

A Much-Needed Ecumenical Council

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In a letter of 1925, Guido M. Conforti shares his opinions and encourages Pope Pius X to consider a possible Ecumenical Council for the Church. Could these dreams be prophetic, 60 years before the celebration of Vatican Council II?

Conforti's deeds and activities were not only geared towards his soul or the vineyard given to him, but they reached out to the entire flock of Christ. No one can say that Conforti lived under the shadow of his Cathedral because of his spiritual shortsightedness. In his homilies and letters, he was not only concerned with Parma and his diocese, or with the entire Italian concerns of the Church. He was universal in his approach of ideas and practices.

In his heart, he felt the need expressed by St. Paul in the letter to Corinth: "there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches" (2Cor. 11:28), and prayed for the well being of the Church at large "so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles,... [without] immediately consulting flesh and blood." (Gal. 1:16)

Many people and bishops of Italy saw all the activities of Bishop Conforti carefully. What most impressed everyone was his ability to balance his total service to his local church and his passionate spirit for the universal church.



A Much-Needed Ecumenical Council, predicted 40 years before

The Mission Exposition in 1925

It is significant his participation to the "mission exposition" in Rome during the Holy Year 1925, willed and organized by Pope Pius XI in the Vatican grounds. The mission gathering showed a panoramic view of the presence and vitality of the universal Church.

Conforti brought his contribution to this page of history, with his enthusiasm and unconditional support and praise for this missionary initiative, by inviting and involving the faithful and priests to collaborate.

Conforti had already done a lot of work on behalf of the universal church and to prepare the soil for mission events such as these. As the president of the Missionary Union of the Clergy, and founder and general superior of the Xaverians, Conforti invited also his missionaries in China to do their utmost best

to collaborate for the success of the Mission Exposition in Rome. The China missions were well represented, with objects from the Chinese museum at Parma's Motherhouse, given to the Supreme Pontiff as a sign of Conforti's love for the Holy Father and the universal character of the Spouse of Christ, instrument of missionary education and activity. Conforti visited the various displays with personal interest and much delight.

Letter on the Ecumenical Council

Even more interesting, on the matter of the universality of the church and the celebration of the Holy Year 1925, was the response of Bishop Guido Conforti to the Pope on a possible gathering of an Ecumenical Council. In his letter, Bishop Conforti notes the motivations for a gathering of this magnitude; indeed prophetic ideas for those times.

Conforti wrote a letter to the Holy Father "in Latin" on June 24, 1925, in which he shares this longing of his heart and the praise of an Ecumenical event such as a Council in the Church. *"It is a wonderful initiative – he writes – which will be beneficial to the universal church."*

Soon after the initial remarks of praise, Bishop Conforti puts down a number of reasons why an Ecumenical Council should take place – some 50 years before Vatican II!

First, it would be of great advantage to the Holy See and its status among the nations. Second, it would provide a renewed awakening of the religious aspect in the whole world, especially soon after the immense and bloody World War which caused a lot of damage in all aspects of life. Third, there are questions of moral, social and international aspects to be answered, in the light of the revealed truth of the Gospel. Fourth, there is the need to invite all Christians to religious discipline, so that all may see in the figure of the Holy Father *"the head and guide, of whom we already admire his strength and clear wisdom."* Fifth, there is the urgency to understand our relationship with other Christian denominations, especially our status with the Eastern Churches, who *"seem to see opportune to come back to the center of the Catholic unity"*; they would *"welcome a Council with a serene heart, full of hope."* Finally, there is a need to bring the entire Church back to his missionary dimension, for *"I find everywhere the holy enthusiasm in clergy and laity to spread the Gospel."*

For all of these reasons, Conforti believes and states: *"the advantages of the convocation of an Ecumenical Council, to be celebrated in Rome near the see of the Vicar of Christ, would be indeed innumerable to the Church and to the religious issues of our time."* Therefore *"the non-surmountable difficulties, which can be encountered in a gathering of such magnitude, cannot stifle such an arduous initiative."* He firmly believes and wishes that *"this Council would come soon"* and prays to God so that *"from this new event in the world, the entire Church spread around the world would become enlightened with glory and praise."*

Bishop Conforti was sure that the Church needed to renew itself in order to bring more concrete answers to its ministry and its mission in the world. Today, the Universal church gives thanks to God for the gift of a missionary bishop who lived the missionary spirit of the Second Vatican Council.