VATICAN II: DID ANYTHING HAPPEN?

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Recent emphasis on the continuity of Vatican II with the Catholic tradition runs the danger of slighting the aspects of the council that were discontinuous. Among those aspects are the literary genre the council adopted and the vocabulary inherent in the genre, different from that of all previous councils. Examination of these aspects yields tools for constructing a hermeneutic appropriate to this *council, and not only shows how distinctive Vatican II was but also allows us to get at that elusive "spirit of the council." The substance of this article was delivered as the Roland Bainton Lecture for 2005 at the Divinity School of Yale University and shortly afterwards as one of the "Gathering Points" lectures at Marquette University.*

O N JUNE 17, 2005, in the Pietro da Cortona room of the Capitoline Museums in Rome, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, the pope's vicar for the diocese of Rome and president of the Italian Bishops' Conference, made a public presentation of a new book by Archbishop Agostino Marchetto and published by the Vatican Press, *The Ecumenical Council Vatican II: A Counterpoint for Its History*.[1] Such "presentations" for new publications are not unusual in Italy, but this one was special because of the official and, indeed, eminent status of the presenter, because of the elegant, public, and civic venue of the presentation, because of its attack on other scholars, and because of the coverage the presentation therefore received even in the secular press.[2]

Ruini welcomed the new book because, according to him, it acts as a

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[1] Agostino Marchetto, *Il concilio ecumenico Vaticano II: Contrappunto per la sua storia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005).

[2] I take my information about the presentation from Sandro Magister, "Vatican II: The Real Untold Story," http://www.chiesa.espressonline.it/dettaglio.jsp?id= 34283&eng=y, July 27, 2005 (accessed October 31, 2005). Sandro Magister is a journalist with the Italian periodical *L'Espresso*.

counterpoint, indeed as the polar opposite of the interpretation of Vatican II that until now has monopolized the historiography of the council. He sees Marchetto as moving us along the road to a "correct" understanding. But Ruini, in line with Marchetto, did not let the matter rest there. He singled out "the Bologna-school," whose *capo* is Professor Giuseppe Alberigo, as the principal and most influential creator of the incorrect understanding.

More specifically he attacked the *magnum opus* of the Bologna-based Institute for Religious Sciences: the recently completed, multi-authored, five-volume history of the council edited by Alberigo and published almost simultaneously in six languages—Italian, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and English.[3] Ruini, like Marchetto, compared the Alberigo volumes to the history of the Council of Trent written by Paolo Sarpi, which was published in London in 1619 and immediately placed on the Index of Forbidden Books.[4] Sarpi's thesis, baldly put: Trent was a papal conspiracy to prevent the reform of the Church. A more damning comparison could hardly be imagined.

What, in the Ruini/Marchetto view, is wrong with Alberigo's approach? Many things, among which are: an anti-curial bias, comparisons of Pope Paul VI with John XXIII unfavorable to the former, emphasis on the so-called novelty of the council and its differences from previous councils, an underlying "reformist" ideology, and, finally, diminishing the importance of the official final documents of the council in favor of the council as "event."

These criticisms are all interrelated, but the sticking point is the last, for by describing the council as "event"[5] Alberigo has borrowed a term and idea from secular social scientists that means a rupture, a change from received norms and ways, a "before" and an "after." The documents of the council do nothing, according to Ruini and Marchetto, but insist on their continuity with the Catholic tradition. Alberigo presents the council as a "new beginning" in the history of the Church, which Ruini dismisses as "theologically inadmissible." He goes on to say: "The interpretation of the council as a rupture and a new beginning is coming to an end. This inter-

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[3] Giuseppe Alberigo, *History of Vatican II*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, 5 vols. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995–2005).

[4] See Magister, "Vatican II" 1 (quoting Ruini) and Marchetto, *Concilio ecumenico Vaticano II* 378–79.

[5] For an elucidation of the category, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Vatican II as 'Event'," Fourth Annual De Lubac Lecture, February 11, 1999 (privately published by the Department of Theological Studies and the Office of University Mission and Ministry, St. Louis University, St. Louis, 1999), with bibliography. See also Maria Teresa Fattori and Alberto Melloni, ed., *L'Evento e le decisioni: Studi sulle dinamiche del concilio Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

pretation is very feeble today and has no real foothold in the body of the Church. It is time for historiography to produce a new reconstruction of Vatican II that will also be, finally, a true story."[6] What is needed, according to Ruini and Marchetto, is a new hermeneutic that will reveal the true nature of the council.

Ruini sometimes seems almost to be paraphrasing Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who in 1985 similarly insisted on no "before" and no "after" the council.[7] In any case, the Ruini-Marchetto incident is not an altogether isolated phenomenon. Other publications have recently been following the same almost exclusive emphasis on the continuity of the council with the preceding tradition. [8] Both Ruini and Marchetto quote in favor of their interpretation a passage from an address Pope John Paul II gave on the occasion of the conference held in the Vatican in 2000 on "The Implementation of Vatican II." The pope's words: "The church has always known the rules for a correct interpretation of the contents of dogma. These rules are woven into the fabric of faith and not outside it. To read the council as if it marked a break with the past, while in fact it placed itself in the line of the faith of all times, is decidedly unacceptable."[9]

Thus an interpretation of the council has emerged that is based on one fundamental assumption: the council was in all important regards continuous with the Catholic past. In fact, that assumption seems to be already well along the road to achieving official and prescriptive status. In 1985, for instance, the synod of bishops that met in the Vatican on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the closing of the council laid down six norms for its interpretation.[10] When from the viewpoint of a professional historian I examine the norms, I have to say that they strike me as resoundingly sound. I will return to them later. At this point, however, I want to highlight number five: "The council must be interpreted in continuity with the great tradition of the church, including other councils."

In any case, the "Bologna school" and especially Alberigo are being

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[6] Quoted by Magister, "Vatican II."

[7] See Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, trans. Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985) 35.

[8] See, e.g., Cardinal Leo Scheffczyk, *La Chiesa: Aspetti della crisi postconciliare e corretta interpretazione del Vaticano II* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1998); Cardinal Avery Dulles, "Vatican II: The Myth and the Reality," *America* 188 (February 24, 2003) 7–11, and "Vatican II: Substantive Teaching," ibid. (March 31, 2003) 14–17; Edward Oakes, "Was Vatican II a Liberal or a Conservative Council?" *Chicago Studies* 41 (2004) 191–211.

[9] See Magister, "Vatican II" 2 (quoting Ruini) and Marchetto, *Concilio ecumenico Vaticano II* 380.

[10] "The Final Report: Synod of Bishops," *Origins* 15 (December 19, 1985) 444–50, at 445–46.

singled out as the great propagators of a history of the council that badly distorts it and that must be opposed. Other scholars are also being criticized for a similar approach, but Alberigo and his colleagues are the ones most often mentioned by name. I have studied the five Alberigo volumes. I consider them a remarkable achievement of historical scholarship, and in print I have compared them not to Sarpi but to the authoritative history of Trent published in the last century by Hubert Jedin.

This is of course not to say that the work is perfect. It has, for instance, all the advantages and disadvantages of a collaborative history in which subjects have been parceled out to different authors. Yes, between the lines and sometimes in the lines, one can detect sympathy for "the progressives." But I am generally impressed with the authors' efforts to be fair to the so-called conservatives or minority and especially to be fair to Pope Paul VI, whom they recognized as being in an extraordinarily difficult and delicate situation.

Most important, however, I do not see that Alberigo and others who have used "event" as an instrument to interpret the council have given it the radical meaning that their critics attribute to them. In my opinion, the quotation from John Paul II cannot be applied to Alberigo—nor for that matter to any other responsible scholarship I have seen on the council. Nowhere in the Alberigo volumes is there the slightest suggestion that the "new beginning" meant in any way a rupture in the faith of the Church or a diminution of any dogma. The only person I know who believed and propagated that assessment was Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who declared the council heretical. "New beginning" in any case seems like a weak description compared with "new Pentecost," which is how on December 8, 1962, Pope John XXIII described what he hoped for from the council.[11]

Whatever the merits and demerits of the two sides, this controversy puts before us in a new, clear, and dramatic way a problem that has dogged Vatican II all along: its interpretation. That is certainly not a problem peculiar to the council, but it is particularly acute for it. For one thing, Ruini, Marchetto, and others are correct when they insist that the documents of the council do nothing but insist on the continuity of the council with the tradition of the Church. On the surface there is in the documents no explicit and straightforward indication that any change was being made in procedures, discipline, doctrine, or ecclesiastical style. In this regard, Vatican II is not notably different from the Council of Trent. Nevertheless, it still poses a major interpretative problem, because in the years immediately following the council, we often heard that it was "the end of the Counter Reformation," or even "the end of the Constantinian era," or,

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[11] *Acta synodalia sacrosancti concilii oecumenici Vaticani II,* 5 vols. (Vatican City: Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970–1978) l, part 4, 647.

indeed, a "new Pentecost." We heard and read a great deal about "the spirit of the council," which seemed to imply a reality that to some extent transcended the letter of its documents and carried with it an implication of, well, a "new beginning" in many areas. The inadequacy of the term "spirit of the council" gradually emerged as it became clear that *your* "spirit of the council" was not *my* "spirit of the council," but many of us, I believe, still cannot shake the feeling that the expression got hold of something that was both real and important. "Spirit" suggested that the council had an overall orientation or pointed in a certain direction.

What is missing in the otherwise excellent norms provided by the synod of 1985 is one that would read somewhat as follows: "While always keeping in mind the fundamental continuity in the great tradition of the Church, interpreters must also take due account of how the council is discontinuous with previous practices, teachings, and traditions, indeed, discontinuous with previous councils." Without such a norm, the emphasis is exclusively on continuity. To thus insist is to blind oneself to discontinuities, which is to blind oneself to change of any kind. And if there is no change, nothing happened. Vatican II was a celebration of the perennial faith of the Catholic Church.

Such continuity, I venture, takes the Church out of history and puts it out of touch with reality as we know it. In Catholicism this emphasis on continuity is not new, but it became characteristic in the 16th century. As I suggested, it found strong expression in the decrees of the Council of Trent, which to an unprecedented degree insisted that they were teaching and prescribing nothing that was not in continuity with the apostolic tradition. The council meant to counter Protestant charges that the Church had deviated from that tradition. Later in the century the emphasis gained momentum with Cesare Baronio's *Ecclesiastical Annales*, written to counter the Lutheran *Magdeburg Centuries*, and, as today's controversy makes clear, it has never since quite lost its hold.[12] A distinguished German Protestant historian, Gottfried Maron, just a few decades ago went so far as to criticize Hubert Jedin's treatment of the era of Trent for precisely this defect.[13] Yet, historians of Trent and of the Counter Reformation have done little else but tell us how Catholicism changed in the 16th century, to a great extent as a result of the council. Even though Trent insisted on its continuity, something changed. Something happened. Why else would we speak of a "Tridentine era"?

[12] See, e.g., my *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Period* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2000) 10–11.

[13] Gottfried Maron, "Das Schicksal der katholischen Reform im 16. Jahrhundert: Zur Frage nach der Kontinuität in der Kirchengeschichte," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 88 (1977) 218–29. See also Paolo Simoncelli, "Inquisizione romana e riforma in Italia," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 100 (1988) 5–125.

In the late 19th century, Otto von Bismark did not lack reasons to try to bring Catholics to heel in the new German *Reich*, but the definitions of papal primacy and especially papal infallibility provided him with yet another reason to launch his *Kulturkampf* against the Church. In 1874 he published a circular letter in which he said, among other things, that the definitions reduced the bishops to mere tools (*Werkzeuge*) of the pope, who now had more power than any absolute monarch of the past. The German bishops' joint statement of early 1875 tried to refute Bismark's allegations, especially by arguing that the definitions had changed nothing, "not the least thing."[14] Pius IX agreed with this interpretation. The definitions, it seems, were a non-event.

Did anything happen at Vatican II? Anything of significance? I believe something happened, and I will try briefly to say why. I will do so by indicating some of the extraordinary ways the council was discontinuous with the 20 councils that preceded it. I must begin, however, with a big qualification. As a practicing historian I have come to realize that in any social entity the continuities run deeper and tend to be stronger than the discontinuities. The *Annales* school of historiography has taught us well the overriding importance of "la longue durée."[15] After the American Revolution the citizens of the new nation continued to eat the same kind of food, read the same kind of books, think pretty much the same kind of thoughts, founded their nation on principles largely derived from their English experience, and even continued to speak the same English language. Much the same can be said analogously of the French after the bloody trauma of the French Revolution.

Not only in fact but in theory this principle of continuity has to obtain in the Church and obtain in an even more profound way. The mission is to preach the word that was received from the mouth of Christ and the Apostles. The charge to the Church is to hand on that message, not adulterate or change it. I cannot imagine any theologian, any historian, any believer disagreeing with that principle. The Church is by definition a conservative society.

All that having been said, change happens. The American Revolution was more than a series of battles ending in a treaty. It changed things. Change happens even in the Church. Unless we admit that reality, the history of the Church makes no sense and has no relevance. It is reduced to a collection of more or less interesting stories, as the Church sails through the sea of history unaffected by it. Such a sailing is an expression

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[14] "Responsa ad epistolam circularem cancellarii Bismarck," in *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum, et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, ed. Henricus Denzinger, Adolfus Schönmetzer, 33rd ed. (New York: Herder, 1965) nos. 3112–17, at no. 3116

[15] See Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929–89* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1990).

of the historical mind-set R. G. Collingwood identified many years ago as "substantialism," a notion that goes back to classical authors but still affects us.[16] The Church is not, however, a substance but a community of human beings living in time and space. The story of the Church, therefore, is the story of encounters with "the other." In these encounters both parties are affected. As the Church converted "the barbarians," the barbarians influenced the Church.

Most important, change is inherent in the very concept of tradition, which is not an inert body of truths but an incarnated reality. The very transcendence of the message means it can be only imperfectly articulated by any given person or culture. Continuity is postulated, deeper than any discontinuity, yet certain discontinuities and shifts in emphasis seem equally postulated. The tradition is faithfully passed on only when it is rendered engaging and life-giving.

John Courtney Murray said that development of doctrine was "*the* issue under the issues at Vatican II."[17] Although I believe that there was in fact a second, closely related, issue under the issues (the relationship of center to periphery), the current debate over interpretation bears out that that issue is still unresolved and burning. Development is a soft word for change. It presumes continuity. It also presumes discontinuity. I am the same person I was 50 years ago, yet in important ways I am not the same person. Just how continuity and discontinuity function must be discerned in each case, but this tricky relationship cannot be understood by ignoring either factor.

THE COUNCIL AND THE COUNCILS

In what ways and to what degree was Vatican II discontinuous with its predecessors and what is the import of that discontinuity? Those are the questions. At the outset it is helpful to recall that almost the only feature common to all the councils from Nicaea (325) to Vatican II is that they have been assemblies, principally of bishops, that have made authoritative decisions binding on the whole Church. Other than that, they differ considerably among themselves. They are to a greater or lesser degree discontinuous with one another.

The councils fall into two clearly distinct groups. The first eight were all held in the East, had Greek as their official language, were convoked by the emperor or empress, and no pope attended any of them. The remaining

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[16] See R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University, 1956) 42–45.

[17] John Courtney Murray, "This Matter of Religious Freedom," *America* 112 (January 9, 1965) 43 (his emphasis).

13 were all held in Italy, France, or Switzerland, conducted in Latin, and were, in one way or another, convoked by the pope. Except for the Council of Florence, there was no notable participation in them by members of the Greek-speaking Church. The councils became an institution of the West—hardly an insignificant change.

Although bishops have for the most part been the determining influence in the councils, others have at times played roles just as important, as with Emperor Charles V at Trent, King Philip IV of France at Vienne, the Empress Irene at Nicaea II, and, of course, Emperor Constantine at Nicaea. Although some 400 bishops attended Lateran Council IV (1215), they were greatly outnumbered by the 800 abbots who attended. At Lateran V (1512–1517), 26 secular rulers, nobles, and knights are listed as participants, a number that does not include the representatives sent by the great monarchs.

I could go on, but I hope I have made the point that there is no reason to be surprised if Vatican II has distinctive features. What I will try to show, however, is how significant those features are when taken in the aggregate—so significant, in fact, as to require, as Ruini has postulated, a new hermeneutic. But it is a hermeneutic that takes serious account of the discontinuity, thus putting the council's continuity in perspective.

The most obvious of these special characteristics is the massive proportions of Vatican II and its remarkable international breadth. It can with some justification be described as the biggest meeting in the history of the world—not in the sense that it attracted the hundreds of thousands that events like the international Olympics do. It was biggest only if we take into account all the factors that are integral to it, which begin with its length, which must include the two years of intense preparation as well as the four years it was in session. This may not seem long compared with Trent, which stretched over 17 years. But for Trent the number is deceptive because of the long intervals between the three periods in which the council was actually in session.

Unlike other councils the consultation with bishops and others before the council was thorough. It fills 13 folio volumes, well over 7,000 pages. When this material was reworked by the preparatory commissions it amounted to another six volumes and another 4,000 pages. These figures are dwarfed by the 35 volumes of the *acta* of the council itself, which brings the grand total to 54 volumes. All the documents related to Trent, the largest collection for any other council, consist of 17 volumes. Vatican II issued 16 final documents. The pagination of these 16 is almost twice the length of the decrees of Trent, and the decrees of Trent and Vatican II together equal in volume the decrees of all the other 19 councils taken together. Those 16 decrees seem like a spectacularly long-winded way of saying, "Nothing is happening here. Business as usual."

The sheer quantity of the official documentation reflects the immense dimensions of almost every other aspect of the council. Approximately 2,500 bishops participated in the council. In contrast, about 750 bishops were present at Vatican I. The Council of Trent opened with just 29 bishops or prelates and five superiors general of religious orders. Even later, at its best-attended sessions, the number of voting members at Trent barely exceeded 200.

The bishops who actually attended Vatican II came from 116 different countries, whereas 40 percent of the bishops at Vatican I were from Italy. Many brought with them a secretary or a theologian, or both. To this number must be added others who came to Rome because of official or semi-official business related to the council, which, of course, included about a hundred "observers" from other churches, as well as representatives of the media. By the time the council opened, the Vatican had issued about a thousand press cards to journalists. Probably close to 10,000 people were present in Rome at any given time during the council because they had some kind of business relating to it.

It would be a terrible shame, and surprising, if this unprecedented expenditure of time, effort, and money (which I have not even mentioned) eventuated in nothing other than "business as usual." Yet two more features about the participants in Vatican II deserve mention. The first is not only the presence but the highly influential role of some Roman Catholic theologians who even as the council opened were under a ban of silence imposed on them by the Vatican's Holy Office of the Inquisition and whose views had in one way or another been condemned. As the council got under way, these theologians not only had the ban on them implicitly lifted but went on to be among the principal architects of the council's decrees. I am referring, of course, to theologians like Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, Karl Rahner, and the American John Courtney Murray. This feature of the council, too, was not only unprecedented but surely suggests that something was happening at the council that was—or wanted to be—a change in the status quo.

The second feature is the presence of the observers, honored guests who did not share many of the basic principles out of which the Catholic Church operated and were invited to make their differences known, which they did outside the formal sessions of the council. Unprecedented. The presence of the observers stimulated a more searching scrutiny of the deliberations and decisions of the council, but it was also important for nudging the council to consider issues of concern to others besides Roman Catholics—or, maybe better, besides Roman Catholic prelates.

The interest in the council of the communications media was aggressive. This, too, helped the nudging process. Until the Council of Trent the deliberations of councils were almost exclusively the private concern of

those who participated in them. The invention of printing ushered in a new situation. By the time of Vatican II radio and television could transmit news around the world at the very moment any newsworthy event happened. Once the council got under way what particularly captivated the attention of the media and the public they served was the ill-kept secret of the sometimes acrid debates and confrontations in the council and the emerging possibility of changes in posture and practice that just a short while before had seemed set in stone. The Catholic Church had presented itself internally and to the world at large as the Church that did not change. It took great care to show a united front on all issues and to deal swiftly with any phenomena within the Church that might seem to suggest otherwise. Yet the debates and disagreements in the council, despite efforts to hide or disguise them, were manifest and entered the public forum, where they were discussed and debated. They shocked some, delighted others, and rendered patent to all that Catholicism was not the monolith they thought they knew.

The new ease of communication meant that after the council was over its decisions could be implemented with a speed and directness no previous council could come close to mustering, even if it had wanted to. In fact, with only a very few exceptions the decisions of previous councils had no immediate relevance for the life of the faithful or at least did not entail a wrenching change in received patterns. As it turned out, some decisions of Vatican II made a dramatic impact on the life of ordinary believers. When such believers entered their churches for Mass a year or so after the council, for instance, they experienced something so different from what they had experienced all their lives up to that Sunday that they would have had to be deaf, dumb, and blind not to notice it.

The decisions of previous councils were directed almost exclusively to the clergy. Vatican II departed from that pattern by addressing Catholics of every status. Most remarkable was the attention it paid to the laity. Then in *Gaudium et spes* it addressed "all humanity," all persons of good will— Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers. Vatican II thus took greater account of the world around it than any previous council and assumed as one of its principal tasks dialogue or conversation with that world in order to work for a better world, not simply a better Church. It dealt with war, peace, poverty, family, and similar topics as they touched every human being. This is a breathtaking change in scope from that of every previous council.

AGGIORNAMENTO AND *RESSOURCEMENT*

Whence the impulse that allowed such change as legitimate and good? The mentality with which many of the most influential bishops and theo-

logians approached their task was, despite the condemnations issued during the Modernist crisis of the early 20th century, more historical than in any previous council. This mentality, the result of the great impetus to historical studies that began in the 19th century and never abated, had in certain Catholic circles deeply affected the study of every aspect of church life and doctrine. The leading voices at the council were thus much aware of the changes that had taken place in the long history of the Church and were willing to draw consequences from them. This keener sense of history permitted greater freedom in judging that some practices, traditions, or doctrinal formulations might simply be anachronistic or currently inappropriate or even harmful and therefore should be modified or eliminated.

This persuasion found expression in two words that capture the justification or motivation behind many of the council's actions—the Italian *aggiornamento* and the French *ressourcement*. Although they express almost diametrically opposed impulses—the first looking forward, the second backward—they are both geared to change. *Aggiornamento* means updating or, more boldly, modernizing. John XXIII's opening allocution to the council fathers provided a basis for it, which was soon taken up by the progressive wing.[18] Changes needed to be made in the Church to make it more viable in the "new era" the council assumed was dawning. On one level this was nothing new. Lateran IV, for instance, legitimated changes if they were done out of *urgens necessitas vel evidens utilitas*.[19]

But at least three aspects were special about the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II. First, the changes done in the name of *aggiornamento* were sometimes obvious reversals of what had broadly been considered normative. Second, no previous council ever took the equivalent of *aggiornamento* as a leitmotif, as a broad principle rather than as a rare exception, with its implication that the Church should change in certain regards to meet the times rather than the times change to meet the Church. Nevertheless, the bishops at the council had no intention of rupturing the fundamental continuity of the Catholic tradition. In the opening oration at Lateran V (1512), Egidio da Viterbo in an often quoted axiom expressed the mind-set that prevailed in councils up to Vatican II: we are to be changed by religion, he insisted, not religion by us.[20] The bishops at Vatican II surely

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[18] *Acta synodalia* 1, part 1, 168, and also 171–72.

[19] *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Norman Tanner, 2 vols. (Washington: Georgetown University, 1990) 1:257. For a description of different uses of history in councils, see my "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's Aggiornamento," *Theological Studies* 32 (1971) 573–601, at 577–84.

[20] Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum collectio* 32.669: "homines per sacra immutari fas est, non sacra per homines." See my *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 179–91. See also Bernard Lon-

subscribed to that principle, but they would interpret it in an unprecedent-
edly broad way.

Third, the council took as axiomatic that Catholicism was adaptive even
to "the modern world." This was a shift from the integralism that marked
most Catholic thinking from the early 19th century well into the 20th and
saw almost everything stemming from the Enlightenment and the French
Revolution as incompatible with the Church. How and why this shift took
place is difficult to determine satisfactorily, but in a few circles it was
already under way by the 1920s. Jacques Maritain's *Antimoderne* (1922)
was, despite the title, a catalyst and a symptom of it. According to him,
Catholicism possesses a "bold ability to adapt itself to the new conditions
erupting suddenly in the life of the world."[21]

Ressourcement means return to the sources with a view to making
changes that retrieve a more normative past. It has *avant la lettre* a truly
venerable history that has found explicit and important articulation in the
history of the Western Church beginning with the Gregorian Reform of the
eleventh century when a series of reforming popes spearheaded a vigorous
campaign to restore a more ancient canonical tradition. As the dust began
to settle after the bitter and bloody battles that the campaign ignited, the
principle, even though not explicitly invoked, undergirded much of the
important legislation of Lateran Councils I and II regarding especially the
election of bishops and clerical celibacy.[22]

Ressourcement was in its Latin form, *ad fontes*, the motto of the great
humanist movement of the Renaissance. *Ad fontes*—a call to return to the
good literature of antiquity to displace the Latin jargon or doggerel, as the
humanists saw it, of "the schools," that is, the universities. It was a call to
recover a more literary style of discourse. Included in the canon of good
literature were not only Demosthenes and Cicero but the Bible and the
Fathers of the Church as well.

This "return to the sources" is what drove humanists like Petrarch and
Erasmus because they believed that the recuperation of the ancient authors
had profound ethical, religious, and theological implications. *Ressource-*

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ergan, "*Exitenz* and *Aggiornamento*," in *Collection*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and
Robert M. Doran, Collected Works, vol. 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1988)
222–31.

[21] See Stephen Schloesser, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar
Paris, 1919–1933* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005) 160–70.

[22] The quantity of literature on this issue is overwhelming. Brian Tierney's little
book, *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050–1300* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-
Hall, 1964) can still be profitably consulted. Among more recent studies especially
commendable are Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *Church and Monarchy from the Ninth
to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988) and H. E. J.
Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073–1085* (New York: Oxford University, 1998).

ment also drove the Protestant Reformers, as they sought to restore the authentic gospel that the papal Church had obscured and perverted. In Catholicism in the 19th century *ressourcement* lay behind both Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni patris* (1879) initiating the Thomistic revival, as well as the conservative origins of the liturgical movement with Prosper Guéranger in the monastery of Solemnes.

On the eve of Vatican II *ressourcement* drove much of the theological ferment in France that caused grave concern in Rome and elicited from the Holy Office silencings and condemnations. Stigmatized by its opponents as *la nouvelle théologie*, it was viewed by its proponents as just the opposite, as a recovery of an older theology—to a large extent, the theology of the Fathers.[23] The problem was that this *ressourcement* seemed to contravene the earlier Thomistic and, more broadly, neo-Scholastic *ressourcement* that originated with Leo XIII and that now monopolized Catholic theological discourse. In *Humani generis* Pius XII expressed his displeasure at those who criticized Thomism and wanted "to bring about a return in the explanation of Catholic doctrine to the way of speaking used in Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church."[24] Within a short time proponents of the "new" theology were being removed from their teaching posts.[25]

Ad fontes and *ressourcement*—these catch-words are, on the surface, about discontinuity. By the time of Vatican II even the most conservative theologians admitted that some form of "development" had taken place in the teaching of the Church through the centuries. Newman's *Essay* on the subject, received with suspicion in Catholic circles when first published, was now taken as its virtually definitive exposition. But "development" was usually understood as moving further along a given path, as with the definition of the dogma of the Assumption following the definition of the Immaculate Conception and leading to the hope expressed by many on the eve of Vatican II for further Marian definitions at the council. *Ressourcement* is not quite the same thing. It looks to the past for norms or practices or mind-sets that somehow are going to change or correct or at least qualify the direction of current developments.

This "return to the sources" has itself had different modalities. With the Gregorian reformers of the eleventh century it said: we have been on the

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[23] See Brian Daley, "The *Nouvelle Théologie* and the Patristic Revival: Sources, Symbols, and the Science of Theology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005) 362–82. See also my "Developments, Reforms, and Two Great Reformations: Towards a Historical Assessment of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 44 (1983) 373–406.

[24] Pius XII, "Humani generis," in *The Papal Encyclicals*, ed. Claudia Carlen, 5 vols. (New York: McGrath, 1981) 4:175–83, at 177.

[25] See, e.g., Thomas O'Meara, "'Raid on the Dominicans': The Repression of 1954," *America* 170 (February 5, 1994) 8–16.

wrong path by letting laymen choose bishops; we must stop that and return to the right path of canonical elections; we are not going to continue to move along path X but go back to the fork in the road and now, instead, take path Y. Confrontation, war, and the sacking of Rome followed. Eventually the Gregorians were forced to accommodate their goals to the political reality of their day. Nonetheless, in principle their "return" postulated a radical discontinuity.

The *ressourcement* of the mid-20th century was not quite the same thing. It was more multiform. It is possible to include within it, for instance, Thomists like Marie-Dominique Chenu as well as patristic scholars like de Lubac and Jean Daniélou.[26] It was reacting in the first place to the rigid propositional theology of the seminary textbooks and to the narrowing and enervating of the Catholic tradition that the scholars of the *ressourcement* believed those texts effected. It was reacting to the ahistorical mentality of those texts.[27] The recovery of the patristic mode, along with a recovery of a more genuine Thomism, was a return to the life-giving well-springs. It would show forth the richness of the Catholic tradition and at the same time suggest that the tradition was bigger than any system. It would thus suggest that mystery was the first quality of the tradition.

Opponents of the *nouvelle théologie* did not see *ressourcement* that way. They saw it as subversive of the status quo on just about every level. Such a return would introduce unacceptable, indeed heterodox, discontinuities into the tradition. That is why applications of the *ressourcement* principle often ran into trouble at Vatican II. The lightening rod at the council was collegiality. Its advocates justified it as a venerable tradition that needed to be recovered to complement and "develop" the teaching of Vatican I on the hierarchical structure of the Church and even to enhance the prerogatives of the papacy. Its opponents saw it not as developing Vatican I but as contravening it.[28] Hence the bitter struggles over it during Vatican II.

The principle ran into trouble in other ways, but for our purposes the most crucial is one that has received practically no attention despite its profound importance for understanding the council and constructing a "new hermeneutic" for it. I am speaking of the literary form in which the decrees of the council were framed. Like collegiality that aspect of *ressourcement* ran into considerable opposition especially in the early months of

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[26] See Daley, "*Nouvelle*" 371–76.

[27] See, e.g., Bernard Lonergan, "The Transition from a Classicist World View to Historical Mindedness," in *A Second Collection: Papers*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996; orig. ed. 1974) 1–10.

[28] See, e.g., the interesting intervention of Bishop Luigi Bettazzi in which he argued that collegiality was based on a long-standing theological and canonical tradition and that it was those who opposed it, not those who proposed it, who were the real *novatores* (*Acta synodalia* 2, part 2, 484–87).

the council, but it eventually prevailed. It must be taken into account if we are to know whether anything happened at Vatican II.

GENRE, FORM, CONTENT

What happened at Vatican II? That question is usually answered by indicating how certain elements in the key decrees were discontinuous with previous teaching or practice. *Unitatis redintegratio,* the decree on ecumenism, was discontinuous not only with the polemics of the Counter Reformation but more pointedly with the encyclicals *Mortalium animos* of Pius XI (1928) condemning the ecumenical movement and *Humani generis* of Pius XII (1950) condemning "eirenicism."[29] It was discontinuous with the mind-set that as late as 1963 forbade a nun in a Catholic hospital to summon a Protestant minister for a dying person.[30] *Dei Verbum,* the Constitution on the Word of God, was discontinuous with the tradition that since the 16th century had made the Bible practically a forbidden book for Catholics.[31] *Dignitatis humanae,* the declaration on religious liberty, was discontinuous not only with the long "Constantinian era" but particularly with the condemnations of separation of church and state by the popes of the 19th and 20th centuries. On the very eve of Vatican II, John Courney Murray was in difficulties with the Holy Office for questioning that the Catholic confessional state was the ideal to be striven for.[32]

These and similar changes were strenuously opposed in the council by a minority precisely because they were changes. They are immensely significant but also well known and frequently commented on. They can be called changes in content. I am asking, however, that we shift the focus from content to form. Even though message and medium are one reality, I am asking that in so far as it is possible we shift the focus from *what* the council said to *how* it said it. This means engaging in form-analysis. It means taking into account the most obvious feature of the council's 16 documents and drawing conclusions from it.

What is that feature? Their length. Why are they so long? Because, as

[29] Pius XI, "Mortalium animos," in Carlen, *Encyclicals*, 3:313–19, and Pius XII, "Humani generis," ibid., 4:175–83, at 176–77.

[30] See, e.g., the widely used handbook by Heribert Jone, *Moral Theology*, trans. Urban Adelman, 15th ed. (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1963) 70.

[31] See, e.g., Gigliola Fragnito, *La Bibbia al rogo: La censura ecclesiastica e i volgarizzamenti della Scrittura, 1471–1605* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997).

[32] See, e.g., Pius IX, "Syllabus," in Denzinger, *Enchiridion* nos. 2901–80, at no. 2955; Leo XIII, "Au milieu," in Carlen, *Encyclicals* 2:278–83, at 282, and Pius X, "Vehementer nos," ibid. 3:45–51, at 46: "The Roman Pontiffs have never ceased, as circumstances required, to condemn the doctrine of the separation of church and state." For an account of Murray's saga, see Donald E. Pelotte, *John Courtney Murray: Theologian in Conflict* (New York: Paulist, 1975) 27–73.

was repeatedly insisted upon in the council, they are "pastoral." This so-called pastoral form is a literary genre that was new to the conciliar tradition; it was a distincively new mode of discourse. That fact is crucially important for understanding what went on in the council. Form and content—*verba et res*—cannot be separated. There is no understanding a poem without taking into account that it is a poem. In our case the form or genre results in a council different from every one that preceded it. The council adopted a new style of discourse and in so doing set forth through that style a striking teaching on how the Church was to be.

The Traditional Genres

Through the centuries councils have made use of a range of literary forms. Beginning with Nicaea, however, the vast majority of those genres evince characteristics derived from the legislative-judicial traditions of discourse developed in the Roman empire. These genres were primarily laws or judicial sentences. It is not far off the mark to postulate that the implicit model for the early Church's synods and councils was the Roman senate.[33] Although that body had lost much of its authority by the time Constantine assumed a leadership role in the Church, it continued to legislate both in Rome and in its counterpart in Constantinople, where Constantine presided over it.

When Constantine convoked the Council of Nicaea, he held it there in his palace. He acted as a kind of honorary president of the assembly and intervened in its deliberations. He ratified the council's decisions by making them legally binding and, except where they would impinge on the rights and duties of bishops, took responsibility for their implementation. A pattern was set. At the Council of Chalcedon (451), the emperor's 19 envoys sat on a dais in the center of the assembly and, though they did not vote, they chaired the meeting and set the order of the day.

While assuring correct belief in the Church and appropriate behavior

[33] See Francis Dvornik, "Emperors, Popes and General Councils," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 6 (1951) 3–23, and his *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background*, 2 vols. (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1966). Although Dvonik made a few mistakes in fact, his basic point that the Roman Senate was the model for how councils operated is generally accepted. For a detailed treatment of pre-Nicaean councils, see Joseph Anton Fischer and Adolf Lumpe, *Die Synoden von den Anfängen bis zum Vorabend des Nicaenums* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1997); Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325–787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1990; orig. ed. 1983); Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 B.C.–A.D. 337)* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977) 590–607; Richard J. A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1984) 431–87.

especially of the clergy were the council's fundamental concerns, they were not and could not be separated from securing the proper social order at large and hence from their implementation by the civil authorities. Law and order. From the beginning that enforcement was inconsistent, depending on the whim of the emperors, but coercive enforcement by emperors, kings, and other lay magnates continued to be a constitutive element of councils down to Vatican I (1870), by which time it had become politically unfeasible because of the growing separation of church and state.

The fundamental assumption governing councils from their very inception, therefore, was that they were legislative bodies that issued ordinances regarding doctrinal formulations and public behavior—*fides et mores*. To these ordinances were often attached penalties for violators. The very first canon of Nicaea imposed suspension on any cleric who castrated himself.[34] The first canon of the next council, Constantinople I (381), anathematized all heresies (a long list of them followed).[35]

Among the literary forms councils used were confessions of faith, historical narratives, bulls and letters, judicial sentences against ecclesiastical criminals, constitutions, "chapters," and various kinds of "decrees." Especially in the early councils the most respected and important form was the creedal statement. Nonetheless, down through the centuries the canon stands out for its recurrence and—if we take into account that in the sources it sometimes goes by other names—for its numerical predominance over every other form. A canon is an ordinance, usually only a few lines in length, that entails punishment for failure to comply.[36] It is a form that clearly manifests the assumption that a council is a legislative-judicial body. Vatican I, for instance, issued 18 canons, whereas Trent issued more than 130 for its doctrinal decrees alone and did much the same for its disciplinary enactments. The canons generally employ the formula: "If anyone should . . . , let him be anathema."

Even dogmatic canons do not strike directly at what a person might believe or think or feel, but at what they "say" or "deny," that is, at some observable behavior. As such, they are not concerned with interiority. Like any good law, canons and their equivalents were formulated to be as unambiguous as possible. They drew clear lines. They spoke a language that tried unmistakably to distinguish "who's in" and "who's out," which often entailed not only meting out punishment for the latter but even considering them enemies.

The language of the councils, of which the canon was emblematic, could

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[34] Alberigo and Tanner, *Decrees* 1:6.
[35] Ibid. 1:31.
[36] See M. Lalmant, "Canon," *Dictionnaire de droit canonique*, 7 vols. (Paris: Letouzey, 1935–65) 2:1283–88.

be vehement in its depiction of those who presumably were subverting the Church, whether by propagating bad belief or indulging in bad behavior. The language is adversarial, the language of battle against a foe. To that extent it is a departure from the sober language of the courts. At Vienne (1311–1312) the council condemned the Knights Templar in the language of "anger and wrath" reminiscent of the prophets.[37] Pope Julius II's decree in Lateran V (1512) against the cardinals who had attempted to depose him minced no words: "We condemn, reject and detest, with the approval of this holy council, each and every thing done by those sons of perdition."[38] The Council of Constance (1418) denounced John Wyclif as a "profligate enemy" of the faith and a "pseudo-Christian," and handed over his disciple Jan Hus to be burned at the stake.[39]

My point is that, although allowances must be made for many differences, the councils from Nicaea to Vatican I had a characteristic style of discourse. The style was composed of two basic elements. The first was a literary genre—the canon or its equivalent. The second was the vocabulary typical of the genre and appropriate to it. It consisted in words of threat and intimidation, words of surveillance and punishment, words of a superior speaking to inferiors, or, just as often, to an enemy. It consisted in power-words.

All this sounds grim. It might sound devoid of even the slightest concern for the spirit, a good case of the letter killing. We need, however, to employ here a hermeneutic of compassion and acknowledge that even in the Church surveillance and punishment are sometimes the only practical course of action if we want to change behavior. The bishops at Trent could not reform the episcopacy (that is, themselves) without strong sanctions. They knew this, and they acted accordingly.[40] We need also recognize that changing behavior can sometimes result in a change of heart—working from the outside to the inside. Although canons and the like deal with the exterior, in so far as they are inspired by Christian principles they must be presumed not to be entirely devoid of relationship to inner conversion.

Be that as it may, this style of discourse expressed and promoted procedures in accord with a certain style of being and behavior. The decrees of Trent illustrate the point. Despite the council's achievements, inconceivable without the "language-game" the council adopted, in the long run the decrees reinforced "social disciplining" as an ecclesiastical style and pro-

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[37] Alberigo and Tanner, *Decrees* 1:336.
[38] Ibid. 1:597.   [39] Ibid. 1:411.
[40] See my "The Council of Trent: Myths, Misunderstandings, and Misinformation," in *Spirit, Style, Story: Essays Honoring John W. Padberg, S.J.*, ed. Thomas M. Lucas (Chicago: Loyola, 2002) 205–26.

moted an image of the Church as a stern, exigent, and suspicious parent.[41] "Behave thus . . . or else." The language projected the image, and the image promoted the reality and helped it self-fulfill.

In the 19th century that reality expressed itself with insistence and prominence at the highest level in the style of papal pronouncements, such as Gregory XVI's *Mirari vos* (1832), Pius IX's "Syllabus of Errors" (1864), and in the early 20th century Pius X's *Lamentabili* and *Pascendi* (1907). The language of these documents and the many like them is the language of adversarial relationships. "We would have drowned," said Gregory, "as a result of the terrible conspiracy of impious men . . . so that we had to restrain their great obstinacy with the rod. . . . Depravity exults, science is impudent, liberty dissolute. The holiness of the sacred is despised . . . and errors of all kinds spread boldly." The errors Gregory especially meant were freedom of the press, liberty of conscience, separation of church and state, and, not least, rebellion against monarchs by "shameless lovers of freedom."[42] By the time Vatican II opened, vituperation of such high quality had practically disappeared from ecclesiastical statements but not the adversarial stance. Even the sober canon assumed bad will on the part of persons contravening it.

From the beginning concepts from Greek philosophy also affected conciliar language, but especially in the High Middle Ages the dialectical and analytical aspects of that tradition began to play a greater role. Dialectics is the art of proving a point and thus winning an argument. It is an appeal to the mind. It cannot succeed without a technical vocabulary and unambiguous definitions. It thus draws clear lines of demarcation and in so doing manifests that characteristic of the legal-judicial tradition. The decrees of Trent on the sacraments are perhaps the best examples of this tradition in action in the councils, but the assumption that the purpose of councils is "to define" betrays the broader influence of the dialectical tradition.

The New Genre

The first open clash at Vatican II between the progressives and conservatives took place in mid-November, 1962, over the document on "The Sources of Revelation" (*De fontibus revelationis*). The document's style was a bone of contention. Besides other traits of the legislative-judicial style, the document contained expressions like "Let no one dare say . . ." and "The Church utterly condemns. . . ."[43] At that early moment in the

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[41] On social disciplining and the Counter Reformation, see my *Trent and All That* 114–16, with bibliography.

[42] Gregory XVI, "Mirari vos," in Carlen, *Encyclicals* 1:235–40.

[43] "De fontibus Revelationis," *Acta synodalia* 1, part 3, 14–26.

council, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, prefect of the Holy Office and chief architect of the document, felt compelled to defend it precisely against the anticipated criticism that its style was not "pastoral." In his presentation of the document to the council, he correctly insisted that its style was "the style that has been sanctioned by its use through the ages."[44]

Ottaviani was defensive because a month earlier, on October 22, the day that substantive discussion opened in the council, style was already an issue. The Council Fathers had been presented with their first schema, *Sacrosanctum concilium*. Cardinal Josef Frings was the first speaker, and almost the first words out of his mouth were: "The schema is to be commended for its modest and pastoral literary style, full of the spirit of Holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church."[45] In fact, that document less well exemplified "the spirit of the Fathers of the Church" than the revised versions of other documents that came later, but Frings rang the bell announcing what was to come. It was a bell announcing the legitimizing of a style that only a decade earlier *Humani generis* had dismissed as illegitimate.

During the first period of the council (1962), the progressives continued to insist on a "pastoral" style. On November 19 Bishop Emiel-Jozef De Smedt, speaking for the Secretariate for Promoting Christian Unity, made an important intervention criticizing *De fontibus*. What, he asked, is required to foster greater unity among Christians today? Of course, clear and precise presentation of positions. But just as important is an appropriate style of presentation, a style that will foster genuine dialogue. That is precisely what this schema lacks, framed as it is in Scholastic categories. "On the contrary, the biblical and patristic style in and of itself avoids and prevents many difficulties, minunderstandings, and prejudices."[46]

Ottaviani's brief and angry presentation to the council of the schema *De ecclesia* some ten days later betrays how frayed tempers had become over precisely this point of style: "The concern of those who prepared the schema was that it be as pastoral as possible. . . . I say this because I expect to hear the usual litany from the fathers of the council: it's academic, it's not ecumenical, it's not pastoral, it's negative and other things like that. . . . Those whose constant cry is 'Take it away! Take it away!' are ready to open fire."[47] That very day De Smedt accepted the challenge and opened fire by denouncing the schema for a style that was triumphal, clerical, and juridical.[48] His speech became one of the most quoted of the council.

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[44] Ibid. 1, part 3, 27 (my translation).
[45] Ibid. 1, part l, 309 (my translation).
[46] See ibid. 1, part 3, 184–87, at 185.
[47] Ibid. 1, part 4, 121 (my translation).
[48] See ibid. 142–44.

Style was, therefore, an explicit and important issue. The new style did not slip into the council unnoticed. By the second period (1963), the opponents of the change had been forced to to capitulate, but not without still nagging criticism. The council had adopted for its pronouncements a new style of discourse, a new genre. That style, while operative in all 16 final documents, is best exemplified in the four constitutions of the council—on the liturgy, the Church, revelation, and the Church in the modern world. Even in the constitutions, however, the new style suffers interruptions, deviations, and admixtures. Long sections are simply expository, but the genre still frames them.

The genre can be precisely identified. It was a genre known and practiced in many cultures from time immemorial, but it was clearly analyzed and its features carefully codified by classical authors like Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian.[49] It is the panegyric, that is, the painting of an idealized portrait in order to excite admiration and appropriation. An old genre in the rhetorical tradition of the West, it was used extensively by the Fathers of the Church in their homilies and other writings. It derives from neither the legal tradition of classical antiquity nor the philosophical/dialectical but from the humanistic or literary.

I have tried in my *Four Cultures of the West* to delineate the characteristics of these traditions and point to some of their religious manifestations in some detail.[50] Also pertinent is my earlier study of the sermons preached *coram papa* in the Sistine Chapel during the Renaissance.[51] In it I show how the introduction of classical rhetoric in the form of the epideictic oration changed the ethos, purpose, and content of preaching there, moving it from its medieval and Scholastic form to something quite different. The appropriation of the epideictic genre redefined what a sermon was supposed to do: rather than proving points it was now to touch hearts and move hearers to action for their fellow human beings. Like any good oration, these, of course, "taught," but in a different mode than did the Scholastic sermons.

This phenomenon was part of the general revival of interest in the Fathers in the Renaissance that until recently scholars have neglected and that manifests striking parallels with the patristic *ressourcement* of the

[49] See, e.g., George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1980), and his *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1983).

[50] John W. O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2004).

[51] John W. O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orators of the Papal Court, c.1450–1521* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1979).

mid-20th century. Erasmus, so scorned by theologians on both sides of the confessional divide down to our own day, produced his magnificent editions of the Greek and Latin Fathers and sought thereby to renew theology and Christian devotion. This renewal entailed adoption of the rhetorical style of the Fathers for religious and theological discourse.[52] The movement had its origins in Italy, however, where it was received with more appreciation and serenity than it was in northern Europe.[53]

The bitter polemics of the Reformation and Counter Reformation obliterated the memory of this important moment in Christian discourse, so that today historians of theology move directly from the late Middle Ages to the Reformation without passing through the Renaissance. My research on it, however, is responsible for my recurring experience of *déja vu* in reading the documents of Vatican II and for my recognizing how the principles of epideictic rhetoric are operative in them.

How did Vatican II come to adopt the epideictic form? The model was at hand. The patristic revival went back to the 19th century. Jacques-Paul Migne had finished publishing his *Patrologia latina* (1844–1865) well over a decade before Leo XIII's encyclical on Aquinas. In 1943, however, the revival received an important goad when Daniélou and de Lubac began publishing *Sources chrétiennes*. As Brian Daley says: "The Fathers were, both for the first editors of *Sources chrétiennes* and their critics, an emblem for a new, different way of thinking and speaking about the central realities of the Christian faith."[54]

The first document to come to the floor of the council that relatively consistently employed this "new way of thinking and speaking" was the revised version of The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*. It can hardly be a coincidence that the titles of the first and last chapters of de Lubac's *Méditation sur l'église* (1953) are identical with the

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[52] See my introduction to *Spiritualia*, ed. John W. O'Malley, Collected Works of Erasmus, vol. 66 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1988) ix–li, and especially my "Erasmus and Vatican II: Interpreting the Council," in *Cristianesimo nella storia: Saggi in onore di Giuseppe Alberigo*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Alberto Melloni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996) 195–211.

[53] See, e.g., my "The Religious and Theological Culture of Michelangelo's Rome, 1508–1512" in Edgar Wind, *The Religious Symbolism of Michelangelo: The Sistine Ceiling*, ed. Elizabeth Sears (New York: Oxford University, 2000) xli–lii; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); John M. McManamon, *Funeral Oratory and the Cultural Ideals of Italian Humanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1989) and Pietro Paolo Vergerio, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder and Saint Jerome: An Edition and Translation of "Sermones pro Sancto Hieronymo,"* ed. and trans. John M. McManamon (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999).

[54] Daley, "*Nouvelle*" 369.

corresponding chapters of *Lumen gentium*, and that his other chapter titles are loosely congruent with key aspects of *Lumen gentium*.[55] *Méditation* was written in a style strongly evocative of the poetical-rhetorical style of the Fathers.

"The Mystery of the Church" is the title for the opening chapter of *Lumen gentium* and the title for the opening chapter of de Lubac's book. In January 1963, in the name of the Coordinating Commission of the council, Cardinal Suenens had directed the committee revising the original *De ecclesia* to make the mystery of the Church the opening chapter of the new text. He had earlier in the commission criticized the original document for using an inappropriate genre.[56]

Gérard Philips, not de Lubac, was principally responsible for the revision. But no matter how little or how much de Lubac's book directly influenced the development of *Lumen gentium*, the document was written in the same style and opened with "mystery," something beyond definition. It thus moved the council away from what councils were expected to do—define. Instead, the document raised up before our eyes Christ, God, the Church, and the dignity of our human nature to excite us to wonder and admiration. It did this through a panorama of images, evocative of the warmth and richness of the reality of the Church. It engaged in a rhetoric of praise and congratulation. It engaged in panegyric, in the *ars laudandi*, whose technical name is epideictic.

The purpose of the genre, therefore, is not so much to clarify concepts as to heighten appreciation for a person, an event, an institution, and to excite emulation of an ideal. If most Fourth of July speeches are secular examples of the genre at its worst, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is an example of it at its best.[57] Lincoln tried simply to raise appreciation for what was at stake in the war and, at least by implication, to praise it as noble and worthy of the great cost. He wanted to touch the affect of his audience by holding up ideals whose attractiveness would motivate them to strive to achieve them. He employed a rhetoric of invitation.

The documents of Vatican II fit this mold. That is their "style." They hold up ideals and then often draw conclusions from them and spell out consequences, as with the decree on bishops in which their responsibilities are clearly laid out. The responsibilities are laid out, however, not as a code of conduct to be enforced but as ideal to be striven for, with the understanding that they are to be adapted to times and circumstances. Trent had

[55] Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956; French orig.: Paris: Aubier, 1954).

[56] *Acta synodalia* 5, part 1, 159: "Adhibetur genus litterarium concilio non conveniens."

[57] See, e.g., Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

proportionately more to say about bishops than did Vatican II, but it did so through ordinances. Although it is possible to derive an ideal beneath the ordinances, the surface message is the enforcement of law and order.[58]

The epideictic genre is a form of the art of persuasion and thus of reconciliation. While it raises appreciation, it creates or fosters among those it addresses a realization that they all share (or should share) the same ideals and need to work together to achieve them. This genre reminds people of what they have in common rather than what might divide them, and the reminder motivates them to cooperate in enterprises for the common good, to work for a common cause.

To engage in persuasion is to some extent to put oneself on the same level as those being persuaded. Persuaders do not command from on high. Otherwise they would not be persuading but coercing. Persuasion works from the inside out. In order to persuade, persuaders need to establish an identity between themselves and their audience and to make them understand that they share the same concerns. They share, indeed, the same "joy and hope, the same grief and anguish."[59]

The form prompts and enhances congruent content. It should come as no surprise that reconciliation has been one of the perennial themes of the epideictic genre. Although ecumenism of some form was on the agenda of Vatican II from the moment John XXIII announced the council, it found appropriate expression in the new genre and could feel very much at home there. Since the genre wants to raise its audience to big issues, its content in a Christian context is typically the major doctrines of creation, redemption, sanctification.

Implicit in this penchant of the genre to focus on big issues is an invitation to rise above all pettiness and to strive for an expansive vision and a generous spirit. In fact, magnanimity was a virtue especially extolled by the classical masters of the rhetorical tradition, intent as they were on motivating individuals to make great sacrifices to promote the common good. Cicero gave eloquent expression to it in his *De officiis* (I.20.66). It was taken up by Christian authors, including Thomas Aquinas, but, not surprisingly, it was most characteristically praised in the Renaissance. In the Jesuit *Constitutions*, Ignatius Loyola commended it as one of the qualities required in the superior general of the order (no. 728).

Those are some of the traits of the genre, and those are the traits that characterize the discourse of Vatican II. The council was about persuading and inviting. To attain that end it used principally the epideictic genre. I

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[58] See, e.g., Hubert Jedin and Giuseppe Alberigo, *La figura ideale del vescovo secondo la Riforma cattolica*, 2nd ed. (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1985).

[59] *Gaudium et spes* no. 1.

am, of course, not saying that the bishops and theologians self-consciously adopted a specific genre of classical rhetoric as such. I am saying that the documents of the council, for whatever reason, fit that pattern and therefore need to be interpreted accordingly.

As with the traditional genres used by councils, the most concrete manifestation of the character of this genre, and therefore an important key to interpreting its import, is the vocabulary it adopts and fosters. Nowhere is that vocabulary more significant than in Vatican II, and nowhere is the contrast greater between it and all preceding councils. Nowhere is the vocabulary more indicative of what the genre stands for and therefore of the style of Church the council promoted by means of it.

We must therefore look at words. First, what kind of words are absent? Notably missing are words of alienation, exclusion, enmity, words of threat and intimidation, words of surveillance and punishment. Anathema does not appear a single time. Although the hierarchical character of the Church is repeatedly stressed and the prerogatives of the supreme pontiff reiterated almost obsessively, the Church is never described as a monarchy or the members of the Church as subjects. That is a significant departure from previous practice.

What kind of words are present? Words new to conciliar vocabulary, or at least untypical of it. None of them can be considered casual asides or mere window dressing—"mere rhetoric." They are used far too insistently and too characteristically for that. They do not occur here and there but are an across-the-board phenomenon, appearing in all or almost all the final documents. They are the best indicators for getting at that elusive thing, "the spirit of the council." They make it possible for us to escape from the proof-texting that has beset the documents of Vatican II and allow us to rise to patterns and overall orientation. The genre and the vocabulary provide us with that much sought-after "horizon of interpretation." They provide us with the materials to devise what Cardinal Ruini is calling for, a new hermeneutic.

I will divide the words into categories, but the categories are imperfectly distinct from one another. They overlap and crisscross, making the same or related points. They are all, moreover, consonant with the epideictic genre and with the wider rhetorical tradition. Genre and vocabulary taken together constitute and manifest a style of discourse, which almost by definition manifests the style—the how—of the person speaking. In this instance the person speaking is the Church.

One category is made up of horizontal words. Words like "brothers and sisters" stress and give color to the wide range of horizontal relationships that characterize the Church. They contrast with the vertical or top-down words typical of former councils and of the 19th-century papacy. The most

widely invoked of such horizontal words after the council and the one that remains best known, despite its problematic implications, is "people of God."

Among the horizontal words are the reciprocity words, such as "cooperation," "partnership," and "collaboration." Striking in *Gaudium et spes* is the bald statement that just as the world learns from the Church the Church learns from the world—in this case, from the *modern* world.[60] But in this horizontal-reciprocity category the two most significant words are "dialogue" and "collegiality." There is scarcely a page in the council documents on which "dialogue" or its equivalent does not occur. "Dialogue" manifests a radical shift from the prophetic I-say-unto-you style that earlier prevailed and indicates something other than unilateral decision-making. "Collegiality," as mentioned, did not find its way into the council's vocabulary without a fierce battle. Implicit in these reciprocity-words, moreover, is engagement and even initiative. In the document on the laity, for instance, the council tells them that they have the right and sometimes the duty to make their opinions known.[61] Implicitly the reciprocity words are empowerment words.

Closely related to reciprocity words are friendship words. The most striking is the all-inclusive "human family" to which *Gaudium et spes* is addressed. Similarly related are the humility-words, beginning with the description of the Church as pilgrim. Among the redefinitions the council silently effected is what it did in some passages with the triad prophet-priest-king, where prophet becomes partner in dialogue, priesthood is extended to all believers, and king is defined as servant.[62] The triad was applied to everybody in the Church, laity as well as clergy, and appears in document after document. Servant is not a power-word.

Even though the word "change" (*mutatio*) occurs in the first paragraph of the decree on the liturgy, the first document approved by the council, the Catholic allergy to it prevails elsewhere. A remarkable feature of the vocabulary of the council, nonetheless, is its employment of words that in fact indicate change—words like "development," "progress," and even "evolution." "Pilgrim" perhaps should also be included here. The most familiar change-word associated with Vatican II is the innocent sounding *aggiornamento*. No doubt, it can be interpreted in a minimal and traditional sense, probably the sense John XXIII intended, but when framed within the full context of the council it becomes one more indicator of a more historical and therefore relativized and open-ended approach to issues and problems. It implies the inevitability of further change in the future and

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[60] Ibid. no. 44.   [61] Ibid. no. 37.
[62] See, e.g., ibid. nos. 10–13, *Christus Dominus* no. 13, *Presbyterorum ordinis* no. 9.

suggests that the council itself must be interpreted in an open-ended way. The council cannot be interpreted and implemented as if it said "thus far and no further." It did not "define."

The final category to which I will call attention is interiority-words. "Joy and hope, grief and anguish"—these are the famous words opening *Gaudium et spes*. The document goes on: for disciples of Christ nothing that is human fails to find an echo in their hearts. Yes, in their hearts. Vatican II was about the inward journey. It was about holiness. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of *Lumen gentium* is chapter five, "The Call to Holiness." *Lumen gentium* set the agenda, leading the way for the call to holiness to become a great theme of the documents of the council.

Holiness is what the Church is all about. An old truth this, of course, but no previous council had ever explicitly asserted it and certainly never developed it so repeatedly and at such length. It is a call to something more than external conformity to enforceable codes of conduct. It is a call that, though it may have an external form, is, as the documents describe it, related more immediately to the outpouring of the Spirit into the hearts of the faithful, to their free and willing acceptance of the gospel, and to their commitment to service of others in the world.

In this regard the council's emphasis on conscience as the ultimate norm in moral choice is remarkable: "Deep within their conscience individuals discover a law that they do not make for themselves but that they are bound to obey, whose voice, ever summoning them to love and to do what is good and avoid what is evil rings in their hearts."[63] While Catholics must take full and serious account of church teachings and guidance, they must ultimately be guided by the inner law. Preachers, theologians, and saints have always taught in some form or other this primacy of conscience, but no council had ever said it.

I will summarize in a simple litany some of the elements in the change in style of the Church indicated by the council's vocabulary: from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to conversation, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical and top-down to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from static to changing, from passive acceptance to active engagement, from prescriptive to principled, from defined to open-ended, from behavior-modification to conversion of heart, from the dictates of law to the dictates of conscience, from external conformity to the joyful pursuit of holiness.

When those elements are taken in the aggregate, they indicate a model of spirituality. This, they say, is what good Catholics should look like and this is how they should behave. That means the elements indicate what the

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[63] *Gaudium et spes* no. 16.

Church should look like and how it should behave. This is a significant model-shift. This is a teaching of the council. Moreover, those elements taken in the aggregate seem to express something that can be called "the spirit of the council." By examining "the letter" in this way we are able to arrive at "the spirit." The medium in its genre and vocabulary conveys a remarkably coherent message that transcends the particularities of the documents. The form conveys content.

The documents of the council are not literary masterpieces. They are committee documents forged in the heat of debate and disagreement, filled with compromises, misleading euphemisms, and stylistic inconsistencies. Yet, despite their many and obvious weaknesses, they in their most characteristic expressions pertain to a literary genre, and, as such, evince a literary unity. It is new that a council would take care to imbue its statements with vocabulary and themes that cut across all of them. The documents of Vatican II are not a grab-bag collection of ordinances. They cohere with one another.

"The spirit of the council!" Although it is a problematic concept, the bishops' synod of 1985 does not hesitate to use it. I suggested earlier that it meant something like a general orientation. I think my analysis substantiates that meaning, but I believe that in the context of Vatican II the concept is even richer. The council has a spirit because in its most profound reality it was about our "spirit," our souls. It was about the well-springs of our motivation, about our call to holiness, about, therefore, spirituality. It provided a profile of the holy Christian as well as the motivation and means to actualize it.

Every one of the elements in my litany above needs qualifications. No institution, for instance, can be simply "open-ended." Sooner or later closure is required. No institution can be all-inclusive. And so forth. Most especially, the horizontal words of the council must be balanced by the vertical. Both are strongly present, and both must be taken into account. In any case, the horizontal words are not about a diminishment of papal or episcopal authority, which the council time and again confirmed, but they are about how that authority is exercised. To that extent the litany as a whole conveys the sweep of the style of the Church the Second Vatican Council held up for contemplation, admiration, and actualization.

The council's rejection of the style in which preparatory documents like *De ecclesia* and *De fontibus* were composed was not about esthetics. Nor was it just about replacing a theological method. It was about something much more profound: a rejection of ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving of which style was the emblem and engine. It was the rejection of a whole mental and emotional framework that found expression in genre and vocabulary. Style in this sense is not an ornament, not a superficial affectation, but expression of deepest personality. It is the ultimate expres-

sion of meaning. *Le style, c'est l'homme même*. My style—how I behave—expresses what I am in my truest and deepest self. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks Or perhaps Hopkins is more apposite:

> Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells
> Crying *What I do is me; for that I came.*[64]

This means that Vatican II, the "pastoral council," has a teaching, a "doctrine" that to a large extent it has been difficult for us to formulate because in this case doctrine and spirit are two sides of the same coin. Cardinal Ottaviani was correct when he insisted in the council that pastoral could not be separated from doctrinal.[65] The council taught a number of things. Among them is a teaching on the style of the Church. It did not "define" that teaching but taught it on almost every page through the form it adopted. Moreover, this teaching on the style of the Church was an implicit but an insistent call for a change in style—a style less autocratic and more collaborative, a style willing to listen to different viewpoints and take them into account, a style open and aboveboard, a style less unilateral in its decision-making, a style committed to fair play and to working with persons and institutions outside the Catholic community, a style that assumes innocence until guilt is proven, a style that eschews secret oaths, anonymous denunciations, and inquisitorial tactics. This is the style for the Church that Pope John seemed to be pointing toward in his allocution on October 11, 1962, opening the Second Vatican Council: the Church should act by "making use of the medicine of mercy rather than severity . . . and by showing herself to be the loving mother of all, benign, patient, full of mercy and goodness."[66]

The shift of Vatican II in style of discourse has, therefore, deep ramifications. It and the many other special features I have mentioned distinguish this council from every previous one. By adopting the style it did Vatican II redefined what a council is. Vatican II, that is to say, did not take the Roman senate as its implicit model. I find it difficult to pinpoint just what its implicit model was, but it seems much closer to guide, partner, friend, and inspired helpmate than it does to lawmaker, police officer, or judge.

INTERPRETING THE COUNCIL

How do we interpret Vatican II? That is the problem that has beset us for 40 years. One reason we have been so frustrated has been the lack of

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[64] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "As kingfishers catch fire," in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University, 2002) 129 (his italics).

[65] See *Acta synodalia* 1, part 3, 27.

[66] Ibid. 1, part 1, 166–75, at 172–73.

a hermeneutic that would take style into account. Proof-texting has a bad name, but I think that, if it can work anywhere, it can work in the interpretation of the councils up to Vatican II, because most of their conciliar pronouncements were discrete units. My impression is that interpreters of Vatican II have often been applying a form of proof-texting to advance their positions, quoting a line here or a passage there but without taking account of the genre. This cannot work for Vatican II. Content gets divorced from form and the "letter" divorced from the "spirit."

It was precisely to forestall such an outcome that the synod of 1985 laid down its norms. Those norms asked us to look at the council in its totality and to recognize its coherence and integrity. I believe that by approaching the documents of the council through their form and vocabulary, as well as through their "content," we have the basis for a method that can fulfill those norms and accomplish the ideal the synod proposed:[67]

(1) Each passage and document of the council must be interpreted in the context of all the others, so that the integral teaching of the council can be rightly grasped.
(2) The four constitutions of the council (liturgy, Church, revelation, and Church in the modern world) are the hermeneutical key to the other documents—namely, the council's nine decrees and three declarations.
(3) The pastoral import of the documents ought not to be separated from, or set in opposition to, their doctrinal content.
(4) No opposition may be made between the spirit of the council and the letter of the council.
(5) The council must be interpreted in continuity with the great tradition of the Church, including other councils.
(6) Vatican II should be accepted as illuminating the problems of our day.

As they stand, these norms could hardly be improved upon. They need to be complemented by a seventh norm that takes account of discontinuity. Yes, Vatican II affirmed again and again its continuity with the Catholic tradition, especially with the councils of Trent and Vatican I. That is incontestable. Vatican II changed nothing in what Cardinal Dulles calls its "substantive teaching." Moreover, it did nothing that in any way diminished the authority structures in the Church. "Servant leaders" know the buck stops with them, as the council insisted. Nonetheless, the questions recur: Is there a "before" and an "after" Vatican II? Is there any noteworthy discontinuity between the council and what preceded it? Did anything happen? When the council ended in 1965, some 40 years ago, practically everybody would have answered those questions with a resounding affir-

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[67] I am using Cardinal Avery Dulles's paraphrase in his "Vatican II: Myth" 9.

mative, to the point that, as mentioned, Archbishop Lefebvre condemned the council as heretical and led a group into schism. Today, however, there are learned, thoughtful, and well-informed people who are responding in the negative. I could not be more in agreement with their affirmation of the profound continuity of the council with the Catholic tradition, an agreement it seems one can never repeat too often. As a historian, however, I believe that we must balance the picture by paying due attention to the discontinuities. When we do so, one thing at least becomes clear: the council *wanted* something to happen.