

Holy Things, Holy People

Exploring Catholic history in the Northwest through treasures from the past

PART 34: ARCHBISHOP CONNOLLY'S COUNCIL INTERVENTION

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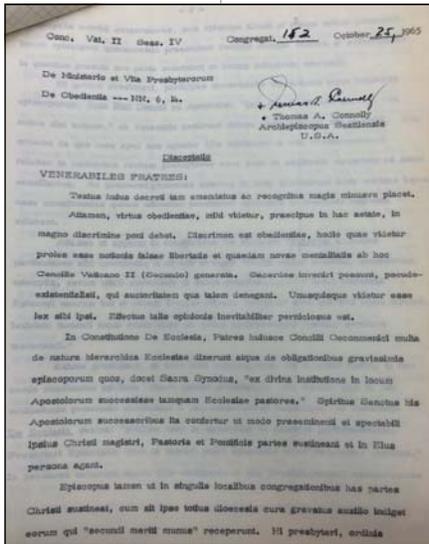
No one knew quite what to expect from the Second Vatican Council. Archbishop Connolly was not alone in assuming that it would be a splendid series of formalities in which he would participate by being present in the proper ecclesiastical attire. It all seemed very remote from the day-to-day realities of life in the Archdiocese of Seattle. In fact, Connolly was not sure he would stay beyond the opening of the Council on October 11, 1962.

The opening ceremonies left him awestruck, and he sent back an enthusiastic account which was published the very next day in the *Catholic Northwest Progress*. “That I should live to see a day such as this! How good is the good God,” he wrote. Connolly came away with an overwhelming “sense of continuity, of stability, in a world of violent change.”

But, as Connolly soon discovered, Pope John XXIII did not want simply to maintain the Church in a changing world; he had gathered the bishops so the Church could respond to the needs of the time—and, yes, change. The Council would be no mere formality; it would be hard work. In addition to twenty hours of formal sessions at St. Peter’s Basilica each week, the Council Fathers attended dozens of meetings, both formal and informal, outside of the Council Hall. Each evening, Connolly joined a group of English-speaking bishops at the Hotel Flora to talk over what had happened in the Council that day. It was at these meetings that Connolly (never a great Latinist) realized how much was really at stake. In November of 1962, he wrote: “We are not particularly united insofar as some of the proposed changes in the Liturgy are concerned. We are a typical cross-section of the fathers of the council at large and the discussions become quite serious to say the least.”

For Connolly, as for so many other bishops, the Council was a journey of self-discovery. He had always considered himself moderately progressive, but now he sometimes found himself out of step with other bishops—and with the Holy Father. When a proposal was made about strengthening national bishops’ conferences during the second session in 1963, Connolly argued, “if all these suggestions were acted upon, the ordinary or residential bishop or archbishop would be responsible not only to the Holy See and the Curia, but to the National Conference as well.... I ventilated a ‘Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death’ fervorino at a recent meeting of the American bishops on this point and found myself in the camp of the moss-backed reactionaries. Horrors!!!” Later, Connolly argued against any change in the fasting laws of the Church, but, he said resignedly, “my observations will not carry any weight for I have already tested the attitude of some of my confreres in this matter and my slant on the problem is quite old fashioned. I am still a moderate revisionist but to no avail.”

Connolly was an attentive, but quiet participant in the Council



Above: Archbishop Connolly (left) snaps a picture of Pope Paul VI during the Council. **Below:** The original typescript of Connolly’s Council intervention. *Courtesy of the Archives of the Archdiocese of Seattle.*

action during the first, second, and fourth Sessions. As the fourth session of the Council drew to a close in 1965, Connolly prepared to address the Council himself. He knew the Council was making history, and he wanted to be part of it. He wrote an “intervention” (a formal address to be delivered before the entire assembly of Council Fathers) in response the Council document on the priesthood.

Connolly had quite a scare when a “standing” vote was taken to curtail discussion on the document, and the overwhelming majority of the Fathers stood up, indicating that they felt they had heard enough. “I had worked too long on my disquisition to see it suffer such an ignominious fate,” Connolly wrote, and he assiduously collected considerably more than the requisite 70 bishops’ signatures for his petition to be heard in the Council Hall.

Connolly spoke on October 25, 1965, and his was one of the very last interventions given from the Council floor. Once again he fell, almost in spite of himself, among the “moss-backed reactionaries,” speaking about the importance of priestly obedience in the wake of the Council. “The ‘aggiornamento’ of the Church can make it more difficult for a priest today to obey an order whose wisdom for the apostolate he does not personally see, and in these days of ferment, priests are more apt to have their own opinions on many important matters,” he said in his address. In the account he sent home, he added, “I took great pains, of course, to inform my confreres that I had no trouble on that score in the Archdiocese of Seattle.... Something had to be said along this line and my remarks were considered to be quite apropos, as it were.” The address lasted ten minutes, and when Connolly returned to his seat, “my seat mates applauded the offering very quietly and we shook hands all around.... I shall not soon forget it. However, I was glad when the ordeal was over.”

A few weeks later, Archbishop Connolly was home again, sharing the teachings of the Council and preparing to implement them in the Archdiocese of Seattle. “There is no doubt in my mind that the Council has been an outstanding success insofar as the achievement of the aims of Pope John XXIII, John the Good, are concerned,” he wrote. “It is equally true, of course, that the successful attainment of the Council’s aims and purposes will depend to a great extent on you and you and you, on the manner in which you translate into action in your daily lives the decrees and declarations promulgated by the Holy Father as the official law of the Church.” Archbishop Connolly invited to the faithful of the Archdiocese of Seattle to study, to explore, and to change in response to the Second Vatican Council—just as he had done himself.

—Corinna Laughlin, *Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy*