

Bishop De Roo's "Pilgrims of hope: the journey is now"

How does a priest whose personal motto is "Build in love," build in love? Does he stand on a pedestal pontificating so that his listeners can extract from him the way they should live? Or does he communicate with his flock, sharing what he knows and listening to the experiences and understandings upon which his people base their decisions about living? Bishop Remi De Roo, as a newly appointed bishop and the youngest Canadian bishop to attend all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's, chose the second way to give witness to his motto.

Now, at 85 years of age and with forty-four years having passed since the close of Vatican II, Bishop De Roo is still sharing what he knows about the most momentous undertaking of the universal Church since the Council of Jerusalem in the first century. He worries that many Catholics lack an appreciation of their inheritance from Vatican II.

Bishop De Roo opened his June 6, 2009 presentation to the Newman Association of Vancouver with a prayer to the Holy Spirit requesting that we be confirmed in the Truth that Christ makes known. As our Advocate, grant us in Christ the help that we need. Renew us by indwelling through your Presence and the gifts that you give. Possess us in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If only we had a more developed theology of the Holy Spirit, we could serve so much better.

John Henry Cardinal Newman had the right idea, articulating it in his song, "Lead kindly Light." Vatican II was, in many ways, Newman's council and his beatification is long overdue. Newman was obedient to Truth wherever he found it and it was Truth that led him by conscience into the Roman Catholic Church. At the core of Vatican II lies Newman's conception of the development of doctrine. This scares many people in positions of power, but Jesus promised he would send the Holy Spirit who would lead into the fullness of Truth.

Newman recognized, too, the contributions the laity must make. Although he did not attend the First Vatican Council, he made the remark that the assembled bishops would look silly without the laity. A favourite Vatican II expression is "gifted, Spirit-led, called to bring the gospel for the transformation of society, especially in the temporal order." It is a misreading of Vatican II to believe it unnecessary to consult the people of God.

Within months of donning the papal tiara, John XXIII astounded the world with a triple decision. He would consult the people in Rome by calling a diocesan synod. He would undertake to reform the 1917 code of canon law. And, thirdly, he would call a council for the universal church. With the third decision, he figuratively wrapped his arms around mankind in an embrace, and when he died in 1963, a Protestant minister could say, "We lost our pope."

Again, figuratively speaking, John XXIII wanted to open the windows of the Church so that those inside could see out and those outside could see in (aggiornamento.) He also wanted to capture the richness of the source of water surging from the spring in the ground in faithfulness to Church traditions (ressourcement.)

A Church guided by the Holy Spirit will not be self-determining. The Holy Spirit cannot be controlled so we should be ready for some surprises. Equating the Church with the "People of God" constitutes a whole new direction. Sr. Pat Brady sees the dominant image of the Church since Vatican II as the circle, not the pyramid. The Church is no

longer a besieged, beleaguered fortress. It is a pilgrim people of God sharing their joys and sorrows. And John XXIII acted as though this were true. When Jewish rabbis came to visit him, they sat in a circle and let their “hearts speak to hearts.” Dialogue of this sort was one of Vatican II’s chief achievements.

Relationships of trust were built at the Council. The Eucharist was celebrated every day in one of twenty-two different rites, with liturgies as diverse as one with African drums and another with Eastern languages. There was a daily solemn enthronement of the Book of the Gospels and debate was always carried out in its presence.

Both John XXIII and Paul VI prayed for a new Pentecost. John Paul II saw Vatican II as a faithful compass to guide us to the future. Benedict XVI said it is the directives of Vatican II that we are to follow.

Vatican II was a pastoral rather than a doctrinal council. The focus was the words of Jesus: I am the Truth, I am the Way, I am the Life. Just as St. Paul directed the disciples at Corinth toward a new way of living, so the post-Vatican II Church came to identify justice as constitutive of the Gospel. The “People of God” must, therefore, act on behalf of justice.

Vatican II gave encouragement to some new directions. First, we must learn to read “The signs of the times.” Secondly, we must recognize “seeds of the Word,” so that we can have ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. Thirdly, recognizing that reality since the moon shot is so different for young people, we must listen to the young describe the reality they see. Fourthly, freedom of conscience has replaced the adversarial stance of the pre-Vatican II Church. Fifthly, the Church has become, for the first time, a world Church as opposed to a European Church. Sixthly, non-violence is promoted for the first time. Paul VI said, “No more war: war never again!” And lastly, the Church is a listening as well as a teaching church. We will all be enriched with dialogue with the “Other.” Of course, with all this new empowerment, the “People of God” also have the duty to stake a claim on these rights. The ordained cannot be expected to have all the answers.

Vatican II is unique in history for a number of reasons. First, the world’s bishops at the Council committed themselves to a loving dialogue in the search for Truth—in whatever form it presents itself. Secondly, we recognize that people of other religions are also entitled to the fullness of Truth and we have the obligation to present in full the best that we have—so that different perceptions of Truth can be collated and considered. Thirdly, article 22 of the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world” should be learned by heart because it presents Christ as the model of what it means to be human. Fourthly, article 16 of “The Decree on priestly formation” considers Scripture as the heart and soul of theology.

Bishop De Roo mused that today’s shortage of clergy might prove to be a blessing in disguise because it forces the Church to be more open to the Holy Spirit. The idea of the royal priesthood of the people, atrophied since Trent, is reclaimed with Vatican II. The ordained have an essential role to play, but they must also give recognition to the triple role of the people. A new reign is unfolding in our midst. We must give witness to the fact that we believe the risen Christ is already present in all believers.

Bishop De Roo closed his presentation with an insight from Ives Congar that was delivered to the Canadian bishops during the Council. For the first thousand years of the

Church's history, the Eucharist made the Church. With the rise of the clerical class and Enlightenment arguments on the question of the Real Presence, the Church became identified with the clergy. The Eucharist no longer made the Church. Now, the clergy made the Eucharist. The elevation of the host became part of the rubric in the Mass. Bishop De Roo encourages us to reclaim the chalice because it is ours. The Eucharist should be the essence, not the clergy or the hierarchy. We need to redress the imbalance. The inheritance given by Vatican II is profound and it is ours.