

Introduction

THE SCENE BEFORE US

“The very future of the world is at stake.” These are not the words of the latest failed prophet of the mass media, predicting the end of the world on a certain date. Rather, they are the words of the Roman Pontiff Benedict XVI in his Christmas message to the Roman Curia in 2010.

In that dramatic address, the Pope compared the scene confronting humanity today with the state of the Roman Empire in the midst of its fall: “The sun was setting over an entire world. Frequent natural disasters further increased this sense of insecurity. There was no power in sight that could put a stop to this decline.”⁴ Today as well, Benedict warned, “moral consensus is collapsing, consensus without which juridical and political structures cannot function. Consequently, the forces mobilized for the defense of such structures seem doomed to failure...”

After nearly fifty years of inexplicable optimism concerning “the modern world” inaugurated by the Second Vatican Council, the Pope returns to the gravely pessimistic line of his preconciliar predecessors, including the admonition by Pius XII in an encyclical on Catholic missions issued eleven years before the Council began:

Venerable Brethren, you are well aware that almost the whole human race is today allowing itself to be driven into two opposing camps, for Christ or against Christ. The human race is involved today in a supreme crisis, which will issue in its salvation by Christ, or in its dire destruction.⁵

Nor has Pope Benedict confined himself to an assessment of the condition of the secular world. For since the Council an entirely new situation has developed *within* the Church, a situation Benedict famously described as “a continuing process of decay” when he was still Cardinal Ratzinger.⁶ Now, speaking as Pope, the former Cardinal Ratzinger has expressed alarm before the entire universal Church concerning “a grave crisis of the sense of the Christian faith and of belonging to the Church.”

On this occasion the Pope announced the creation of a new pontifical council whose specific task will be “promoting a renewed evangelization in countries where the first proclamation of the faith already resounded... but which are going through a progressive

⁴ Benedict XVI, CHRISTMAS GREETING TO THE ROMAN CURIA, December 20, 2010.

⁵ Pius XII, *Evangeliis Praecones* (On the Promotion of Catholic Missions), n. 70.

⁶ *L'Osservatore Romano*, November 9, 1984.

secularization of society and a sort of ‘eclipse of the sense of God’...”⁷ Benedict was referring to what his predecessor had already decried publicly as nothing less than “silent apostasy” throughout a once-Christian Europe.⁸

Here too the currently reigning Pope shatters the post-conciliar “optimism” about the Church and the world, abandoning the myth of a great post-Vatican II “springtime” for the Church. He evokes instead the almost panicked admission of Pope Paul VI in the immediate aftermath of the Council—an admission without precedent in the annals of the pronouncements of Roman Pontiffs:

By some fissure the smoke of Satan has entered into the temple of God: there is doubt, uncertainty, problems, unrest. Doubt has entered our consciences, *and it has entered through the windows which were meant to have been opened to the light.* This state of uncertainty reigns even in the Church. It was hoped that after the Council there would be a day of sunlight in the history of the Church. *Instead, there came a day of clouds, of darkness, of groping, of uncertainty.* How did this happen? We will confide Our thoughts to you: there has been interference from an adverse power: *his name is the devil...*⁹

After Vatican II *the smoke of Satan* entered the Church, afflicting her human element with doubt, uncertainty, problems and unrest. Paul VI himself admitted this in his very capacity as Roman Pontiff, placing the diagnosis beyond any claim of “traditionalist” exaggeration.

And now Pope Benedict further confirms the diagnosis. Indeed, speaking as Cardinal Ratzinger he admitted much earlier that “Developments since the Council seem to be in striking contrast to the expectations of all, beginning with those of John XXIII and Paul VI. Christians are once again a minority, *more than they ever have been since the end of antiquity...* What the Popes and the Council expected was a new Catholic unity, and instead one has encountered a dissension which—to use the words of Paul VI—‘seems to have passed over from self-criticism to *self-destruction.*’”¹⁰

But how did this happen? Once again a Pope himself provides the decisive admission. Speaking only eight years after the Council, Paul VI declared: “the opening to the world [at Vatican II] became a *veritable invasion of the Church by worldly thinking.* We have perhaps

⁷ Cf. Vespers Homily, June 28, 2010.

⁸ John Paul II, *Ecclesia In Europa* (2003), n. 9.

⁹ Paul VI, *Insegnamenti*, Ed. Vaticana, Vol. X, 1972, p. 707.

¹⁰ In Joseph Ratzinger and Vito Messori, *The Ratzinger Report* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 29.

been too weak and imprudent.”¹¹ But how did *that* happen? What explains an “opening” of the Church to the world, the invasion of the Church by worldly thinking, and all the disastrous consequences that have followed? Here we enter into the mystery of the greatest prophecy of our age—the Message of Fatima—recognized as such by the same Popes who admit the ecclesial and civilizational crisis.

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Good Friday, 6 April 2012

Anniversary of the day on which, as the Second Vatican Council declares, “the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ...” *Nostra Aetate* (1965).

¹¹ Address of November 23, 1973, in Romano Amerio, *Iota Unum*, trans. Fr. John P. Parsons (Kansas City: Sarto House, 1996), pp. 9-10.