



# REPORT FROM THE CAPITAL

★ RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ★ BAPTIST PRINCIPLES  
★ PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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## A First Look At Vatican Council II

October 31, 1963

ROME, Vatican Council II — Among the first questions a Baptist news reporter asks as he seeks to understand the 21st ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church are these. Why do Catholics have councils? Why are they called ecumenical? Who makes up the council?

In explaining councils Roman Catholic writers point out that: (1) the bishops, together with the pope, govern the church, (2) the pope needs the advice, help and instruction from the bishops, (3) councils have great psychological effect on matters of faith and morals by having the force of more than the pope alone behind them, (4) the publicity given councils helps the public to understand the church, and (5) a council is one way the church carries out its teaching mission.

Some of the reasons for Vatican Council II have been given as: (1) revision of canon law regulating the liturgy, the laity, marriage, and other internal matters, (2) renewal or reform of the church in order to enable it to meet modern problems of scientism, atheism, the resurgence of non-Christian religions, the unity of mankind, and to prepare the church for the new age into which the world is entering, and (3) to open doors looking toward the ultimate unity or union of all Christians.

The word "ecumenical" means general or universal. The Greek word from which it is derived means "pertaining to the whole of the inhabited earth." Hence, a Roman Catholic ecumenical council is a meeting of bishops from all over the world wherever the Catholic faith exists.

There is another sense in which Vatican II is an ecumenical council. That is its concern for the ultimate reunion of all Christians. Due to modern threats to the existence of Christianity the Roman Catholic Church envisions the unity of Christians as one of the safeguards of the faith. Doors that have been shut to other communions are being opened. Attitudes that have erected barriers between Roman Catholics and others are being torn down. Explanations of doctrines are being rewritten so as to make them more acceptable to non-Catholics. A secretariat on "Christian Unity" is actively at work.

Technically, the council is the assembly of Catholic bishops from all over the world. There are approximately 2400 of them gathered in Rome. These are the only persons with voting privileges. The decisions of the council, after approval by the pope, become the official positions of the Roman Catholic Church.

However, other groups influence the decisions of the council. Among these are study commissions that draw up the schemata (proposals) for consideration by the council. There are the "periti" (experts or advisers) who consult with the bishops and study commissions. These are the theologians, church historians and various other scholars who are specialists in their fields. Their function is advisory.

Among those present at the council are the "observers" from non-Catholic Christian groups. There are 60 or more of these. They are given most of the privileges of the bishops, except, of course, that of voting and

### Vatican Council Report

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs sent W. Barry Garrett, associate director, as a Baptist journalist to the last five weeks of the second session of Vatican Council II in Rome (Oct. 28 to Dec. 4, 1963). He wrote 14 interpretative articles on the Council for Baptist news channels. In view of a number of requests for the assembled materials this issue of Report From The Capital carries 10 of the major reports Mr. Garrett sent from Rome.

debating. They have special seats in the council sessions. The secret schema documents are available to the observers. They are consulted frequently by the council study commissions and are sought out for advice by those who set the policies of the council. When matters affecting non-Catholics are under consideration the observers play a vital role in advising on attitudes and positions.

It is reported that observers are present from every world communion except some of the Orthodox groups, the Baptists, and a few fundamentalist groups.

A smaller group present at the council are "guests" of the pope. These, for all intents and purposes, have the same privileges as observers.

Not officially connected with the council, but playing a powerful role in getting its message to the world, and hence making the council acutely aware of its impact on the world, is

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the press corps. All the major news channels of the world and many lesser ones have their reporters present.

At the first session of the council in 1962 information from the council was hard to get, couched in cautious language and often shrouded in secrecy. This year, however, the picture is different. The actual texts of the proposed schemata remain secret, but summaries of their contents are available, the debate is fully reported, and the actions and counteractions within the council are open points of discussion.

The council has an official news service and press room. After each day's session there are full briefings of news men in various languages. Other news sources are available. Bishops, observers and advisers are freely available to the press for comment on the council's work.

One of the most significant news outlets is the U.S. bishops' news panel each day the council meets. News reports are distributed and a panel of bishops is present to answer any and all questions by news reporters.

### **Catholic Bishops Vote On Virgin Mary Schema**

November 8, 1963

ROME—The week I arrived in Rome as a Baptist news reporter on Vatican Council II two important votes were taken by the council fathers. One was on the place of the schema (proposal) on the Virgin Mary in the council decrees. The other was on the authority of bishops in the church. This report will deal only with the Mary schema.

Outwardly, the vote was on the apparently simple question as to whether there should be a separate schema on Mary or whether it should be included as one of the chapters in the schema on "The Church." Underneath this simple question were torrents of meaning both to Catholics themselves and in the relation of Catholics with other Christians.

If there were to be a separate schema on Mary this could mean a further exalting of the mother of Jesus and an acceleration of her veneration among the faithful. Already the church has declared that she was immaculately conceived and did not share in the sin of the human race,

that she is one of the saints through whom grace is mediated, and that at her death she was bodily taken up into heaven. Some of the terms applied to her are Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, Mediatrix of all Graces and Co-Redemptrix.

The extent to which Mariology has developed has proven to be an embarrassment to many Catholics. To Protestants the exaltation of Mary has seemed to diminish the role of Jesus Christ in the redemption of sinners. One Catholic commentator at a press conference said that it seems to many Protestants that "we Catholics are trying to make Mary the fourth person in the Trinity."

On the other hand, it was argued that if the schema were to be written into the one on the church, this would more clearly show her relationship to the church as the people of God, would put her in perspective as a type of the church, and would be less offensive to Protestants and thus would contribute toward the unity of the Christian world.

The closeness of the vote indicates the differences of opinion on Mariology that exist within the Catholic church. When the vote was announced the proposal to incorporate the doctrine of Mary in the schema on the church carried only by a 51 per cent majority.

In the U.S. Bishops Press Panel following the vote on Mary, it was pointed out that this action in no way changes Roman Catholic doctrine, because once a dogma is proclaimed it can never be changed. However, it was said that there are new ways of explaining old truths so as to make them more understandable by non-Catholics. This appears to an outsider to be a sophisticated way of changing the unchangeable without seeming to deny the original positions.

It would not be correct to say that Roman Catholics have reversed directions in their doctrine of Mary. But it would be correct to say that a step was taken in the direction of lessening the extremes to which this doctrine has led many Catholics. Thus, with an increasing emphasis on the place of Mary in some Protestant quarters, doors toward a closer relationship now seem to be opening slightly.

To a Baptist who views the New

Testament as the sole rule of faith and practice both the immaculate conception and the bodily assumption of Mary are foreign to the revelation of God in Christ. Likewise, the veneration of Mary as the mother of God, praying to God through the mediation of Mary, and the many so-called "appearances" and miracles by the "Blessed Virgin" are beyond the scope of faith for a Baptist.

### **New Catholic Attitudes Emerging From Council**

November 12, 1963

ROME—Two major moves to improve relations between Roman Catholics and non-Catholics have been made thus far in the second session of Vatican Council II now meeting here.

They are: (1) Pope Paul VI's appeal for forgiveness for Catholic fault in injuries that may have been inflicted on Protestants thus causing the "separation" of Christians, and (2) public release of the summary of a document that lifts the blame for the crucifixion of Christ from the shoulders of the Jews as a race.

Other steps to improve Christian unity have also been taken by the council, but these two have special import.

In his opening address to the council on September 29, Pope Paul expressed deep grief over the divisions existing among Christian communions. Referring specifically to the division in the 16th century that resulted in the Protestant movement, as well as to earlier separations within Catholicism, the pope said:

"If we are to blame in any way for that separation, we humbly beg God's forgiveness and ask pardon too of our brethren who feel themselves to have been injured by us. For our part, we willingly forgive the injuries which the Catholic Church has suffered, and forget the grief endured during the long history of heresy and schism."

It is reported that this confession and overture for forgiveness by a pope is unprecedented in Roman Catholic history.

Obviously referring to some Orthodox groups, the Baptists and a few others who would not accept an invitation to send observers to the council the pope expressed the hope

that "our voice" may also reach them. He then made three points about the Catholic view on unity in order that the observers present "may communicate them with their respective Christian communities."

First, Pope Paul spoke of Catholic motives for unity with other Christians. He said, "Our manner of speaking toward them is friendly, completely sincere and loyal. We lay no snares; we are not motivated by temporal interests."

Next, the pope referred to the common Christian heritage shared alike by Catholics and non-Catholics. He paid tribute to the progress in the knowledge of truth made by all groups and invited a mutual sharing of one another's doctrines.

Then, he acknowledged "the enormous difficulties still in the way of the desired union." The Catholics make it clear that they are under no illusion about the distance that separates them from the rest of the Christian world. In spite of this the pope said, "Should historical reality tend to weaken our hopes, we shall try to recall the comforting words of Christ: 'What is impossible to man's powers is possible to God' (Luke 18:27)."

The second major move to improve the Catholic image in relation to others took place on November 8 with the release of the draft on "The Attitude of Catholics Towards Non-Christians, Particularly Toward the Jews." This paper, prepared by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, will compose the fourth chapter of the schema on ecumenism.

This document denounced an attitude prevailing in some Catholic circles, catechisms and books, that the Jews as a race are guilty of the crucifixion of Christ. This view has resulted in strong anti-Semitic attitudes on the part of many Catholics and has caused undue hardships to be imposed on Jews in many areas and at various times in history.

In the new Catholic statement on attitude toward Jews three major points are made: (1) there is a deep bond that ties the church to the Chosen People of the Old Testament; (2) the responsibility for Christ's death falls upon sinful mankind; and (3) it was from Abraham's stock that Christ, His Blessed Mother and the apostles were born.

The document explains: "The part the Jewish leaders of Christ's day played in bringing about the crucifixion does not exclude the guilt of all mankind. But the personal guilt of these leaders cannot be charged to the whole Jewish people either of his time or today. It is therefore unjust to call this people 'deicide' or to consider it 'cursed' by God."

Roman Catholic "preachers and catechists," the document continues, "are admonished never to present a contrary position; furthermore, they are urged to promote mutual understanding and esteem."

## Catholics Complain About Secret Office

November 14, 1963

ROME—This Baptist's blood pressure rose somewhat as he listened to a detailed explanation of the procedures of the Holy Office (the modern version of the Inquisition) at the Vatican. However, as he reflected on the fact that these methods are under sharp criticism from some Catholic quarters and that the U. S. Bishops Press Panel was exposing this problem to the news media of the world, he had a better appreciation for the struggle for change in the Catholic Church.

At the press panel Msgr. Henry Cosgrove, an American member of the Holy Office, explained in detail the membership of the Holy Office, the procedures which it followed, and the function it performed in the church. He made it clear, however, that he was bound by secrecy on some matters.

The first Inquisition, according to Cosgrove, was created by Pope Paul III in 1542. The office is an instrument of the pope alone and has been adjusted many times by succeeding popes. He emphasized that it was not to be confused with the Spanish Inquisition, which left a trail of terror and blood in its wake.

Five areas come under the competence of the Holy Office: (1) safeguarding the doctrine of faith and morals; (2) judging certain "crimes" which come under its jurisdiction; (3) deciding questions relating to marriage that are referred to it; (4) examining, prohibiting and condemning books and publications of any kind that are not satisfactory to

the church; and (5) dealing with "everything pertaining to the Eucharistic fast for priests celebrating mass."

The Holy Office, under the authority of the pope, makes its own rules and "proceeds according to its own mode of action and institution."

The occasion for the panel discussion was an earlier attack on the procedures of the Holy Office by Cardinal Joseph Frings, Archbishop of Cologne, Germany. As one of the leaders for reform in the Catholic Church Frings made this proposal:

"The distinction between administrative and judicial procedures in the Roman Curia should be extended to all areas, including the Supreme Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office. Its procedures are out of harmony with modern times, are a source of harm to the faithful and are a scandal to those outside the church. No Roman congregation should have authority to accuse, judge, and condemn an individual who has no opportunity to defend himself. With all due reverence and gratitude for the devoted individuals who spend their lives in the difficult work of the Holy Office we feel that its methods should be basically revised."

Later in the same morning debate before the council fathers, Cardinal Alfredo Ottoviani, Secretary of the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office, struck back at those who condemned the procedures of the Holy Office. He is paraphrased by the council's press office to have said:

"It should not be forgotten that the Prefect of the Holy Office is none other than the Sovereign Pontiff himself. The criticisms formulated proceed from lack of knowledge, not to use a stronger term, of the procedures of this Sacred Congregation. No one is ever accused, judged, and condemned without a thorough previous investigation carried on with the help of competent consultants and experienced specialists. Besides, all decisions of the Holy Office are approved by the pope personally, and thus such criticisms are a reflection on the Vicar of Christ."

In the briefing by Msgr. Cosgrove, he said that all decisions of the Holy Office were arrived at in the interest of truth and justice. In cases where

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must show the way in the light of truth; and

"4. For ecumenical considerations, in view of the fact that many non-Catholics hold the church in aversion and suspect her of Machiavellianism for allegedly demanding religious freedom when she is in a minority and ignoring it when she gets control."

In positive terms, the bishop continued, religious freedom means the right to free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience. He said that "the schema asserts unequivocally that all men who follow their conscience have a natural right to true and genuine religious liberty."

The most questioned part of the bishop's speech was his assertion that religious liberty "must be regulated in view of the common good and by this common good can at times be subjected to modification and control."

There was not unanimous agreement by the members of the U. S. Bishops Press Panel as to just what the "common good" includes and how this principle applies. It was pointed out by one member of the panel that this term is ambiguous and needs clarifying.

Bishop De Smedt said in his speech that Catholic doctrine had always contained the principle of religious liberty and that it had developed in varying ways under differing historical circumstances. He said that "the teaching of the church on this topic reached its culminating point in John XXIII's 'Pacem in Terris' whose teaching is faithfully reflected in the present chapter.

In his encyclical Pope John XXIII had said, "Every human being has the right to honor God according to the dictates of an upright (or sincere) conscience, and therefore the right to worship God privately and publicly."

The question was asked the U. S. Bishops Press Panel if the principle of religious liberty applied to those who profess the doctrine of atheism. The answer given was, "Yes, if the person is acting with a sincere conscience."

A report that caused concern by some attending the U. S. Bishops Press Panel was the position of Catholic theologians in Spain. It was stated that they were ready to ac-

cept the doctrine of religious liberty with two possible exceptions.

The first was in the case of a country where religion is so intertwined with the culture and the government that divergent religious practices would appear to be subversive.

The second was in the case of a nation where the people are extremely ignorant and undeveloped, like children in a home. In such a case, full religious liberty would not be beneficial, according to the report on the Spanish theologians.

## Council Approves Decree On Communications Media

November 20, 1963

ROME — Although the Catholic bishops of the world at their council here voted overwhelmingly to approve a draft decree on mass media of communications, no one seems to be enthusiastic about their action. Many people are asking why the council fathers would consider such a question at an ecumenical council. Others are wondering why, after two years, the council approved as its first decree such an "innocuous" statement.

At the U. S. Bishops Press Panel in which the draft of the decree was discussed widespread dissatisfaction was expressed. One of the council experts told the Baptist news reporter that the document "is ambiguous, poorly written, and says nothing." However, to this writer the decree is more far-reaching than was acknowledged.

The proposed decree calls upon civil government to "defend the just freedom of information." It develops at length the role of the Catholic Church in spreading its message through such media as "the press, the cinema, radio, television and others of this kind."

Describing modern mass media as "instruments of social communication" the draft decree says that the Mother Church "has the inherent right to use and to possess any of these instruments insofar as they are necessary or useful toward Christian education and her work for the salvation of souls." On the other hand, the draft does not approach the problem of state control of communications or the rights of minority groups. It is unclear at many points whether the church is addressing itself and its communications problems

or whether it is seeking to set standards for all mass media.

The draft says, "To use these instruments properly it is very necessary that all who use them be familiar with the norms of the moral order and faithfully put them into practice." It calls upon the church authorities for an extensive teaching and training program through the churches and schools to prepare laymen for the implementation of the principles laid down in the decree.

The proposed decree says, "It is especially necessary that all concerned with the use of these instruments should form a correct conscience, particularly with respect to certain questions vigorously discussed in our times." These "questions" were listed as: (1) information, that is, the finding and publishing of news; (2) the relation between the right of art and the rights and norms of the moral law; and (3) the narration of moral evil in respect to its effect on those who read and listen.

The most controversial portion of the draft at the bishops panel was section 12 of Chapter I on "The Teaching of the Church." The section deals with civil authority, censorship, entertainment and religion. It says:

"The civil authority should defend the just freedom of information, especially as regards the press. It should foster religion, culture, and the best phases of art. It should protect the legitimate rights of those who wish to use these means of communication. It should help those projects that are useful to youth, which otherwise cannot be supported. However, the civil authority, which legitimately gives aid to the health of the citizens, shall also by the promulgation and execution of laws, prevent harm to the morals and progress of society through the bad use of these instruments. By such vigilance there is no undue restriction of the liberty of individuals or of societies, especially if there are no sufficient precautions on the part of those who have charge of the instruments of communication. Special care should be exercised to protect youth from literature and shows that may be harmful to their age."

Addressing itself to the church's own program of communications the draft decree calls for extensive development of Catholic publications,