

By John Vennari

**Editors Note: We are happy to republish this previously 'lost' (unpublished since 1997) article in conjunction with [a history of the CCR with Kennedy Hall on our YouTube Channel](#). The late John Vennari was a crusader for Catholic orthodoxy and our former Editor-in-Chief.**

**Part 2 will be published soon.**

The August 1997 issue of *Catholic Family News* featured the article "A 'Catholic' Charismatic Extravaganza" which contained a report on the Charismatic's 30th Anniversary conference in Pittsburgh. The article also catalogued a brief summary of the most serious problems with "Catholic" pentecostalism as being radically opposed to traditional Catholic doctrine and practice.

A question that keeps recurring is, if "Catholic" pentecostalism is an anomaly, why does it enjoy such favor in our modern Church, and even endorsements from the Vatican?

Briefly, "Catholic" pentecostalism is ecumenical in root, stem, flower and nectar. It could only grow in the climate of liberal Catholicism that Vatican II unleashed upon the world.

Venerable Pope Pius IX called liberal Catholics "the worst enemies of the Church", since their goal is to reconcile the Church with the Masonic principles of the French Revolution. Rome's opposition to liberal Catholicism within the Church was steadfast until the Second Vatican Council.

Liberalism within Vatican II manifested itself in a number of areas. It was most apparent in the three prominent novelties emanating from the Council: religious liberty, collegiality and ecumenism.

The fact that Vatican II was a triumph for liberal Catholicism was gleefully attested by Marcel Prelot, a Senator from the Dobbs Region in France. Prelot said:

"We had struggled for a century and a half to bring our opinions to prevail within the Church and had not succeeded. Finally, there came Vatican II and we triumphed. From then on the propositions and principles of liberal Catholicism have been definitively and officially accepted by Holy Church."<sup>1</sup>

The French Freemason Yves Maursauden

painted a more frightening tribute to the new ecumenical theology of Vatican II. In his book

*Ecumenism as Seen by a Traditional Freemason* he gloated, “Catholics ... must not forget that all roads lead to God. And they will have to accept that this courageous idea of freethinking, which we can really call a revolution, pouring forth from our Masonic lodges, has spread magnificently over the dome of St. Peters.”<sup>2</sup>

In this dark context, it is fitting that the key figure in the “legitimization” of Charismatics is one of the same key figures responsible for the triumph of liberal Catholicism at Vatican II, the Belgian Cardinal, Leon Joseph Suenens.



The poster features a background image of a large Gothic cathedral with two prominent spires. In the foreground, there is a black and white portrait of a man in clerical attire. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image. In the top left corner, there is a QR code. In the top right corner, there is a small icon of two figures standing under a cross. The main title is in large, bold, white capital letters. Below the title, the dates and location are also in large, bold, white capital letters. A URL for signing up is provided in the middle left.



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## **A Cardinal Whose “Work Was Legendary”**

In the opening speech at the Charismatics’ 30th Anniversary Conference in 1997,

Charismatic pioneer Kevin Ranaghan paid special tribute to Suenens, the first “Cardinal-advocate” of the Charismatic Renewal.

Ranaghan lauded Suenens as a man whose “work on behalf of this renewal is legendary”, and credited Suenens for making the 1975 Charismatic Synod in Rome possible. He praised Suenens as the man who:

- 1:** introduced the idea of “the Charismatic gifts working today” into the discussions at Vatican II;
- 2:** met with theologians and pastors to draw up guidelines for the Charismatic movement;
- 3:** encouraged Pope Paul VI, during the 1975 Rome Charismatic Conference, to go ahead with his address to the charismatic renewal (and subsequent cautious endorsement) in the face of attacks on and criticism of the charismatic movement.

Ranaghan concluded this accolade: “With the fiery spirit of Cardinal Suenens, we should long to work not only to bring the renewal to the heart of the Church but to bring the Church to the heart of the renewal.” (loud applause and halleluja, halleluja, etc. from crowd.)<sup>3</sup>

Conspicuously missing from this litany of praise was that Cardinal Suenens was one of the most liberal Cardinals of this century. Suenens was a “principle architect” of Vatican II’s *aggiornamento*.<sup>4</sup> Talented, bold, persuasive, determined, his progressive influence at Vatican II and over Pope Paul VI was profound.<sup>5</sup>

Suenens counted among his friends and associates the most progressive prelates of the age: Cardinals Bernard Alfrink, Jan Willebrands, Jean Villot, Giovanni Benelli, and Basil Hume. His antagonists were such traditional Cardinals as Alfredo Ottaviani, Guieseppi Siri, Pericle Felici and John Heenan. To his dying day, Suenens regarded these traditional prelates as “dangers ... which wish to restrain and arrest efforts toward renewal.”<sup>6</sup>

Suenens was legendary not only for advocacy of the Charismatic renewal but also for his labors to undermine traditional Catholic teaching and practice.

Suenens was a militant proponent of collegiality and “co-responsibility” in the Church, which strikes at the heart of Catholicism’s divinely instituted hierarchial structure.

Suenens was instrumental in subverting the proper ends of marriage which greatly fueled the 1960’s birth-control debate to the immense delight of Planned Parenthood.

Suenens was an enthusiastic apostle for “updating” religious life. His book *The Nun in the World* left a disastrous trail of ruined religious and empty convents all around the globe.

Suenens was firmly committed to ecumenism. He had a colorful history of ecumenical and syncretistic adventures, including kneeling before a group of Anglican bishops and asking their blessing.<sup>7</sup>

Since the ecumenically- based Charismatic renewal is the fruit of liberal Catholicism, it follows that the rabidly liberal Cardinal Suenens would become a “Catholic Pentecostal” and would regard the Charismatic Movement as the- apple of his eye. By contrast, no Cardinal with a history of fidelity to the traditional Catholic faith strayed anywhere near Pentecostalism.

## Suenens at Vatican II

In his book *The Rhine Flows Into the Tiber*, Fr. Ralph Wiltgen reports that from the beginning of the Council, Vatican II was hijacked by a clique of liberal theologians and prelates primarily from the Rhineland countries.

These progressive Churchmen were determined to reform the Church into their own image and likeness. The group consisted of such *avante-garde* theologians as Hans Kung, Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx, and liberal prelates as Cardinal Alfrink, Cardinal Fringes, and Cardinal Suenens of Belgium. The well known Catholic journalist Peter Hebblethwaite, a cheerleader for the left, described Suenens as the embodiment of a progressive prelate.<sup>8</sup> As is documented in various accounts,<sup>9</sup> the reformers won the day.

Before the Council, Pope John XXIII had established the Central Preparatory Committee in Rome to prepare the *schemas* - documents containing the subject matter to be discussed by the bishops at Vatican II. The Committee’s work lasted two years. The schemas prepared were quite orthodox and would have caused the debates to proceed along traditional lines.

At the opening of Vatican II, the liberal clique at the council, along with Cardinal Suenens, succeeded in having this superb preparatory work assigned to the waste-paper basket”.<sup>10</sup>

This left twenty-five hundred bishops in Rome without an agenda. The bishops then relied on the liberal *periti* to draw up the new documents for discussion. These documents were far more progressive than the original schemas and employed a calculated use of ambiguous language. The progressives’ victories did not end there.

At the beginning of the Council’s Second Session, due to a sudden change in the procedural

rules,<sup>11</sup> Cardinals Suenens, Dopfner and Lercaro who were “universally known for their reformist ardor”<sup>12</sup> became three of the four Cardinal Moderators. These Cardinal Moderators were responsible for “directing the activities of the Council and determining the sequences in which topics would be discussed”.<sup>13</sup> Father Wiltgen writes that the fourth moderator, Cardinal Agagianian was “not a very forceful person. The three liberal Cardinal Moderators often had 100 percent control.”<sup>14</sup> The reformers had secured the power to steer the entire agenda. Michael Novak would write that Suenens influence at the Council “seemed, for a time, second only to the Pope.”<sup>15</sup>

The spirit of reform unleashed was violent and resolute. In many areas of Church teaching, the liberals succeeded in transforming yesterday’s heresies into today’s “orthodoxy”.

It must be recalled here that Vatican II was not a dogmatic Council. From its beginning, it was declared to be a pastoral Council with no intention of formulating dogmatic definitions. All of its documents can only be properly interpreted in the light of Sacred Tradition. Anything that does not square with this Tradition must be rejected.

At the close of Vatican II, the bishops asked Cardinal Felici for what theologians call the “theological note” of the Council. Felici responded, “we have to distinguish according to the schemas and the chapters those which have already been the subject of dogmatic definitions in the past; as for the declarations which have a novel character, we have to make reservations.”<sup>16</sup>

As the present crisis clearly demonstrates, not enough churchmen mustered the courage to voice these justifiable reservations in the face of Vatican II novelties. “Reform” and “renewal” were the order of the day. The dedicated reformers were the new heroes. From the time of Vatican II until his death in 1996, Leon Joseph Cardinal Suenens would enjoy remarkable prestige while devoting all his energy to advance the most revolutionary aspects of the Council.

## Suenens and Collegiality

Cardinal Suenens was a formidable proponent of the new concept of *collegiality*, the primary instrument for introducing the alien spirit of democracy into the Church. He believed collegiality to be good in itself and also saw it as a useful ecumenical overture to false religions.<sup>17</sup>

Collegiality is destructive to the hierarchial institution of the Church established by Our Lord. It is contrary to the authority of the priest and holds that all authority can only be



exercised by consultation and consensus from one's inferiors. In this democratic scheme, everyone must participate in the exercise of authority.

**For the papacy**, collegiality means that the Pope can only act as head of the college of bishops and never alone. "All the bishops of the world form a college or team with their president. This the Council called 'collegiality'."<sup>18</sup>

**For bishops**, collegiality means the establishment of episcopal synods which is a distortion of the organic structure of the Church. It also enfeebles individual bishops. What is decided by majority vote at national bishops' synods becomes the policy for all the dioceses in that country. Rare is the bishop who does not abide by these non-binding rules. To make matters worse, the programs for most national synods are drawn up by liberal theologians (in America the USCC) whose policies are simply rubber stamped by the bishops. It is usually the liberal theologians actually running the show.<sup>19</sup>

**For the priests**, collegiality filters down to mean the establishment of parish councils where all the "parish-community" takes part in decision-making. Along with Suenens' theory of "co-responsibility", the

spirit of collegiality also contributes to the establishment of the endless variety of Protestant style "lay ministries" within the Church.

This so-called "co-responsibility" among all Church members is the calculated outgrowth of emphasizing the Church as "the People of God", another favorite theme of Suenens.

Collegiality and co-responsibility are slogans tailor-fitted to our age. "Grassroots participation in decision-making" charms the ears of modern man who lives in an era when the democratic ideal is loved and served. In our time, democracy is considered synonymous with the culmination of goodness and justice. The average Catholic in America, for example, does not judge the merits of a nation by whether its laws are Catholic, but rather by whether its laws are *democratic*.

Yet Our Lord Jesus Christ did not constitute His Church as a democracy. Any attempt by man to reform the Church according to the democratic model is unlawful - especially since today's understanding of democracy is the fruit of Masonic naturalism.

The Catholic Church is a monarchical, hierarchial structure. The Pope is the Head, the bishops are under him as his assistants, and the priests are under the bishops to assist them. They receive their authority directly from God and exercise it without the need of prior approval from their inferiors. Yet this God-given authority is not limitless. Pontiff,

prelate and priest only validly exercise this authority within the boundaries of their jurisdiction<sup>20</sup> and in fidelity to Catholic truth.<sup>21</sup> This structure, instituted and willed by Christ, was established in order to continue Our Lord's supernatural mission to teach, govern and sanctify mankind.

Collegiality resembles the modernist view of religious authority. Modernism believes that the duty of the religious leader is not to promulgate any God given immutable doctrine, but to formally enunciate the consensus of the populus on a given religious question. Later on, we will see how this modernist theory explodes into collegial chaos during the 1960's uproar over birth-control.

There was no need to introduce the concept of collegiality into the Church, since the old Code of Canon Law, while upholding the traditional teaching on authority, stipulated that it was useful for bishops to ask advice from others on various matters.

The battle over collegiality was one of the most ferocious to take place at Vatican II. During the formulation of *Lumen Gentium*, "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church", the liberal *periti*, especially Rahner and Ratzinger, proposed an extreme interpretation of collegiality whereby the Pope would act more as a President - as head of the college of bishops but only in expression of their consensus. He could never exercise authority alone.<sup>22</sup>

At the time, the wording about collegiality in the schema was couched in deliberately ambiguous language by such liberal *periti* as Schillebeeckx, who actually boasted of employing such tactics.<sup>23</sup> Various Council Fathers warned Paul VI of what the *periti* were truly planning, but the Pope refused to believe. It was only when he was shown an indiscreet letter of one *peritus* boasting of the true intentions behind the ambiguous language that the Pope recognized the threat. He personally intervened to restate the traditional doctrine in hope of staving off disaster. Nevertheless, the final Council documents emerged with the spirit of collegiality woven into the fabric.<sup>24</sup>

## Collegiality Trumpeted to the World

After the Council, the liberal theologians who had planted the ambiguous language within the schemas were permitted to be the primary interpreters of these documents to the world. Because of this, the original radical view of collegiality became part and parcel of the "spirit of Vatican II." It was the buzz-word on everyone's lips. Any post-Vatican II bishop who was not collegial just wasn't considered "up-to-date".

Suenens was by far one of the most "up-to date" of all. With his fellow radicals, he had been

a firm advocate of collegiality from the very beginning and could be relied on to charge forward in its cause come what may. His explosive book and interview on collegiality in the late 60's, which will be treated later, gained so much ground for the liberal troops that if there were such a prize, he would be worthy of the Collegial Medal of Honor. Today's Vatican, whether willfully or reluctantly, is still tangled in the collegial web spun at Vatican II.

Cardinal Suenens proclaimed his modernist leaning view of authority in full voice:

“Authority, if it is to be effective, must gain consent, and consent can only be gained where those involved have been able to take part ... if not in the final decision, at least in the steps leading up to it.”<sup>25</sup>

Not only traditional Catholics recognized trouble in this upside-down notion of authority. The liberal journalist Peter Hebblethwaite, while agreeing with Suenens, admitted that Suenens' utopian blueprint was a portrait of chaos. He writes, “Suenens had sketched out a dream of harmony: ‘Within the Church there is at one and the same time a principle of unity (monarchy), a pluralism of hierarchial responsibilities (oligarchy) and a fundamental equality of all in the communion of the People of God (democracy)’ - (*Co-responsibility in the Church*, p. 109). But that was stated with altogether too much neatness, and it did not explain how the One, the Few and the Many were to be related to each other. And where three factors have to mesh together, there were bound to be disputes and quarrels about demarcation lines.”<sup>26</sup>

This chaos was nowhere better played out than in the battle that ensued over *Humane Vitae*. After it was all over, the charismatic Suenens would still be delirious with enthusiasm carrying the very banner of collegiality responsible for the wreckage.

## Suenens and the Subversion of Catholic Morality

The violent storm within the Church in the 1960's over birth-control was actually initiated during Vatican II with a debate over the primary purpose of matrimony. Once again, the revolutionary Cardinal Suenens was a key figure in generating the upheaval.

Traditional Catholic teaching on matrimony is an established hierarchy of order. The *primary* end of marriage is the procreation and education of children. The *secondary* end (or ends) of marriage is mutual help and conjugal love (alleviation of concupiscence). The



*secondary* ends are essentially subordinated to the *primary* end.

St. Thomas Aquinas was the principal exponent of this traditional teaching<sup>27</sup> and it has been continually reaffirmed into our own century as an established Catholic truth not subject to change.

Pope Pius XI taught in *Casti Canonii* that “among the blessings of marriage, the child holds the first place.”<sup>28</sup> In 1944 Pope Pius XII’s Holy Office forbade Catholics to subscribe to anything but the traditional doctrine on the begetting and education of children as the primary end of marriage<sup>1, 29</sup>.

## Suenens’ Collegial “Churchquake”

In 1968, liberal priests, theologians and bishops around the world greeted Suenens’ *Co-responsibility in the Church* with thunderous ovation. This book, which had bolstered collegiality, yielded a great harvest for the progressives. Suenens had made it “respectable” for those who rejected *Humanae Vitae* to justify their dissent by appealing to the non collegial nature of its promulgation. He had provided, the rationale for their revolt.

Among the theologians, it was Charles Curran of Catholic University who led the assault against the new encyclical. On July 30, 1968, a day after its publication, a press conference was held in the Mayflower Hotel in Washington. Curran had marshaled eighty-seven signatures of radical theologians who challenged *Humanae Vitae* on the grounds that its promulgation ignored the new collegial model of the Church. “The encyclical” they stated, “betrays a narrow and positivistic notion of papal authority as illustrated by the rejection of the majority view presented by the commission established to consider the question as well as by the rejection of the international Catholic theological community.”<sup>30</sup>

In defiance of Catholic truth, these theologians then proclaimed a counter-statement of their own: “AB Roman Catholic theologians ... we conclude that spouses may responsibly decide according to their conscience that artificial contraception in some circumstances is permissible and indeed necessary to preserve and foster the values of the sacredness of marriage.”<sup>31</sup>

About the same time, the bishops of Canada also contested *Humanae Vitae* on the grounds of collegiality. When these bishops had issued their Winnipeg statement in September 1968, dissenting from *Humanae Vitae*, the progressive Bishop Remi de Roo pleaded collegiality as his advocate: “If there is a line that we are following, it is the line of the Canadian hierarchy. We have our own collegial responsibility to the People of God in

Canada.”<sup>32</sup>

Countless Catholics then rushed to the forbidden font of artificial contraception and drank deeply. While all these misguided Catholics were imperilling their souls – glorying in the new-found freedom granted them by a groovy clique of priests, Suenens added fuel to the fire. In 1969, Suenens allowed the release of the above mentioned interview with *Informations Catholiques Internationales* where he even more forcefully defended his objection to the non-collegial nature of the encyclical. Indeed Planned Parenthood had been correct in regarding Suenens as a helpmate in furthering their eugenic designs.

Yet all this was not just a problem of collegiality. Cardinal Suenens himself could not be trusted to teach the traditional Catholic doctrine regarding the moral and natural law.

In 1966, Suenens implicitly denied the objective unchanging truth of Catholic Morality. To the French Catholic Intellectuals’ Week at Paris he said, “Morality is first and foremost alive, a dynamism of life and therefore subject to interior growth that rejects any kind of fixity.”<sup>33</sup>

Randy Engel reports that in 1970, “Suenens made the international press scandal sheets when he attended a Progressive Theological Congress on Sex, held at a Franciscan Church in Brussels where *avante garde* facilitators floated a giant plastic phallus up from the altar at the end of the youth- dominated conference, sending their adolescent delegates into a state of pandemonium!”<sup>34</sup>

Cardinal Suenens also persisted in equivocating between the primary and secondary ends of marriage. Romano Amerio writes that in Suenens’ 1976 pastoral letter on sexuality, the Cardinal said nothing about the procreative end of marriage, which is part of the natural law. Suenens also stated that “a healthy evolution has removed *certain taboos* and has made relations between man and woman more natural and more genuine.”<sup>35</sup>

Amerio, demonstrating the profound confusion of Suenens’ thought, writes:

“This is but one notion of the general demoting of moral virtues from the rank they possess in Christian ethics to the level of mistaken notions and superstitions.” Amerio continues, “Those who equate the natural law with taboos fail to realize that to deny the natural law is to deny the essence of a thing and to go against the principle of non-contradiction.”<sup>36</sup>

Suenens’ destructive views regarding collegiality did not change either. In his 1992 autobiography *Memories and Hopes*,<sup>37</sup> Cardinal Suenens voiced no apologies for the tempest he caused at the time of *Humanae Vitae*, and made it clear that he still firmly adhered to the

ideas expressed in *Co Responsibility in the Church* and in his 1969 *Informations Catholiques Internationales* interview.<sup>38</sup> Twenty years of being an enthusiastic “spirit filled” charismatic had not succeeded in dispelling these foul beliefs from his mind.

*To be continued*

### Footnotes:

1. *La Catholicism Liberal*, 1969.
2. Lefebvre, Marcel. *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, Fowler Wright Books Ltd., Herefordshire, England, 1986, p. 106.
3. Kevin Ranaghan, lecture *Witness*, cassette, Franciscan University at Steubenville Press, Steubenville, OH, 43952, 1997.
4. Hebblethwaite, Peter. *Synod Extraordinary: The Inside Story of the Rome Synod, November-December, 1985*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1986, pp. 76, 96.
5. Michael Davies, *Pope John's Council*, p. 88; also see footnote 40.
6. Suenens, Joseph Leon Cardinal. *Memories and Hopes: The Autobiography of Cardinal Suenens*, Veritas Publications, Dublin, Ireland, 1992, p. 209.
7. Suenens, Joseph Leon Cardinal. “As we were getting ready to leave, the four [Anglican] bishops knelt and asked for my blessing; in turn, I asked for theirs.” See *Memories and Hopes: The Autobiography of Cardinal Suenens*, p. 223.
8. Hebblethwaite, Peter. *The Runaway Church: Post Conciliar Growth or Decline*, Seabury Press, New York, 1975, p. 12.
9. Davies, Michael. *Pope John's Council*. Available from Catholic Family News.
10. Wiltgen, S.V.D., Father Ralph M. *The Rhine Flows Into The Tiber*, Tan Books, Rockford, IL, 1985, pp. 19, 24.
11. Davies, Michael. *Pope John's Council*, p. 34.
12. Ibid.
13. Wiltgen, S.V.D., Father Ralph M. *The Rhine Flows Into The Tiber*, p. 82.
14. Ibid., p. 83.
15. As cited in *Pope John's Council*, p. 87.
16. Lefebvre, Marcel. *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, Fowler Wright, p. 112.
17. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed. *Twelve Council Fathers*, MacMillan Company, New York, 1963, p. 41.
18. Hebblethwaite, Peter. *The Next Pope*, Harper, San Francisco, 1995, p. 66.
19. Msgr. William Smith, *Does the Catholic Church Condemn Nuclear Weapons? Keep the Faith Inc.*, 10 Audrey Place, Fairfield, NJ 07004.
20. Vatican I, Canon: “If then any shall say that the Roman pontiff has the office merely of inspection or direction, and not full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the

universal Church... let him be anathema.”

21. “Any ecclesiastical authority exercised that is contrary to Catholic truth is not to be obeyed.”
22. Muggeridge, Anne Roche. *The Desolate City: Revolution in the Catholic Church*, HarperCollins, NY, 1990, p. 63.
23. Muggeridge, Anne Roche. *The Desolate City*, p. 63.
24. Amerio, Romano. *Iota Unum*, Sarto House, Kansas City, MO, 1996, p. 524. Available from Catholic Family News.
25. Cardinal Suenens, interview in *Informations Catholiques Internationales*, May 15, 1969; as cited in Hebblethwaite, Peter. *The Runaway Church: Post Conciliar Growth or Decline*, Seabury Press, New York, 1975, p. 42.
26. Hebblethwaite, Peter. *The Runaway Church: Post Conciliar Growth or Decline*, p. 50.
27. Ott, Ludwig. *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, Tan Books and Publishers, Rockford, IL, p. 462. Available from Catholic Family News.
28. See *Denzinger*, #2228.
29. Response of the Holy Office (A.S.S., 36, 103; April 20, 1944): “May one subscribe to the opinion of certain modern authors who deny that the principal end of marriage is the begetting and education of children...?” The reply was, “No.”
30. As cited in Muggeridge; *The Desolate City*, p. 87.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. Amerio, Romano. *Iota Unum*, pp. 338-339.
34. Engel, Randy. *The McHugh Chronicles*, Export, PA, 1997, p. iii.
35. Amerio, Romano. *Iota Unum*, p. 395.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Suenens; *Memories and Hopes*, pp. 208-216.
38. “Of course, the Cardinal stated that many people ‘misunderstood him’ and that he was really not advocating democracy in the Church. On page 213 of his autobiography *Memories and Hopes*, he even relates that since he had been suspect, he made a public reaffirmation of his total allegiance to the Holy See at the Cathedral in Brussels. Yet he continued to defend the radical collegiality contained in these earlier writings. Only God knows whether his profession of allegiance to the Holy See was false lip service or a profound confusion of mind.”

#### Notes by Catholic Family News (2025)

1. A few paragraphs of this article, beginning at this point, have simply been lost in the conversion process and we no longer have them in our archives. [↩](#)