

□ CHAPTER ELEVEN □

*Vatican II:
Pastoral Care and Practical Theology*

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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.⁵ 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.⁶

"In the Church there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission," the bishops of the Council said.⁷ 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)*.⁸ 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*?⁹ 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.¹¹ 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.¹²

The earliest communities and individuals who followed in Jesus' footsteps understood themselves to be his disciples, caught up in his mission.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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).¹⁸

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."²¹

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.²² 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.²³ This hierarchical, increasingly clericalized arrangement for church order and ministry received additional emphasis over time.²⁴

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 "abbôt" and other ecclesiastical leaders.²⁵ Over time these trends tended to "absorb the diversity of the ministry," confining it to certain locales, rituals, and sacred persons.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸

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.²⁹

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.³⁰

The sixteenth century was a time of real ferment in Christian ministry.³¹ The Protestant reform emerged in part from a desire

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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.³² 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.³³

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-

13; *LG* 10-11; *CD* 15; *PO* 2, 5-6, 13), 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.³⁶ In Latin America the development of “comunidades de base” or local (“base”) communities, in which shared ministry of the word and service to the poor are hallmarks, shows signs of vitality.³⁷ 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.³⁸ 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).³⁹ 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

adapting 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

"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."⁴² 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."⁴³ 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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ 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 14, 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).

2. See Karl Rahner, “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 716-27, and Rahner, “On the Theological Problems Entailed in a Pastoral Constitution,” *Theological Investigations* 10 (1973): 293-317. For a more comprehensive sense of the “uniqueness” of Vatican II, the reader may also find it helpful to consult John O’Malley, “Vatican II: Historical Perspectives on Its Uniqueness and Interpretation,” in *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda*, ed. Lucien Richard, et al. (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 22-32.

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*

(*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, AA) 2-3. 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 *aggiornamentò* 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).

9. For more detailed examinations of the historical and descriptive material in this section, the reader is advised to consult: Regis Duffy, *A Roman Catholic Theology of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Richard McBrien, *Ministry: A Theological, Pastoral Handbook* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); Thomas F. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983); Edward Schillebeeckx, *The*

Church with a Human Face: A New and Expanded Theology of Ministry (New York: Crossroad, 1987). See also John W. O'Malley, "Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life: Some Historical and Historiographical Considerations," *Theological Studies*, 49 (1988): 223-57; O'Malley, "Developments, Reforms, and Two Great Reformations: Towards a Historical Assessment of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 44 (1983): 373-406; O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness"; and O'Malley, "Vatican II: Historical Perspectives."

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

11. Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, 21-23.

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.

13. Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, 83.

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).

16. Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face*, 106, 114-15.

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.

19. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 142.

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.

21. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 15.

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."

27. O'Malley, "Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life," 230-31.

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.

29. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 109.

30. See O'Malley, "Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life," 233-35.

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.

32. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 114-16.

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).

34. O'Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, 96.

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

D. and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead: *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, rev. ed. (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995); *Community of Faith: Crafting Christian Communities Today*, 2nd ed. (Mystic, Ct.: Twenty-Second Publications, 1993); and *Seasons of Strength: New Visions of Adult Christian Maturing* (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's Press, 1995).

37. See David R. Brooks, "Comunidades de base: Christianity and Contemporary Communitarian Movements." *Eglise et Theologie* 9 (1978): 485-504.

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."

42. Daley, "The Ministry of Disciples," 625.

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

44. See, for example, Robert Imbelli and Thomas Groome, "Signposts Towards a Pastoral Theology," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 127-37, and T. Howland Sanks, "Education for Ministry Since Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 45 (1984): 481-500. For an intriguing contemporary study of the current situation in Roman Catholic theologates, see Katarina Schuth, *Reason for the Hope: The Futures of Roman Catholic Theologates* (Wilmington, De.: Michael Glazier). The reader should not forget that an

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."

46. Imbelli and Groome, "Signposts Towards a Pastoral Theology," focus on the methodological challenges that continue to confront the inclusion of "practical theology" as a theological method. Sanks, "Education for Ministry Since Vatican II," suggests several ways in which contemporary preparation for ministry may be improved. John Shea, "Doing Ministerial Theology: A Skills Approach," in *Toward Vatican III: The Work That Needs to Be Done*, ed. David Tracy (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 188-95, offers important insights into the skills that are needed by modern pastoral ministers, who increasingly are called upon to do "ministerial theology."

47. *Sacramentum Mundi*, 367-68.

48. Karl Rahner, "The Second Vatican Council's Challenge to Theology," *Theological Investigations* 9 (1968): 25-26.

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.

50. Rahner, "On the Theological Problems Entailed in a 'Pastoral Constitution,'" 308, and "The Second Vatican Council's Challenge to Theology," 24-25.

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.

56. The reader who wishes to explore this method in more detail may consult the following sample of references: James Whitehead, "The Practical Play of Theology" in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 36-54; James D. and Evelyn E. Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry*, rev. ed. (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995); David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconceived: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Post-modernity," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 548-70; Thomas H. Groome, "Theology on Our Feet: A Revisionist Pedagogy for Healing the Gap Between Academia and Ecclesia," in *Formation and Reflection*, ed. Lewis Mudge and James Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); and Imbelli and Groome, "Signposts Towards a Pastoral Theology."

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."

59. The interested reader may find these pastoral letters in *Origins*, the official publication from the United States Catholic Conference (USCC). Several authors have commented on the application of this correlational method in the bishops' letters. Donald Gelpi, in *The Turn To Experience In Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), speaks of an "instrumental" theology that informs the bishops' letters and is similar to the correlational method outlined here. Avery Dulles, in *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), describes the "secular-dialogic" model of theology in the pastoral letters as recommended by Vatican Council II. Gerard Magill, in "Public Religious Dialogue: The Economic Pastoral and the Hermeneutics of Democracy," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 678-97, applies the method to the bishops' economic pastoral. Oliver Morgan applies it to a different topic in "The U.S. Catholic Bishops' Instructions On Chemical Dependency: A Model Of Practical Theology," accepted for publication in *Journal of Ministry in Addiction and Recovery* (fall 1997).