

Vatican Council II Background and Beginnings

By Cornelius J. Dyck

In 1657 two Quakers, John Perrot and John Luffe, left England to bear Christian witness to the sultan. When the wind blew their ship off course they decided, with some misgivings, to go to Rome and convert the pope. Their fears were well founded. One of them was promptly hanged, and the other lost his mind in prison.

I have also been fearing for my life, but for different reasons. My anxiety stems from the thousands of little cars that shoot like missiles through the narrow, winding streets of this ancient city, all bent on destroying themselves—it seems. My belief in guardian angels has definitely grown. It is understandable that Robert McAfee Brown, a Protestant observer from California, was led to ponder whether being run over by a cardinal's Mercedes-Benz in Rome would constitute a valid martyrdom. The Italians are good drivers, more alert than most, and always give pedestrians the right of way—if they see them in time!

The Vatican State

The work of Vatican Council II has not been going as fast as the cars, but is now all but over. The sessions were closed finally on Dec. 8. One monsignor said to me, "Our church expects to be around for many hundreds of years. We are not in a hurry." The whole environment of the church breathes an air of permanence and tradition. Is there any city except Jerusalem which gathers up in its history more of the life of the church since its inception? Here (most likely) are the graves of the apostles Peter and Paul, the Colosseum where early Christians were thrown to the lions; here on the old Appian road are the catacombs where Christians used to worship and where many were buried; here are the earliest extant churches of Christendom. Here too is the Church of St. John on the Lateran, built by Constantine in the early fourth century, with its adjoining *Scala Santa* (holy staircase) upon which Luther agonized in a futile effort to receive assurance for the forgiveness of his sins, kissing every step and praying as he crawled up on his knees.

The heart of Rome is Vatican City, a 108-acre complex given independent *political* status by Mussolini in 1929. Many nations maintain diplomatic relations with the papal state. Public reaction prevented the United States from establishing such relations some years ago under President Truman. In Vatican City are located the residence of the

pope and the administrative machinery of the Roman church.

There too is the Sistine Chapel with its famous paintings, including the *Last Judgment* by Michelangelo. Adjoining the Sistine Chapel is the vast museum with its endless tapestries and marble-floored rooms and art treasures in overwhelming profusion. In Vatican City, of course, is also St. Peter's basilica where the council sessions were held. In the grotto under it lie many of the 261 popes of the past (counting Peter in!).

How It Began

The present council was first announced by Pope John XXIII in 1959 as the inspiration of the Holy Spirit while he had been at prayer. He said it would be an ecumenical council. Since ecumenical means universal, there was much excitement among Protestants in the belief that all Christians were now being invited to sit down together to discuss unity. A later announcement that this would be called Vatican Council II clarified the issue.

Vatican Council I had met in 1869-70 to discuss internal reform and had broken up in haste, without finishing its work, because of the Franco-Prussian War. It was never formally closed. This meant that the purpose of Vatican Council II was to continue the work of the former, i.e., internal renewal, and as possible conversation with other Christians also. Since the most notable achievement of the 1870 council had been the declaration of papal infallibility (in matters of faith the Holy Spirit prevents the pope from erring), many Roman Catholics and Protestants had believed there would be no more councils, since the pope was now without need of conciliar help.

Following his announcement Pope John established a commission of 103 experts to prepare the agenda. These wrote to every part of the world asking for suggestions and received so many that, when printed, they filled over six huge volumes. This response indicated both a healthy concern and the presence of many problems. In sifting these the commission grouped them together under 73 schemas or areas, which the bishops further reduced to 20 after the council began.

Ten commissions were established to deal specifically with these areas and to draft preliminary position papers. By 1962 the preparations had been completed and the council was convened on Oct. 11, but when it adjourned on Dec. 8 after working two months, it seemed that the work had just begun. A second session was, therefore, convened Sept. 29 to Dec. 4, 1963, and a third from Sept. 14 to Nov. 21, 1964. The present fourth session began Sept. 14, 1965, and ended Dec. 8, as the last session.

Cornelius J. Dyck, director of Institute of Mennonite Studies and professor at Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., attended Vatican Council II in Rome and shares some pertinent observations and clear insights. This is the first of four articles.

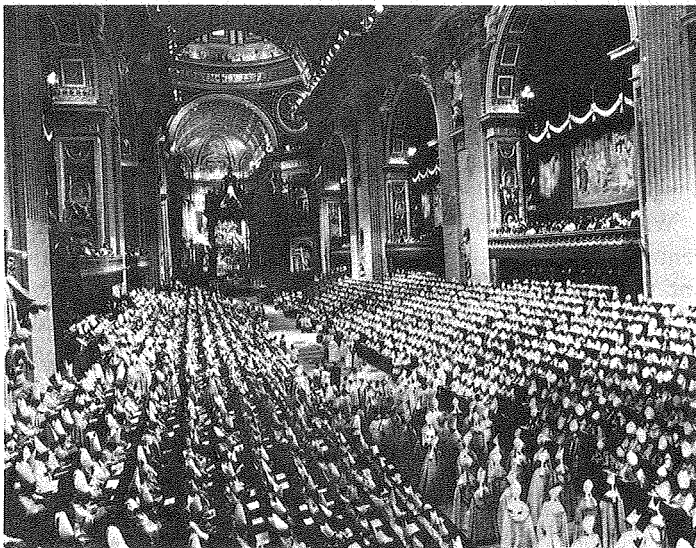
Council of Bishops

This is a council of bishops, over 2,300 of them, among whom Italians make up the largest delegation (440) and Americans the second largest (240). Also present are superiors of religious orders and *periti*—theological experts who advise the bishops but do not vote. And then there are present, seated together in a place of honor, some 50 non-Roman Catholic observers from Protestant and Orthodox communions. Each represents a worldwide body which was invited by Rome. These observers do not have the privilege of speaking while the council is in session, but their counsel is very ardently sought informally. It is clear that their presence has been helpful in many ways.

Mennonites could likely have received an invitation if they had solicited it as a world body. As it is, my presence was completely unofficial and upon my own initiative. The cordiality shown to me in letters and now during my brief stay is, in any case, remarkable and heartwarming. Every priest, not to speak of bishop, knows who the Anabaptists were, if from nothing else than the anathemas (curses) pronounced against them by the decisive Council of Trent (1545-63).

It is easy to talk with these Roman Catholic priests, monsignors, and bishops; they seem quite open and undefensive. The other day, for example, one highly placed person asked, "Has the Roman Church persecuted your work in South America?" The American bishops know the Mennonites also from present experience. One German bishop, with whom several of us spent an evening, said he knew and loved the Mennonites in Russia in earlier years.

In Heubuden, the former Mennonite village near Danzig (now Stogi) where I visited before coming to Rome, my contact with the priest was so cordial that he took the occasion to really unburden his heart to me about his work. When we parted, after eating fish together (it was Friday), we agreed to pray for each other. I wonder what would happen if separated Christians all over the world really started praying for one another.



General view of St. Peter's Basilica as Pope John XXIII, on his gestatorial chair, was greeted by Council Fathers.

A New Leader

Pope Paul VI is, of course, in ultimate charge of the council. He can overrule it, extend it, and its decrees do not become official until he has publicly approved them. Five were approved in a formal ceremony that seemed to contain at least twenty layers of history. The crowds of people were terrible. Even those of us fortunate enough to get passes had to come an hour early to claim our seats. It strikes one as incongruous why so many soldiers in medieval battle dress, including the famed Swiss Guards (there are rumors that they will be abolished), are required to keep order with sword and spear in a church. Since the service was so long, the guard changed twice during the session, steel helmets glittering in the blaze of television lights. A flat-footed Mennonite from the prairies is not particularly edified by the pageantry, though it was impressive.

For this service the pope walked into church instead of being carried. His feet were clad in what looked to me like red slippers, and rested on a red pillow. They were uncovered only when various of the elect came to kiss them. The mass, always just a bit painful to me, was that of Simon and Jude, 24 fathers concelebrating it with the pope.

I participated with the people in the Lord's Prayer (which in Roman Catholicism ends with "deliver us from evil"), in reading the Scriptures aloud with them and following the reading from Eph. 4:7-13; John 15:17-25, but remained silent otherwise out of respect for my conscience and the deep piety of those around me. While the pope may be infallible, the speaker system was not. It went dead twice while he spoke. The mixed choir of men and boys sounded beautiful.

Worship Is Casual

Protestants are invariably struck by the casualness of Roman Catholic worship. During the entire service people and guards were walking around, the master of ceremonies on the rostrum was talking and waving here and there, priests stood up to take flash pictures—all things we would consider very disturbing in our worship. The point, of course, is that since the mass is an objective event there is no room for subjective sentimentalism. What happens at the mass is not dependent upon how people act or feel. There is no room for an emotionally motivated typical Protestant response at the door that "the service was a real blessing"; of course it was a blessing, because Christ's sacrifice was repeated for you at the altar. No congregation is, in fact, needed for the mass to be celebrated and the council has not changed this.

This service, as were all of the council sessions, was in Latin. This is a lot different from Low German or Pennsylvania Dutch. Most North Americans do not speak Latin well, though reading is easier, and their pronunciation makes every respectable European cringe. It is reported that Cardinal Cushing went home after the first two weeks because he could not follow the Latin, saying that all he could do here was pray for the council, and he could do that just as well in Boston. Translation facilities have been provided now and then for the bishops, but it is a badge of honor and sign of faithfulness to the church if one does not need to wear a headset.

The Pastoral Pope

Pope John XXIII, who called the council and died in June, 1963, after the first session, was very different from Paul VI. John was a simple man from the country, and carried great pastoral concern for his people. He wanted the council to be primarily concerned for the daily problems of his people. Paul VI is generally considered to be more concerned for correct doctrine, but he also has strong pastoral concern. Both are very much concerned for peace.

In a sermon commemorating the late John XXIII, Cardinal Suenens of Belgium gave the following quotes from the late pope's writings: "The Vicar of Christ? Ah! I am not worthy of this title, I, the poor son of Baptist and Mary Ann Roncalli, two good Christians, to be sure, but so modest and so humble." On another occasion he said, "The humble pope who speaks to you is fully conscious of being a very small thing in the sight of God." And again: "My recollections are delighted with all the graces received from the Lord, but at the same time I feel humiliated for having been so niggardly in the use of my talents, for having rendered a return without any proportion to the gifts I have received."

Perhaps the following words help us to see why he was able to do so much in his short pontificate: "I bless the Lord for the help He gives me, thus preventing me from complicating simple matters, and assisting me rather to simplify the more complicated." Is it fair, not to speak of Christian, then, to say that the pope is not a Christian, as one Mennonite did, arguing simply, "If he were a Christian, he would not be pope"?

One of the most difficult tasks of Paul VI seems to be that of mediating between the progressives and conservatives in the Roman Catholic Church. While the former are decidedly in the majority, coming especially from France, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada, and the United States, the conservatives carry much weight and have considerable appeal for the cautious nature of the pope. The stronghold of the conservatives has been the Curia, the "civil service" of Roman Catholicism without which very little is done.

The bishops used strong language to indict the Curia, knowing that even the decrees and reforms of the council can be neutralized by the Curia—which was opposed to the very idea of a council from the beginning. Most of the decrees of the council must be read with this tension in mind, some clearly showing which paragraph was designed to pacify which group. For this reason also, it appears, Paul VI never tires of reminding the council fathers of the need for love, instead of speaking to the issues themselves.

Synod of Bishops

One very encouraging institutional change has been made by the pope in this connection by establishing a synod or senate of bishops which will meet periodically to advise him. Until now this was the sole prerogative of the Curia, and some fear it may still be able to prevent the actual functioning of the senate.

The meaning of this progressive-conservative tension will become clearer in the following discussion of some of the

council schemas. It is obviously impossible to do much more than introduce the issues discussed, and that only of several of the key documents. Closer study of the documents themselves reminds us of the words of Pius IX (1846-78): "There are always three movements in a council: that of the devil who tries to upset everything; that of man who seeks to confuse; and that of the Holy Spirit who clears all things up." Sometimes, as I reflect, it appears that these same movements may have been present at Mennonite conference sessions here and there.

The Schema on the Liturgy (Worship)

It may be that this reform will prove to be the most significant in the long run since it touches the believers in every Roman Catholic congregation at the local level. We have become aware of one aspect of this reform already, the use of the national language for parts of the service instead of Latin. The shift did not come any easier than the shift from German to English among the Mennonites over the years, but it is in progress.

An attempt has been made to have the ordinary low mass conform more to the early Supper of the Gospels. The decree gives much greater place to the Scriptures in Roman Catholic worship, and makes the sermon a requirement at every regular service, rather than the exception. It urges the use of lay people in the service, more singing, and gives local bishops authority to adapt worship patterns to their situation without always asking Rome.

Many bishops here mourn the lack of a treasury of Roman Catholic hymnology such as Protestants have, saying it will take many decades before their own can grow substantially. We encourage them to use our Protestant hymns. Every renewal movement in the history of the church—even Anabaptism—had a strong hymnology at its heart as the *Ausbund* and Luther's hymns verify.

Quite inexplicable, in the light of these and other reforms, was Pope John's sudden announcement, during the first session of the council, that he had added Joseph to the canon of the mass. Did he do it to remind the assembled fathers of his authority? This action did not exactly help dialogue with Protestants. Equally puzzling in this connection was Paul VI's encyclical letter called the *Mysterium Fidei* (Sept. 1965) interpreting I Cor. 10, 11 and John 6 as real presence, that is, that Christ is physically present in the bread and wine of the Supper (mass).

While many fathers have held this from Ignatius (2nd century) through Aquinas in the thirteenth, and to the present, many saw the timing of this release as a pointed reminder of the unchanging nature of Roman dogma. This means that the mass has not really moved into the center of the congregation, but remains a mystical, pseudo-magical rite without sole exegetical foundation in the New Testament.

(to be continued)

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Satan has little desire to be worshiped—he merely wants us to take our eyes off Christ and concentrate on self.

—I. Merle Good.

Vatican Council II on the Nature of the Church

By Cornelius J. Dyck

From that corner of the kingdom given to the Anabaptists this statement on the church is disappointing. Only those who hope and love can, of course, be disappointed, but the document spells out rather clearly the self-image of the Roman Catholic Church and her intentions for the decades after this council. It is precisely this projection which leaves me unenthusiastic.

The Nature of the Church

It should be said that there is much in the document with which most Christians would agree, but which is reassuring to hear from Rome in a new way. Baptism in the name of the Trinity is considered the essential criterion creating Christian brotherhood, even though those baptized outside of Roman Catholicism do not possess the full measure of grace.

There is reference to suffering as identical with the true nature of the church: "Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution, so the church is called to follow the same road that it might communicate the fruits of salvation to men" (8). Chapter five is a good statement on holiness. The church, as the Bride of Christ, is holy. Therefore its members are called to holiness. While this holiness can be seen in the fruit of the Spirit, it is not first human works but a gift of the grace of God.

This holiness, which must be received in faith and perfected in life (Col. 3:12; Gal. 5:22; Rom. 6:22), grows in the lives of those who love, and who allow themselves to be led by the Spirit. "He is not saved, however, who, though part of the body of the church, does not persevere in charity. He remains indeed in the bosom of the church, but as it were, only in a 'bodily' manner and not 'in his heart'" (14).

Some Things Ambiguous

A number of the sections might be described as two-pronged, or even ambiguous, containing both positive and negative overtones from my perspective. The need for constant purification and renewal of the church is admitted, for example, in the following:

While Christ, holy, innocent, and undefiled (Heb. 7:26), knew no sin (II Cor. 5:21), but came to expiate only the sins of the people (cf. Heb. 2:17), the church, embracing sinners in her bosom, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, continually follows the way of penance and renewal (8).

This quotation does not mean, however, that the fathers considered the Roman Catholic Church sinful. The Roman definition of the church climaxes in the Vicar of Christ who is the head of the church on earth and infallible in things that really matter. Repentance is for the individual, including the pope as an individual sinner. This historic inerrancy of the church was reaffirmed by Paul VI in his 1963 address to the second session. Speaking also of the need for renewal, he added, "But the expression of this desire must not be interpreted as an admission of guilt on the part of the Catholic Church. . . ."

Many of the passages are not likely to increase understanding with Protestants. Though the "separated Christians" (that's us), for example, "do not profess the faith in its entirety . . . they lovingly believe in God the Father Almighty and in Christ, the Son of God and Saviour," and "Mother Church never ceases to pray, hope, and work" that unity as one flock under one shepherd may come about (15). Chapters 2 and 4, which for some reason discuss the same subject, the laity, in two different places, are weak and paternal.

The Protestant recovery of a theology of the laity has not made a strong impact here. Essentially the laity are defined negatively as not clerics. Those bishops who argued that the laity must be allowed to do more than "obey, pray, and pay" did not win a big victory against the conservatives who expressed considerable fear of losing control of the laity with a "priesthood of all believers" doctrine.

Victory of Bishops

Chapters 3 and 6 of the document on the church deal firmly, almost *ex cathedra*, with the hierarchy and the "religious," that is, those in special orders. This section does, however, reflect the victory of the bishops in achieving his collegiality—the right of the bishops to rule the church together with the pope, and this will decentralize authority in the church, giving greater regional self-direction.

But negatively, this same section almost extends papal infallibility, thereby, to the bishops also. "They nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly . . ." and when they confer together "the infallibility promised to the church resides also in the body of bishops" (25). I suppose all of us could name one or two of our church leaders, past or present, who seemed to consider themselves infallible at times, but this definition of the doctrine of infallibility rules out sin beforehand in a way that makes us uncomfortable. To be infallible means to be without sin, not simply by faith in Christ, but actually here and now.

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Several opportunities presented themselves to discuss this tension between clergy and laity at some length in a smaller circle. While Protestants hold what might be described as a vertical doctrine of the gifts of the Spirit, Roman Catholicism holds what I might call a horizontal view. For us the Spirit chooses His own manner of operation, and gives gifts to each as He chooses (I Cor. 12), but in remaining true to Himself, our friends said, the Spirit normally works through established channels.

Christ's sending out of His disciples signified the entering of the Spirit into history, i.e., into the church. As the German bishop who was with us put it, "*Das Wort wird Fleisch, der Geist wird Amt*" (The Word becomes flesh, the Spirit becomes office/institution). Thus the *ministerium* (servanthood) of the church becomes the *magisterium* (hierarchy), and the gap between the clergy and laity grows large.

Some Big Problems

The biggest problems in the document are raised for Protestants in chapters 7 and 8. While knowing very well that Roman Catholicism defines itself historically rather than eschatologically, and must be so understood, the beautiful heading of chapter 7, "Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church," quickened my anticipation. The chapter, however, deals primarily with the worship of saints, purgatory, prayer for the dead (II Mach. 12:46), and Mary.

After extensively dealing with these issues and instructing the faithful to invoke the help of the saints "in obtaining benefits from God through His Son, Jesus Christ . . ." (50), caution is urged against any abuse of the "authentic cult of the saints" (51). It has always seemed to Protestants that Roman Catholicism knows more about the other side of death than they have a right to know and that they have in-

stitutionalized the inspiration we can receive from departed loved ones, as we treasure their memory.

Chapter 8 is given to a further discussion of the Virgin Mary, yet even this treatment is a victory for the progressives at the Council since the conservatives desperately wanted a separate document dealing only with her. As it is, she is discussed as part of the doctrine of the church and in brief form. Mariology relies more on tradition than on Scripture, particularly also the proto-Gospel of James, which played an important part in the beginnings of Mariology in the second century.

No new development is set forth, but chapter 8 gives encouragement to the rapidly growing veneration of the Virgin, especially in the missionary areas of South America, Africa, and Asia. Though other chapters call Christ the only Mediator, this one calls Mary mediatrix, adding, "This, however, is to be so understood that it neither takes away from, nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one mediator" (62). "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience" (56). Apparently the last words of the great and humble Pope John XXIII himself, in 1963, were "My Mother, my hope."

One cannot help feeling troubled about these statements on the saints, especially Mary, but perhaps we need to have "dialogue" with Roman Catholics particularly on these issues in order to witness to a more Biblical perspective. Perhaps it may also be helpful to cultivate personal relationships to discover the depth of faith and love in many Roman Catholics and to look at problem doctrines from the perspective of personal relationships rather than from the brittle standpoint of doctrinal orthodoxy.

(to be continued)



Prelates attending the second session of the Second Vatican Council stream out of St. Peter's Basilica after an early meeting of the Church congress. Some 2,500 Council Fathers from all over the world—cardinals, archbishops, bishops, abbots, and other ecclesiastical dignitaries—were in Rome for the conclave.

Vatican Council II on Divine Revelation

By Cornelius J. Dyck

It took four years to work out an acceptable statement on this issue, and it is even yet a compromise document. The primary source of trouble was the place of tradition and Scripture in the doctrinal and daily life of the church, and their relationship to each other. The Council of Trent, 1545-63, had set forth both Scripture and tradition as sources of God's revelation, but did not spell out their relationship either.

This led to the development of both as two distinct sources of revelation. Since only the pope could define exactly what Scripture meant, and since he relied on past interpretations, this meant ultimately that tradition included Scripture and became the final source for knowing God's will for the church. The present document seems to reverse this, placing tradition under Scripture, but whether it actually does this depends on how hopefully or pessimistically it is read.

Change of Title

It is significant that the earlier title, "Sources of Revelation," was changed to "Divine Revelation," under the pressure of those bishops who argued that there is only one *source*—God—who speaks to us through the Scriptures, and through the experiences of the church, i.e., tradition. To the conservatives it is tradition which preserves the deposit of the faith, apostolic succession guaranteeing its uncorrupted transmission.

To constantly look at this deposit through new Biblical studies, as the progressives would imply, seemed to them not only a waste of time but highly dangerous. But how, then, is the church to be brought under judgment? One is reminded of the man who took up violin playing in his old age. When his good wife noticed that he kept his left hand on one particular spot on the strings, she ventured to suggest that other violinists she had seen, moved their fingers up and down the strings, to which he replied: "Of course they do; they're looking for the right spot. I've found it."

But the Holy Spirit works in unexpected ways and places. At the bishops' press panel one day, a brilliant and humble Roman Catholic scholar from Indiana gave such a thrilling statement of faith before the press that we all spontaneously broke into thunderous applause when he sat down. We can take much courage from statements like the following, taken from the adopted schema:

There is such superabundant strength in the Word of God that it stands out as the unshakable support of the church, the stiffener to the faith of the church's children,

the food of the soul and the source of spiritual life. . . . Hence it is necessary for clerics . . . to apply themselves to the Scriptures by constant holy reading and searching study. This is so that none of them may become an empty professional preacher of the Word of God who does not hearken to it in his own soul. . . . In like manner this august assembly most instantly urges all the faithful . . . to learn all that is to be known of the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ by frequent reading of the Holy Scriptures. Not to know the Scriptures is not to know Christ.

Scripture Only

The schema seems to be saying that revelation is not a sealed box of tradition, but God speaking in the Scriptures, through them here and now. It clearly implies that tradition can contain no doctrine that is not clearly supported from Scripture. When one of the members of the press panel explained his understanding of *sola scriptura* (the "Scripture only" doctrine of Luther), he said it seemed much more desirable to follow the conviction of some of smaller Protestant groups that "Scripture is understood best when read and studied in the circle of the faithful." That, it seemed to me, was getting close to Anabaptism.

"What," the bishops' press panel was asked, "does Roman Catholicism do now with errors in the Bible?" Differing accounts of the same Biblical-historical events were, of course, admitted. First, it was stated, the best possible translations must be prepared and the schema encourages their scholars to work together with Protestants to this end.

Second, the schema asks the modern reader to "look for the sense which the holy writer in his particular milieu, given the special conditions of his time as determined by the literary forms of that very time, wished to express and did in fact express." That is, a salvation history understanding must guide the reader to see that the Scriptures are first and foremost a record for the salvation of men and do present all necessary truth about Christ; they "faithfully teach Christ."

The methods but not the principles of German form criticism seem to be accepted and the salvation history emphasis moves beyond the relativizing of nineteenth-century historicism. It is for this reason, probably, that the term *historicity* has replaced *historical* in reference to the reliability of the Gospels.

In some parts of the world Roman Catholics have been reading the Bible for many years, but in others they have not, even if they could read. They are now encouraged to do so. Coupled with the tremendous encouragement given to Biblical scholarship in the schema, it may be that this will prove to be the most decisive achievement of the council in the years to come. (To be continued)

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Vatican Council II on Christians and Liberty

By Cornelius J. Dyck

The decree on ecumenism, which was adopted a year ago, is an encouraging document. It puts many Protestants to shame in confessing to sharing in the guilt of separation and in its plea for mutual trust. Its first guide for ecumenical discussion is worthy of note for all Christians when it urges Roman Catholics to make "every effort to avoid expressions, judgments, and actions which do not represent the condition of our separated brethren with truth and fairness, and so make mutual relations with them more difficult." (4)

While this seems obvious for us all, it is not easy. It is far easier to build straw images of others to strengthen our own position, or to pick out the weakest elements or representatives in other groups as representative of that entire group.

Holy Spirit and Christian Unity

The document gives central place to the Holy Spirit in bringing about Christian unity.

It is the Holy Spirit, dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that He is the principle of the church's unity. (2) Further this council declares that it realizes that this holy objective—the reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and only church of Christ—transcends human powers and gifts. It therefore places its hope entirely in the prayer of Christ for the church, in the love of the Father for us, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Rom. 5:5. (24)

The draft indicates clearly that this new concern for unity is unexpected and at points quite disturbing to the Roman Catholic Church, but that it sees this as the work of God and hence wants to encourage it:

Everywhere large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians . . . almost everyone, though in different ways, longs for the one visible church of God, a church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God. (1)

There is strong stress on holiness as the prerequisite for renewal in the church. "Every renewal of the church essentially

consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling." And again, "The faithful should remember that they are better promoting union among Christians, indeed living it better, the more they strive to live holier lives according to the Gospel. For the closer their union with the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, the more deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual brotherly love." This is what the document describes as "spiritual ecumenism." (6, 7, 8)

Forgiveness Desired

As indicated above, the confession of guilt for separation was both unexpected and encouraging. This does not mean that the Roman church is confessing false doctrine, but errors in conduct, moral errors. "If, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these should be set right at the opportune moment and in the proper way." (6) The force of this sentiment was strengthened by Pope Paul in his opening address to the second session, in which he said in the presence of the Protestant observers:

If we are in any way to blame for that separation, we humbly beg God's forgiveness. And we ask pardon too of our brethren who feel themselves to have been injured by us. For our part, we willingly forgive the injuries which the Catholic Church has suffered, and forget the grief during the long series of dissensions and separations. May the heavenly Father deign to hear our prayers and grant us true brotherly peace.

It was this statement which prompted Maynard Shelly to ask, soon after it was made in 1963, whether the Mennonites might be ready to respond with an expression of forgiveness. The statement is partly a prayer, which parts call for no human response. But the statement is also addressed to us. Our Anabaptist fathers suffered much, and thousands died under Roman Catholic as well as Protestant persecution. Are we ready to forgive and search our own hearts for errors we, i.e., the fathers, might also have made? Would such an expression have any meaning so many years after the events? Can we as Christians ignore those who ask us for forgiveness? Who should make such a statement from the Mennonites, conferences, individuals?

In the light of growing inter-Mennonite conversations I found value in the honest plea which the statement makes for frank recognition of differences. "Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism. (1) Dialogue which attempts to water down such issues, or hide them,

Cornelius J. Dyck, director of Institute of Mennonite Studies and professor at Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind., attended Vatican Council II in Rome and shares some pertinent observations and clear insights. This is the concluding article of a series on the Vatican Council.

cannot bear good fruit. Thus the decree frankly acknowledges the problem Protestants have with Mariology. An interesting passage in this connection is "A love and reverence—almost a cult—of Holy Scripture leads our brethren to a constant and diligent study of the sacred text." (20) Joint study of the Scriptures is urged and, where desirable, joint prayer and worship services with Protestants and others. The schema urges "all faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism." (4)

The Statement on the Jews

This statement, about which the public press has written so much, is included in the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions." The beginning references to Hinduism, Buddhism, and especially to the Moslems are unusually open, saying that "the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions," but also adding that she "ever must proclaim Christ, 'the way, the truth, and the life'" (John 14:6).

The section on the Jews is not as strong in their behalf as many bishops wanted it to be. It underwent much rewriting and editing. Since it soon became a political issue, some despaired of it being accepted at all. As it was adopted, the statement does not lay the blame for the death of Christ on the Jews alone but on all men since He died of His own free will for us. The word "deicide" (killing God) was eliminated. The statement also rejects the notion that Jews are predestined to suffering because they rejected Christ, a notion that has likely been the root of much anti-Semitism within the church.

The solidarity of the old Israel with the new is basic to the document. It may be that this statement is too open for Protestants since it, by definition, rules out conventional missionary activity among the Jews. Roman Catholic work with the Jews will continue, and increase, they feel, but in the form of "dialogue" rather than proselyting. This attitude might be said to characterize all decrees of the council that relate to non-Roman Catholics: don't break down the door to get into the house; knock gently.

Religious Liberty

This document had a stormy history, being championed especially by the American bishops while a threat to those from the missionary areas of South America, Africa, and Asia. A particular problem stemmed from the basis of religious liberty—is it based on human dignity with political and juridical freedoms, or is it based on moral law derived from theology and the Bible? The conservatives have insisted that religious liberty cannot be proved from Scripture, and the majority have never attempted to "proof-text" it, but they do believe religious liberty reflects the spirit of the entire New Testament.

In the minds of some of the opponents religious liberty means atheism, i.e., the option for any Roman Catholic to disobey the church and write his own rules of life and faith. This, however, is by no means the intention of the statement. Man is not free to decide all moral issues by and for himself,

nor is error as good as truth. The intention is simply to assert the right of every person to exercise faith according to his conscience and without coercion.

Defines Sphere

The schema does not advocate the separation of church and state, but rather seeks to define the sphere of each. "Civil authority must be declared out of bounds if it interferes with man's relationships with God . . . no one (may) be prevented by public authority . . . from acting according to his own conscience." Liberty does not mean that a particular church cannot receive special recognition (i.e., be state church), provided the religious rights of all citizens are preserved at the same time.

Against this encouraging content stands a reference that seems to negate it. "The concept of religious liberty leaves intact the Catholic teaching on the one true religion and the one true church of Christ." One monsignor said to me, "We had to say it somewhere, and this seemed a good place to slip it in." Let him who would cast stones first count the number of times Menno uses "true church" in his writings!

It remains now to be seen what effect this statement will have upon the freedom of Protestants in Spain, South America, and other traditionally Roman Catholic areas, not to speak of the eastern European nations. Will the bishops remember that they signed this document when they return to their countries and will see that its instructions filter down to the local parish? In a way this document says too little too late. Modern secularisms and political realities have shifted much of the responsibility for religious liberty from the church. Perhaps that is why the fathers were able to write the document as strongly as they did. □

Prayer Requests

If something should happen, it can happen and it should be undertaken. Our youth can be sanely but positively excited about Christ and His church. Pray that this may happen in and for the youth of your church and community as they study *Acts Alive*. It can by your prayers.

From London, England:

One of our former Centre students from Sierra Leone, who is now serving as ambassador to Russia, requests the prayers of all his Christian friends. We extend this ministry of intercession to the whole church.

An English member of the Fellowship, Patricia Wiebe, has had major surgery, followed by recurring illness. She has requested the prayer interest of the fellowship at the Centre. We request the church to pray for her in this trial of her faith, and that of her husband. Any Christian who enjoys writing letters of encouragement, please address Mrs. Wiebe at 12 Gatwick Green, Bishops Stortford, Herts, England.

The fellowship members rejoice with Dr. Martin in his successful passing of his final FRCS exams. Dr. and Mrs. Martin receive this success as a gift from God and seek His further guidance in their service in the Dhamtari Christian Hospital in India.