

# Commentary

THE COUNCIL OPENS. Whatever the outcome of the Second Vatican Council proves to be in terms of formal decrees, perhaps its greatest achievement is that it has come to be at all. From the moment when Pope John announced his intention to call a Council, his initiative has been universally welcomed as marking a new phase in the history of the Church, and that at a time of unparalleled conflict and confusion. It may be that some hopes have been too naively expressed: it is certain that some enthusiastic prophets are bound to be disappointed. But what matters most—and the very summoning of the Council emphasizes it—is the recognition that the Church needs to be freshly equipped for her mission in the world today. And that can only be possible if there is a frank and informed assessment of what that mission is and of the practical ways to implement it.

The preparatory commissions, and in particular the secretariates for the unity of Christians and the media of communication, have assembled a mass of material—all of which is intimately concerned with this primary task and never before presented for the Church's solemn consideration in Council. Only a few years ago the very mention of, say, the mass media of television and the press would have seemed inappropriate to deliberations of this sort. And the changed climate, so sudden and benign as it has been, of the Church's ecumenical action will surely be recognized as a direct consequence of the Pope's decision to call the Council.

There is a danger, no doubt, that such new emphases should be seen as indicating some new process in the traditional conciliar action of the Church. Some commentators, and not only friendly outsiders who can be excused a misunderstanding of the Church's magisterium, have seemed to suppose that the new circumstances demand a new approach to the formulation of Catholic teaching, even an accommodation to the religious insights that have developed outside the unity of the Church, and this in the interests of Christian unity itself. But a Council is not, nor can it be, a democratic assembly in which a view prevails simply by force of persuasion and a majority vote. It is true that the conciliar Fathers are in a real sense the representatives of those they rule, and they would be wise to have always in mind the needs of others too. Discussion there will be, and minorities of opinion will

doubtless emerge. But the authority of the Council in its formal aspect is not a matter of counting of heads. 'It has seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us' must be the formula that concludes the latest Council, as it was of the first Council in Jerusalem in the beginning. It will mean, too, we need not doubt, that 'no further burden is laid upon you than these necessary things'.

For the Council, however much its proceedings are at the mercy of publicity and of mere speculation, is in essence a recall to what is essential in the very constitution of the Church. Consultation does not mean a concession to the shifting tides of human opinion: it is rather the necessary preliminary to the pastoral work of mediating to men, here and now, the truths committed once and for all to the Church of God. The truth does not alter, but its communication to men is a human process; it is a matter of language, of opportunity, of choice. The Pope's initiative, as he himself has frequently emphasized, is concerned above all with the renewal of the Church's mission in terms that have meaning and force for the world of today. It is in such a context that the hope for Christian unity must be seen. It is the Church herself, renewed and pruned of all that is peripheral and the product of a particular time and place, that is the single symbol of reconciliation.

But the Church must appear to men to be what she truly is. An analogy can be found in the architectural forms in which a sacred building is realized. The tradition which it is the Church's work to hand on to men is inalienable. But just as in one age the simple severities of Romanesque are identified with the Church's public image, and in another the soaring Gothic vault, and in yet another the exuberance of Baroque acquires the same external function, so the very language, the modalities of devotion and of theology itself, can—indeed, must—change from age to age. It is the centre that remains; the circumference can vary all the time. And it is from the centre, from the inner reality outwards, that the Church's action springs. So much that exteriorly reflects the Church's life is the product of a culture and of a moment in time. That is as it should be, for the Church exists in the world; she makes use of men.

It is a sign of the present Pope's wisdom that he has called for the help of those to whom the task of presenting the Church to the world is committed. This Council is unique among the long series of Councils, as the Pope has remarked, in the truly international character of its participants. They bring, from every land and tradition, contributions that are new and necessary. The Church's renewal demands not merely

the presence but the active intervention of those who have, with the vast extension of the Church's mission in new countries and in new situations, the precious gift of their own pastoral experience.

In praying for the success of the Council, then, Christians ask for nothing less than that outpouring of the Holy Spirit which may restore to the Church the fulness of her life as at work among men. The individual points of argument and decision matter less than this central need for renewal. And that this should be seen by all men of good will everywhere to be not just a domestic affair for the bishops who are assembled in Rome must be counted a great grace and an augury for a happy outcome.

## Saint Augustine and the Just War

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It is normal today to defend the right of one state to make war against another by comparing a war against aggression with a private individual's exercise of his right of self-defence. If I have a right to live, it seems that I must have a right to protect my life against violent and unjust attack; it is probable that in order effectively to protect myself I may have to use violence, even such as to cause the death of the aggressor in a case of extreme necessity. If an individual can do this, then clearly an organized group can do the same, and this implies the use of an army by a state. Such an army would be used as an individual uses his fists or his sword or his gun in a lawless land; it would be used to protect the life of the country in an internationally lawless world.

Such is the commonsense approach to the justification of war today; and such, if we make allowances for the lack of theological refinement, is the current Catholic view of the just war. It depends for its cogency on an extension of the rights of the individual to the rights of the state.