

Insights into John XXIII and Vatican II that you're unlikely to read anywhere else.

By William Marrin (published on Catholica – March 2013)

The author of this wonderful commentary, Bill Marrin, was a seminarian in Rome at the time of the Second Vatican Council. He subsequently left the priesthood and became a psychologist. He was recently invited to speak at a local college.

Introduction...

Being asked to talk about something that happened 50 years ago makes me feel old, makes me realize I am old. I was invited here I think because the **Second Vatican Council** is part of my story. I was there in Rome as a seminarian studying theology for the priesthood. I arrived there a few days before the Council began in October 1962 and was ordained right after it ended in December 1965. **The Council Class**, they called us.

After a period of parish work I was back in Rome studying again, this time for a degree in Scripture, and then I taught at our diocesan seminary until 1985. I resigned from the priesthood and became a psychologist. I married, worked for a number of years at St. Charles Hospital, and am now retired with a private practice of psychotherapy.

So, about **Vatican II**. Old people generally like to tell their stories, especially when they have happy endings. But this one doesn't end happily. I haven't been eager to re-visit those years in Rome. Over the years, people would occasionally suggest a trip back to Rome but I never wanted even to think about it. My wife finally twisted my arm just a few months ago and I agreed to go — not because of anything to do with **Vatican II**, but to accompany two grandchildren on a graduation trip, and it was a good trip but difficult.

Just as 50 years ago, I enjoyed the Romans immensely — their vitality, their sanity, their sophistication. The warmth of their humanity, their down-to-earth love of beauty and food, their manners and civility. A city doesn't flourish for 2700 years if its citizens don't know how to get along with each other. And just as 50 years ago, I was moved by the palpable presence of history — roads & structures built and re-built over two thousand years, still there; buildings embodying and housing the creative works of countless geniuses. Living with all this history seems to make the Romans extraordinarily secure about who they are.



Piazza Venezia, Rome, Italy

Photo source: sun-surfer.com.

And of course in Rome one can't avoid the presence of the church; the church that inherited the ruling power of the Roman Empire, tried to hold onto it until 1928, and still pays high honor to the memories and monuments, the pomp and glory of that power in its traditions and protocols. The Roman people have always been strikingly able to combine a robust engagement in life with a shrugging menefreghismo, "**well, that's how people are**". They can be cynically tolerant of the sexual shenanigans of **President Berlusconi**, and they can somehow care

passionately about the church while completely disregarding most of what it says, like a crazy uncle. They are not shocked by scandal, certainly. They've seen it all.

But going back made me remember a lot of things that shocked me when I first got there 50 years ago. I was shocked to learn that there were only a small handful of seminarians studying for priesthood for the diocese of Rome — a trend that wouldn't reach the American church for another 25 years. Back then we were ordaining some 25 priests per year in our diocese. I was shocked to see in the newspapers that a monsignor had molested a young man in a **St. Peter's** sacristy, and then shocked again that the matter was swept under the rug because "those things happen". I remember being shocked to learn that the basilica of **St. Peter's** with its vast marble interior and its gold ceiling had cost so much that the Pope encouraged the sale of indulgences in Germany to help pay for it (triggering of course the **Protestant Reformation**), and that the gold covering the ceiling came from Spain, which had plundered it from the Incas & Aztecs in the Americas. I was shocked by the ongoing show of wealth, the trappings of princely status, the assumption of special privilege by some in the Vatican hierarchy. The Italians shrugged these things off, but I was naïve, and shocked.



Pope John XXIII

At the same time, though, I was encouraged to believe that a new spirit was sweeping through the Church, a new day dawning, *Pope John's Aggiornamento*. The Pope himself was an amazing man. I wish I had words to communicate the experience of an audience with him. Even as part of a substantial group, I had a sense of being somehow seen and included in his world, known and accepted as a fellow pilgrim, and assured of God's love by his peaceful, smiling eyes. And as news came in day after day, of the speeches and deliberations in the Council sessions, we became more and more enthusiastic. Again and again, 85% to 90% of the three thousand plus bishops were voting for reforms. The old times of fear, of clinging to pomp and power, of holdovers from the inquisition (secret tribunals, forbidden books), of clerical mumbo-jumbo and mystification, of all the unnecessary trappings of a past world would soon be set aside!

Pope John had asked us to pray for a **new Pentecost**. *Aggiornamentomeant a return to our beginnings for fresh inspiration, the elimination of whatever obscures the Gospel message, and addressing the needs & questions of our own day.*

Well, it didn't work out. **Pope John** died only 8 months into the **Council**, and the new **Pope Paul VI** didn't have his spirit. The Bishops outlined a number of specific reforms but were thwarted when they got to some of the more sensitive issues. The **Council** was officially celebrated as a success but the Vatican bureaucrats worked hard to keep things going on as before. We had expected too much.

The Council's agenda...

Let's talk about the **Council's** agenda. **Pope John** said he wanted the Church to come to terms with the modern world, with contemporary culture. What was that, and what went wrong?

To answer, we have to start with the idea of **culture**. Let me outline how I plan to proceed: first, explain my own coming-to-awareness of culture; then, illustrate cultural change using the mass as an example; and finally, to analyze the modern cultural paradigm that **Pope John** was hoping to deal with.

When I was young I shared what you could call a common unawareness of culture. To me the word vaguely connoted things like **Rembrandt** and **Beethoven**. In this unaware state people are like fish that, never having known anything except water, never think about water. **We are immersed in a culture, but we never pay attention to it. Even though it's all around us, it's outside our horizon.** Anyone different from us must be crazy, or dangerous.

The word **parochial** comes to mind, but it isn't exactly apt. The parish actually helped me broaden my horizon a bit because it had a culture just a bit different from that of most of my neighbors. Missionaries would come around with stories of people in faraway worlds. Learning the Latin for Mass awakened a curiosity about long-ago languages and people. Later on in the seminary we had to become at home with thinkers from centuries ago.

Travel abroad was a major eye-opener for me, making me recognize that what was common sense to me was not necessarily common sense to an Italian or German or Arab — in so many ways. In Italy, for example, I found a different sense of personal space that confused me; a different sense of civic beauty that delighted me; and a different sense of the role of eating in our lives, important for considerably more than nourishment.

Studying Scripture, though, is what forced me to think much more about this issue of culture. The first thing one realizes is that particular words in Hebrew or Greek don't readily translate into simple English equivalents, or they lose a lot of meaning when we do translate them. The Aramaic word *Gehenna* for example, is often translated as *hell*. But it means *the valley of Hinnom*, outside Jerusalem, where garbage was left to rot or burn. **Jesus** used it as a metaphor for the end we deserve if we fail to love one another ... *we make garbage of our lives*. Likewise rich in meaning are *sheol*, which means "*the grave*" (sort of); *orkabod*, roughly translated *glory*. **Jesus'** summons to conversion, *metanoite* in Greek, means far more than the lame "*repent*" usually seen in English. The phrase "*Kingdom of Heaven*" defies brief explanation, but it does not mean a place somewhere away from here, the eternal abode of God. Fundamentally it means the reign of God in this world (which God created and "so loved") as it will ultimately be in the end. To fully explain it would require another talk, **but we should know that the message of the Bible is much more world-affirming than we would suspect. In coming to appreciate it we recognize that Biblical culture was considerably different from ours.**

When the early Church began to bring its message out of its original Jewish setting into the wider Greco-Roman world, it too had to deal with a change of culture. Greek speaking Jews in the diaspora around the Mediterranean had already been trying to translate their Jewish faith into Hellenistic concepts, which gave early Christians some help, but it was still not easy. Even the word **God**, in Greek, didn't have the same connotation it had in Hebrew or Aramaic. Overall, early Christians evidently succeeded in meeting the challenge, but not completely. An example of something that did not translate so well might be the Mass.

How many of you can even remember the Mass before **Vatican II**?

- The priest was the one who "said" the mass, enacted it. Others "attended", watched what the priest did — or didn't watch. Some knelt & prayed the rosary or other devotional practice.
- The priest prayed in a language that only an elite understood.
- He faced away from the rest, at a distance, in a separate sacred space that ordinary people couldn't enter.
- At daily mass, even when he read us the Gospel, he read it in Latin.
- Until the 1920's the priest was often the only one who took communion, and then when sharing the consecrated bread became more common, the priest was still the only one who took the wine.
- The host was hardly recognizable as bread, actually.
- Always there were odd, formal postures and gestures (bowing, turning, genuflecting, etc.) and ornate ceremonial utensils & clothing.

It was not even evident to us that the mass re-enacted Jesus' last supper with his friends before he died. How did we get to that Mass from the Last Supper, or from the Eucharists in the early Church which were so down-to-earth that St. Paul had to warn people against stuffing themselves or drinking too much?

Again we're talking about changing cultural worlds. It was not a huge shift from early Christian gatherings in Damascus, say, to the often clandestine gatherings of Christians in Rome, meeting in private homes in small groups (though subtle shifts of meaning did occur). **But when Christianity became the official public religion in the 4th Century, the mass moved into the imperial palaces, "basilicas", and became a triumphant enactment of God's (supposed) Imperial Court in heaven, using all the courtly rituals of bowing, ring-kissing and so on that had been used to honor the earthly Emperor. Not only the Mass but the Church itself was changed. The clergy became more separate, the laity more passive. The upper and lower class divisions that you find in an empire now applied to the church, with little distinction between church authority and state power. Instead of the intimate "Abba" of Jesus, God was now seen primarily as the mighty Emperor of the Universe.**

Two big paradigm shifts in how we think about culture...

But instead of looking at particular instances of cultural change, one after another, let me introduce a more general way of thinking about cultures that I first learned from **Bernard Lonergan**, one of our professors in Rome. **In the history of our western civilization we can describe two great intellectual innovations that led to sweeping cultural transformation. Paradigm shifts, we could call them. The first shift was from pre-systematic to systematic thinking. The second was from exteriority or object-orientation to interiority, or subject-orientation.**

As to the first shift, from **pre-systematic to systematic**: Ages ago, **pre-systematic thinking was all that anyone knew. It is the commonsense way of thinking in concrete and practical terms and then getting at more subtle meanings through metaphor or other figures of speech. Words are used fluidly instead of being carefully defined. Instead of logic, explanations tend to use story and mental association... "this reminds me of that". The Bible uses pre-systematic**

thinking. And we still use pre-systematic thinking for ordinary daily living. Without it we wouldn't have the arts, we couldn't make political speeches, and who thinks systematically about love? We need **pre-systematic thinking**, but the first great paradigm shift opened new possibilities for culture and technology.

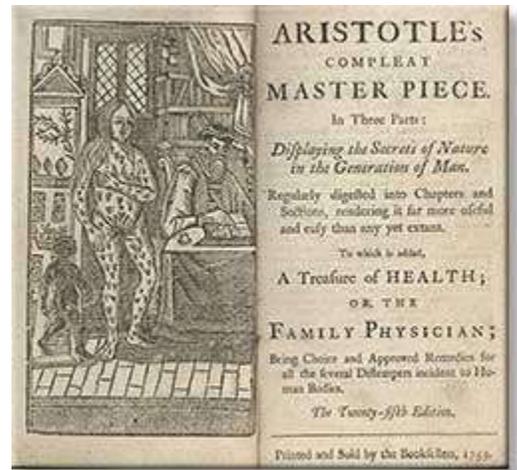
Systematic thinking first gained a foothold with the **pre-Socratic Greeks** around 5 centuries BC. They were working on the idea that underneath all the buzzing multiplicity of our world there might be a few simple elements that could be put together to explain things. **Socrates** was famous for asking about the **essence of something, trying to identify a definition that would apply to any and only whatever-it-was.** **Aristotle** began to write on natural science, and while it wasn't yet science as we know it, it was **systematic.** The breakthrough can be illustrated by comparing Greek ethics with Biblical "Wisdom".

To say how they thought life should be lived, biblical writers collected proverbs: "*A soft answer turns away wrath*"; "*Pride goes before a fall*". These collections do indeed offer wise advice but **proverbs are not systematic.** For example, you've all heard "*many hands make light work*". But we're also told "*too many cooks spoil the broth*". **Both true, but contradictory.** "*Look before you leap*" but "*He who hesitates is lost*". Which one applies? **Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics** was the first great effort to use a **systematic** approach. He defines the range of desirable human qualities or virtues and explains how they relate to each other. (Aristotle's book is still in print, with a new translation just published this year.)

Systematic thinking emerged in the classical Greco-Roman world. It was eclipsed for a while in the west by the barbarian invasions, but it remained alive among Arab thinkers. **Then in late medieval times when Italian merchants opened up trade with the East, the writings of Aristotle** and others were rediscovered, sparking the birth of modern science. In religion, we see the great systematic theologies ("**Summas**") of the scholastics, especially **Thomas Aquinas.**

The second great paradigm shift: from exteriority to interiority...

Next, there is the second paradigm shift to be understood: from **exteriority to interiority.** Where the **systematic paradigm** was concerned with **objects**, the **interiority paradigm** opens up its attention to include **subjects.** Think of the difference between being aware of something and being aware of yourself being aware. **In this new paradigm, instead of just trying to conceptualize and control the world around us, people began trying to think about what it means to know, to make choices, and to be not just another object or instance of some general concept, but a unique conscious individual.** Going back in history we can find many flashes of this interior awareness and concern in ancient times, especially in great religious



Cover page of Aristotle's compleat master piece : in three parts: displaying the secrets of nature in the generation of man

Photo

source: www.library.usyd.edu.au. Click image to enlarge.

writings, but the issue gains critical mass and momentum finally in the **Renaissance**, with its new interest in individual uniqueness.

Renaissance artists moved away from iconic paintings of generic saints — embodiments of an ideal — toward portraits of unique, specific individuals with evident self-awareness. **At the same time political and philosophical writers talked about self-determination, freedom of ideas, and the rights and dignity of each person.** In the middle ages it was still possible for example to accept the idea of a mass conversion of an entire nation to the Christian faith (**St. Boniface, Sts. Cyril & Methodius, St. Patrick**) but no longer. **The issue becomes the individual conscience.**

The **Protestant Reformation** was an effort to bring this new awareness into Christian practice. **Luther wanted to change the church to accommodate the new thinking, but he failed, mostly because of politics.** In philosophy, **Descartes** of course comes to mind with his "*I think, therefore I am*", and subsequent philosophers all grapple with ways to articulate consciousness and how it relates to the objective world. New disciplines are born — **Epistemology** and **Hermeneutics** in philosophy, and what the Germans call **Geisteswissenschaften** in empirical sciences like sociology & psychology. Human development becomes an issue. The classical essence of human beings was "rational animal", but if all you know about someone is that essence, you don't know much.

History now becomes self-reflective as well. No longer is it just "*this is the way it was*", but "*this is the way we currently understand it. Next year we may see it in a more adequate way, or with the benefit of an additional perspective*". **The idea of progress becomes part of our mind set. Things can change; we don't have to accept the way things are, or "have always been".**

And of course in the arts, painters no longer paint objects but subjective ways of seeing objects. Authors don't just give us the classical exemplary hero — and so on and on. **The new paradigm is all around us, and here to stay. Which is why Pope John wanted to come to grips with it.**

The challenges these paradigm shifts created for the Church...

With the help of the paradigm concepts mentioned in Part 1, we can better see what **Pope John** had in mind. Our church was born in a **pre-systematic world** and over time learned to adapt more or less to an increasingly **systematic world**. But when it came to dealing with the next cultural revolution, the dawn of **interiority**, there were problems.

In the liturgy, for instance, the mass originates in the **pre-systematic world** of **Judaism**, which used narrative and symbol as a matter of course. There was no conceptual equipment to analyze what was going on as the early disciples ate and drank in memory of **Jesus**. They used concrete images and affect-laden language like "*He feeds us with his body so that we may become his body*". In the **systematic world** of the medievals, by contrast, they did have a set of analytic tools. These were fairly well adapted to talking about objective realities; when pastoral questions were raised about subjective issues however — like, say, how is it that some eucharistic celebrations might have a greater effect than others on the faith of participants? — then all the medievals could do was answer in terms of **essence, matter & form, substance & accident**. The mass was objectively a mass if it contained such & such "essential elements".

It "produced grace" by repeating Christ's objective redemptive act. **Subjective issues**, like the meaningfulness of symbols, or how the participants might enter more fully into the meanings presented, would have to await the world of **interiority**.

Theological reflections on fundamental issues like sin, grace and redemption were all confined to more or less objective meanings before the **interior paradigm** was available. Do you remember how we thought of grace as "stuff"? **Grace is our relationship with God — His freely given love for us and our responsiveness to it. But these are interior concepts.**

Original Sin...

Consider the concept of original sin and the story of **Adam** in **Genesis**. When **Genesis** was written, transcendent realities were evoked with images and stories. Back around 1000 BC, when Israel's wise men speculated about their messed-up world and the good God who made it, **they had no analytic concepts**. If it were being written today someone might say "well, human beings are such that, if they were placed by God in a perfect world, they would mess it up because they refuse to accept their limits as creatures." **But back then all they could do was tell a story.** "In the beginning there was someone called Adam ("man" in Hebrew) whom God made and put in a perfect world, but Adam wanted to be like God and he messed everything up". **There was no intention of stating we had an actual prehistoric ancestor named Adam who did this. Adam is US — Everyman.**

But after Christianity goes through the first great paradigm shift to **systematic thinking**, scholars no longer think in these metaphors and stories. So they read **Genesis** and think it says **Adam** was objectively **the first man**, the actual ancestor of us all. And we, then, are sinners not because we cannot live with our creaturely limits and so try to be our own **God**, but because our earliest ancestor couldn't live with his limits, and we somehow inherit his sin. Like some sinister "stuff," a stain on our souls, **Adam's sin** is passed down to us.

More recently, with the development of **interiority**, it has become possible to revisit these ancient metaphors and stories and recognize - **Adam is me!** This stirs up an interesting theological aside. Classical theologians assumed that all human beings are descended from one individual. But as science continues to study human origins, if it seems more likely that groups of humans emerged gradually from quasi-humans, I would see no conflict with Genesis. Yet as recently as **Pius XII's** 1950 Encyclical **Humani Generis**, Rome has defended the opposite opinion — not as infallible teaching but seriously enough that it would be embarrassing to have to



Northern Renaissance painting of Adam and Eve by Marbuse (c 1590), Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid, Spain. Photo source: www.wikipaintings.org

change. A Catholic scientist studying human evolution might yet find himself in the same boat with Galileo.

But why has Rome not embraced the new paradigm? Why is it so loath to exploit the possibilities of understanding opened up by the paradigm of interiority?

Understanding some power dynamics in Catholicism...

When Renaissance thinkers proposed ideas of individual conscience, freedom of ideas and so on, the Church was threatened because the Papacy was a secular power, a monarchy, controlled by one or another of the powerful Italian families (Borgias, Medicis, etc.) who often treated it as a pathway to dynastic power and enrichment. Things came to a head because the new ideas called for freedom from Papal oppression too. The authentic religious appeal of the Protestant reformers had to be stamped out much for the same reason Pontius Pilate had to condemn Jesus — to maintain order and control. As the issues opened up by the new paradigm of interiority continued to spread, the Popes fought back. The Roman Inquisition was set up in the decades before 1600 in order to ferret out subversive free-thinkers in areas under Papal control. By the 1700's we have the Enlightenment, in which the ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity became so widely accepted that large-scale revolutions overthrew major monarchies — monarchies that were joined to an established church. Thinkers like Voltaire had no use for Church or King, seeing both as equally opposed to freedom & democracy.



 Pope Pius IX prevailed upon the bishops at Vatican I to declare himself infallible.

In the 1800's monarchy was in trouble all over Europe, including Papal Italy. Gregory XVI in the 1830's felt he had to call in armies from two other Catholic kingdoms, France and Austria, to help him fight off his own people who were in rebellion. He formally denounced the "liberal ideas" of free speech, freedom of the press, and separation of church and state. He claimed that kings are above the law, with absolute authority given to them directly by God. Social structures are immutable and must not be tampered with; in the 1860's, Pius IX declared that even slavery was not necessarily a wrong to be changed. In his *Syllabus of Errors* he denounced freedom of religion. No one has the right to error! He denounced those who said the church should reconcile itself to modern culture. In 1870, with Garibaldi's army poised to besiege Rome itself, he prevailed upon the bishops at Vatican Council I to declare him infallible. In 1881, Leo XIII condemned the idea that government derives its authority from the consent of the governed. "Americanism" was denounced as a heresy in 1898. In 1910 Pius X again condemned separation of church and state. In 1928, the Concordat in which the Pope finally agreed to drop his claim to rule the Papal States contained a stipulation that Italy would keep Catholicism as the official religion, support the Church financially, and teach catechism in the public schools. (When Kennedy was running for president and Protestant leaders were nervous about what a Catholic president might mean for this country, I thought they were just being foolish. I had no idea of the history.)

New questions about belief and practice...

Along with the social issues stirred up by the new cultural paradigm, there were new questions about belief and practice. To Rome, though, they were all seen in the same negative light, like the Protestant challenge to the near-automatic medieval view of the graces "dispensed" by the Church. Along with **freedom of conscience**, new culturally sensitive studies of history and new concepts like *progress* and *evolution* challenged the neat, orderly synthesis of late medieval theology. All of these changes together were labeled **Modernism and condemned**. Questions about **Jesus'** own subjective awareness, and how his life and death effect change in our hearts, were especially touchy. Efforts to sort out the human and the divine were portrayed as attacks on the supernatural. Many of the great Catholic minds whose ideas eventually prevailed in the Council — **John Courtney Murray, Karl Rahner, Yves Congar**, etc. — had been under attack by **The Holy Office (The Roman Inquisition** in its 20th Century name). **Until 1967 all clergy, seminarians and professors were required by Rome to take an Oath against Modernism**. By implication Rome seemed to think it soon expired, because we had to take it over and over again — at least once every year I was there. **Pope John** himself had been under suspicion of **Modernism** by the **Holy Office** because as a young priest he once addressed seminarians in his native city of Bergamo on the topic of "faith & science".

So it was no small thing when he announced an Ecumenical Council to "open the windows", and invited church leaders from all over the world to reconsider their stance on modernity. For five centuries, cultural progress had been opposed and blocked wherever possible. We had no idea, as enthusiastic seminarians in Rome in 1962, what a remarkable turnabout was happening. I remember one evening at **Foyer Unites** on Piazza Navona, a protestant observer at the Council warned us that **Vatican II** could only be the beginning of such a change. I also recall reading **Arnold Toynbee's** remark that all the great advances in a culture have tended to wreck the societies in which they occur. **Back then we dismissed those warnings. The Council was going to renew the face of the earth**. And it did accomplish a lot, considering where Church teaching had been until then — though admittedly, if you didn't know the history, you might not be impressed:

- Freedom of conscience is affirmed. Each person must ultimately follow his own conscience.
- Freedom of religion. No more do we say "Error has no rights".
- Political freedoms such as assembly and participation in government are endorsed.
- Economic equality of opportunity is an important goal.
- Social rights like equal justice, equal educational opportunity, and equality for women are affirmed — though the latter carries the qualifier "in ways suited to her nature"(?).
- In marriage, men and women are equal partners.
- In society, slavery is not to be tolerated in any form.
- Among countries, the Church supports an international organization such as the UN to work for peace and justice.



 The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) offered enormous hope to many.

Self-understanding in the Church itself changes...

Even as regards the Church's self-understanding there are significant changes:

- Acknowledgement that Church doctrine has developed over time and will continue to evolve.
- Acceptance of ecumenism; recognition that non-Catholic religious communities are also valuable toward salvation. Other Christian groups share our baptism into **Christ**. Jews are still **God's** covenanted people (and are not to be condemned as responsible for **Jesus'** death). Holiness is to be found in all religions, as **God's Spirit** is at work everywhere.
- Catholic worship is not something performed by the clergy on behalf of the laity. It is the common act of all, with the clergy responsible for leading it in the name of all.
- Reading **the Bible** should not be discouraged as too complicated for Catholics. It is obscure in some ways because of cultural differences, but it should be studied, known and prayed.
- The Church's mission to promote holiness is not accomplished by taking believers away from activity in the world but by supporting and encouraging them in their holy work of promoting justice, peace and human development in **God's world**.

- And another item which may be obscure for some: The body of the faithful does not err in faith and morals in issues where a consensus prevails. This is by no means a departure from previous teaching, but it serves in an oblique way to say that the 19th Century doctrine of infallibility claims for the Pope no more than the guarantee **Jesus** gave to the whole church: "*The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" (We may feel that **Jesus'** encouragement is timely.)

So what **John XXIII** wanted was partially achieved. The **Council fathers** finally did step into the river of history. They stopped fighting the cultural paradigm that had been gaining momentum for five centuries, and addressed some of the questions and issues it raised. **But, after Pope John** died, they began to get cold feet. In the end, the bishops voting for change were outlasted by their opponents in **the Vatican bureaucracy**. They went home having outlined a program of openness but they left intact the old power structure. **The Inquisition**, re-named in 1908 the **Supreme Congregation of The Holy Office**, now received the less exalted title **Congregation for the Teaching of the Faith**, but it kept its same powers, mission, and personnel. As did the **Roman Curia** generally.

What was their agenda? Well, certainly not the Council's vision of a less centralized church with more participation by all. They worked the other way, actually, to maintain and even increase central control. **They gradually replaced Vatican II bishops with men they thought would be more docile to Roman authority. They emphasized the specialness and separation of the clergy, not their common humanity. And they portrayed the world again as dangerous and corrupt, in contrast to the safe haven of unchanging truth to be found in the Church.**

**Christ did not found the Church as a democracy...
He didn't found it as a dictatorship either!**

And the world is certainly not unchanging. Fifty years may not be a long time in the history of a culture, but in the decades since the **Council** our educated Catholic laity along with the rest of our modern culture has been continuing to develop. We have seen growth in respect for women's equality, better insight into

gender identity and preference, and increased understanding of healthy personality development (and how events such as sexual abuse can affect it). In religious matters Catholics have a wider appreciation of the shared dignity of all before **God**, less tolerance of clerical pretensions to live on some higher plane of existence, and some sense that when Church leaders say "*Christ did not found the Church as a democracy*", they're entitled to say back "*He didn't found it as a dictatorship either*". **There is also a widespread feeling that lay people may know more about sexual morality than does a celibate clergy, and a suspicion that when God said in Genesis "It is not good for man to be alone," He was right.**

Is some of this "voice of the times" the voice of God?

Is some of this "voice of the times" the voice of God? One gets the impression that Rome doesn't think so. I wish I could better understand their impulse to resist change because in different ways we all have it. After 25 years as a psychologist, though, I haven't found any better explanation than the one in **Genesis**: life is in many ways (and ultimately) out of our hands, which leaves us with a fundamental anxiety. **If we could trust God's love, St. John tells us, it would dispel the fear. But instead, aware of our vulnerability, we shrink away from God's invitation to self-transcendence. We jump into the bushes like Adam and Eve to**

hide from His approach. The "bushes" may be wealth or distraction for some, but even we pious people find a place to hide from the too-direct **gaze of God**. We feel safer with rules we can follow to make us feel justified, and in rituals conducted by a separate special caste of holy people who will stand in front of us so we can stay back a bit. I know many wonderful men in the priesthood but there will always be some who want to be those special ones because they think it sets them above the rest. Holding on to the old medieval paradigm suits them just fine. But whatever the reason, the result is so very sad. **Bishops are selected for their obedience to Rome, their eagerness to please those above them in the power structure. New priests are fewer and fewer in number, and by most reports of less auspicious ability. Parishes show declining membership and aging populations. Rome seems preoccupied with rooting out heresy among nuns and distancing itself from homosexuality. And the church is seen as increasingly irrelevant or embarrassing by our children, even those most drawn to a serious search for God. It feels like a death, where we were hoping for a birth.**

Optimism to end this essay...

However, I also know:

- The youthful expectations we had for **Vatican II** were naïve. Opening up windows could only be the beginning of dealing with centuries of new cultural development. Dealing with all the new concepts, questions, insights and values is a vast work, not to be accomplished in a few years. Yet it is a worthwhile work, if the **Gospel** matters. And it is a work that cannot be reversed — the toothpaste can't be put back into the tube.
- **God is still God. His Holy Spirit** is still in our hearts, summoning us to go ahead with confidence. This is not the first conflict Christianity has seen and it won't be the last. Actually it is stasis, changelessness, that is the anomaly. Right from the start, the Church has faced change and sometimes violent disagreement. Read **Galatians 2:11**, where **St. Paul** talks about his confrontation with **St. Peter** over cultural change. We survived that transition and we will survive this.

Writing this talk and reviewing these ideas has been therapeutic for me, I think. I was starting to prepare it when a friend happened to call my attention to **T.S. Eliot's** poem "**Journey of the Magi**". Maybe you've read it. It is written from the viewpoint of one of the **Three Kings**, now grown old. He looks back and describes traveling to find **Jesus**. It was a difficult and disturbing journey, as he relates it to his scribe. Finally, he says "All this was a long time ago, I remember. And I would do it again, but set down this. Set down this: Were we led all that way for Birth, or Death?"

In this case, I think both. **Didn't Jesus tell us, it is only by dying that we come to new birth?**