

# Closing Messages of the Council

Abbott, Walter M.

(Ed.) The Documents  
of Vatican II.

Piscataway, N.J. Association Press  
New Century Pub.  
Inc. : 729-737.

On December 8, at the close of the solemn ceremonies marking the end of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul spoke to the Council Fathers, and cardinals read messages, in the name of the Council Fathers, to various groups of people: rulers, intellectuals and scientists, artists, women, the poor, sick, and suffering, workers, and youth.

## Pope Paul to the Council Fathers

The hour for departure and separation has sounded. In a few moments you are about to leave the Council assembly to go out to meet mankind and to bring the good news of the gospel of Christ and of the renovation of His Church at which we have been working together for four years.

This is a unique moment, a moment of incomparable significance and riches. In this universal assembly, in this privileged point of time and space, there converge together the past, the present, and the future—the past: for here, gathered in this spot, we have the Church of Christ with her tradition, her history, her Councils, her doctors, her saints; the present: for we are taking leave of one another to go out toward the world of today with its miseries, its sufferings, its sins, but also with its prodigious accomplishments, its values, its virtues; and lastly the future is here in the urgent appeal of the peoples of the world for more justice, in their will for peace, in their conscious or unconscious thirst for a higher life, that life precisely which the Church of Christ can and wishes to give them.

We seem to hear from every corner of the world an immense and confused voice, the questions of all those who look toward the Council and ask us anxiously: "Have you not a word for us?" For us rulers? For us intellectuals, workers, artists? And for us women? For us of the younger generation, for us the sick and the poor?

These pleading voices will not remain unheeded. It is for all these categories of men that the Council has been working for four years. It is for them that there has been prepared this

## CLOSING MESSAGES

729

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which we promulgated yesterday amidst the enthusiastic applause of your assembly.

From our long meditation on Christ and His Church, there should spring forth at this moment a first announcement of peace and salvation for the waiting multitudes. Before breaking up, the Council wishes to fulfill this prophetic function and to translate into brief messages and in a language accessible to all men, the "good news" which it has for the world and which some of its most respected spokesmen are now about to pronounce in your name for the whole of humanity.

## To Rulers

(Read by Achille Cardinal Lienart of Lille, assisted by Bernard Cardinal Alfrink of Utrecht and Giovanni Cardinal Colombo of Milan.)

At this solemn moment, we, the Fathers of the twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, on the point of disbanding after four years of prayer and work, with the full consciousness of our mission toward mankind, address ourselves respectively and confidently to those who hold in their hands the destiny of men on this earth, to all those who hold temporal power.

We proclaim publicly: We do honor to your authority and your sovereignty, we respect your office, we recognize your just laws, we esteem those who make them and those who apply them. But we have a sacrosanct word to speak to you and it is this: Only God is great. God alone is the beginning and the end. God alone is the Source of your authority and the Foundation of your laws.

Your task is to be in the world the promoters of order and peace among men. But never forget this: It is God, the living and true God, who is the Father of men. And it is Christ, His eternal Son, who came to make this known to us and to teach us that we are all brothers. He it is who is the great artisan of order and peace on earth, for He it is who guides human history and who alone can incline hearts to renounce those evil passions which beget war and misfortune. It is He who blesses the bread of the human race, who sanctifies its work and its suffering, who gives it those joys which you can never

give it, and strengthens it in those sufferings which you cannot console.

In your earthly and temporal city, God constructs mysteriously His spiritual and eternal city, His Church. And what does this Church ask of you after close to two thousand years of experiences of all kinds in her relations with you, the powers of the earth? What does the Church ask of you today? She tells you in one of the major documents of this Council. She asks of you only liberty, the liberty to believe and to preach her faith, the freedom to love her God and serve Him, the freedom to live and to bring to men her message of life. Do not fear her. She is made after the image of her Master, whose mysterious action does not interfere with your prerogatives but heals everything human of its fatal weakness, transfigures it, and fills it with hope, truth, and beauty.

Allow Christ to exercise His purifying action on society. Do not crucify Him anew. This would be a sacrilege for He is the Son of God. This would be suicide for He is the Son of man. And we, His humble ministers, allow us to spread everywhere without hindrance the gospel of peace on which we have meditated during this Council. Of it, your peoples will be the first beneficiaries, since the Church forms for you loyal citizens, friends of social peace and progress.

On this solemn day when she closes the deliberations of her twenty-first Ecumenical Council, the Church offers you through our voice her friendship, her services, her spiritual and moral forces. She addresses to you all her message of salvation and blessing. Accept it, as she offers it to you, with a joyous and sincere heart and pass it on to your peoples.

## To Men of Thought and Science

*(Read by Paul-Emile Cardinal Leger of Montreal, assisted by Antonio Cardinal Caggiano of Buenos Aires and Norman Cardinal Gilroy of Sydney.)*

A very special greeting to you, seekers after truth, to you, men of thought and science, the explorers of man, of the universe, and of history, to all of you who are pilgrims en route to the light, and to those also who have stopped along the road, tired and disappointed by their vain search.

Why a special greeting for you? Because all of us here, bishops and Fathers of the Council, are on the lookout for

truth. What have our efforts amounted to during these four years except a more attentive search for and deepening of the message of truth entrusted to the Church and an effort at more perfect docility to the spirit of truth?

Hence our paths could not fail to cross. Your road is ours. Your paths are never foreign to ours. We are the friends of your vocation as searchers, companions in your fatigues, admirers of your successes, and, if necessary, consolers in your discouragement and your failures.

Hence for you also we have a message, and it is this: Continue your search without tiring and without ever despairing of the truth. Recall the words of one of your great friends, St. Augustine: "Let us seek with the desire to find, and find with the desire to seek still more." Happy are those who, while possessing the truth, search more earnestly for it in order to renew it, deepen it, and transmit it to others. Happy also are those who, not having found it, are working toward it with a sincere heart. May they seek the light of tomorrow with the light of today until they reach the fullness of light.

But do not forget that if thinking is something great, it is first a duty. Woe to him who voluntarily closes his eyes to the light. Thinking is also a responsibility, so woe to those who darken the spirit by the thousand tricks which degrade it, make it proud, deceive and deform it. What other basic principle is there for men of science except to think rightly?

For this purpose, without troubling your efforts, without dazzling brilliance, we come to offer you the light of our mysterious lamp which is faith. He who entrusted this lamp to us is the sovereign Master of all thought, He whose humble disciples we are, the only one who said and could have said: "I am the light of the world, I am the way, the truth, and the life."

These words have meaning for you. Never perhaps, thank God, has there been so clear a possibility as today of a deep understanding between real science and real faith, mutual servants of one another in the one truth. Do not stand in the way of this important meeting. Have confidence in faith, this great friend of intelligence. Enlighten yourselves with its light in order to take hold of truth, the whole truth. This is the wish, the encouragement, and the hope, which, before disbanding, is expressed to you by the Fathers of the entire world assembled at Rome in Council.

## To Artists

*(Read by Leo Cardinal Suenens of Malines-Brussels [Belgium], assisted by Lawrence Cardinal Shehan of Baltimore and Jaime Cardinal de Barros Camara of Rio de Janeiro.)*

We now address you, artists, who are taken up with beauty and work for it: poets and literary men, painters, sculptors, architects, musicians, men devoted to the theater and the cinema. To all of you, the Church of the Council declares to you through our voice: if you are friends of genuine art, you are our friends.

The Church has long since joined in alliance with you. You have built and adorned her temples, celebrated her dogmas, enriched her liturgy. You have aided her in translating her divine message in the language of forms and figures, making the invisible world palpable. Today, as yesterday, the Church needs you and turns to you. She tells you through our voice: Do not allow an alliance as fruitful as this to be broken. Do not refuse to put your talents at the service of divine truth. Do not close your mind to the breath of the Holy Spirit.

This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. It is beauty, like truth, which brings joy to the heart of man and is that precious fruit which resists the wear and tear of time, which unites generations and makes them share things in admiration. And all of this is through your hands. May these hands be pure and disinterested. Remember that you are the guardians of beauty in the world. May that suffice to free you from tastes which are passing and have no genuine value, to free you from the search after strange or unbecoming expressions. Be always and everywhere worthy of your ideals and you will be worthy of the Church which, by our voice, addresses to you today her message of friendship, salvation, grace, and benediction.

## To Women

*(Read by Leon Cardinal Duval of Algiers, assisted by Julius Cardinal Doepfner of Munich and Raul Cardinal Silva of Santiago [Chile].)*

And now it is to you that we address ourselves, women of all states—girls, wives, mothers, and widows, to you also, con-

secrated virgins and women living alone—you constitute half of the immense human family. As you know, the Church is proud to have glorified and liberated woman, and in the course of the centuries, in diversity of characters, to have brought into relief her basic equality with man. But the hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect, and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the gospel can do much to aid mankind in not falling.

You women have always had as your lot the protection of the home, the love of beginnings, and an understanding of cradles. You are present in the mystery of a life beginning. You offer consolation in the departure of death. Our technology runs the risk of becoming inhuman. Reconcile men with life and above all, we beseech you, watch carefully over the future of our race. Hold back the hand of man who, in a moment of folly, might attempt to destroy human civilization.

Wives, mothers of families, the first educators of the human race in the intimacy of the family circle, pass on to your sons and your daughters the traditions of your fathers at the same time that you prepare them for an unsearchable future. Always remember that by her children a mother belongs to that future which perhaps she will not see.

And you, women living alone, realize what you can accomplish through your dedicated vocation. Society is appealing to you on all sides. Not even families can live without the help of those who have no families. Especially you, consecrated virgins, in a world where egoism and the search for pleasure would become law, be the guardians of purity, unselfishness, and piety. Jesus, who has given to conjugal love all its plenitudes, has also exalted the renouncement of human love when this is for the sake of divine love and for the service of all.

Lastly, women in trial, who stand upright at the foot of the cross like Mary, you who so often in history have given to men the strength to battle unto the very end and to give witness to the point of martyrdom, aid them now still once more to retain courage in their great undertakings, while at

the same time maintaining patience and an esteem for humble beginnings.

Women, you who know how to make truth sweet, tender, and accessible, make it your task to bring the spirit of this Council into institutions, schools, homes, and daily life. Women of the entire universe, whether Christian or non-believing, you to whom life is entrusted at this grave moment in history, it is for you to save the peace of the world.

### To the Poor, the Sick, and the Suffering

*(Read by Paul Cardinal Meouchi, Maronite-rite Patriarch of Antioch; assisted by Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski of Warsaw and Peter Cardinal Doi of Tokyo.)*

To all of you, brothers in trial, who are visited by suffering under a thousand forms, the Council has a very special message. It feels fixed on itself your pleading eyes, burning with fever or hollow with fatigue, questioning eyes which search in vain for the why of human suffering and which ask anxiously when and whence will come relief.

Very dear brothers, we feel echoing deeply within our hearts as fathers and pastors your laments and your complaints. Our suffering is increased at the thought that it is not within our power to bring you bodily help nor the lessening of your physical sufferings, which physicians, nurses, and all those dedicated to the service of the sick are endeavoring to relieve as best they can.

But we have something deeper and more valuable to give you, the only truth capable of answering the mystery of suffering and of bringing you relief without illusion, and that is faith and union with the Man of Sorrows, with Christ the Son of God, nailed to the cross for our sins and for our salvation. Christ did not do away with suffering. He did not even wish to unveil to us entirely the mystery of suffering. He took suffering upon Himself and this is enough to make you understand all its value. All of you who feel heavily the weight of the cross, you who are poor and abandoned, you who weep, you who are persecuted for justice, you who are ignored, you the unknown victims of suffering, take courage. You are the preferred children of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of hope, happiness, and life. You are the brothers of the suffering Christ, and with Him, if you wish, you are saving the world.

This is the Christian science of suffering, the only one which gives peace. Know that you are not alone, separated, abandoned, or useless. You have been called by Christ and are His living and transparent image. In His name, the Council salutes you lovingly, thanks you, assures you of the friendship and assistance of the Church, and blesses you.

### To Workers

*(Read by Paul Cardinal Zoungrana of Ouagadougou [Upper Volta], assisted by Jose Cardinal Quintero of Caracas and Jose Cardinal Bueno y Monreale of Seville.)*

In the course of this Council, we, the Catholic bishops of the five continents, have, among many other subjects, reflected together on the grave questions posed for human conscience by the economic and social conditions of the contemporary world, the coexistence of nations, the problem of armaments, of war and peace. We are fully aware of the repercussions which the solution provided for these problems can have on the concrete life of the working men and women of the entire world. Thus, at the end of our deliberations, we wish to address to all of them a message of confidence, peace, and friendship.

Very loved sons, rest assured first of all that the Church is aware of your sufferings, your struggles, and your hopes, and that she appreciates highly the virtues which ennoble your souls—namely, courage, dedication, professional conscience, love of justice—and that she recognizes fully the immense services which, each in his own place and in positions often the most obscure and the most ignored, you render to the whole of society. The Church is grateful to you for this and thanks you through our voice.

In these recent years, she has never ceased to keep before her eyes the increasingly complex problems of the working world; and the echo which recent pontifical encyclicals have found in your ranks has proved to what degree the soul of the workingman of our time was attuned to that of his highest spiritual leaders. Pope John XXIII, who enriched the patrimony of the Church with his incomparable messages, knew how to find the road to your heart. He, in his own person, gave a shining example of the Church's love for the workingman as well as for truth, justice, liberty, and charity, on which is founded the peace of the world. We wish also to be before

you witnesses of this love of the Church for you workingmen, and we declare to you with all the conviction of our souls: The Church is your friend. Have confidence in her. In the past, regrettable misunderstandings have, over too long a period, maintained a spirit of mistrust and lack of understanding between us, and both the Church and the working-class have suffered from this. Today the hour for reconciliation has sounded and the Church of the Council invites you to celebrate this hour without suspicion.

The Church is ever seeking to understand you better. But on your part you must endeavor to understand what the Church means for you, workingmen, who are the chief artisans of the prodigious changes which the world is undergoing today. For you know full well that unless a mighty spiritual inspiration animates these changes, they will cause disaster for humanity instead of bringing it happiness. It is not hatred which serves the world. It is not only the bread of this earth which can satisfy man's hunger. Thus, accept the message of the Church. Accept the faith which she offers you to light your path. It is the faith of the successor of Peter and of the two thousand bishops assembled in Council. It is the faith of the Christian people. May it be your light. May it be your guide. May it bring you to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, your Companion in work, Master and Savior of the whole human race.

### To Youth

*(Read by Gregorio Cardinal Agagianian of the Roman Curia, assisted by Joseph Cardinal Ritter of St. Louis and Valerian Cardinal Gracias of Bombay.)*

Lastly, it is to you, young men and women of the world, that the Council wishes to address its final message. For it is you who are to receive the torch from the hands of your elders and to live in the world at the period of the most gigantic transformations ever realized in its history. It is you who, receiving the best of the example of the teaching of your parents and your teachers, are to form the society of tomorrow. You will either save yourselves or you will perish with it.

For four years the Church has been working to rejuvenate her image in order to respond the better to the design of her Founder, the great Living One, the Christ who is eternally young. At the term of this imposing re-examination of life,

she now turns to you. It is for you, youth, especially for you that the Church now comes through her Council to enkindle your light, the light which illuminates the future, your future. The Church is anxious that this society that you are going to build up should respect the dignity, the liberty, and the rights of individuals. These individuals are you. The Church is particularly anxious that this society should allow free expansion to her treasure ever ancient and ever new, namely faith, and that your souls may be able to bask freely in its helpful light. She has confidence that you will find such strength and such joy that you will not be tempted, as were some of your elders, to yield to the seductions of egoistic or hedonistic philosophies or to those of despair and annihilation, and that in the face of atheism, a phenomenon of lassitude and old age, you will know how to affirm your faith in life and in what gives meaning to life, that is to say, the certitude of the existence of a just and good God.

It is in the name of this God and of His Son, Jesus, that we exhort you to open your hearts to the dimensions of the world, to heed the appeal of your brothers, to place your youthful energies at their service. Fight against all egoism. Refuse to give free course to the instincts of violence and hatred which beget wars and all their train of miseries. Be generous, pure, respectful, and sincere, and build in enthusiasm a better world than your elders had.

The Church looks to you with confidence and with love. Rich with a long past ever living in her, and marching on toward human perfection in time and the ultimate destinies of history and of life, the Church is the real youth of the world. She possesses what constitutes the strength and the charm of youth, that is to say, the ability to rejoice with what is beginning, to give oneself unreservedly, to renew oneself and to set out again for new conquests. Look upon the Church and you will find in her the face of Christ, the genuine, humble, and wise Hero, the Prophet of truth and love, the Companion and Friend of youth. It is in the name of Christ that we salute you, that we exhort and bless you.