The Archbishop of Adelaide at Vatican II

Josephine Laffin

A violent storm swept through Rome during the night of 10 October 1962. By morning the thunder and lightening had gone, but the bishops who had gathered for the opening of the Second Vatican Council awoke to grey skies and drizzling rain. The sun burst through the clouds as they walked into St. Peter’s Basilica, almost 2500 men in all, row upon row of white mitres and copes. From 1962 to 1965 most bishops would spend about three months a year in Rome. There would be more storms, but also profound developments in the Catholic Church’s self-understanding, liturgy, theology and relations with other religious traditions.

The impact on the Church in Australia was as dramatic as anywhere else, yet for over two decades Australian historians paid little attention to the Council. What was written was hardly flattering to the Australian bishops. Patrick O’Farrell set the tone for future scholars when he wrote:

As to the hierarchy and senior clergy, they were—with very few exceptions—of the older generation, conservative, very firm adherents to traditional concepts of authority and episcopal power, willing to institute such changes as the Vatican Council had decreed, but frequently uncomprehending and even resistant to the spirit of change.¹

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With this from one of the country’s most eminent Catholic historians, it is not surprising that Ian Breward later remarked: “Most Australian bishops were bemused observers of a process which shattered their convictions about the uniformity of the Roman Catholic Church ... Australian contributions to Council debates were few. The pragmatism and traditionalism of the Australian Church stood nakedly exposed.”

In a PhD thesis (which has been appearing as a series of articles in the Australasian Catholic Record), Jeffrey Murphy challenged this widely accepted judgement. He concluded that, while the Australian bishops may not have played a spectacular role at the Council, they generally participated conscientiously and with considerable openness to reform. Yet their reactions naturally varied, and throughout the thesis Murphy discerned three main tendencies: support for significant reforms; resistance to change; and ambivalence. Adelaide’s Matthew Beovich was one of the bishops whom Murphy found too enigmatic to classify, but he suspected that while he eventually accepted the decisions of the Council, his heart wasn’t really in it.

This paper will explore Beovich’s reactions to the Council which can be discerned from his diary entries and council notebook. However, first I would like to go back to 1959 when Catholic bishops were invited to suggest possible subjects for discussion at the Council.

Suggestions for the Agenda

Almost 2000 responses were sent to Rome. A recent international study found that the majority tended to be cautious, conformist, and concerned with discipline rather than doctrine. William Ryder reached a similar conclusion with regard to the Australian bishops in 1988. He ended an article in the Australasian Catholic Record with the rather depressing comment: ‘Pope John’s call for renewal found here a small response on which to build.’

Undeterred, Murphy went over the Australian responses again. He decided that eleven out of twenty-nine respondents were clearly in favour of some reforms, such as Lancelot Goody of Bunbury who thought that the ‘overriding theme’ of the Council could be the goal of promoting Christian unity. Another eleven did not contribute any suggestions. These included James Gleeson, auxiliary bishop of Adelaide, who offered instead his prayers for the Council, and James O’Collins of Ballarat, who observed that the Church was in such a healthy state in his diocese that ‘nothing came to mind’.

4. Murphy, 236-237.
Seven other bishops sent responses which Murphy put in the too hard basket, among them Matthew Beovich.  

Beovich’s brief response contained four suggestions.  The first was that the Council could consider ‘various means of promoting more and more the interior spiritual life both of priests from the diocesan clergy and of men and women from secular institutes.’ He was the only bishop in Australia who explicitly asked for spirituality to be put on the agenda.

Beovich was one of only two bishops to call for discussion on ecclesiology (the theology of the church). He asked for the collection of papal statements on the concept of the church as ‘the mystical body of Christ’. The Council’s reflections on the nature of the church eventually resulted in its most important document Lumen gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Beovich also requested clarification of the doctrine, so troublesome in an increasingly ecumenical and secular age, that ‘outside the Church there is no salvation’. This issue was strongly taken up in Nostra aetate, the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, which presented a much more optimistic view of salvation.

Beovich was also interested in the relationship between the Church and the world, which became the focus of Gaudium et spes, the Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Beovich called for a ‘more polished version’ of the social teaching of the Church, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the Church and the civil state and ‘the dangers of unbridled nationalism’. Only one other bishop in Australia raised the issue of church-state relations, although it was a concern of almost a quarter of the bishops who sent in suggestions from the United States.

Lastly, Beovich, along with six other Australian bishops, recommended that the Council could consider how to reduce and simplify the penalties in canon law. This was done in the revised code of canon law which was promulgated in 1983.

While not radically innovative, Beovich’s suggestions surely indicate that he was not totally out of touch with the issues which would arise at the Council.  On the other hand, he did not realise how long it would take to clarify the Council’s teaching—in that respect he was certainly unprepared for what happened. In June 1960 he heard that Pope John had appointed preparatory commissions to develop schemata or draft documents for the

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8. Murphy, 102. See also Appendix One, 327-401, for English translations of the responses and the final synthesis.
9. There is a copy in the Adelaide Catholic Archives.
10. For Karl Rahner, ‘this optimism concerning salvation ... [was] one of the most noteworthy results of the Second Vatican Council. ’ Theological Investigations, XIV (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 284.
12. All the points which Beovich made were included in the final synthesis of the responses from around the world although this was compiled before he sent them on April 20, 1960. I do not know why his reply was so late. The bishops were originally asked to respond by September 1, 1959. A reminder note was sent on March 21 to those like Beovich who had not replied.
Council. He commented in his diary: ‘I will hazard a guess that the different commissions will get to work rapidly, and from time to time will send statements to the Bishops throughout the world for comments, views, etc., so that when the time comes for the meeting of the Council itself there will not be occasion for any prolonged discussion.’ He later wrote in the margin: ‘Wrong’!13

Seven schemata were dispatched to the bishops in July 1962. Beovich mentioned in his diary on 5 September that he was reading them, but the diary also reveals a kaleidoscope of activities in the final four weeks before he left Australia: two interstate trips, a stream of engagements, and a constant battle to clear his desk of paper work. The transition from pastoral administration to participation at the Council was not an easy one.

The First Session

On 24 September Beovich flew to Rome. In 1962 that meant a journey of over twenty seven hours with six stops on the way. He was met at the airport by his friend Father Paul Jutulis, chaplain to the Lithuanian community in Adelaide from 1949 to 1957. Jutulis took him to the Lithuanian College, not far from St. John Lateran, where he stayed for all four sessions of the council.14 He was joined by Justin Simonds, coadjutor archbishop of Melbourne, Patrick Lyons of Sale and James O’Collins of Ballarat. They were used to each other’s company as each February they descended on the presbytery at Koroi, near Warrnambool, for their annual holiday.

Thanks to some cunning strategising, the Koroi contingent ended up close to the main altar and the pope at the opening ceremony on 11 October.15 In his address, Pope John XXIII famously challenged the ‘prophets of doom’ who saw only problems in the modern world, and called on the Council fathers to express the ancient deposit of faith in a more positive and appropriate way. Commentators had no trouble identifying one of the chief targets of the pope’s message: Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, the seventy-two-year-old secretary of the Holy Office and head of the preparatory Theological Commission. Loris Capovilla, the pope’s secretary, later revealed that John told him that he could not resist glancing at Ottaviani every now and then to see how he was coping.16 Yet, while the pope’s address was very significant, it is worth remembering that it was in Latin, at the end of what Peter Hubblethwaite described as a five-and-a-half-hour ‘Baroque endurance test’,17 which could have lessened its

15. McCarthy gives O’Collins credit for planning this. O’Collins and Beovich had both been students together in Rome and locating good seats in St Peter’s was one of the skills which Roman students tended to acquire. For an account of the opening ceremony based on O’Collins’ diary, see William McCarthy, James Patrick O’Collins, A Bishop’s Story (Richmond, Vic: Spectrum Publications, 1996), 123.
impact at the time. Some advocates of liturgical reform went away disheartened by the ‘triumphalistic pomp’ of the opening ceremony,18 but Beovich wrote in his diary that it was ‘a wonderful and inspiring experience’.

The first working session of the Council, or general congregation, took place on Saturday, 13 October. It lasted less than fifty minutes. It came to a premature end when four cardinals appealed for more time for the Council fathers to consider their options before they voted on members for the commissions which would revise the council documents. This has been interpreted as the first indication that the Council would not simply rubber stamp the decisions of the curia, the Vatican bureaucracy.19 Beovich, who never liked being rushed into a decision, was pleased with the outcome. In the excited lobbying which followed, he was nominated by the Australian hierarchy for a place on the Liturgy Commission, but when the vote was finally taken on 16 October he was not elected.20

The liturgy text was one of the most progressive and pastoral of the prepared drafts. It opened the door to greater use of the vernacular at the discretion of national episcopal conferences. It was the first to be debated, and the battle lines were soon drawn. The most notable opponents of change (sometimes labelled ‘curial zealots’ or ‘intransigent traditionalists’) were Cardinals Ottaviani, Ruffini and Dante. As young priests, all three had been on the faculty of the Urban College of Propaganda Fide, Beovich’s beloved alma mater, during his time as a student. They were strongly supported by Cardinals Godfrey of Westminster and McIntyre of Los Angeles.

In his diary on 23 October Beovich wrote: ‘I agree wholeheartedly with the opinions expressed by Cardinals Ottaviani, Ruffini, McIntyre and Godfrey of the Latin school.’ On 30 October he reflected: ‘So far it has appeared that the Germans, Dutch and French (to some extent) want drastic changes in the liturgy; likewise a number of younger bishops. The Irish, English, Scots and most of the USA and ourselves, along with the Roman Curia, are conservative in these matters.’ The next day he grumbled: ‘Listening to the experiences and opinions voiced by some youthful bishops, one wonders if they think the Holy Spirit was absent from some previous periods of the Church’s history, but is helping them now ...’ A meeting of the Australian hierarchy on 3 November revealed that some of the younger Australians were infected by reformist zeal. Beovich, however, was also beginning to rethink his position. According to Cardinal Heenan, many bishops who were opposed to the vernacular liturgy changed their minds when they heard bishops from Communist countries explain how impossible it was to teach the faith except during the liturgy.21 In his diary Beovich did not identify any particular speech as a turning point, but on 5 November he confided: ‘I would think, at this stage ... there is what one could call a left wing and a right wing; in which case there would be wisdom in following a via media.’ When the schema

was finally put to a vote on 14 November he voted in favour of it, as did the overwhelming number (97%) of bishops.22

You might think that it would have been very exciting to have been part of the Council. In fact, it was quite a gruelling experience. There were 328 speeches during the debate on the liturgy—eighty-eight fathers spoke on the first chapter alone.23 People who criticize the Australian bishops for not speaking more fail to take into account the sheer number of speeches and the amount of tedious repetition. Beovich thought his Australian colleagues exercised commendable restraint!24 Another problem was that Latin, under fire as the language of the liturgy, proved to be less than satisfactory as the language of the Council. Cardinal Cushing of Boston is said to have frankly admitted, ‘I can’t understand a word these guys say’, and to have packed up and gone home. Other bishops were observed reading newspapers or writing letters during the debates.25 Beovich was more conscientious, but he struggled to follow Latin spoken with different accents and sympathised with those who could not understand what was being said.26

General congregations were only held during the mornings. Afternoons and evenings were usually free and some bishops, like Guilford Young of Hobart, dashed around attending lectures given by theologians like Karl Rahner and Yves Congar. There is no evidence that Beovich ever did so. Even if he had been interested in new currents in theology (and he clearly wasn’t at this time) he had to rise at five o’clock each morning to get to St. Peter’s by nine. He was ‘always tired after a morning’s session’ and ready to return to his lodging to rest, or do something pleasant to unwind like visit the zoo.27 Dinners at the Australian Embassy and other social functions also took up time and energy.28 Young acknowledged that he found his stay in Rome exhausting, and he was twenty years younger than Beovich.29 Beovich was among the 40 percent of bishops who were over sixty-two when the Council began.30 He was sixty-six in 1962 but he had been a bishop for twenty-two years which meant—when almost 2000 bishops were seated according to seniority in office—that he was allocated seat number twenty-six! A number of bishops became ill during their time in Rome.31 Within the first fortnight of the

26. Diary, 30 October 1962: ‘This morning Cardinal Cushing left for Boston. I would think that anyone who cannot follow the Latin speeches must find the position very frustrating.’
27. Diary, 7 November 1962. I must admit that he only went to the zoo once, to my knowledge, but he certainly liked to go for a walk in the afternoon.
28. The Australian ambassador, Alfred Stirling, was very hospitable to the Australian bishops and must have kept a record of their conversations—which helped when he came to write his book, *A Distant View of the Vatican*.
Council, four died, one as he was entering the Council hall. While Vatican II was not fatal for Adelaide's archbishop, Beovich had an ongoing problem with diverticulitis and developed a bad cold in November, perhaps helped by the dismal cold, wet weather. In December another cold turned into pneumonia. To add to this catalogue of woes, it is worth remembering that the first session of the Council took place against the backdrop of the Cuban missile crisis.

On 14 November a grim Cardinal Ottaviani rose to his feet to launch the schema on revelation. He knew that it was in for a rough ride. It had already been savagely criticized and alternative schemas were circulating. On 17 November Beovich summarised objections to the draft: it was too scholastic and rigid, it lacked pastoral spirit and mature theological development, it disregarded the problem of salvation prior to revelation, it didn't encourage theological reflection or biblical exegesis, and it was incomprehensible to non-Catholics. The best that defenders of the schema could say was that it had been prepared by some of the 'great minds of the Church'—in other words, an appeal to loyalty. Beovich responded accordingly: 'For my part I am Roman and in Rome I found a fount of inspiration, learning and piety. Consequently, I shall support the schema ...' Amidst intense lobbying, the Council fathers voted on 19 November whether to retain the schema or toss it into the conciliar dustbin. On that morning Beovich had the honour of celebrating Mass at the beginning of the general congregation. He initially attributed the result of the voting to divine intervention: opponents of the schema failed to get the two-thirds majority which they required. Yet 61 percent of the bishops indicated their dissatisfaction with the document. The pope intervened and sent it to be redrafted by a mixed commission made up of members from the Doctrinal Commission and the Secretariat for Christian Unity. Beovich welcomed this decision which, he realised, rescued the Council from a difficult position.

Although he did not attend the general congregations, Pope John followed the debates on television and engaged in some subtle and not-so-subtle morale building. In an audience on 11 November he enthusiastically explained to the Australian bishops how he had been inspired to call the Council. Two days later Beovich went to the coffee bar in the sacristy at St. Peter's and bumped into the retired English archbishop of Bombay, Thomas Roberts SJ. Adrian Hastings commented that 'in even the best-administered autocracies mistakes occur occasionally and Archbishop Roberts was one of them. No one so honest, so independent ... so ingenuously frank should ever have been selected by pre-conciliar Rome as an archbishop—even of Bombay.' Roberts told Beovich that he was surprised that the pope had spoken to the Australian bishops in Italian. Beovich replied that as most of them had been students in Rome, the language wasn't a problem. Roberts blurted out that 'he feared

32. For a detailed account, see HVII, vol. 2, 233 ff.
33. In the end, 1368 voted 'placet' (to discontinue discussion on the draft) while 822 voted 'non placet' (to indicate they wanted to continue to use it as a basis for discussion). However, the question which was put to the bishops was complicated and may have confused some.
34. Diary, 21 November 1962.
35. Hebblethwaite, John XXIII, 450.
Roman students as an arm or upholder of the Curia’. A bemused Beovich wrote in his diary: ‘What a strange Jesuit!’ He was clearly shocked by the hostility toward the Vatican bureaucracy which surfaced at the first session.\textsuperscript{37} It was totally foreign to him.

On 25 November Beovich attended a reunion at his old college. The pope celebrated Mass in the Propaganda chapel and Beovich afterwards wrote down his comments about the Council: ‘we had been feeling our way because none of us had conciliar experience, now we were advancing more surely. The world must be impressed by the liberty of speech and differences of viewpoints among the bishops on those matters outside the deposit of faith.’ \textit{Impressed?} In his address at the close of the first session on 8 December, John continued this theme. The ‘sharply divergent views’ which had arisen illustrated ‘the holy liberty that the children of God enjoy in the Church’ (Archbishop Roberts took this a bit further and said that the children of God could slide down the banisters in the house of the Lord).\textsuperscript{38} However, the pope’s positive assessment of the Council was overshadowed by the obvious fact that he was gravely ill. Before the closing ceremony, Beovich bumped into Cardinal Giobbe, Prefect of the Congregation of Rites. Giobbe, who had been his rector at Propaganda, expressed his fear that the Modernist heresy had returned to haunt the Church.\textsuperscript{39}

On 13 December Beovich arrived home, still suffering from pneumonia and ‘very tired, miserable and grubby’ after the long flight.\textsuperscript{40} The next day he went to the seminary where the diocesan clergy were on retreat. There is no record of what he said about the council on that occasion, but two days later he tried to adopt John’s reassuring tone in an address in the cathedral.\textsuperscript{41} This didn’t fool his auxiliary who knew that he was ‘concerned’. However, Archbishop Gleeson assured me that Beovich’s return from the next session was very different. He came back ‘on top of the world’, really ‘enthralled’ with the Council.\textsuperscript{42} So what had changed?

\textsuperscript{37} So was Heenan: ‘Most of us arrived in Rome in October 1962 without any idea of the anti-Italian mood among many Europeans. This eventually crystallised into a specific hostility towards the curia, the Vatican bureaucracy,’ \textit{Crown of Thorns}, 343.

\textsuperscript{38} Hebblethwaite, \textit{John XXIII}, 464-5.

\textsuperscript{39} ‘Modernism’ was condemned in 1907 by Pope Pius X. It is difficult to define precisely but Pius was clearly afraid that certain trends in biblical scholarship and theology would undermine Catholic orthodoxy, especially a relativistic notion of truth. The repressive reaction to theological innovation would have been at its peak during Giobbe’s days as a student and young seminary professor.

\textsuperscript{40} Diary, 13 December 1962.

\textsuperscript{41} ‘What had been accomplished in the eight weeks of the Vatican Council? A very large body moves slowly in the beginning. The Council is a huge body. Of necessity it had to begin slowly; then it proceeded to make sure and steady progress . . . .’; \textit{Southern Cross}, 21 December 1962, 1.

\textsuperscript{42} Interview, 8 October 1997. Beovich asked Gleeson to remain in Adelaide during the second session but never explained why. Gleeson wondered whether this was because Beovich wanted to protect him from heresy or test his ability to run the diocese (the following year he was appointed coadjutor). A stronger possibility is that Beovich was responding to a request from the Vatican. Word went out that if a diocese had more than one bishop, one should remain home (\textit{HVII}, vol. 2, 174). When Beovich arrived in Rome for the second session he was surprised to find that most bishops had returned (Diary, 29 September 1963).
The Second Session

One difference between the first and second sessions was that in 1963 Beovich travelled by ship. That meant that there was a three-week interlude between Adelaide and Rome: time to rest and study the conciliar documents in the company of some of his episcopal friends, and then three weeks to recover from the Council before he returned to Adelaide.

There was also a new pope whom Beovich deeply respected and trusted. Whereas John XXIII had talked with charismatic vagueness of a 'new Pentecost', Paul VI clearly set out a plan for the Council. In his opening address on 19 September he spelt out that he wanted the Council fathers to come to a deeper understanding of the nature of the Church, promote its inner renewal, encourage Christian unity, and engage in dialogue with the modern world.

Three weeks later Beovich reflected in his diary:

One can now take stock of the second session. A year ago we assembled for the Council uncertain of its atmosphere and direction. Those of us who had been Roman students, certainly myself, would look for a lead from the Pope and the Holy See. Most of us would incline to the conservative side and would not welcome what we called innovations. What impressed us at the first session was to hear the problems of bishops in many countries and the exchange of ideas; what many of us did not relish, myself included, was the enthusiastic activity of a number of periti [theological experts] who looked for groups of bishops to expound their ideas, sometimes very novel.

Now at this second session, the atmosphere has cleared, for me at any rate. It is certain that a vigorous and comparatively youthful pope is following closely the mind of Pope John ...

Consequently, one can discern among the bishops a greater air of assuredness, and a desire to be in the van of progress, myself included.

One notices that the periti are now not much in evidence for propaganda work, though their legitimate task of helping the commissions is praiseworthy. In the many fine speeches delivered by the bishops on the schema before us on the Church, there is no evidence of national blocks or of that or this side of the Alps. We feel that the debate is stimulating and not boring. We are helped by the initiative of the USA bishops who are producing, day by day, a digest in English of the various speeches ...

In addition, the commissions have done and are doing excellent work. There is still maximum freedom of debate. One feels that after a
certain amount of uncertainly at the first session we are now safely launched.\(^3\)

On 28 October, to commemorate the anniversary of Pope John’s election, Pope Paul celebrated Mass in the Council hall. Cardinal Suenens preached a tribute to John and to Paul who—he stressed—was continuing John’s work. He exhorted the Council fathers to have courage. As Pope John had said, ‘Fear comes only through lack of faith.’ When Suenens left the pulpit he was warmly embraced by Paul VI. Not much is made of this in the recent volume on the second session in the *History of Vatican II* series, but it had a profound impact on Beovich.\(^4\) It confirmed that he had correctly discerned the wishes of Popes John and Paul. He resolved: ‘I shall follow them and uphold them as best I can. As between the extreme schools, one is a little left of centre.’

In *The Roman Mould of the Australian Catholic Church*, John Molony defined *Romanità* as ‘unswerving loyalty to the office, and affection for the person of the pope, acceptance of Rome and what it stands for as the centre and heart of Christendom, subservience to the Roman curia ... [and] a willing readiness to form and foster a local institutional Church according to Roman ideas.’\(^5\) Murphy argued that the Australian bishops learnt a different kind of *Romanità* at Vatican II: loyalty to the pope did not necessarily entail subservience to the Curia.\(^6\) Beovich is a clear example of one who made this breakthrough.

A highlight of the second session for Beovich was the debate on episcopal collegiality. A number of issues were interwoven. One concerned the very nature of episcopacy. Supporters of collegiality saw it as the fullness of priesthood, conferred by consecration. In other words, bishops receive their authority directly from Christ. It is not merely delegated by the pope. Moreover, together, in hierarchical communion with the pope, they form an episcopal college, thus sharing responsibility for the universal Church. This was bitterly opposed by a minority at the Council, including Cardinal Ottaviani, who thought that it undermined the First Vatican Council’s emphasis on papal primacy. Few bishops could have been more devoted to the papacy than Matthew Beovich, but ‘after careful thought and prayer’ he voted in favour of collegiality on 30 October. The doctrine reflected the lived experience of the Council where the bishops were acting collegially. Beovich rejoiced in this. One day he arrived early and sat watching the participants gather. He jotted in his notebook: ‘In the happy and relaxed atmosphere of the Council, I savoured this morning the universality of the Church ...’\(^7\)

Collegiality was not only seen in action in the Council hall. It was also evident in the meetings of the national episcopal conferences which took place regularly during the Council and after the Council would have considerable

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43. Diary, 13 October 1963.
46. Murphy, 174 ff.
47. Notebook, 16 October 1963.
responsibility for implementing its decrees. There was some heated discussion over what legislative power the conferences should enjoy. In a written submission, James Carroll of Sydney maintained that while unity should be strongly encouraged, individual bishops should retain the freedom to withdraw from national decisions. Beovich added his name to Carroll’s appeal, and this has been interpreted as an indication that he did not really embrace collegiality but was still captive to a Vatican I mentality.⁴⁸ Like Murphy, I suspect that what actually lay behind the submission was not the First Vatican Council but the Movement controversy of the 1950s.⁴⁹ Beovich and Gilroy, supported by their auxiliaries Gleeson and Carroll, divorced their dioceses from Santamaria’s Movement, but probably would not have been able to gain a two-thirds majority for the decision at the national level. In the end the Council decided that national conferences could develop their own regulations, subject to the approval of the Holy See.

Beovich was disappointed at the second session when the Council fathers narrowly voted to place a chapter on Mary at the end of the Constitution on the Church rather than devote a separate document to her—he was always at the maximalist end of the spectrum where Marian devotion was concerned. He was happier when debate turned to the schema on ecumenism. While some Council fathers believed that Christian unity could only be achieved when Orthodox and Protestant schismatics returned to the Catholic fold, others were keen to foster common Christian witness, cooperation in works of charity, and dialogue. Cardinal Bea, the dynamic eighty-two-year-old president of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, frankly acknowledged the difficulties raised by the ecumenical movement, but argued that ecumenical action, carefully guided and promoted by the bishops, would help the renewal of Christian life for all.⁵⁰

Beovich was very impressed by Bea,⁵¹ and an opportunity soon presented itself to put theory into practice. At the end of the second session, Geoffrey Fisher, retired archbishop of Canterbury, visited Adelaide. Hearing that there would be a liturgical reception to welcome Beovich home, he asked if could attend and hear Beovich’s report on the Council. Bishop Gleeson, who was organising the service, agreed, but somewhat reluctantly, as he was concerned about protocol. Lord Fisher had met Pope John in 1960, but the meeting had been strictly private, no photographs or press releases had been allowed. It would be very different in Adelaide on 9 February 1964. When the liturgy drew to a close, Beovich unexpectedly darted over to Fisher, grabbed him and arm in arm they walked out of St. Francis Xavier Cathedral. It was ecumenism in action, Beovich-style.⁵²

⁴⁹. Murphy, 190.
⁵¹. ‘Cardinal Bea’s words were both convincing and moving’, Notebook, 70th General Congregation; ‘Cardinal Bea gave an excellent address’, Notebook, 25 November 1963.
⁵². Stirling, p. 178; Advertiser, 10 February 1964. Beovich also hosted a ‘pleasant tea party’ for Lord and Lady Fisher and the Anglican Archbishop of Adelaide, Dr. Reed, and his wife. Diary, 11 February 1964.
The Third Session

The third session began on 14 September 1964 with a symbolic display of the yet-to-be-formally-proclaimed doctrine of episcopal collegiality. Twenty-four bishops concelebrated the opening Mass with Pope Paul. It was ‘the day of days’ for Matthew Beovich because he was one of the chosen ones.

With fourteen texts on the agenda, the third session was even more strenuous than the first two. The document which provoked the most heated debate was the one which affirmed that freedom in religious matters was an inherent human right. A particularly contentious paragraph acknowledged that other religious groups had a right to promote their beliefs and practices. This raised the ire of Beovich’s friend, Bishop Lyons of Sale, a firm adherent of the ‘error has no rights’ school. In a written submission he objected to the paragraph and called for a much stronger affirmation that the Catholic Church was the one, true Church. At the other end of the spectrum, Archbishop Young of Hobart argued that the Catholic Church could not claim religious freedom for itself without conceding it to other groups, and this view eventually won out. However, Cardinal Gilroy thought that the paragraph in question should be quietly dropped. Beovich added his name to Gilroy’s submission. It was, typically, the via media.

Another bishop was also striving to steer a middle course—the bishop of Rome. The tragedy of Paul VI is that while this may have saved the Church from schism, it did not make him popular. Die-hard traditionalists were offended by his support for collegiality and ecumenism, while ‘progressives’ were dismayed to find that curia cardinals like Ottaviani bounced back from the humiliations of the first session as stridently conservative as ever. On 2 October 1964 Time magazine quoted an unnamed Australian bishop who said of the pope: ‘Let’s face it, he’s weak.’ Cardinal Gilroy called an emergency meeting of the hierarchy. Everyone denied uttering such heresy, and a missive was speedily dispatched to assure Pope Paul that he had their loyalty and obedience. Undercurrents, however, remained.

Paul exacerbated tensions by making a surprise appearance at a working session of the Council on 6 November. He praised the schema on the missions (which had been prepared largely by Roman clerics associated with the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) and expressed his hope that the bishops would approve it. Unfortunately, in the words of a bishop who actually had experience as a missionary, the schema consisted of ‘thirteen lifeless platitudes culled from some worm-canked textbook on Missiology’. Beovich obediently voted in favour of retaining the document as a basis for discussion, but he knew that Paul had backed the wrong horse and was not

53. Murphy, 217-223.
55. This was not the only resemblance. Paul VI and Beovich were very close in age and temperament: both rather shy, sensitive men with a warmth and sense of humour which sometimes broke through their innate reserve.
56. Diary, 30 September 1964.
surprised when it was sent back to be re-written.88 He had, probably before Paul’s intervention, added his name to the submission of a missionary bishop who called for the Council to develop a more adequate theology of mission, grounded in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and therefore part of the very nature of the Church.59

Why did Paul seem to favour the traditionalists at the third session? Bernard Pawley, one of the Anglican observers at the Council, wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury that he thought that Paul had put a bit of weight on the conservative side to keep the balance and stop the boat rocking too much. Shortly afterwards, he had an audience with the pope and Paul asked what he had reported. Paul agreed with his assessment: ‘As captain of the ship I have to keep her on a steady course ... It is better for me to go ahead slowly and carry everyone with me than to hurry along and cause dissention’.60 Beovich would have heartily endorsed those sentiments.61

Fourth Session

When the final session began in 1965 Beovich was promoted to seat number 11. Justin Simonds was in the seat in front. He had finally succeeded Mannix as archbishop of Melbourne but was by now almost blind. Beovich guided him to and from his seat and filled in his ballot papers. As Simonds was a member of the commission for studies and seminars, Beovich also read the necessary paperwork to him in their free time.62

There was still tension over the declaration on religious liberty, but Paul VI intervened and ordered that it be put to the vote before he addressed the United Nations on 4 October. Almost two thousand fathers voted in favour, only 224 against. Beovich was ‘very pleased’ with the result.63

Beovich was also very interested in the speeches on the document on the Church in the modern world which he thought would be ‘one of the outstanding works of the Council’.64 At almost the last minute an attempt was made to derail the schema by Archbishop Hannan of New Orleans.65 He interpreted its condemnation of nuclear warfare as a slap in the face to the United States because it did not acknowledge the deterrent value of nuclear weapons. He called on the Council fathers to vote against the whole schema if the ‘errors’ in the chapter were not corrected. Nine other bishops signed his submission, including Australia’s Guilford Young.66 In an efficiently organised campaign, Hannan’s appeal was translated into different languages and a

88. The vote for redrafting was passed 1601 to 311 (Diary, 9 November 1964).
59. Rice, 55.
60. Hebblethwaite, Paul VI, 404-6.
61. In his diary on 18 November 1965 Beovich commented that Paul had the great qualities of both his predecessors, John XXIII (revered by ‘progressives’) and Pius XII (revered by ‘conservatives’).
63. Diary, 16 and 21 September 1965.
64. Diary, 17 November 1965.
66. Murphy, 312.
group of nuns rushed around Rome hand-delivering a copy to each bishop. Beovich was not impressed.67 Neither was Cardinal Ottaviani, who gave one of the most passionate speeches against war ever uttered.68 In the end the schema was passed, 2111 to 251.

During the first session a joke went around the Council after Ottaviani had been absent for a few days. It was said that he had hailed a taxi, and when the driver asked where he wanted to go, he inadvertently said ‘Trent’.69 Beovich did go to the beautiful northern Italian city in November 1965. The archbishop of Trent invited a number of bishops from around the world to a ceremony in his cathedral to underline the nexus between the great sixteenth-century council and Vatican II. As the representative of the Australian hierarchy, Beovich enjoyed his visit to Trent, but his mind was on the future rather than the past. He was impressed by the way the congregation recited the Gloria and the Credo in Italian at the concelebrated Mass, and joined in singing hymns at the offertory and communion. He resolved to copy the new liturgical style when he returned to Adelaide.70

On 8 December the Council drew to a triumphant close. Beovich concluded in his diary: ‘The great Council has now entered history; in the aftermath we of our time will also enter history if we speedily and effectively put the decrees of the Council into operation. May God grant it.’71 This was hardly the response of someone ambivalent about the Council or ‘resistant to the spirit of change’. On the contrary, it confirms Murphy’s conclusion that even those bishops who went to Rome in 1962 in an ‘indifferent’ or ‘enigmatic’ frame of mind were much more accepting of the Council’s direction by the end of 1965.72 While Murphy conceded that in some cases the acceptance may have been somewhat grudging, Beovich’s diary entries demonstrate a more profound shift. What caused this? Clearly the archbishop of Adelaide’s unswerving loyalty to Popes John and Paul was the crucial factor. Yet some credit should also be given to his own wisdom and moderation, evident even in the worst days of the first session during the debate on the liturgy. The Council was fundamentally an exercise in collegiality, and genuine collegiality often requires compromises to be made.

As Joseph Komonchak has wryly pointed out, ‘progressive’ Catholics are inclined to appeal to ‘the spirit of Vatican II’ to support positions which they think would have been adopted by the Council if there had been no conservatives present.73 However, any attempt to identify the ‘spirit of Vatican II’ should surely take into account the need for the compromises which

67. Diary, 4 December 1965.
68. Moorman, 169; Rynne, 504-5.
69. Moorman, 45.
70. Diary, 24 November 1965.
71. Diary, 8 December 1965.
72. Murphy, 320.
permeate Council texts. In his careful and prayerful pursuit of the *via media*, and his eventual willingness to move 'a little left of centre', Matthew Beovich was very much a Vatican II bishop.