worldview

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VATICAN COUNCIL II

This month Pope John XXIII inaugurates the Second Vatican Council. In the following months the press, radio and television will devote much of their energies to reporting the external conditions of this historic event. These mere externals will, in themselves, be the occasion of enough drama to draw the interest, not only of those whose religious beliefs impel them to follow the event closely, but of anyone whose imagination can be stirred by this sharp focussing of historical forces.

For in Rome meet the representatives of an institution which, as Macaulay reminded his readers, has outlasted all others in the West, against which can be plotted the rise and fall of nations and the discovery of new continents. Through political and intellectual onslaughts, through triumphs, pyrrhic victories and resounding defeats, it has maintained itself with energy and tenacity. And those representatives meet in Rome, a city whose layers of history make even Christianity seem like a relative newcomer to the human scene. Further, in these coming months, Rome will be the intersection of this vertical dimension of time with the horizontal dimension of space, for the representatives will come from every corner of the world as their various colors—white and black and yellow and red—will attest. There will be, in addition, several external reminders that they come from the contemporary world, such as the absence of Jozsef Cardinal Mindszenty, still imprisoned in Hungary.

All of this, combined with the ritualistic pomp and pageantry, will be sufficient basis for months of reporting. But behind the panoply will take place the real work of the Council, the work which will say what rôle the Roman Catholic Church will play in the modern world, whether it is prepared to reform itself from within and to smooth the way for unity, if not reunion, with other Christian bodies.

Expectations of what the Council will accomplish, of whether it will be a success or a failure, have already gone through an almost complete cycle. Naive and uninformed enthusiasm early gave way to an uncertain skepticism, and both, it now seems, have given way to cautionary hope. But once the Council is underway the most acute perception, the most informed expectation must wait with the knowledge that the Council may take unexpected turns and produce surprising results. And it may be that the accomplishments with the most profound effect will not be apparent in the life time of the participants.

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So much is true. But it cannot obscure the fact that the Council is taking place at a crucial time and will invite immediate assessments. What a noted Victorian said of his age can be applied without great distortion to our own: we are living between two worlds, one dead and the other powerless to be born. We see old orders shattered and fail to see the shape of the new ones that must take their place. Even the nostalgia which joined us to periods regarded as stable, peaceful and pleasant is fading away. We are becoming accustomed to the view that the profundities which describe our age have become its clichés. We see nations, however uneasily and uncertainly, and however newly formed, learning to pursue their national interests under the threat of nuclear disaster.

It is in this context that the Council is taking place and in this context that it will be immediately judged. As far as the Catholic Church itself is concerned the conditions for the Council are propitious. Aside from the normal, expected strife the internal life of the Church is relatively peaceful. The most militant external threat, Communism, is not highly damaging. And the general atmosphere in which it takes place is far removed from that of the last Council (1870) which the New York *Herald* termed "a big farce, a grand archeological show" and which allowed

the New York *Times* to call the Holy See a "degrading influence."

For the first time there will be official observers from outside the Roman Catholic Church (as there were, for the first time, official Catholic observers at the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi). And not only Christians, but others, believers and nonbelievers, will watch to see how the Church pronounces on such essential matters as religious liberty, relations of Church and State, or the role of the laity. If the Council proceeds in the spirit of John XXIII it will emphasize things that unite rather than things that divide. If it does, and meets the response it can properly expect, then not only the Catholic Church, but all men who share an ultimate concern for human dignity and international peace, will be able to front the future with greater strength and effectiveness and a realistic hope for a more ordered world. Amid all, in the modern world, that tends to sunder and shatter relations between men, the Council may serve to recall men to their essential unity.

CUBA, PAST AND PRESENT

Cuba has been a burr under the saddle of our foreign policy for some years now. As a result, our attitudes toward the regimes of both Batista and Castro, under the administrations of both Eisenhower and Kennedy have been jumpy and erratic. When pressed to act we have: we finally withdrew support from Batista and he was overthrown; we supported an invasion of Castro's Cuba and he was not overthrown. Between such moments, we have had time to recoup and formulate a sound policy. With the unerring accuracy of hindsight, it is easy to say that we have failed to make the best use of these quiescent periods.

Now, as the Communist buildup increases, as more men and arms are shipped in from Russia, irritation increases, another crisis seems clearly in the making, and the call for some quick, decisive action grows louder. While many Americans criticize the limited actions our government has taken, precisely because they are limited, America's allies seem to be critical of our government because it has acted at all. What one views as apathy and lethargy the other sees as near-hysteria.

At this point it is unlikely—and it would certainly be foolish—that the administration will follow the course recommended by either of these two significant and vocal groups, one within and the other outside our country. A full-scale blockade or an invasion of the island, which is one recommendation, could succeed in replacing Castro. But the price would be exorbitant—to us, to our allies, and to our negotiations and maneuvers in various other parts of the world, not least of all Berlin. But it would be equally foolish—and, fortunately, it is just as unlikely—to act as if Castro's Cuba does not present a real problem. It may not pose a significant military threat and it is hardly a showcase for Communism, but it *is* a Communist base in our hemisphere. If our allies do not see it as a problem, we must shoulder the burden alone.

It is frequently pointed out that Cuba is only ninety miles off the coast of the United States. The reverse is also true, and it allows us a freedom of action that no other country has in relation to Cuba. We could readily launch vast military forces if conditions called for it. Our task now is to see that such conditions do not arise, that Cuba does not become the Communist showcase it was intended to be, that an effective campaign of subversion does not fan out from that island to other countries in the hemisphere. What is demanded is neither apathy nor hysteria, but simply the application of knowledge and ability we can be expected to possess.

In the magazines

The Spring 1962 issue of *Cross Currents*, devoted entirely to the Second Vatican Council, constitutes a dialogue between Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Christians, both priests and laymen. They present their expectations for the outcome of the deliberations in Rome and what reforms, renewals or innovations they wish to see discussed and acted upon. Articles from France, Germany, Spain, Italy and Poland (results of a symposium begun by the French monthly, *Esprit*) are included in the volume, as well as a number from the U.S. A view of the Council by Asian and African lay-