

Tablet Lecture, 5 October 2012
Stories of Vatican II: The Human Side of the Council.
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In a few days, the pope will be commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council. He will do so at a synod of the world's bishops who may be told, that the Council did not have much of anything new to say to the world's more-than-one billion Catholics, and that, when the Council did come up with anything arresting and original, it was wrong and should be reversed and repudiated. In a way, the pope himself is saying the Council was a failure.

So, curiously, is Hans Kung. He is saying the Council did not go far enough. A good many liberal Catholics are echoing Kung. Just a few weeks ago, the late Cardinal Martini of Milan said in his last interview that the Church that Pope John XXIII tried to update is 200 years behind the times. In a way, both wings in the Church are saying the Council was a failure.

I do not believe the Council was a failure. It has already changed the way we live--and think--as Catholics. In my opinion, as one devoted to the memory of Vatican II, I believe the charter that was written there is the only thing that will save the Church, the people-of-God Church, not the hierarchical Church.

It made our bishops (and us) more real, more human and more loving. Before the Council, we Catholics lived on a high level of abstraction. We weren't men and women, we were angels, we were hostile to the material world, and uncomfortable in our own bodies. We were told we should reject the world and "save our souls."

By contrast, at Vatican II, Pope John XXIII and most of the bishops took stock of the Church's stance toward the world and decided the Church should condemn the world no longer, but try to be a part of it. In his final address to the Council, Pope Paul VI summed it up like this. He said, "Being in the world makes the Church what it is. Otherwise it would make no sense."

Before the Council began, however, none of this was very clear. In fact, throughout the Council's three-year plus preparatory period and through much of the Council's first session in the fall of 1962, the world's Catholics were caught up in a mystery story. I think I can recall for you the outlines of this mystery story by bringing you along with me as I, a correspondent for Time magazine, set about unraveling that mystery.

I entered the story in the spring of 1961, a young reporter for the *Arizona Republic* sitting in the living room of a small mansion of the Biltmore Estates with Clare Booth Luce, a convert to Catholicism under the tutelage of Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. I am there to interview Mrs. Luce's houseguest, the celebrated English Jesuit theologian Martin Darcy. For almost two hours, Father Darcy and I discuss his recent, abstruse work, "The Mind and Heart of Love." After the interview, Mrs. Luce turns to me and says, "I have been reading your articles in *The Republic* and wondering who you were and what you wanted to do with your life."

I tell Mrs. Luce I want to go to Rome and cover the Council for *Time* magazine. She asks me, "Why?"

I only had one small clue. When Pope John called the Council in January 1959, he said he wanted to bring the Church up to date. But few commentators (including the Rome bureau chief of the New York Times and the esteemed writers and the editors of *The Tablet*) could really say what that meant.

I knew what I *wanted* it to mean, and, more of a salesman than anything else, I told Mrs. Luce, “The Church held its last council in 1870. Since then, the world has changed more than it has in the previous 20 centuries. If Pope John is calling together 2,500 bishops from around the world to help him bring the Church up to date in this new world, then the Church may well make a lot of changes. If it does, this will be one of the stories of the century. And *Time* magazine can take a lead in reporting it.”

She looks over to her houseguest, the man I had come to her home to interview, Father Martin D’Arcy, SJ. He nods. He points out that this young reporter was a Jesuit for ten years. “He understands the Church.”

Mrs. Luce is a thoughtful woman. She has been a Congresswoman from Connecticut, a popular playwright, the wife of the man who founded the world’s largest media empire AND she was once the U.S. ambassador to Rome. She blinks. And then she says to me, “I think I can be of some assistance.”

To make a long story short, *Time* hires me as a correspondent in its Beverly Hill bureau and, six months later, I am a foreign correspondent at the Time-Life bureau in Rome, trenchcoat and all, applying for a press pass at the Vatican.

I get the press pass. But getting inside the Vatican is a little harder. It is a Renaissance court. No one interviews Cardinal Ottaviani, much less the pope. But then, little by little, I begin to discover I have friends in Rome. I find some California Jesuits, my contemporaries, who have been in Rome for two years, getting their doctorates in Scripture and canon law. They tell me in no uncertain terms that the pope is fighting his own Curia. One of them says, “He cannot tip his hand too soon. They’d do him in. I know it sounds bizarre. But they’ve poisoned popes before -- popes who tried to change things.”

My California Jesuits introduce me to Father Roberto Tucci, the Oxford-educated Naples Jesuit who edits *Civiltà Cattolica*, a twice-monthly magazine something like *America* magazine. Every two weeks, he takes his journal over the Tiber to be checked out by the pope’s prime minister. He knows the pope, and the men in the pope’s change-oriented, inner circle, and he tells me I should pay no attention to some recent moves by the pope that seem to indicate he has no wish to bring about much change in the Church.

“The pope is playing a shrewd game, signing meaningless documents calculated to overcome the fears of the Vatican’s old guard. When the pope talks about *aggiornamento*, he is really serious. But he cannot update the Church all by himself.”

Fr. Tucci introduces me to Cardinal Augustine Bea, the German Jesuit Biblical scholar appointed by the pope to a new Vatican cabinet post, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, designed to bring about one of the pope’s fondest desires: to get all Christians working together.

Bea confirms one report for me that helps me understand how helpless the pope feels under the thumb of his own Curia: John XXIII has told Bea: *Io sono solamente il papa*. “I am only the pope.”

To me, all this is a revelation. I had come to Rome as a good conservative American Catholic who had all kinds of naive ideas about how the Church is run--top down. God tells the pope, the pope tells the bishops, the bishops tell the priests, the priests tell the nuns. And then the nuns tell us.

Now I am finding out this isn’t quite the way things happen in Rome, and this may be even more true when 2500 bishops come tumbling into Rome for the Council.

Then I get a phone call from Paris. It is Ed Malatesta, a classmate of mine from the California Province, just finishing up his studies in France. He says I must come to Paris. He wants to introduce

me to some Jesuits and Dominicans and Benedictines who are preparing to mount an assault on the members of the Roman Curia who have prepared seventy-two items for the Council agenda designed to keep the change-oriented pope in check. An assault on the Roman Curia, the pope's own cabinet? Now there is nothing a reporter loves more than a good fight.

And so, I jet off to Paris. I meet Malatesta. He introduces me to the Dominican theologian Yves Congar and another Dominican, M.D. Chenu, a scholar of early Church history, and a key figure behind the ill-fated Worker Priest movement. At *Etudes*, I meet two French Jesuits, Robert Roquette and Jean Danielou, (here's a picture of Danielou) and I find out much more specifically from these four what he and they and their fellow scholars in Paris think is wrong with today's Church: it is too abstract, too much removed from the people, too legalistic, too much concerned with its own power (epitomized by the doctrine that there's no salvation outside the Church), still operating under the siege mentality of Popes Pius the Ninth and Pius the Tenth, still fighting long-dead Modernists like George Tyrell, the English Jesuit who was excommunicated and thrown out of the Society of Jesus, and, at age 45, sent to an early grave.

I return to Rome, more clued in to the battle ahead, realizing a little more the human dimensions of the Church and of the Council that Pope John has put in motion. I am still not sure how far the pope and his Council can go. So much of the agenda (1080 pages-long) that has been prepared by the Roman Curia is intramural stuff, written by clerics, for clerics. Ecclesiastical garb and tonsure. Obedience to ecclesiastical teachings. The boundaries of dioceses. The precepts of the Church. Pious donations.

Were there not bigger issues for a Church that claimed founding by a man who said that he had come so that we could have life and have it more abundantly? The pope thought so, but he still couldn't say so. When Boston's Cardinal Richard Cushing offered to put up the money for a simultaneous translation system at the Council, John XXIII told him the Curia wouldn't let him do that. *Sono nel sacco qui*, "I'm in a bag here," Papa Roncalli told Cushing.

The Curia had decided that all the Council speeches were to be cast in Latin for a reason. If the world's bishops understood those speeches, they might be tempted to share them with the press. And the Curia had already determined there would be no press at the Council. Everything, every Council document handed out to the Council Fathers on an almost daily basis, was stamped **SUB SECRETO**.

For the moment, since Pope John had to be careful what he said, he got some of his revolutionary message across in his actions. On July 11, 1962, for example, he leaped at the chance to inaugurate the first program ever on Telstar 1, the first transatlantic TV transmission by satellite. His words then were calculated to excite no one. By appearing on that first satellite TV transmission, however, he was saying that the first Telstar heralded new ways of linking all the peoples of the world, new ways of thinking about the world, and new ways of thinking about ourselves in relationship to that world.

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, the pope's given name before he became Pope John XXIII, was not a Vatican bureaucrat. He studied history, not theology, during his training to be a priest, and, for most of his life, he was a Vatican diplomat with postings most notably in Bulgaria and France. He knew the outside world as perhaps few in the Vatican did. This was a world that was growing up. In a growingly mass-mediated world, people were learning how to read and write and think and transcend the classes they were born into, and demand political and social and personal freedom. How could the Church keep operating under its old class systems? Yes, there was a class system in the Church, clerics in the upper class, and laymen in a lower class, and laywomen in yet another, third-level class.

Did the pope want to turn this system upside down? He didn't say so. He was counting on the fact that the 2,500 bishops he was bringing to Rome (and their theologians) were human beings who would not take kindly to the abstract propositions put forward in draft documents prepared by the Roman Curia. The Church was about more than a set of abstract propositions. It was about this Jesus guy who came that we should have life.

You've been looking here at an image of the [Time magazine cover](#) in early October 1962. It is from a sketch done for Time by the famed Italian artist Pietro Annigoni. Those were the days when Time commissioned some of the world's great artists to paint its cover subjects, encouraging them to see more deeply into a person than any camera can do. Much to the surprise of my editors in New York, Annigoni turned in an unfinished portrait. Time's editors didn't mind a bit. They said they were delighted with this unfinished sketch. For them, it symbolized the unfinished persona of John XXIII, who would not be finished until his Council was finished.

For me, of course, the important thing about that Time magazine cover was the story I told about John XXIII inside the magazine, the result of an hour-long encounter that I had with the pope in August 1962. According to Vatican protocol, popes don't give interviews. But that didn't stop Cardinal Spellman, who arranged for me to run into the pope by accident in a hallway at his summer residence in Castel Gondolfo when he was on his way to lunch. It happened like this: Life magazine had recently done a multi-page layout on the Sistine Chapel, produced from some fantastic color slides done by Life's Dmitri Kessel. Spellman met with Henry Luce, and asked him if he could use those slides to set up a mini-version of the Sistine Chapel at Spellman's Vatican Pavilion at the New York World's Fair.

"Of course," said Luce. "I just have a little favor to ask of you. I have this Time correspondent in Rome reporting on the upcoming Council. If he could have a few words with John XXIII..."

So, here I am in mid-August 1962, chatting with pope's secretary Loris Capovilla at the pope's summer residence, Castel Gondolfo. All of a sudden here comes John XXIII bouncing up the marble hallway. "Why," he says, arms outstretched, "what a wonderful surprise!" Of course, it wasn't a surprise at all. It was all prearranged, arranged that way so the pope wouldn't be breaking tradition.

More than that. I thought I might have a few mostly chatty minutes with the pope, and then make my move to leave. But no. The pope grabbed my elbow and said he had some things he wanted to tell me. He was at last ready to tell the world (and he chose to do it through Time magazine) that he did not intend his Council to be a strictly Churchy event, but a worldly event designed to bring people together, people of all faiths, even the so-called Godless Communists.

His predecessors, Pius XI and Pius XII had mounted crusades against Communism. As an historian, Papa Roncalli knew what a disaster the Crusades had been. Now, he said that, in a world that was armed with megaton nuclear warheads, the time had come to say, "No more crusades." In fact, he didn't want the Council to launch condemnations of any anything or anyone.

Time magazine's foreign editor Henry Grunwald didn't want to believe my report, but what could he do? This Rome correspondent had talked with the pope and he hadn't. So Time ran with my reporting, on this NO MORE CRUSADES story, and on a good many other initiatives the pope was starting to make -- encouraging a visit from Chairman Khrushchev's daughter and son-in-law, which led to the release from prison of the Czech Archbishop Slipij and Hungary's Cardinal Mindzenty, urging Cardinal Bea to get representatives from the Russian Orthodox Church to come be observers at his Council.

Grunwald had to admit: "We've got to watch this Roncalli pope. What's this word *aggiornamento*? What is that all about?"

I had to admit: this was a pretty bold word for the pope to use, in *Roma aeterna*, where nothing ever changed. How do you bring a Church that never changes “up to date?” The top cardinal in Rome, Alfredo Ottaviani, the pro-prefect of the Holy Office of the Inquisition, could not conceive of any of the changes that the word *aggiornamento* implied, and I soon found out from theologians like Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, and Edward Schillebeckx, and Archbishop Denis Hurley that Ottaviani was doing almost everything he could to put roadblocks in the way of Council’s major change-projects. And why wouldn’t he? His coat of arms said it all: *Semper Idem*. Always the same.

Late in the fourth session of the Council, after John was long dead, the Council Fathers remembered that Pope John had wanted to put the kibosh on a number of imagined –isms, all of them abstractions. When they were asked to approve a condemnation of eroticism, one Council Father pointed out: *In se, eros habet aliquid boni*. “In itself, there is something good about eros.” He urged his colleagues not to condemn erotic love, and they agreed with him overwhelmingly.

This was a small but significant example of the humanity (and the common sense) that prevailed among 2,500 bishops and their theological advisers when they were taken out of their over-privileged, over-protected mansions and made to fend for themselves in a city suddenly over-populated by bishops. In Manhattan, Cardinal Spellman moved in a limo. In Rome, he’d walk seven blocks over to my office from his digs at the Grand Hotel to bring me a Council document that he thought I ought to see. Cardinal Spellman and the other bishops were not only allowed to be themselves. They soon realized they were being encouraged to exercise something we Americans had always prized: free speech.

My media colleagues and I began to realize that when we found ways of cutting through the Council’s secrecy. We would gather shortly after noon every day, and scan that black and purple waterfall of bishops tumbling down the steps of St. Peter’s, then pick off our informants who had been inside. They, in turn, would tell us who had made the most rousing speeches. Then we would scatter around the city, persuade the rousing speechmakers to give us copies of their talks, and share them among ourselves so we could file our stories to New York, or London, or Paris, or Stockholm. (Yes, one of our press colleagues was a slim, thoughtful Swedish woman named Gunnell Valquist, now a member of the Nobel Prize Committee.)

Father Tucci gave us another way of breaking through the Council secrecy. He asked me to go to the American bishops and suggest they sponsor a daily press briefing for the English-speaking media. I went to the U.S. bishops and presented Fr. Tucci’s plan. Within a few days, something called “The American Bishops’ Press Panel” was holding a news conference every afternoon at two-thirty in the basement of the U.S.O. offices on the Via della Conciliazione. From this panel, the English-speaking reporters were able to get all the explanations they needed to make the Council’s first debate on the reform of the Church’s liturgy understandable to their readers. Under the guidance of Bishop (later Cardinal) John J. Wright of Pittsburgh, and others on the panel, we began to see that the Council’s discussions about simplifying the Mass and allowing it to be celebrated in the language of the people bore on the entire mission of the Church. Would the Church remain locked in its old forms, or become incarnate in all the world’s cultures? The Council Fathers soon gave us their surprising answer to that question. First vote on the question, would the Mass remain in Latin, the language of the elite, or in the vernacular, the language of the people? They voted 2200 to 200 in favor of the language of the people.

The panelists, moreover, were often funny, always entertaining, and soon other bishops, theologians, Protestant observers, even interested tourists, started filling up in the basement hall to catch this great daily show. The U.S.O. soon became S.R.O.

The Council, as you know, was closed to the press, so I had to find other ways to get the word out. One day, early in the first session, I arranged to meet one of the English Jesuits, T.D. Roberts, the retired archbishop of Bombay, and I ended up bringing him home for dinner. He stayed for two years. He was the archbishop who came to dinner. He said Mass in English every evening on our dining room table, with me and my now deceased wife Susan, and our two-year-old Polly sitting on her lap. In effect, he became my own Council Father-In-Residence. When he came home from the Council every day, he brought home the day's documents, all stamped **SUB SECRETO**, in Latin, of course, and handed them over to me.

And he brought us something else: an ever-increasing crowd of bishops from around the world who came to see Archbishop Roberts at our place, and to enjoy some Time Inc. hospitality (lots of food and drink at sit-down dinners at a table for eight). When three uninvited guests showed up one Sunday night, we improvised and set up a buffet supper instead. A light! Why not a buffet supper every night, and the more the merrier? Soon my wife and I were hosting buffet suppers every Sunday night for sixty or more bishops and separated brethren and Jewish observers and the company of many a Council theologian. Hans Kung, then 34, was invariably the last guy to leave the party, drinking Rusty Nails until well past midnight with me and a few others, like Gregory Baum, the Augustinian ecumenist from Canada who was working with Cardinal Bea's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and John Courtney Murray, the American Jesuit who was famous enough before the Council to make the cover of Time magazine.

After dinner, and after Archbishop Paul Hallinan of Atlanta had finished playing our piano and leading a group in the singing of Irish songs, my theologians and my bishops would often put their heads together and draft some speeches for the coming week. Even some of the separated brethren at those parties were asked for their input.

Our household on Monte Verde Vecchio became the center of the Council's change party.

My *Time* magazine reports were now being read by six million subscribers every week. (Many of the Council Fathers were also seen passing along copies of *Time* in that makeshift stadium inside St. Peter's basilica every Tuesday morning). People were reading my reports because I was also telling them about a pope who was making news by sitting back in his papal apartment watching on closed circuit TV (and applauding) the bishops finding their own voice.

Up to now, the bishops had been part of the **ecclesia docens**, the teaching Church, while the rest of us were the **ecclesia discens**, the learning Church. Here at the Council, the bishops all became part of the learning Church. Hobnobbing with theologians like Congar, Danielou, Chenu, Schillebeckx, Hans Kung, and John Courtney Murray, they began to start speaking of the Church in new ways, promising to create a new kind of Church, a people's Church, not a Church that was making itself less and less relevant with its excessive clericalism, juridicism and triumphalism. Some of the best Council speeches were now calling for a Church that believed God was at work in all men and women, in individuals as well as in humankind as a whole, a Church that wanted us to be all that we could be—in this life as well as in the next.

Soon, Francis Xavier Rynne Murphy was a fixture during these Sunday nights at the Kaiser's. He got many a Council story there for his New Yorker pieces. I did not mind his piggy-backing on my guests, because we were co-conspirators in the work of telling the Council story to the world—in the secular press, not the Catholic press, which was always afraid to print anything if it did not emanate from official Vatican sources. I was not afraid to report anything I could learn, often warning my editors in New York that, sometimes, they would have to quote someone “not for attribution” to protect him from reprisals inside the Vatican. Which led the prize-winner in a limerick contest on the first session of the Council sponsored by England's Catholic Herald to come up with this:

There once was a New Yorker named Rynne
Whose reports when in doubt he kept thin.
But Bob Kaiser of Time
thought conjecture no crime
And every doubt Rynne left out he put in.

TD Roberts not only brought me the Council's secret documents. He also brought home a good many stories. To understand the joke, you have to recall that the Council of Trent, which had frozen the Church into the juridical Church that Pope John was trying to change was several hundred miles away in the Italian Alps. One of Archbishop Roberts's best stories recounted the tale of Cardinal Ottaviani, who was so miffed when they cut off his microphone during an overlong speech one day that he stayed away from the Council for two weeks. What had happened? Well, Archbishop Robert came home with this story: "The morning after Cardinal Ottaviani's rebuff, his limo driver didn't show up. So he hailed a passing taxi and said to the driver, *Al concilio*, "To the Council." And the cab driver took him to Trent.

This is the fun part of what I mean when I frame my talk as "the human side of Vatican II." For me, there was no other side than the human side. As the Council opened, I sought out America's most famed Catholic preacher, Bishop Fulton Sheen (he was staying at the Excelsior, the most pricey hotel on the Via Veneto), to ask him about his hopes for the Council. He turned down my request by denying the very humanity of the Council itself. "It will be all about the Holy Spirit," he said. "He will tell us what to say and do." Bishop Sheen didn't tell me how I should go about interviewing the Holy Spirit.

But I went on to interview everyone else I could find, often in 18-hour-days, and, much to my surprise, I was getting stories about the Council into the magazine almost every week. And then at the end of the Council's first session, the Macmillan Publishing Company in the U.S. and Tom Burns of Burns, Oates and Washburn asked me to do a book on that first session of the Council. Time's editors gave me six weeks off to do it. I went off to the Rome headquarters of the Society of the Divine Word and wrote pretty much around the clock (with a couple hours home for lunch every day). The Observer serialized the book, installments on Page One every Sunday for four Sundays in a row in August 1963. And when the book came out, first in London and Dublin, it shot to number one on the best seller list.

In the book, I used an extended metaphor, imagining the Church as the barque of Peter, a boat that had been in port for too many centuries, its bottom so encrusted with barnacles that it couldn't even sail. Now, by calling a Council, I said that Pope John had figuratively launched that vessel out on to the seas of the world.

Pope Paul VI liked the image so much that he got Msgr. Luigi Ligutti, one of his American monsignor friends who lived in Rome, to ask me for permission to have my book translated into Italian and published for the benefit of the Italian bishops who didn't understand what the Council was about.

The barque of Peter now launched out on to the seas of the world. The image underlined what was different about Vatican II. For all the other councils of history (20 of them) the Church turned inward on itself. This council was turned out to the world.

Not everyone understood that right away. Pope John's Curia didn't get it--they may have never gotten it. The most curious among you might want to read Yves Congar's *Journal of the Council*, a daily diary of his exhaustive and exhausting work behind the scenes, battling with Cardinal Ottaviani and his chief aide, the Dutch Jesuit Sebastian Tromp. To get ready for the Council, they were crafting a

compendium of the faith as enunciated by all the papal encyclicals written since Pius the Ninth, doing everything they could to make Vatican II into another Council of Trent.

"This is all wrong," Congar wrote. "This is papalist nonsense. It is making the Council into a textbook manual that will not help bring about the *aggiornamento* Pope John XXIII is calling for--a recreation of what the faith was in its primitive beginnings. To rediscover the beauty of that faith, we have to take a deeper look at Sacred Scripture, and study the Fathers of the Church. And only then will the Council speak to the world in language it can understand."

Reading Congar's accounts now, I realize my reports in Time and my book on the first session reflected only dimly what a fierce battle was going on, The Observer had a poster for my series that appeared in all the tube stations. It screamed out the headline THE PLOT TO THWART POPE JOHN. Read Congar and you will see that headline was an understatement.

Why am I telling you these stories? Because I want you to be aware during the coming year of efforts to dumb the Council down, of efforts to convince you that the Council didn't change the Church very much. I think it did, and after you recall what kind of Church we lived in before Vatican II, I think you will agree with me, and rejoice with me and be glad for what the Council did do, irreversibly, I hope.

The Council changed the way we thought about God, about ourselves, about our spouses, our Protestant cousins, Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems and Jews, even the way we thought about the Russians. When a handful of bishops kept pushing for conciliar condemnation of Communism, John XXIII kept insisting that that kind of talk would only blow up the world. Pope John and his Council made some preliminary moves that helped end the Cold War. For this, the editors of Time made John XXIII the Man of the Year.

The Jews? The Council reversed the Church's long-standing anti-Semitism. Until the Council, Catholics believed that, if Jews didn't convert to Catholicism, there was something wrong with them. The Council Fathers took another look at that idea and decided that Jews were still living their ancient covenant with God. We decided there was nothing wrong with the Jews; They became our brothers and sisters.

Before the Council, we thought we were miserable sinners when we were being nothing but human. After the Council, we had a new view of ourselves. We learned to put a greater importance on finding and following Jesus as "the way" (as opposed to what we said in the Creed. It didn't matter so much what we said. What mattered was what we did: helping to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and find shelter for the homeless. That's what made us followers of Jesus.

Before the Council, we were told we were excommunicated if we set foot in a Protestant Church. After the Council (where Protestant observers were welcomed, given seats of honor, and spoken of no longer as Protestants, but as "separated brethren"), we stopped fighting the Methodists and the Presbyterians and conspired with them in the fight for justice and peace and marched with them to Selma.

Before the Council, we thought only Protestants read the Bible. After the Council, we've seen a new Catholic appreciation of the Scriptures; they've been given a more prominent place at Mass; and in many parishes, we have groups gathering every week for Bible study.

Before the Council, we took pride in knowing that we were the only people on earth who could expect salvation, according to the

centuries-long mantra, "There is no salvation outside the Church." After the Council, we began to see there was something good and something great in all religions. And we didn't think we had all the answers. After Vatican II, we started thinking of ourselves not as "the one, true Church." We were "a pilgrim people." It was a phrase that summoned up an image of a band of humble travelers on a journey who, though we are subject to rain and snow and high wind and hurricane, to thirst and starvation and pestilence and disease and attack by leopards and locusts, keep on plodding ahead with a hope and a prayer that we will someone reach our destination. The image was calculated to counter an old self-concept that hadn't stood up to scrutiny -- of a triumphal Church that had all the answers, lording it over humankind.

Before the Council, we identified "salvation" as "getting to heaven." After the Council, we knew that we had a duty to bring justice and peace to the world in our own contemporary society, understanding in a new way the words that Jesus gave us when he taught us to pray, "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." By the end, among the most influential figures at the Council, we encountered two humble souls, one a woman, Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, who wasn't allowed to speak to the assembled bishops at Vatican II (no woman was), and a bird-like figure, Dom Helder Camara, the archbishop of Recife, in Brazil. Both of them went around Rome telling individual bishops and those who were putting together the Council's crowning document, *Gaudium et Spes*: please don't forget the poor.

The Council did not forget the poor, and the statement out of Rome in October 2011 allying the Church with the world's have-nots only proves that even the current powers-that-be in the Church (still so unaccountable in so many other ways) get it. I will quote *Gaudium et Spes*:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.

Before the Council, we were sin-obsessed. It was even a sin to eat a hamburger on Friday night after the game. After the Council, we had a new sense of sin. We didn't hurt God when we sinned. We sinned when we hurt somebody else. Or ourselves. After the Council, we had a new holy hopeful view of ourselves, redefining holiness as the famous Trappist monk Thomas Merton did: to be holy is to be human.

Before the Council, we were told we were condemned to hell if we made love to our spouses without at the same time making babies. After the Council, we knew we had a duty (and the God-approved pleasure) to make love even if we could not afford to have another baby.

Before the Council, we thought God spoke directly to the pope and that he passed the word down the ecclesiastical pyramid to the bishops, then to the priests, then the nuns, and, properly filtered, to us. After the Council, we learned a new geometry. The Church wasn't a pyramid. It was more like a circle, where we are all encouraged to have a voice. We are the Church. We have a right and a duty to speak out about the kind of Church we want.

Please note that most of these changes did not come about because the Fathers of Vatican II revamped what we had already professed believing in the Apostles Creed. They didn't change our faith, they didn't come up with a new understanding of God. Still one God, two natures, three

persons. Only in this sense can I agree with Pope Benedict XVI when he keeps insisting on something he calls "the hermeneutic of continuity."

But I have to differ with him when he says the Council didn't come up with anything new. No, no new dogmas. (And thank God for that. The last thing modern, thinking Catholics want are dogmas of any kind. "Dogma" and "dogmatic" are words that we do not much resonate with. When I think of dogma, I think of the hundreds of anathemas laid down by the Council of Trent: "believe these dogmatic propositions or be damned.")

When Jesus addressed the multitude on that hillside overlooking the lake, he did not enlighten their minds by reading them the Ten Commandments. He enkindled their hearts by telling what would make them happy.

The Council Fathers did not follow the example of Trent. They followed the example of Jesus. They did not anathematize anyone or anything. They set a new style of thinking about ourselves as followers of the guy who told us how we could have life and have it more abundantly.

We make a mistake if we comb through the sixteen documents of Vatican II and hope to find explicit warrants for the Church we want to see take shape in the future. We can only capture the real, revolutionary meaning of the Council by looking at the new kind of language that permeated all those documents. It was not the kind of legalistic language Cardinal Ottaviani loved. The American Jesuit John W. O'Malley, author of the most authoritative work on the Council, *What Happened at Vatican II*, says the Council's message was hidden in plain sight. Father O'Malley describes it by contrasting the old language with the old:

...at stake were almost two different visions of Catholicism: from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from definition to mystery, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to service, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from rivalry to partnership, from suspicion to trust, from static to ongoing, from passive acceptance to active engagement, from fault finding to appreciation, from prescriptive to principled, from behavior modification to inner appropriation.

Mere words? I do not think so. They underline my thesis—that the Council helped us all be more real, more human and more loving. The Council helped us realize that the world was a good place. It was good because God made it, and he made it because he loved us and loved the world, too. As should we.