

COLUMNISTS

How could Vatican II shake faith?

I met a woman the other day who told me about her sister. Her sister, she said, had left the Catholic Church because of the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council. We spoke for a few minutes, and in that time I learned that the woman's sister felt that "the very core of her faith" had been shaken because of all the changes brought about through the council.

Maybe it's because we're between Easter and Pentecost, but I have been puzzling about this conversation ever since. It's my impression that Vatican II didn't even touch anywhere near the core of our faith. That council in no way changed, diminished, reformed, or redefined the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for example. Not the Trinity, either. Nothing about "the resurrection of the body and life everlasting."

What the council did focus on were church structures. These have a great deal to do with how we experience the church, but "the core of our faith" they are not. The council's major agenda had to do with trying to find a balance between the authority of the pope and participation in church life and decision-making by other bishops and the rest of the baptized. That's a big agenda and an important one, but it isn't the core of our belief. Many of the



the moral life

By PATRICIA SCHOELLES, SSJ

council's leaders, and both popes who presided over the council, concluded that an exaggeration of papal authority had evolved during the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, Vatican II was called to try to restore the kind of "shared authority" between pope and bishops that had been present during some earlier centuries.

In the process of addressing questions about these matters the council also issued decrees on related matters. As we all know, there were changes in the Mass and other liturgical reforms. The program of priestly formation was renewed. Religious orders were called to return to the intentions of their original founders and foundresses. The document on "The Church in the Modern World" called for

a more positive approach to the world as the arena of salvation, and a variety of documents called for a more open relations with other churches and religions.

Beyond the intentions and actual documents of the council, we have witnessed a range of questions. These issues involve social and medical ethics, sexual ethics, questions about who should be ordained. We are all trying to respond to them in a way that respects the intentions of the now 30-year-old council with its call for a "new" form of authority shared among the pope, bishops, theologians and all the baptized.

There were, obviously, many significant changes that came about as a result of the council. Some are very apparent, others hardly noticeable to most of us. It would be a mistake to minimize the effect that the council has had on church life. But it is a mistake, too, to conclude that the sorts of changes that took place strike at "the core of our faith." They simply do not.

As we all know, the council affects different people in different ways. Some would like to initiate more changes more quickly. Some would like to move cautiously. I am convinced that we need both "liberals" and "conservatives" to ensure that we both conserve what is needed for

authentic Christian living while recognizing that the church is always in need of renewal and reform.

What we don't need, I think, are attitudes that resist the possibility of new or different ideas and interpretations of what faith means. What we don't need is the perspective that there is only one way to experience God's grace, only one approach to all questions about society, only one authority in all the church.

What I don't find helpful are viewpoints that exhibit a kind of "Catholic fundamentalism" based on intense, negative emotions around even the discussion of these aspects of church life. These sorts of viewpoints are often accompanied by a false emphasis on human guilt and divine anger; they seem to reflect great anxiety about the obvious lack of absolute certainty that characterizes every area of human life — even religion.

We need to give Vatican II and its renewal the credit they deserve. In doing so, we should be thoughtful enough not to let lesser matters take the place of greater ones.

Sister Schoelles is the president of St. Bernard's Institute.

Science and philosophy go hand in hand

Scientific and technological breakthroughs are outpacing our moral and social thinking. It is time to address this educationally — to take steps to assure that our college graduates are prepared to assess these breakthroughs and to make mature, well-informed judgments about them.

A development this year in science saw the cloning of a sheep. Immediately, a discussion started up about the possibility of cloning humans.

Do we want to do this? Are we prepared to enter the "brave new world" of science-fiction writer Aldous Huxley?

To some, the advent of cloning is comparable to the achievement reached with the splitting of the atom. Apparently some look forward to human cloning for its ability to create "the perfect child," free of emotional or physical problems.

To those who say human cloning violates God's law, these people might respond: "Then why did God give us DNA and a mind able to make such scientific breakthroughs?"

Those arguing against human cloning



the human side

By FATHER EUGENE HEMRICK

reject reproductive technology that replaces sexual intercourse and goes against natural law. Dr. Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist at Harvard, further notes that human cloning "tempts our narcissism enormously because it gives a physical dimension to a fantasy that one can keep going on through the reproduction of oneself."

Other scientific discoveries are being witnessed in the Human Genome Project, which is mapping our human gene structure with the hope, for example, of being able to predict who is at risk of inheriting

certain diseases.

In another scientific development, a 60-year-old woman gave birth this year.

Note that some call the splitting of the atom the greatest scientific breakthrough in the world, while others point to the nuclear wastes that poison our atmosphere.

In Greek mythology, Prometheus stole fire from heaven and gave it to humankind to further its progress.

Prometheus, or "forethinker," was hailed as the spirit of revolt against tradition, as the liberator who freed us from ignorance and the fear of achievement.

But Zeus condemned him for giving humans powers that almost appeared to place them on a level with the gods.

We are in a similar predicament today. Should we applaud all the scientific breakthroughs or should we condemn them?

But I really don't believe this is the first question we ought to ask. I think the primary question concerns education. Where are the educational institutions that require a liberal arts background — especially philosophy — to balance sci-

entific study?

We need schools of higher education that mandate the study of philosophy. Why? Because it fosters the kind of thinking that helps society keep pace, in a balanced way, with science and technology.

Why advocate the study of philosophy so strongly? Because it raises ultimate questions that reach beyond the wonder of each astonishing discovery to ask how it will affect the common good.

Furthermore, what is natural law, and do some of these discoveries violate it? In creating this world, what moral laws did God give to us for exercising responsible stewardship of it?

In raising ultimate questions, philosophy draws us into the sacred. The biggest risk our world faces today is that of debasing the sacred and thus taking a step backward in terms of human development.

Philosophy is the handmaid of theology. It must be the handmaid of science too.

Father Hemrick is director of diocesan relations at the Catholic University of America.

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