

FOFTY YEARS AT THE SERVICE OF THE Holy See

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Daughter of a Jewish father - journalist and organizer of spectacular "shows" - and of Dulcie Deamer, "Queen of Bohemia" in the Sydney of the '20s and '30s - nothing, for Rosemary, to a career as "first woman in the Roman Curia". A first timid opening of the Curia to lay people, and even to women, required nothing less than an Ecumenical Council which, guided by the Holy Spirit, would pick up and unravel the strands of the post-war world and the soul-searching of a world Church in a world "becoming one". The end - or rather the beginning - whatever the resistance - was possible thanks to the quiet tenacity of a Paul VI, who had lived in depth the outreach and the torment of the Pontificate of Pius XII and to the calm and jovial audacity, and the depth of sanctity of John XXIII.

pointed

What an introduction to the entry of one small Australian woman into the august vicinity of the Papal Court and, concretely, into an itinerant service of the Holy See, of the Secretariat of State, acting through the Council on the Laity ("Consilium de Laicis").., for the first ten years of its "experimental" existence.

To set the scene, I have to go back to my first glimpse of Papal Rome. It was Easter 1938. I was coming to the end of a two-year period in Paris as French Government Travelling Scholar. During the Easter vacation, I travelled down through Italy to Rome with my successor, Ronald Jackson (who was later to have a distinguished career at Melbourne University). On Easter Sunday Pope Pius XI would be celebrating a Canonization Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, before taking off for Castelgandolfo, in order not to meet Hitler, who was coming to visit Mussolini. The NAZI flags were waving all along the Fori Imperiali to welcome him.

A few months later I left Paris to come home. The war years were spent serving in the Grail movement, and with anxious eyes turned towards France. I was preparing an M.A. thesis on "Heroism in French Literature", as news filtered through of authentic acts of heroism in the French Resistance. Almost unbelievably, when the war was hardly over in Europe, a Fellowship from the American Association of University Women took me back to France and the Sorbonne for a year, which became a lifetime - 2 years in Paris, 6 in Fribourg and 50 in Rome.

My years in Fribourg, Switzerland, were my apprenticeship to international service of the Church, working in the secretariat of Pax Romana, International Movement of Catholic Students. It was there that I came to know many of the outstanding people with whom I would have the privilege of working in Rome and in Vatican II. There I came to know and to be known by ^{the} three people who would influence most deeply my Roman experience; three people, intimately linked with one another, and who would help to deepen and widen, to "shape" a whole period in the life of the Church: Giovanni Battista Montini, Paolo VI - Mons. Emilio Guano, Chaplain of the FUCI (Catholic University Students) and later Bishop of Livorno and a leading figure in the Council work on lay apostolate, and especially on "the Church in the modern world", and Vittorino Veronese.

During the post-war years, the Univ. Cath. Federation of Australia became affiliated to both IMCS and ICMCA (which existed together from 1947, after P.R. Congress of 1946. 43.

I met Veronese in Fribourg when he was President of Italian Catholic Action and Vice-President of Pax Romana-ICMICA. With the approval of Pius XII he was initiating the process of consultation that would lead to the First World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, originally planned for the Holy Year 1950, but that would take place in October 1951. It was prepared by an international meeting in Rome of "experts" - about 80 - clerical and lay. Some came with many misgivings. Would they be able freely to contribute their experience of new forms of "apostolate" to meet the needs of the post-war world? They left convinced that they had helped to prepare a real contribution to the Church's mission in a "world becoming one". They received encouragement from Pius XII, brought with deep conviction by Msgr. Montini: "We are called to build up the Church. It is Christ who is at work. We are his labourers, his helpers... it is for us to lay the first stone of the edifice which will be the Christian reality of to-morrow". The victor of the occasion was Canon Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers Movement. The World Congress would bring new theological understandings, but the keynote - as Cardijn hoped - would be the challenge of the modern world. The French sociologist Joseph Folliet summed up the experience for the Paris daily paper La Croix (October 24, 1951):

For the first time in the annals of the Church hundreds of lay people met at the heart of the Eternal and universal City... They freely, at times hotly, discussed everything related to their apostolate. The most scrupulous equality reigned between nations, races, classes and sexes. This will leave an indelible mark on the turning point of this half century.

I returned to Fribourg from Rome. Pax Romana was preparing its own international Congress in Canada. But, by the end of 1952, I was back in Rome - for good, invited by Veronese. There had been dramatic developments after the Lay Apostolate Congress, leading to the creation by Pius XII in January 1952, of the "Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate" ("COPECIAL" for short!) with Veronese as Secretary - making room, as President of Italian C.A., for the Vice-President, Luigi Gedda, who had won great acclaim by his mobilization of Italian Catholic forces (including Catholic Action) to win the crucial post-war elections of 1948 against the Communist Party.

(A recent book - a thesis for the University of Fribourg - by a French priest, Bernard Minvielle - has researched this delicate moment, which opened up a new chapter in pastoral activity at international level, leading up to Vatican II.

On 23 January 1952 a press release in L'Osservatore Romano announced the creation of COPECIAL. It would be seven years before the "Committee" as such became a reality. What emerged and developed was a small international staff, mainly of women - Italian, French, Argentinian, Australian... with no solid basis except its creation by the Pope and the conviction and commitment of its members, and the help (of an Ecclesiastical Commission, and especially) of an Ecclesiastical Assistant, the French Mgr. Achille Glorieux, who would later be the Secretary of the Preparatory Commission and the Conciliar Commission on Lay Apostolate for Vatican II. This was the situation until 1959, when Veronese left Rome to become Director General of UNESCO.

after Varese
 For the staff the driving force behind the First World Congress for the Lay Apostolate (1951) was Maria Vittoria Donadeo from the Girls' Catholic Action Movement in Milan. In later years she would become the cornerstone of a small Orient-rite Russian monastery in Rome, where her dynamism would be channelled into contemplative life and Russian spirituality and - even before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 - into occasional "apostolic visits" to Moscow.

Italian Catholic Action also "lent" Maria Carosi, who brought pioneering experience of international involvement. She was professionally competent, but far removed from any impersonal bureaucracy. [If the Vatican Administration could replace some of its clerical staff with a few women of the calibre and commitment of Maria and Anna Matraccia (her assistant) - and also some more recent acquisitions - it would not only benefit from their "feminine genius", but would also gain in efficiency and make serious economies!]
 Marie-Ange Besson came from Paris and experience with the "Cercle St Jean Baptiste" of Fr. Jean Daniélou, and from two years as a missionary in Vietnam; Sara Alonso, our Spanish-language expert, was from a Secular Institute. Others would come later.]

When Canon Cardijn made his first visit, he would like to have seen a more impressive group than just "these women"; but he gave full cooperation. Plans were mooted for international laity meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and for an "experts' meeting" in May 1953. This was held at Gazzada (Varese) in the north of Italy, with 21 "experts", 5 Bishops from different European countries and a representative of the Holy See. Plans began to take shape also for a Second World Congress, to equip lay people for their varied roles in the mission of the Church. Theological discussion arising out of the First World Congress was introduced by Gérard Philips, Pietro Pavan and Emilio Guano, and the lay viewpoint by Lance Wright from England. Another speaker, a Dominican, was unlucky enough to say that the lay person's activity in the social field could only be called apostolate in a metaphorical sense. Cardijn pounced: "The apostolate is a life and death matter for the Church. You can't ask that in the name of a metaphor" And his fist came down on the table.

[In December 1953, the first African meeting was held - at Kisubi, Uganda. Two African Bishops (~~xiatxxxxcardinaxixxixxxxxpart~~) took part: Kiwanuka (Uganda) and Rugamba (Tanganyika, later Cardinal). Archbishop James Knox represented the Holy See - the first Australian to be an Apostolic Delegate.]

[In 1957 more than 20 African countries would be represented at the Second World Congress in Rome. In 1972, after the Council, a Seminar for all Africa ^{was held} at Accra (Ghana), prepared by a Committee of Africans from 9 Countries, and the Secretariat of COPECIAL.]

In 1959 COPECIAL became a real "Committee", with nine members from different countries, and its President, Silvio Golzio, President of the University Graduates of Italian Catholic Action. I was Executive Secretary. The central task was the preparation of the Second World Congress for the Lay Apostolate. Held in 1957, this would contribute to an important pastoral and theological underpinning for the Vatican Council's work on "Laity" and "The Church in the Modern World".

My own task, as spelt out at the beginning of COPECIAL's existence, should be "study and documentation". This - as I commented later - proved to be "no sedentary employment" (surely, an understatement!) There were meetings and more meetings, meetings to prepare meetings, "experts'" meetings, theological meetings, continental meetings - Africa, Asia, North and South America, middle East, Europa ... Participation in meetings of the Catholic International Organizations and their "Conference"... In 1953-54, I made my one complete round the world journey (including Australia). There was little time for tourism, but my collection of travel brochures was enriched - and my treasure of friendship..

In his History of the World Congresses of 1951 and 1957, Bernard Minvielle provides proof, on the one hand of Veronese's confidence in his "staff", and on the other, of the cordial cooperation received both from members of the "Hierarchy" and from "committed" laity around the world. The travel notes of my explorative journey for the preparation of the Second World Congress show that I was received and discussed our tentative plans with 2 cardinals, Nuncios and other Papal representatives in Asia and Oceania, as well as by 17 Archbishops and Bishops, as well as by representatives of 58 lay organizations (the most numerous, ^{from} the Legion of Mary).

Chapter 10, "A Voyage of Discovery" of my book, From a Roman Window recalls these intercontinental contacts. My visit to Australia (the first since I left Paris in 1945, included a brief visit to Melbourne in 1954 to discuss the "Movement" with B.A. Santamaria, in relation to our preparation for the first Asian Meeting for the Lay Apostolate that was to be held in Manila in 1955. Santamaria had plans for extending the Movement's influence in Asia which caused some anxiety in Rome. We knew also of political actions taken in the Philippines in the name of Catholic Action. During the meeting in Manila the following year, a lecture given by Mgr. (later Cardinal) Pietro Pavan helped to clarify the situation from a doctrinal point of view through a clear distinction between "Catholic Action" and "Christian-inspired lay action". The doctrine was clear. Its application was another problem. ~~Santamaria did not take part in the meeting.~~ ^{At the meeting} Australia was ~~also~~ represented, in the field of Communications, with a Workshop introduced by Brian Doyle.

5

From here there will be quotations from letters to my brother Edwin (1961, 1963), to ~~from~~ my mother, Dulcie Deamer (1964-1966) and to my brother Tony (1973).

To Edwin (11.5.61)

We have been moving our office, After five weeks of dusty coexistence with the workmen who were invading our old office apartment in Palazzo San Calisto, we are at last installed in our new abode, having removed nine years of documentation and hundreds of packages of Congress proceedings from the floor and organizing them on shelves and in cupboards. [The workmen are a little mystified by our attachment to so much "impedimenta"; but it has, at least, historical interest.] The ~~apartment~~ ^{apartment} was international headquarters of pre-war "Catholic Action", presided over internationally by Cardinal Giuseppe Pizzardo...

February, March and April were so unusually fine that prayers were ordered for rain..and answered. Fortunately, the order was withdrawn just in time to allow the Roman sun to shine again on a Congress of some 2000 Catholic Women from all over the world and, no less important, on the royal visit. "Elisabetta" and "Filippo" completely conquered the Italians and shook many Republican convictions. Even Rome, somewhat blasé about visiting Heads of State, went all out in its welcome... I managed to get a ticket to see them pass through the Vatican on their way to and from their visit to Pope John.

During the Women's Congress, I was roped in for simultaneous translation. I found myself putting Bishop Fulton Sheen into French - but some of his humorous asides escaped me !...

{ A backward glance : Our first audience with John XXIII, in October 1959
"La piccinnina" !)

To Edwin, 13.6.1963

6

My own small doings look very small indeed beside what has been happening in the Church during these weeks. If you were following the radio, you will have been closer than I to what was happening, for I left Rome just as the Pope's long agony began. For the next days I was completely occupied in a meeting near Brussels and only able to get news 2 or 3 times a day from someone's transistor. I returned to Rome on June 5. I was in the crowd on St. Peter's Square on the evening of 6th when there was a brief ceremony in front of the Basilica around Pope John's coffin. I doubt there has ever been such universal mourning for anyone. He had succeeded in making the whole human feel like one family.

The cardinals are flocking in and the papers are full of speculations as to the successor. The Holy Spirit will - fortunately - be deciding the matter. I have great faith in the prayers Pope John himself will have offered for this difficult succession and for the continuation of "his" Council... It seems unlikely that, whoever the new Pope, the Council will not reconvene more or less as planned. What is less certain is how long the Council will last, if there is no longer the shadow of death to give it a special urgency... and our future World Congress is to "apply" the Council!

For the remote preparation of the Congress I was at a meeting in London with English, Scottish, Irish and Scandinavian delegates. Before that, I was in Geneva with Marie-Ange - a "courtesy visit" to the World Council of Churches to meet our "colleagues" in their Departments of the Laity and of Cooperation of Men and Women in Church, Family and Society. We had been in vague ^{for a long} time, but to meet the people concerned makes prayers and action for "Unity" much more urgent.

4.XI.1963

You will have read that a few laymen have been admitted to the Council sessions as "Auditors" (~~not a very happy term in English~~). Most of them are chosen from our friends of the Catholic International Organizations. ~~This is a significant gesture for the future...~~ There is, of course, great speculation about the possible nomination of women. It will come, and Pope Paul would certainly not be opposed - but quite a bit of die-hard resistance is likely in certain ecclesiastical circles. I was not made to be a suffragette, but some attitudes almost turn me into a feminist!

...The questions discussed are much more public than during the first session. The texts are still "secret", but journalists get a full summary and a wealth of theological commentary from experts. There should be a generation of newspaper theologians after the hours spent in this kind of briefing.

15.XII.1963

The new excitement is the announcement by the Pope of his decision to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land at the Epiphany. The first Successor of St. Peter to go to Jerusalem!

To my mother, Dulcine Deamer

67

9.8.1964

The Church will never be the same again! At the first session, the Bishops discovered themselves, one another and the Church (or, at least rediscovered, in a new way). Lay people who have been working for years with international organizations no longer get excited by a meeting with 40 or so nationalities. But, for many of the Bishops, the first impression was wonderment at finding a Brazilian to the right, a Chinese to the left, an African across the way! With the second session the "episcopal college" began to emerge in all its unity and diversity (but not in terms of "goodies" and "baddies", as you would sometimes think from press commentaries!).

1.11.64

To the Council

At first I thought I might not go every day, because of the work accumulating outside. But I have been one of the most faithful. Apart from the intrinsic interest of the debates, I manage to do a great deal of "work" which would otherwise entail much correspondence, by meeting Bishops from far and near or "periti" in the Council hall... I manage to follow the Latin speeches fairly well, and there are priests to help with translation for those who want it (including a French-Canadian, Jean Tillard, Dominican, of a "progressive frame of mind, whose face shows what the speaker is saying before it has even been turned into French!)

In addition to the mornings in St. Peter's, we are invited to commission meetings on Laity and on "Schema XIII" (The Church in the Modern World), where our rôle can be more active. The Auditors also have their own meetings, either to meet "experts" or to concoct written contributions...

1.1.65

The Eucharistic Congress in Bombay was a tremendous experience. It was wonderfully organized, but in the fullest sense an act of prayer, of worship - on a mammoth scale, but authentic.

The Pope's visit for the Congress was, in a way, miraculous. No one could have predicted the reactions of the people - nor even less, those of Pope Paul. In spite of his fatigue at the end of the Council session, and of the absolute of the situation, he managed all the time to have exactly the right attitude and to find the right words, which went to the heart of the people... Also in his appeal for solidarity to help the world's poor. This was the best concrete illustration of the whole idea of "dialogue" with the modern world which is stressed in the Council, and also in the only Encyclical that Pope Paul has published so far... (*Ecclesiam Suam*)

28.3.65

8

...For a week at the beginning of February, about 80 people - 30 to 40 Bishops, theologians, a few lay men and women and 2 nuns - met in an Institute on the banks of Lago Albano (opposite Castelgandolfo) and worked in small groups on the various chapters of "Schema XIII". I was in the "doctrinal" sub-commission - to bring the viewpoint of the non-theologian!

In the second^{week} of February, a smaller group met in the Vatican to go over the whole "Schema". It included only 2 lay men, 2 lay women and one nun (the American Sr. Mary Luke Tobin). I don't know^{how} the Swiss Guards felt when they admitted women for a meeting on the "third floor of the Apostolic Palace", just under the Papal apartments. The last meeting before the Council reopens begins to-morrow and will last ten days, with about 50 Bishops, a good number of "periti" and a few lay people. Our job will be mainly listening, as befits "Auditors"...

You mentioned the campaign being made for "women priests". I have a strong feeling that it is at least more suitable for priests to be men, but to date, no satisfactory theological reason has been given for excluding women. It is not enough to say it has "never been done". I think we shall probably come back to something like the "deaconesses" of the early Church...

10. 12. 65

The weeks of the Council were fuller than ever. Even during "vacation" periods there were Commission meetings, especially for what is now the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today". The last few days were almost too full of history to be realized - culminating in the last Public Session at which nine centuries were skipped over for the Pope to embrace the representative of Athenagoras in front of the altar of St. Peter's, with the whole "People of God" applauding. Or the close of the Council in front of the Basilica, under a mild December sky, while Bernini's colonnade embraced one of the biggest crowds it has yet seen.

We shall be lonely without the Council. But, no doubt, it is good to be back on the "job" and in the crowd - no longer an "Auditor" on a red plush seat in the front row.

16.1.66

You ask me about the "practical outcome" of the Council. That is difficult to gauge. It has certainly effected far greater changes in the Church at all levels - and in the attitude to the Catholic Church of many outside it - than we could have dreamed of when Pope John announced his decision in 1959 to convene it.

Suggestions made at that time seem timid indeed - for instance as regards "dialogue" within the Church and between Catholics and other Christians or non-Christians.

The Council texts are not perfect. They hardly could be considering the pressure under which some at least had to be drafted. But all can be a basis for far-reaching reform and development. People themselves have changed! There are some "die-hards" who have remained in opposition, but even these will have learned a lot. And there is the simple fact that the Bishops of the world have come to know one another and to understand better the situations in which they have to work. The Council hall inside St. Peter's is being vigorously demolished, but the Council will remain with us, helping the Church to carry on the work of Christ in the world ...

1.4.66

The next items on my programme are :

- a meeting of the Post-Conciliar Lay Apostolate Commission - a temporary body to work on points of immediate application for the Decree on Lay Apostolate;
 - talks I have been asked to give, always about the Council and its follow-up: near Naples (April 25), Pisa (May 4), Bari (June 2); May 12-15 : a European meeting at St.Pölten, near Vienna. (~~Trent, November 1965~~)
- The most spectacular immediate follow-up to the Council has been the visit of Archbishop Ramsey. In St.Paul's outside the Walls the Pope and the Archbishop prayed together, made their joint Declaration and gave one another the Kiss of Peace.

Our own meeting in March was marked in a small way by this ecumenical development. It was an "experts' meeting" of about 60 people, priests and laity, to work on the programme of our World Congress of October 1967. Among them were five Protestant Observers from the World Council of Churches, the YMCA and YWCA. (At the Second World Congress in 1957 there was one Protestant - Dr.Hans Ruedi Weber - cautiously admitted on a press ticket). We had a Special Audience for the "Experts". By a concourse of circumstances, I found myself standing next to Pope Paul and introducing the Observers !

7.8.66

You may have seen my name - with your own - cropping up again lately in the news. If so, I hasten to correct a mis-statement. I have not been appointed to a Vatican Committee to combat world poverty, organize development or anything of the sort (my qualifications would hardly be serious for such a job;) . What actually happened was that on July 7 a "Provisional Committee" was created by the Pope to ^{work on} ~~set up~~ a "blue print" for new structures to be set up within the Holy See, in accordance with the wishes of the Council - on the one hand for Laity questions and on the other, for "promotional" work to make the Catholic world aware of its responsibilities as regards world poverty, international Justice, in the light of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today. ~~The President would be~~ Cardinal Roy from Québec, ^{Amory} the members : ~~(Archbishop Castelli and Mgr. Glorieux from COPECIAL),~~ Vittorino Veronese, ~~Auguste Vanistendael from the Christian Trade Unions Federation,~~ Johannes Schaff from ~~Germany~~ and myself. The Committee would work rapidly, mainly through "hearings" with outstanding people associated with Vatican II and its follow-up. The decisions would, of course, remain with the Pope. (The new structures would be set up in 1967: the Council on the Laity - today, Pontifical Council for the Laity - and the present "Pontifical Council Justice and Peace".)]

29.1.67

I do not need to tell you what has been happening over here. From paper clippings sent from Australia and from London, I see that the press has been after you again about your "curial" daughter ("first woman in the Curia!"). In a few years it should be so normal for a woman to be operating in the Curia that no comment will be forthcoming. The post I have been given is Under-secretary of the new "Consilium de Laicis" (Council on the Laity), (which would become the "Pontifical Council for the Laity" in 1976-77 and be recognized as a "dicastery" of the Curia .)

Coming now to my own programme for 1967, I expect to leave Rome on February 13, to arrive in Sydney (via Tokyo, Seoul and New Zealand) on February 27 and leave for Rome on March 16. In Australia the Catholic Women's League has arranged a rather fearsome schedule which will keep me hopping about from Sydney to Melbourne - Hobart - Adelaide - Brisbane - Perth and stations in between ...introducing everywhere the Third World Congress for the Apostolate of the Laity. to be held in Rome in October 1967 on the theme "God's People on Man's Journey"- (The grand finale would be a public meeting in Sydney's Trocadero for more than 2000 people, in presence of Cardinal Gilroy and a representative of the Apostolic Delegate.) .

For Vatican II, the Ecumenical Observers had been invited through the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Through this same channel COPECIAL was able to invite for the World Congress Observer-Consultants from all the Orthodox Churches and all Christian communions working at international level, from the YMCA, YWCA, the World Student Christian Federation... All responded by sending official delegates. Even the Baptist World Alliance, not represented at Vatican II, sent two Observers. Altogether there were 88 delegated Observer-Consultants. The Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress was a special Guest.

(Note The "Pontifical Council for the Laity" has, today, as Members Cardinals, Bishops, priests and lay people, men and women; as Consultors Bishops, priests and lay people. It has a lay man as Under-secretary , and women and men as "officials", staff-members. One of the lay Members is a layman, Allan Panozza, from Victoria and the Charismatic Renewal.)

Q. 1004:

"Representing the Holy See".

Since Vatican II there are many ways of "representing the Holy See", also for a lay person. As well as Under-Secretary in the first Laity Council, I have been (~~and~~ ~~theoretically I still am~~) Consultant of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Member of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses, Member of various Delegations of the Holy See (e.g. for the World Conference for International Women's Year, Mexico 1975; for the Assemblies of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala 1968 and Cancerra 1991; member of the Women's Ecumenical Liaison Group between the WCC and the RCC . As well as by "representation" I have served the Holy See (or hope to have served it!) through innumerable interviews, by press and radio, both in Rome and during my travels. In the immediate post-Council period, I gave more than 30 talks up and ~~down~~ down Italy from Palermo to Turin; invited by the Archbishop of Trent the day after the publication of the Conciliar Decree on Lay Apostolate, I arrived with for only documentation the text of the Decree published in the daily paper.

My appointment to the Pastoral Institute of the Pontifical Lateran University (the Pope's University) gave a new dimension to my "service of the Holy See" and gave access also to other Roman Faculties of Theology, in spite of my lack of any formal qualification for teaching theology.

To Tony , 17.6.1973

These are busy weeks, for everything has to be finished before the holiday period.

The trip to England (for a meeting of the World Council of Churches) was good, but hardly sightseeing. We were for five days in a lodge in the middle of Windsor ~~great~~ Great Park , with the nearest village store about a mile and a half away. I did have a quick visit to the nearby Eton College (we were shown around by a courteous and lanky youth in morning coat and striped trousers). We had visits from the Archbishop of Canterbury and from Cardinal Heenan, and from other dignataries...

Returning to Rome I took off again for two days at Gallipoli (not the one of ANZAC fame, but another, on the Gulf of Taranto, in Italy's "foot"), where I had rashly promised to give talks at a diocesan meeting...And so it goes on.

14.10.73

Since my return to Rome (from Sydney), I have been involved almost continually in a series of meetings.

My visit to Port Moresby on the way back was good, but it was like emerging into a turkish bath after the beautiful days in Sydney. My first afternoon was a long rush, including two interviews for radio and one for the press, a visit to the University Chaplain (clad only in shorts when we arrived unexpectedly); tea with the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart from Kensington; and in the evening, a talk in a parish. The following morning was free, except for a visit to the Archbishop and lunch with him, but the afternoon and evening were very full. Next day, on the National Day of PNG we took off early (they were afraid there might be some trouble during the celebrations), after, almost alone, I had attended the Archbishop's Mass in his very "New Guinea style" cathedral...

11.XI. 73

This coming week we will have the first full meeting of the Study Commission on "Women in Society and in the Church "set up by Pope Paul. It is a mixed group: 13 women. from various parts pf the world and avocations, and 12 men (3 laymen, the others theologians, liturgists, etc. and a Bishop as President). It has given me a lot of extra work, since there is no other office available for secretarial help. It brings a lot of contact with feminists of various types, some of them very critical of Pope Paul's approach to women's - or rather, to feminists' - positions. The situation was very different at the time of the Council when a first meeting was held at Vicarello near Rome on the initiative of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and of the World Council of Churches, and organized through our office. One of the feminists visiting us recently was Betty Friedan, American Jewess, author of "The Feminine Mystique " (1963) and described by TIME Magazine as the "Mom" of the feminist movement in the USA. She was received by the Holy Father, after visits in various offices, including ours. She was excited about the Audience, and gave it considerable publicity...

(Note: The last chapter ("Concerning Women" of my book, From a Roman Window gives quite a full account of the Commission, as well as of the Women's Ecumenical Liaison Group set up in 1968 between the World Council of Churches and the Catholic Church ~~to implement recommendations~~ ~~that adopted at Vicarello in 1966~~ as a follow-up to the meeting at Vicarello.)

The Audience was requested to ask the Holy Father's blessing on my new task as Ordinary Professor in the Pontifical Lateran University, after ten years as Under-Secretary in what was now the Pontifical Council for the Laity. This would not have been sufficient reason for "disturbing" the Holy Father, especially after the letter of thanks which I had received on behalf of the Pope from the Cardinal Secretary of State. What I wanted was the opportunity to submit directly to the Holy Father the problem created by my departure as regards the presence of women within the Roman Curia. I had prepared a note on this subject which I wanted to deliver personally into the hands of Paul VI.

The Audience was the last of the morning, after, the general Audience of the Wednesday; arranged in this way by Msgr. (now Cardinal) Monduzzi so that I could be sure of being alone with the Holy Father.

After greeting me, the Holy Father invited me to sit beside him (his own chair was very slightly higher than mine). When everyone else had left, he took my two hands in his own, resting them on the arm of his chair. In this way we spoke together for about ten minutes.

I began by recalling the long years during which I had had the joy of working in Rome for the Church, at first in the COEPIAL with Veronese and then in the "Consilium de Laicis". The Holy Father asked me if I was still with the Council on the Laity (!) I explained that the new "Pontifical Council" excluded this possibility. Then he asked me if I was staying in Rome, and I spoke about my new task, the experience I had already had at the University, and how encouraging I found the "pastoral" attitude of the priests with whom I had been working. (X) When I said I was lecturing to the priest students, he was pleased. He said: "You can do so much good! You must speak strongly to priests, speak strongly to priests!"

Finally, I asked permission to speak also about the presence of women in the structures of the Holy See. He granted the permission willingly, and he stressed his own interest and his desire to contribute to women's "promotion" - whatever people may say about him in this regard. I summed up rapidly the contents of my note, which he accepted and promised to read.

Finally I knelt and, with both hands on my head, he gave me his blessing.

Romyg Roche

(Not) (X) I had known for some time that the new "Pontifical Council for the Laity" would have no "Under-Secretary". The new structure had been published in the Motu Proprio Apostolatus Peragendi of 10 December 1976. I had been informed by a telephone call the evening before from arch-bishop Benelli that my new task would be ^{as} Professor in the Pastoral Institute of the Lateran University, where I had been giving lectures on Laity questions since 1967. I was to remain as "Consultor" in the new Pontifical Council.