



# Council 50 : Towards a Church, Inspired by the Gospel, for the world

Postal address : c/o EN-RE 68 rue de Babylone 75007 Paris France

Web site: <http://www.council50.org>

Contact : [francois.becker@council50.org](mailto:francois.becker@council50.org)

## Why the Council 50 project and why now?

A Few days before the end of the Council Vatican II, on November 16th, 1965, approximately 40 conciliar fathers led by Helder Camara met in the catacomb Domitilla to sign the Pact of the Catacombs. With this pact, they made a commitment to remedy "the deficiencies of their life of poverty according to the Gospel", underlining an "option for the poor", that was in line with the spirit of the Council. But this pact fast fell into oblivion.

In spite of numerous advances and practices<sup>1</sup> stemming from the Council which revitalized the Church and gave some breath to the Christians to put into practice the appeals of Jesus, numerous deficiencies<sup>2</sup> are regrettably always on the agenda fifty years after Pope Paul VI brought to an end the work of the Council:

*the short views, the lack of perspicacity in front of the requirements of the time and of discernment towards the currents which carry the world of tomorrow, the pusillanimity in front of the future and its risks, the collusions with the powerful of this world, the breathlessness of the Spirit by the legal and the administrative attitude, ... the too negative character of the fight against the error, the slowness to recognize the action of the Spirit, "her" Spirit, on the paths of the profane history and not only in the sanctuary of its clean life"*

Other deficiencies appeared<sup>3</sup> and key concepts that the Council had affirmed were put in doubt or at least not developed:

*The attention for the "signs of the time", that for Pope John XXIII meant a positive and fatherly attention to the changes taking place in the world, became often a negative attitude to the world. The role of lay people in the Church was emphasized by the Council, with its reference to the People of God was soon confined and restricted; the general sacerdotal dignity of Christians was in fact denied, and the base communities that started to practice it were marginalized and excluded.*

*The freedom of religion and the primacy of personal conscience were affirmed as central elements of the Christian view of the world, but were often contradicted by the practical behaviour of the Church. The autonomy of the local churches at first encouraged, was subsequently limited and contradicted by the growing centralisation of power in the offices of the Curia, and by the media role of the Pope himself. The establishment of the Synod of the bishops was not followed by the expected devolution of powers.*

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<sup>1</sup> The liturgical reform was widespread; it revived and infused new significance to the celebration and to the Eucharist. But the Pope and a part of the hierarchy were afraid by the change that was taking place in the church. Pope Paul expressed this attitude in his speech of the 29 of June 1972, when he said that "through some crevices, the smoke of the devil has entered the Church".

<sup>2</sup> Charles Muller et Herbert Vorgrimler, « Karl Rahner » Fleurus 1965

<sup>3</sup> For example: almost non-existent collegiality, the people silenced, omnipresent Curia and increasing clericalism, blockings on the necessary evolution of the organization of ministries; refusal to put into practice the equality of rights and responsibilities of men and women at every level of responsibility and service. Claim to be the only ones to detain the "truth" and the way of expressing it, almost non-existence of the intra-Church dialogue, what leaves so aside a big part of the Catholic people. Less and less audible Church because of its particular appreciation of the stakes in the contemporary world (family, sex and sexuality, scientific and theological research)

*The rejection of war – at the heart of the encyclical Pacem in terris that Pope John XXIII issued during the first phases of the Council – was somewhat softened. The option for the poor, and its consequences for political responsibilities, was contradicted by the behaviour of the hierarchy and the condemnation of the theological development in this direction, as for the Theology of liberation. The research of new pastoral solutions and choices, such as the end of the obligation of celibacy of the clergy, and the role of the women in the Church was stopped.*

Hence, although the Council renewed the Catholic Church, the stride for expressing the Gospel message in a way that the contemporary men and women can understand was stopped.

Therefore, startled by this situation, number of communities, groups, associations, parishes for 50 years took initiatives, lived experiences, thought about reforms to undertake in the spirit of the Council Vatican II and of the Gospel to remedy the deficiencies of the Church and transform into "delight" the "disenchantment" of a bigger and bigger number of people who turn away from the Church, and worst, from the Jesus. But this part of the Church is too often ignored, hidden, and even condemned.

The election of Pope Francis and the spirit he gave in the early days to his pontificate, his renewed attention to the Synod, his attitudes, calls, gestures aroused great hope and encouraged this part of the Church

- to support him in his efforts to turn the Church from a dogmatic attitude to a pastoral and evangelic approach, hoping that the hierarchy will also contribute to this change;
- to respond to his exhortations, in particular that in "*Evangelii Gaudium*"<sup>4</sup>, recommending to the bishops "in certain circumstances to walk behind the people because the herd possesses itself an intuition to find new paths ".

It is in this spirit that, to be faithful to the message of Vatican II and to the Gospel, Council 50 was launched on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the close of the Council Vatican II, and of the Pact of Catacombs,

- to revivify the disappointed hopes, to relight the flame of the Council Vatican II, to renew the impetus towards the future which it introduced, and to answer its recommendations<sup>5</sup> inviting the laymen " to show their feelings as regards the good of the Church ".
- to make visible, "to bring out of catacombs " this part too often hidden and unknown of the Church, and to give it, as well as to the whole "people of God", the opportunity
  - to inform the pope as did St Francis of Assisi in his time, and spread to the Church, their experiences, their actions and reflections made in the spirit of Vatican II, demonstrating the power of the Gospel to bring liberation to the oppressed, peace and justice in the world;
  - to express, share and discuss their views on the future of our Church and their proposals to renew it, so that it can inspire the world in the spirit of Jesus in his way of life

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<sup>4</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* 31 :At yet other times, the bishop will have to walk after the people, helping those who lag behind and – above all – allowing the flock to strike out on new paths.

<sup>5</sup> *Lumen Gentium* IV, 37: The laity should openly reveal to their spiritual shepherds their needs and desires with that freedom and confidence which is fitting for children of God and brothers in Christ. They are, by reason of the knowledge, competence or outstanding ability which they may enjoy, permitted and sometimes even obliged to express their opinion on those things which concern the good of the Church