

# Why Vatican II Didn't Fail

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This afternoon I would like to discuss Vatican II not in terms of its official teaching but as an ecclesial event. To do that, however, means that we spend a few moments contemplating the often overlooked fact that Vatican II might well have been played out in a very different way. A mere month before the council opened, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, sought a private audience with Pope John XXIII to warn him that he foresaw a disaster in the upcoming council. Cardinal Paul-Emile Leger, Cardinal Archbishop of Montreal, drafted an extensive twelve page letter which he sent to the pope on September 11, with the accompanying signatures of Cardinals Frings, Liénart, Döpfner, Suenens and König.<sup>1</sup> In that letter he warned that any hopes for real church reform had been hijacked by those who had been responsible for much of the planning of the council. Why were these bishops so fearful that the council would fail? To answer that question we must go back to the very beginnings of the planning for the council.

## I. Pope John's Goals for the Council

Barely three months after his election, on January 25, 1959, at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, Pope John announced to eighteen Roman cardinals his intention to hold an ecumenical council. He was met with a stony silence which, he recounts later in his diary, deeply pained him. In his famous January 25th allocution announcing the council, he mentioned two general aims, the edification of the whole Christian faithful and a “renewed cordial

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<sup>1</sup> The letter is discussed in in Gilles Routhier, “Les réactions du cardinal Léger à la préparation de Vatican II,” *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France* 80 (1994): 281-302.

invitation to the faithful of the separated Churches to participate with us in this feast of grace and brotherhood, for which so many souls long in all parts of the world.”<sup>2</sup> The pope spoke frequently of the need for an *aggiornamento* but he was seldom specific about what that entailed. As the planning of the council proceeded, many who were initially hopeful that the council would be the occasion of much needed church reform gradually became dismayed at the direction the council preparations were going.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, a month before the council was to open, Cardinal Léger, the archbishop of Montreal, wrote a letter to Pope John XXIII signed by a number of influential bishops: Cardinals Frings, Liénart, Döpfner, Suenens and König. In it he warned that the council planning had gone poorly, the draft documents sent to the bishop were inadequate and that the council was in danger of being hijacked by reactionary elements of the Roman curia. As we will see in a moment, they had good reason to be concerned.

For the balance of my presentation I would like to first rehearse for you why these bishops had good reason to fear for the future of the council, and then second, to consider what happened at the council to prevent their fears from being realized, Finally, I will consider what we might learn from these events.

## **II. Preparations for the Council: Stacking the Deck**

Pope John XXIII's announcement of an upcoming council marked the beginning of over three years of preparation for the council. There was little in this preparation that augured well for substantive reform of the church.

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<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Giuseppe Alberigo, “The Announcement of the Council,” in *History of Vatican II*, ed. by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 15. Alberigo notes that the official Latin version sanitized this text in typical fashion, substituting the word “communities” for “churches,” “follow” for “participate” and “search” for “feast.”

## **A. The Antepreparatory Commission**

In 1959 the pope created an initial ante-preparatory commission headed by the secretary of state, Cardinal Tardini. This commission's work would transpire over three phases: 1) soliciting initial proposals from curial officials, bishops, religious superiors (male only), university faculties and theologians and 2) drawing up a rough outline of topics to be addressed based on the questionnaires, 3) proposing membership for the various preparatory commissions.

One unfortunate outcome was probably determined in advance when the pope stacked the antepreparatory commission with curial figures: in general these officials were little disposed to take the views of the consultation seriously. The very notion of a consultation was seen as a slap at the curial leadership, and it smacked of a democratic mentality which had no place in Christ's church. On the other hand, putting the commission under leadership of Tardini represented a defeat for the Holy Office and Cardinal Ottaviani, who had expected leadership of the planning commission.

The proposals gathered from the bishops would provide the raw material for the proximate preparation of the council. The make-up of this commission was significant. It was comprised primarily of the secretaries and other representatives from each of the Roman congregations. At the time, liberal elements in the church saw this as a crucial blunder on the part of the pope. In hindsight it now seems remarkably wise to have the curia involved from the outset in order to forestall their adopting a blatantly hostile stance toward the council.<sup>3</sup>

The ante-preparatory commission sent out questionnaires to 2812 bishops, theologians, religious superiors (male only), theological faculties, and Roman congregations. Of this number, 2150 replied in some manner, though many were short and perfunctory. The commission then

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 47.

organized these responses into various categories of issues and questions that would need to be addressed by the soon to be appointed preparatory commission. Unfortunately, in the process of classification, the significance of many of the proposals was obscured by the fact that the material was classified according to the categories of canon law and the neo-scholastic manual tradition. Innovative proposals often as not fell through the cracks. More significant, however, was the fact that many of the curial officials on the commission found the very process of consultation distasteful. The notion of a consultation was seen as a slap at the curial leadership, and it smacked of a democratic mentality which had no place, they believed, in Christ's church.

The lists of topics produced by the ante-preparatory commission were intended to guide the preparatory commissions in the drafting of council documents. However, the fragmentary and unfocused character of these reports helps explain why the preparatory schemata which emerged from the preparatory commissions lacked any common vision or sense of the overarching goal of the council.

## **B. The Preparatory Commissions**

The final task of the ante-preparatory commission was to propose membership to the ten (later eleven) preparatory commissions which would actually have the responsibility of drawing up draft documents to be given to the bishops for council debate. The pope then appointed the membership of the preparatory commissions based on these recommendations. This meant that, with a few noteworthy exceptions, the preparatory commissions were also placed in the hands of leading curial officials least disposed to upset the ecclesial status quo.

Many leading bishops were dismayed at the way in which the deck was stacked in the appointments to the preparatory commissions. Cardinal Leo Suenens, in his memoirs writes:

In the presence of the entire group [a special steering committee created by Pope John] I asked him: "Holy Father, why did you appoint the prefects of Roman Congregations to head the Council Commissions? This can only inhibit the freedom of Council members in their work and in their discussions." He answered, laughing: "...You're quite right, but I didn't have the courage."<sup>4</sup>

### C. The Rules of the Council

One of the tasks of the antepreparatory commission was that of drawing up the rules of the council. In his very first press conference Cardinal Tardini had announced that many bishops were concerned about being drawn away from their dioceses for an extended period of time. Consequently, the likely procedure would be to have preparatory texts drafted in advance of the council and then sent to the bishops for their comments. That way, when the bishops actually arrived at the council, they would be able to vote on an already revised text "reflecting their views." Later, Fr. Sebastian Tromp, secretary for the Theological Commission, would come to the defense of Tardini's view, to the point of arguing that it wasn't even necessary for the bishops to actually gather in one place! Tromp also noted the logistical problems of having as many as 3000 bishops gathered in one place. He further remarked, "there is a danger that it will be extremists who do most of the talking and that the voice of moderates will not be heard."<sup>5</sup> This was followed by Paul Phillippe, a representative of the Holy Office, who made the remarkable suggestion that the bishops need not be allowed to actually speak at the council, but only to offer written comments in advance and then simply cast their vote on the *schemata* at the general session. Fortunately, the views of Tromp and Phillippe were quite extreme, and perhaps

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<sup>4</sup> Leon-Joseph Cardinal Seunens, *Memories And Hopes* (Dublin: Veritas, 1992), 71.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 327n.<sup>555</sup>.

spurred other bishops, including curialists like Archbishop Parente, to insist on the fundamental right of bishops to speak at a council.

The authority for determining the rules of the council was placed in the hands of the pope, following the model of Vatican I. In the summer of 1962 the pope promulgated the rules of procedure for the council as the *Ordo Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II Celebrandi*.<sup>6</sup>

A number of important norms were established in the *Ordo Concilii*.

- *Although at Vatican I the bishops chose all the members of the conciliar commissions, the rules of Vatican II allowed the bishops to elect sixteen members, leaving eight members to be appointed by the pope.*
- *The periti for the conciliar commissions would be designated by the pope. Additionally, each bishop could bring his own peritus to the council. The periti assigned by the pope to commissions could attend the general congregations but could not speak or vote at them. The bishops' own periti were not allowed to attend the general congregations. At the commission meetings, periti could attend, but could not vote and could only speak if invited to do so. These rules were followed to the letter by the Theological Commission but were generally ignored by many of the other commissions.*
- *One of the more significant rules for the council determined that the council would be conducted in its entirety in Latin. There is some thought that this was intended to put the non-Italian bishops at a disadvantage, though early in the council it became readily apparent that many of the Italian prelates were not*

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<sup>6</sup>*Acta et Documenta Concilio oecumenico Vaticano II apparando; Series prima (antepreparatoria)*, volume II Part I (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1960-61), 434 [Henceforward, ADP].

*nearly as good at Latin as they had fancied themselves to be. The language rule was quite a problem.*

The American bishops often spoke Latin with an accent which made them quite unintelligible to the Europeans and vice-versa. Cardinal Cushing at one point addressed the Council on the Church and Jews, media people asked what was said. Cushing replied, "How should I know? I had to say it in Latin!"

Another person who flaunted the Latin rule was one of the great cantankerous figures of the council, Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh, patriarch of the Melkite rite. For him the law requiring the use of Latin was an affront to the Eastern churches and so when he offered his first intervention, in spite of the protestations of the president of the assembly, he delivered the entire speech in French, after which he received a standing ovation from the assembly!

#### **D. The Draft Documents**

In August, the bishops were sent the seven schemata which they were to consider at the beginning of the council. Many bishops complained about receiving the schemata at such a late date and only 10% responded with comments.<sup>7</sup> The responses were overwhelmingly negative. Cardinal Léger drafted an extensive twelve page letter which he sent to the pope on September 11, with the accompanying signatures of Cardinals Frings (Cologne), Liénart (Lille), Döpfner (Munich), Suenens (Malines) and König (Vienna). In it he complained of the poor quality of the drafts and questioned the attitudes of those responsible for planning the council.

Many of the themes in Léger's letter would appear in the pope's opening address at the council. In addition to the responses of many bishops, theologians who were allowed to read the

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<sup>7</sup>Klaus Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council (July 1--October 10, 1962)," in *History of Vatican II*, 419ff.

schemata offered pointed commentaries. Karl Rahner and several other German theologians met with Cardinal Döpfner and other members of the German episcopate, offering extensive critique of the documents. Yves Congar also distributed detailed criticisms. The German and French bishops commissioned Karl Rahner to draw up a statement which rejected the schemata proposed by the theological commission. Edward Schillebeeckx penned a response on behalf of the Dutch bishops which urged that the first four schemata be completely rewritten.<sup>8</sup>

### **E. No Plan for the Council**

Another shocking feature of the conciliar preparations was the fact that there was, in the midst of all of the preparations for the council, no concrete plan for how the council would conduct its business, what documents it would address and in which order. By early 1962 the preparatory commissions had produced over 70 schemata. Cardinal Leo Suenens, a close confidant of the pope and heavily involved in preparations for the council, and Cardinal Montini, Archbishop of Milan and Pope John's eventual successor, were concerned that the council was likely to get bogged down in all of these often technical documents on items of little interest to the church at large. In March of 1962, the cardinal from Belgium met with the pope to voice his concerns.<sup>9</sup> Suenens asked the pope,

“Who is working on an overall plan for the Council?”

“Nobody,” said Pope John.

“But there will be total chaos. How do you imagine we can discuss seventy-two  
*schemata*...?”

“Yes,” John agreed, “we need a plan...Would you like to do one?”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Wittstadt, “On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council...,” 425-6.

<sup>9</sup> Suenens, 78.

<sup>10</sup> This account is taken from Léon-Joseph Suenens, “A Plan for the Whole Council,” in *Vatican II by Those Who Were There*, edited by Alberic Stacpoole (London: Chapman, 1985), 88-91.

This was a rather delicate matter. The pope certainly agreed that an overall plan was needed, but he did not wish to appear as if he was imposing his will on the wishes of all the bishops.

Consequently, the pope also asked Suenens to discuss his plans with Cardinals Montini, Döpfner, Siri and Liénart. The pope directed Suenens: “Bring them together so that I will be able to say, ‘According to the wishes of a number of cardinals,’ while being a bit vague on the details. Then it won’t just look like something I’ve cooked up.”<sup>11</sup>

With that, Suenens drafted a pastoral plan for the council that provided some important criteria for determining what the council should and should not address. Suenens also proposed that a distinction be made between matters concerning the church *ad intra* and those concerning the church *ad extra*. This document was submitted to the pope and on May 19th, Cardinal Cicognani sent a copy of the plan to a number of key cardinals. However, nothing further was heard of it until after the opening of the council.

Meanwhile, throughout the summer preceding the opening of the council, numerous bishops began to speak out about the lack of planning for the council. Many of these complaints were thinly veiled attacks on Felici, who was in charge of oversight for the conciliar preparations. Many others had seen a number of the preparatory drafts and expressed concern about their general tone.

## II. Changing the Course of the Council

2856 invitations to participate in the council were sent to 85 cardinals, 8 patriarchs, 533 archbishops, 2131 bishops, 26 abbots, and 68 male religious superiors. Approximately 500 bishops were not able to attend, almost half because they were from Eastern bloc countries and

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<sup>11</sup> Recounted in Hebblethwaite, *Pope Paul VI*, 301.

most of the rest because of health reasons. Although a little over 1000 of the bishops who attended were from Europe, 404 were from North America, 489 from South America, 374 from Asia 84 from Central America and 75 from Oceania.<sup>12</sup> When one considers secretaries and *periti*, the total number of direct and indirect participants gathered in Rome for the council numbered over 7500. If one includes press and other representatives, the number exceeded 10,000.<sup>13</sup>

### A. Pope John's Opening Address

On September 23, 1962, Pope John learned that he was suffering from cancer and would not have long to live. At the time it was still thought that the entire business of the council might be concluded in one session. The council opened on October 11, 1962 with a mass of the Holy Spirit. John has often been criticized for not having imposed an agenda on the council. A few excerpts from this crucial address, will help us appreciate how much the pope's own address set the ecclesial tone for the council:

illuminated by the light of this council, the Church—we confidently trust—will become greater in spiritual riches and gaining the strength of new energies therefrom, she will look to the future without fear. In fact, *by bringing herself up-to-date where required*, and by the wise organization of mutual cooperation, the Church will make men and women, families and peoples really turn their minds to heavenly things....

In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion and measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse and they behave as though they learned nothing from

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<sup>12</sup> Statistics from Pat Morrison, "A Council Primer," *National Catholic Reporter* (October 4, 2002): 7.

<sup>13</sup> Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council...", 493

history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life...We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world was at hand. In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which...are directed toward the fulfillment of God's superior and inscrutable designs....

The salient point of this council is not...a discussion of one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church which has repeatedly been taught by the Fathers and by ancient and modern theologians, and which is presumed to be well know and familiar to all. For this a council was not necessary. *But ....the Christian, Catholic and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciences in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine.... The substance of the ancient doctrine of the Deposit of Faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another....*

We see...as one age succeeds another, that the opinions of men and women follow one another and exclude each other. And often errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. *Nowadays, however, the spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations....*

Unfortunately, the entire Christian family has not yet fully attained to this visible unity in truth. The Catholic Church, therefore, considers it her duty to work actively so that there may be fulfilled the great mystery of that unity, which Jesus Christ invoked with fervent prayer...<sup>14</sup>

These passages set forth not so much an agenda as a new conciliar framework that would become a source of inspiration for the bishops in the years ahead.

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<sup>14</sup> Excerpts taken from the English translation in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed., Walter M. Abbott (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 710-19.

## **B. Electing the Conciliar Commissions**

Yet another significant event in re-directing the course of the council took place on the very first day of the first general congregation of the council on October 13, 1962. The first order of business was the election of bishops to the conciliar commissions, successors to the preparatory commissions. This was to be conducted under the presidency of Cardinal Tisserant a formidable, conservative curialist. A list of those bishops who served on the preparatory commissions was distributed among the council members with the clear expectation that these bishops would be re-elected to the respective commissions. Had this occurred, it is difficult to know what course the council might have taken. But almost immediately upon the distribution of the list Cardinal Liénart of Lille, and primate of France, rose to speak. He moved that the election be postponed until the bishops could meet in regional caucuses in order to add their own nominations to the list of candidates. Cardinal Frings of Cologne then rose and seconded the motion. Before Tisserant could prevent further objection to this violation of procedures, their proposal was met with such an ovation that Tisserant conceded the point and the first session was adjourned after fifteen minutes! In that brief encounter it became clear that this was not going to be a council content to rubber stamp curial documents.

## **C. Montini's Plan for the Council**

During the first week of the council Cardinal Montini (later Pope Paul VI) was beginning to panic that there was no plan for the council. He wrote a letter to Cardinal Cicognani, but which he knew would find the eyes of the pope, which expressed concern over the lack of any plan for the council. In essence he was asking why the Suenens plan was not being announced. Soon after, with Pope John's approval, Montini re-worked Suenens' plan. Suenens had been

handicapped by having to incorporate all 70 of the schemata into his plan. Furthermore Suenens had proposed addressing questions relating to marriage and sexuality and the restoration of the permanent diaconate. Martini chose to avoid these topics. He mapped out a detailed agenda for the council, which he envisioned, following Suenens, as consisting of three sessions ( a fourth would eventually be necessary): the first being more doctrinal in character, the last two more pastoral. The pope was alarmed at the mention of more than one session. He had only discovered that he had cancer in late September, and he desperately hoped to see the council through, assuming that it would be limited to one session. Nevertheless, he accepted the plan.

#### **D. The Bishops's Participation in the Liturgy of the Eastern Rites**

Often it was practical experience of diversity which did more than anything else to move the bishops. All of the bishops celebrated the liturgy daily in St. Peter's rotating the celebration of the different liturgical rites (26 in total). For many of the bishops, this was their first exposure to the already existing diversity of liturgical rites in the church. On November 28th, 1962, Archbishop Yemmeru of Addis Ababa celebrated, with the entire assembly, the Ethiopian rite. I quote here Rynne's account:

The rite itself was extremely ancient, going back in outline at least to the fourth century, but with many later additions and ceremonies of a distinctly African flavor. It was characterized by moving simplicity and solemnity. The language was classical Ethiopian or Gheez. As the book of Gospels was being enthroned, the spirited chanting of the seminarians and priests belonging to the Ethiopian College on Vatican Hill behind St. Peter's---they also chanted the mass---was accompanied by the deep rhythms of African drums, the ringing of bells, and the shaking of tambourines, causing the *New York Journal American* to headline its story: 'African drums boom in Vatican rite.' [Rynne, 104]

## **E. Removal of the Preparatory Schema on Divine Revelation**

Immediately after debate began on the schema on divine revelation during the first session of the council, a number of bishops rose in fundamental opposition, most notably Cardinals Liénart (Lille), Frings (Cologne), Léger (Montreal), Alfrink (Utrecht), Suenens (Malines), Ritter (St. Louis) and Bea. The Schema was defended by the Italians Ottaviani, Ruffini (Palermo) and Siri (Genoa). The major point of contention regarded the two-source theory of revelation. Indeed the first chapter of this schema was entitled "Two Sources of Revelation." Liénart was adamant in his insistence on the rejection of this schema. He pointed out that the church had never formally taught that there were two sources of revelation but rather one font, the Word of God, transmitted in different modes. Soon Frings and Alfrink joined Liénart in demanding the rejecting of the schema as did Cardinal Ritter from St. Louis.

In response to Cardinal Ottaviani's protest that this schema represented the best in modern scholarship, Cardinal Döpfner of Munich responded that the document reflected the best in scholarship among the Lateran faculty (its purported authors) but hardly that of all modern scholarship. Ottaviani then took a different procedural tack and claimed that the rules did not permit the complete rejection of a schema but only its modification. Finally the Secretary General, Archbishop Felici called for a vote on the status of the schema. The explanation of the balloting offered by Cardinal Ruffini, however, was quite confusing and it is apparent that not a few council members were unsure as to the implications of their vote. 1368 voted for rejecting the schema, 822 for retaining it. Since the rules required a 2/3 majority, the schema was narrowly retained. The next morning, however, Pope John ordered that the schema be withdrawn and turned the matter over to a joint commission to be presided over by both

Cardinals Ottaviani and Bea. The Pope indicated that the new schema was to be short, irenic and pastoral.

### **F. The Education of the Episcopate**

One of the more surprising sidelights of such an extended council was the opportunity which many bishops had, frequently for the first time since their seminary days, to take advantage of the recent developments in theology, biblical studies and church history. The bishops in attendance at the council regularly attended to evening lectures by such eminent scholars as Karl Rahner, Piet Fransen and Barnabus Ahern. So threatening was the influence of these theologians, that Cardinal Ottaviani petitioned John XXIII to have the Jesuits at the *Biblicum* cease giving lectures to groups of bishops. He also asked that Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner be asked to leave Rome. The pope asked who it was that was inviting these theologians to speak. When told that the bishops themselves had proffered the invitations he said that he would not interfere in the legitimate right of bishops to become better informed regarding the questions being debated at the council.<sup>15</sup>

The well known Vaticanologist, Giancarlo Zizola tells the story of visiting Bishop Albino Luciani (the future Pope John Paul I) during the council where he was staying at a Roman *pensione* run by some Italian sisters. Luciani admitted that he tried to spend each afternoon in his room studying, because, as he put it:

everything I learned at the Gregorian is useless now. I have to become a student again. Fortunately I have an African bishop as a neighbor in the bleachers in the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 92.

council hall, who gives me the texts of the experts of the German bishops. That way I can better prepare myself.<sup>16</sup>

## **IV. What Can We Learn From the Council as an Ecclesial Event?**

Having reviewed some of the factors that re-directed the course of the council toward substantive reform, we can now ask what we might learn today from this account of the council.

### **A. Encourage Genuine Collegiality**

One of the crucial reasons why Vatican II succeeded was Pope John XXIII's confidence in the bishops. Pope John did not, as best as we can tell, have a specific ecclesiological agenda. He trusted the insight of his bishops and intervened in the council whenever he felt their will was being thwarted by bureaucratic power plays. This trust in the work of the bishops is as important today as ever. Unfortunately, authentic episcopal collegiality is often frustrated by church structures and Vatican attitudes that remain resistant to the exercise of collegiality. World synods of bishops are carefully orchestrated by the Vatican and are conducted in a manner guaranteed to minimize genuine episcopal debate. The authority of episcopal conferences has been weakened by recent papal decrees. The Vatican attitude seems to be one which sees the bishops as executors of the will of the Vatican rather than as genuine collaborators with the bishop of Rome. In light of these difficulties, we might consider the following proposal as one way to recover Pope John's confidence in the work of the bishops:

The council also called for substantive reform of the Roman curia. In its Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office the council noted that the members of the curia were to "perform their

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<sup>16</sup> Giancarlo Zizola, "He Answered Papal Summons to Journalism," *National Catholic Reporter* (October 4, 2002): 10.

duties in [the pope's] name and with his authority for the good of the churches and in the service of the sacred pastors (CD # 9).” Interestingly, in the revised Code of Canon Law, reference to serving the bishops was deleted. A major canonical reform of the curia is required to make it clearer that the curia serves the bishops and not the other way around. This reform should place much more explicit limits on when the curia can and cannot intervene in matters that do not clearly and directly threaten the unity of faith and communion of the universal church. One concrete reform would more clearly tie the work of the curia to service of the permanent synod mentioned earlier, or, alternatively, to decentralize the curia, splitting it into regional bureaucratic offices more closely aligned with bishops conferences and subject to their authority.

### **B. There is No Substitute for Sustained Engagement with Those of Different Backgrounds Who Hold Different Viewpoints**

One of the striking realities of the council was that some of the most important work was accomplished at a coffee bar kept open behind the bleachers in the basilica. Bishops who found themselves falling asleep as they were asked to hear mind-numbing Latin speech after another, found respite in the bar, and often engaged in important conversation about the issues being discussed. It was the sustained, face-to-face conversations and sharing of experiences, that opened the bishops eyes to new perspectives on important theological and pastoral issues.

### **C. Church Teachers Must be Willing to Learn**

The bishops at the council were humble enough to believe that they had much to learn. They willingly entrusted themselves to the best of contemporary scholarship, regardless of ideology and then exercised their proper role as pastors and guardians of the faith. This

represented a recovery of a conviction voiced by one of our tradition's strongest advocates for the ministry of the bishop, St. Cyprian of Carthage. In one of his many letters Cyprian wrote:

But it is unrepentant presumption and insolence that induces men to defend their own perverse errors instead of giving assent to what is right and true, but has come from another....It is thus a bishop's duty not only to teach but also to learn. For he becomes a better teacher if he makes daily progress and advancement in learning what is better<sup>17</sup>

When the International Theological Commission was created under Pope Paul VI many hoped for new developments in theological consultation in which the Holy See and all the bishops would consult internationally respected theologians belonging to different schools of thought. The pope had envisioned that the commission would serve a consultative role not only to the pope himself but to the CDF. This important papal initiative must be expanded. A frequent consultation of theologians representing divergent views on a matter need not threaten the legitimate authority of those who hold church office. Unfortunately, in the last fifteen years the diversity of views represented by the ITC membership has diminished considerably and some fear a return to the practice of limiting Vatican consultation to "court theologians." Yet another proposed reform would demand revised structures for theological consultation at the local and universal levels. These structures, like the present International Theological Commission, must represent a genuine diversity of theological perspectives, and allow for legitimate and respectful dissent from authoritative, non infallible teaching.

It is true that the church today has much to learn from the teaching of Vatican II and we must continue to work toward the dissemination of the teaching of the council. What I have proposed today, however, is that we can also learn much from the *conduct* of the council, from

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<sup>17</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle*, 74, 10.

the pope's relationship to the bishops, the bishops work with theologians etc. The conduct of the council itself offered us a model for how the church today can become a genuine community of corporate discernment led by its leaders to read the signs of the times and bring the gospel to bear on the questions of our age. If we are faithful to that task perhaps we can fulfill the hope of Pope John XXIII who hoped for an ecclesial renewal that would restore "the simple and pure lines that the face of the Church of Jesus had at its birth."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rynne, 8.