

## THE TRINITARIAN DEPTHS OF VATICAN II

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*Central to Vatican II's deliberations on the church was a fundamental rediscovery: the church's origin in the mystery of the Trinity. How this rediscovery permeates and shapes the council's ecclesial vision is what this article addresses. Four leitmotifs exemplify the expanded horizon for the council's understanding of the church that this rediscovery afforded: church as mystery, as communio, as mission to the world, and as community of dialogue.*

AT THE HEART OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL lay its deliberations on the church itself<sup>1</sup> and, at their core, its most fundamental rediscovery of all: the church's origin in the mystery of the Trinity. The rediscovery of her trinitarian origins opened up new avenues and vistas, an expanded horizon and a new mindset for the council's understanding of the church, both *ad intra* in regard to her life and mission and *ad extra* in regard to her dialogical outreach to others. As Giuseppe Alberigo commented toward the end of his magisterial history of the council, "It does not seem an exaggeration to claim that the action of the Spirit and the dynamism of the Trinity were a constant running through the Council itself and the body of its decrees."<sup>2</sup> I here propose to demonstrate how this rediscovery permeates and profoundly shapes the council's leitmotifs, major themes, and overarching ecclesial vision.

Trinitarian references in the Vatican II corpus occur at highly significant points: *Sacrosanctum concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (hereafter *SC*), describes the church's nature and mission as deriving from the will of the triune God who wishes all to be saved

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner writes: "The Council . . . was a Council of the Church about the Church, a Council in which all the themes discussed were ecclesiological ones; which concentrated upon ecclesiology as no previous Council had ever done" ("The New Image of the Church," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 10, trans. David Bourke [London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1973] 10–24, at 4).

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, "Transition to a New Age," in *History of Vatican II*, 5 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000) 5:573–644, at 632.

(no. 5).<sup>3</sup> God's salvific will is realized through the missions of the Son and Holy Spirit and celebrated in the church's Eucharistic liturgy (no. 5). The "whole of liturgical life" (no. 6) revolves around the work of salvation and thus manifests "the sort of entity the true church really is" (no. 2). Here in *SC* is not only the council's chronological starting point but also its theological starting point, adumbrating the key conciliar themes and priorities, as they would subsequently emerge.<sup>4</sup> Here indeed lies Vatican II's ecclesiological core. It is a distinctly paschal-eucharistic ecclesiology, and it is deeply trinitarian.<sup>5</sup> *Dei verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (hereafter *DV*), is likewise of remarkable significance for the council and its ecclesiology. As Pope Benedict XVI has noted, it "gave an intense impulse to the appreciation of the Word of God from which has derived a profound renewal of the life of the ecclesial community."<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the return to the Word of God prompted a renewed appreciation of the missions of the Son and Spirit in the world and of the life of the Trinity *ad intra* from which the missions emanated. The explicit reference to Father, Son, and Spirit in the opening paragraphs of the constitution signals the deeply trinitarian orientation of the entire document (no. 2). Revelation is described in terms of a personal trinitarian self-communication (nos. 2, 4). It leads humankind to the Father, through Christ and in the Spirit, and to a sharing in the divine nature (no. 2). Our eschatological end is the trinitarian communion (no. 2). The Son's mission took place so that humankind would know of God's inmost being (no. 4). Only after the trinitarian grounding of revelation does the document proceed to a discussion of Scripture and tradition (no. 7). While the christological dimension of *DV* is strong, a clear pneumatological emphasis is also evident (nos. 5, 7–11).

*Lumen gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (hereafter *LG*), describes the church first in terms of its inner reality as mystery, not as

<sup>3</sup> All English translations of Vatican II texts are taken from *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner (Washington: Georgetown University, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> *SC*'s first sentence is programmatic: "It is the intention of this holy council to improve the standard of daily christian living among Catholics; to adapt those structures which are subject to change so as better to meet the needs of our time; to encourage whatever can contribute to the union of all who believe in Christ; and to strengthen whatever serves to call all people into the embrace of the church" (no. 1).

<sup>5</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, "Sacrosanctum Concilium and the Meaning of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 71 (2010) 437–52.

<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, "On 'Dei Verbum' and Reading Scripture," *Zenit*, November 6, 2005, ref. ZE05110601, <http://www.zenit.org/article-14473?l=english> (all URLs cited herein were accessed on November 11, 2012). See Karim Schelkens, *Catholic Theology of Revelation on the Eve of Vatican II: A Redaction History of the Schema De fontibus revelationis (1960–1962)* (Boston: Brill, 2010).

structure or institution or even society.<sup>7</sup> The mystery of the church is, then, grounded in the mystery of the Trinity (nos. 2–4). Here, a strong trinitarian seal is firmly placed on the whole document. The church is “a people made one by the unity of the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit” (no. 4). The trinitarian missions are the source of her life and mission, just as union with the triune God and the unity of the whole human race are her goal (no. 1). *LG* recognizes the founding of the church at Pentecost as manifestly a work of the Trinity (no. 5). The church *itself*, and not merely its missionary dynamism or catholicity, originates in the trinitarian life of God. The church’s nature, mission, and identity manifest a trinitarian form: the church is *Ecclesia de Trinitate*, people of God, Body of Christ, and Temple of the Holy Spirit (no. 17). The universal call to holiness in the church is expressed in explicitly trinitarian terms (nos. 39, 47). The eschatological nature of the pilgrim church is also expressed in trinitarian terms (no. 48). The vocation of the church is unity with one another in mutual charity and in praise of the Trinity (no. 51). The trinitarian resonances of the constitution sound through to the end with the prayer that all people “be happily gathered together in peace and harmony into one people of God to the glory of the most holy and undivided Trinity” (no. 69). *LG* also describes the vital pneumatic dimension of the church (nos. 2, 4, 7, 13).<sup>8</sup>

*Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (hereafter *GS*), in its famous opening words explains in explicitly trinitarian terms that all that is genuinely human is of concern for the followers of Christ (no. 1). On the topic of human community and interpersonal relationships, *GS* also assumes an expressly trinitarian frame of reference (no. 24). It is precisely the church’s trinitarian origins that

<sup>7</sup> This theological rhetoric—symbolic and metaphorical as distinct from juridical and legislative—signals the clear change in the style and tenor of the council’s ecclesiological discourse, a change registered not only in *LG* but also in the other conciliar documents. There is also immediate evidence of the council’s shifting from the neo-Scholastic theological style and the apologetic concerns of the preconciliar period. Joseph Ratzinger has noted the “one-sided” view of the nature of the church that focuses on the juridical and hierarchical that persisted up to the council. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 2nd ed., intro. Thomas P. Rausch, S.J. (New York: Paulist, 2009) 73–74. See also Joseph A. Komonchak, “Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) 579–602; Avery Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 419–42.

<sup>8</sup> The documents of Vatican II frequently refer to the Holy Spirit—92 times in *LG* alone. For the rich Pneumatology of Vatican II, see Yves Congar, “The Pneumatology of Vatican II,” in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 167–74; see also Sally M. Vance-Trembath, “The Pneumatology of Vatican II with Particular Reference to *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2003).

inspire dialogue and engagement with today's world (no. 40). As in the case of *LG*, what at first appears as a Christocentrism in fact opens out into a differentiated trinitarian vision. The strong pneumatological statements in *GS* also unfold in a comprehensively trinitarian manner. The trinitarian resonances throughout *GS*, as in *LG*, rise to an explicitly trinitarian conclusion with a distinctly trinitarian comprehension of the faith, hope, and love that unite the human community in God even now (no. 93).

*Ad gentes*, the Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (hereafter *AG*), provides what is arguably the trinitarian highlight of the Vatican II documents.<sup>9</sup> *AG* describes the nature of the church as fundamentally missionary, with the foundation for its missionary activity lying in its participation in the trinitarian missions: "The pilgrim Church is of its very nature missionary, since it draws its origin from the mission of the Son and the mission of the holy Spirit, in accordance with the plan of God the Father" (no. 2). Mission is thus not merely just one aspect of the church's nature, but essentially constitutive of it, springing from the church's grounding in the trinitarian mystery of God. Furthermore the church's missionary activity pertains not only to missionaries but also to all the faithful by virtue of their participation through baptism in the very life of the Trinity, in which all the faithful share (no. 6).

When read in conjunction with *LG* and *AG*, *Unitatis redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism (hereafter *UR*), offers further insight into the deep trinitarian roots of the council's ecclesial vision. *UR* ascribes the impetus for Christian unity to the Holy Spirit (no. 1). The principles of ecumenism are articulated in trinitarian terms (no. 2). The mystery of the unity of all the followers of Christ finds its exemplar, as well as its source, in the mystery of the unity of the Trinity (no. 2). *UR* exhorts Christians to holiness—union with the persons of the Trinity—as a way to advance Christian unity: "For the closer their union with the Father, the Word and the Spirit, the more deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual brotherly love" (no. 7).

The council's rediscovery of the church's origins in the mystery of the Trinity, reflected in these references to the mystery, exercised a profound influence on the council's understanding of the church, its nature, life, and mission. It is the key that opens the door to an understanding of the whole. Indeed, one might well make the same comments on the teachings

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed account of the history of *Ad gentes*, see Stephen Bevans and Jeffrey Gros, *Evangelization and Religious Freedom: Ad gentes and Dignitatis humanae* (New York: Paulist, 2009) 3–38. See also James B. Anderson, *A Vatican II Pneumatology of the Paschal Mystery: The Historical-Doctrinal Genesis of Ad Gentes I, 2–5* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1988).

of Vatican II that then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger made in a forward to Henri de Lubac's book, *Catholicism*:

[De Lubac] makes visible to us in a new way the fundamental intuition of Christian Faith so that from this inner core all the particular elements appear in a new light. He shows how the idea of community and universality, rooted in the trinitarian concept of God, permeates and shapes all the individual elements of Faith's content. The idea of the Catholic, the all-embracing, the inner unity of I and Thou and We does not constitute one chapter of theology among others. It is the key that opens the door to a proper understanding of the whole.<sup>10</sup>

### THE TRINITARIAN ROOTS OF THE COUNCIL'S LEITMOTIFS

The influence of Vatican II's heightened consciousness of the relationship between the Trinity and the church is evident particularly in the council's more dynamic conception of church, in her origins, mission, and eschatological goal. I suggest that it is also evident in the language, style, and tone of the council's documents. As some scholars have noted, the Vatican II documents, in contrast to those of prior councils, are persuasive rather than dogmatic in tone, pastoral rather than juridical in genre, dialogical rather than didactic in style, and inclusive and open rather than defensive and hostile in their vision of the church in relation to the world.<sup>11</sup>

This most fundamental *ressourcement* afforded a change of horizon and mindset and thus a fresh consideration of the church's life and mission. The ecclesiology that emerged as a consequence contrasts in significant ways with the dominant ecclesiology of preconciliar papal and conciliar statements.<sup>12</sup> I now turn to consider four leitmotifs, each of immense import in the council's ecclesial vision, and each traceable to the rediscovery in the church's trinitarian origins.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, foreword to Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) 11–12, at 12. Ratzinger goes on: "For me, the encounter with this book became an essential milestone on my theological journey."

<sup>11</sup> See John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard, 2008) 305–11; and O'Malley, "Trent and Vatican II: Two Styles of Church," in *From Trent to Vatican II: Historical and Theological Investigations*, ed. Raymond F. Bulman and Frederick J. Parrella, foreword Jill Raitt (New York: Oxford University, 2006) 301–20; Ghislain Lafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church: Structured Communion in the Spirit* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000) 69–78; and Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> For example, Pius XII's encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943) and Vatican I's *Dei Filius* (1870) and *Pastor aeternus* (1870).

### Church as Mystery

*LG* begins its programmatic first chapter under the heading, “The Mystery of the Church (*De ecclesiae mysterio*).” There is arguably no more significant development in Vatican II than its understanding of the nature and mission of the church as mystery. As Pope Paul VI expressed it, the church is “imbued with the hidden presence of God”;<sup>13</sup> it is not simply the bearer or proclaimer of the mystery, but mystery itself. This leitmotif was decisive not only for its theological significance in *LG* but also for the corpus of conciliar teachings and the key themes they addressed.

In sharp contrast to previously prevailing notions of the church as perfect society or mystical body of Christ, the vision of the church as mystery, deriving from the trinitarian mystery itself, situated the council’s ecclesiology in a specifically theological context, as distinct from a juridical or institutional one.<sup>14</sup> Envisioning the church as mystery also highlighted the pilgrim nature of the church as a community of *viatores*, not perfect but continually journeying, on the way to an essentially eschatological fulfilment. Ever in anticipation of this fulfilment, the church is not an end in itself, but rather the sign, sacrament, and instrument of God’s will for the salvation of all.

Given an understanding of mystery as primordial and intrinsic to the church’s very being, she is then recognized as ever in process, on her pilgrim way, developing and maturing, always incomplete and short of her goal, and never fully possessing or understanding her own nature and mission.<sup>15</sup> As ever imperfect and *in via*, she is called to continual renewal and reform, not merely institutionally and structurally but also spiritually and interiorly. Indeed she is ever called to conversion. A renewed appreciation of the church as mystery, grounded in the mystery of the Trinity, thus prompts recognition of the need for continuing renewal.

This appreciation also prompts a sense of ecclesial humility in the realization that the church is not immune to criticism or reproach. *UR*, for example, speaks of the church as summoned by Christ “to continual reformation,

<sup>13</sup> Pope Paul VI, allocution opening the second session of the Second Vatican Council, September 19, 1963, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/speeches/1963/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19630929\\_concilio-vaticano-ii\\_lt.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/speeches/1963/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19630929_concilio-vaticano-ii_lt.html).

<sup>14</sup> “Mystery” also afforded the recognition of the church as *una realitas complexa* (*LG* no. 8), allowing the council to hold in tension both the social and transcendent dimensions of the church’s reality, and avoiding an overemphasis on either the mystical or the institutional aspects of her existence.

<sup>15</sup> *LG* also employs the metaphor of a seed sprouting, unfolding, growing, developing, maturing, and dying into something else (no. 5). Similarly the pilgrim church is on the way, developing, maturing, and imperfect. See nos. 8 and 43 for the council’s reflections on the church’s imperfections.

of which it is always in need” (no. 6),<sup>16</sup> and that, if there have been deficiencies in moral conduct, church discipline, or the formulation of church teaching, “these should be set right in the proper way at the opportune moment” (no. 6). *UR* also speaks of a kind of fraternal rivalry among separated Christians by means of which *all* will be stirred to “a deeper awareness and a clearer manifestation of the unfathomable riches of Christ” (no. 11).

A dynamic notion of church and of the development of doctrine emerges—in contrast to institutional rigidity and static doctrinal approaches.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the way is opened for assimilation of the faith in new cultures and contexts. As Pope John XXIII had explained in his address at the opening of the council, “For the deposit of faith, the truths contained in our venerable doctrine, are one thing; the fashion in which they are expressed, but with the same meaning and the same judgement, is another thing.”<sup>18</sup>

This stance of humility and openness also moved the council from *ad intra* considerations of church life to *ad extra* considerations of her relation to the world. The church emerged as more positively attuned to the world, open to learning from it, and freshly attentive to the voices of the times. As *GS* explains:

It is for God’s people as a whole, with the help of the holy Spirit, and especially for pastors and theologians, to listen to the various voices of our day, discerning them and interpreting them, and to evaluate them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can be increasingly appropriated, better understood and more suitably expressed (no. 44).

<sup>16</sup> This text is notable particularly in that it is the only time the council uses the word *reformatio* in relation to the church.

<sup>17</sup> Ratzinger commented: “In the era of liberalism that preceded the First World War, the Catholic Church was looked upon as a fossilized organization, stubbornly opposed to all modern achievements. Theology had so concentrated on the question of the primacy as to make the Church appear to be essentially a centralized organization that one defended staunchly but which somehow one related to from the outside. Once again it became clear that the Church was more than this. . . . It became clear that the Church has experienced organic growth over the centuries, and continues to grow even today” (Ratzinger, “The Ecclesiology of Vatican II,” Conference of Cardinal Ratzinger at the Opening of the Pastoral Congress of the Diocese of Aversa, Italy, September 15, 2001, Ratzinger Archives, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/cdfecv2.htm>). John Courtney Murray, peritus at the council, argued that development of doctrine was “the issue underlying all the issues at the Council” (Murray, “This Matter of Religious Freedom,” *America* 112.2 [January 9, 1965] 40–43; [http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/library/Murray/0\\_murraybib.html](http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/library/Murray/0_murraybib.html)).

<sup>18</sup> The pope added: “This way of speaking will require a great deal of work and, it may be, much patience: types of presentation must be introduced which are more in accord with a teaching authority which is primarily pastoral in character” (*Acta apostolicae sedis* 54 [1962] 785–96, at 791; ET, <http://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf>).

A renewed sense of revelation as God's loving tripersonal self-disclosure released the council from static neo-Scholastic notions of revelation as objective formulae and merely abstract propositional information. Together with the council's fresh comprehension of the church as mystery grounded in the mystery of the Trinity, it afforded an appreciation of revelation as most fundamentally personal and dialogical. The council was thus freed for personal and dialogical engagement, for *communio* and mission.

### Church as *Communio*

As has often been lamented, for much of the church's history in the West a certain Christomonism had seemed to overshadow the role of the Holy Spirit, so much so that Yves Congar was moved to comment that until recently the Holy Spirit was rightly described as "the 'unknown' or 'half-known' one."<sup>19</sup> The council's heightened awareness of the pneumatic dimension of the church prompted an appreciation of the Holy Spirit as the life-principle or soul of the church (*LG* no. 7), and of the people of God as a communion of persons, who are created, animated, and sustained in union by the Spirit of Christ. This fresh insight into the role of the Spirit served to correct limited Christomonistic understandings of church. It also reinforced the council's sense of the church's distinctly trinitarian origins. The result, as noted above, was a focus on the church's inner life and its people *qua* mystery, as distinct from an unbalanced emphasis on the juridical, legislative, and institutional aspects of church life.

The council's new emphasis on both the pneumatological and christological dimensions of the church was also accompanied by a heightened sense of *all* the faithful sharing in the one Spirit of unity. This realization inevitably called into question notions of a rigidly hierarchical and highly centralized ecclesial structure and inspired a shift toward an understanding of church in terms of *communio*, based on the analogy with the mystery of the Trinity. Indeed, according to Ladislav Orsy: "*Communio* was the central theme of the Council. . . . The Council Fathers made a profession of faith in the church of Christ as the *communio* of believers. . . . The Council lifted up the church to a new vision, or into a new field of vision."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 3 vols., trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 3:5.

<sup>20</sup> Orsy adds that the council, however, "left little guidance for its implementation" (*Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2009] xiii). In "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II," Ratzinger comments: "First of all one must admit that the word 'communio' did not occupy a central place in the Council. All the same if properly understood it can serve as a synthesis of the essential elements of the Council's ecclesiology" (<http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/cdfecv2.htm>).



The notion of church as *communio* emerged under three aspects: (1) the church herself as mystery of trinitarian *communio* (*LG* no. 4; *UR* no. 2); (2) the church as sign and sacrament of *communio* (*LG* no. 9); and (3) the church's origin and end as the trinitarian *communio* (*LG* nos. 2–4).<sup>21</sup> A heightened comprehension of the Trinity as both the original mystery of unity in diversity and exemplar for the church prompted a fresh openness to unity in diversity and a new impetus for a *communio* model of church. A *communio* ecclesiology thus emerged, albeit in a variety of forms, as the principal ecclesiology of Vatican II.

The *communio* model of church yielded rich ecclesiological fruits, although not without attendant challenges.<sup>22</sup> While *communio* is not primarily concerned with institutional structures, the momentum for such a model and for the relationship between unity and plurality in the church fashioned accordingly served to challenge a more Rome-centered, institutional, juridical model. One of those ecclesiological fruits was a renewed emphasis on the importance of the local church in relation to the universal church, understood as a *communio ecclesiarum*, and a sense of unity as issuing from below rather than from above. The *communio* model also afforded a fresh appreciation of the plurality of human cultures (*GS* nos. 44, 53, 58) and of inculturation in the work of evangelization, although it inevitably also raised the challenge of legitimate diversity in relation to the concern for unity.

Very importantly, the *communio* model prompted a renewed appreciation of the collegiality of the episcopacy in the exercise of its shared responsibility for the teaching and authority of the universal church (*LG* no. 22). While affirming Vatican I's teaching on the primacy of the papacy, Vatican II envisioned the pope and the bishops as together forming a college in which the bishops share with the pope, as bishop of Rome, the leadership of the universal church. Just as the universal church is comprised of a *communio* of local churches, the college of bishops is comprised of the *communio* of bishops. Both communions find their exemplar in the Trinity.

The rediscovery of the people of God as one reality, a mutuality of hierarchy and laity, in which all are called to holiness, was another of the

<sup>21</sup> For elaboration on these three aspects, see Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology; Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004) 62–73.

<sup>22</sup> See Avery Dulles, "A Half Century of Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 419–42; Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Dennis Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000); Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. R. C. De Peaux (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992).

profound insights of Vatican II. This recognition of the fundamental equality and dignity of all the faithful gave impetus to a more mature theology of the laity. The council envisaged the vital role of the laity in the church, wherein they are no longer regarded as mere subjects but as participants; as no longer passive recipients of the directions of the hierarchy, nor even merely collaborators with the hierarchy, but as active members of the people of God, with all the baptized sharing in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices of Christ. As *Apostolicam actuositatem*, the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (hereafter *AA*) explained, “Laypeople, sharing in the priestly, prophetic and kingly offices of Christ, play their part in the mission of the whole people of God in the church and in the world” (no. 2). Moreover the layperson is not merely a noncleric or nonreligious. Rather, each member of the church, through new birth at baptism, is gifted by the Holy Spirit and has a legitimate role to play in the church’s mission and its quest for the fullness of grace and truth. “Through receiving these gifts of grace, however unspectacular, everyone of the faithful has the right and duty to exercise them in the church and in the world for the good of humanity and for the building up of the Church” (no. 3). The Holy Spirit “leads the church into all truth (Jn 16:23), and he makes it one in fellowship and ministry, instructing and directing it through a diversity of gifts both hierarchical and charismatic, and he adorns it with his fruits (see Eph 4:11–12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 5:22)” (*LG* no. 4). The council described the relationship between clergy and laity as one of mutual respect and esteem.<sup>23</sup> Thus, in contrast to a strongly hierarchical, monarchical model of church with the laity firmly and passively situated at the bottom of a pyramidal structure, a much-expanded vision of the laity emerged.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, given the presence of the Holy Spirit in the whole baptized people of God, the laity together with the hierarchy is imbued with a sense of the faith (*sensus fidei*, *LG* no. 35). While Vatican II affirms the teaching of Vatican I that the solemn “definitions [of the Roman pontiff] are rightly said to be irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the church, for they are delivered with the assistance of the holy Spirit which was promised to him in blessed Peter” (*LG* no. 25), it also unambiguously affirmed the dignity of *all* the faithful, and that the sense of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*) pertains to hierarchy *and* laity. Reception too, like mission, is a coresponsibility.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the council also recognized that the laity are not only entitled but are also sometimes duty-bound to express their opinions on matters that concern the good of the church (*LG* no. 37).

<sup>23</sup> *AA* no. 23.

<sup>24</sup> *Monarchia*/monarchy does not appear in any of the final Vatican II documents.

<sup>25</sup> See Cardinal Léon Joseph Suenens, *Coresponsibility in the Church*, trans. Francis Martin (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968) 29.

### Church as Mission to the World

In recognizing that the church is missionary by her very nature, and that her mission derives from the Trinity itself, *AG* no. 2 marked a momentous breakthrough in the church's self-understanding in terms of mission. The council recognized that not only are the dynamic quality of her missionary activity and her outreach in catholicity sustained and inspired by the missions of the triune God, who wishes all to be saved, but also her very nature and mission *qua* church derives from the Trinity. As *LG* nos. 2–4 also explain, it is from this trinitarian source that the church receives the mission to proclaim and spread among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God. This insight was crucially important in the council's mind-set, direction, and dynamism, and it derives directly from the council's rediscovery of the church's trinitarian origins.

Being missionary by her very nature, organizational, structural, and legislative questions take second place in service to mission. Moreover, the mission of the church cannot be limited to that of the hierarchy alone, for the laity, by virtue of their baptism, are endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and share in the abiding charismatic character of the church and in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions (*triplex munus*) of Christ (*LG* nos. 34–36), and so participate in the church's mission. Theirs is an active participation that belongs to *all*, hierarchy and laity alike, whatever their distinct gifts, vocations, and responsibilities.

A distinctly new ecumenical openness also arises from the sense of the "church as mission," giving an enduring impetus to a renewed quest for unity with other Christians, and inspiring the church's positive recognition of other religions and indeed of all people who seek God with a sincere heart (*LG* nos. 16,22). As Congar noted, when *UR* speaks of a fraternal emulation, a kind of fraternal rivalry, "to incite all to a deeper understanding and a clearer manifestation of the unfathomable riches of Christ" (*UR* no. 11), the council expresses deep respect for the theological and spiritual life of the reformed churches.<sup>26</sup> Stressing what unites rather than what divides separated Christians, *LG* no. 15 states: "They lovingly believe in God the almighty Father and in Christ, the Son of God and saviour. They are marked by baptism, by which they are joined to Christ; and indeed there are other sacraments that they recognise and accept in their own churches or ecclesiastical communities." Hence the council, in another striking development, makes frequent mention of dialogue in regard to other Christian communities.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, trans. Mary John Ronayne and Mary Cecily Boulding, ET ed. Denis Minns (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical, 2012) lv.

<sup>27</sup> *UR* nos. 4, 9, 11, 14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23.

Few developments were more radical than that expressed in *Nostra aetate*, the Declaration on the Church's Relation to Non-Christian Religions (hereafter *NA*), namely, that the church "rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy in these religions," and that "those ways of acting and living and those precepts and teachings which, though often at variance with what it holds and expounds, frequently reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens everyone" (no. 2). While *NA* makes no references to the Trinity as such—it refers to the Father and to the Son but not to the Holy Spirit<sup>28</sup>—the council's unprecedented openness to dialogue and collaboration with other religions is necessarily situated in terms of its reflection on the nature and mission of the church, particularly as articulated in *LG*. This openness to other religious paths is clearly adumbrated in the council's awareness of the church's trinitarian origins and of her sharing in the missions of the Son and Spirit: God is Father of all (*NA* no. 5), "since he gives to all life and breath and everything (see Acts 17:25–28), and the Saviour wills all to be saved" (*LG* no. 16). The triune God's will for the salvation of *all* provides the theological foundation for the church's universal evangelizing mission, and thus for her dialogue and engagement with the whole world, including other Christian churches and other religions. For as *LG* reiterates, "All human beings are called to the new people of God" (no. 13).

### Church as Community of Dialogue

The council also recognized that the church's mission is undertaken not in a dogmatic or didactic fashion, but in dialogue and engagement with the world in its joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties (*GS* no. 1). Dialogue—accompanied by such notions as colloquium, conversation, cooperation, and collaboration—is another of the council's leitmotifs.<sup>29</sup> The principle of dialogue as fundamental to the mission of the church also flows directly from its refreshed trinitarian consciousness and is rightly regarded as another of the most important insights of Vatican II. The principle derives from a dialogical understanding of communal life of the Trinity itself as exemplar par excellence. As Ormond Rush explains: "If the church is called to be the icon of the Trinity, and dialogue is at the heart of trinitarian *communio*, . . . then dialogue must be at the heart of, and indeed constitute, ecclesial *communio*—vertical, horizontal, and temporal."<sup>30</sup> The principle of

<sup>28</sup> *NA* nos. 2, 4, 5.

<sup>29</sup> "Dialogue" occurs 24 times in the Vatican II corpus, frequently in connection with other Christians and the contemporary world.

<sup>30</sup> Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2009) 49.

dialogue also derives from the mystery of salvation whereby the triune God, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, entered into dialogue with humanity, a dialogue that the church undertakes by continuing Christ's mission. To recognize that the church is missionary by her very nature, with her mission deriving from the Trinity, is also to recognize that she is dialogical by nature, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

The council's awareness of the church's multidimensional relation to the mystery of the Trinity—as origin, form, exemplar, and goal—thus also allowed for a fresh framing of the question of its relationship to the world. *LG* acknowledged that the church is not untouched by the world or remote from its history, but rather is immersed in an evolving reality and is part of the movement toward the eschaton when God will be all in all (nos. 5, 9, 48). *GS* similarly brought a new approach to the mutuality of the world-church relationship when it begins, not with the timeless abstract truths of faith, but with the human person and the human condition in the world.<sup>31</sup> The universal call to holiness, another vital element in the council's vision, is an invitation to communion with the triune God and with the whole human family. The council thus recognized the world as a genuine dialogue partner and the church-world relationship as one that involved both mutual benefits and mutual obligations (*GS* nos. 40–45).

The council thus also signalled a shift from conflict with the world to *rapprochement* with it, from defensively denouncing the world to appreciating and engaging it in dialogue.<sup>32</sup> As *GS* explains, “The wish for such conversations, undertaken solely out of love for the truth and with all due prudence, excludes nobody, as far as we are concerned, neither those who cultivate the value of the human spirit while not yet acknowledging their source, nor those who are hostile to the church and persecute it in various ways” (no. 92). In this respect, the council also defended with unprecedented conviction the role of conscience and religious freedom,<sup>33</sup> and expressed an appreciation even of the church's critics and persecutors: “Indeed the church affirms that it has derived, and can derive, much benefit from the opposition of its opponents and persecutors” (*GS* no. 44).

### CONCLUSION: THE COUNCIL'S TRINITARIAN DEPTHS

Vatican II was an occasion of effervescent, dynamic self-awareness, inspired by its most fundamental *ressourcement*: the rediscovery of the

<sup>31</sup> See James McEvoy, “Church and World at the Second Vatican Council: The Significance of *Gaudium et Spes*,” *Pacifica* 19 (2006) 37–57.

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., James Gerard McEvoy, “Proclamation As Dialogue: Transition in the Church-World Relationship,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009) 875–903.

<sup>33</sup> See *Dignitatis humanae*, the Declaration on Religious Freedom (hereafter *DH*).

transcendent mystery of the triune God as the mystery at the heart of the church's existence and the ultimate source of its life. The result of this trinitarian *ressourcement* was a renewed insight into the church's relation to the Trinity as her origin, exemplar, source of her mission, and eschatological goal. Indeed, the Council Fathers' recognition of the church as *Ecclesia de Trinitate* led them to a fresh framing of the questions of her identity, mission, and relation to the world.

John XXIII had prayed for a new Pentecost, and indeed, according to the accounts of many who were there, it was so. Alberigo observed:

From its first announcement and throughout its entire course, the Council was motivated by reliance on the Holy Spirit. It is worth noting that with increasing frequency John XXIII emphasized "the need of a continuous outpouring of the Holy Spirit as if on a new Pentecost that will renew the face of the earth." The image of a new Pentecost was regularly associated with the Council which "will be truly a new Pentecost that will cause the interior riches of the Church to blossom."<sup>34</sup>

Gregory Baum, *peritus* at the council, writes:

I have experienced that pentecostal events are possible in the church. The sociologist Emile Durkheim speaks of "times of effervescence" in the life of societies that allow them to renew themselves. Pentecostal events happen; they cannot be manipulated; institutions may initiate them, but they cannot foretell whether the Spirit will summon forth effervescence.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Alberigo, "Transition to a New Age" 632. He adds: "The call for a revival of pneumatology is inherent in the Council's conception of the Church. This conception, which moved beyond the Christo-monistic limitations typical of *Mystici corporis*, was based precisely on a rediscovery of the role of the Spirit."

<sup>35</sup> In *Voices from the Council*, ed. Michael R. Prendergast and M. D. Ridge (Portland, OR: Pastoral, 2004) 143, Bishop Frank Markus Fernando remarked that the presence of the Holy Spirit was palpable at the council ("Interview," in *Voices from the Council* 19). John A. Coleman reports: "In the Caporale interviews, and in other memoirs or accounts of the Council, it is very clear that a large number of those who participated in the Council—as *periti* or bishops—felt such strong surges of solidarity and alternative possibility. They saw the Council as an historical event. Cardinal Suenens, in his interview with Caporale, captures this: 'surely, we all have changed considerably between the first and second sessions, very much so. The action of the Holy Spirit was evident. One could almost touch it everywhere'" (*The Belgian Contribution to the Second Vatican Council*, ed. D. Donnelly et al. [Leuven: Peeters, 2008] 17). See Thomas Hughson, "Interpreting Vatican II: 'A New Pentecost,'" *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 3–37; and Cardinal Léon Joseph Suenens, *A New Pentecost?*, trans. Francis Martin (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1975). For Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence, see Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954) 214–23.

Finally, Ratzinger commented on his experience:

The Council is a Pentecost—that was a thought that corresponded to our own experiences at that time; not only because Pope John had formulated it as a wish, as a prayer, but because it reflected what we experienced on our arrival in the city of the Council: meetings with bishops of all countries, all tongues, far beyond what Luke . . . could have imagined and, thus, a lived experience of real Catholicity with its Pentecostal hope.<sup>36</sup>

As a consequence of its trinitarian *ressourcement*, the council experienced an effervescent bubbling up of a new freedom and creativity in the task of *aggiornamento*. It began to imagine the church anew—in her nature, identity, and mission, and in her relationship to the world. Admittedly, the council offered no fully articulated blueprint for renewal, but it pointed to the sources of a new vitality and vision and gave new impetus for renewal in the church, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*. The result was a fresh openness and sense of mutuality in regard to the world, a receptivity to the other, and a readiness for dialogue, engagement, and commitment.

While I do not presume to reduce the council's ecclesiology to the four leitmotifs identified here, the ones I have examined—mystery, *communio*, mission, and dialogue—figure very strongly and decisively in the council's ecclesiology. I have demonstrated that each derives from and expresses the council's trinitarian consciousness. They are, moreover, mutually related and inextricably interconnected in their own kind of perichoretic unity. In this way, the council's rediscovery of the church's origins in the mystery of the Trinity suffuses the conciliar texts and the great ecclesiological themes they address. While the council's trinitarian assumptions were often subtle, this most fundamental *ressourcement* of the council provides an indispensable frame of reference for the deep, internal, intertextual coherence of the conciliar corpus and is a vital key to a proper understanding of the whole.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987) 367.

<sup>37</sup> On the intertextual character and coherence of the Vatican II documents, see O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* 309–12. Most recently, O'Malley comments, "Unlike the determinations of previous councils, those of Vatican II . . . implicitly but deliberately cross-reference and play off one another—in the vocabulary they employ, in the great themes to which they recur, in the core values they inculcate, and in certain basic issues that cut across them" ("The Hermeneutic of Reform': A Historical Analysis," *Theological Studies* 73 [2012] 517–46, at 541). In his own way, Congar also attests to the coherence of the conciliar texts: "a very serious attempt at integration was made at Vatican II. There was, for instance, no Scripture without Tradition and no Tradition without Scripture.

In conclusion, my analysis compels me to endorse Alberigo's judgment that the council expressed its ecclesial vision within a distinctly *trinitarian horizon*:

There is no denying that the preconciliar work in the area of pneumatology and the trinitarian dimension was fragmentary and inadequate. During the work of the Council no proposal was even made for a treatment of these subjects, and yet they really, and increasingly, formed the horizon against which the Council developed its subjects, inasmuch [as] and to the extent that the great majority of fathers felt an urgent need to escape from an overly static doctrinal approach incapable of being assimilated by new cultures. It does not seem an exaggeration to claim that the action of the Spirit and the dynamism of the Trinity were a constant running through the Council itself and the body of its decrees. Perhaps as a result also of the witness given by the observers, especially in view of the dynamic action of the Spirit, the Council was not deaf but showed an impulse, weak as it may have been, to reintegrate the trinitarian and pneumatological dimensions in Catholic thought and devotion.<sup>38</sup>

The tasks of *aggiornamento* and of *ressourcement* for the sake of the gospel are as urgent for us now as they were then for the Council Fathers. So too the challenge to hold in ever creative tension and balance the juridical and communal, administrative and charismatic, local and universal, papacy and episcopacy, hierarchy and people, clergy and laity, unity and diversity, tradition and renewal, continuity and discontinuity. John Henry Newman observed that "there has seldom been a council without great confusion after it."<sup>39</sup> Clearly, reflection on the message of Vatican II will be confused and its reception seriously impeded if its profound and pervasive trinitarian consciousness is lost. Should it be so, all that would be left is a few—and basically disconnected—doctrinal formulations and ecclesiastic arrangements, along with the risk of withdrawal into legalism and juridicism to the detriment of the Spirit-led, charismatic, and profoundly trinitarian character of the church.

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There was no sacrament without the Word. There was no Christology without pneumatology and no pneumatology without Christology. There was no hierarchy without the people and no people without the hierarchy. There was no episcopate without the Pope and no Pope without the episcopate. There was no local Church that was not missionary and no mission that was not ecclesial. There was no Church which was not mindful of the whole Church and which did not provide universality within itself and so on" (quoted in *Vatican II by Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986] 343–44).

<sup>38</sup> Alberigo, "Transition to a New Age" 632.

<sup>39</sup> John Henry Newman, letter to W. J. O'Neill Daunt, August 7, 1870, in *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. 25, *The Vatican Council (January 1870 to December 1871)*, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain and Thomas Gornall, S.J., electronic ed. (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corp., 1995) 174–75, at 175.



But the mystery of the Trinity is a mystery of life ever surging forth inexhaustibly, drawing all to itself, calling the church into life, and ever active in its renewal. As we look back and move forward—not without the anxieties, preoccupations, and challenges of our own day—it is well to be mindful that it is not so much a matter of finding the Trinity in the documents of Vatican II as of finding the whole event of Vatican II, its history, its spirit, and the texts it produced, within the infinities of love, light, and life that are the grace of the Trinity, now and always, for the church and for each of her members.