

Vatican II and Tradition - The Second Vatican Council in Question



"Religion is not a private issue. It was not so in any time period, for religion played a role even in universities. But, later on, Faith and reason were divided. Now we realize more and more the religious impact on our social and political life, and we start asking about religion. Hence, you invited me to speak about the Second Vatican Council."

By Rev. Fr. Niklaus Pfluger, SSPX

Decrease of religion

“Not every valid council in the history of the Church has been a fruitful one; in the last analysis, many of them have been a waste of time. Despite all the good to be found in the texts it produced, the last word about the historical value of Vatican Council II (two) has yet to be spoken.”¹

This council, called for short Vatican II, was an assembly of nearly all Catholic bishops in the Vatican between 1962 and 1965. Until now this council, its documents, and their interpretation have influenced the Catholic Church, and thus also the societies in which the Catholic Church has at least a factor of influence. I want to speak of:

1. how this council affected the so-called “Catholic world”;
2. about the rupture with and through the Council: it’s a new theology against the “old doctrine”;
3. about its new self-image, and finally about some problematic documents. We don’t speak here about religion as something abstract, something in an ivory tower! Take religion always as something real, something that matters in your everyday life!

Unaccomplished promise

If we look simply at statistics we can realize that the percentage of Catholics who practise their religion has tremendously decreased within the last 40 years. There has been no other period of time in world history in which the religious practice in a single religion has decreased so much without any pressure from the outside than that within the Catholic religion between 1965 and 2005. The decrease of religious practice is a phenomenon that can be recognized worldwide. Together with this collapse of religious practice, there became a change in political thinking. People who stopped practising their faith changed their positions concerning abortion, euthanasia, gay marriage and so on. A good example is Spain, where at the end of the 60s, about 90 percent of the people attended Sunday Mass in comparison to a few percent now, as in all the countries of Europe. Spain now has one of Europe’s most liberal legislations on abortion and gay marriage; it has also one of the lowest birth rates in Europe, while it was one of Europe’s most conservative societies in the 60s. The impact of Catholic practice on such matters is scientifically proved, as you surely know. It is

quite the same in Quebec, in Portugal or in Italy.

If we agree about these facts – they’re obvious – we can look for the reasons. And my answer is that Vatican II is the main reason for this development. Vatican II is the main cause for the collapse of religious practice and thus for the swing to leftist, liberal positions in our western societies.

A Change of Society

First, I say the “main cause”, because there are other causes as well. In the 50s, the western world saw a boom in economy, which brought wealth to the majority of people. “Wealth to everybody”, was a slogan of the German Christian democrats. Societies changed from agricultural to industrial. People moved from the countryside to the cities. The children even from the countryside had access to higher education. The world changed, and people had big hopes for the future. It was a period of unclouded optimism. This affected Catholic people a lot, even more than the French Revolution; Catholicism was strong among simple people, outside the cities, without higher education. In the intellectual elite the spirit was rationalist, atheist, mostly liberal. For the intellectual elite at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century it was clear: “God is dead”.

Why do I think so? First, I say the “main cause”, because there are other causes as well. In the 50s, the western world saw a boom in economy, which brought wealth to the majority of people. “Wealth to everybody”, was a slogan of the German Christian democrats. Societies changed from agricultural to industrial. People moved from the countryside to the cities. The children even from the countryside had access to higher education. The world changed, and people had big hopes for the future. It was a period of unclouded optimism. This affected Catholic people a lot, even more than the French Revolution; Catholicism was strong among simple people, outside the cities, without higher education. In the intellectual elite the spirit was rationalist, atheist, mostly liberal. For the intellectual elite at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century it was clear: “God is dead”.

In the 20th century things began to change. The better thinkers among the educated people realized the weaknesses of modern ideologies. Both communism and fascism led to moral ca-

tastrophes. Perhaps communism had some attraction to the academic youth in the 20s; it was over when the Iron curtain came down within Europe. Fascism lost the little rest of its false glamour in Auschwitz. So we had a new interest in Catholicism among the educated since the 50s, but the sociological base remained in the rural population. And this population was caught by the modernization in the 50s. The younger attended universities; they left their villages, went into new professions, and changed their lifestyle by taking up a social career. In this process, the religion of their parents belonged to the world they were going to leave, the world from which they desired to free themselves. In a time when the children of the liberal bourgeoisie discovered the Catholic faith, the children of the Catholic farmers lost this faith, becoming one with them. It's paradoxical.

Catholics and other Christian confessions

This is one reason for the decline in religious practice. But it is not the significant one. The significance is inside Catholicism. Why? Why not compare the decline in religious practice in the Catholic Church with other Christian confessions and with other religions? Take a look at the protestant communities within the USA. Here we had the same starting point: religion was strong in the rural areas, in the so-called "bible belt", away from the liberal coasts and the big cities. The younger people tried to emancipate themselves from the lifestyle of their parents, and also from their values. It was the Vietnam War which gave the pretext for this movement of protest and emancipation. The burning "stars and stripes" were the symbol of this protest. Sexual promiscuity, rock music, the Woodstock "spirit", were part of the life of these young people. Sex and drugs and rock'n'roll, but surely not Jesus Christ and confession and Sunday Mass. So far, there was no difference between Catholics and Protestants. But at the end of the 60s, in the beginning of the 70s, this brave new world of flower power and marijuana began to lose its innocence. People didn't consume just marijuana any longer, but changed to cocaine and heroin. They became addicted, and some very popular rock stars died. The political movement became more radical. It wasn't flower power any longer; it was hard, dirty, ugly and uncomfortable. And all who didn't want to understand nevertheless woke up at least when AIDS came in the early

80s. If you look at the protestant communities in the USA, you will realize that they increased in correlation to this development. When the hippie wave went away, when the party was over and the headache came on, the Americans went back to their religion. In 1980 Ronald Reagan became president, and he was the first president since the 50s who preferred a religious rhetoric. And he was backed by the new Christian movement, the Christian Coalition and so on. There are some statistics about these protestant groups. They all show the same: that those groups which were strict in their teaching and morals had success, while those which had tried to adapt the "flower power" spirit of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll had not. There is a significant movement from so-called "liberal" protestant communities like the "Episcopal church" towards conservative groups, which we call "evangelical". And in politics you see it in the pro-life movement: even senators from the democrats called president Obama for a guarantee that no public money from his health care plan would be used for abortion. And he gave it. There is no way to make politics against the religious majority in today's USA.

Comparison with Islam

It is quite similar in the Islamic world. Until the Islamic revolution in 1979, young, urban people tried to be like their counterparts in the West, similar in style, morals, and atheism. The Arabs fought the Israelis not for religion, but for national ideology. But since the 80s, things changed completely. Religion became the most important political issue in the Islamic countries. Either Islamic parties are in charge, or the secular governments are confronted with strong Islamic opposition movements and try to overcome them by religious politics.

And now compare this to Catholic countries. There, religious renaissance did not happen. Why not? Because the Church had changed. The Catholic Church had adapted to the spirit of the 60s. And when the former flower-power kids realized how primitive this spirit was, there was no church which correlated with this insight. So the flower-power kids in Catholic countries became nihilists, cynics, but not Christians. They stayed agnostic, not to protest against religion, but because the (Catholic) religion did not affect them. They have no religion, but they know that they should have one. A German philoso-

pher, very left-wing, Jürgen Habermas, formulated it very well: "There is a consciousness for the missing."

Does Catholicism not affect these people? You have two possible ways to answer this question: first, because the Catholic religion is something stupid, outdated, nonsense. If you chose this answer you should explain why Evangelical Christianity in the USA or Islam is doing as well as it is. The other possible answer to the question is to say that the Church is in bad shape. To say, that the Catholic religion is still the answer to the questions of life, is my choice. I believe that the Catholic faith is the only way to heaven and this is true at all times, under all lifestyles, be it that of a farmer in the middle ages, a merchant in renaissance Venice or a student in today's Winnipeg. If you prefer this answer you may ask what the reason is for the current situation in the Church. And all churchmen, be they right or left, will answer that Vatican II is the roadmap for today's Church politics: Vatican II, this bishop's assembly.

The way to the Council

We spoke about the change in western society in the 1950s. So the Church had to find an answer to the new challenges. The first attempt to do so was under Pope Pius XII, who modernized the Church in a very clever way. He used new techniques, but he didn't forget the risks and negative developments which social change brought with it. In all, he remained strictly within Catholic doctrine. This Pope was very successful in his time. Most of the western European governments were run by Christian democrats during that time; he had a big influence on the academic debate in the 50s. He was surely the most powerful pope in modern times. Unfortunately, many of Pius' reforms were not adopted by the local churchmen in their everyday work. The Church had grown cold. Both priests and lay people were self-satisfied. They did not realize the social change which was in progress. Some proposed a council. Pius XII was very sceptical; there was a lack of competent and orthodox theologians; he knew the risk of how such an assembly could get out of control. His successor John XXIII was brave or naive enough – decide on your own – to call for a council. He was one-sidedly optimistic. Modern theologians² began to speak about a necessary reform of the Church. They didn't understand by "reform" a true re-

form of hearts and minds, a true interior conversion and renewal. They were determined to change the structure of the Church and its doctrine: a true revolution. Vatican II began. Pope John XXIII gave the starting shot with his "aggiornamento" – to live and teach according to the times. "We have to update the Church," he said, "to the new living conditions in the modern world, making us acceptable to modern man."³ A complete wrong and a particularly naive illusion was expressed in the longest document of Vatican II, "Gaudium et spes".⁴ Forty years later, Pope John-Paul II would speak about "the silent apostasy"...

The Roman curia prepared documents for the Council which followed the spirit of Pius XII's reforms, profoundly rooted in Catholic doctrine. Unfortunately, a group of bishops – foremost from France, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands – called for further reforms. They led the way and combined their subversion with theological positions which were in contradiction to the Catholic doctrine of Pius XII. This group strove that the prepared documents be rejected. Instead of these documents, new schemas were made.⁵

The first concerned the liturgy.⁶ The Roman liturgy was in Latin. There were different reasons for that. One is uniformity throughout the world, which manifests the unity of Christians. Another is that Latin is a language which doesn't change any more, so it is timeless. But the language is not the most important element of a rite. The order of the Catholic rite in its structure comes out of the third century and was finally defined in the 16th century. Like a "dogma" of Catholic liturgy is the known sentence: "Lex orandi lex credendi" – The way we pray is the way we believe. All liturgical rites, prayers, chants, ceremonies, which make up even the whole liturgical year, are a perfect expression of the faith; the liturgy, i.e. the Catholic ritual, reflects the Catholic faith. On the other hand, this sentence expresses that any change of the prayer in any rite or liturgy will necessarily change the faith, the doctrine (expressed in the liturgy).

The most complete and unmitigated expression of the Catholic faith is the Mass, "the Mass of all time"⁷, because the Church believes "quod semper, quod ab omnibus, quod ubique"⁸ – what has always, what has by everyone, what has everywhere – been believed.

The catholic faith about the Mass

What's the Catholic faith about the Mass? There are sacrifices in all religions. But the idea of sacrifice has been realized in a unique and decisive way in the immolation of Christ on the Cross. The agonizing and bloody death of Christ is an exterior act whereby His interior oblation is expressed. "He offered Himself because He willed to do so." He offered Himself to suffering and death of His own free will. It is love, expressed in obedience, that is, in the total offering of His human will to the divine will, which gave value to His bloody immolation on the Cross. His act of offering is of itself an act of expiation, the perfect reparation for the sins of mankind. Jesus accomplishes the sacrifice in the name of all men – *propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem*.⁹ He is the Priest of mankind in the most rigorous sense.

The Mass is a sacrifice only because of its relation to the sacrifice of the Cross. The Council of Trent says: it is the same sacrifice because it is the same Priest, the same Victim, offered in another manner; at the Mass, this same sacrifice is offered in a sacramental and symbolic way. The Mass is the sacrament of the sacrifice of the Cross in so far as the latter continues to exist. The Mass makes the Cross present once again. That is why the Council makes it clear that the Mass possesses all the virtue of the sacrifice of the Cross and applies its fruits to us. Christ Himself is contained in the Eucharist exercising this power and applying it here and now to all those who share in the Eucharist. Christ died for everyone, but to be saved and justified we have to believe in His redemption and salvation; we have to accept the power of His sacrifice. That's the reason why we have to believe in the Faith and to attend Holy Mass.

A New Mass – a New Faith

Is it a coincidence that the first document in Vatican II – as we said – speaks about liturgical reform, about a Liturgy updated to modern times? Or inversely, why create a new Mass? By the way, it's plain and simply false to say that the Council didn't want a new Mass; the *Novus Ordo Missae*, the Mass from Pope Paul VI was a posterior creation, not the idea of Vatican II. That's wrong. It is the Mass of the Council; the Council wanted the new Mass. Monsignor Annibale Bugnini was appointed in 1964 to create the NOM – *Novus Ordo Missae*, the New Rite of

Mass. 1964 was during the Council! In the commission elaborating the new Mass there were six Protestant theologians among the Catholic experts. And you understand the Protestants gave their opinions.

Again, why a new Mass? Now, more than 40 years later, we can objectively notice that the ideas of the Council are conveyed by the New Rite of Mass. That was the best way to spread all the novelties like ecumenism, religious liberty, liberalism, collegiality and so forth. But already at that time, during the Council, existed a main idea, a guiding-light: Bugnini's objective for the new Mass was to "remove everything which could be even the shadow of a stumbling block for our separated brethren or could cause them any displeasure."¹⁰ We can quote also what Jean Guitton said.¹¹ What is the displeasure for the Protestants? Sacrifice

The protestant theology about the Mass

To put it in a nutshell: What is the protestant theology about the Mass? The Mass of Martin Luther is the so-called "German Mass". Andreas Karlstadt,¹² Luther's friend, wanted to de-catholicize the Mass. In 1521, at Christmas, he celebrated the German Mass in secular clothes and gave communion under both species; he used the vernacular. The next day, Karlstadt got engaged. After that, many monks and nuns left their cloisters. Why such a violent alteration of the "Mass"? Behind it we find the Protestant theology about the Mass: There is no longer a sacrifice (expressed rather was the meal, with both species, vernacular) or any priesthood (with secular clothes, marriage).

The new Mass was to be like the Protestant mass. When the new Mass started, the faithful saw a Protestant mass. Archbishop Lefebvre gave conferences entitled "La Messe de Luther". Why? The new Mass is not only a Protestant mass; the theology of the new Mass goes further, in fact we have a new theology. With the concept of the Paschal mystery there is no longer a sacrifice; the Redemption is reduced to only one day – the paschal mystery.¹³ And with the theory of the universal salvation, everybody is "saved and justified".¹⁴ Everybody goes to heaven. The basis for this new theology is the concept of the "anonymous Christianity" and "anonymous Christians" by Karl Rahner, the most important Catholic theologian on Vatican II. With his "new theology" the Church no longer needs any mis-

sion, any conversion, any apostolate; the Church is no longer the unique "Ark of the Covenant", but merely one way between other ways, churches and religions. Because everybody is already redeemed (and justified), nobody understands the necessity of the Sacrifice. Consequently, we need a new Mass! With the New Theology, you cannot understand the old Mass, the meaning of expiation or the remission of sins.¹⁵

And consequently, immediately after the Council, the Catholic Mass, the so-called "old Mass" was condemned. In 1967, the *Missa normativa* – a test or trial Mass – was presented by Annibale Bugnini, secretary to the Congregation for Divine Worship on the occasion of a bishops' synod in Rome. Most of the bishops rejected the project because it did not correspond to what the majority of bishops at the Council desired. But the Pope and all the reformers wanted a completely new Mass. On April 3rd, 1969, the NOM was imposed by Paul VI. Priests were not to say any other Mass than the *Missa normativa*. In May 1976, on the occasion of a consistory, Paul VI demanded that henceforth only the NOM be celebrated. A low resistance to the NOM started. Only in Spain was an opposition formed: Over 1,000 priests from Spain appealed to Rome: "Let us keep the Mass!" Bugnini's answer: "The Mass is abrogated forever!"

Destruction of liturgy

So I accuse Vatican II for being the reason for the loss of faith within the Church. Cardinal Ratzinger, who is now Pope Benedict XVI, once pointed out that the "destruction of liturgy" is the main reason for today's crisis in the Church. And when he was named Pope he did the right thing: he allowed the celebration of the Mass in the pre-Vatican II rite.¹⁶ But as long as the majority of priests and local bishops prefer the Vatican II rite, as long as in the seminaries and Sunday sermons and catechism, the Mass is not really explained, the crisis will remain. It is very easy to destroy the faith, but it is hard to rebuild it.

I bring such attention to the liturgy, as it is the most relevant change Vatican II brought about. It affects all of the faithful. And you can explain, by this, the whole council. Under these conditions and this roadmap the council published documents which were ambiguous. It was clear that a change, a reform was intended, but the documents remained unclear as to how these reforms should be realized. For both the faithful

and the clergy, the old doctrine lost its validity. An uncontrolled change began, everyone felt responsible for making a new religion and putting the old aside. In the name of the Council one could justify the greatest nonsense, such as the destruction of church interiors mostly into a wretched style or the different new teachings. The wish to break with one's roots was exaggerated with an obsession to change everything in church. The result was a complete change in the every-day practice in parishes.

This change prevented a Catholic renaissance, when the optimism of the 60s had gone, when the party was over and the people looked for values which were stable. The Church which such searchers found was highly-influenced by the wrong ideas of the 1960s and hence couldn't convince those who had just turned away from these ideas. (TO BE CONTINUED)

1. Ratzinger, Joseph. Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 378.

2. Cf. Franz Schmidberger (Superior General of the Society of St. Pius Xth from 1982-1994), Time Bombs of the Second Vatican Council. (Kansas City, Angelus Press, 2005), 5.

3. Ibid.

4. Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World; December 7th, 1965.

5. Wiltgen, Ralph. The Rhine Flows into the Tiber.

6. Sacrosanctum Concilium, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy; December 4th, 1963.

7. As Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre habitually said.

8. St. Vincent of Lerins.

9. From the Nicene Creed: "For us men and for our salvation."

10. Osservatore Romano, March 19, 1965.

11. Jean Guitton, an old friend of Paul VI, related in 1993, "That the pope wanted, in full awareness, to remove from the Mass what could displease the Protestants." Max Thurian, one of the six experts said: "Nothing in the new Mass can really displease a Protestant" From: Catechism on the Crisis of the Church, Matthias Gaudron, Rex Regum 1997, p. 93. Cf. Just as quote 106, Ibid.

12. Andreas Rudolf Bodenstein, auch: Andreas Rudolff-Bodenstein von Karlstadt, Haufig auch nur als "Karlstadt" bezeichnet, (* um 1482 in Karlstadt; + 24. Dezember 1541 in Basel) war ein deutscher Reformator des 16.

13. Cardinal Wojtyla, The Sign of Contradiction. Communio-Fayard 1979, p. 31 and 119.

14. Ibid.

15. A few years ago, statistics in Germany proved that for 95% of all the practicing Catholics, the Catholic Mass and the Protestant supper mean the same thing!

16. Motu proprio, Summorum Pontificum, 7/7/2007