

I'm over Vatican II

Kate Childs Graham | Dec. 3, 2009

To tell you the truth, I am not sure I was ever under it. Lately, I've been hanging out with some folks who were around during Vatican II and maintain a deep hope that our church will revert back to the sentiments of those "glory days." While I understand where they are coming from, I'm not convinced that we want to go back.

Sure, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was a pivotal moment and brought sweeping reforms that our church desperately needed. At the same time, for me, Vatican II didn't go far enough. I would never want to go 40-plus years back in time, especially to a time that afforded fewer people fewer rights.

However, to be fair, mine is the opinion of only one young Catholic. Recognizing this, I sought out other young Catholics via Facebook to comment on what Vatican II means to them. Here is a sampling of what folks had to say:

From Anice in Washington, D.C.

Vatican II took the "fear" out of the "fear of God." Faith became more than an if-then proposition and the Church (Capital C on purpose) for the first time encouraged an adult faith -- informed, examined, conscience-driven and chosen freely. Vatican II also means a solidification of the Church's social justice foundations -- the only reason that I am still here.

From Caitlin in Minneapolis, Minn.

I've heard people from older generations call themselves "Vatican II Catholics." They laud Vatican II as the shining moment that saved the Church for them. I'm also very grateful that it happened, but, as a young person, it is frustrating for me when Vatican II is idealized. The renewal that happened as a result of Vatican II was very important. I could never be a part of the Church if Mass were still in Latin and priests still turned their backs on the congregation. However, Vatican II was far from perfect especially for those of us who are concerned with issues of sexuality and gender within the Church. Even though it had the potential to do so, Vatican II did not open ordination to women, address sexual abuse, or affirm GLBT people. That is why, as a young person and a feminist, I am not a "Vatican II Catholic."

From Phillip in Baltimore, Maryland

I just think that to me, the Second Vatican Council meant that the Church finally stopped thinking in the mindset of the Middle Ages. At that epoch marking period, the Church was not just realized as the pope and the bishops but the entire People of God. Although those ordained to the priesthood do have a unique and special ministry, all baptized members of the Mystical Body of Christ share in the threefold offices of Priest, Prophet, and King that Christ continues to fulfill throughout His Church. Thus, the laity should be seen as equal collaborators with the clergy as well as being treasured and enlightened voices within the Church. Thus, the "pray, pay, and obey" mentality is over.

From Julia in South Bend, Ind.

This semester I've been taking a class on Vatican II and we've been reading mostly council documents. I think I had approached the class waiting to be stunned and excited by these documents, because I believed the Catholic myth that Vatican II was this amazing (near-eschatological!) event which has yet to be fully realized in the Church. But, as I read the texts I'm reminded time and again about how dated their insights are, and although it is true that some in the church advocate for regressing to positions prior to Vatican II and therefore we need to fight somewhat just to keep the council in view, mostly the reforms of Vatican II are just starting points, bare minimums for efforts of contemporary theologians and church reformers today. There is a lot of work left to be done. Certainly some great things happened at Vatican II, but when we take seriously the reforms of the Council, we've really only just begun.

From Erin in Washington, D.C.

As a young leader in the church-justice movement, I am grateful for the struggle, truly value Vatican II's importance, and recognize that I stand on the shoulders of 1960s Catholics. However, when asked what it means to me, the first words that pop into my head are *Humanae Vitae* and "Brides of Christ," my favorite '90s Australian television miniseries, which told the tale of Vatican II through a soap-opera-like-nun-drama. I don't mean any disrespect to my Vatican II colleagues and friends. I know I am here working for justice in the Roman Catholic Church because of their inspiration and wisdom. I respect V2, I just didn't live through it. Vatican II was a page in my history book and my job now is to write a page about how we revolutionized the church for the next generation.

From Lauren in Chicago, Ill.

I see Vatican II as a great event that inspired many of my mentors but which we are yet to see in full fruition. I also see that it threw a lot of people off kilter, that they haven't exactly been able to grab hold of church again since. So many changes put skepticism into many people's minds, and resulted in apathy and/or loss.

From Gina-Louise in Montclair, N.J.

I always say that if I were thrown back in time before the days of Vatican II, I would never walk into a Catholic church. There's absolutely no reason why I should have to cover my head when my male counterparts don't have to, and I would have refused to do it then and probably got burned at the stake for it (not literally of course).

So, now I turn it over to all of you. What does Vatican II mean to you?

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