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Introduction

1. Importance of the Easter Season which extends to Pentecost.
2. Exclusive tendencies in the contemporary world.
3. The Council of Jerusalem is the most important meeting in the history of Christianity.
4. Becoming a world church (cf Karl Rahner).

I. The Contemporary challenge

- A. In general
 1. The new tribalism as response to globalization.
 2. The danger of turning inward and ignoring or demonizing those who are different.
- B. More specifically
 1. Growing number of hate crimes in U.S. 5% increase in last year.
 2. Religious prejudice against Jews as betrayers, Muslims as enemies, Hindu and Buddhists as strangers.
 3. Political Partisanship:

II. Acts of the Apostles

- A. The first reading for Sunday liturgy through the whole Easter season
- B. Background
 1. Jesus confined his mission to fellow Jews with few exceptions.
 2. Paul allowed Gentiles to join without circumcision.
- C. Council (Conference) of Jerusalem
 1. We have two accounts: Acts 15 and Paul's letter to the Galatians Ch. 2 which provides a way of analyzing the historical accuracy of Acts. Most scholars rely more on Paul's authentic letters. Luke as a historian: he covers over a 30 year period and so his work is highly selective and leaves out a great deal. Much of what he writes we cannot verify (for example the existence and martyrdom of Stephen). He clearly romanticized the early community in Jerusalem (rapid spread, holiness of life, generosity in sharing possessions). Portrayal of Peter as leader is confirmed (Galatians 2:7-9). He is wrong about the date of the census by Quirinius. Luke is remarkably accurate about titles of officials in towns Paul visited and knows about boundaries of Roman provinces in the 50s. Luke did ok on historical accuracy given he wrote to confirm the faith of believers.
 2. Paul's version in Galatians reflects his own bias in defending himself. He took the initiative to go to Jerusalem with Barnabus and Titus (an uncircumcised Gentile). In a private meeting with James, Peter and John (the pillars of the Church), he defended his mission. Some spies got into the meeting trying to make slaves of them but they resisted. The leaders recognized that he was entrusted to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles as Peter to the Jews. The only stipulation was that he be mindful of the poor as he was already doing. Afterward,

back in Antioch, Paul publicly rebuked Peter for ignoring the Gentiles when some of the followers of James showed up; even Barnabas was “swept away” also.

3. Luke’s Version in Acts: it is simplified less contentious and more irenic; some converted Pharisees from Jerusalem come to Antioch to confront Paul on his strategy of admitting Gentiles; he recognizes that the leaders in Jerusalem had the power to decide the issue; Luke envisions a public discussion: some demand the Gentile converts be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses as required; Peter points out that God had sent the Holy Spirit on the Gentile Cornelius and therefore a burden should not be placed on the Gentile converts; Paul and Barnabas describe the wonders and signs God performed among their Gentile converts; James argues from scripture that the prophets foretold that the Gentiles would come and they were allowed to live among the people of God provided they avoided certain pollutions, therefore he judged that we should not cause the Gentile converts any difficulties. The apostles and presbyters sent Barnabas and Silas to Antioch with a letter declaring “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and ours too, not to lay on you any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from illicit sexual union. You will be well advised to avoid these things. Farewell.”

D. Points to note

1. Nothing was said about the words or actions of Jesus. They relied on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and their own judgement. ”
2. Paul accepted the authority of the Jerusalem Church leaders even though he called them “so called pillars.”
3. This was the most important decision made in the history of the Church, opening up the possibility of a continuing missionary outreach to Gentiles and the creation of a distinct Christian religion.
4. The decision did not immediately solve all the problems because old habits remained and dissenters continued to press for more rigid approaches.
5. James the brother of the Lord who was martyred in 62 was a powerful figure in the early stages of the Jesus movement.
6. Peter and Paul were in fundamental agreement because of their experiences with Gentiles touched by the Holy Spirit (Cornelius Acts 10: 36-4).
7. It is more likely that Paul was commissioned to go to Jerusalem by the Antioch church than it was his initiative as in Galatians..
8. Paul made a shrewd move by taking the Gentile Titus with him.
9. In Galatians Paul says only stipulation was to help the poor while Acts mentions four. It is possible Luke combined two events: the Jerusalem Council which made no mention of dietary prohibitions; and a later decree that did note restrictions mentioned in Leviticus (17-18) for Gentiles living in Jewish territory.
10. The whole Council of Jerusalem is part of God’s saving activity.

III. **Vatican II (1962-1965) *cf What Happened at Vatican II* by John O’Malley**

A. Background

1. John XXIII wanted *Aggiornamento* (updating) a new Pentecost, open the windows, fresh air, worried about “prophets of doom.”
 2. He distinguished the substance of church teaching from the way it is expressed which can be improved.
 3. Curia leaders were leery of a council and prepared very traditional working documents.
 4. Speculation was that nothing much would happen because all the bishops thought the same, and people in charge were against changes like Cardinal Ottaviani whose motto was *Semper Idem* (Always the Same).
- B. Dynamics
1. Constant tension between Curia and about 90% of the bishops.
 2. At the beginning progressive cardinals rejected the slate of Council leaders proposed by Curia; Cardinal Siri wrote in his diary “the devil had a hand in this.”
 3. Bishops brought their own theologians and Congar, Rahner, Murray, Gerard Philips exercised great influence.
 4. Protestant and Orthodox observers were present.
 5. The debates became public (*cf* Xavier Rynne).
 6. Curial preparatory documents were rewritten with some 10% to 15% opposed to revised documents.
 7. The final documents give no obvious clues to the strong debates behind them.
 8. Addition of Pastoral Constitution *The Church in the Modern World*.
- C. Style and Language
1. No harsh language or condemnations as in previous Councils.
 2. Not much Scholastic language.
 3. No new doctrinal statements.
 4. Pastoral style to make Christian ideals appealing.
 5. Humility language: pilgrim Church, servant leaders.
 6. Spiritual language such as charism (gift of the Spirit) and call to holiness.
- D. Issues
1. Liturgy: from being passive spectators to full active conscious participants.
 2. Spirituality: from holiness for priests and nuns to universal call to holiness.
 3. Religious liberty: from Catholic privilege to freedom for all.
 4. From a ghetto mentality to ecumenical dialogue.
 5. From opposition to other religions to interfaith dialogue and cooperation.
 6. From withdrawal from the world to active engagement.

IV. Karl Rahner on Vatican II *cf* “Basic Theological Interpretation of Vatican II Vol 20 pp. 77-89.

A. In general

1. Vatican II was the rudimentary beginning of a new era in which the Church will understand itself for the first time as a world church.
2. This is the 2nd most important change after the Council of Jerusalem.
3. Indigenous cultural expressions of Christianity will interact to enrich the universal Church.

B. Vatican II harbingers

1. Bishops present from Asia and Africa as active participants.
2. Vernacular in liturgy.

3. The Pastoral Constitution addressed whole human family with all its joys and sorrows.
 4. For first time the Church officially offered a positive assessment of world religions.
 5. Salvation open to all (LC16 and GS 23).
 6. Freedom of conscience for everyone.
 7. Energized ecumenical dialogue.
- C. Post-conciliar strategies
1. Abandon failed effort to export Roman Catholicism to other cultures.
 2. With “Pauline boldness” proclaim the fundamental Christian message and let local cultures creatively develop and express it.
 3. More power to national conferences of bishops.
 4. Curia officials will serve the bishops.
 5. Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and collaboration will flourish.
 6. Less Vatican intervention in local churches.
 7. Globalization can help this process.
 8. Rome cannot impose one Canon Law.
 9. Pope Francis is trying to implement this Rahnerian vision without explicit attribution.

V. Striving for a healthy tribalism with open arms

- A. Tribalism is inevitable in our society but can be more open.
1. *The Big Sort* by Bill Bishop—we gather with like-minded.
 2. A natural trend reinforced by globalization and high-pressure lifestyles.
- B. Making tribalism more inclusive, open, welcoming
1. Listening to those who are different and socialize at times.
 2. Working together for worthwhile causes.
 3. Read material, listen to programs of other tribes.

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