

Church in the Modern World

Our Catholic Heritage

Two Popes Face Modern Challenges

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY
Msgr. Connelly is a professor of Church history at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia.

Angelo Cardinal Roncalli was 77 years old when he was chosen Vicar of Christ in 1958. The jovial, portly, down-to-earth son of a peasant family from the Bergamo region of Italy had a long career in the Church before he settled into Peter's chair. In 1901, his seminary studies were interrupted by a stint in the Italian army, as was his priesthood in 1915, when he was called up in the reserves. He was ordained in Rome in 1904 and became a seminary professor, writer, journalist, secretary to the Bishop of Bergamo, student chaplain, Vatican curialist, Apostolic Visitor to Bulgaria; Apostolic Delegate in Turkey and Greece; Nuncio to France; Bishop (1925); Bishop (1925); Cardinal-Patriarch of Venice (1953) and Pope.

The farmer's son gained a cosmopolitan outlook, pastoral and

diplomatic experience, and an understanding and friendship for those who were not Roman Catholics. Yet he never lost his personal love for people, his fraternal charity for the erring, and his jovial disposition. Pope John XXIII made the world realize that the Church was concerned with human problems. His death on June 3, 1963 evoked a tremendous surge of sorrow from the whole world, because he had brought it home.

His pontificate was pastoral, not doctrinaire. This tone is evident in his two major encyclicals, *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris*, in which he analyzed the conditions necessary to preserve human dignity in a world of interdependent nations.

Giovanni Cardinal Montini, who succeeded Pope John XXIII as Pope Paul VI (1963-1978), came from a distinguished northern Italian family. Most of his priestly career was spent

in the Vatican's Office of the Secretary of State. He was an ascetic intellectual whose curial duties were broadened by his world travels. Giovanni Cardinal Montini was the Cardinal-Archbishop of Milan when he was elected pope. His reputation was that of a balanced moderate who supported the aggiornamento of Vatican Council II but would be less hasty than Pope John XXIII in making decisions.

Almost immediately after his papal election, Pope Paul VI was criticized by the members of the liberal and the conservative press. Yet, to his credit, he carried the Second Vatican Council to its conclusion and implemented its decrees.

Pope Paul VI issued five profound encyclicals: "Ecclesiam Suam," "Mysterium Fidei," "Sacerdotalis Coelibatus," "Populorum Progressio" and "Humanae Vitae." In them he treated succes-

sively of the Church; the Blessed Eucharist; priestly celibacy; social justice; and the Church's traditional teaching on the generation of human life, its value, importance and beauty. His stance on artificial birth control brought a storm of protests from liberal bishops, priests, theologians and lay people.

Though he was a sensitive man, who tried to bring the papacy from Rome to the people, he was barraged with harsh criticism which many Catholic writers leveled at him. They could not budge him on matters of doctrine.

But the critical harassment, his world-wide travels and his own intense personality took their toll. As his papacy reached its 15th year, he took on the look of a tired laborer for Christ. He died on Aug. 6, 1978. Future historians, freed from the bias of this age, will undoubtedly rank him as one of the outstanding popes in history.

The Council Opens the "Windows of the Church"

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY

Experts and pundits predicted that Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) would be a transitional pope.

Within a few months of his election, however, the 77-year-old pontiff proved that a transitional pope could be an exciting pope. His unpredictable ways, his democratic ideals and his ecumenism demonstrated to the world that Pope John would be quite different than Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) in leading the Church. Pope John began speaking of "opening the windows of the Church," and constantly repeating his theme of the "brotherhood of all men." He mitigated the policies of Pope Pius XII towards the Communists. He delighted the hierarchy by emphasizing his function as a "brother to all bishops throughout the world."

In order to update the Church in an age of rapid change, and to encourage the separated churches to join in a common quest for religious unity, Pope John convoked the Second Vatican Council.

When this council was announced (Jan. 25, 1959), the world reacted with pleasant surprise. Perhaps such surprise was unwarranted. Both Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII had thought of reconvening the Second Vatican Council, but world conditions prevented them.

Pope John XXIII saw that the Church was in a position to accept a council. As time went on, people realized that a council was needed, and they were encouraged in their belief by Pope John's personal attractiveness. They trusted him.

The Holy Father stated that the council would not interest itself in the dogmatic condemnation of error but in the positive statement of the perennial dogmas of the faith in modern language and with

pastoral understanding. The key word which would govern the attitude of the council was aggiornamento (bringing up to date). It was the same word which Pope Pius XII had used 10 years before when he was contemplating a council.

The Second Vatican Council opened on Oct. 11 1962 and ended on Dec. 8, 1965. Its four periods October-December, 1962; September-December, 1963; September-November, 1964; and September-December, 1965 saw the largest attendance of bishops in history and were the most global in representation. In addition to the bishops, heads of religious orders, theologians and experts, the Holy Father invited as observers representatives of the clergy of the world, of women religious, of lay people, and of the other churches of the world.

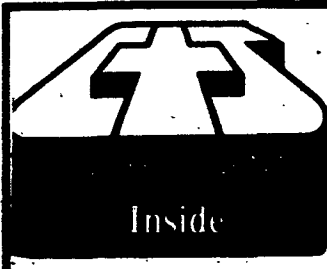
Between the first and second periods of the council, a major crisis occurred when Pope John XXIII died (June 3, 1963). Pope Paul VI succeeded him and carried the council to its conclusion.

Vatican Council II issued some 16 documents. The pastoral aggiornamento of this Council produced radical but not essential changes in the Church's life, especially in the areas of liturgy, ecumenical activities, an understanding of the structure of the Church and of the relationship with the secular world. These teachings, authoritatively interpreted by the Holy See, are solemn doctrine of the Church. They are doctrines about which the Fathers of the Council could proclaim: "Let there be unity in what is necessary; freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case."

The Second Vatican Council guided the Church into the modern age, and its doctrines and attitude have directed the life of the Church ever since.



The Second Vatican Council
(Art by Robert McGovern)



Calendar	10	Parish News	18
Child	10	Pope	4
Classified	19	RapAround	12,13
Cuddy	19	Reedy	16
Editorial	17	Shamon	11
Liturgy	8	Sisters Reflect	14
Opinion	17	Southern Tier	10

Nuestra Vida, Spanish Page 15

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