

CHRIS CONLEE

## THE FEVER OF VATICAN II

On October 11, 1962, the doors of the Vatican were swung open to the bishops, resplendent in formality and expectation, for they were embarking on a new endeavor. One of the goals of the Second Vatican Council was to bring the world into a more “enlightened era.” The Church’s “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” *Gaudium et Spes*, states, “history itself speeds along on so rapid a course that an individual person can scarcely keep abreast of it. The destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, where once the various groups of men had a kind of private history of their own. *Thus, the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one.* In consequence, there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as important as can be, calling for new efforts of analysis and synthesis” (article 5; emphasis added). The philosophy of the Jesuit evolutionary scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who was involved in one the greatest and gravest scientific scandals of all time, the Piltdown Man “fossil,” is clearly evident here. If this is the “working of the Holy Spirit,” as many modern prelates pound into the heads of the faithful, then, one may argue, the Holy Spirit Himself is an evolutionary object subject to change. But don’t question this “enlightened” view of reality, or you’ll be labeled a “heretic.” Never mind that Vatican II proclaimed no new dogmas, and thus if a thoughtful person questions a non-dogmatic tenet of this Council, he cannot be

termed a heretic, since to constitute heresy, one must deny a dogma of the Church.

Nobody was more jubilant about Vatican II than the secular media. The December 17, 1965, issue of *LIFE* magazine was headlined “Catholicism’s Epic Venture.” You know there is something askew when a modern, liberal publication is ecstatic about a Catholic Council. John K. Jessup wrote:

Coming at a time when so many human faiths, loyalties and grips on truth are unmoored or slipping, the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council which ended last week must be called the most impressive religious event this century has yet seen. . . . The spirit of the new era was symbolized by one of the closing events of the council, when the Pope shared with Protestant and Orthodox clergymen the conduct of a prayer and gospel-reading service in the monastic church of St. Paul’s Outside the Walls. This service was not Roman, not Protestant and not Orthodox. It was simply Christian.

“New era” is a term often heard. Supposedly, the “new era” envisioned in the 1960s did not include a wholesale exodus of priests, and many of the remaining priests engaged in pedophilia. The “new era” probably didn’t forecast a reduction in Mass attendance from 75 percent before Vatican II to roughly 30 percent afterward. Forty years ago it wasn’t acceptable to wear short skirts and tank tops to Mass; women wore chapel veils or hats. But most priests are too afraid — too emasculated — to speak out about those blasphemies these days. The sought-after “new era” of the 1960s probably didn’t con-

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template that a majority of Catholics in 2006 would support abortion and contraception, priestesses, and other “progressive” trends. The “new era” probably didn’t anticipate that although roughly 70 percent of Catholics today don’t believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, they would be all too eager to line up to take the Eucharist in an unworthy manner from relaxed lay ministers passing out the Body of Christ, hand to hand.

Largely gone are resplendent churches, with their images of the Holy Family and saints, burning candles and smells of incense, women in ornate shawls, men wearing their Sunday best, and the sound of Gregorian chant connecting the modern believer to nearly 1,500 years of believers and saints who worshiped in substantially the same manner. Gone is the solidarity with believers throughout the world that comes with worshipping in the same language, replaced by a Babel of tongues and diverse practices. Of course, for centuries the Church has allowed a variety of rites to exist alongside the Latin rite, such as the beautiful and ancient Ambrosian rite, and the argument is made that Catholicism may not have spread as quickly in places such as Africa if believers there were forced to worship in a “European” manner. Still, when the Tridentine Latin Mass was ascendant, there was never a problem garnering converts throughout the world.

During the Second Vatican Council, the subject of the liturgy was the first and most heavily debated topic. Of course, then as now, there was a divide between “traditionalists” and “progressives.” The schema prepared before the debate began advocated a more general use of the vernacular. Many of the traditionalists, however, would have none of it. Even the papal Master of Ceremonies condemned the schema. Cardinal Spellman of New York, Cardinal McIntyre of Los Angeles, and many others believed the Mass should be retained as it was, in Latin. Cardinal Feltin of Paris believed, on the other hand, that if the people didn’t understand the Mass, it was failing in its primary objective, though he did acknowledge that if “by chance the poorly instructed Catholic or even non-Catholic layman should find himself at mass, it ought to be immediately obvious to him that he was witnessing something tremendously significant, holy and profound.” Cardinal Tisserant of the Vatican Library noted that Hebrew and Greek were used by the first Christians. Japanese Bishop Kobayashi said that the exclusive use of Latin would appear to his people as something “western and alien.” Yet, arguably, a majority of the Western prelates believed that Latin in the Mass should be largely

retained in areas where the “Church was long established and people were used to it. . . .”

At the end of the day, the progressives won. The liturgy was the first subject debated, and it was the first subject of the first completed document from Vatican II, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, promulgated on December 4, 1963. It didn’t contain a draft of the *Novus Ordo Missae*, or New Order Mass, which in its final form would not come out until 1970, nearly four years after the fourth and final session. What this “Constitution” did call for was a complete dismantling of the Tridentine Latin Mass, which in its present form had existed since the 16th century, and had remained substantially the same for a thousand years before that. The Mass was to be “revised,” its rites “simplified,” and other elements “discarded.” Article 54 states that “In Masses which are celebrated with the people, a suitable place may be allotted to their mother tongue.” It also states, “Nevertheless steps should be taken so that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.” As if this is even contemplated anymore!

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Although a “more extended use of the mother tongue is needed,” article 40 states, “In some places and circumstances, however, an even more radical adaptation of the liturgy is needed. . . .” In other words, it’s a liturgical free for all! To go along with this, bishops soon abandoned the devout practice of abstaining from meat on Fridays. Now we even have super-hip bishops who allow corned beef and cabbage when St. Patrick’s Day falls on Friday during Lent. Forget meatless Friday, baby, ’cause we’re groovin’ with the times!

Gone are the incredibly moving, poetical words of the Latin Mass, forged during nearly two millennia of persecutions, triumphs, and history. Gone is the Mass of the majority of the saints, which was heard in solidarity with the average sinner for century upon century. Gone are the moving words, *Introibo ad altare Dei, Ad Deum qui laetificat iuventutem meam*, replaced by, well, whatever! No doubt some priests can say the new Mass with profundity, but more often one is treated to the banal, with songs such as “When the Saints Come Marching In,” and priests wearing pink tennis shoes telling jokes about their Chihuahuas, and giving homilies about the evils of not washing one’s hands after one goes to the restroom. (The latter two examples really happened here in Santa Fe, New Mexico, whose full name translates to The Royal City of the Holy Father of St. Francis of Assisi.) Gone is any mention of “evil” or “Satan,” even as evil is increasing.

Gone is the vertical orientation of the Mass, where the priest and faithful together orient themselves to Christ and His great sacrifice at Calvary. Now the Mass is a horizontal community gathering, or “meal,” with the priest facing the people, the people facing the priest, and the people holding hands, hand-grabbing, back-clapping, or otherwise making bodily contact whenever possible. Whatever they can do to distract each other from Christ! Recently I even had a deacon reach from two pews behind me and tap me on the back repeatedly until I would

hold his hand during the Our Father.

Writing about the great English writer and Catholic convert Evelyn Waugh, William F. Buckley Jr. wrote, “I somewhere opined that Evelyn Waugh’s death on Easter Sunday in 1966, the Sunday before the reformers promulgated the Kiss of Peace, was evidence that the Holy Spirit was in fact behind it all, but merciful in His afflictions: no imagination is so vivid as to visualize Mr. Waugh yanked from prayerful thought to clasp the hand of the pilgrim to his right, to his left, ahead, and behind him.”

At the beginning of the Council, so sure was Evelyn Waugh that the Council wouldn’t dare abrogate the Latin Mass, that he wrote, in part, to William Buckley:

The nature of the Mass is so profoundly mysterious that the most acute and holy men are continually discovering further nuances of significance. It is not a peculiarity of the Roman Church that much which happens at the altar is in varying degrees obscure to most of the worshipers. It is in fact the mark of all the historic, apostolic Churches. I think it highly doubtful whether the average churchgoer either needs or desires to have complete intellectual, verbal comprehension of all that is said. He has come to worship.

It is doubtful that the string of 20th-century English literary converts such as Evelyn Waugh and G.K. Chesterton would have converted to Catholicism after having attended a protestantesque, watered-down New Order Mass. So much of the splendor and mystery is absent. One wonders how many potential converts we have lost since the Second Vatican Council. One goes to a New Order Mass to receive the Eucharist, since it *is* a valid rite, but one does *not* go for its beauty or splendor.

In its “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council was in ecstasy about how beautiful every other religion is (not even praising itself as strongly). This document begins strangely by addressing Hinduism: “Thus, in Hinduism men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an unspent fruitfulness of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek release from the anguish of our condition through ascetical practices or deep meditation or a loving, *trusting flight toward God*” (emphasis added). Of Buddhism it says, “Buddhism in its multiple forms acknowledges the radical insufficiency of this shifting world. It teaches a path by which men, in a devout and

## PASTORS

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confident spirit, can either reach a state of absolute freedom or attain supreme enlightenment by their own efforts or by higher assistance.” Wicca was not popular then, but it could have said of Wicca: “Wicca is a beautiful path whereby man, through nature, can realize the true modality of his commonality with foraging beasts, and flying creatures.”

Although various religions do contain elements of beauty, and even great saints such as Thomas Aquinas acknowledged that Christians can attain good from them, Vatican II never mentions that the pagan’s flight toward his god(s) might lead to everlasting separation from God. God is a perfect and loving God, but He is not a swingin’ hipster God of relativism. If you choose to purposefully reject Christ, that’s it, baby. God is tolerant to a point, but believe it or not, there is an end point, at least according to Scripture and two thousand years of Catholic Tradition. Hell exists. It may or may not be the naked body upon naked body of the medieval painters, but it is an eternal separation from God, and that’s not a good thing. But there is no mention of Hell in *Nostra Aetate*, or Satan for that matter, and almost no mention of them elsewhere in the documents of Vatican II, which exemplifies the almost fanatical optimism that permeated the Council.

One of the sillier and more ironic passages in the documents of Vatican II is the third article of “The Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life,” *Perfectae Caritatis*: “The manner of living, praying, and working should be suitably adapted to the physical and psychological conditions of today’s religious.... The way in which communities are governed should also be re-examined.... For this reason constitutions, directories, custom books, books of prayers and ceremonies, and similar compilations are to be suitably revised and brought into harmony with the documents of this sacred Synod. This task will require the suppression of outmoded regulations.” Presumably, the Council Fathers had hoped that doing away with “outmoded regulations” and providing the monks with La-Z-Boy chairs would lead to an increase in vocations to the religious life. Just the opposite happened: It is well documented that there was an exodus of priests and monks after Vatican II, and the void was either not filled, or filled with huge numbers of pedophile priests and monks.

Although there are beautiful passages in the documents of Vatican II, words emanating from men with a real love for Christ, one cannot help but be persuaded by the words of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger: “Certainly the

results [of Vatican II] seem to have gone from self-criticism to self-destruction. Expected was a new enthusiasm, and many wound up discouraged and bored.... The net result therefore seems to be negative” (*L’Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 24, 1984). And, “When I came home after the Council’s first session, I had been filled with the joyful feeling...of an important new beginning.... Now I became troubled by the change in ecclesial climate that was becoming ever more evident.... I tried to sound a first warning signal, but few noticed it” (*Milestones, Memories 1927-1977*). Cardinal Ratzinger said, regarding the near abolishment of the Tridentine missal, “Pius V had simply ordered a reworking of the *Missale Romanum* [during the Council of Trent]... [a reworking done] as one phase in a long history of growth.... The prohibition of the missal that was now decreed, a missal that had known continuous growth over the centuries, starting with the sacramentaries of the ancient Church, introduced a breach into the history of the liturgy whose consequences could only be tragic... the old building was demolished, and another was built...” (*ibid.*).



Most of the previous 20 councils before Vatican II were convened to combat error and proclaim new dogma; Vatican II was established to embrace the world — a world full of error. The Church would do well, at this grave juncture in her mostly glorious history, to increase the availability of the Tridentine Latin Mass (it can only be celebrated with an indult), and allow the Society of St. Pius X to reconcile with Rome by acknowledging its right to object to certain documents of Vatican II, including the declarations on religious freedom, ecumenism, and the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions, which are policies, not doctrine. ■

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