

A 'Human' View of the First Council

By FR. WALTER ABBOTT, S.J.

Catholic commentators generally hold that the "Council" of Jerusalem (Chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles) recognized and proclaimed what Paul would teach extensively in his letters to the Romans and Galatians; the Mosaic Law was abrogated; justification is by faith and not by works of the Law; salvation is through Christ.

When the Second Vatican Council was being prepared, I remember some scholars published articles holding that these items of the faith were declared by Peter in his speech at the "Council" to have been divinely revealed, and therefore Chapter 15 of Acts witnessed to the primacy of Peter, the infallible magisterium, and conciliar decrees, both doctrinal and disciplinary.

The meeting at Jerusalem with Peter presiding, they said, thus stood as a model for future Ecumenical Councils. Some pointed out that the meeting of the Apostles was characterized by freedom of speech, justice, and charity. They must have been pleased when Vatican II proved to be endowed with the same qualities.

Many Protestants hold that Peter did not preside over the "Council" because he had ceased to be head of the Church

and was head only of the mission to the Jews, as Paul was head of the mission to the Gentiles. For this they lean heavily on Chapter 2 of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, which I would like you to read now.

They argue from Acts and Galatians 2 that James had taken Peter's place as head of the Church.

Whatever you hold on the leadership of the "Council," I think your study will have shown you that it was Paul who provoked the "Council" of Jerusalem. As you can see from the beginning of Chapter 15, it was what Paul and Barnabas did at Antioch that triggered develop-

ments leading to the calling of the "Council."

Paul and Barnabas were making converts and not requiring them to accept circumcision. Visitors from Judea began to circulate in Antioch and to teach that there was no salvation without circumcision "as the Law of Moses requires." Fierce argument ensued. The result was a decision to appeal the matter to the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Paul's victory in the "Council" certainly enhanced his prestige in the Church.

Luke makes no mention in Acts of Paul's run-in with Peter at Antioch, which is de-

scribed in Galatians 2. On that occasion Paul saw a menace of a return to the situation as it was before the "Council." He rebuked Peter, who had allowed himself to be influenced for a time by a group of reactionary Christians who still clung to their Jewish customs. However, it was a temporary and minor matter. Peter had been eating with Gentiles, contrary to Jewish law, but when visitors came to Antioch from Jerusalem he did not continue to do so.

Peter was in the wrong on that occasion and obviously got back on the right track after admitting it. In the main details of the message they daily preached Peter and Paul were completely at one. You will have noticed in the Acts of the Apostles how careful Paul was to maintain contact with Jerusalem, where the Apostles were.

It is an interesting fact that in the four apologetic discourses Paul gives in the later chapters of Acts he defends not the mission to the Gentiles, nor the Christian community, nor

the gospel, but himself.

Some say that Luke, the author of Acts, saw the question at stake as the personal position of Paul in relation both to Judaism and to the early Christian Church. They argue that Luke was tussling with the objection that if the largest part of the Christian community owed its origins to a Jewish apostate then the Church was not the renewed Israel and had no right to claim the salvation promised to Israel. They say Luke wanted to defend the orthodoxy of Paul because he was writing for Christian readers who were being displaced from their Jewish environment because of charges against Paul.

When you read Acts 21:17-26 you will see how Paul went along with an idea of James and the elders to help his public image among Christians who were still observing the Jewish laws. Some of you I suspect will wish, when you read the passage, that Peter had been there to tell them all off, James and the elders, as well as Paul.

No More 'Heresy'?

Vatican City —(RNS)— The Roman Catholic Church will no longer level a charge of "heresy" at Catholic authors it may consider to be in "doctrinal error."

Though it has been quite some time since the Church has formally branded any Catholic a heretic, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (formerly the Holy Office) issued a new set of

"liberalized" regulations that will govern its policy in "safeguarding the doctrine of faith and morals."

Commenting on the new regulations, Msgr. Giuseppe Tomko, a member of the Congregation, said "the old-fashioned heresy charge" is to be "wiped out" and writers of "doubtful" books will be given a greater chance to defend themselves.

The Priest and the Dying

Priests must bring much more to the aged and dying than just the Sacraments: full pastoral care must include sensitivity, Christ-like love and ability to touch the emotions and the intellect of the patient.

Priests of the diocese heard this counsel from teams of speakers at three clergy conferences held last week in Rochester and Elmira.

Miss Marie Weidman of Catholic Family Center discussed pastoral care of the aged, Father Daniel Tormey, chaplain of Rochester General Hospital, spoke on care of the dying and Father Douglas A. Morrison, chaplain of St. Raphael's Hospital, New Haven, Conn., covered areas of counselling required in dealing with the sick.

Discussing how "team min-

istry" should be used for the chronically ill were Dr. Robert F. Klein of Strong Memorial Hospital and Dr. Alfred W. Lucas of St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira.

Father Morrison described the requirements for a priest-counsellor as "be perceptive, be sensitive, able to articulate and to listen and be free of personal problems."

He charged that many priests "need self-assurance that they have much to give." A sense of a lack of training to handle all problems often leads to "the keep-at-arms-length-stature", he said.

"We priests have so much to give because we have Jesus Christ. But we must constantly put all our faith in the relevance and the importance of His message. He became human to reach people; we must be ourselves."

Father Tormey described the stages a dying patient goes through "in coming to grips with death." Denial of the imminence of the end is followed by anger at the very thought that God was making the decision, he said. Then comes the bargaining process ("I'll do something for God if He spares me"), depression and final acceptance.

"The priest's role," Father Tormey explained, "is to help remove the barriers of emotions and mental torture to prepare the patient for the fullest possible values of the Sacraments. Grace comes most effectively when the patient is ready to face God and reach out for His love."

KNOW YOUR FAITH

Q. and A.

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Q. Is it true to say that Catholic theologians in general regard the Second Vatican Council as already out-of-date? It seems to me that many segments of the Catholic Church have yet to catch up with Vatican II. Don't we have to take one step at a time?

A. In my judgment, it is not a common opinion among Catholic theologians that Vatican II is already out of date. Many would argue, however, that the council did not answer all the major questions of our day, nor did the council even raise some of them.

The Second Vatican Council was concerned primarily with the problem of the Church: its nature, its mission, liturgy, ecumenism, relations with non-Christians, religious freedom, priest's, bishops, religious, and so forth. But there are other theological problems beyond the problem of the Church. There is the problem of God, of Jesus, and of man himself.

For a Catholic theologian interested primarily in the question of the Church (ecclesiology), Vatican II is eminently useful and practical. And it is certainly not out-of-date. But for Catholic theologians who happen to be working in other areas of theology, the council offers only indirect assistance (as, for example, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World).

You are probably right in your opinion that many segments of the Catholic Church have not yet assimilated the basic teaching of Vatican II, and that it would be premature to move beyond the council at this time. So much of the pastoral confusion today arises from basic misunderstandings regarding the nature, mission, and structure of the Church. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council still has much to offer.

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