

Vatican II's context is essential reading

Last October we marked the anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Catholics under the age of 40 had not yet been born; those under 58 were not yet adults.

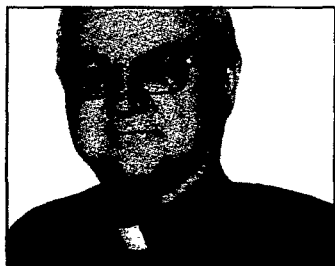
The council was an event and an experience for the thousands of bishops, clergy, religious and laity who were involved in its preparations, deliberations, formulations and applications.

That is why it is so important for younger members of the church to do more than read the council's 16 documents. Indeed, the documents cannot properly be understood except in the context of the conciliar event itself: what was going on, what forces were at work, what arguments and conflicts were in play, which figures were exercising the major influence.

It is also a matter of much interest and enlightenment to read the observations of those who were at the edges of the council during all or part of its proceedings, from October 1962 until December 1965.

One also has to take into account the preparatory phase, which began soon after Pope John XXIII declared, on January 25, 1959, his intention to call a council, and the years immediately following the council under the leadership of Pope Paul VI, when the implementation of its decrees and recommendations began.

There have, been many commentaries on the council, both academic and per-



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

sonal. Some, like the five-volume *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (Herder and Herder, 1967-69), produced by some of the leading theologians in the German-speaking world, stands today as the most respected resource of its kind.

The late Redemptorist Francis X. Murphy, writing under the pseudonym of Xavier Rynne, produced the liveliest, most revealing accounts of the council's four sessions, available in a single volume entitled, *Vatican Council II* (Orbis Books, 1999). There is also a splendid five-cassette video series, "Faithful Revolution: Vatican II" (Lyrick Productions, Texas, 1997).

Father Thomas O'Meara, OP, my friend and former Notre Dame colleague, is the author of *A Theologian's Journey* (Paulist Press, 2002), a personal and theological reflection on the years immediately preceding the council, the council itself and its aftermath.

Father O'Meara did his doctoral work in Munich, for the most part viewing the happenings in St. Peter's Basilica from a vantage

point several hundred miles to the north. But he was a keen, insightful observer of the council and of its initial impact in Western Europe.

The best parts are the most autobiographical, for example, when the author shares his initial experiences as a young American priest in Munich, with no knowledge of German and no Americans to talk to. His reflections on the church of the early 1960s, in the United States and abroad, provide an excellent introduction to the larger context in which Vatican II happened and from which the postconciliar church has emerged.

This resource — instructive and enjoyable, often humorous — provides a better understanding of the world and the church that shaped the thinking and pastoral approaches of the author's generation (and mine).

An even more recent book is *Vatican II: Forty Personal Stories* (Twenty-Third Publications, Conn.), edited by William Madges and Michael J. Daley. The collection, predicated on the well-founded assumption that we learn more from narratives than from theoretical expositions, contains the stories of two Protestants and some 38 Catholics, several (myself included) who were actually in Rome for one or more of the council's four sessions.

Both books provide a taste of the conciliar experience.

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

Conservative finds church unwelcoming

To the editor:

After reading the *Catholic Courier* last week, and then hearing the homily at our Mass Saturday night, I am troubled to the deepest depths of my soul, and wonder if I will be doomed to spend eternity in hell, because I disagree with almost everything I heard and read this past weekend. I read the Bishop's column, Sister Schoelles' column and Father McBrien's column. I have come to the conclusion that there is no longer room in the Roman Catholic Church for a conservative.

It is patently obvious that the present campaign by the Catholic hierarchy, opposing a war to bring down a person who would definitely and joyously kill my children and grandchildren, is engaged in politics, and not theology or the propagation of the Faith. I, and others like me, are able to read the "not welcome" sign. We may as well change our name to "Catholic Democrats" because the church has become a mouthpiece for a political viewpoint.

Where was the condemnation for our previous president when he sent missiles Saddam's way? Thank God we have a morally upright GENUINE Christian president who will uphold his oath of office, without influence from the vocal left of the world. It is a travesty that these opinions are presented as the only theologically correct possibilities.

Most people believe every word the clergy utters. Try a little balance in the *Courier* and publish some of Michael Novak's writings, or one of the other conservatives who believe in the traditional role of the Church, and try to guide our Church back to its mission and away from politics.

Dr. Anthony D'Amico
 Canal Street
 Lyons

Questions pro-choicers' 'discomfort'

To the editor:

The euphemism "pro-choice" belies the fact the baby has no choice. Almost 44 million babies have been killed since *Roe v Wade*. If surgical abortion numbers are down, this is mitigated by the number of chemical abortions from abortifacient contraceptives. Today in America 4,000 babies are killed every day.

It is ludicrous to state the pro-aborts are "uncomfortable" with abortion. Why then do they fight so hard against anything that might really reduce the number of abortions, like abstinence programs, or pregnancy counseling? At the behest of Planned Parenthood, the New York attorney general almost put a number of counseling sites out of business.

Pro-lifers should not have to apologize for wanting to end the killing.

Ken Conway
 Bell Road
 Red Creek

Misses voice of secretary

To the editor:

I think President Bush is running a "puppet show" in Washington. The current propaganda trying to rev us up for war is unfair and even at times untruthful. Someone should cut some strings. Colin, we miss you. Come back!

Raymond J. Tierney Jr.
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