

**booklets**

**FIFTY YEARS AGO  
THERE WAS A COUNCIL...**



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**Víctor Codina**



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**THE MEANING OF VATICAN II**

Víctor Codina

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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We live our lives at such an accelerated pace that an event of 50 years ago can easily be buried in oblivion if we make no effort to recover the memory of our past. And such recovery is not easy when the direct witnesses of the event are gradually disappearing. This is what is happening with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Slowly but surely the great protagonists of Vatican II have been vanishing from our midst: the Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI and the great majority of the bishops, both the renewers (such as Suenens, Alfrink, Frings, Döpfner, König, Máximos IV, Lercaro, Helder Camara) and the conservatives (such as Ottaviani and the great antagonist Lefebvre). Of the great theologians of the Council (Rahner, Congar, De Lubac, Schillebeeckx, Jungmann, Haring, Murray, etc.), there survive only Kung and Ratzinger, who were then quite young.

Deceased also are the Taize monks (Roger Schutz and Max Thurian) and the Orthodox observers such as Evdokimov and the Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople, whom Paul VI embraced as a sign of ecumenical reconciliation.

Even the historians of Vatican II (such as G. Albrigo and E. Vilanova) have been slowly leaving the scene. The Christians who had some direct experience of the Council are now persons retired from active life. How are we to transmit to today's younger generation the meaning of an event whose main protagonists have almost all disappeared?

But the problem is not simply generational or chronological because there are sectors of the today's Church that are interested in forgetting Vatican II. They wish to bury its «dangerous memory» or at least offer a minimalist, «lite» reading of the Council.

What was the real meaning of Vatican II? Different people have described it as the major event of the 20th century (De Gaulle), a prophetic council for our days (Chenu), or a great grace the Spirit gave the Church (John Paul II). It signaled a change from anathema to dialogue (Garaudy) and a shift from a western Church to a universal Church (Rahner). For others the Council was a kind of nightmare or even «a sewer», as a Lefebvre follower claimed. How can we now recover the memory of Vatican II in such a way that its message is good news for the world of today?

There is no better way to do this than to recall what the pre-Vatican II era was like, what happened during the Council itself, and what changes have taken place since then.

## 2. THE PRE-COUNCIL ERA

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Instead of beginning with generic pronouncements about the pre-conciliar Church, let us recall what the Eucharist was like before Vatican II.

### 2.1. The pre-conciliar Eucharist

The priest celebrates with his back to the people; he is the mediator of the sacred, the one who stands between God and human beings, the other Christ; he is separated from the people even by his dress: habit, clerics, tonsure; he administers the sacraments in the name of Christ; he prays and reads the word of God in Latin. There is no concelebration; often simultaneous Masses are celebrated on side altars; sometimes Mass is celebrated with the Blessed Sacrament exposed, or at the end of Mass there is exposition and benediction. The tabernacle presides over the church. The central act is the narrative of the consecration and the elevation of the host and chalice (with bells ringings). Adoration appears to be more important than communion. The liturgy is an action of the priest alone. The Roman canon is the only one that exists.

The people are passive; they attend Mass as if at a spectacle; they do not understand the Latin; they pray the rosary or novenas; the more adept follow the liturgy with a bilingual missal; the faithful are kneeling down almost all the time; communion is taken kneeling and in the mouth; it is offered in just one species; people have been fasting since midnight; many do not dare to receive communion without confessing beforehand; other attend Mass without receiving communion; sometimes communion is given before and after Mass or in a side chapel. Many people attend Mass simply to fulfill the Sunday obligation since otherwise they would be sinning mortally; in order for the Mass to count they must reach the church at least by the time of the Gospel.

The Eucharist is not understood or appreciated as a community celebration of the paschal mystery; there is no prayer

of the faithful and no kiss of peace; the Credo and the Our Father are prayed in Latin; most of the hymns are in Latin and sung as Gregorian chant; at the end of Mass the prologue to John's Gospel is read, and then everyone prays three Hail Marys and a Latin prayer to Saint Michael asking him to defend the Church and cast the devil into hell.

The sermon or homily, when there was one, was in the vernacular; it summed up the Gospel interpreted in very little fashion; the preaching was often very moralistic. What little knowledge people had of the Bible was gained through the preaching they heard and through their study of the catechism with its questions and answers; the Bible itself was hardly read.

## **2.2. What was behind this liturgy?**

The liturgical celebration is not something accidental in the Church; it expresses the Church's faith, her theology, her way of being Church.<sup>1</sup> What lay behind this pre-conciliar Tridentine liturgy was the Church of Christendom which originated in the 4<sup>th</sup> century with Constantine and Theodosius and which was reinforced in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by the reforms of Gregory VII which established the model for a centralized Church until Vatican II. That model was a pyramidal Church at whose summit was the Pope, the bishops, and the priests and at whose base were the laity. It was an unequal Church: a few persons taught, commanded, and celebrated; the rest obeyed, learned, prayed, kept quiet, and paid tithes. It was a clerical Church that had the power to consecrate, pardon, and baptize; it possessed the Spirit. The

Church was the pope, the bishop, the priest. It was a Church in which the priests and religious were called to holiness by the evangelical counsels while lay people had to be satisfied with obeying the commandments in order to be saved. It was a Church united to the state, which protected her and assisted her; the citizens of a country were automatically members of the Church. Baptism of children was the common practice; Christianity was something socio-cultural; people were Christian more by tradition than by conviction. Outside the Catholic Church there was no salvation, which explains the missionary zeal to save souls from perdition, the condemnation of non-Christian religions as diabolical, and the denunciation of non-Catholic Christians as heretics and schismatics. There was no religious liberty because error has no rights. The Church was a perfect society like the state; it possessed not only spiritual power but also temporal power (the Papal States...); the pope could assign newly discovered territories to the Catholic monarchs; he could consecrate and depose emperors and kings. The Church was the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Church of Christendom, also called the Church of the Second Millennium, certainly made a great effort to become incarnate in society. It was a source of humanization at critical moments of history; it kept the faith united; it brought the Gospel to other continents; it struggled for liberty; it produced many fruits of extraordinary holiness; it built cathedrals and published theological masterpieces. But all this came at a great cost: the separation of the Eastern Churches, the Reformation, the Crusades, the religious

wars, anti-Semitism, rejection of the modern world of the Enlightenment, opposition to the French revolution and Latin American independence, neglect of modern science and technology, and the departure from the Church of many intellectuals, workers, politicians. It is no wonder, then, that during the Jubilee Year celebration of 2000 John Paul II asked pardon for these sins and errors of the Church of the Second Millennium.

The two major councils of modern Christendom, Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and Vatican I in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, reinforced the institutional ecclesiology. They were on the defensive against Protestants and the modern world, and they identified the Church with the hierarchy, above all the papacy. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, with Popes Pius IX, Pius X, Pius XI, and Pius XII (the «piano» epoch, to use Rahner's expression), this church of Christendom reached its peak. The Church became a legalist, triumphalist, clericalist institution far removed from the Church that Jesus wanted and from the Church of the first centuries. The Church of the First Millennium was a Church of communion and fraternity; it was a Church of the Spirit structured in the image of the trinitarian community.

### **2.3. Something was moving in the Church**

The theology of the pre-conciliar years was scholasticism or, in the best of cases, neo-scholasticism, in accord with the norms laid down by Leo XIII in the encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. Its deductive method was built around Latin theses of great logical rigor, but it was completely

divorced from history and modern culture. It was what Rahner called «Den-zinger theology», that is, theology based principally on the documents of the councils and the magisterium.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, modernity was advancing: the Enlightenment brought science and progress; the Russian revolution of 1917 spread through eastern Europe and part of Asia; the two world wars caused massive bloodshed; the countries of the so-called Third World attained autonomy and independence and made their voices heard. New philosophies and new ways of thinking became ever more estranged from traditional Christian ways of thinking.

But not all was tranquility in the bosom of the Catholic Church. Between the First and the Second World Wars, a series of theological movements arose, above all in Central Europe, and they sowed a crop that would later be reaped by Vatican II. This aspect has been widely studied,<sup>3</sup> and it will suffice here to outline its principal components.

The biblical movement (the Biblical School in Jerusalem, the Biblical Institute in Rome, etc.) approached the Bible with new perspectives and fresh historical and critical methodologies. The patristic movement (DeLubac, Daniélou, etc.) rediscovered the importance of the Latin and Greek Fathers, and it brought a new richness to theology, spirituality, and pastoral work with its new editions of the works of the Fathers (*Sources chré-tiennes*, *Patrologia Graeca*, etc.). The liturgical movement (the monasteries of Solesmes, Maria Laach, Montserrat, etc.) placed special value on the liturgical assembly and focused especially on the celebration of the paschal mystery. The

ecumenical movement (Couturier, Congar, etc.) entered into dialogue with Protestants, Anglicans, and the Orthodox, thus putting an end to a long epoch of confrontation and apologetics. Pastoral ministry was also opening up new paths, above all in reaching out to young people, workers, and the secularized sectors of the population. This was the age of worker priests, and questions were raised as to whether the so-called Christian countries were not now themselves mission lands. A new social sensibility was born, resulting both from a deepened Christology that emphasized the life of Jesus of Nazareth (Cardijn, Abbé Pierre, Gauthier, Voillaume, the biblical studies of Dupont and Gelin, etc.) and from earnest dialogue with the social sciences, especially Marxism. There also appeared the so-called «theology of earthly realities», which stressed the importance of the sciences, economics, history, politics, progress, the body, and sex (Thils). Finally, Teilhard de Chardin opened up new theological perspectives through his evolutionary vision of the cosmos.

All of these innovative movements centered around European theological faculties at places like Lyon-Fourvière, Louvain, Le Saulchoir-Paris, Innsbruck, Munich, and Tübingen. Prominent theologians like Rahner, Balthasar, Chenu, Congar, Daniélou, and Schillebeeckx sought to replace the then dominant scho-

lastic theology with a theology that was more biblical, historical, and anthropological. These theologians not only knew well the sources of Church tradition, but they were also in dialogue with the modern world. Some of them had direct experience of the World Wars and even suffered imprisonment; they participated in ecumenical meetings, and they were in contact with worker priests, with scientists, with Marxists, and with others outside the Church.

This «new theology» was censured by Pius XII in his encyclical *Humani generis* (1950), but the same theologians who were then sanctioned and in some case removed from their university posts would later become the star theologians of Vatican II.

The groundwork was also being laid for the ecclesiology that would emerge from Vatican II. Theologians like Cerfaux and Koster were developing the biblical concept of the people of God, and others like Mersch and Tromp contributed to the dogmatic development of the concept. Their efforts resulted in the encyclical *Mystici corporis* of Pius XII (1943), which presented a vision of the Church that was less juridical and more mystical.

But all this theological and ecclesiastical renewal arising from the bases of the Church found its catalyzer in John XXIII. Without taking him into account there is no way to understand the council.

## 3. THE COUNCIL

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What one analyst has called the «Roncalli mystery» can be in part clarified if we recall something of the life of the man who would become John XXIII.

### 3.1. There was a man sent by God, named John...

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was born in 1881 in the small Italian town of Sotto il Monte. His family was poor and lived from farming, but they were very Christian and never ashamed of their peasant roots; they remained faithful to the wisdom and simplicity of country folk. Angelo studied Church history, especially the epochs of Gregory the Great and of Charles Borromeo, the great Tridentine reformer of Milan. These studies helped him develop a dynamic, historical vision of the Church. During the First World War he served as a chaplain, ministering to the wounded soldiers who were recovering in a military hospital. After the war he was made secretary to Radini Tedeschi, the progressive bishop of Bergamo, and also taught for some years in the seminary of

Bergamo. Being unjustly accused at that time of modernism, he was later able to understand well the situation of theologians who had been removed from their university positions by Pius XII.

Roncalli was named apostolic delegate in Bulgaria and then in Turkey and Greece, nations belonging to the Orthodox Christian tradition. Working in those countries, he experienced the tragedy of the divisions within Christianity and came to appreciate the importance of ecumenism. He considered it important to highlight what unites the different traditions rather than dwell on what divides them. During the Second World War he helped with the evacuation of the persecuted Jewish population and of the prisoners of war. His years as papal nuncio in Paris (1944-52) opened him up to modernity. These were the years of the worker

priests, of Teilhard de Chardin, and of the French theological renewal (*the nouvelle théologie*). During years France faced great pastoral challenges as a «mission land». Finally, his years as archbishop of Venice (1953-58) helped him understand the difficulties of proclaiming the Gospel in modern society.

### 3.2. A transitional Pope?

When Pius XII died in 1958, Roncalli was elected as a transitional Pope since the conclave considered it as difficult for anyone to follow up on the extraordinary pontificate of the noble, cultivated figure of Pope Eugenio Pacelli.

Once elected, Roncalli demonstrated a different human and ecclesial style. He was a short, plump peasant Pope, good-humored and astute. He began his pontificate with a historical wink of the eye by taking the name John XXIII, since the previous John had been an anti-Pope deposed by the Council of Constance. Although he was 77 years old, he surprised everybody in 1959 by convoking an ecumenical council. His idea was that it should complete the work the First Vatican Council (1870) had left unfinished, but it was not to be a simple continuation of Vatican I; rather it was to be a new council, Vatican II. He recognized himself that this idea «sprang from his heart and onto his lips as a grace of God, as a light from on high, with great fervor and gentleness of soul and vision».

Many Church leaders were left speechless. They thought that the Pope was naïve, precipitous, and impulsive, completely unaware of the difficulties he would have to face, even with the Roman curia. Or

maybe, they thought, the old man was losing it. Nevertheless, the idea provoked great enthusiasm in all the theological and ecclesial movements of the time. It had a tremendous ecumenical impact and inspired much hope throughout the Christian world. John XXIII in effect shifted the trajectory of Pius XII, whose ideal had been the Church of Christendom. John XXIII proposed a new model of Church, one that returned to the sources of the faith and responded to the signs of the times.

The new Pope sought what he called the *aggiornamento* of the Church; he wanted to bring the Church up to date. This updating would involve dialogue with the modern world, engagement with the new culture forces, return to the living sources of Christian tradition, and doctrinal and pastoral renewal. The goal of the Council was to take a leap forward by strengthening the faith, renewing the customs of the Christian faithful, and updating Church discipline. When an African bishop asked the Pope what he was hoping to achieve, he responded that he was «opening the window» so that fresh air would enter the Church and carry off the dust that had accumulated during centuries.

Little by little the goals of the Council became more concrete: dialogue with the modern world, renewal of Christian life, ecumenism, and making the Church once again the Church of the poor.

There began four years of preparation. Consultations were held with all sectors of the Church, and from these consultations came all sorts of petitions, ranging from condemnation of communism to promotion of devotion to Saint Joseph to observance of morality on the beaches.

The Pope's inaugural discourse to the Council on October 11, 1962, caused even greater surprise. The Church, said John XXIII, does not want to condemn anyone; she prefers to practice compassion and mercy; she desires to be open to the modern world and to all Christians and to offer them a renewed proclamation of the Gospel. In contrast to the «prophets of doom», John XXIII professed a hopeful optimism based on God's action in history. He was also careful to distinguish between the essential content of the faith and the adaptations that could be made in the light of the changing times and new cultural circumstances.

This speech, according to the historian Alberigo, was the most significant act of Roncalli's pontificate; it challenged the Church to confront the modern age. And as the Pope had hoped, it was a major leap forward.

In the evening of that historic day, the Pope, although weary from the long inaugural ceremony, appeared in Saint Peter's Square where many people were still gathered. Pondering the full moon in the sky, he greeted everybody and asked all the parents to embrace their children on his part as soon as they reached home. Something was clearly changing in the Church. The «little flowers» of Pope John were reflecting this new style.

Once the Council was underway, it was quickly seen that the bishops arriving in Rome from all over the globe were not going to let themselves be limited to simply approving documents elaborated by the commissions of the Vatican curia. Due to the interventions in the Council hall of Cardinals Joseph Frings of Germany and Achille Liénart of France, new

commissions were created which included many bishops of the «periphery», as those from outside the Vatican were called.

This buoyant atmosphere dissipated, however, at the end of the first session of the Council when rumors spread of the Pope's illness. When John XXIII died serenely on June 3, 1963, his passing deeply moved not only the Church but the whole world. And questions about the future of Vatican II were left floating in the air.

The new Pope Paul VI, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, assured people that the Council would continue to move forward. Montini had a character rather different from that of John XXIII. He was less charismatic and less intuitive; he was a Vatican insider and an intellectual with good knowledge of theology, especially French theology. He was hesitant – they called him Hamlet – but his primary concern was the welfare and unity of the Church. He brought the Council to a successful end, but after it was over he suffered greatly, going so far as to say that the devil had entered the Church.<sup>4</sup>

### **3.3. Keys for understanding Vatican II**

Rather than give detailed explanations of the 16 documents of the Council (4 constitutions, 9 decrees, and 3 declarations) along with their context, their genesis, and their interpretation, we prefer to provide a few keys that will help us to understand all the documents. In this way we will be able to discern the underlying constants that reveal the spirit of John XXIII's conciliar aggiornamento.

### 3.3.1. *A new stance toward the world: the «legitimate autonomy of creation»*

This new stance reflects the goodness and the realism of John XXIII and his openness to the whole world. He viewed all people with compassion and sought to do good by all. He wanted people to be optimistic and merciful, not prophets of doom.

The earlier theology was profoundly dualist (body and soul, heaven and earth, world and Church, profane and sacred, nature and grace). Vatican II departed from this worldview, especially in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. It affirmed that God and world are not rivals. Rather, the world is the work of God; God is the ultimate mystery of the world; the world is a sacrament of God; worldly reality is constitutive of the Church and of Christian life. Therefore, there exists only one history, the history of salvation. The Church does not consider itself superior to the world or opposed to the modern world. Rather, it is part of the world and of history. Vatican II moved from anathema to dialogue; it took human progress seriously and recognized the autonomy of creation [GS 36]. For this reason, said the Council, the Church not only gives to the world but receives from the world [GS 44], and the Church's pastors do not always have answers to every question [GS 43].

In this way Vatican II inaugurated a new, more inductive theological method, the so-called doctrine of the signs of the times [GS 4:11,44]. This method, recognizing that the Spirit of the Lord directs history and sows the seeds of God's Word in all cultures, seeks to discover God in

human reality. Vatican II was also a pastoral council and so gave birth to a pastoral theology that was not simply the application of dogma to practice; rather, it saw pastoral work as constitutive of theology of itself. Pastoral work was both the starting point and the end point for theology.

Concretely speaking, Vatican II expressed its positive regard for the human person [GS 12-17], for labor [GS 33-36], for culture [GS 53-62], and for all of creation. It reaffirmed that the goods of the earth exist for the benefit of everybody [GS 69]. In expressing its appreciation for the human person, the Council especially stressed respect for religious liberty. This was something new because in 1832 Pope Gregory XVI in *Mirari Vos* called religious liberty a pestilent error and delusion, and in 1864 Pope Pius IX condemned it in the *Syllabus of Errors*. Vatican II's document *Dignitatis Humanae* is dedicated to the defense of religious liberty; it states that every person has the right to follow his or her own conscience in religious matters.

But the Council was not naïve; it recognized the presence of sin and evil in the world, and it realized that there was a constant struggle between the light and the shadows [GS 13]. Accordingly, it denounced all that destroys the dignity of creation, and it condemned all sin that enslaves the human person [GS 13-14]. More concretely, it condemned atheism [GS 19-21]; racial, sexual, and cultural discrimination [GS 29]; degradation of human labor [GS 37] and culture [GS 56]; economic inequality [GS 66]; totalitarianism and dictatorship [GS 75]; torture and war [GS 82]. It sought to found

human dignity on Christ, the new man [GS 22,45].

In the Council's vision, the mission of the Church is not just religious and spiritualist but involves the whole human person; it preaches the Gospel to the whole of society insofar as it looks out for the welfare of human beings [GS 76].

### 3.3.2. *Rediscovering community: «the Lord established a people»*

The importance of the Church's communal dimension was rediscovered as the Council responded to the economic, social, political, and religious individualism of modern society. Human persons are essentially social beings, and the family is the first and most basic human community [GS 47-52]. All men and women are called to form one great family, living in a community modeled on the image of the Trinity. They should pursue the common good of all [GS 23-32] in a socio-economic community where material goods exist for the benefit of all [GS 63-72], in a political community that seeks the common good and respects the rights of all [GS 73-76], and in an international community that works for peace, collaboration, and justice [GS 77-91]. All this is founded on Christ who desires to bring together the community of God's children [GS 32].

This communitarian dimension, already implicit in *Gaudium et Spes*, reaches its full ecclesial significance in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. The first draft of the document was elaborated by the Roman curia but was rejected as excessively clerical, legalist, and triumphalist. It described the

Church in terms more characteristic of the Christendom of pre-Reformation times. A new document was drawn up which defined the Church as a community united by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [LG 4]; it is the People of God [LG II] moving toward eschatological fulfillment [LG VII]; it is the mystery and sacrament of salvation [LG I]; it is a community born of baptism and responding to the plan of God, who wants to save humankind not as isolated individuals but as a united people who knows him and serves him in holiness [LG 9].

In treating of the People of God [LG II] before the hierarchy [LG III], the laity [LG IV], and religious life [LG VI], this ecclesiology was truly revolutionary. The hierarchy and the various charisms are seen as oriented to community and ordained for the service of the People of God. The reaffirmation of the collegiality of all the bishops with the Pope is situated within this communitarian and synodal vision of the Church [LG 22-23]. Also, the recognition of the autonomy of the local Churches in communion with Rome is founded on a vision of the Church that is not pyramidal but collegial [LG 23]. The ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium* is centered on the People of God, the local Church, and episcopal collegiality; it is above all an ecclesiology of communion. It consequently brought about a transition from the Christendom ecclesiology of the second millennium to the communion ecclesiology more typical of the first millennium.

This concern for community and communion is what led the Council to stress the importance of ecumenism with the other Christian churches [LG 15] and

dialogue with non-Christian religions [LG 16]. These themes are developed in greater detail in the Document on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) and in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), respectively.

After Vatican II this communitarian spirit was reflected in synods, national bishops' conferences, pastoral councils, concern for world peace, and dialogue with those outside the Church. Paul VI dedicated his very first encyclical, *Ecclesia Suam*, to the theme of dialogue.

One of the main places where the mystery of the Church as community and communion is revealed is in liturgical celebration, especially the Eucharist. It is therefore natural that the first document approved by the Council was the Dogmatic Constitution on the Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), which brought together and synthesized the best contributions of the liturgical movement of the 1950s.

We have already commented on how the preconciliar Eucharistic liturgy, which had remained the same since the Council of Trent (1545-63), was a reflection of the old Christendom ecclesiology. A change in ecclesiology naturally leads to a change in liturgy since the liturgy is the community's celebration of Christ's salvation and helps the faithful penetrate into the paschal mystery. The Eucharist is the source and the summit of Christian life [SC 10].

According to Vatican II, the liturgy is an action not of the priest alone but of the whole assembly. Liturgical actions are not private devotions but celebrations of the whole Church. The entire People of God

[SC 26] participates actively in these celebrations [SC 17,18,30]. Both the clergy and the faithful were therefore in need of education regarding reform of the liturgy [SC 15-18]. The Word is what gives Spirit to the liturgy [SC 25,33].

The new theological vision produced sweeping liturgical reform and corresponding transformation of the rites. The vernacular was used; well chosen biblical readings were plentiful; the altar faced the people; the celebrant's seat was at the center and the tabernacle at the side; there were also the prayer of the faithful, the kiss of peace, communion under two species, renewal of the sacramental rituals, etc.

All these liturgical reforms were not just a concession to modern style but a concrete expression of the Church's identity as a community of baptized persons all of whom are equal before the Word and before God.

### 3.3.3. *Return to the sources:* *«Christ the mediator and fullness of revelation»*

John XXIII was a traditional man but firmly rooted in the true Tradition, which sought to make the Church resemble the village fountains, always ready to offer everyone the living water of the Gospel but without forcing anyone to drink the water.

The life the Church in Christendom had been centered on laws, norms, and structures. In 1816 Pius VII order Bishop Mohilev to retract his statements recommending that all Christians read the Word of God. Now Vatican II was encouraging a return to the sources, to the origins of the

true Tradition, to Christ. That is why the Council turned again to the Word of God, above all in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*). This renewed enthusiasm for the Word would make it easier to engage in dialogue with the Reformation churches.

Following the lead of the biblical movement, the Council restored the Word to its central place in Christian living. Citing Saint Jerome, *Dei Verbum* stated that «being ignorant of scripture is being ignorant of Christ» [DV 25]. If traditional theology had considered revelation to be a parcel of truths that God had communicated (or even dictated) to us and that constituted the «deposit of faith», the Council understood revelation as the living communication of God in history through Jesus and the Spirit. Revelation does not consist only of ideas; it communicates to us the life of the Spirit in the person of Jesus.

Thus it becomes clear that what comes first is not the human search for God but God's free communication of himself to humankind in creation and in history. Revelation is communicated to us not only through words but also through deeds, such as the liberation of the Exodus and the paschal mystery of Jesus. The God who spoke to us in the past through his Son keeps up the dialogue now with the spouse of his Son, the Church [DV8].

Revelation can be understood better with the help of contemplation, study, preaching, and spiritual experience [DV 8]. Revelation can be investigated scientifically with modern methods but should always be kept within the faith of the Church, which has the Spirit of the Lord. In response to those who wished to speak

of two sources of revelation, the Council stated that both Church Tradition and the scriptures proceed from one and the same source, Christ and his Spirit [DV 9].

For the Council the Word revealed in scriptures [DV] is present in the Church [LG 1-2,8] and active in the liturgy [SC]. It should be the soul of theological study. The whole Church is under the Word of God. This affirmation by the Council will later receive deeper treatment in the Church and will find new expression in the post-synodal exhortation of Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010).

It is also interesting to recall that the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) affirms that there is a hierarchy of truths and that not all truths have the same force and importance [UR 11]. For example, denying the divinity of Christ is not the same as denying the primacy of Peter.

### 3.3.4. *Rediscovering the Spirit: «the Spirit of the Lord fills the universe»*

John XXIII saw Vatican II as the Spirit's breathing new life into the Church, as renewal and *aggiornamento*, as a true Pentecost. This breath was a wind that would renew the Church and blow away the accumulated dust of past centuries.

Vatican II rediscovered the Spirit, which had been quite forgotten by the theology of the Latin Church. This rediscovery was no doubt helped by the presence at the Council of other Christian observers, especially the Orthodox Christians of the eastern Churches who always criticized Catholics for lack of attention to the Spirit. This highlighting of the Spirit is the key to understanding the Council documents; though silent and

unseen, the Spirit is present and gives life to the texts. The Council was truly an event where the Spirit blew where she would.

The Council recognized and reaffirmed that the Spirit has always been active in the world, in the Old Testament, in the prophets, and in Jesus. It is the Spirit who vivifies, sanctifies, guides, instructs, unifies, renews, and rejuvenates the Church [LG 4]. The Spirit inspires the scriptures, which need to be read in the light of the same Spirit [DV 7,9,12,18,21]. The Spirit acts in the sacraments of the Church and above all in the Eucharist [SC 6,43]. The Spirit anoints the faithful interiorly, gives full meaning to their faith, and assures their unflinching adherence to it [LG 12]. The Spirit bestows gifts and charisms on all the baptized [LG 12], raises up vocations to religious life [LG 44-45], and transfigures history and the world in the likeness of the eschatological fullness of the Kingdom [GS 37-39]. Christian life is, therefore, life according to the Spirit.

The Spirit is active in other Christian communities [LG 15; UR 3-4] and has given rise to the ecumenical movement of recent years [UR 1,4]. Moreover, Vatican II was moved by the Spirit when it affirmed that salvation exists outside the Church because Providence does not deny the assistance needed for salvation to those who live righteously without knowledge of Christian revelation [LG 16]. In a way known only to God, the Holy Spirit offers to all people the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery of Christ [GS 22]. The mysterious but efficacious presence of

the Spirit inspired both the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) and the Declaration on Relations with Non-Christians (*Nostra Aetate*), and it is this same Spirit who drives the missionary activity of the Church from within (see the decree *Ad Gentes*).

Not only does the Spirit lead the Church to her eschatological fullness, but the Spirit also guides the history of humankind, filling the universe and becoming visible in the signs of the time [GS 4,11,44]. Accordingly, recognition of religious liberty (*Dignitas Humanae*) does not mean yielding to relativism or denying Christian identity. Rather, it is a way of responding to the Spirit's signs of the times.

### **3.4. The final synthesis of Paul VI: a Samaritan spirituality**

In his discourse at the closing of Vatican II on 8 December, 1965, Paul VI expressed all these new dimensions in synthetic fashion:

«The religion of the God who becomes human has encountered the religion –for that is what it is– of human beings who would make themselves God. What has happened? A collision, a struggle, a condemnation? That could have happened, but it didn't. The old story of the Samaritan has set the guidelines for the Council's spirituality. Immense sympathy has pervaded all its proceedings. The discovery of human needs, which grow greater even as earth's children increase their power, has absorbed the attention of our gathering.» (no. 8)

The Pope later in his speech said the following:

«Let us remember how we can and must recognize the face of Christ the Son of Man in the face of every person, especially those faces made transparent by their tears and their pains (Matt 25:40); and let us remember how in the face of Christ we can and must also recognize the face of the heavenly Father. “Who

sees me sees the Father”, said Jesus (John 14:9). If we do this both the one and the other, then our humanism becomes Christianity, and our Christianity becomes theocentric to such an extent that we can also affirm: to know God it is necessary to know human beings.» (no. 16)

John XXIII’s spirit of *aggiornamento* pervaded the whole Council from beginning to end.

## 4. PERSONAL INTERLUDE: MY OWN EXPERIENCES OF THE COUNCIL

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During the years 1963-65, when the Council was in session under Paul VI, I was living in Rome and studying for my doctorate in theology. The excitement of the Council events was overflowing the Vatican halls and filling the streets. The whole city was vibrating with passionate enthusiasm and unprecedented joy. The debates and the voting in the Council sessions were closely followed day by day. We discussed the commentaries issued by the Vatican press office and devoured the reports of well-known journalists like Raniero La Valle in *L'Avenire d'Italia*, Henri Fesquet in *Le Monde*, and Martín Descalzo in *La Gaceta del Norte*. We filled Saint Peter's Square to watch the bishops and famous theologian entering and leaving the sessions.

Each night there were press conferences in which bishops, observers, and theologians commented on the progress of the Council. We heard from everybody: Karl Rahner on episcopal collegiality, Jean Daniélou on religious life, Yves Congar on the Church, Henri DeLubac on revelation, the Protestant theologian Oskar Cullman on salvation history, Cardinal Augustine Bea on ecumenism, Roger Schutz on Taizé, Sugranyes de Franc on schema XIII, etc.

A number of Third World bishops met together in a Roman college, with Brazi-

lian Helder Camara at their head, to treat of their specific problems. Their aim was to create a new face of the Church of the poor and to send prophetic messages to the other Council bishops. Some of the cardinals also gave conferences. I remember especially conferences at the Gregorian in which Cardinal Franz König of Vienna spoke about non-Christian religions and Cardinal Pellegrino of Turin spoke about the signs of the times, lamenting the fact that the Church had sometimes been very unaware of those signs.

Besides the ones I've already mentioned, other more progressive bishops were beginning to become known. I remember that Suenens of Belgium had an important role in introducing the chapter on the People of God in the Constitution on the Church. Alfrink of Holland, Döpfner of Germany, and Lercaro of Italy made highly publicized interventions on the importance of the poor in the Church. The Eastern Patriarch Maximus IV became well known for his freedom of spirit, as did Bettazzi of Italy for the ardor with which he defended episcopal collegiality. The more conservative prelates also became famous in their own way, such as Cardinal Ottaviani, head of the Holy Office, and Bishop Lefèbvre of France, a fierce opponent of religious liberty who ended up provoking a schism after the Council

We should also consider other events that coincided with Vatican II such as Paul VI's trip to the Holy Land, where he embraced the Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople, and his trip to Bombay, which left him profoundly impressed with the deep religious sense and the poverty of India. The assassination of John F. Kennedy profoundly moved the members of the Council, and a solemn funeral Mass was celebrated in the Basilica of Saint John Lateran. Meanwhile, the people of Rome were constantly visiting the tomb of John XXIII with great devotion and adorning it with flowers and garlands.

The hall of Saint Peter's Basilica, with its immense stands for 2,000 bishops, was for the most part reserved for the bishops, theologians, *periti*, and official observers

from other churches. With the help of a bishop, however, it was possible to get a pass to attend a conciliar session.

Thanks to Bishop Azcárate, a Cuban Jesuit, I was able to attend a morning session, which began with the Eucharist. Before Mass many bishops lined up to go to confession; this offered the world a new and refreshing image of a humble, sinful Church that was conscious of her need to be forgiven by God. After Mass the Book of the Gospels was enthroned as a sign that all the discussions were nothing more than an attempt to understand better the Word of God. For DeLubac this constituted the most impressive moment of the Council schedule: the Church placing herself beneath the Word.

Debate then began on the theme of the day, all in Latin. On that day it centered on marriage between Catholics and Protestants. I remember that Cardinal Heenan of London was in favor of festive celebrations of these matrimonies; he was opposed to the sad sight of brides being obliged to get married without flowers or music, as some bishops dictated. Halfway through the morning the bishops and the *periti* disappeared silently into a cafeteria situated in a side chapel, popularly known as «Bar Jona». There they drank coffee or a soft drink while they shared their impressions of the session just finished. At the end of the morning session the secretary of the Council, Bishop Pericles Felici, advised the bishops about the subsequent session in his Ciceronian Latin.

The Second Vatican Council was truly a phenomenon of the Spirit.

## 5. AFTER THE COUNCIL

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The prayers and the desires of John XXIII that Vatican II would be a kind of Pentecost for the Church were certainly heard by the Lord. The Council was an authentic outpouring of the Spirit onto the Church. It was a salvific event, a true *kairos*, a new Pentecost. Vatican II was a watershed between what came “before” and what came “after”.

### 5.1. Ecclesial springtime

It was a Council of the Church about the Church; it related to the Church in herself (*ad intra*), and it related the Church to the modern world (*ad extra*). True renewal was seen in every aspect of the Church:

– In the ecumenical sphere, the mutual excommunications between Rome and Constantinople were canceled, and meetings were held between Paul VI and Athenagoras in Jerusalem and Rome. Ramsay, the Primate of England, visited the Pope, and Paul VI traveled to Geneva for a meeting of the Reformed Churches.

– In the area of liturgy, as we mentioned above, there was a renewal of the sacramental rituals, especially of the Eucharist. Greater emphasis was placed on the Word and on preaching, the laity was allowed more participation, the vernacular was used in the liturgy, etc.

– More serious dialogue was undertaken with the non-Christian religions and with the modern world in general, all within an ambience of respect for religious liberty previously unknown.

– As regards Church structure, there were new modes of participation and collegiality in the form of episcopal

conferences, bishops' synods in Rome, pastoral councils in dioceses and parishes, assemblies and synods at the diocesan and national levels, etc.

– There was theological and spiritual renewal in the training of priests, in religious life, and among the laity, who took on a more active role in the Church.

– In the area of theology there was more serious study of biblical and patristic sources, and in liturgical and pastoral ministry there was greater openness to modern reality and the signs of the times.

In a word, there was a new mentality that could be called «conciliar» to distinguish it from the «preconciliar» mentality prior to Vatican II.

The following are the most significant ecclesiological changes that resulted from the Council:

– The Church grew from a second-millennium Christendom-type institution centered on power and hierarchy into a Church of the third millennium that is seeking to restore the communion ecclesiology more typical of the first millennium. In doing so, the Church seeks to open herself up to the challenges presented by the new signs of the times [GS 4,11,44].

– The Church grew from being centered on herself to being oriented toward the Kingdom of which the Church here on earth is the seed and the beginning [LG 5].

– The Church grew for being considered a «perfect» society as visible and historical as the Republic of

Venice or the Kingdom of the Franks (according to Robert Bellarmine) to being a Church of mystery rooted in the Trinity, a multitude gather together by the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [LG 4].

– The Church grew from being exclusively Christocentric (*Christomonist* in the vocabulary of Eastern theologians) to living under the Christological principle and at the same time under the pneumatological principle of the Spirit who rejuvenates, renews, and leads her to the fullness of union with Christ [LG 4].

– The Church grew from being centralist to being co-responsible and synodal and respectful of the local churches, in which and for the sake of which the universal Church exists [LG 23].

– The Church grew from being identified with the hierarchy to being seen as the whole People of God endowed with diverse charisms and ministries [LG II].

– The Church grew from being a triumphalist institution that gave airs of having already reached glory to being a Church that gets covered with dust as she walks along the road of history toward eschatological times [LG VII].

– The Church grew from being mistress, dominating mother, and universal teacher to being the servant of all, especially the poor, in whom she recognizes the image of her poor and patient founder [LG 8].

– The Church grew from being allied with the powerful to being sent to evangelized the poor, with whom she feels herself in solidarity [GS 1; LG 8].

– The Church grew from being an ark of salvation to being a sacrament of salvation [LG 1,9,48], engaged in dialogue with other churches and with other world religions and committed to recognizing religious liberty.

In this sense it has been said that Vatican II was a council of transition which helped the Church to move from a traditional ecclesiology to one more in keeping with the times.<sup>5</sup> As the Church thus moved from anathema to dialogue in a true *aggiornamento*, some overly optimistic observers thought that meant the *requiem* of Constantinism, the tomb of the Church of Christendom. As Joseph Comblin reports, however, the euphoria resulting from the Council lasted only three or four years.

## 5.2. From springtime to winter in the Church

Just as springtime produces thaws which can cause dangerous avalanches and mudslides, so the implementation of Vatican II after fifteen centuries of ecclesial Constantinism produced many exaggerated reactions in the bosom of the Church. From a sociological perspective this should not surprise us since it is only with great difficulty that most of the faithful change their traditional ways of thinking and acting.

Some conservative theologians resisted accepting Vatican II because they thought that the Church was bowing to modernity (J. Maritain, L. Bouyer, etc.). Even more intransigent was the posture of Bishop Marcel Lefèbvre, who ended up forming a dissident group, the Fraternity of Pius X. When he proceeded to ordain

his own bishops, he was excommunicated by John Paul II (1988). For the followers of Lefèbvre, the liturgical question (such as returning to the Latin liturgy of Pius V) was not the most important one; at the base of the split was a frontal attack on Vatican II, which was accused of yielding to Protestantism and modernism.

These reactionary postures were aggravated by the tendency of some progressive groups to interpret Vatican II with excessive freedom and exuberance, as if the Council had created a rupture with the true ecclesial tradition of the past. Such a way of understanding the Council led to abusive excesses in the areas of dogma, liturgy, morals, ecumenics, the mission to non-Christians, etc. What hurt most, however, was that many priests and religious abandoned Church ministry.

Additional problem resulted from the significant declines in Sunday church attendance, in reception of the sacraments, and in the number of religious and priestly vocations. Meanwhile, the divorce rate increased, religious indifference grew, and the general ambience became highly secularized and critical of the Church. All these negative developments were blamed on the Council.

By May of 1968 Paul VI was quite concerned about the struggles going on in the Church; he feared that the documents of the Council were being interpreted in ways that went beyond what the texts said. At that point he began to act more on his own. Without consulting with the bishops, he published the encyclical on celibacy (*Sacerdotalis Coelibatus*) and the Pope's Profession of Faith. He also published the encyclical against contraceptives (*Humanae Vitae*) even though a majority of his

own pontifical commission had counseled otherwise.

These developments explain why some very responsible and representative members of the Church criticized the way Vatican II was implemented, if not the Council itself. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the interview that Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, then prefect of the Congregation for the Defense of the Faith, gave to the Italian journalist Vittorio Messori in 1985.<sup>6</sup>

Ratzinger did not criticize the Council itself but only the «anti-spirit» of the Council that had been introduced into the Church; this «anti-spirit» resulted from the assaults of modernity and the cultural revolution on the whole of western culture. He did not advocate turning back but argued in favor of ecclesial restoration. He wanted to return to the authentic texts of the Council in order to find a new balance, to recover the unity and integrity of Church life, and to restore her relation with Christ. In the interview he did not express much inclination to emphasize the Church's historical nature, the signs of the times, or the concept of the People of God. He did not support the bishops' conferences which he thought interfered with the role of the local bishop. He thought that the twenty years following the Council had been unfavorable ones for the Church and contrary to what John XXIII had hoped for. He had no sympathy for the liberation theology of Latin America, the non-Christian religions, or the feminist movement. The tone of the dialogue is rather pessimist and somber. The sole hopeful ray of light for Ratzinger were the new lay movements and the charismatic renewal.<sup>7</sup>

In response to Ratzinger's critique of the post-Council years, the Cardinal of Vienna, Franz König, who played a very important role in Vatican II, wrote a book titled *Church, Where Are You Going?*<sup>8</sup> In the book he stated that a minority of the Council fathers had seen Vatican II as a threat, and they had used all their power to empty it of meaningful content. König claimed that the situation of the contemporary Church without Vatican II would be catastrophic, and he viewed the restoration attempts with suspicion.

The change of ecclesial climate that had begun in the time of Paul VI got consolidated in the long pontificate of John Paul II. As we have said already, John Paul II was post-Marxist and progressive in social concerns, but his thinking about Church matters was premodern.<sup>9</sup>

In 1984 John Paul II allowed diocesan bishops to grant permission for Mass to be celebrated in Latin according to the pre-Council rite. In 1985 he convoked an extraordinary synod on the Council, which ended up defending the integrity of Vatican II against those who attacked it. However, instead of using the concept of the People of God, the synod preferred to speak of the Church as communion and as the Body of Christ; it was claimed that the concept of the People of God was prone to sociological and political misinterpretation. The synod stressed the importance of holiness and the cross in the Church, and it also used the word «pluriformity» instead of «pluralism». Deeming *Gaudium et Spes* to be excessively optimistic and humanist, it proposed that the document be read from the perspective of *Lumen Gentium* and not the reverse.

The minority who were originally «defeated» by Vatican II have little by little been winning the day as regards the way the Council is interpreted and implemented (Alberigo). We have slowly passed from springtime to winter (K. Rahner); we have returned to the great discipline (J.B. Libanio), to ecclesial restoration (G.C. Zizola), to a dark night of the Church (J.I. González Faus). The journal *Concilium* featured the Council's great theologians, but in 1972 it was joined by the journal *Communio*, inspired by Hans Urs von Balthasar and following a different theological line. Von Balthasar seems to have become the great theological figure of the post-Council epoch, as Rahner was during the Council. Something is changing.

The magisterium produced a number of ecclesiological documents during the papacy of John Paul II—such as *Apostolos Suos* (1998) on bishops' conferences, *Communio Notio* (1992) on the local churches, and the *Instruction on Collaboration of the Faithful Laity in the Ministry of Priests* (1987)—but these clearly are a retreat from the profound inspiration of Vatican II.<sup>10</sup>

There is talk of ending experiments, and canon law has become the norm for authentic interpretation of the Council. Dissident theologians are being censured (Pohier, Schillebeeckx, Küng, Boff, Curran, Balasurya, De Mello, Dupuis, Haig, etc.). Conflicts arise with some religious orders (Jesuit, Franciscans, Carmelites, etc.). There are attempts to reverse earlier achievements through control of local churches, prevalence of nuncios, and selection of conservative bishops. The practice of the bishops' conferences are questioned, and their decisions are so

controlled that collegiality becomes an empty formality. The Roman synods are only consultative and treat strictly intra-ecclesial matters. There are negative responses to such pastoral demands as communion for the divorced and remarried, admission of women to ministry, and sacramental discipline. The liturgical reform is further reformed. Church governance returns to being pyramidal, clerical, and authoritarian. Everything having to do with base communities is watered down. The phrase «option of the poor» has the adjective «preferential» added to it. At the same time there is strong support for lay movements of a traditional nature with little social sensitivity or advocacy; these include Opus Dei, Communion and Liberation, the Legionaries of Christ, and the Neo-catechumenate.

Despite this reversals, we should recognize that John Paul II made some important gestures of openness, such as the meeting in Assisi with representatives of all the world religions (1986), the invitation for all Christians to rethink the manner in which the primacy of Peter is exercised in the Church (*Ut Unum Sint* [1996]), the exhortation to the faithful to follow the Council teaching (*At the Beginning of the Third Millennium* [1994]), and his asking forgiveness in the jubilee year 2000 for the Church's sins during the second millennium.

Benedict XVI acceded to the pontificate in 2005, during a time of ecclesial confrontation and conflict when there was increasing debate about interpretation of the Council. Benedict spoke of a confrontation between two hermeneutics, the hermeneutics of discontinuity or rupture and the hermeneutics of reform.<sup>11</sup> In 2007

the Pope allowed the whole Church to use the Latin ritual of Pius V's Roman Missal which predated the reforms of 1970. In 2009 he lifted the excommunication of several bishops of the Lefèbvre schism. These actions have provoked considerable consternation and even indignation in many sectors of the Church. They are considered a pastoral error (Hünemann) and a step backward with regard to the Council. They are seen as yielding to the pressures of more conservative groups which reject the Council's liturgical reform and the ecclesiology of *Lumen Gentium*, as well as the Council's positions on religious liberty and dialogue with non-Christian religions.<sup>12</sup>

### 5.3. Symptoms of disquiet

Fifty years after Vatican II convened, some people are asking whether anything really happened at the Council.<sup>13</sup> In response to those who have doubts and criticize what has been happening, historians like G. Alberigo and J. O'Malley have demonstrated that Vatican II was truly a «significant event». In counter-response are the arguments of people like Bishop A. Marchetto, who claims that Vatican II brought about no historical changes and that it is better to speak of continuity.<sup>14</sup>

We are in fact witnessing a slow but steady regression to pre-conciliar times. A counter-reformation is attempting to reform the Council's reforms. Rome has continued to function the same as before the Council; the Curia has overwhelmed the forces for renewal; centralism has won out over local church autonomy. In a word, the Council has been dismantled piece by piece (E. Biser). In all of Church

history we have never seen such a repudiation of the conclusions of a legitimate council (P. Hünemann). Every effort has been made to minimize the Council's teaching and to retreat from the «great leap forward» that the Council made.

Setting up an opposition between continuity and novelty is faulty reasoning. No serious theologian holds that Vatican II created a rupture with respect to the great tradition of the Church. Rather, what it brought about was in the line with Newman's teaching on «doctrinal development»: it was continuity open to novelty, or novelty in profound continuity with tradition. As John XXIII wrote in his diary a few days before his death: «It's not as if the Gospel has changed; it's just that we have begun to understand the Gospel better». In any case, the most serious rupture has been brought about not by progressives but by the extreme right-wing followers of Lefèbvre.

This involution has caused great disillusionment among the faithful who were hopeful that the Council would renew the Church. Many good-willed Christians have left the Church silently, especially young people and women. The Church runs the risk of becoming a subculture or a ghetto, but as Rahner tells us, we should not confuse the «small flock» with a sect. There has recently been a growing outcry against the movement toward a ghetto.<sup>15</sup> We are face to face with an ecclesial crisis which some people compare to the crisis that preceded the Reformation of the 16th century.

The Church has lost its credibility, and it has great difficulty situating itself in the contemporary social and cultural context. It is a clerical organization in a society that

is often anticlerical; it is vertically structured in a democratic society; it silences women even a feminism grows stronger throughout the world; and it subordinates lay people in a lay-run society. Once again the Church has become infused with anti-modern features.<sup>16</sup>

#### 5.4. Causes of the ecclesial involution

The Second Vatican Council was deficient in ways that have thwarted its positive elements and overshadowed them.

In order to obtain a larger consensus of the bishops, the Council had to approve a series of amendments proposed by the more conservative groups. As a result, the Council's ecclesiology contains a certain ambiguous duality, as the Italian theologian L. Acerbi has pointed out: on the one hand, there is the juridical stress of traditional ecclesiology, and on the other there is the more affirmative quality of an ecclesiology of communion.

Another deficiency is that Vatican II was not able to spell out the concrete application of some of the major themes it discussed; general pronouncements were left without specification of practical measures. In many cases the Council formulated only theoretical principles and underestimated the difficulty of putting the reforms it proposed into practice. The Council's documents were never truly institutionalized. No concrete proposals were made regarding topics such as the election of bishops, the election of the Pope, the importance of the bishops' conferences, the authority of the Roman synods, the relation of laity to ordained ministers, or the power of lay people in the Church.

Moreover, the Council failed to treat some of the more controversial topics such as priestly celibacy, the decrease in the number of ordained ministers, the ordination of married men (*viri probati*), the role of women in society and the Church, sexuality and birth control, the discipline of matrimony, the function of the Roman curia, the relation between civil laws and moral precepts, and the ecclesiological status of auxiliary bishops, nuncios, and cardinals.

Anxious to avoid division in the Church, Pope Paul VI himself ordered that a *Nota previa* be introduced at the end of *Lumen Gentium*. He seemed to fear that episcopal collegiality would diminish the papal power proclaimed at Vatican I; he wanted it to be perfectly clear that the Pope maintained his primacy in the episcopal college.

In addition to all this, Vatican II failed to realize the prophetic dream of John XXIII that the Church would truly become the Church of the poor. Apart from a brief allusion to the topic in *Lumen Gentium* 8 and *Gaudium et Spes* 1, the Council documents, which were drawn up mainly by bishops and theologians from the North, place little importance on the role of the poor. In 1968 it was the Latin American Church that took up the theme when it spoke of the option for the poor and condemned the unjust structures of sin that oppress the people.

As a result of these lacunae, Vatican II's magnificent ecclesiology of communion has been only half realized in practical terms. After the Council, during the papacy of Paul VI, many of these topics gave rise not only to discussion but to conflict.

Think for example of the polemics that arose around *Humanae Vitae*.

The Roman curia under Ottaviani's leadership always viewed the Council with suspicion. If the Council's decrees were given practical application, the curia would lose power. As a result, implementation was impeded, and barriers were often set up between the Pope and the bishops of the world. The Council documents were interpreted in a literalist, minimalist manner, that is, according to the norms of Christendom, Trent, and Vatican I. Clear examples of this involution are the new *Code of Canon Law* (1983) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992).

The Church's magisterium was besieged by traditionalist bishops and theologians who were terrified at the thought of the Council's possible consequences. Acceding to the petitions of conservatives, the curia put the brake on reforms and censured prophetic positions that were considered dangerous.

## 5.5. Outstanding matters

There are a number of themes which the Council could not treat or which it treated inadequately. We offer here a long list of the principal ones.

- Reform of the Petrine ministry in accord with the desire John Paul II expressed in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, so that the exercise of the papacy ceases to be a major obstacle to the union of Christians. It has been proposed that the Pope no longer be a head of state and that the curia be thoroughly reformed since it has

seriously hindered the implementation of the Council's decrees and has obstructed the relations between the Pope and the bishops. There is a need to revise the whole question of «sacred power» in the Church.

- Revision of structures relating to cardinals and nuncios as diplomatic bishops, since they are positions that correspond more to a Christendom-style of Church than to Vatican II.

- Participation of the Christian people in the election of their bishops.

- Making episcopal collegiality more effective by granting greater autonomy to the local churches as regards doctrines of faith, law, and liturgy.

- Making the Roman synods deliberative and not just consultative.

- Improving relations between the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and theologians by creating a climate of sincere dialogue, respecting human rights, and doing away with humiliating secret processes that violate human dignity.

- Being open to other forms of ordained ministry, which can include ordination of married men who are mature in their faith (*viri probati*).

- No longer considering celibacy as an obligatory condition for ordained ministry in the Latin Church.

- Reevaluation of the role of women in the Church and elimination of all forms of chauvinist patriarchy. Reconsidering whether excluding women from ordained ministry should be considered something «definite» and truly undebatable, especially since this

exclusion seems to have no foundation in scripture or tradition.

– Promoting the role of the laity and their ministries; improving their training; giving them full confidence and autonomy; listening to them and seeking their advice in matters of their competency such as marriage and the family, economics, politics, science, culture, etc.

– Greater respect for the charisms of religious life and for the role of women religious and brothers, which means not using them to make up for the lack of clergy and giving them parish jobs indiscriminately.

– Thorough revision of the official doctrine on birth control and contraceptives; renewed consideration of homosexuality, premarital relations, communion for remarried divorced persons; these should be seriously rethought on the basis of anthropology, psychology, and modern science.

– Greater dialogue with the fields of medicine and genetics about many topics of bioethics.

– Relaunching ecumenical efforts which are now being restrained, and greater openness to inter-religious dialogue.

– Continuation of liturgical reform, permitting greater freedom to bishops' conferences and allowing greater space for variation of forms according to different cultures and traditions.

– Renewal of ecclesial language in theology and catechetics as well as in the magisterium and the liturgy. The

present language tends to be «anachronistic, boring, repetitive, moralizing, and ill-adapted to today's world» (Boulad).

– Last but not least, we must take very seriously the initial proposal of John XXIII that the Church, while certainly universal, but above all be the Church of the poor.

No doubt there are other themes that Vatican II could not foresee. Two examples are the insertion of the new lay ecclesial movements in the local church and the challenge of the environment and respect for the natural world.

## 5.6. Change of emphases

Keeping in mind the diverse ways Vatican II has been interpreted and implemented, if we examine the new socio-ecclesial context in which we live, we will come to realize that in these 50 years there has been a steady shift in accents and interest regarding the relevance of the council documents.

To take one example, while the ecclesiology of Vatican II, expressed principally in *Lumen Gentium*, was that of an already constituted Church, nowadays we see that the decree *Ad Gentes* on the Church's missionary activity takes on great urgency and significance. This is so not only for the so-called «mission lands» but also and perhaps especially for the traditionally Catholic countries which have today become truly mission territories badly in need of a new evangelization. Was it any accident that the synod of bishops in 2012 was about the new evangelization?

Furthermore, the Council's ecumenism, expressed above all in the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, seems to have been somewhat displaced by the inter-religious dialogue that the same Council promoted in its decree *Nostra Aetate*. What meaning and urgency can there be in the in-house discussions with Orthodox Christians, Evangelicals, and Anglicans when the most serious problems concern our relations with the great non-Christian majorities? The whole ecumenical problematic obviously does not disappear, but it becomes subordinated to the political and religious problems involved in dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and other types of religious expression, both traditional and postmodern.

What is happening? How are we to interpret these changes that affect the very nature of our ecclesial reality?

### **5.7. From ecclesiology to the problem of God**

This overview would be excessively intra-ecclesial and basically false if we did not take into account the social, political, economical, cultural, and religious events of the last 50 years, ranging from the events of May 1968 to the protest of the *indignados* of 2011. We have seen the fall of the Berlin Wall, the destruction of the Twin Towers, globalization, postmodernity, the present economic crisis of neoliberalism, African turmoil, new technology, advances in science and biology, climatic change, the new axial age with a changing religious paradigm, and so many other things. We are experiencing an earthquake or a tsunami that is overturning everything, and naturally the religious sphere as

well. We are entering into a new world and experiencing a change of epochs. There is a crisis of world culture that is not exactly destructive, but it is of unprecedented proportions; it affects all dimensions of our existence: social, economic, political, cultural, religious, and spiritual.

To blame Vatican II or the Roman curia for all these disparities would be extremely unfair.

All these changes naturally affect our religious and ecclesial consciousness. J.B. Metz has formulated in a kind of sorites the changes we are experiencing in this regard. As we emerge out of an epoch of unquestioningly belonging to the Church, we are today first affirming «Christ yes, the Church no», and then advancing to «God yes, Christ no», and then further on saying «religion yes, God no», and finally asserting «spirituality yes, religion no».

In this chaotic climate of change and generalized uncertainty, the problematic of Vatican II has been in a way displaced and even superseded. There is no longer much sense in limiting ourselves to discussing liturgical rites, the Vatican curia, the decrease in Sunday Mass attendance, birth control, communion for divorced people, or homosexual couples. The problems are much more radical and deep-seated. The younger generations are the ones who perceive them and suffer them.

Vatican II had a strong ecclesiological emphasis, which was expressed in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. The Council was responding to the question that Paul VI had posed to the Council fathers: «Church, what do you say about yourself?» All the other documents revolve around the Church and converge toward her: revelation, liturgy, laity, People of God, hierarchy,

religious life, ecumenism, dialogue with the modern world, religious liberty, etc.

But while addressing a social forum in France a few years after Vatican II, Paul VI himself changed the question and asked, «Church, what do you say about God?».

Cardinal Walter Kasper acknowledged that Vatican II limited itself to the Church and ecclesial matters to such an extent that it failed to treat of God, the authentic content of faith.<sup>17</sup> Karl Rahner went so far as to state that the First Vatican Council was bolder than Vatican II in that it dared to treat the question of God's ineffable mystery. In this regard he wrote: «The future will not ask the Church about the most precise and beautiful forms of liturgy nor about the controversial theological doctrines that distinguish Catholic doctrine from the teachings of non-Catholic Christians nor about a more or less ideal organization of the Roman curia. The future will ask whether the Church can bear witness to the intimate guidance of the ineffable mystery we call

God. ... That is why the answers and solutions of the recent Council can be no more than a first step toward what the Church of the future must do».<sup>18</sup>

The Church must concentrate on what is essential; she must return again to Jesus and the Gospel; she must regain a spiritual experience of God (mystagogy). Ours is an age of spirituality and mysticism. It is an age of prophecy that confronts a world where the greater part of humanity is poor and excluded from the wealth of the earth, an earth which itself is seriously threatened. Mysticism and prophecy are inseparable. The Church is called upon to awaken hope and instill meaning into a world that is death-bound. This is not a time for half-hearted revamping.

We should not fool ourselves. We should not give in to the temptation to play our violins while the Titanic is sinking. The Church must be a mystagogical community;<sup>19</sup> it must be a hermeneutical community that helps to mediate the encounter with the God of Jesus and with the poor instead of obstructing it.

## 6. CONCLUSION: FROM CHAOS TO *KAIROS*

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In this climate of generalized confusion and crisis, we Christians believe that it is a moment not of death but of birth. We believe that present in the midst of this chaos is the *Ruah*, the Spirit who hovered over the primeval chaos to bring forth life, the same Spirit that begot Jesus of the Virgin Mary and raised him up from the dead. This is the Spirit who guides the Church and all humankind. The present crisis is not the first one through which the Church has passed. This can be a paschal moment, the passage from death to life. Out of the chaos can arise a time of grace, a *kairos*, and a renewed Church, one that is poorer, more evangelical, and truly Nazarene.

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Amid the complaints and discontent of Christians who demand this new style of Church in order to escape from the present ecclesial impasse, we can discern the living presence of the Spirit who is groaning and pleading for a different kind of Church. Another Church is possible; another Church is necessary (J. Sobrino).

Meanwhile, we have to continue the still unfinished process of adopting Vatican II and doing the best we can with its legacy, for we cannot respond to the challenges of today without the light of its intuitions. We must be converted to the same Spirit that moved John XXIII to call the Council; we must imitate his goodness, his willingness to dialogue, and his

mercy, serenity, and confidence in God. At the same time, we must be in tune with his desire for *aggiornamento* and his desire to make a great leap forward. We must not become disillusioned but must rather work from below to renew the Church just as the renewal movements of the 1950s did. After a harsh winter there are always the spring blossoms.

We cannot be «prophets of doom». We must feel with the Church, or better still, we must feel ourselves Church, even in the middle of the ecclesial winter. God and his Reign are greater than the Church. The Church is sinful, but she is under the force

of the Lord's Spirit who never abandons her. The Church is not identified simply with the hierarchy; she is the Church of the poor, historical Jesus; she is the Church incarnated in the smallness and fragility of the human race as a sign of contradiction like Jesus himself. We should be grateful that the Church has given us the best of what it possesses, Jesus. And all of us, both hierarchy and faithful, must be converted to the Gospel. We must remain critically and defiantly faithful, but always hoping against hope in the One «who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist» (Rom 4:17).<sup>20</sup>

1. There is a classical axiom of Prospero of Aquitaine which states, «*lex orandi, lex credendi*», that is, the form of prayer expresses the form of belief.
2. H. Denzinger was the German Jesuit who authored a classical work that gathers the key texts of the Church councils and the pontifical magisterium. This work has been updated in recent years with the collaboration of other theologians such as Rahner, Schönmetzer, and Hünemann.
3. See R. AUBERT, *La théologie catholique au milieu du XXe. siècle*, Tournai 1954.
4. For a more complete study of Vatican II we refer the reader to these specialized works: G. ALBERIGO, ed., *Historia del Concilio Vaticano II*, 5 vv., Salamanca, Sígueme, 2008; S. MADRIGAL, *Vaticano II: Remembranza y actualización*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2002; *Unas lecciones sobre el Vaticano II y su legado*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2012; E. VILANOVA, *El Concilio Vaticà II*, Barcelona, Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya, 1995; J. M<sup>a</sup>. ROVIRA BELLOSO, *Vaticano II: Un concilio para el tercer milenio*, Madrid, B.A.C., 1997.
5. A. J. de ALMEIDA, *Lumen Gentium. A transição necessária*, São Paulo, 2005.
6. V. MESSORI, J. RATZINGER, *Informe sobre la fe*, Madrid, B.A.C., 1985.
7. A text helpful for understanding the theological thought of J. Ratzinger is that of J. MARTÍNEZ GORDO, *La cristología de Josef Ratzinger-Benedicto XVI. A la luz de su biografía teológica*, Barcelona, Cristianisme i Justícia, Cuaderno 158, 2008.
8. K. KÖNIG, *Iglesia ¿adónde vas?*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 1986.
9. J. I. GONZÁLEZ FAUS, *Comprender a Karol Wojtyła*, Santander, Sal Terrae, 2005.
10. J. MARTÍNEZ GORDO, «Datos y razones de la involución eclesial», *Éxodo*, no. 109, June 2011, pp. 5-12.
11. BENEDICT XVI, *Discourse of Christmas Greeting to the Roman Curia*, 2005, published in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98 (2006), pp. 40-53.
12. J. PEREA, J. I. GONZÁLEZ FAUS, A. TORRES QUEIRUGA, J. VITORIA: *Clamor contra el gueto*, Madrid, Trotta, 2012, pp. 9-23.
13. D. G. SCHULTENHOVER (ed.), *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?*, New York 2007.
14. A. MARCHETTO, *El Concilio Ecuménico Vaticano II. Contrapunto para su historia*, Valencia 2008. See also S. MADRIGAL, *El aggiornamento, clave teológica para la interpretación del Concilio*, Santander, Sal Terrae, February 2010, pp. 111-127.
15. PEREA, GONZALEZ FAUS, TORRES QUEIRUGA, VITORIA, *Clamor contra...*
16. J. A. ESTRADA, «La pérdida de credibilidad de la Iglesia», in *Clamor contra...*, pp. 205-207.
17. W. KASPER, «El desafío permanente del Vaticano II», in *Teología e Iglesia*, Barcelona 1989, p. 414.
18. K. RAHNER, *El Concilio, nuevo comienzo*, Barcelona, Herder, 1966, p. 22.
19. F. J. VITORIA, *No hay "territorio comanche" para Dios*, Madrid 2009, pp. 163-193.
20. Allow me to refer to my booklet, *Sentirse Iglesia en el invierno eclesial*, Barcelona, Cristianisme i justícia, EIDES 46, 2006.



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