican II is supported by the same authority as Vatican I and the Council of Trent, i.e. by the Pope and the College of Bishops in communion with him; and that, also from the point of view of content, it is strictly in continuity with the two previous Councils and in decisive points it reiterates them to the letter, so much so that the particularly distinctive and perceptive formulas

'pari pietatis affectu' and *'ex sese, non ex consensu ecclesiae'* are repeated. Two theses derive from this:

- a) It is impossible to take sides in favour of Vatican II and against the Tridentine Council and Vatican I. Those who say yes to Vatican II, as it has clearly expressed and conceived itself, thereby say yes to the entire binding Tradition of the Catholic Church, and specifically to the two previous councils.
- b) In the same way, it is impossible to take sides in favour of the Tridentine Council and Vatican I, but against Vatican II. Those who deny Vatican II deny the authority that supports the other two councils and thereby annul them, starting from their founding principle. Every choice, in this case, destroys the whole, which exists only as an indivisible unity' (*ib.* p. 501).

To understand the situation, however, let us return to the analysis of 'A balance sheet of Post-Council times', paying initial attention to the first days of the Council in which real catholicity with its Pentecostal hope was experienced, something no longer characteristic of the 'Post-Council fifty years later'. If we leave aside the rest of the author's historical analysis, he arrives at the critical evolution that followed Vatican II, its crisis situation, in which the positive effects of the Great Synod certainly remain (see the synthesis on p. 509). They do not, however, prevent the observation "that the climate within the Church has at times become not simply frostier, but now only poisonous and aggressive, and that partisan attitudes are tearing the community apart... Seeing the facts is not pessimism but rather objectivity" (p. 510).

So what are the causes and what is the right answer? And how did we come to the post-conciliar evolution? In the first place, our crisis coincided with the global crisis of mankind, and so we observe, by way of confirmation, that "without the Council, evangelical Christianity faced a similar crisis" (p. 511). Moreover, the Council's examination of conscience led to the idea of "a Church that is fundamentally and radically sinful... which led to insecurity regarding its own identity, whereas we should know that Christian repentance does not mean denying

oneself, but finding oneself again” (p. 513). Ratzinger concludes that “now it is necessary to reawaken joy for the uninterrupted reality that is in it, from the community of faith that comes from Jesus Christ” (p. 514).

What then is to be done? The Theologian limits himself to two positions that I would say are indispensable; first of all there is the correct placement and evaluation of the Councils that lead to considering them “from time to time as a necessity”, but that always represent an exceptional situation in the Church and cannot be considered in general as the model of its life (p. 516). The second aspect is the “(fundamental) question of the proper reception of Vatican II, which for Professor Ratzinger in 1975 had not yet begun. To make things simple, he refers to two basic themes of the Council. The first is “collegiality (synodality, as it can also be called, given its current expansion), proceeding together and establishing councils” (see p. 517). “Nevertheless, it has also become clearer that, while on the one hand there is collegiality, on the other there is personal responsibility and personal intuition that can be neither replaced nor stifled” (p. 518). The second reason, then, is that of simplicity. In this regard, the author recalls that “man does not understand with reason alone, but also with the senses and the heart, and that pruning must be distinguished from cutting” (p. 519), and furthermore “when faith turns into an earthly messianism, Christianity is betrayed and man is betrayed”. “On the other hand, today we are seeing the rise of a new fundamentalism that only apparently preserves what is strictly Catholic, but in reality it is destroying it from the foundations up” (p. 520). And to think that both tendencies, one particularly attentive to the communion with Tradition, and the other to service to the World, to the human family, in an attitude of incarnation, as the beginning of the paschal mystery, are indispensable to the true Church of Christ! So why are we ‘armed against each other’ if we belong to one rather than the other ‘militancy’? We should start by respecting each other in our words, attitudes and judgements. A little more *longanimitas* is needed, an expression of charity, while

at the same time arguing and communicating and also pointing out what is wrong and divisive, so that it is combined in plural unity. We need to rediscover the dialogue, that which, despite everything, materialised during the Second Vatican Council and we need to reread and live what St Paul wrote, called for and exhorted (first part of Chapter 2) in his letter to the Philippians: “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the World. Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.” (Phil. 2: 1-18).

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