



## 50 years Vatican Council II – Remembrance and obligation

### Remembrance and Obligation

For many it sounded like liberation; for others like a threat: "Open wide the windows of the Church!" With these words Pope John XXIII announced an Ecumenical Council for the entire Church on 25th January 1959 in the Roman basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls. He demanded a renewal: An "aggiornamento", a rapprochement of the Church to the needs of the time.

Despite all doubts and resistance, the Council could be inaugurated in October 1962. The three-year Church assembly really made history and led to breathtaking changes: A profound liturgical renewal, a new Church-understanding as people of God, the turning to the worries and needs of the people, as well as the awareness of international Church, and an ecumenical opening without example. The movement of the Holy Spirit was really very noticeable there. A new spring followed; unfortunately only for a short duration.

Already during the Council there were strong arguments between the conservatives and the innovators. The topic "Church of the poor", which was the permanent topic not only of many bishops of the continents of the south but also of the initiators and sponsors of the worker-priests in France, then did not find any majority anyway. The supporters of the idea had to recognize that many of the brother-bishops "were not yet so gripped by the grace of the love of poverty", as Dom Helder Camara expressed. Soon after the Council an intense and partly bitter discussion arose about the meaning of the Council documents.

For the traditionalists and the conservatives the Council was a break with the entrenched and unalterable Church of the previous Councils (Trent and Vatican I); however, for the reformers it was exactly about saving the tradition in its core by developing them anew, relevant for the present. There is no timeless truth chiseled into stone; it is always temporary to the cultural and linguistic medium of expression which is permanent in its change. And

therefore the Church must always say its truth newly if it should be understood by the respective contemporaries.

The Latin American Church succeeded mostly in this in its bishops-meetings of Medellín in 1968 and Puebla in 1979. They connected the inhuman poverty and oppression of the majority of peoples with the biblical liberation message, and drew the only possible conclusion out of it: An "option for the poor". A new kind of Church arose: The freeing Church of the poor. The base-communities became the places where the poor became the self-acting subjects. The theology of liberation which arose out of it became a trademark of this Church. Certainly Leonardo Boff is wholly right when he says: "Obviously nowhere in the Christian world the teaching statements of the Second Vatican Council have been more seriously taken and put into the practice with greater strength and creativity than in the third world and by the suppressed minorities." (L. Boff, *Concilium*, 24, 1988).

The CCFMC is a fruit of the Council. Thousands of sisters and brothers of the Franciscan family have taken seriously the demand of the Council to read anew the Franciscan sources in the light of the Council and the need of the times, and to rediscover the meaning of their theology for our time. In a long intercultural dialog they have taken today's challenges to a Franciscan version. Thereby they have discovered that the essential Franciscan options are convergent with important documents of the Council such as the Church of the poor, people of God as a brotherly and serving Church, the creation as an original element of the revelation of God, justice and peace, and conservation of nature. It should therefore be a heartfelt concern of us all to use the memory of 50 years of Council as a chance to have a good look at these topics seriously. To this end we will give suggestions this year in our news with which we can discover the spirit of the Council again personally and in community.

Andreas Müller OFM

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*The council has asked the Religious Orders to return to their sources. The CCFMC is a fruit of this obligation. Thousands of sisters and brothers of the Franciscan family in the whole world are gathered together in an intercultural dialog regarding what the Franciscan spirituality has to say for our time. Fifty years after the beginning of the council we want to show with lived examples how highly relevant and explosive this is today.*

### The People of God on Vatican Council II

#### A vision of mankind in the spirit of St. Francis

Prof. Dr. Elmar Klinger

"That 'No' to the existing forms of the Church, which one would call today a prophetic protest, could not be more radical than it was with Francis." J. Ratzinger, the present Pope, made this statement correctly, and it is still valid to this day.



For Francis finds his role in the Church by virtue of his vocation by God. Despite much resistance he gains acceptance in it. He makes the social question a great topic; because he sees Christ Himself in the poor - a great revolution for the Middle-Ages with its system of social ranks and feudal land-owners. It is the same for every society including ours. This change of perspective in the work of the Church means not only the social order so that one could confine oneself to socio-political questions but is also the basic approach of every analysis of the supernatural as such. It concerns the Church as a Church and the theology as a theology. It belongs to the contents of revelation as a revelation; because Jesus said: "What you do to the least of my brothers (and sisters), you have done unto me." The social question concerns the social order and the faith in God in the commandment of love of neighbour; that often questions the conditions of present social structures. It extends to all areas of the human living together. It concerns the respective order of man and woman, parents and children, supervisors and subordinates, locals and foreigners, haves and have-nots. In all these constellations there exist unforeseeably many problems. The solution does not consist in the comfort of the hereafter; nor is it the highest ideal which nobody can reach, but a challenge in the here and now which concerns the State as well as the Church. It is of primary importance to the Church because it passes on the revelation. It stands for salvation and liberation. With Francis the social question is a key question of the mission. The brothers should be "subject to the Muslims (Saracens)" (cf. NbR 16.6ff) to be capable at all to talk to them about Christ.

The II Vatican Council demands of all religious orders a return to the sources. What J. Ratzinger, today's pope, has said about Francis and his prophetic criticism of the forms of the Church is correct - it is correct in an eminent way. It means a return to Francis, a following in his attachment to the Church, a following in solidarity in the strength of prophetic criticism. The step from a traditional cooperation towards the cooperation moved by the spirit of one's own sources and its spirituality is difficult; but can be all the more easy to the Franciscan family after the II Vatican Council because this Council follows in the traces of St. Francis and supports his points of view. Mario von Galli called Francis "the secret topic of the Council".

In this the Franciscan family finds itself confirmed and can make a contribution through the strength of its own spirituality to the implementation of the Council and with that to the renewal of the Church as such. For that she does not follow any special way; because her way is exemplary. It is a way of the Christians and all people regardless of any social differences at all.

This agreement with the Council one can grasp in many places; but nowhere is it clearer than in the key concept of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, i.e., the People of God. In it is the social question the central topic of Church as Church, namely that God did not want to save the people "as individuals, independent of all mutual connection," but that He made it to be a

people which "shall acknowledge Him in truth and serve Him in holiness". Thus is stated at the beginning of chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium* about the People of God. The master of this people is God Himself. He alone calls this people; all together form this people. He wants them to have communion with Him and among themselves. They are namely a people of God, and mutual love the characteristic note of the people of the Reign of God. Highlight of its history is Christ. He makes it the messianic-people which follows only one law, namely, the law of love.

This new people consists often only of a few members. It is then a little fold. But it is the indestructible nucleus of the unity, the hope and the well-being for all people. Being in communion with Christ and bestowed with love and the truth it is given the role to be the instrument of salvation, and sent forth to the whole world as light of the world and salt of the earth.

One may not therefore restrict the membership to the people God to the baptized alone. From the beginning all are called by Him. This vocation is the foundation and guide line to its membership. In chapter 2 of *Lumen Gentium* the Council makes all people the topic under the idea of the people of God. The Church is the Messianic people, sign of whole mankind, provided that she forms a community in Christ.

The Franciscan community is obliged to this universality. It renders its service to all people and excludes nobody from it. Everybody can and must become the objects of its service - man and woman, the rich and the poor, old and young. All that find communion in Christ are the people of God. Therefore one shall not misunderstand this people idealistically. There the poor are exemplary. They stand for all people of the earth. Therefore "the people of God" is no bare idea which floats over everything and realizes itself nowhere. They do not promote any servile spirit but want the salvation and liberation of everyone. Especially in view of common mistakes and falsifications it is an indispensable and necessary task of the Franciscan community to subscribe for realism in dealing with this basic idea of Church.

Every idealism was foreign to Francis. He turns to all people because Christ is sent to all people. The baptized can call on Christ only if they follow him in this and form a community of all people - the people of God in Christ.

It is the very central task of being Franciscan: to live this messianic spirit and to let it bloom. It is the core of his spirituality.