

Poverty of the Church— Poverty of Culture: A Contribution of Giuseppe Dossetti to Vatican II

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Abstract

Giuseppe Dossetti was an important figure not only in Italian politics, in the reform of historical studies, and in the history of new monasticism, but also at Vatican II. One topic in particular—poverty—was at the core of his contribution to the activity of Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, archbishop of Bologna, at the council. The article analyzes these contributions based on the private papers of Lercaro and Dossetti. It highlights the meaning of poverty, which was scarcely received in the conciliar decrees and about which post-Vatican II magisterial teaching has been virtually silent, until the election of Pope Francis.

Keywords

Council, Dossetti, Lercaro, poverty, Vatican II

Giuseppe Dossetti is a key personage in the history of Italian Catholicism and of Vatican Council II. Born in Genoa in 1913, he was brought up in a small town in the province of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy. There he was educated in a severe and demanding spiritual life by both his mother and some local priests. He then went to Bologna University, where he was a model student and where he graduated in canon law, not under the great Arturo Carlo Jemolo as he would have wished, but under a less illustrious professor who succeeded Jemolo on his transfer to

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Rome. Thanks to his rich thesis on violence in marriage according to canon law and the network of encultured Catholics in Fascist Italy, he was led to pursue postgraduate studies at the Catholic University in Milan in 1921. There he studied Roman law, further developed his thesis, for some years formed part of the university's secular institute, and drafted the documents with which Pius XII would in 1947–1949 recognize the new form of consecration of lay people who take vows but live *in mundo*. Appointed full professor at the University of Modena before he reached the age of 30, Dossetti became involved in the resistance to Fascism, eventually becoming, between 1944 and 1945, chairman of the Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale (CLN) of his home province. He was the only partisan leader at this level to have emerged from the ranks of Catholicism along the Gothic Line, the last redoubt of the occupying German forces across the natural defensive wall of the Apennines as the Allies broke through in spring 1944. It was also for this service, after the liberation of April 25, 1945, that Alcide De Gasperi chose him as deputy secretary of the Christian Democratic Party. But instead of being a mere cipher, Dossetti became the leader of the progressive wing within the party, and in this role he campaigned actively for collaboration with the largest parties of the left, which sought a deep renewal of Italian society. Dossetti would become one of the most influential figures in the drafting of the Italian Constitution in 1946–47. Along with the key points of relations between church and state, fundamental passages of that Constitution can be attributed to Dossetti. But when De Gasperi, under American pressure, dismissed the Communists and Socialists from the government, Dossetti started to withdraw from political life just after the first democratic elections in 1948, in which he was elected a member of the lower house of parliament. After having dreamed of founding a (Catholic) labor party, he decided to resign his seat in the Parliament and in 1953 embarked on a life of study. He first founded a research institute in Bologna (Centro documentazione, now called Fondazione per le scienze religiose), which he would later entrust to Giuseppe Alberigo, though he always remained its source of inspiration; he then founded a monastic community subject to the archbishop of Bologna. It was the archbishop himself, Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro, who would “force” him to conform to his vow of obedience, to present himself as a candidate for mayor of Bologna in 1956, and to add two years of local political life to his career as a statesman. But after his ordination as priest in 1959, he withdrew from public life to pursue a life of study and prayer, only to emerge in 1962 from his voluntary isolation. It was then that Lercaro called him to Rome to serve as his *peritus* during the Second Vatican Council. Dossetti would be not merely an observer but, as we will see below, a protagonist of the council: he would both provide the council's new regulatory framework (the version Pope Paul VI used in guiding the sessions of 1963 to 1965) and facilitate its procedural integrity as secretary of the moderators appointed by the pope to direct the assembly in the decisive month of October 1963 on crucial issues in the debate. After the council, Lercaro imagined Dossetti as his successor, but in 1968, when the cardinal was accused of having been too outspoken in criticizing both the American bombardments in Vietnam and liturgical reform, Pope Paul removed him from his see. Dossetti then disappeared from diocesan public life and a few years later went to live in the Holy Land, first in Jerusalem and Jericho, then in the Palestinian

territories of the West Bank and in Jordan. He reappeared in Italy in 1985, only after the death of Cardinal Antonio Poma, auxiliary *cum jure successionis* of Lercaro and probably an originator of Lercaro's destitution. Dossetti thereafter spent much of his time in the monastic community he had founded at Monte Sole (Bologna), site of the terrible massacre of 1700 civilians by the Nazi Party's Schutzstaffel (the SS) in September 1944. There he devoted himself to a life of prayer and interiorly kept a shrine to the martyrdom of so many innocent victims. And yet in 1994–1996, the last years of his life, he once again raised his voice on the political scene to attack the project of Silvio Berlusconi and his parties and to defend the Constitution. He died in December 1996. Dossetti's life and work have continued thereafter to excite historical interest, evidenced in Italy by many biographical studies and the publication of his writings and speeches (not always edited with sufficient philological scruple).

A Producer of Culture

In Dossetti's complex biography one can discern a horizon that constantly weaves together the various levels of his existence. We might define it roughly as a "cultural" horizon, but one in which the multiple strands of his thought are subsumed: a particular way of conducting theology, a radical intention of life, and a habit of scientific rigor that was for him the essential prerequisite for a "profound" interpretation of history.¹

It was an intellectual style that took shape in Dossetti's Milanese years, beginning in the autumn of 1934. These were the years he spent at the Catholic University, to which he naturally brought the defining experiences of his previous life, in particular the spiritual example of his mother Ines Ligabue,² the oblative evangelical radicalism of Father Dino Torreggiani, founder of the Servants of the Church and himself a servant of the poor, and the influence of Monsignor Angelo Spadoni, vicar general of the diocese of Reggio Emilia.³ Yet these were also years in which the Milan of the economic depression—so different from the small-town atmosphere and domestic environment in which Dossetti had been brought up—would provide him with a new source of inner enrichment that would indelibly mark his way of thinking. Against this background of these diverse formative experiences, Dossetti wove a complex tapestry of references that can be easily corroborated by an *index fontium* and a chronology based on the order of their appearance in his letters.⁴ From Dossetti's arrival in Milan

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1. In depicting this "cultural" horizon, we must never forget that Dossetti himself was reluctant to define what had been most essential in his spiritual experiences, precisely because he had undergone the doubts that went with them: on his relativization of monasticism itself see the biography by Giuseppe Alberigo, *Coscienza di un secolo: Le lezioni del 1997 su Giuseppe Dossetti*, ed. Enrico Galavotti (Bologna: ebook Fscire, 2013).
 2. See Enrico Galavotti, *Il giovane Dossetti: Gli anni della formazione, 1913–1939* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006) 32–37.
 3. *Ibid.* 163–71.
 4. Such an investigation would disclose a number of significant influences in Dossetti's background: Francesco Ruffini and Benedetto Croce, Johan Huizinga and Santi Romano, key

in 1934 onward, this “cultural” horizon would be further enriched by references and connections, in which his many levels of action are all operative: his spiritual drive and his political creativity, the fervor of his writings on canon law, his militancy as a member of the Constituent Assembly, his reading of the Bible, his personal asceticism, and his dedication to his spiritual family and to the study of history. Yet all this was not the result of a sudden conversion of the kind that imposes itself without any conscious analysis. Rather, it was the harsh counterpoint to an intellectual progress that was fused with his interior spiritual growth.

This is no surprise from a man who formed part of the second generation of Father Agostino Gemelli’s disciples in the university’s cloisters situated next door to the basilica of Sant’Ambrogio in Milan. Gemelli’s dream was to train new recruits to reconquer for a new Christendom a newly secularized society following national unification. They would have had to promote the final Catholic victory over the liberal regime and—in substance—furnish the ruling class with a post-Fascist Catholic brand of authoritarianism. The aim of this “Mussolinian” mission was to deconstruct with authoritarianism the “liberal revolution”—the anticlerical mission—of the late 19th century, and to “restore” the sovereignty of “Christus Rex.”⁵ The Catholic University was Gemelli’s “stable,” his select body of recruits for the Catholic “reconquest.” But Gemelli never aimed to impart to his disciples (and thankfully he did not succeed at this) everything this controversial and volcanic figure stood for: neither his indebtedness to the scientific positivism he had absorbed as a student of Camillo Golgi (1906 Nobel Prize winner for medicine); nor his experience as a socialist revolutionary and organizer of mass movements; nor the philo-fascist *integrismo* he had elaborated and that, at the political level, Father Luigi Sturzo and his Partito Popolare Italiano had defeated in 1919.⁶ But what is beyond doubt is that “the Father”—as Gemelli liked to be called—instilled in his pupils and associates a thirst for intellectual excellence, a habit of scientific rigor, and even a kind of presumption that in the best cases became a habit of humility.⁷

figures of a classical historical and juridical culture; the Carmelite and Franciscan sources; the cult authors of political Catholicism of the interwar period such as Jacques Maritain and Charles Journet; poets such as Margherita Guidacci, economists such as Federico Caffé, the as-yet-unknown Ralf Dahrendorf, the young Hubert Jedin, and a thousand other authors of obvious interest for a student of canon law, patristics, Scholastic theology, philosophy, sociology, economics, and science—all cultivated in the milieu of the 1930s of which Renato Moro, *La formazione della classe dirigente cattolica (1929–1937)* (Bologna: Mulino, 1979), has furnished a kind of collective biography. See the index of *Cronache sociali 1947–1951*, 2 vols. with DVD, intro. and ed. Alberto Melloni (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 2007).

5. For a review of Gemelli in his role as founder and rector of the Catholic University in Milan, see Luciano Pazzaglia, ed., *Gemelli, l’Università Cattolica e la ricerca scientifica fra le due guerre. Annali di storia dell’educazione e delle istituzioni scolastiche* (Brescia: La Scuola 2012) 19.
6. See Emilio Gentile, “La Grande guerra e la rivoluzione fascista,” in *Cristiani d’Italia: Chiesa stato società 1861–2011*, ed. Alberto Melloni, 2 vols. (Rome: Treccani, 2011) 1:247–60.
7. Marcello Malpensa and Alessandro Parola, *Lazzati: Una sentinella nella notte* (Bologna: Mulino, 2005).

A double existential and cultural knot was tightened at the center of this educational process. It was one in which “tension”—a key word in Dossetti’s lexicon—was a positive link between widely contrasting needs. On the one hand, Dossetti supported a kind of spirituality that postulated a “necessary violence,” the violence entailed by strict self-control of physical and intellectual forces. This was an interior resistance that unconsciously opposed the subversive idolatry of a culture imbued with the values of Gabriele d’Annunzio (1863–1938) who considered only the passivity of the senses and the vitalism of the immediate to be authentic. On the other hand, Dossetti was vehement in his support for “intellectual rigor” fueled by a philosophic and juridical hermeneutic of the text and a Crocean historicism, emphasizing the *longue durée* of historical processes and castigated readers of French reviews *à la page* who boasted of a short-sighted internationalism.⁸ Gemelli’s successful project was to endow the ruling class (the one in democratic Italy!) with the conviction, or at least with the consciousness, of aspiring to the role of reconquering modernity by maintaining a “tension,” between the conduct of life and critical analysis.⁹ That “tension” inscribed Dossetti’s experience as a scholar and as a Christian, and to it he would bring his capacity of being both a consumer and producer of culture.¹⁰ It was a creative tension against which Dossetti, throughout his life, pitted himself against the intellectual horizon that, for the sake of convenience, I continue to call “culture.” In this formulation, culture is a tool capable of explaining and guiding the historical process: culture affords consciousness of the general significance of the particular gesture, as the sum of knowledge that each person can shape and deploy with a view to an end that determines its ethical and spiritual quality; and culture functions as a tool of the “exculturation” of the faith achieved through the assumption of the biblical “language” and the universality of the promised redemption, which the rise of the exploited classes proves.

Vatican Council II

To have drawn attention to this tension-filled journey of Dossetti’s life “as a Christian and as a man” is not superfluous in a study dedicated to a person who is often cited reductively in political journalism, as though it were a case of deciding whether, to understand him, one should see him in the light of the *totus politicus* or the *totus devotus*, or some combination thereof.¹¹ Still less is it so in an article that aims to show how

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8. For a comparison with the formation of Giovanni Montini see also Fulvio De Giorgi, *Mons. Montini: Chiesa cattolica e scontri di civiltà nella prima metà del Novecento* (Bologna: Mulino, 2012).
 9. I have developed this problem in *Gemelli, l’Università Cattolica e la ricerca scientifica fra le due guerre* 83–85.
 10. Dossetti himself had drawn up the distinction with regard to Giacomo Lercaro’s lecture, “Linee per una ricerca su Giovanni XXIII,” in Lercaro, *Per la forza dello Spirito: Discorsi Conciliari*, new ed., ed. Saretta Marotta 1984 (Bologna: EDB, 2013) 287–310.
 11. For example, Paolo Pombeni, *Giuseppe Dossetti: L’avventura politica di un riformatore cristiano* (Bologna: Mulino, 2012); Fabrizio Mandreoli, *Giuseppe Dossetti* (Trento, 2012).

his contribution to a theology of poverty and the poor Christ was not born in the darkness of personal asceticism (though this was not lacking), but in the light of the conciliar event and in the universality of its ecclesial dimension. Dossetti never exempted himself from observing a strict and hidden poverty. However, he did not derive his own intellectual quest from his lived asceticism, nor did he content himself with a material and thoughtless practice of the poverty whose value he perceived in proportion to his apprehension of the heart of the conciliar experience. His personal spiritual commitment is testified to in his youthful letters and reflections:¹² Dossetti's effort to assign political consequence to the aspirations of the exploited classes,¹³ his personal sharing of the condition of the "least," which he posed programmatically in the light of his Bolognese experience,¹⁴ his return to moderation as the key to his administrative campaign in 1956,¹⁵ and his adoption of poverty as the key to his monastic life¹⁶ are all but the preparations and contours of a theological commitment of particular intensity and efficacy that culminated in his participation in Vatican II between 1962 and 1965.

To this council—which Dossetti awaited and experienced as “the fulfilment of a dream”—he found himself invited by Cardinal Lercaro a few weeks after it began.¹⁷ And with his accustomed alacrity when taking on a task, Dossetti entered into the council. Thus, within the space of a few months he wrote and edited all the major speeches given by his cardinal at the council.¹⁸ He proposed the two essential reforms of Pope Paul VI on the regulation of the council in general and on the legates called to preside over the council on behalf of the pope.¹⁹ It was to Dossetti that the assembly would owe the major innovations: (1) the procedure that in October 1963 unblocked the ecclesiological discussion; and (2) the theme of collegiality that would be the driving force of an ecclesiological reform that Dossetti would like to have structured on poverty, but that—even though it arose in public debate—would be neglected after the council.²⁰

The formal and—to put it mildly—strained occasion that Lercaro seized in early November 1962 to invite Dossetti to the council is well known: the cardinal asserted that he had difficulty following the work of the informal group chaired by Father

12. Galavotti, *Il giovane Dossetti* 93–132.

13. Enrico Galavotti, *Il professorino: Giuseppe Dossetti tra crisi del fascismo e costruzione della democrazia, 1940–1948* (Bologna: Mulino, 2013) 593–680.

14. See Alberigo, *Coscienza di un secolo*.

15. Mario Tesini, *Oltre la città rossa: L'alternativa mancata di Dossetti a Bologna (1956–1958)* (Bologna: Mulino, 1986).

16. Paulo Bettiolo, *Dossetti—Monachesimo e chiesa locale* (forthcoming).

17. Giuseppe Alberigo, *Giuseppe Dossetti al Concilio Vaticano II*, now in Giuseppe Alberigo, *Transizione epocale: Studi sul concilio Vaticano II* (Bologna: Mulino, 2007) 383–493.

18. Giuseppe Alberigo, introduction to *Per la forza dello Spirito* 10–62.

19. The essays “Dinamiche e procedure nel Vaticano II” and “La preparazione del Regolamento del concilio Vaticano II del 1992–1993” are now to be found in Alberigo, *Transizione epocale* 152–220.

20. See my “Procedure e coscienza conciliare al Vaticano II: I 5 voti del 30 ottobre 1963,” in *Cristianesimo nella storia: Saggi in onore di Giuseppe Alberigo*, ed. Alberto Melloni et al. (Bologna: Mulino, 1996) 313–96.

Paul Gauthier on “Jesus, the church, and the poor,” in which he took a particular interest;²¹ So Lercaro asked Dossetti to “substitute for him” in a wholly external and private workgroup three weeks after the council opened, by which time it was clear that the council would not exhaust its mandate in a brief sequence of votes of approval.²² Lercaro, in effect, invited Dossetti to enter the council and to monitor on his behalf the crucial theme of poverty, which, as it turned out, was debated in a forum of minor public significance. How this decision should be evaluated is not easy to determine. It is clear that Lercaro sought a “noble” pretext to have Dossetti at his side, once he had realized that Vatican II would not be a mechanical process that would proceed by acritical endorsements of votes of approval that some in the Curia had imagined.²³ Lercaro considered significant this small group that had so quickly formed on the fringes of the council and that in the end would be one of the many that constituted the council’s very heart and soul. His decision to employ Dossetti may be the sign of attention to a theme whose significance had blazed forth, as if in a prophetic flash of lightning, in Pope John XXIII’s preconciliar address of September 11, 1962: “the church wishes to be the church of everyone, but especially the church of the poor.”²⁴

Lercaro knew Dossetti very well, and with this famous but obedient diocesan priest he would forge a close conciliar and postconciliar association, interrupted only by the dramatic circumstance of Lercaro’s removal from office in 1968.²⁵ The way Dossetti’s conciliar collaboration with his archbishop began is in itself indicative of what would be a line of conduct during the council when Dossetti would act as ghostwriter of almost every intervention by Lercaro. This role of great delicacy was a two-way process: Lercaro asked his *peritus* to draw on what he knew and to draft what was required of him, and Dossetti wrote what the cardinal wanted to say and could say. Lercaro’s speeches on poverty given both in and outside the assembly hall were drafted by Dossetti with the clear understanding that a council moderator never spoke without the Council Fathers listening to him. And it is precisely these speeches that were of seminal importance for the history of Vatican II, for the intellectual biography of Dossetti, and for the very position assumed by Lercaro in the assembly.

21. In 1964, e.g., Gauthier published *Les pauvres, Jésus et l’Église* (Paris: Ed. universitaires); it appeared in English in 1965 as *Christ, the Church and the Poor*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964).

22. Matteo Mennini, “Paul Gauthier e la povertà della Chiesa durante il Vaticano II: La faticosa ricerca di un consenso,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 34 (2013) 391–422. See Gautier, *Les pauvres, Jésus et l’Église / Christ, the Church and the Poor*.

23. Alberigo, *Transizione epocale*.

24. See Vittorino Grossi, *Poveri e povertà nella storia della Chiesa* (Modena: Mucchi, 1988); ET at <http://conciliaria.com/2012/09/popes-address-to-world-month-before-council-opens>.

25. Alberto Melloni, “La verità e l’abbandono: Due lettere di G. Dossetti e G. Lercaro dell’aprile 1968,” in *Tutto è grazia: In omaggio a Giuseppe Ruggieri*, ed. Albergo Melloni (Milan: Jaca, 2010) 503–19.

Lercaro's First Intervention in the Council and the *Propositio*

Dossetti in fact drafted Lercaro's intervention on poverty, delivered in the decisive week that in early December 1962 closed the discussions of the first period. Faced with an ailing pope, the prospect of a conclave to elect his successor, and the uncertainties about the fate of Vatican II, the leading cardinals all took a position in relation to the ecclesiological themes planned for the agenda of the forthcoming session.²⁶ Cardinal Giovanni Montini, archbishop of Milan, and Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens, archbishop of Malines-Brussels, in particular took a position on the question of conciliar structure. In fact, Pope Paul VI had already raised this issue in a thoughtful letter to Secretary of State Cardinal Amleto Cicognani, dated October 18, 1962, in which he lamented the lack of progress on a "project" (a lack that had been the key to John XXIII's conciliar doctrine!).²⁷

Lercaro too, in his intervention of December 6, posed an architectonic question and—as we now know—kept in reserve the option of a straw vote that would test the position of the Council Fathers on what direction the council should take while John XXIII was still alive.²⁸ Lercaro's emphasis in his December 6 intervention—which was not only drafted but worked out by Dossetti²⁹—would prove to be decisive for including the crux of poverty in the ecclesiological discussion and in the end would provide the foundation of *Lumen gentium* no. 8, paragraph 3 (a passage that has never

26. See Giuseppe Alberigo and Alberto Melloni, eds., *Storia del Concilio Vaticano II*, 5 vols. (1995–2001; Bologna: Mulino, 2012–13) 2:354–72.

27. *Ibid.* 369–70.

28. See Lercaro, *Per la forza dello Spirito* 113–22; and Corrado Lorefice, *Dossetti e Lercaro: La Chiesa povera e dei poveri nella prospettiva del Concilio Vaticano II*, pref. Giuseppe Ruggieri (Milan: Paoline, 2011) 175–86.

29. Giuseppe Dossetti, "Alcune linee dinamiche del contributo del Cardinale G. Lercaro al Concilio ecumenico Vaticano II," in *Il Vaticano II: Frammenti di una riflessione*, ed. Francesco Margiotta Broglio (Bologna: Mulina, 1996) 117–18. Lercaro, however, recalled it in another sense, which I can approximate in this translation: "We spoke of it in the speech given on the conclusion of the first session, expressing the hope at the time that it would be placed at the center and would animate all the doctrinal and legislative work of the Council on the mystery of Christ in the poor and the evangelization of the poor. Since then there has been much discussion about it, and some aspects of this theme penetrated almost all the schemas (from *Lumen gentium* to the schema on mission), but perhaps not enough and not exactly as had been hoped: it seems that the Council Fathers did not fully grasp that the situation of the poor in the Gospels and the Christian practice of poverty concern not merely moral conduct of the Christian and of the Church; they also impinge on the intimate and personal mystery of Christ. In other words, gospel poverty does not constitute merely *an* aspect—however sublime—of morality and philanthropy; rather, it is an essential message of the revelation of Christ about himself; it is a central part of Christology" (Lercaro, *Per la forza dello Spirito*, cited in *Servizio presbiterale e povertà* 75, ll. 132–46).

once been appropriately cited by the postconciliar popes, right down to Pope Francis). In that passage in the Constitution *De Ecclesia* (later *Lumen gentium*) there is the famous parenthetical statement on the church of Christ, *subsistit in Ecclesia catholica* (over which, as theologian Gérard Philips of Louvain predicted, rivers of ink would flow).³⁰ As a result of a “violent compromise,” said Dossetti, the phrase did not survive the clash, and instead of playing the desired role of unbinding the identification between “the one Church of Christ” and the Roman institution, it ended up fuelling a fruitless debate.³¹ In that paragraph one may also find the following lines in which the triple and normative relation or analogy between the way, the form, and the flesh of the poor Christ is established: *Sicut Christus . . . ita Ecclesia; Christus . . . ita Ecclesia; Christus . . . similiter Ecclesia*.³² These occurrences opened a fissure on which an ominous silence fell, a silence that only the end of the European papacy in 2013 was able to dispel.

Lumen gentium no. 8, whose significance is now perceived more clearly than had ever been the case in the theology of the poor developed during the Latin American bishops’ assemblies at Medellín or Puebla, was a result of the way Lercaro had posed the question of poverty on the floor of the council in December 1962. To a council willing to reassemble for a new session (unpredicted a few months earlier) Lercaro, adopting the words of Dossetti, asked that poverty be considered not “an additional theme after all the others” but “the one [overriding] theme of the whole of Vatican II.”³³ Crucial for Lercaro was to affirm the theological correspondence between messianic annunciation and the hopes of the poor; and hence the need to interpret poverty as a form of obedience to the logic of redemption.³⁴

As is now clear from the Dossetti archives, we know that this speech implied—and might have predicted—a procedural move that never took place: in other words, a straw vote to test the views of the Council Fathers that did not occur in 1962. The speech, however, was made extremely significant by analogy with the one Lercaro delivered on October 30, 1963, on the controversial issues of ecclesiology—once again on Dossetti’s initiative.³⁵

Corrado Loreface reconstructed the dating of a brief but crucial document in the Dossetti archives: a *Propositio* for the council that Alberigo thought belonged to the intersession of 1963, but instead should be dated to shortly before the end of the first session. This note contains the first proposal of a straw vote relating to the significance

30. Philips’s position is now clear from his diaries; see Karim Schelkens, *Carnets conciliaires de Mgr. Gérard Philips, secrétaire adjoint de la commission doctrinale*, intro. Leo Declerck (Leuven: Peeters, 2006).

31. Dossetti, *Vaticano II: Frammenti*.

32. Marie-Dominique Chenu, “La chiesa dei poveri nel Vaticano II”; and Yves Congar, “La povertà come atto di fede,” *Concilium* 4 (1977) 89–96; 145–57; in the English version: “Vatican II and the Church of the Poor” 56–61, and “Poverty as an Act of Faith” 97–105.

33. In Lercaro, *Per la forza dello Spirito* 118ff.; and Loreface, *Dossetti e Lercaro* 187–97.

34. In Lercaro, *Per la forza dello Spirito* 117ff., 76–88; and Loreface, *Dossetti e Lercaro* 194.

35. See Melloni, “Procedure e coscienza conciliare.”

of *evangelizatio pauperum*.³⁶ Lercaro's December 6 speech indicated that poverty is the *principio unificatore* ("unifying principle") that everyone had been seeking since October, and on which Lercaro insisted in an important interview broadcast by Italy's state television RAI on December 22.³⁷ Dossetti did not stop there, however. He hoped to persuade the assembly, among its first steps, to pass a conciliar decision sanctioning the Vatican's priorities, which in his view should not derive from an academic process. What are and should be the church's priorities, he urged, are the

themes . . . that immediately and directly refer to: (a) doctrine on the Church, mostly under the aspect of fostering Christian unity; (b) cooperation of the college of bishops with the Roman Pontiff and its practice and functioning; (c) evangelization of the poor, relations with non-Christian religions, service to people pursuing their own development.³⁸

The examination of a "clear guiding declaration"³⁹ was a constitutional technique that Dossetti had used in the Italian Constituent Assembly in 1946.⁴⁰ And, as mentioned above, in October 1963 that technique would resolve the knotty problem of the sacramentality of the episcopate and of collegiality, showing the latter to be as fundamental a feature of the church as *communio*. It is very significant that Dossetti should have thought of using this constitutional technique on the question of poverty already in the first period of the council, since it clearly indicates his view of the assembly not as an occasion for co-inspiration—*conspiratio* in Nicholas of Cusa's sense—but rather for compromise.⁴¹

At this point in the council, however, there would be no opportunity for such a vote. Time for it was lacking, because the bishops had to return to their dioceses for Christmas. But especially lacking was a procedural instrument. This was due to the

36. Lorefice, *Dossetti e Lercaro* 162–63.

37. Federico Ruozi, *Il concilio in diretta: Il Vaticano II e la televisione tra informazione e partecipazione* (Bologna: Mulino, 2012) 341–42. An inventory of RAI television coverage of the council can be found in *Il concilio in mostra: Il racconto del Concilio Vaticano II nei filmati delle Teche Rai (1959–1962)*, ed. Alberto Melloni (Bologna: Istituto per le scienze religiose, 2005).

38. Dossetti's *Propositio* is to be found in Fondo Dossetti (hereafter FD), Archivio fscire (Bologna) II/109 2; on the structure and history of the conciliar archives of Lercaro and Dossetti see my review, "I fondi conciliari di Giacomo Lercaro e di Giuseppe Dossetti," forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference held by the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences in October 2012.

39. "Provvedimenti," in FD II/190 3–4. The Italian and French typescript version of a *Pro-memoriam* per una dichiarazione orientativa del futuro lavoro del Concilio (French title: *Note pour une déclaration d'orientation*) are preserved respectively in FD II/198a, typescript 7r and FD II/198b, typescript 4r, December 1962.

40. Galavotti, *Il professorino* 475.

41. On Cusa's sense of *conspiratio*, see his *De pace fidei*, in *Nicolaus of Cusa's De Pace Fidei and Cribratio Alkorni*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning, 1994) 38, 70, where he discusses grounds for finding divine inspiration in world religions.

rules for the first period—modeled as they were on the *ordo* for the First Vatican Council of 1869–70, which insisted that no authority other than that of the supreme authority, namely, the pope, could interrupt a flow of work establishing a series of *pro forma* votes of approval of already-drafted documents. According to the heads of the Roman Curia and of the Roman schools (and contrary to the guidelines of John XIII), this procedure was supposed to result in few, if any, amendments.

John XXIII's letter of January 6, 1963, *Mirabilis ille*, would address this latter aspect.⁴² This document, which governed the intersession and prefigured the future of Vatican II, freed the council from the obligation to examine and reject all the preparatory documents. It also provided the individual thematic commissions the guidance of a new coordinating committee that prefigures the instrument of effective supervision of the work, the need for which was felt by the Council Fathers to enable them to pass binding decisions. Yet not even *Mirabilis ille* welcomed the kind of procedural innovations called for by Lercaro and Dossetti: it rejected the idea of an intermediate conciliar structure and deferred the search for a proper balance of the work to the debate among the members of the coordinating committee.

This procedural-organizational issue would be addressed by the newly established coordinating committee, which convened in January 1963 to consider a reformulation of the Constitution *De Ecclesia* to deal with the fact that “two ecclesiologies” were present in the current text. But the revision proposed by the committee—mostly the work of *peritus* Gérard Philips of Louvain—would be effected by trying to save as much of Father Sebastian Tromp's preparatory schema as possible. Not that the committee had a high opinion of it, but they were convinced that compromise would promote a politically expedient consensus. Philips's revision, which Dossetti characterized as having been executed by “scissors and paste,” left untouched the theme of poverty; and the progression of the three relations/analogies of *Lumen gentium* no. 8 would reemerge only in 1964, once the bottleneck of collegiality had been overcome.

Poor People and Proletarians

In that same year of 1964, Dossetti drafted a lecture that Lercaro gave in Beirut on April 12, 1964; in November he also drafted a series of memoranda (*appunti*) for Paul VI. In these documents, so different in terms of interlocutor and horizon, Dossetti took a step that distanced him from the working group on the church of the poor in which he had participated since his arrival in Rome in November 1962. Here the theme of poverty emerges in a new context, namely, that of schema XIII on the relation between the church and the contemporary world, a relation influenced by the challenge posed by the Marxist analysis of the mechanisms of exploitation that generate the proletarian masses.⁴³ In this case, too, Dossetti's previous political experience was not without

42. Enrico Galavotti, “Il concilio continua: Giovanni XXIII e la lettera ‘Mirabilis Ille’ del 6 gennaio 1963: Introduzione e sinossi critica,” in *Tutto è grazia* 115–70.

43. See Loreface, *Dossetti e Lercaro* 178–79. In his *appunti* (notes) Dossetti writes, “The numerous books and articles published in the last few years, the drafts prepared during the

significance in contextualizing the theme; but once again he tried to rise above the ideological discussion about Marxism and find a deeper theological meaning.

Instead of attributing the role of antagonist of the faith to “atheist Communism” (to use Pius XI’s term), Dossetti, during his years of direct political activity, had repeatedly emphasized that practical atheism was the inevitable result of an affluent society.⁴⁴ So in 1964 he committed Lercaro to engage in a direct confrontation with Marxism, which took complementary forms in the lecture he drafted for the cardinal and in his memoranda for the pope. Dossetti’s analysis of affluent society was theological. It aimed to press the point that it was precisely this lifestyle that led Christians to spiritualize evangelical poverty,⁴⁵ which goes beyond paganism itself. For capitalism

necessarily generates something worse than paganism. The neopaganism of our time differs from its primitive form. The latter, while still admiring created things (those not made by man), mistook them for God: “Yet these men are little to be blamed, for perhaps they go astray while seeking God and desiring to find him” (Wis 13:6). By contrast, neopaganism substitutes for the (still religious) adoration of the things created by God the adoration—infinite more foolish—of the works made by human hands: hence the total and purely negative irreligion, the self-idolatry that is no longer interested in God, not even to deny and combat him, and no longer even sincerely interested in others, i.e., in man, in his quality as brother. In this way the greatest negation of Christianity that is historically possible has come to pass.⁴⁶

That is why Dossetti proposed a distinction between universalistic and nonuniversalistic forms of atheism.⁴⁷ He went so far as to make a seemingly paradoxical

three conciliar sessions by the various groups of initiative and study, even the contributions within the Council itself during the discussions of both the dogmatic schemas and schema XIII, all reveal as a whole a pronounced immaturity. The problem of evangelical poverty is posed in our time; the aspiration to it is spreading and being deepened; the number of those among the bishops who wish to pass from words to actions is growing by the day. But, at both the doctrinal level and the level of practical proposals, the key points still fail to be grasped: one feels that something is still lacking to arrive at immediate conclusions, capable of having any real impact. That is as sad as it is symptomatic.”

44. Galavotti, *Il professorino* 808–18.

45. “In the first place it [affluent society] tempts Christians to a total ‘spiritualization’ of evangelical poverty; in other words it induces them to imagine that a totally subjective and interior poverty, without any objective relationship to a material condition of privation, is still covered by the first beatitude. . . . In the second place, affluent society increasingly tends to dismiss any attempt to resume the proper terms of the evangelical discourse on poverty: as a jarring note or as something inelegant or as a defect of historical sense and of solidarity aimed at ensuring prosperity to ever larger masses, or ultimately as a dangerous form of utopianism or one suspected of having links, at least unconscious, with the Marxist critique of capitalist society” (Lercaro, *Per la forza dello Spirito* 135, ll. 357–62; 136, ll. 376–83).

46. See *ibid.* 135, ll. 357–62; 160, ll. 95–107.

47. “It is contemporary atheism, in the last analysis, that now poses the need to practice the mystery of evangelical poverty in our lives in a radical way as a categorical imperative

accusation, namely, underestimating the “dogmatic” point by which the culture that generated capitalist affluence had enslaved even Marx. And here we come to a crucial passage in Dossetti’s *Appunti sulla povertà*, heavily underlined in Corrado Lorefice’s study:

For too long all this has been underestimated, namely, by considering only (whether to permit or to oppose) the economic or social conception of Marxism, its political and moral aspects, and by failing to see that the sociology and ethics of Marx are strongly rooted in his philosophy and in the transposition of this into a theology, which has precisely as its primary foundation a dogma relating to the relation between man and material goods, a dogma that in turn supports the whole Marxist conception of man, nature, spirit, existence, sin, redemption, and salvation.

And yet this fundamental datum continues to escape most people. Even a recent critical review of Marxist sociology begins from the presupposition: “His philosophy prompted Marx to betray his sociology, and this betrayal forces us continuously to separate the two elements.” After over a century of analysis, however, the very strong coherence and indivisibility of all the elements of Marxian doctrine ought by now to be clear to everyone.

From the beginning of his meditation Marx was fully aware of the theological analogy between the process of development of modern economic thought and the task of theological overturning [*rovesciamento*] that he had assumed. One of his earliest texts immediately established a link between death and private property and then immediately posed the problem of the appropriation of material goods in the theological framework of the supreme problems of the human spirit, freedom, sin, and destiny.⁴⁸

All this, in Dossetti’s view, leads to qualifying evangelical poverty as mystery, precisely thanks to the identification of a philosophic aporia of Marxism: this “achieves a coherent and complete overturning of traditional ethics” and therefore “makes it finally impossible for Christianity to propose its doctrine on poverty on a case-by-case basis or at any rate in the framework of an ethics of common sense.” To say that “evangelical poverty must therefore be qualified theologically—in other words, qualified for what it really is—a mystery,”⁴⁹ alludes not simply to the inscrutability of its grammar, but to its correlation with what it is. In the language of the New Testament, this is “the mystery itself of the Messiah,” the mystery that enables the poor to have Jesus present in the flesh with them (*il mistero rende i poveri carne di Gesù con loro*).⁵⁰ In

for Christianity and for the Church: for it is only thus that the suffocating stranglehold of affluent society and the loss of the sacred can be broken. The mystery of evangelical poverty, therefore, can not only combat atheist aggression, but also liberate those residues of religious faith and universalism that may still be incorporated by contemporary atheism” (“Appunti sulla tema della povertà,” in *ibid.* 157–70, at 161–62, ll. 157–64).

48. *Ibid.* 129, ll. 177–201; the quotation in paragraph 2 is referenced to Ralf Dahrendorf, *Classi nella società industriale* (Bari: Laterza, 1970) 65.

49. *Ibid.* 130, ll. 233–36, 244–46.

50. “Analogically, as for sinners, it seems that, more than their interior dispositions, it is the predilection of divine mercy that takes priority. So, with all the more reason in the case of

other words, as Dossetti would say in his *appunti* for Paul VI, there exists a “conformity to the Word” in the poor that disintegrates the essentialist Christologies from which the church had to liberate herself.

A nonessentialist but existential Christology that sees in the *kenosis* and in the cross of Christ not only an accidental modality (which “might also not have existed”) on the level of the incarnation, but also the only real and concrete way of fulfilling the incarnation itself, [is] therefore the absolute and essential precondition for the prolongation of the incarnation in the Christian and in the church.⁵¹

Poverty of Culture

One result of the discussion on poverty can be found in *Lumen gentium* no 8, articulated in the above-mentioned triple analysis of the analogies between the Christ of history and the church of the faith, according to a proposal made by one of the most active of the French bishops, Alfred Ancel.⁵² Throughout 1965, however, the theme of poverty would further develop in the reflections of Dossetti and Lercaro, with a passage that would deepen the analysis of the conformity of the poor to ordering the *logos* of the cosmos and of history itself. We still find traces of this latest of their reflections on the poverty of culture in some documents emerging from the Dossetti–Lercaro relationship.

The most important trace is the text of Lercaro’s speech at the Istituto Sturzo in Rome in February 1965 on the sanctity of John XXIII. Here Dossetti proposed that a distinction be drawn between three types of ecclesiastical culture: that of the manual tradition, that of controversial essays, and that of the church’s sources capable of those prophetic leaps—the same *sapientia exemplata* he wrote on in 1954 and had recognized in Roncalli’s images of the book and the chalice as sacramental icons of the *depositum fidei*. Lercaro said nothing in this lecture about poverty as ascetic deprecation of an intellectual superstructure. But he laid the premise for an examination of a certain kind of ecclesiastical culture, supercilious and self-sufficient, as the ultimate form of wealth and proposed the “culture of sources” derived from mining biblical wisdom.

Dossetti took a further step by recording the intervention drafted for Lercaro regarding no. 22 of the future Constitution *Gaudium et spes* in 1965 and by drafting the text of a lecture given by Cardinal Leo Jozef Suenens of Brussels at Florence in 1966. Dossetti was not keen on the faith–science dilemma as the testing ground for a vague opening to the modern, as facile as it was insignificant. In the debate on culture he saw

the poor, we need to emphasize not the moral dispositions (of which the text says nothing), but the fact that Christ was sent to console them, because Jesus has as his mission that of bringing them the happiness of the Kingdom” (ibid. 150, ll. 820–25).

51. See “Appunti sulla tema della povertà” in ibid. 163, ll. 210–16. See the reference to 2 Corinthians 8:9 for the special conformity to the Word of the annihilated and crucified God (Giuseppe Dossetti, *Sullo schema “De Ecclesia,”* typescript), on which see Lorefice, *Dossetti e Lercaro* 215. A copy of Dossetti’s typescript can be found in FD II/144 (ibid. 165).

52. Lorefice, *Dossetti e Lercaro* 265.

continuously implicit a paramount and very difficult problem, namely: in what sense and to what degree is divine revelation necessary for humans to progress in a consciousness that is capable of becoming (in its various objects and orders) ever more human? And in what sense and to what degree might human cognitive progress, even at its secular level, contribute to the homogeneous realization and evolution of revelation itself?⁵³

In these pages Dossetti freed himself from the obvious attitude “of sympathy and attention toward, and even trust in, scientific, technological, and artistic progress, and toward those who were involved in it,” whom the church must nourish.

He emphasized, however, that the council ought to pose the problem of an effective encounter not “with the culture of the past, but that of the future.” And in saying so he highlighted not the narrow-mindedness or obscurantism of past centuries, but the reigning “cultural *ordo* within the church” from which the church should liberate herself and cast off a burden that prevented her from experiencing a more genuine poverty. Dossetti’s notion of poverty was not one subordinate to an apologetic logic that sees poverty as a more effective means of propaganda of the faith in the present situation of wealth. The theological poverty that rejects a theology of power is both incapable of listening to the culture of others and averse to recognizing that it is precisely familiarity with the Scriptures that may strip and dismantle systematic and dogmatic superfetations that prevent access to the gospel.⁵⁴ The crux is that of a sharp separation between doctrine and system:⁵⁵

53. Ibid.

54. “1. The church must, as a necessary premise, recognize herself as culturally poor and, consistent with this, wish herself ever poorer. I do not speak here of material poverty, but of a special application of evangelical poverty proper to the field of ecclesiastical culture. In this field too—as in that of properties and patrimonial institutions—the church still preserves certain riches of a glorious but perhaps anachronistic past (Scholastic systems of philosophy and theology, educational and academic institutions, methods of university teaching and of research). The church must have the courage, if necessary, to renounce these riches or at least not to presume too much from them. She must not boast of them; she must trust in them ever more cautiously. Riches may place the gospel message not on a stand but under a bushel; they may prevent the church from opening herself to the genuine values of the new culture or the ancient non-Christian cultures. They may limit the universality of her language, divide instead of unite, and exclude many more people than those it attracts and convinces. I do not want in the least to hope for a purely negative theological and cultural impoverishment for the church. In the field of culture, too, the distinction between evangelical poverty and subhuman poverty holds good. It is the former, not the latter, that is to be hoped for: in other words, not ignorance and meanness, but sobriety and an ability to recognize limitations, magnanimity, and the courage to attempt (even with a risk) new roads, chastity and intellectual humility, which is the true and most enriching form of supernatural wisdom and at the same time a most elegant sense of both newness and genuine historical realism. In short, what we hope for is not renunciation for the sake of renunciation, but the renunciation that enriches and that, even from a strictly human point of view, leads to greater rigour and scruple” (Lercaro, *Per la forza dello Spirito* 227 ll. 51–80).

55. On Congar’s position, see Alberto Melloni, “The System and the Truth in the Diaries of Yves Congar,” in *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, ed. Gabriel Flynn (Dudley, MA: Eerdmans, 2005) 277–302.

The church has always said that she does not wish to identify either herself or her own doctrine with a particular system, with a particular kind of philosophy or theology. But hitherto this has been more a *de iure* than a *de facto* distinction. The time has come to separate *de facto*, more and more, the church and her essential message from a particular cultural organon, whose human universality and perpetuity—on the contrary—many churchmen still claim too much with a spirit of possessiveness and self-sufficiency. To open herself to any real dialogue with contemporary culture, the church must, with a spirit of evangelical poverty, increasingly focus and concentrate her culture on the absolute richness of the Scriptures and of biblical thought and language. To this end the church should not fear being misunderstood or disappointing people's hopes. People fundamentally do not wish anything other than this from the church. And so the church's culture will no longer appear—as it occasionally has in the past—as a form of rationalism or scientism of profane derivation, but as a very powerful religious dynamism able to leaven any culture of our time or of the future.⁵⁶

The need to think in “a universal language, capable of expressing new and universally valid categories,” presupposes, in short, not an impoverishment of theology as such, but the need to return to the role of “doctor-bishops” who, in chiasmus with “lay theologians,” are theologians in the primitive sense, because they “speak with God,” and from this dialogue “draw the essential profile of the work of government and of teaching [that makes them] truly capable of being interpreters of a situation, of an epoch, of a people, and of its culture.”⁵⁷ In a lecture written for Cardinal Suenens, and given by him in Florence in 1966, this intuition would find an even clearer synthetic formulation: “Claiming that any cultural value (even if of great scope and profundity as might be Roman law or Aristotelian metaphysics) is universally valid would be tantamount to excommunicating from humanity all those who do not accept or cannot understand or assimilate that value.”⁵⁸

Addenda

Any exhaustive analysis of the theme of poverty in the connotation given to it by Dossetti within Vatican II would require a comparative study of how these intuitions circulated in Vatican II, how they were reflected on, reduced, opposed, and reused.⁵⁹ It is quite clear that when Joseph Ratzinger, in 1969, affirmed “a perpetual and irrevocable right” of Hellenistic culture to subsist in the Christian faith, he did not mean to enter into any direct controversy with Lercaro's speech; but his affirmation documents the sharpness with which a self-proclaimed “traditional” theology is opposed to Dossetti's thesis, which sees in the great non-Christian cultures a potential not inferior to that hailed by the encounter between the faith of the Galileans and the Greco-Roman world.

56. See Lercaro, *Per la forza dello Spirito* 227–28, ll. 81–99.

57. *Ibid.*

58. From Suenens's lecture at Florence drafted by Dossetti (FD III/275*).

59. For these comparisons the digital version of the *Acta* is now available on the website fscire.it (Fondazione per le scienze religiose Giovanni XXIII), in the framework of the Mansi digitalization project for the study of church councils.

The same could be said of the theology of religions implicit in Dossetti's reflections on poverty. There is in fact a theological dimension of poverty in recognizing the asymmetry of the relation between Israel and the church (while the church cannot be thought of without Israel, Israel can be thought of without the church), and in the fact that this fundamental link has become the key, if not the sacrament, of all religious differences. What Christoph Theobald indicates as the reform achieved by Vatican II that affects the very idea of revelation,⁶⁰ or what Ruggieri indicates as the peculiarity of the fundamental theology of John XXIII, in his identification of the *depositum fidei* with the book and the chalice,⁶¹ is in some sense a reflection on poverty that the council opened up, and in which Dossetti sowed insights. But that reflection has still to be taken to its fundamental conclusions on the theological as well as on the historical level. After having long been removed from theological discourse,⁶² it must be placed once again at the center of Catholic debate, and from there started anew.

And perhaps, with the pontificate of Pope Francis, who raises issues that on principle exclude any consideration of their sources and any examination of the theological consequences, this reflection has not only been resumed but has also been placed in a position from which it can and must begin anew.

Author biography

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60. Christoph Theobald, *La réception du concile Vatican II*, vol. 1, *Accéder à la source* (Paris: Cerf, 2009) 514–15, 666–67.

61. Giuseppe Ruggieri, *Ritrovare il concilio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2012).

62. By way of example I may point out that in Lorefice's monograph (repeatedly cited in this article) a mention in his introduction of the "removal" of the theme of poverty in the bishops' magisterium was censored by the Catholic publisher Paoline.