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## **The Second Vatican Council: Why should it matter to your generation?**

### **A Word of Thanks to My Alma Mater**

THANK YOU FOR THAT VERY WARM and welcoming introduction. It is a great joy for me to be here and a great honor to give this year's Annual Joseph and Edith Habiger Lecture in Catholic Studies. I want to begin this evening by offering a word of thanks to my alma mater, St. Thomas. I do so with a story.

Some thirty years ago, I was sitting in Aquinas Hall gripped in concentration during a philosophy exam. One of the men (that's all we had in those days) raised his hand and asked the late Monsignor Henri DuLac: "Father, what if you know something and you can't explain it in your own words?" Without hesitation, Monsignor replied, "Then you don't know it."

I am sure that was little consolation to the student. It may even have sent him into a panic. I recall that story as a way of helping me say what the then-St. Thomas College did for me during my college years. Here I discovered that learning must be more than a rote memorization of data, a parrot-like recitation of the past or a mindless repetition of familiar formulas. Here I learned that we truly know something when we can take the ancient truths, the traditions of the past and scholarship of the ages, and make them our own by expressing them in our own words, in words that give meaning to our lives today.

When Don Briel invited me last year to give this lecture, I was genuinely honored and I gladly accepted. I saw it as an opportunity to give something back to a community of

learning I called home during my college years. I am honest with you when I say that any contribution that I have made as a priest and now as a bishop is due in no small measure to the education and formation I received here at St. Thomas.

As noted in your program, Monsignor James Habiger established this lecture series to celebrate his parents' passion for education and to bring faith alive in the campus communities of St. Thomas and St. John's University. Tonight, I want to contribute in some small way to that very noble and worthwhile initiative as I talk to you about the Second Vatican Council and invite you to see why it matters to your generation.

### **Introduction**

In addressing this topic, "Why should the Second Vatican Council matter to your generation?", I want to make three points by way of introduction.

First, it is important to recall that the reforms of the Council were not a matter of change-for-change sake. The reforms were not cosmetic and superficial changes designed to give the Church a more modern and updated look for the times. The Council was not the equivalent of an ecclesiastical facelift. I think it is worthwhile stating this up front, since many younger people today could easily get this impression after hearing people of my generation haggle over minute details related to the Liturgy or disparage the Council by calling the reforms trendy. The Bishops had a serious agenda in coming together during those four years. Put simply, the agenda was you, or better, the people living in this time. Many leaders in the Church were becoming increasingly concerned about the growing perception and criticism that the Church was not connecting with the lives of ordinary believers. The Bishops wanted people to know that their concerns mattered to the Church and they made that abundantly clear in the opening lines of their *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes*:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ.

Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.<sup>1</sup>

The second thing I want to say by way of introduction is that the Bishops realized that the reforms had to be comprehensive of the Church's life if she was to speak with credibility and conviction to the people of this age. Just consider the vast scope of subjects treated: the understanding of revelation, the nature, membership and constitution of the Church, pastoral and missionary activity, other Christian communities and other religions, the liturgy, the laity, consecrated life, education, social communication, the relations between faith and culture. It is easy to forget that the Council's reforms were the most enormous undertaking in the Church's history. The single paperback volume of the sixteen conciliar documents is not very impressive. But, as an historian of the Council reminds us, "the twenty-six volumes of the *Acta Synodalia* – the *Acts of the Council* – attest to the mammoth dimension of the undertaking."<sup>2</sup>

This leads me to my third and final introductory point. Given the serious and comprehensive nature of the Council's work, it is more accurate to speak of the Council's reforms as a number of shifts that reshaped the Church rather than mere changes that affected various aspects of Church life. This evening, as I talk to you about the meaning of the Council for your generation, I am going to focus on three of these shifts. My goal in doing so is two-fold. First, I want to help you understand that the Council was about making the Church more effective and authentic in her mission of presenting the Gospel to your generation. Specifically, that would mean presenting the Gospel in a way that speaks to the deepest aspirations and concerns of people living in this age. My second goal is to give you a sense of the enormous risk that the Bishops took in calling for the most comprehensive reform in the history of the Church. It was a risk that they took for you, a point which might prompt you to take a second look at the Council not just as a part of human history but a part of your history.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1.

<sup>2</sup> René Latourelle, *Introduction* in Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), vol. 1, xv.

### **Sound Byte Response**

And so, if I were asked to give a sound byte response to the question, “Why should the Second Vatican Council mean something to your generation?” I would simply reply, “Because you matter. And, it was at the Council that the Church boldly made a fresh and compelling argument for why your life matters.”

### **Three Shifts - An Overview**

The first shift had to do with the way we understand the work and activity of the Holy Spirit. Instead of limiting the work and activity of the Spirit to just a privileged few, or thinking about holiness and the mission of the Church as the sole task of the vowed religious or the ordained, the Council reminded us that all the baptized are gifted, called to holiness and sent into the world to build up the Kingdom of God. The message here is that those spiritual gifts should not be overlooked and wasted but they should contribute to the life of the Church.

Secondly, there was a shift in the Church’s understanding of herself. Prior to the Council, it was common to speak of the Church mainly as an institution organized by a legal framework and defined primarily in terms of a hierarchical structure. Without denying the Church’s important institutional aspects, the Bishops, by recovering from scripture and tradition much richer images such as “the People of God,” “the Body of Christ,” emphasized that we are a community of believers.

Finally, the Bishops called for a shift in the way that the Church approaches the world. Instead of seeing herself as a fortress at odds with the world, cloistered and defensive, the Council Fathers spoke of the Church as a servant for the world, caring for the world. As one theologian put it, the Church is not of the world or against the world, but for the world.

### **My Method**

My method is quite simple and straight forward. I will ask “What?”, “Why?” and “How?” First, I will describe each shift in greater detail: “What was really involved?”

Second, I will ask, “Why was it important? What were, as the Bishops put it, ‘the signs of the times,’ the historical circumstances that led the Bishops to move in this new direction?” Finally, I will deal with the question, “How does all of this relate to you? How does it make a difference in your life?”

I believe that the Council has something fresh to offer you, especially as you compare its message with all the other voices today in the world that pretend to speak to your needs, hopes and aspirations. My hope is that you will see that the Bishops undertook the reforms because they believed that your life matters and they were willing to take a risk on your behalf. This is why the Council should matter to you.

### **First Shift: The Work and Activity of the Holy Spirit**

For good reasons, the Second Vatican Council has often been referred to as a new Pentecost for the Church. Simply put, the Bishops, through the documents they issued at the Council, gave the baptized a fresh and, I would even say, revolutionary insight into how the Spirit of God works in the Church and in each of our lives. Each person is called, 1) to holiness, 2) to mission and 3) to contribute our understanding of the faith.

Holiness is the destiny of all the baptized. The Bishops, attentive to recent scholarship, recovered the Church’s rich tradition that each baptized person is called to holiness in the very circumstances of their own lives. This is how they put it: “In the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God. . . . All of Christ’s followers, therefore, are invited and bound to pursue holiness and the perfect fulfillment of their proper state.”<sup>3</sup>

The Spirit also works in the baptized by calling them to share in the mission of Christ and the Church. According to the Bishops, each Christian has the “splendid burden of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men

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<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 41 and 42.

throughout the world.”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, all the faithful, through baptism, contribute to the development of the Church’s understanding of its teaching and heritage.

Most Catholics at the time of the Council would have considered these ideas new if not somewhat revolutionary. While there was never a denial that the Spirit was active in the lives of each baptized person, the call to holiness and sharing in the mission of Christ was commonly understood to be the work of the ordained or vowed religious. After all, they were the ones who dedicated their lives to this. They lived, dressed and acted as though they were set apart for this higher purpose. The Bishops at the Council clearly wanted to move away from this limited reading of the work of the Spirit. They did so by reaffirming the ancient teaching about the priesthood of the faithful, the dignity of the baptism we share in common.

Even more remarkable was the notion that the Holy Spirit works in the ordinary lives of believers in a way that contributes to the Church’s understanding of her teaching and heritage. If you think about it, this is a natural conclusion of the first two ideas. However, it is for the most part an overlooked doctrine, perhaps because it requires a real shift in thought. Prior to the Council, the development of doctrine seemed to be the sole purview of the hierarchy with the aid of theologians. At the Council, the Bishops made it clear that the Spirit assists the Church to grow in its understanding both of the realities and the words of the heritage of faith, a) through the work of theologians, b) in the ministry of the hierarchy, and c) from the lived experience of believers.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Historical Context: Responding to a Crisis in Faith**

The recovery of these much richer and more traditional descriptions of the activity of the work of the Spirit in each believer was not just an academic exercise, the results of

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<sup>4</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., *Dei Verbum*, The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 8, cf. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 94.

research. The Bishops were faced with the crisis in faith that many people were experiencing as the world had just gone through two brutal world wars, fought for the most part by “Christian nations.” People began to wonder whether there was really any connection between religious faith and everyday life. Does faith really matter to our lived experience? Does it make us act and behave any differently? In the context of the times, many asked: “What does it mean for us to call ourselves disciples of Christ if this is the way we treat each other?” These were the questions of the day that people were posing to the Church. The Bishops responded to this Christian identity crisis by clearly articulating the meaning of Christian baptism and by reforming the Church’s rituals and structures to allow for and encourage greater participation in her life and mission.

### **Renewed Interest in the Spiritual Life Today**

My experience tells me that the questions and aspirations which the Bishops identified forty years ago are very much alive in the present generation today. Bookstores are full of new works every year offering spiritual counsel and direction. As an easy target on an airplane, I can also testify that people have no hesitation talking about their spiritual lives and giving me their opinion! I honestly believe that an increasing number of people are concerned about their spiritual lives and want to live authentically.

### **The Need for a Clear Voice in the Midst of Other Messages**

However, this renewed interest in the spiritual life presents some unique pastoral challenges. The time and culture we live in is so very heavily influenced by a climate of radical individualism. In fact, many today speak of spirituality or the growth in the spiritual life in terms of a self-improvement or self-actualization program, the success of which is measured by how it leaves me feeling.

In his landmark critique of American culture, The Habits of the Heart, Robert Bellah introduces us to a young woman who typifies how our culture can affect one’s approach to spirituality. Sheila, like others in his book, was asked her views on religion and spirituality. She identifies herself as a spiritual person, but hers is a private spirituality. She wants no part of any of the organized religions. When pressed by Bellah to name

what she would call her religion and explain it, she simply replies, “It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice ...It’s just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself.”<sup>6</sup> The spiritual life for Sheila is a matter of self-actualization or personal improvement on her own. Its success is measured by how alive she feels, how uplifting an experience is and how animated she becomes through such an experience. Aside from the fact that “Sheilaism” and any of its clones cannot be considered adult spirituality, they are also not the Gospel. This is not a spirituality that belongs to Christian baptism.

### **The Council’s Understanding of an Authentic Christian Spirituality**

Rather, as the Council reminded us, the true test that we are living in the Spirit is as old as the day Jesus, himself filled with the Holy Spirit, stood in his hometown synagogue, unrolled the scroll and read from the prophet Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ...to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, release of prisoners and to announce a year of favor from the Lord.

According to the Bishops, this passage from the fourth chapter of Luke’s Gospel is the point of reference for an authentic Christian spiritual life, for anyone graced with the Holy Spirit in baptism.

Christ was sent by the Father “to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart,” “to seek and to save what was lost.” Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering, and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder.<sup>7</sup>

From the earliest days of the Church, taking responsibility as members of a community for the poor and the weak has been the true test of an authentic Christian spirituality. It is the spirituality of Christian baptism, which the Bishops at the Council knew had to be recaptured if the Church was going to be a credible witness to the Gospel and an answer to the deepest aspirations of people living in our time. As one popular spiritual writer put

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Bellah et al., Habits of the Heart, (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 221.

<sup>7</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

it when addressing young people of today about coming to an authentic spirituality, “You will know you are on the right track when you can say with conviction and understanding: ‘My life is not about me.’” This approach to spirituality has a perennial quality that is needed today. It challenges and stands in stark opposition to “Sheilaism” and the present day trend of reducing the goal of one’s spirituality to how it makes me feel, how alive and energetic I become as a result.

### **Second Shift: The Church’s Self-Understanding**

While the first shift involved the identity of each baptized person, the second shift was about the Church’s very self-identity. As then-Father Avery Dulles SJ notes, this identity shift took place during the Council itself: “The successive drafts of the Constitution (*The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*), compared with one another, strikingly reveal the tremendous development of the Church’s self-understanding which resulted from the dialogue within the Council.”<sup>8</sup>

Those who prepared the first draft relied on a vision that portrayed the Church as a hierarchical and juridical institution. Simply put, the Church could be explained by an ecclesiastical flow chart complete with rules and regulations for maintaining order.

Putting this initial attempt aside, the Bishops opted for a different approach, a pastoral approach, one that relied on a more biblical understanding of the Church. As a result, instead of beginning with a discussion of the governance structures of the Church, the Constitution opens with a portrayal of the Church as a people whom God invites into intimate union. Throughout the text, biblical images such as “the Body of Christ,” “the People of God,” and “mystery” are used to stress the communal nature of the Church.

This shift has had a profound effect in the life of the Church on various levels. Let me

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<sup>8</sup> Avery Dulles SJ, “Commentary on the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*”, in Documents of Vatican II, Walter M. Abbot, SJ, ed., (New York: Guild Press, 1966), pp. 9-13.

cite two. First, by placing greater emphasis on the communal nature of the Church, it was clear that her structures of organization and communication had to be adapted accordingly. With no little struggle, we began to see shortly after the Council the emergence of consultative bodies in the Church such as parish and presbyteral councils, the synod of bishops and the refashioning of episcopal conferences.

Secondly, this more communal nature of the Church aided the liturgical renewal, which called for greater participation of all the baptized. The shift in the Church's self-understanding, based on biblical images, gave more theological depth to this move towards greater participation. As members of the Body of Christ, a priestly community, all the baptized "offer the divine victim of God and . . . by the act of oblation and through Holy Communion, all perform their proper part in the liturgical service."<sup>9</sup>

### **The Historical Context: Longing for Human Solidarity**

Without question, the Bishops were attending to the results of recent scholarship in scripture and the writings of the early Church Fathers in emphasizing this more communal understanding of the Church. It is no less true that the Bishops also had an eye to the world's situation and the growing aspiration for greater human solidarity in the world. Again, I want to take you back to the historical context. As noted earlier, the world had just gone through two horrific world wars. These wars, however, did not bring true peace but only the Cold War with its threat of mutual atomic annihilation. In fact, on October 14, 1963, just three days after the Second Vatican Council began, United States reconnaissance flights verified the presence of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba. It was important for the Church to give the world a message of hope, that it is possible to live together in solidarity. The world heard that message on the opening day of the Council, October 11, 1962, when the elderly Pope John XXIII called humanity to see that Divine Providence was "leading us to a new order of human relations."

## **Post 9/11 World and the Renewed Longing for Human Solidarity**

While people of good will on both sides are divided over the military actions taken after the September 11, 2001, attacks, all would agree that the world changed dramatically that day. As we in North America joined all the other continents in being victims of terrorism from abroad, our perception of the world grew smaller. Despite the anger and grief that is in our hearts, there is a general perception that the entire world needs to look for new ways to work together and bring about freedom, safety, justice and opportunity. As John XXIII put it in his address opening the Council, the old ways are not working: “Experience has taught men that violence inflicted on others, might of arms and political domination are of no help at all in finding a happy solution to the grave problems which afflict them.”

## **The Council’s Vision of the Church as Community**

The Fathers of the Council understood that the Church had more to offer the world than words when it came to promoting human solidarity. The Church had to lead by example, which meant renewing her internal life as a community of faith. It is important, however, to recall what we mean when we call the Church a community. The community of the Church does not refer to a group of people who are one because they have things or beliefs in common. The members of the Church are not a community because of what they do, or because of their economic status, or their ethnic or racial background.

They are members of this community because of what Christ did in shedding His blood on the Cross. It is this action of Christ, made present in the sacraments of Christian initiation, which unites members to His work of reconciling the world. He takes the initiative in each of our lives and that is why we are one. The unity we have with each other as a community of faith is the result of that union with Christ, and of the works of salvation that we accomplish together through Him as Head of the Body.

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<sup>9</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 11

The Council's description of the Church as community, then, helps us to better understand how she carries on the work of Christ in reconciling all of creation to the Father. The touchstone for this work is the Cross, in which all members are signed and made into the Body of Christ, with the hope and mission that all of humanity will one day share in this solidarity.

### **A Vision for Our Time?**

The Church seems to speak of herself as a community in a way that differs from its common usage in society. Is this notion of community too sophisticated to speak to the modern person's aspiration for human solidarity? I believe that it is not. Every so often, we are graced by examples in the wider culture that seem to be in tune or at least reflect a receptivity to the Church's way of thinking. For instance, let's look at Bruce Springsteen's latest album, *The Rising*. In his lyrics he not only reflects the aspiration for greater human solidarity in our time, but he also offers some strikingly Christian images of community and the hope it offers amidst the deep and perilous division facing our world. I am particularly impressed by the importance he gives to reconciliation as essential for making the human community possible, and the hopeful way he suggests we pursue it. The song "Worlds Apart" best illustrates this. Reconciliation, he suggests has to begin with the bloodshed. For Springsteen, bloodshed cannot be just an image of the past, of the dead. In an ironic twist, he invites us to see bloodshed as an image of the future. Bloodshed reminds us, we who live, what we share in common. It is the bridge to bring us together. And so he sings: "May the living let us in, before the dead tear us apart. . . . We'll let blood build a bridge over mountains draped in stars. I'll meet you on the ridge between these worlds apart."

Springsteen, himself raised Catholic, speaks not only to the modern day aspiration for human solidarity, but offers a way to get there by using language that is remarkably receptive, if not close to what the Council says about the Church's community and liturgy.

This (the Church's) inauguration and growth are both symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of a crucified Jesus, and are foretold in the words of the Lord referring to His death on the Cross: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself." As often as the sacrifice of the Cross in which Christ our Passover was sacrificed, is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on, and, in the sacrament of the eucharistic bread, the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ is both expressed and brought about. All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our whole life strains.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Renewal of the Church through the Renewal of the Liturgy**

As an aside, it is worth noting that this emphasis on the communal nature of the Church opened up a much richer understanding of the liturgy. Now our worship of God becomes a renewal of the bonds we share with each other, and with Christ, as we take up His mission of reconciling all of creation through the blood of His Cross. The Church grows in this identity and mission through the Eucharist. That is why the Council called for full, active and conscious participation in the liturgy. It is not for building our own small group or social enclave of like-minded or like-income people. Rather, it is about Christ drawing us together to renew us in our identity and to reinvigorate us for the mission. It is no wonder that the Council Fathers' first task was the renewal of the liturgy. In fact, *The Constitution on the Liturgy* was their first document, issued forty years ago this coming December 4.<sup>11</sup> The renewal of the liturgy was aimed at building the kind of community we have been talking about and, as Springsteen suggests, such a work is critically important for our times.

### **Third Shift: The Church from Defensive Bulwark to Servant of Humanity**

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<sup>10</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> I draw the reader's attention to the particular distinction the Fathers gave to the liturgical renewal when they said: "Zeal for the promotion and restoration of the liturgy is rightly held to be a sign of the providential dispositions of God in our time, as a movement of the Holy Spirit in His Church. It is today a distinguishing mark of the Church's life, indeed of the whole tenor of contemporary religious thought and action." Unless I am mistaken, this is the only time the Bishops at the Council identified a particular aspect of their work as God's providence and the movement of the Holy Spirit. Cf., *The Constitution on the*

The third and final shift I want to discuss with you is related to how the Church interacts with the world. Clearly this issue was on the minds of Church leaders as they came together in Rome for the Council. Many bishops were calling for more openness to the world and dialogue with those outside of the Church. Still others considered the Council an opportunity to issue new condemnations of errors and were talking openly of this to the media. Pope John XXIII quickly dispelled these doomsayers in his inaugural message to the Bishops. He admitted that the Church rightly opposed errors and frequently condemned them in the past, but then he added:

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.

John XXIII then used the story of Acts 3, in which Peter cures the lame beggar, to illustrate how the Church, knowing that humanity is “oppressed by so many difficulties,” is interested in serving the human race. Her mission is “to distribute the goods of divine grace which, raising men to the dignity of the sons of God, are the most efficacious safeguards and the aids toward a more human life.” By her teaching, the Church enlightens humanity to “understand well what they really are, what their lofty dignity and their purpose are.” Finally, through her members,

She spreads everywhere the fullness of Christian charity, than which nothing is more effective in eradicating the seeds of discord, nothing more efficacious in promoting concord, just peace, and the brotherly unity of all.”

These sentiments were echoed by the Fathers of the Council as they made clear to the world that the Church has come to a new self-understanding.

Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ... to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served.<sup>12</sup>

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Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 43.

<sup>12</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 3.

### **The Historical Context of this Shift**

These statements and actions by the Pope and the Council Fathers did not occur in a vacuum. We should not forget that with the loss of the Papal States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Church struggled for almost a century to redefine her new place in the world. In this period of time, some counseled the Church to withdraw from the world in isolation or to become defensive by condemning the world. Wiser leaders prevailed, for they understood that these narrow approaches to the world would only lead the Church down the path of unnecessary antagonism, or worse, give the harmful impression that the Church's main interest was to regain her past privileges and status.

There was no more visible example of this new approach to the world by the Church than Pope John XXIII and his successors. The Pope became much more present and approachable. It was sensational but welcome news when Pope Paul VI began traveling to other countries in the 1960s and when he addressed the United Nations in New York. He was dubbed "the Pilgrim Pope."

Now, we think nothing of it. John Paul II has traveled over 700,000 miles, the equivalent of 29 trips around the world. It is true that his personality is somewhat responsible for his globetrotting and demanding schedule. As a Father of the Council, the Holy Father has taken seriously during these twenty-five years of his pontificate the mission of the Church to be present – for the world, not against it.

### **An Openness to the World, Welcomed by the World**

How has this new approach by the Church to the world been received? While I could point to any number of positive reactions, I want to share with you a tribute that Kofi Anan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, paid Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his silver jubilee. Anan calls the Pope the world's "most powerful voice of peace, hope and justice."

He has reminded us that lasting peace means more than the absence of war. . . He has reminded us of our obligations to one another. . . He has explained how we can give our globalizing world a soul, a meaning and a

direction. . . I have been fortunate enough to be inspired by that voice firsthand.

A Vatican spokesman recently spoke about the Pope's universal appeal in a way that captures the unique contribution the Church can make to the world:

He is the only global leader who is concerned about the spiritual well-being of today's men and women, as opposed to just their material well-being. He asks, "Who are you?" instead of "What do you do?" or "What do you want to buy?" and people understand this and respond to it.

The pope knows that he is not the only one in the Church responsible for this mission of service to the world. Time and again over these years, he has reminded us that we all, as members of the Body of Christ, have a share in an outreach to the world. Like him, we are to be servants who are "not inspired by any human ambition." Rather, we are doing the work of Christ by being the voice for the voiceless and speaking the truth in a way that liberates human beings to respond to their dignity. We are serving as Christ when we build relationships with the stranger, welcome the homeless and speak words of peace to a world that too easily opts for a violent solution to its problems. In effect we, like Christ, do what we do because we are concerned about the spiritual well-being of all of humanity.

### **Unfinished Agenda**

While each of these three shifts is far from complete, I believe that this last one is the most demanding for the Church. We are still learning how to speak with those who reject the Gospel. Open and mature dialogue is never easy, but the strength and patience it demands will keep us from the two extremes, a quick condemnation of those at odds with us or an easy compromise of our own position so that we fit in. This is true in dialogue with people of other faiths and traditions or with politicians and elected officials.

This part of the Church's agenda is a work in progress, but it needs to go forward if the Church is going to be true to her identity as a servant to the world, not against the world or of the world but for the world.

### **Conclusion: Pope John Paul II - A Father of the Council Speaks to Your Generation**

My hope this evening is that I have at the least introduced you not just to the Council, but to the Fathers of the Council. As your elders, they boldly looked ahead to your day with hope. Their actions, particularly in bringing about these three shifts, and their writings were crafted to speak to your hopes and aspirations. They took the risk of bringing about the most dramatic renewal of the Church in history because they believed you were worth it. They believed that you matter and they made a compelling case for it. That is why the Council should matter to your generation.

No one better speaks of this confidence in you, this concern that you matter, than the man whom the universal Church happily honors tomorrow as he marks his twenty-fifth anniversary as the Successor of Peter. John Paul II, one of the last surviving Fathers of the Council, has made real the bond his brother Bishops wanted with your generation when they gathered over forty years ago in Rome. Even now in these last years of his life, he can look ahead to the future with confidence in you.

I leave you with an excerpt from his last message to young people at World Youth Day in Toronto. His words express the confidence he and his brother Bishops at the Council have in your generation. It is the confidence of those who looked ahead to your time two generations ago and prepared the Church to receive you:

At the end of this World Youth Day, as I look at you now, at your young faces, at your genuine enthusiasm, from the depths of my heart I want to give thanks to God for the gift of youth, which continues to be present in the Church and in the world because of you... Thanks be to God for all the young people! You will carry the proclamation of Christ into the new millennium. I look with confidence to this new humanity which you are now helping to prepare. I look to this Church which in every age is made youthful by the Spirit of Christ and today is made happy by your intentions and commitment. I look to the future and make my own the words of an ancient prayer:

I give thanks to you, Father of us all, for the life and the knowledge which you have revealed to us through Jesus your servant. To you be glory in every age! AMEN