

Transcript of an interview of Gregory Baum by Fr. Thomas Rosica, C.S.B.

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Gregory Baum is a former Augustinian priest who was a peritus at Vatican II and is well known in Canada for his dissent from many aspects of Catholic teaching.

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Fr. Rosica: Professor Gregory Baum it's a great joy for us to have you here on set with us for Witness at Salt and Light Television, *herzlich willkommen*, and thank you very much for coming.

Baum: Well thank you for being invited.

R: Gregory we've known each other for a long time. We knew each other when you were a professor here at the University of Saint Michael's College in Toronto. I've certainly admired very much your theology, your writings, but also your love of the Church, your love of Christ and you help to keep alive not only the spirit of the Second Vatican Council but the authentic teaching of the Council. We're celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Council in October now, fifty years later. You were a *peritus* at the Council, you're one of that rare breed of people still alive today to remember those great moments. What was it like to be in Rome in October, 1962 ?

G: The Council was for me really an extraordinary experience, I think the most powerful experience spiritually speaking I had in all my life. It was the presence of all these bishops and theologians who were in dialogue with one another and who were trying to be faithful to the Gospel in the new situation of the world. And so there was an openness - we talked, people talked people were open to new ideas, people were anxious to make Christianity, to make the Gospel understandable to people today, and great things happened.

R: It was an Ecumenical Council which is the highest form of teaching of the Church, but it just didn't fall out of the sky, it happened in the context of history, and some great trends and movements in history that were taking place. Take us back to that era - what was happening in world history at the time that received the Council?

G: Yes, two things, first of all there were - in the Catholic Church in Europe in particular - there were renewal movements. There was already a Biblical movement where theologians and exegetes got together and wanted the Bible to have greater emphasis and be better known. There was an ecumenical movement, there was a lay movement, there were movements, and these

movements were at the beginning frowned upon by the Bishops, but the people in it were faithful and the Vatican Council allowed these movements to come to the surface and to influence policymaking at the top. This was one influence, and the other influence was - the sixties after all was a time of great optimism, that is, the kind of welfare state had come, a kind of capitalism that was guided by government and was very successful, and the European countries became wealthy after the Second World War, and there was this great sense of optimism and I think that too influenced the Second Vatican Council.

R: Those trends of the world that were taking place – optimism, economy, politics, a theology of hope, if you will, that was there, how did that influence the actual day-to-day operations of the three-year Council, from 1962-65.

G: The pope, Pope John, and later on Pope Paul had created commissions for various areas and created the Secretariat for Christian Unity - this is where I worked. Our responsibility were the preparation of three documents, one document on religious liberty, another document on the ecumenical movement, and the third one was to be a document on the Church's relationship to Jews, which was later on expanded to the Church's relationship to the world religions. And so other commissions had other assignments, and so ours was in some way a very controversial commission because this was really new ground. And so we were everyday working, reading, interviewing people preparing documents. I got up at six o'clock, at five-thirty in the morning, had Mass and meditation, I went to our offices, worked, I went to the Council. After the Council sessions in the afternoon we still have to work in the office at night, we couldn't even be silent about the Council so we went out for supper with bishops, with theologians, we talked till twelve o'clock or one o'clock all about theology, about the Church, about what the Gospel means to us today, and I got home late. I lived with the Augustinians, with the Irish Augustinians in an Irish parish in Rome, and how I did so well with so little sleep I don't know, but I was young at the time.

R: It must have been a terribly exciting time. Not only the sessions in St. Peter's Basilica - and now our viewers see on the screen some of the images we're showing, courtesy of Vatican Television of the bleachers, the banks of bishops, over two thousand bishops setup - but also what took place on the sidelines. People say that the coffee breaks were important moments.

G: Yes, but also the national Episcopal Conferences were organized, and they invited theologians to speak to them on different topics. And so I was often invited by different groups of bishops to talk about particular topics, and other theologians too, and so you felt that the whole Catholic community was really in dialogue with one another, and therefore there was a kind of openness. Pope Paul VI was so impressed by this dialogue, the creativity through this dialogue, that he wrote the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* published in '64, in which he praised dialogue, and said in the future the Church will relate itself to the outside through dialogue, but even inside there will be dialogue – 'I want to be in dialogue with the Catholic people'. He was so impressed by this because it was creativity, people had the courage to have new ideas and new ways of being faithful to the gifts that have come through Jesus.

R: Gregory let's talk about some of the figures, the great personalities at the heart of this Council. What do you remember of John XXIII, Blessed John XXIII.

G: Well I just remember that he was the figure whom everybody loved.

R: Why?

G: I think it was his simplicity and his humility, his spontaneous sympathy with ordinary people. He was just loved and I mean I think that people are willing to believe in the Gospel if you give witness of some happiness, just that you are personally reconciled to this and happy in this. I mean if the Church, if Rome only speaks when there are heresies and when there are errors and all you hear from Rome is corrections, that doesn't really inspire people. He was able to inspire people because he expressed his confidence in them and his love for them.

R: Its interesting, when people in Rome even to this day fifty years later speak of him, '*il bom papa*', 'the good Father', 'the good Holy Father'. Yes we've been blessed with wonderful popes but there was something about John XXIII. You also rubbed shoulders with some of the great minds and theologians: Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, Karl Rahner, and others. What are your memories of those figures.

G: I was in awe, I mean I had enormous admiration for these great theologians. I mean I'm a theologian but I never thought of myself, compared myself, with these great minds. I mean they have brains like computers. I mean they are able to read, remember things, able to organize things, able to formulate them. Congar I met of course many times, wonderful man. Rahner I loved. Rahner was, yes, a kind of a saint for me, a man who was very simple. I saw him in Rome. He went to convents to give talks to sisters, spiritual talks, and at the same time at the Council, very influential. No I have great memories of all these wonderful man.

R: There was a young German priest a couple years younger than you who was one of the *periti* at the Council, a certain Fr. Joseph Ratzinger that you knew and you met. What are your memories of this young Joseph Ratzinger.

G: Well first of all he was already then a very well-known German theologian and I had read his works, I had read his books. I mean he was really, he was a great scholar, and he was very much among the progressive theologians. It is interesting - after each session he wrote an article about what happened at the Second Vatican Council, and at the end of the Council in 1965, these five articles or four articles were translated into English and published in a little book called *Highlights of Vatican II*, and when you read them today you see that Joseph Ratzinger at that time was hoping the Council would lead to the decentralization. He said that the kind of centralization of the Church in the papacy was an historical development that had certain advantages, but also disadvantages, and therefore we have to emphasize with the ancient Church the particular churches, and the pluralism within the Church. He was in favour of this at the time, and he gave an interpretation of the Council in these pages that is very much very positive and very open to the new, and I think that he changed his mind about some of these things later on in his life.

R: Why do you think that change of mind and perhaps heart took place or has taken place.

G: I don't know enough about this, but he was professor in Tübingen, and this was in '68, the student unrest, and I was told that he was very upset by the student unrest and felt there wasn't enough Catholic faith, he couldn't go on teaching there and so he went to the priests, to the seminary in Regensburg, and it is supposed, I mean I don't know how true that is, but people say when he became bishop of Munich he said, 'I will correct all the mistakes I made when I was a young theologian'.

R: You follow Joseph Ratzinger's career from Tübingen, to the seminary, to his teaching, to Archbishop of Munich, to a long period of time at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and now he's crossed the piazza, he's no longer at the CDF, but he's in the *Terza Loggia*, in the Papal Apartment. How do you view Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI now.

G: I mean I was very surprised when he was elected because he was known in the Church, really, as the one who was simply looking at the errors and the mistakes and correcting them, and he wasn't really known to be a person who encourages and who has hope. But he came. I read everything he writes.

R: What do you think of what he writes?

G: He still remains a great theologian, and again and again they are totally new insights and bold ideas that he has, but at the same time this is coupled with a certain fear that there isn't enough discipline, that people aren't obedient enough, and so you almost feel that there are sort of two personalities. There is the great theologian with imagination, with new ideas. Joseph Ratzinger writes magnificent German, his German is just a seductively beautiful language – a great writer, a great writer. And I think he was interviewed, and two books of interviews appeared, and in one of them he said that in a way he regretted that he was in the Curia and that he was pope because he couldn't have an oeuvre, he couldn't have these kind of collected works because he didn't have the time to write everything he wanted to write. No he's a great thinker, but I mean he has kind of re-emphasized the kind of more monarchical understanding of the papacy, that is very much the center, the pope is the center, and no longer the pope in the context of the college of bishops, collegiality, exchange, dialogue. This will come again.

R: I consider him to be the Mozart of theologians and I couldn't agree more with the magnificence of his writings. He really is a Biblical pope. Everything coming up from his pen is filled with the Sacred Scriptures and he's been a great inspiration to me. But there is that 'fear' that you've expressed, not only on your part but in the part of others, of this attempt to centralize once again. One could say that there could be negative aspects of that but what would be some of the positive aspects of calling attention to the primacy of Peter and the role of Peter. He speaks about it in fact as the 'Petrine ministry'. He insisted there not be an enthronement when he took over but rather a Mass of inauguration of his Petrine ministry. What are the positive elements of the Petrine ministry.

G: Well the Petrine ministry means preserving the unity of the Church, and therefore if you have the Church becomes more pluralistic, it's different in China, different from Africa, different from Latin America, different from the United States, different from Germany and France, and yet it is united symbolically through loyalty to the Petrine ministry, to the pope, so there is an important

function of the papacy. But I think this function appears in particular when there is pluralism, and he encouraged this pluralism in the past, at the moment he's more reticent.

R: Many express concern, or fear, or reservation, over the Second Vatican Council, in fact one could say there's a bit of a backlash right now, a push back, and a sense of regret for what the Council unleashed on the world today. I know you don't feel that, but why would there be such feelings among people do you think?

G: I mean these are difficult questions. I mean I am still very much moved by what the Council achieved, I just mention this – our open attitude to outsiders, Protestants, Jews members of other religions preparing us to live in modern pluralistic society. We are not a sect, we are a Church and therefore we are in dialogue with others and cooperating with others to create a more just society. We enter into culture to transform it. Secondly I'm deeply moved by the Council because it taught us that the spirit is at work not just in the Church but in the world, and therefore we have an attitude, we look at the world and discern the work of God wherever people love one another, wherever people struggle for justice, wherever people are generous - this is God at work. And so I think it give us a new approach to the world. So I feel very much everyday strengthened by the teaching of the Council. It is true that Catholic institutions are declining, there's no doubt about this, and therefore I guess some people might say all this is due to the Council, but I don't think this is at all convincing to me.

R: Certainly in the teaching of Pope John Paul II, and now Pope Benedict, we hear often the expression of an affirmative, positive orthodoxy, a way going forward to be proud of the Catholic faith, to be proud of Catholic teaching, but to take that into the world today. How do you understand the thrust of John Paul II's implementation of the Council and Benedict's bringing that to fulfillment.

G: I mean I would have to think about this much longer. I've never heard this 'positive orthodoxy'. I mean to be orthodox is all right, but by itself it doesn't give you any life. I mean you have to be a believer, you have to be inspired by the Gospel, you have to read the Scriptures and be addressed again, you have to go to the liturgy and be spoken to, you have to meet other people and work with them and experience love and friendship, to be alive. I mean orthodoxy is in the head, but it doesn't necessarily give you any life, any joy, and energize you. I don't think that we need this enormous unanimity about everything in the Church, I think that in the future we have to, if you go into your parish to find out what people really believe you'll find there's a great variety of beliefs, and I think we are united in the Creed, we are united in the kind of vision that we have of the world and we work together, but this kind of unanimity regarding elements, doctrines that are quite removed from the Scriptures, I don't really think this is such a good formula.

R: One of the things I admired about your ilk, those wonderful people that were with you – Chenu, Congar, de Lubac, Rahner, Baum and others – is in the midst of great theological – and even Ratzinger let me say – in the midst of great theological search was a deep and profound joy, and John XXIII embodied that. And it's interesting that many of those who are on the front lines, the crusaders of the orthodoxy today – I would call it a pseudo orthodoxy – are among the most unhappy, and sad, and angry that I've ever met. And I think joy – Paul VI wrote that magnificent

document *Gaudete in Domino, Rejoicing in the Lord*, and I think that flowed from his experience of the Council very clearly, that in the midst of all of this there must be joy, it's our greatest weapon, if you will, and when it's not there one calls into question what our enterprise is about. Pope Benedict in his address, his now famous address to the Roman Curia, several months after his election in December 2005, spoke specifically about the Council. He talked about continuity, and if you will discontinuity. Explain to me a little bit about those two trends that are at work – about continuity and discontinuity.

G: I think that the present Pope spoke about, he said that many people have a hermeneutics of discontinuity, they emphasize the new in the Council and talk about it as though there was an interruption that took place and that the Church of the past is no longer interesting. But he contrasted this, what he called the hermeneutics of reform.

R: And what is that?

G: And the hermeneutics of reform is that the new is there but it is supported by a new reading of the past, especially the present Pope is really a great patristic scholar, and therefore he looks at the Church in the early centuries, and many of the things that we are concerned with today are already experienced by people then. I'll just give an example of this – that the Church fathers in Egypt believed already that the word of God that was became flesh in Jesus sounded in the whole of history, and they believe that Plato and Aristotle and Socrates were already touched by the word of God. And this ancient doctrine was retrieved by modern theologians and so on the basis of this doctrine we are so open to the world because we do believe that God is at work there. So the reform is, I mean there is some discontinuity, but it means you retrieve the great wisdom of the past. And later on certain conservative Catholics have made this contrast between the hermeneutics of discontinuity, into a hermeneutics of continuity, but the Pope had never said this it was reform that is...

R: You were involved in the formulation of three very significant documents as you mentioned. The document *Unitatis Redintegratio* on ecumenism, the document on religious liberty and freedom, certainly you worked with the great American historian and scholar, the Jesuit who was behind the thinking about that, John Courtney Murray. You were also involved with *Nostra Aetate* and God knows the good that that document had done. But you were also there as a witness to the formulation of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*, which continue to be guiding lights. What are some of your favorite memories of those documents.

G: I mean I was really involved, personally involved, only in the document on ecumenism because I belonged to the small committee working on these things, and the document *Nostra Aetate*, I was involved in this. I mean we worked on these for years really, because we redrafted it, redrafted it, it was submitted to the bishops, it was submitted to the Council, there were always critiques of them and we integrated these, these were great experiences. *Gaudium et Spes* - I wasn't involved in this but I was deeply moved by this, I continue to be moved by this.

R: Why?

G: At the very beginning, the first sentence of *Gaudium et Spes*, is to me still, I get thrilled still.

R: So do I.

G: It says that joys and the sorrows of humanity, of people everywhere, we share in them as believers in Jesus Christ. There is a solidarity because Jesus makes us all create solidarity in us for the whole of humanity. It's a wonderful sentence and it's very difficult I mean I don't know of any sentence in the Church's history that expresses this kind of universal solidarity as magnificently well as this particular sentence.

R: Gregory as you look back over fifty years now since those historic moments in St. Peter's Basilica, October 1962, you've seen a lot, some would say you've seen it all. You remain a faithful, deeply devoted Catholic, you love Jesus, the Church, the Eucharist. What sustains you in the Roman Catholic Church fifty years later after this great moment of hope in the 1960's.

G: I mean I am disappointed that many things that were promised by the Council didn't really take place. I was disappointed by this re-emphasis on centralization, but I think it is dangerous to allow yourself to be disappointed and then move into depression and bitterness.

R: You never did.

G: No. And so you have to reread the past, and reread the Gospel and you focus on the positive things that happened, and to me they are still there every day. And so I continue to be grateful for the Council and apply this to my life, and to my activity, and to my writings and in my pastoral engagement.

R: Gregory I want to thank you. You have been for me and continue to be a real model of hope, *gaudium et spes*, joy and hope. And you're on the eve of your 90th birthday, alive and well, ever green, and I think I know what's kept you ever green. Thank you very much for coming to us today, *vielen dank*.