



Barquilla de la Santa Maria

BULLETIN of the Catholic Record Society - Diocese of Columbus

Vol. XXXVII, No. 9

Sept. 21: St. Matthew the Apostle

September, 2012



Impressions of the First Session of Vatican II

by Rev. Charles P. Essman

The first of the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council opened on October 11 and closed on December 8, 1962. The world looked on in fascination, using newly developing technology, at the first ecumenical council held by the Church in nearly a century. It was not until 1999 that publication of the fifty-one volumes of the official acta of the Council was completed. The Council's decrees still have not been fully implemented. Nevertheless, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of its opening by Pope John XXIII, we present here some impressions of the first session, written by Father Charles P. Essman of this diocese. Father Essman, born in 1926 and ordained in 1951, was a student in Rome at the North American College from 1948 to 1952 and at the

Gregorian University from 1952 to 1954. He returned to Rome as a staff member at the NAC from 1959 to 1963. His interesting account, while brief, seems to accurately hit all the highlights of the book-length histories that are now available. It is not known for whom Father Essman wrote this account. The contest between "liberal" and "conservative" that he sees was a typical view of the time, which today is still being corrected to reflect, instead, an understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Being on the "fringe" of the Council has been fascinating. You can get the general outlines of what has been happening from the newspapers—even the *Osservatore!*—but the little "living" comments from the participants themselves have enlivened our table-

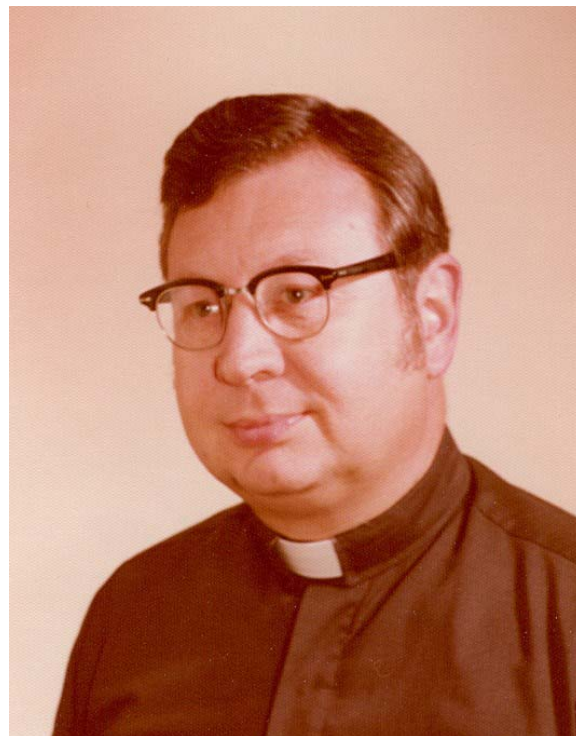
talk considerably these past two months. The notion of secrecy was very quickly interpreted to mean “you can tell anything that is said as long as you don’t say who said it.” And so if the General Congregation adjourns at 12:30, by 1:00 one knows most everything that went on that morning! This has given the reporters more and more liberty to use what they know—and often to make up things if they don’t know. So presuming you have been reading the papers, I shall jot down a few personal observations here at the beginning of the last week of the first session.

Before all else I would suggest you read Butler’s history of the first Vatican Council.¹ As I read it I am absolutely amazed how the stories of the two councils parallel each other so far. Only the names and a few issues would have to be changed to make the book into a report of this Council (e.g. the scriptural issue substituted for papal infallibility). Also for your background reading on the Council, I would say that *Time*, while very nasty in some of its barbs, has been very close to the truth in its articles; and for an idea of the in-fighting here on the eve of the Council, I trust you have read the famous “Letter from Rome” in the *New Yorker* (Oct. 20). If not, do so!

The Conciliar Fathers, though, have been more than pleased with one thing, the physical arrangements. The sight of all of them gathered in white cope and mitre to fill the nave of St. Peter’s for the opening was awe-inspiring—but for once the Italians have not just built for show, but have covered every practical angle and made St. Peter’s the ideal conciliar hall. Esthetically it is beautiful, materially it is well built, and the use of a perfect amplifying system and various IBM gadgets for vote counting, etc., has eliminated most of the complaints you would expect to hear at a convention with 2,000 delegates. Of course, the *coup de grace* was the installation, on either side of St. Peter’s, of modern toilet facilities and an adjoining snack bar. (I haven’t verified it, but they say that the toilet doors, instead of the traditional marking *libero* have *sede vacante*!) The bars have become the real hub of Council activity, most of the ideas being exchanged there in the

vernacular. At about 10:30 each morning the empty places in the nave make it obvious that the bars are crowded and it takes an exceptionally able speaker—or an important vote—to hold the “boys” in their places about that time!

Anyway, you saw the opening on telestar.² The first real business began a day or so later with the election of sixteen members for each of the ten standing committees or Commissions as they are wont to be called. Here the bishops came to realize very quickly how unwieldy the Council is, and the American bishops came to realize that they should have been thinking about, and organizing for, this Council months ago, as many of the other hierarchies proved to have done. However, I must say our bishops reacted quickly, organized their own “ballots,” and when things were finished we achieved a just representation on the elected Commissions. Here too, in the elections, came the first indication that the rules of the Council were flexible. The Holy Father dispensed from the necessity of each member of a Commission receiving an absolute majority of the votes and permitted the sixteen highest to be



Rev. Charles P. Essman
(1926-2007)

seated. Otherwise they would still be voting until after Christmas! But this also should have been a distant warning that Papa Giovanni was not to be a passive spectator to this whole affair. As events were to show, there are three forces in the Council, the “liberals,” “conservatives,” and John! Unfortunately, or fortunately, no one, least of all him, knows just which way he wants things to go. And who knows but that his poor health could mean that they won’t go either way. I frankly think the nine month recess, a practical concession to the missionary bishops, could be the death knell of the Council if the Pope is not well enough to “push” the work during these months. My observation is that the conservative curia, outgunned within the Council, could well drag its feet during these months, hoping to harass the opposition into settling for the *status quo* in many points of dispute. And actually there might be a number of liberals to whom this would not be unsatisfactory. They maintain that many of the theological problems are not “ripe” for a conciliar definition and would be willing to let them ride until, as they say, “the next Council.”

But these currents were not evident in the early days, when, to everyone’s surprise, the liturgy was proposed as the first subject for discussion. It actually proved to be a very wise decision. It gave them a chance to work out the procedural bugs on a subject that actually wasn’t calculated to raise anyone’s blood pressure too high. If you—as I—thought that the liturgy was the burning question for this Council, you were wrong. And the reason it wasn’t “burning” is not because everyone was against it but that everyone was for it! Apparently the Liturgical Preparatory Commission had done its work so well that no major faults were to be found in the *schema*. And those among the hierarchy (some very close to us) who really don’t know much about liturgy were willing to admit it in this assembly of their peers and sit back and learn! I really think they will all come out wiser and better disposed.

The unfortunate side of the discussion of this first *schema* is that it was first! Each bishop is allotted ten minutes to talk and it seemed that many of them thought that the Council would run out of ten-minute

periods. They all seemed to want to get in their two cents’ worth. (Someone calculated that with the number of bishops staying here at about \$10 a day, it was costing \$1,000 a speech!) The first days of twenty speeches a day grew into weeks and the general unrest was noticeable, not because the Fathers didn’t believe in free speech but because no one was saying anything new. Finally came the morning of the second intervention by the Holy Father (he listens to the proceedings on a special intercom) to permit the Board of Presidents to propose, at their own discretion, a motion to end debate on any given subject. It breathed new life into the whole operation and the discussion of the Liturgical Schema was quickly concluded and it was sent to the Commission in charge of making the suggested “emendations” before it is put to a final vote. However, there had been time for literally over 600 suggestions, most of them picayune, but all necessary to consider. For that reason the Commission on the Liturgy has bogged down and certainly won’t be able to bring the *schema* to a vote before they adjourn December 8th. Another reason why the nine-month adjournment will seem very long.

But, God willing, the Liturgical Schema will eventually be promulgated by the Second Vatican Council.³ I haven’t seen it intact, but my own observation is that it will not contain anything new or startling. It will, however, give a final direction to the Liturgical Movement speeded by the Papal documents of the past twenty years and better than anything else it will “canonize” the movement and remove all suspicion of its being something for dilettantes. The bishops themselves have had to speak up and will want to back up what they have decided in Council. How soon we will have English in the Mass and Breviary will depend on how soon the Council gets around to forming regional groupings of the hierarchy to put its decrees in to practice.

After the mild, boring discussion on the liturgy came the bomb—the Schema on the Sources of Revelation. Cardinal Ottaviani’s⁴ Theological Preparatory Commission had gotten this one ready and I hardly think they expected the reception it

received. Before Ottaviani had seated himself, Bea⁵ and his boys were ramming it down his throat! Obviously, the Council is not in open warfare, but this *schema* did polarize the two “sides.” It’s an oversimplification, but the two “poles” are Ottaviani, backed by Ruffini⁶ and Siri⁷, along with the prestige of the Holy Office, and Bea, backed by Alfrink⁸ of the Netherlands and the rest of the German and French Cardinals, as well as the prestige of the Biblical Institute. My own (unquotable) opinion is that the American hierarchy was at first bewildered by the whole thing and only gradually came to be sold on the merits of the “liberal” position. For the most part we have been conspicuous by our absence in the debates, though after a couple of early “flubs” in the liturgy discussions by Spellman⁹ and McIntyre¹⁰, Cardinals Ritter¹¹ and Meyer¹² have come to the fore and made some good points for Bea and Co., as well as providing a measure, albeit small, of leadership for the Americans.

Anyway, those were the days when the sides were drawn and ever since each day has been enlivened by a new story or two. One of the earliest vintage had it that Ottaviani and Ruffini came out of their apartment one morning, hailed a cab and told the driver to take them to the Council. He dutifully started out for Trent! But the conservatives have hit right back. They claim the Christmas card being sent out from the Biblicum shows on the front three riderless camels with the greeting inside “Happy Midrash!” And they have changed the final phrasing of the *Salve Regina* to “*nobis post hoc concilium ostende.*”¹³ But it is all done in a spirit of good clean gouging, kicking, biting, etc.!

Meanwhile, back in the Council... I gather the liberals felt there were two things at stake in this *schema*. First an immediate theological point and this is that there is only one “source” of Revelation (i.e. Sacred Scripture interpreted in the light of present day studies) with two “aspects,” not two distinct sources. The second thing was more indirect but perhaps more fundamental: it was that this *schema* was to be a test of whether the scripture scholar and the theologian was to have any “freedom” of action in pursuing truth where modern

science seemed to lead him. These points were telling in gathering votes for the eventual rejection of the *schema*. But possibly the crucial point came when the Bishop of Brugge, De Smedt¹⁴, with masterful oratory, “revealed” to the Fathers that in the preparation of the *schema* the Theological Commission had been offered the services of the Secretariat for Christian Unity and had refused to listen. This was the death blow for the conservatives for it threw Pope John on the other side.

If one thing is becoming more and more clear it is that Pope John does not want this Council to make a “*brutta figura*” in front of our “separated brethren” and so the very hint that something might be offensive to the observers and those for whom they are observing is enough to make it anathema. Perhaps I am exaggerating, but none the less you probably heard what happened shortly after that. A vote was taken to “close the discussion of the *schema* in general and proceed to a discussion of each point in particular.” This was what Ottaviani wanted because it would mean acceptance by the Council of the *schema* in its present form and each amendment proposed would have to pass his subcommittee. And really it was in the bag for him because the way the motion was proposed it would have taken a two-thirds vote to kill it. The vote came out, in round numbers, 1,300 against the motion and 800 for it—and so the liberals failed by less than a hundred votes to reach the two-thirds. They were a very discouraged group that evening. Then, lo and behold, the next morning Cardinal Cicognani¹⁵ read a letter from Pope John saying that because “so many” of the Fathers had expressed their will to have the whole question reworked he was dispensing from further debate on the *schema* and having it turned over to a special, new Commission of Cardinals¹⁶—the co-presidents of which would be Ottaviani and Bea! And so the next nine months should see some heavy traffic between the Biblicum and the Holy Office—although on the face of it, the special committee appointed by the Holy Father seems to have five liberal minds (Bea, Fringe¹⁷, Meyer, and two Frenchmen, Lienart¹⁸ and Lefebvre¹⁹) to three conservatives (Ottaviani, Ruffini, and Browne²⁰).



Bl. Pope John XXIII, carried in procession

Hooray for John! After that everyone was even willing to forgive him the wild, Protestant-bating innovation of inserting his patron saint into the Canon of the Mass!

Following the hectic week and a half on the Sources of Revelation, calm was acquired by considering the *schema* prepared on the Media of Communications, led by none other than Martin John O'Connor²¹, late of Thespia, now of Laodicea. It took the Fathers fifteen minutes, but they stretched it into three days, to agree that this *schema* was wonderful (some questioned if it was even a fitting topic for a General Council to bother with), and so should be sent back to Commission and cut down to about one-fourth the present size by eliminating duplication and unnecessary verbiage!²² This brought them to the discussion of another *schema* on the Unity of the Church, but prepared by the Commission on the Oriental Rites. Again, all agreed that it was wonderful but why directed only to the Orthodox, why not to all the Separated Christians.

So they quickly decided that the contents of this *schema* should be combined and worked into a new one in conjunction with the one by the Secretariat for Christian Unity and the chapter on “Ecumenism” in the *De Ecclesia schema*.²³

I believe this was a time when everyone was aware of one of the basic defects in the preparation for this Council: the various *schema* had not been compared with one another beforehand (many of them are not even printed yet) and the overlapping and lack of logical order in their presentation to the Council has caused a terrible waste of time. Strong papal intervention to coordinate things during the next nine months might correct this. If it can be done, and if the bishops can be given the *schema* far enough in advance so that they will have a chance to study them, this Council may not really last the ten years that some are predicting. (As I write this today they have just issued a revised listing of all the *schema*—titles only—that they expect to be eventually brought before the Council. There are twenty in all, but no indication of the length of each. This session has considered five of them, only two of which it can be said to have finished and three sent back to be redone.²⁴ You see why some say ten years.)

The final ten days of the session are seeing the *schema* on *De Ecclesia* brought out for discussion. Again it is Ottaviani against the world! His Theological Commission prepared this one, too, and it contains such hot issues at just what is the Church, the position and powers of the episcopacy, the laity’s place in the Church, “*extra Ecclesia nulla salus est*,” etc. Cardinal Ottaviani tried to get this one put off until next session but thank goodness this maneuver was effectively blocked. It’s pretty obvious that the assembly will ask that this entire *schema* be turned over to a special commission, also, and reworked in the intervening period. You must admit they will have an interesting session ahead of them next Fall.²⁵

So, though you didn’t ask for them I have given you my “inside” comments on the first session of Vatican Two. Honestly, I hope it hasn’t seemed too negative. I believe the seeming lack of tangible results of this session has been far outweighed by

the intangible but real effect that the bishops have had on one another. Someone has rightly said that the hierarchy will never be the same again—and that is meant in a good sense. They have been exposed to each other’s problems and solutions. New and stimulating air has blown into their “rooms,” dissipating provincialism and stirring up thought processes that have been dormant since seminary days! The bishops have impressed us with their devotion to work and their honesty in realizing the grave responsibilities of Conciliar Fathers. Their differences, which I have emphasized (perhaps too much) do not detract from the good results and the good will in getting the Council under way. If this same good could be accomplished each Fall, maybe we should pray that the Holy Spirit will prolong the Council, not just ten years but permanently.

I’ll close with a quote found in Dom Butler’s book from a letter written by a priest in Rome in the year 1870. “I have come away, after having had a good opportunity of observing the workings of the Council, far more impressed with the deep conscientious love of truth displayed, than the human passions of which so much is said and written.” Amen!

NOTES (by the Editor)

- 1) Butler, Edward C., *The Vatican Council, 1869-1870, based on Bishop Ullathorne’s Letters*; London & N.Y., Longmans, Green, 1930. The book had just been re-issued by Newman Press in 1962.
- 2) Telstar 1 was the first, experimental satellite that transmitted television pictures, telephone calls, and facsimiles across the Atlantic Ocean. It was launched on July 10, 1962.
- 3) Ultimately the liturgical schema, *Sancrosanctum Concilium*, became the constitution of the same name.
- 4) Alfredo Cardinal Ottaviani (1890-1979) was a native of Trastevere in Rome. He was ordained in 1916 and had a doctorate in Canon Law. He entered the Roman curia in 1926. At the time of this first session he had spent nearly thirty years in the Congregation of the Holy Office, as its head since 1959, and so was powerful among all the curial offices.
- 5) Augustin Cardinal Bea (1881-1896) was a Jesuit and had been rector of the Biblicum from 1930 to 1949.
- 6) Ernesto Cardinal Ruffini (1888-1968) was Archbishop of Palermo.
- 7) Giuseppe Cardinal Siri (1906-1989) was Archbishop of Genoa.
- 8) Jan Bernard Cardinal Alfrink (1900-1987) was Archbishop of Utrecht.
- 9) Francis Cardinal Spellman (1889-1967) was Archbishop of New York.
- 10) James Francis Cardinal McIntyre (1886-1979) was Archbishop of Los Angeles.
- 11) Joseph Elmer Cardinal Ritter (1892-1967) was born in New Albany, Indiana. He was named Auxiliary Bishop of Indianapolis in 1933, Bishop in 1934, Archbishop in 1944, and Archbishop of St. Louis in 1946. In 1962 he was the youngest Cardinal from the U.S.
- 12) Albert Gregory Cardinal Meyer (1903-1965) spent much of his life in his native city of Milwaukee. After studying at the University of the Propaganda in Rome he was ordained in 1926. He later returned to Rome to study at the Pontifical Biblical Institute and earned a doctorate in Sacred Scripture and was professor of Dogmatic Theology in Milwaukee. He was named Bishop of Superior in 1946, Archbishop of Milwaukee in 1953, and Archbishop of Chicago in 1958.
- 13) For our younger readers: The *Salve Regina*, the “Hail Holy Queen” prayer traditionally offered at the end of the Rosary, also traditionally was said or sung at the end of each day, as it was even on Columbus’s *Santa Maria*. And so the phrase “and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus” instead became “and after this our council,” the council by implication being a form of exile.
- 14) Émile-Joseph Cardinal De Smedt (1909-1995) was Bishop of Bruges.

- 15) Amleto Giovanni Cardinal Cicognani (1883-1973) taught Canon Law from 1921 to 1931, served as Apostolic Delegate to the U.S. from 1933 to 1958, and was named Vatican Secretary of State in 1961. He was a native of Brisghella in the Romagna region of northern Italy. .
- 16) The work of the joint commission in time resulted in the constitution *Dei Verbum*.
- 17) Most Rev. Joseph Frings (1887-1978), Archbishop of Cologne, brought with him as advisor Rev. Joseph Ratzinger.
- 18) Achille Cardinal Liénart (1884-1973) was born in Lille, France. He was ordained in 1907 and was named Bishop of Lille in 1928 and Cardinal in 1930.
- 19) This was not Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre of post-conciliar controversy but his cousin Joseph Cardinal Lefebvre (1892-1973), Archbishop of Bourges.
- 20) Michael Cardinal Browne (1887-1971), an Irish Dominican, had been rector of the Angelicum and from 1955 to 1962 was Master-General of the order.
- 21) Most Rev. Martin J. O'Connor (1900-1986) was a native of Scranton, Pa., ordained in Rome in 1924 and ordained bishop in 1943 to be Auxiliary Bishop of Scranton. He was titular Bishop of Thespieae and in 1959 was named titular Archbishop of Laodicea. He studied at the North American College in Rome and returned there to serve as rector from 1946 to 1964. He served many years in the Curia. He ordained Father Essman in Rome in 1951.
- 22) This *schema* became the decree *Inter Mirifica*.
- 23) Despite this movement, two decrees resulted, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*.
- 24) The Council produced four constitutions, nine decrees, and three declarations.
- 25) This *schema* became the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*.

St. Joseph Parish near Somerset Baptisms, 1834-1850

(Continued, from Vol. XXXVII, No. 8)

1838, continued

page 68

- Feb. 17, Ellen Dolin, daughter of Owen Dolin and Sarah Duncand; spon. Patrick Largey and Mary McGanagle. G. A. J. Wilson
- Feb. 28, Thomas, son of John Higgins and Margaret Schlem, spouses; spon. Patrick Gough and Ellenor Higgins. F. J. H. Clarkson
- Mar. 21, Margaret, daughter of Willson Sharkey and Jane Sharkey (or Caton); spon. John Carany. N. D. Young
- Mar. 30, Catherine Isabel, daughter of Thomas Horahan and Mary McGarvy, spouses; spon. James McBarron and his wife. FJHC
- Mar. 7, Samuel Harbaugh, adult
same time, Eliza Harbaugh (or Windan), adult
same time, Lavina, daughter of Samuel Harbaugh and Eliza Wardan, spouses; spon. William

Stine and Lydia Stine. FJHC [The family gives the mother's name as Williar, as it also appears in later children's baptisms below.]

- Apr. 16, Martha Ann, daughter of Patrick Bucy and Elizabeth Jay, spouses; spon. John Braddock and Patience Lynch. FJHC
- Apr. 22, Michael, son of Gilbert Crosby and Ann Tempany, spouses; spon. Frances Crossin and John Keenan. FJHC

page 69

- Apr. 22, Thomas, son of John Brown and Mary Clark, spouses; spon. Alexander McClain and Mary Rafferty.
- same time, Ellen, daughter of William Gordon and Catherine Keenan; spon. William McGary and Mary Keenan. FJHC
- Apr. 23, Joseph, son of Joseph Maser and Mary Bash, spouses; spon. Peter Bash and

