

The 1962 Metz Agreement

by Regan Wick
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Three brief introductory notes. First, while this topic already has been treated in books and articles, this article serves to consolidate all the various sources, including recently available electronic versions of Vatican II documentation. Even for well-established and commonly referenced quotations, this work anchors exclusively on personally obtained primary sources and provides links to PDF image copies of those primary sources. Second, this article does not ascribe motives for words or actions; it does not state or intend to imply that anyone is a Communist, or the words and actions of anyone were intended to promote Communism. Third, throughout the centuries, the Vatican had entered into agreements with antagonistic governments in order to protect the interests of Catholics. The Metz agreement, as will be shown, was not this sort of concordant; it cannot be justified in this way.

On 18 Aug 1962, several weeks prior to the opening of Vatican II, a secret agreement was drafted between the Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Russian Orthodox Church will send observers to the Second Vatican Council; in exchange, the Catholic Church guarantees that the Council will not condemn Communism.

Eugène Cardinal Tisserant represented Pope John XXIII and the Catholic Church. Metropolitan Nikodim represented the Russian Orthodox Church under control of the Kremlin. The negotiations between Tisserant and Nikodim occurred in Metz, France, the diocese of Bishop Paul Joseph Schmitt, at the home of Fr. Lagarde, Chaplain of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Based on the Metz negotiations, Msgr. Johannes Willebrands visited Kremlin officials in Moscow to ratify the agreement.

As a result, on 12 Oct 1962, “two high officials of the Russian Orthodox Church,” Vitalij Borovoj and Vladimir Kotliarov, arrived in Rome as observers at the Council; and Vatican II did not condemn Communism nor even mention it despite numerous attempts by Council Fathers.



Below is a scan of an original, official, physical Vatican press release photograph of Msgr. Johannes Willebrands with the two Russian Orthodox officials arriving in Rome 12 Oct 1962 as observers of Vatican II.



That the Metz meeting and agreement occurred is established and evidenced by the following five sources:

1. Vatican II Council Fathers' Appeals to Condemn Communism
2. "From Vatican I to Vatican II" Article by Jean-Claude Poulain. *France Nouvelle* Communist Periodical, 16-22 Jan 1963
3. Metz Bishop Schmitt Observations about Vatican II as Reported in *Le Républicain Lorrain* 9 Feb 1963
4. Cardinal Tisserant's Secretary Msgr. Georges Roche Rebuttal Letter to Journalist Jean Madiran 14 May 1984
5. The Oct 1965 Petition Incident

(1) Vatican II Council Fathers' Appeals to Condemn Communism

Documentation for Vatican II is divided into four categories.

1. Antepreparatory Phase: Jan 1959 – Jun 1960
Survey of Future Council Fathers, Catholic Universities, and Roman Curia
Published by the Vatican as:
Acta et Documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II apparando – Series I (ADC.I)
2. Preparatory Phase: Jun 1960 to Oct 1962
Creation of Draft Schemas
Published by the Vatican as:
Acta et Documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II apparando – Series II (ADC.II)
3. Proceedings of the Second Vatican Council: Oct 1962 – Dec 1965
Full Record of Speeches and Interventions During the Council
Published by the Vatican as:
Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II (AS)
4. The Sixteen Published Documents of the Second Vatican Council
Dei Verbum, Lumen Gentium, Sacrosanctum Concilium, Gaudium et Spes, Gravissimum Educationis, Nostra Aetate, Dignitatis Humanae, Ad Gentes, Presbyterorum Ordinis, Apostolicam Actuositatem, Optatam Totius, Perfectae Caritatis, Christus Dominus, Unitatis Redintegratio, Orientalium Ecclesiarum, Inter Mirifica

The official Vatican-published texts for Antepreparatory, Preparatory and Council Proceedings are available online at <https://archive.org/details/second-vatican-council>. The sixteen official documents of the Second Vatican Council are available online at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm

A summary-level text search of these primary sources yields the following:

Preparatory and Council Proceedings

Antepreparatory Phase: Jan 1959 – Jun 1960

Vol I: Acts of the Supreme Pontiff John XXIII	1 Reference to Communism
Vol II: Survey of Future Council Fathers (Vota)	444 References to Communism
Vol II Appendix: Vota Analysis	37 References to Communism
Vol III: Holy Congregations of the Roman Curia	41 References to Communism
Vol IV: Catholic Universities and Faculty	48 References to Communism

Preparatory Phase: Jun 1960 – Oct 1962

Vol I: Acts of the Supreme Pontiff John XXIII	0 References to Communism
Vol II: Pontifical Central Preparatory Commission	322 References to Communism
Vol III: Preparatory Commissions and Secretariats	57 References to Communism
Vol IV: Subcommissions of the Central Preparatory Commission	258 References to Communism

Proceedings of the Second Vatican Council

Vol I: Session 1 (11 Oct – 8 Dec, 1962)	10 References to Communism
Vol II: Session 2 (29 Sep – 4 Dec, 1963)	12 References to Communism
Vol III: Session 3 (14 Sep – 21 Nov, 1964)	114 References to Communism
Vol IV: Session 4 (14 Sep – 8 Dec, 1965)	169 References to Communism
Vol V: Verbal Processes	49 References to Communism
Vol VI: Acts of the General Secretariat	24 References to Communism

All Preparatory and Council Proceedings Combined

1,586 References to Communism

Documents of Vatican II

<i>Dei Verbum</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Lumen Gentium</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Gravissimum Educationis</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Nostra Aetate</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Dignitatis Humanae</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Ad Gentes</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Optatam Totius</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Christus Dominus</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Orientalium Ecclesiarum</i>	0 References to Communism
<i>Inter Mirifica</i>	0 References to Communism

All Sixteen Documents of Vatican II Combined

0 References to Communism

In addition to this statistical overview, below is a sample of references to Communism in the antepreparatory survey responses from the future Council Fathers reflecting a consistent message from many regions of the world.

“It seems appropriate that certain truths, which are nevertheless already contained in the Pontifical Documents, should be proposed once more to the attention and meditation of the faithful: The condemnation of atheistic Communism, as well as those errors that contradict human freedom and dignity.”
- Belgium, Archbishop Efreim Forni, 2 Apr 1960, ADC.I.II.I p. 122

“In our times, the Church must fight especially against the following errors: a) against modernism ...and b) against materialism, propagated today by Communism and Marxist doctrines.”
- Spain, Bishop Narcís Jubany Arnau, 24 Aug 1959, ADC.I.II.II p. 458

“In the flawed social consciousness is found the error of the age, namely Communism, which the Ecumenical Council will in no way be able to ignore.”
- Italy, Bishop Carlo Baldini, 14 Jul 1959, ADC.I.II.III p. 213

“I pray that the future Ecumenical Council will subject all these things to a serious examination, and well these points, condemnation and discipline against the Communists.”
- China, Bishop Gaetano Mignani, [Date not specified], ADC.I.II.IV p. 513

“The solemn condemnation of the Fathers will be very opportune for the nefarious doctrine of Communism which is gradually spreading through our regions.”
- West Africa, Bishop Bernardin Gantin, 30 Aug 1959, ADC.I.II.V p. 87

“We judge it appropriate to establish a more accurate study of the doctrine of Communism, so that the errors contained in it are solemnly condemned.”
- Mexico, Archbishop Luis María Altamirano y Bulnes, 3 Oct 1959, ADC.I.II.VI p. 226

“It would seem desirable that the Council issue a statement on the intrinsically evil nature of atheistic Communism as well as on the need for a common struggle by all Christians and people of good will against the enemy of religion and society alike.”
- Australia, Bishop Edward John Doody, 14 Aug 1959, ADC.I.II.VII p. 582

From Jun 1960 to Oct 1962, the Pontifical Central Preparatory Commission created draft schemas for the Council – three of which addressed Communism. The Fathers' concerns about Communism expressed in the survey responses had been duly considered and reflected in draft schemas. The titles of the three draft schemas are listed below.

De Cura Animarum pro Christianis Communismo Infectis

On the care of Souls regarding Christians infected with Communism

- ADC.II.III.I p. 333

De Cura Animarum et Communismo

On the Care of Souls and Communism

- ADC.II.III.I p. 401

De Laicorum Apostolatu in Ambitibus Materialismo, Praesertim Marxistico, Imbutis

On the Apostolate of the Laity in Environments Imbued with Materialism, Particularly Marxism

- ADC.II.III.II p. 345

Thus, as Vatican II began, years of preparation had provided for a solemn pronouncement on Communism.

Augmenting all the preparatory work and draft schemas were numerous interventions during the Council concerning the need to address Communism. Below is a sample from each of the four Council sessions.

Second Vatican Council, Session I

"If the Church neglects this matter in this Council, the greatest danger will befall the world that new nations will be inspired by the atheistic and materialistic ideology of Communism."

- Paul Yu Pin, Archbishop of Nanking, China, AS.I.IV p. 599

Second Vatican Council, Session II

"In the chapter on the principles of Catholic Ecumenism, in the paragraph on Ecumenism, everything is said in such words and in such a way that someone ignorant of the factors not only of the past, but also of the present, could think that we are living in very peaceful times ...from 1910 until the present time, Christians and especially Catholics not in isolated occurrences but tens of thousands are slaughtered, virgins consecrated to God are attacked and humiliated in ways unheard of even among the ancient pagans ...And I see not only atheistic Communism, but also masonic and other associations – without whose help even Communism could not remain in power in any country."

- Vincentas Brizgys, Bishop of Kaunas, Lithuania, AS.II.VI p. 104

Second Vatican Council, Session III

"It is very unfortunate, in my opinion, the outline of the Apostolate of the Laity ...to be completely silent about Communism which is, without a doubt, the most injurious to the Church and souls everywhere in the world ...Therefore I would like to modify the schema so that it contains the following: 'Among the primary projects of the laity, a place must be given to the obligation to frustrate the attempts of atheistic Communism to dominate each and every nation. Christians should always have before their eyes the warning that Communism is intrinsically evil and that no one who wishes to preserve the Christian religion is permitted to embrace Communism in any way whatsoever.'"

- Patrick Francis Lyons, Bishop of Sale, Australia, AS.III.IV p. 741-742

Second Vatican Council, Session IV

"This Synod cannot ignore the question of Communism in silence, otherwise it will be severely criticized before the court of history. The Council can and should talk about Communism! Truth demands this, charity demands this!"

- Michael Rusnak, C.SS.R., Aux. Bishop of Toronto, Canada Ukrainians, AS.IV.II p. 640

Thus, at every stage, the Council Fathers voiced a need to address Communism culminating with a total of 1,586 references to Communism, three draft schemas, and numerous interventions during the Council. Despite this substantial volume of consistent calls to condemn Communism, the Council remained silent with zero references to Communism in the final sixteen published documents of the Council.

This is not a chance occurrence. It is empirical evidence of some influence, separate from the Council Fathers, that censored all their references to Communism from the final documents of the Council. The following review of the remaining four sources demonstrates that this suppression was the direct result of the 1962 Metz Agreement.

(2) *France Nouvelle*, 16-22 Jan 1963

Five months after the Metz meeting and six weeks after the end of the first session of Vatican II, the French Communist weekly periodical, *France Nouvelle*, published several articles about the Council, with an overall favorable view regarding the direction the Council was leading the Church; included was an article “From Vatican I to Vatican II” by Jean-Claude Poulain. The thesis of the article was summarized with photographs and captions for the popes corresponding to the two councils. According to Poulain, Pius IX and Vatican I defined papal infallibility which aligned to monarchy; in contrast, John XXIII and Vatican II were “updating” the Church with the modern world which aligned to socialism.



Poulain rightly identified that historically, Church ecumenical councils have been called to address specific issues threatening some aspect of the Church. However, contradicting Pope John XXIII who characterized Vatican II differently, as “pastoral” and not called in response to a specific problem, Poulain claimed that the Council was in fact called primarily to address socialism – yet not to issue an anathema, but instead as an attempt to reconcile the Church to the unstoppable force of socialism. It is in this context that the author made reference to the Metz Agreement.

“Because it is new ideas which today decisively influence the course of the world, it is increasingly difficult for the Church to reject them purely and simply.

...

Because the world socialist system unquestionably demonstrates its superiority and is backed by the approval of hundreds and hundreds of millions of people, the Church can no longer be satisfied with crude anti-Communism. **She has even assured, on the occasion of her dialogue with the Russian**

Orthodox Church, that there would be no direct attack on the Communist regime during the Council.” (emphasis added)

This publication demonstrated that from the Communist side (a) the reality of the Metz Agreement was a given and (b) the terms were that the Council would not condemn Communism.

The cover page and article of the original *France Nouvelle* publication with the relevant passage highlighted are available here: https://www.vaticanii.com/docs/FranceNouvelle_1963-01-22.pdf. A complete copy of the 16-22 Jan 1963 edition of *France Nouvelle* can be purchased here: <https://iisg.amsterdam/en>.

(3) *Le Républicain Lorrain* 9 Feb 1963

Two weeks after the *France Nouvelle* Communist article, the *Le Républicain Lorrain* daily periodical published an article also confirming the Metz Agreement, but from the Catholic perspective. Returning from participating in the first session of Vatican II, Msgr. Paul Joseph Schmitt, bishop of Metz, gave an interview about the Council. His observations favorably emphasized that the Council included non-Catholics, and proceeded to celebrate the facilitating role his diocese of Metz played enabling Russian Orthodox priests to attend the Council as observers. Bishop Schmitt went beyond a mere acknowledgment of the Metz meeting and provided names and details. As bishop of Metz, Schmitt would have been aware of and have authorized such an important meeting in his diocese. His testimony is highly reliable.

“All the confessions had sent delegates there, and certain lay people also attended. On the spiritual level, the presence of these observers was a grace for the Council. It was a recognition of the value of others, while for others the opportunity to realize that the Roman Catholic Church was not as dictatorial as they might think. In the circumstances, the concern of the separated brothers was also highlighted. The Russian Orthodox Church was itself represented. It is worth noting the role that the bishopric of Metz played in this affair. **It was in our region that the secret meeting of Cardinal Tisserant with archbishop Nikodin occurred.** The exact place was the residence of Fr. Lagarde, chaplain for the Little Sisters of the Poor in Borny. Here for the first time the arrival of the prelates of the Russian Church was envisaged. **Following these interviews, the terms of the presence of the Russian Church were established by Msgr. Willebrands, an assistant of Cardinal Bea. Archbishop Nikodin agreed that an official invitation should be sent to Moscow, with the guarantee of the apolitical character of the Council.**” (emphases added)



Cardinal Tisserant

Metropolitan Nikodin

Given the context as well as details of the other sources referencing the Metz agreement, it is clear that “apolitical” refers to an assurance not to condemn Communism. It also is worth noting that Schmitt characterized the meeting as secret (*incognito*) although by the time of this publication, after the first session had concluded, he was free to reveal details of the meeting.

The cover page and article of the original *Le Républicain Lorrain* publication with the relevant passage highlighted are available here:

https://www.vaticanii.com/docs/RepublicainLorrain_1963-02-09.pdf. A complete copy of the 9 Feb 1963 edition of *Le Républicain Lorrain* can be purchased here: <https://boutique.estrepublikain.fr/archives/anciens-journaux>.

(4) Cardinal Tisserant’s Secretary Msgr. Georges Roche Rebuttal Letter to Journalist Jean Madiran

Journalist Jean Madiran published an editorial in the Feb 1984 issue of *Itinéraires* (no. 280) which exposed the Metz Agreement and was critical of the role Cardinal Tisserant played in the negotiations. Msgr. Georges Roche, a longtime friend and secretary of Cardinal Tisserant, sent a rebuttal letter which Madiran then published in the July/August 1984 edition of *Itinéraires* (no. 285). While Roche’s intent was to exonerate Tisserant (clarifying that his role was a mere “spokesman” for Pope John XXIII), his response still acknowledged the entire Metz Agreement. Below are excerpts from Roche’s letter corroborating all the essential details.

“For the moment, however, I wish to deal exclusively with your comment concerning the **Agreement of 1962**.

Everyone knows that **this Agreement had been negotiated between the Kremlin and the Vatican at the very highest level**. Mgr. Nikodim and Cardinal Tisserant were merely spokesmen, the former for the master of the Kremlin, the latter for the Sovereign Pontiff then gloriously reigning.

...the decision to invite the Russian Orthodox observers to the Second Vatican Council had been taken personally by His Holiness Pope John XXIII with the obvious encouragement of Cardinal Montini who had been adviser to the Patriarch of Venice when he himself was Archbishop of Milan. What is more, **it was also Cardinal Montini who secretly directed the policy of the Secretariat of State during the first session of the Council** from the secret place that the Pope had prepared for him in the famous St. John Tower within the very walls of Vatican City.

...
Cardinal Tisserant had received formal instructions not only to negotiate the Agreement but also to supervise its being carried out precisely during the Council. Thus whenever a Bishop wished to touch on the question of Communism, the Cardinal intervened from the desk of the Chairman’s adviser to recall the order of silence (concerning this question) in accordance with the Pope’s wishes.

...
The Cardinal had received firm, irrevocable directives from the Pope himself, and the Cardinal had always been a man of faith. He believed in authority, he obeyed authority even when he was convinced there had been a diplomatic or political error.” (emphases added)

In the words of Madiran, Msgr. Roche – confidant of Cardinal Tisserant – “confirms everything and contradicts nothing.” His letter confirmed that the 1962 Metz Agreement occurred at the wish of Pope John XXIII, and that this directly influenced Council proceedings, limiting the

freedom of bishops to discuss Communism and ultimately to prevent any mention of Communism in final documents.



Jean Madiran



Bishop Georges Roche

The cover page and article of the original *Itinéraires* no. 285 publication with the relevant passages highlighted are available here:

https://www.vaticanii.com/docs/Itineraires_285_1984-08.pdf. A complete copy of the

July/August no. 285 edition of *Itinéraires* can be purchased here:

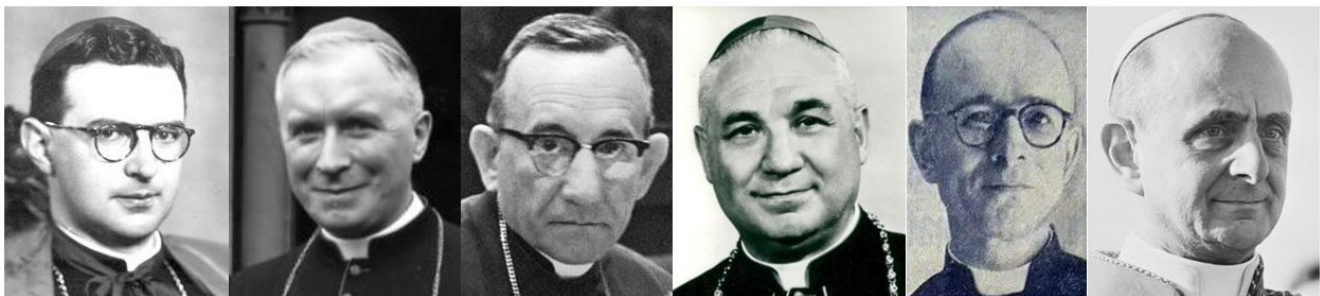
<https://www.chire.fr/itineraires-c-45856-6> .

(5) The October 1965 Petition Incident

In early Oct 1965, during deliberations on *Gaudium et Spes*, *Coetus Internationalis Patrum*, a group of traditionally-minded Council Fathers led by Bishop Luigi Maria Carli, submitted a petition to have an explicit condemnation of Communism included in the schema on The Church in the Modern World. There are differing accounts of the number of signatures the petition received; somewhere between 300 and 450 Fathers signed the petition.

Archbishop Geraldo de Proença Sigaud and Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre personally delivered the petition and signatures to Archbishop Pericle Felici, Secretary General of the Council, on 9 Oct 1965 in time to meet the deadline. Felici appropriately forwarded the petition to Msgr. Achille Glorieux, Secretary of the Mixed Commission responsible for that schema. However, Glorieux did not forward the petition to the commission members working on that schema; consequently, it was not able to be discussed or voted on at the subsequent 13 Nov 1965 General Session.

An inquiry revealed that Glorieux had violated Council procedures. Bishop Carli appealed which ultimately went all the way to Pope Paul VI culminating with a compromise to include a vague statement in *Gaudium et Spes*, not specifically naming Communism.



Archbishop Geraldo
de Proença Sigaud

Archbishop Marcel
Lefebvre

Bishop Luigi
Maria Carli

Archbishop Pericle
Felici

Msgr. Achille
Glorieux

Pope Paul VI

Archbishop Felici documented the incident with the following two entries.

Entry – Acts of the Secretariat, 15 Nov 1965

“On the afternoon of 13 November, His excellency Monsignor Luigi Carli made an appeal to the President of the Council against the procedure followed by the Mixed Commission for the amendment of the text ...presented by **numerous Fathers**.

...The Commission, which met urgently this morning, deemed it possible to satisfy the appeal of Monsignor Carli ...to include Communism, **without naming it**, in the generic expression of condemnation of atheism.

...Cardinal Tisserant, having learned of Msgr. Carli's response [being not satisfied] asked the Secretary General to refer the matter to the Holy Father.” (emphases added)

- AS.VI.IV p. 618-619

Entry – Verbal Processes, 16 Nov 1965

“Among the written interventions presented on the schema “The Church in the Modern World” there was **a request for an explicit condemnation of Communism**. The request was presented to the General Secretary on Saturday 9 October 1965 and on the same day an oral communication of it was given to the Secretary of the Mixed Commission [Glorieux] which then received it on Monday 11 October with the letter.

The request was therefore presented within the deadline (9 October)

...Monsignor Glorieux stated that since the request mentioned above had arrived late, the Commission had not considered it. The Secretary General [Felici referring to himself] objected that the request of **numerous Fathers** had arrived within the terms and had been transmitted to the Commission within the terms (this was later also acknowledged by Monsignor Glorieux). It was therefore appropriate ...to seek a way to overcome this procedural inconvenience. The competent Commission deemed it sufficient to add **a generic sentence** to the schema. Monsignor Carli was not satisfied with this last-minute remedy.

The Secretary General communicated to him **the mind of the Holy Father**. His Excellency Monsignor Carli, after deploring the procedural irregularity and the press campaign that had been stirred up, said he was willing to withdraw the appeal and to abide by whatever the Pope decided.” (emphases added)

- AS.V.III p. 568-570

Bishop Carli acceded to the pope.

On the following page is an image copy of the primary source, Vatican-published documentation of Pope Paul VI's response on 15 Nov 1965 concerning the Council-violation, suppressed petition to condemn Communism. The original (AS.VI.IV p. 619-620) is available online here: <https://archive.org/details/ASVI.4/page/619/mode/1up?view=theater>

Memo Directly From Pope Paul VI

SUMMUS PONTIFEX PAULUS VI

15 novembre 1965

ANNOTATIO

Si conserva o si ritira il ricorso?

1° È stata illegale la condotta della Commissione mista?

2° Dopo l'intervento «iuxta modum» la tesi dei ricorrenti sarebbe portata conoscenza dei Padri, con le relative osservazioni.

Is it prudent to bring the petition to the attention of the Fathers

620

SECRETARIA GENERALIS CONC. VATICANI II

* * *

A. È prudente?

se respinto: il Concilio sembra aver rifiutato la condanna del comunismo già condannato;

se approva: quale sorte dei cattolici nei Paesi comunisti?

B. È coerente con gli impegni del Concilio?

– di non entrare in temi «politici»?;

– di non pronunciare anatemi?;

– di non parlare di comunismo (1962)?

Is it consistent with the commitments of the Council not to discuss Communism (1962)

Annotationis textus ab exc.mo Dell'Acqua missus est ad exc.mum Felici, qui die 16 mensis novembris 1965 ad Summum Pontificem Paulum VI misit «Nota sul ricorso presentato da S.E. Mons. Carli»: cf. *Acta Synodalia...*, vol. V, pass III, pp. 568-570.

Thus, a Council procedure violation was resolved by deference to the will of Pope Paul VI who explicitly cited a “commitment to not discuss Communism (1962)” Below is the final compromise text and footnote added to *Gaudium et Spes*, Chapter 1 – The Dignity of the Human Person, Section 21.

“In her loyal devotion to God and men, the Church has already repudiated¹⁶ and cannot cease repudiating, sorrowfully but as firmly as possible, those poisonous doctrines and actions which contradict reason and the common experience of humanity, and dethrone man from his native excellence.”

Footnote

16. Cf. Pius XI, encyclical letter *Divini Redemptoris*, March 19, 1937: AAS 29 (1937), pp. 65-106; Pius XII, encyclical letter *Ad Apostolorum Principis*, June 29, 1958: AAS 50 (1958) pp. 601-614; John XXIII, encyclical letter *Mater et Magistra* May 15, 1961: AAS 53 (1961), pp. 451-453; Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, Aug. 6, 1964: AAS 56 (1964), pp. 651-653.

At the opening of Vatican II, there was a contradiction: Surveyed Council Fathers having consistently called for the condemnation of Communism and draft schemas explicitly condemning Communism with specific, practical direction how to counter the influence of Communism; yet also a secret negotiation at the highest levels of Church authority that the Council would not condemn Communism.

In his opening address for the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII distinguished Vatican II from prior Ecumenical Councils as being free from political constraints.

“In fact, it suffices to leaf even cursorily through the pages of ecclesiastical history to note clearly how the **Ecumenical Councils** themselves, while constituting a series of true glories for the Catholic Church, **were often held to the accompaniment of most serious difficulties and sufferings because of the undue interference of civil authorities.** The princes of this world, indeed, sometimes in all sincerity, intended thus to protect the Church. But more frequently this occurred not without spiritual damage and danger, since their interest therein was guided by the views of a selfish and perilous policy.

In this regard, we confess to you that we feel most poignant sorrow over the fact that very many bishops, so dear to us, are noticeable here today by their absence, because they are imprisoned for their faithfulness to Christ, or impeded by other restraints. The thought of them impels us to raise most fervent prayer to God. Nevertheless, we see today, not without great hopes and **to our immense consolation, that the Church, finally freed from so many obstacles of a profane nature such as restrained her in the past, can from this Vatican Basilica**, as if from a second apostolic cenacle, and through your intermediary, **raise her voice resonant with majesty and greatness.**” (emphases added)

- 11 Oct 1962 Pope John XXIII Address for Inauguration of the Council

While John XXIII publicly celebrated Vatican II having a unique freedom from “undue authority of the civil power [and] profane obstacles of the past age,” privately he was aware of the Metz Agreement between the Vatican and the Communist civil power which ultimately would silence 1,586 Council Fathers’ references to Communism.

Administrators fulfilling the terms of the 1962 Metz Agreement suppressed the voices of the Second Vatican Council Fathers.