



Third Sunday of Lent March 23, 2014 A

- ◆ Report on my trip to Los Angeles
- ◆ Church History - Article 20
(From Vatican II to the Present)

Last week I went to the Religious Education Congress in Los Angeles. This annual gathering has been going on for 30+ years. For a long time, I have wanted to go and, finally, I got there. It is the largest event of its kind in the world, usually attracting about 30,000 people from different countries. The liturgies are diverse and spectacular. I attended a Celtic Mass and a Contemplative Mass. There were also Indian, Hispanic and African American liturgies. There was a huge array of religious vendors. I came home with a lot of books, CDs and DVDs.

Each of the three days started with a Prayer Service, followed by a keynote speaker. Afterwards, we had the opportunity to go to one of the many presentations. Next, we had a 90-minute break to visit the large room with all the vendors. After lunch—if you got it (I didn't!), we had the opportunity to attend two more presentations. The day ended with a 5:00 pm Mass.

A big challenge was deciding which one of twenty choices of presentations to attend. I did a lot of running in and out of presentations. I usually gave the presenter ten minutes to catch my attention. There were presentations on scripture, youth ministry, social justice, liturgy, music, evangelization, and *many* other topics.

The New Evangelization

The term New Evangelization was created by Pope John Paul II. Its focus is twofold:

- the millions of Catholics who no longer attend church
- the large numbers of churchgoing Catholics who do not feel comfortable sharing their Catholic faith with others

Sadly, too many Catholics—especially older Catholics—were raised with the dictum: “Two things you never talk about in polite company are religion and politics.” Too many churchgoing Catholics continue to believe that religion and politics are a private matter.

In our day and age, an *essential* part of being Catholic is overcoming our reluctance to be open and expressive about our Catholic faith. I have had to overcome this reluctance myself. We can ask ourselves: If Jesus is truly real for us, why would we hesitate to share the excitement we have about him in our daily lives? Isn't it a bit strange that we can jump and shout for our favorite football team yet be very timid when it comes to expressing our love for Jesus? Isn't it odd that people can sleep together but not pray together? Sadly, it seems that way too many churchgoing Catholics can talk to others about everything *but* their faith.

In today's Gospel, we have the beautiful example of a woman whose life is touched by Jesus. After her authentic encounter with Jesus, she runs to her village and begins to tell everyone about Jesus. As a result of her testimony, many people come to know Jesus. How good the Samaritan woman must have felt that despite her several failed marriages, Jesus could still use her to bring others to him.

A young Hispanic layman presenter at the conference beautifully shared that he recently started to pray every morning: “*Lord, today give me opportunities to share my faith with others.*” Can you imagine if *everyone* in our parish prayed like that? What a difference it would make! Most likely, our church would not be able to contain all who would come.

A few other miscellaneous take-a-ways

- In our very secular world, religion is more and more being pushed to the fringes of people's lives. Many see no need for God because the world provides them with all they need to live the ‘good life’—which, of course, is a big lie.
- Lots of people are working extended hours, leaving them little or no time to care for their soul.
- Preoccupation with social media is hurting not only our family relationships but also our relationship with God.

Church History - Article 20 From Vatican II to the Present

Recently, I wrote twenty articles on Church History. The following are some excerpts from the final article. In this article—which will be continued next weekend—we will look at positive developments after Vatican II, challenges after Vatican II, and the papacies since Vatican II.

A new era. Vatican Council II ends a 400-year period in Church history that began with the Council of Trent (1545-1563), referred to as the Tridentine period. Henceforth, people talk about the Church as “before Vatican II” and “after Vatican II.”

Positive developments after Vatican Council II

Vatican II takes place in the 1960's, an historic decade in which many turbulent changes are occurring in the world, especially in America. In the 1960's, we witness the sexual revolution, the assassination of President Kennedy, his brother Bobby, and Dr. Martin Luther King, riots protesting the Vietnam War, the breakdown of traditional morality and the questioning of authority. All of these changes take place either during or after the Council. Catholics are bound to be affected by them, and they are. This is an evolving world in which changes after Vatican II are inevitable.

Liturgy. For the ordinary Catholic in the pew, the “winds of change” brought about by Vatican II are first experienced in the celebration of the Mass. All of a sudden, and often without much explanation, altars are installed close to the people; Mass is celebrated in the vernacular; people are invited and encouraged to be more actively engaged in the Mass; a new genre of music and songs is introduced, including the folk Mass. Gradually, lay people are proclaiming the Scriptures, distributing Holy Communion, and exchanging the ‘sign of peace’ at Mass.

For the most part, these changes are warmly welcomed by Catholics. But some, including Cardinals, bishops, priests and lay people, are not at all happy with the new Mass promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1968.

The Bible. Prior to Vatican II, most Catholics did not read the Bible. Many saw it as a “Protestant Book.” As a result of Vatican II, particularly with regard to the document on *Divine Revelation*, there is a whole new attitude towards the Scriptures. The document on *Divine Revelation* “urges all the Christian faithful... to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures, the

excelling knowledge of Jesus Christ. For ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” (#25).

With this exhortation, many parishes start to organize Bible studies. The Lectionary for Mass is totally revised to provide a greater selection of Scriptures for the Sunday liturgy.

Laity involvement in the Church's mission. Prior to Vatican II, some laity were involved in the parish. After Vatican II, the laity become involved in many more ways, e.g., as pastoral council members, catechists for youth and adult faith formation programs, social action and social justice ministries. As a result of Vatican II, there is a greater emphasis on *every* baptized person's call to be a witness to gospel values in the marketplace.

Interior renewal of the Church. Although Vatican II has not called for the formation of spiritual renewal movements, several spring up spontaneously after the Council. One of these is the *Charismatic Movement* which was born in 1969 in Pittsburgh. Gradually, hundreds of thousands of Catholics become involved in this new movement of the Holy Spirit. They gather together for prayer, faith-sharing, healing and transformation. In June 1975, Charismatic prayer groups from all over the world gather together in Rome for the International Renewal Conference. Other renewal movements, like the Cursillo and Marriage Encounter, also bring much spiritual renewal to the Church and family life. All these movements are led by lay people.

Ecumenism: reaching out to non-Catholics and non-Christians. Another significant fruit of Vatican II is the ecumenical movement that seeks unity amongst all Christians and, eventually, the unity of all peoples throughout the world.

For the purpose of creating greater dialog and common ground with various religious and non-religious groups, Rome creates three new commissions: 1) *Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity*, 2) *Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions*, and 3) *Secretariat for Nonbelievers*. In March 1966, Pope Paul VI meets with Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury (Head of the Anglican Church), and in July 1967 with Patriarch Athenagoras I, a key leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church. On the local level, ecumenical prayer services are held among local Christian churches.

Challenges after the Council

Significant changes in large institutions do not usually occur easily and without turmoil. This is certainly true of the changes brought about in the Catholic Church as a result of Vatican II. Four areas of Church life that experience much turmoil have to do with changes in the Mass, priesthood and religious life, religious education, and attitudes towards authority.

Liturgy. While changes in the Mass are for the most part warmly received, some Catholic clergy and laity strongly resist the introduction of the New Missal of 1969 which promulgated such changes. For example, the retired Archbishop of France, Marcel Lefebvre, denounces Vatican II as heretical. He founds the international group of Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X, which carries on as if Vatican II never occurred. As a result, in various parts of the world today, we have traditional Catholic churches that continue to celebrate the pre-Vatican II Mass in Latin. For them, the last legitimate pope is Pius XII, the predecessor of John XXIII. It should also be noted that some of the changes in the Liturgy are poorly introduced. In an attempt to be ‘relevant,’ all kinds of inappropriate music and symbols are brought into the Mass. In the decades after Vatican II, Mass attendance in America and in other countries drops from 70% or more to 30% or less.

Priesthood and religious life. Some believed that Vatican II would reverse the ruling on mandatory celibacy for priests. But when Pope Paul VI in June 1967 issues an encyclical on *Priestly Celibacy*, reaffirming the Church’s centuries-old practice of mandatory celibacy, thousands of priests and sisters, especially in affluent Western and European nations, request dispensation from their vows. In America alone, 10,000 priests leave, and vocations to the priesthood and religious life decline greatly.

The decline was and is still partly due to the secularization of our society and the deterioration in a family culture that promotes vocations. But the vocations crisis is not worldwide. Vocations are up in other parts of the world, in some dioceses in America, and in some religious orders that are traditional in nature.

Religious education. It is generally accepted that in the decades following Vatican II, the religious education programs in all three levels of Catholic formation—elementary, high school and college—have gone haywire. In all too many parishes, schools and colleges, knowledge and practice of Catholicism is replaced by

the Beatle Mantra, “All you need is love.” In many places, and especially in America and Canada, whole generations of young Catholics are poorly catechized.

Loss of respect for authority. Catholics growing up in the 1960’s in America witness the so-called sexual revolution which is greatly diminishing respect for traditional sexual morality. The 60’s are also a time of chaos on many college campuses, symbolized by protests against America’s involvement in the Vietnam War.

During Vatican II, when the issue of *contraception* is raised, Pope Paul VI does away with the debate from the Council floor and sets up a *Special Commission* of bishops, theologians and married couples to study the question. The creation of this special commission leads many Catholics, including clergy and laity, to expect a change in the Church’s teaching. When it is leaked to the media that the majority of the commission has voted for a change, there is a huge firestorm when Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life) reaffirms the traditional teaching of the Church banning all forms of contraception. *Humanae Vitae* leads to a great loss of respect for Church authority, particularly, papal authority.

Pope Paul VI (1963-1978)

Cardinal Giovanni Montini is elected Pope between Sessions One and Two of the Council.

Immediately upon his election in June 1963, Paul VI (who wants to be an apostle to modern day Gentiles) announces his plan to carry forward the revision of the Code of Canon Law and Vatican Council II.

In addition to overseeing the last three sessions of the Council, Paul VI sets up a worldwide Synod of Bishops to oversee the implementation of the Council’s decrees and deal with other pastoral issues. In 1969, he issues the *New Missal* to replace the 400-year old Missal of Pius V (1556-1572) which was created after the Council of Trent. The Curia (Church governance) undergoes changes which include the introduction of new laws mandating that bishops must hand in a letter of retirement at age 75, and Cardinals over 80 years old can no longer participate in papal elections.

In modern times, Paul VI becomes the first globe-trotting pope. He travels to all five continents and is the first pope to visit the Holy Land since St. Peter. In 1965, he speaks at the United Nations where he famously states: “*No more war! Never war again! If you wish to*

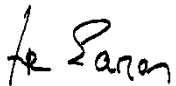
be brothers, drop your weapons.” In the Philippines in 1970, he is nearly assassinated. He offers to act as mediator between Pakistan and India and bravely offers himself in exchange for hostages held by terrorists.

Paul VI works diligently to remove the barriers that exist between Rome and other Christian churches. He is the first pope to hire women to work in the Curia and he restores the office of the permanent diaconate to the status it held in the early church. He does much to internationalize the College of Cardinals.

Writing- and teaching-wise, Paul VI is sadly remembered most for his encyclical on birth control, *Humanae Vitae*. But he has written several other publications. In 1967, he writes *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples) and in 1975, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World). Both of these encyclicals have been highly regarded in Church circles. In *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI issues a strong plea for the redistribution of wealth to benefit poor nations. In the latter apostolic exhortation, he states: “*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses*” (41). Paul VI dies on August 6, 1978, on the Feast of the Transfiguration, with a simple funeral as he had requested.

Next week, we will look at the papacies since Paul VI.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr Saran". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.