DEVELOPMENTS, REFORMS, AND TWO GREAT REFORMATIONS: TOWARDS A HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT OF VATICAN II

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WE HAVE just celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the start of Vatican Council II, and questions about its significance exercise us today as urgently as they did while the Council was in session.[1] These questions are often addressed to historians. The familiar evasion that it is too soon to judge is not without merit, but it also risks relegating the historical profession to irrelevance for the contemporary life of the Church.[2] It was for this reason that I attempted some years ago in the pages of this journal to venture an assessment of the Council, and I would now like to take up the subject again, but from a different point of view.[3] The present article presupposes the earlier one and builds upon it.

In that earlier article I stated: "In the breadth of its applications and in the depths of its implications, *aggiornamento* was a revolution in the history of the idea of reform."[4] I still stand by that judgment. The question today, however, is not whether "the idea" of *aggiornamento* was revolutionary but whether the applications and implications of the idea are correspondingly being translated into action. Is a "revolution" taking place, or did Catholicism simply indulge in a momentary flirtation or infatuation with an idea? How much and how deeply have things changed? What kind of "reform" did the Council initiate, and how can its magnitude, or finitude, be assessed? These are the questions that seem to be on many people's minds.

[1] The problem appears in many forms. See, e.g., Andrew M. Greeley, "The Failures of Vatican II after Twenty Years," *America* 146, no. 5 (Feb. 6, 1982) 86–89, and the various responses in the same journal, 146, no. 23 (June 12, 1982) 454–61; Antonio Acerbi, "Receiving Vatican II in a Changed Historical Context," in *Where Does the Church Stand?*, Concilium 146 (1981) 77–84; Alberto Abelli, "Ein Grundgesetz der Restauration? Zum Entwurf einer 'Lex fundamentalis' der Kirche," *Herder Korrespondenz* 33 (1979) 36–43; Karl Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *TS* 40 (1979) 716–27; various authors, "Vatican II 20 Years Later," *National Catholic Reporter* 18, no. 44 (Oct. 8, 1982); William McSweeney, *Roman Catholicism: The Search for Relevance* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980).

[2] On this issue see my "Church History in the Service of the Church," *America* 147, no. 10 (Oct. 9, 1982) 188–90.

[3] "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's Aggiornamento," *TS* 32 (1971) 573–601.

[4] Ibid. 576.

There can be no doubt, of course, that the Council effected some change. We worship and pray differently. Our official stance towards other religious bodies is different. We now must reckon with the inescapably obvious phenomenon of change in a Church that previously boasted that it did not change. But now we ask how these changes are being "received" and whether we are slipping back into previous patterns, invoking the documents of the Council to ratify the *status quo antea*. Are the changes that the Council promoted to be interpreted in some minimal or some maximal sense? These are simply other ways of posing the same questions as above, but they have the advantage of highlighting the most incontestable feature of any "reform" or "reformation": its claim to effect change.

Today no one with even the slightest knowledge about the history of the Christian Church denies that it has during its long course in this world undergone a number of significant changes—in its organization, in the styles of its theology, in the forms of its piety, in the ways it exercises its ministries. From a theological viewpoint one could postulate that this phenomenon of change is implied in the very incarnational or historical nature of Christianity. Change does not, therefore, jeopardize a deeper identity; it is, rather, the precondition for maintaining the authenticity of that identity. These postulates or their equivalents seem to have undergirded, in any case, every reform or reformation the Christian tradition has known. In this article I shall simply take them for granted and limit my task here to categorizing, analyzing, and even quantifying the forms in which change has taken place. With that task accomplished, we will still not be able perfectly to assess Vatican II, but we shall have moved "towards an assessment," which is all that I—or any historian at this stage—can hope to achieve.

I believe that if we look at the history of Christianity, we can see change taking place in three general ways. I will use the terms "developments," "reforms," and "reformations" to denote those ways. The meanings I give the terms are my own. The methodology I use in arriving at them is vaguely inspired by the work of Erwin Panofsky,[5] Crane Brinton,[6] Ian Barbour,[7] and Thomas Kuhn,[8] who applied similar approaches to quite different historical phenomena. I am aware of the

[5] *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

[6] *The Anatomy of Revolution* (rev. ed.; Engelwood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1952).

[7] *Myths, Models, and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

[8] *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970). The book has been the subject of an immense amount of discussion and controversy. See, e.g., David A. Hollinger, "T. S. Kuhn's Theory of Science and Its Implications for History," *American Historical Review* 78 (1973) 370–93; and Garry Gutting, ed., *Paradigms and Revolutions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1980).

pitfalls of these approaches and of the criticisms their creators received, but at present I know of no better way of going about the project I have undertaken. I take full responsibility for the method, and I do not ask any of the distinguished historians I have cited to assume responsibility for what, in the final analysis, is a way of looking at the phenomenon of change in the Church that is personal to me.

My documentation, moreover, will be small because the issues are big. This is not a sly way of saying "trust me," but a straightforward admission that my theses cannot be strictly proved. I am engaged in a historical essay, with all the cautions for the reader that such an enterprise entails.

First, then, a definition of terms. By "developments" I mean all those changes, some of them of vast proportions, that have occurred in the Church without being deliberately and self-consciously initiated by Church leadership for the good of the Church. This lack of original self-determination is what, in this definition, distinguishes "developments" from both "reforms" and "reformations." Developments are changes in mentality or structures that occur in tandem with realities located "outside" the Church, often by a kind of osmosis with them. So gradual and unobtrusive at times is their impact that they may only with the benefit of considerable hindsight be recognized as even having taken place. Once recognized, however, as affecting the Church, some developments have been repudiated as abuses, whereas others have been ratified and embraced. Only upon recognition, if it ever occurs, might developments therefore begin to assume some characteristics of reform or reformation. ˙

Examples of developments abound. One of the earliest and most striking was the change in cultural framework that early Christianity underwent as it was gradually and more effectively assimilated into the Hellenistic world. The "gospel" may or may not have been "Hellenized," but it surely began to be conceptualized and articulated in a different cultural framework than that of Jesus the Jew.

Constantine issued his edict of toleration without the organized initiative of Church membership, yet momentous changes resulted for the Church. Later, the conversion of the barbarian tribes resulted in the phenomenon known as the Feudal Church. Then the revival of urban life in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the establishment of universities in the thirteenth effected other changes. The invention of printing and, almost in our own day, the invention of radio and television supply examples of further changes that took place "outside" the Church but that have affected it. The evolving role of women in modern society is another such development, as is the emergence of democracy as a characteristic political form of many modern states.

There are, however, other changes that came about in a different way,

changes that were self-consciously initiated by membership within the Church for the presumed good of the Church, changes *in melius*. This is the common characteristic of what I mean by both "reform" and "reformation," and that is how those terms are generally understood by historians.[9] It can effectively be argued that none of these self-conscious phenomena, no matter how important they may have been, brought about such profound changes as did some of the developments I mentioned. Be that as it may, "reforms" and "reformations" have been a significant feature of Church history, especially in the West since the eleventh century, and the very presupposition that underlay them—that the Church has the right, and sometimes the duty, to initiate changes within itself—is a fact of great importance. In any case, it is somewhere within these two categories that Vatican II must be located; for, whatever else it did, it surely undertook its task of *aggiornamento* in a fully self-conscious way.

How do I distinguish reform from reformation? Here I am dependent upon Thomas Kuhn. By "reform" I mean simply all those changes enacted within the Church that take place within a given frame of reference. They are changes within a system. They are "adjustments" or "emendations," terms sometimes used to describe what Vatican II was all about.[10] They do not require or effect a new "myth," "model," "universe of discourse," or a new "paradigm." In fact, they support or further articulate certain unchallenged assumptions within a given system. They do not rock the boat; they steady it on its course.

Some examples will perhaps clarify what I mean. The decree *Omnis utriusque sexus* of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215, required annual confession and Communion during the Easter season of every adult Christian. This was a reforming decree, and an important one at that. Yet it did not shock the system. It built on a pattern of piety already recognized as normative, and it confirmed a sacramental practice and theology that were not contested. No matter how effectively or ineffectively the decree was implemented, there is no record of formal or organized opposition to it.

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[9] One of the first to study the phenomenon was Yves M.-J. Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'église* (Paris: Cerf, 1950). For further bibliography see my "Reform, Historical Consciousness" 573, nn. 1 and 2. To these listings should now be added other works such as Giuseppe Alberigo, "'Réforme' en tant que critère de l'histoire de l'église," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 76 (1981) 72–81; Marc Venard, "Réforme, Réformation, Préréforme, Contre-Réforme: Etude de vocabulaire chez les historiens récents de la langue française," in *Historiographie de la Réforme*, ed. Philippe Joutard (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1977) 352–65. See also, along a slightly different line, my "Catholic Reform," in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982) 297–319.

[10] See my "Reform, Historical Consciousness" 576.

The Council of Trent insisted on the duty of bishops to reside in their dioceses. The Council almost destroyed itself in the bitter debate over whether this duty was *jure divino* or *jure humano*, but there was no serious question that this was a duty to be insisted upon. It was a decree, moreover, meant to strengthen a system already normatively in place, not to dislodge it with a new one.

The approbation given the mendicant orders like the Dominicans and Franciscans in the thirteenth century began to alter the way religious life was conceived and practiced in the Church. These approvals practically for the first time officially invested religious with the care of souls. The recurring conflicts that the mendicants had with the bishops through most of the Late Middle Ages indicate that certain old prerogatives were challenged, and a new, parallel system of ministry had come into being as a result of initiatives within the Church.

Nonetheless, it can be argued that this change was simply an adjustment in a system in which monks had, in fact, long engaged in ministry of both word and sacrament, though that ministry was at times officially denied them.[11] Bitter though the conflicts between the mendicants and the bishops were at times, the status of the mendicants does not seem to represent an across-the-board shift in ministerial or ecclesiological paradigm. My very hesitancy in pronouncing in this case indicates, however, that in practice it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish between "reform" and "reformation."

What, then, do I mean by "reformation"? I mean a self-consciously induced change in ecclesiastical life or consciousness that is based on principles that tend to dislodge old ones. This reorientation implies, in Kuhn's term, a paradigm shift. It is *not* "puzzle solving" or "mopping up." It means the displacement of one inclusive model or even world view for another. When Copernican astronomy replaced Ptolomaic, to use one of Kuhn's examples, it created a different way of viewing the universe and did not merely effect an adjustment within a prevailing view. It forced the abandonment of certain basic assumptions and it replaced them with new ones.

The difficulties in applying such a construct to the history of Christianity are even more enormous than those in applying it to the history of science. For believing Christians, for instance, a total shift of paradigm is by definition impossible. Moreover, the charting of changes in assumptions and in consequent practice in a reality as sprawling as the history of Christianity, or even in a single moment of it, is fraught with problems of which the appearance of a new scientific theory, usually in the mind

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[11] See canon 16 of Lateran Council I, 1123, in *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, ed. Guiseppe Alberigo *et al.* (2nd ed.; Rome: Herder, 1962) 169.

of one individual, is innocent. Nonetheless, it seems to me that enough can be salvaged in the construct to allow it to be of some use to us in the task in which we are engaged. The difficulties should not, however, be minimized.

There is no doubt, in any case, that some of the proposed or even actualized changes that have occurred in Christian history were of far greater import than others, and that we fail to understand them if we in unreflective manner equate them with lesser ones. Some changes do not merely confirm and further elaborate received ideas and institutions; they challenge and contradict them. They originate from different pre-suppositions. To understand Luther's conflict with the Catholic Church, the comparison of his doctrine of "justification by faith alone" with the teaching of the Council of Trent on that same issue is only a first step. The inquiry will be hopelessly superficial unless it goes further. That doctrine is the tip of a *different* iceberg.[12]

Are there in the long history of Christianity any phenomena of self-consciously induced changes that qualify as "reformations"—or, to be slightly safer, as *"great* reformations." In my opinion, there are two: the so-called Gregorian Reform of the eleventh century and the Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth. It is by an analysis of them that I intend to move "towards a historical assessment of Vatican II," in order to judge whether that Council better fits the category of "reform" or "reforma-tion." I will try to isolate and analyze features in the two reformations that made them successful and thereby try to construct an "anatomy" or a "structure" of an ecclesiastical reformation.

By a "successful reformation" I mean merely that, within the limits of all historical endeavors, the change was able to institutionalize itself in such an effective fashion that it wrought a transformation in ways of thinking and behaving that had extremely long-range effects. By "suc-cess" I mean, therefore, that the change was clearly identifiable as relating to the impulse that initiated it, that it clearly displaced or notably modified older institutions, that it created mechanisms and agents to perpetuate itself so that a reversal of course would for a long period of time be virtually impossible. By "success" I do not mean to pass judgment on any of the other merits or demerits of the phenomena in question.

I
THE GREGORIAN AND LUTHERAN REFORMATIONS

Before I proceed to an analysis of these two movements, some back-ground information may be helpful. I assume that the readers of this

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[12] See, e.g., my "Erasmus and Luther: Continuity and Discontinuity as Key to Their Conflict," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 5/2 (1974) 47–65, now reprinted in my *Rome and the Renaissance* (London: Variorum, 1981) XII.

journal will have sufficient familiarity with the Lutheran Reformation to follow my arguments, but perhaps some basic facts about the Gregorian Reform—or Investiture Controversy, as it is sometimes termed—may need to be recalled.[13] That phenomenon was a complex series of historical events that in its more obvious phase stretched from the beginning of the pontificate of Leo IX in 1049 to the Concordat of Worms in 1122. Its most intense period was the pontificate of Pope Gregory VII, 1073–86. Gregory's conflict with Emperor Henry IV of Germany led to civil war in Germany, to the siege and sacking of Rome by imperial and Norman forces, and to the death of the pope in exile.

The "reform party" (the popes and their supporters from 1049 to 1122) fought for the elimination of simony, clerical concubinage, and lay intervention in the designation of bishops, including the bishop of Rome. These were its immediate goals. But since it thereby challenged the feudal and familial relationships between the clergy and lay magnates upon which early medieval society rested, historians see the controversy as the first massive attack on the feudal system as such. It is generally considered one of the great turning points of Western history.

Within the Church itself the Gregorian Reform insisted on clearer distinctions of function between clergy and laity. It based its case on ancient canons and secured its position through an unprecedentedly heavy reliance on legalistic argumentation. It sparked the development of a more visible, vigilant, and centralized papacy, more conscious than ever before of a pre-eminence over other bishoprics. Papal right to act in various civil and ecclesiastical cases began to be exercised with new frequency and with a clearer sense of ultimate authority. The movement thus had an effect on the way the Church functioned that would long outlast the achievement of its more immediate goals over which the struggle raged until at least 1122. In fact, the role of the papacy in the Church and the dominant, almost exclusive role played by the clergy in Church order, as we know these realities today, are clearly traceable to the Gregorian Reform.

A word must be said, meanwhile, about my isolating the specifically Lutheran component in the much larger phenomenon of the Protestant Reformation. I do so for reasons of economy in an essay that in fact

[13] Handy summaries of the issues involved and the assessments of various historians, with bibliography, are provided in Schafer Williams, ed., *The Gregorian Epoch: Reformation, Revolution, Reaction?* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1964), and Karl F. Morrison, ed., *The Investiture Controversy: Issues, Ideals, and Results* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971). The bibliography is immense. The classic study is Augustin Fliche, *La Réforme grégorienne* (3 vols.; Louvain and Paris: Champion, 1924–37), and there is a sober account in Hubert Jedin, ed., *Handbook of Church History* 3 (Montreal: Palm, 1969) 351–465. The most recent presentation is Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *Die Investiturstreit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1982).

demands several volumes to argue its case effectively, and also because Luther was the catalyst who unleashed the larger reality that always remained somewhat dependent on the direction he gave it, immense though the diversities within that reality would be. Whatever those diversities, for instance, there was in every case a clear rejection of the papal component in Church order. Luther is, in other words, prototypical as the initiator of the various Protestant reformations, and I employ him in the essay in precisely that role; implied, therefore, is a regrettable but necessary oversimplification of the situation that developed in the sixteenth century to a large extent as a result of his initiative.

We are now, at last, in a position to study these two "great reformations." In what follows I propose four major aspects under which to view and compare them. The first question to be answered here is how these reformations verify in their content my claim for their paradigmatic radicality. Next the language or "rhetoric" will be examined, to see how these reformations made themselves heard and had impact on consciousness. Thirdly, I will examine the quality of leadership in both of them and, finally, try to see ways they grounded themselves in social or politico-ecclesiastical institutions.

I have created these four categories of analysis, along with their subdivisions, during the years I have spent teaching and writing about reforms and reformers in the Church. The categories are my own. Except for the idea of "model" or "paradigm," I am not aware of any immediate dependencies on other authors for them, although at this point I would have difficulty in retrieving the various works that over a long period of time may have suggested one or another of them to me. I believe they are adequate to the task I have set, but of course others could be added to them for a more complete treatment.

Their principal advantage, it seems to me, is that they lift our considerations to a broad perspective. In this they differ from sociological studies of the Council that view it close-up and that examine more immediate phenomena like the impact the Council has thus far had on religious vocations, attendance at Mass, and similar issues. Helpful though such approaches are, they need to be supplemented with perceptions of longer range. That is what I attempt here.

The Content and Paradigm

1) *A focused issue.* Both reformations centered their attention on a single problem, the remedy of which would set things right. Although the Gregorians for the first several decades tried to deal with various problems like simony and clerical celibacy, as well as the regulation of episcopal elections, Gregory VII by 1075 joined battle with the emperor over the issue of lay investiture, i.e., the conferral on prelates by members

of the laity of the insignia for their spiritual office. This practice symbolized for the Gregorians lay control of episcopal nominations. That was the "abuse" that sparked the dramatic clash and consequently it became focus and symbol for all the other issues the reformation carried with it.

Luther arrived at his central issue more quickly and directly. True, the controversy exploded in late 1517 over the preaching of indulgences by Johannes Tetzel, but already underlying the Ninety-five Theses was the doctrine of "justification by faith alone," even if the clarifying experience of the *Turmerlebnis* had not yet taken place, as some scholars maintain. Luther eloquently stated his position on that central doctrine in his *Freedom of the Christian*, addressed to Pope Leo X in 1520, and for him that doctrine remained the fundamental plank in what came to be a program, however unsystematically presented that program always remained.[14]

2) *Tests for authenticity*. The psychological advantages of a central issue, clearly focused, are many. Proponents are better able, for instance, to "prove" its authenticity. For the proponents, their position thus becomes incontestable, easily defended against the attacks of opponents. The Gregorians found their justification in the canons, some authentic and some inauthentic.[15] The canons represented, quite literally, the "truth," whereas the contemporary practice of investiture was merely "custom."[16] That practice, judged against the canons, came to be seen as *perverted* custom, an unwarranted "development." The canons acted as a first principle, as a norm not itself requiring authentication but that whereby all other norms were authenticated. Retrieved from the hallowed past, the canons passed judgment on the present but were not themselves susceptible of judgment.

[14] There are so many studies of Luther's theology that it would be impossible here to list even the most important ones. I will content myself, therefore, with naming three comprehensive works that are often cited and are easily available: Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953); Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966); and Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964). See also Jack Bigane and Kenneth Hagen, *Annotated Bibliography of Luther Studies, 1967–76* (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1977). Still useful for Catholics approaching Luther is Jared Wicks, ed., *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther* (Chicago: Loyola University, 1970); see also Wicks's article on Luther in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 9 (1976) 1206–43. A recent work especially pertinent to this article is Yves Congar, *Martin Luther: Sa foi, sa réforme* (Paris: Cerf, 1983).

[15] An important work indicating the centrality of the canonical revival in the Gregorian Reform is John Joseph Ryan, *Saint Peter Damiani and His Canonical Sources* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1956).

[16] See Gerhart B. Ladner, "Two Gregorian Letters: On the Sources and Nature of Gregory VII's Reform Ideology," *Studi Gregoriani* 5 (1956) 221–42.

Luther's test was even more fundamental. His doctrine of justification encapsulated "the gospel." He retrieved the doctrine, fallen into desuetude in his own day and even suppressed by the papacy, from St. Paul, who articulated it in unmistakably clear terms in Romans and Galatians. Those two epistles became for Luther the heart of "the canon within the canon," against which the rest of the Bible was judged. The doctrine was the essence of Christianity, clear and incontestable. The fact that the doctrine contradicted common sense and the fallacies of human philosophy, i.e., Aristotle, only validated its divine origins in "Scripture alone."

3) *Programs.* What is remarkable about the focused issues in both these cases is that they implied the basis for broad programs of change. Viewed clinically and abstractly, this need not have been true. Neither of the issues, for instance, was exactly new to Christianity. But imbedded as they were in specific historical circumstances and in the personalities of their proponents, they assumed radical implications as they were translated into action. They became the foundations from which their proponents intended to accomplish their divinely ordained task of setting the world right.

To insure the universal observance of clerical celibacy, the elimination of simony in the "buying and selling" of Church offices, and the establishment of canonical procedures in the election of bishops, the Gregorians in effect began to create a new Church order. With the advantages of hindsight, we today see more clearly where their proposals were carrying them than they did themselves. The Gregorians set in motion a long process that would eventually eliminate from Church order the active role the lay magnates had played for centuries. Canon law, interpreted in a decidedly papal sense, would soon emerge as the central ecclesiastical discipline. Most important of all, the papacy emerged with new or at least more vigorous claims, so that the leadership and effective mechanisms in Church order passed from abbots, bishops, and lay princes to the popes. From the shadowy, ill-defined, principally symbolic and liturgical role of the popes in previous centuries, the "papal monarchy" came into being. By the early fourteenth century, the curial theologian Giles of Rome could utter a definition of ecclesiastical order that would never have crossed the mind of anybody in the tenth: "the pope, who can be said to be the Church."[17] That was a hotly contested proposition even when Giles advocated it, but the fact that it even occurred to him tells us much about the shift in consciousness that had occurred in the intervening centuries in some theologians, partisan advocates though they may have been.

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[17] See Yves Congar, *L'Eglise: De saint Augustin à l'époque moderne* (Paris: Cerf, 1970) 272–73.

Luther passed rather quickly from a focused issue—an abstract and strictly theological one at that—to an across-the-board program. Earlier in the same year in which he wrote the *Freedom of the Christian*, he published his *Appeal to the German Nobility*. In some ways that document reads like nothing more than a grocery list of late-medieval grievances and thus would seem to contain nothing new. Read in the context of Luther's other writings and in the context of his doctrine of justification, the document has an internal cohesion that, again, sets the stage for a radical change in Church order. It would cancel or blunt, for instance, many of the achievements of the Gregorians regarding the role of laity and papacy in the Church.

Underlying his writings on an even deeper level was a redefinition of piety and religious attitude. His shorthand expression for this redefinition was a rejection of "works righteousness" in favor of righteousness by faith. Along this line he composed a new sacramental theology and constructed a powerful theology of the Word. In all this he was convinced he was ultimately basing himself on the traditional repudiation by the Church of Pelagianism, the damnable heresy that the doctrine of justification by faith laid low.

4) *Paradigm shift.* In each of these cases the programs were unacceptable and even unintelligible to outsiders, and they soon provoked stubborn opposition. The opposition originated not because one or other of the ideas or changes was in itself unthinkable, but because all the elements were related to one another to form a program or system, though this fact may sometimes have been only vaguely intuited rather than clearly perceived. More fundamentally, the system itself rested on new presuppositions. A paradigm shift had occurred.

From at least the sixth to the eleventh century, the Church in the Latin West operated on a lumbering basis of ill-defined exercise of authority. This situation reflected and was part of the "medieval muddle" known as feudalism. Put more positively, authority in Church and society was seized and exercised as needs emerged. Undifferentiated function was the operative pattern for ecclesiastical and secular leadership. Bishops and great abbots, who were often members of the local nobility, performed functions that we would today unhesitatingly describe as civic or political; conversely, lay magnates and kings sometimes convoked and almost invariably implemented synods, and they considered it their right in most cases to have a determining voice in the nomination of prelates. Emperor Henry III exercised this last prerogative, with beneficial effects, for the bishopric of Rome just a new decades before the conflict broke out between his son and Pope Gregory VII. The decree of the Roman Synod of 1059, promoted by the papal reform party later known as the Gregorians, that placed the election of the pope in the hands of the

cardinal-bishops was an affront to this practice and a harbinger of things to come.

From a religious point of view, there were certainly problems with some of the practices that prevailed in the Feudal Church. Unworthy men became bishops and abbots, sometimes through deals that deserve the label of simony that the Gregorians attached to them. But there were also advantages for the Church. Dedicated prelates, for instance, were not a rarity. In any case, it never occurred to most persons that the practices were "abuses." Those practices simply were the way things were. For the Gregorians to make their case credible, they had to introduce a new way of arguing, based on a new model of the ideal Church.

"Scripture alone" is a theological principle found in Aquinas.[18] But the circumstances surrounding Luther's invocation of it invest it with a quite different significance. He certainly was not in the first place opposing Scripture to "tradition," as Catholics sometimes assume, but to "philosophy." The *scriptural* doctrine of justification contradicts *Aristotle's* proposition that it is by doing good deeds that one acquires good habits and thus becomes a good person. For Luther, the Christian is good only through divine favor—"grace alone"—not by his deeds or good works. This truth destroys the pretensions of human reason.

Luther came to oppose the papacy and the Church order that the papacy symbolized, therefore, not so much because he found no basis for it in Scripture but because the papacy, in opposing his teaching on justification, in effect was suppressing the gospel. It was for this reason that he saw it as the Antichrist, busy in the world doing the devil's work for him.

With that fact as background, Luther could invoke the "Scripture alone" principle in a different way—now to search the Bible for a Church order that in his opinion more clearly conformed to the Bible, shorn of the accretion of the centuries that had intervened since then; Calvin and other Protestant leaders would carry this search much further. With "Scripture alone" as his professed norm, Luther applied it to sacramental practice and theology, and to other issues as well. Luther's repudiation of canon law (mere "human inventions") as a basis for that order was as fervid as the Gregorians' advocacy of it.

In a role reversal with the papal party of the Gregorians, the "papists" now had to argue for the validity of the *status quo*. The problems that "the Lutherans" and "the papists" had in understanding each other was now not only the vast range of particulars over which they were in controversy, but the difference in the underlying models, values, authen-

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[18] *Sum. theol.* 1, 1, 8, ad 2.

ticity tests, and presuppositions that were explicitly or implicitly in play. A paradigm shift had taken place concerning what the Church and even the "true Christian" looked like.

Reform Rhetoric

It is one thing to have a program based on a paradigm shift; it is quite another to rally support for it. Paradigm shifts by definition fly in the face of common sense and received opinions. To the unbiased beholder they are far from self-validating. They threaten the very basis on which institutions are seen to operate, and thus seem to be nightmares rather than solutions.

Certainly, the societies to which they were addressed had to be to some extent psychologically and sociologically disposed, and some sense of anomaly within the old paradigm had to be operative. In both of our instances, grievances and problems of various kinds were surfacing and beginning to be addressed in more effective fashion. These grievances and problems were the soft underbellies of the old paradigm, but the radical surgery that a new paradigm implies is always an unpopular intervention.

The new paradigms had to be mounted, therefore, in a propaganda campaign as massive as the radicality of the program itself. Both these reformations forged in fact, without the considered calculation with which we are familiar today, effective instruments for such a campaign.[19] Their rhetoric outfitted their paradigms with emotional and valuational overtones.

1) *Slogans.* First, in each case a slogan soon emerged. For the Gregorians the slogan was "the liberty of the Church." This is what they convinced themselves they were fighting for when they opposed the emperor and other lay leaders. For Luther the slogan was "justification by faith alone" or simply "the gospel." These words were not invented by Luther, but he invested them with a meaning peculiarly his own.

The psychological advantages of such condensed and encapsulating expressions need not be proved to persons like ourselves, so familiar with the techniques of modern advertising. Slogans function as cheer, as loyalty test, as battle cry. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the slogan of the Gregorians seems to have performed all these functions. Luther, with his usual psychological acumen, actually saw his message as a "battle cry."[20] The success of the Gregorians in making their slogan operative

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[19] See, e.g., a recent study of visual propaganda: R. W. Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981).

[20] "Preface to the New Testament," in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings,* ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961) 15.

could not be more effectively demonstrated than by its eventual incorporation into the prayers of the liturgy.[21] It was thereby both enshrined and also provided with an ongoing mechanism with which to perpetuate the vision of the Church that it represented.

It is important to note the relationship of these two slogans to the focused issues that characterized each of the reformations. The advantages of such focuses are many: they give the movement a center, enable friends to be distinguished from enemies, provide a measure with which to distinguish progress from regress. And, critically important, they can be summed up in a slogan.

An example of a reform that in its articulation lacked such focus is the Council of Constance, 1414-17, which called for "reform in faith and morals, in head and members." A potentially more radical program is difficult to imagine. But its very all-inclusiveness, reflected in the slogan, helped dissipate, rather than marshal, reform efforts in Europe in the century before the Reformation. It did, nonetheless, engender part of that vague sense of anomaly, that unease with the present dispensation, that was a precondition for receptivity to messages like Luther's.

2) *Redefinition.* One of the most striking features of these two reformations is that they were unanticipated in the forms in which they received their classic articulation. There was relatively little in the history of the Middle Ages until about 1050 that suggested that the "liberty of the Church" from lay interventions was a possible or desirable "reform." The role that emperors, kings, and nobles played was generally perceived as good, not bad—as indispensable for the smooth functioning of Church and society. The Gregorians redefined this role when they opposed the "truth" of the ancient canons to the mere "custom" of their contemporaries. In this dramatic redefinition we have another indication of the revolutionary nature of that reformation.

Although the century between the end of the Council of Constance and the publication of the Ninety-five Theses resounded with cries for reform, nobody anticipated that "justification by faith" would be the issue over which conflict would explode. Eminent spokesmen for reform like Erasmus called for simplification of religious practices and for greater interiority—for a more spiritual appreciation of "good works." No one questioned, however, that "good works" were "good" and religiously meritorious. Nonetheless, Luther effected precisely such a reversal, such a turnaround, through his presentation of the truth of "justification by faith alone." This doctrine was framed in Luther's "theology of the cross," which would lead him to defend the proposition that naturally

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[21] "Oratio," in *Missale Romanum,* May 25, feast of St. Gregory VII: "Deus, in te sperantium fortitudo, qui beatum Gregorium confessorem tuum atque pontificem, pro tuenda Ecclesiae libertate...."

good acts are sins.[22]

The very boldness of these redefinitions gave them rhetorical force. They could not be ignored, for they flew too clearly in the face of common sense. They could not get lost in a bundle of other, more conventional proposals, for they challenged too directly the very foundations on which the other proposals rested. Doubters could be referred to clearly designated tests for their authenticity.

What I am saying is that in both of these reformations "abuses" were not abuses until they were perceived and defined as such. Until that moment they were good, or at least neutral. From the psychological standpoint, it is difficult to conceive a more brilliant success than the redefinitions these reformations articulated.[23]

3) *Prophetic stance.* Another feature of this reform rhetoric was the prophetic stance and language assumed by the two leaders. This language was "prophetic" in at least four senses. First, the style resembled the assertive, take-it-or-leave-it style often assumed by the prophets of Israel. Put negatively, it eschewed discursive, dialectical, homiletical, or persuasional styles. Gregory VII, moreover, quoted the prophets and knew that it was incumbent upon him to "cry aloud."[24] Luther, the "doctor hyperbolicus," insisted that a proclamatory and categorical style, "assertion," is what the Christian message by its very nature requires.[25]

Second, both men assumed the burden of denouncing the evils of their day, cost what it might. This meant unmasking the enemies of truth and confronting them with their error. They were both convinced they lived in a world in which the devil held sway.[26] In this dangerous situation enemies assumed a bigger-than-life stature. They had to be unmasked for what they were, and the dangers they posed unambiguously denounced. This is the "rhetoric of reproach" in which both reformers consistently indulged.[27]

While they did this, they assumed a further prophetic function of

[22] See Dillenberger, *Luther* 501 (WA 1, 353), Heidelberg Disputation: "3. Opera hominum ut semper sint speciosa bonaque videantur, probabile tamen est ea esse peccata mortalia."

[23] See, e.g., the section on "persuasive definitions" in Charles L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven: Yale University, 1944) 206–26.

[24] See *The Correspondence of Pope Gregory VII*, ed. and tr. Ephraim Emerton (New York: Norton, 1969) 8, 11, 15, 17, 32–33, etc.

[25] See especially his reply to Erasmus entitled *On the Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, ed. and tr. E. Gordon Rupp (Library of Christian Classics 17; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969) 105–12 (WA 18, 603–8).

[26] For Gregory see *Correspondence*, e.g., 11, 12, 51, 92, 100–101, 103, 123, 150, 161, 162, 172, 179, 189–90, 195; for Luther see Hans-Martin Barth, *Der Teufel und Jesus Christus in der Theologie Martin Luthers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1967), and Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1982).

[27] On "rhetoric of reproach" and its relationship to reform, see my "Historical Thought and the Reform Crisis of the Early Sixteenth Century," *TS* 28 (1967) 531–48.

holding out the promise of better times to come, once truth triumphed over error. Even as they "tore down" one order, they promised to "build up" another. It must be admitted that the good measure of pessimism in both Gregory and Luther somewhat inhibited this aspect of their prophetic function. Nonetheless, along with a "rhetoric of reproach," they utilized a "rhetoric of great expectations." Along with enemies to be destroyed, there were hopes to be realized. Thus was created a *vision* that goes beyond a "program." Such rhetoric minimizes difficulties, creates enthusiasm, discourages sober analysis.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, both men assumed the persona of a prophet. According to the prophetic model, they identified their cause with God's. Although they understood the term in quite different ways, both men were preoccupied with *justitia*—justice, righteousness, God's sovereignty. In the earliest interpretation of Luther by his followers, he was in fact perceived as a prophet, after centuries of prophetic silence among God's people.[28] Both men, surely, saw themselves as spokesmen for God, the essential definition of the prophetic role.

The net result of the prophetic stance is that it provokes a crisis situation. By definition given to confrontation, it forces decision. It divides father from son and mother from daughter. Both the Gregorian and the Lutheran reformations convulsed the society of their day; they led to war, bloodshed, and political disarray. The emperor ordered Gregory to descend from the papal throne, denouncing him to the whole Christian world as "false monk" and not a true pope, and he eventually was responsible for Gregory's being driven from the city of Rome and dying in desperate exile. Luther lived his whole life after 1521 as an excommunicate and an outlaw of the Empire, who most surely would have been put to death if he had not been in the protective custody of powerful political allies.

The crisis that the Gregorians provoked in Western society ended with a kind of reconciliation, though so shaky that it contained a potential for a later schism if the memories of the role played by lay leaders in the Church were ever later revived and fanned into flames, as happened in the sixteenth century. Luther's crisis produced an immediate schism, resulted in a century of religious wars throughout northern Europe, and divided Western Christianity until our own day.

Leadership

A feature that characterized both reformations, as must be clear by now, was the fierce passion that animated both Gregory and Luther. Although Gregory was involved in the movement almost from the begin-

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[28] See John P. Dolan, *History of the Reformation* (New York: New American Library, 1967) 21–24.

ning, the reformation was under way before he clearly assumed its direction. Nonetheless, he soon made the reformation *his* reformation. He identified it with the very meaning of his life itself. It today quite correctly bears his name.

Luther, on the other hand, was the pivotal figure from the very first. It was his case and his cause that stood in the dock. For his truth he risked his reputation and his life—over the course of decades. With excellent psychological accuracy statements are ascribed to both men that vindicate their utter commitment to their causes: to Gregory, as his dying words, "I have loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore I die in exile;" to Luther, "Here I stand; I can do no other."[29]

The importance of such utter commitment in effecting a reformation is obvious. Reformation means a changing of set ways and mentalities, which implies dislodging imbedded interest-groups and earning their hatred. The resistance to such change is inevitably enormous and requires heroic energies to overcome it. The old axiom that it is more difficult to reform a religious order than to found a new one betrays a profound understanding of how institutions function.

If historians find it difficult to chart the precise impact of reform councils like Lateran IV and Constance, part of that difficulty lies in the fact that these councils, being the responsibility of everyone, ended by being the responsibility of no one. The permanent impact that Trent had upon the Church was due to the fact that in the end the Council, whose major effort was to strengthen episcopal authority and pastoral care, in effect handed over its own implementation to the papacy. Without precisely intending to do so, the Council in the end thus strengthened the papacy and helped it continue along Gregorian lines.

The impact of Trent was also due to the devoted follow-through of people like Charles Borromeo and others, who appropriated with zeal specific proposals and were determined to perpetuate them through institutional forms like seminaries, frequent diocesan and provincial synods, enforced residency of pastors in their parishes, and clear pastoral directives. Borromeo's bitter conflicts with the Spanish authorities in Milan testify to the risks he was prepared to take to see his measures implemented.

Institutional Grounding

In both the Gregorian and Lutheran reformations, leadership of course extended beyond the two principal figures. Others were won to the cause,

[29] See, e.g., Paul Egon Hübinger, *Die letzten Worte Papst Gregors VII.* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1973). The eight personal traits that Ann Ruth Willner identifies in the charismatically effective political leader are clearly and to a high degree verified in both Gregory and Luther: *Charismatic Political Leadership: A Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1968).

and they committed themselves and their fate to its furtherance. Thus these movements began to insert themselves into the fabric of society, with the effect that some old institutions began to function in different ways and some new institutions, self-perpetuating in certain instances, were founded.

The papal Curia, for example, had a long history before the Gregorians came onto the scene, yet that reformation gave great impetus to its fuller development and imbued it with a keener sense of responsibility as an authoritative clearinghouse with an international scope. The intestate clergy that celibacy implied must also enter into consideration. In Germany in the sixteenth century, the Protestant princes who seized Church lands or who particularly enjoyed the role Luther sometimes assigned them as "emergency bishops" soon had high stakes in the outcome of the religious controversies. We assume that, as reformers, Gregory and Luther had a powerful impact upon the religious sensibilities of Christians who heard their message. I mention the Curia, intestate clergy, and the German nobility, however, to underscore that the message had an institutional component as well.

Further examples of institutional influence could be adduced, but I will limit myself to one for each case: for the Gregorians, the creation of the college of cardinals, and for the Lutherans, the married clergy. It seems to me—although I am not aware that other scholars have argued in precisely this way—that both movements thus created a new "class" of Church officers or ministers whose self-interest, even survival, was essentially tied to the success of the respective reformations.[30] In both cases the new class of officers or ministers became important agents for the implementation of the reformation.

The Gregorians redefined the function of the cardinals of the Roman Church, transforming an essentially liturgical and politically inert group of clergy into one of the most powerful forces in Europe by placing the election of the pope in its hands, from whose membership in the future most popes would be selected. It is true that for centuries to come the history of the sacred college was tortured, tumultuous, and ambivalent. Nonetheless, the important fact is that out of the Gregorian reformation emerged a new body, inserted into the very fabric of Church order, whose meaning and immense prerogatives were created and consolidated in the course of that reformation.

The Gregorians early on deliberately created their institution, though with no clear sense of its ultimate significance. Luther was anything but an organizer, and the "reformed Church" that came into being under his

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[30] Steven Ozment touches on this issue in his forthcoming *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1983).

leadership was for years seriously disturbed by his failure, for instance, to provide clear guidelines about how the rights and obligations of bishops and princes were to be delimited. He created at the outset, however, a new clergy.

The doctrinal convictions and the liturgical practices of that clergy distinguished it from its Catholic counterpart. But what irrevocably tied this clergy to Luther's reformation, I suggest, was the permission to marry. It was this fact that made it a new institution. That institution thus had both human and divine obligations to wife and to children. It seems to me that, with Luther's justification of marriage for the clergy and with Catholicism's adamant refusal to countenance that change, a new class came into being, now bound to the reformation by the irreversible choice of the married state. Thus Luther created, somewhat unwittingly, a self-perpetuating instrument to carry forward his vision and program. Whereas the election decree of 1059 that placed the election of the pope in the hands of the cardinal bishops was directly related to the objectives the Gregorians had in mind, married clergy was only a distant corollary to Luther's central concerns. Nonetheless, with it an institution came into being upon whose viability the permanent viability of this reformation to a large extent depended. A significant change had been effected in society at large that grounded the reformation. Without such groundings, programs of reformation tend to remain imprisoned in the minds, hearts, and words of those who conceive them, without final insertion into the societies they are intent upon reforming.

II
VATICAN COUNCIL II

By this time I trust that I have provided sufficient information to indicate why both the Gregorian and the Lutheran movements deserve the appellation "great reformation" that I attach to them, as well as how and why they deserve to be judged "successful." By means of their content, rhetoric, leadership, and institutional grounding, they proposed and effected a paradigmatic change that had long-range effects. We are now in a position to address Vatican II in this large historical perspective.[31] In the light of the categories I have utilized, does it more closely approximate a "reform" or a "great reformation"? How does it relate to "developments"?

The disclaimer that it is too early to judge must, of course, be invoked. After all, it took centuries for the implications of the Gregorian reformation to take hold and become widely operative. We must expect the

[31] For a summary of the background to the Council, its character, decisions, and legacy, see my "Vatican Council II," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 17 (Supplement, 1979) 687–90.

same of Vatican II, if it is to be categorized as "great reformation." Nonetheless, we at least have at our disposal some categories of analysis and some historical models against which to test what we have experienced and observed over the past twenty years. In my opinion, there is reason to believe that in Vatican II we may indeed be witnessing another "great reformation." That is the central statement in my thesis. However, there are such notable discrepancies between Vatican II and the two models—especially in the rhetoric, leadership, and institutional grounding of the Council—that a definitive judgment is at this point impossible. Even so, by engaging in this process of assessment, tentative though it is, we are enabled to get a helpful perspective on the Council and thus on ourselves. That last is the ultimate objective, I believe, of good historical studies.

The Content and Paradigm

In my earlier article I proposed that in effect Vatican II created a new ecclesiological paradigm. The Council never unambiguously articulated that paradigm, however, and hence any discussion of it will to some degree reflect the lack of clarity in the conciliar statements themselves. In what follows concerning Vatican II, in *all* its aspects, I will try to follow Aristotle's sage advice of not forcing more clarity and precision onto this subject than it from its nature will bear.[32] I would maintain, nonetheless, that in both its formal and its material aspects the idea of *aggiornamento* marked a notable departure from the fundamental paradigm of Church order that prevailed before the Council.

Viewed formally, "in the breadth of its application and in the depth of its implications, *aggiornamento* was a revolution in the history of the idea of reform." This was—and remains—my fundamental judgment about the Council. I will not repeat here all the arguments for that judgment that I originally adduced, but merely state its premises.

Until the Council, Catholic thought on reform was based ón what can be called a "classicist" mentality. According to such a mentality, the Church moved through history more or less unaffected by history. "Men must be changed by religion, not religion by men" was the concise articulation of this position, enunciated by Giles of Viterbo at the opening session of the Fifth Lateran Council, 1512.[33] The Church was so aware of the divine origin of its doctrines, rites, and discipline and of the continuity of its traditions that the historical and contingent components of these realities received relatively little attention.

In the past hundred years especially, a new "historical consciousness"

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[32] *Nicomachean Ethics* 1, 3, 1–4.

[33] Mansi 32, 669: "Homines per sacra immutari fas est, non sacra per homines." See my *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) esp. 179–91.

has emerged in Western society that has influenced even sacred studies—Scripture, liturgy, canon law, the "development" of doctrine. The "progressive" theologians who eventually came to have such great influence at Vatican II were affected by this mentality, and they soon began to determine the way the Council conceived its task. An awareness, more radical than ever before in the history of the Church, that "things have not always been thus" took hold, and it emboldened the Council to review its agenda with new eyes.

The Council never denied, of course, the divine origin of the message and mission of the Church; in fact, it insisted upon it repeatedly. Nevertheless, the Council also evinced a sense of freedom and flexibility in its interpretation of the tradition of the Church that was unprecedented. Thus it arrived at the basic intuition underlying *aggiornamento*, that, with all sorts of qualifications, religion had to change to meet "the needs of the times." That intuition constitutes the formal element of *aggiornamento* that is new in the history of the idea of reform and reformation, and it notably modifies the axiom of Giles of Viterbo.

The Council thereby began to effect a shift in consciousness closer to a "great reformation" than to a "reform." The seeds for this "revolution" are contained in the way the idea of *aggiornamento* began to operate within the Council, bursting the modest confines originally foreseen for it. The fact that the Council was at the time hailed as "the end of the Constantinian era," the "end of the Counter Reformation," and even as the "new Pentecost" testifies that participants and observers sensed that something more momentous was at stake than adjustments or emendations within a given system.[34] The ship was not perceived as being steadied in its course but as striking out in a new direction.

What was that new direction? Here we begin to enter the material aspects of the paradigm. Unlike its formal character, the content of the paradigm cannot be summarized in a few paragraphs. This situation is due in part to the vastness and diffuse character of the conciliar documents, in part to the fact that the Council generally did not state where and to what degree its directives differed from those in force before the Council. Broad aims did emerge, however, and taken together they indicate the changes in substance that the paradigm began to effect.

Put in the most generic terms, the aims of the Council were as follows: to end the stance of cultural isolation that the Church was now seen as having maintained; to initiate a new freedom of expression and action within the Church that certain Vatican institutions were now interpreted as having previously curtailed; to distribute more broadly the exercise of

[34] See, e.g., Congar, *Luther* 79, and Christopher Butler, "The *Aggiornamento* of Vatican II," in *Vatican II: An Interfaith Appraisal*, ed. John H. Miller (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1966) 6, as well as *AAS* 54 (1962) 13.

pastoral authority, especially by strengthening the role of the episcopacy and local churches vis-à-vis the Holy See; to modify in people's consciousness and in the actual functioning of the Church the predominantly clerical, institutional, and hierarchical model that had prevailed; to affirm the dignity of the laity in the Church; to establish through a more conciliatory attitude, through some new theological insights, and through effective mechanisms a better relationship with other religious bodies, looking ultimately to the healing of the divisions in Christianity and fruitful "dialogue" with non-Christian religions; to change the teaching of the Church on "religious liberty" and give new support to the principle of "freedom of conscience"; to base theology and biblical studies more firmly on historical principles; to foster styles of piety based more obviously on Scripture and the public liturgy of the Church; to affirm clearly that the Church was and should be affected by the cultures in which it exercises its ministries; finally, to promote a more positive appreciation of "the world" and the relationship of the Church to it, with a concomitant assumption of clearer responsibility for the fate of the world in "the new era" that the Council saw opening up before its eyes.

The very comprehensiveness of this listing, along with the *de facto* changes in attitude and practice it necessitated, suggests that we are dealing here with something more than a "reform." Moreover, disparate though the individual aims may seem to be when listed in such an abstract way, they do have a logical or affective relationship among themselves and originate from a new ecclesiological or theological paradigm. For one thing, many of these aims moderate or even reverse positions that crystallized in the Middle Ages and the Counter Reformation. In essence, however, the new paradigm wanted to effect a Church responsive to "the needs of the times." The paradigm bore within itself, therefore, the basis for its program, which was identical with the content of the paradigm as it was actually elaborated by the Council.

Of all the changes in attitude that the Council seemed to permit or promote, few were more profound in their implications than that there was "salvation outside the Church," even outside Christianity. The Council is cautious here. But if we contrast its documents, especially those relating to persons or institutions outside the Roman Catholic Church, with the pronouncement of Pope Boniface VIII in 1302, we see what is at stake: "Furthermore, we declare, state, and define that it is absolutely necessary to salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff."[35] No matter how that pronouncement is inter-

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[35] Henricus Denzinger and Adolphus Schönmetzer, ed., *Enchiridion symbolorum* (33rd ed.; Rome: Herder, 1965) 281: "Porro subesse Romano Pontifici omni humanae creaturae declaramus, dicimus, diffinimus omnino esse de necessitate salutis."

preted, it indicates an attitude from which the Council sedulously dis-
tanced itself.[36] The position that the Council took on this issue reflects
its new "world consciousness" and its recognition of the pluralism of the
contemporary situation. More important still, it is symptomatic of the
radical implications of the new paradigm; the repercussions that this
position on "salvation outside the Church" has for Christology, soteriol-
ogy, and ecclesiology are enormous and are only now beginning to be
elaborated.[37]

In adjusting itself in this and other ways to a "world consciousness,"
the Council gave shape to its own paradigm of the Church. After recourse
to its own tradition, the Council determined that the Church could and
should in fact refashion its own paradigm to bring it more into accord
with conditions "out there." The need of the Church at present, a need
legitimated by the tradition itself, was to accommodate to the present
situation.

We thus arrive at the authenticity test for the formal and material
aspects of the Council's paradigm. On what basis were the many changes
it promoted justified? The ultimate justification was the self-validating
authority of the Council itself, but the more immediate one was, in fact,
the "needs of the times." The test was coterminous with the paradigm.

When the test is compared with the ones adduced in the Gregorian
and Lutheran reformations, it lacks the more focused and specific quality
that those enjoyed. The lack of focus here points to the lack of a single
"focused issue," in contrast with those reformations. Nothing is more
characteristic of Vatican II than the breadth of its concerns, never neatly
packaged into a central issue.

Moreover, the needs of the times are so variously perceived in the
concrete by different individuals and groups that their probative force as
an authenticity test is infinitely more dissipated than an appeal to the
sacred canons or to the Epistle to the Romans. Which needs? Whose
needs? To what realities and to what extent may the test legitimately be
applied by a Church that wholeheartedly believes in the divine origin of
its constitution? Herein lies a fundamental problem in the "structure of
the content" of Vatican II that is quite different from the analogous
problem in the two reformations.

The Rhetoric of Vatican II

Despite these and other ambiguities and even ambivalences, the Coun-
cil certainly provoked a crisis within Roman Catholicism—a fact that I

[36] See, e.g., Rahner, "Interpretation of Vatican II" 720.
[37] See, e.g., J. Peter Schineller, "Christ and the Church: A Spectrum of Views," in *Why the Church?* ed. Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., and William G. Thompson, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 1977) 1-22; reprinted from *TS* 37 (1976) 545-66.

assume does not need proof or detailed description here. That crisis did not manifest itself in such a dramatic way as did Gregory's conflict with the Emperor or the religious wars that followed upon the Protestant Reformation. This fact could be interpreted as a sign that the crisis was not so deep as those provoked in the other two instances, but crisis it was, in any case.

Part of the reason for the less dramatic nature of the crisis surely rests with the style of rhetoric the Council adopted in presenting itself to the world and the Church. It conciliated and reassured rather than confronted. This time the slogan was *aggiornamento*, updating. In a culture used to the attempts of almost every institution to "modernize" and "streamline" itself from time to time, this slogan could be counted upon to appeal to many. It could function as cheer, even loyalty test, but hardly as battle cry—at least not a battle cry from those directly responsible for the decisions of the Council, the bishops. *Aggiornamento* exemplifies the conciliatory or "soft" rhetoric that the Council consistently employed. It was litotes, a rhetorical understatement.[38] Its equivalents like "renewal" and "renovation" substituted for terms like "reformation" that, because of their historical connotations, were far more threatening.[39]

These considerations begin to indicate how widely the Council's rhetoric differed from the denunciatory stance assumed by both Gregory and Luther. The documents of the Council were deliberately structured in a discursive, even homiletical, way—quite different from the apodictic style of Gregory and Luther, and different even from the condemnatory canons that have traditionally been the literary forms councils employed in their decrees. Indeed, the "rhetoric of reproach" is almost wholly absent from the Council, at least as applied to identifiable persons, groups, ideas, or movements. There are no palpable and clear enemies. The "rhetoric of reproach" is replaced by a "rhetoric of congratulation." This stance may well be religiously admirable, but it is rhetorically problematic; for it induces a vagueness and indeterminacy into language that deprives it of dramatic force.

On the other hand, the Council certainly engaged in a "rhetoric of great expectations" in many of its documents. Both implicitly and explicitly it held out, for instance, promise of a world of religious harmony

[38] See Philippe Levillain, *La méchanique politique de Vatican II: La majorité et l'unanimité dans un concile* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1975) 35–36: "Il [*aggiornamento*] représentait une litote subtile entre les deux termes inexprimables de 'Réforme' et d' 'Autocritique,' traçait à l'Église une perspective de réflexion sur elle-même et proposait un Concile qui n'était dirigé contre personne parce qu'il l'était en realité 'contre' l'Église elle-même, pour dégager le neuf du permanent et vivifier son éternité."

[39] See my "Reform, Historical Consciousness" 587.

in which competing churches and religious traditions would somehow be brought together. Especially in *Gaudium et spes*, it held out hopes for a world in which justice and peace would reign and in which religion and technology would co-operate for a more humane environment. The optimism of this document has often been noted. It helped create a vision of hope in a world receptive to such a message. But visions of hope, unless somehow soon realized, tend after a short while to be forgotten or to turn sour. It seems to be true, unfortunately, that the "rhetoric of reproach" has more staying power.[40]

The refusal by the Council to engage in vituperation extended to the practices and attitudes that it was in fact repudiating. The Council heads off in a new direction often without indication that an older direction has been abandoned, without much indication even of what that older direction was. In other words, explicit redefinition of what was good and bad—vernacular liturgy rather than Latin liturgy, conciliatory rather than polemical attitudes towards the churches of the Reformation, and similar matters—had to be done by "experts" outside the Council. These experts quite often indulged in sharp criticism of the preconciliar situation. In lectures, in books, in articles in both popular and learned journals, and in jokes at cocktail parties, deficiencies and aberrations were pointed out. This activity took place, however, apart from the official texts of the Council. Today, twenty years after the Council, its conciliatory language produces notable problems for anyone trying to teach its documents to a generation born after the Council closed.

An even more confusing situation occurs at those points in the documents of the Council where the "new" is simply placed alongside the "old," with the apparent assumption that they are mutually compatible and both equally valid. The now classic example of this problem, of course, is how to relate chapter 3 in *Lumen gentium*, which treats the hierarchical character of the Church, to the rest of the document. The vertical "hierarchical Church" and the more horizontal "people-of-God Church" may be reconcilable, but the documents do not clearly tell us how to effect that reconciliation. Such unclarity even permits the disturbing question to arise in some people's minds not of what new direction or paradigm it was that the Council advocated, but whether in fact there was a new direction or paradigm advocated at all. It is necessary to *argue*, as I have been doing, that there was indeed such a new direction or paradigm.

In contrast, therefore, with the rhetoric of the Gregorian and Lutheran

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[40] See Quintilian, *Institutiones oratoriae* 3, 8, 40: "For quite apart from the fact that the minds of unprincipled men are easily swayed by terror, I am not sure that most men's minds are not more easily influenced by fear of evil than by hope of good, for they find it easier to understand what is evil than what is good" (Loeb tr.).

reformations, the rhetoric of the Council lacks sharpness and clarity. The interpretation of its documents is even more susceptible of manipulation than most other reform documents in the history of the Christian Church, especially as we move away from the event itself.[41] However much distaste we might feel for the vituperative language in which both Gregory and Luther indulged, that language supplied clear indication of what was right and what was wrong, of what was to be embraced and of what was to be repudiated—embraced and repudiated, moreover, with all one's heart and with all one's strength, at the risk of one's life.

Nonetheless, the Council evoked a crisis in Catholicism. How is this fact to be explained? In a Church that by and large distinguished itself from other Christian bodies in the West by its confession of unbroken continuity with its venerable past, the slogan of *aggiornamento*, for all its surface appeal, had bite. Attempts to downplay its innovative character, moreover, had to face the reality of the adjustments in practice and attitude with which it consistently confronted the faithful. Never before in the history of Catholicism had so many changes been legislated and implemented that immediately touched the lives of common folk, and never before had such radical adjustments of viewpoint been so abruptly required of them. The verbal rhetoric of the Council may have been reassuring; the "rhetoric of action" that accompanied it was not.

The changes the Council mandated were thrust upon a membership that was psychologically and theologically unprepared to receive them. Elements of the "new paradigm" that before the Council had been gestating in the minds of some theologians had never been allowed to mature even in academic circles in an atmosphere of healthy give-and-take, and the faithful had been kept even more carefully sheltered from any suggestion that certain issues were under discussion. The advantages of the Latin liturgy, for instance, had been deeply inculcated upon the minds and hearts of the faithful up to the time the Council opened. It is now easy to forget, moreover, the restrictions that John Courtney Murray suffered for his ideas on religious liberty.

When the changes came, they burst upon the scene. Some of them, like the changes in the liturgy, were implemented in autocratic fashion, with little or no attempt to explain them. The "rhetoric" of the Council, now viewed broadly to include the actions that interpreted the words, was more assertive, therefore, than it at first seems. Paradoxically, the conciliatory language of the Council was accompanied by an autocratic manner of implementing the decisions of the Council. In many ways the language did not correlate with the kinds of changes that began to take place. Crisis, or at least confusion, was the almost inevitable result.

[41] See Acerbi, "Receiving Vatican II."

Leadership

One of the greatest contrasts between the changes effected by Vatican II and those effected by the two reformations is that the former emanated from a committee, whereas the latter were causes assumed by two individuals utterly committed to visions they had made their own. By the time the Council was over, the participants did not lack enthusiasm for its *aggiornamento* but, due to the very matrix in which *aggiornamento* came into being, they did lack passion for it.

"Pope John's Council," as it finally turned out, could only remotely be claimed by him. That great pope deserves credit for convoking the Council, but there is not the slightest shred of evidence that he foresaw or intended the direction it took. In any case, he died early in the Council and, again by the very nature of the case that would have prevailed even if he had survived, his successors were only implementers of decisions taken by a group.

The unclarities, the hesitations, the qualifications, the ambivalences that mark the documents reflect the huge committee in which they were hammered out. They were the price paid to obtain consensus. They reflect the work of a committee, whose members went home to resume life pretty much as usual once the work was done. Gregory and Luther never "went home."

The very comprehensiveness of the documents and their care not to offend, as well as their concern to satisfy various constituencies, militated against their being assumed by any individual as passionately his own. It can be questioned, in fact, just how clearly some of the fathers understood what they had wrought and now had to communicate to constituencies that understood less than they did.

All this is not to underestimate what that "huge committee" accomplished. I know of no other such assembly in history that undertook such a bold reshaping of the institution it represented, and did it with more fairness, serenity, and courage. The care to win, not impose, consensus was a hallmark of the Council, as exemplified by its insistence on at least a two-third majority, soon leading almost to unanimity, for all its important steps.[42] Nonetheless, the problems inherent in such assemblies and in the "committee documents" they produce must not be underestimated. As some of the leading figures at the Council such as Cardinals Bea, Lercaro, and Suhard pass from the scene, the problem of leadership becomes more crucial than ever.

To Paul VI fell the task, in the first instance, of carrying forward the decisions and spirit of the Council once it closed. The criticisms he had

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[42] The most thorough analysis of this aspect of the Council is Levillain, *La méchanique politique.*

to suffer from both "right" and "left" suggest how difficult the task was, how unclear the mandate. The fact that the next two pontiffs deliberately made the names of the two conciliar popes their own—John and Paul—indicates the recognized obligation of further implementation. The anomaly of the problem of leadership for the Council appears here in symbolic form: the chief implementer of a Council that opted in favor of a less centralized and less hierarchical polity turns out to be, in most people's minds, the central authority of the Church, the top figure in the hierarchical pyramid.

Institutional Grounding

In my opinion, the ultimate key to the success of the two reformations lay neither in the content nor the rhetoric nor the leadership that characterized them, but in their eventual grounding in new or ongoing institutions. They both created, for instance, a new social class that had high stakes in the success of the reformation. They thus wove themselves into the fabric of society in ways that made it virtually impossible to reverse course without destroying the class.

The Second Vatican Council was cautious regarding the structures within the Church. Few, if any, institutions were obliterated. Even the Holy Office, so severely criticized and ridiculed during the Council, escaped with a reorganization and a new name; it was not abolished. Episcopal Conferences, already a reality in the Church, received conciliar codification and blessing, and the Synod of Bishops was inaugurated. Both these institutions were meant to give palpable substance to a theology of episcopal collegiality.

Many people pinned great hopes on the Conferences and on the Synod. Only time will tell how great the impact of these two institutions will be. On certain issues the National Conference of Bishops in the United States, for instance, has demonstrated a capacity for courageous leadership. Institutions have a curious way of assuming a life of their own and playing a role unforeseen by their creators and members. Sometimes that role does not emerge until decades or centuries after their founding. Nonetheless, these two institutions lack clear definition of their powers, and their decision-making processes up to now seem to be more *sub Petro* than *cum Petro*. Neither the Conferences nor the Synod represent, in any case, the investing of a new class with high stakes in *aggiornamento*. They are, therefore, quite different from the institutions that came into being in the two reformations.

The closest historical parallel to the Synod and Conferences I can think of is the institution resulting from the decree *Frequens* of the

Council of Constance in 1417. According to that solemn and never officially repudiated decree of perhaps the most important of all the medieval councils, the pope was bound to convoke a council henceforth in perpetuity at clearly stated intervals. The provisions of the decree were duly observed by Pope Martin V when he convoked the Council of Pavia-Siena, 1423, and the Council of Basel, 1431. But after the severe crisis occasioned by the latter, the decree became a dead letter. It had created, you will note, no new social class whose very existence depended on its implementation.

Sometimes, of course, new classes come into being by default or indirection. Luther did not calculate that he was creating a new class when he advocated clerical marriage, but he made a decision that eventuated in a new class. Perhaps something along that line is happening today, not because of any specific decision Vatican II took along this line, but because of the impact the Council had among Catholics on their general appreciation of the Church, its ministry, and the role of the laity in the Church.

One of the most striking, even alarming, phenomena in postconciliar Catholicism has been the dramatic decline in priestly and religious vocations in many parts of the world. This decline has been taken as one of the signs of "the postconciliar crisis." The decline may be only temporary but the indications are not reassuring. The slack is being taken up, however, and the traditional ministries of the Church are being exercised now increasingly in certain parts of the world by lay volunteers and lay professionals—men and women, single and married.

The laity has a different education, a different experience of life, and a different incorporation into Church and society than does the clergy as we know it today. Its psychological and religious profile cannot at present be charted, but it is surely different in many respects from that of the official clergy. Although not identified with the program of the Council, lay ministry is an indirect result of it and finds its theological justification in the Council's affirmation of the priesthood of all believers.[43]

"Class" is a vague word, and it becomes vaguer when applied to a phenomenon like this one. Furthermore, one can hardly state that this new class of ministers has a life-and-death stake in the shape of *aggiornamento*. Moreover, lay ministry is not as totally new in the Church as we sometimes believe; religious sisters and brothers, for instance, have long engaged in activities that can be described as ministry. The difference today is that the laity is doing things once reserved exclusively to priests. In that sense it is a new reality in Catholicism, and its implica-

[43] *See Apostolicam actuositatem* 10 (*AAS* 58 [1966] 846).

tions for the future are altogether unpredictable.[44] The apprehensions in certain circles today regarding the whole question of ministry indicates that a sensitive nerve is being touched. The present "crisis in ministry" is part of the legacy of the Council, and it may indicate that through it a new institutional grounding is taking place.

From the very moment that Pope John XXIII announced on January 25, 1959, that he intended to convoke a council, the most obvious and explicit instrument for its institutional grounding was to be the revision of the Code of Canon Law. Now that the new Code is completed and promulgated, scholars are examining it to see how faithfully it reflects the Council and carries it forward. Some are disappointed with its caution; others believe it is an appropriate, probably only provisional, step forward.[45]

In some of its provisions the new Code surely reflects the theology of the laity found in key documents of the Council. The Code provides, for instance, for mandatory involvement of the laity in all financial matters pertaining to diocesan and parochial life; the laity may perform all the functions of an ordained deacon when particular conditions so warrant; the removal of the old canon that limited a pastor to one parish opens the way for laity and members of the "consecrated life" (religious) to perform the day-to-day care of souls previously reserved to priests. Thus the new Code, while reaffirming the traditional Roman-law theories of polity, also admits a pastoral practice and theology that in certain ways runs counter to an older structure. The suggestions of a grounding of a paradigmatic shift seem to be present.[46]

CONCLUSION

By now it is clear that, although the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II in some ways resembles the two reformations I have delineated, it also differs from them considerably. The Council most clearly resembles the Gregorian and Lutheran reformations in that it constructed a new paradigm of religious consciousness and Church order, a paradigm that departed in significant ways from the one in possession before the Council

[44] See, e.g., the report by the U.S. Bishops' National Advisory Council, "The Thrust of Lay Ministry," *Origins* 9 (1980) 621–26, and the reflections of the bishops of the United States, "Called and Gifted: Catholic Laity 1980," ibid. 10 (1980) 369–73. The latter document states: "Ecclesial ministers, i.e., lay persons who have prepared for professional ministry in the Church, represent a new development. We welcome this as a gift to the church" (372).

[45] See Abelli, "Ein Grundgesetz."

[46] See, e.g., Francis Morrisey, "The Laity and the Threefold Mission of the Church," *Canon Law Society Great Britain and Ireland Newsletter* 25 (1982) 130–55. See also Winfried Aymans, "Ecclesiological Implications of the New Legislation," ibid. 38–73. I am indebted to John T. Finnegan, adjunct professor of canon law, Weston School of Theology, for these references and for a number of suggestions concerning this article.

began. In the documents of the Council this paradigm generally displaces the older one, while on a few occasions it coexists uneasily alongside it. With the construction of a new paradigm, a series of redefinitions concomitantly took place. These redefinitions were usually only implicit and were thus characteristic of the essentially conciliatory rhetoric of the Council, in contrast with the more denunciatory and assertive rhetoric of both Gregory and Luther. A more assertive and confronting element was present, however, in the manner in which some of the decisions of the Council were implemented. The leadership exercised by the Council and the Council's institutional grounding appear at present notably weaker than in either the Gregorian or Lutheran reformations, but it is too early to judge, especially for the institutional grounding. There is, therefore, no point-for-point correlation between Vatican II and either of these other two phenomena.

Where does this leave us in our assessment? First, we must recall that the Gregorian and Lutheran reformations are in no way prescriptive or normative for other self-induced changes on a large scale that might occur at some given time in the history of the Christian Church. These two reformations provide models for comparison and supply materials from which to construct some instruments of analysis; nothing more— or less. No historical event or phenomenon ever repeats itself. This is true of the two reformations. My analysis of them designedly highlighted their similarities, thereby doing violence to the immense differences that distinguish them from one another. There is no reason to anticipate that Vatican II would altogether tally even with the similarities I have indicated between these reformations. Indeed, we should a priori expect that the differences would far outweigh the likenesses.

The second consideration of absolutely fundamental importance, to which I have so far only casually called attention, is not the correlation between the two reformations themselves but between each of them and the culture in which they achieved their success. In ways almost too complex to analyze, each of them reflected and promoted developments in society at large that assured their success at least as much as the four factors I isolated for the sake of comparison between them. The centralizing tendencies of the Gregorians reflected and promoted similar tendencies in secular society as Western Europe began to emerge from the feudal age; as the "papal monarch" rose to prominence, so did national monarchies. We cannot adequately speak about religious paradigms without locating them in the larger cultural context.

This consideration is not meant to minimize the aggressive energies of the reformations viewed in themselves, but to emphasize that they were not self-contained realities. Earlier I made the point that changes that take place "outside" the Church result in "developments" within the

Church. It is, accordingly, also true that no "reformation" within the Church can ultimately succeed unless it correlates with some realities "out there." The reason is obvious: the same human person is both member of the Church and citizen of the world.

Whatever the intrinsic force of a reformation, it has to be "received" to be effective. Any movement that is too much at odds with general culture is bound to fail or remain marginal, unless, of course, it is carried forward by sheer violence. Only if the movement is somehow co-ordinate with the hopes, grievances, mentality, and structures of society at large does it have a chance of success. If the movement is thus co-ordinated, even imperfectly, the culture itself contains a momentum that after a certain point tends to carry the movement along, most probably in ways that transcend the intentions of the original creators.

Most characteristic of Vatican II was precisely its effort to co-ordinate itself with general culture. The very nature of this enterprise suggests why the rhetoric of the Council differed from the rhetoric of Gregory and Luther. The rhetoric differed because the enterprises were different. The Council adopted a conciliatory rhetoric because it was engaged in a conciliatory task.

Initially the Council meant to speak only to the Roman Catholic Church, but as it moved along it extended its message to "the whole of humanity." There were thus two sets of addressees: those within the Roman Catholic Church and all those outside it. Even when the Council spoke to Catholics, it was not only to put them in touch with the deeper roots of their own tradition but often to show them how that tradition could respond more effectively to conditions "outside." In so far as there was an element of confrontation in the rhetoric of the Council, it was directed for the most part to members of the Roman Catholic Church. The Council confronted those who could be presumed to agree with it; it conciliated those who on the surface seemed far removed from sympathy with what it represented. The complexity of the Council's undertaking manifests itself in the complexity, in almost the tangle, of its rhetoric.

The rhetoric of the Council is thus intimately related to its enterprise. That enterprise was complex—but also unique and unprecedented in that a major change was undertaken not in prophetic opposition to something but as an act of profound reconciliation. If this was what was unique about the Council, then it is here we must especially look in order to assess it.

To assess Vatican II, therefore, we must return to the radical nature of *aggiornamento*. The material aspects of that principle as the Council actually formulated them are, of course, important. Far more important, it seems to me, is the formal aspect, i.e., the admission of the principle

of deliberate reconciliation between the Church and certain changes taking place outside it.

This admission implies a continuation after the Council of the open-ended agenda that characterized the Council itself. If we are now "beyond" the Council, that is where we should be. Important though specific decisions were and continue to be, more important would be the continuing, and inevitable, dialogue of the Church with the world outside it. The central point of contact was the new historical consciousness that pervades modern culture and that had such impact on the Council itself. This consciousness meant an admission of contingency on a scale larger than was ever admitted before. By admitting the principle, the Council admitted the inevitability of ongoing change, admitted the impossibility of being immune to such change.

As I illustrated earlier, many of the most profound changes that have taken place in the history of the Church were not the result, in the first instance, of self-conscious initiative on the part of Church membership. There is no reason to believe that the situation is any different today, except perhaps more intensified because of the mass media and the fast pace of contemporary culture. Few cultural developments in the past hundred years are as important as the pervasive influence of the idea of historical contingency, and there is little reason to believe that this idea will not continue to influence theology and Church order.

In other words, unlike the Gregorian and the Lutheran reformations, where the critical point for success seems to have been institutional grounding, the critical point for Vatican II may well be in the idea, in the paradigm. Whereas in those reformations the paradigm flew in the face of convention, in this instance it represents a belated recognition of the already established reality of the new historical consciousness. There are other established realities to which it relates as well: the emergence of democracy as a favored political form, the world as global village, a new religious and cultural pluralism, and similar phenomena. The reality "out there," so ingrained into the way we think and judge, seems to be where the long-range grounding of the Council may lie. Thus, though it may be possible in particular instances and for a short while to resist or deny the paradigm, the reality of the new consciousness will persist and have its effects.

It is important to recall that many, even most, political revolutions have been followed by some attempt at "restoration." Restorations moderate excesses, but they do so by positing a dreamworld that artificially reconstructs the conditions of days gone by. The unreality of that world guarantees that it will not last long. The proponents of the Gregorian and the Lutheran reformations soon experienced disappointment at what

seemed to be the futility of their efforts and the dissipation of their visions. But both of these movements were too much in concert with their epochs to go down in defeat. Forces outside them began, sometimes unwittingly and unwillingly, to carry them forward.

Was Vatican II, then, another "great reformation"? If it was, it was quite different from the other two. Nonetheless, despite the complexity of its rhetoric, despite the weakness of its leadership and institutional grounding, I am inclined to answer in the affirmative. There are, however, signs to the contrary.

Perhaps we would be on less contested, and more helpful, ground if we simply rephrased the question. Was Vatican II at least symptomatic of a huge change in perception and in ways of thinking, judging, and acting that marks modern culture and that therefore will inevitably continue to mark the course of theology and Church order? Here the answer can be a sturdier affirmative. By this affirmative we assess both Vatican II and the general situation of the Church and ourselves in contemporary culture—which was the point of the question about Vatican II in the first place. There is little doubt in my mind that the Roman Catholic Church has in the past twenty years entered a new era of its history. The Council is more responsible than any other single agent for the formal inception of that era.

No large institution will overnight transform its paradigm into something entirely different; no institution ever continues over a long period of time to operate wholly on the same paradigm, especially not an institution so deeply imbedded in human culture as the Roman Catholic Church. The persistent Catholic impulse to reconcile "nature and grace" is, when raised to the level of social institutions, an impulse to reconcile the Church with human culture in all its positive dimensions—with sin excepted and the gospel affirmed. In that sense the Council, for all its daring, moved solidly in line with the Catholic tradition. The Church is fully incorporated into human history, and changes that take place there deeply affect it. That is what the Council saw, and that perception is perhaps its best legacy. That is what it means to belong to a Church that, as the Council insisted, is truly a pilgrim in this world. That is the continuing challenge of the Council to us all.