

# Vatican Council II and The Deposit of Faith

by Fr. Edwin Gordon

Pope John XXIII, in his inaugural address to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, said: "This sure unchangeable doctrine, which must be faithfully respected, has to be studied in depth and presented in a way that fits the requirements of our time. For the deposit of the faith, that is, the truths contained in our venerable doctrine, is one thing, and the way in which they are enunciated, while still preserving the same meaning and fullness, is another."

These words remind us that Vatican II was intended to be a pastoral council rather than a doctrinal one. The deposit of faith remained unchanged. This means that the doctrinal teachings of the Council of Trent remained, and so too the Catechism of the Council of Trent. The definitions of Trent were expressly written to defend the faith against the many Protestant heresies that sprang up in the sixteenth century, and, providentially, they were to deepen the understanding of many of these doctrines. For instance, catechisms based on the Council of Trent defined a sacrament as an outward sign of inward grace ordained by Jesus Christ by which grace is conferred on the soul.

St. Augustine demonstrates the same doctrine in a different way by using the parable of the Good Samaritan, who for him can be seen as our Lord; the man robbed and left wounded by the wayside represents the human race, which has been wounded and robbed of its inheritance by Satan. The bandages and splints used to bind up the wounds represent the sacraments. Thus the doctrine expressed by Trent and St. Augustine is basically the same – the sacraments are efficacious signs of God's healing love – only the method of presentation is different.

Pope John XXIII spoke about opening the windows of the Church to let in the fresh air. By this, he meant making the perennial truths of the faith living truths rather than simply dry definitions. These truths were to be exemplified in those who are truly trying to follow Christ. The council was also to emphasize that ordinary people living in the world were called to sanctity, and not just priests and religious. The council was also called to make Catholics better instructed in their faith, so as to bring the faith to the modern world. The Catholic Catechism teaches the same truths, often quoting from the Council of Trent and from the writings of many saints and Fathers of the Church. The purpose remains the same, however-presenting "this sure unchangeable doctrine" in a way that is demanded by our times.

There were many liberal theologians who were ready to misinterpret Vatican II according to their own way of thinking. The so-called "spirit of Vatican II" was often used to mean anything and everything except what was actually promulgated by the Council Fathers. The statement that "this sure unchangeable doctrine" had to be explored and presented in a way that was demanded of our times was very often misinterpreted to mean watering down the faith so as to make it palatable to "modern man." This watering down of the faith took place first of all in the field of catechetics, then in the liturgy, and then in the blurring of the distinction between the sacred and the profane. For example, it was said that one should not preach so much about the Blessed Virgin Mary, as it would divert people from her Divine Son.

The Ten Commandments were reduced to "love" with the pretext that "all you need is love," forgetting our Lord's words, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Similarly, the traditional acts of contrition that contained all the motives for sorrow were often reduced, to the perhaps too brief, "O my God, I am sorry for my sins because you are so good, and by the help of your grace I will not sin again."

If we compare this with a form of the older, longer version we can see that much has been lost by such a reduction: "O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended you. I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell. But most of all because they offend thee, my God, who are all good and deserving of my love. I firmly resolve with the help of thy grace to do penance, to sin no more and to avoid whatever leads me to sin."

Regarding confession, even before the council, Pope Pius XII had said in *Mystici Corporis* (88): "Let those therefore among the younger clergy who make light of or lessen esteem for frequent confession realize that what they are

doing is alien to the Spirit of Christ and disastrous for the mystical body of our Savior." Above all, it was said you must not give young people a "guilty feeling" that would pull them away from a loving God. Neither should hell be mentioned – it was said that God is a merciful God who would never send anyone to hell, forgetting that those who go to hell go in spite of God and not because of him.

In the liturgical field, it was said that the Mass must be acceptable to modern man, and particularly the young. This often resulted in turning the liturgy into a party and a sing-song. Thankfully, many of these abuses have been addressed in the document on the liturgy issued by the Holy See, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*.

Priests and religious were also encouraged to make themselves more acceptable to modernity, to abandon clerical dress and habits, and to dress in more casual clothing. For instance, the headline in a certain newspaper regarding a nun who was acting as "chaplainess" at a well-known university was "Mini-skirted nun speaks out." The reporter quizzed her, "Sister, why do you wear a mini-skirt?" She responded, "In the spirit of Vatican II, I want to make myself more acceptable to the modern student." Where indeed did Vatican II talk about mini-skirted nuns?

The truths of the faith were so diluted in schools that they became more like a vaccination against authentic Catholic instruction than anything positive and life giving. The principle that "we must bring Christ to the modern world," which-understood in the right way-is valid, was misinterpreted to mean we must water down the faith to make it more acceptable; it would clearly be better to say we must bring the world to Christ. Vocations dwindled and all this was blamed on the materialistic society, when indeed much of it ought to have been blamed on those who corrupted the faith. Modernism, that is to say a way of thinking that left out God and supernatural realities, was well and truly in the ascendant. The words of Cardinal Gagnon come very much to mind: "Whenever modernism rears its head, vocations dwindle,"

In his letter to all the bishops on the Feast of the Holy Eucharist, 1980, Pope John Paul II spoke about the tendency to blur the distinction between the sacred and the profane. This took place particularly in Church music and architecture. Many churches were vandalized at enormous expense, as altar rails and statues were removed. The removal of altar rails, which was never recommended by Vatican II, was based on the theological error that the congregation was saying Mass with the priest. A certain so-called theologian stated in a lecture that the consecration did not take place until the great "Amen" at the end of the Eucharistic prayer.

The result was that some beautiful churches were desecrated to become multipurpose halls. Even cathedrals were built without a single crucifix, while modern art was often the excuse for designing Stations of the Cross that were incomprehensible to the average person. All this was the blurring of the sacred and profane. Beauty gave way to indescribable ugliness, and was justified because it was said to be in the spirit of Vatican II. And yet, Vatican II said the exact opposite: "Holy Mother Church has therefore always been the friend of the fine arts and has ever sought their noble help, with the special aim that all things set apart for use in divine worship should be truly worthy, becoming and beautiful, signs and symbols of the supernatural world, and for this purpose she has trained artists" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 122).

Indeed, one could say that as a result of all these aberrations, it seemed as if a hurricane had struck the Church. However, like Noah's Ark, the Church would survive the storm, and always will, for the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Pope Paul VI, in the midst of this spiritual tempest in the 60s, had the courage to give clear guidelines on moral issues against the permissiveness of the age in *Humanae Vitae*, while in the *Credo of the People of God* he corrected many of the heresies that were once again springing up, as in the sixteenth century. It is perhaps significant that both of these documents were written after his visit to Fatima in 1967, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima. He had already consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary at the conclusion of Vatican II, following the request of Our Lady.

Pope Paul VI was to suffer much as a result of these two documents from liberal so-called theologians and went through a living martyrdom seeing the harm being done to so many of the faithful throughout the world. The election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla to the chair of St. Peter brought new hope to the faithful. Here was a priest who knew what it was to suffer under Communism and Nazism-he would confront the attacks of the liberals as he had the assaults of Communism. His love for Our Blessed Lady and his fortitude in suffering the assassination attempt on May 13, 1981, the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, was to bring hope to the faithful who were confused by the clamor of so many false prophets. The consecration of the world, including Russia, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on

March 25, 1984, the Feast of the Annunciation, was to have a profound effect on the breaking down of Communism.

After the spiritual storms of the 60s and 70s, there now began the first signs of spring, with new movements developing and vitality within the Church becoming apparent. A longing for the reaffirmation of the perennial truths of the faith, which culminated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, also developed. It now remained to bring back the traditional question and answer form of catechetical instruction, initiated by the Council of Trent and enriched by the catechism, which quotes the saints and the Fathers of the Church.

Furthermore, the teachings of the faith can be learned in a very simple way through praying the Rosary in every home. This was the message given by John Paul II at the beatification of Francisco and Jacinta in 2000: "Tell your parents to put you in the school of Mary." One could go further and say, "Tell your parents and bishops to put you in the school of Mary." That "school of Mary" is the Holy Rosary, which, prayed in every home, is the bulwark against the attacks of the devil and the false attractions of the world.

Pope Benedict XVI's recent encyclical on hope reminds us that amid the storms that launch themselves against the Church, the anchor of the soul is Christian hope. That hope is not unfounded. There are numerous signs of the beginning of a springtime for the Church. This can be seen in the new religious orders and movements that are growing up and that go back to the fundamentals; the restoration of frequent confession; the wearing of habits; and the insistence on sound catechetical teaching. In the liturgy, there has to be a renewed emphasis on reverence, the correction of many abuses, and an insistence on the fundamental distinction between the sacred and the world.

The Church persecuted in so many parts of the world and the martyrdom of so many Christians reminds us that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, and ultimately there will be a rich harvest of souls. The young are not attracted by a watered down Christianity, but they are attracted by a faith that demands sacrifice and the complete giving of oneself to Christ.

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