

From the Observer of History to the Maker of History: Angelo Roncalli, Charles Borromeo, the Council of Trent and the Consequences for Vatican II¹

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Fifty years after the conclusion of Vatican II, debate still continues regarding the Council, its legacy and interpretation. The now-canonised Pope John XXIII surprised many by his sudden decision to summon Vatican II in 1959 soon after his election; it was not anticipated that a “transitional” pope would make such an audacious and daring decision that would have such major historical implications for the Catholic Church. However, John XXIII’s “surprise” decision came after decades of research, scholarship, and reflection on the Council of Trent especially the pastoral reforms instituted by St Charles Borromeo. Angelo Roncalli’s study of Borromeo’s apostolic visitation to the diocese of Bergamo in 1575 was decisive in shaping the historical framework that guided his ideas, his language, and style of leadership.

Keywords: Angelo Roncalli/John XXIII, Second Vatican Council, St Charles Borromeo, Council of Trent, pastoral reform

On 25 January 1959, Pope John XXIII announced his intention to call an ecumenical council for the Catholic Church. On that same day, he announced a synod for the diocese of Rome and the updating of the code of canon law. Many were taken by surprise by these announcements for a number of reasons. Firstly, John XXIII had only been in office less than one hundred days. His announcement was daring and audacious given that he was expected to be a “transitional” pope undertaking a “caretaker” papacy of no great significance.

Angelo Roncalli had spent thirty years as a papal diplomat in Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, and Paris. In 1953 he was appointed Patriarch of Venice and made a cardinal. He was known as a warm, friendly, engaging, and humourous man quite unlike his austere and stern predecessor, Pius XII. Roncalli, now canonised, is remembered in stereotypical terms as “good Pope John” and the “peasant pope”, a type of accidental hero that the late Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro of Bologna once described as “mediocrity giving birth to genius”. In 1965, two years after the death of John XXIII, Lercaro insisted that stereotypes alone were inadequate to describe the culture and personality of Angelo Roncalli. Lercaro recommended in his lecture that an immediate and complete reconstruction of Roncalli’s life was needed, paying close attention to the classical and foundational sources of the Christian tradition that critically shaped the mind and vision of Pope John XXIII.²

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² Giacomo Lercaro and Giuseppe De Rosa, *John XXIII: Simpleton or Saint?* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967). Originally published in Italian as *Giovanni XXIII: Linee per un’aricercastorica* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1965).

Angelo Roncalli had spent the greater part of his adult life editing a critical five-volume edition of St Charles Borromeo's apostolic visitation to the diocese of Bergamo in 1575 in the wake of the Council of Trent.³ This work has received at times only a passing mention in many of the popular biographies on Roncalli and very little scholarly attention on Borromeo.⁴ Roncalli's editing of the apostolic visitation was the subject of a recent doctoral dissertation. It explored in more detail both the content and context of Roncalli's historical study in order to see how this study shaped in a decisive way his decision as pope to convene the Second Vatican Council.⁵

Roncalli discovered the papers of Borromeo's apostolic visitation in 1906 almost by accident in the Milan archives and worked with great diligence and dedication to edit five critical volumes, the first published in 1936 during his time in Istanbul and the last in 1958 soon after his election to the papacy.⁶ On the surface, it appears that Roncalli undertook this critical editing of Borromeo's visitation during his long years in the Orient as a type of hobby in much the same way that people collect stamps or make model airplanes. To the contrary, this critical study not only shaped Roncalli's view of the Church's past but also shaped the language and style of his ministry as a bishop and ultimately his decision as pope to convoke the Second Vatican Council and to give it a particularly "pastoral" orientation. In studying Trent and the reform implemented by Borromeo, Roncalli was the observer of history. In his supposedly "sudden" decision as pope to summon Vatican II, Roncalli became the maker of history.

In editing the *Atti*, Roncalli framed Trent and Borromeo in a particular way. He reinterpreted the Council of Trent and the reforms of Borromeo by moving away from the polemical anti-Protestant/Counter-Reformation historical perspective in order to embrace the little understood or appreciated sub-text of Trent.⁷ In this scholarly endeavour, Roncalli gave great emphasis to what Trent had clearly highlighted—genuine pastoral renewal, concern for the *curaanimarum* (or the care of souls), and the reform of ecclesiastical discipline such as obligatory residence for bishops, a much debated and highly divisive issue at Trent recently highlighted by John O'Malley.⁸ Trent recommended the restructure of diocesan governance that required the regular convocation of synods and provincial councils and systematic episcopal visitation. For Roncalli, Borromeo was the model bishop *par excellence* and the principal agent in terms of enacting Trent's decrees regarding pastoral renewal and episcopal solicitude for the care of souls.⁹

³ A. G. Roncalli, *GliAttidellaVisitaApostolica di S. Carlo Borromeo a Bergamo (1575)* (Firenze: Olschki, 1936-58), hereafter referred to as the *Atti*. The *Atti* is technically a two-volume work divided into five tomes but for the sake of chronological clarity, it will be referred to as a five-volume series according to each volume's specific year of publication.

⁴ John Headley and John Tomaro, (eds.), *San Carlo Borromeo: Catholic Reform and Ecclesiastical Politics in the Second Half of the Sixteenth Century* (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Press, 1988). Italian scholarship on Roncalli's study of Trent and Borromeo has been more comprehensive. See Giuseppe Alberigo, "Carlo del mito, Carlo dellastoria: Sensibilitàstorica e impegnopastorale" in *ilgrandeBorromeotrastoria e fede*, (a cura del ServizioStudi e PianificazioneCassa di RisparmiodelleProvinceLombarde, AmilcarePizziS.p.A. – ArtiGrafiche: Cinisello Balsamo, 1984), 127-219; Alberto Melloni, "Il modello di Carlo Borromeoneglitesti e nell' - "esperienza di Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli," in *Rivista di storia e letteraturareligiosa* 23 (1987): 68-114; Stefano Trinchese, *Roncalli "storico": L'interesse per la storianellaformazione e negli studi di Papa Giovanni XXIII, 1905-1958* (Chieti: Solfanelli, 1988).

⁵ Max Vodola, "John XXIII, Vatican II and the Genesis of Aggiornamento: A Contextual Analysis of Angelo Roncalli's Works on San Carlo Borromeo in Relation to Late Twentieth Century Church Reform" Ph.D. Diss., Monash University, 2010.

⁶ Alberto Melloni, *Papa Giovanni: Uncristiano e il suoconcilio* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009).

⁷ John O'Malley, *Trent and all That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.

⁸ John O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁹ Hubert Jedin, *Crisis and Closure of the Council of Trent* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1967), 168. While Borromeo is commemorated as the "model bishop" of Tridentine reform, other pastorally zealous bishops at this time included Gabriele

Charles Borromeo was born at Arona near Lago Maggiore in 1538 and studied canon and civil law at the University of Pavia. He was called to Rome by his uncle Pope Pius IV (1559-65) and showered with numerous titles and responsibilities especially in Borromeo's capacity as secretary of state.¹⁰ Borromeo was appointed "administrator" of the diocese of Milan in 1560 and created a cardinal. The Council of Trent was meeting for its third and final period in 1563 and Borromeo at first sided with the curialists; he saw the council as a threat to the papacy but slowly became aware of how the office of diocesan bishop was the foundation both of ecclesiastical life and of Tridentine reform.¹¹ He was appointed archbishop of Milan in 1563 and received episcopal consecration. The death of his elder brother Federico late in 1562 turned him into a more devout and austere figure. There was great pressure on Charles to leave the clerical state and to take charge of family affairs following his brother's death. Not only did Charles continue in his vocation but he divested himself of all Roman titles and positions in order to seriously fulfil his pastoral obligations as archbishop of Milan.¹² When entered the ancient and prestigious see of Milan in 1565, he became its first resident bishop in more than ninety years. This captured Roncalli's historical imagination.¹³

In 1906, Roncalli was accompanying his bishop, Giacomo Radini Tedeschi, to Milan, who was involved in planning a forthcoming provincial council.¹⁴ To fill in the time, Roncalli took himself off to the diocesan archives and made an astonishing discovery that would have lifelong implications. The prefect of the Ambrosian Library at this time was none other than Achille Ratti, the future Pope Pius XI (1922-39), who in 1925 would select Roncalli for a diplomatic mission to Bulgaria. Roncalli was greatly guided by the advice of Ratti in the handling of this important archival material and would later write of that experience:

I had nothing interesting to do while I waited except to visit the large archdiocesan archives that house many yet unexplored historical treasures, and not just those of the Archdiocese of Milan. I was immediately taken with the collection of thirty-nine parchment volumes entitled *Archivio Spirituale – Bergamo*. I explored these and returned to see them on successive visits. What a pleasant surprise for me! To find all those interesting documents on the Church of Bergamo in one place, which at the time following Trent – the most intense period of fervour of the Catholic Counter-Reformation – was so noted for Church renewal.¹⁵

But what exactly did Roncalli find? He found all the documentation relating to Borromeo's extensive three month apostolic visitation to Bergamo in 1575. This official visitation included the diocesan curia and cathedral chapter, convents and monasteries of men and women religious, hospitals and charitable institutions, all parish churches and places of worship and numerous lay confraternities. There are extensive parish inventories regarding the condition of the physical fabric of churches and the number and condition of ecclesiastical

Paleotti (1522-97), Archbishop of Bologna, Bartolomeo deMartyribus (1514-90), Archbishop of Braga (Portugal), Paolo Burali (1511-78), Bishop of Piacenza then Archbishop of Naples, Pedro Guerrero (1501-76), Archbishop of Granada and St Francis de Sales (1567-1622), Bishop of Geneva.

¹⁰ G. P. Giussano, *The Life of St Charles Borromeo, Cardinal Archbishop of Milan* (London: Burns and Oates, 1884). This is a translation from the original Italian published in 1610 for Borromeo's canonization and a highly hagiographical piece of writing. Despite the historical importance of Borromeo, he still awaits a substantial and scholarly biography.

¹¹ Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation* (Basingstoke, London: Macmillan, 1999), 61.

¹² Giuseppe Alberigo, "Carlo Borromeo come modello di vescovonellachiesa post-tridentina," *RivistaStoricaItaliana* 79 (1967): 1031-1052.

¹³ MaxVodola, "I met Charles Borromeo...and he brought me to Vatican II," *Pacifica* 26 (2013): 171-183.

¹⁴ Giuseppe Battelli, *Unpastoretrafede e ideologia. Giacomo M. RadiniTedeschi, 1857-1914* (Genova: Marietti, 1988).

¹⁵ Mario Benigni and Goffredo Zanchi, *John XXIII: The Official Biography* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2001), 84.

requisites such as vestments, church plate, furnishings, and art work. There are also numerous petitions to Borromeo regarding the improper conduct of clergy, disputes regarding church property and the dispersal of ecclesiastical funds, and the absence of clergy from their parishes, which caused lay people to complain about the deficiency of Masses, the lack of catechetical instruction, and other devotional activities.

Having discovered this material, Roncalli brought it to the attention of the bishop, RadiniTedeschi, who convened a special diocesan commission with Roncalli as secretary to copy, transcribe and edit the material to coincide with the 300th anniversary of Borromeo's canonisation which was due to be celebrated in 1910. The material took considerable time to prepare and the first volume was almost ready for publication in 1910. Meanwhile, Roncalli was able to explore key themes in Borromeo's life and ministry in an article published in 1909 in Bergamo's *La Vita Diocesana*. Roncalli stated that "perhaps we have become accustomed to admiring this great archbishop too much from afar...this true colossus of pastoral holiness..."¹⁶ Roncalli wondered whether stereotypes of Borromeo's austerity and inflexibility which often led "to a respectful fear of him" was perhaps related to the fact that Borromeo was single-minded in his aims for the Church which were always "holy and noble". According to Roncalli, "these are first impressions and first impressions are deceiving". Roncalli went on to frame his own particular and unique interpretation of Borromeo:

But it is important for us instead to come close to the great saint with confidence, studying his every action in minute detail, his every movement, every word on his lips and from his pen, every crease of his vestments. S. Carlo Borromeo, studied like this, is almost transfigured before our eyes, his face illuminated by an expression of goodness that is gentle and attractive; above all, one has this sense of being near a big heart; and the heart of S. Carlo explains much about his life and renders him endearing even there where his actions seems inspired by an excessive rigour...He was in the 16th century a genius in the re-organisation of the Christian life that renewed itself following the battles against heresy; and in a moment, like the present, of the general reorganisation of Christian life, his voice responds again, from the century that was his to our own, the shining and vast thinking of Borromeo finds itself in harmony with our own aspirations and with our own needs...¹⁷

Progress on editing the *Atti* was slow and by 1914 World War I had broken out, RadiniTedeschi had died, Roncalli was moved aside, and the new bishop showed little enthusiasm for the project. But Roncalli stored the material and held onto the dream of one day seeing it published.

Historical Scholarship and Pastoral Ministry

The project of editing and publishing the *Atti* literally collapsed in 1914. It was a "nice idea" but many historical factors militated against its success. Three decades later, Roncalli resumed the work of editing this material. The historical context is significant. By this stage, Roncalli had left his native Bergamo and was serving as a papal diplomat in the Orient, first in Bulgaria (1925-34) and then Turkey and Greece (1934-44). As a papal representative, Roncalli self-consciously described his diplomatic missions as the 'pastoral' endeavour of the bishop, to be a pastor, shepherd, and father of all regardless of religious or cultural differences. Roncalli

¹⁶ A.G. Roncalli, *La Vita Diocesana*, Ottobre 1909, 1/10, "San Carlo Borromeo e il nostro Clero nelle prossime Feste Centenarie," 317-319. (Translations from the Italian are mine).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 318. Roncalli appears to be "softening" the harsh, rigid and more ascetic dimensions of Borromeo's personality in order to "come close" to the reforming zeal of this pastoral bishop. In Catholic iconography, Borromeo is nearly always depicted in cardinal's robes and rarely in episcopal attire of mitre and crozier, a victim of curial insistence on Roman centralism rather than a reforming local bishop. See, for example, Michele Aramini, *San Carlo Borromeo* (Gorle, Bergamo: Editrice Velar, 2012), *San Carlo Borromeo: La casa costruita sulla roccia* (Bari: Edizioni di Pagina, 2011) and Fabiola Giancotti, *Per ragioni di salute: San Carlo Borromeo nel quarto centenario della canonizzazione 1610-2010* (Milano: Il Club di Milano & Spirali, 2010).

was exercising this ministry in places where the Catholic Church was in a minority, often in challenging circumstances, and sometimes treated with suspicion by the Orthodox.¹⁸ As secretary of his beloved bishop in Bergamo, RadiniTedeschi, Roncalli had seen at first hand the value of extensive pastoral visitation of the diocese by the bishop.¹⁹ Now Roncalli was undertaking this ministry himself, often going to isolated regions and encountering small pockets of Catholics that had not seen a priest in years, let alone a bishop.²⁰

In a remarkable burst of energy and activity, Roncalli resumed the editing of the *Atti* in the early 1930s with the assistance of Bergamo priest Don PietroForno. Roncalli was now a bishop himself exercising that same pastoral ministry he had witnessed by the side of RadiniTedeschi for nine years and literally ‘following’ Borromeo as he studied the latter’s visitation of the Bergamo diocese in 1575. In this historical study, Roncalli brings together the world of Trent and Borromeo in the sixteenth century and his own daily experience as a bishop and papal representative in the early part of the twentieth century. One of the driving forces behind the editing of the *Atti* is the fact that Roncalli not only discerned meaning in the past but retrieved meaning from this past in order to address a question or a particular intellectual preoccupation. For Roncalli, the question or driving issue related to his understanding of the Christian tradition, and how the Church changes in the course of its history and adapts itself to new historical circumstances. Roncalli discerned in Trent a period of change, renewal and adaptation, in particular, a renewed understanding of the office of bishop as exemplified by Borromeo through his use of instruments such as the erection of seminaries, provincial councils, diocesan synods, and extensive episcopal/apostolic visitation. During his nineteen years of office in Milan (1565-84), Borromeo convoked six provincial councils and 11 diocesan synods.²¹ The systematic way that Borromeo went about enacting the reform decrees of Trent is evidenced by the way he became the model bishop *par excellence* through the publication of the *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, the classic manual of Tridentine reform.²² Nothing escaped Borromeo’s close vigilance and this involved clear directives on preaching, the construction, maintenance and outfitting of churches, and advice on hearing confessions.²³

Therefore, the editing of Borromeo’s visitation acts as a critical source that enabled Roncalli to construct both a historical framework and language around which he shaped his daring vision of announcing Vatican II and designating it a predominantly “pastoral” council. This historical framework articulated at Vatican II bears direct relationship to Roncalli’s lifelong study of Trent and Borromeo. As a historian, Roncalli uses the *Atti* to develop an increased sensitivity to history, an increasing openness to critical thinking, and an ability to discern

¹⁸ See the impressive scholarship on this period including, Francesca Della Salda, *Obbedienza e Pace: Il vescovo A.G. Roncalli tra Sofia e Roma, 1925-1934* (Genova: Marietti, 1989); Alberto Melloni, *Fra Istanbul, Atene e La Guerra: La missione di A.G. Roncalli (1934-1944)* (Genova: Marietti, 1992); KirilKartaloff, *La SollecitudineEcclesiale di Monsignor Angelo Roncalli in Bulgaria (1925-1934)* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice del Vaticano), 2014; Lorenzo Botrugno, *L’artedell’incontro* (Venezia: Marcianum Press, 2013); MariagraziaZambon, *Vescovo e Pastore: Angelo Giuseppe Roncallidelegatoapostolico in Turchia* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2013); Rinaldo Marmara, *Giovanni XXIII amicodeiTurchi* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2013); Crispino Valenziano, *Angelo Roncalli: Letteredall’Oriente e altreinedite a Giovanni Dieci* (Panzano in Chianti, Firenze: EdizioniFeeria, 2010).

¹⁹ A.G. Roncalli, *My Bishop: A Portrait of Mgr. Giacomo Maria RadiniTedeschi* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969).

²⁰ Some of Roncalli’s visitation in Bulgaria was conducted on horseback because of the remoteness and isolation of the very small Catholic population. See Marco Roncalli, *Giovanni XXIII/Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli: Una Vita nellaStoria* (Milano: Mondadori, 2006).

²¹ Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 114.

²² O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 260.

²³ Simon Ditchfield, “San Carlo Borromeo in the Construction of Roman Catholicism as a World Religion,” *StudiaBorromaeica* 25 (2011): 3-23 and Evelyn Carole Voelker, “Charles Borromeo’s*InstructionesFabricae et SupellectilisEcclesiasticae*”, 1577. A Translation with Commentary and Analysis.Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Syracuse University, 1977.

meaning in, and to link, somewhat forgotten historical periods. Above all, it demonstrates the capacity to negotiate the process of historical change which Roncalli intuits throughout the twentieth century and which he clearly articulates at the opening of Vatican II on 11 October 1962 in his magisterial address *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*²⁴ which Jared Wicks describes as “the Council’s first great text”.²⁵

In editing the *Atti*, Roncalli would often work late into the night after the business of papal diplomacy was done for the day. Roncalli’s engagement with the editing of the *Atti* can be described by adopting the words of Machiavelli:

On the coming of evening, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the day’s clothing, covered with mud and dust, and I put on garments regal and courtly, and re clothed appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for.²⁶

As a historian, Roncalli uses the *Atti* to enter the world of Trent and Borromeo “the ancient courts of ancient men”.

The first volume of the *Atti* published in 1936 was not the work of some amateur history enthusiast. It was published by the Jewish firm Olschki, a highly reputable Florentine publisher, part of the *Fontes Ambrosiani* series and thus is a work that corresponds to the highest standards of critical scholarship. The dense volumes of the *Atti* are certainly not “page-turning best sellers” as Roncalli literally follows Borromeo in the official visitation of the city and diocese of Bergamo in 1575.

Roncalli’s introduction to the first volume is a highly specialised piece of historical writing.²⁷ In discussing the Council of Trent, Roncalli shifted the historical discourse from the polemical and disputatious nature of the Reformation/Counter-Reformation and stated that Trent contributed to “a vigorous regaining of Catholic life”. Roncalli makes only two indirect references to the Counter-Reformation. Despite the religious upheaval of the time, he called this “a period of mysterious and fruitful rejuvenation for the Church”. In the reform decrees of Trent, Roncalli detected “a pastoral ardour” that contributed “to the transformation and spiritual elevation of clergy and people”. He believed that the Council of Trent “had awakened a potent force of energy that was unknown in any previous period of the history of the Church”.²⁸

In the introduction, Roncalli reserved a special place of honour for Borromeo in bringing about or enacting the pastoral directives of Trent. According to Roncalli, Borromeo is justifiably hailed as the “model bishop” who “extended the benefits of his prodigious reforming activity throughout the parishes of the Lombard region”. Borromeo is recognised for his pastoral zeal in applying the spirit of Catholic reform. Here, Roncalli is shifting the historical discourse away from the more severe and ascetic myths of Borromeo as a ruthless and hardline enforcer of Tridentine legislation towards a concept of him “as a man able to respond to the new and changing needs of the time and of the restoration of Christian life in all its forms and manifestations”. Far from being a rigorist, Roncalli argues that Borromeo possessed “the exquisite art of being able to provide for the needs of the time and adapt himself as circumstances warranted”. To all intents and purposes, it appears that Roncalli was “writing himself” in the text and perhaps “finding” himself in this historical study.

²⁴ The critical edition of this text is found in Melloni, *Papa Giovanni: un cristiano e il suo concilio*, 299-335.

²⁵ Jared Wicks, *Doing Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), 22.

²⁶ J.B. Atkinson and D. Sices, *Machiavelli and his Friends: Their Personal Correspondence* (Dekalb, IL: Illinois University Press, 1996), 262-265.

²⁷ Roncalli, *Atti*, Vol. 1, Introduction, xxiv-xlvi.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xxxiv.

Paris/Venice/Rome

Soon after his arrival in Paris as nuncio (1944-53), Roncalli witnessed the publication of volume four of the *Atti* in 1946. He relied greatly on his collaborator Pietro Forno in the transcription, layout, and correction of proofs but Forno died in 1938. By this time, Roncalli was approximately sixty-five years of age, with a heavy workload in Paris. Time and finances had always been his enemy and age was now advancing. There is a particular intensity in Roncalli's diary entries for this period. At his native Sotto il Monte in 1950 for annual holidays, Roncalli stated, "Today I have recommenced preparations for my final volume...with great pleasure and keenness. That S. Carlo will help me to not delay any longer".²⁹ During this same period of annual leave, Roncalli wrote:

My work on the fifth volume ties me to the desk...If I had fifteen days of total freedom, my work would be finished. That conversation with all the Bergamasque souls of 1575 in the company of S. Carlo Borromeo gladdens and edifies my soul. It tells me amongst other things that *omniatemushabent* (all things have their time), and that the times are similar: and the pessimism of the present is neither rational or useful.³⁰

During his time in Paris, Roncalli continued the nightly vigil of working on volume five at the end of a heavy day of commitments. On a visit to Rome for official business, he snatched a free morning to continue correcting the proofs of volume five. On successive visits to Sotto il Monte, even wet weather outside was an advantage as it kept Roncalli indoors and working at the desk. Months go by and there are gaps in his diary where Roncalli does not mention the *Atti*. At one stage, Roncalli had taken to working in a separate room on the top floor of the nunciature in Paris in order to complete the project.³¹

Despite Roncalli's best efforts, determination, and intense commitment to complete volume five, his dream was not realised. In 1953, he was appointed Patriarch of Venice and elevated to the College of Cardinals. Roncalli had been away from Italy for almost thirty years and returned home to take charge of a prestigious diocese. He was conscious that despite his age, he now attained what he had always desired, that is, full governance as a diocesan bishop:

It is interesting that Providence has brought me back to where I began to exercise my priestly vocation, that is, to pastoral work. Now I am ministering directly to souls. To tell the truth, I have always believed that, for an ecclesiastic, diplomacy (so-called!) must be imbued with the pastoral spirit...³²

This was no ecclesiastical reward after a long diplomatic sojourn. What did Roncalli do in Venice? Like his historical mentors of old, he commenced a full programme of pastoral activity, extensive visitation of the one hundred parishes, and convened a diocesan synod for 1957. He also found time to recommence the editing of volume five of the *Atti*. Once again, pastoral ministry and historical perspective came together.

When Angelo Roncalli was elected to the papacy on 28 October 1958, it was customary for a papal coronation to be held on the following Sunday. However, the newly-elected John XXIII insisted that the ceremony be celebrated on a weekday, 4 November, the feast of St Charles Borromeo. He also announced another innovation. The newly-elected pope would preach a homily in which he emphasised the pastoral

²⁹ A. G. Roncalli/Giovanni XXIII, *Anni di Francia. Agende del nunzio, Vol. II: 1949-1953*, a cura di É. Fouilloux. (Bologna: Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, 2007), 259.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 268.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 574.

³² A. G. Roncalli/John XXIII, *Journal of a Soul* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1965), 282.

dimensions of his office in imitation of Jesus the Good Shepherd who goes out in search of the lost sheep.³³ At the end of the address, John XXIII spoke directly about the significance of Borromeo's feast-day and brought together the biblical image of the shepherd and the historical importance of the great archbishop of Milan. John XXIII stated that the image of Borromeo had been dear to him right throughout his priestly and episcopal life, "this great pastor of souls in the history of the Church in all ages".³⁴ John XXIII recalled his episcopal ordination in Rome in 1925 at the Church of San Carlo. According to the pope, divine providence had reserved for Borromeo the glorious title of model bishop and admirable example of episcopal holiness through his application of the pastoral reforms of Trent in Milan.³⁵

In his magisterial work, *What Happened at Vatican II*, John O'Malley uses a clever literary device to speak of those who were figuratively "present" in St Peter's Basilica for the Second Vatican Council. O'Malley does not simply mention the Catholic bishops of the world, lay auditors, and ecumenical representatives, but a complex group of historical characters that according to him, seemed to have had some influence on the very convocation of the council:

Hauntingly present in St Peter's were de Maistre, de Lamennais, Pius IX, and Pius X. Present as well were Guéranger, Beauduin, Migne, Mersch and Lagrange. Alongside them were Möhler, Newman, and Teilhard de Chardin. In a dark corner skulked Darwin, Marx and Freud. Not to be forgotten in a brighter corner were folks like Maréchal and Buber. The ghosts of Mussolini and Hitler found entrance. Pope Pius XI was present in the basilica, but Pius XII stepped into the spotlight at almost every juncture. This list is far from complete.³⁶

The list is indeed far from complete. Without any shadow of a doubt, another character "present" in St Peter's Basilica for the Council was St Charles Borromeo. We can say with great confidence that Borromeo was "present" at Vatican II because he played a decisive role in the historical and intellectual formation of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli. Borromeo was "present" because he shaped Roncalli's critical view of history, his style of episcopal leadership, and the language that guided his ideas. Borromeo was "present" because Angelo Roncalli was a historian who brought the perspective of history to the papacy, in particular, his designation of Vatican II as a predominantly "pastoral" council. Borromeo was "present" at the Council because in his opening address on 11 October 1962, John XXIII stated that "history is the teacher of life".³⁷

³³ Giuseppe Alberigo, *Giovanni XXIII: profezianella fedeltà* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1978), 265-267. John XXIII quotes extensively from chapter 10 of John's Gospel.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 265.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 367.

³⁶ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 291.

³⁷ Melloni, *Papa Giovanni: Uncristiano e il suo concilio*, 314.