

to send observers to Rome so as not to offend pan-Orthodox unity.<sup>277</sup> Thus the patriarchate of Moscow had very cleverly displaced the patriarchate of Constantinople through the new network of relations with the Vatican. Bea's biographer states: "Painful recriminations among the Orthodox followed, and also against the secretariat, as if it had tried to divide Orthodoxy."<sup>278</sup> In fact, only the meeting between Paul VI and Athenagoras in January 1964 managed to defuse the situation and make possible the participation of observers from the Orthodox Churches starting with the third session of the council. As Komonchak emphasizes: "The decision to invite non-Catholics as observers was one of the most important decisions made during the preparatory period, with consequences for the character the council would assume and the work it would carry out that far surpassed the expectations of even the most optimistic. In more ways than one, their presence at the council marked the end of the Counter-Reformation."<sup>279</sup>

#### c) Communism at the council

The magisterium of the Catholic Church had spoken out repeatedly against communism in terms clearly condemning it, in particular in the encyclical of Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris* dated March 19, 1937,<sup>280</sup> and in the encyclical of Pius XII, *Ad Apostolorum Principum* dated June 29, 1958.<sup>281</sup> A decree of the Holy Office in April 1959 had confirmed the validity of the excommunication dated January 7, 1949, incurred by any sort of collaboration with communism.<sup>282</sup> John XXIII, however, did not agree with the 1949 document, as he confided to several interlocutors, among them

<sup>277</sup> Cf. José Oscar Beozzo, "The External Climate," *op. cit.*, 404.

<sup>278</sup> Schmidt, *Bea*, 382. The Greek-Orthodox Metropolitan Jakovos (1911–2005) of the two Americas went so far as to accuse the Vatican of having used the council to divide and weaken Orthodoxy (A. Wenger, *Vatican II, op. cit., Première Session*, 222–265).

<sup>279</sup> J. A. Komonchak, "The Struggle for the Council During the Preparation," *op. cit.*, 326. Cf. also Y. Congar, O.P. "Le rôle des 'Observateurs' dans l'avancée oecuménique," in *Le Concile Vatican II: Son Église, Peuple de Dieu et Corps du Christ* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984), 90–98.

<sup>280</sup> AAS 29 (1937): 65–106.

<sup>281</sup> AAS 50 (1958): 601–614.



Monsignor Parente (“basically, the communists are seeking justice and are sick people.”)<sup>283</sup>

According to the bishops’ *vota* [written recommendations] that had arrived in Rome for the council, communism appeared as the most error to condemn.<sup>284</sup> In the ante-preparatory phase of the council, a good 378 bishops had requested that it deal with modern atheism and, in particular, with communism, identifying remedies with which to confront the danger.<sup>285</sup> The Vietnamese archbishop of Hué, Ngô-Dinh-Thuc,<sup>286</sup> for example, described communism as “the problem of problems,”<sup>287</sup> the most important question of the moment. Archbishop Ngô-Dinh-Thuc, speaking in the commission on the topic of communism, had declared:

Our Central Preparatory Commission has until now examined many problems, but communism seems to me to be the problem of problems; indeed, it concerns the very existence of Christianity, which communism has put in the utmost danger. To discuss other problems without giving priority to solving the problems that arise from communism would be to follow the example of the theologians of Constantinople who were bitterly debating about the sex of the angels while the Mohammedan army threatened the very walls of the city. The sorrowful condition of the Church in China perhaps is the result of our lack of preparation. However, with regard to the countries

<sup>283</sup> Cited in A. Riccardi, “Dalla Chiesa di Pio XII. alla Chiesa giovannea,” in Alberigo, *Papa Giovanni*, 135–174 at 151.

<sup>284</sup> On the relations between the Church and communism during the council cf. Wiltgen, 272–278; A. Wenger, *Vatican II*, *op. cit.* 1:187–346 and 2:297–316; P. Levillain, *La mécanique politique*, *op. cit.*, 361–439; Vincenzo Carbone, “Schemi e discussioni sull’ateismo e sul marxismo nel Concilio Vaticano II: Documentazione,” in *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia* 44 (1990): 10–68; A. Riccardi, *Il Vaticano e Mosca*, *op. cit.*, 217–304; Giovanni Turbanti, “Il problema del comunismo al Concilio,” in *Vatican II in Moscow*, 147–187; P. Chenaux, *L’Église catholique et le communisme en Europe* (Paris: Cerf, 2009), 239–267.

<sup>285</sup> Cf. V. Carbone, “Schemi e discussioni sull’ateismo e sul marxismo,” *op. cit.*, 11–12.

<sup>286</sup> Pierre Martin Ngô-Dinh-Thuc (1897–1984), Vietnamese, ordained in 1925. archbishop of Hué (Vietnam) from 1960 to 1968. Member of the Commission for the Missions during the first session. After the council, he ordained several bishops on his own initiative and was excommunicated by Paul VI.

that are presently in the hands of communists, for example Laos and Vietnam, it seems to me that the Catholics, and above all the bishops of the Catholic world, must not limit their concern to saying a few prayers, but can offer very powerful help by arousing public opinion among their fellow countrymen on behalf of the oppressed nations. We are all stupefied by the silence of the Catholic world with regard to the agony of the most unfortunate Laotian people and the passion that the Vietnamese people are going through, while in the meantime one hears everywhere the voice of the communists and of their accomplices who live in the democratic nations, of which some are Catholic, who prefer to howl with the wolves: the voice, I say, of those who condemn the victims and glorify the executioners.<sup>288</sup>

In the subsequent preparatory phase, the topic of communism was assigned to the Doctrinal Commission with these instructions: “Let the Catholic doctrine be explained in its entirety, and the principal contemporary errors rejected, namely, naturalism, materialism, communism, and secularism.”<sup>289</sup> The Theological Commission however did not address the issue. Three other commissions dealt with it instead under the pastoral aspect: the Commission for Bishops and the Governance of Dioceses,<sup>290</sup> which accepted a document condemning communism (with three dissenting votes, among them Cardinal Tisserant’s);<sup>291</sup> the Commission for the Discipline of the Clergy and the Christian People, which was evasive, replacing the term “communism” with the more generic term “materialism”; and the Commission for the Lay Apostolate, which also approved a generic, ambiguous document. Also in the work of the Central Commission, which sifted through the proposals submitted by the Preparatory Commissions, the subject did not attract much attention. Cardinal Montini, for example, used very cautious words, asking whether the reason for the spread of communism should not be sought in the errors of the Church herself, and Cardinal Alfrink asked for a distinction between communism’s ends and its means, because to some extent the ends

<sup>288</sup> AD II-II/3:775.

<sup>289</sup> AD II-II/1:408.

<sup>290</sup> AD II-II/3:761–842.



could be considered just.<sup>292</sup> During the first session of the council, Cardinal Tisserant, who presided over the mixed sub-commission responsible for the schema *De cura animarum*, insisted that the word *communismus* be removed from the draft and, according to Giovanni Turbanti, intervened also for the deletion of the paragraphs denouncing the persecutions in communist countries.<sup>293</sup>

On November 2, 1962, Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira met with Cardinal Tisserant and found him, despite his eighty years, "lucid, calm, and lively."<sup>294</sup> The Cardinal confided to him that he had participated in the negotiations with the schismatic Russian Orthodox: "Moscow demanded that no one speak against communism in the council, and Rome agreed," he said, adding that he thought it "possible to speak against materialism and atheism without mentioning communism; in this way the council, which deals only with religion, could accomplish its mission perfectly." Besides, he asserted, "Who could ever speak against taking from the rich so as to give to the poor?" For this reason, in his opinion, the Holy See had accepted the Kremlin's conditions. In the course of the conversation, conducted in French, Tisserant praised Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, described Cardinal Mindszenty as a "*pauvre imbecile*," and declared that it was more difficult to convert a schismatic monarchist than an atheist communist, because "the first accepts only the Tsar as his master, while the second harbors no anti-Roman preconceptions."<sup>295</sup>

Cardinal Mindszenty had remained the last symbol of ecclesiastical resistance to communism, after the death of Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, who had died of poisoning on February 10, 1962. Until then the position of these two pillars of the Church was identical to the instructions issued by the Holy See. In the early sixties, however, both the international and the ecclesiastical picture appeared to have changed.<sup>296</sup>

<sup>292</sup> G. Turbanti, "Il problema del comunismo al Concilio," in *Vatican II in Moscow*, 155.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>294</sup> Maranhão Galliez, *Diario*, November 2, 1962.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.* The meeting, reported by Murillo Maranhão Galliez, was confirmed several times by Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira (A-IPCO, Meeting on September 28, 1980).

<sup>296</sup> Cf. A. Riccardi, *Il Vaticano e Mosca*, *op. cit.*, 151–158. On October 3, 1956 Stepinac wrote to Father Sakač: "A battle of life and death is being waged and it is not possible to retreat if we do not want to betray God. Bloody communism, too, knows very well that it will be destroyed, down