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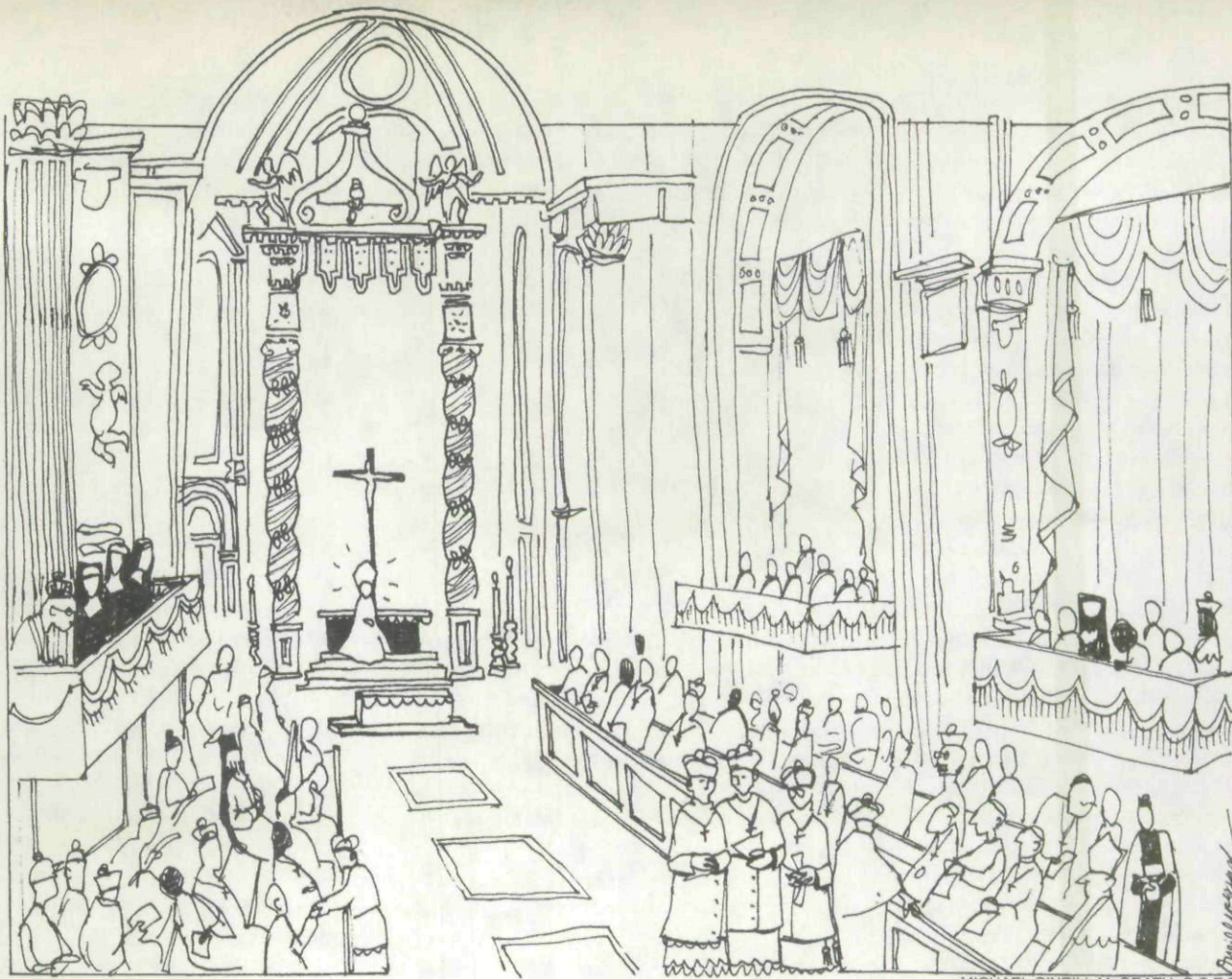


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MICHAEL O'NEILL McGRATH, O.S.F.S.

The Unfinished Agenda of Vatican II

By THOMAS P. RAUSCH

THIRTY YEARS AGO THIS DECEMBER, the Second Vatican Council came to an end. Did the publication of its decrees signify the completion of the renewal of the church that the council represented, or did those documents mark only the beginning of a process that has not yet been completed? This question is still being debated.

Some Catholics feel that the church has gone too far too fast, accommodating itself to the spirit of the times rather than challenging the times with its timeless truth. Other Catholics are equally unhappy for the opposite reason. They feel that the church has not moved fast enough and has failed to carry out the reforms called for by the council documents.

But for the vast majority of Catholics throughout the world, Vatican II belongs now to history, and the changes

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it introduced into Catholic life are taken for granted. Those under 30 have known no other church. In more technical language, the council has been "received" by the church. The Jesuit historian, John O'Malley, has described it as one of the three "great reformations" in the life of the church. The conciliar documents established the parameters for renewal; they remain a normative expression of the self-understanding of the Catholic Church as it approaches the third millennium.

But the currents of renewal that preceded the council, as well as new ones the council unleashed, continue to reshape Catholicism. In a real sense, the issues raised by these currents constitute the council's unfinished agenda. I would like here to consider some of those issues, among them liturgical renewal, the question of authority, women in the church, the ecumenical movement and interreligious dialogue. These issues will continue to transform the Catholic experience well into the next century.

Liturgical Renewal.

One of the primary goals of the liturgical movement from its beginning has been the encouragement of a "full,

conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations" by the faithful. The Second Vatican Council moved a considerable way toward this goal by making possible the use of vernacular languages in the liturgy and by opening to lay men and women a number of liturgical roles previously reserved to clerics.

In the years following the council Catholics experienced a succession of changes designed to reduce the physical and psychic distance between priest and people and to shift attention away from an overemphasis on the consecration and back to the eucharistic celebration of the gathered community. But beyond these relatively minor changes, liturgical scholarship has effected a shift in the way liturgy itself is understood. Especially significant has been the emphasis in recent liturgical theology on the liturgical assembly as the real celebrant of the liturgy. The liturgical language of the first millennium indicates that it is the entire assembly that celebrates the Eucharist, as do recent Roman documents, such as the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (1970) and the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (No. 1140). From this

perspective, the priest is more appropriately referred to as presider, rather than celebrant. But putting theology into practice is not always easy. The challenge still remains to find appropriate ways to move from what liturgical composer Bob Hurd calls "priest-centered liturgies with congregations" to "assembly-centered liturgies with presiders," so that the assembly's role in the celebration might be more clearly expressed.

The recovery of the concept of the liturgical assembly has also meant a declericalization of the liturgy. This has created not just new liturgical roles for lay men and women, but new expectations as well. Catholics today, especially young Catholics, expect to be able to take an active part in the liturgy. They are eager to serve as lectors and eucharistic ministers, as planners, music ministers and, in some cases, as preachers at non-eucharistic liturgies and presiders at Communion services in the absence of a priest.

Today these lay men and women resent being told that they are only "special" ministers of the Eucharist and hence that they cannot distribute the bread or present the cup for Communion at large liturgies when there are enough concelebrating priests. They do not understand why unordained men can be installed into the ministries of acolyte and lector, but women cannot. Some ask why qualified lay men and women could not on occasion give

the homily at the Eucharist, a role canon law reserves for the ordained (Canon 767.1). And many argue that given the shortage of priests, pastoral leaders in local communities should be ordained to function as priests in the context of their communities.

Ministerial demographics will have much to do with bringing about a change. According to the sociologist Richard Schoenherr, the number of active diocesan priests

in the United States stood at 35,000 in 1966, but will fall to about 21,000 by the year 2005. Meanwhile, the Catholic population of the country will increase in this same period from 45 million to at least 75 million. While the number of priests relative to total Catholic population continues to decrease, the number of lay men and women preparing for ministry is increasing dramatically. A 1992-93 study funded by the Lilly Foundation found that there are significantly more men and especially women in graduate programs in theology and ministry in Catholic institutions today than there are candidates for the priesthood. This "virtual revolution in how ministry functions in the Catholic Church in the United States"

means that the church's institutional culture will be quite different in the future. Certainly as more lay men and women take on full time ministerial roles within the church there will continue to be tensions over restricting the roles lay ministers can fulfill at the Eucharist as well over the broader question of who can be ordained.

A final liturgical question calls for a rethinking of the theology of the permanent diaconate to give better expression to the deacon's role in the charitable ministries of the church.

The Question of Authority.

Two events in recent Catholic history have played an enormous role in moving Catholics from a timeless, abstract, dogmatic and clerical way of thinking to one that is much more historically aware. One was the church's acceptance of modern biblical criticism. The other is the increasing laicization of Catholic theology in the years since the council.

Prior to the council, most Catholic theology was done in seminaries by priests. But as the council came to an end, Catholic graduate schools began admitting lay men and women into their doctoral programs. In recognition of this, the Catholic Theological Society of America, previously an association of seminary professors for the most

The currents of renewal unleashed by the council have not yet run their course. Indeed, they seem to have outdistanced the ability of the church's leaders to channel or control them.

part, began admitting lay members in 1964. As these men and women received their degrees and began moving into faculty positions, the locus of theological reflection began to shift from the seminaries to the universities and graduate schools. Theology came to be done more and more not by clerics but by lay men and women.

These developments in the way that Catholic theology is done have resulted in a number of significant changes. First, Catholic theology is far more independent than in the days when it was done almost exclusively by priests and religious. This new independence lies behind the recent efforts of the Vatican to bring Catholic theologians under the juridical control of the local bishop, particularly through the insistence that they should receive a canonical mandate to teach.

Second, many Catholics today are theologically much better educated than they were in the past, when, for the most part, only priests and religious had the benefit of a theological education. They are aware of the diverse nature of the biblical sources and the different historical contexts out of which Catholic doctrine has developed, so they are far more ready to recognize development and change. This, in turn, has changed the ways in which they understand church doctrine and church authority. They appreciate the importance of a strong teaching magisterium, but at the same time they are aware that the magisterium is an office within the church, not an independent authority placed above it.

The question of how authority is exercised in the church will continue to be a matter of controversy well into the next century. There are many issues—among them, the shortage of priests, the place of women in the church, divorce and remarriage and the church's sexual morality—that the church needs to face honestly today. These issues have to be discussed openly. If the church is not a democracy, neither is it an absolute monarchy. It is not simply an institutional structure, but a living organism, a genuine community of lay and ordained members. How can the church better express the shared responsibility for its life that its interdependent nature indicates? There are a number of steps that could be taken—for example, providing for some participation of clergy and laity in the church's decision-making structures or allowing local churches to present to Rome several candidates for the office of bishop. Steps such as these would give recognition to the dialectical relation that ought to exist between office and charism, without changing the fundamental structure of the church.

Women in the Church.

Perhaps the most radical challenge to the status quo in the church since the council comes from the questions being asked today by so many women. In spite of the advances women have made in recent years in secular society, many Catholic women feel like second-class citizens in a church that maintains that it is not able to admit them to its ordained ministry and thus to the ranks of its

official leaders and decision-makers. Ecclesiastical pronouncements notwithstanding, many women feel that their baptism is not taken seriously, that the overcoming of divisions on the basis of race, social status or sex that baptism is said to bring about (Gal. 3:28) has not yet been recognized by the official church. An increasing number of women are being alienated from the church. What is the women's movement asking of the church today? That it take women's experience seriously, that it acknowledge that its sacred texts are conditioned by an androcentric or patriarchal culture, that it speak more inclusively and that it provide for a more inclusive ministry.

Women today are insisting that truth comes from experience and not from authority only, and they want their experience to be taken seriously. First, what women experience is very often different from what men experience. They are very much aware that many women throughout the world are denied their full rights, that they work two thirds of the world's working hours, represent two thirds of the world's illiterate people and are often physically abused or sexually exploited. Some of these things they have experienced themselves in very personal ways. They know there are things that they cannot do, not because they are limited by talent or biology, but because of social roles determined solely on the basis of gender.

Second, as feminist theologians and psychologists like Carol Gilligan of Harvard argue, the ways women experience themselves and the world is different from men's ways. These differences are rooted in the different ways boys and girls develop their sense of identity from their earliest years. Men tend to experience themselves as separate or distinct from other persons and things in the world, while women tend to experience themselves and the world in terms of relationships. Marga Bührig, a former president of the World Council of Churches, gives a fine example of this. She tells of a sermon she heard, in which the preacher, a male, used as an example the Golden Gate Bridge, comparing the two great commandments to the two great towers from which the bridge was suspended. He saw the bridge in terms of its structure. But she saw it very differently. She saw its beauty, that it is to be crossed, that it links two separated shores. She saw it in terms of relationships.

At least one implication of the different ways that men and women experience the world is that the church should find some more adequate way to include both perspectives, particularly in the way it arrives at decisions and formulates its teachings.

Perhaps the most radical challenge to contemporary Christianity comes from feminist theologians using a feminist theory of interpretation to deconstruct the New Testament and reinterpret the message of Jesus. Not all their efforts will be acceptable to the majority of Christians. Some move beyond the limits of orthodoxy or so radically reinterpret Scripture that its reconstructed meaning is accessible only to the specialist. But the extremes of the movement should not blind us to the genuine insights of feminist scholarship.

Feminist biblical scholars are asking that we approach the biblical text with an awareness that it is conditioned, not just historically, but also by the androcentric or patriarchal culture out of which it comes. That is to say, the biblical texts tend to reflect male interests, for they were written by men, translated by men and in the subsequent tradition interpreted and commented upon by men. Feminist critics therefore ask that we come to the Bible with a critical approach to the text that recognizes its patriarchal bias and seeks to recover the often suppressed stories of women in primitive Christian history.

The question of gender-inclusive language is a difficult one. How do we speak of ourselves as a community when we pray; how do we name God? Many Christians today, both men and women, are sensitive to the fact that the way we use language does not seem to include women specifically. Our language uses the generic noun "man" to refer to both men and women. God is described in masculine terms and addressed as father, even though we understand that God is neither masculine nor feminine. When our liturgical language continues to speak as though God were male or does not make the effort to include women, many object that it is "sexist" or non-inclusive.

The fact that the English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, though first prepared in an inclusive-language version, was published, after a two-year delay, in traditional non-inclusive language was deeply offensive to many Catholics, both women and men. It suggests that the official church was not willing to take even this small step to accommodate the concerns of so many of its women.

The exclusion of women from ordination remains a difficult and painful issue. Pope John Paul II sought to bring closure to this issue in his declaration, "Ordinatio Sacerdotalis" (1994), declaring "that the Church has no authority to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful." But the discussion has not ended. It is difficult to say with certainty what the church might eventually do on any given question. One thing is certain. The women's movement has already changed the church and will continue to do so in the years ahead.

Ecumenism.

One of the most significant accomplishments of the ecumenical movement is the broad consensus that has

been reached on many issues that have divided the churches since the 16th century: the doctrine of justification, the nature of the Eucharist, the theology and structure of the ordained ministry, the exercise of authority, episcopacy, even the question of papal primacy. A great deal of progress has been made over the years in the agreements worked out between church representatives and theologians, but these agreements have not yet been officially received by the sponsoring churches themselves.

But if considerable agreement has been reached on many of these historically divisive issues, the latter part of the 20th century has seen new divisions appearing that make the churches seem as far apart as ever. The foremost among these have to do with ethical questions and the place of women in the church.

The fact that the churches generally have not explored their differences on ethical questions may indicate that they are at least implicitly aware of the often considerable distance between them in this area. Furthermore, they are often divided as to how specific issues should be identified. For example, is abortion to be considered a human life issue

or a women's rights issue? There are considerable differences regarding such topics as divorce and remarriage, abortion, birth control, sex outside of marriage, homosexual relations, new reproductive technologies, surrogate parenthood and sterilization.

The ordination of women, taken for granted in many churches today, presents perhaps the most significant obstacle to the reconciliation of the churches and to the sacramental sharing that should follow it. Those churches that have ordained women are not about to reverse decisions made after considerable theological reflection, prayer and discernment. The Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches remain opposed to the ordination of women on the basis of what they consider to be the ancient tradition of the church. Even if the churches officially accept the consensus emerging through the dialogue, the question remains, how can churches that cannot accept the ordination of women enter into eucharistic fellowship with those that do? The situation is at an impasse.

If there are new challenges today to the reconciliation of churches, it is also evident that a number of directions for the future are emerging from the more than 30 years of encounter and dialogue. The apparent lack of movement today may indicate that the initial enthusiasm following the council has given way to a more sober and realistic

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recognition that the churches need time to assess and assimilate the considerable progress that has been made, as well as the positive steps towards renewal and the recovery of the tradition that each of them will be called upon to make.

The mainline Protestant churches are being challenged by the ecumenical dialogue to a renewal of their structures of ministry and authority. The World Council of Churches' document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), suggests that the recovery of the sign of communion with the ancient church through ordination in the historic episcopal succession may be necessary. Other, later bilateral agreements such as the Catholic-Lutheran report, "Facing Unity" (1985) and the Anglican-Lutheran "Niagara Report" (1988), call for a joint exercise of the episcopal office, including joint ordinations, which will lead to a mutually recognized ministry.

The evangelical and Pentecostal churches are being called to a recovery of the liturgical and sacramental tradition of the ancient church, particularly the centrality of the Eucharist. They also need to find some way to give institutional expression to the universality and catholicity of the church.

The Catholic and Orthodox Churches are being called to reform the way in which authority is exercised, so that leadership and decision-making are exercised in a manner both truly collegial and inclusive of the laity. They will have to acknowledge the authenticity of ordained ministry in other churches, even if it lacks the sign of continuity with the ancient church through apostolic succession. They must be willing to accept a much greater diversity in theology, spirituality and ecclesial life and to recognize that the doctrinal inheritance of one communion need not be imposed on another. And they will ultimately have to come to terms with the ordination of women.

The Rev. Mark E. Chapman, a Lutheran pastor, observed in an article in *Ecumenical Trends* in 1994: "Only Rome has the traditional, ecclesiological and moral authority to work the reunion of the church." But it is frustrating that after so many years of dialogue and so much progress, "Rome cannot figure out a way to re-open the ancient aqueducts so that the waters of unity that spring from her font might again flow to her marooned and isolated daughters." Pastor Chapman may be right in suggesting that the reconciliation of churches must wait for some significant gesture from Rome.

Interreligious Dialogue.

The council's shortest document, the "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," may well turn out to be one of its most significant. For the first time, the Catholic Church acknowledged the presence of truth within the great world religions, mentioning specifically Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Thus the church has come a considerable way, moving from the traditional teaching that no one outside the church could be saved to a recognition that truth is

also reflected in the other great world religions and that those who cooperate with God's grace can be saved.

The council fathers did not explicitly raise the question of the salvific value of the other great religions, but that question has been increasingly discussed since the council. Certainly it is difficult to maintain that Christianity is the only way to salvation when it is the religion of only one third of the world's people. Is not Islam the ordinary way of salvation for the devout Muslim, or Buddhism for the devout Buddhist? Is either any less close to God than the devout Christian? Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., a specialist in ecclesiology who taught for many years at the Gregorian University in Rome, says that mainstream Catholic theology today holds that both non-Christian religions and secular realities (devoting oneself to transcendent values such as justice, peace, humanity) serve as mediations of salvation for non-Christians.

Pope John Paul II has gone further than any other pope in his appreciation of non-Christian religions, but not so far as to recognize them as salvific. He holds firmly to the absolute centrality of Christ. In his encyclical on missiology, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), he affirms: "Christ is the one savior of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God" (No. 5). Like Paul VI, he insists "that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation" (No. 55). But he also sees signs of the working of the Spirit in other religions.

Interreligious dialogue will continue to challenge the church, even if its importance is not always recognized by Christians in Western Europe and in North and South America. But in Asia, India and parts of Africa where Christians are not just a minority, but often a threatened minority, interreligious dialogue is a pressing and deeply felt need.

The Third Millennium.

The Catholic Church at the dawn of the third millennium is very different from what it was as the 20th century began. It has come through these last decades of turmoil and change better than many religious groups, thanks to the wisdom of Pope John XXIII, who called the church into a period of intensive self-examination and renewal. The Second Vatican Council was clearly a council about the church itself. It meant that the church was able to draw on its tradition, its scholarship and the vitality of its members in a conscious effort at renewal. It was not simply swept along by the winds of change.

But the currents of renewal unleashed by the council have not yet run their course. Indeed, they seem to have outdistanced the ability of the church's leaders to channel or control them. The church today is facing challenges as great as any in its history. Some of these are challenges to the inner life of the church, even to its nature as a eucharistic community; others concern the relation of the Catholic Church to the other Christian churches, to other religious faiths and to the world. The way the church responds to these challenges will determine its viability in the third millennium. ■

