T he Second Vatican Council was very much a council about the Church. Its documents make a comprehensive statement about ecclesial life, examining it both in terms of its internal operations as well as its complex of external relations. The purpose of this intense self-scrutiny was eminently practical. The Council knew that if the Church were to advance its mission on behalf of the gospel, it had, at last, to take the modern world seriously. Above all, the Council knew that ecclesial life and practice must be renewed if the Church were to creatively engage the difficult new challenges increasingly presented it.

This essay will examine the understanding of the Church that emerged from the conciliar reflections and deliberations. It will consider five themes integral to the Council’s renewed vision. Thus this essay will look briefly at: 1) the nature of the Church as communio; 2) the Church as simultaneously local and universal; 3) Church mission; 4) Church ministry; and 5) the christifideles who constitute the Church.

But at the same time, such a review must take into account the extent to which, some thirty years later, the conciliar view has become that of the entire Church. According to the theological notion of “reception,” conciliar teaching is but a beginning; such must also be accepted and appropriated (i.e., received) by the
entire community of believers. In short, this teaching must become part of the fabric of the Church’s everyday existence.¹

Historically, the process by which conciliar decisions are incorporated into Christian life and practice proves to be a gradual one. In respect to Vatican II, theologian Hermann J. Pottmeyer aptly describes the process as “a movement in the course of which the Church elaborated a new interpretation of itself”;² in his view, full reception of Vatican II is even yet incomplete.³ On the other hand, he would argue it is not inappropriate at this point to take stock: How has conciliar teaching on the Church’s self-understanding shaped the Catholic community’s life today? On what points has the Council’s teaching been implemented, experienced setbacks or even been rejected? What yet needs to be done to align Catholic life with the Council’s visions and hopes, both now and for the future?

Certainly some elements of conciliar teaching have already become commonplace. For example, this is very much evident in the fact that I, a lay theologian and a woman, am writing this essay on the Church. This would not be the case if the Council Fathers had not urged that the study of theology become the province of laity as well as of clergy.⁴ The point is that in some instances, reception of the Council has so thoroughly occurred that it already conditions any analysis of it.

Implementation of Council teaching will determine assessment of it in other ways. For instance, in encouraging theologians to find new sets of categories for communicating the faith and in inviting the contribution of a lay perspective on theology, the council moved away from a narrow, monolithic view of Catholic reality to a much richer, inclusive one.⁵ This originated in the Council’s acknowledgement of the cultural and social diversity present in the local churches. This pluralism decrees that the Council’s effect will not have been uniform throughout the Church. It also suggests that inherent to my view of the Council will be the standpoint of the lay church as well as my particular context, that of U.S. church life.

To reiterate, my project here will be to examine five themes related to the Church’s self-understanding implicated in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. I will consider the extent
to which Council teaching has influenced the Church’s life and practice to date. On this basis I will then proceed to suggest what yet remains to be done if the Council’s vision is to finally become a reality. And, given the fact of the council’s partial implementation, my analysis will both reflect as well as speak to my location in the Church as a lay theologian and as a member of the U.S. Catholic community.

The Nature of the Church as *Communio*

The critical impulse that can be seen at work during and after the Council was aroused because the official self-understanding of the Church which right up to the Council had been formed by a counter-reformational and neo-scholastic theology, had become questionable. It had become increasingly alien to the real life of human beings and no longer met the needs of an effective pastoral practice. 

In its search for a new self-definition, one that could better represent the aspect of grace and the charisms present to the social body missing from juridical interpretations that had prevailed formerly, Vatican II looked to early Christian experience. Thus *Lumen Gentium (LG)* resorted to an array of biblical images to explicate the divine mystery at the heart of the Church. While “People of God” may appear to have been the council’s preferred description, theologians have concluded subsequently that the fundamental ecclesiological category of the council documents is actually that of *communio*. According to one commentator, the notion of the Church as *communio* was struggling to be born in the text of *Lumen Gentium*; such is the thrust of the biblical images themselves. Yet this richer, deeper understanding of the Church could emerge only “after and as a result of Vatican II.”

The Extraordinary Synod of 1985 was convoked for the express purpose of evaluating the Second Vatican Council’s impact across the Church. The Synod’s Final Report concluded: “The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of
the Council’s documents.” Synod members cited the trinitarian origin of Church communion, noting that “the unfolding missions of the Son and the Spirit in salvation history,” because “they are specifically constituting, sending and gathering missions, calling together and making one people” become the Church’s own and are its very purpose for being.

What then is *communio*? The term “koinonia” (Greek) / “communio” (Latin) is an ancient one, and unlike the images found in *Lumen Gentium* that merely describe the Church, this word “says what the Church actually is.” *Koinonia* is a central New Testament term. It has as referents both God’s grace and the human response to it. Primarily, it is used to express the understanding early Christians had of themselves as constituting an entirely new form of human community, a society whose very principle of unity and identity was the felt presence of God’s own self. This shared experience of union with God through Christ in the Spirit was not only the basis for the union between believer and believer and source of the local Church’s common life, it was also recognized to be the bond that linked the local Church to Christian communities everywhere, past as well as present. Finally, it was out of this *communio* experience that particular forms of ministerial and missionary activity eventually took shape.

Ironically, one reason the image “People of God” lost favor with many bishops and theologians after the Council was that, in the same way as the juridical definitions it sought to replace, it too seemed unable to give adequate expression to the Church’s sacral, charismatic dimension. While initially this metaphor enjoyed great popularity because it returned the laity to the center of the Church once again, “People of God” came to be construed in a narrowly political, even ideological way. Such readings re-introduced division within the Body of Christ, especially that between people and hierarchy; they also tended to reduce the notion of a people united by grace and Spirit to that of a people bound by no more than a common social agenda.

Unfortunately, what was lost here was the Council’s positive hermeneutical move to acknowledge lay equality. It did this by acknowledging that true equality is a matter of the Spirit’s gifts and charisms that are abundant throughout the Church and
present to the entire People of God, to laity no less than to clergy and religious. Beyond this, the Council wished to indicate that ecclesial communion must be achieved through a variety of structures, including those associated with the laity's own lived experience of being Catholic and not just through formal ones associated with the hierarchical institution.

Certainly any reduction of the graced community to the status of a merely human one is incongruent with Lumen Gentium; here the Church's divine and human elements are understood to comprise an inseparable, irreducible, interlocking reality. As such, neither element should take ascendance over the other; nor can one be permitted to flourish at the expense of the other.

As an ecclesiological category, communio then has an advantage in that it presents a conceptual framework capable of maintaining the divine and human in this creative tension. This becomes especially relevant in light of the 1985 Synod's claim that trinitarian communio has substantial implications for the development of ecclesial forms. The Final Report states: "The ecclesiology of communion is also the foundation for order in the church." It then proceeds to identify five relations mediated by the internal dynamism of trinitarian life; these five organizational patterns are unity/pluriformity, participation and co-responsibility, collegiality, subsidiarity, and inculturation. Each is recognized to be a mode of ecclesial self-expression that arises out of "that common participation in the triune life, common faith, common baptism, common eucharist."

But to say that the Church's internal dynamic requires visible structure if it is to manifest a vital historical presence is also to admit that some sort of social patterning is integral to communio. This then directs attention to the quality of the Church's institutional life and raises questions about the dialectic that occurs between divine communio and structure.

For example, the Synod suggests that analysis of institutional forms, their capacity to facilitate Church mission, is a way to determining the presence or absence of communio in the local church. But what then are the particular criteria for measuring this achievement? And, are there additional criteria for specifying what structural forms are best suited to realizing communion? Furthermore, the
Synod position implies that while structure itself may be inseparable from *communio*, concrete historical forms are not inseparable and thus are changeable, especially if they fail in their ability to build communion. In truth, many of the difficult post-synodal debates about such issues as the teaching authority of bishops' conferences, the freedom of local churches to adapt their institutions to meet the pastoral needs of mission, and the full integration of women into Church life are, at bottom, an effort to work out the ramifications of both conciliar and synodal teaching on the proper relation of communion's divine and human realities.

But clearly, by making this direct correlation between *communio* and Church order, the Synod reiterated Vatican II's assertion that the Church's institutional life must not be underestimated. As both the means for carrying human response to mystery as well as for carrying mystery's graced overture to humanity, ecclesial life is something to be taken seriously, attended to, even nurtured. And so, because dysfunctional structures are instrumental to the breakdown of *communio*, a constant attention to and evaluation of institutional order must be an ongoing theological and pastoral priority.

A last question posed by the Synod's Final Report is this: Are there then social patterns, structures other than those five the Synod identified, that are also indispensable to achieving Church communion? For as the report notes, *communio*'s ultimate destiny is the world, and yet the means by which *communio* comes to be mediated here is not really studied by either Council or Synod. But the fact that some concrete means is always necessary to constituting Church communion suggests that some type of social form is also essential to realizing communion in the midst of the world's own structures.

The relation between communion and structure becomes clearer upon examining the Council's teaching on the local church.

The Local Church

One of the most striking statements Vatican II made about the Church was its assertion that "the one and universal Church is
realized in and through the variety of local churches." By so saying, it insisted that "the Church is not simply an abstract but a concrete universal"; in this way the Council emphasized that the universal Church's existence is directly tied to communio's actualization in a diversity of local cultures and historical circumstances. Whereas for the past, ecclesial reality was believed to cohere primarily in the institutionalized hierarchical and administrative order, now the Church is conceived in terms of its coming-to-be in the different milieus of contemporary experience, places where the Church must not only take up existence but areas for which and within which it must define and direct its mission.

By this means, the Council suggests that the local church is the normative historical form of ecclesial reality. Certainly, careful study of the constitution of young churches helps to make clear what the practical achievement of communio entails. For example, inculturation, i.e., the integration of Christian meanings and values into the culture of a specific people, requires such things as the creation of: 1) a style of worship and liturgical practice expressive of the local culture in its choice of language, ritual, and symbol; 2) grass roots churches whose institutional forms are shaped in response to the social and cultural exigencies of the people; 3) new forms of ministry to address the pastoral needs of individual societies; 4) a Christian moral vision based on the critical synthesis of the ethical values of church and cultural tradition; 5) vital dialogue between faith and culture at a variety of levels, geared to shaping a social life that is both more human and humane; and 6) the articulation of new contextual theologies expressive of the local church's own apprehension and evaluation of its project on behalf of trinitarian communio.

Postconciliar experience and continuing reflection on the nature and character of the local church confirm that communio is a genuine historical achievement. And while communio may begin with divine initiative, it also depends on the response to grace and Spirit on the human side. Communio as something to be built is an eminently social cultural project. On the other hand, precisely because it takes human effort, something inevitably conditioned by sin, communio's realization will neither be immediate nor easy.
In addition, the example of the young churches reveals that building the Church may not be left to clergy and religious alone. On the contrary, laity prove indispensable to bringing the Christian community into being, *ad intra* as well as *ad extra*. For example, laity constitute the Church *ad intra* in their work as liturgical ministers, religious educators and pastoral counselors. But at the same time, and as recent Church documents repeatedly insist, by virtue of baptism laity have been commissioned to the Church’s *ad extra* mission. By their individual and collective efforts, they must mediate the ecclesial experience of *communio* within/to the patterns, interactions, exchanges of the everyday. Per the Council’s vision, laity work from within the world “in the manner of leaven.”

On this point, hierarchy of the young churches attending the 1987 Synod on the Laity expressed great concern. While the bishops rejoiced at having secured a Catholic presence in their diverse cultures, they nonetheless recognized that the Church’s establishment there was as yet incomplete. That is, they were aware that the local church must have a visible public effect by way of a radical Christian witness directed to, in, and for the everyday.

The bishops saw that most laity had yet to understand that their vocation was to be more than just a community of worship, that as members of Christ’s Body they had to replicate in their own particular situations the graced life of the Spirit. More to the point, the bishops were very much aware that for the local church to fail in this was also a failure of mission — as well as a failure of *communio*.

To repeat, what this experience of the young churches demonstrates is that inculcating a church involves more than just securing a community’s presence and/or its relative autonomy. Rather, and even as it is putting down roots, the Christian community must ever be about the work of communicating the gospel to others, testifying to God’s redemptive love by both word and credible deed.

But then, this matter of Church mission was another aspect of Church life that the Council saw compelling need to address.
Church Mission

Because the terms “church” and “mission” are reciprocal and condition one another, in articulating a new definition of the Church, the Second Vatican Council was obliged to restate its beliefs about the nature and purpose of the Church’s mission as well.

As was true for communio, all of the conciliar documents bear on the issue of mission in some way. The most important contributions, however, are to be found in Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes (GS), and Ad Gentes (AG).26

The Council’s key assertion is that mission is simply not something the Church does. Rather, mission is what the Church is and it is thus because ecclesial reality originates and participates in the very missions of the Son and the Spirit:

The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. (AG 2)

And according to Lumen Gentium, the divine missions and their historical extension, the Church, make possible both a sharing in the divine life and the creation of one people.

By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity. (LG 1)

On this basis, the Council went on to say that as participants in Christ’s three-fold office of priest, prophet, and king, all of the baptized share responsibility for the Church’s mission of evangelization.

Just as the complex meaning of communio took time to unfold, so too it has taken time for a renewed understanding of
Church mission, one planted in the soil of *communio*, to develop. For example, recognition that mission and communion implicate each other is presumed by the Council documents. But what was mostly implicit becomes explicit in the documents of the 1985 Synod; here the connection is made that mission involves the mediation of communion. But an even fuller statement yet can be found in *Christifideles Laici (CL)*, the papal statement on the 1987 Synod on the Laity. Here a direct correlation between communion and mission is clearly articulated:

Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communio represents both the source and fruit of mission: Communion gives rise to mission, and mission is accomplished in communion. (*CL* 32)

But with this identification, the question arises: Just as communion needs structure to become historically viable, is this also true for its correlate, mission? In other words, if structural form is needed to constitute the Church as an *ad intra* communio, isn’t structure also necessary to constituting the Church in its *ad extra* mission? This then places in focus the five structuring relations the 1985 Synod identified with communio: Are these also intrinsic to or in some way associated with Church mission? Or, is it also possible that there are other structures necessary to communio but that go unidentified? To get at this, it is helpful to look at the 1990 papal document on mission, *Redemptoris Missio (RM)*, as well as at point’s made about the laity in *Christifideles Laici*.

Acknowledging the need to be more precise when describing the object of Church mission today, *Redemptoris Missio* sets out some “specific parameters” concerning the mission *ad gentes*. In considering the proclamation of the gospel to people and contexts where Christ is not known, *Redemptoris Missio* notes that while “missionary activity has normally been defined in terms of specific territories,” today evangelization must also address “new worlds and new social phenomena” as well as individual “cultural
sectors,” which it deems to be “the modern equivalents of the Areopagus.”

On the one hand, the document is quite specific about the formal ecclesial structures that are necessary to carrying out this mission of evangelization. Thus *Redemptoris Missio* calls for the establishment of local churches, “ecclesial basic communities,” missionary institutes, for episcopal conferences and families to assist this work. In addition, the document cites the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples as having overall responsibility for coordinating mission. Indeed, the document confirms the necessity of a structured approach to this endeavor by saying that since the church is also a communion which is visible and organic, her mission requires an external and ordered union between the various responsibilities and functions involved, in such a way that all the members “may in harmony spend their energies for the building up of the Church.”

Certain passages of *Remptoris Missio* indicate that the structuring relations of *communio* are very much a factor here. For example, the responsibility for mission is said to be a collegial one, one shared by all the bishops. The establishment of new churches involves the effort to inculturate the gospel in such a way that the Church can become an intelligible sign in and for this context of God’s salvation in Christ; bishops’ and people’s discernment of a culture’s authentic appropriation of the gospel suggests an autonomy for local churches associated with the principle of subsidiarity. Finally, acknowledgement of the laity’s role as agents of mission reflects the principle of participation and co-responsibility.

On the other hand, when it comes to talking about structure for those aspects of Church mission which *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) identified as “the evangelization of culture,” i.e., the “strata of humanity . . . mankind’s criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life,” *Redemptoris Missio* becomes much less clear.
While cities, youth culture, poverty, the mass media are definite cultural sectors needing to be addressed, the text is rather vague about what a formal gospel response might actually be. Here there is a tendency simply to describe these challenges rather than to outline definite strategies of approach. A likely reason for this ambiguity has to do with the fact that, since the Council, primary responsibility for the *ad extra* mission tends to be attributed to the laity. Thus it is in texts pertaining to their particular ecclesial role that further development of this matter must be sought.

The 1987 Synod’s subject was “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World 20 Years After the Second Vatican Council,” and the document *Christifideles Laici*, issued in December 1988, presents a papal summary of the Synod’s conclusions. Reiterating much of what the Second Vatican Council had said, the text again highlights the laity’s “secular” character which originates in God’s call to realize the Church, to mediate *communio* in all the different areas of contemporary human experience.\(^34\) The primary structure for supporting this effort is the local church community, the parish.\(^35\) On the other hand, lay mission is also dependent on other social forms: the family, such lay groups and associations as confraternities, third orders, sodalities, movements and other groups formed to respond to today’s cultural and communal needs. *Christifideles Laici* underscores the importance of these organized efforts by asserting that Church communion “finds its specific expression in the lay faithful’s working together in groups”; and following Vatican II, the document additionally states that “the group apostolate” represents “a sign of communion and of unity of the church of Christ.”\(^36\)

But here too, while the 1987 Synod agrees that Church order is requisite to facilitating lay mission, nevertheless there is a lack of specificity as to exactly what these structures might actually do. While the document enumerates the kinds of structures needed to support lay effort, it does not really address the types of programmatic action that structure serves as a framework for. What this might involve will be dealt with more fully in the next two sections.
One interesting development in *Christifideles Laici* concerns the "criteria of ecclesiality" that set the parameters for lay activity. While the 1985 Synod identifies communion structures in terms of collegiality, subsidiarity, inculturation, and so on — and which are reprised in *Redemptoris Missio* — the criteria offered by *Christifideles Laici* involve "obedience to the church’s magisterium, as the church interprets it," "witness to a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship to the pope, in total adherence to the belief that he is the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal church," union with one’s bishops, "conformity to and participation in the church’s apostolic goals."37

But the question is, are these relational patterns also part of the mediation of communio? They are not mentioned by either the 1985 Synod or *Redemptoris Missio*; furthermore, these "criteria" appear to contradict the spirit of participation, collaboration, and collegiality originally advocated by the Final Report. Is it to be concluded then that there are two different sets of mediating structures, two different modes of ecclesial self-expression, one for lay mission and another for hierarchical mission? If so, how do the two relate to each other in a formal ecclesiology of communion?

Clarification of the nature of the relationships existing between mission, communio and structure is to be had by examining the Council’s rethinking of Church ministry.

**Ministry**

Perhaps Vatican II’s best received and best implemented teachings to date have been those pertaining to the liturgy. The Council’s call for full and active participation of all the Church’s members has become the reality in many places. At the same time, the opening of Church ministry to laity has resulted in the institution of myriad forms of service to meet the growing — and diverse — pastoral needs of local churches. Indeed, this fundamental restructuring of Church ministry has created two difficult questions for theology today: What precisely is the essential difference (noted in *Lumen Gentium*) that distinguishes the ordained and the non-ordained ministries? And, is everything that the ordinary baptized do rightly named “ministry” or is ministry
a term to be used only in designating activities done within the Church?

Prior to Vatican II, ministry and mission appeared to be two distinct realities; generally speaking, clergy’s responsibility was Church ministry while laity’s, under the aegis of Catholic Action, had become the mission to the world. Vatican II, however, retrieved the concept of the baptismal priesthood and restored to the Church the notion of the fundamental unity and equality of all believers. But in doing so, it opened the way to confusion over the distribution of ecclesial tasks. In showing that Church ministry has its origins in baptism rather than orders, the Council emphasized that lay and clergy alike have responsibility for both mission and ministry. And in thus weakening the boundaries between clergy and lay, the Council demanded a new approach to the traditional “church/world” distinction. Thus the Council appeared to say that instead of laity functioning as a bridge between church and world (as it was conceived in the past), laity and clergy are now to act together as the church in the world, sharing responsibility for both.

According to David Power, when Paul VI officially opened Church ministry to laity with the issuance of the *motu proprio* Ministeria Quaedam, the pontiff wished to make clear that service in the Church and service in the world are intimately related, that they are even extensions of one another. For example, the text indicates that the one who reads in the assembly has a responsibility for making God’s word known to those outside. Similarly, catechesis is not simply a work done within the Church; as the pontiff later explained in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the catechist must be able to read the signs of the times in order to impact her/his surroundings in a Christian way and “to reach those who are remote from [the church].”

That this effort to strengthen the links between Church ministry and mission ultimately had little effect is heard in the plaint of the *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern* issued five short years after Ministeria Quaedam. Here a group of U.S. Catholics voiced dismay that ministry within the Church, rather than the service to the world that is properly theirs, has become the U.S. laity’s major preoccupation. That this is true for the rest
of the Church was later confirmed in *Christifideles Laici*; here it is noted that laity have been tempted to be “so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world.”41 This statement indicates that despite Paul VI’s effort, the dichotomization of ministry and mission has once again become the norm.

On the other hand, this neglect of the world is quite understandable when one examines the way in which the Church’s ministries have developed in the U.S. context. For example, review of the study *New Parish Ministers* conducted by the National Pastoral Life Center shows that while an important emphasis has been placed on religious education, the liturgical ministries, and creating ministries to address special group needs (elderly, youth, families), there has been very little development of ministry initiatives and supporting structures to enable lay evangelization of “new worlds and social phenomena,” the “cultural sectors” called for by *Redemptoris Missio*.42

In identifying the specific activities of lay and religious ministers, *New Parish Ministers* shows, for example, only 0.5% of the sample serve as Evangelization Ministers; only 2.5% serve as Social Ministry Directors.43 And while the largest category of ministers, General Pastoral Ministers, is involved in social service and evangelization outreach, they do this as part of their many other parish responsibilities.44 In other words, the time and resources given over to formation of Catholic laity for their worldly obligations have been quite minimal. On the other hand, the ministry study does suggest that given the way parish energies and church resources are directed, most laity are indirectly prepared for ministering in the church.

While both the Council and *Christifideles Laici* emphasize that the local church, the parish is the place where lay mission originates, in most instances, little has been done in this area to develop or promote an active lay leadership which could set its own agenda *ad extra*. But neither is there much opportunity for such to be exercised. While participation on parish and diocesan councils is a place where laity could have an effective voice in setting mission agendas, the U.S. Church’s record here is quite
mixed. Not all parishes have councils, some are purely appointive bodies, while others are elected and fully representative of parish membership. In some parishes, lay members have no voice; in most other situations, the lay voice is purely consultative and advisory; only in a few instances are laity actually involved in decision-making and encouraged to take responsibility for the parish.

A very small percent of laity have access to diocesan or national Church offices and of these laity, many are professional Church workers. What is lacking are regular opportunities and formal structures promoting honest dialogue and genuine collaboration between laity and hierarchy; such would permit laity to have a vital role in pastoral planning and to help make decisions about the use and allocation of Church resources.

Nor are most parishes places where a Catholic response to the challenges of job and profession can be fashioned, the social questions of the day discussed, a Catholic conscience on the issues formed. In the past, a significant conduit for lay activity was the many parish/diocesan/national organizations that provided formal contexts for both discussion and apostolic endeavor. Today many of these organizations, because they have not adapted to changed times and to the needs and circumstances of a new generation of Catholics, involve only minimal numbers of older laity or have simply become defunct. But as The Chicago Declaration observes, the need for innovative lay groups, the need for places for fostering lay initiative and for developing programs to meet a panoply of social issues continues. Interest in promoting such, however, seems hardly a priority for either bishops or their staffs. And, without support of clergy, most lay efforts of and by themselves do not usually succeed.

On the other hand, the inherent bond between ecclesial ministry and Church mission becomes strikingly evident in the activity of clergy and religious. Indeed, since the Council the Church's mission to the world has been taken up more and more by members of the United States hierarchy, both as individuals and as a group. Bishops, priests, religious men and women have been the ones to develop Catholic positions on social issues, to formulate public policy, to do the work of political advocacy. The
evidence shows that what these groups do in a ministerial capacity tends to be replicated in some form of beneficial service for the world.

Laity, unfortunately, have not been taught to view mission in this way, as a corollary to their in-church effort. But neither do they have access to the kinds of formal networks of service that clergy and religious do. Much more troublesome is the fact that the Council hedged on giving laity the same kind of freedom to act publicly as church as it gave to clergy and religious. While official teaching recognizes that laity are called to mission by virtue of their baptism, the “criteria of ecclesiality” cited above strongly suggests that the official Church still tends to regard lay mission as a delegated one.

This discussion raises a fundamental question about the need to shape a ministry for the future that is consistent with an ecclesiology of communion. What would a ministry look like that took as its starting point Church mission? Would there be a continuing need to keep clerical and lay tasks distinct? Or, would the result be an understanding of ministry that presumes its tasks ought to be approached on the basis of the Church’s mission of evangelization rather than on the status of the person undertaking them? But this then would implicitly require collaborative, co-responsible action by lay and clergy; furthermore, it presupposes the need and right of local churches to act autonomously in accord with the principle of subsidiarity, another of the relational patterns identified with communio by the 1985 Synod.

To better understand the lay experience and the possibility of a solution to the unfortunate bifurcation of mission and ministry, it is instructive to review the Council’s teaching on the subject of the laity.

Laity

If Vatican II marks the Church’s rediscovery of itself as a human society generated by Word and Spirit, then one practical consequence of this had to be its rediscovery of the laity. Thus, Lumen Gentium affirms that by baptism, laity are fully constituted christifideles, that as such, they participate in Christ’s three-fold
mission of priest, prophet, and king. It asserts that laity too, no less than clergy or religious, are called to a life of holiness.

In the intervening years, *communio*’s practical achievement has been evidenced by such things as active lay participation in the liturgy, the recognition of lay ministers and ministries, laity’s service on pastoral and diocesan councils, their service as Church professionals and administrators. Yet in taking stock of the laity’s progress, bishops attending the 1987 Synod on the Laity noted that their advance had been uneven and that a significant part of the laity, Catholic women, have yet to be fully integrated into ecclesial life.

While women’s issues are presumed to be a concern of First World churches only, the 1987 Synod showed that, to the contrary, bishops of the young churches, heavily dependent upon the pastoral work women do in the base communities, were eager to find additional ways for recognizing in some institutional way women’s spiritual gifts and energies. For their part, First World bishops argued a role for women on consultative and decision-making bodies, that women’s voices be heard in the articulation of Church positions, the preparation of Church documents. Some bishops even requested that study be made about opening the diaconate to women. Yet despite such suggestions, the Synod did little to change things for Catholic women. In the U.S. the only discernible move towards admitting women to the fullness of communion has been intermittent attempts at dialogue between representatives of women and the bishops. But to date, this has had little tangible or meaningful result.

On the other hand, the 1987 Synod was quite prepared to give women a major role in the Church’s *ad extra* mission, the work of evangelizing culture. *Christifideles Laici* states that:

> the human problems of today’s world, already cited in the second part of the council’s constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which remain unresolved and not at all affected by the passage of time, must witness the presence and commitment of women with their irreplaceable and customary contributions. *(CL 51)*
Not only this, but the document also goes on to make this striking attribution:

Women have the task of assuring the moral dimension of culture, the dimension, namely, of a culture worthy of the person, of an individual yet social life. (CL 51)

But by the positions regarding women that it adopts, the official Church encourages the continuing dichotomization of ministry and mission, certainly as far as lay people are concerned. And by limiting women's participation intra Church, the hierarchy not only misses the opportunity to enrich and deepen Church communio, it also impedes the natural movement of communio into mission. And as has been suggested, while formal structure is just as crucial to mission as it is to ministry, there is little official interest in building networks for lay Catholic action. Furthermore, there is little understanding that laity themselves, their lives constitute a part of the ecclesial reality through which communion can and must freely flow. As the Venerable Bede once proposed, "every day the church gives birth to the church"; and while this seems evident when the community gathers around the table for eucharist, the truth is that the Church is also born daily in the inchoate structures of lay activity in the areas of family, economic, political and social life. Little recognized and hardly appreciated or studied, this has been an historic and significant means by which the Church becomes an incarnate presence to and for each generation.

Given the Council's strong identification of the Church with its mission, there is pressing need to give fresh attention to its teaching on this point, and in particular to Gaudium et Spes. This document not only recapitulated the Council's teaching on mission but in doing so, laid out a scheme for lay Catholic activity. For instance, review of Gaudium et Spes makes clear that it is principally in the circumstances of everyday life that the Christian missionary exigence is met. This document suggests that to be lay is already to be on mission given that one's life situation of family, work, public affairs—all that constitutes the lay person's every
day, i.e., the individuals, the ideas, values, concepts, feelings and frameworks of society and culture are precisely those entities that must be referred to Christ and infused with the spirit of communio.

What needs to be fostered in Catholic laity is an appreciation of the fact that they themselves, their lives are the realizations of the Church in the world and to help them approach this with a ministerial attitude of service, a perspective that brings to the Church the needs of the world and finds itself irresistibly drawn to meet them.

This ministerial attitude must be rooted in an authentic lay spirituality. While this remains yet to be articulated, conciliar teaching suggests that it will have the following characteristics. First of all, this spirituality will be inherently ecclesial, rooted as it is in baptism and the parish eucharistic celebration of communio. Having this sacramental origin, lay spirituality will also be christocentric in that Jesus’ life and teaching provide the basic pattern for living communio in the world. It will also be incarnational in that laity, aware of the Spirit’s presence to created reality, will be instrumental in freeing its transforming power. But this will also be an incarnational spirituality insofar as its prayer forms, spiritual practices, meanings and values will be enfleshed in the diverse cultures in which laity find themselves and in which their catholicity expresses itself.

Finally, this spirituality will be one that is collaborative and communitarian. To be a member of the laity is to be in communion; the term itself is without meaning in any other context besides the Church. But more than this, lay spirituality is communitarian in that it presumes that we are inherently social beings, in need of each other, affirmation, and forgiveness. To this end, this lay spirituality will help shape lives that witness to a new way of being human; it will also give evidence of a new style of common life, inviting and gathering all to union with Christ.

But at the same time, a contemporary lay spirituality, rising out of communio and the trinitarian missions as it does, is invariably drawn to mission. As such it must seek out both formal and informal social networks to enable the spread of communio beyond the Church. Evangelii Nuntiandi suggests that there are three distinct moments associated with the contemporary task of
evangelizing culture. First, ways must be found to increase and build on those types of service that provide hands-on acts of charity to the poor, the homeless. But since this solution to human need is but temporary, laity, by means of their education and expertise, must go on to do the sort of social analysis and critique needed to create transformational strategies that result in just social structures capable of protecting human well-being.

Laity must also be about changing the attitudes, the biases implicit to all social systems; thus lay Catholics must be influential in shaping a moral ecology for a global society, an approach to life which views even society's weakest, poorest member to be something of inestimable value.

Conclusion

What conclusions may be drawn from this review of Vatican II and reception of its renewed vision for the Church?

If Vatican II described the Church as being the sign and instrument of God's saving love, it has since become evident that *communio* is the best term for referring to this mystery of divine favor at the heart of the Church. And, in that *communio* is destined for the world, the Christian task is to be the historical mediator of this experience of God through Christ in the Spirit. While the fullness of communion remains an eschatological achievement and is only partially realizable in time, nevertheless communion requires no little human effort. To have real credible effect, it must be expressed in the exigencies of human social life. As has been seen, *communio* is originally received in and through the relations that give rise to the Church's interior life. But it can and must be expressed in the culturally patterned interactions that comprise everyday existence.

The challenge that has always confronted the Church is to make this experience of God the world's own. Yet as the Catholic community approaches a new millennium, it must find innovative ways for acting as well as new energy; new commitment for its mission on behalf of the gospel. This cannot happen, however, if the Church's institutions do not become more responsive to the needs of the contemporary world.
This study has emphasized the critical importance of attending to the quality of the Church’s institutional life; not only must dysfunctional structures that block communion be dealt with; a way must be found to allow the Church’s charismatic element to be a major impetus, spurring the renovation and/or reform of Church order.

Furthermore, this study has suggested that ministry and mission, while extensions of one another, are two distinct moments of the Church’s constitution. As such, each involves a different set of performative actions to achieve their ends. Since the Council, considerable attention has been given to reorganizing ministry. Much less has been done in respect to mission. As a first thing, mission’s task must be conceived in a way appropriate for today, the future. For this, *Gaudium et Spes’s* teaching about mission must be re-visited as must the Council’s teaching about the laity, the baptismal priesthood.

There also needs to be serious study and reflection on the questions generated by the Council, especially those given extended development in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*. As they show, the work of mission presents challenging new questions: What precisely does it mean to evangelize culture? And how are the different aspects of mission to be conceptualized so that this effort can be addressed, both strategically and programmatically?

As far as laity are concerned, they are primary agents of Church mission; it is imperative that at last they be brought into full communion (women will be the litmus test for this) and that the ambiguities of conciliar teaching that continue to thwart lay freedom and ability to act constructively as Church be resolved. More important, across the Church there is need to acknowledge the central role laity play in constituting the Church every day by means of their lived witness. For this reason, it is essential to begin to educate laity to this truth, to help them foster a proper spirituality in which their Christian vocation can be firmly rooted. Finally, the Church’s pastors must work with laity to create the supporting structures necessary to inculcating the gospel in the diverse areas of experience.

The challenge of empowering and preparing lay Catholics to
assume their proper responsibility for Church and world is a theological and pastoral urgency. This will require the articulation of a new spirituality, new forms of Church order, and new commitment — and laity themselves have much to contribute here. But in the final analysis, this is not an option. The Church’s future, as well as the gospel’s, depends on it.

Notes

4. Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 29, 32.
15. LG 8.
18. “Final Report,” II C.
22. There continues to be debate about whether the local church is the diocese or the particular, national church. See Patrick Granfield, “The Local Church as a Center of Communication and Control,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 35 (1985): 256-58. From a lay point of view and experience, the Church is the parish; it is this Church, the local eucharistic community, with which one has almost exclusive contact.

23. According to Jan Grootaers, the “young churches” designates those of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The term originated in the ecumenical movement.


28. *RM* 37a,b,c.

29. *RM* 75.

30. *RM* 61-64.

31. *RM* 52.

32. *RM* 54.

33. *EN* 19.

34. *CL* 15.


39. *EN* 73.


41. *CL* 2.


43. Murnion, *New Parish Ministers*, 44.


46. Grootaers, 126.
Revision, Reform, Renewal:  
The Impact of Sacrosanctum Concilium  
on Roman Rite Liturgy and Worship  

JAN MICHAEL JONCAS

The first of the formal documents issued by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC), wrought a profound transformation of the ways in which Roman Catholics worship in common. Issued on December 4, 1963, Sacrosanctum Concilium both placed official approval on the liturgical movement’s aims as they had been developing from the middle of the nineteenth century and promoted new perspectives on church life and practice that would bear fruit in later conciliar documents. It could be argued that Sacrosanctum Concilium has had more impact upon the “person in the pew” than any of the other conciliar writings, since changes in worship and devotional practices have immediate consequences on church members, for good or ill:

In the following article I will explore three issues: What did Sacrosanctum Concilium teach about liturgy and worship? What has happened since its promulgation by way of implementation, reception and development? What is an agenda for the future?

The limits of my treatment should be made clear. I will examine only nine elements of Sacrosanctum Concilium’s teaching. Other topics (e.g., use of sacramentals, rites of consecration to a life of virginity and religious profession, funerals, the daily, weekly, and yearly cycles of liturgical celebration) could be chosen
and should be treated, but limits of space dictate this selection. Second, I will confine my remarks to liturgy and worship in the Roman Rite. One of the glories of Catholicism is the multiplicity of rites in which its liturgy and worship is expressed: both Western (e.g., Ambrosian, Mozarabic) and Eastern (e.g., Byzantine, Chaldean, Melkite, Coptic, Ethiopic, Malabarese, Malankarese, Maronite). While the principles espoused in Sacrosanctum Concilium have also resulted in liturgical reforms in many of the non-Roman Rite traditions, I am only competent to treat those in the Roman Rite. Finally, I will especially concentrate on liturgical reforms and renewal occurring among English-speaking Roman Rite Catholics in the United States, since this represents my own worship heritage.

The overall impact of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy appears in three areas: revision, reform and renewal. Sacrosanctum Concilium directly mandated a revision of the liturgical library employed in Roman Catholic worship. It assumed that the revision of these books would lead to a reform of Catholic liturgical and devotional practices. It hoped that this liturgical reform would express and engender a renewal of Catholic Christian life, ecumenical amity and transformation of humanity (cf. SC 1). By the mid-1980s the revision of the liturgical library was by-and-large completed with the official promulgation of the editiones typicae (the Latin-language “typical editions” from which the various vernacular adaptations were to arise), although revised editions of these documents continue to be published. In the mid-1990s we are presently engaged in the liturgical reform responding to these revised texts and ceremonies. Whether or not this revision and reform actually engenders ecclesial and social renewal the future alone will reveal.

We will now consider nine aspects of the revision, reform, and renewal that have developed in the three decades since Sacrosanctum Concilium was promulgated.

Liturgical Theology

While changes in texts and ceremonies are the most perceptible results of Sacrosanctum Concilium’s publication, I believe
its greatest long-term impact will be in the area of liturgical theology. The document itself succinctly provides a theological rationale for each mandated revision. Articles in chapter one on the nature of the liturgy (5-13) and the norms for its reform (21-40), as well as the introductory articles in each of the subsequent chapters (47-49, 59-62, 83-87, 102-105, 112, 122), provide a rich deposit of authoritative teaching whose implications are still being worked out.

Core doctrinal themes in Sacrosanctum Concilium include the following:

Liturgy, as an “exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ” (7), enshrines and actualizes his paschal mystery (5). Humanity has been redeemed by Jesus’ life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit. The liturgy makes redemption sacramentally accessible to believers (6).

Access to Christ and the redemption wrought by him is sacramentally facilitated by multiple modes of personal presence: in the proclamation of God’s Word, in the persons ministering at the liturgy, in the effective actions of the sacraments themselves, in the assembly gathered in prayer and song, under the appearances of bread and wine in the consecrated eucharistic elements (7). Traditionally, this effective signification of Christ’s redemptive activity in space, time, human life and material objects has been called the sacramental principle and lies at the heart of a distinctively Catholic (and Orthodox) embodiment of Christianity.

The liturgy has a dual purpose: glorifying God (understood as faith-filled acknowledgment of the divine presence and purpose in nature and history) and sanctifying humanity (understood as the transformation in holiness made possible for forgiven sinners by the life of grace) (7).

Enacting the liturgy most clearly establishes and manifests the nature of the church (2, 26, 28, 41). The liturgical prayer of God’s holy people discloses in a differentiation of roles for the sake of a common good the ecclesial mystery of unity in diversity. Liturgical prayer unites those physically present in a given location with other members of Christ’s body throughout the world in addition to those angels and saints who share in his celestial praise of his Father (8).
Liturgy is the fount and summit of the Christian life (10). Evangelization, conversion and catechesis all find fulfillment in the liturgy, while genuine worship deepens individual holiness and impels believers to committed lives of discipleship (9, 12, 13).

How have each of these doctrinal claims been implemented in the last thirty years? The term “paschal mystery” appears frequently in catechetical materials and homilies, but its implications for Christian life remain underdeveloped in practice. If Andrew Greeley’s sociological research is to be believed, Catholic worshipers exhibit an ingrained sense of the sacramental principle, reveling in the beautiful, sensual and narrative qualities of human life as pathways to the transcendent rather than mistrusting the created order as depraved or demonic. Unfortunately some communities drive a wedge between God’s glorification and humanity’s sanctification as the purpose of the liturgy, either so emphasizing the transcendent that only the highest art forms are considered “worthy” of God’s worship or so concentrating on the expressed needs of the worshipers that the transcendent is effectively banished; the dual nature of the liturgy’s purpose sets up surprising tensions in pastoral practice. Since Sacrosanctum Concilium claims that in the liturgy the true nature of church is revealed, it is not surprising that different models of church membership and organization will have implications for the forms of common worship; this is probably most intensely exhibited in calls for more public participation of women in roles of presidency and preaching. The connections between liturgy and life are still tenuous for many believers, especially since the liturgy’s interaction with postmodern culture is still in its infancy.

What developments in liturgical theology loom? Perhaps the most important will lie in a reappropriation of patristic thinking on the liturgy as a locus for symbolic-and-therefore-real encounter with God (rather than an allegorical puzzle to be decoded), a new appreciation for the medieval scholastic teaching on the sign character of the liturgy (shorn of an inadequate understanding of its causal character that led to mechanistic and sometimes superstitious celebration), and a genuine engagement with modern understandings of humans as person and agents in history constituted by memory and hope (without reducing the worship
event to self-congratulating therapeutic interchanges or thinly disguised political rallies). In any case the split between liturgical and sacramental theology must be overcome, and the embodied theological insights of the liturgical interchange must inform and be informed by developments in theology proper, christology, pneumatology, moral theology, spirituality, and eschatology.

**Full, Conscious, Active Liturgical Participation**

The recovery of liturgy as the action of the People of God in Christ is key in understanding the revision, reform and renewal proposed by the Council. Article 14 expressly articulates this central principle:

> The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” [1 Pt 2:9; see 2:4-5] is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.

> In the reform and promotion of the liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else. (emphasis added)

The refrain of “full, conscious, and active” liturgical participation dominates not only the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* but all of the implementation documents issued in its wake.

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 19 categorizes “full, conscious and active” liturgical participation under two headings, external and internal:

> With zeal and patience pastors must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful and also their active participation in the liturgy both internally and externally, taking into account their age and
condition, their way of life, and their state of religious development.

While some might question the adequacy of an anthropology that juxtaposes external and internal human activity without integrating them, it should be clear that Sacrosanctum Concilium rejected two extremes: 1) that liturgical participation was purely a matter of internal attitude without any embodied engagement in the ritual prayer; and 2) that liturgical participation was simply a matter of bodily activity without contemplative engagement in the ritual prayer. "Full, conscious and active" liturgical participation demands both internal and external activity; it demands embodied contemplative engagement.

Sacrosanctum Concilium 30 specifies some of the elements by which both internal and external "full, conscious and active" liturgical participation occurs:

To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bearing. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.

Note that this taxonomy divides into verbal, non-verbal, and silent participation. These categories in turn can be sub-divided into further categories: spoken and sung verbal activity as well as active listening; postural, gestural, and kinesthetic bodily participation; keeping corporate as well as individual silence. One might also note visual engagement with the objects used in worship and the environment that facilitates worship. Even taste (in sacramental communion) and smell (through the use of incense) may enhance "full, conscious and active" liturgical participation.

Active participation in the liturgy has increased enormously in the last thirty years. The assembly speaks or sings its texts in response to ritual promptings by presider, deacon, lector, or cantor rather than having ritual representatives such as the choir or altar servers make the responses on their behalf. Common
patterns of standing, sitting and kneeling have been established, communal devotional gestures (such as genuflecting to the tabernacle or bowing to the altar before taking one's seat, signing oneself on forehead, lips, and breast before the proclamation of the gospel, or holding hands for the Lord's Prayer) have been begun or restored, while other forms of physical activity (the sign of peace, the collection and presentation of the eucharistic gifts) are still in development.

Concerns are voiced, however, that the quality of recollected worship may have declined among the faithful since Vatican II. Keeping corporate silence is still difficult or non-existent in many worshiping communities, in spite of the encouragement of the official documents. Liturgical leadership is presently occupying itself with the question of how best to engender contemplative participation in the members of the worshiping community. New resources for liturgical catechesis and mystagogy may make the verbal, non-verbal, and silent modes of participation more deeply understood and grounded in the piety of the faithful.

**Liturgical Celebration of the Word of God**

The liturgical revisions mandated by the Second Vatican Council also transformed the way in which Catholics celebrate the Word of God. From the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation onward, Catholic and Protestant worship was popularly, if stereotypically, distinguished by its treatment of scripture: Catholics worshiped by means of sacraments provided by priests with little reference to the Bible, while Protestants worshiped by means of the Bible proclaimed and preached by ministers with little reference to the sacraments. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 24 and 35.1 provided the impetus for changing this stereotype, emphasizing the foundational role of sacred scripture in contemporary Roman Rite liturgical reform:

> Sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from Scripture that the readings are given and explained in the homily and that psalms are sung;
the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration; it is from the Scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning. Thus to achieve the reform, progress, and adaption of the liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for Scripture to which the venerable tradition of both Eastern and Western rites gives testimony. . . .

That the intimate connection between words and rites may stand out clearly in the liturgy . . . in sacred celebrations there is to be more reading from holy Scripture and it is to be more varied and apposite.

Over the past three decades, implementation of these articles has taken two major forms. First, every revised liturgical rite has included a selection of scriptural readings intended for proclamation during the liturgy. (Even the ostensibly “private” Form I of the Sacrament of Penance calls for a proclamation and sharing of God’s Word.) The crowning achievement of this biblical restoration in Roman Rite worship is the Ordo Lectionum Missae ("Order of Readings for Mass"), which first appeared in 1970 and was slightly revised and issued with an enriched introduction in 1981 in direct response to the mandate of Sacrosanctum Concilium 51:

The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that a richer share in God’s word may be provided for the faithful. In this way a more representative portion of holy Scripture will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years.

The Ordo Lectionum Missae not only increased the number of scriptural readings proclaimed at Lord’s Day eucharist from an Epistle/Gospel pattern to a First Testament/Second Testament non-Gospel/Gospel pattern, but also provided a three-year Lord’s Day and a two-year weekday cycle of scriptural proclamations for
eucharist in contrast to the previous Roman Rite one-year cycle. The Ordo Lectionum Missae did more than simply change Catholic practice; it bore remarkable ecumenical fruit as three-year Lord’s Day lectionaries based on the Roman pattern were adopted by a wide range of Protestant ecclesial bodies right up through the Revised Common Lectionary of 1992.

Second, liturgical preaching in the form of homilies became the norm within liturgical celebrations. Some sense of the seriousness accorded the restoration of biblical preaching appears in Sacrosanctum Concilium 52:

> By means of the homily the mysteries of the faith and the guiding principles of the Christian life are expounded from the sacred text during the course of the liturgical year; as part of the liturgy itself, therefore, the homily is strongly recommended; in fact, at Masses celebrated with the assistance of the people on Sundays and holy days of obligation it is not to be omitted except for serious reasons.

A veritable explosion of publishing aimed at assisting liturgical preachers has swept the Catholic world in the last three decades, from one-volume commentaries on the entire Bible, through liturgical commentaries on the sets of readings appointed for various feasts and celebrations, to topical subscription services providing preparation aids, outlines, and even complete texts for preaching.

Nevertheless, questions may be raised about the present Roman Rite patterns of celebrating God’s Word, both in proclamation and preaching. Given most Roman Catholics’ lack of familiarity with the Bible, some wonder if the Lord’s Day pattern of four pericopes (First Testament proclamation, Psalm, Second Testament non-gospel proclamation, Gospel) provides too much scripture for the “average” Catholic to digest at a single celebration. (In this light it is interesting to note that the German bishops have relegated what we call the “Second Reading” to an appendix of their Lectionary for Mass, to be used only by those communities who deem themselves capable of handling so much
scripture in a single celebration.) While rejoicing in lectionary cycles that allow participants to hear the particular perspectives of Second Testament writers unfold over time (e.g., the unique emphases of the Gospel of Matthew marking the Sundays of Ordinary Time in Year A), the decision to yoke a First Testament reading with the Gospel by means of some perceived thematic or typological connection means that Catholics never hear the Hebrew Scriptures unfold in their canonical integrity. This is only exacerbated when the Psalm is treated as a musical interlude or meditation song between scriptural proclamations rather than another, albeit sung, proclamation of the First Testament scriptures.

Questions can also be raised about liturgical preaching. Although one can point to improvement in Catholic homilies, poll after poll still reports that worshipers are dissatisfied with both the content and style of liturgical preaching. Many reasons can be given for this: the comparative lack of emphasis on homiletics in many ministerial formation programs, the absence of models and mentors for young preachers, the lack of helpful feedback from the worshiping assembly, no mandated ongoing education and evaluation for those already preaching. Others, alarmed by the apparent failure of contemporary catechetics to inculcate basic Catholic beliefs among the faithful, want to replace the biblical homily with systematic doctrinal instructions, calling for sermon series rather than homilies. Perhaps the strongest debates address the question of who is authorized to preach in a Catholic liturgical setting: does restricting the liturgical homily to ordained Roman Rite clergy deprive the People of God of the insights and witness that may be offered by married men (outside of the diaconate) and married or single women?

**Liturgical Language**

Another change in Roman Rite worship mandated by the Second Vatican Council concerns the language in which that worship is conducted. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 36 directed: 1) that the Latin language was to remain foundational for the Latin rites; 2) that vernacular languages would be permitted in the Mass,
sacraments and other liturgical acts, primarily for readings and instructions (*monitiones*, homilies), though also for some prayers and chants; 3) that the local territorial authority could determine the extent of the vernacular's use; and 4) that this same territorial authority would approve the translations.

Over the past three decades, each of these prescriptions has been implemented, although in ways that might not have been foreseen by the Council Fathers. First, as noted above, all revisions of the official liturgical books for the Roman Rite have been issued in Latin; in fact, some of the *editiones typicae* (such as the Roman Missal, the ordination rites, and the marriage ritual) have already appeared in second editions. However, in the vast majority of cases, these Latin editions do not serve as scripts for actual liturgical celebration, but as documents for translation into the various vernaculars.

Second, distinguishing between texts addressed to God in a sacred hieratic language (Latin) by clergy and other texts disappeared in pastoral practice. (One notes how quickly the “bilingual” sacramentary used in the late 1960s vanished.) Clearly pastoral practice taught us that there were no publicly proclaimed texts that did not concern the laity at worship. Thus linguistic distinctions between clergy and laity during common worship proved untenable.

Third, in the light of this pastoral insight, all of the territorial authorities of which I am aware eventually approved the extension of the vernacular to all texts of the Roman Rite.

Fourth, the individual territorial authorities in the English­speaking world did not retain the direct process of generating officially approved liturgical translations. Recognizing the chaos that might ensue if each English-speaking territory produced its own liturgical translation, English-speaking bishops’ conferences created the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) during the closing days of Vatican II. For the past thirty years ICEL has produced general liturgical translations for the English­speaking world, which have in turn been submitted to the various territorial authorities for their adaptation and approval. These initial translations are presently being critiqued, refined and resubmitted for public use with episcopal approval.
Three major sets of questions present themselves as we consider the future direction of our liturgical language.

First, whose vernacular language are we to employ in our common prayer? Australia, Canada and the United States are all struggling with issues of multicultural and multilingual diversity; these issues impact our liturgical assemblies as well. Recognizing that monolingual liturgical assemblies are increasingly rare, a variety of strategies have been employed. Some have called for the restoration of Latin as a transnational, transcultural worship language. Others have suggested worship in a single vernacular as long as written translations are provided for participants from other language groups. Still others have experimented with bi- or multilingual celebrations, ranging from simple alternation of language by unit to creating entire macro-structures. (I do not believe a Preface Dialogue consisting of “Il Signore sia con voi” / “E con il spirito tuo” / “Sursum corda” / “Habemus ad Dominum” / “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God” / “It is right to give him thanks and praise” works as public prayer, however!)

Second, which register within a vernacular language is appropriate for public liturgical prayer? Does one address God during communal prayer as “Omnipotent and puissant Deity,” “Almighty and everliving God” or “Yo, Big Guy”? How may different language registers distance or trivialize the encounter with God?

Third, there is the challenge of inclusive language for English public prayer. Although some have decried the abandonment of the masculine generic as a capitulation to political correctness, many worshipers are not disturbed by references to “humanity” rather than “mankind,” to “Abraham and Sarah; Moses and Miriam” rather than simply “the patriarchs and prophets,” to “the deaf-mute man” rather than to “the deaf-and-dumb.” More controversial are changes in the titles or pronouns used to refer to the God of biblical religion: “Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier” / “Abba, Jesu, Ruah” for the persons of the Trinity or “Our Father, Our Mother” as the divine address in the Lord’s Prayer.

It seems unlikely that a reversion to exclusively non-vernacular worship will occur in the future, although particular phrases such as “Kyrie eleison” or “Miserere nobis” might be
used more frequently, especially as sung texts. Ongoing revision of official vernacular worship texts will probably become a fact of life, although the rate of change (with the concomitant need to print and buy new liturgical books) will most likely decrease. Discussions between representatives of the United States Catholic Bishops and the Vatican officials responsible for overseeing scriptural and liturgical translations may clarify the principles by which vernacular liturgical language develops, faithful to the biblical and worship heritage while genuinely and evocatively communicative for present-day worshipers.

Eucharist.

Sacrosanctum Concilium 50, calling for the revision of the Order of Mass, articulated four strategies that have in fact been applied to all of the texts and ceremonies of Roman Rite liturgical worship:

The Order of Mass is to be revised in a way that will bring out more clearly the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as also the connection between them, and will more readily achieve the devout, active participation of the faithful.

For this purpose the rites are to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance; elements that, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated or were added with but little advantage are now to be discarded; other elements that have suffered injury through accident of history are now, as may seem useful or necessary, to be restored to the vigor they had in the traditions of the Fathers.

First, the rites were simplified. One has only to consider the process of hand- and object-kissing in the passing of the principal celebrant’s biretta from celebrant through deacon and sub-deacon to acolyte, the duplication of Roman and Gallican consecratory
prayers at ordinations, or the elaborate rules to determine how many collects to pray on a given feast to realize how much the Roman Rite has been simplified. Deep structures of Introductory Rites, Liturgy of the Word, Sacramental Rites, and Concluding Rites mark all of the revised liturgical books.

Second, ritual duplications were removed. For example, the multiple signs of the cross made over gifts, chalice and paten during the Roman Canon (e.g., “haec + dona, haec + munera, haec sancta + sacrificia illibata” / “bene+dictam, adscrip+tam, ra+tam, rationabilem, acceptabilemque facere digneris Cor+pus et San+quis fiat dilectissimi Filii tui Domini nostri Jesu Christi”) have disappeared.

Third, added elements have been discarded. Usually these are medieval or later accretions added after the Roman Rite achieved its classical form in the fifth-sixth century. For example, both the Prayers at the Foot of the Altar and the Last Gospel have been removed from the Introductory Rites and Concluding Rites of the revised Order of Mass.

Fourth, lost elements have been restored. Usually these are aspects of the classical fifth-sixth century Roman Rite that had not survived the vicissitudes of medieval liturgical history. For example, the Kiss of Peace reappears as part of the communion rite, the General Intercessions (though not in their characteristically Roman format) once again mark every eucharist, and multi-verse Responsorial Psalms replace the single- or few-versed Graduals and Tracts.

While many applaud aspects of this restructuring of Roman Rite worship, other voices have questioned some of its applications. One frequently hears complaints that the “transcendence,” the “mystery,” of pre-Vatican II Roman Rite worship has disappeared. While one could argue that much of what was identified as mystery might have been mystification, I observe that the restructuring of Roman Rite worship according to rationalist principles may conflict with aspects of human ritual activity identified through the help of the social sciences. This is easily exemplified by comparing the ritual behavior during the praying of the Roman Canon at a missa cantata (with its multiple modes of ritual engagement: celebrant praying Latin texts _sub voce_ while...
the choir sang the “Sanctus” and members of the congregation variously followed in their hand missals, read devotional books, prayed the rosary, or simply gave themselves up to silent prayer) with the ritual behavior during the praying of a contemporary Eucharistic Prayer (with its single linear mode of ritual engagement: all expected to follow in lock-step the unfolding of the proclaimed and chanted ritual texts).

What developments will occur in eucharistic celebration in the near future? At the highest official level, an editio typica tertia (“third official edition”) of the post-Vatican II Roman Missal is in development by the Congregation for Divine Worship. Some have suggested that rather than providing a fundamental Order of Mass which is then modified, simplified, or amplified depending on the feast being celebrated, the character of the worshiping assembly, and the number and quality of ministries available, different Orders of Mass for small-group weekday celebration and large-group Lord’s Day celebration be developed. Questions of inter-communion and eucharistic hospitality are intensely debated, especially in “mixed religion” households. Perhaps most pressing is the impact of Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest on the eucharistic character of Roman Catholic Church life: how will the Mass remain central in people’s liturgical and devotional life when communion services become the most frequent form of celebration in communities without the weekly presence of priests or bishops?

Christian Initiation

In addition to the revision of the Order of Mass, Sacrosanctum Concilium mandated a revision of the structures of Christian Initiation. Articles 64-65 decreed the revision of adult initiation into Roman Catholic Christianity, including the restoration of a multi-staged catechumenate. Articles 67-70 declared that the texts and ceremonies of infant baptism were also to be revised, emphasizing ritual authenticity. Article 71 called for the revision of the sacrament of Confirmation.

Although the editio typica of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) was promulgated by the Congregation for
Divine Worship in 1972 and appeared in an initial approved translation for the United States in 1974, a much more extensive adaptation for the dioceses of the United States was approved by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) in 1986, confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1987, and published in 1988. It presents a new community-based model for incorporating adults into the Roman Catholic communion. Rather than an earlier model of adult "instruction" (usually one-on-one with a member of the clergy) followed by a quasi-private baptism and first communion (usually with only selected family members and friends in attendance), the RCIA mandates periods of inquiry, catechumenate, purification and enlightenment, and mystagogy as the normal publicly demarcated stages leading an unbaptized adult from the initial stirrings of faith through full status as a baptized, confirmed, and eucharistized Roman Catholic Christian. Each of these stages is marked by particular rites of transition and reinforcement, although some stages (e.g., the period of purification and enlightenment with its scrutinies and presentations of Creed and Lord’s Prayer) are more ritually developed than others. So powerful has been the impact of this liturgical reform that the flourishing North American Forum on the Catechumenate was founded to educate and network those responsible for Christian Initiation in their local communities, to disseminate theoretical and practical reflection on the RCIA’s implementation, and to surface issues for further reform and renewal.

Present tensions involving the implementation of the RCIA include: 1) refusing to employ these texts and structures, although mandated by both curial and episcopal authorities, because of lack of pastoral leadership or personnel; 2) using ritual structures intended for unbaptized adults for other populations, e.g., adults baptized in other denominations, adult Catholics baptized in infancy but uncatechized (and possibly unconfirmed and/or uneucharistized), or fully initiated Catholic adults seeking reincorporation after a time without religious practice or desiring personal renewal; 3) conceptualizing the RCIA as a program for schooling rather than a sacramental process for conversion; 4) being unable to sustain the neophytes’ spiritual lives once they have been sacramentally initiated; 5) negotiating the varying
expectations and policies for adult, adolescent, child, and infant initiation.

The *editio typica* of the Rite of Baptism for Infants was promulgated by the Congregation for Divine Worship in 1969 and remains the foundation for the present vernacular version in use in the United States. In response to *Sacrosanctum Concilium*’s mandate, the present rite acknowledges the role of the local assembly in the baptized infant’s Christian nurture, so much so that communal celebrations of infant baptism during the Sunday eucharist have grown in number and quality in many communities. The rite emphasizes the role of parents prior to, during, and after the baptismal ceremony, in contrast to earlier practice where the desire to baptize the infant as soon as possible after birth often kept the mother from attending. Also unlike earlier practice, the godparents’ roles are less prominent during the rite, although their responsibility to assist parents in the Christian raising of their children remains highlighted. The rite presupposes a full complement of ministries (presider, reader[s], musician[s], acolyte[s]) in the celebration of infant baptism, although in practice many of these roles are taken by the presider. The deep structure of the rite demonstrates its stational character (a reception at the door of the church, a liturgy of the word at the ambo, the central baptismal rites at the font, and concluding prayers and blessings at the altar), although in practice its processional traits may be ignored.

Present issues concerning the baptism of infants include: 1) supporting Christian families as they nurture the faith life of their members in a culture whose values may be opposed to the gospel; 2) determining the minimum levels of faith, commitment, and practice in parents and guardians who present their infants for baptism so that the hope for Christian nurture might be reasonably justified; 3) experiencing the baptism of infants during the Lord’s Day eucharist as a community commitment to assist Christian families with prayer and example rather than as an intrusive lengthening of the Mass.

In 1971 the Congregation for Divine Worship promulgated the revised *Rite of Confirmation*, determining the future essential matter and form of the sacrament’s celebration for the Latin church:
The Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred through the anointing with chrism on the forehead, which is done by the laying on of hands, and through the words: “Accipe Signaculum Doni Spiritus Sancti” [lit., “Receive the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit”].

Although the role of the bishop as originating minister of this sacrament is emphasized, its conferral is extended to presbyters in certain defined cases. Baptized children, adolescents, and adults are considered appropriate recipients of the sacrament. Its intimate connection with the other sacraments of initiation is signified by the candidates’ reaffirmation of their baptismal vows, the preference given that the confirmation sponsors be the baptismal godparents, and by celebrating confirmation in the context of a eucharist after the Liturgy of the Word.

In pastoral practice, the celebration of Confirmation today raises many complex questions. Some have even gone so far as to suggest that it is a “sacrament in search of a purpose and a theology.” Arguments can be made that infants should be not only baptized, but confirmed and eucharistized as in Orthodox practice; that those baptized in infancy should be confirmed and eucharistized in a single ceremony at the “age of reason”; that those baptized in infancy should receive eucharist for the first time when they can distinguish the sacramental elements from other foodstuffs, but that they should be confirmed in late adolescence or early adulthood when they can make a personal reaffirmation of their baptismal commitment; that adults should be baptized, confirmed and eucharistized in a single ceremony (as emphasized in the RCIA). In spite of the consistent teaching of the general introductions (praenotanda) of each of these rites, the 1982 Code of Canon Law, and the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church that the proper order of the initiation sacraments is Baptism/Confirmation/Eucharist, much United States practice still demands not only catechesis concerning but the reception of the sacrament of penance prior to “first communion” or Confirmation, raising the difficult issue of reconciling back into the Church those who have not yet been fully initiated in it.
It is likely that various patterns of Christian Initiation will continue to develop in the near future. Citizenship in the United States may be conferred on infants by the place in which they are born or the citizen status of their parent(s) at the time of their birth, or on adults in a naturalization ceremony after a lengthy process of civic education; there is not much debate about the appropriateness of both systems, although there is great concern about the development of civic virtue in all citizens. Similarly, different patterns of Christian Initiation provide "citizenship" in the Church while emphasizing different aspects of divine election; future debates may not be so much on the initiatory texts and ceremonies as on the effectiveness of any initiation structure in inviting, confirming, and strengthening Christian conversion and growth in holiness.

Sacraments of Healing

Sacrosanctum Concilium mandated a revision of the sacraments of healing in articles 72-75. Although the revision of the texts and ceremonies associated with the sacrament of penance is described in quite generic terms (e.g., that "they more clearly express both the nature and effect of the sacrament"), the revision of the texts and ceremonies associated with the anointing of the sick is much more extensive.

In 1973 the Congregation for Divine Worship promulgated a revised Rite of Penance, and its official English translation and adaptation for the dioceses of the United States appeared soon after. This document provided three fundamental forms for the celebration of the sacrament: 1) reconciliation of an individual penitent with an individual confessor; 2) reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution; and 3) reconciliation of several penitents with general confession and absolution. No matter what form of the liturgy of reconciliation is employed, four elements are given ritual form: 1) contrition ("heartfelt sorrow for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more") on the part of the penitent; 2) confession of sins (whether individually in number and kind to the confessor or in a group silently to the Lord); 3) satisfaction (a "penance" that
attempts to repair the damage done by sin and/or provide amendment of life); and 4) absolution (the sacramental declaration that the penitent’s sins are forgiven, effecting reconciliation both with God and the Church).

A surprising result in the United States of the implementation of the post-Vatican II Rite of Penance has been its wholesale abandonment by many and its very infrequent celebration by others. Some commentators have traced this change in practice to a loss of the sense of sin among the faithful, to neglect or laziness on the part of confessors, to unconvincing texts and ceremonies in its ritual celebration. Others point out that the frequency of private confession on the eve of the Council represents an historically aberrant phase in the celebration of this sacrament and observe that much of what was sought in frequent confession is now dealt with in other venues both sacred and secular (therapy, counseling, spiritual direction). It should also be noted that, while Form III reconciliation remains on the books, its use has been increasingly restricted by hierarchical intervention over the last decade.

Two primary issues affect the future celebration of the sacrament of Penance. The first involves catechesis on the nature of human sin and divine forgiveness. Sin is more than rule-breaking or guilt-producing behavior; it is a profound mystery in which human freedom confronts complicity with evil. Similarly, forgiveness is more than forensic acquittal or psychological reassurance; it is a gracious act by which God through Christ in the Holy Spirit restores human beings to communion of life. The second explores the communal dimensions of human sinfulness and reconciliation. Taking their cue from the catechumenal structures of the RCIA, some theorists are suggesting the restoration of an “order of penitents” whose reconversion to the way of Christ would be publicly celebrated and supported by the prayer and witness of the faithful in a series of stages leading to full sacramental reconciliation.

The Congregation for Divine Worship promulgated the editio typica of the revised Rite of Anointing of the Sick in 1972, including Pope Paul VI’s apostolic constitution determining the essential matter and form of this sacrament’s celebration in the Latin Church:
The sacrament of anointing of the sick is administered to those who are dangerously ill by anointing them on the forehead and hands with blessed olive oil or, according to the circumstances, with another plant oil and saying once only these words: “Per istam Sanctam Unctionem et suam piissiīmam misericordiam adiuvet te Dominus gratia Spiritus Sancti, ut a peccatis liberatum te salvet atque propitius allevet” [lit., “Through this holy anointing and his most faithful mercy may the Lord help you by the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he might save you, freed from sins, and kindly relieve you”].

The change in title for the sacrament reveals its revised focus: from “Extreme Unction” (a “final anointing,” preparing a dying person to enter union with God by anointing each of the senses while praying that whatever sins had been committed through that sense would be forgiven) to “Anointing of the Sick” (an honorific massage intended to designate the sufferer as a participant in the paschal mystery and to petition God for the restoration of physical health). It is also significant that the rite appears in the context of an entire panoply of texts and ceremonies: for prayer with the sick, including visitation and communion, viaticum, and rites of commendation of the dying. The Catechism of the Catholic Church notes a parallel between the order of the three sacraments of initiation (Baptism for forgiveness of sins/Confirmation/anointing/Eucharist) with the order of three sacraments at the end of physical life (Penance for forgiveness of sins/Anointing of the Sick/Eucharist as viaticum).

Issues in the present and future celebration of the sacrament include: 1) determining whether those suffering mental/emotional illness or psychological addictions are suitable subjects for the sacrament in addition to those who are seriously physically ill; 2) considering whether presidency of this sacrament should continue to be reserved to bishops and presbyters or should be opened to “extraordinary” ministers such as deacons or laity who may serve as chaplains to the sick; 3) expanding the celebration of this
sacrament in communal contexts, possibly including the Lord’s Day Eucharist.

Sacraments of Service to Communion

These “sacraments of Christian vocation” were among the earliest editiones typicae produced after Vatican II: the Congregation of Rites promulgated the Rite of Ordination of a Deacon, a Presbyter, and a Bishop in 1968 and the Rite of Marriage in 1969. Officially approved English translations and adaptations of these documents are presently in use in the dioceses of the United States, but the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has promulgated “second editions” of both: the Rite of Ordination of a Bishop, of Presbyters, and of Deacons in 1989 and the Rite of Marriage in 1990. The NCCB will consider proposed official English translations and adaptations of these documents for use in the dioceses of the United States before the turn of the century; after the NCCB’s approval and confirmation by the appropriate Roman officials, they will begin to be used in the United States.

Perhaps the most far-reaching consequence of the 1968 ordination rites is the replacement of the system of major (presbyter, deacon, subdeacon) and minor (acolyte, exorcist, lector, porter) orders begun by admission to the clerical state (tonsure) with a system of ordinations (bishop, presbyter, deacon) whose candidates first go through a ceremony of “admission to candidacy” and instituted ministries (acolyte, lector) whose recipients are laity. Structurally, ordinations now take place during the celebration of the eucharist after the Liturgy of the Word, whose pool of scriptural selections has been greatly expanded. The formal ordination rites are identical in structure: 1) initial rites consisting of the presentation and election of the candidates, the bishop’s homily/instruction addressed to worshiping assembly and candidates respectively, and a formal examination; 2) consecratory rites consisting of the laying on of hands followed by the formal ordination prayer, that for a bishop adapted from the prayer appearing in the Apostolic Tradition and those for presbyters and deacons modified from prayers appearing in the ancient Roman
sacramentaries; 3) explanatory rites consisting of vesting, the presentation of symbols of office, and a kiss of peace. Major changes in the 1990 rites involve the promises made by diaconal and presbyteral candidates and the texts of their consecratory ordination prayers.

Issues raised in the present celebration of these rites include: 1) the ritual role of the faithful in electing, confirming, and supporting the candidates, since the rites may give the impression that they are joining a particular clerical caste rather than being set apart for ministry in the Church; 2) giving ritual expression to the roles of spouses and children for married candidates for the diaconate; 3) clarifying the relationship between “instituted” and “non-instituted” ministries, since the vast majority of those functioning as acolytes and lectors in the United States are not formally installed in their ministries; 4) considering whether liturgical musicians should be formally installed into the ministry of cantor.

Questions for the future celebration of this sacrament actually take us beyond ritual considerations to the polity of the Roman Catholic Church in reference to its ministerial leadership. Intense discussions on each of the following topics presently abound, with little indication that they will cease in the near future: 1) about the propriety of calling married men not only to the diaconate, but to the presbyterate and episcopate; 2) about dropping the pledge that married deacons will remain celibate if their spouses should die; 3) about calling women as candidates for ordination to any of the three “degrees” of the sacrament; 4) about the “re-activation” of ordained ministers who have ceased to function ministerially after marrying; 5) about how ministers of other denominations are to be welcomed and established as Catholic clergy; and 6) about how ordained and lay leadership work together for the good of the church and the world.

The 1969 Rite of Marriage provides three fundamental forms for this sacrament’s celebration: 1) during Mass for baptized Christians; 2) outside of Mass for baptized Christians; and 3) a special form for the union of a baptized Catholic and an unbaptized person. The 1990 rite adds a fourth fundamental form when the marriage of baptized Christians is witnessed by a layperson rather than a bishop, presbyter, or deacon. The 1969 rite provided a pool
of thirty-five possible scripture readings to be proclaimed during the matrimonial Liturgy of the Word; the 1990 rite adds five more pericopes and indicates that at least one must speak explicitly of marriage. Both rites position most of the matrimonial ceremonies (formal questions, exchange of consent, blessing, and exchange of rings) after the Liturgy of the Word, but the 1990 rite includes texts and songs by which the worshiping assembly signifies its consent and support of the matrimonial covenant. Both rites continue to position the Nuptial Blessing after the Lord's Prayer when marriages are celebrated during Mass.

Issues in the present celebration of matrimony include: 1) determining criteria for negotiating secular and ecclesial expectations in a single celebration; 2) clarifying the roles of bride and groom as "minister/recipient" of the sacrament; the assembly as matrix; parents, godparents, best man, maid/matron of honor, and attendants as formal/legal witnesses; and presider as prayer-leader and official ecclesial/legal witness; 3) developing texts and ceremonies faithful to a Catholic understanding of the sacramentality of marriage as well as cultural expectations for the equality and complementarity of the spouses.

Since the Roman Catholic understanding of the purpose and permanence of the matrimonial covenant is in many ways antithetical to United States' cultural presuppositions about marriage, many commentators have suggested that the journey from engagement to anniversary celebrations be structured after the model of the catechumenal journey of the RCIA. Such initiatives will place high premium on involving married parishioners from the worshiping community as "sponsor-couples," presenting the engaged to the assembly at occasional Lord's Day eucharists for prayer support, developing opportunities for the recently married to reflect on how their sacramental commitment influences their adjustment to married life, and providing material and emotional support in times of stress.

**Liturgal Music, Art, and Architecture**

*Sacrosanctum Concilium* devoted two entire chapters to a consideration of the arts in service to the liturgy: chapter six on sacred
music and chapter seven on sacred visual art and environment. At the risk of oversimplification, the mandate of the Second Vatican Council can be summed up in two phrases: *preserve the heritage* and *develop further expressions*. For example, we read in reference to sacred music:

The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care. Choirs must be diligently developed, especially in cathedral churches [114]. . . . The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as distinctive of the Roman liturgy; therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services [116]. . . . The people’s own religious songs are to be encouraged with care so that in sacred devotions as well as during the services of the liturgy itself . . . the faithful may raise their voices in song [118]. . . . In the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument that adds a wonderful splendor to the Church’s ceremonies and powerfully lifts up the spirit to God and to higher things [120].

In other words, preserve the heritage. But we also read:

Bishops and pastors of souls must be at pains to ensure that . . . the whole assembly of the faithful is enabled . . . to contribute the active participation that rightly belongs to it [114]. . . . Other kinds of sacred music [in addition to Gregorian chant] . . . are by no means excluded from liturgical celebrations, provided they accord with the spirit of the liturgical service [116]. . . . Other instruments [in addition to the pipe organ] may be admitted for use in divine worship [120]. . . . Composers, filled with the Christian spirit, should feel that their vocation is to develop sacred music and to increase its store of treasures.
In other words, develop further expressions. (Similar exhortations appear in chapter seven applied to the visual arts and architecture.)

Over the past thirty years, the preservation and development of liturgical arts has proven both difficult and controversial. I will limit my remarks to the area of liturgical music where I have the most expertise, but I believe that parallel instances could be adduced for the visual arts and architecture as well.

First, in spite of the Council's exhortation, Gregorian chant and Roman school polyphony have almost completely disappeared from Catholic parochial worship. This may be due to a belief that a vernacular liturgy had no room for traditional chants or that "full, conscious and active" sung participation by the assembly was impossible using the chant. (Admittedly, the melismatic Graduals and Offertories are certainly and the neumatic Introits and Communions are probably beyond the capabilities of most musically untrained worshipers, but some of the Ordinary chants [e.g., the "Orbis Factor" Kyrie, Credo III, or the Agnus Dei from the Requiem] could be sung by the average assembly.)

Second, the new emphasis placed on assembly singing and the new prominence given to the cantor as animator of the assembly's song has led to the decline of the contribution choirs and instrumentalists make in Catholic worship. It is difficult to find a liturgical music program that balances the durable simplicity appropriate for assembly-based liturgical music with the sophistication appealing to musical artists.

Third, with the abandonment of the Graduale Romanum, Kyriale and/or the Liber Usualis as the norm for Roman Rite sung worship, establishing a common Catholic sung repertoire has been daunting. While some remnants of the chant tradition still appear (usually psalm-tones set to "pointed" English texts or vernacular lyrics set to the simpler hymn melodies), much of the English-language music sung in today's Roman Rite celebrations is imported from other worship traditions: Orthodox chants, Anglican anthems, Lutheran, Methodist, and Baptist hymns, charismatic praise choruses, even camp meeting songs. Some communities also sing compositions taken from secular sources: Broadway musicals, pop recordings, folk traditions. Compositions produced by Roman Catholics for the liturgy may actually be more appropriate for
witness, testimony, meditation, catechetics, consciousness-raising, or entertainment than for the liturgy. Determining commonly agreed upon criteria for choosing Roman Rite worship music is quite controverted at the present.

Fourth, for many worshipers music functions as a decorative addition to the texts of the liturgy rather than serves as the acoustic means by which the liturgical event transpires: music is optional "frosting" on the hard "cake" of liturgy rather than one of the very means by which the liturgy occurs. This is especially obvious when one examines the expressed motives for choosing particular pieces: nostalgia, therapy, consciousness-raising, instruction, or entertainment.

Fifth, when the deep structures of Roman Rite worship are misunderstood, or when liturgical directives are treated as prescriptions; the evocative, artistic dimensions of our worship may be compromised. This is most easily observed when the congregational interventions in the Eucharistic Prayer are provided with musical settings that have no thematic or stylistic relationship to each other; one then experiences a series of musically filled slots in the ritual rather than an artistically shaped ritual unit.

Conclusion

Having considered nine aspects of the liturgical revisions mandated, sketched how liturgical reform appears in the United States some three decades after Sacrosanctum Concilium was promulgated, and offered some thoughts about the future ecclesial and social renewal promised by these revisions and reforms, I conclude with a quotation from an address given by Pope Paul VI in 1977. As the authority under whom so many of the revised liturgical books and initial reforms appeared, his insights bear special weight as the Church continues on the path of renewal initiated by the Second Vatican Council:

From the day that Vatican Council II issued its Constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium, great advances have been made that are in line with the state of things prepared by the liturgical
movement of the late 19th century and that fulfill those dearly held objectives for which so many churchmen and scholars had worked and prayed. The new Order of Mass . . . has yielded special fruit: namely, a wider participation in the liturgy, a deeper, more reflective understanding of the sacred rites, a greater and fuller knowledge of the inexhaustible treasures of Scripture, and increased sense of the Church as community.

The passage of these last years has shown that we are on the right path. . . . Now is the time once and for all to cast out the decaying leaven of harmful extremes and to put liturgical reform we have approved, following the will of the Council, into effect integrally, i.e., by respecting the balanced judgments or criteria that inspired it. (from International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Documents on the Liturgy 1963-1979: Conciliar, Papal, and Curial Texts [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1982], #65, pp. 191-92)
For most Roman Catholics it is as difficult to recall when bishops forbade Catholics to go to National Conference of Christians and Jews' banquets or "mixed marriages" had to occur in the sacristy as it is for them to remember the Latin Mass, so normal have become some aspects of ecumenical life. For the full spectrum of Catholics, tolerance of themselves by others and of fellow Christians by Catholics is taken for granted. However, the ecumenical commitments of the Catholic Church go much deeper, seeking Christ's will for the full, visible unity of the Church.

Catholics are only gradually learning to live with the commitments made in Vatican II's *Unitatis Redintegratio* to recognize the real, if imperfect, communion among Christians; to respond to the call to conversion to zeal for unity in every element of Catholic life recalled by Pope John Paul's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995); and to bring ecumenical formation to all aspects of developing Catholic identity and spirituality outlined in the 1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*.¹

In this brief essay we will review the dramatic change that occurred at the moment of the Council and the content of the appropriate decrees, the developments of the last thirty years in the Roman Catholic Church and its relationship with other churches, and the challenges before the Catholic Church and its ecumenical partners on the threshold of the third millennium.
The Council Era and Content

The modern ecumenical movement had its roots, initially, in the unitive impulses coming from the churches of the Reformation. In 1886 the Episcopal Church proposed four points, which in 1888 were adopted by the Anglican Lambeth Conference as an ecumenical platform on which to reach out to other Christian churches, now known as the Chicago-Lambeth Quadraleteral. Philip Schaff, Reformed theologian in the United States, founded the American Society for Church History in 1888, among other things to promote unity among the Christian churches.

In 1910 a World Mission Conference convened in Edinburgh. Subsequently, plans were made for the movement toward visible unity, which was to become Faith and Order, and for collaboration in social witness, which was to become Life and Work. In 1919 a delegation visited the Holy See and had an audience with Pope Benedict XV, but the Catholic Church declined to be involved in the discussions. An encyclical was issued in 1928, Mortalium Animos, praying for the success of relations among Anglicans, Protestants, and Orthodox, but forbidding Catholic participation in the ecumenical movement. Theologically, the Roman Catholic Church stood as the one true Church to which Orthodox and Reformation Christians were to return.²

The context that made change possible in 1959, when John XXIII called the Vatican Council and established the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, included the liturgical, biblical, and patristic renewal of the early twentieth century which began to lay a common basis in scholarship, including a historical consciousness. Theologically, a renewed understanding of an ecclesiology of communion, koinonia, which balanced the institutional, ahistorical, and centralizing tendencies inherited from the anti-modernist and nineteenth century developments, began to enrich Catholic thinking with a sense of history, the sacramentality of the Church, and the richness of the faith and life of non-Catholic Christians.³ Likewise, the experiences of forced collaboration in Europe during the second World War, the positive experience of many Catholics in ecumenical gatherings, the affirmation of pluralism and religious liberty in some sectors...
of Catholicism, and the seriousness of the theology emerging within the ecumenical movement created a new climate when the Council Fathers gathered in Rome. The Decree on the Liturgy and that on Divine Revelation show considerable ecumenical sensitivity and created a common ground in worship, theology, and bible study that enable the churches to better recognize in one another a common sacramental and biblical tradition from which unity can be built. Of particular importance were the shifts in the understanding of the nature of the Church enunciated in Lumen Gentium, the ecumenical implications of which are spelled out in the Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio. While Americans take for granted the understanding and content of the Decree on Religious Liberty, Dignitatis Humane, at the Council it was a major debate and triumph for the U.S. bishops. Its reception has made an important contribution, not only to the Roman Catholic ability to relate credibly with Orthodox and Protestant Christians, but also to the other churches’ willingness to receive the Catholic Church as an honest partner.

The founding of the Secretariat (now called Pontifical Council) for Promoting Christian Unity and the work of the Secretariat on the decrees on divine revelation, religious liberty, non-Christian religions, and eastern churches are as important, in many ways, as the text of the Decree on Ecumenism itself. The non-Catholic observers and the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury to Pope John ushered in an era of direct contact, which produced the sensitivity of all the texts of the Council, but especially of the Decree on Ecumenism itself.

This Decree moved the Catholic ecumenical position from one of self-identification with the “one true church” to an affirmation that the “one true church subsists in the Catholic Church.” It also moves from an admission that there were vestiges of the true church beyond the borders of the Catholic Church to recognition that it is through these churches and ecclesial communities that Christ’s grace is present. Judgments are not made about the sacraments or orders of the churches of the Reformation, but it is noted that “because of a lack of the sacraments of orders they have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the eucharistic
mystery,” although “when they commemorate the Lord’s death and resurrection in the holy supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and they await his coming in glory.” The churchly reality of the Eastern Orthodox churches is duly noted, and the Anglican communion among the Western churches is singled out as having a special relationship.

The Decree bases Catholic ecumenism on an ecclesiology that affirms a common baptism, an impulse in the Catholic understanding of the Church toward full visible unity, and the elements of the true church among other churches and ecclesial communities. The Catholic Church lives in real, if imperfect, communion with all who call themselves Christian and moves to perfect that communion through dialogue, renewal of Catholic life and practice, collaboration, and above all conversion and prayer.

On the basis of this ecclesiology, the Decree sketches the Catholic principles of ecumenism, the practice of ecumenism mandated for the “whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talent of each.” In the section on practice, it sketches out the importance of common prayer and spirituality, the principles of sacramental sharing, and the role and norms for ecumenical dialogue. The text ends with extended treatments of Catholic approaches to the Eastern churches and to the ecclesial communities of the West.

One of the major goals of the Council was to restore the unity among the divided churches. The unfortunate failures of earlier councils, at Lyons (1274) and Florence (1439), have taught the Church to approach this delicate task with care and seriousness, patience, and persistence. There were those in the press who mistakenly took Vatican II as a council of reunion, which it was not. Other optimistic voices expected union to come in two or three decades of ecumenical work. The Decree itself is much more serious and nuanced and understands the pastoral imperative that, on the one hand, impels zeal, prayer, and participation in ecumenical life before full reconciliation is possible. On the other hand, it lays down the principles for the long-term, Spirit-filled journey through the theological, institutional, pastoral, cultural, and collaborative challenges necessary for full communion to be achieved.
Developments Since the Council

The progress of the modern ecumenical movement since the Council and the participation of the Roman Catholic Church in it have taken place on several levels. On the pastoral level changes have moved quite rapidly, especially where Catholics live side by side with other Christians. On the theological level, the dialogues have deepened our mutual understanding and prospects for full communion and yet unearthed new obstacles as we come closer to one another. On the institutional level there has been a steady engagement of the leadership and structures of the Church in Catholic ecumenical life. All of these levels of progress in the reception of the ecumenical movement provide us with new challenges that point the way toward a rich ecumenical future, as we stand on the threshold of the Jubilee Year, 2000.

On the pastoral level, the implementation of the Decree on Religious Liberty was particularly challenging in southern Europe and Latin America. It took the Spanish Episcopal Conference until 1973 to stand fully behind the conciliar understanding of religious liberty and until 1980 to develop a concordat that set it free from state entanglements. There are no longer any European countries in which the Roman Catholic is established, although there are Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox countries with state churches. While there are still states in Latin America where Catholicism is established, religious liberty has been written into all of the constitutions. Protestants who experienced the Church before and after 1968, when the council was adapted for Latin America in the Medellin Conference, will witness to the dramatic shift in interchurch relationships there.

For many, the shift in the Catholic stance on interchurch marriages was most dramatic, where Catholic Church weddings, dispensation from the Catholic form to allow Protestant and Orthodox weddings, and the oral promises all gave a more pastoral tone to the preparation of interchurch couples. The Week of Prayer intensified in the early years after the council and continues as a consistent and essential part of Catholic ecumenical commitment in communities and parishes across the globe. Common sharing of spiritual resources through spiritual
reading, the publishing jointly of spiritual classics and journals, and ecumenical spirituality and retreat centers has provided many Christians with ecumenical spiritual nourishment.

The situation in Eastern Europe, where many bishops were absent from the Council, where the tensions with local Orthodox or Protestant churches sometimes obscures the ecumenical possibilities, and where there have been years of persecution and defensiveness, makes the pastoral dimension of ecumenism quite difficult. The new Latin American experience with pluralism and the emergence of aggressive non-Catholic groups make defensiveness against the “sects” take a pastoral priority over ecumenical openness in many sectors.

Sacramental sharing has become a place of particular pastoral concern, and even confusion. Knowing how Protestants evaluated the Catholic Mass has made it particularly dramatic how many of them have revised their understanding of the Eucharist and Catholic practice. With the Catholic renewal some Protestants are even willing to receive communion in the Catholic Church. It was only gradually after the Council, in 1972 and 1973, that the Catholic Church was able to clarify its own guidelines for sacramental hospitality.

The different judgments of bishops and of the Catholic ministers who implement these and subsequent guidelines witness to the rich diversity within the parameters of Catholic sacramental practice and the challenge of ecumenical formation, not only of our ministers and communicants, but also of our ecumenical partners. It would have been hard to imagine, given what Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, and Wesley said about Catholic sacramental understanding and practice, that their heirs would be willing to share at the Catholic eucharistic table. Indeed, this openness and transformation is attributable to our common liturgical renewal and theological understanding.

On the theological level, the progress has been equally dramatic. The reform of the Catholic liturgical life has been deeply rooted in the ecumenical biblical, missiological, historical, and liturgical studies of the last century. The liturgical books of Catholics, Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Lutherans have all been produced in consultation. They have been formulated
with the intent of serving fidelity to the Tradition and the unity of the Church.

In a similar way, biblical studies are thoroughly ecumenical at every level, historical studies increasingly so, and systematic theology for the ecumenical churches is no longer written in isolation. On the international level, formal dialogues with the goal of full communion were initiated after the Council with the Lutheran World Federation, the Anglican Communion, the World Methodist Council, the Disciples World Conference, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. The texts of these dialogues have produced a substantial basis of common faith serving the goal of unity in doctrine, sacrament, and Church life. Later dialogues were able to be developed with the Baptist World Alliance, Pentecostals, and a group of Evangelicals, oriented toward mutual understanding, not toward full visible unity.

The Orthodox dialogues were more challenging. With the Eastern Byzantine Orthodox, there was only a gradual and partial response to the Catholic invitation to the Council itself. A decade and a half of the Dialogue of Love was necessary before a theological dialogue could begin. In the United States, a dialogue was able to begin immediately after the Council and eventually collaborate quite closely with the international theological dialogue that began in 1980.

The dialogue with the Oriental, non-Chalcedonian, Orthodox churches was more complex. The Armenians, Copts, Ethiopians, and Syrians, though in full communion, do not have instrumentalities of decision-making or dialogue together. Therefore, these relationships have been dealt with individually as bilaterals by the Pontifical Council. In the United States, there is a dialogue in which all of the churches, together, are able to be in conversation with the Catholic Church. The Pro Oreinte Foundation in Vienna has provided an unofficial forum where dialogues with these churches and the Catholic Church have been most productive. In 1994 a Common Declaration with the Assyrian Church of the East concluded differences lingering from the Council of Ephesus (430).

The Roman Catholic Church has been a member of Faith and Order in the World Council of Churches since 1968. The
theological dialogues have been particularly productive in this multilateral context, with the 1982 *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* being the most widely read ecumenical text in the history of the modern ecumenical movement. Faith and Order in the United States has also been a place where the Catholic Church has made a major contribution to the theological dialogue, in a multilateral context.

The United States has been particularly fruitful in theological bilateral dialogue as well. Catholic have been in dialogue toward full communion with United Methodists; the Episcopal Church; the Lutherans — originally with the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, and other Lutherans, but now only with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Reformed, including Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, and Reformed Church in America; the Polish National Catholic Church; the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches. There is also a conversation for mutual understanding with the Southern Baptist Convention. Pentecostal, Holiness, Anabaptist, and Evangelical conversations are carried on through Faith and Order. While not a member of the nine churches moving toward full communion in the Consultation on Church Union, the Catholic Church has participated fully in the formulation of the theological, liturgical-sacramental, and canonical proposals before these churches for action during these years.

On the institutional level, the Catholic Church has moved with a measured pace to adapt its internal and institutional life to its commitment to the modern ecumenical movement and the quest for full communion. The biblical, liturgical, catechetical, evangelical, and social dimensions of Catholic reform have themselves been important preludes to and bases for deepening the bonds of communion and mutual understanding with other churches.

Episcopal Conferences around the world have become members of national or international regional councils of churches in over forty situations. In the United States, over half the dioceses are members of their state council of churches. Parishes and pastoral agents are members of innumerable local ecumenical agencies, ministerial associations or neighborhood ministries. Most Catholic
schools have a wider Christian constituency than the Catholic community, and many have adapted their curriculum, campus ministry, and spiritual formation programs to promote the unity of the Church. The Catholic Church, while not a member of the World Council or the U.S. National Council, is so involved in the programs of these two councils on a variety of levels that it may be a more important ecumenical partner than some of the churches who are formally members.\textsuperscript{20}

Since the Council, the Catholic Church has set up ecumenical commissions in all of the episcopal conferences of the world and encouraged each of its dioceses to do so. A series of texts was published after the Council, giving stimulus, encouragement, and guidance to the Catholic community worldwide.\textsuperscript{21} However, the variety of cultures in which the Church finds itself inculturated, the difference of the ecumenical contexts, and the different priorities of ecumenical partners mean that the Catholic ecumenical experience is quite varied, and the progress has been quite different across the globe.

With the 1983 and 1991 \textit{Codes of Canon Law for Western and Eastern Churches} and the 1993 \textit{Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism}, there has been a certain codification of the ecumenical movement in the Catholic Church to date. When one looks at the detail and care with which the formulations from previous directives are gathered together and refined in the \textit{Directory}, one can see how far the Church has come in its institutional vision of ecumenism. It includes a theological section and detailed directives on ecumenical formation, and it carefully encourages structures for ecumenical engagement, provides guidelines for dialogue and collaboration, and is careful to touch every dimension of Catholic life. Again, the receptivity of the ecumenical movement on different levels and in different contexts is quite varied.

After fifteen years of theological dialogue and ecumenical participation of parishes and dioceses, the 1980s began to bring the Catholic Church into a new stage of ecumenical life, beyond collaboration and coming to know our Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant ecumenical partners to a moment of decision. Texts began to emerge for formal evaluation and reception. The
theological term “reception” has now come into the ecclesiological vocabulary as a key to this stage of ecumenical engagement.\textsuperscript{22} Even Pope John Paul admonishes that “a new task lies before us: that of receiving the results already achieved” which “must involve the whole people of God.”\textsuperscript{23}

As noted above, the Vatican response to the World Council Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry was an important first step. The second occasion for such a Vatican response was the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission Final Report.\textsuperscript{24} While this response was judged more critically by Catholic and Anglican ecumenists, it was finally productive in generating a positive Vatican reply that “no further work is necessary at this time” on Eucharist and ministry. In both these official Roman Catholic response processes, episcopal conferences around the world were invited to contribute their evaluations. In some places, like the United States, every diocese and many academic institutions and learned societies participated as well. The Roman Catholic Church is too early into the modern ecumenical movement to have perfected its response process. However, these two early examples have shown the way for improvement in the future.

In the ecumenical movement as a whole, many churches are moving from the first stage of getting to know one another and establishing agencies for collaboration and mutual sharing to the stage of serious dialogue with the goal of full communion before them. In the United States, for example, the nine churches of the Consultation on Church Union are acting on covenanting proposals that will bring them into full communion. They have set the first Sunday in Advent of the year 2000 for the celebration of the rites of mutual recognition and reconciliation. There are proposals before the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Episcopal Church on the one hand, and three Reformed churches: United Church of Christ, Presbyterian, and Reformed Church in America, on the other, to establish full communion on the basis of theological and sacramental agreements to be acted upon in 1997.

In this move from dialogue to evaluation and to action for unity, the Roman Catholic Church has progressed particularly well with the Syrian (Oriental) Orthodox Church of Antioch on
the one hand, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church on the other. With the Syrian Church, there is a Common Declaration between Pope John Paul and Patriarch Ignatius that not only resolves the Christological differences of Chalcedon (451) but that, also opens mutual sacramental hospitality. Similar agreements with the Syrian Churches of India and the Catholic Church encourage eucharistic sharing, especially in the context of marriage.

With the Lutherans, a Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith is proposed for 1997, the 450th anniversary of the Decrees on Justification of the Council of Trent, which would place these two churches in a binding agreement in faith on this issue, which was the divisive core of the Reformation.25 Such a joint statement would have the effect of declaring that the condemnations on the doctrine of justification included in the Book of Concord and the Council of Trent would no longer apply to the churches making the Declaration. This move from relationship to dialogue and from dialogue to decision marks the maturing of the institutional reception of the ecumenical commitment of the churches.

In addition to the work of the Pontifical Council and the various dialogues and councils of churches, the Pope himself has made some major contributions to the ecumenical life. Since the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, there have been three major papal documents published in addition to the Directory. In implementing the Catechism, these developments and the Holy Father’s emphasis on bringing the results of the ecumenical dialogues into Catholic educational life and spirituality are key.

The two Apostolic Letters, Orientale Lumen and Tertio Millennio Adveniente, are important for integrating progress with the Eastern Churches, Catholic and Orthodox, and taking up the ecumenical preparation for the Jubilee 2000.26 Finally, in the encyclical Ut Unum Sint, Pope John Paul celebrates the progress made ecumenically and exhorts the bishops and people to be reconverted to the ecumenical cause. He also recounts his own personal ecumenical commitments, especially demonstrated through the ecumenical encounters in his travels and his face to face meetings with the leaders of other churches. His offer to reform the papacy, in the context of ecumenical advice, in order to
make it a better servant of the unity of the churches is a welcome sign of the institutional changes for which we can hope as well as a celebration of the stage of development already achieved.

The pastoral, theological, and institutional progress of the Roman Catholic Church in its ecumenical commitments over the last thirty years is truly astounding. However, the progress is not uniform, and as the Holy Father’s encyclical points out again, the spirituality of dialogue is at the very center of Catholic life. Furthermore, new obstacles — such as the ordination of women, different views on sexuality and ethics, or unprecedented uses of the charism of infallibility — continue to keep the path complex, no matter how deep the commitments. On the other hand, the new signs of hope far outweigh the obstacles and enable us to recognize the hand of the Holy Spirit driving this dimension of the Church’s mission.

**Future Agenda**

A rich agenda is laid out in the encyclical itself, including the reception of ecumenical progress into the life of the Church, a spirituality of dialogue that permeates every dimension of Catholic life, progress toward the unity of the Church as integral to the New Evangelization, and the reform of leadership structures like the papacy so that they may better serve the unity of Christians. In this section I would like to lift up some very specific prospects for the United States ecumenical initiative, in continuity with but moving beyond the thirty years of progress since the Council.³⁷

**Reception**

There needs to be specific attention to the preaching of the content of the ecumenical results achieved so far. This would include a careful evaluation of seminary and lay ministry curricula to see that they adequately convey the ecumenical content and developments as well as the conversion and motivation for unity. It would also include evaluation of all catechetical programs to see that they meet the level of ecumenical commitment central to Catholic identity. Sacramental preparation, congregational nurture,
and formation of religious all have their ecumenical components. The formation and selection of bishops, administrators, and boards and every other area of Church leadership need to be held accountable to the ecumenical commitments of the Catholic Church.

Inter-American Collaboration

As we prepare for the Roman Synod for America and as the U.S. Catholic Church becomes more sensitive to its Latino membership, dialogue between the Latin American and North American ecumenical leadership will be necessary to come to a common understanding and a shared ecumenical strategy. The different histories, relative to pluralism, church and state, economics and politics, and evangelization, mean that a great deal of mutual Catholic understanding will be necessary as the quest for Christian unity moves forward in the hemisphere. This conversation has only just begun.28

Deeper Institutionalization

In many U.S. dioceses, there are formal covenants between the bishops, especially of Lutheran, Episcopal, and Catholic churches. Such irreversible institutional commitments can serve the long process of supporting, pastorally and ecclesially, the relationship as it moves forward. The Holy Father has asked for ecumenical advice in the reform of the papacy and its curia. With the theological progress that has been made, the churches need to find ways of holding themselves accountable to their theology of communion. With the sacramental and ecclesiological decisions before the churches, the canon lawyers of the churches will need to make proposals for the structures of unity that hold us accountable to the decisions we have made and those before us.

New Relationships

In the last decade, relations have begun to develop with Pentecostal, Holiness, Anabaptist, and Evangelical Christians. Through the pro-life movement and in academic and local
contexts, personal contacts have broadened mutual understanding. More work needs to be done with these Christian churches as ecclesial communities of faith in order to foster deeper levels of mutual understanding and build bonds of communion as well as to decrease inter-Christian tensions, especially those in U.S. immigrant communities, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. While there are effective relationships with the African-American churches in the U.S. urban community and through the Faith and Order movement, these relationships need to find a focus in direct church-to-church contact with the Catholic Church. This is particularly important for schools and institutions where there are large numbers of African-American Protestants.

Ecclesiological Research

Catholic liturgists, canonists, and theologians have done serious work on the traditions of Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, Pentecostalism, and Lutheranism. Similar work needs to be done with the Reformed, Anabaptist, and free churches. The elements of theology that have developed in the dialogue need to find ecclesiological synthesis for Catholics and their ecumenical partners so as to spell out in more accessible detail our realistic and common hopes for a united Christian Church.

Jubilee 2000

Under the impetus of the Holy Father’s invitation and in view of the 1998 World Council Assembly, ways need to be found to appropriately prepare for and celebrate steps along the way in this graced five-year period to find ways of bringing the churches closer to Christian unity by the year 2000. This is a matter of concrete planning, educational programming, and common celebration as we move through the millennial transition.

Continued Dialogue

As the encyclical notes, the ecumenical dialogue of charity and truth is a spirituality and way of life, not only for theologians but
for all Christians. However, specific issues still keep us apart. The question of authority is particularly pressing, as what seemed to be intractable issues like Tradition, Eucharist, Episcopacy, Mary, and even Papacy have found pathways toward solution in some of the dialogues. Even ethical issues like divorce, contraception, homosexuality, euthanasia, and abortion are finding agreement, while recognizing that our different ways of decision-making and the lack of mutual organs of consultation and communication continue to inhibit our unity in these matters. As more areas of agreement are found, more precise and careful agreement on the remaining issues will need to be developed so as to provide the solid and lasting foundation for action toward unity. Evaluation and decision will need to begin even while there are further issues under discussion.

We have become irreversibly part of one another, living in the same real if yet imperfect communion. Christians committed to their churches' ecumenical hopes often share more in their spiritual and ecclesial lives than they do with those indifferent to their churches' ecumenical goal or who are still hostile to it. This is certainly true for Roman Catholics who have lived thirty years of conversion, faithful to the Council's ecumenical call. The new ecumenical problems before the Church will not be seen as obstacles to Christ's will for the unity of the Church. Rather they are challenges for which we are given the grace of the Holy Spirit to respond. The ecumenical journey is a pilgrimage full of rich blessings as we proceed in realizing the Church's irreversible commitment to the unity of all Christians.

Notes


7. It may be noted that the interpretation of this phrase was debated well into the 1980s, and was finally laid to rest with the *Directory* and Pope John Paul's *Ut Unum Sint* (see esp. 10-14), which reaffirmed the conciliar teaching. Johannes Willebrands, “*Vatican II's Ecclesiology of Communion*,” *Origins*, 17, no. 2 (May 28, 1987): 27-32; F.A. Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).


CHAPTER FOUR

Scripture in the Life of the Church

BRIGID CURTIN FREIN

The Second Vatican Council’s teaching on Scripture in general and on the place of Scripture in the life of Church in specific ranks among its most far-reaching accomplishments. *Dei Verbum* (DV), the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, addresses the Church’s understanding of how the life of faith is to be shaped by God’s revelation in Scripture.¹ Some of its teaching had immediate effects, but in other ways its influence still remains to be seen and in many ways much of what is taught in this groundbreaking document still awaits implementation thirty years after the closing of the Council. My tasks here are to: 1) outline the main themes of the Council’s teaching on Scripture in the life of the Church; 2) briefly indicate how this teaching has been implemented, received, and developed; and 3) sketch an agenda for the future.

Vatican II and Scripture in the Life of the Church

The process by which *Dei Verbum* came to be written mirrored the polarities between more traditionalist Council Fathers, who advocated a static view of faith as a “deposit” of propositions which must be defended, and more progressive segments of the Council, whose views of faith and God’s revelation were more dynamic and who sought to reinvigorate the life of faith by emphasizing how God’s word acts in history.
These polarities manifested themselves in most of the Council's proceedings and provided the creative tension which allowed the Church to renew itself without losing its roots.2

The document places Scripture within the context of divine revelation as a whole. Revelation is the way in which “God wished to manifest and communicate both himself and the eternal decrees of his will concerning the salvation of mankind” (DV 6). The Bible, then, must be understood as an aspect of the more comprehensive reality of divine revelation.3 As an aspect of revelation, Scripture is also tied to the Sacred Tradition of the Church, which comes to the Church from Christ through the preaching of the apostles and through which the Church came to recognize the canon of Scripture. The connection consists in the fact that both Tradition and Scripture convey the word of God, both originate from the same source — God — and both have the same aim — salvation of souls (9-10). Yet, as article 24 makes clear, the Scriptures are preeminent because they are the Word of God in human words, while Tradition conveys the word of God.4

Dei Verbum also discusses Scripture and Tradition in relation to the teaching office of the Church, the Magisterium. The role of the Magisterium in relation to the Word of God is variously characterized as servant, listener, protector, and transmitter: While the authority in interpreting Scripture rests with the teaching office of the Church, this authority is not above the Word of God in Scripture; it is its servant.5

One of the most disputed articles of the whole document, article 11, is also one of the most far-reaching in its implications for the way Scripture is received and interpreted in the modern Church.6 It states that “Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error, teaches that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scripture.” More than any other statement in the document, this one allows the Church to avoid the trap of fundamentalist literalism while at the same time unequivocally asserting the authority and inspiration of Scripture.

That the document describes Scripture as teaching truth and not as being truth indicates that the Church accepts that some statements found in Scripture may not be factual statements, yet they do nonetheless teach truth. Article 12 reiterates this
sentiment: “for the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in various types of historical writing, in prophetical and poetical texts.” Thus Dei Verbum teaches that while Christians must see Scripture as a source of truth, they are not bound to assert that all details of Scripture are factual. The implications of this statement for interpretation are developed later in the discussion of the Old and New Testaments (14-20). The Old Testament conveys a “lively sense of God” and “authentic divine teaching” even while it contains “matters imperfect and provisional” (15). The four Gospels tell the “honest truth about Jesus,” even though the writers selected, synthesized, and explained elements of Jesus’ teaching which had been handed on orally or in writing. This editorial activity took into consideration the needs and concerns of communities which the evangelists originally addressed (19). Thus Dei Verbum makes it possible for the Church to affirm the reliability of the Old Testament’s revelation of God even while allowing believers to see that it is imperfect in some matters. It also insists that the Gospels present us with a faithful portrait of the person, words and acts of Jesus while acknowledging the editorial activity of the evangelists and accepting that the Gospel tradition developed in three stages from the actual words of Jesus to the oral tradition of the apostles and earliest believers and finally to the written Gospels.7

The phrase “which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to sacred Scripture” specifies what sort of truth Scripture is intended to convey. It does not teach truth about everything; rather, it conveys that truth which is necessary for salvation. The careful phrasing of this article enabled the Church to recognize the historical and human conditionedness of Scripture and avoid literal interpretations of those parts of the Bible which could be taken as legitimating oppression, while still asserting its divine inspiration and inerrancy.8 The truth of Scripture, then, is inextricably linked to the salvation of humankind (see also articles 1, 10). Article 11 carefully situates the discussion of inspiration, inerrancy, and the meaning of Scripture in the context of soteriology.9

The consequences of this view of inspiration and inerrancy for the Church’s interpretation of Scripture are set forth in article 12.
If Scripture reveals the Word of God spoken through humans in a human fashion, then understanding that revelation requires inquiry into the intent of the human authors and into the literary forms used by that author. Such an inquiry requires a consideration of the situation of the author at the time of writing and the circumstances of his time and culture, as well as the ways of perceiving, speaking, and narrating that were prevalent in the time and situation of its writing. While the intent of the human author is the starting point for determining Scripture’s divine message of salvation, the truth revealed in Scripture often goes beyond that original intent. Yet the purpose of the author must serve as the framework for understanding the deeper and richer meanings of Scripture.  

Article 12 then not only allows for and encourages critical study of the Bible, it stipulates it as necessary for a complete understanding of divine revelation. If Scripture is the saving Word of God expressed in the words of humans, then an understanding of the divine meaning requires an understanding of the human; and because human expressions always take place in history and are inseparable from their literary form, investigation of the historical and literary background of the biblical text is necessary if we are to understand the intent of the human author.  

Yet critical literary and historical investigations are not enough. While Dei Verbum’s encouragement of such scholarship is perhaps the most innovative aspect of the document, and while it had greatest impact on the development of Catholic biblical scholarship, the Constitution on Divine Revelation also insisted that since interpretation of Scripture is an activity of the Church, and since both Tradition and Scripture are the revelation of the one God, interpreters must consider the Tradition of the Church as they search for the meaning of texts. Dei Verbum, then, provides a way for the Church’s interpretation of Scripture to remain rooted in the best insights of the patristic theologians while also being enriched by the fruits of modern critical exegesis.  

The final chapter of the document specifically addresses the topic of Scripture in the life of the Church. The primary image for Scripture’s role in the Church is that of nourishment. Scripture is analogous to the Body of Christ in that both are
venerated by the Church and both nourish the faithful. The nourishment of Scripture “enlightens the mind, strengthens the will, and fires the hearts of men with the love of God” (21). By seeing the Word of Scripture as spiritual food, the Council reiterates what had been stated in the Constitution on the Liturgy (56), the Liturgy of the Word is to be seen as of equal value with the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and not simply as a preliminary to it. This image of Scripture has implications for the place of the Bible in the lives of the faithful, its role in the ministries of the Church, and its relationship with the study of sacred theology.

The document stipulates that the Bible play a new and central role in the lives of all of the faithful. In order that the faithful may be nourished by Scripture, the Council urged that they be given greater access through new more accurate translations (22) and through Bible study and reading (25). Before the Council, the only translation officially approved for use by Catholic laity in the United States was the CCD Bible, a translation of a translation of the Latin Vulgate, which had in turn been translated from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. Dei Verbum urged that new “suitable and correct” translations be made from the original language manuscripts (22), and these should be accompanied by adequate explanations (25). In the preconciliar Church, private Bible reading and group Bible study were seen as exclusively Protestant practices. This document urges all Christians to be nourished by Scripture, not only in sacred liturgy but also in devout reading (25). By placing Bible reading in the center of Christian life, the council gave new direction to Catholic piety.

The ministries of the Church are to be renewed by an expanded understanding of the Scriptures. It urges continued biblical studies so that “those who are ministers of the divine Word may be able to distribute fruitfully the nourishment of the Scriptures” (23). All aspects of the ministry of the Word, including preaching and catechetics, are formed by and derive their strength from the Scripture; and therefore, those involved in such ministries must be especially devoted to its study (24-25). These instructions expanded the call for regular homilies during the Eucharist found in the Constitution on the Liturgy (52) by emphasizing that such preaching should be oriented toward Scripture.
In order for the Church to be fully nourished by Scripture, the Council encouraged those engaged in scholarly biblical studies to continue and renew their work because biblical studies should be seen as the soul of sacred theology (23-24). That the study of theology is to be informed by renewed Scripture studies represents a change from previous approaches to dogmatic theology which started from Church teaching and then supported it with proofs from Scripture. Scripture as the soul of theology must be considered first on its own terms, and dogmatic theology must be built on its basis.\textsuperscript{17}

In many ways \textit{Dei Verbum} is as notable for what it does not say as for what it does say. It does not clearly describe how Scripture and Tradition interact. It does not attempt to describe systematically the nature or function of inspiration.\textsuperscript{18} There is no elaboration on the nature of the cooperation between divine authorship and human literary authorship.\textsuperscript{19} It neither condemns nor endorses any particular methodological approach to exegesis. Indeed, unlike the earlier drafts of the document, the final draft contains no condemnations.\textsuperscript{20} No attempt to address the question of how the Bible can be used to critique Church practices or to mediate between various traditions is made.\textsuperscript{21} Yet its silence on these matters allowed the Church to restore the Bible to the center of its faith life without too narrowly defining its position on many of the more difficult questions of interpretation.

\textbf{The Reception, Development, and Implementation of \textit{Dei Verbum}'s Teaching}

The impact of the Second Vatican Council as a whole still remains to be completely assessed, and this is true of the Constitution on Divine Revelation as well. I will focus on three broad areas of Catholic life that have been most profoundly affected by this document: biblical studies, the Church's ministry of teaching and preaching, and Catholic piety. Because of the limits of space in this volume, most of my discussion will focus on life in the Church of the United States.

\textit{Dei Verbum}'s effect on Catholic Biblical scholarship was immediate. Twenty-two years before the Council issued \textit{Dei
Verbum, Pius XII’s encyclical, Divino Afflante Spiritu, had begun to reverse the Church’s stand against critical historical studies of the Bible and had gone a long way in alleviating the hostility toward Catholic biblical scholarship by members of the hierarchy who believed that the rationalist roots of historical criticism made it inimical to the Catholic faith. As a result of this encyclical, American Catholic Biblical scholarship began to flourish during the 1950s. Yet even a papal encyclical was not enough to put to rest traditionalist objections to historical critical scholarship. Up until the eve of the Council, biblical scholars both in the United States and Europe were still being forced out of teaching positions in Catholic institutions.

Dei Verbum gave critical biblical scholarship a place in the Catholic Church by insisting that the writers of the biblical books were “true authors.” Though chosen by God, they wrote using their own powers and faculties (11). Hence, Scripture is the Word of God in human language; and in order to understand God’s message in Scripture, interpreters must determine what the writer meant to say (12). By so sanctioning historical criticism, the Council sparked the renewal and development of Catholic biblical scholarship.

One of the most immediate results was that Catholic biblical scholars gained recognition within the wider academy of scholars. This is attested to by the fact that five presidents of the historically Protestant Society of Biblical Literature since 1967 have been Catholics. Catholic scholars have collaborated on major non-denominational translations (e.g., the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, the New Revised Standard Version) and editions (most notably the Oxford Annotated editions of both the Revised Standard and the New Revised Standard). Also, the Catholic Biblical Association, which began as a subcommittee of the American Bishop’s Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, became a scholarly organization which, while it retained its Catholic character, is open to and respected by scholars of many faiths. Paul J. Achtemeier, a Presbyterian biblical scholar, served as the president of the Catholic Biblical Association in 1984-85.

The publication of the New American Bible in 1970 demonstrates the reception of the teaching of Dei Verbum in
Catholic biblical scholarship. What became the New American Bible began as a revision of the CCD edition of the Challoner-Rheims' Bible (a translation of the Vulgate) commissioned in 1936 by the bishops of the United States to be carried out by the newly formed Catholic Biblical Association. However, before this revision could be completed, the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, which encouraged recourse to ancient manuscripts and the application of the principles of textual criticism, was issued. From that point on, the project became not a revision of CCD Bible, but rather a new translation from the original languages. When the New American Bible was first published in 1970, it reflected the changed attitude toward biblical studies brought about by the Council. Several Protestant scholars were commissioned to work on the project. The brief discussion of inspiration in the introduction reflects *Dei Verbum*’s teaching that the divinely inspired authors wrote as members of a particular human society using their own powers and talents. The introduction to the Pentateuch carefully discusses the four sources of the Pentateuch and presents Moses as the lawgiver *par excellence* but not the author in the modern sense of the word.

Another indication of the implementation of the Council’s teaching on Scripture can be seen in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, first published in 1968. This one-volume commentary on both Old and New Testaments was consciously conceived of as a project of Catholic biblical scholars. The fact that Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah (Is 40-55) are treated in separate commentaries and the placement of the commentary on the Gospel of Mark before Matthew and the Gospel of John after the epistles demonstrate how widely accepted the methods and results of biblical scholarship had become. The explosion of commentary series and monographs on Scripture by Catholic scholars also witnesses to the flowering of critical Scripture scholarship in the Church.

Since the Council, however, there have been unanticipated developments within biblical studies. Many of these are related to changes in the intellectual climate not only in the Church but in society in general. Although Catholic exegetes originally adopted historical-critical methodologies with great confidence, recently, scholars both within and outside of the Church have questioned
both its presuppositions and its results. An example of this kind of challenge from within the Church can be found in Cardinal Ratzinger’s “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis.” While not advocating a return to pre-critical, over literalist approaches, he did accuse modern exegesis of completely relegating God to the incomprehensible, the otherworldly and the inexpressible in order to be able to treat the biblical text itself as an entirely worldly reality according to natural-scientific methods.

Literary studies, the emergence of postmodern approaches, the use of social science methodologies, feminist, and liberationist approaches have all challenged the hegemony of historical-critical exegesis and have brought unanticipated richness as well as unexpected controversy to Catholic biblical scholarship. There is much less unanimity among Catholic biblical scholars now than in the years just after the Council.

The repercussions of Dei Verbum in the field of biblical studies soon had effects in the teaching and preaching of the Church. As result of the call for regular homilies at Sunday Mass and for those homilies to reflect on the biblical reading, the years after the Council saw an explosion of study sessions and programs to give priests more extensive training in biblical interpretation. Numerous publications provide priests with exegetical notes to help them prepare homilies that help worshipers to be more completely formed by the Word of God in Scripture. The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Training of Priests (16) as well as the Basic Plan for Priestly Formation (78) stipulate that seminarians should be carefully trained in exegetical method and that all other areas of theological training should draw on Scripture. The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults recommends that new Catechumens be given a Bible during the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens (64), and many RCIA programs use the lectionary as a basis for catechesis. Religious education has also become more biblically oriented. It is now not uncommon for Catholic parishes to sponsor “Vacation
Bible Schools’ for children, a practice borrowed from Protestant churches.

Catholic piety and parish life have also changed as a result of Dei Verbum’s encouragement of biblical reading by all of the faithful. Whereas Bible study groups were almost unheard of in Catholic parishes before Vatican II, they have become part of the fabric of almost every parish in the United States. In thirty years, the Church has moved the Bible from the edges of the faith life of ordinary Catholics to its center. Raymond Brown points out that “the Bible became a fundamental referent in Catholic theology, spirituality and religious discussion.” In assessing the effects of Renew, a program aimed at revitalizing parish life whose central element is the rediscovery of the power of God’s Word in Scripture, Richard Sklba, auxiliary bishop of the diocese of Milwaukee, found that communal reading and praying the Scripture could be a force of reintegration for divided and disintegrating parishes.

The Latin American “base community” movement has been one of the most widely recognized responses to Dei Verbum’s encouragement of increased biblical reading among the laity. The effects of this movement have been far reaching and controversial. Members of these groups often learned to read by reading the Bible. Their reading of the Bible inspired these often impoverished Catholics inspired to work against the forces of society that oppress them. The roots of liberation theology, then, can be found in the lay Bible study movement.

Yet in spite of thirty years of progress, many priests and laity remain biblically uninformed. While the new lectionary has received more attention, the quality of preaching has not improved as quickly as many had originally expected. Indeed the new, expanded lectionary may have contributed to the low quality of preaching. There are now more readings that are difficult to preach on and even more difficult for congregations to comprehend. Even though the “Decree on the Training of Priests” emphasizes the need for adequate Scripture study, the discussion of homiletics instruction in the “Program of Priestly Formation” says very little about incorporating seminary study of Scripture into training in homiletics. Many Masters of Divinity programs offered at Catholic seminaries and theological schools require only
two courses in Scripture. It seems, then, that not only do recently educated priests learn a minimum about Scripture, but they are also not prepared to incorporate that learning into their preaching.

_Dei Verbum_ has also not had the hoped for implementation in catechesis. While major religious education curricula used in Catholic schools and parish catechetical programs include a scriptural component, it is not uncommon to find college freshmen who, after twelve years of Catholic school, are unfamiliar with the central events and characters of the Bible, not to mention Church teaching about biblical interpretation and the truth of Scripture. Many of them are convinced that Catholic faith requires them to read Genesis 1-2 as one (not two) factual account of how God created the world and humankind, and that Catholic teaching does not allow believers to accept the theory of evolution.

A further and even more disturbing indication that the teaching of Vatican II on Scripture has not been well-received and implemented in the area of catechesis can be found in the _Catechism of the Catholic Church_. While the section in the _Catechism_ on Revelation presents the main points of _Dei Verbum_ (Catechism #80-141), the rest of the _Catechism_ shows little evidence that the Council’s teaching on Scripture has influenced the way Scripture is used in the presentation of the Catholic faith. For example, in the discussion of the Fall (#390), the reader is reminded that Genesis 3 uses figurative language but it nonetheless refers to a real event. The text does not discuss what “figurative language” means in this context or how this figurative language can refer to a real event. Similarly, the discussion of the fundamental goodness of creation in #339 leaves the impression that the six-day creation story is a literal fact. The discussion of the life of Christ (Catechism #484-658) simply harmonizes the Gospels and shows no awareness of the development of the Gospel tradition as outlined in _Dei Verbum_ 19. Even though _Dei Verbum_ emphasizes that frequent reading of the Bible is necessary if Christians are to come to know Christ and to conform their lives to His (_DV_ 25), and even though the Scriptures are presented as essential nourishment for faith (_DV_ 21), the importance of regular and prayerful reading
of Scripture is not mentioned until the last major division of the *Catechism* (#2653).\textsuperscript{48} The *Catechism* contains little guidance for Christians in how they should read the Bible so as to be nourished by it.

The Second Vatican Council’s teaching on Scripture in the life of the Church has opened the way for a greater appreciation of Scripture among Catholics not only by encouraging the development of Scripture scholarship in the Church, but also by ensuring that the faithful have access to the Bible through accurate translations and commentaries. Catholics, more than at any time in the modern era, can be nourished by Scripture in catechesis and preaching, and through communal and individual reading and study. Yet while the Bible has moved from the periphery of Catholic life, much of the vision of *Dei Verbum* remains to be accepted and implemented. Scripture scholarship has not made significant contributions to questions in systematic and moral theology. The problem of moving from what the text *meant* to what it *means* remains unanswered. While many more Catholics read Scripture now than before the Council, even serious Catholics tend to be less biblically literate than their Protestant neighbors. While the homily has become a fixture at Sunday Mass, the vision of that homily as opening the Word of God in Scripture to the people has not been realized. In spite of attempts such as *Renew*, effective ways of bringing the Bible to bear on the daily lives of Catholics at the end of the twentieth century have not been found.\textsuperscript{49}

**Agenda for the Future**

The future of the biblical renewal in the Catholic Church begun by Vatican II depends on the Church’s willingness to do as it did in the 1960s; that is, to assess how the Church’s teaching can address the world at the end of the twentieth century. With regard to the role of Scripture in the life of the Church, the Council had to address the following problems: 1) there was little understanding of how Scripture was related to Tradition and of how both Tradition and Scripture functioned as revelation; 2) Scripture had been relegated to the margins of theological investigation,
catechesis, and Catholic piety; 3) most of the faithful had little familiarity and even less understanding of the Bible as God’s revelation; and 4) Catholic scholars who endeavored to contribute to the Church’s understanding of Scripture were often thwarted by official suspicion and misunderstanding of their goals and methods. Some of these problems have diminished since the Council, but others have arisen. The teachings of Dei Verbum must be addressed to the questions that have arisen in the thirty years since the end of the Council.

While aspects of historical-critical biblical scholarship have been incorporated into the Church’s understanding of Scripture, and while there are few serious attacks on the work of Catholic biblical scholars, there is still need for a biblical scholarship that is distinctively Catholic. Since all of our knowledge rests on often unexamined presuppositions, it is important that the Church not accept the presupposition of disbelief that undergirds some (but certainly not all) historical-critical scholarship. Biblical scholars in the Church need to develop approaches and methods that rest on the presuppositions of faith. In a critique of recent historical Jesus scholarship, Luke T. Johnson points out that the historical-critical approach used by members of the Jesus Seminar and other more secular New Testament scholars presupposes that the texts of the New Testament are nothing more than sources for the reconstruction of Christian origins. Such presuppositions distort the character of the text and fail to consider the intent of the author. To counter such one-dimensional approaches, Johnson proposes a new approach for Scripture scholarship that he calls an “experience/interpretation model.” It considers the human character of the writings, the experiences and convictions that generated them, and the cultural and historical symbols they appropriate. Such an approach takes seriously the Bible’s character as witness to human religious experience. While it is a good thing for biblical scholars in the Church to be respected by and to interact with the larger academy of scholars, it is important that the task of biblical scholars in service to the Church not be defined by the interests of the academy. Catholic biblical scholars need to bridge the gap between scholarship in service to the Church and that which responds to the demands of the academic community.
Another chasm needs to be spanned when it comes to the role of the Bible in preaching and teaching. It is not enough to give priests, deacons, and catechists a broad familiarity with the content of Scripture and its historical and literary character. They must be enabled to show how Scripture teaches “truth for the sake of our salvation”; in other words, how Scripture addresses both the perennial problems of human existence and the challenges to the life of faith that are particular to our age. Those who carry out the Church’s ministry of the Word must be able to use what they learn about Scripture in their training to nurture faith in those to whom they minister.

The future of the biblical renewal is threatened by two opposing cultural trends. One is the fundamentalism of televangelists who promote a literalist, ahistorical view of the Bible; the other is the skeptical historicism of the Jesus Seminar, which has recently captured almost as much media attention as the televangelists. As the Bible continues to play a more central role in Catholic piety, Catholics need more guidance in how to understand the Bible in relation to Tradition, and in how to appropriate it as not only the Word of God but the Word of God in human language. While *Dei Verbum*’s encouragement of prayerful Bible study and reading has been enthusiastically received, many Catholics remain uncertain about how the teaching of the Bible fits to the teaching of the Church.

The teaching of Vatican II changed the way Scripture was perceived in the life of the Church, and restored the Bible to its rightful place as the Word of God which, together with the Tradition of the Church, reveals salvation and nourishes faith. As a result of *Dei Verbum*, the Church has gained a new appreciation of the human character of the writings of the Bible and of their importance in preaching, teaching and the life of faith. Yet, much of the promise of Vatican II remains unrealized. While Scripture scholarship developed and flourished since the Council, overall it has not greatly aided in the religious appropriation of the Bible. The Bible is still seen by many Catholics as inspirational in some ways, but as having little to do with their fundamental beliefs and practices. The agenda for the future is to revitalize the biblical renewal begun by the Second Vatican Council by developing
approaches to biblical studies that take the religious character of the Bible seriously, and by continuing to emphasize the centrality of Scripture in the life of faith.

Notes

5. Murray, “Revelation (Dei Verbum),” 76.
15. Raymond E. Brown, “The Contribution of Historical Biblical Criticism to Ecumenical Church Discussion,” in Biblical Interpretation in

20. Murray, "Revelation (Dei Verbum)," 76.
24. Dailey, "In Praise of God's Word," 50, 54; Donahue, "A Journey Remembered," 8; Fogarty, American Catholic Biblical Scholarship, 343; Murray, "Revelation (Dei Verbum)," 80.
25. Fogarty, American Catholic Biblical Scholarship, 348-49.
28. Fogarty, American Catholic Biblical Scholarship, 347.
38. Murray, "Revelation (Dei Verbum)," 80.
40. Murray, “Revelation (Dei Verbum),” 79.
43. The Sadlier “Coming to Faith” series (New York: Sadlier, 1994) for Catholic schools devotes its sixth grade textbook to the study of Scripture. In other grade levels, biblical material is incorporated into nearly every lesson. The Silver, Burdett, and Ginn “This is our Faith” series (Morristown, NJ, 1991) shows a similar emphasis on Scripture.
47. L. Cunningham, “The New Catechism: A First Reading,” Commonweal 120 (March 12, 1993): 10; cf. Luke T. Johnson, “Response to the Catechism,” Commonweal 120 (May 7, 1993): 17, who rejoices that the Catechism ignores the results of critical biblical scholarship, because in his estimation, the contributions of biblical scholarship have not been particularly impressive. However, it is one thing to ignore results of scholarship, it is another for the Catechism to fail to incorporate the teaching of Vatican II on the importance of biblical scholarship.
49. Murray, “Revelation (Dei Verbum),” 77.
The Catholic Church and Interreligious Dialogue

JOHN BORELLI

In 1994 the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, which was established as the Secretariat for Non-Christians in 1964, produced an 875-page volume, *Interreligious Dialogue in the Pontifical Magisterium (Documents 1963-1993)*. The text of *Nostra Aetate* (*NA*) and selections from other documents of the Second Vatican Council specifically related to interreligious relations account for nearly 40 pages by themselves. Documents and excerpts from the solemn Magisterium of Paul VI and John Paul II take up another 60 pages. To this the editor has added over 500 pages of speeches, letters, and communications of the popes in the past 30 years and 150 pages of texts issued by offices of the Holy See. Thus, when one studies the Catholic Church and interreligious dialogue in the era of the Second Vatican Council, one must do considerably more than read a single seminal document and note references to it in subsequent addresses and statements of the Holy See. Interreligious relations and dialogue constitute one of the significant new ministries that the Catholic Church has taken up vigorously as the renewed Church of the Second Vatican Council. Over the last 30 years, this new ministry has blended thoroughly into the life and mission of the Church.

From *Ecclesian Suam* (the encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Church, 1964) to *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (the apostolic letter
on the third millennium, 1994) or perhaps *Ecclesia in Africa* (the apostolic exhortation on the Church in Africa, 1995) — the two most recent major documents of the Holy See that incorporate interreligious dialogue and relations into specific embodiments of the mission of the Church — one finds a clear, ongoing record of the Catholic Church’s formal commitment to interreligious dialogue. In the history of Christianity before the twentieth century, astute teachers had argued through every age for interreligious understanding. One can think of numerous illustrious examples beginning with Justin Martyr and the Alexandrian school of theology. Major encounters with Muslims, for example when Arabic Christian theology thrived in the eighth and ninth centuries in the Middle East or during the times of Ramon Lull and Nicholas of Cusa in the West, produced learned pleas for interreligious understanding and careful theological inquiry directed towards the teachings of Islam. The European age of discoveries brought many surprising accounts of the enlightened wisdom of Hindus, Buddhists, and Chinese, especially from the Jesuit missionaries who had immersed themselves in the languages and cultures of Asia. They had discovered teachings similar to those of Christianity but bearing no apparent historical influence from it. However, it was the Second Vatican Council that formally recognized interreligious understanding and broadened it to include interreligious dialogue as an explicit teaching with universal status.²

### The Second Vatican Council and Interreligious Dialogue and Relations

For the Catholic position regarding interreligious relations and dialogue, everyone moves quickly to the Council’s *Nostra Aetate* (the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) as if it were square one — that is, the place to begin. The declaration, taking its name from the first two words of the Latin text “in our age,” was issued in 1965 near the end of the Council. Actually, *Lumen Gentium (LG)* contains important passages and was issued a year earlier (1964). Passages in *Ecclesiam Suam*, a truly influential encyclical of Paul VI, promulgated earlier in 1964,
foreshadow certain lines in *Nostra Aetate*. Recall too that Pope Paul VI made pilgrimages to the Holy Land in January 1964 and to India in December of that year. The year 1964 was truly a prelude to the conciliar consensus found in *Nostra Aetate*. Pope Paul VI was giving expression to a confident new spiritual outreach to peoples of other faiths in his addresses and in *Ecclesiam Suam*. A number of conciliar texts would reflect aspects of a growing consensus among the Council Fathers. Therefore, one must look at the whole context of the Second Vatican Council with its re-examination of mission, its commitment to the restoration of unity among Christians through ecumenical activity, its deliberations on the nature the Church, its dedication to religious liberty, and its renewal and revitalization of the liturgy and the whole life of the Church by encouraging updating, inculturation, and the increasing role of the laity as well as by the speeches and encyclicals of John XXIII and Paul VI and the establishment of secretariats to handle the new ministries, especially in ecumenical and interreligious relations.

The exact origin of the idea of *Nostra Aetate* as a text might well have originated when a Jewish scholar, a Frenchman, Jules Isaac, met with Pope John XXIII in 1960, and asked him to do something at the upcoming council about the teaching of contempt for the Jews. That private meeting between scholar and pope was indeed a moment of grace. Pope John had been a Vatican diplomat to Bulgaria, Turkey, and France, where he had close experiences with Jews and peoples of other faiths and had been kept informed of the Nazi persecution of Jews and the extermination camps. Perhaps Jules Isaac elicited in Pope John a concrete idea. Later in 1960 he asked Cardinal Augustin Bea, whom he had already charged to begin the official work of the Holy See towards the restoration of unity among Christians, to prepare a draft on the relation of the Church to the people of Israel.

Pope Paul VI wrote eloquently on the relation of the Church to peoples of faith in *Ecclesiam Suam*, issued about three months before the third session and before *Lumen Gentium* was finally approved by the assembly. In his encyclical Pope Paul VI presented a lengthy meditation on the "dialogue of salvation" and
then, in the spirit of John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*,
sketched "a series of concentric-circles around the central point in
which God has placed us" (96). These circles are individually
described as follows: first the immense circle of the whole of
humanity, the earth community, and including in particular those
of goodwill who do not profess God (104); second, another circle
"vast in its extent, yet it is not so far away from us" of Jews,
Muslims, and "the followers of the great Afro-Asiatic religions"
(107); and then "the circle which is nearest to us, the circle of
Christianity" (109).

The Council Fathers agreed with this refreshing way to unite
functionally the nature of the Church and its salvific mission in
*Lumen Gentium*:

For the church is driven by the Holy Spirit to do
her part for the full realization of the plan of
God, who has constituted Christ as the source of
salvation for the whole world . . . The effect of
her work is that whatever good is found sown in
the minds and hearts of men or in the rites and
customs of peoples, these not only are preserved
from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and
perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of
the devil, and the happiness of man. (*LG* 17)⁵

In the preceding paragraph of *Lumen Gentium* (16), there is
mention of specific believers in a certain order of relationship to
the Catholic Church: 1) Jews, "a people most dear for the sake of
the fathers"; 2) Muslims, among those in the first place "who
acknowledge the Creator" and "who profess to hold the faith of
Abraham"; and 3) others who "in shadows and images seek the
unknown God."

There is a resounding theme in the document on the Church
and in other texts of the conciliar period that all of humanity is
orientated towards God's universal call to salvation. One can find
such an idea implicit in Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici Corporis*
(1943, sect. 100). The texts of the Second Vatican Council go a
step further; they express appreciation for those who seek God in
the ancient ways of their ancestors, the great religions of the earth. Thus the laity are encouraged to cooperate with persons of other faiths working towards the common good and agreeing on commonly recognized values (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* 27). Recognition of worthy spiritual values and aspirations found within religious traditions is at the basis of the Second Vatican Council's monumental reflections on religious liberty:

> It is in accordance with their dignity that all, because they are persons, that is, beings endowed with reason and free will and therefore bearing personal responsibility, are both impelled by their nature and bound by a moral obligation to seek the truth, especially religious truth. (*Dignitatis Humanae* 2)

The Declaration on Religious Liberty lists dialogue among the particular factors in the search for truth (3) but more importantly argues from the basic position that religious freedom should be guaranteed and protected for all who aspire to know God and live justly according to their consciences. The Council Fathers clearly declared that they believe that the one true religion continues to exist in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, entrusted with the mission to spread the Good News abroad (*Dignitatis Humanae* 1); nevertheless, by combining mission with respect for the honest and good aspirations of all, best expressed in sincere interreligious encounter, they would generate an intense exchange within the Church on the relationship between mission and dialogue for decades to come.

The Council's document on mission thus attempted to couple this universalistic approach, we could call it, with the Gospel imperative. It teaches that all Christians should behave with respect: "They should be familiar with their [fellow citizens'] national and religious traditions and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them" (*Ad Gentes* 11). Echoing a passage from John XXIII's *Princeps Pastorum* (an encyclical on missions, native clergy, and lay participation, 1959), the conciliar decree on missionary activity advised
seminaries to prepare candidates for the priesthood to "understand and appreciate the culture of their own people" and to "examine the relationship between the traditions and religions of their homeland and Christianity" (16). The decree, sounding revolutionary to a church needing to be reminded of its own history of inculturation, recommended that religious orders "should carefully consider how traditions of asceticism and contemplation, the seeds of which had been sown by God in certain ancient cultures before the preaching of the Gospel, might be incorporated into the Christian religious life" (18). There are other passages which offer guidelines for careful and honest ways to situate the Church in the cultures of Asia, Africa, and elsewhere that are more sharply defined through another religion or set of religions (22, 26).

Pope Paul VI inaugurated the Secretariat for non-Christians on Pentecost Sunday (May 17, 1964), although he had already announced his intention eight months earlier in a letter to the Dean of the College of Cardinals (September 12, 1963) and sketched an idea for it in an address to the second session of the Council (September 29, 1963). In 1964, on the day the Church celebrates the reception of the Holy Spirit and the foundation of the Church, Paul VI dwelt on the idea of catholicity in his address to the world. He drew attention to the work of the Council, now taking specific direction after two sessions, and concluded this reflection by praising the effort of the Church to bring closer together, even by means of simple human contacts, those belonging to other religions. He then announced, so that it would have the tone and significance of Pentecost, that he shall institute in Rome a Secretariat for non-Christians, which shall have very different functions but the same structure of the Secretariat of Christian Unity. No pilgrim, Paul VI said, shall ever again feel wholly a foreigner in Rome. He ended by saying that there can be no catholicity if it is not linked to the unity of the Church and, likewise, an edifying catholicity must spring from the interior, spiritual life, nourished by silence, prayer, love, and grace. In this way, the theme of interreligious relations would outlast the Council and was linked to the same kind of conversion of heart required for authentic ecumenism.

Officially, according to the Brief, *Progrediente Concilio*, dated
May 19, 1964, the Secretariat for non-Christians was to be a sign of the concern of the Church for the spiritual needs of all peoples, a vehicle for dialogue with other believers, and a proof of the catholic dimension of the Church. The Secretariat for Christian Unity, which was established a few years earlier, was already shepherding the conciliar draft on the Jews that would eventually become *Nostra Aetate*, and circumstances did not change with the establishment of the second secretariat. The Secretariat for Christian Unity would eventually house the Commission for Religious Relations with Jews. The Secretariat for non-Christians was established for the post-conciliar period and could not make proposals to the Council itself. It would eventually oversee the Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. That distinction in specific missions for relations with Jews, on the one hand, and with Muslims, on the other, would continue after the Council so that Catholic-Jewish relations would be held generally distinct from interreligious relations.

As asserted earlier, *Nostra Aetate* cannot be taken by itself as marking the revolution in Catholic teaching on interreligious relations that the Second Vatican Council generated; nevertheless, there had been nothing like it in the history of the Church, nor has any church followed with a document that has had a similar effect on a Christian vision of interreligious relations. Approved in the final session of the Council, when eleven of the sixteen conciliar documents received final agreement, *Nostra Aetate* resulted from a somewhat complex process. *Nostra Aetate* began as a draft decree on the Jews and the Church’s relationship to them. Besides the theological and scriptural debates that took place in its preparation, there were also political, social, and ecumenical controversies surrounding its preparation. In the second session of the Council, it was appended as chapter four to the draft of the Decree on Ecumenism, just as the future Declaration on Religious Liberty was appended as chapter five to the same decree. For many reasons, including developments after Paul VI’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land, a separate draft declaration on the Jews and non-Christians was prepared for the third session of the Council. Indeed, most of the history and controversy surrounding *Nostra Aetate* pertains to its fourth and largest section on Jewish relations.⁶
Nostra Aetate specifically names Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus in addition to noting the "deep religious sense" among all peoples whose way of life is religious. The unity of the human community and the openness of every human person to the experience of the divine are foundational ideas in the text: "Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence" (1) and "throughout history even to the present day, there is found among different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life" (2). Then there is the famous "ray of divine truth" passage:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 1:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life. (NA 2)

Nostra Aetate recognized a specific gift of each of the identified religious traditions to either the history of salvation or to promoting a general religious sense among all people. To a general group that could be identified as "traditional religions" or the ancient ways still practiced by traditional peoples, the text uplifts the "certain awareness of a hidden power," which is even recognized as supreme being or a father. Hinduism is extolled for its rich myths and philosophical traditions, which direct people to seek "release from the trials of the present life" through asceticism, meditation, and devotion to God in confidence and love. Buddhism is noted for how it "testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world" and for its way of liberation through effort and "divine help." Other religions are
acknowledged, though unnamed, for their ways of calming hearts and outlining programs of life. What is true and good in these then are what the Catholic Church does not reject, and she expresses her high regard for their reflecting a ray of divine truth.

An entire section is devoted to Muslims, for they worship the "one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men." The text acknowledges that they too look to Abraham, "to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own." They are also raised up for honoring Jesus and his virgin mother, though not as God and as the mother of God. Finally, the Islamic belief in the final judgment and the afterlife and how these are linked to a notion of divine justice and an upright life are underscored. In a distinct paragraph, the "many quarrels and dissensions" over the centuries are acknowledged, and a plea to forget and "to achieve mutual understanding" is made. A confidence that Muslims can promote with Christians "peace, liberty, social justice and moral values" concludes this second paragraph.

The lengthiest section then follows, including the extremely important statements on the relationship of the Church to the people of Israel, acknowledging the Jewish origins of the Church, the endearment of the Jews to God, that the gifts bestowed by God on them are in force, and that "neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during [Christ's] passion" (4). The text concludes with a condemnation of religious bigotry and discrimination based on race, color, condition in life, or religion.

The approach of the Council clearly was influenced by Karl Rahner, and thus a certain positive anthropological approach pervades much of the documentation. The Catholic focus during the early phase of this ministry would be on the relationship of peoples of faith and their religious traditions to the Church, and this attitude was founded on the view of the unity of the human family and its orientation towards God. Of course, this idea has a rich history in theology captured in the symbolization of the journey to God in the work, for example, of Augustine and Bonaventure, to name two authors who synthesized theological currents of their day through the spiritual journey.?
Gentium opens with this rich symbolism, describing Christ as the light of humanity, a related symbolism, and expressing the desire of the Church to bring this light to all. The Church is seen as on pilgrimage herself, seeking to restore unity among her members, just as all humanity is on pilgrimage to God.

The overall attitude resulting from the Council and directing the first fifteen years of formal relations was aptly summarized by Pietro Rossano, the second to serve as secretary of the Secretariat for non-Christians:

At this point a query arises on the relationship of the church to other religions. Nostra Aetate represents the first time in its history that the Roman Catholic Church has faced this question in such an official way. This declaration in many ways implies a new mentality, and in it we can distinguish two approaches. There is, first of all, a global approach to the world religions. In comparison with the attitude prevalent in many past centuries, this approach is certainly new and uses such terms as esteem, respect, dialogue, proclamation, witness. Second, there is a differentiated approach to the individual religions according to the nature of each; this had already been delineated in Lumen Gentium (n. 16).  

Bishop Rossano demonstrates rather tersely for us the importance of studying at least these two conciliar texts together. We have looked even more widely at encyclicals, speeches, addresses, and even those documents establishing the Secretariat for non-Christians.

A Secretariat Continues the Work of the Second Vatican Council

In an address to Cardinals on June 23, 1964, a month after he had inaugurated the Secretariat for non-Christians, Pope Paul VI enumerated these three roles for the new Secretariat: 1) to create
a climate of warmth and cordiality between the Catholic Church and other religions; 2) to dispel and dissipate errors, misconceptions, and misinformation about other religions, especially among Catholics; and 3) to establish and organize meetings and deepen discussions with representatives of different religious traditions. The first president of the Secretariat, Cardinal Paul Marella, had served as apostolic delegate to Tokyo during the Pacific War and brought to this new position an interest in culture and ethnic studies. He was assisted by Father Paul Humbertclaude, who served as the first secretary of the staff. While the Second Vatican Council was still in session, they held informal meetings with bishops of Asia and Africa. The first members, all of whom are bishops, were appointed in 1969, although they would not meet in plenary session until 1979. In 1967 the Secretariat was given a permanent role in the Roman Curia in the reform of the Church’s central administration (Regimini Ecclesiae Universae 96ff.)

From the beginning, the Secretariat staff sought the assistance of scholars and persons with expertise in various fields of study and a number of formally recognized consultors. In 1967, the Secretariat began the annual practice of sending greetings to Muslims worldwide at the conclusion of their month of fasting, Ramadan, and this practice was expanded in 1995 to sending greetings to Buddhists celebrating Vesakha, the Spring festival honoring Buddha Shakyamuni, and to Hindus celebrating Diwali, the Autumn Equinox festival for Hindus. The Secretariat also undertook a publication program, starting a Bulletin that would appear three times a year containing statements of the Pope, documents of the Roman Curia, reports of events and relations around the world, articles, and reviews — all related to interreligious relations and dialogue. In 1994, with Bulletin 85, the publication was renamed Pro Dialogo. Between 1967 and 1971, a number of separate publications were issued explaining reasons for dialogue and introducing Catholics to African religions, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Not only were these specific religious traditions explained, but also points of contact, similarity, and mutual concern were presented by a number of recognized Catholic scholars. One could summarize then that during the Marella years (1964–73), the Secretariat launched a wide program of education
and encouragement for Catholics to learn about the peoples of faiths of the world and to initiate dialogues with them. This was a period of enthusiasm for learning.

Cardinal Sergio Pignedoli was the second to serve as president, from 1973 until his death in 1980. He was assisted by the able Bible scholar, Pietro Rossano, later an Auxiliary Bishop of Rome. During their time, the first plenary of bishop members was held, and on many occasions consultors were gathered to reflect on some of the large issues surrounding interreligious dialogue. The president and secretary were known for their journeys to all parts of the world, fostering friendships and participating in conferences. I recall meeting Cardinal Pignedoli at Fordham University in 1976, where I was completing my doctoral studies in the history of religions. At a brief roundtable discussion, someone asked the cardinal how is it that he carries on his work, and he replied that he was no expert on any of these traditions with which he is responsible for maintaining contact. But, he said, I have made many, many friends around the world, and I write to them all the time. Interreligious dialogue requires trust and friendship, and the period of Cardinal Pignedoli was important for the longevity and credibility of the Secretariat.

Cardinal Pignedoli was followed for a brief period by Archbishop Jean Jadot (1980-84), who had served as apostolic delegate to the United States. Now assisted by Fr. Marcello Zago as secretary, Archbishop Jadot emphasized an ecclesiology of the local church, suggesting that the Roman Curia, in matters regarding interreligious relations, should not act independently of the needs and concerns of local churches. The Secretariat was put at the service of local churches, and its staff attended meetings and dialogues organized over the whole world. Bishops of various countries were consulted when they were in Rome on their ad limina visits. In certain parts of the world, for example in India, enormously important steps were taken to ensure regular contact with representatives of other religions. The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences began its special institutes for interreligious affairs and a series of seminars on interreligious dialogue. With so much activity now fermenting in the local churches of territories that are also known as mission fields, there was a growing need
for reflection on the relationship between mission and dialogue. Such a task Pope John Paul II had charged Archbishop Jadot's predecessor to take up as an activity of the Secretariat. With wide consultation from Catholics engaged in interreligious activity in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, the Secretariat's plenary gave its final approval in 1984 to perhaps the most significant text up to that time in the brief history The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission. The greatest achievement of this text was how it gave expression to the heartfelt understandings and hopes of many engaged in interreligious activity. The respect and good will that they fostered and the common spiritual undertakings with peoples of other faiths that they were forging were now given expression by the Holy See.

The stage was now set for a truly vibrant period in the history of the Secretariat, from 1984 to the present, combining unprecedented initiatives of Pope John Paul II and the able leadership of Cardinal Francis Arinze as president and Bishop Michael Fitzgerald as secretary. In the 1988 reorganization of the Roman Curia (Pastor Bonus), the Secretariat was renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Its twin roles of promotion of interreligious dialogue and relations and the formation of Catholics for such work were reiterated. New to its place within the curia, the Pontifical Council must consult with the Congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith, for the Oriental Churches, and for the Evangelization of Peoples when the subject matter requires it.

Developments in the United States as an Example

After the Second Vatican Council, Catholics with training, academic, or pastoral interests, or for purely personal reasons set themselves to the task of promoting interreligious relations. Episcopal conferences, especially in those countries where Christians represented a small minority, for example in India and Japan, appointed staff, held conferences, and added the study of religions to the curricula of their seminaries. For example, by 1977 the bishops of India issued guidelines encouraging interreligious
dialogue. Interreligious activity, noticeably hand in hand with inculcation of liturgical and other forms of Christian life, was far more crucial in many parts of Asia to the lives of Catholics than ecumenical activity, which was no less essential. In Africa the interaction between indigenous cultural and religious traditions was often quite personal because many Catholics had only been baptized as adults or had family and friends still identified with the ancient ways of their land. Dialogue was often an internalized experience for those who did not feel separated from their traditional ways. For Europeans and North Americans, encounters with representatives of other faiths became more and more frequent as the numbers of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs grew in towns and neighborhoods.

While in Rome during the third session of the Council (1964), the bishops of the United States established the committees that would constitute the blueprint for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Among these was the Bishops’ Commission for Ecumenical Affairs. Two years later, in 1966, with some ecumenical dialogues already in progress, the commission was reorganized into the committee it is today, the Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA). The work of the BCEIA was expanded to include the undertakings of the Holy See, especially in Jewish relations and interreligious relations. At the time, however, only staff members for ecumenical and Jewish relations were hired. A whole national conference was taking shape, and it was decided to begin gradually and capably to address those churches and communities of size in the United States. Even today the United States has the largest Jewish population in the world.

Diocesan bishops appointed ecumenical officers to handle locally these new sets of relations, and diocesan workers soon organized themselves into a support group, the National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers (NADEO). In certain dioceses — for example, Detroit, Los Angeles, Honolulu, San Francisco, Chicago, Houston, New York, and Newark — large populations of Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and others were already present and growing significantly. Relationships and, in a few cases, dialogues were being established. In 1982 NADEO
mandated a committee of ecumenical officers and historians of religions to provide support and information to the dioceses. They immediately began planning seminars for annual meetings of diocesan workers in conjunction with the National Workshop on Christian Unity and also drafted and published a handbook.10

So successful was the work of the committee, which continues to meet annually and develop projects in support of interreligious relations on the diocesan level, that by 1986 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops voted to expand the staff to the BCEIA so that special competence for interreligious relations would be available. The BCEIA chairman, who is elected every three years and at that time (1988) was Archbishop Francis Stafford of Denver, appointed Bishop Joseph Gerry, formerly a professor of philosophy and then abbot and chancellor of St. Anselm’s Abbey and College, to serve as episcopal moderator for interreligious relations. In 1991 Bishop Gerry, by then head of the Diocese of Portland, Maine, was named by Cardinal Arinze to be the United States bishop to serve as a member of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The United States scholars and bishops’ conference staff had served as consultors to the Secretariat/Pontifical Council for many years, but now the episcopal conference membership was linked formally to the membership of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Soon after I began serving as the first staff member for the bishops’ conference in the field of interreligious relations, with the assistance of those scholars, monastics, missionaries who had returned home to the United States, and diocesan officers, we began holding a series of consultations on relations with Muslims, Buddhists, and Native Americans. Enthusiasm for interreligious relations and a desire to serve the Church in this ministry were easy to find. We also continued to remain in contact with those national institutions that were pursuing interreligious and multireligious relations in one way or another. Eventually, formal relations with Muslims were pursued through the existing national Islamic institutions.11 Buddhist relations have been developed along a different model. First, there is the personal attention the episcopal moderator and I have given to Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, which I will further explain below. In addition, I have
been fortunate to interact with Buddhists in a number of settings, including an international Buddhist-Christian theological encounter group and meetings of the United States chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace.

Finally, in the field of Native American relations, the same important phenomenon exists for many Native American Catholics as occurs for African Catholics. So many are very close to their ancient roots and the religious ways of their people. At present, the National Tekakwitha Conference convenes annually for Native American Catholics, and any formal outreach on a national scale would be dependent to some extent on the success and accomplishments of that conference. In several dioceses relations between the Church and particular tribes are quite developed.

One lesson is clear to me after nine years of consultations, dialogues, publication projects, special reflections within ecumenical circles, academic conferences, and spiritual retreats and workshops in meditation: the local level and the national level have to be linked both closely and imaginatively. Interreligious dialogue moves ahead with trust and friendship, and these best thrive through regular and frequent personal contact. We have found that diocesan workers vary in the sort of relationship they encourage among scholars and religious leaders in their communities from bilateral dialogues to multilateral committees, but one locale can learn from the experiences and results of another. The best place for scholars and experts to serve is at the local level, where the church is living a daily relationship with particular groups. At the same time, national and international events and crises have considerable impact on local communities. Sometimes the expertise that a national office can gather and direct towards a certain topic can help bring communities together and aid understanding, and even prayer. This was definitely the case during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis and war.

One of the momentous events in the history of post-Vatican II interreligious relations was the first Asian East-West Intermonastic Conference in Bangkok in 1968. It was an occasion for dialogue and reflection on interreligious relations as part of Catholic monastic life, but it will be forever remembered as the time when Thomas Merton met his untimely death. The conference
was an opportunity for Merton to travel to Asia, to meet with Buddhist and Hindu representatives, and to carry on his own reflections on interreligious relations. His accidental death at the conference made the event even more significant, for the whole work of Thomas Merton was uplifted among monastics the world over. In 1977 Cardinal Pignedoli encouraged Catholic monastics to meet and form an agency for interreligious, intermonastic dialogue. In 1978 a North American body was formed, which today is known as Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. A newsletter was started, which continues to this day. A program of hospitality was inaugurated, which has passed through several phases, including visits of Buddhist monastics to North American monastic houses and visits of Benedictines and Trappists to Buddhist communities in India, Nepal, and even Tibet.

A new level of exchange was reached in July 1996, when Monastic Interreligious Dialogue hosted an encounter at the Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, where Thomas Merton had lived as a monk. For six days, Catholics and Buddhists, most of whom were monastics, lived in spiritual retreat, following a schedule of prayer and dialogue, and addressed together the topics of prayer, meditation, and contemplative life. Nearly twenty-five Buddhists and twenty-five Catholics engaged in the formal sessions of dialogue, and more than one hundred attended the whole Gethsemani Encounter. For the participants it was an extraordinary occasion of mutuality, respect, and spiritual depth and communion. Some have said that it was the best interreligious experience of their lives.

From time to time, questions of an interreligious nature have emerged in the work of theologians and scholars. An extensive body of literature on Christology and world religions, for example, now rests on library shelves. A number of academic societies now exist in the United States that bring together Christian scholars with Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim scholars. One such body, the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, holds major national conferences every three years and meets annually at the American Academy of Religion. Catholic scholars are among the members of these organizations promoting academic study and scholarship in conjunction with interreligious dialogue.
Important Steps During the Pontificate of John Paul II

The Second Vatican Council was an epochal step for Catholics in interreligious relations, but the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986 was its boldest implementation up to that point in post-conciliar times. It was an event that connected the ecumenical, the interreligious, and the social missions of the Church, so boldly defined at the Council, and displayed them to the world. The generous response of Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and other religious leaders to join Pope John Paul II in fasting, walking, and praying for peace made October 27, 1986 an historic date in the history of interreligious relations. At the end of 1986, the Pope described how much that single day influenced him personally, calling it the greatest religious event of the year, a moment when the hidden and radical unity of humanity found visible expression, and an event so significant that it invites deep reflection. In the same place he noted the lessons of Assisi, and among them was the reassurance that “we can indeed maintain that every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person.”

Those who were present at Assisi have given similar testimonies. A few who spoke to the Pope or observed him have relayed how much he was personally moved by happenings. It is an experience that has occurred countless times to those who have engaged wholeheartedly and faithfully in interreligious encounter. I believe that the Assisi event underscored a model for persons of faith to come together respectfully and genuinely to pray and to listen. That single day as an event has influenced interreligious relations more than any other single event. A Church opened its doors and placed its supreme leader and symbol of unity in the midst of representatives of churches and religious traditions so that they could stand together and witness cooperation, understanding, and prayer.

In his encyclical Redemptoris Missio (RM, 1990), John Paul II again described the impact of that experience and provided the Catholic Church with a very clear statement of its importance. He again offered reflections on the work of the Holy Spirit in every human heart. He also made this very personal observation:
The missionary must be a “contemplative in action.” He finds answers to problems in the light of God’s word and in personal and community prayer. My contact with representatives of the non-Christian spiritual traditions, particularly those of Asia, has confirmed me in the view that the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. (RM 91)

He again stated very clearly that the Catholic Church not only respects every individual for being open to God and the action of the Spirit but also understands that God works through other religious traditions: “[God] does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression.” (RM 55). In my mind, this text moves beyond a statement of respect for all religious persons and a belief that all humanity is directed towards God. This passage states explicitly a respect for religions in themselves.

The work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has expanded enormously as Pope John Paul II has invited people of faith to join him and has traveled to their countries and cities. The journal of the Pontifical Council has fattened with documentation and reports. Various Buddhist, Muslim, and other scholars have been published in it. In 1991, the Pontifical Council completed work on an extremely important document, Dialogue and Proclamation, which it issued jointly with the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In it the relationship between mission and dialogue was addressed once again, concluding that dialogue and proclamation are both authentic elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission. They are both necessary and legitimate, intimately related though not interchangeable. Various kinds of dialogues and accomplishments, gained from over twenty-five years of experience, are listed. In my mind, one of its most significant passages is found in the reflection on spiritual experience:

Interreligious dialogue does not merely aim at mutual understanding and friendly relations. It
reaches a much deeper level, that of the spirit, where exchange and sharing consist in a mutual witness to one’s beliefs and a common exploration of one’s religious convictions. In dialogue Christians and others are invited to deepen their religious commitment, to respond with increasing sincerity to God’s personal call and gracious self-gift, which, as our faith tells us, always passes through the mediation of Jesus Christ and the work of his Spirit. (40)

Dialogue and Proclamation also summarized the forms and goals of dialogue and offered inspiration for those who wish to take up interreligious activities. The text not only drew together insights of previous texts and accomplishments of the Pontifical Council but also linked the work of the Pontifical Council within the whole work of the Church. A discussion was not laid to rest, however, with this text. Though an endorsement of its earlier 1984 reflections on dialogue and mission, Dialogue and Proclamation left somewhat unresolved the personal synthesis every Christian needs to determine between mission and dialogue. By placing dialogue within the work of evangelization, the specific goals of dialogue need to be carefully discerned.

The Future

We can expect multireligious gatherings to-swell in importance and number in the decades ahead. The celebration of the Great Jubilee Year 2000 will provide occasions for peoples of faith to gather. Multireligious organizations, such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace, whose sixth assembly Pope John Paul II opened in 1994; will gain the formal support of religious bodies providing a forum for dialogue that guarantees respect for differences and opportunity for successful cooperation. Monastics will continue to increase their interreligious contacts and will provide rich resources for those seeking to grow spiritually. Scholarship will increase exponentially as the tools for accessing information and sharing it improve beyond even our present amazing capacities.
What does all this mean for the Catholic Church? The example of Pope John Paul II in meeting time and again with religious leaders and gaining the respect of Muslims has moved interreligious dialogue front and center in the life of the Church. To stay there, it needs the dedicated efforts of Catholics. The experience of religious pluralism is growing, and they will need to respond to it.

Who will be doing the work of interreligious dialogue for the Catholic Church in the years to come? Unless there is a reversal of current trends, fewer and fewer priests will be specializing in this field for their bishops and religious superiors. More and more men and women will fill the positions for official contact with religious groups. NADEO and the BCEIA have agreed to co-sponsor an institute for interreligious leadership for summer 1997. They have been sponsoring institutes for ecumenical leadership since 1981. The few scholars who have acquired competency in both theology and the study of the history of religions will need to be replaced by a competently trained new generation. No single graduate program at a Catholic university in the U.S. now offers specialization in the study of another religious tradition in the context of theology. Similarly, spirituality programs with adequate resources in Christian spirituality and for study of another religious tradition will be needed to train competent spiritual guides.

To those of us who remember well the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council, the few developments in the past thirty years outlined in this study may still seem somewhat incredible. Interreligious relations take time. Only in 1994 was a permanent liaison committee formed between the Pontifical Council and international Islamic organizations, although there has been informal contact for several years. Only in 1995 was the first international Buddhist-Catholic dialogue held under the sponsorship and with the participation of officials of the Holy See. We are still at the beginning, even as one generation of pioneers gives way gradually to another. While few among us can recall the events surrounding the drafting of *Nostra Aetate*, we perhaps should ponder what the state and condition of interreligious dialogue will be when few will be able to recall the 1986 World
Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi. It is my firm belief that the major steps taken by the Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council in the area of interreligious relations and dialogue and the continuing real development of its teaching and outreach in the past thirty years have placed the Church in a position of commitment so that this work will remain central to its life and mission.

Notes


2. For an account of the history of the Catholic response to religious pluralism around the question of salvation outside of the Church, see Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., Salvation Outside the Church? (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).


7. See the suggestions of Ewert Cousins, Christ of the 21st Century (Rockport, Mass: Element, 1992), especially chapters 3 and 5, where various theological syntheses, journey symbolism, and contemporary interreligious encounter are condensed into a theological and spiritual program for the future.


12. In July 1996, Bishop Donald Pelotte of Gallup, one of two U.S. Native American Catholics, attended an important colloquium sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and hosted in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Encounter of Traditional Religions.” Reports of the conference will be forthcoming. Also attending from North America was Fr. Achiel Peelman, whose recent book provides a summary of both important information and theological understanding of Native American-Catholic relations; see *Christ is a Native American* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).


15. Reports will appear in MID’s *Bulletin* and the Pontifical Council’s *Pro Dialogo*. The papers will be edited by Donald Mitchell and James Wiseman and published in 1997 by Continuum Press.


17. Three journals that give voice to this enterprise are: *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 15 (1995), University of Hawaii, 2530 Dole Street, Honolulu, HI 96822; *Hindu-Christian Studies Bulletin* 9 (1996), Centre for Studies in Religion & Society, University of Victoria, P.O. Box 3045, Victoria, BC V8W 3P4, Canada; and *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, no. 2 (July 1996), Carfax Publishing Company, 875-81 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139.


CHAPTER SIX

The Church in the Modern World: Rereading Gaudium et Spes After Thirty Years

WILLIAM C. MC DONOUGH

Introduction: The Significance of a Preposition

IN HIS COMMENTARY on Gaudium et Spes, Charles Moeller calls attention to the preposition “in” in the title of The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Catholics, he writes, cannot follow the separation implied in World Council of Churches’ documents on “Church and Society,” since the very title of Vatican II’s pastoral constitution relates church and world in an intrinsic manner.¹ Moeller’s reminder notwithstanding, one sees many commentators — perhaps the majority — reading that pastoral constitution as if the little preposition “in” were not present in its title. Such commentators seem to read the document selectively, centering on either the “modern world” part of the title or the “church” part.

This paper’s thesis is that the preposition is a key to reading Gaudium et Spes. The thesis has a general and a specific form. More generally, I claim that centering in on that preposition can help us move beyond two false starts — the overemphasis on either church or world that I mentioned above — in our reception of Gaudium et Spes. More particularly, I argue here that getting beyond those false starts is crucial for Catholic moral discussions,
which have been largely paralyzed by two opposing forms of church-world dualism. In pursuing both the general and particular thesis I am only elaborating a position recently articulated by Walter Kasper:

Even today — thirty years after *Gaudium et Spes* — both the systematic development of . . . a christologically grounded and defined anthropology and the fully articulated formulation of corresponding individual and social ethics are in many respects an urgent *desideratum*. Formulated in general terms: today the reception of the Second Vatican Council is by no means behind us, but in many respects still before us.²

In the second and third sections of this article, I will argue for the general and specific forms of my thesis in positive terms. In the first section which follows, I outline the approaches I am arguing against here, approaches that tend to concentrate — I think almost exclusively — on one half of the subtitle of *Gaudium et Spes*. That is, both approaches have taken the preposition “in” out of the title of *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.

Before any of that I pause to admit the difficulty of getting the meaning of *Gaudium et Spes* right. Already in introducing the first textual draft considered on the floor of the Council in 1964, Bishop Guano, who headed the drafting subcommission, described the great difficulty his group had in drafting the constitution: “What is difficult is to arrive at a just equilibrium between recalling the greatest principles of the Gospel — without which we would not be able to see — and an explanation of present conditions, which need to be treated in light of those principles.”³

What is Guano admitting except that the Council itself, once it decided to take up work on the church *ad extra*, was not sure how to proceed?⁴ And, in what remains perhaps the most helpful interpretation of *Gaudium et Spes*, Henri de Lubac claimed in his 1968 commentary that the document itself provides some of the seeds of its own misinterpretation:
Everything . . . in the end, was placed under the sign of the Word of God made flesh, who, “a perfect human being entered into the history of the world, assuming and recapitulating that history in himself” *(Gaudium et Spes*, par. 38). One senses here, on the part of the redactors, the concern to find a doctrinal equilibrium that will always be hard to establish perfectly. Without doubt, even the final text reflects the steps of a path strewn with stumbling stones, and the hand of many redactors who helped it along. . . . It is nonetheless necessary to be grateful to the Council for having entered into new terrain . . . without organizing a system.”

So when I now reject two tendencies in the interpretation of *Gaudium et Spes*, I do not mean to imply that the document’s meaning is easy to establish.

**Two Missteps on the Way to Understanding**

Interpretations of *Gaudium et Spes* emphasizing its embrace of the possibilities of the modern world predominated in the heady years following the Council, a period Kasper calls the “initial phase of exuberance immediately after the Council.” One already sees this tendency to embrace the modern world and its promise in the conciliar debates themselves. In the same speech in which he asked his brother bishops to avoid another Galileo case around the issue of contraception, Cardinal Suenens issued this call: *Sequamur progressum scientiae.*

Thirty years later the initial exuberance has faded, and along with it has come a gnawing sense that scientific progress has been accompanied by “man’s growing, far-reaching uncertainty regarding his own essence.” In the words of Vaclev Havel, “the relationship to the world that modern science fostered and shaped now appears to have exhausted its potential . . . [T]he relationship is missing something.”

Still, one-sided, overly optimistic readings of *Gaudium et Spes*
reign in some quarters. Let Thomas Shannon’s recent characterization of the meaning of *Gaudium et Spes* stand for the partial reading I am rejecting here:

I wish to focus on what I consider to be the most critical element in *Gaudium et Spes*: the shift from a classical to an historical perspective. . . . From my perspective, the most important sentence in *Gaudium et Spes* is in paragraph five: “Thus, the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one.”

This interpreter, a moralist, like many others who read *Gaudium et Spes* this way, emphasizes that among the Council’s major contributions was to free moral thinking from “an impersonal system of law applied abstractly to the individual to a consideration of the person and his or her acts as the moral standard.”

A similar reading of *Gaudium et Spes* appears in a recent book by moralist John Gallagher, for whom the document signaled a “shift away from human nature . . . focus[ing] instead on the human person or individual.”

But how can this be the central meaning of *Gaudium et Spes*? Where has the church gone in this exaltation of change and individual persons? Listen again to Kasper: “The church today is among the few remaining providers of meaning in our society. For a secularized and pluralistic society cannot give itself any final grounding.”

My claim is that Shannon’s interpretation represents a first failure to keep the preposition “in” in the title of *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.

But it is certainly not the only, nor perhaps the most pressing of the one-sided interpretations of *Gaudium et Spes*. There is another, perhaps more subtle partial reading of the document that begins from the recognition of the limits of a full embrace of the modern world. This partial reading would take the “in” out of the *Pastoral Constitution* and leave us, I think, as a church very much outside the modern world.

I see such a partial reading of *Gaudium et Spes* in the recent *America* magazine article “The American Church in Jeopardy,”
by Martin Tripole. The author takes issue with Avery Dulles’s suggestion that *Gaudium et Spes* called for “a completely new understanding of the relationship between the church and the world.” Tripole warns:

A problem begins to occur, however, when, according to some who adopt this new way of thinking, the service (of the church to the world) is to the temporal needs of others. . . . As a result, we no longer have provided people with a valid reason for concern for the communal, liturgical and sacramental life of the church. . . . Our church is falling apart. For the sake of our commitment to less noble factional causes, we are sapping the life blood of the church. Only if we unite in a faith community in and with the Lord, will God’s purposes in his church be served. Immediate action is necessary, if we care about the church’s survival.¹⁴

Tripole’s call for “immediate action” is the unspecified and ominous concluding sentence of his article. Does he mean that the church should withdraw from serving the “temporal needs” of the people in the world? If so, his article is an overreaction, one beginning to take form in our day, that, while finding the central meaning of *Gaudium et Spes* to be almost the opposite of that proposed by Shannon, will turn out to be just as incomplete. Taking the church out of the modern world cannot be the direction indicated by *Gaudium et Spes*.

Again, it is Kasper who provides the needed response:

Unfortunately, in the last twenty-five years the many energies for the internal renewal of the church were as often absorbed by internal trench-fighting. In fact, most of these internal fights are of very little interest to the majority of humanity. They are the more or less esoteric concerns of insiders. The majority of human beings have other
and more pressing concerns. In fact, while the house burns blazing, we fight about which picture frames should be dusted first, by whom, and how. We forget that the church is not there for itself. It is a sacrament for the salvation of the world.  

It was Moeller who first noted the importance of the preposition “in” in the title of the Pastoral Constitution. As we try to decipher the document’s significance many years later, let us begin by refusing to ignore that preposition and either the church or the modern world which it attempts to link.

The Twofold Meaning of Gaudium et Spes

Even though he finds “stumbling stones” in the road to interpreting Gaudium et Spes, Henri de Lubac suggests a way toward a less partial reading of the pastoral constitution. De Lubac suggests that the two parts of Gaudium et Spes complement each other: part one begins on modernity’s terms and claims that we modern human beings, on our own terms, cannot avoid admitting our dependence on God; part two begins on the church’s terms and claims the church, again on its own terms, cannot avoid engaging with all human beings in responding to the world’s urgent problems:

And so arise the two great interconnected but inverse problems involved in these two parts of the Constitution . . . On the one hand, it is our task to justify, from the starting point of human reality, the obligation that binds man to direct his path, within the liberty of his personal life, toward that divine end that Jesus Christ reveals and promises to him through the mediation of his Church. Or again, in echo of the words that open the Constitution: from the starting point of the joys and hopes, but also of the sorrows and agonies of contemporary man, it will be necessary to remind him of an anxiety infinitely more
profound, but also of a promise infinitely more grandiose than all the anxieties and all the promises of the time in which he lives. . . . The goal of this task is to lead man, so often absorbed by the multiplicity of worries and problems that he daily encounters in the structure of his earthly life, to ask himself about the entirety of his being.

On the other hand, once this great problem — which is undeniably the problem of man and the problem of God — is considered resolved, it will still be necessary to begin from the starting point of faith itself, and to justify rationally the interest that the Christian nonetheless attaches to the contingent realities of this world.

Two interrelated problems. . . . [First, the theologian] will start to demonstrate to the unbeliever that he cannot avoid the problem of his final destiny. . . . [Second, she] will have to show that the Christian vocation is the final reason — and the only fully satisfying one of the "earthly activity" (par. 34) of man.16

For de Lubac, *Gaudium et Spes* moves beyond its partial interpretations by insisting that neither church nor world has meaning except in its link to the other. Pope Paul VI had put the issue this way: "The split between the gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time."17 My thesis is that de Lubac here shows us a way beyond any approaches to interpreting *Gaudium et Spes* that retain the "split" spoken of by Paul VI.

To Shannon and all who are concerned about "individual persons," de Lubac says *Gaudium et Spes* accepts such persons as the starting point of discussion. Then it shows that what such persons have most in common is their need for God: what we need most is the way beyond our individuality that only faith provides. But to Tripole and others who move quickly to emphasize Christ's church as the place providing the needed move beyond themselves for modern individuals, de Lubac will also have a response. And it is the quickness of the move to Christology that needs questioning.
Such quick moves to Christology are made often enough. For example, one seems to be made by David Schindler in his recent article on the pastoral constitution. He advocates a reading of the document through the lens of what he calls an "ontological" and not merely "moral" Christocentrism, an approach that "insists that a re-centering in Jesus Christ makes a difference already in the original content of man's imaging of God."¹⁸

But *Gaudium et Spes* recognizes a different, more ambiguous "original content": the "joys and the hopes, the grief and the anguish of the people of our time" are the starting point for and necessary orientation of the church's concerns. The move to a christological response, while necessary, is made less quickly in *Gaudium et Spes* than Schindler seems to recognize. Let another affirmation by Walter Kasper stand as a further specification of the less partial interpretation de Lubac is calling for:

The premise of christology is a relatively independent anthropology. In this sense theology should adopt a positive attitude to the modern turn to anthropology and the modern notion of autonomy. But christology is also critical of particular anthropological schemes, whether they be theoretical or practically lived; and it points to the fundamental problem which the anthropological approach leads to. It therefore outbids anthropology. . . . The relationship between christology and anthropology can be more closely defined in three ways: as an affirmation of everything that is right, true, good and lovely about human beings; as a prophetic criticism of all forms of alienation in human beings; and finally as the creative surpassing of everything that is possible in purely human terms, and thus as the completion and fulfillment of human beings in God."¹⁹

So it is not that the Christological center of *Gaudium et Spes* is in doubt. Kasper even claims that paragraph twenty-two's
opening sentence, which follows here, is the central affirmation of the constitution: “In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear.”

It is just that *Gaudium et Spes* works its way to this central affirmation in a less aprioristic way. Tripole’s and Schindler’s christological focus forgets to start on modernity’s anthropological turf: it does not keep the church in the modern world. Shannon’s anthropological focus forgets to move beyond modernity’s paralyzed anxiety in the face of death; it forgets to keep the modern world in some context that can give it a reason to go on.

Thus, it is by means of a christological move, but one come to “from below,” that *Gaudium et Spes* kept the church in the modern world. We will return to the question of Christology at the end of this paper. For now it is enough to say that it is by means of such a Christology that the pastoral constitution emphasizes the preposition this paper is seeking to highlight.

**Four Moral Theological Implications**

Immediately after claiming that in *Gaudium et Spes* anthropology is taken up into and outbid by christology, Kasper adds that “an individual and social ethic based on the Christian viewpoint is an urgent requirement.” In this section of the paper I ask about the implications for moral theology of the decision of *Gaudium et Spes* to keep the church in the modern world. We already saw that Kasper thinks we are just now able to begin working on this “urgent desideratum.” So from the start I wish to be clear that what follows should be read not as a road map for the revision of moral theology but as a hope-filled extension and application of *Gaudium et Spes* to a very urgent task before us.

What is evidently needed is an understanding of morality as spirituality, a spirituality that arises from the natural desire for happiness that is built into all human beings. Servais Pinckaers summarizes the connection between morality and spirituality in this way: “The spontaneous, universal desire that receives an unhoped-for answer lifts human hope to its highest pitch.” What follows are four ideas, already arising in *Gaudium et Spes*, for a morality that would lift human hope to its highest pitch.
a. Catholic morality will be a natural law morality, and it will not be like preconciliar natural law moralities.

A first moral theological implication of keeping the “in” in The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World is that “the idea of natural law ought to be creatively renewed.”24 If one partial reading of Gaudium et Spes calls for a “shift away” from natural law morality, then another such partial reading of the document could legitimate a return to an only seemingly objective natural law. Certainly we need no “immediate action” to reestablish an inadequately thought through natural law:

The problem which many have found with the version of natural law which dominated Roman Catholic morality was that the whole person was not kept in view: certain aspects seemed to be given a significance and prominence out of relation to the total person. The ongoing task, of course, is to understand what it means to be a person, to discover what are the lines of human wholeness, what humanizes, what are genuine human goods. But we should not expect to be able to prove that a piece of behavior is inhuman and therefore immoral as clearly as we can prove something in the natural sciences. It is not something that can be easily “read off” from a definition of human nature.25

Keeping church and world together in reading Gaudium et Spes will result in a very different form of natural law morality than is described above. First, such a morality will acknowledge the church’s dependence on “human experience, human judgment and the relevant human sciences” in its discernment of moral norms.26 There can be no other conclusion drawn from Gaudium et Spes, paragraph twenty-two’s confidence that the Spirit is at work in “all people of good will.”

But, second, instead of shifting away from natural law morality, a Catholic morality based in the pastoral constitution
will abandon as illusory the search for any approach that is either only for “individual persons” or is independent of faith. *Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph fifty-one, called for an objective morality whose criteria are drawn *ex natura personae eiusdemque actuum*. One can find little support for moving away from natural law there.

And with respect to the search for a natural law morality unconnected to faith, Alasdair MacIntyre reminds us that this is an illusory search: “Modern Catholic protagonists of theories of natural law have sometimes claimed that we can fully understand and obey the natural law without any knowledge of God. . . . But a knowledge of God is . . . available to us from the outset of our moral enquiry and plays a crucial part in our progress in that enquiry.”

So a first moral implication of keeping the church in the modern world will be in our “creative renewal” of natural law morality.

b. Catholic natural law morality will have unchanging moral norms, and they will not be focused on sexual morality.

A second moral implication of keeping the church in the world might be thought of in these terms: *Gaudium et Spes* has suggested a clear move beyond both moral authoritarianism and moral anarchy. That is, the pastoral constitution contains unheeded wisdom for the debates around unchangeable moral norms that have become almost intractable in our day. So, while some moralists see unchanging moral norms around every corner (especially if something sexual lurks there) and other moralists deny the existence of any such norms, *Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph twenty-eight, is precise in its listing of “the variety of crimes . . . that poison civilization.” Unlike many moralists who call for “immediate action” to clarify church teaching in the face of the world’s secularizing influences, the pastoral constitution does not list sexual sins among those crimes, instead condemning “all offenses against life . . . all violations of the integrity of the human person . . . and all offenses against human dignity.” Unlike a second group of moralists who refer always to the complexity of individual reality, *Gaudium et Spes* is clear that there are specific forms of human behavior that always “poison civilization.”
In other words, *Gaudium et Spes* does have a list of what have become known as intrinsically evil acts. And to begin listing those actions one should not look to the area of human sexuality but to the area of direct attacks on human beings. In his own recent reversal of his previous position—rejecting the existence of any intrinsically evil acts, American moralist Timothy O’Connell put it this way: “to kill the innocent directly is not to judge incorrectly within morality. Rather, it is to attack the very existence and meaning of morality.”

Basing a similar position on her understanding of Thomas Aquinas’s account of the fundamental inclinations of all human beings, Jean Porter has written that “the more fundamental an inclination is, the more absolute are the claims that it generates regarding respect on the part of others.” What I am claiming is that these moralists find support for their moderate position on the existence of (some) intrinsically evil moral acts in *Gaudium et Spes*.

c. Catholic natural law morality will focus on our common humanity, and will find that commonality at the interior level of virtue more than at the exterior level of norm.

A third moral implication follows from this reading of *Gaudium et Spes*, an implication that again finds a way between positions calling for either an abandonment or a restoration of “traditional” natural law morality. Where some see human individuality and uniqueness as the mark of the modern era and others want “immediate action” (also at the level of imposing more universal moral norms?), the view proposed here stresses our common humanity and does so at the level of the virtues that animate moral living from within human beings.

It is very significant that the pastoral constitution separates its normative teaching, in its part one, regarding these “criminal” actions from its teaching, in part two, regarding the “urgent problems” of our day. That is, one should read the moral teaching of the document as moving from part one’s absolute prohibitions to part two’s descriptions of moral excellence. In this way the constitution is following Aquinas’s understanding of moral
goodness which, according to Porter, moves from the "fundamental" to the "higher" moral inclinations of human beings.30

Thus, Gaudium et Spes, from its concern to protect individuals from direct attacks on their human dignity (in part one), moves out in successive stages from the individual person to our most global concerns: part two begins closest to the individual in its consideration of marriage, then to culture, then to economic and social life, then to national political communities, then to international peace, and finally to the establishment of a community among all nations. So the document moves out from its most fundamental concern with individual human life to its most excellent and universal concern for all life together.

And Gaudium et Spes also shares Aquinas’s wisdom about the limits of normative morality. Describing Aquinas, Porter writes that when it comes to matters involving not fundamental, but excellent moral goods, “Aquinas has a very sketchy treatment, providing little or no guidance when we attempt to negotiate these waters. This relative sketchiness of Aquinas’ account should be seen as an indication of his wisdom, rather than his lack of foresight. . . . One can never be just unless he also possesses the virtue of prudence.”31 That the second part of the pastoral constitution has almost no condemnations equivalent to those expressed in part one’s paragraph twenty-seven suggests that Gaudium et Spes shares this Thomistic wisdom.32

This emphasis begins in part two of Gaudium et Spes with paragraph fifty-one’s linking of the virtue of “conjugal chastity” to the possibility of even knowing what the integrum sensum of marriage is.33 The rereading of Gaudium et Spes I am proposing supports Herbert McCabe’s understanding of a helpful method for moral theology: “You cannot fit the virtues into a legal structure without reducing them to disposition to follow the rules. You can, however, fit law and obedience to law into a comfortable, though minor, niche in the project of growing up in the rich and variegated life of virtues.”34 Part two of Gaudium et Spes opens the way to a rethinking of Catholic morality as beginning from a few absolute prohibitions and moving toward a morality of virtue.
d. Catholic natural law morality, situated in the communio of virtue, will integrate concerns for subsidiarity with concerns for the common good.

A last element of a Catholic morality that keeps the church in the world will be that morality's ability to integrate the inevitable tensions between concerns for subsidiarity and for the common good. A Catholic morality-as-spirituality will emphasize our human capacity for truth as a capacity to join others in searching for the truth. If, as Josef Ratzinger claims, paragraph sixteen on conscience is the leitmotiv of the pastoral constitution, then that paragraph's description of how conscience functions is central to any adequate moral theology:

By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in the love of God and of one's neighbor. Through loyalty to conscience Christians are joined to others in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships.

If God's call in conscience is the possibility of our setting out on the moral life in the first place, then communities of virtue are the possibility of our continuing on our way to discern our particular moral obligations. Norbert Rigali insists that all virtue is gained communally:

One can ask whether there has not been a tendency in past theology to understand freedom and moral responsibility themselves in an individualistically distorted way. . . . If the radically social doctrine of the Communion of the Saints were less theologically neglected and underdeveloped, it would perhaps be more apparent that the church must safeguard its teaching on personal freedom and moral responsibility not only against a doctrine reducing evil to social
systems, institutions, or collectives but also against an individualistically distorted view of freedom and responsibility.\textsuperscript{37}

Contemporary Catholic morality probably underemphasizes the particularly ecclesial function that the magisterium plays in this regard. Should not the magisterium remind all of us that we will be divorced from the fundamental desires of our hearts unless we are being transformed within the \textit{communio sanctorum}? That only as members of those being transformed by our communion in the holy things of God, do we have a ghost of a chance of finding a correct interpretation of our experience, of knowing and doing our moral obligations? Again it is Kasper who gets the theological significance right here:

\textit{Communio} is not something we make or are even able to produce. What is meant is much more the community and the reconciliation with God that was opened to us in Jesus Christ, and through the preaching of the word of God is made present to us now. The classically Catholic term \textit{communio sanctorum} did not in its origins mean the community of the holy ones, but community in the holy, a common participation in the holy things.\textsuperscript{38}

Could we not say that a confidence derived from our participation in the “holy things” of God enabled \textit{Gaudium et Spes} to call the church to dialogue with the world in the expectation of learning from the world? As Yves Congar put it: “The Church has probably . . . never before acknowledged so plainly that it too receives from the world (as it readily admits in chapter four of part one of \textit{Gaudium et Spes}).”\textsuperscript{39}

It is only inclusive communities of virtue that can equip persons for the task that \textit{Gaudium et Spes} enjoins to us: our humanization as persons through our divinization. And this, perhaps the most challenging moral implication of all in our reading of \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, is simply another instance of the Thomistic spirit of the document. The way Aquinas put it is that
“the higher one’s degree of goodness, the more universal is one’s desire for good. Imperfect things extend no further than their own individual good. God, who is most perfect in good, is the good of all being.” The way *Gaudium et Spes* puts it is that the church can only be the church *in* the modern world.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately the way *Gaudium et Spes* keeps the church *in* the world is by helping both church and world come to a deeper understanding of their own meaning. So the pastoral constitution corrects any myopic focus on either church or world by attending to both, but settling elsewhere, on the truth that is Jesus Christ and will be fully ours in the world to come. *Gaudium et Spes* thus affirms that human beings will always be revising what we know to be true. Cardinal Colombo put the point best in a work written just a year after the Council:

The actual course of the Council can show how the Church understands that possession of truth which constitutes its essence. The conciliar debates, which have lasted four long years and have sometimes been marked by very sharp contrasts, unmistakably show that the possession of truth in the Church is not something dead, rigid, static, not a reason for comfortable repose, but a ceaseless, inexhaustible search, struggle and endeavor for renewal. . . . To describe this relation (between Church and truth) we might perhaps with profit modify the formula which has led to the erroneous opinion that the Church represents a dogmatism hostile to culture. Instead of repeating perpetually that the Church is in possession of the truth, we should say that the Church is possessed by the truth. . . . Growth in knowledge and love of truth is the basis and inner law of the continued existence of the Church in time. The day on which this growth reached its
utmost limit would, according to the Church’s firm conviction, be the last day of history.\textsuperscript{41}

To take such a stance on the meaning of \textit{The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World} is simply to honor the preposition “in.” It is to follow the way of incarnation, God’s honoring of the world by taking flesh in it and assuming it into God’s own Son’s life, death, and resurrection. To keep the church \textit{in} the world is to keep our eyes on Christ. It is to do what Paul VI asked of the Council Fathers in his own speech inaugurating the second session of the Council: “Where does our path start? What course should it follow? What goal must be set? Three essential questions, in all simplicity. There is only a single answer to them. . . . Christ. Christ our principle; Christ our way and our leader; Christ our hope and our goal.”\textsuperscript{42}

We will keep our eyes on Christ if we refuse to overfocus our gaze on either the church in its present form or on the changing world. This is a difficult, but not a partial strategy of interpretation; and it is a difficult, but not a partial way of life. It is also the strategy that \textit{Gaudium et Spes} took to keep the church \textit{in} the modern world.

Notes

1. “The expression ‘in’ was retained from the first version onwards. It makes clear that it has never been a question of the Church standing opposite to and facing the world, but of presence in it. . . . Right from the start it was never a matter of two opposed realities. Theologically, that is not something to be taken for granted as a matter of course, for at the-time the view of the World Council of Churches, for example, was rather that of an opposition . . . ‘Church and Society.’ ” Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” in Vorgrimler, ed. \textit{Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II}, vol. 5 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 81.


3. “Difficile insuper est invenire iustum aequilibrium inter revocationem grandium principiorum Evangelii — qua certe nos carere non posse videmur — et descriptionem et enodationem praesentium

4. See Moeller’s description of “the decisive impulse” during the first session of the Council to support Cardinal Suenens’ call for two schemata on the church, one *ad intra*, the other *ad extra*. Moeller, “The History of the Constitution,” 10-12.


15. “In den letzten 25 Jahren waren bei uns die meisten Kräfte leider für die innerkirchliche Grabenkämpfe absorbiert. Doch die meisten

16. Henri de Lubac, “The Total Meaning of Man and of the World: Two Interrelated Problems,” *Communio* 17 (1990): 614-16. This is an English translation of one brief section of de Lubac’s commentary. As far as I can tell, it is the only portion of the brilliant French commentary, *Atheisme et le sense de l’homme*, available in English.


21. Here is the “fundamental problem” for modern anthropology, for Kasper: “Angst (has become) the constitutive ground of human existence. It is not an anxiety about ‘some thing,’ but anxiety without object, a dread that has eaten into a freedom that has become bottomless. This dread has become the very constitution of human existence.” *The Christian Meaning of Freedom and the History of Freedom in the Modern Era* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1988), 15.


26. Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 174. With his usual clarity Kasper outlines a threefold method for his “creatively renewed” natural law. Unlike the dualism of some principles and applications approaches to natural law, Kasper outlines a threefold process: from church principles, to norms discerned with all the relevant sciences, to individual judgments of conscience. See *Theology and Church*, 173-75.

Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 141. Gaudium et Spes, par. 36 says: “Without its Creator the creature simply disappears.”


29. Jean Porter, The Recovery of Virtue (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 89, 144. In her newer book, Porter suggests a theoretical rationale behind this renewed natural law: “Aquinas’s account of morality does offer a substantive contribution to the moral debates of our time. . . . It is worth emphasizing that the normative account that Aquinas offers is quite minimal, as far as its actual content goes. He begins with a set of very general, even banal, observations about tendencies that are ubiquitous in human life, together with a metaphysical argument that these are constitutive inclinations of human nature. . . . [He adds] more specific arguments along this line that are not always convincing. Yet a revision of Aquinas’ thicker account of human nature does not affect the core of his normative account. . . . The price of this flexibility is of course a high level of generality. . . . Still, Aquinas’ approach makes a real difference in practice.” Moral Actions and Christian Ethics (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 111.

30. See Porter, The Recovery of Virtue, 89-90, 144.


32. There are three exceptions: genocide (in par. 79) and count­population bombing as well as total war (in par. 80) are all called “crimes against God and humanity.”

33. Here is how Gaudium et Spes, par. 51 reads on the subject: “Moralis igitur indoles rationis agendi . . . obiectivis criteriis, ex personae eiusdemque actuum natura desumptis, determinari debet, quae integrum sensum mutuae donationis ac humanae procreationis in contextu veri amoris observant; quod fieri nequit nisi virtus castitatis coniugalis sincero animo colatur.” Acta Apostolicae Sedis 58 (1966): 1072. In another study I trace the long conciliar debate on this topic. See McDonough, “‘New terrain’ and a ‘stumbling stone’ in Redemptorist Contributions to Gaudium et Spes: On Relating and Juxtaposing Truth’s Expression and Truth’s Experience,” Studia Moralia (1997, forthcoming).


35. “(Paragraph sixteen) arrives at the essential leitmotiv of the whole Constitution. For if the simple voice of conscience, which discloses the whole will of God, consists in the precept of love, then what it commands is ultimately man’s ‘humanity’ — being human in the full sense. At the same time it is clear what the content of ‘humanity’ actually
involved in the field of action. . . a consent to love which makes man human.” Ratzinger, “Commentary on Part I, Chapter I of *Gaudium et Spes*,” in Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5, 135.

36. *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), par. 16. It is unfortunate that this text from *Gaudium et Spes* is not cited in the recent papal encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*.


I N THIS ESSAY I would like to look at three questions. First, what are a) Catholic social teaching and b) Catholic social action? Second, what are the central themes of Catholic social teaching as it has developed since Vatican II? And, third, why is Catholic social teaching still, as so many have said, the Church’s best kept secret?

Social Teaching and Social Action

Catholic social thought is nothing more than the serious effort by Catholics to make sense of their faith in the midst of history. When that thought is gathered and offered in a systematic way by those exercising pastoral authority in the Church, we have Catholic social teaching. The phrase Catholic social teaching (or Catholic social thought) may simply be redundant, for all Catholic articulation of faith is, in some basic sense, social. Doctrinal formulations and prayers always have definite social and political implications, just as social and political claims made in the name of faith rest on theological judgements, stated or not.

Still, there is a body of Catholic teaching which is explicitly and deliberately understood as the conscious articulation of the meaning of the faith in the concrete setting of a particular historical situation. Leo XIII spoke to new things, “rerum novarum,” by which he meant the phenomena associated with
industrial society. Pius XI spoke in 1931 to worldwide economic depression and ideological conflict, John XXIII in 1963 to Cold War militarism, the collapse of colonial empires and the spread of Christian democracy in Europe.

As these examples suggest, the meaning of the Church’s faith and life turns on the meaning assigned to contemporary political and historical events. The revolutions in Catholic consciousness which have punctuated recent decades, from John XXIII on, found their origin not in libraries and monasteries but in the events of this tragic century. The sources of Vatican II lie in the fascist movements of the inter-war years, in the death camps, the Resistance and the bomb, in the anti-colonial rebellions, the successes of post-war Christian democracy and the failures of revolutionary Leninism. These events made thoughtful women and men ask new questions and frame new answers. Among Roman Catholics they led to a basic shift away from a church that cared mainly for itself, convinced that it alone offered the way to save humanity, and toward a church enlisted by choice in the common human enterprise.

So Catholic social teaching and lives based on it are nothing more than intelligent and responsible Catholicism, Catholicism engaged in thinking through the meaning of historical experience, personal and collective. The teaching embodies the Church’s more or less systematic reflection in light of faith on its ongoing historical experience and, in dialectical fashion, its honest reflection on its faith in light of its ongoing historical experience.

In the United States, Catholic social thought has been associated with the work of so-called public theologians like John A. Ryan, director of the Social Action Department of the old National Catholic Welfare Conference from 1919 to 1945; John Courtney Murray, S.J., the most influential public theologian of the Vatican II years, best known for his work on church and state, and J. Bryan Hehir, architect of many of the post-Vatican II statements of the United States bishops. In its social teaching, the United States Church draws on the work of such thinkers to advise Catholics about their civic responsibilities. At the same time the Church seeks to speak to all Americans about the moral dimension of common problems.
Catholic social teaching has a dual function, then, to help the Church form its conscience on public matters and to help the multi-cultural public to develop a broad moral consensus to inform its necessary public choices.

In the United States, the hierarchy has provided this kind of guidance in a systematic way since 1919, when their newly established national office produced a detailed program for postwar reconstruction. Then, under Ryan’s guidance, the bishops continued to offer moral commentary on public affairs and occasionally to take positions for and against specific legislation. In the 1930s they backed New Deal domestic legislation, and later they gave belated support to civil rights. More cautious in dealing with questions of war and peace, the hierarchy after Vatican II finally began to apply Catholic principles to the arms race, the military draft, and specific questions of military action. Two of their pastoral letters of the 1980s, one dealing with the moral problems posed by nuclear arms, the other offering a comprehensive commentary on the American economy, drew unusual attention not only among Catholics but across the country.

The body of Catholic teaching on public issues since Vatican II fills two large volumes. This corpus of work follows the basic structure erected at Vatican II: that is, the Church has no specific agenda of its own but seeks to affirm human dignity, defend human rights and contribute to building up the unity of the human family, and to apply these principles to specific public questions. The late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin helped his fellow bishops weave these together into what he called a “seamless garment” of pro-life positions which included opposition to abortion and capital punishment, moral limits on the use of military force, and advocacy for full employment, universal access to housing, education and health care, and government assistance for community-based economic development.

Through a standing committee and a national office, the bishops actively promote such views, occasionally testify before Congress, and even lobby for legislative action, as they did recently during the welfare reform debate. And they attempt to educate Catholics and the general public regarding the moral dimension of public policy, as in documents prepared for wide
distribution during presidential elections. Comparable educational and governmental work goes on at the state level through state Catholic conferences.

So there is a great deal of material available to answer the question "what does the Church think about matters of social justice?" But there is a second question: what does the Church do? Catholic social action, while based upon Catholic social teaching, often has a different orientation. More practical than theoretical, social action has to do with living the Gospel in the concrete circumstances in which the Church finds itself. At one level, of course, Catholic social action, like Catholic social teaching, is redundant. The Church's ordinary work of worship, prayer, and pastoral care helps form and sustain persons, families, and communities, all with immeasurable social consequences. Then there is the tremendous array of Catholic social services, from quiet care for the poor in parishes and church-sponsored food pantries and soup kitchens, to massive Catholic hospitals and health centers, to the bewildering array of Catholic social service agencies at work among every group of persons in need in our country. Add the Catholic educational institutions which dot the landscape, and the tremendous fact of the Church's presence becomes clear.

Catholic social action, as distinct from social service, has to do with church-based efforts to address the causes of social injustice and unnecessary human suffering. In the United States such work ordinarily aims to empower people for participation in the always ambiguous marketplace realities of contemporary society. American Catholic social action reflects the Catholic experience of ethnic associations, trade unions, political machines and community organization, vehicles immigrant, working-class Catholics used to protect their interests and defend their values. Each reflected a self-interested, realistic quest for power and resources, as in trade union collective bargaining and "bread and butter" liberal politics, both in some tension with the principled pursuit of social justice and the common good which dominated Catholic social teaching.

In 1969 the American bishops launched their own war on poverty, the Campaign for Human Development, a national financial drive which provided seed money for self-help organizing
among poor and marginalized people. It has become a major source of support for such grass roots organizing, while other Catholic agencies have joined in efforts to organize people in need. Congregation-based organizing, aimed at drawing citizens into groups which can identify issues and find remedies, dominates the work of Catholic social action offices. Other organizing efforts, including efforts at building cooperatives, providing low- and middle-income housing, forming partnerships for economic development, or developing networks with the capacity to lobby government officials, all have in common bringing ordinary citizens into active civic participation while constructing grass roots institutions through which such responsible citizenship can be sustained.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the combination of social teaching and social action does not tell the whole story. There are movements of social engagement that have still another quality, which can be called the Catholic Social Gospel, symbolized by such activists as Dorothy Day’s Catholic Worker movement or the witness of Jesuit Daniel Berrigan and the so-called Catholic peace movement. Catholic social teaching seeks to address Catholics as citizens in a pluralistic society, and to speak to the whole American public, so it moves from Gospel and faith imperatives to natural law categories of human dignity and rights, ending with arguments that make little direct reference to Christian mandates.

Similarly, Catholic social action seeks bottom-up mobilization and practical effectiveness, entering the give and take of politics with a stress on self-interest that sometimes seems at odds with Christian imperatives of self-sacrificing love. The Catholic social gospel, in contrast, is more prophetic, making a more direct application of Christian values to social realities. Social Gospel Catholics are impatient with the natural law moderation of Catholic social teaching and uncomfortable with the hard-headed realism and limited objectives of mainstream social action. Instead Catholic Social Gospel opts for personal conversion, intense community, and radical Christian witness as ways to build a just and peaceful society. While the number of people in such movements is limited, their influence is significant. Indeed the language
and spirit of the Catholic social gospel (as in, for example, the phrase "option for the poor") informs much of the piety, the prayer, and the reflection evident in that enormous network of social services, from soup kitchens to prison ministries, that dot the American cityscape.

One example might help illustrate these categories. In their 1986 pastoral letter on the American economy, the bishops spoke in some sections of the "option for the poor" in ways which condemned materialism and consumerism and urged countercultural witness to Gospel values. That social gospel emphasis was less evident when they spoke of public policy, where they offered very modest recommendations to improve provision of services for the needy while working toward full employment. And there was still a different tone when they spoke of their continuing support for labor organization and widespread participation in decisions on economic policy. While these were not necessarily irreducible conflict with each other, the tensions involved may account for the weakness of the final sections of the text, when the bishops confined their recommendations for Catholic action to modest prescriptions for prayer, family life, and personal witness.

There was no ringing call for political engagement, as the policy sections might have suggested, nor for renewed organizing drives in accord with their own tradition and practice, nor for voluntary poverty as the option the poor might require. Social teaching, social action, and social gospel remain, it seems, on different tracks.

Themes of Catholic Social Teaching Since Vatican II

Human Rights

Before World War II, the Church was equivocal at best in dealing with human rights, but John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* (1963), with its long list of political and civil as well as social and economic rights, marked a decisive turning point. It is important to note the presence of those two forms of rights and the Church's insistence on both.
In many ways, provision for social and economic rights remains the central agenda of Catholic social teaching. If the popes have campaigned for political and civil rights, including religious liberty, in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, they have campaigned with equal fervor for recognition of social and economic rights less accepted in the United States. The American welfare system has always fallen short of including everyone or meeting basic needs, so the Church in this country has often been an advocate on behalf of basic minimum social and economic rights, especially amid the pressures for welfare reform.

Still, the Church insists that exclusive emphasis on rights and distributive justice is inadequate. In the past, in the United States, the language of rights made sense for a church which saw itself as an outsider battling for acceptance. For an insider church, sharing responsibility, advocacy must be balanced against wider responsibility, especially in times of slow economic growth and diminishing public finances.

This is probably why John Paul II speaks in a different tone to better-off Catholics than to the poor, insisting to the one group that their demand for a place at the table is justified, insisting to the other group that they had better go beyond sharing crumbs from that table to making it work better for everyone. Similarly, despite claims to the contrary, the economic thought of the U.S. hierarchy has modified its demands for distributive justice with careful assessment of the need for economic growth, investment, productivity, and stability.

Nevertheless, human dignity and human rights remain, of course, a central element of Church teaching today, perhaps the central element. That teaching will always place the Church in a prophetic stance, especially as it draws out the political and civil rights implications in some countries, the social and economic implications in others. Across the globe, even while internally the Church seems to become more conservative, the Church stands out as a major voice for human rights. This is true at an official level, bishops and Church agencies, and at the level of lay Catholic movements, often at the forefront of defense of human rights. This is a major change since Vatican II, and one which should sustain a positive sense of the process of renewal.
The Common Good

This has been a far more crucial theme of papal teaching than it has been in the United States. Leo XIII, addressing an apparently successful liberal capitalism in 1891, advocated reform and only hinted at the need for institutional change. But Pius XI, writing at the start of the great depression, made institutional change the centerpiece of Quadragesimo Anno in 1931, offering a Christian alternative, the long-forgotten system of vocational or occupational groups. More generally, he argued that social justice, defined as the common good, could only be implemented if there were new structures which transcended individual and group interests. What was missing then, as now, amid the contending demands of free market liberalism and state-directed socialism was an alternative which would allow persons to work for the common good without dictation. His Christian social order was intended to do that.

American Catholics were never comfortable with European corporatism, but many did understand the need to go beyond rights to examine how the economy could be reorganized to insure the common good. The 1919 program spoke of cooperatives, stock and profit sharing plans, and copartnership schemes which would allow workers to share in decision-making. In the mid-1930s almost every major social action leader signed a manifesto entitled “Organized Social Justice,” which outlined a democratized version of the papal system. Later the CIO’s abortive industrial council plan, proposing that unions and management groups collaborate on industry-wide policies, reflected a continued striving to move beyond the limitations of American business unionism to build structures of shared responsibility into the American political economy.

All these efforts failed. In articulating the demands of the common good, Catholics ran into two problems which plagued American reformers. One was the problem of relying upon the state. On the one hand, only the government had the power to checkmate the power of private corporations and make construction of alternative institutions possible. Occasionally the government did exert a negative check on corporate power, but
the combination of political pluralism and constitutional federalism limited its ability, except in war time, to define and enforce the terms of the common good or the public interest. In domestic policy, Americans consistently settled for a compensatory system, in which the federal government intervened to compensate for the failures of the market. Thus our modified version of the welfare state and our fiscal and monetary systems of nudging the private sector while leaving intact its autonomous decision making structures. This compromise is sustained by a variety of political and cultural ideologies of a quasi-religious character.

But there are deeper problems facing those who would construct institutions based on common rather than particular interests. Part of it is the individualism of American culture, which makes us all reluctant to accept the disciplines of corporate responsibility: the church and the university provide two excellent examples. Then there is the structural as opposed to moral selfishness of our dominant institutions, which render them incapable of sacrificing short-run interests to common concerns. There is much else. The church is not alone in failing to find a common good appeal as strong as its appeals about rights. Labor, civil rights, and feminist groups similarly mobilize considerable resources around specific questions of rights; they have far greater difficulty articulating constructive alternatives for society as a whole. In the end, who has a good answer for the question: how does a free and pluralistic community define what is common and voluntarily give it priority?

Still, there can be no avoidance of John XXIII's insistence that articulation of rights carries with it the responsibility to join in the more ambiguous political and cultural struggle to determine how these rights are to be implemented. In Karl Rahner's formulation, it is possible in the name of Church teaching to authoritatively name an evil, for example, the deprivation of rights, and to insist on responsibility to overcome that evil; it is not possible, in the name of the faith, to say how it is to be done.

Yet each citizen must try, and this means learning how to translate Christian faith and its impulse toward human rights and solidarity into terms comprehensible to all citizens, and not just
comprehensible but compelling enough to motivate sacrifice and risk. The pastoral letters of the bishops represented a courageous attempt to help shape the common culture and the common institutions for which Catholics, no longer immigrant outsiders, now share responsibility. This is where they have to prove that recognizing human rights and meeting human needs makes sense, that it can be done in such a way as to help develop the common life. Similarly, it means learning how to translate the Gospel imperative of peacemaking into policies of national and global security which are realistic and persuasive. The application of this argument to the abortion question is obvious: it is not enough to be right, it is also necessary to persuade in terms of the common national life.

The option for the poor, the human rights of the unborn, and the value of nonviolence may be admirable for churches and for some unusually religious people; they have not been accepted as normative for the common life of this country. That, it seems to me, is the greatest challenge Catholics now face. It is a cultural challenge first of all, deciding what our relationship as Christians is with our fellow Americans, what is the meaning of this national community, and what can we say to assist our people to feel that they are one people, that they share a common life, and that they can build together a common history. Catholics need to continue to take up that task, begun so well with those pastoral letters: to contend for the American conscience.

**Participation**

It is no secret that Catholic social teaching before John XXIII was not very democratic. Not only was it weak on political and civil, as distinguished from social and economic, rights, but it lacked any real appreciation of popular participation. At its best, it reflected a benevolent paternalism; to take one example, unions and Catholic action groups were always spoken of as under clerical protection and guidance. On this score much has changed. John XXIII insisted that the community as a whole, not simply the government, had the obligation to work together to construct a society in which his long list of human rights could be
implemented. Since Vatican II, liberation theologies around the world have almost always rejected top down socialization in favor of bottom up mobilization (quite the contrary of the charges of Marxist state-directed socialism levelled against liberation theology advocates). The poor, they have insisted, must be the agents of their own liberation.

Here in the United States, the American bishops, perhaps influenced by their long association with community organizing, took up the theme of justice as participation in the Campaign for Human Development and in their pastoral letter on the economy. Most remarkable, they even argued that the common good factor of social justice could best be pursued through a new American experiment in democracy and shared responsibility. Clearly arising from the history of episcopal proposals for cooperatives and industrial councils in the past, this section of the pastoral demonstrated how structural analysis might be detached from its long and tragic association with authoritarian ideologies of both left and right and be integrated with democratic values inherent in our new theology of human dignity and solidarity.

It is remarkable that there has been so little theological or political reflection on this dimension of the American Catholic experience. Millions of poor immigrants came to this country and, over a few generations, many, not all, achieved the economic independence, education, and access to dominant institutions which are the goals of historical liberation movements. The ethnic associations, political machines, trade unions and community organizations which were part of this struggle have rarely attracted any but critical examination. Yet there is surely here a story not only of an always ambiguous material success, but of liberation. People who had few choices, now have many; people who were marginal are now insiders; people who once thought ill of themselves now walk with heads held high. It is an American story worth telling, and telling it will perhaps contribute to an articulation of that common ground we must seek. Most of all it may suggest that participation is of the very essence of democracy, and motivate us to explore how new institutions might be built to give all of us a share of responsibility for the outcome of the historical project.
Why Has Catholic Social Teaching
Been the Church’s “Best Kept Secret”?

I would argue that the Church suffers today from a polarization about Catholic social teaching between evangelical radicals and conservative accommodationists. The first group, often heroic in their commitment to peace and social justice, ask in each situation, what would Jesus do? They speak easily of nonviolence and the option for the poor. They are at their best in questioning the integrity of the Church and pricking the conscience of its members, from the pews to the chanceries. They carry on their fight most often with comfortable accommodationists who recognize few serious defects in American institutions or American policy. Solidly grounded in American experience and in modern social sciences, they have worked hard for the last twenty years to persuade the Vatican and the American hierarchy to be more appreciative of American political institutions, free market economic policies, and, until recently, cold war strategies of military deterrence and third world interventionism. Convinced that, however flawed, American ideals and institutions are the best available, they seem to spend far more energy fighting what they take to be threats from the left, at home and abroad, than proposing ways to resolve outstanding problems. Most of all they want to keep religion confined to the religious sphere of church, family, and personal life, and persuade bishops and popes to confine their remarks about politics and economics to general moral prescriptions and make specific recommendations only on matters of family, sexuality, and personal morality. For lay people grown weary of the sometimes “ain’t it awful” tone of preaching and teaching by social gospel enthusiasts, the comfortable accommodationists probably seem a reasonable alternative.

The best kept secret remains secret because it is presented by evangelical Catholics under a guise that makes it so demanding that it negates lay life, or, when presented by accommodationists, it is so modest that it makes no real difference. Until a third way, at once demanding and responsible, emerges with greater clarity, the rich, vital body of Catholic social teaching will likely remain too little known.
Conclusion

During and after World War II, many Catholics felt compelled by the tragic events of the war and the Holocaust to reconsider their church and its place in human history. That rethinking burst into the open with the arrival of Pope John XXIII in 1958 and especially at the Second Vatican Council, 1962 to 1965. Pope John affirmed human rights that Catholicism had long denied and asked Christians to think of Christ's church as humanity's partner and friend, sharing with others the responsibility to make peace by reforming human society on the basis of truth, justice, charity, and freedom. The Council endorsed this turn away from the Church as an exclusive channel of other worldly salvation to one which made its own "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted."

The beginning of renewal for Christians, then and now, was this new realism, this willingness to look around and see "the signs of the times" through the eyes of faith. That process, dramatic at times in Latin America, the Philippines, and Poland, constitutes the central drama of modern Catholic history. Its outcome remains, where it began, in the hands of Catholics themselves. The story is not yet over.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Full, Conscious, and Active Participation:
The Laity’s Quest

H. Richard McCord, Jr.

A Fundamental Theme

The urge to participate more fully and actively in the life and mission of the Church is a dominant motif running through the story of U.S. Catholic laity. Participation is also the underlying theme of the Second Vatican Council’s teaching about the laity. In the years since the council, it has become the key to interpreting what has been happening among lay persons as well as what remains for them as the continuing agenda of Vatican II.

Participation has been a concern of Catholics in the United States since the beginning. When Vatican Council I ended in 1870, they were outsiders wrestling with the question of how to participate fully in American life as Roman Catholics. One hundred years later, when Vatican II ended, they struggled with the opposite question. How would they, who were now part of mainstream American society, participate in the Catholic Church? What did it mean to be Catholic in the context of their American experience and in the light of Vatican II?

It is not surprising that U.S. Catholics value participation so highly. It is, after all, a defining characteristic of the American way of life which is shaped by such values as equal opportunity, free expression, democratic process, and volunteerism. All these create and maintain a participatory climate.
In the postconciliar Church, U.S. Catholics have embraced the goal of participation at many levels. There is extensive lay activity in Church life: serving in paid and volunteer parish ministry positions, taking leadership on pastoral councils and governance boards, staffing diocesan offices, establishing educational, spiritual renewal, and social outreach programs, organizing advocacy efforts to influence legislation and public policy. Laity also participate through consultation and the shaping of policy. Several times in the past few decades, the U.S. bishops have conducted extensive listening processes, involving hundreds of thousands of laity, as they developed pastoral letters or prepared for synods. Lay people have also taken the initiative to make their voices heard through lay organizations, national publications, and many special interest groups.

U.S. Catholics demonstrate their interest in participation in other ways. Studies show that financial giving increases as a parish welcomes lay participation and leadership. Consistently, national surveys show that lay people want more involvement, not only in parish activities, but in making decisions about certain beliefs and Church practices. Even more to the point are studies of young people raised entirely in the post-Vatican II Church. This generation, and particularly its female members, has higher expectations for participation than any other.

There is variety, depth, and conviction about lay participation in the U.S. Catholic Church, not only among laity but also among clergy. Pastors cite involvement of the laity as the top reason for parish vitality. In short, participation has become a defining characteristic of Church life for U.S. Catholics.

Is the Second Vatican Council responsible for the impulse toward lay participation and for the variety and extent of it we now see? The answer is yes, but not entirely so. By means of the Council’s deliberations and documents, the Church officially began to reshape its self-understanding and to rethink its relationship to the modern world. This process sanctioned, and even accelerated, social and theological developments already at work for several decades in the United States and elsewhere. Then the Council’s teaching itself planted seeds that have since flowered in U.S. soil, though sometimes in ways not entirely envisioned by the Council.
Vatican II functioned as both a point of arrival and a point of departure for developments in the roles and responsibilities of lay persons. In this chapter I want to examine that idea which, particularly in the U.S. situation, illustrates the dynamic relationship between Church experience and Church teaching. By this I mean the ongoing cycle whereby conditions in society and Church developed a climate of readiness for the Council’s teaching. In turn, its teaching brought focus and new energy to the experience. This encounter produced, sometimes through conflict, further elaboration and refinement in the teaching.

Preconciliar Experience

In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the first document it promulgated, the Council declared that the “aim to be considered above all else” is that the faithful be led to “full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations” (n. 14). As if it were viewing the liturgy as a microcosm of all Church life and ministry, the Council then applied this goal more broadly to lay roles and responsibilities. Its call to participation resonated well with U.S. laity because it connected with developments that had been occurring in their society and Church for at least a generation. With the announcement of Vatican II, a powerful point of convergence was reached.

From the mid-nineteenth century until the late 1920s, the Catholic Church in the United States was mostly a church of immigrants. In 1925, when Congress restricted the waves of immigration by law, coping with the needs of newly arrived European groups ceased to dominate the Church’s pastoral agenda. Historian Debra Campbell marks the late 1920s as a time when “the laity turned a corner and saw its own situation, both within American society and within the Church, from a new perspective.”

This new perspective was created by the gradual movement of Catholics out of immigrant ghettos, poverty, and the working class into a more prosperous, mainstream, middle-class life. By the 1960s this movement was irreversible. The election of John F. Kennedy as the first Catholic president was the symbolic climax.
U.S. Catholics, buoyed up by higher educational levels, postwar economic prosperity, and increased social acceptance, entered the 1960s with a new spirit of optimism and confidence.  

A cumulative effect of these social changes was to dispose U.S. Catholics toward more active and self-directing participation in the religious domain, since this is what they were experiencing in other aspects of their lives. Gradually they were constructing a bridge out of the immigrant church, with its tendencies toward insularity and passive obedience. When the Second Vatican Council began to think in new ways about the Church as a People of God and to focus on a relationship with the world and with other religions, it definitely helped U.S. Catholic laity to build their bridge.

Along with social factors, there were new movements and currents of thought within the Church, most of which were imported from Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, that took hold among U.S. Catholics and helped them to achieve new levels of participation in Church life. For example, advances in biblical scholarship, the liturgical movement, and the rediscovery of the Pauline understanding of the mystical body of Christ paved the way for thinking about the Church in more communal, and less hierarchical, terms. The many groups and associations (e.g., Young Catholic Workers, Young Catholic Students, Christian Family Movement, Grail Movement, Catholic Worker Movement, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Catholic Youth Organization) that are examples of a phenomenon known as the "lay apostolate" helped lay people to learn Church leadership and to experience a new measure of cooperation with the clergy.

Since the beginning of the century, the terms "Catholic Action" and "lay apostolate" had been used to refer to the laity's responsibility to take action in the world on the Church's behalf. Though this notion rested on a fairly sharp dichotomy between Church and world and on a clear understanding that the hierarchy maintained ultimate control of the effort, nonetheless it did underscore the call of laity to participate in apostolic work.

In the teaching of Pius XI, Catholic Action came to be defined as "the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy," though he acknowledged that circumstances of time
and place would require adaptations and that laity could, on their own, sometimes accomplish things impossible to the clergy. This understanding produced two consequences. First, the definition of the lay apostolate as derived from and subordinate to the clergy’s apostolate formed the theological horizon which most bishops brought to Vatican II (see Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity 20). Second, the flexibility allowed in how the lay apostolate actually functioned created an opening for the major development in thought that was soon to occur in the teaching of Vatican II.

The Conciliar Teaching

Within the Council itself a major shift in horizon occurred that, in an immediate sense, made it possible for the bishops to turn their attention to the laity in a new way. This shift in horizon involved a renewed understanding of the inner nature of the Church (communion) and of its relationship to the world (mission). These teachings are contained in the Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) and the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes). In a sense, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Apostolicam Actuositatem) is an application of the relevant sections of these two constitutions.

Gene A. Scapanski offers a helpful summary of the key insights contained in Lumen Gentium (LG) and Gaudium et Spes that opened a new window on the roles and responsibilities of lay persons:

1) The Church is the mystery (sacramentum) of God’s loving and saving presence in the world. The Church’s external structure is not the starting point for understanding its nature. This recovers a more ancient emphasis on the Church’s inner life of communio with the Trinity.

2) Participating intimately in the life of God, the Church experiences the Good News of the reign of God to which all humanity is called. The Church becomes a sign and instrument within
history of the coming reign of God. Its mission is to draw all into communio with God.

3) The Church is described using the biblical image of the People of God. This expresses the sense of election and consecration of everyone, clergy and laity alike, for communion and mission.

4) The Church understands its relationship to the world in a manner that moves toward overcoming dualism and an attitude of rejection and condemnation. The world has a legitimate autonomy. The Church is a community of mission within the world. Engagement and dialogue are valued inasmuch as church and world each have something to learn from one another.¹⁰

These were fundamental themes within the documents of Vatican II, but they were not the only ideas competing for attention. The Council’s teaching, often worked out through compromise among theological viewpoints, was not entirely integrated or systematic. As a result, in the Constitution on the Church, one can detect a juridical/hierarchical ecclesiology standing alongside the newer ecclesiology of sacramental communion. Likewise, Joseph A. Komonchak cites certain “obscurities and difficulties” concerning the relationship of Church and world that remain unresolved in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.¹¹ The somewhat uneven heritage of Vatican II’s teaching, therefore, allows various points of departure to be taken when implementing it on a practical level. This will eventually lead to questions and tensions in the postconciliar Church over such matters as lay-clergy relationships, the meaning of ministry, the nature of Church authority, and the proper sphere of lay activity and influence.

Nonetheless, Vatican II did begin to construct a renewed framework of understanding the Church’s life (a sacramental communion) and its mission (salvation and the renewal of the temporal order). Within this framework, the Council considered
the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of lay persons. Though it articulated a rather minimal definition of the lay person (someone not ordained or in vowed religious life), it did offer four related viewpoints about lay identity. Together they help to shape a fuller definition of laity. Each also leads to distinct developments in the U.S. Church after the Council. The four viewpoints are: fundamental equality, sacramental union and mission, secular character, ordered relationships.

**Fundamental Equality**

Laity participate, with ordained and vowed religious, as co-equal members of the People of God (LG 9-17). Equality comes from the Sacrament of Baptism which, along with Confirmation and Eucharist, joins all to Christ. By reason of this sacramental union, the People of God receive the gifts of the Spirit (charisms) enabling them to participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ. All differences and distinctions among the People of God are secondary in view of the fundamental unity they share as a "royal priesthood" derived from their baptism.

**Sacramental Union and Mission**

Not only their dignity, but also their warrant for participation in the mission of the Church, comes to the laity because they have been united with Christ in the sacraments of initiation. This effectively redefines the apostolate of the laity. The Council declares, "The lay apostolate . . . is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself" (LG 33). This statement is repeated in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (AA 3), though elsewhere in the same document the older definition of Catholic Action as "collaboration of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy" is reintroduced (20). One could interpret the reference in the context of this section of the Decree dealing with organized groups and associations of laity. Here the Council is concerned that there be a "close union" in the manner of "an organic body" and
“cooperation” with the hierarchy in work which is “properly apostolic.” Specifically, this seems to refer to times when laity offer or are invited to cooperate in the apostolate of the hierarchy. In such instances, direction comes from the hierarchy.

The Decree makes it clear, however, that the individual form of the apostolate, not the organizational form, is the fundamental expression (AA 16) and is to be valued above all else. Examples of the lay apostolate are to be found in the family, parish, work and professional life, civic and political arenas (AA 10-14).

In short, the gifts of the Spirit, received in the sacraments of initiation, impose upon lay persons the right and duty of exercising their apostolate in the Church and in the world (AA 9). As a consequence, a genuine initiative and autonomy was granted to the lay apostolate.12

Secular Character

What the Council said about fundamental equality and sacramental union applies to the whole People of God, not just laity. What the Council identifies as distinctive of the lay vocation is its secular character. This term indicates that the laity’s “proper vocation [is] to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering them according to God’s will ... so that, led by the spirit of the gospel ... they may, like a leaven, contribute to the sanctification of the world” (LG 31).

Though it allows that the ordained can at times engage in secular activity, Vatican II squarely places responsibility for the Church’s secular apostolate on the shoulders of lay people. This form of the apostolate expresses in a special way the Church’s understanding of its responsibilities with regard to human dignity, community, and activity. Unique to this apostolate is its being identified as “so much the duty ... of the laity that it can never be properly performed by others” (AA 13).

Though it is distinguished from the hierarchical ministry, this secular apostolate is nonetheless profoundly religious. It is in fact the means by which the ecclesial mission is accomplished because, in this sense, the Church is most fully a leaven within society.13 Thus, the Council sees new meaning in lay people doing their
Ordinary tasks as parents, spouses, workers. This activity, prior to any hierarchical authorization, constitutes an ecclesial role. In turn, the laity's secular involvement gives them unique competence to make a contribution (which should not be restricted to advice on properties and finances) to the life of the Church community.¹⁴

Ordered Relationships

In keeping with its ecclesiology of sacramental communion, Vatican II emphatically taught that "In the Church, there is diversity of service but unity of purpose" (AA 2). It underscored the collaborative relationship that should exist between laity and clergy as well as the distinction in their roles and responsibilities (LG 10), going even so far as to declare that ordained and lay faithful "are bound to each other by a mutual need" (32).

The Council distinguished various levels of lay-clergy collaboration. There are: 1) activities in the temporal order, that are properly the laity's and for which the hierarchy teaches the moral principles involved; 2) apostolic undertakings freely established and regulated by lay people, to which the hierarchy may give support by praise and recommendation; 3) forms of lay activity having an immediate spiritual purpose, which the hierarchy may join more closely to its own work, while maintaining the lay nature of the activity and the right of the laity to act on their own accord; 4) some functions proper to the hierarchy that can be entrusted to the laity; in this instance, laity become fully subject to hierarchical direction in the apostolate.¹⁵

Vatican II was a turning point for the laity if for no other reason than it was the first ecumenical council to give explicit attention to the layperson's role, responsibilities, and relationships. It gave lay participation a new grounding in a person's sacramental union with Christ and linked it more fully to the life and mission of the Church. It acknowledged that lay people could assume a properly ecclesial role both within the Church community and within society, though it placed much more emphasis on the latter. It offered an approach to the question of lay-clergy relationships in the apostolate. These initiatives were seeds, planted in soil
already cultivated by movements of reform and renewal sweeping through U.S. society and the Church. These seeds took root and grew in many directions during the next three decades.

Postconciliar Experience and Teaching

When the Church in the United States began to absorb and implement the Council’s teachings, it did so in a social environment that was becoming more pluralistic in everything from religious beliefs and cultural values to political viewpoints and styles of dress. A climate of pluralism gives rise, among other things, to tensions about diversity, dissent, and protest, as well as new forms of participation and new groups clamoring for it. All these constitute a framework for the unfolding of lay participation in the postconciliar Church.

An additional conditioning factor for the U.S. reception of Vatican II was the rapid change in the demographics of ministry. From 1965 to 1995 the number of priests declined by 15%, and the number of graduate-level seminarians dropped by 62%. The trend toward fewer ordinations, combined with the number of resignations of younger priests from ministry, has created a rapidly aging (average age about 55) and less active clergy. This has been occurring at the same time that the U.S. Catholic population rose nearly 32% from 45 million to 60 million. There are projections that, by the year 2005, U.S. Catholics will number 74 million and the ratio will be one priest to 2200 parishioners.

The rapid growth of the permanent diaconate in the U.S. has added to the ranks of official ministers. Since its restoration twenty-five years ago, the permanent diaconate in the U.S. now includes almost 12,000 men. But this growth has been offset by a decline of 46% in religious brothers and 48% in religious sisters. The obvious effect of these trends was to leave parishes, schools, and Church institutions with fewer religious professionals. Faced with an institutional crisis, U.S. lay people have moved into many positions of leadership and service and have even created other roles not formerly played by priests and sisters.

It is against this ecclesial and sociocultural backdrop that I want to identify and reflect upon some key expressions of U.S. lay
participation in the postconciliar Church. I group them into three categories — lay spirituality, lay voice, lay ministry — and connect them to themes in the teaching of Vatican II. The three categories are a set of perspectives on lay life and the quest for more active and meaningful participation.

**Lay Spirituality**

Many lines of activity converge under this umbrella. All have been inspired to one degree or another by the Council’s emphasis on the universal call to holiness: “all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (*LG* 40). This call flows directly from the Council’s understanding of the Church as a community of the People of God who share a common bond of unity by reason of their baptism.

Postconciliar teaching has returned again and again to this central point that there is one Christian spirituality, rooted in the priesthood of Christ, and many ways to respond to the call to holiness. Pope John Paul II declared that responding to the vocation to live holy lives is a “first and fundamental way” in which lay people participate in building up the Church. The U.S. bishops, in their first pastoral statement on the laity (1980), said:

It is characteristic that lay men and women hear the call to holiness in the very web of their existence, in and through the events of the world, the pluralism of modern living, the complex decisions and conflicting values they must struggle with, the richness and fragility of sexual relationships, the delicate balance between activity and stillness, presence and privacy, love and loss.

Holiness is not opposed to ordinary activity. However, spiritual growth does not occur automatically just because one lives daily in the world. Spiritual growth happens when it is supported by a conscious process of Christian formation. Calling it “not the privilege of a few, but the right and duty of all,” John
Paul II urges that lay formation be a priority in every diocese. He urges repeatedly that it take place in family life, parishes, small communities, schools, and lay organizations.\(^{19}\)

In the decades since Vatican II, U.S. laity have established and participated in a wide range of formation experiences. Examples are: bible study and prayer groups; adult education and renewal programs like *Renew* and *Christ Renews His Parish*, and the larger Cursillo movement and the Charismatic Renewal movement; graduate theological education as well as participation in diocesan-sponsored programs for lay ministry formation. In graduate-level theological programs alone, there are over 3,000 lay students, slightly more then the number of seminarians in theological schools. A majority of the lay students are women.\(^{20}\) Thousands of lay men and women participate in two- or three-year, part-time, non-degree programs of lay ministry formation sponsored in 135 U.S. dioceses.

Participation in the liturgy is a common means of spiritual formation. Though weekly Mass attendance has declined in the past two decades, laity are participating in worship more extensively and in greater depth through the ministerial roles of reading, singing, distributing communion, assisting at the altar, providing hospitality, and so on. The restored catechumenate has been a path for many to return to the practice of their faith as well as a process for those seeking to convert to Catholicism.

Another response to the call to holiness and spiritual formation is small Christian communities. U.S. laity have been drawn to them, sometimes from their involvement in a renewal program or prayer group, or as a result of their desire for a more intimate experience of Christian living and mutual support. Longstanding membership in a lay movement like Cursillo or the Christian Family Movement can function as the equivalent of a small Christian community or can lead people into such communities, which often are established on a neighborhood basis. The Hispanic/Latino influence within the Church in the United States has been a major stimulus to the growth of these small communities. The U.S. bishops called attention to this creative development in their 1995 pastoral statement on the laity, entitled *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*.\(^{21}\)
Finally, a mark of the laity’s awareness of the call to holiness is their own testimony about their experience of God and their desire for spiritual leadership from the clergy, expressed in preaching, meaningful worship and prayer, spiritual direction. Such leadership is a resource that lay people say brings them to a deeper awareness of God in their marriage and family life, in their parish and workplace. The naming and claiming of spiritual experience from a distinctly lay perspective is surely a way of participating in the life of the Church. As the U.S. bishops observed, it has “contributed greatly to the spiritual heritage of the Church, enlarging our understanding of what it means to be called to holiness.”

_Lay Voice_

Vatican II gave prominence to the lay person’s responsibility to spread the gospel in the world. As a result, it recognized that this “secular apostolate” provided him or her with a unique and valid point of view to bring to the life of the Church. The _Constitution on the Church_ (n. 37) declared that a layperson “is permitted and sometimes even obliged to express his opinion on things which concern the good of the Church.” It urged clergy to “willingly make use of his prudent advice.”

Accustomed to free expression and open discussion in other aspects of their lives, U.S. laity responded energetically to the Council’s receptivity toward lay influence in Church life. A major development in the postconciliar Church in the U.S. has been the establishment of structures for lay consultation. Examples are: pastoral councils at parish and diocesan levels, diocesan synods and planning processes. The 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law took account of this development. It urged the establishment of pastoral councils in parishes and dioceses and required finance councils for the same (Canons 511-14; 536-37).

At the national level, the U.S. bishops deliberately sought lay input for pastoral letters on peace (1983) and the economy (1996) and on other policy documents, such as family life (1979), evangelization (1993), and young adults (1996). In addition, they supported the process of three _encuentros_ within the Hispanic
community that led to a pastoral plan for Hispanic ministry (1987). The custom of Black Catholic Congresses was reinstituted after a lapse of a century. These gatherings enabled an under-represented lay voice to be heard and led eventually to national initiatives on racism and evangelization within the African-American community. Although the U.S. bishops did not succeed in publishing a pastoral letter responding to women's concerns, after nine years of work, they did systematically listen to the ideas of thousands of women and, in an early draft of their document, included within the text quotes from those sessions expressing the "voices" of women.

Lay voices have spoken in an organized way, not only to the Church, but as Catholics to the wider society. A few groups exemplifying this are: Women Affirming Life, the Parenting for Peace and Justice Network, and the Catholic Campaign for America.

Whether expressed through structures set up by the hierarchy or through other channels, the voices of U.S. Catholic laity have not always been in agreement with one another and with ecclesiastical leadership. Differences of opinion and varying levels of dissent have become a common feature of Church life. As early as 1968 Pope Paul VI's encyclical letter, *Humanae Vitae*, provoked great controversy and dissent among laity and clergy alike. Contraception and other issues of sexual morality have continued to evoke many and differing voices from among the laity.

To judge whether these are instances of dissent, rebellion, or simply legitimate disagreements is beyond the scope of this essay. Persons to the right of center tend to interpret such activity as dissent and have organized lay groups precisely to counteract such dissent. A highly visible and symbolic moment occurred in this debate when Pope John Paul II visited the United States in 1987. One of the spokespersons at his national meeting with laity, a woman named Donna Hanson, placed the issue in a context, citing the diversity present in U.S. society and the cultural value placed upon open discussion. She spoke for many when she said: "In my cultural experience, questioning is neither rebellion nor dissent. Rather, it is a desire to participate and is a sign of both love and maturity."
The urge to participate through having one's voice heard and seeking to influence the direction of Church policy continues vigorously among U.S. laity. Responses from official Church leadership have also kept pace — ranging from outright denunciation to a reassertion of Church authority in teaching and disciplinary matters to calls for more patient listening and dialogue — depending upon the issue and the persons involved. As I write this, an initiative has been announced by Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin, the Archbishop of Chicago, lamenting an increasing polarization within the Church and seeking to re-establish a "common ground" upon which people of diverse viewpoints can engage in dialogue and possibly recommit themselves to unity and service.26

*Lay Ministry*

Perhaps the most sustained way by which lay persons have made their voices heard within the postconciliar Church is through lay ministry. Currently, over 12,000 lay women and men (not including religious sisters or brothers) work, at least part-time, in pastoral roles (sometimes involving responsibility for the entire parish in the absence of a resident pastor) in half of the nation's 20,000 parishes. In addition, 96,000 lay people constitute the majority of teachers and administrators in Catholic schools. There are thousands of other lay persons performing roles of leadership and service in diocesan agencies, retreat centers, national offices and organizations. All these can be counted as part of the formal ministry of the Church.27 Moreover, a major national study of parish lay ministers concluded that, in the opinion of priests and parishioners, lay ministers have made a significant contribution to parish life. "They have enabled the parish to reach more people, . . . they have also contributed to religious education, liturgy, spirituality, hospitality, and pastoral care."28

Vatican II's documents did not use the term "lay minister." Nonetheless, in the space of thirty years, lay ministry/minister is widely referred to and accepted by U.S. laity and clergy alike. It has also acquired a wide variety of meanings. This has sparked a running debate as to "whether the term 'ministry' should be used
expansively to include all apostolic activity by whomever performed, or restrictively to include only some apostolic activities such as those carried out pursuant to an ecclesiastical office, or more narrowly, only those carried out by the ordained."

Whether or not it should be called ministry, it is clear that the Council intended lay persons to be involved in the life and activity of the Church (AA 10) and even recognized that laity could be deputed to "exercise certain church functions for a spiritual purpose" (LG 33). In addition to creating a climate of openness for more substantive and responsible involvement in Church life, an overall effect of the Council's teaching on the Church was to engender a broader sense of ownership for Church mission among the laity.

But, aided by better theological education after Vatican II, laity seemed less willing to accept the distribution of effort for mission taught before the Council and, to some extent, still present in its documents. The distinction between clergy/church and laity/world began to blur and, with it, the distinction between ministry/clergy and apostolate/laity. Lay people began to understand ministry as the operationalizing of mission, a responsibility given to all in Baptism, and thus started applying the term "ministry" to their own faith-inspired activity. This development is significant for it reveals a level of awareness and of reception of Vatican II arising directly from laity, not something given them by the hierarchy. For many, lay ministry has become the primary mode of full and active participation in the Church as well as a symbol of hope for further developments in collegiality, collaboration between men and women, consultative decision making, accountability for Church resources, and so on.

Accompanying the rapid expansion of lay ministries in the postconciliar Church — and no doubt because of it — has been the attempt by theologians, lay persons, and hierarchy to achieve greater clarity about the proper scope of the term and thereby to guide its development in harmony with the ordained ministry. Volumes have been written about the historical, scriptural, and theological underpinnings of ministry. In 1977 a group of Catholic laity issued The Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern, in which they voiced alarm that the involvement of lay people in
Church ministries was leading to a devaluation of the lay responsibility to witness and serve in the worlds of family, work, education, politics, and so on. This statement sharpened the terms of the discussion and even tended to polarize it in the years to come. Subsequently, frequent warnings have been heard about the clericalization of the laity and the laicization of the clergy.

Official Church statements have tried to bring order and focus into the discussion. The U.S. bishops twice addressed the topic of lay ministry, making a distinction between “ecclesial lay ministry” (professionally prepared lay persons serving in designated Church roles) and a broader ministry of the laity (service and witness of holy lives in the world). The revised Code of Canon Law applies “ministry” to certain lay activity within the Church that requires some type of ecclesiastical authorization for its exercise (Canons 230; 759; 910; 943; 1481; 1502; 1634). Furthermore, in his Apostolic Exhortation (Christifideles Laici 22-23) following the Synod on the Laity in 1987, John Paul II outlined certain points: 1) ordained ministries are primary in the Church, but they are always oriented to service in relationship with other ministries and gifts of the laity; 2) ministries proper to lay persons derive from their baptism and should be exercised in keeping with the laity’s secular character; 3) lay persons can be authorized to perform pastoral functions, such as distributing communion and leading liturgical prayer, in the absence of priests, but this does not make them pastoral ministers; 4) “ministry” should not be used indiscriminately to describe every function in the Church. All this notwithstanding, the same pope also declared that the lay vocation includes specific roles and ministries in ecclesial life as a right and duty flowing from baptism.

Lay ministry, at least the kind known as “ecclesial,” seems firmly planted within the U.S. Church. In fact, there is every reason to claim that the institution could not function without it. However, the experience and practice of lay ministry has developed beyond most attempts to understand and articulate it theologically, and much less to fully accommodate it pastorally and legally. Because “lay ministry” is so highly symbolic for the entire impulse toward meaningful lay participation, this theological, pastoral, and canonical task must continue. To the extent
it does, it will be a singular example of the dynamic, reciprocal relationship between experience and teaching unfolding within the great stream of Church tradition.

Continuing Agenda

The main lines of development for lay participation, already in process before the Council and then given official approbation by it, are likely to continue and intensify in the decades ahead. It will be — to quote the phrase of Rev. Bernard J. Lee, S.M. — “a same and different future.” The difference will consist in how the challenges embedded in the categories of lay participation (spirituality, voice, ministry) are addressed in interaction with three emerging groups of lay persons: women, youth, and members of minority cultures in the United States. The concerns and perspectives of these specific “types” of laity are giving a shape to lay participation now and into the future.

Women, youth, and minority cultures (principally Hispanic/Latino) have several things in common. First is their size and relative representation within the U.S. Catholic Church. Not only are women more churchgoing than men, but they also comprise 85% of lay ministers. Young people in their twenties and thirties, though not usually Church members, are nonetheless the largest population group and characteristically searchers for spiritual meaning. Hispanic persons are historically and culturally Catholic. They are the fastest growing sub-group within the U.S. Catholic population and by far the youngest.

Second, each of these groups traditionally has been excluded, in one way or another, from leadership and influence within the Church. Together they feel their experience has not been taken seriously in the formulation of Church teaching and practice.

This situation produces a third common characteristic — namely, the development of distinct perspectives on Church life and mission by each group. Many of these perspectives represent the most influential forces for reform and renewal within the Church. Women’s concern for equality and for being treated with the same dignity as men; young people’s challenge to autocratic forms of authority and their lack of institutional commitment; the
Hispanic way of inculturating faith through family, home, and specific devotional practices — all these act as filters through which lay people themselves will interpret what it means to be a Catholic layperson within an increasingly pluralistic U.S. society.

The emergence of a distinct and more mature “lay interpretation” of reality will influence how lay people hear the call to holiness and integrate their spirituality with marital and family relationships, work, politics, and the creation of culture. It will underscore the necessity and diversity of the lay voice as well as intensify the need for creating forums in which people can speak to and listen to one another without fear of reprisal or acrimony. It will accentuate the desire for shared responsibility and for more collaborative forms of leadership and ministry and will also identify areas and persons in need of ministry and help determine who can best minister in given situations.

As before, the fundamental theme is participation. The issues and perspectives giving it flesh, however, will be unique and responsive to the signs of the time. It will be a same and different future for laity and for the Church.

Notes

4. James D. Davidson and Andrea S. Williams, “Generations of Catholics: Results From Focus Groups,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, 1993. This material also forms the basis for two chapters in *Laity, American and Catholic, Transforming the Church* (cited above).


9. Dolan uses the Christian Family Movement (CFM) as an example of the transition occurring within the lay apostolate of the 1950s. CFM groups were led by couples; the priest was a chaplain. CFM was based in homes; it transcended parish boundaries. CFM had a definite focus on social action, particularly within neighborhoods and communities where laity exercised primary influence. See *The American Catholic Experience*, 396.


23. *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium*, 3.
24. A marvelous social and ecclesial mapping of this phenomenon can be found in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
26. For a reprint of the statement providing the rationale for this project see: *America* 175, no. 5 (August 31, 1996): 5-8.
The Journey from the Side Chapel to the Main Aisle: Religious Life in the Postconciliar Church

MARGARET PALLISER

The title for this essay is inspired by the wonderful metaphor used by John Manuel Lozano to capture the ecclesial tone of the dramatic transformation of religious life unleashed by Vatican Council II:

From the "side chapels" in which religious orders used to sit (each with their own advocacies, devotions and privileges), they have moved out into the "main aisle" of the church. There is a strong ecclesial orientation in their spirituality and a sense of communion with the rest of God's people.¹

The ecclesiological principles enunciated in the documents of Vatican II have shaped the direction of religious life in ways that could not have been imagined prior to the council. The developments that have taken place in the renewal of religious life over the past thirty years reflect critical paradigmatic shifts in ecclesiology that have both called into question and radically affirmed the very nature and meaning of religious life within the life of the Church. In fact, it could be argued that the changes in
the Church’s self-understanding during Vatican II are nowhere more dramatically seen than in the continuing transformation of religious life.

Among the many conciliar and postconciliar documents that present and develop the teaching of the council regarding religious life, for the purpose of this discussion, the most significant are, not surprisingly, the two constitutions that treat directly of the Church — *Lumen Gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, November 21, 1964) and *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, December 7, 1965) — as well as *Perfectae Caritatis* (*Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of the Religious Life*, October 28, 1965). 2 *Lumen Gentium* (*LG*) explicitly addresses the relationship of religious life to the life of the Church, while *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS*) sets the tone for understanding the fundamental relationship of the Church, including religious life, to the world. *Perfectae Caritatis* (*PC*) focuses specifically on the renewal of religious life according to two guiding principles: a return to the biblical roots of religious life as the following of the Christ of the gospels and to the spirit and charism of the founder of the particular institute; and the need for appropriate accommodations to the contemporary situation. 3

In the first section of this essay, I shall draw primarily on these documents to explore three focal elements of the council’s ecclesiology in regard to religious life: the universal nature of the call to holiness, the role of charisms in the life of the Church, and the nature of the Church’s relationship to its historical context, i.e., the Church’s mission in and to the world. In the second section, I shall identify some major areas of concern that present some of the more pressing tasks facing institutes of consecrated life 4 as they move into the twenty-first century: the ongoing struggle for clarity around identity and mission, the growing movement toward collaboration, and the nature of the corporate witness of religious life — areas that challenge today’s men and women religious to a creative fidelity to their rich heritage as they move forward into the future as witnesses to Christ’s compassion for the world.

To capture the heart of Vatican II’s teaching in regard to religious life and to describe where religious life is now in its
ongoing response to the council’s challenge are daunting tasks, to say the very least. The reflection that follows comes from one who has lived the vowed religious life for thirty years, a period of time that coincides exactly with the period of renewal of religious life that has followed the Second Vatican Council. As with all perspectives, mine is both uniquely enriched and necessarily limited by my experience; I offer it in the hope that it will contribute to a more complete understanding of the complex reality that is religious life at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

What the Council Said: Call, Charism, Context

_The Universal Call to Holiness_

Vatican Council II did a great service to religious life when it replaced the operative preconciliar ecclesiology (with its clearly articulated ranks and states) with an ecclesiology built on an understanding of the universal call to holiness, a call rooted in the grace of baptism. With the promulgation of _Lumen Gentium_ in 1964, the popular understanding of the Church as divided into three tiers of descending degrees of holiness (i.e., clergy, religious, and laity) was challenged by the clear affirmation that all Christians, regardless of the forms and tasks of their lives, are called to one and the same holiness, the perfect holiness given to the Church by its head, Jesus Christ. By emphasizing the dignity and importance of baptism, _Lumen Gentium_ affirmed the role of all Christians in the mission and ministry of the Church: to realize the one holiness of the Church itself in many and varied expressions. All baptized persons are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity; moreover, the evangelical counsels have a place in the life of all Christians.

In rejecting the clergy/religious/lay division, the Church embraced a self-understanding in which, to enlarge upon Lozano’s metaphor, religious life no longer found its home in the side chapels of the Church (between the sanctuary of the bishops and priests and the body of the laity); religious suddenly found themselves situated squarely in the main aisle with their lay brothers and sisters. Religious life had lost its claim to an identity
as a privileged "state of perfection." Prior to the council, by their very self-definition, religious had understood themselves to be superior to and separated from the lay or secular members of the Church itself; now, by virtue of their baptismal call to the one holiness of the Church, the laity could no longer be considered as belonging to a form of Christian life somehow inferior to that of the clergy or religious. Religious did not simply relinquish any claim to superiority over or separation from the laity; non-ordained religious were themselves identified as laity in contradistinction to clergy.

The question of the place of religious life within the structure of the Church remained a significantly controversial one and eventually led to an interesting development in the final drafting of *Lumen Gentium*. Prior to Vatican II, it had been accepted that the hierarchical structure of the Church, i.e., the distinction made between the clergy and the lay faithful whom they pastor, is an essential constitutive divine structure of the Church. The 1963 working draft reflected this teaching when it suggested that

[the religious state] is not, if one considers the divine constitution of the Church, intermediate between the clerical and lay condition: but some faithful from both states are called by God to enjoy this special gift in the mystery of the Church, and are dedicated to his service.

This initial formulation rejected the popular triple division which placed religious life somewhere between the clerical state and the secular laity, but it also implied that religious life does not belong essentially to the divine structure of the Church. After much debate and a number of forceful interventions by the Council fathers, the text was amended to read:

[The religious state] . . . is not, if one considers the divine *and hierarchical* constitution of the Church, intermediate between the clerical and lay condition: but some faithful from both states are called by God to enjoy this special gift in the life
of the Church and may contribute, each in their own way, to its saving mission.\textsuperscript{10}

The definitive text of \textit{Lumen Gentium} suggests that there is not simply one divine constitution in the Church. Rather, the concept of “the divine constitution of the church” is a generic one which requires specification in terms of which divine constitution is intended in a given context.\textsuperscript{11} This conclusion is further strengthened by the final paragraph of No. 44 of \textit{Lumen Gentium}:

The state of life, then, which is constituted by the profession of the evangelical counsels, while not belonging to the hierarchical structure of the church, belongs nevertheless inalienably to its life and holiness.

There is a necessary and essential relatedness between the Church and religious life; religious life belongs to the very life and holiness of the Church as an essential constitutive structure.\textsuperscript{12} This relatedness is reiterated by John Paul II in his recent exhortation \textit{Vita Consecrata (VC)}, which teaches that

the consecrated life, present in the church from the beginning, can never fail to be one of her essential and characteristic elements, for it expresses her very nature. This is clearly seen from the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels is intimately connected with the mystery of Christ and has the duty of making somehow present the way of life which Jesus himself chose. . . . Jesus himself, by calling some men and women to abandon everything in order to follow him, established this type of life which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, would gradually develop down the centuries into the various forms of the consecrated life. The idea of a church made up only of sacred ministers and lay people does not therefore conform to the
intentions of her divine founder, as revealed to us by the Gospels and the other writings of the New Testament.\textsuperscript{13}

While \textit{Lumen Gentium} clearly recognized that religious life belongs “inalienably” to the Church, it did leave a vagueness about the “how” and “where” it fits into the Church’s structure. Some religious found the lack of clarity on this point difficult to live with. They were uncomfortable with the fact that, unlike the concept of the hierarchy (whose nature it is to have distinctions and exclusive categories), the place of religious life in the structure of the Church had not been defined as clearly. Many religious actually pushed the Church to pin things down a bit more; much to their chagrin, the Church has been working at it ever since. Responding to the discomfort, the council itself produced a separate document on religious life, \textit{Perfectae Caritatis}, in 1965. \textit{Essential Elements} (1985) and \textit{Vita Consecrata} (1996) represent subsequent attempts to clarify further the nature of religious life. Unfortunately, these later documents return to an emphasis on distinctions and categories, running the risk of creating a new elitism. In other words, they use a hierarchical approach to analyze a non-hierarchical reality, a charism given to the Church by the Spirit. A clear nomenclature of charism is an oxymoron. The clarifications have sometimes produced new and equally effective straitjackets for religious because abstract definitions, while helpful, always lose something of the nuanced reality of the concrete particularity of each institute’s charism. The genius of \textit{Lumen Gentium} had been precisely to let go of the need for categories in relationship to religious life: the hierarchical diocesan entity and religious life are not parallel structures.\textsuperscript{14}

As postconciliar religious set about the challenging but liberating process of relinquishing their self-definition in terms of \textit{de jure} as well as \textit{de facto} superiority to other members of the Church, they sought and embraced a more ecclesial, if less rigidly defined, identity. Notwithstanding, the concept of religious life as a “state of perfection” still surfaced in new ways, as evidenced by John Paul II’s recent statements in \textit{Vita Consecrata} regarding “the objective superiority” of the consecrated life.\textsuperscript{15} While affirming the
"equal dignity of all members of the church," this papal exhortation describes religious profession primarily as a "deepening" of the consecration received in baptism, a "further consecration differing in a special way from baptismal consecration," and a "more-authentic configuration to Christ" which, as a way of showing forth the Church's holiness, has an "objective superiority." Aside from the evident difficulty in asking a theology of consecration to bear the full weight of the mystery of the gift of religious life in the Church, the language of this document also seems to indicate that the Church still has a long way to go in recognizing the dignity and centrality of baptism and the consequent equality of all the members of Christ's body. Although there is certainly a validity to a theology of consecration based in baptism, perhaps it is a construct that alone cannot adequately account for the rich reality of religious life in the life of the Church today and in the future. In any case, as Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland has observed, it certainly does not seem to have emerged naturally from the lived experience of religious, nor have religious found the notion particularly liberating or inspiring.

The recent introduction of the term "consecrated life" also points to another aspect of the Church's understanding of religious life: the creative tension that exists between spirit and law, charism and institution. "Consecrated life" is intended to embrace both secular and religious institutes as a juridic framework within which to define each. (Indeed, \textit{Vita Consecrata} strains to cover many diverse forms of life under a common rubric.) While the "secular" institute is clearly envisioned with positive content as a consecration \textit{in} the world, the "religious" institute is seen as a consecration somehow contradistinct from that being-in-the-world, leaving the defining characteristic of religious institutes in a negative key, less in sync with the theology of \textit{Lumen Gentium} and \textit{Gaudium et Spes} and certainly not reflective of the lived experience of men and women religious over the past three decades. This attempt to systematize the various expressions of religious life into static legal categories flies in the face of the postconciliar emphasis on the creative work of the Spirit in shaping religious life as a living, evolving charism in and for the Church.
Another result of the emphasis on the universal call to holiness in *Lumen Gentium* is best reflected in the general consensus that Vatican II ushered in the era of the “church of the laity.” This term is not meant to signify a shift of emphasis from one “rank” to another, i.e., from a clerical model of church to a lay model. Such an interpretation would use “laity” as a category that excludes when just the opposite had been intended by the council. The post-Vatican II “church of the laity” really connotes a collaborative church which uses the gifts of all members, however the Spirit may see fit to distribute those gifts.

*Religious Life as Charism*

The Holy Spirit nurtures and directs the Church through the rich variety of gifts, ordinary and extraordinary, given for the good of the whole body of Christ. Religious life is just such a gift, or charism, given to individuals for the good of all, i.e., the whole church; consequently, religious life is more properly the treasure of the Church than the personal possession of those persons who exercise the charism in religious congregations.

While the Church recognizes, affirms, and claims charisms, it does not create the gifts. As charism, religious life is not simply or even primarily a juridical entity. In other words, religious life did not begin because the institutional Church defined it and consecrated it, nor does it continue because Church law has ordained it so. The Church did not create religious life; the life endures because it is a gift of God to the Church, a constitutive element of the life and holiness of the Church. Religious life belongs to the mystery of the Church and, like the Church, it continues — sometimes despite itself. Of course, as institution, religious life needs law to serve its useful purpose: to recognize, authenticate, safeguard, and preserve valued ways of life. Charisms are situated within the Church as gifts of God who gives to the Church the pastoral authority and obligation to protect them by discerning the divinely inspired wisdom of the community’s experience and formulating that wisdom in canon law. However, while it is entirely appropriate that, in due time, the experience of the religious institute find canonical expression for the protection of
the rights of persons, communities, and the whole Church, one must be careful not to mistake the canonical form for the life itself. Religious life is better understood in terms of a fluid, vital, ever-changing “movement” than in terms of institutional forms and canonical categories. Shaped by the Spirit, this movement is at its core a mystery which, although identifiable, is not completely definable in terms of essences.

A biblical understanding of “call” can help to distinguish religious life as an evolving ecclesial identity from religious life as a canonical “state of perfection.” Both Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes present religious life primarily as a way of living the gospel, a way of following Christ. The simple and direct gospel invitation, “Come, follow me,” suggests that the charism of the religious vocation is a whole way of life, an organically coherent way of interacting with persons, situations and needs. Nourished by the lifegiving Spirit, religious life is a prophetic, compassionate ongoing response to the call to live the life of Christ in a new time and place. Because it finds itself in the midst of historical reality, religious life digs deep into the messy stuff of holiness. True religious hesitate to depend upon such “certainties” as juridical prescriptions that promise to ensure a steady advance along the path of perfection; rather, they simply follow their loving Lord, struggling to respond in faith to the rigorous standard of the gospel amidst the sometimes confusing circumstances of their lives without the luxury of knowing exactly where they are in that mysterious journey of faith.

Any theological project that reduces religious life to an entity defined by canons reveals an essentialist and predominantly juridical mentality. While they may provide a convenient tool for judging authenticity and orthodoxy, canonical definitions and norms are only capable of giving religious life an existence as an enduring, unchangeable “essence,” reducing religious life in the concrete to nothing more than a manifestation of an “essence,” which tends to express itself in antisecular and ahistorical terms. As Philibert has observed,

it would be unfortunate if one were to try to reduce religious life to a genus and species
analysis. There is no simple common denominator that can be used as the generic form for religious life. Religious life arises genetically from the inspired, charismatic response to the gospel of a creative genius whose work is continued by a religious family of sisters and brothers beyond the original time and place of its foundation.\(^{22}\)

To use a simple analogy, the difference between religious life as a defined static essence and religious life as a charismatic way of life is similar to the difference between a clay figure made from a mold and the clay pot formed by the master potter at the wheel. The first is a dime-a-dozen, painted-by-numbers, lifeless copy, however intricate and perfect the detail; the second is a genuine work of art whose beauty lies in the uniqueness of its form. The canonical prescription may produce an “objectively superior” life form, but it is the honest following of Christ that yields the true gift of religious life to the Church. Religious life is a way of self-forgetfulness whereby one concentrates, not on actively conforming oneself to a pre-existing mold, but rather on being receptive and pliable to the touch of the master potter’s hand. The pot is always being shaped anew. Of course, in the religious institute one finds a “family” resemblance, a particular “way” (or shape to the pot), which springs from the original inspiration of the institute’s founder; yet each individual in the institute is formed, coaxed by the Spirit into that unique, particular expression of the mystery of Christ imbedded deep within his or her very being. The particular institute’s “way” of self-forgetfulness allows each member’s true self to emerge unspoiled by an inflexible external mold.

As soon as one defines religious life in canonical forms, one runs the risk of destroying its very life. The following of Christ always involves concrete situations, in a changing world that demands answers to new questions, and answers to new questions are not obtained by sheer deduction from juridical premises and categories. Religious institutes are not primarily verifications of a species, but unique, historically identifiable communities living the evangelical counsels. When one looks at the origins of a religious
congregation, one finds a charismatic, Spirit-filled response conditioned by the concrete circumstances of its world — not a canonically-inspired state of consecrated separation from that world. The vowed life as lived by a particular institute is shaped by the mission and charism of that institute, both of which necessarily respond to a specific historical and cultural experience and environment. The resulting diversity among religious institutes is itself the Spirit’s gift to the Church.

*Perfectae Caritatis* also called upon religious to return to the founding charisms of their institutes. As a result, many congregations were led to rewrite their constitutions in the years following Vatican II. Following the mandate to go back to their roots in the gospel and in the lives of their founders, religious institutes came to the realization that their founding charisms had less to do with what the founders did and more to do with the “eyes” through which they had viewed their world. The charism is not so much the type of work, but rather the “way” in which one is present in that work. Consequently, in reformulating their constitutions, religious sought to de-emphasize canonical categories in an effort to reclaim the true spirit of their founding charisms. They discovered that precise categories and distinctions fail to capture the playful breath of the Spirit and that theirs is a way of life as opposed to a canonical state. Again, it is the difference between the technique of using a mold (the perfect mold, recipe, ingredients, temperature, etc.) and the art of the potter’s wheel (a changing atmosphere, moisture, a steady hand, the unpredictable irregularities that become the hallmark of true beauty).

The Context: The Church in the Contemporary World

*Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* are the two documents of Vatican II that dealt explicitly with the topic of religious life; however, a study of these two documents alone would fail to account for the dramatic changes in religious life in the years following the council. It is the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*) which actually provides the clarifying prism through which one must see all the other documents of Vatican II, including those which address issues of
religious life. *Gaudium et Spes*, an unexpected gift of the Spirit working in the gathered church, called the Church to realize that it is inextricably and intimately linked to humankind and its history: all that is truly human — the joy, hope, grief, and anguish of all humankind — cannot fail to find an echo in the hearts of those who follow Christ. Moreover, the Church’s prophetic mission to the world cannot be fulfilled if its message is unintelligible to that world, especially to the poor and the marginalized members of the human family.

Religious, who have always understood themselves to be at the heart of the Church and its mission, were deeply affected by the powerful message of *Gaudium et Spes*. They quickly grasped its significance for their lives. Whereas, prior to Vatican II, religious life had functioned as a prophetic sign within the Church’s inner life by witnessing to a radical living of the evangelical counsels, postconciliar religious life was challenged to be a sign in and to the world as an integral part of the Church’s mission in the world. The implications were dramatic: if religious were to be effective and credible witnesses in service to the Church’s mission in the modern world, they needed to be relevant and intelligible to that world; conversely, if they were to participate in the proclamation of the good news of the gospel to their world, religious must understand that world, its problems and its needs, especially the needs of the poor.

Complicating matters for religious institutes was the fact that the “modern world” in which they were navigating a course from a medieval “state of perfection” to a prophetic “way of life” was itself in the throes of a major paradigm shift from modernity to the as-yet-unnamed age labeled only as “postmodernity.” Postconciliar religious found themselves embracing the challenges of the dawning postmodern era without having had the advantage of actively participating in the modern world. In other words, religious life was forced to go from a pre-modern (medieval) worldview to a postmodern worldview in one leap, fastforwarding through centuries of modernity. Religious had scarcely become acquainted with modern culture before they began to wrestle with the implications of the postmodern critique that rejected the individualism, competition, and hierarchical dualism (the either-or,
right-wrong, sacred-secular, superior-inferior distinctions that define by separation and fragmentation) of the modern age in favor of holistic interrelatedness, cooperation, and unity-in-diversity (the creative tension of inclusive, both-and relationships of equality) in a postmodern global society that values pluralism.

Since the council did not return to the role of religious after the promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes* in 1965, religious were left to explore for themselves their relationship to the Church and the emerging postmodern world in light of the new way in which the whole Church was entering into dialogue with that same world. In the period following the council, religious institutes enthusiastically set about the task of adapting their life and ministry to meet the challenges of *Gaudium et Spes*. They quickly grasped that, since the Church had explicitly located its mission in the world in solidarity with all humankind, it was absolutely incongruous for religious to seek an identity as “separated” from that world. The reformulation of their constitutions allowed religious institutes not only to reflect more clearly their original sources of inspiration (namely, the gospel and the founding charisms of their institutes), but also to incorporate their newly expanded understanding of their mission to and in the modern world. Religious pursued the goals of the council with relentless enthusiasm and a profound trust in the Spirit’s abiding presence. In the process, they rediscovered that their authentic mission lies not in achieving a canonical ideal, but in responding as Christ to a very real world.

With the impetus provided by *Gaudium et Spes*, religious embraced human experience as a legitimate locus of truth and the world as a sacred place, a place where one can find holiness. The resulting movement away from a sacred/secular dualism began to chip away at some of the ways that the religious and apostolic dimensions of religious life had been dichotomized. For example, in the preconciliar paradigm, the “world” had distracted religious from the “sacred,” so they disavowed the world to enter the “state of perfection.” Consequently, contact with “seculars” in one’s ministry had been kept to an absolute minimum (even visits from family members were restricted). In the years following the council, however, religious grappled with the image of Church as leaven in the world and eventually relinquished their more
privileged self-understanding as beacons of holiness in an alien world. In the process, many dualisms were challenged, especially those that tended to divide or hierarchicalize religious life itself: clerical/lay, cloistered/non-cloistered, contemplative/active. Religious recognized that the active life, which is more directly involved in the lives and concerns of people, is truly in harmony with and not in opposition to the contemplative dimension of religious life, i.e., seeing with the eyes of God. Religious holiness and presence in the world are not antithetical: one embraces the world in order to find God in it.

In his postconciliar apostolic exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio* (1971), Paul VI highlighted the prophetic nature and spiritual value of the insertion of religious into the life of the world:

> How then will the cry of the poor find an echo in your lives? That cry must, first of all, bar you from whatever would be a compromise with any form of social injustice. It obliges you also to awaken consciences to the drama of misery and to the demands of social justice made by the Gospel and the Church. It leads some of you to join the poor in their situation and to share their bitter cares.²⁹

[The] religious life, if it is to be renewed, must adapt its accidental forms to certain changes which are affecting with growing rapidity and to an increasing extent the conditions of life of every human being . . . . Deep understanding of present tendencies and of the needs of the modern world should cause your own sources of energy to spring up with renewed vigor and freshness. It [an authentic living of religious life in the context of the modern world] is a sublime task in the measure that it is a difficult one.³⁰

By gaining insight into their own times, religious were able to develop sharper “ears” with which to hear the cry of the poor,
the cry to which they aspire to respond with the compassion of Christ, in whose footsteps they have chosen to follow. Heeding the message of *Gaudium et Spes*, they wholeheartedly embraced the "duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel." As a result, many religious congregations adopted the prophetic vision articulated in the postconciliar *Justitia in Mundo* from the 1971 Synod of Bishops:

> Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.

Reflecting on the example of Jesus presented in the gospels as well as on statements coming from both the Vatican and from the Latin American bishops' meetings in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), religious turned their attention to the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized of society, all who are considered and treated as "the least." In evaluating and redefining their ministerial commitments since the council, religious institutes have struggled to witness to a true "preferential option for the poor," not only in terms of living a life of poverty, but also of embracing the cause of the poor by denouncing social injustices and promoting justice in the society and culture in which they work, each according to its own charism. Perhaps more than any other factor, the preferential option for the poor continues to serve as a guiding principle for prophetic witness and ministry within religious congregations.

**Today’s Agenda: Clarity, Compassion, Collaboration, and Corporate Witness**

**Clarity of Identity and Mission:**

**Compassion and Prophetic Witness**

As religious life strives to find a language with which to speak its truth in the postmodern pluralistic world, clarity remains an elusive commodity. Religious life has found it difficult to
disengage itself from its highly institutionalized form. The
sweeping revisions of congregational constitutions and statements
of purpose have only partially succeeded in dealing with the
tension that exists between religious life as charism and religious
life as institution. Now, after thirty years; perhaps it is time for
religious institutes to turn their attention away from the task of
pinning down the structure of religious life in favor of looking
more to its mission and ministry in the postmodern age. The
renewal of religious life called for by Vatican II is not a discrete
task, but a continuing way of responding to the world. Each
religious community is called to ongoing discernment of what its
future is to be. The conciliar goal was never to accomplish a
“renewal” (i.e., a restructuring of “religious life”) but rather to
free religious life to be religious afresh in each new age and
circumstance, prophesying by its very life lived in relationship to
an ever-changing world.

In the years following the council, many religious experienced
a certain ambivalence in terms of their identity within the struc-
ture of the Church. During a time when the gospels replaced the
Rule as the primary formative influence, they enthusiastically
undertook what turned out to be the somewhat incongruous task
of rewriting their constitutions and statements of purpose —
incongruous because the very process of rewriting constitutions
does little to help religious institutes experience their identity
apart from canonical categories. As a result, religious life has yet
to claim fully its charismatic identity as it struggles to move away
from a primarily institutional self-understanding. In answer to the
challenge of Gaudium et Spes, it seeks to be faithful to what it
always has been, the following of Christ, but a following in new
modalities more in tune with a postmodern, global, interfaith
world. A great challenge facing religious life as it moves into the
postmodern age will be to keep its focus on Christ and to seek
clarity of identity in terms of its charism, its “way” of being
Christ’s presence in the world, rather than in terms of canonical
categories and juridical distinctions. Identity for the members of
a religious institute lies in their unfailing attachment to and
faithful imitation of Christ.

The freedom and flexibility evident in the post-Vatican II
recasting of religious life have had a paradoxical effect in terms of clarity. Prior to the council, the highly institutionalized structure of religious life bore the burden of projecting a clear identity and mission (e.g., one could hardly mistake the identity and mission of the highly visible armies of habited worker bees staffing hospitals, schools, etc.) The life of the religious was prescribed in minute detail. Since Vatican II, as religious exercise considerable personal freedom in the way they live out their vows, each individual is more responsible for the clarity and integrity of his or her witness to the living of the evangelical counsels. As a result, today’s religious have the opportunity to embrace the counsels, not by a blanket acceptance of a complex set of structures as a whole, but by a conscious discernment of God’s call in every individual choice they make. As a result, the evangelical counsels and the institute’s charism find expression in the life of a religious because he or she has owned them in a uniquely personal way rather than because structures have put them there. Paradoxically, while it is possible for religious to live with greater personal authenticity today, their corporate identity seems less clear because each member expresses that identity in an individual and original way.

Because charism is more properly revealed in one’s “way of presence” in ministry rather than in the specific tasks performed, the search for clarity demands that religious concentrate more on the “gift to” than on the “gift of” — to whom and in what way is one present in the Church’s mission to the world? The kind of self-forgetfulness that focuses on Christ and sees the world through his eyes yields the most authentic witness: a compassion — a “suffering with” — that embraces the poor, the marginalized, those who are most oppressed by the agenda of modernity. Compassion for the world is perhaps the best measure of holiness because to be one with Christ, whose suffering embraces the world’s suffering, is to “suffer with” the world. To meet this challenge, religious must also come to a certain degree of clarity about their context, the radical pluralism of the postmodern world. The result will be an example of the classic balance between contemplation and action: while religious keep their eyes on Christ in order to become the eyes of Christ with which to see
the world, religious also must keep their eyes on the world in order to bring the light of Christ’s vision to the darkest corners of that world.

The final paradox of clarity results from the fact that religious life is not about self-conscious identity, but rather about an invisibility in which all attention is focused on the one being served. Love is self-gift, not self-consciousness. In a sense, religious find their truest identity in self-forgetfulness: when they lose themselves in Christ and his mission, they become truly visible as Christ’s compassionate presence in the world. Christ is both whom they see and the seeing itself. Because no individual or community can exhaust the richness that is Christ, the different religious institutes focus on specific facets of Christ’s way of being present in and to the world and try to follow his lead. According to their specific charism or “way” of being present, religious look to the world in compassion, picking up on those cries of the poor that are not being heard by others. Postconciliar religious are being called out of the privileged seclusion of a Catholic culture into a global world where their prophetic witness gives visibility to gospel values that might otherwise be forgotten. Religious often serve needs that have been neglected by the society; when a need is recognized by society and others pick up their work, religious must be ready to move on in compassion to new needs, always seeing with Christ’s eyes and leading the Church in new directions. For this reason, religious life will always be rooted in an existential experience of the contemporary world, not in pre-existing, free-floating “essences.” Because of this, the specific forms of that life will remain provisional, responsive to being reshaped by the Spirit to recognize and speak the truth in new situations.

Because clarity of form is an element that can make religious life an attractive option for idealistic young people, there is a temptation to return to more clearly-defined structures and forms when a religious institute experiences a shrinking number of new vocations. It must be remembered that today’s drop in numbers is not unprecedented in the history of religious life. Whenever the Church begins to understand its mission in new ways, the impact is often dramatic in terms of the effect on vocations to religious life (e.g., when mendicant orders and apostolic congregations
appeared in response to the needs of the Church in a changing society, monastic and cloistered communities dwindled in numbers. The advent of the era of the laity in the post-Vatican II Church has allowed religious life to return to its more natural state as a prophetic minority. However, the fact that laypersons are assuming tasks formerly done by religious does not mean that religious life is no longer necessary. Religious life is not a service organization that can be replaced by other, more efficient service groups. Clarity about the prophetic nature of religious life ensures that religious life will continue to be understood, not as a social institution, but as a way of life in which one seeks to embody Christ’s being in the world, a world whose changing needs will continue to dictate new charisms or “ways” of responding in compassion.

A challenge for religious today is to risk giving priority to prophetic witness in a postmodern world rather than focusing their energies on simply preserving religious life. In other words, the age-old tension between charism and institution must be negotiated once again. Christ’s compassionate presence must be realized in each new age, however that presence is best embodied or institutionalized. Institution and law stand in service to charism; and charism is a gift to the context, a way of bringing Christ’s presence to the world. The charismatic founders of religious communities are those who look outward to their world, its forgotten values, its unmet needs, its unheard cries; the later generations of members tend to maintain the institution built on the founding charism. Pre-Vatican II, religious life was very involved in such maintenance, requiring managers who are inclined to look inward to the past. Vatican II has called religious to look outward at their world, especially the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. It is once again time for prophetic charismatic leaders to reclaim the original vibrancy of a founding charism and bring that gift to the postmodern world.

Collaboration and Corporate Witness

A second major challenge facing religious life in the future lies in the area of collaboration. Charisms are gifts for the whole
Church, and the charism of religious life is no exception. A charism is given not in order to be admired or compared, but to be used in collaboration with other charisms in bringing about the reign of God. No single charism exhausts the richness of the gospel. The charism of religious life is meant to complement, not compete with, the other charisms present in the Church’s life. As with a mosaic, each individual piece is needed, but the beauty is found in the whole, not in any single piece. When religious institutes work in collaboration with each other and with the clergy and laity, each brings its unique gift and enhances the ministry of the whole Church. The gospel paradox holds true: one must lose oneself in order to save oneself. In other words, when religious life focuses more on furthering the mission of the whole Church than on clarifying its own identity, its charism is realized with greater effectiveness. By “losing” its high institutional visibility, a religious institute may actually exercise its charism with more authenticity and clarity because its individual charism is less likely to distract from the Church’s communal mission to proclaim the fullness of the gospel.

In some ways, the growing movement toward collaboration among religious communities may seem to be a matter of mere survival in response to external factors operating on religious life. A closer examination suggests that it may be an example of the Spirit’s informing the future shape of religious life. In other words, circumstances may be the potter’s way of remolding religious life when good intentions are not enough. For example, after an unusual era of ever-growing armies of religious staffing flourishing hospitals, schools, and social service agencies, the number of religious has dwindled, and they are less visible in these ministries. At the same time, lay members of the community have come forward to manage and staff Church institutions. While it still remains difficult for founding congregations to relinquish control of their institutions, many religious communities have done so and are involved in various federations and mergers in order to ensure the continuation of the needed ministries these institutions provide. Collaboration has become a necessity rather than an interesting theory.

In a broader evaluation, collaboration may be the charism
specifically required in today's pluralistic world. In the postmodern era, perhaps the proclamation of the gospel message will be best served by a collaborative "world wide web" model as opposed to a pyramidal "chain letter." Each charism logs directly onto the "website" of the Church's mission and interacts with the whole in an immediate, lateral, and openly collaborative way, rather than through a hierarchical chain-of-command model. The issues facing a multicultural global Church in a pluralistic world demand the postmodern values of cooperation, inclusivity, and mutuality, values that critique the individualism, fragmentation, and isolation so identified with the modern age. The wisdom and insights gained through the many collaborative efforts made by religious institutes over the past thirty years (e.g., co-membership and associate membership programs, intercommunity living, and intercongregational projects, federations, and mergers, etc.) will bear much fruit in the Church in the postmodern age. Moreover, because religious congregations will be logging onto the "web" of the Church's mission precisely as real communities, they will stand in prophetic opposition to the anonymity of a postmodern "virtual" community.

The ability to collaborate and effect change laterally also calls for a new emphasis on corporateness, not in terms of an homogenized conformity but as a model of mutuality, interdependence, and genuine community. In the preconciliar Church, structures gave great clarity of identity to the group, albeit at the cost of an institutionalism that often consumed the individual members who were able to exercise little personal influence on that identity. After the council, when structures have tended to be less obvious, the corporate sense has diminished, and each individual religious seems to bear the burden of representing the whole institution singlehandedly, i.e., in any given circumstance, an individual member's personal choices regarding lifestyle and ministry have the effect of forging the identity of the group. The challenge for religious life today is one of being corporate in new self-forgetful ways that stretch the members to use their unique individual gifts collaboratively in the Church's common mission and that allow the gospel message to become more visible in a pluralistic world. The corporate apostolic witness of religious life will continue to
be a source of power, not in the sense of a dualistic “power over,” but in its impact on the web of interconnections that are affected by the self-forgetful, collaborative exercise of charisms. While, on the one hand, religious are striving to achieve greater clarity around identity and charism, their seeming invisibility may be the identifying characteristic of the gift they are being called to be for the Church in the postmodern world. Perhaps religious life will have achieved its purpose when the Church no longer views it as a privileged center of power, when the gospel is proclaimed by all members of the Church without any sense that religious life has a special claim to “proprietorship” of the gospel mission. What the onlooker will see is Christ and his church, not religious life. In what seems to be a losing of its “identity,” religious life may be most authentically what it has always been called to be: a gift of Christ’s spirit animating the body, the Church. As religious become self-forgetful animators of a collaborative model of church, their very invisibility will be, in fact, a most profound clarity.

To return once again to Lozano’s metaphor, the movement of religious life from a “side chapel” to the “main aisle” is simply an indication that the Church has come to understand itself as a whole: the Church, is all the people of God, the one body of Christ. The Church’s self-understanding is diminished when too much emphasis is placed on a division of its members into categories. Baptized Christians may have different roles within the Church by virtue of their charisms, but their one baptism assures their equal membership in Christ. Stretching the metaphor, one can say that the Church is the whole building, not simply a composite of a sanctuary (hierarchy) plus side chapels (religious life) plus icons and statues (saints) plus the middle aisle (laity). While the constituent parts may be essential to its structure, the Church must keep its focus on the integrity of the whole. Just as the human person cannot be defined solely in terms of complex relationships between physiological systems and organs, so the Church cannot be adequately defined in terms of the canonical status of its members. This is not new theology, but an early Pauline doctrine that had been somewhat obscured by layers of theological complexity arising from the medieval fascination with categories and distinctions.
Like it or not, with Vatican Council II, religious (and clergy, for that matter) found themselves in the main aisle, the body of the Church — still an essential part of the Church, but no longer an elite corps somehow superior in holiness to the ordinary baptized Christian. Since religious life has always been a gift to and in the Church, it should not have been surprising that religious found themselves squarely in the midst of the laity at the precise moment when the era of the Church of the laity was inaugurated. Often, the gift religious life brings to any particular period in the Church’s history is only clearly identified in retrospect. We recognize now, for example, that religious life in the period immediately preceding the council actually prepared today’s laity for mission, both through a comprehensive ministry of education and also through the lives of the many religious who decided that they could serve the Church better as lay persons and thus left religious communities to take up new work. One of the great, still generally unrecognized gifts of religious life to the postconciliar Church was the influx of former religious to lay ministry, even if the Church was not quite ready to have them.

So what could at first be easily misconstrued as a loss of identity for religious life following the council slowly comes into clear focus: the Spirit’s intention was the abolition of “ranks” of holiness within the structure of the Church, not a denial of the reality of religious life as an essential part of the Church. In the process, religious life was liberated from self-preoccupation with rigid structures in order to see again the world with the eyes of Christ and, seeing, to respond with his compassion to the as-yet-unheeded cries of the poor and marginalized of the contemporary world. Postconciliar religious life reflects a deeper sense of communion with all of God’s people, finding its home in the main aisle, right in the midst of the Church’s mission in and to the emerging postmodern world. Perhaps the gift religious life is now struggling to be for the Church will be evident and appreciated only in retrospect. However, as long as there are men and women accepting the challenge to follow Christ through a radical living of the evangelical counsels in each new age and circumstance, the Spirit will continue to surprise the Church through the gift of religious life.
Notes


2. Unfortunately, the scope of this essay does not permit a full exploration of all conciliar and postconciliar documents that develop the council’s teaching with regard to religious life. (See listing at the end of this essay.) For an excellent summary analysis of the many of the key documents, see Patricia F. Walter, O.P., “Religious Life in Church Documents,” Review for Religious 51, no. 4 (July-August, 1992): 550-61.

3. PC 2.

4. “Consecrated life” is the relatively new term currently preferred by John Paul II to describe the whole range of responses to the invitation to live more completely the evangelical counsels, including hermits, contemplatives, religious orders, apostolic congregations, secular institutes, societies of apostolic life, etc.

5. Dilanni observes that, historically, twenty-five years seems to be the normal period of time required following an ecumenical council for the spirit of a council to take root and bear its best fruit. See Albert Dilanni, “Religious Life and Modernity,” Review for Religious 50, no. 3 (May-June, 1991): 339.

6. See chapter five of Lumen Gentium, especially LG 39, 40, 42.

7. Walter, “Religious Life in Church Documents,” summarizes this preconciliar concept as “a privileged way of life undertaken by those with enough nobility and strength of soul to obey Christ’s counsels as well as the commandments. There was a focus on individual perfection achieved through total consecration to God and through a life of asceticism marked by penance, separation from the world, and the three-fold renunciation of the vows. Such an understanding was greatly influenced by Aquinas’s theology of the counsels, nineteenth-century ascetical theology, and the 1917 Code of Canon Law” (551).

8. See 1917 Code of Canon Law, can. 948.

10. LG 43

11. The argument that this amendment represents a deliberate improvement rather than a mere accidental change is supported by the fact that the amendment of the text to include the insertion of the words “et hierarchicae” was made at the formal request of many fathers of the Council. Furthermore, the authoritative commentary of the Theological Commission on that passage mentions that the addition of “and hierarchical” serves to determine the specific aspect. For the most complete and illuminating discussion of this point, see Molinari and Gumpel, *Chapter VI of the Dogmatic Constitution*, 11-32.

12. Based on clear affirmations in the text as well as authoritative explanations by the doctrinal commission and taking into consideration the difficult history of the document and various problems with ambiguous terminology, Molinari and Gumpel, *Chapter VI of the Dogmatic Constitution*, 23-32, make a strong argument for the conclusion that according to the formal teaching of *Lumen Gentium*, there are two divine structures or constitutions of the Church: the hierarchical constitution and the pneumatic or charismatic constitution, which is based on the diversity with which Christians tend to holiness. In other words, there are within the Church persons who belong to the clergy and persons who do not, and there are some of the faithful, both clerical and lay, who bind themselves by vows to tend to holiness by the radical living of the evangelical counsels, whereas others of the faithful do not undertake such an obligation.

13. VC 20.

14. The non-parallelism between these two realities is nowhere more apparent than in the lives of clerical religious communities. Because the documents promoted the parish as the center of Christian life, clerical religious were left with a dilemma: should the religious institute or the parish be the focus of their life? The Church has attempted to address some of the tensions in *Mutuae Relationes*.

15. Gottemoeller suggests that “excellence” is a better translation of the original Latin and Italian. The choice of the word “superiority” on the part of the English translators, however, suggests that there is a tendency among some Church officials to return to a ranking of the states of life according to degrees of holiness or perfection. See Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M., “Some Reflections on *Vita Consecrata*,” (Washington: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 1996), 1.

16. VC 32.


19. *LG* 43.

20. In *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II asserts the need for religious institutes to develop a dynamic, creative fidelity to their mission, “adapting forms if need be to new situations and different needs in complete openness to God’s inspiration and to the church’s discernment” (*VC* 37). Canon law is one expression of the Church’s ongoing discernment, a pastoral function of the hierarchy; canonical formulations articulate values, rights, and obligations in terms that are neither whimsical nor arbitrary. To serve its proper purpose, canon law must encourage a creative fidelity both to the wisdom of the past and to the fresh inspiration of the Spirit in new circumstances. Cf. *LG* 43; *MR* 8-9, 12; *EE* 4.

21. “Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel, this must be taken by all institutes as the supreme rule.” *PC* 2a; cf. *PC* 1; *LG* 43-46.

22. Philibert, 214.

23. *PC* 3.

24. I have chosen the word “contemporary” here because, whereas the council texts speak of the “modern world,” the world in which the Church has found itself during the past thirty years has been one in which modernity has been giving way to a postmodern worldview.

25. Prior to the opening of the council, when the various schemas were proposed and prepared for deliberation, there were no plans for a conciliar document on the Church’s relationship to the world, and certainly not a document of the stature of a pastoral constitution.


28. Karl Rahner's thesis that the real theological significance of Vatican II is its proclamation of the transition from a western or European Church to a world Church is supported by the characteristics of the postmodern global age. See Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40, no. 12 (December 1979): 716-27.


30. *ET* 51.


33. As *Evangelica Testificatio* points out, Christ came to respond to the cry of the poor, even going so far as to identify himself with them. As followers of Christ, religious are called to the same path. *ET* 17. Cf. Lk 4:18; 6:20; Mt 25:35-46; *LG* 8.

34. The term "preferential option for the poor" was used in relation to an understanding of religious life as recently as March 1996 in John Paul II's *Vita Consecrata* (85). Introduced at the 1979 Latin American Bishops' meeting in Puebla, Mexico (*The Final Document*, 1134), the phrase made its first appearance in John Paul II's writings in *Familiaris Consortio*, 47 (1981). The "preferential option for the poor" finds its specific roots in scripture (Jr 22:13-16; Mt 25:31-46; Lk 6:20) and in the Church's social teaching during modern times: *Rerum Novarum* 29 (1891); *Gaudium et Spes* 1 (1965); Medellín Documents: *Poverty of the Church* (1968), 9-11, 16; *Evangelica Testificatio* (1971), 18, 51; *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), 23; *Economic Justice for All* (1986), 16, 52, 85-91; and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), 42.

35. Mk 8:35; Mt 16:25; Lk 9:24, 17:33.

36. This same emphasis is found in the other documents of Vatican II, e.g., the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* promotes the active participation of the entire assembly in the celebration of the Eucharist, highlighting the fact that it is the whole assembly that celebrates, not solely the presider. See *SC* 7, 14.

37. The renewed interest in reestablishing the "gathering space" (e.g., the courtyards of the early and medieval basilicas) as an integral part of the architectural design of new churches witnesses to this need for integration.


39. Weakland suggests that, whereas this phenomenon has often been characterized as a blemish on religious life in the postconciliar age, it might also be considered as "a way in which religious life prepared for the life and work of the Church important new active lay members, all
THREE CONTRIBUTORS TO this collection write about the role of the Church as she faces the social issues of our world today: David O’Brien, William McDonough, and Anthony Cernera. In many ways they rely on the great conciliar document Gaudium et Spes, which gave to the Church a vision for addressing social issues. But the Second Vatican Council gave no such vision for the field of moral theology. As a matter of fact, the only thing that the Council said was a practically passing remark made in the document on priestly formation: moral theology “should draw more fully on the teaching of the Holy Scripture and should throw light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world” (Optatam Totius 16).

Moral theology changed dramatically after the Council, not because of any direct intervention by the members of the Council, but rather because of the moral theologians who began changing during the years of the Council. Only one issue was raised at the Council, and that was soon remanded to a commission: birth control. That commission, operating under the spirit of the Council, met up with another part of the Church that could not conceive of change in Church moral teaching. Though the commission’s report was rejected by the Vatican, eventually its major concern, to help families to reason well in making moral
decisions, became clearly inserted into the Church's life. It is to that legacy that I now turn.

To acknowledge that legacy, I want first to discuss how I as a moral theologian reason, and then I look at four other topics: moral theology before and after the Council, prudence (the virtue of reasoning well), casuistry (the method of reasoning), and cooperation (a way of reasoning well in a pluralistic society).

How I Reason

I am a Jesuit Casuist. These words spoken even ten years ago would have been embarrassing to utter, for on two occasions Jesuit casuistry was repudiated. First, when Blaise Pascal wrote the Provincial Letters in the seventeenth century and devastated the Jesuits with ridicule and second, immediately after the Second Vatican Council, when moral theologians threw out the manuals of casuistry that they had written during the last two centuries. In the first instance, Jesuit casuists were depicted as charlatans who did nothing but water down the demands of the Gospel and lead their faithful into perdition. In the second, they were considered simply out of date.

Casuistry is the study of cases, and the word cases is derived from the Latin casus, which means "what happened." Most of our interesting TV shows use cases in order to engage the audience. If they want to discuss big topics like abortion, euthanasia, or homosexuality, they don't ask us, "Do you think abortions are always wrong?" — that is, they don't ask us a big general question. Rather they give us a concrete case, a story of what happened to this particular woman who fell into a coma four months after becoming pregnant. After two months in the coma, the doctors are convinced that the woman's condition has worsened to an irreversible state — that is, that she has slipped into a persistent vegetative state from which it is impossible for her to return. Her husband, in deep denial, wants her to stay on the life support machinery, even though the doctors all agree that any life support for this woman is useless. Nonetheless, the doctors wonder whether they should heed the husband's request, not because his hope is reasonable, but so as to bring the fetus to term. The
woman's sister, aware that her sister's life is effectively over, sees what is happening and demands that her family be allowed to bury her sister rather than leaving her as some unliving incubator.

That’s a case. It’s not about every instance of abortion, but about one specific instance of protecting life in the womb. It does not pretend to deal with all cases as similar. On the contrary, it is so filled with circumstances that we can only think of the case at hand. Watch Homicide, ER, Chicago Hope, Law and Order, and so on: they all rely on cases. I will return to this topic later, but I need to first state who I am: that is, a casuist. I am a moral theologian who is more at home in the particular and the real, rather than in the general and the abstract.

Moral Theology: Before the Council

I turn now to the next topic: moral theology, and I do so because I want to consider the most important shift in moral theology in this century. This shift concerns not a topic like intrinsic evil, or proportionalism, or the growing exercise of papal teaching, but simply the role of the moral theologian. Though much has been done to describe the change in the moral theologian vis-à-vis the Magisterium, I want to describe the change in the role of the moral theologian vis-à-vis the People of God. This role has shifted from being judge or arbiter to being teacher, and despite this enormous shift, I believe that no one has noted it. And yet, it has had an enormous impact on the way Catholics think about morality.

After the Second Vatican Council, the late great French theologian Yves Congar argued that the greatest shift concerning authority in the Catholic Church was that the quod (the what) replaced the quo (the who). For example, before the Council, if anyone heard a particular teaching and wanted to know how much authority to attach to it, one asked, “Who teaches this?” If the answer was “Pope Pius IX” or “Cardinal Tisserant,” then it was considered true and to be held. Likewise, if it was a particular moral teaching and someone answered, “The Gregorian Professor, Father Josef Fuchs,” it was also considered true. Roman moral theologians, like popes and cardinals, had a great deal of authority,
and they determined whether particular courses of action were right or wrong.

In fact, many people mistakenly believe that the only ones who taught moral theology or condemned moral theologians were popes. However, as a matter of fact, both papal teaching and their occasional condemnations are relatively new phenomena. We do well to remember that of all the major theologians of the Church who shaped the tradition — Clement, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Peter Lombard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Abelard, Albert, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Suarez, and Newman — only one was a pope. Likewise, the faculty of the university of Paris probably condemned more people in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries than the Vatican has in the last two centuries.

The authority of the theologian, Roman or otherwise, was particularly strong in this century. Since truth relied more on the "who" than on the "what," American Roman Catholics looked to their own moral theologians to determine the answers to their moral questions. To assist one another, these moralists met together annually to discuss cases and to consider questions that others raised. Then listening to one another, they espoused their own individual and collective opinions in various subsequent forums. But they were as vulnerable to the priority of the "who" as was everyone else.

One tale that I have often heard recounts a meeting of American Jesuit moral theologians in the mid-1960s, where they discussed, among other things, birth control. Canvassing the room, one after another declared that artificial birth control was never permitted. However, the last one remarked that he had heard that "The Gregorian Professor Josef Fuchs" was changing his mind on birth control. Then they went around the room again, and several gave other instances when artificial birth control would be permitted!

From roughly the eighteenth to the twentieth century, these meetings were not uncommon. These moral theologians decided what was right or wrong. They wrote in large textbooks or what they called "Manuals" for which reasons they were subsequently called "manualists." In these manuals, they gave their opinions about all sorts of actions, from worshipping God, paying taxes,
masturbating, stealing and killing, to unfair prices. You name it, and they had an opinion on it.\textsuperscript{9}

In seminary, local priests were taught these manuals. When those priests came to the parishes, they in turn taught from the pulpit, in the schools, and in the confessional what the moral theologians had written on all these matters. The laity learned from the priests. As the years went by, moralists updated their positions by adding new circumstances and offering new decisions that were published in later editions of their manuals.

One way that these moralists learned about new circumstances was through the laity. The laity were so familiar with the variety of theological decisions that they often wrote into their local diocesan newspaper asking circumstantial questions that were answered by the paper’s own or another’s syndicated columnist. This columnist, of course, relied on a noted moral theologian, and so the questions raised on the diocesan level were often eventually picked up by some moralist of note. Moreover, the columnist may also have put together a collection of letters received and answered. In other words, this system of moral deliberations and promulgated judgments was effectively a cottage industry.

Notice the overall demeanor of the parish priest and the laity. They simply wanted to know what the moral theologian permitted or prohibited. The attitude was not to read what the moral theologian wrote, but simply to find out his decision. No one during all these years wrote any book called \textit{You Can Reason Okay}, \textit{I Can Reason Okay} or \textit{Ten Steps to Reasoning Well}. In fact, an essay like this one would be unthinkable. A Jesuit casuist would never teach you the method of casuistry basically for three reasons. First, because moral theologians did not believe that average persons were capable of moral reasoning about serious topics.\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, they were convinced that the Church should have a universal teaching on most issues and that moral truth and moral teaching were not served well by people claiming different solutions.\textsuperscript{11} Third, most of the material with which they dealt concerned whether a particular activity was a sin or not. What was not a sin was usually permitted.

This third point is very important. Moral theologians made decisions about what was sinful and what was not. They did not
consider what was a better action than another. They simply determined what was sinful. If it was not sinful, it was permitted. No one, I repeat, no one of these moral theologians was interested in recommending positive courses of action. Instead, they simply wanted to help the priest and in turn the laity find out what activity was safe and what was not. This absence of any positive recommendations is striking. Moralists did not recommend that we should be nice to our roommate, that we should develop self-esteem, that we should join JVC. In 1908, Thomas Slater, the first moral theologian to publish a manual in English, wrote in his preface:

Here, however, we must ask the reader to bear in mind that manuals of moral theology are technical works intended to help the confessor and the parish priest in the discharge of his duties. They are as technical as the text-books of the lawyer and the doctor. They are not intended for edification, nor do they hold up a high ideal of Christian perfection for the initiation of the faithful. They deal with what is of obligation under pain of sin; they are books of moral pathology. They are necessary for the Catholic priest to enable him to administer the sacrament of Penance and to fulfill his other duties.

After talking about how spiritual or ascetical theology is the study of the “lofty ideals of life,” Slater adds, “Moral theology proposes to itself the humbler but still necessary task of defining what is right and what is wrong in all of the practical relations of Christian life.”

Until the Second Vatican Council, the moral theologian then determined what was permitted and what was prohibited in nearly every area of life. The laity may have understood to some extent how these theologians reasoned. But they were never taught this. Instead they were taught what the bottom-line verdicts were.

**Moral Theology: After the Council**

After the Council, however, if one wanted to know how much authority to attach to a position, the question was not,
"Who said it?" but rather, "What are the reasons for it?" That shift from the who to the what was a shift from obedience to reason. After the Council, we considered it more important to use right reason ourselves, rather than simply to give assent to people who held a particular place of authority. This shift was a return to Thomas Aquinas's insight that right reason, not a person sitting in a particular office, was the source of truth.¹³

At the Council, moral theologians were charged with the task of developing a moral theology that was nourished by the Scriptures and that would encourage all people to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Two theologians, Bernard Häring¹⁴ and Josef Fuchs,¹⁵ did much to advance that, but soon after these initial movements, Pope Paul VI presented the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the birth control encyclical. That encyclical prohibited artificial birth control but permitted the natural family planning method. (Note, please, that while moral theologians have changed their self-understanding from being judges to being teachers, other moral teachers, like bishops and popes, have not adopted that model.)

In the encyclical, the Pope thanked the commission that had studied the issue but acknowledged that he could not accept its majority report. About this commission, it is helpful to remember that during the Council, Pope John XXIII appointed theologians, physicians, bishops, and married couples to study whether birth control was always wrong. When Pope Paul VI was elected, he decided that the commission needed to be toughened; some of its existing members seemed too open to the possibility of changing the teaching on birth control.¹⁶ Thus he appointed several cardinals and several moral theologians, including Josef Fuchs, who at that time was, like most moral theologians, against birth control. One of the most important things that happened on that commission was that Fuchs and others changed their minds. In fact, Fuchs later became the chairman who authored the majority report, which all but four or five of the more than forty commission members approved. That report argued that the decision of how to regulate the birth of children ought to be left to married couples.

Fuchs and the others changed their position because they heard the testimony of married people talking about their
struggles and about their moral reasoning. This had an enormous impact not only on the topic of birth control, but — even more important, in my opinion — on moral reasoning. Fuchs no longer saw himself and others as the judges or determiners of what was right or wrong. Rather, in listening to these married couples who suffered from the determination of earlier moral theologians and who were forced to reason on their own, Fuchs heard that adult Catholics could indeed reason morally.

Fuchs then began writing essays not on what was right or wrong, but rather on what was right reasoning and, more important, on the primacy of the conscience and its responsibility to reason rightly. That is, he no longer wanted to be a prohibitor or a permitter of particular actions; rather, he wanted to be a teacher who helped all people — priests and laity — to reason well.

That has been an enormous shift. For instance, Fuchs never said in the majority report that married couples are permitted to practice birth control; rather he said that married couples must decide how morally to regulate births in their family. This is a key shift in moral instruction. Thus it is jarring for moral theologians today to hear people say things like Charlie Curran or Dick McCormick say it is okay to use birth control or things like that. Curran and McCormick, like the rest of us, gave up the role description of permitter or prohibitor. Rather we are now engaged in trying to teach others in the Church how we think one can reason and judge well. We do this by looking at method, but also by looking at our tradition and teaching it, especially those moments, like the patristic period and high scholasticism, that aimed to help ordinary people understand the Scriptures and its call to form and follow the conscience.

Of course, not every one agrees with us. The Irish Jesuit Bart Kiely argues that humans are so dysfunctional that moralists are irresponsible when they recommend to others that they should reason for themselves. Better, he argues, that we simply reiterate time-honored prescriptions that more or less keep us from worsening the state of affairs. He has some legitimacy here. Just think of how some of our best friends reason; or better yet, think of how we reason about things on occasion. Others, like Pope
John Paul II, wonder as he did in *Veritatis Splendor* whether we are becoming relativists. That is, he wonders whether we are suggesting to people not that they should reason well, but that they should do whatever they want. In many ways, moralists have painstakingly tried to answer these charges and have shown that we are interested in right reasoning. Still others simply presume we have given away the store.

Our task since the Second Vatican Council has been to help others to reason rightly. Moreover, besides giving up our rôle of judging others' actions, we no longer think of morals as simply avoiding sin. For the most part, we conceive of morals as what the Council commanded us to do: moral theology "should draw more fully on the teaching of the Holy Scripture and should throw light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world" (*Optatam Totius* 16).

**Prudence**

On this note then, hopefully, we can appreciate the third concern. We moral theologians are effectively concerned with teaching the virtue of prudence. Now many think of prudence as self-interest. One sees a jacket hanging up at J. Crew and goes to put it on his credit card. His best friend, knowing that the guy is unable to pay for his food bills, asks, "Is this prudent?" In a good deal of contemporary language, the word "prudence" is used to inhibit us from acting. It is commonly used in phrases like "Are you being prudent?" which means "Are you going to regret having done the action that you seem bent on doing?" This use of prudence is peculiar, because Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle both considered prudence as the virtue that helps us move forward by setting reasonable goals.

One reason why this negative interpretation of prudence developed seems to be the result of what we thought of as moral theology — that is, as avoiding sin. If the main task of moral theologians was to warn us against sin, then what they did was "prudence." Prudence kept us from doing the wrong. But Aristotle and Aquinas viewed ethics as not the avoidance of the
wrong but as the pursuit of virtue; for them prudence is the virtue of reasoning well about practical matters.\textsuperscript{22} It is not at all theoretical; rather prudence is about planning to act.\textsuperscript{23} The prudent person is one who sets goals. Prudence is what each of us needs in order to anticipate tomorrow: we need to know what courses to take, what programs to get degrees in, what schools to apply to. All these future-oriented activities are exercises in prudence.

Let me then summarize the two steps that we have taken: first, moral theologians no longer believe that moral theology is about determining which actions are right and which are wrong; rather it is about teaching others how to reason well. Second, the virtue of reasoning well is prudence, which looks to see how we can grow into more virtuous persons.

In light of all this optimism, let me register a bit of realism before moving on. It was believed throughout the medieval period that the majority of people were going to hell. This is a presumption that dominates from the fourth century almost until the Vatican Council II. Today, however, we seem to believe not only that everybody is going to heaven but, worse, that everyone is good. Certainly, believing that everyone is going to heaven may well be a right understanding of the Scripture. After all, revelation does refer to universal salvation and, more important, stresses the depth of God’s mercy. Thus, by God’s doing, we may all be going to heaven. But believing that we are all good is ridiculous, for then we believe that we are all going to heaven by our own doing.

I cannot help but believe that this presumption in universal goodness is simply another reaction to three centuries of moral theologians’ doing nothing but talking about sin and sinners. It is as if we rejected them without realizing that we may be going irresponsibly to the opposite extreme. I have no idea of when any of us are bad or good.\textsuperscript{24} Indeed, I have no idea of whether I’m good, although it is my particular hope that God will call me to eternal life. But I do think that we should avoid presumption and that we do well to recall the words of St. Paul, later echoed by Sören Kierkegaard, that we are called to work out our redemption with fear and trembling.

Thus, as we turn to the exercise of moral reasoning, we need
to act responsibly, not only because we should be concerned out of love for our neighbor, but out of concern for our own consciences, for which we will be held accountable. Saying that, then, let me turn to a particular way of developing prudence, which is through right moral reasoning, and here is my fourth topic, casuistry.

Casuistry

I turn to casuistry, not as an indulgent judge, but as a teacher of prudence. Instead of discussing broad rules or general theories, we need, as in television shows, to see cases in order to reason well. We need to consider Mary, who has a difficult pregnancy on ER, or Louise, who assists her cancer-ridden husband Joe commit suicide on NYPD Blue, or the priest who knows the identity of a murderer on Homicide. On these television programs, we see people dealing with a case. Rather than simply turning to a rule—for example, that a woman has the right to decide about her pregnancy in the first two trimesters of her pregnancy—ER is going to raise some complications that make applying the rule difficult. In other words, ER will introduce a number of circumstances that will make us ask ourselves whether “a woman’s decision” is the only thing we should be considering. The circumstances will present some doubt. That is exactly what will happen on all the other programs: NYPD Blue may presume that all illegal killing is always wrong but will nonetheless ask whether Louise should have helped kill her husband; the police on Homicide will ask the priest whether he should ever break the seal of confession. All the shows will give us a strong enough case that its circumstances will produce a doubt about whether the rule applies.

That doubt is key. It is the same doubt that made Josef Fuchs rethink his position on birth control. Hearing all the different objections to the teaching on birth control, he recognized that some circumstances placed his position in doubt. When a rule is placed in doubt, what should we do?

Over the past ten years, a number of writers have urged us to investigate the way casuistry was done in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One reason for that is that the casuistry
done from the eighteenth to the end of the twentieth century was fairly simplistic. In those more recent centuries, casuistry was no more than taking a rule and applying it to a case. Thus, to the rule that all lying is a sin, one could propose the case of lying to protect a life. The moral theologian solved the problem by simply applying the rule to the case, asking, “Are you in fact lying?” If you said, “Yes,” then the theologian referred you back to the rule. Certainly there were some exceptions, but for the most part, the rule remained firm, and cases were solved by directly applying the rule deductively to the case.

In order to explain the casuistry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is helpful to see that it was not unlike the way families reason today. Indeed that method of reasoning is similar to casuistry and is precisely why we find these TV shows so engaging. For instance, consider when little Johnny asks why his sister Mary got more allowance this week. The child is asking what happened to the rule that brothers and sisters get the same allowance. Johnny is basically comparing his case against his sister’s and notices a difference. He went to the rule and found an inequity. He wants an explanation to find out what makes his case different from Mary’s. His mother may answer, “Because Mary babysat for us.” Notice how she answers him the same way he asked, by comparing the situations or cases inductively.

One rule that children understand is the rule of fairness. They think that everyone should always get the same. They are vigilant about this: at Christmas, birthdays, family feasts, and weekly allowances. Watch their expectant faces. Any departure from the rule causes enormous problems that are only offset by another’s offering reasons for why one case is not the same as another. Thus parents do not explain rules, but turn to cases: They try to explain the differences by looking to the circumstances in each case that prompt different treatments. “Mary got an expensive guitar because you got sixteen small presents.” “Johnny can stay up late because he did well in school.”

Likewise, students do the same. How many professors have faced a student who is asking, “By why did I get this grade; Johnny did the same work?” Such utterances are extraordinary. But whenever we are to justify our grading, we usually compare
the student's work before us with another work. And usually we make sure that the other paper to which we compare this one is excellent. Notice, here, how this other student's paper becomes the norm, the standard.

Casuistry appears then whenever there is doubt and whenever there is need to explain or illustrate some standard. The need to find another standard arises because an existing rule either does not exist or is inadequate to resolve the doubt or to set the standard. In sum, casuistry emerges as a method of moral reasoning whenever extraordinarily new issues materialize.

The reason why casuistry was developed and practiced in the sixteenth century was precisely because of this newness. In their very important work, The Abuse of Casuistry, Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin describe the new issues in the public and private arenas of life that prompted the birth of high casuistry. In the public world, Europeans, through the explorations of the New World and their trade with the East, could no longer accept the older moral guidelines of the past. For instance, in 1237 Pope Gregory IX declared that maritime insurance was a form of usury and morally wrong. But at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a prohibition against underwriting expeditions to the West and the East was unthinkable. No one could afford this teaching, and the teaching was considered dated. Thus, merchants petitioned faculty members of the University of Paris to render new decisions on the pope's decretal. Instead of taking the rule that Gregory offered—that is, that all usury is wrong and maritime insurance is a form of usury—the faculty responded to the doubt with a new standard, the case. They responded by asking whether the case of an insurer's guaranteeing the arrival of the worth of a cargo was any different from the case of the captain of a ship who secures the arrival of the cargo. Thus, the question became a case and was placed against another case that described a standard—that is, an already validated moral activity. By showing congruency between the two, these writers provided new ways of circumscribing the decretal, distinguishing insurance from usury and proposing ethical grounds to legitimate the insurance. Casuistry was used to liberate institutions from normative determinations that did not keep pace with other developments. But with this freedom came
the need for new expressions of moral guidance, and thus casuistry also provided those bankers, merchants, missionaries, explorers, and princes bent on expansionism with a new inductive method of moral logic to navigate the unfamiliar waters before them.

Sometimes the newness of moral dilemmas in the sixteenth century was not occasioned by expeditions. Religious and political conflicts in England at the end of the sixteenth century raised questions that at earlier times were unthinkable: Could a priest lie about his identity? Could one take an oath and not keep it? Could a Catholic landowner contribute to a "heretic" church? There were few principles that addressed these questions, and those that did were ill-equipped to answer them. But much like those at the University of Paris, these English writers sought to reexamine previous teaching by invoking not principles but rather cases and to make distinctions that were not current in earlier years. A prime example was whether there was a distinction between lying and pretense, and the case that enabled them to entertain this distinction is the pretense of the risen Christ who acted as if he meant to go on rather than to stay with the disciples at Emmaus. In other words, since the risen Jesus used pretense so could priests.

In the face of antiquated principles, sixteenth-century ethicists, attentive to the newness of contemporary projects, turned for guidance to cases, circumstances, new distinctions, and analogous logic; likewise, we stand at the end of the century facing the new horizons of medical advances, international business, the geopolitical world, and information technology with an unimaginable set of new ethical questions, and many urge a return to casuistry. The times are similar, for ethicists and historians revisiting this material are struck by the resemblances: new questions, new meetings between people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, weak principles, a time bent on expansionism, and most important, a world where the advances in other fields outpace those in ethics. For these reasons, casuistry makes a comeback today.

Cooperation

One particular issue in casuistry is the question of whether I can help someone do something wrong. It is the case of
cooperation, my final topic. As I mentioned earlier, English casuistry dealt with a series of questions never before raised in ministry. These questions and cases were raised, answered, and published at the end of the sixteenth century. Their concerns fall into one of two topics. Either it settles cases for how priests who are secretly infiltrating England should act: what they may wear, where they may say Mass, how they may refrain from bringing certain items of piety with them, and so on. Or it concerns what lay Roman Catholics may do in light of the fact that they are a diminishing group with less and less power and yet have to contend with normal affairs of land, property, taxes, government, and worship. Thus, could an innkeeper serve meat to a demanding customer on a Friday? Could she house a member of the institutional Church? Could she pay the Church tax? Could she attend those Church services, and so on? All these cases were about cooperation.

Eventually, a principle of cooperation was articulated that expressed some of the common features among these cases. Let me repeat that. Eventually, a principle of cooperation was articulated that expressed some of the common features among these cases. We must realize that principles like cooperation, double effect, and toleration did not come out of thin air. Nor did they precede the cases about cooperation, toleration, or double effect. The opposite is true. After years of solving cases that were all about cooperating with people in wrongdoing, a principle of cooperation was articulated. After years of considering cases that had two effects, one right, the other wrong, moral theologians articulated the principle of double effect. After years of treating cases of toleration, the principle of toleration was articulated. Cases preceded principles, and after years of treating similar cases with similar conclusions, moralists found common features among the cases and formulated the particular principles. Principles derived from the right solution of concrete cases; those right solutions ground today’s principles.

I am giving you an abbreviated treatment of what I and others like John Kekes and Martha Nussbaum have developed elsewhere. But what we argue is that principles are summary explanations of long-term casuistry. Thus, some may think that an
appeal to principles is always more sophisticated moral reasoning and that, for instance, Johnny's mother is using a pretty primitive type of moral reasoning in explaining apparent inequities in allowances. But as a matter of fact, Johnny's mother's use of comparative cases — that is, her inductive moral reasoning with Johnny — is the stuff that principles are made of.

The manualists of the eighteenth to the twentieth century used cooperation frequently, but it is only during the last five years that the principle has received contemporary American Catholic attention. This should not surprise us. Why? Because moral theology is no longer about avoiding sin, but rather about following in the footsteps of Christ. Thus, if moral theology is no longer about avoiding sin, it is no longer about playing it safe.31

Cooperation made its first recent appearance when the National Conference of Catholic Bishops considered the following case: What should a health care worker in a Catholic facility say when faced with a person who has recently tested HIV-positive and who insists that he will not be sexually abstinent? In the face of his refusal, should she become silent, or should she refer him to the common good and recommend that he take steps to protect it by using a condom? Let me illustrate the argument by making the case more specific — that is, the man who is positive is not a married man talking about relations with his wife, but a gay man talking about sex with a variety of different men.32

The first thing that we must do regarding cooperation is distinguish the activity of the person doing the wrong action from the activity of the person cooperating. The gay man is intending to engage in activity that the Church teaches is unethical: it teaches sexual activity outside of marriage is not permitted and that all homosexual activity is always wrong. It may be worth noting that there are many moral theologians who look at homosexual relationships from a variety of perspectives; however, in the case at hand, we have an employee in a Catholic institution. Thus, regardless of her own particular beliefs about the moral rightness or wrongness of homosexual activity, the question here is what ought the health care worker do? As an employee, she must respect the institution's policy not to recommend what the institution considers illicit moral activity. Thus she notes that she
is not recommending sexual activity; in fact, she has already recommended abstinence, without success. Now she is recommending that he use a prophylactic since he is so intent on sexual activity.

After distinguishing the two activities, she asks another question. Does she as cooperator give advice because she approves his activity? If she approves his activity then she is wrong because then she is in effect saying that she is helping him do wrong activity because she thinks he is right. Thus, she can only morally cooperate in wrong activity if she does not approve it. That is, she is helping him for some reason other than the reason why he wants to do what he wants to do. She is recommending the prophylactic because she is interested in the common good: she does not want to see more people infected with the frequently deadly virus.

The third step is to put some distance between the agent and the cooperator and their distinguishable activities. Thus, she is certainly not engaging in the sexual activity. Nor is she helping him find a partner or providing any support that may assist him in actually having sexual activity. In fact, she is so distant from his activity that literally she is not helping him in any way to have the activity. With or without a condom, he can engage in sexual activity. Her activity is so remote from the client's that it is difficult to see much of a connection.

Fourth, she needs to ask herself to what extent it is morally important to cooperate — that is, to give the advice? She has already recommended abstinence as morally and medically the proper conduct for a person who tests positive for HIV. But he has rejected that advice. Thus, given the enormity of the AIDS epidemic and given the relative utility of condoms in making sex safer (though not safe), she deems it at least fair to say that such advice to protect the common good is legitimate, indeed, necessary.

Fifth, the cooperator should ask herself whether her assistance is indispensable. That is, in cooperating, one's assistance should not be so necessary that the person doing the wrong action, could not act otherwise. In this case, clearly, the client is going to engage in the sexual activity regardless of the employee's advice. Not only
is her advice dispensable vis-à-vis his intention to engage in sexual activity, it is absolutely inconsequential to whether he will engage in sexual activity. Her advice only affects the possible harm to other persons.

Finally, she needs to avoid giving scandal. That is, anyone who gets involved in another’s wrong-doing has a responsibility to make sure that others do not misconstrue her activity as promoting or advancing this wrongdoing.

These six conditions are then what we use for talking about cases in which we are forced to ask ourselves whether we ought ever to help another who is doing something wrong. The six conditions are: that we should be able to distinguish what we are doing from what the other person is doing; that we should not approve of the other person’s wrong-doing; that we should be able to put some distance between each another’s activity; that what we are doing is morally important; that our action is not indispensable for the other one’s action to happen; and that we avoid scandal.

From this exercise, we can learn a few important insights. First, cooperation is not a permitting or prohibiting principle, nor is it an excusing principle. It is simply a helpful tool that assists us as we sincerely look to find out what’s right. In this instance, the health care worker shows herself as a person who carefully reasons that her activity, advising to protect the common good, is different from his activity, which the Church teaches is morally wrong. She is able to explain both how their actions are different and why it is important that she acts as she does. The principle serves, then, as a guide to distinguish and to ascertain exactly what one is doing.

Secondly, the distinctions are important. Moral decision-making is not about creating artificial distinctions but recognizing real ones. Above all, when we are involved in morally complex material, we should determine exactly what it is that we believe that we are doing. For instance, we cannot say that by her advising she is promoting unethical activity. As a matter of fact, she is simply keeping unethical activity from causing greater harm. To obfuscate what she is doing serves no one.

Third, the six conditions are not specific ones for which there is an either/or answer. They are more buoys that help us navigate.
Thus, a computer could not really use the principle. The principle
calls for human judgment: on each level we have to ask ourselves
different questions and try to ascertain prudently how involved we
ought to get.

Fourth, we implicitly live with cooperation all the time. For
instance, every time we pay one cent in taxes — whether local,
state, or federal — we are cooperating in wrongdoing since we can
presume that somewhere along the way the government is engaged
in some wrong activity. Does it fund abortions, approve nuclear
testing, hunt down immigrants, conduct unlawful entries, use
excessive force? If so, we are cooperating in another’s wrongdoing,
and unlike the health care worker who gives advice, we’re giving
money. But we are not alone. Even the Vatican has a long history
of cooperation every time it signs treaties or concordats with
another nation.

The principle works, then, in every instance where there is a
question of getting our hands dirty. Here then I want to make one
thing clear: I like the principle. I think that it helps us to
understand what we should be doing. In the professional world,
there are moral people who are trying to determine whether they
should be involved in genetic counseling, in obstetrics, in in-vitro
fertilization, in fetal tissue research, who try to negotiate the
extent to which they believe they should be involved in the work
of others that they are convinced is wrong. I think the principle
helps us understand when and to what degree we should or should
not cooperate in another’s wrongdoing.

In concluding, let me give you some instances of when the
manualists of the last three centuries used the principle of
cooperation. First; manualists considered the case of employees
who are somehow involved in activity that assists wrongdoing and
who want to know whether they have to give up their job. For
instance, centuries ago they considered the case of the servant who
has among many tasks the responsibility to transport letters
between his master and his master’s mistress. Clearly the master
is engaged in adultery, but does the servant have to quit because
transporting amorous letters is included in his job description?
That case has been updated to the person working at a newspaper
stand where the owner has decided to add several pornographic
magnalizes to the stand or to the ticket salesperson at a cinema that occasionally shows a movie judged morally objectionable. Determining what one is actually doing and to what extent one is involved and why one is involved is what cooperation allows us to discern.

More recently, we find the case of a Catholic nurse working in a non-Catholic hospital where sterilizations are performed. The nurse assists as she does in other surgical procedures. She understands her activity as distinguishable from the doctor doing the sterilization. Likewise the anesthesiologist. Doing casuistry we can say that the work of both the nurse and the anesthesiologist is distinguishable from the doctor’s. Both are protecting the patient from any harm and are not per se performing the sterilization. Moreover, their presence in the hospital we hope adds to the moral life of the hospital. Thus, these more recent cases were not simply about keeping employment, but rather that the person’s presence rather than her absence may better the promotion of value in important institutions.

But reasons for invoking cooperation are as numerous as its settings. For instance, in the bedroom, what happens when one spouse practices birth control and another does not approve? Or what about the judge in family court division who tries to bring Christian values to that setting, but who must occasionally preside over divorces? Or what about the priest who is distributing communion and knows that the person standing before him is a known sinner?

These are all different cases of cooperation. None of them are answered with an unequivocal no or an unequivocal yes. As the manualist Henry Davis wrote about trying to figure out how cooperation applies in any instance: “there is no more difficult question than this in the whole range of moral theology.” For the principle of cooperation is not a permitting principle, rather it helps us to decide prudently how involved we ought to be with others whose activities occasionally overlap with ours and whose activities do not reflect the values that our Church promotes. But, like the cases in England at the beginning of the seventeenth century, these cases of cooperation help guide us to reason well as we see how we should act in a world in which values conflict.
This method of moral reasoning from the tradition teaches us that avoiding evil isn’t the only thing that Catholics should look to do when they want to reason well and act well. Rather, as prudent people, we know that to withdraw completely from the world with all its complexity is not right. To be immersed in the world is to get entangled with it. And so cooperation, an instance of moral reasoning that teaches us a lot about the richness of the tradition, helps us to reason prudently.

I conclude by noting that a university that upholds its Catholic identity while facing courageously the modern world invites a casuist to write on moral theology after the Council. In answering the invitation, I must consider the world in which we actually live. Thus, I hopefully respond to the invitation with a sense of the tradition. But I also leave it as a post-conciliar casuist, not telling the university what to do or not to do, but rather offering its audience a teaching moment about the tools that we use to reason well. That is, after all, what Josef Fuchs taught me: to teach others how to reason well with the tools from the tradition so that we may not worry so much about whether we do wrong, but whether we are following Christ.

Notes


2. Jesuits have long been associated with casuistry, so much so that if you pick up your dictionary, you may find, as I found in my Webster’s New World Dictionary, this definition of “Jesuit”: “A crafty schemer; cunning dissembler; casuist.”


12. Thomas Slater, A Manual of Moral Theology, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1908), 1:6. In his Cases of Conscience (1:36) he writes that the object of moral theology “is not to place high ideals of virtue before the people and train them in Christian perfection . . . its primary object is to teach the priest how to distinguish what is sinful from what is lawful . . . it is not intended for edification nor for the building up of character.” As quoted in Henry McAdoo, The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology (London: Longmans, 1949), 10-11.


28. Precisely the argument of Kopfensteiner above. In a different vein Edward Long argued years ago that casuistry was needed to apply the absolute ideal of love to the concrete; see *Conscience and Compromise: An Approach to Protestant Casuistry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954).


31. It is the belief of many moral theologians that as a matter of fact we have confused sin with wrong action and that what we really have been avoiding for centuries is what was considered wrong, not what was considered sinful. See my “The Problem with Thomas Aquinas’s Concept of Sin,” *Heythrop Journal* 35 (1994): 440-44.


Vatican II: 
Pastoral Care and Practical Theology

OLIVER J. MORGAN, S.J.

To read the signs of the times, to cherish deep solidarity with humanity and its history, to serve the people of this age with an ever growing generosity and success: with words and metaphors such as these, Vatican Council II signaled profound changes in the life and ministry of the Catholic Church.\(^1\) Taken from *Gaudium et Spes*, the first explicitly “pastoral constitution” in the history of the Church, these metaphors capture both a contemporary self-understanding and a new style of action and reflection in the Church’s pastoral care.\(^2\)

This chapter will explore an important aspect of Catholic life — namely, its ministry or pastoral care.\(^3\) Christians, as we all know, believe certain things, pray in certain ways, think and speak theologically so that their commitments are clearly identifiable. This chapter will explore what Christians do. How do Christians live the call of Jesus to discipleship and service? What are the activities of care in which Christian communities and individual Christians engage? What has been the impact of Vatican II on the ministry and pastoral care of Catholic Christians?\(^4\)

As we shall see, there is a fundamental connection between the Church’s identity and self-understanding (who the Church is) and its ministry (what the Church does). Vatican II envisioned the Church as the “People of God,” the “Body of Christ,” God’s active “sacrament of salvation” with a mission of service to the
world. As the Council came to appreciate anew such qualities as optimism, dialogue, listening, adaptation, solidarity, and inclusion as being fundamental to the Church’s identity and mission, these qualities were integrated into a revisioning of the Church’s ministries and the formulation of a new model for pastoral theology. This ongoing process of appreciation and integration forms a “continuing agenda” for today’s Church.

“In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission,” the bishops of the Council said. However, the vision of mission and pastoral care that the bishops articulated appears throughout a number of conciliar documents, principally The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium, LG), The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, GS), The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (Apostolicam Actuositatem, AA), and the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (Presbyterorum Ordinis, PO). There is not one comprehensive document or instruction that speaks directly to ministry. This makes the task of examining what the Council said somewhat complex. Consequently, we will explore Vatican II’s understanding of pastoral care as the concrete expression of the Church’s identity and mission with the help of three basic questions.

First, we will address the question, what is ministry? A brief account of the varied historical forms of pastoral care will help us to formulate a description of ministry. It will also introduce us to an important theme that underlies the work of Vatican II — namely, the principle of historical adaptation of ministry as necessary for effective Church mission.

Next, we will consider who does ministry. Vatican II was a catalyst for significant changes regarding who cares for the Christian community, who addresses the needs of the world in the name of the community, and who exercises leadership. Results of these changes include both a deeper appreciation of the ministry of all baptized persons and alterations in the training and formation of pastoral persons.

Third, we will examine how the Church thinks about ministry. The Vatican Council proposed a new method for choosing and reflecting on the Church’s various pastoral activities; it pointed the way toward a theology that fully addresses the
world’s needs as well as the community’s. This new method and mandate for “pastoral theology,” promoted by Vatican II, may arguably be seen as the Council’s most important and far-reaching contribution to the field of pastoral care.

Ministry: Brief Description and History

What do Christians do? How does the Christian community address and minister to the needs of the world? How are the needs of Christians themselves addressed? To understand what we mean by pastoral care, we turn to a brief historical examination of its various forms and adaptations.

A discussion of pastoral care must begin with the ministry of Jesus, which continues today in the ministry of his disciples, the “People of God” (LG 10-13). Jesus’ ministry, the foundation for all Christian pastoral care, was focused on his vision, living, and practice of the Kingdom of God. The theologian Edward Schillebeeckx puts it this way:

For Jesus the kingdom is to be found where human life becomes “whole,” where “salvation” is realized for men and women, where righteousness and love begin to prevail, and enslaving conditions come to an end. . . . This kingdom takes concrete form in human action. That kingdom is not wholly present, once and for all, but wherever and whenever Jesus performs his work of salvation in his fellow men and women. Where Jesus appears, the sick are cured and human communication is restored.10

Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom, of God’s victorious rule of love and healing over human hearts and human history, shaped his lifestyle and his message to the people of his time; it grounded everything he did (LG 5). It led him to act in ways that brought about wholeness, healing, reconciliation, greater understanding of the ways of God, and enhanced communication among the women and men whom he encountered. His ministry consisted primarily
in a lifestyle of welcoming fellowship that included proclamation of the word of God, healing and reconciling encounters with others, and prophetic actions. Jesus’ life was so transformed by the message of God’s impending kingdom that his ministry and care of others were focused on this one reality; lifestyle and ministry were all of a piece.

The earliest communities and individuals who followed in Jesus’ footsteps understood themselves to be his disciples, caught up in his mission. Remember the commission that Jesus gave at the conclusion of Matthew’s gospel (28:18-20): “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” From the first, it seems, the members of the early Church understood that joining the community of Jesus’ disciples also meant receiving this commission. Being a disciple meant something “fundamentally missionary” as well as being responsive to the community’s needs. And, everyone received the commission (GD 1-2, 4-5, 7). While the Twelve preached, healed and exercised leadership, they were not alone in these tasks.

Discipleship, community, lifestyle, and ministry are deeply intertwined. The apostle Paul, for example, understood this as he founded new churches to be centers of both Christian life and mission. The Kingdom of God now becomes visible in the action and life of the community of disciples, just as it had previously in the life and ministry of Jesus (LG 7, 9-11; GS 44-45; GD 5). The ministry and care of this community presents the Christian identity of the group and maintains its connection with Jesus’ own life and work. Pastoral care, then, is the “building up” of the community and its members in the gospel, through a set of roles, and practices, and services, so that the “saints” are equipped for mission and ministry (Eph 4:11-16).

New Testament records of the earliest Christian communities — for example, the Acts of the Apostles and Paul’s Letters — describe a rich communal life in which service and care for one another were advocated, living a new life of love and virtue was expected, and bringing the “good news” to potential new members — indeed to “all nations” — was encouraged. How each
Christian concretely lived out his or her commission, whether through preaching, prophecy, instruction, discernment of spirits, healing, works of mercy, interpretation of tongues, exhortation, administration, almsgiving, and the like, was understood as each one's particular form of service in the community, a "ministry."

As a Christian, each disciple was called to incarnate this fundamental commission given to the Church, according to her or his gifts or "charisms" (LG 7, 10-13; AA 3). The biblical records convey a sense of the diversity of these gifts and how they were used for the community and its mission (1 Cor 12:4-11; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:11-16; Titus and 1 and 2 Tm).

Consequently, picking up the meaning of this biblical context, Thomas O'Meara describes "ministry" this way:

Christian ministry is the public activity of a baptized follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit's charism and an individual personality on behalf of a Christian community to witness to, serve and realize the kingdom of God.\(^{19}\)

Whether directed inward to the community and the service of other disciples or outward to the world, ministry takes concrete form in the varieties of gifts and the service of each Christian.

Several elements of this New Testament definition of pastoral care are worth highlighting: 1) ministry participates in the Church's mission, in view of its vocation to preach the reign of God in Jesus' name; 2) it is made concrete in a variety of forms of service and care; 3) it is intended both to "build up" the community, the Body of Christ, and to evangelize "all the nations"; and 4) it is everyone's responsibility as a baptized disciple.\(^{20}\)

A History of Adaptation

Over the course of centuries, a hallmark of the Church's ministry, as it spread throughout the world, has been its adaptation to changing circumstances and to the needs of its times. The Church's ministry has been both diverse and adaptive. Vatican II called such adaptation the "law of all evangelization"
and spoke of the Church’s “learning” to adapt its life, message, and ministry to the concepts and language of different peoples and cultures (GS 44; GD 5-6). As theologian Thomas O’Meara reminds us, “The forms which the church and its ministries assume amid cultures and epochs are part of our ancestry.”

For example, while the pagan world offered the early Christian communities enormous opportunities for preaching and teaching about Jesus of Nazareth and shaped the first missionary activities of Christians, these communities gradually began to organize and structure themselves along the lines of the available institutional models of their day and adapted to a variety of political developments, including first persecution and later official recognition, within the Roman Empire. The formation of “patriarchates” or regional organizational centers, the focus on “ordination” as an official designation for leadership and service, and the division of pastoral tasks among bishops, presbyters, deacons, and others, all helped the communities to establish and maintain themselves during the first four centuries of the Church’s existence.

This adaptive institutionalization of ministry and the concentration of pastoral care into the hands of approved leaders, while apparently necessary at the time, was not an unmixed blessing, however. These changes helped Christianity to adapt to, and utilize, its status as an approved state religion (fourth century); they also began a long process of dividing “laity” from “clergy” and narrowing participation in ministry. Ordinary baptized Christians increasingly became the “objects” of pastoral care from clergy rather than active pastoral agents as disciples with a mission. This hierarchical, increasingly clericalized arrangement for church order and ministry received additional emphasis over time.

The “monastic” movement in the Church, which provided religious inspiration and stability for the Church in difficult times, is another example of adaptation. By the fifth century, monasteries were becoming centers of faithful life, learning, hospitality, aid to the poor, prayer, and liturgy; they were a firm anchor for Christians and for church order through the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, this adaptation also had drawbacks.
Monastic life emphasized detachment and withdrawal from the world of ordinary affairs, a personalized following of Christ, ascetical disciplines, celibacy, an increasing focus on Eucharist and sacraments celebrated by “sacred” persons, and a primarily hierarchical order of power (and wealth) in the person of the “abbot” and other ecclesiastical leaders. Over time these trends tended to “absorb the diversity of the ministry,” confining it to certain locales, rituals, and sacred persons. Widespread evangelizing, teaching the faith, even preaching were greatly diminished as Christian life became increasingly localized to monastic environs and narrowed to the ministry of an approved few.

Something akin to a “protest movement” began around the twelfth century, however, providing another example of pastoral adaptation with the emphasis on a return to “evangelical” or “apostolic” living in imitation of the New Testament. Identified with itinerant preaching, a return to more simple living, and renunciation of wealth and honors, as well as with pilgrimage and even crusade in the name of Christ, this movement came to a culmination in the ministry of the mendicant “friars” and the founding of the Dominican and Franciscan orders.

Both Dominic and Francis chose poverty as a lifestyle and engaged in a post-monastic “ministry of discipleship.” Ministry and Christian living were once again united. As Jesus, his disciples, and the early Christians lived in fellowship and simplicity, shared goods, and preached from place to place, so the friars would do. As preaching and teaching were seen to characterize apostolic ministry, so the friars, reviving and adapting this ministry to their world, forged relationships with the emerging universities and formulated systematic forms of education and training for their recruits. This “educated mendicant” ministry of the friars became a major form of pastoral care through the later Middle Ages.

What is important to note about these “adaptations” is that they occurred with a view to ministry — that is, consideration was given to what would be more authentically Christian and to what would be most effective. These changes met the needs of an increasingly urban, sophisticated, and literate populace.

The sixteenth century was a time of real ferment in Christian ministry. The Protestant reform emerged in part from a desire
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The sixteenth century was a time of real ferment in Christian ministry. The Protestant reform emerged in part from a desire
to renew the life and importance of local congregations, to adapt and extend ministry on the New Testament model, and to reaffirm the priesthood of all believers based on Baptism. In its reaction to the “reform” and to a new world situation, a renewed Catholicism adapted and aggressively pursued a variety of ministries. The Jesuits and their pastoral works can be seen as representative of the times.

Adapting to the needs of the day, the Jesuits embarked on a variety of “ministries of the word”: preaching, not only at Mass but on street-corners and hospitals, not only on Sundays but in novenas, Forty Hours, the famous Jesuit “mission,” and other venues; publishing books on topics such as aids to preaching, sayings, and precepts from religious and classical sources and devotional methods of prayer; the founding of schools for formation of youth; and a variety of methods for adult education, including “sacred lectures,” exhortations, catechetical instruction, “cases of conscience,” and “spiritual conversation.”

The Jesuits also engaged in “ministries of interiority,” such as retreats and spiritual direction as well as the famous Spiritual Exercises of their founder St. Ignatius Loyola, and various “social ministries,” including prison visitation and the founding of houses and programs for orphans, the incurably ill, catechumens, even prostitutes and their children. In these and other projects, the Jesuits worked collaboratively with laywomen and laymen in order to ensure that these ministries would continue. They labored on behalf of Christians and of others who were in need. This universal, expanded version of ministry was made concrete in the Jesuits’ vow to labor under the authority of the Pope, the universal pastor. The Jesuits had a worldwide mandate and a highly adaptive vision of pastoral care.

Adaptive Ministry

What should be clear from this brief digression into some examples from the history of ministry is the adaptation of pastoral care to the needs and tenor of the times. The Church and the world are intertwined; pastoral care that is connected to the needs of its time must change and adapt to be authentic ministry.
Ministry lives in and through history and culture, seeking to make concrete the Church's self-understanding and desire to serve.

Ministry is a living organism. When it finds itself blocked from activity, it seeks new channels. The external forms of ministry may be reduced or wounded, but the organic nature of ministry as a living pleroma [or fullness] in the church is never fully anesthetized. Obeying their inner law, diversity of forms and styles of servanthood struggle for external realization. . . . Cultures bring their own material to the ministry; rather than diluting it, cultural forms free ministry to live. 34

Vatican II sought to revive awareness of this ancient and radical understanding of ministry and pastoral care. Flexible adaptation, as the Council Fathers saw it, was for the purpose of greater and more effective service to the world (GD 6). 35

The Church learned early in its history to express the Christian message in the concepts and language of different peoples and tried to clarify it in the light of the wisdom of their philosophers: it was an attempt to adapt the Gospel to the understanding of all . . . Indeed, this kind of adaptation and preaching of the revealed Word must ever be the law of all evangelization. In this way it is possible to create in every country the possibility of expressing the message of Christ in suitable terms and to foster contact and exchange between the Church and different cultures. (GS 44)

Today, many forms of pastoral care are direct descendants from this history of adaptation, while other (newer) forms of ministry are developing as the Church tries to meet contemporary needs. The "core Christian ministries" of evangelization and proclaiming the good news (LG 16-17, 25; CD 11-13; PO 2, 4, 13), of sacramental celebration and nurturing the life of prayer (SC 9-
of catechesis and instruction in the faith for youth and adults (GE 2; CD 14; PO 13), and of leadership or administration of the community and its ministries (LG 18-29; GD 6), continue to give shape to contemporary ministry. In addition, many of the historically developed forms of pastoral care (e.g., schools, hospitals, forms of charitable work, and the like) continue (AA 8-21).

True to the dynamic of adaptation, new forms of ministry continue to develop as the Church responds to contemporary needs. In Latin America the development of “communidades de base” or local (“base”) communities, in which shared ministry of the word and service to the poor are hallmarks, shows signs of vitality. In the United States, the development of creative forms of health ministries (e.g., hospice) as well as ministry to persons with HIV/AIDS show similar energy. These and other adaptive forms of ministry continue to emerge in the Church.

An informative and concrete description of the various forms of pastoral care is given in the Vatican II document on the “apostolate of the laity” (Apostolicam actuositatem, 5-22). Beginning with the importance of joining the witness of a holy Christian life to pastoral service (AA 6, 13-14), the Council goes on to speak of evangelization and ministry of the word (AA 6, 16); of charitable work on behalf of the poor, sick, and needy (AA 8); of service to local communities (AA 10), families (AA 11), youth (AA 12), and other forms of pastoral action (AA 16-21) as the picture of today’s pastoral care. The Council highlights themes that are by now familiar from our discussion:

It is the Lord himself, by this Council, who is once more inviting all the laity to unite themselves to him ever more intimately, to consider his interests as their own (cf. Phil 2.5), and to join in his mission as Saviour. It is the Lord who is again sending them into every town and every place where he himself is to come (cf. Lk 10.1). He sends them on the Church’s apostolate, an apostolate that is one yet has different forms and methods, an apostolate that must all the time be
adapted itself to the needs of the moment; he sends them on an apostolate where they are to show themselves his cooperators, doing their full share continually in the work of the Lord . . . (AA 33)

Vatican II lent its voice of approval to this adaptive dynamic of ministry in the Church. However, two other contributions from the Council to pastoral care are also important: The re-inclusion of all baptized Christians into a vision of who ministers are and a method for discerning and reflecting theologically on the Church's practice of pastoral care. We will examine these contributions below.

Who Are the Ministers?

As we have seen, the Church's practice of pastoral care flows from its self-understanding; identity and action mutually enhance each other. In the early Church, discipleship led directly to the practice of ministry. The followers of Jesus understood themselves as called to his mission, to service of the Kingdom of God. Each disciple contributed to the mission and to the life of the community according to his or her gifts.

Vatican II sought to recapture this inclusive biblical view of ministry. Describing the Church as the "People of God" (LG 9-17; GS 11; AA 1-3), reminding Christians that there is a "variety of ministries" in the Church (LG 7, 18, 20-21, 28-30; AA 2-3), and focusing on Baptism as the primary sacrament for ministry (LG 11, 31-33; AA 3), the conciliar bishops once again opened the ministry of the Church to all believers.

"The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well" (AA 2). In this more inclusive view, all the baptized share in the mission and ministry of Christ (LG 30; AA 3; PO 9). Ministry has been expanded (retrieved) to mean "every kind of Christian activity done in imitation of the serving Christ." What has occurred in ministry, as a result of Vatican II's vision, has been described as an "explosion of ministry . . . moving towards expansion and diversity." The Church has
returned to an ancient, and ever new, notion of the ministry of all Christians:

When the Holy Spirit, who calls all men [and women] to Christ and arouses in their hearts the submission of faith by the seed of the word and the preaching of the Gospel, brings those who believe in Christ to a new life through the womb of the baptismal font, He gathers them into one people of God which is a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people.” (1 Pet 2.9)

Therefore, missionaries, the fellow workers of God, should raise up communities of the faithful, so that walking worthy of the calling to which they have been called (cf. Eph 4.1) they might carry out the priestly, prophetic and royal offices entrusted to them by God. In this way the Christian community will become a sign of God's presence in the world. Through the eucharistic sacrifice it goes continually to the Father with Christ, carefully nourished with the word of God it bears witness to Christ, it walks in charity and is enlivened by an apostolic spirit. (GD 15)

A Practical Illustration

The impact of these changes in self-understanding, together with the resulting inclusiveness and expansion of ministry, is perhaps best illustrated in the shifting situation of ministry training and formation.

Prior to Vatican II, training for pastoral care was located primarily in seminaries and was a marginalized field of “applied” study among the major theological disciplines (biblical, systematic, historical, and moral theology). It was learned by seminarians who were to be ordained; it was a kind of practical training (for preaching, catechesis, sacramental celebration, hospital visiting,
pastoral counseling, parish administration, and the like) and was taught by clerical, often part-time, faculty. However, this older model of pastoral formation was too clerical, hierarchical, and sectarian to withstand the changes initiated by the Council. Movements toward greater openness, ecumenical collaboration, inclusion, collegial sharing, and diversity, once given the blessing of the Council, inevitably brought about changes in training for a wider, more variegated, and more expanded ministry.

The bishops addressed the kind of new pastoral training that was needed in several conciliar documents. They highlight themes to be addressed in pastoral formation that are consistent with the Council’s new self-understanding. In speaking of priestly formation, they stressed training for dialogue, listening, collaboration, and professional cooperation along with the requisite spiritual and theological development (OT 19-22); in speaking of formation for lay ministers, they emphasized development of human maturity along with spiritual sensitivity and knowledge of the faith (AA 28-32). Throughout the documents, the bishops stress the overall importance of a “pastoral preoccupation” in the doing of theology and in the training of pastoral ministers (see, for example, OT 19 and GS 62).

Theologian T. Howland Sanks, in his article “Education for Ministry Since Vatican II,” has documented some of the changes that have occurred in pastoral training since the Council’s conclusion. He describes a “dramatic drop” in the number of Catholic seminaries as well as in the number of seminarians preparing for priesthood in the United States, as recorded from 1962 through 1983-84. This comes as no surprise to those aware of the contemporary “shortage of priests” in the U.S. and elsewhere. However, this is not the whole story. Revolutionary changes in several aspects of ministry preparation reflect the thematic priorities and desires of the Council.

During the same period of time, there has been dramatic growth in the numbers of students not studying for the priesthood, but studying theology and preparing for ministry in colleges and universities, in non-degree and summer programs, and in institutes connected to seminaries and other institutions of higher education. Significant percentages of these students are lay women
and men as well as religious, with an older average age and more life experience than the former traditional-age seminarian. Thus, there is real growth and “diversification” in the population preparing for ministry.

There is also diversification in the make-up of faculty who teach theological and ministerial studies (i.e., more women, more doctorates, greater pluralism and ecumenism in the degree-granting institutions from which faculty come). In addition, a significant amount of Catholic pastoral preparation today occurs in urban settings, in ecumenical and collaborative consortia of schools, as opposed to the older, more isolated and rural settings of the pre-Vatican II seminaries.

The curricula in these schools reflect the ecumenical and pastoral priorities of the Council as well with collaborative studies, required field education, heightened attention to pastoral skills, and increased opportunities for theological reflection on the ministry of students in actual situations of pastoral care. While the full implications of these changes have yet to be developed, they suggest real adaptation of contemporary ministry and its preparation as the post-Vatican II Church continues its encounter with today’s world.46

Vatican II has proven to be the catalyst for a dramatic change in vision and action regarding “who” does Church ministry as well as in the process of preparing the next generation of pastoral ministers. The Council, as we will see, also stimulated renewal of method in theology. Ministering individuals and communities must continually be reflecting theologically about their practice and about the call of God. The Council highlights the need for ministers who can collaboratively “read the signs of the times” and discern the purposes of God in the contemporary world: The goal of this new kind of pastoral theology is “the planning of the total activity of the Church.”47

Pastoral Theology in a New Key

The pastoral Council calls for a new pastoral theology, broader in its compass and deeper in its methods, which . . . enlightened by a theological
view of the present situation, seeks to discover at least approximately what are the imperatives which must determine the Church’s concrete action as a whole.\(^{48}\)

This assessment of Vatican II’s pastoral approach by Karl Rahner, S.J., one of this century’s most influential Catholic theologians, points toward the third question that concerns us — namely, how the Church discerns, acts, and thinks theologically about its ministry. Perhaps the most important contribution of the Council to pastoral care lies in this area — that is, in its approach to pastoral or “practical” theology.\(^{49}\)

Rahner pointed out that something “new and unique” had occurred in the issuing of a “pastoral” constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, from an explicitly “pastoral” Council.\(^{50}\) He believed that Vatican II, in its concern “to throw light upon the concrete contemporary situation in which the world, the Church, and the individual Christian live and have to accomplish their tasks,” had embarked upon a new way of acting pastorally and thinking theologically. However, the Council itself lacked a clear and explicit consideration of this “unique” element as well as of the precisely “pastoral” nature of its intention.\(^{51}\)

Rahner elaborated several elements that he believed to be involved in this new approach: first, it would incorporate a description of the “situation” of human needs, contemporary society, faith, and ministry; second, it would not be confined to the work of clergy or to a narrow view of care for souls, but would be fully modern, broadly and inclusively engaging in a range of human concerns and adapted to the needs of the times; and third, it would utilize a method of dialogue between theological and secular sciences to examine the challenges confronting the Church and to formulate effective pastoral strategy.

In Rahner’s view, this joint secular-theological analysis of the contemporary situation and its challenges distinguishes pastoral theology from other theological disciplines. It is a new and unique element in the Church’s pastoral care, rooted in a new self-understanding. Thus, pastoral or “practical” theology consists of a “theological illumination of the particular situation in which the
Church must realize itself in all its dimensions;" it is a unique and collaborative endeavor, "a testing of the spirits with a view to the act of committal." It leads toward discernment and action in which the Church responds in ever-new and concrete ways to the call of the Spirit from within unique situations of human need.52

The Vatican Council called for this new "practical" theology (GS 44, 62; OT 19-21; GD 16).53 The call emerged from a basic attitude or stance that the Council Fathers took, particularly in some of the more surprising documents (e.g., Church in the Modern World, Apostolate of Lay People, On Religious Liberty), in which there was a desire to listen to the world, to stand in solidarity with humanity and its needs, and to respect the contribution of specialists in a variety of secular fields of endeavor.54 Perhaps the Council came closest to naming the method for this new theology in the phrase "reading the signs of the time and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" from Gaudium et Spes (GS 4). This way of speaking was a significant departure from previous models of conceptualizing theology and pastoral mission.

In reading the "signs" of their own time, the condition of humanity as they saw it in 1964, the Vatican II bishops began with a stance of solidarity with "the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men [and women] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" (GS 1, 3). The Church’s presence and immersion in the world raises questions, the bishops said, questions that must be brought to critical dialogue with Gospel values and Christian sources (GS 4) as well as with the sciences and understandings of others (GS 44, 52). Thus, this model of theological thinking begins in solidarity and proceeds through mutually informing and shaping dialogue about questions raised from within the Church’s pastoral presence, its sensitivity to the "times" in which it lives, its discernment of the presence and purpose of God, to achieve some sense of its mission and ministry in the world of today (GS 1-4, 11, 40-45).

This method of doing theology is based on discernment, listening, dialogue, collaboration, and a willingness to learn. It requires new "modes of expression," moving away from dogmatic statements and set canonical formulae and toward pastoral "appeals" and "instructions" that are more tentative and
conditioned to meet the needs of current situations. The Church adopts a stance of listening, learning, and solidarity as integral to its mission and prior to statement and action.

What has emerged in Catholic theology and practice since the Council, in part through the kind of collaborative dialogue with non-Catholic theologies and the secular sciences that was championed at the Council, has been a method for practical theology that begins to address this “call” of Vatican II. The method is often described as a contemporary method of correlation.

James Whitehead describes this method as an imaginative, even playful, interaction among several sources: description of the contemporary situation; dialogue among theological (biblical, historical) and other (scientific, artistic, etc.) sources so that the situation is fully understood and the challenges of the Gospel are clarified; leading to pastoral action and further evaluation. It is in the interaction or “correlation” of these elements that a practical theology is formed; training pastoral actors in this method is an ongoing challenge for the Church as it seeks to meet the challenge from Vatican II.

One outcome of this new theological method for contemporary analysis and pastoral action may be seen in recent “pastoral letters” from the U.S. Catholic bishops on the topics of peace, the American economy, and chemical dependency. Use of this method allows the bishops to be in mutual and informed dialogue on issues of critical importance and to shape public policy and pastoral action that can make a difference.

This new method for practical theology, utilizing the initial insights from Vatican II, allows the Church to continue adapting and developing its ministries to contemporary needs. It allows pastoral carers to discern the presence and purposes of God and promotes effective ministry on the part of the Christian community. It challenges the Church to adopt a stance of listening, learning, and solidarity with the women and men of today (GS 1-4, 40-45, 92-93).

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been the pastoral care or ministry of the Church. Vatican Council II addressed this
important aspect of Christian life in ways that highlighted its own self-understanding. As this eminently "pastoral" Council attempted to be more inclusive, more adaptive, more dialogical, and more engaged with the women and men of the world, so too did it incorporate these themes into its vision of ministry.

As we have seen, these themes affect and shape the forms that ministry takes (what Christians do), the selection and training of those who do ministry (who ministers are), and the ways in which theology addresses ministry (pastoral theological method).

Notes

1. These phrases occur in *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*, GS), paragraphs 4, 1 and 93, respectively. Textual references for this chapter will be to the Revised Edition of Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello, 1992).


3. In traditional Roman Catholicism, the term "ministry" indicated the religious activities engaged in by official Church leaders (e.g., pastors or priests), primarily preaching, sacramental presiding, and administration of Church order. "Pastoral care," on the other hand, was often used to describe the range of service activities that pastors and others (e.g., religious, laity) performed, for example, teaching and religious instruction, care of the sick, the poor, the elderly, and so forth. As we will see, the contemporary usage of these terms is now somewhat different. The Second Vatican Council replaced the traditional notion of ministry with a "declericalized" and more "inclusive" view of all Christians as commissioned to ministry through Baptism and the call to discipleship. See, for example, *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen Gentium*, LG) 10 and *The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*
In this chapter I will use “ministry” interchangeably with “pastoral care” to indicate “the service of others to which every Christian is called as a disciple.” For a historical discussion of ministry as an element in discipleship, see Brian Daley, “The Ministry of Disciples: Historical Reflections on the Role of Religious Priests,” *Theological Studies* 48 (1987): 605-29.

4. For the twentieth anniversary of the Council, *America* magazine sponsored a discussion and appraisal, initiated with a provocative article by Andrew Greeley entitled “The Failures of Vatican II After Twenty Years” (February 6, 1982). Several responses and a rejoinder by Greeley appeared in a later issue that same year (June 12, 1982). The reader may find this “snapshot” of evaluation on the Council’s progress helpful.

5. See GS 40, 45; LG 1, 5-6, 48; GD 1, 5.

6. Thirty years after the closing of the Council, the Church is still in an early phase of comprehending and implementing what was begun at Vatican II. This should come as no surprise. The aggiornamento or “updating” that Vatican II initiated appears even today to be strikingly ambitious. Several appraisals of Vatican II’s aggiornamento suggest that, while the Council Fathers initiated a “revolution” in Catholic self-understanding and practice, they did so without fully comprehending the scope of change their actions stirred. The “pilgrim” Church struck out in new directions without calculating how far-reaching the journey would be. Today, we are still experiencing the challenges and implications (even tensions) of this journey. See O’Malley, “Vatican II: Historical Perspectives,” and also his article “Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II’s Aggiornamento,” *Theological Studies* 32 (1971). See also Karl Rahner, “Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council,” *Theological Investigations* 20 (1981): 77ff.

7. AA 2.

8. These issues are addressed less fully in several other documents that we will reference, including the *Decree on the Training of Priests* (Optatum Totius, OT), *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity* (Ad Gentes Divinitus, GD), *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church* (Christus Dominus, CD), and the *Declaration of Christian Education* (Gravissimum Educationis, GE).


10. This discussion flows from the comprehensive work of Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, especially 20ff.


12. Jesus “expressed the reality of God as he saw it through his message of the kingdom of God and his action in accordance with it, personally, in a very special and distinctive way.” Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, 23.


14. As McBrien, *Ministry: A Theological, Pastoral Handbook*, makes clear, ministry was understood to include both “missionary” activities of extending the faith and “residential” forms of caring within local Christian communities; see 32-33.

15. McBrien, *Ministry*, makes some important observations in this regard:

> Before there was any formal community of faith, there was only discipleship, not ministry. The disciple was by definition a learner, someone who was on the way to perfection but with a long road yet to travel. The first formal ministry in the Church was that of the Twelve . . . But as the Church moved to culturally different communities through the ministry of the apostles, different models of ministry, with bishops and deacons, were adopted in and adapted to those places . . .

> The New Testament yields no ecclesiastical blueprint in which the Church’s many ministries are already securely in place, job descriptions and all. The watchwords are *pluralism, diversity, and variety*” (32-33; original emphasis).


17. The “apostolic” nature of the church is rooted here in the connection of each Christian and each community to the mission of the earliest disciples, and through them to Jesus himself. There is a living
connection in mission and lifestyle to the foundational proclamation of the Kingdom of God. A community without ministry loses its connectedness to the message of Jesus and thus its essential mission. See Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, 91-92.

18. The theme of ministry as service for “building up” the People of God runs throughout the documents of Vatican II. See *GS* 43, 93; *GD* 5; *PO* 1.


20. For a concise discussion of these elements of Pastoral Ministry, as seen in the documents of the Council, the reader should consult, *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* (1969), volume four, 359-64. The reader may wish to consult several Vatican II documents for echoes of these themes: *LG* 5, 7, 33; *AA* 1-3.


22. O’Malley, “Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life,” describes “itinerant preaching” as the characteristic form of ministry in the early Church.

23. See Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*.

24. For example, in the Middle Ages a theology of priesthood as a special “state of life,” in contrast to lay involvement in the world and mundane matters, emphasized the class distinction. Later, with the Council of Trent and the post-Reformation, theology imputed a heightened sense of mystery and sacred power to the ordained person, who functioned in the place of Christ himself, particularly in regard to sacramental events. In these and other ways ministry and pastoral care were gradually seen to be the special province of the ordained, who were at the top of the hierarchical order. Ministry became increasingly centralized, institutionalized and sacralized. See both McBrien, *Ministry*, and O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry*. Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, describes this institutionalizing trend as, not simply a shift from charisma to institution, but from the charisma of many to a “specialized charisma” of the few (121).

25. Brian Daley, “The Ministry of Disciples,” speaks of the monastic emphasis on “discipleship,” conceived as a radical although internalized and spiritualized following of Christ, over against the notion of “apostolate” or official and public ministry. Active engagement or service can be diminished. “Whether in the free, essentially solitary form of eremitical discipleship or in the highly structured life of large communities, monasticism always begins in the decision of those who want to follow Christ to withdraw from “the world”: to leave behind them ordinary public life and its spectrum of values and demands” (616).
26. See O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 105ff. His discussion of the gradual historical replacing of the earlier “circle-of-charisms” model of Christian ministry with a “pyramid of hierarchy” is particularly enlightening. Ministry, in O'Meara’s view, becomes increasingly focused in the hands of a clerical hierarchy (bishops, abbots, priests), and narrowed to Eucharist and reception of sacraments. See also O'Malley, “Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life.”


28. Daley, “The Ministry of Disciples,” describes the long history of a more active, publicly engaged, “pastoral discipleship” that co-existed simultaneously and parallel to the monastic lifestyle. He describes the work of Basil of Caesarea and his communities of ascetical women and men with active ministries to the poor, Eusebius of Vercelli, and even Augustine of Hippo as examples of this “ministerial monasticism” (618-19). Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, also describes this “popular evangelism” which resulted in a return to a more active faith and the founding of hostels and other works for the poor (167ff.). Nevertheless, the segregating and spiritualizing impact of mainstream monasticism exerted a powerful influence on the life and ministry of the Church, East and West. These more pastoral trends toward a life of simplicity and ministry in accord with the New Testament record were fulfilled in the lives of the friars.


31. “Nothing is more characteristic of Catholicism in the sixteenth century than the veritable explosion of ministerial initiatives . . . . ‘Catholic Reform’ of the 16th century was not, therefore, simply a ‘reform of morals,’ but a reform of pastoral practice and an immense expansion of its scope.” O’Malley, “Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life,” 238.


33. The interested reader may wish to explore the material given below in more detail. Further information may be gathered by reading O'Malley, “Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life,” and his most recent study of early Jesuit history, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).


35. See O’Malley, “Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II’s Aggiornamento,” 589ff.

36. The reader who wishes to explore the “modern face” of Catholic ministry today would do well to begin by reading several books by James


38. For a fascinating look at the achievements and difficulties in the Church’s AIDS ministry, see Richard L. Smith, *AIDS, Gays, and the American Catholic Church* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1994).

39. This listing conveys a vivid sense of the variety of ministry that is available to Christians. Other documents also mention forms of ministry, for example, in the long discussion of “More-Urgent Problems” in Part II of *Gaudium et Spes* (46ff.). In this regard see also the entry on “Pastoral Ministry” in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, volume 4, 360-64.

40. In the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (AA 1), the Council Fathers announce a “desire to intensify the apostolic activity of the People of God.” The document portrays an awareness among the Vatican II bishops of the increased desire among Catholic Christians to have a greater role in the Church’s mission:

> The need for this urgent and many-sided apostolate is shown by the manifest action of the Holy Spirit moving laymen today to a deeper and deeper awareness of their responsibility and urging them on everywhere to the service of Christ and the Church. (AA 1)

41. See O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 8ff. In his view this expansion and legitimization of ministry as proper to all baptized believers is the natural consequence of the Church’s renewed self-understanding as a worldwide organization and its desire to promote “pastoral improvement.”


43. O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 4-5.

indispensable element in Church ministry was conducted by religious orders of women and men. In particular, ministries of education, health care, and the like simply could not have been done without these non-ordained pastoral persons. Nevertheless, prior to Vatican II formal training for Church ministry was primarily envisioned in the more clerical and hierarchical model described in this text.

45. The data for this section are reported in some detail in Sanks, “Education for Ministry Since Vatican II.”


47. Sacramentum Mundi, 367-68.


49. Several important publications by Rahner, including the one referenced above, indicate the importance of this “pastoral” and theological focus by the Council. The reader may refer to the following articles in Rahner’s multi-volume Theological Investigations: “The Second Vatican Council’s Challenge to Theology” and “Practical Theology Within the Totality of Theological Disciplines,” 9 (1968), 3-27 and 101-14, respectively; “On the Theological Problems Entailed in a ‘Pastoral Constitution,’” 10 (1973), 293-317; “The New Claims Which Pastoral Theology Makes Upon Theology as a Whole” and “The Future of Theology,” 11 (1982), 115-36 and 137-46, respectively; “Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council” and “The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council,” 20 (1981), 77-89 and 90-102, respectively.


51. Imbelli and Groome, in their “Signposts Towards a Pastoral Theology,” remind us that Gaudium et Spes was, uniquely and entirely, a production of the Council and its process. Without prior preparatory documentation, it emerged from a desire on the part of the Vatican II
bishops to address the contemporary world by reading the "signs of the times." In doing so, the document "promoted the methodological shift" in pastoral theology for which it called.

52. See Rahner, "Practical Theology Within the Totality of Theological Disciplines," 102ff.

53. Rahner and others accept the term, "practical theology," as the most appropriate one; it has become the common usage today. See the entry "Pastoral Theology" in Sacramentum Mundi, 365-68 and in Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, Theological Dictionary (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 338-39. The entire Part Two of Gaudium et Spes (GS 46-90), entitled "Some More Urgent Problems," may be seen as a prolonged meditation in which the Council reflects theologically on contemporary challenges from modern life and culture. Having laid out some guideposts for a new theological method (in dialogue, solidarity, discernment of the "signs of the times," collaboration) and proposed the central theme of human dignity based in creation by God as central to the Church's vision (GS 1-45), the Council proceeds to practice (tentatively) the method for which it calls (see GS 62). The Conclusion (GS 91-93) suggests that this open and dialogical reflection (theology) on the signs and challenges of the times is essential for the "building up" and fulfillment of both Church and world.

54. In calling for this new theological approach, the Council highlighted a kind of training for ministry that would capture this same attitude (OT 19-21).

55. Rahner, "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council," 89.


57. His most succinct summary of this method is in "The Practical Play of Theology," 36-54.
58. See Imbelli and Groome, "Signposts Towards a Pastoral Theology."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Reading the Signs of the Times: An Ongoing Task of the Church in the World

ANTHONY J. CERNERA

IN CALLING THE Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII invited the Church not only to renew herself but also to renew her relationship to the world so as to be of better service to the entire human family on its journey to God. The Council was to do this by understanding better the great events occurring in history and by listening to the voice of the Lord in these signs of the times. In so doing, the Council gave the Church a continuing way to assess its mission in the world. The primary purpose of this chapter will be to examine how the bishops at the Vatican Council read the signs of the times in their historical context. It will also briefly describe several other examples of how this method of theological reflection has been used since the Council and will draw some conclusions for the ongoing work of the Church in the world.

What did the bishops mean when they used the term “signs of the times”? It seems to me that what they meant were those significant events, phenomena, or movements that characterize an era and that bring about or reveal new awareness and, therefore, call forth new action in human history.

Pope John XXIII’s Reading of the Signs of the Times

Although John XXIII did not live to see the completion of the Council, he left his mark on its work in many ways. One of the
significant contributions that he made was to call the Church and the world to mutual dialogue and learning. Since this way of engaging the world was to find fruition in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, it seems appropriate to review briefly the way Pope John came to read the signs of the times.

*Humanae Salutis*

Shortly after his election as pope, John XXIII surprised the Church and the world by calling an ecumenical Council for the Church Universal. He formally convened this Council for October 11, 1962, in the apostolic constitution *Humanae Salutis*, which was issued on December 25, 1961. In this often neglected document, John XXIII placed the convocation of the Council in the context of the global crisis facing humanity. Within the crisis in society, John XXIII also found reasons for confidence. While this confidence is rooted fundamentally in the Living Christ, the major events of contemporary history, “the signs of the times,” also contain within them some reasons for hope as well as a call to the Church. I quote the following passage at length because it is the first time that Pope John used the phrase “signs of the times” in his pontificate:

These painful considerations are a reminder of the duty to be vigilant and to keep the sense of responsibility awake. Distrustful souls see only darkness burdening the face of the earth. We, instead, like to reaffirm all our confidence in Our Saviour, Who has not left the world which He redeemed.

Indeed, we make ours the recommendation of Jesus that one should know how to distinguish the “signs of the times” (Matt. 16.4), and we seem to see now, in the midst of so much darkness, a few indications which augur well for the fate of the Church and of humanity. The bloody wars that have followed one on the other in our times, the spiritual ruins caused by many ideologies and
the fruits of so many bitter experiences have not been without useful teachings. Scientific progress itself, which gave man the possibility of creating catastrophic instruments for his destruction, has raised questions. It has obliged human beings to become thoughtful, more conscious of their own limitations, desirous of peace and attentive to the importance of spiritual values. And it has accelerated that progress of closer collaboration and of mutual integration toward which, even though in the midst of a thousand uncertainties, the human family seems to be moving. All this facilitates, no doubt, the apostolate of the Church, since many people who did not realize the importance of its mission in the past are, taught by experience, today more disposed to welcome its warnings.

This is a remarkable passage which deserves a moment of analysis and reflection. While the signs of the times identified above are ones of grave concern, Pope John called our attention to how even these negative or dangerous events in humanity’s contemporary experience can teach lessons in truth and lead to humanity’s renewal. They also facilitate the ministry of the Church because they bring people to the point of being receptive to the Church’s message.

Then turning his attention immediately to the Church, Pope John wrote that she “has not remained a life spectator in the face of these events.” Rather, the Church “has followed step by step the evolution of peoples, scientific progress and social revolution.” This has led the Church to oppose those materialistic ideologies that deny faith and to witness to the growth of the immense energies of the apostolate of prayer and of action. He concluded by remarking that “though the Church may appear profoundly changed, the Christian community is also in great part transformed and renewed.” For Pope John, the Church is clearly part of history and is caught up in the historical process.

These statements are noteworthy for us because they show that Pope John was deeply aware of the intimate relationship
between the Church and the signs of the times. Not only was there a message in the great events of the times, there was also a call for the Church to follow these events step by step. In the process the Church herself will be transformed and renewed.

_Pope John XXIII’s Radio Address of September 11, 1962_

One month before the formal opening of the Council, Pope John gave a significant radio address regarding the Council. In this papal allocution of September 11, 1962, the Pope underlined the importance of the Council being directed both outward (*ad extra*) toward the world as well as inward (*ad intra*) toward the Church. However, the emphasis was on the outward relationship with the world. According to Pope John,

> We must also consider the Church from the viewpoint of her relations with the world outside — _ad extra_; confronted with the needs and demands of peoples who are tempted to turn in upon themselves and enjoy the goods of this world, she must carry out her mission and teach them “to use material goods in such a way that they do not lose the goods of eternity.”

After acknowledging that the world “has its own problems,” he went on to say that

> the Church always has these acutely serious problems very much at heart. For this reason she has made them the object of careful study, and the ecumenical Council will be able to offer, in clear language, solutions demanded by man’s dignity and that of his Christian vocation.

For Pope John, the gospel can help interpret the signs of the times and offer solutions to the problems facing the human community. John XXIII mentioned some of these problems by name: equality among nations, the dignity of marriage, social justice and
the problem of underdevelopment, freedom to seek peace and the desire for authentic peace. These were the major issues facing the human community at that time. The Church had to address them if she was to be faithful to her mission. He then went on to commit the Council to an important task:

The Council will formally and solemnly work out the practical applications of brotherhood and love. They are dictated by human nature itself, and for the Christian they are the guiding norm in relations between individuals and nations.¹⁰

*The Speech at the Opening of the Council*

Pope John XXIII gave the most important address of his life on October 11, 1962 at the solemn opening of the Second Vatican Council. This address represented a further development in Pope John’s thinking about the relationship of the Church and the world. It also underscored his growing appreciation of the signs of the times as containing a message or word from God to the world and the Church.

Early in the speech, the Pope challenged those persons in the Church’s central administration and others in the Church who see only evil in the world:

In the daily exercise of our pastoral office, we sometimes have to listen, much to our regret, to voices of persons who, though burning with zeal, are not endowed with too much sense of discretion or measure. In these modern times they can see nothing but prevarication and ruin. They say that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse and they behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is, none the less, the teacher of life. They behave as though at the time of former councils everything was a full triumph for the Christian idea and life and for proper religious liberty.
We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world was at hand.\textsuperscript{11}

The next two paragraphs of his speech show clearly how John XXIII's stance toward the world had changed and the direction in which he was moving. He went beyond his previous papal statements by speaking of Divine Providence operating in the world and leading humanity to a better tomorrow:

In the present order of things, Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which, by men's own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward the fulfillment of God's superior and inscrutable designs. And everything, even human differences, leads to the greater good of the Church.\textsuperscript{12}

Pope John thus saw Divine Providence operating in all of history. In his view of human history, Pope John looked for the advantages in the developments within history. He was not willing to look back on the past as if it contained some glorious history of the Church, which in the present age, the Church could only long for or remember nostalgically. He was realistic about the Church's history. Furthermore, his realism sought to find out what God was doing in the historical events.\textsuperscript{13}

It seems clear that Pope John XXIII was calling the Church to read the signs of the times and to discern in them the presence and activity of God. In his opening speech, he further laid the groundwork for the \textit{Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World}. That groundwork would be completed with the encyclical \textit{Pacem in Terris}, issued on April 11, 1963, fewer than two months before John's death.

\textit{Pacem in Terris}

Before turning our attention to the emergence of the theological category "signs of the times" and its refinement through
the drafts that led to the final version of the Pastoral Constitution in the Modern World, a word is in order regarding Pope John's last major statement to the world, *Pacem in Terris*. Along with the *ad intra/ad extra* distinction discussed above, this encyclical had important methodological and thematic influences on the development of *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) and other conciliar documents.14

*Pacem in Terris* displays a remarkable understanding of the modern world. Although the encyclical does not use the phrase “reading the signs of the times,” this is one of the primary methods used in analyzing the world.15 In each of the first four sections of the letter, Pope John discussed explicitly the signs of the times or the “distinctive characteristics” of the age. Thus, in Part I of the encyclical on the “Order Among Men,” Pope John discerned three principal characteristics in this area: 1) the working classes have gradually gained ground in economic and public affairs; 2) women are now taking a part in public life; and 3) people either have or are on the way to achieving political independence.

Part II of the encyclical centered around a discussion of the relations between individuals and public authorities within given countries. Pope John XXIII acknowledged three distinct characteristics in this area. They are: 1) the inclusion of fundamental human rights in the nation's constitution; 2) the procedures through which the governing powers are to be defined and related to one another; and 3) the delineation of the rights and duties of the government and the people.

In the third section on the relations between states, Pope John noted one major characteristic of the age: people are becoming more and more convinced that war is a futile way to resolve conflicts and, therefore, nations must seek to negotiate their differences.

The relationship between people in political communities and the world community is the subject of the fourth section of *Pacem in Terris*. Here Pope John pointed to the United Nations as a sign of hope for the human community. According to Pope John, the United Nations has as its essential purpose:

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> the maintenance and consolidation of peace between peoples, fostering between them friendly
relations based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and varied forms of cooperation in every sector of human endeavor.16

Of particular interest to us is that after reading these signs of the times in the first four parts of the encyclical, Pope John then went on to give his pastoral exhortations on the involvement of the Church in working to establish peace on earth:

Once again we deem it opportune to remind our children of their duty to take an active part in public life and to contribute toward the attainment of the common good of the entire human family as well as to that of their own political community. They should endeavor, therefore, in the light of their Christian faith and led by love, to insure that the various institutions — whether economic, social, cultural or political in purpose — should be such as not to create obstacles, but rather to facilitate or render less arduous man’s perfecting of himself in both the natural order and the supernatural.17

Furthermore, because of the technical and scientific developments that have occurred, it is not enough to be merely “illumined with the gift of faith and enkindled with the desire of forwarding a good cause.”18 The situation in the world today requires Catholics “to take an active part in the various organizations and influence them from within.”19 However, “one cannot enter these organizations and work effectively from within unless one is scientifically competent, technically capable and skilled in the practice of his own profession.”20

It should be clear that in *Pacem in Terris* Pope John provided the Council and Catholic theology with a theological method that takes seriously the signs of the times as a source of, and point of departure for, theological reflection. As Cardinal Roy noted, “John XXIII is content to enunciate this approach to reality by practicing it, in all simplicity. It is *Gaudium et Spes* that worked
out the theory of it, as well as its own proper methodology." \(^{21}\)

We now turn our attention to the theological category "signs of the times" as it is used in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes.*

*The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes*

The promulgation of the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* on December 7, 1965 was the culmination of a long process of development. This pastoral constitution is unique in conciliar history for two reasons. First, it represented the first time that the Church addressed formally her relationship with the world in a conciliar document. Second, it proposed a new way of theologizing about the role of the Church in the world.

The bishops began their reflection on the role of the Church in the modern world by reading the signs of the times. It was on this basis that they went on to express a theology of human existence and consequently develop a theology of the role of the Church in the modern world. This was a great methodological breakthrough for contemporary Catholic theology. The bishops provided subsequent Catholic theological reflection with the possibility of starting with the signs of the times.

*Contemporary Signs of the Times*

Having linked the Church with the "joys and hopes and the griefs and anxieties" (*GS* 1) of all people of this age, the bishops of the Second Vatican Council affirmed the Church's "solidarity with the human family with which it is bound up" (*GS* 3). \(^{22}\) In order to "carry forward the work of Christ Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit" (*GS* 3), the Church has the responsibility of "scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (*GS* 4). Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit. To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting
them in the light of the gospel (GS 3 & 4). In order to do this, the Church must "recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics" (GS 4). This was a different way of undertaking theological reflection.  

In the promulgated version of Gaudium et Spes, the bishops called attention to a number of dramatic characteristics of the times in which they lived.

**Profoundly Changing Times**

The most significant sign of the times, according to Gaudium et Spes, is the rapidly changing conditions of the modern world, seen as part of "a broader and deeper revolution" (GS 5). As such, it is the principal characteristic of this age, having brought about new consciousness, and having called forth new action from within the human community. This judgment affected the entire analysis that the bishops made regarding the modern world in which the Church must carry out her mission. According to the bishops, the human race is entering a new period in its development:

Today the human race is passing through a new stage of its history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence we can already speak of a true social and cultural transformation, one which has repercussions on man’s religious life as well. (GS 4)

Moreover, these profound changes are occurring rapidly and affect everyone:

History itself speeds along on so rapid a course that an individual person can scarcely keep abreast
of it. The destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, where once the various groups of men had a kind of private history of their own. Thus, the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. (GS 5)

The changing conditions that the Council identified were: the vast migration of people from rural areas; increasing urbanization throughout the world; the expansion of industrial society to all parts of the earth; the development of new and more efficient media of communication; decolonization and the emergence of new nations; the challenging of accepted values by young people; and the changing role of women.

The Council Fathers recognized the importance of culture in every age, for the changing conditions listed above are all taking place within cultures:

It is a fact bearing on the very person of man that he can come to an authentic and full humanity only through culture, that is, through the cultivation of natural goods and values. Wherever human life is involved, therefore, nature and culture are quite intimately connected. (GS 53)

However, in this age, culture is even more important because contemporary culture has changed substantially from classical times. The reason for this is the enormous growth of natural, human, and social sciences, progress in technology, and advances in the development and organization of communication (GS 54). Because of these changes, contemporary culture possesses particular characteristics. Some of the characteristics seem to be of great importance:

The so-called exact sciences sharpen critical judgment to a very fine edge. Recent psychological research explains human activity more profoundly. Historical studies make a signal contribution to
bringing men to see things in their changeable and evolutionary aspects. Customs and usages are becoming increasingly uniform. Industrialization, urbanization, and other causes of community living create new forms of culture (mass-culture), from which arise new ways of thinking, acting, and making use of leisure. The growth of communication between the various nations and social groups opens more widely to all the treasures of different cultures. (GS 54)

Because of the development of these characteristics, “a more universal form of culture is developing, one which will promote and express the unity of the human race” (GS 54). As a result of this contemporary cultural phenomenon, a growing number of men and women throughout the world are becoming aware of themselves as “the artisans and authors of the culture of their community” (GS 55).

Developing the notion that radical change is one of the most significant signs of these times, the Council fathers also recognized the dramatic upheavals occurring within the political dimensions of life:

Our times have witnessed profound changes too in the institutions of peoples and in the ways that peoples are joined together. These changes are resulting from the cultural, economic, and social evolution of these same peoples. The changes are having a great impact on the life of the political community, especially with regard to universal rights and duties both in the exercise of civil liberty and in the attainment of the common good, and with regard to the regulation of the relations of citizens among themselves, and with public authority. (GS 73)

In this age, many people are more conscious of their personal rights and are looking to establish political structures which will foster those rights:
From a keener awareness of human dignity there arises in many parts of the world a desire to establish a political-world-order in which personal rights can gain better protection. These include the rights of free assembly, of common action, of expressing personal opinions and of professing a religion both privately and publicly. For the protection of personal rights is a necessary condition for the active participation of citizens, whether as individuals or collectively, in the life and government of the state. (GS 73)

These changes have caused serious difficulties for many people:

As happens in any crisis of growth, this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake. Thus while man extends his power in every direction, he does not always succeed in subjecting it to his own welfare. Striving to penetrate farther into the deeper recesses of his own mind, he frequently appears more unsure of himself. Gradually and more precisely he lays bare the laws of society, only to be paralyzed by uncertainty about the direction to give it. (GS 4)

This is a startling insight which merits further analysis. What the bishops were suggesting is that change itself had become a fundamental characteristic of the age. The reality of change was affecting every aspect of life on earth. Stability and traditional patterns of organization and behavior could no longer be taken for granted. The phenomenon of change would raise a new set of questions, fears and hopes. It would also challenge many traditional philosophical and theological categories that were no longer viable.

While recognizing the significant effect these changing times were having on human beings and society as a whole, the bishops in Gaudium et Spes also affirmed the universal longings and questions of the human person that exist in every historical age.
"The Church maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change" (GS 10).

Furthermore, in the face of the modern development of the world, an ever-increasing number of people are raising the most basic questions or recognizing them with a new sharpness: What is man? What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death, which continues to exist despite so much progress? What is the purpose of these victories, purchased at so high a cost? What can man offer to society? What can he expect from it? What follows this earthly life? (GS 10)

In a thorough analysis of the signs of the times, there is a recognition that the human person is both finite and called and oriented towards a limitless, higher destiny.

**Imbalance in Economic and Social Life**

Another important sign of the times, according to *Gaudium et Spes*, is the tremendous imbalance between the rich and the poor:

While an enormous mass of people still lack the absolute necessities of life, some even in less advanced countries, live sumptuously or squander wealth. Luxury and misery rub shoulders. While the few enjoy very great freedom of choice, the many are deprived of almost all possibility of acting on their own initiative and responsibility, and often subsist in living and working conditions unworthy of human beings. (GS 63)

Thus, while acknowledging the fact that the human race has never enjoyed so great an abundance of wealth, resources, and economic power as today, the Council was also quick to point out that a "high proportion of the world's citizens is still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total
illiteracy” (GS 4). As the Council repeatedly noted, economic and social development is ambiguous:

Again, we are at a moment in history when the development of economic life could diminish social inequalities if that development were guided and coordinated in a reasonable and human way. Yet all too often it serves only to intensify the inequalities. In some places it even results in a decline in the social status of the weak and in contempt for the poor. (GS 63)

This is true not only for economic and social development but for all human activity.

A new development in today’s world is that many people, particularly the poor, “are coming to feel these inequalities with an ever sharper awareness” (GS 63). Indeed a growing number of people are “thoroughly convinced that the wider technical and economic potential which the modern world enjoys can and should correct this unhappy state of affairs” (GS 63).

The bishops perceived correctly that the tremendous imbalances in the socio-economic order and the desires of many people, particularly the poor, to change this situation were signs of the times to which the Church must respond. This was an important judgment on the part of the bishops because in so doing, they aligned themselves with some of the dominant forces in this historical era, forces whose influence was being felt throughout the world.

*Peace and the Threat of Total War*

No scrutiny of the signs of the times would be complete without a word about the quest for peace and the threat of war, which becomes all the more significant in our own age because nations now possess the possibility of nuclear annihilation:

The horror and perversity of war are immensely magnified by the multiplication of scientific
weapons. For acts of war involving these weapons can inflict massive and indiscriminate destruction far exceeding the bounds of legitimate defense. Indeed, if the kinds of instruments which can now be found in the armories of the great nations were to be employed to their fullest, an almost total and altogether reciprocal slaughter of each side by the other would follow, not to mention the widespread devastation which would take place in the world and the deadly aftereffects which would be spawned by the use of such weapons. (GS 80)

The human enterprise is now challenged in a way that it has not been challenged before.

Religious Changes

In article 7 of Gaudium et Spes the bishops recognized the significant changes that have occurred in the area of religion. On the one hand, the new conditions of contemporary culture have helped people distinguish religion from a magical view of the world and from superstitions. This has resulted in many people “achieving a more vivid sense of God” (GS 7).

On the other hand, however, a growing number of people are abandoning religion in practice. In the contemporary world, this is no longer an unusual or isolated occurrence:

For today it is not rare for such decisions to be presented as requirements of scientific progress or of a certain new humanism. In numerous places these views are voiced not only in the teachings of philosophers, but on every side they influence literature, the arts, and interpretation of the humanities and of history, and civil laws themselves. As a consequence, many people are shaken. (GS 7)
Any attentive reading of the signs of the times by the church in the last third of the twentieth century would have to include a recognition of these religious developments in contemporary life.

A New Way of Doing Theology

In the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the Council Fathers introduced an important methodological development for Catholic theology. In *Gaudium et Spes* the bishops began their theological reflection on the role of the Church in the modern world by reading the signs of the times, discerning in these events the presence and activity of God. It was on the basis of this analysis and discernment that they went on to develop a theology of human existence and of the role of the Church in the world. This represented a significant departure from the traditional classicist approach in dogmatic and moral theology, which was essentially ahistorical, starting from established principles and applying them to the question at hand.

The questions that the signs of the times raise pose two challenges for the Church, according to *Gaudium et Spes*. First, the Church can and indeed must answer those questions from the biblical tradition (GS 3, 10, 22, 40, 42). The theological anthropology developed in this document draws heavily on the scriptural tradition.

The second challenge to which the Church must respond is to appreciate the hermeneutic or interpretive role which the contemporary questions can play in clarifying the meaning of the Gospel (GS 40, 44, 62). For example, the Church is “firmly convinced that she can be abundantly and variously helped by the world in the matter of preparing the ground for the gospel” (GS 40). Just as it is in the world’s interest to acknowledge the Church as a historical reality and to recognize her good influence, so “the Church herself knows how richly she has profited by the history and development of humanity” (GS 44).

The bishops went on to acknowledge that

the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture,
the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened. These benefits profit the Church too, for from the beginning of her history, she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various peoples, and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers too. (GS 44).

Furthermore, the Church has always had as her purpose to adapt the gospel “to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned, insofar as such was appropriate” (GS 44). Indeed, this accommodated preaching of the revealed Word ought to remain the law of all evangelization. Each nation must develop the ability to express Christ’s message in its own way. This allows a living exchange to be fostered between the Church and the diverse cultures of people.

For this to happen, the Church requires special help, particularly in our day, when things are changing very rapidly and the ways of thinking are exceedingly various. She must rely on those who live in the world, are versed in different institutions and specialties, and grasp their innermost significance in the eyes of both believers and unbelievers. With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine Word. In this way, revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and set forth to greater advantage. (GS 44)

The Council Fathers also recognized that since the Church has a visible and social structure, “she can and ought to be enriched by the development of human social life” (GS 44). In addition, she
gratefully understands that in her community life no less than in her individual children, she receives help from people of every rank and condition. For whoever promotes the human community at the family level, culturally, in its economic, social, and political dimensions, both nationally and internationally, such a one, according to God's design, is contributing greatly to the Church community as well. Indeed, the Church admits that she has greatly profited and still profits from the antagonism of those who oppose or persecute her (GS 44).

The bishops thus recognized the important hermeneutic role that the signs of the times play for the elaboration of the gospel in the contemporary world. The Church is firmly rooted in history. As such she is both teacher and one who can learn from the world.

**Reading the Signs of the Times After Vatican II**

The process of reading the signs of the times as it was developed in *Gaudium et Spes* recognized that this method of theological reflection would necessarily be ongoing. It was not a once and for all process but rather one that the Church would need to engage in during every historical period. The times would change, new movements would emerge, and thus the Church would need to read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel so as to better understand her mission in the world at that particular time. For example, twice in the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops’ Final Report, the bishops recognized that the signs of the times were somewhat different than they were in the days of the Second Vatican Council. Under the heading “The Mystery of the Church,” they affirmed that “The brief twenty-year period that separates us from the conclusion of the Council has brought with it accelerated changes in history. In this sense, the signs of our times do not exactly coincide, in some points, with those of the period of the Council.” Later on, under the heading “Importance of the Constitution ‘Gaudium et Spes,’” they wrote:

> We perceive that the signs of our time are, in part, different from those of the time of the
Council, with greater problems and anguish. Today, in fact, everywhere in the world we witness an increase in hunger, oppression, injustice and war, sufferings, terrorism and other forms of violence of every sort. This requires a new and more profound theological reflection in order to interpret these signs in the light of the gospel.27

Reading the signs of the times since Vatican II as a starting point for theological reflection has had enormous influence on the life of the Church since the Council. Not only has it guided the Universal Church in articulating her work in the world, it has also been of enormous use to many regional and national churches throughout the world.

Within the North American context, the two best examples of the Catholic Church using the methodology of reading the signs of the times are the pastoral letters on peace and on the American economy. Issued by the U.S. Catholic bishops, each document was developed through a process of listening and dialogue with many individuals and groups before the final version was approved by the bishops.

In “The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response,” the bishops acknowledged three signs of the times that had particularly influenced the writing of this pastoral letter. The first sign was that the world wants peace and needs it. The second sign was that the arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race and the harm it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured. “The third is the way in which the unique dangers and dynamics of the nuclear arms race present qualitatively new problems which must be addressed by fresh applications of traditional moral principles.” Of particular interest for us is the next sentence: “In the light of these three characteristics, we wish to examine Catholic teaching on peace and war.”28 The bishops recognized that this is a new historical situation which required a reexamination of the Church’s teaching on peace and war. The traditional teaching would have to be applied in a fresh way and would also involve new development in the teaching. For
example, in this pastoral letter, there is a positive presentation of a theology of nonviolence.29

In “Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teachings and the U.S. Economy,” the bishops began their pastoral letter with an analysis of the signs of hope and the failures in U.S. economic life. Having read the signs of the times, the bishops then went on to reflect on the Christian vision of economic life. It is only then that they applied the vision and its principles and norms to specific issues, engaging in detailed analysis of the urgent problems of the day.

In addition, countless theologians, religious congregations, parish communities, church movements, and individuals have adopted this theological method in their scholarly work and in their pastoral and personal ministries. In Latin America in the late 1960s, Gustavo Gutierrez led the way in the development of liberation theology. This dynamic theological movement grew out of the critical reading of the signs of the times within events and circumstances of that continent. Gutierrez and other theologians in Latin America took seriously the idea of discerning the activity of God not only in the pastoral activity of the Church but also in the events of history as they were unfolding.

In Africa, the German born theologian Walbert Buehlmann recognized the emergence of the world church in the major developments occurring in the rapid growth of churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. In the dramatic demographic shift of the center of Christianity from Europe and North America to these continents, Buehlmann identified the work of the Holy Spirit in the signs of the times. The task of theologians and pastors was to articulate a theology and pastoral plans of action that took seriously this new circumstance for the Church in the world. A new missionary era was beginning, different from anything that preceded it.

In surveying the way many religious communities and parishes have undertaken pastoral planning, it is clear that reading the signs of the times in order to discern what God may be calling these Christian communities to do has become the prevalent modus operandi. While the work of the Jesuits in this regard is the most well known expression, one is quick to find this method being used by campus ministry groups, congregations of men and
women religious, and pastoral care programs throughout the country.

**Conclusion**

As is evident from the material in this chapter, Pope John XXIII's decision to call together the bishops of the Catholic Church for the purpose of a general council has had a profound effect on the Church. It inaugurated a movement of renewal and transformation that continues to affect every area of Church life. This is particularly true for Catholic theology, which has, as a principal task, the responsibility of assisting the Church in fulfilling her mission in the world.

The Second Vatican Council, more than any other event in the twentieth century, was the Church's public recognition of her solidarity with the human family, especially the poor, and of her integral involvement, as servant, in the world. Furthermore, the Council affirmed the Church's rootedness in history and her eschatological nature as a reality in the making, a promise as yet unfulfilled. These affirmations were rooted in, as well as led to, a realization that there was a source or locus for Catholic theology that had not been appreciated fully in the past, that of human experience, particularly the signs of the times.

In *Gaudium et Spes*, the bishops introduced an important methodological development that would have far-reaching implications for future theological reflection. They started their theological reflection on the role of the Church in the world by first reading the signs of the times. Subsequent Catholic theology has come to recognize some major events, phenomena, or movements in history as special indicators of the presence and activity of God in the world, indeed, of His word to the Church. As such, they point toward and may even mediate His presence, activity, and word. Thus, the signs of the times necessarily become an integral part of the starting point of theological reflection. They are *loci theologici*. Since this is the case, the task of scrutinizing or discerning the signs of the times so as to hear the word of God being addressed to the Church is an essential part of doing theology.
The recognition of the signs of the times as an integral part of the starting point for theology represented a significant departure from the traditional classicist approaches in dogmatic theology.\textsuperscript{30} In the methodology of the earlier dogmatic theology, three steps were involved, namely: 1) presentation of the Church's teaching; 2) appeal to Scripture and tradition to prove or support the teaching; and 3) speculative support and exploration of it.\textsuperscript{31} The methodology employed in \textit{Gaudium et Spes} recognized that the Church's theological reflection could not remain separate from the events of history and from what God is doing in these events. Theology is necessarily rooted in and related to history. It can both provide an answer to the questions raised by the events of history and be interpreted in light of those events.

Thus the rediscovery of the "signs of the times" as a principal source for theological reflection is one of the most important developments occurring in Catholic life and theology as a result of the Council. Historical events, phenomena, or movements are "signs of the times" and not merely raw empirical human data because they are interpreted by prophets, pastors, ecclesial communities within the Church, and the Church as a whole in the light of the Gospel. Recognizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel are critical functions for the Church if she is to exercise her pastoral ministry in a given culture, since the signs of the times provide key insights into the human condition at a particular time.

Equally important for the Church is that in these signs of the times God is also addressing a word to the Church. With this recognition comes the task of scrutinizing the signs of the times so as to hear the word of God being addressed to the Church today. The totality of discourse addressed by God to humankind includes, therefore, the word of God being addressed to the Church in the signs of the times.

The emergence of the "signs of the times" as an integral part of the starting point for theological reflection requires the recognition that God's word is not exhausted in the Scriptures or even in the living tradition of the Church. Rather, it challenges theology to search for the word of God in contemporary history as well.
In addition, an important dimension of this discovery is the conviction that scrutinizing the "signs of the times" is not solely an intellectual activity. It requires active engagement therein. Thus, the word of God can also be manifested in the praxis called forth by the "signs of the times." By responding to that word, the Church is able to carry out faithfully her fundamental yet evolving mission in the world.

Once the "signs of the times" are seen as vehicles through which God can address His word to the Church, it becomes incumbent upon the Church to read carefully and continually the "signs of the times."

Notes


2. He wrote in Humanae Salutis, "Today the Church is witnessing a crisis underway within society, while humanity is on the edge of a new era, tasks of immense gravity and amplitude await the Church as in the most tragic periods of its history. It is a question in fact of bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel." In Floyd Anderson, ed., Council Daybook: Sessions in I and II (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), 6.

3. Humanae Salutis, 6.

4. Some writers have argued that Pope John was too focused on merely the positive developments or events in history. See, for example, Peter Hebblethwaite, Synod Extraordinary (New York: Doubleday, 1986), 114.

5. Humanae Salutis, 6.


7. Humanae Salutis, 70.


14. The influence of Pacem in Terris on Gaudium et Spes can be seen in the Subject Index of Commentary, volume 5, 405. As Cardinal Roy
pointed out in his "Reflections on the Tenth Anniversary of Pacem in Terris," "It is on Gaudium et Spes that the Encyclical exercised an undeniable influence. This is evident in the chapter devoted to war and peace (part II, chapter 5); but is equally clear in the very inspiration and structure of this pastoral constitution." In Joseph Gremillion, ed., The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 537, cited hereafter as GPJ.

15. Again, Cardinal Roy on the tenth anniversary of Pacem in Terris made a similar point: "The most widely noted novelty of its method is the recourse to the idea of the "signs of the times" ("Reflections," 561).

17. Pacem in Terris, 232.
22. This theme of solidarity with the human family is a recurring one in subsequent church documents. Pope Paul VI, in On the Development of Peoples (March 27, 1967), wrote, "A renewed consciousness of the demands of the Gospel make it the Church's duty to put herself at the service of all men, to help them grasp their serious problem in all its dimensions, and to convince them that solidarity in action at this turning point in human history is a matter of urgency" (GPJ, 387-88). In the documents from the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Medellín, solidarity is an important theme. For example, in the document "Peace," the Latin American bishops see one of their responsibilities to be "to awaken in individuals and communities, principally through mass media, a living awareness of justice, infusing in them a dynamic sense of responsibility and solidarity" (GPJ, 462). Speaking of their own responsibility as bishops, they said, "We ought to sharpen the awareness of our duty of solidarity with the poor, to which charity leads us. This solidarity means that we make ours their problems and struggles, that we know how to speak with them. This has to be concretized in criticism of injustice and oppression, in the struggle against the intolerable situation which a poor person often has to tolerate, in the willingness to dialogue with the groups responsible for the situation in order to make them understand their obligations" (GPJ, 474).

The bishops of the United States have spoken on several occasions about their solidarity with other bishops in countries where there have been violations of human rights. For example, on February 14, 1974, in a statement issued by the Administrative Board of the United States

23. The pastoral letters on peace and on the economy issued by the U.S. Catholic bishops show the strong influence of the methodology developed in *Gaudium et Spes*.

24. A complete listing of all the references in ecclesial documents on this theme of the imbalances in economic and social life would be too long. It is sufficient to note the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, the documents of the Latin American Bishops at Medellín, and the numerous addresses of Pope John Paul II in his travels. The U.S. Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral Letter on the Economy continues this tradition: “Beyond our own shores, the reality of 800 million people living in absolute poverty and 450 million malnourished or facing starvation casts an ominous shadow over all these hopes and problems at home.”

25. As noted in note 14, the Pastoral Letter of the U.S. Bishops on War and Peace issued in 1983 recognized this very fact among the reasons for their being obliged to write this letter.


31. Praising the work of Adolphe Tanquerey in dogmatic and moral theology, Archbishop Michael Curley of Baltimore wrote in 1930 that “Father Tanquerey had many models; the general outline, the questions treated and the method of procedure had been determined long before. Among our many excellent textbooks there can be now but accidental differences.” Foreword to Adolphe Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology* (Tournai, Belgium: Desclee and Company, 1930), v.
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