

COLUMNISTS

Who 'hijacked' Second Vatican Council?

A pattern of unsupported assertions concerning the Second Vatican Council has made its way recently into various articles and letters in various Catholic publications.

The assertions frequently include two words that have acquired a kind of signature status — "elite" and "aging" — and two assumptions; namely, that the truly enlightened Catholic is indifferent to the debates generated by Vatican II, and that the council was the work of a small, aging(?) group of elitists who somehow hijacked its proceedings and shaped its outcome to advance their own narrow theological and pastoral agenda.

One is led to ask the purveyors of such assertions to identify — specifically — what there was about the council, and about the debates surrounding it, that we ought now to transcend or simply forget about.

The council, for example, replaced the late medieval view of the church as a pyramid, with the pope at the top and the laity at the bottom, by a profoundly traditional view, rooted in the Bible, the writings of the early Fathers of the Church, and much of the church's lived experience during its first millennium.

It captured the spirit of this traditional ecclesiology in such images as people of God and in such documents as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.

Since the church consists of all the bap-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

tized, the council declared, the laity must also share in its mission and ministries, in a manner consistent with their gifts. They do not simply participate in the ministry of the hierarchy and at their sufferance; by baptism and through the power of the Holy Spirit the laity share directly in the mission and ministries of the church.

Are we now to assume that none of this really makes any difference? Are the ministries of the church to be consigned once again almost exclusively to the hierarchy and the clergy?

And what of Catholic worship? Before Vatican II, Mass was celebrated by a priest with his back to the people, at an altar facing the wall, with the only responses given by altar boys in rushed and fractured Latin.

The words of the Mass were usually inaudible and always unintelligible (except with the use of a missal) and the point and purpose of its many ritual elements were

largely obscure.

Where those elements could not easily be explained, they were allegorized. Thus, when the priest washed his hands after the offertory, it was said to symbolize Pilate's washing his hands of Christ.

Does it really make no difference now whether the language and rituals of the Eucharist are intelligible to everyone present, or whether all present can actively participate in word and action? Does it make no difference, after all, whether most of those in a given eucharistic assembly receive Communion or not? Or should we welcome a return to the days when only a minority of the congregation received Communion at a Sunday liturgy?

And who were those elitists who allegedly hijacked Vatican II for their own narrow purposes?

Pope John XXIII, who called the council and took an active part in its first session? Pope Paul VI, who presided over the next three sessions and who guided its implementation?

Cardinals Leon-Joseph Suenens (Belgium), Bernard Alfrink (Holland), Augustin Bea (the Vatican), Joseph Dopfner (Germany), Joseph Frings (Germany), Franz Konig (Austria) and others who exercised strong pastoral leadership at the council?

Or were the elitists perhaps the theologians, who served officially as "periti" (Latin for "experts")? "Peritus" does bear

some resemblance to "elite," does it not?

And if so, who were those theological hijackers? Yves Congar? Charles Moeller? Gustav Thiels? Bernard Haring? Gerard Philips? Karl Rahner? Henri de Lubac? Jean Danilou? Rene Latourelle? Joseph Ratzinger? John Courtney Murray?

Or were the liturgical scholars the hijackers, with names like Vaggagini, Capelle, Botte, Chavasse, Jounel, Martimort, Jungmann and Gy?

Or perhaps they were Scripture scholars like the pious Passionist, Barnabas Mary Ahern, who so captivated the American bishops with his stirring explanation of Mary's role in the church on the night before a key vote on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church?

The 16 documents of the council were passed by overwhelming margins and were subsequently approved by Pope Paul VI. The great majority of the world's bishops and the pope himself must surely have been putty in the hijackers' hands.

When Pope John Paul II and the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops celebrated the council as a work of the Holy Spirit, were they, too, manifesting the pathology of aging elitists?

Has anyone, by the way, checked the ages of the critics and their mentors lately, or their elitist institutional affiliations?

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Prepare for the coming of the Messiah

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 3:10-18, (R1) Zephaniah 3:14-18. (R2) Philippians 4:4-7.

John the Baptist's role was to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. According to him we prepare in three ways.

First, if you have wealth, share it. The multitudes asked John, "What ought we to do?" In reply he said, "Let the man with two coats give to him who has none. The man who has food should do the same."

Christmas is a time of sharing. We exchange gifts, but many of us will go beyond that. We drop money into Salvation Army kettles, write checks to worthy community projects, or make an end-of-the-year contribution to the church. This season helps us to see beyond ourselves to the needs of others.

Of course, not everyone is able to give. Recently I read this funny letter in response to an appeal for a check.

"In reply to your request to send a check I must inform you that the present condition of my bank account makes it almost impossible. My shattered financial condition is due to federal laws, state laws, county laws, corporation laws, mother-in-laws, brother-in-laws and outlaws. Through these laws I am compelled to pay a business tax, amusement tax, head tax, school tax, gas tax, light tax, water tax, sales tax,



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

I am required to get a business license, a dog license, not to mention a marriage license. For my own safety I am required to carry life insurance, property insurance, liability insurance, accident insurance, burglar insurance, business insurance, unemployment insurance, fire insurance. I am inspected, expected, respected, examined, reexamined, informed, reformed, summoned, commanded, and compelled until I supply money for every known need, desire or hope of the human race. Honestly, had not the unexpected happened I could not enclose this check. The wolf that comes to so many doors nowadays, just had pups in the kitchen, I sold them, and here's the money."

I guess we all feel that way sometimes — demands for money from every side —

particularly during this season. Yet the gift of Christmas is a gift that must be passed on to be enjoyed. Our joy will be in proportion to the joy we bring to others by sharing with them.

John's second prescription for preparing for the coming of Christ is, "If you are in a position of trust, honor it."

Tax collectors came and said, "Teacher, what are we to do?"

"Exact nothing over and above your fixed amount," John told them.

Tax collectors in that time were despised as collaborators with the Romans. They were also infamous for their lack of ethics. They would add extra fees to the amount they collected. John does not tell them to give up their jobs. What he tells them is to exercise honesty in their work. They are in a position of trust. They need to honor that trust.

Honesty is a disappearing commodity in our land. We have replaced absolute principles of conduct with moral relativism. As a result more students are cheating on their school work, more adults are cheating on their taxes. College ethic courses are teaching little about private decency, honesty, personal responsibility or honor.

The final way to prepare is, if you have power, don't abuse it.

Soldiers asked John, "What about us?" "Do not bully anyone," John replied. "Denounce no one falsely. Be content with your pay."

A parent has power over a child, an employer has power over an employee, a teacher has power over his or her students. John says, "Don't abuse it."

Follow the example of Christ. He had it all, but he gave it up because of his love for you and me.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

- Monday, December 15**
Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17;
Matthew 21:23-27
- Tuesday, December 16**
Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13;
Matthew 21:28-32
- Wednesday, December 17**
Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Matthew 1:1-17
- Thursday, December 18**
Jeremiah 23:5-8; Matthew 1:18-24
- Friday, December 19**
Judges 13:2-7, 24-25; Luke 1:5-25
- Saturday, December 20**
Isaiah 7:10-14; Luke 1:26-38

Kids' Answers

from page 13

The names that should be crossed out are: Pilate, Mark, Esther, Joshua, Simon

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