

The Vatican and Communism from 'Divini Redemptoris' to Pope Paul VI

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The period between the publication of the encyclical 'Divini Redemptoris' (On Atheistic Communism) in 1937 and the election of the Polish Pope, John Paul II, was marked by a definite and fundamental change in Vatican/Communist relations. This study attempts to chart this development, explaining exactly how and why this transformation has occurred. The few other studies of this subject have all lacked a historical perspective, and have therefore tended to encourage the false notion that the views and action of the successive popes have remained the same. Part I of this essay examines the hostile intransigence of Pius XI and Pius XII during the Second World War and the Cold War that followed, and centres upon the startling change of attitude promoted by Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council. The more cautious but perhaps more significant promotion and extension of this Johanne ideal by Paul VI over a longer period of time will be analysed (along with a brief look at the state of Vatican/Communist relations in the present day). In Part II this study is essentially Vatican centred; the Church is large and often ambiguous, and local hierarchies, groups of militant lay Catholics, Christian Marxists, prominent theologians, and individual clergy, have only been analysed when they influence or have helped to change the Holy See. Papal speeches and letters, promulgations and edicts from the Holy Office and the other Vatican Congregations, and particularly Papal encyclicals, have been used extensively, and other primary material such as journals, reviews, newspapers and other contemporary writings have been consulted where necessary. The change in the nature of communism and the policies of the communist world (primarily the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, but also China, Indo-China, Latin America and the European Communist parties) I have treated as a secondary development due to limitations of time, space and sources. What I have been concerned with is a development perhaps best illustrated by the case of Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary, who when released from prison by the Communist authorities in 1956 was triumphantly heralded as a hero by Pius XII. However, by 1974 he had become a source of great embarrassment to Communist-Vatican detente and was un-

ceremoniously dismissed by Paul VI as Primate of Hungary and Archbishop of Esztergom. Contrary to all popular myth, the Vatican somewhere along the line, had undergone quite a radical transformation.

*Vatican-Communist relations before the War:
Pius XI and 'Divini Redemptoris'*

Pius IX was the first Pope to concern himself with the notion of communism and his encyclical letter 'Qui pluribus' of 1848 sets the scene for over a century of Papal denunciations. "This evil doctrine which is called Communism, radically contrary to natural rights itself; this doctrine, once accepted, would be the complete ruin of all rights, institutions, properties and of human society itself." Leo XIII was equally concerned with that "sect of men who are known by the diverse and almost barbaric names of Socialists, Communists, and Nihilists." (Encyclical Letter, *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, 1878). He articulated a fear that was to dominate Catholic thinking until John XXIII – that Communism was bent on destroying the entire framework of civil society. His answer to the problem was characteristically clear and strident: "Communism (is) a mortal pest which attacks the very backbone of human society and which should be annihilated." (Ibid) Strong words indeed, and these sentiments were re-echoed after the Russian Revolution, particularly when the Soviets began to intensify their persecution of the Church in the late 1920s. Soviet propaganda effectively countered papal pronouncements – religion was described as "an evil no less pernicious than alcoholism or prostitution."¹ Anti-clerical persecution became more subtle (and more effective) as the years passed and the Vatican's response became more hysterical, prompted partly by a total inability to do anything about the situation other than denounce and wait for better days. In the 1930s persecution of Mexican communists, plus the 'out-stretched hand' to France intensified the conflict between Communism and the Vatican and this reached an unprecedented level during the Spanish Civil War. Diplomatic documents suggest that that War lay behind the silence of Pius XI over the German violations of the concordat with the Vatican. The Pope was persuaded that the Nazis should be tacitly supported because they were the main opponents of communism on the eastern front, a view which, as we shall see, was later shared by his successor Pius XII. The German hierarchy, inspired by the events in Spain, were less equivocal: "As always when the call of the Fatherland is sounded, we German Catholics are prepared to place ourselves at the disposition of the Fuhrer in his campaign against a creed which threatens the entire universe."² The Pope does not and cannot act in the isolation which he is mythically supposed to enjoy, and the pressures on him to oppose Communism were the same as those which

acted on the rest of the western world in this period.

Pius XI was easily swayed by these pressures. He was brought up in a strictly conservative Lombard environment and in his early days supported Don Sturzo's Popolare Party because of its anti-socialist bias. He was also greatly influenced by a visit to Poland when, as Mgr Ratti, he witnessed tremendous persecution and suffering amongst Polish Catholics. He supported the Anschluss of Austria and Germany, and much of the fascism of the pre-war period, based as it was on authority, stability and hierarchy, and revolving around the family, was warmly received in the Vatican. Pius was willing to support almost any anti-communist movement and until 1935 he saw Mussolini as a "man of destiny". As Count de Salis had pointed out: "Everything in the Vatican is dominated by the Pope's fear of Russian Communism, that the Soviets may reach Western Europe."³ Not only was Communism destroying the Church on a practical and pastoral level, but Pius saw its doctrines of class warfare and the abolition of private property as an insidious threat to the moral and spiritual bases of society. These fears and prejudices came to the surface in the famous encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* (1937) which must have left any of the faithful who were considering the possibilities of a dialogue with communism more than a little dismayed: "Communism is intrinsically evil, and no one wishing to save Christian civilisation can collaborate with it in any conceivable enterprise." The encyclical concludes that atheistic materialism will erode human liberty, and the description of the Communists as evil conspirators and Machiavellian plotters which seemed so real in those troubled pre-war years, appears as naive and glaringly simplistic to the modern reader. This pronouncement was motivated by very real fears and events: the intensification of anti-religious activity in Russia, the spread of Communism in China and Indo-China, the decision to launch popular fronts in 1935 and above all the civil war in Spain, Pius XI saw himself as the great protector of the faith and it was his duty to put the world on its guard against communism – hence the encyclical. But he was also motivated by a genuine desire to find a Christian solution to the world's problems and the major part of *Divini Redemptoris* consists of a positive attempt to put forward an alternative Papal social doctrine.

The Vatican's obsession with the 'Communist menace' was reflected in the election of the next Pope, Pius XII, who was elevated to the Chair of St Peter simply because he was an experienced diplomat and anti-communist, and was therefore suitably qualified for the years of war and turmoil that were to follow his election.

Pius XII and the Vatican Cold War 1939-58

The first major problem that Pius XII had to face came after

June 1941 when the Soviet Union was invaded by Germany and the War turned into a crusade against communism for the Fascist powers. It has been suggested that because of Pius' clear obsession with the threat of "Bolshevism" he took care not to condemn the actions of the Axis powers, and it is significant that the Pope cancelled a speech he was to have made attacking the Nazi persecution of the Church when he learnt of the Russian war. However, he refused to surrender to pressures from the Italian government to formally bless the German and Italian soldiers in order to boost morale. "We took special care notwithstanding certain tendentious pressures not to let fall from Our lips, or from Our pen, one single word of encouragement for the war against Russia in 1941."⁴ Although these words were spoken well after the event (and the Vatican is notorious for whitewashing its history), they are significant. The Italian hierarchy were not quite as reticent however, and perhaps the Pope turned a blind eye, and perhaps even secretly welcomed the sermons of encouragement which his bishops were quick to issue: "With all our heart we pray that the struggle may bring victory and the destruction of a system based on negation and subversion". The Italian soldiers "at this decisive hour defend our ideals of Freedom against the Red Barbarism."⁵

What motivated Pius XII during this period? Like all Popes he seemed more concerned with the future than with the present, and he was certainly concerned to protect the long term position of Catholics and Catholic structures in Europe, particularly in Germany, so that after the war the Church might emerge relatively unscathed and play a more important role in determining the future course of world events. However, he also desired to remain as neutral as possible during the war in order that he might act as peacemaker if necessary, and also to prevent reprisals from the Nazi government on German Catholics and guard against a schism in the German Church, which would inevitably follow repeated denunciations of Fascism. This neutrality is often difficult to accept, however: the Vatican clearly opposed the sending of arms to the Soviet Union by the Americans, the Apostolic Delegate in Washington Mgr Cicognani clearly stating that "a dogmatic authority is given to this interpretation, and most American Catholics conclude that Pontifical instructions conflict with the policy of the US government".⁶ When Roosevelt asked the Pope to reverse this situation, Pius cynically pointed out that he was concerned with the system that was most dangerous to the Church (that is, Communism), and he concluded rather naively that the best outcome of the war would be a defeated Communism and a weakened Nazism so that later it too could be destroyed,⁷ Pius seems to have regarded Nazism as the lesser of two evils, prompted, no doubt, by the fact that in the Fascist countries the Church was allowed a

freedom which did not exist in the USSR. However, the Pope did allow *Divini Redemptoris* to be re-interpreted by the American hierarchy in answer to the requests of the American President, and an examination of his six Christmas broadcasts during the war reveals a careful neutrality. He was careful though to guard against communist influence on his own back-door: in a speech in 1943 to 100,000 Turin workers who were striking in an attempt to bring down the Mussolini government, the Pope warned of the dangers of listening to communists, those with "specious and fatuous theories and visions of future bliss.... These false prophets are preaching that salvation must come through a revolution that would destroy social stability and dissolve unique national characteristics".⁸

When the war ended the diplomatic caution that Pius had observed on the international scene, if not in Italy, dissolved rapidly, and the advance of the Soviets into Eastern Europe marked another stage in Communist-Vatican hostilities. These setbacks for the Church were made worse by the complete destruction of the missions in China where the Church was regarded as an outpost of western imperialism, and the advances made by the local French and Italian communist parties. The Vatican opposed any attempts at co-existence made by the clergy in Soviet controlled Europe and made heroes of those who were imprisoned by the Communists. The rift widened and positions became more entrenched. Stalin, convinced that the Holy See was merely the spiritual arm of Western capitalism, and with the bitter memory of the many Catholic troops who had invaded Russian soil, stepped up his persecution and extended it to the newly formed Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The era of the Cold War had begun, and the Vatican's attempt at neutrality soon crumbled. Naturally in Italy it actively intervened in the crucial 1948 elections, but the trial of Cardinal Mindszenty a year later provoked a storm of protest from the Pope which culminated in the unprecedented decree of July which excommunicated Catholics who were members of, or who gave assistance to, the Communist Party. Despite Pius XII's claims for the universal mission of the Papacy, the Pope quite clearly supported the formation of NATO, and gave every encouragement to the newly formed Christian Democrat parties and Catholic Action groups. An unholy alliance of United States finance, the propertied sections of the European community, and the Vatican, combined to oppose Communism in any and every way possible, and in Italy particularly, Vatican influence kept the Catholic vote in firm opposition to all the Left-wing parties.

With the death of Stalin in 1953, relations began to improve. Changes in the communist world – Tito, notions of decentralisation and "polycentrism", the twentieth Congress of CPSU, the

emergence of China, and a new breed of non-aligned 'Third World' countries – began to soften the Soviet monolith and these changes were reflected in a slight mellowing of attitude at the Vatican. The Holy See was still not prepared to tolerate a liberal attitude within the Church itself however and the 1950s were marked by denunciations of 'progressive Christians' and notions such as co-partnership in industry and trade union reform, as well as the termination of the worker-priest experiment in France because of the Marxist ideas which began to influence and affect the clergy involved. In 1956 the Pope denounced any attempts at dialogue with Communists. "It is with extreme misgivings that we deplore the support given by Catholics, ecclesiastical or laymen to certain confusing manoeuvres ... Can one put in doubt the bad faith of those who organise these "conversations" or "meetings"? What is the use of discussion without a common language? And can it be useful when the interlocutors have neither the objectives nor the moral values accepted by the two parties; which excludes any form of "co-existence in sincerity"? ... (Christmas message, 1956)

The Vatican's intransigent and hostile attitude to communism during these years reflects the personality and character of Pius XII. As a Nuncio in Munich in 1919, he was threatened with hand-guns when Communists burst into his office during the Spartacists rising and this experience deeply affected him (it troubled him in his sleep throughout his life). His philosophy moreover was rooted in an earlier pessimistic age, and like his predecessor he believed his task was to warn and admonish the world, to expose error and point out sin. He believed in a natural law and a divine order for mankind which if forsaken could only lead to false philosophies (like communism) which would deceive and pervert mankind.⁹ He never saw communism as a political programme for economic and social reform but as a new religion, and as he grew older his obsession grew, and his pronouncements became more dogmatic and insistent. The negative attitude of the Pope did little to further a Catholic response to the social problems of the day and given his awareness of the social conditions which gave rise to Communism, this was a chance missed. Furthermore, movements campaigning for social justice were too readily branded as "Communist" by a Pope blinded by a fear of Communism which sprang from an incomplete and therefore unbalanced picture of the Soviet Union.

Pius wanted peace, but he always linked this with a harsh and unsympathetic notion of justice. Because the Eastern European countries were "the victims of unjust aggression", (Christmas broadcast, 1948) there could be no compromise with Russia, in fact, Pius even seemed to favour a war of liberation against the Communists. His ideas could only heighten the Cold War tension:

in the same Christmas broadcast he proposed that “any violator of international law ought to be placed in an infamous solitude outside civilised society”. Eminent historians have tended to ignore or misinterpret these aspects of the Pope’s character. Pius clearly departed from Papal teaching in his suggestions of collective security, and sanctions against offending states; such principles were merely tools with which to attack Communism and were not apparent when Germany and Italy were the offending parties in the Second World War, or when the United Nations intervened in Korea in 1950. It seemed the Pope was only disturbed by aggression when it was Catholic religious liberty that was under attack.

And so the pontificate of Pius XII was marked by an unprecedented hostility between the Vatican and the Communist world. No dialogue was possible, even if it had been desired. War time problems and the Cold War conditions which followed were partly the cause of this antagonism, as was the particular character of Pius XII and the nature of the Church at that time. The brutal persecution which the Communist world seemed to inflict on all forms of organised religion aggravated the situation still further. Indeed some would have said that conflict was inevitable and eternal between two such monoliths, both claiming to enshrine the whole and only Truth, if it had not been for the remarkable changes that were to occur after the election of John XXIII to the Petrine Ministry in the winter of 1958.

From Anathema to Dialogue: Pope John XXIII

The new Pope’s reign began with a number of significant and unprecedented developments in Vatican-Communist relations. At the end of 1958 John withdrew recognition from the envoys of the pre-war Polish and Lithuanian governments which had previously enjoyed full recognition at the Vatican – a situation which had always annoyed Moscow. When the Italian President, Gronchi, made an official visit to the Soviet Union, it was strongly rumoured (and the rumour, even though it may not be true, is significant) that Pope John had personally blessed the visit, in the face of vociferous opposition from prominent members of the episcopate. Then there was the ‘Opening to the Left’ debate in Italy, whether or not the Christian Democrats should ally with the Socialist parties, and a strange silence was heard at the Vatican, when in previous years, denunciations would have filled the air.¹⁰

Perhaps the first real sign of a deeper change came with the publication of the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* in May 1961. The ‘socialistic’ tone of the encyclical marked a departure from traditional Papal teaching, clearly advocating a form of State intervention that would have been unacceptable to previous Popes as an infringement of personal liberty. This was partly why communism had always appeared evil – it had seemed to destroy the personal

and natural rights of the individual, so that man found it difficult to freely achieve his supernatural end. John revolutionised this teaching: "So long as social action does in fact adhere to ... principles within the framework of the moral order, it is not of its nature dangerous or detrimental to the individual. On the contrary, it will in all likelihood help him to develop and perfect his own personal talents...." (*Mater et Magistra*, para 67). The scope of social welfare proposed by John ranged from further education, health care and the right to social security, to leisure and recreational facilities. Contrary to previous Papal social encyclicals John had little to say about the Soviet bloc or Communism, and was careful to indicate that the Vatican was not the natural ally of the Right, nor implacably opposed to modern socialist developments. In the section on incomplete and false ideologies he lightly passes over an opportunity to denounce Communism which would have been eagerly seized by Pius XII: "Some of these (ideologies) were little more than ephemeral; others have undergone, and are still undergoing, substantial change; others again, are proving themselves less and less attractive to modern man". (p. 213. All paragraph references to encyclicals are CTS). In fact, John is careful when he does denounce, to include every kind of political totalitarianism, including "totalitarian democratic" in his strictures.

The Pope had an opportunity to put some of his new found ideals into practice during the Cuban crisis a few months later and his forthright appeal for peace was warmly welcomed by Khrushchev who in an unprecedented interview with Tass recognised the peaceful intentions of the Vatican: "Such an appeal is a good sign". (*Documentation Catholique*, 20 Sept 1961).

John had announced his intention of summoning a Vatican Council as early as January 1959, and in the preparatory commissions which began to meet in the following year and in the questionnaire replies that were sent in from all over the world, the demand for another fierce assault on Communism was strong. The preparatory central commission included this discussion topic under the euphemistic title, 'Pastoral care of the faithful so that they might not be misled by the errors of materialism'. Even in this early stage the word 'communism' had been dropped by the Council organisers. This was partly to offset the fears of the delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate representing the Orthodox Church who had agreed to attend the Council only if the Fathers refrained from political condemnations of communism.

In his opening address to the Council in October 1962, the Pope laid down a clear framework for the Council Fathers. He touched only briefly on the fact that many of his bishops could not attend because of imprisonment or detention. He was quite firm in his intention that the Council should be inspired by a pos-

itive and optimistic spirit free from the severe denunciations that had characterised the previous two pontificates. "Nowadays ... the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She concedes that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations". He went on to criticise those "prophets of doom" around him at the Vatican (with their continual warnings about the danger of Communism) and even hinted that Communism could be of service to religion and lead in the long run "to the greater good of the Church". Pope John was in effect inviting the Fathers to rethink many of their attitudes and prejudices and consider the world need for dialogue and peace.

The Russians were not slow to respond to these gestures of reconciliation. In November 1962 Khrushchev sent a letter of greeting to the Pope on his eightieth birthday, and the following year saw the release of Mgr Slipyi, Archbishop of Lvov after an eighteen year Siberian imprisonment. Perhaps the most significant sign of the new detente, was the visit to the Vatican of Khrushchev's son-in-law, Alexis Adjubei, editor of *Isvestia*, who was accorded a private audience with the Pope. Anti-communists in the Italian episcopate were furious, and the audience was blamed for the sharp increase in the Communist Party vote in the following elections.

Before John died in June 1963 he published his last and most important encyclical, the celebrated *Pacem in Terris*, which went even further than *Mater et Magistra*, in its search for a new relationship with the Communist ideology and which is worth studying in depth. Possessed by the urgent need for peace which all felt in those years following the Cuban crisis, John was determined not to bow to anti-communist pressures in the Vatican. He told Mgr Pavan, "I cannot attribute ill-will to either side. If I do, there will be no dialogue and doors will be closed". The encyclical made a number of revolutionary distinctions. First, between "error as such and the person who falls into error ... A man who had fallen into error does not cease to be a man", (*Pacem in Terris*, p. 158) and therefore should be respected and listened to. The second distinction is "between a false philosophy of the nature, origin and purpose of men and the world, and an economic, social, cultural and political programme, even when such a programme draws its origin and inspiration from that philosophy". (p. 159) It was therefore possible for Communist programmes to contain "good and commendable elements", for John saw God working in all men, Christian or otherwise. The Pope was clearly far more pragmatic than Pius XII, and the view that although Communism was a false philosophy it may have good practical objectives, for instance a desire for peace, signified a fundamental break with traditional

teaching. John explained that although Marxism may be an erroneous philosophy in “the changing conditions in which it has to operate”. (p. 159) it may promote and encourage peaceful co-existence and dialogue.

Furthermore, John, unlike Pius, was able to clearly state that war is not “a fit instrument with which to repair the violation of justice”, (p. 127) even the violation that had occurred in Eastern Europe, and he denied that nations built up armaments out of aggression – fear was the motivating force. In a similar spirit of optimism he supported the United Nations Organisation, which Pius could never tolerate because of the Soviet veto and the power of the Communist bloc.

Perhaps the most important single sentence in *Pacem in Terris* opens the way for future dialogue with the communists. “It might sometimes happen, therefore, that meetings arranged for some practical end – though hitherto they were thought to be altogether useless – may in fact be fruitful at the present time, or at least offer prospects of success.” (p. 160) The Pope was aware that as times change so do ideologies and so do solutions to problems. When this encyclical is compared with *Divini Redemptoris* or some of the sermons of Pius XII one is aware of a fundamental change in attitude and a new approach to the problems of East-West rapprochement. The very fact that the encyclical is addressed not just to the faithful, but to “all men of good will” even those who espouse a hostile ideology, is a significant departure from tradition. In effect this reversed Pius XII’s ruling and meant that Catholics were now able to vote for the Communist and other left-wing parties in Italy. The encyclical was issued just three weeks before an Italian general election, during which the Christian Democrats lost four million votes and the Socialists made large advances. Naturally the encyclical was blamed in Catholic right-wing circles. The Pope must have been advised to withhold publication until after the election and it is significant that this line was not taken: John quite clearly wanted to change the tone of Italian politics and must have known and considered the implications of his encyclical.

What caused this clear change in the position of the Vatican in relation to the Communist world? As we have seen, the personality of Pope John XXIII is at the centre of the change. His early life at Sotto il Monte, his experiences amongst the peasants in Bulgaria and later his time as a Nuncio in Paris had encouraged a broad minded and tolerant spirit in the young Roncalli. Less tainted with the prejudices of his predecessors and with a refreshing disregard for philosophical differences he sought dialogue and friendship with those once regarded as dangerous and subversive. He accepted and embraced the modern world and refused to pontificate on political or economic affairs in the manner of previous Popes. His

honesty even led him to point out the errors of past Papal teaching (including Pius IX's famous *Syllabus of Errors*), in a way which can be likened to Krushchev's attack on Stalin at the twentieth Party Congress. His optimism and positive approach were rare qualities in the Vatican at that time. In an age when China was re-starting its persecution of the Church and the fear of the H-bomb loomed large in Western European minds he never once issued a direct denunciation of communist theory or practice. Even when he talked of the "Church of Silence" behind the iron curtain he was quick to point out that although the persecuted "merit our praise and our compassion, we must pity even more their persecutors, who are no less our brothers in God".¹¹ Pius would never have reached such a conclusion.

Another important factor in explaining the change in the Church's attitude is more straightforward – the old policy was simply not working. Aggressively confronting the Communist world and calling the faithful to martyrdom simply encouraged the Communist states to further persecution and slowly destroyed the local Churches. In order to survive the Vatican had to realise that Communism was here to stay and, unable for organizational and theological reasons to go underground it had to attempt to construct a working relationship with each individual government, which demanded compromise and acceptance, in return for a limited legality and freedom of action. Bea, Willebrands and Casaroli were instructed by John XXIII to formulate a new diplomatic policy, given that the Church could not sustain a prolonged conflict for an indefinite period.

The Church desired a new policy for another reason – it needed to be seen as truly neutral in the eyes of the world if it was to fulfil its mission for peace and increase its influence in world affairs. The Catholic Church has always longed to return to those days when its moral weight could mobilise public opinion, and in the age of the Cold War it certainly wanted to be seen working for peace and conciliation; and this if it was to have any chance of success required an accommodation with Communism. Furthermore the Vatican had learnt that it could not make pronouncements on matters of faith without these having political implications and repercussions, and it genuinely desired that this situation should not lead it into the arms of Western capitalism. The Church needed to preserve its freedom of action if it was to fulfil its pastoral mission.

This led to the change in the Church's attitude towards Italy already described. In the past, too great an involvement in Italian politics had clouded the vision of the Vatican. Concern to 'save Italy' had led Pius XI into the arms of the Fascists, and Pius XII's obsession with Communism after the war and his 1949 ban particularly

were partly due to his fears of a Communist takeover by Togliatti. John refused to continue the attempt to control the course of Italian politics, especially the attempt to exclude from government all but the Christian Democrats: *Pacem in Terris* and especially the date of its publication are evidence that the Pope had his eye on a wider horizon.

This broader vision soon revealed to the Vatican that conditions in the world were changing, and it became evident that the Church too would have to change, would have to be brought up to date, if it was to understand, and remain relevant to the modern world. Primarily the Vatican perceived that Communism had changed significantly since the time of Pius XII. Pope John made the distinction between the old hard-line Stalinist leaders and the new forces of the Khrushchev era,¹² and was also aware that the Church behind the iron curtain, especially in Poland, was beginning to be allowed greater freedom. Indeed the Vatican, perhaps imbued with that spirit of optimism and confidence that sprang from an era of increasing prosperity and stability, seemed to be following the line of general political development, far less pre-occupied with these iron curtain nations, and more concerned with the developing world in Africa and Latin America. In *Pacem in Terris* in discussing the rights of these "emerging" peoples, the Pope seemed to concentrate his attack on Western cultural and economic imperialism, (*Pacem in Terris*, pp. 121-125) and the Communists, no longer the sole object of Vatican denunciations encouraged and welcomed this change of direction. Moreover, in these nations themselves, especially in Latin America, the fear of losing many of its members led the Church to reconsider its connection with the Establishment. Under immense social pressures at home, the South American bishops who came to the Vatican Council with a great conservative reputation, voted consistently on the progressive side, and in turn, pressurised the Vatican into taking the line it did in the social encyclicals, and documents of the Council.

Despite all tradition to the contrary, the position of the Vatican was becoming increasingly determined, especially on political matters, by the pressures and requirements of the age. The period before and during Vatican II witnessed the emergence of a new generation of Catholics who, because of the openness of John's Pontificate were given an opportunity to influence Vatican policy which Catholics had rarely enjoyed on such a scale before. A new breed of theologians arose who began to study and direct attention to such thinkers as Marx, Sartre and Kierkegaard and diverted theology down new and exciting pathways, which had profound implications for the Church as a whole. The work of Teilhard de Chardin and Henri de Lubac inspired the 'new theology', which

called for a re-interpretation and fresh expression of existing Vatican structures, and at the Council itself men like Rahner, Hans Küng and Yves Congar exerted a powerful influence for change. This new liberalism even percolated through to some of the European hierarchies, and before Vatican II, the progressively minded Dutch bishops issued a pastoral letter pressing the Church to discern what was truth in Marxist philosophy, so that a common approach to human problems could be calculated, and a real dialogue emerge. Lay Catholics, hitherto ignored and often dismissed by the leaders of the Church, began to demand and obtain a new influence and involvement in Church affairs and in many cases took the initiative in leading Rome into an increasing dialogue with the rest of humanity, including communism. Furthermore the Vatican realised that they were losing the workers to Socialist and Communist ideals in the West, and therefore encouraged the local parishes to become more socially conscious and evangelical in their outlook and this brought many individual Catholics into dialogue with Marxism. The worker-priests were typical of this kind of activity, and though this experiment, as we have seen, was suppressed by the Vatican, the movement and others like it created a climate of opinion that demanded change and reform, and many of the French bishops and theologians who were behind the movement were very influential in the early stage of Vatican II.

It is clear then, that a new chapter in Vatican–Communist relations was being written during this Pontificate. The character of John XXIII, combined with a realisation that the old policies were neither efficient nor effective, led the Vatican to re-interpret many of its ideas on communism in the face of a changing world situation and under pressure from many reform movements that flowed into and then directed the workings of the Second Vatican Council. But encyclicals and sermons of reconciliation cannot by themselves engender a long term change in an institution like the Catholic Church. The awkward fumbblings of the early 60s detente would have remained simply the monument to a particular Pope and a particular age, if Pope John's initiative was not taken up and extended. His encyclicals were not dogmatic or particularly binding as were Pius XII's; they were pastoral, and their very success was partly due to the fact that John appeared not to pontificate but simply to give the world his personal advice. They were likely to encourage and console those individuals and groups working for dialogue, but they seemed unlikely to compel changes in policy within the hierarchy and the Catholic rank and file. It was possible, (some would have said likely), that the changes John had initiated would have been ignored after his death, if it had not been for the continuing presence in Rome of the Second Vatican Council.

- 1 Circular issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the Ukraine (1923).
- 2 The German hierarchy, *Fulda Pastoral Letter*, (August 1936).
- 3 Count de Salis, British Minister at the Vatican Foreign Office, *Vatican relations with Italy, Annual Report*, (25 October 1922).
- 4 Pius XII, speech to Sacred College and Diplomatic Corps, (25 Feb. 1946).
- 5 Archbishop Constantini, Head of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, sermon in basilica at Concordia.
- 6 *Actes et Documents du Saint Siege*, Vol. 5 No 56 (1 Sept. 1941).
- 7 Reply of Pius XII through his Secretary of State, Mgr Maglione, op. cit. Vol. 5 No 59 (3 Sept. 1941).
- 8 Pius XII, discourse of 13 June, 1943. Reported in '*Osservatore Romano*', (14-15 June 1943).
- 9 See his first encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, (October 1939) for an indication of Pius XII's Thomist philosophy.
- 10 It has been suggested that the Vatican actually gave permission for the negotiations between the two parties (see *Le Monde*, Jan - Feb 1962). The whole tone of *Pacem in Terris* seems to support this theory.
- 11 Address to the Diocesan Synod (31 Jan. 1960).
- 12 John XXIII in interview with Norman Cousins, 12 Dec. 1962. Reported in F. Sweeney (ed), *The Vatican and World Peace*, (London 1970).

On the Fringe

Edward Quinn

I

'I wouldn't belong to this bunch of macaroni merchants for another second if it wasn't the way of laying hold on Christ'. My own feelings about the Church are not exactly the same as those of Stanley Morison when he made this statement many years ago to Tom Burns, but something like this principle has enabled me to remain in the Church as the body of Christ, without feeling obliged to belong to the Catholic club, throughout my three score years and ten. Unlike Morison, I am not a convert, but Catholicism intervened effectively in my life only after childhood. And my first contacts were not with an Italian but with what appeared to be a very Irish and clerical institution.

For those inside and outside the Church in 1908 Catholicism in the West Riding town of Keighley was personified by the parish priest, Joseph Russell, a fine figure of a man who until his death in 1945 was always seen outside wearing a top hat (except on one occasion when he realised half-way up Highfield Lane that biretta and frock coat did not go together). After studies at Waterford and Maynooth, he soon made his mark in the Leeds diocese as preacher and administrator, a successful money-raiser who established four parishes from St Anne's in Keighley and largely paid for their churches before they were cut off. He was very concern-