



Research article

The Historical Revolution of Vatican II and the Vision of a Post-Western Christianity in India

Enrico Beltramini

Notre Dame de Namur University, Belmont, California, USA. 0000-0001-9704-3960

Abstract

The vision of a post-western Christianity in India is traditionally linked to a distinct theological interpretation of Vatican II. According to such an interpretation, Vatican II was a theological revolution that favoured the openness of the Church to the world. In this article, I explore that vision through a historical, rather than a theological, interpretation of Vatican II. In Europe, Vatican II was a historical revolution that promoted the exit of Catholicism from Christendom and the establishment of a new Christian order with no links with Christendom. In India, this post-Christendom order has taken the form of a post-western order.

Keywords: Vatican II; revolution; reception; India; theology; Church; Roman Catholicism



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Introduction

One main effort of Indian theologians in the last four decades has been driven by the purpose of contributing to the construction of an Indian Roman Catholic Church (henceforth, 'Catholic Church' or only 'Church') with a distinct Asian—that is, non-western—flavour. In turn, these theological contributions massively rely on the outcomes of the Second Vatican Council (or 'Vatican II' or simply 'Council'), and, more precisely, on a specific hermeneutical key through which to assess these outcomes: the 'spirit of Vatican II.' From the lens of the 'spirit of Vatican II,' the definitive significance of the Council rests primarily, not on the magisterial documents it produced, but—and this differs from the other ecumenical councils—in the impulse for change and reform that the event inspired, even if they appear to overcome established Church teaching. To put it differently, the 'spirit of Vatican II' stands for the belief that the Holy Spirit protects the texts of the Council from errors that would contradict the Church's essential doctrines. As a consequence, the doctrines are interpreted in light of the Conciliar texts rather than the other way around.

The 'spirit of Vatican II' is not just an expression but has become the brand of a distinct perspective to interpreting the Council. The celebrated divergence on the hermeneutic of the Council, whether it should be considered in terms of continuity with the earlier sacred tradition or

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rather a far greater break from the pre-conciliar Church, has monopolized the reception of Vatican II in Europe. Regarding the former, the hermeneutic of continuity, the Council is an event to be placed in the long history of the Church; as far as the latter is concerned, the hermeneutic of discontinuity (sometimes referred to as the hermeneutic of rupture), the Council is instead the primary judgment criteria of that history. For the supporters of the hermeneutic of continuity, the theological arc designed by the Council Fathers resulted in a reform, a re-form (a new form) of the sacred tradition; for those sympathizing with the hermeneutic of rupture, the Council Fathers moved sacred tradition into new territories. In India, the significance of the conciliar magisterium has been received almost unanimously according to the second option. This distinct hermeneutic of the spirit informs the reception of the Council in South Asia and, as the interpretation goes, the sense that the Council was a theological revolution.

Nobody can underestimate the impact that the Council had on Catholicism in Europe and South Asia. In Europe, the Council has been interpreted as an enormous and felicitous effort to reverse the attitudes and strategies with which the Catholic Church had consistently opposed the modern world, created by the political, philosophical, and scientific revolutions of the previous centuries. This is at least one interpretation of the Council, and it is an interpretation with which many agree. In South Asia, however, the Council has been interpreted mostly in terms of openness to the complex and pluralistic reality of the world.¹ The inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, the theology of religions, the socio-political mission of the Church, the preferential option for the poor, and the liberation theologies are only some of the implications of the notion that Vatican II was not about changing sacred doctrine but reorienting the Church far from walls and barriers and reconciling her with the Asian world in the light of the Gospel.

A celebrated passage of the *Nostra Aetate* underscores the value of other religious traditions; the Church “rejects nothing of what is true and holy” in these religions; she has a high regard for anything that may “reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”² Another fundamental document of the Council, *Gaudium et spes*, states that the Holy Spirit also operates outside of the Church.³ A crucial outcome of the Council has determined a change in the mode of theologizing in India. In the *Dei verbum*, one of the principal documents generated during the Council, the Council Fathers offered a long-awaited revision of the concept of tradition. Tradition (in terms of ‘sacred tradition’) can be explained in terms of a living tradition, that is, it happens in the ongoing life of the Church Tradition, in the words of the Asian bishops, “growth in the understanding of realities and the words handed on [which] takes place ‘through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (Luke, 2:19,51), through the intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth.’ (DV

¹ One may say that the Asian reflection on the Council is far more limited than the western. In his article on the reception of the Council in the period 2001-2019, Massimo Faggioli identifies only two writings in Asia against the hundreds in the West. It is also possible, however, that Faggioli privileges western sources. Massimo Faggioli, “Vatican II: Bibliographical Survey 2016-2019,” *Cristianesimo nella Storia*, vol. 40, no. 3 (2019), 713–738.

² Pope Paul VI, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, Rome, October 28, 1965, 2.

³ Pope Paul VI, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, Rome, December 7, 1965, 22.

8).⁴ In other words, the living reality is an addition to the doctrinal teachings of the councils, symbols of faith, creeds, and liturgical traditions of the Church (*lex orandi, lex credendi*). These are the conciliar pillars of the Indian theology and its vision of an Indian Christianity.⁵

The question this article aims to answer is whether it is possible to identify a different path that led to the contemporary vision of a post-western Church in India, a path that does not depend on the theological interpretation of the Council. The question, in other words, is whether it is possible to draw an alternative genealogy of such a vision so that the established genealogy can be relativized and a different understanding of the lines of thoughts that have infused the present vision of a post-western Church in India can emerge. From different genealogies, in fact, originate different arguments. The established genealogy claims that a theological revolution at Vatican II is the original event of the vision of post-western Christianity in India. That vision finds its justification in a theological event that produced a theological revolution and a relationship of openness between the Church and the world. That openness has subsequently declined in theological advancements in the realms of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, gospel of liberation, social change, and justice. In this paper, I argue that Vatican II as a historical revolution is the interpretation that generated the vision of a post-western Christianity in India. That vision finds its legitimation in a historical event that produced a historical revolution, namely, an exit from Christendom and the search for a post-Christendom order. That search reverberates today in the efforts of Indian theologians to erect a post-western Christianity in India. I draft an alternative genealogy to the present vision of the post-western Christianity in India in which that vision is rooted in an intellectual stream internal to Catholicism that, beginning in 19th-century Europe, has conceived Catholicism as moving beyond Christendom. In Europe, this movement crystallized in the vision of a new Catholicism that, by accepting immanentism, flourishes in a post-Christian world; in India, the vision became that of a new Catholicism that would develop in a post-western world.

In this article, I explain that the historical interpretation of the Vatican, as in the case of the theological interpretation of Vatican II, is twofold: the exit from Christendom, in fact, can be seen as either a return to a new Christendom or a passage to a post-Christendom order. 'A return to a new Christendom' stands for a reform, a re-form, or a new form of Christendom. Once upon a time, an ancient, good Christian order existed, then it became inadequate and obsolete. The Council is the historical event that (1) concludes the corrupted order that replaced the ancient, good order, and (2) generates a new ancient order. The revival, restoration, and retrieval (all terms frequently adopted in this perspective of the new Christendom) of the ancient order is a new order. This is the position of moderates. 'A post-Christendom order,' instead, refers to a revolution—an exit from Christendom that is not propaedeutic to a return to a purified, reformed Christendom but to progress toward a Christian order that has nothing to do with Christendom. This is the position of an intellectual stream within Catholicism that, in the course of history, has

⁴ Office of Theological Concerns Methodology 3.3 in Franz-Josef Eilers (ed.), *For All the Peoples of Asia. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1997 to 2001*. Vol. 3 (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), 362–363. Here the text cites Vatican II document *Dei verbum*. Pope Paul VI, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, Rome, November 18, 1965.

⁵ See Michael Amaladoss, *Experiencing God in India* (Gujarat, India: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 2016), 169–170.

been associated with liberals, democrats, and socialists. For the supporters of the hermeneutic of the post-Christendom Christianity, the Council abandoned the past and pushed Catholicism into a new Christian order. In India, the significance of the conciliar event has been received almost unanimously according to this second option. My argument is that this distinct hermeneutic of the post-Christendom order informs the reception of the Council in South Asia. To be more specific, I claim that, in South Asia, the post-Christendom order has taken the form of a post-western Christian order.

In this article, I encourage thinking and discussion across historical contexts. It is an attempt to propose a critical engagement with both the Council and Indian Christianity that recognizes a novel connection between the two phenomena. The established genealogy addresses the Council theologically and interprets it as primarily a theological effort to open the Church to the world. The suggested genealogy instead deals with the Council historically and frames it as a historical event that marked the exit of Catholicism from Christendom. At first approximation, Christendom is Christian civilization, the civilization that Christianity embedded during the European Middle Ages. The Council was the exit of Catholicism from Christendom, an exit that (and Pope Francis would agree with this) is ongoing.⁶ Thus, the established genealogy identifies in Vatican II through the lens of a theological hermeneutic; the alternative genealogy, instead, constructs Vatican II through the prism of a historical hermeneutic. The former stresses the post-conciliar era and the trajectory initiated at the Council, while the latter focuses instead on the pre-conciliar period.

In this article, I establish a direct link between a distinct, historical interpretation of Vatican II and the vision of post-western Christianity in India. Moreover, I suggest a connection between the history of Catholicism in Europe and in South Asia, as the trajectory of the latter at some level resembles that of the former. Some Indian scholars might resent this approach and believe that I exhibit a depreciable form of cultural paternalism—namely that I consider Indian Christianity unable to forge its own path, independent of western influences. My intention, however, is different: I explore the possibility that similar historical and theological considerations bring different Catholic communities to pursue routes that show a certain level of consistency. To put it differently, I assume that different Catholic realities might reflect a certain level of intersection despite the distinction of cultural and historical contexts. In no way do I assume a causation between European and South Asian Catholicism, but instead a correlation.⁷ Under these conditions, I feel justified in my attempt to adopt given frames of analysis and apply them to both the European and Indian realities.

Here, I offer a few words about terminology. The concept of 'revolution' applied in this article assumes a progressive philosophy of history, that is, the nexus of a certain philosophy of history and an interpretation of history as political. As a philosophical category, revolution implies history as a permanent change (or progress), as a Becoming; it implies a movement from the past into the future. Revolution is the opposite of Tradition (as a philosophical concept), namely, the primacy of contemplation, the experience of the eternal in the flux of time, the classic conception

⁶ Pope Francis, "Ma il Cammino è ancora lungo," *La Repubblica*, October 2, 2022, 37.

⁷ On the difference between historical causation and correlation, see: Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 189.

of a worldview founded on the metaphysical reality of Being. In this article, I carefully distinguish Tradition as a philosophical concept from tradition as sacred tradition. The suffix 'post' in post-western and post-Christendom stands for a movement beyond the West and beyond Christendom.

I offer a fourfold schema to understand the different intellectual lineages within Indian Catholicism. Liberalism hinges on the autonomous and self-sufficient value of the individual, promoting a society in which the state and the market mutually negotiate their relationship. Socialism focuses on the necessity to suppress social privileges and to promote total equality among social members. Nationalism promotes the exaltation and defense of the nation, which is considered the chief social value. Both progressivism and radicalism demand a process of change and question traditional institutions; the former, however, suggests a reform of the existing order whereas the latter encourages projects to create perfect societies and replace current social orders. Another way to put it is this: progressivism and radicalism share the same theory of progress based on the belief that human development bears a progressive and unidirectional character. They differ on the nature and intensity of such progress: progressives accept modernity and a certain degree of innovation, and radicals embrace modernity and wish to lead it to the most extreme consequences. Both moderatism and conservatism are political philosophies that support tradition in its various representations— religion, culture, identity, beliefs, and customs— and contrast all thrusts that encourage radical social change. Moderatism wishes to adapt to the present an order that existed in the past. Conservatism is a radical ideology of those who challenge all forms of evolution and revolution in order to return to the principles of earlier times. Another way to put it is this: moderates accept modernity critically, and conservatives challenge modernity and wish to turn back to the premodern sociotheological order.

As usual, Church is female.

Revolution in Europe

The story is well known to scholars of the religious history of Italy, but here I summarize it for other scholars' benefit. The story begins with the French Revolution, which aimed to terminate the alliance of altar and throne in Europe and dissolve the Church's secular power. The Revolution initiated a series of national revolutions, in which the aspiration for a new political order was matched with nationalistic impulses. The Italian revolution, called Risorgimento, was, however, different from the other national revolutions in Europe because it had to face a unique problem: the temporal power of the pontiff. In the first half of the 19th century, Italy was a patchwork of small states, some of them occupied or politically linked to foreign powers. One of these small states was the State of the Church, or Papal States, a collection of territories in the central part of the Italian peninsula, including Rome, under the direct sovereign rule of the pontiff. These holdings were considered to be an expression of the temporal power of the pope and elevated him to be one of the most important secular rulers of the country. The State of the Church was a theocracy, the expression of the spiritual as well as temporal power of the pontiff; the subjects of

such a power, the angry Romans, loved to call it “the government by the priests,” namely, a form of government in which priests rule laity in the name of God.⁸

In 1848, a series of local revolutions, fueled by nationalist sentiments, in Sicily and northern Italy, shook up the precarious political order of the country. When the revolution reached Rome, Pius IX (1792–1878) was appalled. On November 15, 1848, Pius’ Secretary of State was murdered while entering parliament; on the following day, the Pope decided to flee Rome for Naples, eventually ending up in the fortress of Gaeta where he spent much of his time in exile.⁹ It was the beginning of the Roman Republic, which amounted to a revolution against the pope’s temporal power. Pius IX spent 18 months in exile before returning to the Eternal City, where on July 3, 1849, French troops breached Rome to restore Pope Pius IX’s temporal rule of the Papal States. The Roman revolution was a turning point: Pius IX reversed his initial flirtation with liberal ideas and embraced a more conservative stance. Gone was the early reformer who released debtors from prison, granted limited freedom of the press, and appointed laity to key government roles. The pope became an increasingly implacable foe of liberals and moderates, both secular and Catholic. At the center of Pius’ concern over liberals and moderates was not simply the strong advocacy of the republican government in Rome to bring about the liberal reforms necessary to change the Papal States into a republic, but the crucial role of temporal power in sustaining and protecting the pope’s spiritual authority.¹⁰ He did not want to rule as a constitutional monarch, rather, to borrow a phrase from historian David Kertzer, “to be king” in a medieval sense.¹¹ As history goes, Pius IX would become “the last of the pope-kings, a dual role central to church doctrine and a pillar of Europe’s political order for a thousand years.”¹²

Pius IX is a giant of modern ecclesiastical history. He was the pontiff who convoked the First Vatican Council, promulgated the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and papal infallibility, oriented Catholic theology toward Neo-Scholasticism, and issued the *Syllabus Errorum* through which the Church positioned herself against liberalism, modernism, moral relativism, secularization, separation of Church and state, and Enlightenment in general. He did not limit his efforts to restore papal doctrinal authority to the re-establishment of orthodoxy in doctrine (Syllabus), theology (Neo-Scholasticism), and matters of faith (papal infallibility); in 1853, he also executed the fatal decision to condemn Gallican doctrines (the idea that ecclesial authority rests primarily with local bishops and that political authority rests with the state over the Church) and centralized power in the Church in the Holy See and Roman Curia.

In the context of the story I am narrating, Pius IX’s pontificate is important for two events. The first is his decision to separate his destiny and the destiny of the Church from the Italian revolution. The second event happened almost twenty years later, and it refers to the loss of the pope’s temporal power. On the first occasion, Pius IX disbanded moderate Catholicism; on the second, he settled the scores with liberal Catholicism. The fundamental line of thought of

⁸ David I. Kertzer, *Prisoner of the Vatican* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2004), 18.

⁹ Frank J. Coppa, *Pope Pius IX: Crusader in a Secular Age* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1970), 71–97.

¹⁰ Frank J. Coppa, “Pius IX.” In *The Encyclopedia of the Vatican and Papacy*. Edited by Frank J. Coppa (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 334–336, 335.

¹¹ David I. Kertzer, *The Pope Who Would Be King* (New York: Random House, 2018).

¹² Kertzer, *The Pope Who Would Be King*, 3.

Catholicism of the late 19th century is neither liberal nor moderate, but conservative. Progressive Catholics saw the Italian revolution as an extension of the French Revolution and therefore as a historical process to terminate both altar and throne. Liberal Catholics instead interpreted the Risorgimento as an Italian alternative to the French Revolution and, more properly, as a secular revolution. Their idea was that revolution and Christianity were compatible as long as Christianity accepted becoming an integral part of a secular society. Moderate Catholics, too, believed in the compatibility of revolution and Christianity, but in the sense that the Italian revolution was the case for a regeneration of the Church and a religious renewal. Finally, conservative Catholics, including the Jesuits of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, at that time the unofficial voice of the Holy See, framed the Italian revolution as a frontal attack on the spiritual and mundane power of the Church. For the sake of this article, the trajectories of liberal and moderate Catholics are crucial.

On April 29, 1848, a few months before the eruption of the revolution in Rome, the pope refused to lead a war of Italian independence against the then-Austrian empire, which at that time controlled territories in the northern part of the country. Liberals and moderates envisioned a movement to unify Italy under the pope's leadership. Instead, Pius IX gave the allocution *Non Semel* ("Not Once") in which he invited the Italian citizens to remain faithful to their rulers.

We cannot but reject the devious advice, also manifested through newspapers and pamphlets, of those who would like the Roman Pontiff [to become] President of a certain new Republic to be done, all together, by the peoples of Italy ... Out of our charity towards the peoples of Italy, we warmly urge and admonish them to beware of this cunning and pernicious advice ... and to be faithful to their princes.¹³

Pius IX had no interest in rejecting the altar-throne alliance and becoming the president of a unified republic of Italy. He believed that the republic was a mortal threat to the survival of the pope, the Church, and Catholicism as an organized religion (in this order) because it undermined the metaphysical legitimation of her power. If the sovereignty belongs to the people and is exercised by the people in the form of a republic, the pope's temporal power is ultimately in the hands of the people. Instead, Pope Pius IX advocated the conservation of the actual power of the princes. The allocution *Non Semel* was a precise choice of field: Pius IX took the side of conservative Catholicism and abandoned the moderates to their fate. This choice, one that scholars have reviewed *ad nauseam*, was itself the subproduct of a certain idea of revolution as disruptive of the current order of affairs. Avogadro della Motta (1798–1865), who belonged to the conservative group of Catholics and was an advisor of Pius IX, wrote in his *Saggio* that an unbreakable link exists between altar and throne, popes and monarchs.¹⁴ The same sovereignty from above that legitimizes the altar legitimizes the throne, and the same movement that in those days was replacing the legitimization of the throne with that of the people would replace the legitimization of the altar with that of the people in the near future.¹⁵ The destiny of altar and

¹³ Pius IX, Allocuzione Non Semel, Rome, April 29, 1848. At <https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/it/documents/allocuzione-non-semel-29-aprile-1848.html> (accessed on October 9, 2022).

¹⁴ Emiliano Avogadro della Motta, *Saggio intorno al socialismo e alle dottrine e tendenze socialistiche* (Societa' Editrice, Napoli, 1852), 348.

¹⁵ Avogadro della Motta, *Saggio intorno al socialismo e alle dottrine e tendenze socialistiche*, 348.

throne, Church and monarchy, spiritual and temporal power, in modern Europe was one and the same.¹⁶

Liberals and moderates were united in considering the revolution compatible with the Church. More precisely, they nurtured the idea that the end of the alliance between altar and throne, namely, the end of Christendom, was compatible with the survival of the Church. The difference between liberal and moderate Catholics was the ground on which the compromise between revolution and Church could be signed. For the liberals, it was on the immanent ground of history: the end of Christendom marked the beginning of a secular society in which believers and non-believers peacefully cohabit. Christians would become part of a secularized world in which Catholicism is free to continue its course outside the intransigence and orthodoxy of the spiritual and temporal papal authority. For the liberal Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852), the problem was not to free the Church from the corrupting effect of the temporal power but to free Christians from the exhausting constraints of a dogmatic institution. For the moderates, it was on the transcendent ground of spiritual values: the end of Christendom freed the Church from her temporal power and placed her in a better disposition to exercise without compromising her spiritual power. Antonio Rosmini (1797–1855), an Italian priest, philosopher, theologian, founder of a religious congregation, and the leader of moderate Catholicism, believed that the alliance of altar and throne was unnecessary to guarantee freedom to the Church and the faithful. Rosmini believed that the separation of altar and throne, temporal power and spiritual power, would have actually allowed the Church to renew herself and inaugurate a new season of freedom for Catholics.¹⁷ His idea, or at least the idea of his followers, was that the head of the Church should give up the temporal power to magnify his spiritual power.¹⁸

By suggesting a compromise between revolution and Catholicism, Avogadro counterargued, liberal and moderate Catholics almost inevitably deduced the compatibility of different forms of temporal power—not only monarchy but also democracy or a mix of the two—with the Church.¹⁹ In his opinion, moderate Catholics in particular failed to see that the revolution aimed to “make Italy less papist in order to make it less Catholic” and to promote “the subversion of all of the principles of order.”²⁰ Avogadro believed that the Church is a spiritual power because she enjoys divine sovereignty, namely, she received legitimacy directly from Christ. The Church is, however, also a universal society, namely, the Christian organization of civil society. This second aspect implies a certain relationship between spiritual and temporal powers. If the temporal power recognizes the religious and moral authority of the Church, then it proclaims itself Catholic (a state that has its religion); if instead the temporal power does not recognize such an authority, then the

¹⁶ Ferenc Fejtő, *Requiem pour un empire défunt; Histoire de la destruction de l'Autriche-Hongrie* (Paris: Seuil, 1993).

¹⁷ Antonio Rosmini, “La Costituzione secondo la giustizia sociale,” in *Progetti di Costituzione. Saggi editi e inediti sullo stato* (Milano: Fratelli Bocca, 1952), 65–242, 89. It was Rosmini who, in fact, asked Pius IX to lead a confederation of the states of the country against Austria. The pontiff declined the invitation but offered the role of prime minister of the Papal States to Rosmini.

¹⁸ Frederich Heyer, *The Catholic Church from 1648–1870*, Translation by D.W.D. Shaw (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1960), 154.

¹⁹ Avogadro della Motta, *Saggio intorno al socialismo e alle dottrine e tendenze socialistiche*, 348.

²⁰ Emiliano Avogadro della Motta, *Saggio intorno al socialismo e alle dottrine e tendenze socialistiche* (Societa' Editrice, Napoli, 1852), 572 and 324. Translation is my own.

society is no longer Catholic but populated of Catholics and non-Catholics, and the state itself is secular, that is, non-Catholic.²¹ Pius IX agreed with Avogadro: without temporal power, spiritual power is impotent as far as the construction of a Catholic society is concerned. Catholics are free to be Catholics in the society, but neither the civil society nor the state is Catholic. And a Church with no temporal power is at the mercy of a non-Catholic state, which can either be amical or hostile; the 19th and 20th-century histories of the Church offer abundant examples of both tendencies.

The second event to be considered is Pius IX's loss of temporal power. All the territories of the State of the Church, except Rome, were taken by the Italian nationalists in 1860. When the Franco-Prussian War drew the French military home from Rome, the pope was left unprotected. A new Italian army seized the remaining areas of the Papal States, and Rome surrendered. Following a referendum, Rome was declared Italy's capital city. Pius IX retreated into a self-imposed Vatican captivity, but the pope never lost hope of returning to power. After losing control of Rome and much of central Italy to the newly unified Italian state in 1870, Pius IX (and his successor, Leo XIII (1801-1903)) made secret plans to go into exile, to stir up support for the papal cause, and to return triumphantly to Rome on the heels of an invading army sent by a sympathetic power.²² The return did not materialize, but the pontiff's plans became instrumental in keeping the balance of power within the Vatican on the side of the 'intransigents' in their ecclesiastical struggle with the 'reconcilers' that echoed the previous one between Avogadro and Rosmini. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the diplomacy of *non possumus* that Pius IX initiated maintained Catholics, especially liberal Catholics, away from political life. Only the Second Vatican Council reversed this attitude.

Although unable to derail the modernist impetus that threatened the very existence of the Church from the outside, Pius IX prevailed in slowing down the modernist threat that risked fracturing the Church from the inside. The decline of papal temporal power across Europe, in fact, was accompanied by a consolidation of ecclesial power in the papacy. Beginning with the pontificate of Pius IX and then Leo XIII, the pope began to play an increasingly hegemonic role in the internal trajectory of Catholic theology. These pontiffs tried to compensate for the historical loss of temporal power through the consolidation of the Church's spiritual power. Their resolutions to increase papal doctrinal authority, protect orthodoxy, and centralize Church government can be seen in his perspective to protect the Church as a primary religious institution despite the loss of her temporal power. Pius IX increased the control of the Curia on the institution and protected that of the clergy on the laity. The Council was instrumental in overturning this situation, too. It is worth remembering that almost two centuries ago, Rosmini pleaded for the Church's freedom from monarchical power and coupled that with an insistence on (a certain degree of) freedom of laity from the clergy.²³

Some scholars interpret the dialogue between fascism in Italy and national socialism in Germany, on one side, and the Church, on the other, as a return to the ancient altar-throne

²¹ Avogadro della Motta, *Saggio intorno al socialismo e alle dottrine e tendenze socialistiche*, 432-433.

²² Kertzer, *Prisoner of the Vatican*.

²³ Rosmini, "La Costituzione secondo la giustizia sociale," 89.

alliance, but it was not.²⁴ Both fascism and national socialism believed in the separation between the state and the Church. Although the institutional side of both parties offered the Church good terms, the movements associated with the parties aimed to sweep away the remaining traces of both the monarchical and religious institutions. Under the absolute imperative to protect the integrity of the institution from concrete risks of possible extinction and clergy from physical, brutal assaults, Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII maintained categorical neutrality with regard to the political choices made by the governments in Germany and Italy. One must remember that the restoration of territorial sovereignty to the Holy See and the creation of the Vatican City State as we know it today is a result of the Lateran Treaty between Pius XI and Mussolini. The sacrificial lamb of the Lateran Treaty and of the correspondent 1933 concordat with Hitler was, not surprisingly, the liberal Catholics, who were eliminated from the public life of both countries with the tacit approval of the religious hierarchy.

The role originally occupied by the liberals would be filled by the Catholic democrats (or 'progressives') during and after the fall of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler and the end of World War II. They intended to promote integration, instead of separation, between Catholicism and secular and democratic society; to reach this goal, they thought, Catholicism should change, that is, reject the old doctrinal and institutional rigidities and acclimate to the modern world. From July 17 to 23, 1943, a group of Catholic scholars, politicians, and members of the clergy convened in the ancient Camaldoli Monastery, in Tuscany, to formulate a modern approach to Catholic social doctrine, seen as a third way between liberalism and authoritarianism. At the end of the retreat week, some principles were agreed upon, then articulated in 76 enunciations later collectively considered as the *Codice di Camaldoli* (Code of Camaldoli).²⁵ The Code was translated in a more political fashion immediately after the end of the retreat and elaborated in a document that became the Magna Carta of post-war political Catholicism in Europe.²⁶ Finally, Pope Pius XII provided an endorsement to the cultural and political platform embedded in the Code of Camaldoli during his radio message to the people of the entire world on Christmas Eve, 1944.²⁷ Although the remote history of liberal Catholics was marked by the relationship with fascism, the more recent history of Catholic democrats would become identified with confronting socialism as well as communism.

It should be clear at this point that the interpretation of the Council as an exit from Christendom is more specifically an exit in modern days from Pope Pius IX's Church. He was neither the advocate of a medieval Church in modern times nor of a return of the medieval Church in modern times. He believed that eternal truths embody themselves in concrete historical realities, which more or less approximate those truths in this or that age, and Christendom was the historical form that better resembles those truths. Pius IX's successor, Leo XIII, expressed this concept in his encyclical *Immortale Dei*. "There was once a time when States were governed by the philosophy of the Gospel. Then it was that the power and divine virtue of Christian wisdom

²⁴ See, for example, David I. Kertzer, *The Pope at War* (New York: Random House, 2022).

²⁵ *The Code of Camaldoli* (Rome: Editions Civitas, 1984, 1st edition 1945).

²⁶ Alcide De Gasperi, *Idee Ricostruttive della Democrazia Cristiana*, published anonymously and clandestinely on July 26, 1943.

²⁷ Pius XII, Radio Message of His Holiness Pius XII to the People of the Entire World, Vatican City, December 24, 1944.

had diffused itself throughout the laws, institutions, and morals of the people, permeating all ranks and relations of civil society."²⁸ Another pope, Pius X, returned to the same concept in the 20th century:

We must repeat with the utmost energy in these times of social and intellectual anarchy when everyone takes it upon himself to teach as a teacher and lawmaker – the City cannot be built otherwise than as God has built it; society cannot be set up unless the Church lays the foundations and supervises the work; no, civilization is not something yet to be found, nor is the New City to be built on hazy notions; *it has been in existence and still is: it is Christian civilization, it is the Catholic City*. It has only to be set up and restored continually against the unremitting attacks of insane dreamers, rebels and miscreants. *Omnia instaurare in Christo* (Ephesians 1:10)" (emphasis added).²⁹

For these pontiffs, Christendom is not one of the several forms Christianity has assumed in the flux of history. It is the only possible form expressing the perennial Christian civilization, which does not need to be built or invented but rather continually restored.

Against this conservative view, the Council Fathers conceived the alternative view of a new Christianity, to mention Jacques Maritain.³⁰ What this new Christianity is, however, remains a matter of opinion. Once again, Catholics divided into groups: the progressives framed the Council as an extension of the revolution as an unstoppable historical force; it is the group containing the varied expressions of revolutionary Christianity according to which Catholicism is a force for social change. On the opposite side, the conservatives rejected the Council as an acceptance of the revolution and treason of the immortal truths. The liberals (or more precisely, democrats) and moderates interpreted the Council as an opportunity to reduce the barriers between Christianity and the world. They pursued a middle ground between progressivism and conservatism, although they differed on one relevant point: for the democrats, the path to renewal is immanentism, that is, a secular reality in which the divine order is extrinsic; for the moderates, the path is instead a return to transcendence, namely, the presence of the divine in the world. For the former, the main concern is social justice; for the latter, it is the sacredness of human life. This distinction took theological forms, for example, in the rivalry between the theological journals *Concilium* and *Communio* or in John Milbank's distinction between 'classical' and 'romantic' orthodoxy, one which replaces the older distinction between theological liberalism and moderation.³¹

The revolution has been on both the cultural and philosophical levels, a massive attack on Tradition, a worldview led by the primate of Being. The revolution has also been a destructive offensive against the theocratic system of power that sustained both Church and monarchy. Thus, the question of the new Christianity cannot be addressed separately from that of altar and throne, that is, the relationship between spiritual and temporal power. Both democrats and moderates welcomed the process that wiped out the Church's temporal power; it was providential. What is

²⁸ Leo XIII, Encyclical *Immortale Dei*, Rome, November 1, 1885, 21.

²⁹ Pius X, Lettre *Notre Charge Apostolique*, Rome, August 25, 1910.

³⁰ Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme intégral. Problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chrétienté* (Paris: Fernand Aubier, 1936).

³¹ John Milbank, "The New Divide: Romantic versus Classical Orthodoxy," *Modern Theology*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2010), 26–38.

at stake between democrats and moderates are different theologies of history. For both groups, the Council is providential in the sense that it moves Catholicism away from Christendom. For the former, however, the movement is an evolution, a progress from Christendom to a less hierarchical and dogmatic form of Catholicism. For the latter, the process is in effect a religious renewal within Catholicism, that is, a new Christian order. For the democrats, the exit from Christendom is a movement beyond Tradition; for the moderates, the exit from Christendom is a recovery of Tradition. Accordingly, for the former, new Christianity is a post-Christendom Christianity, but for the latter, it is a new Christendom.

The readers would underestimate the influence of Pius IX, Pius X, Pius XII, and Rosmini if they confine their legacies to the remote past. All of them are still alive in the institutional life of the Church today. Pius XII made Pius X a saint in 1954. Pope John Paul II beatified Pius IX in 2000. His successor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, declared Rosmini venerable in 2006 and Pius XII venerable in 2009. From a historical point of view, the canonization of these men represents, among other things, the acceptance and legitimization of their philosophical and ecclesiological systems within the Church.

Revolution and India

The counterpart of Italian Risorgimento is the solemnized National Movement, the campaign for India's independence from British rule. Although the former was part of a vast attempt to overcome the medieval world, the latter was integral to a global effort to consign western colonialism to the history books. Both were revolutions in the dual sense of being a political and historical phenomenon as well as a philosophical and cultural worldview. Both revolutions were nationalistic at their core: the former, however, was intrinsically a liberal project, the latter a socialist project. Both revolutions ultimately fell into the hands of far-right regimes, Fascism and Hindutva. The literature on the standing of Indian Christians during the National Movement is scarce. A recent publication, however, sheds some light on the topic. Here I extract from this book.³²

The engagement of Catholicism with nationalism in India has passed through different phases and differs on whether it refers to clergy and missionaries or to the laity. In the initial days, that is, the mid-1800s, the Catholic laity was mostly disinterested in the mounting efforts of nationalists, but the clergy supported the British government. In a second phase, between the Great Upheaval of 1857 and the emergence of Gandhi on the political scene, the nationalistic impetus was transformed within Catholicism in an attempt to indigenize the Church. A crucial step was considered the creation of an Indian clergy. In 1917 a resolution of the Conference of Bishops held in Bangalore stated that "Every means should be adopted to increase the number of Indian clergy."³³ The Catholics' interest in the National Movement grew during the *Salt Satyagraha* and the other nationalistic campaigns between the two world wars. Members of the laity became involved not only in the ordinary life of the National Movement but also sought to occupy roles in the local branches of the Indian National Congress. "At some point," Mary John argues, "some

³² Mary John, *Indian Catholic Christians and Nationalism* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2017).

³³ Quoted in John, *Indian Catholic Christians and Nationalism*, 69.

Catholics along with some Protestants took the lead to launch a National Christian Party in order to extend their support to the national movement."³⁴ This moment of alignment of Catholics with the National Movement ended abruptly when some nationalist leaders took an anti-Catholic stance for fear of religious conversion. Their actions generated apprehension in the Catholic community, especially regarding the destiny of religious minorities in the would-be Swaraj.³⁵

The National Movement was a political movement, and its leaders, with the remarkable exception of Gandhi, paid little to no attention to religion. On the other side, Catholics conceived of themselves as a religious minority. It is highly possible that Catholic freedom fighters were recognized within the nationalistic movement on Indian, not Catholic, terms. Thus, in the history of the National Movement, the role of Indian Catholics is untold, and their presence in the ranks of the Indian National Congress is concealed. The majority of the Catholic laity followed the guidelines of the clergy or simply remained extraneous to the fight between colonialism and independence. A minority found in the participation in Catholic Action a convenient third way between militancy and indifference. Catholic Action was (and still is) an organization of lay Catholics who advocate for increased Catholic influence on society. The organization is only indirectly political, focused as it is on the spiritual and intellectual development of its members. The clergy and the cadres of the missionary orders were formed by priests coming from different European and American countries; they might express personal preferences to one side or the other of the contention but remain firmly obedient to the orders coming from Rome. In his book, John pays little attention to theology. However, she clarified that "The traditional Catholic theology insisted upon showing respect and obedience to established legitimate political authority."³⁶ It was just another example of the classical proclivity to surrender to the authority that was (and still is) so deeply embedded in the very fabric of Catholicism.

The so-called Indianization of Christianity is a well-known ecclesiastic topic. Pope Benedict XV and Pope Pius XI ignited the movement for the indigenous Church, in India and everywhere else, between the two world wars. In his Apostolic Letter on Catholic Missions, Pope Benedict XV advised the foreign missionaries to consider the rise of nationalistic movements in several countries of mission and avoid behaviors that could position Christianity as a foreign religion and cause the local Christians to lose all their rights of citizenship in their own country.³⁷ The pontiff envisioned the collapse of the colonial order as a result of World War I, which he labeled "the suicide of civilized Europe."³⁸ In the Indian context, however, the shift happening in Rome was received with mixed feelings. The redirection of the missionary enterprise in Catholicism left western missionaries open to the accusation that they simply pretended to have no connections with the colonial powers.³⁹ The nationalist wing of Indian Catholicism protested that the

³⁴ Quoted in John, *Indian Catholic Christians and Nationalism*, 188.

³⁵ The word usually refers to Gandhi's concept of India's independence from foreign domination.

³⁶ John, *Indian Catholic Christians and Nationalism*, 15.

³⁷ Pope Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*, Rome, November 30, 1919.

³⁸ Pope Benedict XV, *Peace Note*, August 1, 1917.

³⁹ Henry Heras, "Indian Art and European Art," *The Examiner*, 77/40 (October 2, 1926), 472 and Henry Heras, "Indian Art in Catholic Churches," *The Examiner*, 77/41 (October 8, 1927), 474–475. Father Henry Heras was one of the earliest foreigners to earn Indian citizenship and is considered the 'Father of Christian Indian Art.'

Indianization was an aim in itself, not instrumental to conversion.⁴⁰ The missionary wing of Catholicism responded that, in the end, Catholicism is evangelic and universalistic.⁴¹ Most of the native Indian Catholics refused to engage in the debate.

The National Movement was a conglomerate of different ideologies. There was the universalistic ideology of Gandhi and Tagore, who believed that Indian civilization, not Indian nationalism, was the future of the country. The more proper nationalistic leadership was divided between those who tended to look back to the past identified with the Hindu and those who identified the axis of the nation in its social, religious, and cultural pluralism. The revivalist stream of Indian nationalism provided religious nationalism its ideological foundation; the eclectic stream, instead, gave birth to secular nationalism.⁴² After Independence, secular nationalism established itself as a center of gravity of the nation. The Nehruvian India appeased the preoccupations of Indian Catholics who found their place in a pluralistic India shaped by the Indian National Congress. The long period of Indian history dominated by the Indian National Congress favored the acceptance of the Catholics of the revolution who freed the country from the British Raj. This positive acceptance of the revolution, however, took different forms: radicalism saw the Indian revolution as an extension of the anti-colonialist movement, the struggle against western rule in colonized countries that dominated the history of the twentieth century. This position was a constant invitation to bring the revolution to its ultimate end, liberation for all. When it became clear that the Indian National Congress was unwilling to do so, the radical position became a lament that the aspirations of the nationalist movement had been ultimately betrayed. Progressives instead found their home in the democratic, socialist, secular Nehruvian India, and moderate Catholics maintained their link with the West. Finally, conservatives simply kept applying with enthusiasm the guidelines from the Magisterium to the Indian Church.

As mentioned, Vatican II was received almost unanimously in India in terms of theological revolution. This is, in brief, the theological revolution: the sacred tradition is read through the lens of the texts issued during the Council (hermeneutic of rupture). The alternative option reads the texts through the lens of the sacred tradition (hermeneutic of continuity). In the hermeneutic of rupture, the texts issued in the Council are assimilated into the spirit of the Council and therefore distanced from the sacred tradition. It is the spirit of the ultimate hermeneutic criteria of texts and sacred tradition. This, I repeat, is the *theological* interpretation. In the *historical* interpretation I am developing, the texts issued in the Council are distinguished but not separated from the event of the Council; however, this link between texts and events is not theological but historical. This does not mean that the Council enjoys sovereignty over the theological meaning of the texts (theological interpretation), but rather that the texts and the context are historically entangled (historical interpretation). In this historical interpretation, what makes the Council a historical revolution is the Conciliar Fathers' acceptance of a certain idea of history of human progress.

⁴⁰ Raul Gonsalves, "The New Missionary," *The Examiner*, 78/42 (October 15, 1927), 486–487.

⁴¹ Anonymous, "Indianisation of the Church," *The Examiner*, 77/27 (July 3, 1926), 321.

⁴² K. N. Panikkar, "Alternative Historiographies: Changing Paradigms of Power," in Felix Wilfred and Jose D. Maliekal (eds.), *The Struggle for the Past. Historiography Today* (Chennai: Department of Christian Studies, University of Madras, 2002), 11–20, 14.

A philosophy of history that frames history as human progress moves civilization away from the past. Accordingly, history becomes political history, in the sense that it produces practical outputs. More exactly, history produces liberation, including liberation from religion (superstition, cults, irrationality) in Europe and liberation from colonial legacies in South Asia. This philosophical-historical dispositive is that hermeneutical lens through which the Council has been read as moving Catholicism away from Christendom into a post-Christian European and a post-western South Asian Christianity. Revolution, or the mentioned philosophical-historical dispositive, is synonymous with the disruption of the old order and the birth of a new order through history. It is history that makes the old order obsolete and the new order necessary. In fact, humanity does not progress in history but rather through history. History redeems humanity; humanity does not redeem itself. In India, Catholic moderates appreciated the Council with reference to recentering the Church on liturgy and encouraged a genuine encounter with transcendence. They celebrated the Council with an emphasis on the final texts and doctrinal continuity. The intellectual influence of the latter has been declining in India, and today they amount to an irrelevant minority. Progressivism instead interpreted the Council as liberation from the ecclesiastical western forms and ultimately as a mandate for the Indianization of the Church. Christianity's destiny is to become intrinsic to Indian pluralistic society. Finally, radicalism interpreted the Council primarily in terms of social and economic transformation.

For European-turned-Indian thinkers, an exit from Christendom was crucial. When Raimon Panikkar mentioned Christianness, it was the exit from Christendom that he had in mind; when Abhishiktananda (the Hindu name taken by French Christian Henri le Saux) criticized the Church for still being too 'Neolithic,' what he had in mind was the passage from Christendom to something else.⁴³ However, their primary idea was the return to a pre-Christendom Christianity, and therefore, a re-formed form of Catholicism. For both progressives and radicals in India, in fact, read the exit from Christendom as a revolutionary movement beyond colonialism, either ecclesiastical or political. With the collapse of the colonial empires and the indigenization of the Church, Catholicism focuses on transformative social action, namely, making Christianity more Indian (progressivism) or India more just (radicalism). The exit is an Indian Christianity that ultimately identifies itself in a post-western Christianity. The unifying principle of progressivism and radicalism has been the possibility of a new Christianity away from western Christianity, a post-colonial Christianity with an Asian face. Where they differ is in the scope of the change: for progressivism, Christianity must change to adjust to the pluralistic, Asian (nonwestern) society of India. For radicalism, Christianity is a social force to structurally change India for the good. Radical theologians are the originators of innovative forms of theologies: liberation, Dalit, tribal, ecological, among others.

The argument of Indian Christianity as a post-western Christianity has both a philosophical and a political ingredient, and the two cannot be separated. Or, to borrow a sentence from Antonio Gramsci, "It is a philosophy that it is also a politics, and a politics that is also a philosophy."⁴⁴ At the theoretical level, the argument is embedded in a larger aim to recognize

⁴³Raimon Panikkar, *Christianity: Opera Omnia*, vol. III.2 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 29; Abhishiktananda, *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart. The Spiritual Diary (1948-1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda* (Delhi: ISPC, 1998), 140–141.

⁴⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere*, 4 volumes (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), vol. III, 1860. Translation is my own.

attempts within Indian theology to articulate a distinct trajectory that does not simply accept the tale of a singular path to an Indian Church based on the western model but instead tries to articulate an alternative vision of the Church, grounded within an Indian perspective. History becomes an irreversible force, a force of progress, and a force of liberation. It is in history and through history that people, Christians, and even the Church are redeemed. Therefore, it is in the praxis, in the realm of experience, in the concrete circumstances of life that the truths of philosophies, theologies, and even doctrines are verified. The nature of these truths is modified: they are historically built frameworks that are experimentally verified in the reality of human affairs. The argument of a post-western Christianity is concerned with the primacy of the historical over the philosophical. To put it differently, philosophies, theologies, and even doctrines, on one hand, and, on the other, history, are intertwined, the latter enjoying primacy over the former. In this view, praxis is elevated upon speculation, and therefore, theology of experience is placed above systematic and doctrinal theology. It is in the immanent realm of experience that the truths of Catholicism are judged.

The difference between moderates, on the one hand, and progressives on the other can also be investigated regarding the conciliation between Christianity and the complex and plural reality of India. For moderates, the conciliation happens in metaphysics and for progressives in praxis. At the core of both the progressive and radical wings of Indian Catholicism there is an anti-Augustinian view of history. Although Augustine envisioned the co-inhabitation of evil and good in human history until the end of time, progressive and radical theologians in India believe that evil is contingent and can be eradicated. War and peace, justice and discrimination are not bonded in the very heart of each human being but are components of society. If capitalism, globalization, and neo-liberalism are abolished, good will triumph. Philosophy is no longer about truth and lies but progress and conservatism. The same is true in theology: Platonism provides the sense of the transcendental truths that are absolute, but Marxism and the other grand narratives (sociologism, positivism, scientism) that reject Platonism deliver a philosophical understanding of history as progressive and redemptive. Ultimately, those narratives transform theology from speculative to experiential because theology is no longer separable from its historical output. Besides, progressives and radicals are suspicious of western liberalism, particularly the Anglo-Saxon stream of liberalism. Here the Indian distrust of imperialism merges with the much older opposition of Catholicism against liberalism, seen as a subproduct of Protestantism. Socialism, in its different forms, is instead conceived as a force that has successfully opposed western imperialism in the past and that can oppose it again in the future.

Revolution, from 1789 forward, is the passage from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of liberation. With liberation, one must understand liberation from the alienation in which people find themselves because of a certain social or religious order of things. In Europe, it was the clerical and monarchic order, therefore, the solution was an anticlerical, republican order, that is, a post-Christian society. In India, it was a clerical and colonial order; the solution, accordingly, was (and still is) a post-colonial, post-western society. Revolution denies the value of Tradition; it is a break from Tradition. In the reality of Indian theology, patristics, for example, is considered deprived of value because it belongs to a foreign past. Behind the rejection of Tradition is a specific theology of history marked by the idea of irreversible progress. Thus, Tradition is something that belongs to the past, something that has been passed over and has

nothing good or useful to offer to the current status of Indian Catholicism. The assumption is that Tradition is worthless and destined to perish. As a consequence, Indian theology is forced to find its own foundation in the present and therefore in the intellectual forms of the present times.

Conclusion

Revolution is the nexus between political history and philosophy of history and ultimately between politics and philosophy. The philosophical category of revolution as Becoming sustains an interpretation of history as politically progressive; in turn, the understanding of revolution as historical process justifies the philosophical category of revolution as Becoming. In the end, this link between politics and philosophy is the metaphysical foundation of the revolution and therefore of both the visions of post-Christian western society and post-western Christian India.

As a matter of fact, the interpretation of the Council in terms of historical revolution is ultimately the Church's positive judgement on the revolution itself. Despite the fact that the revolution—as a historical process—has threatened the survival of the Church and caused enormous pain, including wiping out her temporal power, it was providential. This, in brief, was the conclusion of the Council Fathers: The Church can cohabit with the revolution. How the Church can cohabit, however, is a matter of opinion.

It should be clear at this point that revolution in Italy (Europe) stands for modernity and therefore for secularization and immanentization of society as well as the laicization of the institutions and the relativization of social morality. Revolution is the modern effort to overcome the Christian civilization of the Middle Ages, rooted in the primacy of contemplation and the alliance of altar and throne, and build a modern society based on a post-Christian view of the world. In South Asia, instead, revolution implies the rejection and eviction of every form of western colonialism. The traits of nationalism and self-determination that characterized the reaction to colonialism maintain their value in this current postcolonial era. Independence was a revolution, and postcolonialism is the continuation of that revolution: it is a process of expelling the remaining traces of colonialism from the Indian psyche.

Enrico Beltramini's research interests lie in the history and theology of Catholicism in India. He is widely published in these matters, with three monographs and several articles to his credit. Beltramini is on faculty at Notre Dame de Namur University, California.
