

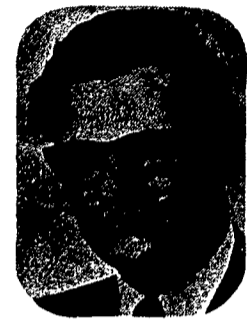
VATICAN II...10 Years Later

Non-Catholics Assess Vatican II in History

New York (RNS) — Vatican II stands as a major event of Church history in the view of churchmen representing important non-Catholic traditions — Lutheran, Orthodox, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist. Looking back ten years after the Council's opening, they assess the Council's impact on the ecumenical movement as well as its role in Church history.

Dr. Kent L. Knutson, president of the American Lutheran Church, and a participant in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogues:

To assess the state of the church ten years after Vatican II is a difficult matter. There are forces now involved which make the situation more ambiguous than even three years ago. There can be little doubt that Vatican II still stands as the most formative event in this century, indeed, even since the Council of Trent. It has already shaped the Roman Catholic Church in ways that, from the point of view of Lutherans, has placed Rome on a new path which brings Catholics closer and closer to their Protestant brethren. We can now characterize the Catholic Church as being evangelical in its main thrust in the tradition of Vatican II.



The difficulty lies precisely in that it has already been 10 years since Vatican II opened, and the Council begins to recede into the past, bit by bit. Its glow and warmth cool a bit and one does not know what the final effect will be. Some forces are beginning to counter the Council's influence with greater power than before. The Catholic Church has not yet recovered from some of the divisive forces within her fellowship. And, of course, the Catholic Church, along with the rest of us, is wrestling with the secular, hostile, as well as changing, forces of the modern world.

Dr. Robert V. Moss, president of the United Church of Christ, who represented the former International Congregational Council at Vatican II:

No other ecclesiastical event of our time has done more to open the door to Christian union than the Second Vatican Council. It is regarded by Protestants as the most important innovation in the Church since the Reformation.



This great Council under the hands of the gentle Pope John XXIII has paved the way toward the sharing in mutual brotherhood by Protestants, Orthodox and Roman Catholics alike in the agonies of our time. Through the understanding that the Council has brought about, we can learn from one another, serve together and hope together.

It was because of the act of the Council that the Roman Catholic Church in this country and around the world began to share in the continuing work of local and regional councils of churches. Now, in some countries they are members of the national councils of churches and their joining of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. is a possibility in the foreseeable future.

At the time of the 10th anniversary of this milestone in Christian history it is appropriate that we renew our memory of Pope John and express our appreciation to those people of vision and concern for worldwide Christianity who were the prime movers in Vatican II.

Denver (RNS) — One of the nation's leading spokesmen for the Catholic laity said that a tremendous surge of "spirituality" — as evidenced in movements like the Charismatic Renewal — is helping overcome the polarity among Catholics that was one of the "discouraging" effects of Vatican II.

He said also that the emphasis on Christian social witness which derived from the Council has been "running out of steam" and needed an infusion of the Courier-Journal

"Spirit" to revive it and keep it going.

Martin Work, former executive director of the National Council of Catholic Men and one of two American members of the Vatican Council of the Laity, said that while Vatican II has surely brought about unprecedented opportunities for lay involvement in the mission of the Church, there has been a corresponding "deterioration in traditional lay group vitality, in both membership and leadership" throughout the Catholic

Church.

Mr. Work, in analyzing the impact of Vatican II on the Church some 10 years after the historic conclave opened, indicated that the council undoubtedly "opened up the life of the Church to the laity" but in many cases the lay apostolate has not grasped the opportunities available.

There was a real "freeing" of the individual Catholic by Vatican II, he said. But, unfortunately, there developed a "polarization" on almost every issue and very level — between people and

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Father William McDonnell, OSB

Impact on Clergy

Collegeville, Minn. (RNS) — The impact which Vatican II intended to have and the impact it actually did have are not always identical. What it had to say about the priesthood was unexceptional. In fact, the priesthood was given scant attention.

Yet its impact on the priesthood was immense. This impact cannot be assessed in isolation from the socio-political changes which have occurred over these past ten years.

The priest, especially the younger priest, no longer considered himself as an instrument of an institution. He was a person who was committed to Christ and to the mission of Christ, but he was his own man. No uniform (Roman collar and black clothes) was going to deprive him of that unique gift he had to give to Christ and to others. And many stopped wearing the clerical clothes which identified him with the institution.

Given the broad current of anti-institutional, anti-establishment feelings, this can hardly be surprising. Not only the institutional church was establishment, but also the military-industrial complex, the university and the government. And they all elicited negative feelings.

Some priests abandoned the structured forms of ministry which the institution imposed, such as parish priest, and have chosen to follow a "free ministry," which exists on the margin of church life. Many in this category are exercising their ministry as married priests.

Both the priesthood and life in a religious order suffered a kind of unintended devaluation. The priesthood and religious life were presented in the documents not as a higher kind of calling, but as a different sign of Christ's presence. The intent of the Council was to elevate the laity by reminding them that they were called to the same kind of holiness as those who took vows. In actual fact, what resulted was a devaluation of the priesthood and religious life.

This unintended devaluation of the clergy was reinforced by the tendency in the whole of society to dissolve all caste systems. The priestly status, which in some places was almost a caste system, was like all status systems, called into radical question.

Authority did not commend itself because it was priestly. Authority was accepted and followed not for external reasons (because it was the authority of the Church) but because it was credible in itself and because he who speaks witnesses with his life to the authenticity of what he says. Authority too gets deinstitutionalized and personalized.

The priest feels responsible for structural reforms in the social and political order. He is caught in a conflict of expectations. Many of the laity would like to see him go back to the sanctuary where they feel he belongs. The priests do not want to abandon the sanctuary but they also see the desperate urgency of problems of racial strife, poverty, war and housing.

In more positive terms the council revitalized theology. Its documents are not cast in scholastic form, but are essentially biblical. This has made contemporary theology to be more personalist, much more easily prayed and preached.

At the parish level as well as at the level of the professional theological conversations this has meant ecumenical contacts which are broad and deep. Full sharing in worship is a commonplace, though officially discouraged in many places.

Younger priests think less in denominational terms and more in terms of a common Christian commitment. The results of this are not uniformly good. It is as though many priests were saying, "Give us more Christ, give us less church." The intent is good and laudable, but ultimately it is bad theology. The Church is the body of Christ. They cannot be separated.

(Editor's Note: Father McDonnell is executive director of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, Collegeville, Minn. A scholar and theologian at St. John's Abbey and University, he also is an acknowledged authority on the neo-Pentecostal movement.)

Layman Sees Spirituality on the Rise

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There was a real "freeing" of the individual Catholic by Vatican II, he said. But, unfortunately, there developed a "polarization" on almost every issue and very level — between people and

priests, priests and bishops, people and bishops — and there seemed to be a "fundamental lack of Christian charity" in many confrontations.

Indicating that the last eight or ten years have somehow served as a period of "testing" of new approaches to Church life and involvement wrought by the council, Mr. Work said he believed that in the next five to ten years there will develop a "new kind of unity" in the Church

Mr. Work predicted a radical change in Church structures in the years ahead — on the parish level, with respect to the role of women and in many other ways. He said it is already happening in many areas.

He said he believes the growing emphasis on personal spirituality, a turning back toward prayer and the meaning of the Gospels, and the development of prayer communities, will have a "tremendous impact" on the Church in years to come.