

Articles and Interviews

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By Marina Narbais

“To read the Council’s documents and put them into practice is to love the Church.” Published in the review “Desde la Austral” of Austral University, Year I, no. 3, Spring-Summer 2012, pp. 22-24.

THE COUNCIL

Now that we have celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, can you comment on the importance it had and continues to have for the Church today?

The Second Vatican Council was the most solemn manifestation of the Church’s Magisterium in the past century, in continuity with all of its previous teaching. The documents that came from it clearly contain great riches and, as John Paul II and Benedict XVI have stressed, we have the challenge of putting them into practice with full fidelity, so that Jesus Christ and his Gospel will reach the hearts and minds of millions of people. To read the Council’s documents and put them into practice is to love the Church and all mankind.

What was the central message that the Council wanted to give to the men and women of today?

It’s not easy to put in a few words. In any case, we might sum it up by saying that God draws close to us and comes to meet us: he loves us, we are of interest to him and he counts on us; by his grace, we can respond to him and do great good to others. And specifically, the Council has reminded us that holiness—the full response to God’s love—is not a goal for just a privileged few, but is within everyone’s reach, and that we are all called to attain union with God in Christ, through our ordinary life: through our family, work and social relationships. The work of the Council was very intense. More than 2,500 council fathers took part.

How was it possible to reach a true unity and almost unanimity regarding the approved texts, when in the working sessions and discussions on various topics the positions defended were not only quite different but divergent?

The Church is made up of men and women, so it’s not surprising that, at times, people may have a different focus or point of view. Nevertheless it would be a mistake to forget that it is also divine: Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would always accompany and assist the Church. Therefore, as Benedict XVI insists, our readiness to listen is indispensable: it’s not a question of following our own ideas, but of trying to discover God’s will and letting Him be the one to guide us. The documents of Vatican are due to the hard work of many people, but above all we see

there the teaching of Jesus Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit.

Why were there conflicting interpretations of some of the Council's words? Why have John Paul II and Benedict XVI insisted so strongly that its conclusions should be put into practice?

It's well-known that the Council was badly or partially interpreted in some sectors. The causes were varied and are closely tied to the spread of secularism and hedonistic materialism, which have caused grave harm to souls. I am thinking, for example, of the loss of a Christian sense that has affected many families, of the decline in religious practice, and also of the crisis affecting some members of the clergy and the consecrated life. Nevertheless, as I've already said, the texts of the Council contain great riches; many of its teachings, in part, have already been put into practice in the Church and one can see the fruits: the frequent use of Sacred Scripture, the full responsibility of the laity, as members of the people of God.... But the Council is not an historical event in the past; it is more like an ongoing project that is spreading and being assimilated little by little, with more or less success. We also need to recall that the Church is a pilgrim in this world, and therefore must always go forward with optimistic faith. The new evangelization convoked by Blessed John Paul II and Benedict XVI reminds us of the need to spread one of the key messages of the Council, as I said above: the universal call to holiness, a central message also in the teachings of St. Josemaría.

The Second Vatican Council saw itself as a noble attempt to foster "dialogue between the Church and the world." Fifty years later, the Pope once again is insisting on this point. A father or mother of a family, a professional, a student, a teacher.... How can they carry out this dialogue with people who don't know or have left behind the faith?

The Church is essentially missionary and Christians are called to always give witness to Jesus Christ. St. Josemaría taught that one cannot separate Christian life from apostolate, just as one cannot separate in Christ his being the God-Man and his mission as Redeemer. I think that the first challenge of all the faithful—whether a mother or father of a family, a son or daughter, a worker, an intellectual, a priest, bishop, religious or lay person—is to acquire a strong formation and go deeply into the reasons for one's faith. The Holy Father has recommended, in this Year of Faith, that we get to know very well the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Thus we will be able to dialogue with others, in order to invite them to share in the treasure we have received, doing so with respect and sincerity. This is the basis of every effort to draw others closer to the faith. And it's very important that we Catholics put the *mandatum novum*, the new commandment into practice: learning to love everyone, in order to serve and help them, and when necessary, to correct them with charity.

What importance did the message that St. Josemaría preached since 1928—the universal call to holiness—have on the teaching on the laity accepted by the Council?

St. Josemaría's teachings shed light on the importance of the vocation to holiness that all the lay faithful receive at baptism for the service of the Church and the whole world: for the service of families, professional environments, the most needy. This was highlighted by Blessed John Paul II, when he referred to St. Josemaría as "an apostle of the laity for modern times." And in the official documents of his cause of canonization he was called "a precursor of the Second Vatican Council." Many Conciliar fathers stated that St. Josemaría had been a precursor of the message of this Church assembly.

Could you explain the role that our first Honorary Rector, the Venerable Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, carried out in the working sessions of the Council?

I would need to go on for a long time to answer this, and I want to stress that more about this topic will become known over time. Many of the protagonists highlighted his contribution: as is well known, he intervened directly, from the antepreparatory stage right to the end of the Council. I can bear witness to a significant fact: the appreciation for his work on the part of the Roman Curia, including those who didn't agree with his viewpoint. He was a man of peace, unity and charity. His personal seal was a calm smile of fraternal warmth. Anyone who works on a team knows how important it is to have people who smile and unite. In Don Álvaro's case, this went hand in hand with his great intelligence and capacity for work.

THE YEAR OF FAITH

Can you give us some advice on how to live and take fruitful advantage within the university community of the recent "Year of Faith" convoked by Pope Benedict XVI?

The Year of Faith is a marvelous opportunity to go more deeply, also personally, into Christ's message, and to renew ourselves personally so as to communicate that message better. It is an opportunity to value the faith more fully, to try to ensure that our life is that of consistent Christians, and help the men and women of our time to see it as an answer to their deepest questions, so that they feel protected, helped, encouraged. What is fundamental here is study and formation, and also personal friendship that leads to apostolate.

Faith has to be present in university life and scientific research. Benedict XVI insists on the need to "expand reason," since there is no opposition between science and faith. It would be a mistake—one that restricts and impoverishes reason—to dispense, in practice, in science or in public life, in the economy or in university work, with the transcendent dimension of the human being.

On the other hand, a university community has to be centered on the education and formation of its students and open to the great intellectual challenges, at the same time as it gives priority to helping solve society's pressing problems: the protection of human life, in all stages of development; fostering the stability of the family, based on marriage be-

tween a man and a woman; the struggle against poverty and marginalization; the promotion of a new culture, new legislation, new styles more in accord with the dignity of women and men, as children of God. Where will specific Christian proposals aimed at building a just society based on solidarity come from, if not from those who are inspired by the Gospel and give priority to generous and well-done work? Society needs people who are well prepared from the human, professional, and spiritual point of view. We have a clear path marked out for us during this Year of Faith and afterwards as well.

Benedict XVI convoked a Year of Faith at a time when the weakness of some members of the Church has become obvious to all and the world seems set on a course that falls outside her teachings. Why do you think that, despite everything, this is a moment for faith? Why should one continue believing in the Church?

As I said before, the Church is made up of men and women: we know that sin exists and that God constantly calls us to convert our hearts. As we see the Pope doing, it is important not to ignore the problems, or fail to be concerned about people who have suffered injustices. Nevertheless, it is so evident that the world today has a great need for God and his grace, which reaches us through the sacraments in the Church. Young people seem to discover this easily; it's striking (for example in the World Youth Days) how they are in tune with the Eucharist, with the Pope and with the Church. The Church is young and we are tru-

ly in a time of hope. The Church seeks unity, it promotes peace and solidarity, it makes evangelization its priority, it cares for the poorest and is a beacon of light in the face of the hatred and violence in so many parts of the world. In this context, we Christians need to reflect the lovable face of Christ. The Church our Mother is holy and always will be, although the behavior of some of her children may not be in accord with that holiness.

St. Josemaría used to say graphically that he had a faith “so thick you could cut it with a knife.” You lived with this saint: how was this faith shown?

In his trusting relationship with Jesus, which “saturated” his entire day. In his filial devotion to our Lady. And also in his humility and magnanimity: he considered himself as of little worth, and was very aware that whatever he did would be of value only if God made it prosper; and, at the same time, he encouraged great enterprises to help this world of ours. So many important social, educational and religious initiatives arose under the influence of his words. The Austral University is a specific example of St. Josemaría's overflowing zeal to serve God and all society. He sought always to rely on God, while personally hiding and disappearing so that only our Lord would shine forth.

Can you speak a bit about the need that today's men and women have for strengthening their faith in order to find happiness in this world of ours, which often does not seem to have room for God?

That true happiness that we all yearn for will only be attained in fullness in eternal life, but it is won and begins here on earth when we live in friendship with God. As St. Augustine said so forcefully: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." I'll also add that only those who feel a need for salvation can feel a need for Jesus. Is there anyone today who thinks he has no need to cleanse anything in his heart, in his life, in his past, in his present? We Christians should be the understanding face of Christ for others. If our friends, and all mankind, find in us a fraternal face, we can communicate to them the Church's marvelous message: "Do not be afraid to open your doors to Christ" (John Paul II). "Have the magnanimity to risk your life on Christ" (Benedict XVI). The path of happiness is always a path of generosity. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, a person "cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24).

Finally, we would like to ask you something on a more personal note: Is there any possibility that you might visit us during the course of this Year of Faith?

I would be delighted to visit the University and chat with each and every one of you, to share your joys and sorrows, your challenges and plans. I place this desire in God's hands.

Address at the Tenth Anniversary of Harambee, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 5, 2012)

Dear friends of Harambee-Africa,

The tenth anniversary of your association leads us directly to the ever-present memory of St. Josemaría's canonization. Permit me, ten years on from that date, to begin with an act of thanksgiving to God for this exemplary shepherd. By his heroic response to the spiritual and human gifts he received from God, he made many things happen. One of them is the way so many thousands of people from all over the world who feel the need to help the men and women in developing countries, are able to do so effectively through your organization.

I also want to thank God personally for the way devotion to St. Josemaría has spread around the world, and for all the help he has given from Heaven over these ten years, ever since the ceremony of his canonization, when our much-loved Pope John Paul II called St. Josemaría "the patron saint of ordinary life."

St. Josemaría was a big-hearted priest, and that comes through in everything he wrote, in his preaching, and also in the projects for helping the needy that he inspired during