

Wednesday, October 10, 1962

THE JOSEPHINUM REVIEW

Objectives of the Second Vatican Council

EVER SINCE Pope John announced to the world on January 25, 1959, that he intended to convoke an ecumenical council, speculation about the council's objectives has run as free as fancy, will allow. So flippant were some of the suggestions immediately proposed for the council by a scattered group of journalists that within months of the first announcement the Jesuit review, *La Civiltà Catolica*, had to rebuke these excesses.

Since then, however, Pope John has made quite clear the general lines the council will pursue. In his encyclical *Ad Petri Cathedram*, he writes:

.... that there may be one fold and one shepherd (Jn.10:1 6). This irresistible assurance was the compelling motive which led us to announce publicly our resolve to call an ecumenical council. Bishops will come together from every corner of the world to discuss important matters of religion. But the most pressing topics will be those which concern the spread of the Catholic faith, the revival of Christian standards of morality, and the bringing of ecclesiastical discipline into closer accord with the needs and conditions of our times. This in itself will provide an outstanding example of truth, unity, and love.

May those who are separated from this Apostolic See, beholding this manifestation of unity, derive from it the inspiration to seek out that unity which Jesus Christ prayed for so ardently from his heavenly Father.

Except for these generalities, any, discussion of the council's particulars must as yet prove inadequate. To stave off preconciliar controversy and pressures, hardly any release has been made public about the questions being dealt with by the preparatory committees since the end of 1960.

What is known, however, is that the ageless Church is preparing to come to grips with the modern milieu. Humanity hangs on the critical edge of a new era, and direction must be provided to keep awake man's sense of moral responsibility. The Church cannot stand aloof from any world problems nor can she neglect the tensions which they generate.

A Council of Reforms

The most general objective of the council is to put the Church into guiding contact with an aerospace society well-versed in science and technique the while it is threatened by commercial secularism and militant atheism. Therefore the Church must take stock of herself, reorganize her natural resources, and revivify her internal life. This entails internal reform.

Needless to say, when the work of the council is mentioned as reformatory, this is not to be understood in the sense of its being directly aimed at correcting palpable abuses. Its task will rather be positively oriented according to what Pope John has called *aggiornamento*: an adaptation of the Church's structure and procedures to the demands of the present day. Thus, in the context of the Second Vatican Council, reform will mean evolution rather than revolution.

Some Vain Speculation

Despite the secrecy, there are still intelligent and proper ways by which information concerning the council's particulars can be garnered: use of the papal declarations about the council, the study of the past Church councils, and a consideration of the needs of the times which the Church intends to recognize.

As if affirming the validity of this latter method, the late Cardinal Tardini said shortly after the council was announced, "I will freely say that this will be a council given over to actual practical matters rather than a council specifically doctrinal."

A guess at the range of topics to be considered would be just that: a guess. But prominent among the 2,500 pages of proposals submitted, these subjects may be in the fore:

Reapportionment of clergy would draw surplus vocations from well-established dioceses so as to help in sectors of the Church in which there are now grave shortages of priests.

Seminary Training. What improvements can be made in seminary studies and schedules that will better equip a young clergy in learning and virtue for its mission? How can the students be better informed as to the practical working out of the Church's social doctrine regarding the family, education, civil society, and related problems? Will a fifth year of theological training become mandatory?

The Diaconate. No doubt some thought will be given to the possibility of using once again members of the diaconate (who might be permitted to marry) to aid especially priests in missionary areas.

Vocations. In South America there is one priest to 6,000 people or more. The ideal is said to be about 800 people to one parish priest. Ways must be found to foster new vocations in spiritually underprivileged areas.

The Laity in the Church. The laity must be awakened to their own vocation in the Church. They must be encouraged to take an even more active share in that same Church's sanctifying work. In the words of Cardinal Suhard, the late Archbishop of Paris: "The laity have an irreplaceable work to do. They have their own witness to bear, their own specific problems to solve and reforms to bring about, for all of which they are solely responsible." The role and dignity of the laity are matters of deep concern to the present Holy Father.

Greater participation of the laity in the liturgy through use of the vernacular. Arcadio Cardinal Laraona said there may be a majority of delegates who favor the use of modern languages in portions of the Mass.

Possibly the council will authorize the use of the vernacular for the Mass of the Catechumens, while keeping Latin for the Canon. In this way the instructional parts of the Mass could be understood directly by the congregation, while Latin could remain a symbol of unity in the Roman rite.

The Teaching and Preaching of the Gospel. Pope John mentions in the Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis* (which convoked this present council) "...the diffusion of revealed truth" by a "...Church, always living, always young, which feels the rhythm of the times."

Evidently, study will be made of the Church's ability to adapt the teaching of the Good News of Christ to the catechetical media of motion pictures, television, and recordings.

There may be a long-needed advance in the problem of positive censorship of movies, television, and the press, accompanied by a clarification concerning the Index of Forbidden Books. Greater freedom to confessors and parish priests to grant permission to read certain books for good reasons has also been urged.

Church-State relations will undoubtedly be discussed, as will the Church's laws of fast and abstinence. The date of Easter may possibly be fixed to a definite Sunday, and the Gregorian calendar of the Western Church and the Julian calendar of the Eastern rites may be made coincidental.

The Leitmotiv of Unity

Yet motivating all the investigation and change in ecclesiastical matters is the long-range idea of unity, of making the road to Rome a little less arduous for those separated brothers who in all good faith seek that very singularity Christ Himself desired: "That they all may be one as Thou, Father in Me and I in Thee ..."

The Holy Father has addressed himself to all separated Christians: "...when We fondly call you to the unity of the Church, please observe that We are not inviting you to a strange home, but to your own, to the abode of your forefathers."

Yet who dares say what will happen when the council convenes? There is a human element here as well as a divine. Who can predict the ideas and flavored decisions of 2,800 bishops of varied races and cultures?

Finally, the Holy Spirit must not be forgotten in any real consideration of the work to be undertaken by this council. He Himself may well inspire now-unpredictable movements among the men of God convening this week in Rome.