

# Building on Vatican II:

Setting the Agenda for the Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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As the church's celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of Vatican II many in the church feel torn between two impulses: first, gratitude for the gift of the council to the church today and, second, discouragement at the extent to which important conciliar teachings have not been yet fully implemented. How are we to make sense of this situation? To describe our complicated position with respect to the council, I would like to draw on a well known metaphor offered by the German ecclesiologist, Hermann Pottmeyer, who referred to Vatican II as "an unfinished building site," an ecclesiological project still waiting the completion of construction.<sup>1</sup> Pottmeyer offered as a visual image the re-building of St. Peter's basilica in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, the foundation for the new basilica was first erected alongside the still standing older basilica. In like manner, Pottmeyer contends that the work of the council was part of a building site concerned with constructing a new ecclesiological foundation while the influence of the older foundation was still being felt. The council's principal teachings are represented by the supporting columns for the new basilica. Unfortunately, those pillars stand alone, still awaiting a "dome" to draw them together as a unified structure. I would like to use this metaphor to structure my reflections on the council in three parts. Part one considers the old ecclesial "edifice" that was still standing at the time of the council, the presence of which had a tremendous impact on the entire "building project." Part two will sketch out the central "columns" or "pillars" of Vatican II's teaching

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<sup>1</sup> Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I & II* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 110.

that constitute the vital supports for a new ecclesial foundation. Part three will conclude with a consideration of the work yet to be done in “completing” the structure.

## ***I. The “Gregorian Form” of the Church***

Just as the rebuilding of St. Peter’s was undertaken in the imposing shadow of the older basilica, so too the work of Vatican II was undertaken, in many ways, in the shadow of a largely outdated ecclesiological edifice, which, following the French Benedictine theologian, Ghislain Lafont, we will refer to as “the Gregorian form” of the church.<sup>2</sup> The Gregorian form takes its name from Pope Gregory VII who in the eleventh century instigated a fundamental pivot in Catholic ecclesiology away from a more theological and sacramental view of the church to one which was more juridical and hierarchical in structure. This enduring ecclesial form was the object of extensive critique in the council deliberations and at the same time its defenders exerted a countervailing influence, pushing back against the conciliar impulse for reform. According to Lafont, the Gregorian form was gradually solidified over the course of the second millennium and was sustained by three “supporting elements”: 1) an “illuminationist” theology of divine revelation, 2) a papo-centric view of church authority, and 3) a sacral priesthood.

### **An Illuminationist Theology of Revelation**

The first component of this Gregorian form of the church is a theology of divine revelation that is illuminationist in character inasmuch as it presupposes that divine truth comes from above and is mediated hierarchically from the higher to the lower ranks of the church. Lafont contends that this theology of revelation assumes “a quasi-identity of revealed truth and the formulas expressing the truth.”<sup>3</sup> We might describe this as

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<sup>2</sup> Ghislain Lafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church: Structured Communion in the Spirit* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 37-64.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

a kind of spiritual “trickle-down theory.”<sup>4</sup> Drawing on a Lonerganian theological framework, Michael Vertin and Margaret O’Gara refer to this as a “classical cognitivist” framework in which God communicates a divine message through doctrines that are taught by the magisterium and passively received by the Christian faithful.<sup>5</sup>

Over the centuries, this illuminationist theology of revelation gradually shaped conceptions of the role of the people of God in the handing on and reception of the faith of the church. If revelation is passively received from above through the exclusive mediation of church teaching authorities then the reception of that revelation by the faithful will necessarily be passive and obediential, adding nothing to what has been handed down. As Vatican II opened we see this theology not only in the preparatory schema on revelation but also in the preparatory schema on the church which emphasized the attitude of docile obedience on the part of the lay faithful.

### **Papal Monarchialism**

The second element in this Gregorian form concerns the growing influence of the papacy, the central figure in the modern conception of the magisterium. The increase in papal authority was enhanced by the influence of the Christian neo-Platonism of Pseudo-Denys on later medieval ecclesiology which conceived the church as mirror of the celestial “hierarchy.” Within this pyramidal view of the church the pope was granted the *plenitudo potestatis*, the fullness of power. In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries the conciliarist controversy, in which some canonists and bishops held that, at least in exceptional circumstances, a council might have authority over the papacy, created a potent counter-reaction culminating in the Council of Florence’s muscular reassertion of papal authority over the church. In the wake of the conciliarist controversy, any assertion of even

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<sup>4</sup> Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority: A Theology of the Magisterium in the Church* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 247.

<sup>5</sup> See Margaret O’Gara and Michael Vertin, “The Holy Spirit’s Assistance to the Magisterium in Teaching,” *Catholic Theological Society of America Proceedings* 51 (1996) 125-42, at 128.

limited regional autonomy by local bishops was immediately accused of conciliarist heresy and stamped out. The growth in claims to papal authority was accompanied by a diminishment in episcopal authority. Throughout the late middle ages many theologians held that episcopal consecration was not sacramental and that bishops were, sacramentally speaking, priests with greater jurisdictional authority. Episcopal faculties were conceded to bishops as if they were mere delegates of the pope. In the nineteenth century the threatened loss of the Papal States led to a Catholic preoccupation, in certain circles anyway, with needing to reaffirm papal “sovereignty.” Vatican I issued a document that solemnly defined both papal primacy and infallibility. The council had intended to issue another document that offered a more comprehensive treatise on the church, but the council was suspended because of the Franco-Prussian War and the draft was never considered. Even though both the German bishops and John Henry Newman argued that it was wrong to interpret the teaching of Vatican I as granting the pope virtually unfettered authority, the practical impact of Vatican I’s teaching was a further enhancement of papal authority.<sup>6</sup> The papal encyclical, which first emerged in the eighteenth century, would soon become an indispensable tool in the expansion of the pope’s doctrinal teaching authority. In 1950, Pope Pius XII would assert in *Humani generis* that even when a pope pronounced on a matter in his non-infallible, ordinary magisterium, that matter was no longer subject to free theological debate.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, one of the biggest reasons for surprise when Pope John announced his intention to convene a new council is that many bishops and theologians had privately concluded that ecumenical councils were no longer necessary since everything that a council could accomplish, a robust papacy, accompanied of course by the Roman curia, could do much more effectively.

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<sup>6</sup> “Collective Declaration of the German Episcopate on the Circular of the Imperial German Chancellor concerning the Next Papal Election.” An English translation of this 1875 statement of the German bishops can be found in Hans Küng, *The Council and Reunion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 283-95. Newman’s response is found in his famous *A letter addressed to His Grace the Duke of Norfolk: on occasion of Mr. Gladstone’s recent expostulation* (London: B.M. Pickering, 1875).

<sup>7</sup> *Humani generis*, 20.

## A Sacral Priesthood

Lastly we must consider the third component in the Gregorian form of the church, a sacral priesthood: that is, a theology of the priesthood in which the ordained are imagined as belonging to a spiritual elite, separate from the rest of the people of God, superior in holiness and wisdom, and granted exclusive responsibility for all teaching and ministry in the church. One could list a number of historical developments that cumulatively brought about a more sacral understanding of the priesthood. Many of these reach back into the first millennium even though they do not really coalesce into an enduring ecclesial form until early in the second millennium. A first development came as the result of a dramatic hardening of the distinction between the clergy and the laity beginning in the fourth century.<sup>8</sup> More and more ministries, many of which had once been exercised by the laity, were now preserved for clerics and these diverse ministries, over time, would gradually be reconfigured as an ascending ladder of ecclesiastical ranks, what is sometimes termed as the *cursus honorum*. In the medieval church of Rome this *cursus honorum* took the following form: porter, lector, exorcist, acolyte (the minor orders), followed by sub-deacon, deacon, presbyter and bishop (the major orders).<sup>9</sup> Lost was the sense of a plurality of ministries exercised by a multitude of the faithful for the building up of the church and in the service of the church's mission.

A second factor was the debate regarding the theology of the Eucharist that began in the ninth century. Prior to the ninth century there was a broad consensus in the church regarding two features of eucharistic theology: 1) it was thoroughly ecclesial in character, that is, we understood the Eucharist as effecting the

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<sup>8</sup> Alexandre, Faivre, *Les laïcs aux origines de l'Eglise* (Paris: Centurion, 1984) [ET: *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church* (New York: Paulist, 1990)].

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 216. For further studies into the history and contemporary significance of the "minor orders" see Winfried Haunerland, "The Heirs of the Clergy? The New Pastoral Ministries and the Reform of the Minor Orders," *Worship* 75 (July, 2001): 305-20; Bruno Kleinheyer, "Ordinationen und Beauftragungen," in *Sakramentliche Feiern II, Gottesdienst der Kirche*, vol. 8, edited by Emmanuel v. Severus and Reiner Kaczynski (Regensburg: Pustet, 1984), 7-65; Walter Croce, "Die niederen Weihen und ihre hierarchische Wertung," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 70 (1948): 257-314: .

transformation of the gathered community into the body of Christ, and 2) the theology of the Eucharist focused on its ultimate *purpose*, mainly bringing the believer into contact with the saving work of Christ crucified and risen. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century we see these two features supplanted by a Eucharistic theology focused on the spiritual dynamics that transformed the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.<sup>10</sup>

This singular focus on the transformation of the Eucharistic elements led to a gradual neglect of the transformation of the Eucharistic community. With Eucharist and church no longer closely related, ministry involving one need not involve the other. This separation is reflected in the growing significance of the canonical distinction between the *potestas ordinis* and the *potestas iurisdictionis*.<sup>11</sup> That is, it was increasingly possible to ordain one to sacramental ministry apart from pastoral leadership of a living Eucharistic community. The consequence was a shift away from ordained ministry conceived as service to a community and toward ordained ministry conceived as the exercise of sacramental power. The priesthood would now be understood almost exclusively as the power to confect the Eucharist and absolve sins with no substantive reference to a real flesh and blood community.

A third factor in the development of a sacral priesthood came in the seventeenth century with the rise of the so called “French School” of spirituality led by Pierre de Bérulle, Jean Eudes and Vincent de Paul.<sup>12</sup> In this spiritual framework we see a pronounced emphasis on the priest as an *alter Christus*, “another Christ.” The French school consistently viewed the priest as representing Christ through his interior holiness and the offering of the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist. In this line of thought the entire theology of the priesthood was reduced to

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<sup>10</sup> The classic study of this shift in the theology of the Eucharist and its implications for ecclesiology is Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: l'eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen âge. Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1949) [ET: *Corpus Mysticum: the Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages: Historical Survey* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006)].

<sup>11</sup> Laurent Villemin, *Pouvoir d'ordre et pouvoir de juridiction: Histoire théologique de leur distinction* (Paris: Cerf, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Vidal, “Presbyterat,” *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, (Paris: Beauchesne, 1985), 2093-4.

one essential moment, when the priest pronounces the words of institution. The priest represented Christ not in his action or service on behalf of the kingdom, but in his very being. This spirituality was spread worldwide by the Oratorians, Vincentians and Sulpicians who staffed numerous seminaries. Indeed, for much of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, priests were nourished on a classic expression of this spirituality in Dom Marmion's *Christ—The Ideal of the Priest*.<sup>13</sup> It is this perspective that provided the foundation for the modern argument that women could not be ordained priest because they could not sacramentally represent Christ as “head of the church.”

This Gregorian form, built on the foundation of an illuminationist theology of revelation, a papocentric view of church authority and a sacral priesthood, was born out of the womb of medieval society, where much of it was quite intelligible.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, it continued long after the cultural forms of medieval society died out. Indeed, it has persisted into the present, in spite of countervailing forces, not the least of which was the thoroughgoing *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* undertaken by the Second Vatican Council. This form continues to cast its large shadow over the ecclesial context of the exercise of theology today.

## ***II. Central Pillars in the Council's Theological Vision***

One could plausibly interpret the intentions of the council as an effort to confront and move beyond this Gregorian form by recalling a more ancient ecclesial vision and attending carefully to the pastoral concerns of the present moment. This confrontation did not, however, constitute a repudiation of the Gregorian form in its entirety. Clearly the council recognized the enduring elements in the Gregorian form, and in many ways it

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<sup>13</sup> Abbot Columba Marmion, *Christ—The Ideal of the Priest* (St. Louis: Herder, 1952).

<sup>14</sup> I have largely followed the basic outlines of Lafont's critique but one could argue for at least three further pillars in the Gregorian form, 1) a mechanistic, baroque theology of the sacraments and sacramental grace; 2) a siege mentality in the church's engagement with the world; 3) a triumphalist tone that refused to grant any real grace or truth beyond the boundaries of the church. However, these three additional pillars cannot be developed within the limits of this essay.

continued to affirm the basic hierarchical structure of the church. Nevertheless, the council proposed what we can think of as a new configuration of these enduring elements. For example, *Sacrosanctum concilium* affirmed the hierarchical structure of the church but, by setting it in the context of the liturgy, it gave a more relational understanding of hierarchy than was evident in the Gregorian form. When the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy refers to the “hierarchical and communal nature of the liturgy” it does not have in mind a return to a pyramidal ecclesiology. The liturgy can be said to be hierarchical, not in the sense of a chain of command or a pyramidal structure, but in the sense that the liturgy manifests the church as an *ordered* communion with a great diversity of ministries and Christian activities that together build up the life of the church.

Even though the imposing edifice of the Gregorian form continued to influence the council, it was able to establish the foundations for a new vision of the church, foundations reflected in six “pillars” of conciliar teaching.<sup>15</sup>

### Personalist and Trinitarian Theology of Divine Revelation

A number of theologians have suggested that an adequate assessment of the theology of Vatican II must begin with the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) and its theology of revelation.<sup>16</sup> In the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation we discover a striking shift away from an illuminationist theology of revelation to a theology of revelation that begins with a thoroughly Trinitarian account of God revealing Godself to us in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>15</sup> At this point I am departing from Pottmeyer’s development of the metaphor; he offered a somewhat different account of the “pillar” teachings of the council.

<sup>16</sup> See, especially, Christoph Theobald, “*Dans les traces... de la constitution “Dei Verbum” du concile Vatican II. Bible, théologie et pratiques de lecture* (Paris: Cerf, 2009); *idem, La réception du concile Vatican II* (Vol. I) *Accéder à la source* (Paris: Cerf, 2009); Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004); Jared Wicks, “Vatican II on Revelation—From Behind the Scenes,” *Theological Studies* 71 (2010): 637-50.

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will, which was that people can draw near to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (DV 2).<sup>17</sup>

The council's theology of revelation was deeply Christocentric; it begins not with doctrines but with Christ and God's desire that we enter into a communion of divine friendship through Christ and in the Spirit.

By this revelation, then, the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men and women as his friends, and lives among them in order to invite and receive them into his own company (DV 2).

This theological perspective serves as a corrective for certain theological accounts which imagine that revelation is nothing more than a collection of truths that can be mastered through study. A Trinitarian theology of revelation reminds us that knowledge of God is not like knowledge of the periodic tables in chemistry or of the public bus schedule. The knowledge of God that has been revealed to us in Christ is the kind of knowledge gained in personal relationship. We come to know God through our relationship with Christ and in his Spirit. God's revelation is portrayed as an event of divine self-communication. The council's theology of revelation was not just communicative; it was also dialogical in its structure.

The illuminationist theology of revelation also saw revelation as an event of divine communication, but it imagined that communication as unidirectional, from God through scripture, tradition and the magisterium to the church.<sup>18</sup> *Dei Verbum*, by contrast, sees this event of divine communication as genuinely dialogical; God's self-communication invites, even demands our response as a response of faith and communion.

For this faith to be accorded we need the grace of God, anticipating it and assisting it, as well as the interior helps of the holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, and opens the eyes of the mind and "makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth" (DV 5).

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<sup>17</sup> Unless otherwise noted, English translations of council documents are taken from Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (Northport: Costello, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> For a development of the communicative nature of God and divine revelation see Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *The Practice of Communicative Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 64-79.

This shift has sweeping implications for the life of the church. If the revelatory event is truly dialogical then our response to God's revelation is theologically significant. Within the illuminationist theology of revelation, normative teaching and docile obedience was primary. If, however, the revelatory event is truly dialogical, then church teaching can no longer be strictly discursive in character; we must conceive of the whole church, including those who hold apostolic office, teaching *and learning*. The council stressed this at numerous points: 1) it recognized the need for biblical hermeneutics in order to arrive at an adequate interpretation and reception of the Word of God as it is mediated through Scripture (DV 12); 2) it placed the magisterium at the service of God's Word (DV 10); 3) it affirmed that all God's people contribute to the development of tradition (DV 8); 4) it acknowledged the supernatural instinct for the faith (*sensus fidei*) given to all believers by baptism which allowed them to penetrating the meaning of God's Word.

### **Dialogical Engagement, with other Christians, other Religions and the World Itself**

The dialogical character of divine revelation sketched out above served as a theological foundation for the fundamental role of dialogue in the life of the church. For the historian John O'Malley, one of the most striking features of the council was its emphasis on the priority of dialogue: dialogue among the members of the church, dialogue with other Christians, other religions and the world itself.<sup>19</sup> Dialogue within the church must embrace the contributions of theologians, scholars and especially the laity.

The laity should disclose their needs and desires to the pastors with that liberty and confidence which befits children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. To the extent of their knowledge, competence or authority the laity are entitled, and indeed sometimes duty-bound, to express their opinion on matters which concern the good of the church (LG 37).

Speaking of the mission of the church, the council affirms that

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<sup>19</sup> This is a reoccurring theme in John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

Such a mission requires us first of all to create in the church itself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, and the acknowledge all legitimate diversity; in this way all who constitute the one people of God will be able to engage in ever more fruitful dialogue, whether they are pastors or other members of the faithful. For the ties which unite the faithful together are stronger than those which separate them: let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is doubtful, and charity in everything (GS 92).

The council would extend this commitment to dialogue beyond the Roman Catholic Church to its engagements with other Christians. In its Decree on Ecumenism the council effectively repudiated a pre-conciliar “ecumenism of return” in favor of an honest dialogue with other Christians in which Catholicism would have to admit that in past divisions within the body of Christ “people on both sides were to blame” (UR 3).

The spirit of dialogue was carried forward by the council into the church’s engagement with other world religions. In its Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra aetate*), the church

[u]rges its sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture (NA2).

Finally, in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*) the council recognized a properly dialogical relationship with the world itself. Within that relationship the church brings something to the world, the precious gift of Jesus Christ (GS 41-3, 45), but it also humbly receives from the world (GS 44).

## The Priority of Baptism

The dominance of a sacral priesthood in the Gregorian form of the church led to a vision of the church that presupposed a gaping ontological divide between the clergy and the laity. This tendency to see the church as fundamentally a *societas inequalis*, an unequal society comprised of two ranks, clergy and laity, was directly challenged in the teaching of the council.<sup>20</sup> This was accomplished in part by the council’s efforts to develop a more positive theology of the laity. However, its more lasting achievement was the result of its reaffirmation of

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<sup>20</sup> This view is articulated most famously in Pius X’s encyclical, *Vehementor nos*. The English translation of the text is available in *The Papal Encyclicals*, edited by Claudia Carlen (New York: McGrath, 1981) 3: 47-8.

the priority of Christian baptism in any theological account of the church. In a number of texts the council reminded us that it was baptism and not ordination or marriage or professed vows that confers our most basic Christian identity. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum concilium*) reminded us, not only in its call for the reform of the rites of initiation but also in its focus on the whole worshipping assembly, that our primary identity as Christians is not as lay or cleric but as a member of the baptized called to participate in the life and worship of the church.

It is very much the wish of the church that all the faithful should be led to take that full, conscious, and active part in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people have a right and to which they are bound by reasons of their Baptism (SC 14).

This focus on the primacy of baptism was further developed in Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*), in particular in its consideration of the church as people of God and temple of the Holy Spirit. The decision to place the chapter on the people of God before the chapter on the hierarchy<sup>21</sup> expressed a profound ecclesiological principle: we must begin with what unites us—faith and baptism—before we can consider what distinguishes us (e.g., ordination). This does not deny, of course, that Christians may be further “ordered” in service of the church by sacramental ordination. It does mean, as Bishop Franjo Seper of Zagreb noted at the council, that the ordained do not cease being members of the people of God after ordination; the obligations that are theirs by virtue of baptism and confirmation still remain.<sup>22</sup> In *Lumen gentium* the council affirms the common baptism of all believers before it develops a theology of the ministerial priesthood:

Christ the Lord, high priest taken from the midst of humanity, made the new people “a kingdom of priests to his god and Father.” The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all their

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<sup>21</sup> For the history of the key changes that occurred in the drafting of *Lumen gentium*, see Richard R. Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. [Rediscovering Vatican II Series] (New York: Paulist Press 2006), 8-27.

<sup>22</sup> *Acta Synodalia* II/3, 202.

Christian activities they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the marvels of him who has called them out of darkness into his wonderful light (LG 10).

The practical implications of this shift are pithily summed up in the off-handed remark of one of the most influential bishops at the council, Belgium's Cardinal Leo Suenens: "a pope's finest moment is not that of his election or consecration, but that of his baptism."<sup>23</sup>

## **Renewed Emphasis on the Holy Spirit**

In continuity with the teaching of Pius XII, the council offered a beautiful meditation on the church as the Body of Christ, but it added to this a reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit "which dwells in the church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple" (LG 4). The council's recovery of a theology of the Holy Spirit is evident in two particular contributions of the council: its theology of charisms and its theology of the sense of the faithful.

The council taught that the Spirit "guides the church in the way of all truth and, uniting it in fellowship and ministry, bestows upon it different hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs it and adorns it with his fruits" (LG 4). In this crucial passage "hierarchic gifts" refers to stable church office and "charismatic gifts" refers to those many charisms that the Spirit distributes among all the faithful. In council teaching, charism and office are not opposed to one another since both have the Spirit as their origin. The council acknowledged that church office could not exist unless it was animated by the Holy Spirit and charisms could not survive unless they submitted to an ordering which sought the good of the whole church.

By appealing to the biblical concept of charism the council was able to affirm the indispensable role of all the faithful in building up the church and assisting in the fulfillment of the church's mission in the world. The bishops wrote: "It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries that the holy Spirit makes the people

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 105.

holy, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts 'at will to each individual,' he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank" (LG 12). Although few if any at the council could have anticipated the flourishing of lay ministries that would occur in the ensuing decades, it is this emphasis on the charisms of all the baptized that provided a helpful theological framework for interpreting that later post-conciliar development of lay ministry.

One of the ways in which the council was able to get beyond the opposition of charism vs. office was to stress the reciprocal relationship that obtains between the two terms. In several passages the council suggested a possible theology of ordained pastoral leadership within a community animated by many charisms. The pastoral leadership of the ordained need not compete with the exercise of the many gifts of the faithful. Each requires the other. According to conciliar teaching, those ordained to pastoral leadership were not to absorb into their own ministry all the tasks proper to building up the church. Rather the church's pastors were exhorted to recognize, empower and affirm the gifts of all God's people. In the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam acuositatem*) the council held that, having received charisms from the Spirit through baptism,

there follow for all Christian believers the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of humanity and the development of the Church, to use them in the freedom of the holy Spirit who "chooses where to blow," and at the same time in communion with the sisters and brothers in Christ, and with the pastors especially. It is for the pastors to pass judgment on the authenticity and good us of these gifts, not certainly with a view to quenching the Spirit but to testing everything and keeping what is good (AA 3).

The Decree on Priestly Ministry and Life (*Presbyterorum ordinis*) likewise asserted the responsibility of the priest to affirm and nurture the gifts of the faithful: "While testing the spirits to discover if they be of God, they must discover with faith, recognize with joy and foster diligently the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity, whether these be of a humble or more exalted kind" (PO 9). These passages situated ordained pastoral ministry not above but within the Christian community. The ordained minister is responsible for the discernment and coordination of the charisms and ministries of all the baptized.

The second fruit of the council's renewed pneumatology is found in its teaching that the whole Christian faithful, "from the bishops down to the last of the lay faithful," share in a "supernatural discernment in matters of faith." This spiritual gift is often referred to by the Latin term, *sensus fidei*. The people of God "adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life" (LG 12, see also LG 35). It is this capacity that allows a believer, almost intuitively, to sense what is of God and what is not. As we saw earlier, the council's teaching on the sense of faith contributes to its dialogical understanding of revelation in which the whole people of God play a vital role in "hearing the Word of God."

### **Episcopal Collegiality**

In its teaching on episcopal collegiality we find yet another instance of the council's attempt to move beyond the imposing shadow of the Gregorian form of the church. In particular, the council sought to distance itself from almost a thousand years of papal monarchialism. Although the council was careful to affirm Vatican I's teaching on papal primacy and papal infallibility, the council reached back to a much more ancient period of church history and recalled the bond of communion shared among bishops and with the bishop of Rome that was attested to in the ancient tradition and which was reflected in the ancient custom of bishops gathering to deliberate at synods and councils (LG 23). The council taught that although the college of bishops has no authority on its own apart from communion with its head, the pope, the college shares with the bishop of Rome, and never apart from him, "supreme and full power over the universal church" (LG 22).

This assertion of shared power and authority over the universal church represented the heart of the council's teaching on collegiality. It overcame a centuries-long tendency to pit the college of bishops against the pope in a kind of zero-sum relationship—to assert the authority of the bishops was to take it away from the papacy, and vice versa. The council moved beyond this opposition primarily by recognizing the place of the pope, constituted by his episcopal ordination, *within* the college of bishops as its head. Consequently, even

when the pope exercised his authority apart from the explicit cooperation of the bishops, his actions must presuppose an enduring communion between the pope and the college within which the pope always stood as head.

## Eschatological Humility of a Pilgrim Church

The final conciliar pillar to be considered here emerged as, yet again, a direct reaction to another characteristic of the Gregorian form of the church, namely its triumphalism. We see in the Catholicism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a troubling ecclesial arrogance. During that period, the Catholic Church so emphasized its status as the mystical body of Christ on earth, instituted by Christ himself and guided and protected from error by the Holy Spirit, that it struggled to acknowledge even the possibility of church reform. Catholic teaching recognized, of course, that the church was comprised of both saints and sinners, and that each individual Christian was a pilgrim on a journey toward salvation. The council, however, went beyond traditional Catholic preoccupation with the “four last things” (death, heaven, hell and final judgment) to explore the eschatological character of the church itself. The council provocatively affirmed that the church was not merely comprised of individual pilgrims on the journey toward their salvation, but was itself a “pilgrim people.” Therefore, as a church, it would not achieve its perfection until the “the consummation of history” (LG 48).

The Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), taught that

[e]very renewal of the church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling. Undoubtedly this explains the dynamism of the movement toward unity. Christ summons the church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is a human institution here on earth. Consequently, if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these should be set right at the opportune moment and in the proper way (UR 6).

*Dei Verbum* asserted that the church, as recipient of God’s revelation in Christ by the Spirit, was moving toward “the fullness of divine truth” (DV 8), implicitly turning away from more static and propositional notions of truth that allowed some Catholics to speak of the church “possessing the truth.” *Gaudium et spes* confirmed

confidence in the council's belief that with Christ the church had much to offer a world wounded by sin: "the church is guardian of the deposit of God's word and draws religious and moral principles from it..." Yet the council also insisted "...it does not always have a ready answer to every question. Still, it is eager to associate the light of revelation with the experience of humanity in trying to clarify the course upon which it has recently entered" (GS 33). Finally, the council adopted an attitude of confident humility reflected in the council's genuine openness to the world, its celebration of the world's legitimate autonomy and its recognition that God's grace and traces of the reign of God could be identified outside the boundaries of the church.

These six pillars do not constitute a comprehensive presentation of the council's many contributions to ecclesiology, but they do mark out an important "building foundation," an "unfinished building site" that stands before us, awaiting its completion. Let us conclude by briefly considering the task that lies before us: completing the building project.

### ***III. Completing the Building Project***

Any discussion of "completing the building project" will have to grapple with the limits of Pottmeyer's metaphor. There is a basic sense in which the work of the church is never completed. If the council sought to move beyond the Gregorian form, we must recognize that fifty or hundred years from now a new council may have to do the same with respect to Vatican II's contributions. Still, there is value in considering the work of the council as an "unfinished project" that demands much of us.

We must begin with the frank recognition of a formidable obstacle, namely the imposing shadow still being cast by the Gregorian form of the church. In spite of the council's efforts in constructing a new form of the church, it was unable to fully dispel the Gregorian form; the ruins of the old basilica, to follow Pottmeyer's metaphor, are still very much with us. We see its enduring influence in a number of ecclesiastical policies and documents. Particularly during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, we encountered, church

leaders employing a more confrontational rhetoric with regular denunciations of a “dictatorship of relativism” and the secularism of the modern world. This tone is reminiscent of the siege mentality that dominated church leadership throughout the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. Second, during those two pontificates there is evidence of a pre-conciliar triumphalism in Vatican pronouncements like *Dominus Iesus*<sup>24</sup> and the 2007 Vatican statement, “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church,”<sup>25</sup> statements that offered a shockingly negative assessment of the extent to which other Christian traditions participate in the Church of Christ. Third, there were troubling signs of a neo-clericalism reflected in a host of ecclesiastical documents, including the 1997 Interdicasterial document “Certain Questions Regarding Collaboration of the non-Ordained Faithful in Ministry of Priests,”<sup>26</sup> *Redemptionis sacramentum*,<sup>27</sup> the revised General Instruction of the Roman Missal<sup>28</sup> and even the new English translation of the Roman missal. All of these documents, in various ways, reinforced the ontological divide between the clergy and the laity. We saw this neo-clericalism as well in the disturbing return of birettas, cassocks and a sense of ecclesiastical entitlement with many but certainly not all of our current seminarians and young priests. Finally, we have witnessed remnants of papal monarchialism. This is evident in the emasculation of episcopal conferences in Pope John Paul II’s

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<sup>24</sup> This document can be accessed at the Vatican web-site:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html) .

<sup>25</sup> This document can be accessed at the Vatican web-site:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20070629\\_responsa-gaestiones\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-gaestiones_en.html) .

<sup>26</sup> This document can be accessed at the Vatican web-site:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/laity/documents/rc\\_con\\_interdic\\_doc\\_15081997\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html) .

<sup>27</sup> This document can be accessed at the Vatican web-site:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20040423\\_redemptionis-sacramentum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html) .

<sup>28</sup> This document can be accessed at the Vatican web-site:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccdds\\_doc\\_20030317\\_ordinamento-messale\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20030317_ordinamento-messale_en.html) .

apostolic letter *Apostolos suos*,<sup>29</sup> in the ecclesiastical marginalization of the synod of bishops which has been maintained in an ecclesiastical form far less substantial than what the bishops had hoped for at the council and, finally, in the current process of the papal appointment of bishops. This practice of papal appointment is a relative novelty in the history of the church and encourages a view of bishops as delegates of the pope that is, in fact, at odds with Catholic doctrine.<sup>30</sup> Of course, with the new pontificate of Pope Francis, and his consistent critique of modern forms of neo-clericalism and “spiritual worldliness” among the clergy, along with his determination to push forward substantive curial reform, there is a real hope that the last remnants of the Gregorian form may finally be dismantled.

Given the challenges that the enduring influence of the Gregorian form represent, we must still push forward and consider the challenges that remain in completing the unfinished building project of the council. This work will necessarily involve drawing together into an integrated pastoral program disconnected insights and contributions found in the council documents. Let me recommend two potentially fruitful paths toward furthering this project: 1) becoming a community of Christian discipleship, and 2) becoming a community of discernment.

## The Call to Discipleship

Over the two pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and continuing in the pontificate of Pope Francis we have heard much of a pastoral project referred to as “the new evangelization.”<sup>31</sup> This is a pastoral project with enormous potential for integrating a number of the council’s teachings and putting them in the service of

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<sup>29</sup> This document can be accessed at the Vatican web-site:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_motu-proprio\\_22071998\\_apostolos-suos\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/motu_proprio/documents/hf_jp-ii_motu-proprio_22071998_apostolos-suos_en.html).

<sup>30</sup> The literature on this topic is voluminous. For a recent study see, Joseph f. O’Callaghan, *Electing Our Bishops: How the Catholic Church Should Choose Its Leaders* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> This topic was also the subject of the episcopal synod held in the fall of 2012.

the church's mission in the world. For the work of new evangelization to be effective, however, it must resist the temptation to settle for simply a new form of Catholic apologetics; it must recognize that any authentic and effective form of "new evangelization" must be concerned with the recovery of the biblical notion of discipleship. Acts of the Apostles reports that it was in Antioch that the first followers of Jesus were called "Christians." The first self-appellations used by early Christians included such terms as "disciples" (Acts 6: 1; 9: 1) or simply "the saints" (Rom. 1: 7; 1 Cor. 1: 2).<sup>32</sup> Such terms did not refer to a specific subset within the Christian community but to all believers. Some form of the word "disciple" appears in the New Testament over 200 times. A comprehensive theological and pastoral plan that focuses on Christian discipleship would help us bring together three important conciliar teachings: 1) the priority of Christian baptism, 2) the universal call to holiness, and 3) the need for the laity to take the initiative in applying the gospel to their daily lives.

As we saw above, the council's teaching on baptism challenged the tendency in Catholic ecclesiology to grant holy orders a sacramental priority as regards the nature of the church. Indeed, the council explicitly invoked the example of St. Augustine who gave priority to his baptismal identity quoting one of his sermons: "When I am frightened by what I am for you, then I am consoled by what I am with you. For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian. The first is an office, the second a grace; the first is a danger, the second salvation" (LG 32). The council also recovered the biblical notion of a priesthood of the faithful, a baptismal priesthood. In doing so, of course, the council did not deny the place of the ministerial priesthood in the life of the church, but it did wish to reorient the ministerial priesthood as a ministry in service of all the baptized. This has become even clearer in post-conciliar teaching, as is evident in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

While the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit—the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians (CCC 1547).

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<sup>32</sup> Faivre, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church* 5.

A recovery of this theology of the ministerial priesthood as completely oriented toward the “unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians” would go a long way toward dismantling the new clericalism that is still with us. The ministry of the ordained priest is directed toward making each of us better disciples of Jesus.

This teaching on the priority of our baptismal identity as disciples of Jesus can draw further conciliar support from the council’s teaching on the universal call to holiness. In the preparatory draft on the church, sent to the bishops during the first session, there was a chapter entitled, “The States of Evangelical Perfection,” which asserted that perfection in holiness was achieved preeminently by those who pursued in consecrated life. There was virtually no consideration of the other 99+% of the church who were not called to consecrated life. Indeed, implicit in the chapter was the assumption that those who do not pursue the evangelical counsels have accepted the more pedestrian path to holiness provided by the Ten Commandments and precepts of the church. In the revised schema this chapter was thoroughly re-worked under the new title, “The Universal Call to Holiness.” This revised chapter focused on the call to holiness addressed to all believers. The conception of a gradation of “states of perfection” was quietly abandoned. In this new chapter the council taught

that all Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth (LG 40).

Just as the council’s teaching on the priority of baptism reversed the tendency to place the laity in a secondary position relative to the ordained, the council’s teaching on the universal call to holiness reversed the tendency to place the laity in a secondary position relative to those in consecrated life. Taken together, these two teachings provide important support for a return to a biblical emphasis on Christian discipleship; all Christians share in the church’s mission in the world.

One consequence of a more integrated theology of Christian discipleship would be a reconsideration of our understanding of Christian vocation. In spite of the council’s many contributions, it remained trapped in a more traditional conception of Christian vocation, one that identified three distinct vocations within the church: 1)

ordained ministry, 2) professed religious life and 3) marriage. Yet a theological and pastoral program oriented toward Christian discipleship must challenge the adequacy of this vocational schema. If we move in the direction provided for us by the council, we must assert that at the most basic level of Christian life there can be only one primordial vocation for all Christians, the vocation to be a baptized disciple of Jesus. All other ways of Christian living become simply concrete embodiments of this one vocation. Holy orders, professed religious life, Christian marriage and the single life all need to be considered as concrete ways in which individuals respond to the invitation to Christian discipleship. Consider, for example, the vocation to Christian marriage.

The lay Filipino theologian, José de Mesa, has placed discipleship at the heart of Christian marriage.<sup>33</sup> Mesa contends that for too long, at least in the Catholic tradition, marriage has been viewed as a second class vocation, either because of its carnal character, or because one's responsibilities towards one spouse and/or children made it impossible to give an "undivided heart" to God. He insists that the true theological significance of marriage is found in its relationship to the one primordial call to all Christians to be disciples of Jesus in service to God's reign. Christian discipleship, in all of its forms, is a "thankful response to God's act toward us in Jesus Christ, in a life of serving and caring patterned after the life of Christ." To consider marriage from the perspective of discipleship is to understand marriage as a concrete way of serving God's coming reign and contributing to the transformation of society. Marriage constitutes, Mesa insists, a particular form of "covenant community"; it creates a "domestic church." Here he draws on a theme that has received considerable theological attention since it was first treated at Vatican II.<sup>34</sup> The council reflected on the domestic church in several texts. The expression was used in *Lumen gentium* to emphasize parents' role as "the first preachers of the faith" (LG 11). But of particular significance is the council's treatment of marriage and family in its Decree on

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<sup>33</sup> José de Mesa, *Marriage is Discipleship* (Quezon City, Philippines: East Asian Pastoral Institute, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> For more on the theology of the domestic church, see Florence Caffrey Bourg, *Where Two or Three are Gathered* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

the Apostolate of the Laity, where it describes marriage and family from the perspective of the church's mission in the world to serve God's coming reign:

The mission of being the primary vital cell of society has been given to the family by God. This mission will be accomplished if the family, by the mutual affection of its members and by family prayer, presents itself as a domestic sanctuary of the church; if the whole family takes its part in the church's liturgical worship; if, finally, it offers active hospitality, and practices justice and other good works for the benefit of all its sisters and brothers who suffer from want. Among the various works of the family apostolate the following may be listed: adopting abandoned children, showing a loving welcome to strangers, helping with the running of schools, supporting adolescents with advice and help ... (AA 11).

Pope John Paul II often returned to the theme of the domestic church and in his apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, he described the family as a "school of deeper humanity" (FC 21).<sup>35</sup> In that document the pope explicitly relates the family to discipleship and service of God's reign:

Among the fundamental tasks of the Christian family is its ecclesial task: the family is placed at the service of the building up of the Kingdom of God in history by participating in the life and mission of the Church (FC 49).

This view of marriage is far removed from that which would see marriage and family as a self-contained refuge from a hostile world. A Christian theology of marriage and family must never be presented as some inward looking reality which does little more than ward off the evil "secular" influences of our broader society. To be a member of a family is always at the same time to be engaged in the concerns of the broader society.

Finally a renewed emphasis on Christian discipleship will build on the council's call to lay people to take the initiative in bringing the gospel to bear on their daily lives. The council bishops sought to move beyond more passive theologies of the laity that called for nothing other than obedience to the clergy. The council called all the Christian faithful to a more adult form of participation in the life of the church. It was the laity, in particular,

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<sup>35</sup> This document can be accessed at the Vatican web-site:  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html) .

who were to take the lead in applying the Gospel to the pressing concerns of the modern age; however it was the whole church which was to be a leaven in the world (GS 40).

But what then was to be the role of the traditional teachers of the faith, the pope and bishops? The council wrote: "For guidance and spiritual strength let them turn to the clergy; but let them realize that their pastors will not always be so expert as to have a ready answer to every problem, even every grave problem, that arises; this is not the role of the clergy." The council saw the task of the clergy, from the normative teaching of pope and bishops to the catechetical activities and preaching of priests and deacons, as that of proclaiming the moral vision of the Gospel as it has been perpetuated in the living tradition of the Church. It was the particular duty of all the lay baptized to take this moral vision and integrate it into their daily lives and apply it to the complex issues of the age. This process of integration and application went beyond the province of the clergy; this was the realm of concrete prudential judgment.

The council bishops were surprisingly realistic about the complexity of the prudential realm and recognized that "[v]ery often their Christian vision will suggest a certain solution in some given situation. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that some of the faithful, with no less sincerity, will see the problem quite differently." How is this disagreement to be adjudicated? "Let them, then, try to guide each other by sincere dialogue in a spirit of mutual charity and with a genuine concern for the common good above all" (GS 43). This passage reflects a sophisticated grasp of both the necessity and the complexity of Christian participation in the public realm.

Not everyone has appreciated the practical significance of the council's acknowledgment of the place of prudential judgment. Implicit in the council's teaching is the acknowledgment that Catholics who embrace the full range of church moral teaching may legitimately disagree with one another regarding the concrete implementation of these teachings in society. For example, church social teaching calls Catholics to a preferential option for the poor, a special concern for those who are poor and powerless in the world. No

conscientious Catholic is free to dismiss the plight of the poor as somebody else's problem. Yet, even as two Catholics must agree that they have a religious and moral obligation toward the poor, they may legitimately disagree on the particular policy initiatives that will best alleviate poverty.

If we are to complete the council's vision, we must develop a theological vision and a pastoral plan that begins with the life of Christian discipleship and puts all church institutions and polices at the service of this commitment.

### **Becoming a Community of Discernment**

The second project that must be undertaken if we are to bring the council's vision to completion takes its inspiration from the opening lines of *Dei Verbum*, "[h]earing the Word of God reverently and proclaiming it confidently, this sacred synod makes its own the words of St. John..." (DV1). The council reminds us of the ecclesial priority of *hearing* the Word of God. This divine Word, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth by the power of the Holy Spirit, is addressed to the entire people of God and invites a response of faith. As we have already noted, in *Dei Verbum* we see a decisive turn away from an illuminationist theology of revelation and toward a theology that was more personalist and fully Trinitarian in character. Throughout the documents the council offered scattered insights into the ecclesial dynamics that would be required if the church were to effectively hear the Word of God. These include the assertion that the magisterium is not superior to God's Word but rather is its servant (DV 10), its teaching on the *sensus fidei*, the graced capacity of believers to actively appropriate God's Word into their lives (LG 12), and the council's theology of tradition that affirmed that tradition progresses, not only by the preaching of the bishops but also by "the contemplation and study of believers" and their "intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience" (DV 8).

In spite of these scattered insights, the council was not able to develop in any detail ways in which these insights might be given institutional form. Hervé Legrand writes:

*Vatican II paid scant attention to the canonical dimension of the reforms it sought to introduce.* Of all the Council documents, only the Constitution on the Liturgy concerned itself with guaranteeing its enactment, setting out forty-nine(!) normative prescriptions. After this, *Christus Dominus* was virtually the only document to use this method, though it set out wishes rather than norms.<sup>36</sup>

Legrand wonders whether this failure to attend to issues of canonical implementation may be a consequence of the fact that canon law at that time “presented no more than a cramped vision of ecclesiology” that consequently held little interest for the council majority.<sup>37</sup> This failure to attend to the canonical implementation of the theological insight regarding the church’s active reception of God’s Word may explain why the council so often settled for vague exhortations to pastors to “willingly use [the faithful’s] prudent advice.” What was lacking was any effort to promulgate norms for the obligatory consultation of the faithful as an absolutely crucial element in the church’s process of discerning God’s Word.

Since the council there have been sporadic efforts in this regard. The 1983 Code of Canon Law, in canon 212, explicitly affirms the rights of the faithful to make known their needs and desires and to share their insight with church leaders. In keeping with this fundamental right, the code provides several consultative structures oriented toward input from the Christian faithful.<sup>38</sup> For example the code encourages the creation of diocesan pastoral councils (c. 511) and the convocation of diocesan synods (cc. 460-8); in both instances lay participation is envisioned. However, it must also be noted that these structures are only *recommended* by the code whereas diocesan presbyteral councils are actually mandated by canon law (c. 495). There is another structure mandated by the code that, in principle, could offer an important venue for consultation of the faithful and that is the parish visitation. The Code of Canon Law requires that the bishop or a proxy visit all parishes in their diocese over a five year period (c. 396.1). Of course structures for consultation are not limited to these canonical

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<sup>36</sup> Hervé Legrand, “Forty Years Later: What has become of the Ecclesiological Reforms envisaged by Vatican II?” in *Vatican II: A Forgotten Future* [Concilium 2005/4]: 57-72, at 57.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>38</sup> Sharon Euart, “Structures for Participation in the Church,” *Origins* 35 (May 26, 2005): 18-25. The treatment of the canonical structures for the consultation of the faithful in this section is largely drawn from Sr. Euart’s address.

provisions. In many dioceses one finds various boards and commissions created to oversee important dimensions of the church's ministry and mission and many of these boards and commissions have significant lay representation.

In Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter, *Novo millennio ineunte*,<sup>39</sup> and in his apostolic exhortation on the office of the bishop, *Pastores gregis*, he affirmed the value of bishops exercising their ministry collaboratively through consultation and dialogue.<sup>40</sup> In *Novo millennio ineunte* John Paul II quoted St. Paulinus of Nola: "Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes" (NM 45). And in an address to the U.S. bishops in September, 2004:

A commitment to creating better structures of participation, consultation, and shared responsibility, should not be misunderstood as a concession to a secular democratic model of governance, but as an intrinsic requirement of the exercise of episcopal authority and a necessary means of strengthening that authority.<sup>41</sup>

It is difficult to ignore the unusually strong language: consultation is an "intrinsic requirement" of the exercise of church authority.

Progress in this area has been hampered in the decades since the council by the repeated reminder that the church is not a democracy. Immediately the specter is raised of ballot distribution among the faithful to determine whether or not to continue to teach the Incarnation! Of course, nothing could be further from the vision of the council. I believe that one of the crucial projects needed to complete the council's building site is the task, which must be undertaken at the level of institution and policy, to pursue something far more

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<sup>39</sup> This document can be accessed at the Vatican web-site:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html) .

<sup>40</sup> See article 44 This document can be accessed at the Vatican web-site:

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_20031016\\_pastores-gregis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20031016_pastores-gregis_en.html) .

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Thomas J. Healey, "A Blueprint for Change," *America* (September, 26, 2005): 15.

spiritually robust than a liberal democracy; the church must seek to become a community of holy discernment where Christians exhibit the courage to set aside their own personal preferences in a disciplined exercise of listening to the echoes of the Word, reverberating in the life of the church through the power of the Spirit.

And so the work must continue. The council offered sturdy “pillars” that can serve as a strong foundation for a new “form” of the church, one that draws from the customs, practices and insights from our great Tradition, but which creatively re-works them in the construction of an ecclesial form adequate to the demands of our church today. To complete Vatican II’s grand project we must redouble our efforts to encourage a theological and pastoral commitment to become a community of discipleship and discernment, for without that commitment our church will be ill equipped to face the challenges it faces today.