

Vatican II brought real change to the church

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

Few disgruntled Catholics ever attack the Second Vatican Council head-on. Even the schismatic and excommunicated Archbishop Marcel LeFebvre once insisted that he accepted the Council — properly interpreted, of course.

That has been a common tactic of those in sympathy with the defeated minority at Vatican II. Instead of rejecting the Council outright, they reinterpret it.

The Council, they claim, didn't say anything new. Everything is as it was before.

While it is true that the vast majority of

doctrines remained firmly in place following the Council, the Second Vatican Council did amend or surpass some significant elements of traditional Catholic theology and official Catholic teachings.

I mention some by way of example:

- Before the Council, theology, catechesis, preaching, and official teaching did not speak of the church as a sacrament. There were only seven sacraments, and the church was not one of them. The Council, however, called the church itself a sacrament (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 1), thereby laying the groundwork for the whole movement of postconciliar renewal and reform.

- Before the Council, the church and the Kingdom of God were considered one and the same. The Council changed that equation. At most, the church is "the initial budding forth" of the Kingdom (Constitution on the Church, n. 5).

- Before Vatican II, the Catholic Church and the Church of Christ were also regarded as "one and the same" (the exact wording of Pope Pius XXII's 1950 encyclical, *Humani Generis*). Vatican II changed that equation as well. At most, the Church of Christ "subsists in" (rather than "is") the Catholic Church (Constitution on the Church, n. 8).

- Before the Council, sin was never at-



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tributed to the church as such but only to individuals within the church. The Council changed that, insisting that the church is at the same time holy and sinful, always in need of being purified and of incessantly pursuing the path of penance and renewal (Constitution on the Church, n. 16), and that non-Christian religions may serve as instruments of salvation (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, n. 2).

- Before the Council, it was assumed that bishops were creatures of the pope, and as such his vicars or delegates. Vatican II taught that bishops are *not* vicars of the Roman Pontiff (Constitution on the Church, n. 27). They are constituted as members of the college of bishops not by an act of papal jurisdiction, but by sacramental consecration (n. 22).

- Before the Council, it was also simply assumed in Catholic theology, catechesis, preaching, and teaching that the church is an absolute monarchy under the pope. Over against this view, the Council taught that the governance of the Universal Church devolves upon the whole college of bishops, and that their pastoral authority is exercised in regional councils and in national episcopal conferences as well as in ecumenical councils (Constitution on the Church, nn. 22-23).

- Before Vatican II, the role of the laity in the church was understood in the mode of help-mates to the hierarchy and the clergy. But the Council taught that the laity participate directly in the mission of the church by reason of their baptism and confirmation and not by episcopal delegation (n. 33).

- Before the Council, it was taken for granted that the Body of Christ is composed of Catholics alone. Vatican II included non-Catholic Christians as well (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 3).

- Before the Council, Father John Courtney Murray, S.J., was forbidden to write and speak on the subject of religious freedom because his views were regarded as those of a dissenter from official Catholic teaching.

At Vatican II the "dissenters" theology became official Catholic teaching.

There's a lesson there that still has to be learned in today's church.

Matthias fears following the footsteps of a traitor

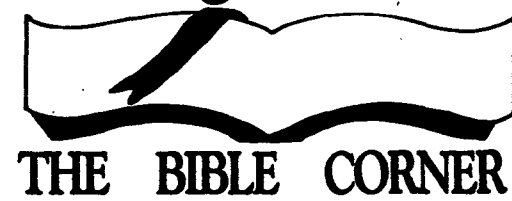
By Cindy Bassett
Courier columnist

Before Matthias had even reached the small plot of land just outside of Jerusalem, he felt uneasy. He had passed this familiar spot many times before without ever taking any particular notice of it. Today, as he looked at it, he shuddered.

The chief priests had posted a sign on the land which stated: "Potter's Field, cemetery for foreigners." Everyone in Jerusalem knew this place by a different name. They called it the field of blood because it was there that Judas had taken his own life.

What had driven Judas to this point in his life? He had been one of those closest to Jesus, part of the inner circle of the 12 chosen as His apostles.

Judas had longed like everyone else for Israel to be restored to its former glory with its own king. But Jesus preached a different message: "Love your enemies; do good to those who seek to harm you. If you want to be one of my followers, take



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up your cross and come after me."

Jesus did promise a new kingdom, which would be open to all who chose to be his followers. First, however, there was death and then, by example, Jesus taught them resurrection and eternal life.

How had Judas gotten so lost? He would be known forever as the traitor of Jesus because he had given Him over to His detractors for 30 pieces of silver. Afterward he had regretted his actions. So Judas went back to see the same priests who had paid him for Jesus and flung the coins at them as if — by giving them back — he could erase what he had done.

For their part, the priests would not put the coins back in the temple treasury. They called it "blood money." Instead, they

used the money to purchase the field. It was Judas, however, who had really purchased it with his misbegotten deeds.

Peter had told Matthias that the betrayal of Jesus was predicted long ago in Scripture. It was also written of Judas: "May someone else take his place of service" (Acts 1:20).

Today, in Jerusalem, all of the followers of Jesus would cast lots for an apostle. Matthias and Barsabbas had both been chosen as candidates.

Matthias wondered if his own faith would be strong enough or would all of his good intentions crumble into dust? Peter told them that Jesus had conquered sin and death. "Put your faith in Jesus," Peter had said.

"Help me Jesus," Matthias prayed as he entered the house in Jerusalem where the followers had gathered.

Peter had called the entire assembly of believers — 120 people in all — to cast lots for a new apostle. Before they cast their lots, Peter stood before them and prayed, "Lord, you know everything about us. Show us which of these two men you have chosen to take the place of Judas."

When the voting process was completed, the lot fell in favor of Matthias.

Scripture reference: Matthew, 27:3-9; Acts 1:12-26.

Meditation: "Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart" (Philippians, 4:6).

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