



The Council Becoming Aware of Itself

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For those of us who over the past three years have had the privilege and responsibility of participation in the Sacred Vatican Council, it was an unforgettable experience to see a sense of order and, especially, a sense of direction emerge from the relative confusion of the pre-conciliar months and of the first weeks of the Council itself.

The promulgation of the Constitution on the Liturgy at the close of the second session in the fall of 1963 was a major accomplishment but full maturity had to wait till the third session with the proclamation of the Constitution on the Church. By that time, the Fathers had traveled a long and difficult road from the opening days and the preceding months of the Council.

Among ourselves, the Fathers of the Council have often wondered if even Pope John himself knew what he had started or precisely where he was going when he convened the Council. He spoke of *aggiornamento*, of bringing the Church up to date with the times and people of our own day. There is no doubt now that Pope John was inspired by God in convoking the Council and in his idea of *aggiornamento*, but what did all that mean on October 11, 1962 when we entered St. Peter's in procession to open the Council?

The Challenge of Aggiornamento

For some months beforehand, on invitation of the Holy See, we had sent in our suggestions on the matters we thought should be treated by the Council. Then we had in our hands detailed proposals of these matters. We studied them privately, we discussed them among ourselves, for instance on the ship which took some fifty of us to Rome. But, basically, they were simply rehashes of the textbooks of our seminary days. *Where* was the *aggiornamento*? *What* was the *aggiornamento*? *What* were we to do? *Where* were we to go? No one seemed to know.

However, even on the ship which brought us to Italy, the Council began to take shape, we began to learn. Except for those of us who had been seminary or college professors, the majority of the bishops had been involved for a good part of their priestly lives in administration and pastoral duties with little time for formal study. We had brought with us other priests, usually younger priests, trained in graduate study to help us, to brief us. They told us of new trends, of new discoveries in research in the sacred sciences. Personally, this was of tremendous help to me in later weeks, especially in Sacred Scripture, when I was assigned to the American Bishops Committee on Theology.

The opening weeks of the Council were confusion confounded.

First of all, none of us had taken part in a previous Council. The last one had taken place almost a century before. At the First Vatican Council, there were only some 700 Fathers participating, there was no limit of time on the speeches of the individual Fathers, voting was done by a show of hands with the attendant delay on the counting of hands, etc. Now the Fathers approached the number of 2,500; individual speeches were limited to ten minutes, but there was no limit on the number of speeches on a given subject, so we listened to repetition upon repetition on the Liturgy, first, and then on Divine Revelation. Remember, we had been presented with some seventy topics for eventual discussion! When would it all end? Then, toward the end of October came the first break and, I think, the turning point in the Council. We found the 'moment of truth.' The schema on "Divine Revelation" was bogged down. The conservatives and the liberals, for want of better terms, were at loggerheads. Should we stay with the past or move into the future? Neither side would yield. Pope John moved in and asked for a vote by the Fathers. Would we stay with the schema as presented by the pre-conciliar commission, upholding the traditional approach, or would we send it back to the commission for revision in the light of the findings of recent research? The vast majority voted to send it back for revision but they lacked the required two-thirds majority to carry the issue. All were depressed by the outcome of the vote. Discussion could go on endlessly word by word, point by point. Then, on the following day, like a bolt out of the blue, the Pope intervened again, deciding, by his supreme authority, that the view of the majority was deserving of consideration, and he sent the whole schema back for revision.

Here was the turning point in the matter of order. Voting had been simplified from the beginning by the use of IBM cards, permitting successive balloting every twenty minutes. Now it was decided to put an end, by vote of the Fathers, to interminable and repetitious discussions of a particular subject. Individual interventions on the floor of the Council were limited to eight minutes and, to avoid repetition, an outline of each intervention had to be submitted to the Council Secretariate at least three days in advance.

But we still had before us the question: Where are we going? What are we trying to do? All we had was Pope John's directive of *aggiornamento*, bringing the Church into line with the thinking and needs of the contemporary world. We had been given some seventy

topics for eventual discussion and they had been presented to us in the form and substance of our traditional seminary textbooks. Some wondered whether even Pope John knew what he wanted when, under the certain guidance of the Holy Spirit, he convened the Council for the *aggiornamento* of the Church. But gradually the mind and the goal of the Council took shape as bishop after bishop, on the floor and in written interventions, refused to accept the schemas as presented by the pre-conciliar commissions and insisted on a second look at the traditional teaching of the Church and its relationship to the needs of the modern world. Everywhere and to almost everyone, the prevailing influence of the Holy Spirit became an almost tangible reality. Almost imperceptibly, we began to know where we were going and how we were to get there. This became evident with the promulgation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy at the close of the second session of the Council and especially with its practical implementation during these past few months. But the high point of the Council, the Council's coming of age, came with the adoption of the Constitution on the Church at the close of the recent third session. Whatever has gone before, whatever we do in the future, looked forward to or will look back at this memorable document.

During the third session, the Second Vatican Council reached its maturity. The confusion and uncertainty which overshadowed the first two sessions were dissipated. I do not mean that unanimity was reached on all points or that there were not frustrations and disappointments. Remember the consternation that ensued when the document on religious liberty was not permitted to be brought before the Fathers for a vote!

What I do mean is that now a consensus of the Fathers has been reached, in general terms at least, on what the needs of the contemporary Church are, and on the direction in which the Catholicism of the future will move. Behind us now is the undisciplined precipitation of anything and everything new; behind us also is the unmovable opposition to any change. Both attitudes, of course, will continue to be expressed here and there. They may delay things. But in the long run, they will not seriously influence the direction of the Church's life. It is now clear that the Council is intent on pursuing Pope John's goal of *aggiornamento*, of relating the doctrines of the Church not to textbook abstractions, but to the present world and to the actual men and women living in it.

At the end of the session, the Holy Father and the Council Fathers proclaimed three historic achievements: the decree on the Church, and those on Ecumenism and the Oriental Churches. It is almost universally accepted that, of these three, the Constitution on the Church will prove to have been the Council's most significant contribution towards the 'updating' of the Church.

A prominent writer and layman, John Cogley, has said of this document:

The decree will stand for a thousand years. Nothing more important or more profound can come out of the Council. Everything in the future of Catholic Christianity will, one way or another, be linked with this most fundamental doctrine. No matter what he does in the future, Pope Paul will have his place in history if only because he was the Pontiff who proclaimed it. . . . Nothing the Council can do in the future will outrank "De Ecclesia" in significance.

I heartily agree with this statement. The Constitution on the Church is the Church's meditation on her own nature. In this document she has given to the world a fresh understanding of what she believes herself to be. This expression of her own self-examination is vital for any authentic, lasting renewal. Only in the light of this meditation will the Church gain a true insight into those areas of her life and practice where reform is possible and most urgent. Only in the light of this meditation can the Church make a genuine contribution to a fruitful dialogue with our separated brethren. As she comes to know herself better, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, she will perceive that in many ways she is not being true to herself, that many reforms are necessary if she is to present her true image more clearly to the world.

De Ecclesia

I would like to discuss here a few elements of this Constitution on the Church.

It is important, first of all, to appreciate why such a treatise on the Church was necessary at this time in the Church's life. The answer, it seems to me, can be understood only in the light of history. With the Protestant Reformation, the Church came face to face with the first large-scale falling away from the Church in the West. This event did not suddenly burst upon the scene. It was well-prepared for.

The divorce of the people from the liturgy, the widespread abuses within the Church, the paternalistic attitude of the clergy toward the laity—all these contributed to the final break. The fault did not lie completely on the side of the Reformers, as Paul VI stated in his address to open the Council's second session: "If in the causes of the separation, fault may be imputed to us, we humbly ask God's pardon, and we seek as well the pardon of our brethren who consider themselves to have been offended by us."

The Reformers denied all essential distinction between the priest and the people and, consequently, denied the visible, hierarchical nature of the Church and proclaimed the priesthood of the laity. This was not a new doctrine. Venerable and respected Catholic teaching has always maintained that every Christian possesses a certain share in the priesthood of Christ by virtue of the sacramental characters of baptism and confirmation. But, at the same time, it has always maintained that this priesthood of the laity is essentially distinct from the priesthood of orders. By denying the priesthood of orders, the leaders of the Reformation waged an all-out attack on the hierarchical and sacramental structure of the visible Church.

We can easily understand the position of the Church in this historic situation. By reaction, the Catholic Counter-Reformation, as evidenced in the Council of Trent and the post-tridentine theologians, had to place great emphasis on those elements under attack. The visible, hierarchical, authoritarian character of the Church was defended and accented. This was necessary and it was a positive contribution to ecclesiology.

But this positive contribution was not without its negative effects. Now, more than ever before, the word 'Church' came to mean primarily the Pope, bishops, and priests as hierarchically organized, as holding authority. The concept of the Church as the union of all baptized people with Christ, as the extension of Christ in time and space, receded from view. The mystery of the Church, her inner, invisible side which could never in practice be denied by Catholics, was just not spoken of very often. The juridical concept of the Church came to the fore. The Church *active* was identified with the clerical state. The laity were seen simply on the receiving end.

Obviously, this one-sided view of the Church was unfortunate for the spiritual lives of the faithful. But, given the historical circumstances, it is understandable. It is only natural to lay particular

stress upon one side of an argument when one is trying to make a point.

Unfortunately, this emphasis on the external, authoritarian element of the Church remained long after the necessity for it disappeared. For three hundred years the Church was dominated by a *fortress mentality*, concerned with protecting its own interests from the onslaughts of those who would try to destroy her. The *institution* of the Church and its hierarchy came out of this immeasurably more powerful than before in their narrow confines, yet considerably weakened in their impact on society and the shape of modern thought. We have only to remember Pius XI's statement that the great scandal of the 19th century was the loss of the working class to the Church. Enlightened men within the Church were painfully aware of the increasing irrelevance of the Church to contemporary life and called for a more balanced exposition of the nature of the Church to stem the tide.

Vatican I was convened to meet this challenge. But in the Constitution on the Church the important chapters on papal primacy and papal infallibility had to take priority because the very existence of the Council was in jeopardy. Dark clouds of war were forming during the first sessions. Its work unfinished, the Council adjourned abruptly in July 1870 shortly after the proclamation of the papal prerogatives.

It was not until after the first World War that the ideas of giants like John Adam Moehler, Matthias Scheeben and Cardinal Newman began to gain widespread recognition. The inner, spiritual, living, sacramental structure of the Church as a community was, in a true sense, re-discovered. The years 1920-1943 saw the astonishing spread and dominance of the idea of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, finally culminating in the encyclical of Pope Pius XII. "The Church," said Romano Guardini, speaking of those years, "began to awaken in the hearts of men."

And now, an ecumenical council has placed the full weight of the Church's solemn magisterium behind the valuable insights on the nature of the Church which had been re-discovered since Vatican I. What a difference between "De Ecclesia" of Vatican I and Vatican II! From the very beginning this new Constitution on the Church proclaims that the Church is a mystery—the community of men joined by faith and love through Christ the Lord in the family of God the Father. The purely apologetic approach to ecclesiology which has

dominated our textbook treatises on the Church is not the approach of this document. Once and for all, in this irreformable dogmatic constitution it is made clear that the Church of Christ is more than the Pope, the bishops and the priests; that it is immeasurably more than a juridical society erected in this world to wield the authority of God over men.

And it is important to realize that this Constitution does not represent the thought of any particular school of theology but of the Church as a whole. This was mainly the result of the interventions of the Council Fathers themselves on the floor of the Council, each one of which was recorded and carefully sifted by the members of the subcommissions for its bearing on the question at hand. It was largely these interventions that were responsible for the striking difference in depth and breadth of vision to be found between the decree as it was finally promulgated and the original schema submitted to the Council as a basis for discussion.

The People of God

Returning to Scripture and to the whole variety of images and symbols which cast light on the nature of the Church, the Council has restored the concept of the Church as the people to whom God has passed his covenant. This notion of the Church is immensely valuable for the development of the theology of the role of the Pope, bishops, priests and laity in the Church. For when we see the Church as the People of God we start at the level where all the members of the Church are equal. We start with the faithful; and all, without exception, are members of the faithful—the believing followers of Christ formed into a sacramental community by baptism and confirmation, with all united to Christ and sharing his priesthood and all having equal access to the mystery of Christ and communion with him at the spiritual level. Any separation created after baptism by the sacrament of orders can never destroy the basic unity and solidarity within the Church. The Holy Spirit dwells in all and all are called to take part in the life and mission of the Church.

This fundamental equality of the members does not convert the Church into a parliamentary and democratic system with no divinely appointed authority. This would be tantamount to destroying the divinely willed order of the Church. Submission to divinely appointed

authority there must be; and so, within this community are persons with special functions and powers. These are the ordained ministers, consecrated by the action of Christ in a sacrament. This consecration, however, does not alter their *essential* equality with the other members as regards their personal relationship with Christ.

Furthermore, these ministers have not been consecrated for their own personal aggrandizement but for service to the community. They have been consecrated to serve; to represent the faith of the community and see that it is handed down by sound teaching; to preside over the liturgical celebrations of the community, not to celebrate instead of the community but to guide and rule so that the freedom proper to all Christians will be exercised with order. The proper use of the endowments which they receive from Christ calls for close contact with the rest of the community. This can be achieved only by consultation and willingness to learn from others and work with them.

This concept of the Church as the People of God corrects that unbalanced view of the Church to which we have been heir since the sixteenth century; the view which envisions the hierarchy as the only important element in the Church; the view which sees the whole vocation of the laity summed up in four words: believe, pray, obey and pay.

This concept also has the advantage of underlining the *pilgrim* nature of the Church. It helps us to avoid that *triumphalism* which sees the Church as advancing gloriously from victory to victory in every age. It keeps us in touch with the human reality of the Church as a community and we are not tempted to lose sight of sin and failure within the Church. The Church is the glorious Mystical Body of Christ—but it does not do to blur all distinctions in praising it and forget the inadequacy, the sin and the need for reform that is always within the Church during its pilgrimage on earth.

Collegiality

Certainly, one of the most important and widely discussed issues inside and outside the Council was the matter of collegiality. In some quarters it was thought that the struggle to get this doctrine approved was an effort on the part of some of the Fathers to unseat the doctrine of papal primacy defined in Vatican I. Nothing could be further from the truth. The doctrine of the collegiate role of the bishops does not

imply a lessening of authority in the office of Peter. Quite the contrary, it focuses attention on the true plenitude of his power in relation to the bishops as a body. It clarifies his real function as the foundation of the unity of the college of bishops. It is precisely the purpose of the Pope to be the *effective* sign of the unity of faith in its preaching, assuring the unity of the universal episcopate. It does not make the Pope 'first among equals,' nor does it 'share the Pope's authority' with the bishops. The Pope has his power as the Vicar of Christ and head of the college; the bishops have their power as members of the college united to its head.

What the Council tries to clarify is that the Pope is not the *only* supreme authority in the Church; that the episcopal college to which he belongs as head, and this inseparably so, is also the seat of supreme authority. The bishops, as a body, are the successors of the Apostles; they are not merely delegates or functionaries of the Pope. But *with* him and *under* him they have been endowed with divine authority to rule the Church of God. Papacy and episcopacy are the two pillars on which the Church is being built by Christ. There is no contradiction between the two. The primacy of the Pope must be considered as *within* the college of bishops, not parallel to it. Pope and college are not two entities which face each other.

In short, collegiality means that all in the college of bishops participate by divine right in the exercise of full authority over the universal Church as successors of the Apostles *in union with* the Pope who also exercises full authority.

The word 'collegiality' may be new but the doctrine is not. Historic developments, especially since Vatican I, may have obscured the doctrine and have directed the bishops almost exclusively into what we might call a vertical relation of individual prelate with the central authority of the Church. Vatican II has corrected this and clarified the responsibility which all the bishops have for the universal Church. The traditional doctrine of the Church has in no way been changed. What has been done, then? Pope Paul has given the answer in his closing address: "What has been up to now expressed only in the life of the Church, now has clear doctrinal expression. What has been up to now subject to consideration, dispute and even controversy, now is drawn up in a doctrinal formula which is certain."

It is true that the Council did not clarify in precise terms the relationship between the bishops and the Pope. It did not specify in

detail just how collegiality will work in practice. This, it seems to me, is a good thing. The details of the relationship will be worked out gradually in the day-to-day living of the life of the Church rather than by theological speculations. We must have confidence in the Spirit of God who is the final guarantee that the episcopate will retain that scope of activity which by divine right it must enjoy.

This doctrine has immediate practical consequences. A bishop in the Catholic Church is not only the head of his diocese; he is also, and first of all, a member of that body which has care for the universal Church. He is co-responsible for the life of the whole Church. His eyes must not be simply turned to his own diocese; he must look rather at the whole Church, conscious that he has a real responsibility for what happens in it.

At the Council, the bishops rediscovered this mission again. Suddenly they realized what the apostolic office to which they are appointed means in the Church of God. In union with the Pope, their head, the bishops exercise their sacred ministry for the good of the universal Catholic community. At the Council the collegiality of the bishops has become a meaningful term again.

Certainly one of the practical post-conciliar manifestations of collegiality will be the establishment of the senate of bishops promised by Pope Paul. Exactly what the membership of this body will be and the extent of its authority we cannot tell at this time. It could become merely an advisory body to the Holy Father. Or it could receive jurisdiction over specific areas of the universal apostolate. But we can be sure that the doctrine of collegiality will not remain a theory. It will reach the practical level. The Pope has committed himself to a reform wherein the bishops will more actively participate in the central administration of the Church.

May I conclude these remarks with the sincere request that you be patient with the efforts of the Council? The huge majority of votes in favor of—in contrast to the consistently small minority against—the documents on the Liturgy, the Church, Ecumenism etc., was a thunderous amen to the direction of renewal; the breeze of reform and renewal *is* blowing in the Church. But it is a gentle breeze, not a hurricane.

The wise formula of good Pope John will help us to keep our balance: first one step, then another, then closer still, and some time in God's providence we hope to arrive where we ought to be.