

## THE ROME-MOSCOW AGREEMENT

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The theme of the article is the same as that of the Supplement to the Christmas 1982, No. 79 issue of *Approaches* by Gregory McDonald entitled 'Vatican II: The Questions No one has Dared to Ask'. Jean Madiran gives chapter and verse from the Catholic and Communist press of the period corroborating Gregory McDonald's thesis beyond all doubt.)

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### **There was an agreement\***

Secret negotiations between the Holy See and the Kremlin *did* take place. An agreement was concluded. Rome has kept the undertaking. There is every indication that the accord is still in force, although it does not date from yesterday, but from the day before yesterday: from 1962. For nearly twenty years from now, the universal attitude of the Catholic Church towards Communism has been governed by the promises which she conceded to the Soviet negotiators.

I am not disclosing any secret. I am recalling what everyone ought to know, what everyone has forgotten, or never known or else has always pretended not to know.

Yet three things were published in 1962 in both the Communist and the Catholic press: 1. the existence of the negotiations, 2. the conclusion of the agreement, 3. the promises made by the Holy See. The kernel has been related in word and print, but has escaped general notice. The best-informed commentators bashfully lowered their eyes. There was no precise commentary, except in *Itinéraires*. As absent-mindedness, whether real or pretended, was then universal, so today ignorance is total: so much so that, when I summed up the whole affair in a few lines in *Présent*, on December 30 last, I aroused amazement among the best informed and often met with scornful or angry disbelief.

### **The essential facts\***

Here is what I said in my summary:

*'John XXIII had conceded to the Soviet negotiator, Mgr. Nikodim, the promise not to attack the people OR THE REGIME of Russia. This was done to secure Moscow's permission for the Russian Orthodox observers to attend the Council. Since then, the Holy See has considered itself to be still bound by the commitments of John XXIII. Communism is no longer ever mentioned in any papal document.'*

On reading these lines, people responded as if they had never heard of the negotiations or the promise. Yet it all appeared in *Itinéraires* at the time.

We ask our old readers who have always kept them in mind to bear with us, as we give the texts, dates and facts here again. For almost everyone it will come as something new.

## I. THE CONDITION SET BY MOSCOW

In November 1961, one year before the beginning of Vatican II, the Kremlin made known publicly what condition it had set the Vatican for authorizing the representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate to come and follow the work of the Council as observers.

### **His Supreme Holiness Mgr. Nikodim\***

The Kremlin's spokesman was, as it happened, '*His Supreme Holiness Monsignor Nikodim*', as *L'Humanité*, the principal organ of the French Communist Party, respectfully called him.

This Mgr. Nikodim is the one who seems to have been finally converted to Christianity, shortly before dying in Rome in the arms of the ephemeral John Paul I, in 1978. He had formerly been an agent of the K.G.B., installed in the governing body of the official Russian Church. He was born in 1929, and had a dazzling career in the Church: priest at the age of twenty; rector of Jaroslav Cathedral at twenty-five; head of the Mission in the Holy Land at twenty-six; head of the Patriarchal Chancellery at thirty; at thirty-one bishop and head of the department of '*external relations*' of the Patriarchate of Moscow, that is, the official Orthodox Church, which is an instrument of the Soviet State and of the Communist Party.

It was he who arranged the admission of the Patriarchate into the World Council of Churches at New Delhi in November 1961. That was the occasion when he stated what condition had been set by the Kremlin, declaring that observers from the Patriarchate of Moscow might attend the Council, '*if there are no declarations hostile to our beloved country*'.

He continued: '*The Vatican is often aggressive, on the political level, towards the USSR. We, who are Christians, Russian Orthodox believers, are loyal citizens of our country and we love our motherland dearly. That is why anything aimed against our country is not likely to improve our relations with others.*'

These statements of Mgr. Nikodim were not secret. They were published subsequently in France on p.29 of the Jan. 1, 1963 issue of '*Informations catholiques Internationales*', and on pages 177-178 of *Itinéraires* (Number70) of February, 1963.

We did not yet know then that negotiations had taken place and that an agreement had been concluded, on this very basis, between Rome and Moscow. We knew that the Russian Orthodox observers had finally arrived in Rome, on October 1962, for the opening of the Council. Furthermore, we grasped the full import of the preliminary condition which had been publicly set by Moscow.

We explained it in the same number of *Itinéraires*:

*'Monsignor Nikodim's manner of acting, which is astounding, consists of forbidding all criticism of Communism, by pleading the offence it would give to his own patriotism . . . All criticism of Communism is considered by Mgr. Nikodim as an attack on his country.*

*'The Vatican bears no animosity towards the country of Russia, the Russian people or nation. However, as a skilful agent of the Kremlin, Mgr. Nikodim identifies the Russian people and country with Communism. In the name of "patriotism", he sets out, as a prior condition for any religious conversation, the omission of any grievance expressed against Communism. . . .*

*'To secure, by this expedient, that the Council shall not speak one word about the greatest drama, the greatest evil, the greatest crime of our age is, indeed, for Moscow, a prime objective. We do not know whether this ultimatum has been the subject of further secret negotiations: but everyone can see that this ultimatum has been publicly formulated.'* (*Itinéraires*, No.7 -, February 1963).

Indeed, we did not yet know, in the month of January 1963, when we wrote these words, which appeared in our February number; we understood only that Moscow had set a condition for the coming of the Orthodox observers - and that these observers had finally come; but, we were to know, almost immediately, that the negotiations had, in fact, taken place.

## **II. - THE AGREEMENT CONCLUDED BETWEEN ROME AND MOSCOW, AND THE PROMISE MADE BY THE HOLY SEE.**

The Communist press was the first to disclose the agreement; and, on this point, it has never been denied or contradicted. Let us quote, among others, *'France nouvelle'*, the *'leading weekly of the Party'*, which wrote, on page 15 of its January 16-22, 1963 issue:

*'Since the world socialist system shows its superiority indisputably and enjoys the approval, of many hundreds of millions of men, the Church can no longer rest content with crude anti-communism. SHE HAS EVEN GIVEN AN UNDERTAKING, ON THE OCCASION OF HER DIALOGUE WITH THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, THAT THERE WOULD BE NO DIRECT ATTACK ON THE COMMUNIST REGIME AT THE COUNCIL..'*

We, reproduced this text, from *'France nouvelle'* in *Itinéraires*, No. 72, of April. 1963 (page 43), with this commentary:

*'Elsewhere in the same newspaper and in Communist propaganda generally, on the subject of the Council, the same formula is repeated, as if it were the literal clause of an explicit agreement which had been formally concluded: "No direct attacks on the Communist regime!.."*

*'It is remarkable that this has been said and repeated openly, without arousing any apparent response. Let us suppose that an American Protestant church had publicly stated, as a condition for the despatch of observers: "no direct attacks on the American, way of life and the capitalist regime". Let us suppose: that subsequent propaganda should boast of having obtained a commitment on this point. What an uproar there would be in the Catholic press! All the more so if the American "way of life" and "capitalism" were ALONE in demanding, and in ..... asserting that they had obtained, such an immense favour, so exclusive and restrictive of the Council.'*

### **III. - THE FACT AND THE DETAILS CONFIRMED IN 'LA CROIX'**

A few days later, 'La Croix', on its part, published an unobtrusive but substantial paragraph, on page 5 of its February 15, 1963 issue:

*'The newspaper "Le Lorrain" of 9th February publishes the report of a talk given to journalists by Bishop Schmitt. Some interesting details were provided by the Bishop of Metz concerning the background to the presence in Rome of observers from the Russian Orthodox Church: It was at Metz that Cardinal Tisserant met Mgr. Nikodim, the archbishop in charge of the foreign affairs of the Russian Church, and it was there that the message which Mgr. Willebrands took to Moscow was prepared. Mgr. Nikodim, who had come to Paris in the first fortnight of August, expressed a desire to meet Cardinal Tisserant. The meeting took place at the house of Fr. Lagarde, chaplain to the Little Sisters of the Poor at Bordes, who has always devoted himself to international problems. After this discussion, Mgr. Nikodim agreed that someone should go to Moscow to convey an invitation, PROVIDED THAT A PLEDGE WERE GIVEN AS TO THE NON-POLITICAL ATTITUDE OF THE COUNCIL.'*

This report in 'La Croix' does not seem to have been noticed by anyone, except the review *Itinéraires*, which reproduced it in the April 1963 issue already mentioned, and commented upon it in these terms:

*'This is not exactly a denial of the Communist assertions. It is rather a confirmation of the existence of "pledges". The phrase "provided that a pledge were given as to the non-political attitude of the Council" is somewhat obscure and could be equivocal. In one sense, the Church, her doctrine and councils are certainly "non-political", and proclaim themselves to be such, publicly and frequently. In another sense, the Church professes a political morality, and this morality directly condemns the Communist regime. It is difficult to imagine that the Church could renounce all political morality; and it is impossible that a political morality should suddenly become neutral or indifferent with regard to Communism.'*

*'In the sense – the legitimate, consistent and certain sense – in which the Church is “non-political”, the encyclical “Divini Redemptoris” is a “non-political” encyclical. It is a religious and moral encyclical. It is unlikely that Mgr. Nikodim insisted on “pledges” only for a “political neutrality” of that kind. It is regrettable that the assertion is being allowed to circulate - and not whispered around, but declared aloud - that the Church has given an undertaking that there would be “NO DIRECT ATTACKS ON THE COMMUNIST REGIME”.*

*'Of course, one can play on words: the Church, in fact, never “attacks” anything or anybody. She defends the natural and supernatural rights of the human person. Such a distinction however, is not likely to satisfy the Soviet governing body of the Patriarchate of Moscow.*

*'It is easy to understand the Soviet stratagem. They would like to compromise and discredit the Church. They would like the Church to fall into line with the so-called “progressive” tendency which, in the name of denouncing injustice, combats fiercely on the side of all the “anti’s”: anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, anti-paternalism, anti-corporativism, anti-integrism, etc., etc., — ALL THE “ANTI’S”, EXCEPT ONE: no anti-communism.*

*'In their initial message to the world, the Fathers of the Council solemnly affirmed that IT WAS PART OF THE CHURCH'S DUTY TO DENOUNCE FLAGRANT INJUSTICE. How could the Church do so, IF, IN THE PROCESS, SHE KEPT SILENT ON THE MOST FLAGRANT INJUSTICE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD — the most highly perfected EXPLOITATION OF MAN BY MAN which has ever existed, that of the Communist regime? She would lose all moral authority in the eyes of unbelievers of good will. She would disturb the minds of her own faithful.'*

At that time, though we analysed the precise significance of the Communist demands, we could not imagine that the Holy See would fall so completely into the trap. So our commentary added:

*'This is utterly impossible and it will not happen. Some local churches have, for various reasons, occasionally been enveloped in this unilateral, systematic silence over the greatest of all contemporary injustices. There can always be, and there often has been, in the history of the Church, some members of the ecclesial body, some local churches, which, for a time, are more or less sick. The Universal Church, assembled in council, is quite another matter.*

*'The Communists, however, in order to destroy the moral influence of the Church in the world of today, are audaciously seeking to spread the belief that the commitment has really been given: “NO DIRECT ATTACKS ON THE COMMUNIST REGIME”.'*

Yet the fact remains: neither during nor after the Council was there any 'direct attack on the Communist regime'. There has still been none. Sometimes there are warnings against

*'materialistic' philosophies and 'totalitarian' ideologies - always in general terms and often vague. Communism is no longer called by its name - ever.*

#### **IV. - THE BENEVOLENT INTERPRETATION**

The following year, in the June 1964 issue of *Itinéraires* (No. 84, pages 39-40), we took the whole matter up again, endeavouring to put the most benevolent interpretation on it:

*The presence of Soviet Orthodox observers at the first session of the Council was negotiated with Mgr. Nikodim. The negotiations were held at Metz in 1962. Mgr. Nikodim and Cardinal Tisserant prepared the message of invitation, which Mgr. Willebrands was then authorized to take to Moscow. In the negotiations, Mgr. Nikodim had sought "pledges", about which no public information from Catholic sources is available. The Communists, on their part, publicly assert that the Catholic Church "HAD GIVEN AN UNDERTAKING, ON THE OCCASION OF HER DIALOGUE WITH THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, THAT THERE WOULD BE NO DIRECT ATTACK ON THE COMMUNIST REGIME AT THE COUNCIL".*

*'It is scarcely credible that an undertaking has been given that the Council would say nothing about Communism, but it is highly probable that Mgr. Nikodim has brought the negotiations to a completely ambiguous position. He asked for the assurance that the Council would be "non-political" and would not attack "his motherland": assurances, easy in themselves to give, but which did not have the same meaning for the Catholic and Soviet negotiators. To the latter, these assurances meant that nothing would be said against Communism. As the ambiguity has not been cleared up, the Communist newspapers have been able publicly to propagate their view on the "undertaking given" by the Catholic Church, and have not encountered any denial.*

*'It was a "misunderstanding" — a deliberate misunderstanding, contrived by Mgr. Nikodim, and ending in a disastrous impasse. Many of the Council Fathers earnestly desire the Church to show that she is "present in the world". A whole schema, schema 17, is being prepared on this subject: but what kind of presence in the world would a Church have which spoke about all the great problems, except the Communist problem? Which acted as if Communism did not exist? Which did not say one word about it? Which spoke about capitalism, racism, under-development, social justice, everything — except Communism? Yes, but how can it be discussed without appearing to break an undertaking which, of course, was not given, but which one of the two parties declares and deems to have been given?*

*'This disastrous impasse could have been avoided, if the person, career and real conduct of Mgr. Nikodim had been better known and understood.'*

We do not regret that, in 1963 and 1964, we held to the most benevolent interpretation. One has always the duty to begin this way. It is just that one may not persist in it, when it has become manifestly untenable.

## APPENDIX

### Textual Notes

1. We know nothing about Fr. Lagarde, that priest of whom it is oddly said that *'he has always devoted himself to international problems'*. We did not enquire about him at the time, as this was not our business, and we imagined that others would do so, or had done so. It would be interesting, even today, to have a little precise information on this personality, if only in historical retrospect.
2. On the other hand, we are quite familiar with the bishop at whose residence the Nikodim-Tisserant negotiations took place: Mgr. Paul-Joseph Schmitt, Bishop of Metz since 1958. A few years after the negotiations of 1962 - in 1967 and 1968 - he came out completely into the open, proclaiming that the change in the world must involve a similar change in the idea of salvation brought by Jesus Christ, and in the idea of God's design for the world. He also stated: *'We have to take into account the reproof which the Marxists make against us. After nineteen centuries, Christians have not succeeded in placing the economy at the service of man. The exploitation of man by man is still a tragic reality.'* Mgr. Paul-Joseph Schmitt, in religion as in political morality, is the very incarnation of the contemporary episcopal heresy which forms the subject of our book, *'L'Hérésie du XXème siècle'*, (volume I).
3. Cardinal Tisserant liked to be considered as a Gaullist of the first hour (which he probably was), and as an unyielding anti-Communist (which is much less certain). I always felt that he was a rogue. Quite a lot could be said about him. At any rate, his presence at the negotiations was no guarantee of innocence and purity of intention. I cannot believe that Mgr. Nikodim tricked him. All things considered, I think he had conceived the desire (or received a command) to negotiate, no matter what the price.
4. One year before the agreement was concluded between Rome and Moscow, John XXIII had published the social encyclical *'Mater et Magistra'* (May 15, 1961) . . . COMMUNISM was still named, to recall *'the fundamental opposition between Communism and Christianity'* (para. 34). I think it was the last time [this was done] in a papal document. Even then, its importance was craftily diminished, for this reminder was wilfully made to appear retrospective. It occurred in the preliminary summary of previous papal teaching. It was attributed to Pius XI, which is not incorrect; and John XXIII did not question it, but neither did he make it his own and he avoided repeating it. Furthermore, he referred exclusively to Pius XI's encyclical *'Quadragesimo Anno'*, and not at all to his encyclical *'Divini Redemptoris'* on Communism. This

was a significant omission, which could not have come from mere absent-mindedness.

5. If the encyclical '*Mater et Magistra*' is anterior to the Rome-Moscow agreement," the encyclical '*Pacem in Terris*' is subsequent to it (April 11, 1963). Consequently, Communism is no longer mentioned not even — to recall that, formerly or a short time previously, it was condemned by the Church. So Rome kept the pledge given to the Communists.
6. In the encyclical '*Pacem in terris*', John XXIII declares: '*. . . the philosophic formula does not change once it has been set down in precise terms*'. A strange assertion, which the whole history of doctrines and their evolution manifestly contradicts. However, the avowed intention of John XXIII was, starting from this point, craftily to restrict the extent of the Church's condemnations to '*a false philosophy of the nature, origin and purpose of men and the world*', exempting from her strictures of such and such '*an economic, social cultural and political programme, even when such a programme draws its origin and inspiration from that philosophy*'.

Let us follow his way of looking: the Church has condemned Marxist doctrine, and neither this doctrine nor her condemnation can hereafter change; but the *Communist movement* is evolving (for the better). Hence the marvellous conclusion: '*It may sometimes happen, therefore, that meetings arranged for some practical end — though hitherto they were thought to be altogether useless — may in fact be fruitful at the present time, or at least offer prospects of success.*' (para 160 CTS Edition). Thus did John XXIII surreptitiously rescind the pontifical injunction: '*therefore no one who desires to save Christian civilisation from extinction should render it [Communism] assistance in any enterprise whatever*' (Divini Redemptoris, 22).

7. In fact, all that hotchpotch of paragraphs 159 and 160 in '*Pacem in Terris*' has never been applied by the ecclesiastical hierarchy except for the benefit of Communism (and Marxist socialism) — never to fascism or liberalism. Despite the misleading appearance of a general rule, applicable to every doctrine and benefiting every movement, it is nothing but a fabrication made to accommodate Communism alone.
8. And now, as we consider things from the historical perspective of nearly a quarter of a century, we can no longer doubt that confronted with Communism, the Holy See has voluntarily effected unilateral disarmament. We have also, of course, every reason to think that the central organs of the Church's government have been penetrated: not only, as we knew, by modernists (who wittingly or unwittingly as the case may be are the auxiliaries of Freemasonry but also by Communist agents. Hence, the systematic distortion of information at the very top. However, it is no longer possible to suppose that the attitude of the popes from John XXIII towards

Communism comes only from the fact of their having been tricked.