

Openness Without Compromise, Firmness without Arrogance

By JOHN COGLEY
Special Correspondent

Vatican City—(RNS)—As the Second Vatican Council met Monday for its 100th general congregation, it is not too early to begin assessing it—first as a religious event in a secularist age, then as the most serious attempt since the Council of Trent 400 years ago to renew the spirit of Catholicism, and finally as a monumental effort on the part of the Church to speak meaningfully to non-Christian brethren of other faiths and to that vast number of alienated nonbelievers whom Pope Paul in his first encyclical delicately addressed as the "contaminated" far-away brothers.

At the first session of the Council two years ago Cardinal Suenens, the dynamic Belgian churchman, summed up in his afflicting the Church is "ecclisialism, legalism, and triumphalism."

In these three words it is possible to find a really expressive of the Council's mission to uproot the ideas of the Church as a clerical monopoly, with the laity reduced to auxiliary status and not quite full membership in the body of

Christ on earth, second, to herald the notion of Christian faith as more committed to an intellectual system and of the spiritual life as essentially the observance of ecclesiastical canons and codes; and third, to affirm the idea of the Christian vocation as a triumphal march of men out from their fellows and their own time but bravely saying hitherto to celebrate victories never won in wars never truly fought.

It was important that these three failings be clearly identified and fearlessly faced if the Council was to succeed in its purposes. But so much attention has been fastened on them in subsequent reporting and discussion that it is easy to lose sight of Vatican II's more positive goals of renewal.

After more than a thousand hours of general discussion in Saint Peter's Basilica, hundreds of committee meetings, tens of thousands of hours of private study, and millions of earnest prayers for its success, what can be said of the Council's progress and prospects, in the light of its high aims?

First, as a religious event, the record is impressive. Thanks in great part to the universal acceptance of Pope John,

the most beloved man of our generation, the Council is anything other than what it is—a gathering of religious leaders with no ulterior motive in mind who are sincerely intent on renewing the spiritual energies of their ancient Church.

This may seem like a small thing, but it is well to remember that not long ago any such gathering would have been held suspect and held charged with having "imperialistic" intentions of a secular domination. Less than a decade ago in the U.S., many sincere people would have interpreted such a display of "papal power" rather as a sign of "domination of freedom" than as a meeting of devout ecclesiastical seeking to serve their God and to be of more service to their fellow men.

It is something of a miracle, then, that today one has to go beyond the reaches of healthy minds to find anyone who does not take Vatican II at its face value.

The reason? Aside from the influence of Pope John, there is the fact that the Council has been persuasively ecumenical. It has not been preoccupied with "only" men, distinctions of communion, secularism, heresy, or any other aberrations. The tone has been frank, the public expressions humble in character and positive in their impact.

This of course has not always pleased the inveterate militants of the Church.

Those who regard Romanism as weakness, ecumenism as (liberal) tolerance, and public humility as unbecoming to militant churchmen have been disappointed and are frequently bitter about the way things are going in Rome. They may, however, be missing the point. On one occasion has publicly expressed his disapproval and asked the bishops for "more of the same old familiar religion please" in their efforts to strengthen the Church.

But the general reaction throughout the world, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, has been one of surprise and admiration.

Anyone who has sat in the press building down from Saint Peter's and has listened to hard-bitten journalists from all over the world studiously asking the "official" opinions on the source of revelation knows that there is a great deal of interest in the matter. At the Council, Dr. Albert Outler, a Protestant observer, said once, the remarkable thing is that the laity has been taken by a Church long deemed past and irreformable.

At their best, the Fathers of the Council have given brilliant evidence that the spirit of the Gospels still lives in the Church.

Take their discussions about the declaration on the laity and large, it was a model of evangelical charity. As such it was a balm to a few Catholics who have nurtured anti-Semitism in their hearts. To such persons there seems to be no explanation for the general Christian consensus expressed by the Council Fathers other than their glibility and susceptibility to alleged Jewish "plots."

In the absence of facts to sustain their theory, they simply manufacture them. For example, it was recently reported in Le Monde, the Parisian daily, that Fathers of the Council had been circled by a group identifying itself only as a body of priests. The anonymous group warned the bishops against being taken in by Jewish propaganda. They also singled out a number of priests active in Council affairs who have Jewish backgrounds. The conciliar Fathers were warned against these priests. It was suggested that they might be "plants."

Among those named were two prominent members of the clergy well known to Americans—Alger John M. Oesterlicher of Seton Hall University, Newark, N.J., and the Canadian Augustinian theologian, Father Gregory Baum. The same letter cast doubt on the leading ecumenist of the Church, the Jesuit Cardinal Bea, Cardinal Bea, who was born in Germany, it was suggested, has been a Jewish "agent" all along.

But it is of major significance that no one here took this facile letter seriously. The latest harangue were more amused than hurt by it and the bishops treated it with the disdain it deserved.

As an effort to renew Catholicism, great progress has already been made by the Council, and more is in the offing.

One need only recall the shocked reaction to Father Hans Kuenig's first book on reform and renewal to see how far along the Church has come. When, in that book, Father Kuenig, the brilliant young Swiss theologian, suggested that the Church needed an internal "reformation" and "abolition" of outmoded customs, criteria, theological methods, and restrictions on freedom, there was a very special him throughout the Catholic world. He was accused of being not only a heretic but a

and trouble-maker but a cryptic heretic to boot.

But, Father Kuenig, rather than his critics, turned out to be the better prophet of what the work of Vatican II would be.

Only two decrees of the Council have been formally proclaimed by the Pope to date. The least of these, the decree on communications, admittedly added little to Pope John's search for aggiornamento. At best it was a collection of banalities and revealed the inability of its authors to deal creatively and at the same time realistically with its challenging theme. Since its proclamation last December it has been largely, and mercifully, forgotten.

The explanation for this failure is that the Fathers of the Council were preoccupied with more pressing theological matters and did not give it the attention it deserved. Absentmindedly, they let a golden opportunity slip through their fingers.

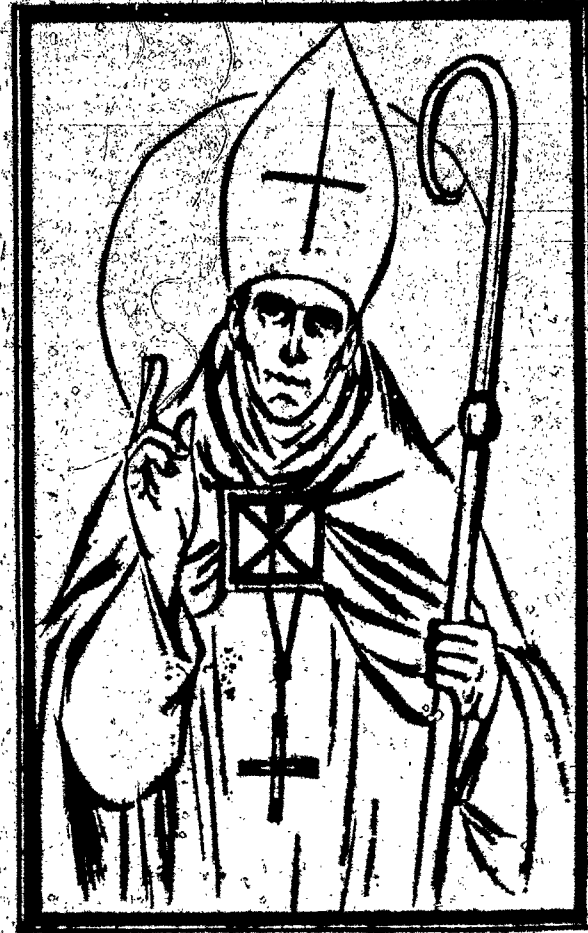
But the liturgical constitution, proclaimed on the same occasion, was a brilliant accomplishment. To the degree that it is put into practice, it will restore Catholic prayer from an individualistic and sometimes sentimental preoccupation with personal salvation to a broad social awareness that the Church's prayer is the people of God sharing the highest spiritual experience open to man on earth.

Public attention has been largely fixed on such dramatic changes as the shift from Latin to the vernacular in the Mass and Sacraments. Much more important, however, is the spirit of the document, which promises to enrich the worship of the Church, heighten the meaning of the Sacraments, and dissipate the incomprehensibility and frequent boredom which so many Catholics, for as long as a century, have had in their formalism of their sacramental "duties."

The draft of Divine Revelation, which at this writing is under discussion, is equally promising. Though its themes are at best and highly theological, its strong implications are only for the future intellectual life of the Church and ecumenical work but for the growth of Biblical studies among the Catholic people, as well.

This proposed decree opens the possibility of unfolding, for Catholics, the riches to be found in the sacred Scriptures and allowing their religious thinking away from the long-enslaved "propositional" mode, by which faith becomes assent to a series of syllogistic conclusions, to a more Biblical turn of mind, which puts its emphasis on the Christian experience as an "encounter" between God and man.

As the Abbot of Downside (England), Dom Christopher Butler, O.S.B., noted, the scheme on the sources of revelation which is of great interest to theologians may be practically inoperative due to the untrained. Coming immediately after the lively discussions of religious liberty and the declaration on the Jews, the debate on it seemed like something of a let-down to many. Still, its importance cannot be exaggerated.



Patron of Corsica

From the Isle of Exile—St. Alexander Sauli was born in Milan in 1524. He joined the Barnabite Cleric Regular, was for many years the spiritual director of St. Charles Borromeo, and was appointed Bishop to reform the Corsican diocese of Ajaccio in 1570. He carried on his very difficult task for twenty years, and with such success that he was then appointed to Faenza, where he died in the following year, 1592. His feastday is October 11.

The schema is concerned with three basic matters:

- 1. The idea of revelation;
- 2. The consequences of revelation; and
- 3. The role of the Bible.

The schema, formerly known as "sources of revelation," is now simply "On Divine Revelation." The title change from the 1962 schema indicates a shift in emphasis from the apologetic, catechetical tone criticized then to the current preservation of revelation as the "personal and living word still active in the Church."

TWO KEY WORDS in the treatment of revelation are Scripture and tradition. The authentic interpretation of tradition is entrusted to the magisterium of the Church, including the interpretation of sacred Scripture which is not outside tradition but forms part of it. Under guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church gains an ever-increasing comprehension of the mystery of salvation. There are no new revelations, but what has already been revealed can be better understood as the Church progresses on its journey through time.

The first session of the Council, in 1962, got bogged down in the argument about whether the sources of revelation were to be found independently in the Bible and in the tradition of the Church or whether the revelation is communicated through tradition was also

mainly rooted in Scripture. Thus a variant on the Protestant-Catholic theological battle of the affirmation about Scripture will follow in the work of Saint Peter's.

The present schema hypothesis that faith entirely. It was felt that theological speculation had not matured enough for the Council to take a firm position on the matter and that it would be well to let the theological work on it longer.

In the meantime, the Biblically-oriented faction, who were once held highly suspect by the Holy Office as possible deviants from orthodoxy—are free to continue their studies, to uphold their position that Scripture and tradition are intimately related, and to question the other doctrines, which have been widely held for the last 400 years—but, as Father George Tavard, insisted, no longer than that.

As it now stands, "the sources of revelation" is in keeping with the thought of John Henry Newman, the great Victorian cardinal, whose classic theories on the development of doctrine were questioned in his own day. It gives expression to the idea that revelation is not so much a matter of words as of the "salvific" actions of God in history, which are recorded in the books of the Bible and preserved by tradition. The Biblical accounts themselves, the documents affirm, must be understood in their literary, historical, linguistic, and theological contexts. The program reveals

ation of course, in which all is fulfilled, is to be found in the life of Christ, who is the revelation in whom God manifested Himself.

The new schema encourages Catholics to read the sacred Scriptures in both their private and public worship. It encourages the work of the modern Scriptures scholars and the collaboration of Catholic scholars with biblicists of other faiths. Finally, it authorizes joint Protestant-Catholic versions of the Bible based on modern scholarship, especially in those new nations where no translations have been available.

This stress on the Bible will surely strengthen ecumenical ties between Christians. It will enrich Jewish-Catholic understanding as well; the Church's theology of the future—inspired by the Semitic sense of thought found in the Scriptures—will be more comprehensible to Jewish thinkers than the alien Hellenic emphasis of Catholic theology ever was. Moreover, the existential flavor of Biblical thought also seems much more congenial to modernist thinkers than the abstract Roman presentation of Catholic doctrine which has for so long dominated the Church's seminary and university.

The implementation of the program collectively, the doctrine by which the bishops will be given a larger share with the Pope in the governance of the entire Church, can also be counted as a big step forward in making the stamp of the Council.

Acceptance of the "collegiate" principle brings Catholic thinking closer to Eastern Orthodox conceptions of the bishop's role. It diminishes somewhat the persistent Protestant notion of Catholicism as a kind of totalitarian dictatorship presided over by a "despotic" Pope. In addition, the wider representation within the ruling body at Rome seems much more congenial to modernist "open" attitudes. Theologically, "collegial" directors of the Roman Curia—like too is appealing.

The implementation of "collegiality" in a word, is sure to have a vast ecumenical and perhaps wholesome effect on the life of the Church.

All these changes will affect the dialogue between the Church and the world which Pope Paul called for. The first attempt at that dialogue will be coming before the Fathers' soon, when the crucial Schema 15, On the Church and the Modern World, is presented to them.

The schema deals with major population problems, nuclear war, and other touchy questions. In either way—a further step or a way-back—another series of modifications—decrees or speak meaningfully to modern man. But one thing is certain: if the declarations on religious liberty and on the Jews and other non-Christians had not been received as they were by the Fathers of the Council, they approved of both of them and sent them back for strengthening. They arrived here in mid-September, the third attempt of the Council—to speak meaningfully to contemporary man—would have been put out of range.

The scheme on ecumenism, to which these faithful declarations were attached, established a model for speaking to the world: "openness" without essential compromise, firmness about principle without arrogance or self-righteousness; a lively awareness that the arrangement of centuries cannot be completely halted, overnight, without hopelessness.

If the Church's attempts to establish a dialogue with the modern world are as fruitful as its earlier effort to speak through St. Vincent of Lérins, Christ an heretic, Vatican II will go down in history as the greatest event in a thousand years of Catholic history. The greatest challenge, then, is still ahead.

'Christian Coffee House'

St. Louis—A "Christian coffee house," with a board of directors, which includes two Catholics, has opened here.

Waitresses and other helpers will attend weekly lectures, quarterly retreats and reading seminars. Before they begin each night, they will take part in a discussion hour they will receive no money.

Mrs. Lewis A. McDonald, a member of the Presbyterian U.S. Church here, outlined the plan. The board includes Father Donald E. Barnhurst, director of the Newman Center at Normandy, Mo., Branch of Missouri University, and Dr. Charles T. Dougherty, professor of English at St. Louis University.

Called "The Exit," Mrs. McDonald says the house's name comes from Jean Paul Sartre's play which depicts hell as a closed room where three persons cannot escape from each other. The Christian "Exit" hopefully will offer a "way out" of that hell, Mrs. McDonald said.



October is month of the Rosary and the bishops at the Vatican Council this week studied the new role hymen will have in the Church in the years ahead. This twofold aspect of the faith is caught in this photo taken recently at the ceremony of the blessing of graves at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Rochester. The gloved hand of a Knight of St. John holds the symbolic sword indicating readiness to defend the faith while other hands piously hold a Rosary.

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