

Co-responsibility Marks Post-Council Church

(Continued from Page 4)

lines are still vague and indistinct. This Vatican III must, in its turn, draw out what Vatican II contained only in germ; it must unfold what is now only virtual, and make explicit its riches for the future.

The Church, rooted in the past though she is, is also impelled toward the future; she is faithfulness and hope. For her, simply to return to the past or to restore it as it was, but rather, in continuity with the past, to go forth to meet the Lord and to answer His new invitations. Christ was yesterday, He is today, and He will be tomorrow. Christ is Himself the past, the present and the future of the Church. We must live in the experience of Vatican II in the perspective, which will lead us from the present stage to the next one, from the "already" to the "not yet."

Every human endeavor, no matter how grandiose, has a certain tribute to pay to human limitations: our vision never takes in the entire horizon; we all bear the treasures entrusted to us "in earthen vessels." A Council too must needs bear the mark of the times, and of the men who took part in it. This is which gives it its historical meaning, and hence its limitations — and, by that very fact, its necessary openness to the future.

The Second Vatican Council was initially handicapped by the fact that it came as something of a surprise, and by certain shortcomings in the preparations for it. "When it comes to Councils," John XXIII would say with his fine smile, "we are all novices."

Analyzing the preparatory "schemata" of the Council in retrospect, and comparing them with the definitive texts that were voted on, we can measure the long journey by which the Council had to work its way out of the excessively narrow, juridical and defensive theology that underlay the original projects.

Those who took part in the Council from day to day can only be filled with awe at the impulse of the Holy Spirit that guided the progress of its work. And clearly, even the delays in the conciliar work had the advantage of allowing the Fathers to grow in their awareness of its implications, and to create among themselves a unity of mind and soul.

For another obstacle to the full flowering of the Council, astonishing as this may seem at first glance, was the quest for this unanimity. It is both the glory and the weakness of a Council to strive to win the assent of all its members to the proposed texts and decrees. It is its glory, because we are here working out the supernatural mystery of the Church, which is a mystery of communion. A Council is no parliament, where a majority can lay down the law to a minority. To express this

concern for unanimity, the Council agreed in advance to require the assent of three-fourths of the Fathers, dependent of course upon the ultimate agreement of the Pope. In fact, the important votes were for the most part nearly unanimous.

This unanimity, however, had its price.

It can happen, in the course of debate, with the interplay of numerous amendments—which, in principle, must be integrated into the document — that certain texts lose their point, or at least their forcefulness. Historians of the future will have to disentangle, here and there, the central affirmation from the interpolations and embellishments. The quest for a "common denominator" does not do full justice to the underlying thought of the majority, and it is not easy to bring into synthesis elements which have originated richer in what they imply than in what they openly affirm.

In the conciliar texts, there are some formulae whose aim was to counter-balance other assertions, or to win wider assent; these were, in some cases, like temporary stopping-places in a long climb. Because of the interplay of circumstances — and of men — certain emphases did not manage to have their full force for renewal. But the seeds are there, like unopened buds awaiting the sun; it will be the task of men moved by the Holy Spirit to draw out all the vital riches contained in the conciliar texts — and, for that matter, in all that was said both inside and outside the Council hall, but which has become an integral part of Vatican II.

Another element situating the Council in history, and therefore calling for further development, is that its underlying theology was Latin rather than oriental in character.

If at the outset there was a certain rather strikingly unilateral "Latinism," the influence of the oriental Fathers brought about a number of significant corrections in which they were almost always supported by the majority. At the end of the process, St. Peter's, the Fathers could contemplate Bernini's Chair of Peter, held aloft by the Latin Fathers Augustine and Ambrose, and also by the Greek Fathers Athanasius and Chrysostom. The symbolism was expressive, but only gradually did it enter into the awareness of the Council; no doubt there is still a considerable distance to be travelled in that direction.

Patriarch Maximos IV has written, "There are doors which the Holy Spirit has opened, that will never again be closed." This "oriental" complementarity is a priceless element of balance and of counterweight. As Cardinal Colombo, Archbishop of Milan, aptly remarked, "Just as having two eyes enables a man to estimate the distance between objects, so, it seems to me, the oriental view of many of the problems de-

bated in the Council, joined with the western view, enabled me — and still enables me — to grasp more fully the teaching of Christ."

Co-responsibility

If Vatican II has not solved all the problems, it has at least opened up some limitless horizons: in the soil of the Church it has planted, as Paul VI said, "seeds of life" that should now begin to produce fruit. Were I asked which of these seeds of life is richest in pastoral consequences, I should reply: the rediscovery of the People of God as a totality, and the co-responsibility that flows as a consequence from it for all the members.

By presenting the Church first of all as the People of God, we are placed at the outset beyond the organic and functional distinction of hierarchy and laity, at a level common to all: Baptism. Whether pastors or not, all Christians are, first and foremost, "the Faithful" in the deepest sense of the term, that is, believers.

• The sacrament of baptism is constitutive of the Church; the other sacraments are located in the Church; the perspective is different.

• Baptism is the root of all religious life, whether consecrated or not: it is the starting point from which unfold all the various vocations, functions, and charisms.

• In the Church of God, there is a primary and fundamental equality of all the members; there is no super-baptism, there are no castes, no privileges.

The greatest day in the life of a Pope is therefore not the day of his election or coronation, but the day of his baptismal consecration.

We must take note of these basic truths, for they are essential to the life of the Church, and they must govern all her choices and all her attitudes.

There has been too much confusion between the terms "laity" and "faithful." A Pope or a bishop or a priest is not a layman, but he is one of the faithful, precisely as he is one of the baptized, a Christian. His primary duty is to live his Christianity in obedience to the Gospel, and his particular mission has its starting-point there.

- Co-responsibility of the bishops with the Pope.
- Co-responsibility of bishops among themselves.
- Co-responsibility of bishops and priests.
- Co-responsibility of clergy and laity.
- Co-responsibility of service.

At each of these levels, Vatican II has planted "seeds of life," and has created institutions intended to translate into practice each of these co-responsibilities with its own particular

qualities. Forced as I am to restrict my choice of topic, I should like to offer you a few reflections on co-responsibility at three of these levels: that of bishops; that of "clergy-laity," and finally that of theologians.

A. At the episcopal level

During the symposium of European bishops held in Holland last July, Archbishop Marty of Rheims openly made a moving examination of conscience or in the manner in which he had assumed episcopal responsibility prior to the Council, and on his subsequent commitment. Humorously and humbly, he underlined the contrast and the transition — from a certain unconscious paternalism and friendly condescension, to the direct and open dialogue which is the distinctive feature of the new era. We all recognized ourselves in this picture which no longer exists; we all understood that the profound doctrinal reality of episcopal authority, while remaining changeless in itself, needs to be clothed in new modalities in function of the context of today.

Let it be acknowledged, moreover, that such a psychological transition is not accomplished overnight: some leeway will have to be allowed for trial and error. What matters, above all, is the general direction to which one is committed, and which governs one's choice in matters of detail.

There exists no training-programme for the duties of organizing the pastoral effort of a diocese. They taught us a lot of things in the seminary, but none of the courses dealt with organizing a diocese or a parish, or with group-dynamics and the laws of collective psychology.

The criticisms coming from almost everywhere in the world about diocesan structures, about their "impersonalism" and "anonymity," are too consistent not to be given attentive study. For while the system could doubtless be in some measure corrected by the efforts of individual men, the fact remains that the system itself has its own internal lacunae that call for remedies.

This is all the more true inasmuch as pastoral care, which until yesterday was practiced in a highly individualistic manner, is going to become more and more a matter of structured and coordinated teamwork. And this supposes the systematic bringing together of many efforts in mutual trust and collaboration.

All this within the diocese.

But we are also becoming aware now that a particular church does not exist within the Church universal as a self-sufficient whole. It must in its turn be in a state of openness and communication with its sister-churches of the same country or region.

The idea of the bishops' co-responsibility among themselves emerged very strongly during the Council, which was itself a constant exercise of that co-responsibility. Even before the Council, to be sure, there had been episcopal conferences bringing together the bishops of a region or a country, but for the most part these had no definite status. By giving them the duty to accomplish, the Council gave them new possibilities, and thereby opened the

way to a very broad de-centralization in the Church.

Now for that matter, did the movement halt at a time a little beyond the Council? There have sprung up episcopal conferences on the continental level, as indeed, the bishops of Latin America had already been joined in a great confederation (CELAM) even prior to the Council. In Rome itself, some of these conferences have come to birth, such as the European Episcopal Conference that is now taking shape. In his message of greeting to the First Symposium of European Bishops, gathered in Holland last summer, the Holy Father not only voiced his joy at seeing such a gathering, but qualified it as "necessary." All this is very rich in promise for the future.

This enlargement of horizon is an invitation to every bishop to put "Church" ahead of "diocese" in his thinking — for the reality of diocese is best understood in the context of the Church universal.

But episcopal co-responsibility comes into play not only on the horizontal level; it is taking shape now also in the vertical lines that link the particular churches to Rome.

In setting up the Synod of Bishops as a permanent institution, His Holiness Pope Paul wished to institutionalize the dialogue between Centre and periphery which the Council had so happily begun. By gathering around him periodically some 200 bishops, chosen for the most part by their peers, he has opened up possibilities of very close contact and exchange of views.

This is no "miniature Council" at a Council, all the bishops of the world attend by right, and with deliberative vote; only certain delegates of the world episcopate will take part in the Synod, and with merely consultative power. Yet the Pope has not excluded the future possibility of giving deliberative voice to the Synod. Living experience must precede legislation, and it is experience that will reveal, as things proceed, all the pastoral implications virtually contained in the Synod.

B. At "clergy-laity" level

Vatican II did not succeed in assigning to the laity their proper place in the Church. Not that it is for the laity to judge concerning matters of faith — this belongs to bishops alone — but it is for them to give real aid in promoting, from within, the pastoral renewal.

At the first Council at Jerusalem, the decrees began with these words: "It has seemed good to the Apostles and the Ancients, along with all the Church, to decide that . . ."

Vatican II did not bring the co-responsibility of the laity into play on the scale one would have wished, nor with as wide a representation as would have been desirable. In this, too, it bears the mark of the time at which it took place.

Vatican II suffered from the fact that the theology of the laity has not yet reached its maturity.

We all know how little there is about the laity in the Code of Canon Law — fortunately being revised now. Under the title "De Laicis" there are two articles, the one asserting their



Cardinal Suenens — Co-responsibility

right to receive spiritual goods, constant circulation of ideas in the Church. Doctrinal vigilance is needed, and theologians have an irreplaceable ecclesial role. But the determination and the safeguarding of orthodoxy must never become the monopoly of a certain school or of certain theologians.

What I should like to see, then, is dialogue among the various theological schools, and inter-university conferences. It is my view that our Faculties of Theology have a role to play not only during Councils, but permanently in the life of the Church. Dialogue at this level will create a unity of spirit, a deep sharing, that will prepare the way for decisions of the Magisterium. This would be the best possible response to the invitation which Pope Paul addressed to theologians on October 2, 1966, when he told them: "Develop a spirit of communion with the whole Christian people, and with the sacred hierarchy; develop too a communion among yourselves, as theologians."

A close collaboration of this sort among theologians could render priceless services in the pastoral domain.

C. At level of theologians

If co-responsibility is becoming a more and more prominent element in the life of all the Church, it is especially important that sharing take place in the domain of theological thought, which is of necessity the point of departure for any sound pastoral care.

Both before and during the Council, we suffered from the lack of dialogue among theologians who were of divergent schools or trends.

In order to assure a better doctrinal balance between the Centre and the periphery, one important transformation has already been accomplished: the Congregation of the Holy Office has become the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Certain of its earlier procedures have been abolished — to no one's regret — and the number of its consultants and assessors has been increased. The bishops of the world appreciated the fact that they were consulted about a series of doctrinal propositions: even if this did not allow a confrontation or an exchange of views properly so called, it did at least provide for a very wide enquiry.

All this is moving in the direction desired by the Council; but there is still need, I think, to go forward in more resolute fashion if we are to establish real dialogue between the Centre and the periphery. It is essential, in fact, that there be a

need a pastoral care which is based on a common intellectual effort.

If we have insisted on the need for continuing this theological collaboration that was so fruitful at the Council, it is not with any thought of submitting the Magisterium to the authority of theologians, but rather in order that the Magisterium, fully informed and in possession of all the data of a problem, may be able to speak its authentic and authoritative word.

Moreover, it will have been noticed how very careful the Council was in its texts to avoid entering into theological controversies. The Doctrinal Commission willingly opted for whatever formula would be closest to the bare truth of faith, stripped of any theological options that were still the object of free discussion. This served to emphasize not only how precious is the contribution of theologians in delimiting doctrinal affirmations and weighing the force of their wording, but also what special weight attaches to the truth as proposed by the Magisterium.

In a world where intellectual anarchy reigns, there is more place than ever for this teaching function which the Lord entrusted to the Apostles, and especially to Peter. It is an incomparable advantage for the Church to have, in Peter and in his successors, this living centre of reference and of communion in that faith which is the very basis of the Church's life. "I have prayed for you, Peter," said Jesus; "once you have been converted, strengthen your brethren."

Since Rome is, and should remain, the centre of Christendom, her message needs to be catholic in scope. The Church is neither Latin nor Greek, neither western nor eastern. The Word of God cannot be fettered; it must be set loose from the limitations of every human commentary, and must cut across all the schools of theological thought, in order to be "all things to all men."

In a world that is in process of unification, the Church lives her catholicity on a continental scale. Her word must be as pure as a spring, yet as wide as the ocean. It would seem, therefore, that in laboring at theological co-responsibility, we are working for nothing less than the most authentic possible shining forth of the Church herself.

Urban Vic

(In this wrap-up our "Church in the City" series, the Courier-Journal interviewed Father Finks, for the past six years Vice Rector of the Rochester Diocese, to clarify just what Church was in "The City" and to suggest the direction which it would like to take.)

By REV. ROBERT FINKS

The Catholic Office Ministry is "not a parish," aiming at telling city parishes what to do.

So began Father Finks in a Courier-Journal last week. As Urban Ministry of the Rochester, he has recently formed de-

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Modern Thought Termed 'Destructive' of Faith

Castel Gandolfo (RNS) — The "destructive" attitude of modern thought makes the study of God difficult today. Pope Paul VI told the participants in a scholarly symposium discussing "The Problems of God."

"Human thought has lost faith in itself," the Pope said in a private address the text of which was made public two days after its delivery. The symposium took place at Albano, near Rome. Its participants were given an audience at Castel Gandolfo, the Pope's summer residence. Pope Paul charged that modern thought "does not want formal logic or metaphysics; it does not want organic systems of truth, no matter how authoritative they are."

"Everything must be questioned, everything is uncertain," he said, except for scientific thought. This has "a temporary value," he said, "without illuminating the deep problems of the intelligence and giving useful answers to life in its spiritual and religious needs."

Pragmatism can substitute in some way for this emptiness," he said, "but often more to stimulate hunger for the real truth rather than satisfy it."

After deploring the dangers of "speculative and arbitrary language" and the "illogical procedures" and "totally subjective" views which he called typical of modern philosophical discussion, Pope Paul ended on a note of optimism, saying that in spite of everything God watches over us "because He exists. He is alive and true."

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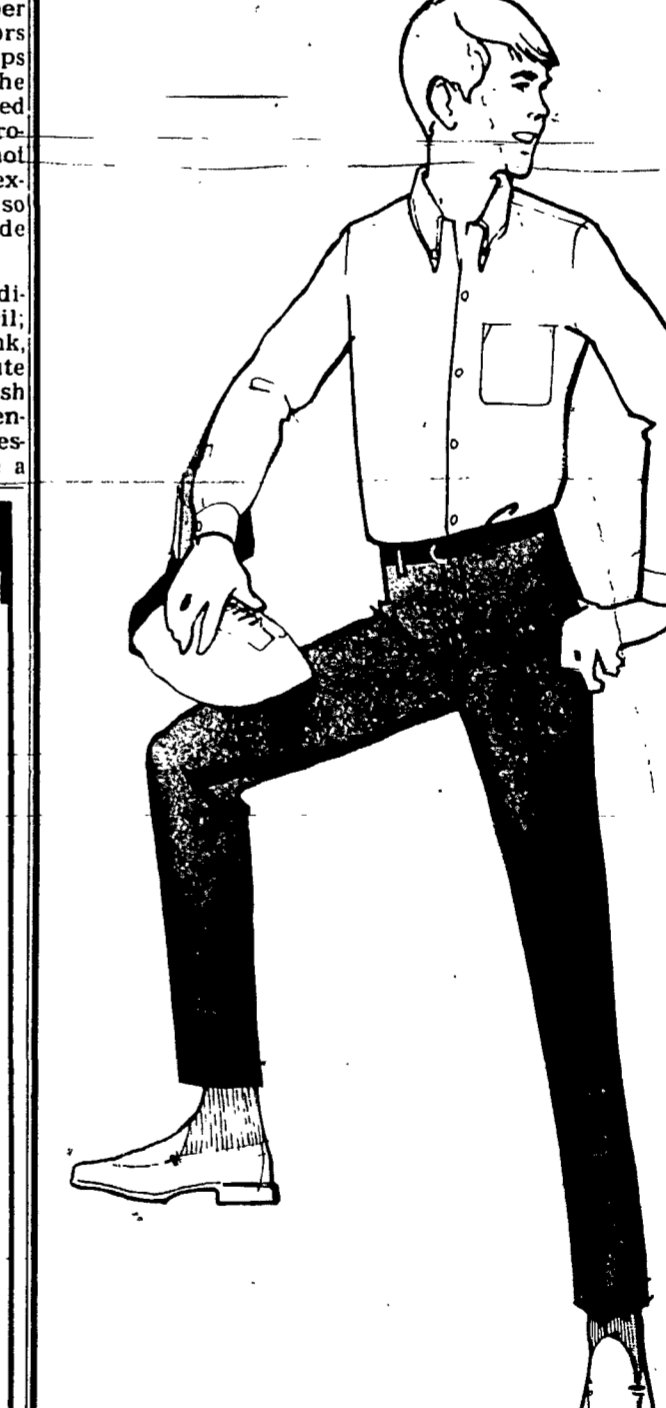


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