"THE HERMENEUTIC OF REFORM": A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Few ideas have impacted the church more than reform, but in recent centuries it virtually disappeared from theological discourse. That changed on December 22, 2005, when Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to the Roman Curia, introduced "hermeneutic of reform" as the proper category for interpreting Vatican II. John O'Malley here traces the history of the idea of reform, describes its meaning in different contexts, and shows how the problem of change is at its very core. He then shows how Vatican II dealt with the problem and concludes with an analysis of Benedict's address.

IN THE WEST FEW IDEAS have enjoyed a longer, more complex, and, in many instances, more disruptive history than reform. Expressed through a number of terms, of which the most direct and obvious is the Latin *reformatio*, it has traditionally been defined as *mutatio in melius*, change for the better. Etymologically speaking, *reformatio*, whose English equivalents are both *reform* and *reformation*, indicates a re-forming or a restructuring of something already in place. Thus, although change is at its core, reform presupposes continuity with what has gone before. It is not *creatio ex nihilo*.

This definition presupposes, as well, that reform entails a self-consciously undertaken effort within an institution to effect change. It is thus different from changes that come about because of decisions taken by others. Few events, for instance, more radically changed the Christian church than Constantine's recognition of it and his granting it a privileged status in his empire. Yet the changes his decisions effected, which church leaders welcomed as "for the better," are never described as reform.

The definition also implicitly differentiates reform from changes that come about in a gradual fashion without deliberate decision making to effect the final result. Over the course of time, institutions, for instance, have a tendency toward greater sophistication in procedures. The change is incremental, as when a business bit by bit adds more staff and eventually

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opens branch offices. Or, to take a concrete example from the sphere of ideas: renaissance was first employed in the 15th century to indicate a literary rebirth, then got applied to designate a shift in standards in painting, sculpture, and architecture, and finally was applied to a whole period of history. Rather than call such changes reform, we tend to call them developments, about which I will say more later.

Although the synonyms, quasi-synonyms, and euphemisms for reform have slightly different nuances, they express the same idea of change for the better. They too have played such important roles in cultural and political history that it is almost impossible to speak of the course of Western civilization without employing them. I refer to words such as *renewal*, *renovation*, *restoration*, *revival*, *rebirth*, and *renaissance*. To that list can be added, with less cogency, terms such as *correction*, *emendation*, and *improvement*.[1] Important though these terms are, *reform* remains the most basic and most frequently invoked in almost every sphere of human activity to indicate deliberate efforts undertaken within an institution to improve the status quo.

Important as the idea of reform has been in secular history, it has been even more important in the history of Christianity.[2] It cuts, after all, to the very heart of the Christian message, which is a call to repentance, conversion, and reform of life. Without rebirth, according to John's Gospel, there is no entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Reform was, therefore, originally directed to the individual Christian. Repent! Change your ways! Nonetheless, it early on began to be applied also to the church as an organized social body and was thus launched on its impressive ecclesiastical trajectory. Councils, both local and ecumenical, emerged by the third and fourth centuries as the most unquestioned institutions responsible for reform.

Despite its importance for Christian history, scholarship on reform has been notably sparse.[3] Only two major monographs have ever explicitly

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[1] The Latin for such terms, used often in church documents: *corrigere*, *emendare*, *meliorare*, *recreare*, *regenerare*, *renovare*, *reparare*, *restituere*, *revocare*.

[2] German scholars have been particularly interested in its use in political and social discourse. See, e.g., Martin Greiffenhagen, ed., *Zur Theorie der Reform: Entwürfe und Strategien* (Heidelberg: Müller, 1978).

[3] Among the relatively few studies are Gerald Strauss, "Ideas of *Reformatio* and *Renovatio* from the Middle Ages to the Reformation," in *Handbook of European History 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. Brady Jr. et al., 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1995) 2:1–30; Konrad Repken, "Reform als Leitgedanke kirchlicher Vergangenheit und Gegenwart," *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* 84 (1989) 5–39; Giuseppe Alberigo, "'Réforme' en tant que critère de l'histoire de l'église," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 76 (1981) 72–81; John W. O'Malley, S.J., "Developments, Reforms, and Two Great Reformations: Towards a Historical Assessment of Vatican II,"

dealt with it. Both were published in the 1950s, on the eve of Vatican II. They remain to this day the classic studies. Gerhart B. Ladner's *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* appeared in 1959.[4] It dealt almost exclusively with the idea's impact on personal asceticism and monastic discipline in late antiquity. Especially significant in it is Ladner's insistence on the multivalent character of the term: its meaning in any given instance depends on concrete circumstances.

The Idea of Reform, a work of superb historical scholarship and still indispensable for the sphere it covers, has attracted little attention outside a circle of specialists. The same cannot be said of Yves Congar's *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'église*, published nine years earlier, in 1950.[5] It has been described as "arguably Congar's most important and original contribution to Christian theology."[6]

Shortly after the publication of *Vraie et fausse réforme*, the Holy Office of the Inquisition forbade its reprinting and translation into other languages and informed Congar that in the future everything he intended to publish had first to be submitted to the master general of the Dominican order for censorship.[7] These strictures were just the beginning of Congar's difficulties with Roman authorities.[8]

What was the Holy Office's problem with *Vraie et fausse réforme*? The book, unlike Ladner's, was not a historical study in the conventional sense,

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Theological Studies 44 (1983) 373–406; Wayne J. Hankey, "Self and Cosmos in Becoming Deiform: Neoplatonic Paradigms for Reform by Self-knowledge from Augustine to Aquinas," in *Reforming the Church before Modernity: Patterns, Problems, and Approaches*, ed. Christopher M. Bellitto and Louis J. Hamilton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005) 39–60. For case studies, see, e.g., John W. O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1968); and Nelson H. Minnich, "Concepts of Reform Proposed at the Fifth Lateran Council," *Archivum historiae pontificiae* 7 (1969) 163–251. Hans Norbert Janowski takes a quite different approach in "Reform als theologisch-ethisches Problem," in *Zur Theorie der Reform* 211–40.

[4] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1959). Ladner also wrote a number of important articles on the subject. For a listing, see O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo* 1 n. 1.

[5] (Paris: Cerf, 1950); 2nd ed., rev. and corr. (Paris: Cerf, 1968); ET, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011). For an analysis of Congar's approach to church reform that takes off from *Vraie et fausse réforme*, see Gabriel Flynn, "Yves Congar and Catholic Church Reform: A Renewal of Spirit," in *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, ed. Gabriel Flynn (Louvain: Peeters, 2005) 99–133.

[6] Gabriel Flynn, introduction to *Yves Congar* 1–24, at 9.

[7] See Yves Congar, *Journal d'un théologien (1946–1956)*, ed. Étienne Fouilloux (Paris: Cerf, 2001) 181–222.

[8] See Congar, ibid., esp. 232–76. See also Thomas O'Meara, "'Raid on the Dominicans': The Repression of 1954," *America* 170.4 (February 5, 1994) 8–16; and, more broadly, Étienne Fouilloux *Une église en quête de liberté: La pensée française entre modernisme et Vatican II* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1998).

but one of the early ventures by a Catholic into historical theology. This attempt to correlate doctrine and practice with historical contingencies could not but seem dangerous in certain circles and cause unease. Much of the burden of *Vraie et fausse réforme* consists in Congar's attempt to justify the method and thus anticipate potential critics.

Moreover, for reasons I will discuss below, the application to the church of the word *reform* had by the 20th century become anathema. Congar in his foreword in fact noted that "a veritable curse" seemed to hang over the word.[9] Only in that light can we understand, for instance, how Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, could ask, when questioned about the book while he was nuncio in Paris, "Reform of the church—is such a thing possible?"[10]

Congar had in fact phrased his title cautiously: reform *in* the church, not reform *of* the church, but his caution did not save him. After Vatican II, however, Congar, now fully rehabilitated, felt free to undertake and publish a revised edition, which only last year appeared in English translation.[11] By 1969 when Congar published the revision, the idea that the church might be reformed no longer seemed unthinkable. Yet, misgivings about it persisted.

The council itself had to tread warily. In its 16 final documents it applied *reformatio* to the church only once, in the often quoted line from the decree On Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*: "In its pilgrimage on earth Christ summons the church to continual reformation [*perennem reformationem*], of which it is always in need, in so far as it is an institution of human beings here on earth" (no. 6).[12] In the early 1960s that was a bold statement and was recognized as such at the time. Reform was not truly applicable to the Catholic Church. Moreover, in some ears the document's expression *perennis reformatio* sounded more Protestant than Catholic, for it seemed to be a paraphrase of the principle *ecclesia semper reformanda* that originated in 17th-century German Pietism and was given currency in the early 20th century by Karl Barth's circle.[13]

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[9] Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme* (1950) 13, "une véritable malédiction."

[10] Philibert, "Translator's Introduction," in Congar, *True and False Reform* xi. Congar explicitly stated that Roncalli read the book in 1952, *Mon journal du concile*, 2 vols., ed. Éric Mahieu (Paris: Cerf, 2002) 2:441–42 (October 19, 1965).

[11] See n. 5 above.

[12] Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (Washington: Georgetown University, 1990) 2:913; "Ecclesia in via peregrinans vocatur a Christo ad hanc perennem reformationem qua ipsa, quo humanum terrenumque institutum, perpetuo indiget." Throughout I use Tanner's English translation, sometimes with slight modification.

[13] See Repgen, "Reform als Leitgedanke" 21–22.

Nowhere else in the council's final 16 documents is *reformatio* applied to the church. The word occurs in eight other instances but in reference to aspects of secular society needing improvement.[14] For the church the council preferred euphemisms such as *renewal* or *renovation* (*renovatio*), a term that occurs 64 times, most often to indicate changes in church life or practice, that is, to indicate some aspect of reform of the church.

This queasiness about *reformatio* explains why, even a half-century after the council, Catholics continue to show a decided preference for softer words in referring to Vatican II. It was a council of "renewal." It was a council of "updating" or even "modernizing." It was almost anything but a reform council. In late 2005, however, that situation suddenly changed. When on December 22 Pope Benedict XVI proposed in his Christmas allocution to the Roman Curia that the proper lens for understanding Vatican II is a "hermeneutic of reform," the term got instantaneously and powerfully rehabilitated. The pope authoritatively readmitted reform into Catholic theological vocabulary.[15]

In his allocution Benedict did not rest content with introducing the term. He went on to explain what he understood it to entail. In so doing he implicitly reinforced the point made by Congar in 1950 that the term is "a little vague" (*un peu vague*) and the point made later by Ladner that it was multivalent.[16] What *reform* means in concrete circumstances is not self-evident. It is revealed only when tested against the historical phenomena it professes to describe.

Examination of the "idea of reform" in the different historical circumstances in which it came into play is precisely what I attempt to do in what follows. Because of space limitations my review will be sketchy but, I hope, sufficient for a profitable exploration of the implications and problems entailed in "a hermeneutic of reform" applied to Vatican II. Only by being grounded in historical reality can such a hermeneutic be helpful and make sense. When we deal with real historical happenings it becomes clear that an abstract idea like reform has meaning only in relation to them. If, on the contrary, reform is explained by further abstractions, it degenerates into a platitude or even a mask for an ideology.[17]

In the survey that follows, patterns emerge. I divide them into three types, each of which has different manifestations. The first type concerns leadership, which can come either "from above" or "from below." The leaders from above are persons or institutions with authority to impose

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[14] See Tanner, *Decrees* 2:888, 911, 915, 1067, 1114, 1115, 1120, 1128.

[15] See *Acta apostolicae sedis: Commentarium officiale* 98 (2006) 40–53, at 45–53 (henceforth, *AAS*, allocution).

[16] Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme* (1950) 13; and Ladner, *Idea of Reform* 1–35.

[17] See, e.g., Alberigo, "'Réforme.'"

a reform, such as bishops, popes, and councils. Leaders from below may be charismatic individuals like Francis of Assisi or intellectuals like Erasmus, persons who lead movements that directly affect the religious life and mentality of the faithful, including clergy.

The second type concerns the extent of reform. The reform might look to repairing a system in place and remedying "abuses" in it. The Council of Trent, for instance, did not challenge the place of bishops in the church but aimed at making them more effective in their traditional pastoral duties. Another type of reform, however, aims at displacing or replacing a given system within the church, as when the Gregorian reformers of the eleventh century sought to reintroduce the free election of bishops by the local clergy to replace the system of episcopal nomination by lay magnates.

The final type concerns content, which most often and most obviously has meant either doctrine or practice. For the former, reform traditionally consisted in a strong reaffirmation of what presumably had always been the orthodox belief, but more recently it has had to take account of process or "development," that is, change. The latter, which has often been designated simply "church discipline," has been the more obvious object of reform and readier to admit change, but even it has been hedged with problems.

There is in this last type, however, a third manifestation that is not usually taken into account, but that is particularly pertinent for Vatican II. It concerns values and mind-set. As such it entails a rethinking of received patterns. It is expressed and issues in new patterns of discourse. When taken seriously, it imposes new patterns of behavior, new ways of "doing business," and perhaps a new configuration of doctrine. Although it may seem distinct from doctrine and practice, it affects both.

Conceptually clear though these types are, in concrete historical happenings they are never quite so distinct from one another. A reform initiated "from below," for instance, can have repercussions on church authority and result in a decision "from above" clearly influenced by what has been going on "below." Still, naming these types helps us discern patterns in the seemingly infinitely complex and intractable thing that is history.

THE GREGORIAN REFORM: THE CRUCIAL TURNING POINT

As Ladner showed, the idea of reform was alive and well in the patristic period but applied principally to the ongoing amendment of life required of the Christian. However, both the local and ecumenical councils of the era were in fact convoked to correct deviations from received church teaching and practice.[18] Councils meted out sentences of guilt and innocence and made

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[18] See, e.g., Claire Sotinel, "The Church in the Roman Empire: Changes without Reform and Reforms without Change," in *Reforming the Church* 155–72.

regulations to uproot abuses that here and there had sprung up. Although a number of these councils dealt with doctrinal issues and controversies, they all without exception dealt in some measure with "discipline," or "correction," that is, with reform. They were all, thus, "reform councils."

The councils assumed that what they enacted as correctives consisted in reassertions, reinforcements, or even reformulations of earlier Christian teaching and practice. They further assumed that these problems were localized. Change for the worse might affect individual persons or churches but not the church as a whole. The councils remedied the problems by defining orthodox teaching, by expelling deviant individuals from the body of the church, by instituting penalties for disciplinary infractions, and by installing once again the traditional modus operandi.

In the eleventh century, however, the conviction arose in a group of devout churchmen that certain abuses were widespread, almost universal. These men became convinced that certain practices that they believed deviated from "the fathers," by which they generally meant church legislation enacted between the fourth and sixth centuries, infected virtually the whole church. Only with them did the idea clearly emerge that the system-in-place might itself be subject to reform or even replacement and, indeed, require it.

The reformers, eventually led by Pope Gregory VII (1073–1085), tried to abolish long-standing procedures and practices in the name of a return to ancient canonical provisions. They were determined, more specifically, to accomplish principally two changes: first, as mentioned, to reinstate the free election of bishops by local clergy and thereby displace the almost universal practice of episcopal appointments being made by secular rulers; second, to reinstate clerical celibacy and thereby abolish widespread clerical marriage and concubinage.

The idea that the current system of received operating procedures needed radically to be reformed had its genesis in a revival of the study of canon law in Germany and Italy, made possible by more settled political conditions. This study of the canons was the first great renaissance of learning in the Middle Ages that would from that point forward have a continuous history.[19] In it was born the first glimmerings of a sense of anachronism, of significant discrepancies between past and present—in this instance, the discrepancy between the feudal culture of the Middle Ages and the Roman culture of Christian antiquity. Although the reformers could not possibly have formulated the problem in such terms, they clearly

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[19] See the classic study by Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1927). See also Erwin Panofsky, "Renaissance and Renascences," *Kenyon Review* 6 (1944) 201–36.

saw that present practice differed radically from the past as they discovered it in the canons.

What they had engaged in was a process that in mid-20th century Congar called *ressourcement*, a neologism coined earlier in the century by the poet Charles Péguy.[20] The term came to mean returning to past sources in systematic fashion to discover what might there be of use in the present. Although *ressourcement* could be employed simply to trace how an idea or an institution got to be the way it was, it was more regularly employed in discovering discrepancies between past and present. It thus implied the possibility of a repudiation of aspects of the present in favor of a better or more authentic past. *Ressourcement* was not, therefore, an antiquarian project but a practical one and, in practice, often a virtual synonym of *reform*.

The popes and their allies, who waged against recalcitrants a vigorous war not only of propaganda but sometimes of spear and sword, became the first great church reformers. The upheaval that accompanied and followed their efforts resulted in civil war in Germany, in the most horrible sacking of the city of Rome in its history, and in several generations of bitter contest between popes and antipopes and between popes and secular rulers.

The reformers eventually had to settle for compromises on their stated goals. There was no way, for instance, that secular rulers were going to relinquish all control over the appointment of such important vassals as the bishops. Such a change would have upset the very foundations upon which feudal society operated. The reformers had more success with celibacy, not so much in its enforcement as in its firm installation in canon law.

Nonetheless, the Gregorian Reform constitutes a landmark in the history of the idea of church reform. Replacement of a system normatively in place by another system is what distinguished the Gregorian Reform from preceding reforms. Earlier reforms attempted to plug leaks and repair glitches in the status quo. The Gregorians, on the contrary, repudiated the status quo in favor of a different status, one presumably better and more authentic than what was in place Their aims and ideals constituted a new paradigm, to use the expression made famous by Thomas Kuhn. They tried to establish that paradigm to replace the regnant paradigm. This was something new in the history of the church. The fact that the reform provoked such profound political and military reactions substantiates its radical character for its age. To distinguish it from less momentous reforms I have called it "a great reformation."[21]

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[20] See Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme* (1950) 43; in the note on this page Congar cites the pertinent passages from Péguy.
[21] See O'Malley, "Developments, Reforms" 378–91.

FROM THE GREGORIAN REFORM TO THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

The Gregorian reformers gave reform as applied to social institutions a strikingly new prominence. Their movement helped generate a mind-set intimating that an improvement of corporate behavior and a return to more ancient norms was at times urgent in the church and in other institutions of society. By the time of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), the word *reformare* had begun to appear in ecclesiastical sources with ever-greater frequency. From then until the 17th century, *reform* became one of the most characteristic and frequently invoked words in discussion of Catholic church life.

In Lateran IV, moreover, there appeared for the first time in council documents an unmistakably clear assertion that a change in discipline (*statuta humana*) might be required by a change in "the times." The assertion is notable not only for its straightforward affirmation of the necessity of adjustment to new conditions and therefore its suggestion of discrimination between past and present, but also because it provided a criterion for deciding when such a change should be adopted: when required by necessity or clear advantage—*urgens necessitas vel evidens utilitas*.[22] The assertion was an anticipation of the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II.

At just the time of Lateran IV, an impetus to ideas of radical church reform entered the stage through the newly founded Franciscan order. Saint Francis saw himself as anything but a challenge to the ecclesiastical status quo. His literal interpretation of Gospel passages concerning poverty set the stage, however, for the emergence after his death of a party within the order that aggressively pursued that interpretation and began to apply it in a sharply negative way to the church at large, which they saw as operating far from the ideals of the New Testament. This party became known as the Spirituals or Spiritual Franciscans. The Spirituals' stridency and the threat they posed brought them, not surprisingly, into conflict with ecclesiastical authorities and eventually with the papacy itself, which culminated during the pontificate of John XXII (1316–1334). The pope condemned their ideas and program, especially the idea that Christ and the Apostles had no money either individually or collectively. But it was easier to condemn such ideas than to stamp them out.

The Spirituals gave impetus to ideas and aspirations that spread in different but recognizable forms among both theologians and the rank and file of the faithful. The English theologian John Wycliffe held a number of heretical ideas, among them those concerning the church's deviation from the poverty demanded by the New Testament. It was in the wake of the Great Western Schism (1378–1418), however, that reform of the church

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[22] Tanner, *Decrees* 1:257, "50. De restricta prohibitione matrimonii."

surged as an insistent, persistent, and absolutely urgent theme in upper echelons of both secular and ecclesiastical society.

The scandal of two, then three, men claiming to be the legitimate successor of Saint Peter and their refusal over the course of two generations to resolve the problem on their own fed the persuasion that radical measures were required. Emperor-elect Sigismund pressured Pope John XXIII, who seemed to be the claimant with the best credentials for legitimacy, to convoke the Council of Constance (1414–1418). The council deposed two claimants, "persuaded" the third to resign, and elected a new pope, Martin V, who soon won almost universal recognition as the true successor of Peter. It is from the line established at Constance with Martin V that all subsequent popes have descended.

The Great Western Schism had turned eyes to the papacy in a newly critical way and focused attention on grievances that were already of long standing, most especially on papal taxes, fines, and other financial exactions that, since the long residence of the popes in Avignon in the 14th century, seemed to be expanding without limit or oversight. It is no wonder, then, that in its very first document the Council of Constance set for itself the task of implementing the "necessary reform" (*debitam reformationem*).[23]

Four months later, on March 26, 1415, Constance even more emphatically took the task in hand by making its own the all-inclusive expression, "reform of the said church in head and members" (*pro reformatione dictae ecclesiae in capite et in membris*).[24] The council's formal adoption of the expression propelled it into the imagination of concerned persons across Europe. It evolved into a powerful mantra. Reform, understood by different persons in different ways and applied to different entities, exploded as the great preoccupation of the century between Constance and the outbreak of the Reformation.[25] In that preoccupation "reform of the head," that is, the papacy, achieved a special preeminence. The slogan ran: "Reform Rome, [and you will] reform the world."

Constance itself legislated a number of reforms, many of which concerned the management and responsible use of church revenues. Other reforms concerned the proper functioning of papal conclaves and the behavior of clerics. Just before it elected Martin V, it issued a decree informing the pope-to-be that he was bound to "reform the church in head

[23] Tanner, *Decrees* 1:406.
[24] Tanner, *Decrees* 1:407. William Durant the Younger did not coin the expression "reform of the church in head and members," but he gave it currency when, at the Council of Vienne in 1311, he demanded such a reform. See Constantin Fasolt, *Council and Hierarchy: The Political Thought of William Durant the Younger* (New York: Cambridge University, 1991) 1, 115–76.
[25] See, e.g., Erika Rummel, "Voices of Reform from Hus to Erasmus," in *Handbook of European History* 2:61–91.

and the Roman curia" (*reformare ecclesiam in capite et curia Romana*). It then provided a list of 18 areas where abuses occurred that he was to remedy. The first was in "the number, quality, and nationality of the lord cardinals." Many of the rest concerned the use and misuse of church funds and goods, the proliferation of church taxes and fines, simony in papal elections and other transactions, and the amount of the revenues enjoyed by the pope and cardinals.[26]

With the Council of Constance, then, reform of the church developed into an ongoing project that preoccupied the leaders, clerical and lay, of late-medieval society. In Italy at about the same time, the idea that a return to ancient sources would effect a reform of society arose in a powerfully influential mode outside ecclesiastical circles. It was set in motion principally by the poet Petrarch (1309–1374), who called for return to classical Latin prose and poetry and to a revival of the moral ideals that literature embodied. The result would be, he believed, a rebirth of good literature and good morals after the "darkness" (*tenebrae*) of the intervening centuries up to his own.[27] The venture, crowned with great success by the 16th century, came to be known, aptly, as the Renaissance—literally, a *rebirth.*

Ad fontes! To the sources! The leaders of the movement, known as humanists, wanted of course to revive the study of classical authors such as Virgil and Cicero but also of the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. In Erasmus (1469–1536) the reforming impulses of the humanist movement related to Christian issues found their most thoughtful, eloquent, and widely respected exponent. He was not the superficial litterateur and theological dilettante that he is often depicted as being. Virtually everything he wrote was directed, in one form or another, toward promoting *pietas*, a more authentically human and Christian style of life. He believed that the model for that *pietas* and the nourishment for it was to be found, yes, in the "good pagans," but more pointedly and authentically in the Bible and the Fathers.[28]

On that basis he promoted reform in several interlocking spheres, of which two are particularly pertinent. The first was reform of practices of devotion. He was an acerbic (and sometimes amusing) critic of the crass superstition that in his day often accompanied such phenomena as relics, indulgences, and pilgrimages. In place of those practices he promoted what he regarded as more authentic alternatives that he found in the Bible and the earlier Christian tradition. Important among these alternatives was

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[26] See Tanner, *Decrees* 1:438–50, at 444.

[27] See, e.g., Panofsky, "Renaissance"; and Theodore Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages," *Speculum* 17 (1943) 226–49.

[28] See John W. O'Malley, "Introduction," *Spiritualia: Enchiridion, De Contemptu Mundi, De Vidua Christiana*, Collected Works of Erasmus 66, ed. John W. O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1988) ix–li.

the liturgy. Although virtually every line we have from him is in Latin, he in fact favored the idea of vernacular liturgy, as a proper expression of Christian devotion and *pietas*.

Even more basic to his program was installing Scripture as the principal focus of Christian life. In 1516 Erasmus published the first critical edition of the Greek New Testament along with a new Latin translation. In the preface he expressed the wish that the Scriptures be translated into every language and made easily available to everybody. In reading and contemplating that text, he asserted, one encountered "the speaking, healing, dying, rising Christ himself."[29] Thus would Christians learn to live and appropriate "the philosophy of Christ."

The second sphere needing reform was theological method, and he campaigned against Scholastic theology because it was in its very procedures inimical to *pietas*. He attacked the method as having devolved into the pursuit of irrelevant and even irreverent questions. Its practitioners engaged in endless disputes among themselves over trivial issues and the very style in which they wrote and preached snuffed out the life of the Spirit. In its stead he promoted the "ancient and more authentic" style of the Fathers of the Church. The Fathers did not get lost in theological trivialities but kept the focus on the central mysteries of the faith—Trinity, Incarnation, Redemption, and the power of grace. They wrote in a style accessible to all and in a style that touched the heart as well as the mind.

In these ways, as in others, Erasmus's program was an anticipation of aspects of *la nouvelle théologie* of the mid-20th century promoted by theologians such as Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, and Jean Daniélou. It is, therefore, also an anticipation of the effect "the new theology" had on Vatican II that refashioned the council into a mode different from all its predecessors.[30] The *ad fontes* of Renaissance reformers such as Erasmus is, after all, simply the Latin form of the French *ressourcement*—return to the past to correct the present. It was not a reform of doctrine or of church discipline, and in that regard it differs from "church reform" in the conventional sense, yet it fulfills the classic definition of reform: *mutatio in melius*.

Erasmus's reform was like the Gregorians' in one extremely important regard. Like theirs, his was not an adjustment or repair of a system in place but the replacement of one system with another. Although he was willing

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[29] Erasmus, "Paraclesis" [preface to his *Novum Instrumentum*], in *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Desiderius Erasmus, Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. John C. Olin (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 106.

[30] See John W. O'Malley, "Erasmus and Vatican II: Interpreting the Council," in *Cristianesimo nella storia: Saggi in onore di Giuseppe Alberigo*, ed. Alberto Melloni et al. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996) 195–211; and O'Malley, "*Fides quaerens et non quaerens intellectum*: Reform and the Intellectuals in the Early Modern Period," in *Reforming the Church* 69–84.

at points to grant that Scholastic theology had certain merits, he wanted a different method and ethos to prevail over it. The same was true for his reform of the practices of piety. In other words, he was not engaged in paradigm adjustment but in paradigm replacement.

He was passionate about his cause because he saw its goal as engendering a deeper, more heartfelt appropriation of values that he considered most authentically Christian. For him, for instance, Christ was the Prince of Peace, which meant that the Christian worked for peace on earth and attempted to understand "the other" rather than wipe him off the face of the earth. The ideal Christian held, for instance, that the canon of saints was "wider than we might believe." Rather than trying to solve all problems with apodictic pronouncements from on high, the Christian engaged in dialogue and conversation and was ready to assume good will on the part of "the other." The central discipline in the humanist program was not dialectics, as in Scholasticism, but rhetoric. The former was the art of winning an argument, whereas the latter was the art of winning consensus.[31]

What Erasmus required of the Christian—and therefore of the church— was a new mind-set and the appropriation of values that would be expressed in new patterns of behavior. These "reforms" rode on the wave of a "new" mode of discourse, which was, as he saw it, the truly "ancient and venerable" mode, the mode of the Bible and the Fathers.

THE REFORMATION AND ITS CATHOLIC AFTERMATH

By the first few decades of the 16th century, reform was the emotionally charged cry of the day. Its most explosive instantiation was, of course, the Protestant Reformation, an immensely complex movement that, for reasons of space, I must reduce to Luther. In him the close relationship between conversion and reform could not have been clearer. Luther's discovery of "the gospel"—justification by faith alone—was for him a dramatically reorienting insight, a eureka experience, a conversion that led him to a sharp and irreversible break with his past. "Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates."[32] He soon became convinced that he saw things differently from his contemporaries, who lived in blindness and bondage.

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[31] For manifestations of a "rhetorical theology" in Italian humanists of the period, see Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Renaissance Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); and 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, NC: Duke University, 1979).

[32] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings" (1545), in *Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986) 34:337.

Luther's great and frightening insight, therefore, was that in the church the most vital and essential function, the preaching of the Good News, had for long ages been suppressed by the papacy in favor of a save-yourself-by-your-own-efforts Pelagianism. If the humanists saw a "dark age" of literature between themselves and the good past, Luther saw an even more dreadfully dark age of the suppression of the gospel. He took up the challenge to set things right once again.

He published his "Ninety-Five Theses" in 1517. Three years later, in 1520, he published his "Appeal to the German Nobility," a call to lay magnates to intervene and take church reform into their own hands. While the "Appeal" contained radical principles, it consisted for the most part in a vigorously worded compilation of widely held late-medieval grievances about how the church functioned on a practical level. Prominent in it were the standard complaints about papal financial exactions and the extravagant lifestyle of the papal court. Decades later prelates at the Council of Trent railed against many of the same problems.

Luther's insight into justification soon led him to a drastic restructuring of ministry, piety, and church order, which was based on his fundamental principle of the exclusive prerogatives of Scripture in all things Christian. He rejected five of the seven traditional sacraments, utterly repudiated the papacy as having any role in church order, and rejected the idea of ecclesiastical hierarchy as Catholics understood it. The ultimate result was a new paradigm, derived, Luther believed, from the authentic message of the word of God through a process of *ressourcement*. Luther's reform consisted not in making adjustments, however drastic, to a system in place but rather in replacing that system with another.

Along with these radical changes he demanded yet another—a change in mode of discourse. In his famous debate with Erasmus on justification, Luther insisted that the only Christian mode of discourse was the prophetic mode of assertion. In that mode the supreme value is "the cause," which does not admit either Scholastic qualifications and distinctions or the humanist mode of middle ground. This was an issue-under-the-issues that contemporaries were incapable of naming but that colored everything Luther said.[33]

As a response to the doctrinal and reform issues raised by Luther and, to a lesser extent, by other Protestant reformers, Pope Paul III was finally able in 1545 to convoke the Council of Trent. The council met intermittently in three distinct periods over 18 years, finally concluding on December 4, 1563. As its very length suggests, it was an extremely difficult enterprise, threatened by war, plague, internal conflicts, and political machinations of the first order. It lurched from major crisis to major crisis.

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[33] See John W. O'Malley, *Four Cultures of the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2004) esp. 1–75.

After the council controversy over how it was to be interpreted and implemented emerged almost immediately. It contributed to distortions of what the council legislated and intended that entered into Catholic historiography as what "Trent decided." Not until quite recently, especially with the work Hubert Jedin, has the distinction between what actually happened at the council and what often erroneously got attributed to it become clear, at least to specialists.[34]

The council's internal difficulties stemmed in large measure from a conflict of priorities that surfaced even before the council opened. Although Pope Paul III convoked the council, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, had for 20 years been the indefatigable, most persistent, and often frustrated voice insisting on its necessity. These two men formed an uneasy partnership that finally allowed the council to happen, but they disagreed about the council's agenda.

Paul III envisaged the council as principally a response to the doctrinal issues raised by "the Lutherans," a generic term that for long included other reformers such as Zwingli, Karlstadt, and, eventually, Calvin. Like all popes of the era, Paul III feared allowing the council to deal with reform, lest it touch the sensitive and explosive issue of the practices of the papal court. Reform, surely, was needed, but it was to be handled directly by himself, not by the council.

The Holy Roman emperor had for centuries been recognized as the Protector of the Church, a role emperors took seriously. Charles V's agenda for the council, which he felt it was his prerogative to promote, was almost diametrically opposed to the pope's. A practical man, he was convinced that the real problem was reform. Just as the unreformed condition of the church had, in his analysis, caused the Lutheran crisis, a reform of the church was the first, most urgent, and absolutely indispensable step in resolving it.

During the first months of the council, the prelates at Trent, under pressure from both sides, wrestled with this conflict of priorities. They eventually adopted the sensible solution of treating both issues, and to do so in parallel tracts. For every doctrinal decree, the council would simultaneously issue a decree on reform, *de reformatione*. Through thick and thin this binary agenda prevailed to the very end of the council. Although Trent showed a decided preference for *reformatio* as the designation for what

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[34] See John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, forthcoming). The standard and indispensable history of the council is Hubert Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, 4 vols. in 5 (Freiburg im/Br.: Herder, 1949–1975). Only the first two volumes have been translated into English: *A History of the Council of Trent*, 2 vols., trans. Ernest Graf (London: Thomas Nelson, 1957, 1961). See also Giuseppe Alberigo, "Du concile de Trente au tridentinisme," *Irenikon* 54 (1981) 192–210.

it was about, it employed other traditional terms—such as *restituere*, *revocare*, and *innovare*—to express the same idea.

The council never explicitly stated the parameters of its reform, but it in practice understood it to focus primarily, almost exclusively, on reform of three *offices* in the church—the papacy, the episcopate, and the pastorate, that is, pastors of parishes. It was never able to address reform of the papacy except in the most tangential way. The council, thus, did not undertake a comprehensive review of Catholicism. For instance, it said not a word about the most impressive undertaking of the era, the evangelization of the newly discovered lands.

As the council evolved, its reform decrees took shape as radically pastoral. Its aim was to persuade or, more often, force the incumbents in church offices to act as shepherds of their flocks by attending to the basic and traditional duties the offices entailed. The council wanted bishops and pastors of parishes to do their jobs, as those jobs were traditionally understood and spelled out in canon law. Trent thus engaged in a specifically focused *ressourcement*.

Trent's doctrinal decrees had perhaps an even more precise focus than did the reform decrees. They dealt essentially with two issues: first, justification (with original sin as a kind of essential prelude), and, second, the sacraments. For anyone familiar with medieval Scholastic theology, Trent's decrees on the sacraments hold few surprises. One of their features, however, is of extreme importance for the future of the idea of reform.

Luther postulated a complete rupture in the handing on of the gospel, with the result that the teaching of the "papal church" criminally departed from the message of Christ and the Apostles.[35] In reaction to Luther's (and then other Reformers') accusation, Catholic apologists rushed to insist upon the church's unbroken continuity with the faith and practice of the apostolic era. Trent imparted further force to this insistence and again and again stated that its enactments faithfully reflected what had been determined "from the beginning."

No previous council had ever so often and so explicitly declared the continuity of its teachings with the authentic Christian past. When Trent affirmed regarding the sacrament of penance that the Catholic practice of secret confession to a priest had been observed since "the beginning," it was only making explicit a principle that underlay almost all its doctrinal pronouncements.

The council thus gave force and validation to a characteristically Catholic historiographical tradition just emerging at the time. That tradition was of course heir to the substantialism that for long had marked historical

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[35] See John M. Headley, *Luther's View of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1963).

thinking, but it developed it and made it into a hermeneutical principle. In its insistence on continuity, Trent helped develop the tradition and fostered the Catholic mind-set reluctant to admit change in the course of church history. By the early 17th century, Catholic reluctance to see or admit change had become deeply rooted and pervasive. It persisted in different degrees and different forms up to the present.

That historiographical tradition, of course, holds important implications for the idea of reform, which is about change. It was a major factor in the gradual development of Catholic aversion to the idea that the church could or should be reformed and an aversion even to the very word "reform." This was the aversion dramatized so well by Roncalli's question in the early 1950s, "Reform of the church—is such a thing possible?"

A not unrelated factor was Protestants' appropriation of "reform" and their claim to it as properly their own. Calvinist communities almost from their beginning referred to themselves as "reformed churches" (*églises réformées*), and Lutherans by the last quarter of the 16th century were following a similar path. Catholic rulers and reformers in Germany continued for some time to assert a claim on the word by calling the sometimes forcible restoration of Catholicism in areas gone Lutheran "the reform of religion" (*die Reformation der religion*). The Protestant purchase on reform and reformation, however, was destined ultimately to triumph. *Reformatio*, which had played such a vital role in Catholic life up to that point and that had inspired the Council of Trent to try to resolve glaring abuses in church practice, suffered banishment as foreign to Catholicism and subversive of it. Catholics surrendered the word to Protestants.

Only in 1946 when Hubert Jedin, the great historian of the Council of Trent, mounted a persuasive argument for the legitimacy of Catholic "reform" as a category to describe aspects of the 15th and 16th centuries, did reform begin to sneak back, in a limited and highly qualified sense, into Catholic vocabulary.[36] Congar's *Vraie et fausse réforme* appeared four years later.

THE LONG 19TH CENTURY

The Enlightenment threw history's goal into the future and gave 19th-century historiography its orientation toward progress.[37] The golden age now loomed in the future. This radical reorientation of thinking, which was previously, retrospective occurred, of course, gradually and was due to a number of factors. Since the beginning of the scientific revolution, progress

[36] See John W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2000) 16–45.

[37] See chapter 2, "The Long Nineteenth Century," in John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2008) 53–92.

in science and technology seemed undeniable. The *philosophes* saw humankind as emerging from the darkness of religion to enter into an era illumined by the clear light of reason. Hegel saw history culminating in the German *Reich*, and "Whig" historians in England saw it as leading inevitably to the triumph of the British Empire and the Anglican Church. Most tellingly, Darwin argued for the evolution of the species.[38]

On a less grandiose scale, professional historians, with critical skills newly honed by the revival of historical studies especially under the inspiration of Leopold von Ranke and his like, began to earn new respect and attention. They grew ever more aware of the distance in mentality, mores, and fundamental cultural assumptions that separated present from past and almost universally saw the present as improvement on what had gone before.

Ten years before Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* appeared, John Henry Newman published his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, in which he used different analogies to show how church teachings had evolved while remaining fundamentally true to their origins. The book, still the classic on the subject, is ironic in that the idea behind the book helped lead Newman into a church that on the official and unofficial levels denied that such an evolution took place.

Newman had as a young man immersed himself in the study of the patristic era, and in 1833 published *The Arians of the Fourth Century*. His research and wide reading alerted him to the difference between patristic positions on doctrinal matters and the 19th-century teaching of both Roman Catholicism and Liberal Protestantism. Instead of seeing the current discrepancy as by definition a sign of decline from the purity of the past, he interpreted aspects of it as healthy and inevitable growth, as a providential fulfillment of impulses present at the beginning. From the acorn comes the oak.

Newman was certainly not an admirer of the culture of his times. Nonetheless, his theory of development was in essence a ratification of what had evolved into the present. It affirmed the validity of the status quo as it had "developed." He thus, for a restricted area and almost despite himself, gave his approval to aspects of the times in which he lived. "Development" recognizes the reality of historical change, but it inhibits *reformatio*.

Catholic officialdom, especially the papacy, did not share the positive view of the historical process that prevailed in the 19th century. Especially since the French Revolution and its Europe-wide repercussions, it felt beleaguered and the victim of vicious and lawless forces. The Revolution's

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[38] See, e.g., Frank E. Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1962); and John Edward Sullivan, *Prophets of the West: An Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1970) esp. 21–87, 245–90.

call for liberty, equality, and fraternity sounded like a call for anarchy. In Italy the *Risorgimento*, with its aim of making Rome the new capital of a united Italy, exacerbated the papacy's fears and resentments.

For Catholics, led by the papacy, the "modern world," with all its works and pomps, was not the result of an upward trajectory of progress but of a dangerous and precipitous decline in the other direction that originated in the Reformation and that with ever greater strength and force hurtled the church downward, propelled by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Risorgimento, and the corrosive results of modern science and historical methods. Official response came with measures like "The Syllabus of Errors" of Pius IX, in 1864.

A few years later Pius convoked Vatican I. *Reformatio* appears in the council's decrees not a single time. What does appear is *irreformabiles*, used by the council to describe papal decisions *ex cathedra*. Vatican I was, for reasons that by now should be clear, intellectually and emotionally fortified against admitting the possibility of reform, a striking contrast with Trent, the council that immediately preceded it.

Despite the impact of the draconian measures against Modernism launched by Pius X in 1907, Catholic scholars began with ever-greater intensity to apply historical methods to sacred subjects. As they did so, they found it impossible not to acknowledge significant changes in teaching and practice over the course of the centuries. By and large their efforts turned into exercises in *ressourcement*, that is, into the hope of using what they discovered in the past to correct and improve the present.

With Pius XII's encyclicals *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) on modern biblical methods and *Mediator Dei* (1947) on the sacred liturgy, such *ressourcement* won qualified official approval. By the eve of Vatican II, therefore, *ressourcement*, though not named as such, was ready for use in the council. Reform, partially under the quasi-pseudonym of *ressourcement*, got silently reintroduced into Catholic life.

Historians of dogma faced a more daunting problem in the discrepancy between past and present. How were they to explain it while holding to the principle that the church's teaching was in fundamental and unbroken continuity with the teaching of the Apostles. Newman's theory of development provided the solution. Yes, church teaching changed, but in the process of change it was as true to itself as in its beginning—or even truer. By the eve of Vatican II development as a way to explain change had, in widely diverging degrees, won almost universal acceptance in Catholic circles. It was a reassuring theory.

In the wake of the two World Wars the "modern world" was not nearly as cocky as before about its attainments and its future and, so it seemed, not so inimical to Catholicism. Moreover, the Western democracies had, in defiance of earlier assessments of their military and moral impotence,

rallied to defeat the seemingly unstoppable Nazi onslaughts. They professed liberty, equality, and fraternity, not as a club to beat down monarchies but as a necessity in political life to ensure justice and safeguard human rights. When in 1944, just as World War II drew to a close, Pope Pius XII in his Christmas message commended democracy as a political form especially compatible with human dignity, he took a significant step toward reconciliation of the church with "the modern world" and thus laid the groundwork for the more profound implications of the *aggiornamento* that Pope John XXIII set as a goal of the council.

By the time the council got under way in the fall of 1962, therefore, three terms were in circulation among Catholics to deal with the problem of change: *aggiornamento*, development, and *ressourcement*. Although they overlapped in meaning, they more directly pointed to three ways change might take place in the church. In the atmosphere of reluctance to admit change that still strongly prevailed among many of the prelates at the council, they operated as euphemisms or soft synonyms for it. *Reform*, though by no means a word uttered in respectable ecclesiastical company, had begun its struggle for rehabilitation.

AGGIORNAMENTO, DEVELOPMENT, AND *RESSOURCEMENT* AT VATICAN II

The Problem of Change

As in previous councils, the documents of Vatican II evince a strong sense of continuity with the past and a determination to remain true to it. They reassert the church's continuity in faith, spiritual gift, and evangelical tradition from the time of the Apostles to the present, a continuity that in part stretches back even to Israel and that will continue to the end of time. The council underscored the undeviating nature of the church's tradition and its identification with it by its repeated, almost obsessive affirmation of its continuity with previous councils, especially Trent and Vatican I.

Nonetheless, Vatican II showed an awareness of change that in its pervasiveness and implications was new for a council and, at least on an official level, new for Catholicism as such. Unless the council stuck its head in the sand, it really had no choice. The problems for the church that the historically conscious culture of the modern world generated were too many and too deep to be avoided.

The council betrayed its awareness of the issue in the opening sentence of the first document it approved, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*. That sentence is replete with change words, including "change" itself, *mutatio*:

It is the intention of this holy council to *improve* the standard of daily Christian living among Catholics; to *adapt* those structures that are subject to *change* so as

better to meet the needs of *our time*; . . . it will, therefore, and with quite special reason, see the taking of steps towards the *renewal* and *growth* of the liturgy as something that it can and should do.[39]

It is certainly possible to quibble about the English equivalents here used for the Latin originals, but the Latin words, no matter how translated, have to do with change—*augere*, *accommodare*, *mutationes*, *nostra aetas*, *instaurare*, and, not so clearly, *fovere*.

As Massimo Faggioli has shown, *Sacrosanctum concilium* was not only a landmark document on the liturgy. It was also, and perhaps more importantly, an ecclesiological statement that contained in germ the orientations that guided the council in its subsequent course.[40] Among those orientations was the recognition of change and the need to take account of it—under the three headings of *aggiornamento*, development, and *ressourcement*.[41]

"Adapting to meet the needs of our time," almost the first words of the council's first document, is the definition of *aggiornamento*. In his opening allocution to the council on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII provided the basis for the "updating" that became a leitmotif in the council, to the point that Vatican II became known as the council of *aggiornamento*. Several comments are in order.

First, important though *aggiornamento* is for understanding Vatican II, it is not the only or the most significant way the council wrestled with the question of "change for the better." Second, though the term was new, the idea that change might be needed in view of new circumstances had been operative earlier in the church and even in councils, as indicated when Lateran IV approved change when it seemed "necessary or opportune."

Third, although previous councils invoked the equivalent of *aggiornamento* for changes they undertook, they did so rarely and by way of exception. In Vatican II, however, *aggiornamento* explicitly and implicitly affects virtually every document the council issued. The pervasiveness of the idea betrays a new mind-set in which accommodation to circumstances assumes a much more dominant role in how the church is to go about its mission. What is peculiar to Vatican II is the scope given to updating and the admission of it as a broad principle rather than as a rare exception.

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[39] "Sacrosanctum concilium, cum sibi proponat vitam christianam inter fideles in dies *augere*; eas institutiones quae *mutationibus* obnoxiae sunt, ad *nostrae aetatis* necessitates melius *accommodare*; . . . suum esse arbitratur peculiari ratione etiam *instaurandam* atque *fovendam* liturgiam curare" (Tanner, *Decrees* 2:820, emphases added).

[40] See Massimo Faggioli, "*Sacrosanctum concilium* and the Meaning of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 71 (2010) 437–52.

[41] For further elaboration on these terms and their implications, see O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, esp. 36–43, 298–302.

Finally, the "adaptations" and "accommodations" the council enjoins are not presented as remedies for abuses in the system, nor are penalties enjoined for noncompliance with them. In effect "adapting" and "accommodating" displace the traditional "correcting" and "remedying," expressions virtually absent in Vatican II. *Aggiornamento* thus redefines reform in a way peculiar to Vatican II. The adaptations and accommodations are not measures taken against evils that have crept into the church from the outside. They are, rather, a form of *rapprochement* between church and the existing order in the world. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that this feature of the council's appropriation of *aggiornamento* is of a piece with a larger pattern in Vatican II of which the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, is the most impressive monument.

John Courtney Murray famously commented that "development of doctrine" was *the* issue-under-the-issues at Vatican II. The idea explicitly appears at crucial moments in the council's documents, as in the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei verbum*, where we are told that apostolic tradition "makes progress in the church." There is a "growth in understanding," as the centuries advance and as the church moves further toward "the fullness of God's truth."[42] The idea also appears explicitly in the opening paragraphs of the Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis humanae*: the council "intends to develop [*evolvere*]" the teaching of recent popes on the subject.[43]

Murray was correct in his assessment about the centrality of the issue of doctrinal development, but he could have gone further. Development burst the limits of "development of doctrine." It was a mind-set that pervaded the thinking of the council on a much wider scope than doctrine, a fact revealed by how often the council has recourse to words that expressed it. The Latin equivalents of "evolution" and "development" (*evolutio* and *evolvo*), for instance, occur 42 times in the conciliar documents. The Latin equivalents of "progress" and "advance" (*progredior*, *progressio*, and *progressus*) occur 120 times.

Not only are these among the most characteristic words employed by the council; they are virtually absent from the vocabulary of previous councils. True, although the council applies them to aspects of church teaching and practice, it also often, especially in *Gaudium et spes*, applies them to aspects of secular society. This distinction, however, only strengthens the

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[42] "Haec quae est ab apostolis traditio sub assistentia Spiritus sancti in ecclesia proficit; crescit enim tam rerum quam verborum traditorum perceptio. . . . Ecclesia scilicet, volventibus saeculis, ad plenitudinem divinae veritatis iugiter tendit" (Tanner, *Decrees* 2:974).

[43] "Summorum pontificum doctrinam . . . evolvere intendit" (Tanner, *Decrees* 2:1002).

point that "development," a new form of *mutatio in melius* in the church, is a ubiquitous feature of Vatican Council II.

In contrast to development, *ressourcement* in the sense of return to the past to correct the present does not have in the council documents an obvious Latin equivalent that occurs with any frequency. The obvious candidate would be *reformatio*, but, as mentioned, it is, except in one important instance, altogether absent. "Renewal" (*renovatio*) does much better, but it is a softer word. It seems to imply warming up or refurbishing something that has lost its luster rather than retrieving something lost in order to repair or replace a piece outmoded or gone wrong. Euphemism though it is, it still points to the fundamental fact that Vatican II is unintelligible without taking *ressourcement* into account.

Despite the fact that *Sacrosanctum concilium* opens by invoking *aggiornamento*, *ressourcement* is the idea much more responsible for its provisions. Yes, the council wanted to adapt the liturgy to make it more meaningful in the religious life of contemporaries, but it did so by making use of a century of *ressourcement*, a century of scholars searching ancient and medieval sources to discover how and why things got to be the way they were.

When the council insisted that the fundamental principle of liturgical reform was the participation of the whole assembly in the sacred action, it did so on the basis of a principle derived from ancient liturgical practice, not as a sop to hyperactive moderns. Restoring the dignity of the first part of the mass, the Liturgy of the Word, was similarly derived. And so forth. The application of such principles to the present, the *aggiornamento*, was a consequence, not the starting point.

Other examples of *ressourcement* abound. The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, begins with hope for the "restoration" of Christian unity that prevailed before the Great Eastern Schism and the Reformation. In the contested passages of *Dei verbum* over the Scripture/tradition relationship, the majority voices wanted to recapture modes of thinking about it that predated the 16th-century controversies and their theological aftermath.

In *Dignitatis humanae*, the council in effect retrieved and refashioned the age-old teachings on the free character of the act of faith and on the primacy of conscience in moral decision making as arguments to displace a tradition of church-state relations that had its remote origins with Constantine, got refashioned in the 16th century with the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, refashioned again in the arrangements the Holy See negotiated with governments after the defeat of Napoleon, then rationalized in theological textbooks in the thesis-hypothesis model, and, on the very eve of Vatican II, not only officially professed but also instantiated in the Vatican's concordats with Franco in Spain and with other governments. Despite the "*evolvere*" of the text of *Dignitatis humanae*, this was system replacement.

The lightening-rod issue at the council was episcopal collegiality. No other section of any other document was more contested or received more minute scrutiny than chapter 3 of *Lumen gentium*. Even after the council overwhelmingly approved that chapter, the issue did not die but returned at the last moment in the famous *Nota praevia* attached to the decree by "a higher authority." The fierce and unrelenting opposition to collegiality from a small but powerful minority at the council, which surely provided the impetus for the *Nota*, indicates that something important was at stake, something more than an updating or a development.[44]

Proponents of collegiality saw it as a recovery of the predominantly collegial character of the church that had gradually but effectively been sidelined almost to the point of banishment by the way papal primacy had been interpreted and functioned especially in recent centuries. Yet, though the church had never officially defined collegiality as part of its constitution, for centuries it had taken collegiality for granted as its normal mode of operation. Collegiality surfaced at Vatican II as a result of the engagement of historians and theologians in *ressourcement*. Although its proponents presented collegiality at the council as simply an enhancement of the current mode in which the Holy See functioned, its opponents saw it as something much more threatening, a real *re-forming*, a paradigm replacement.

I have up to this point stressed the differences evinced by these three modes of "change for the better" operative at Vatican II: *aggiornamento*, development, and *ressourcement*. I now need to stress that in practice they were often not so distinct from one another. A given measure might from one perspective seem like *aggiornamento* and from another like development. Life is never as simple as theory. Even so, these three categories derive from the council's reality as a historical happening. They capture differences that we smooth over at our peril.

In particular, development and *ressourcement* are far from being synonyms. Development indicates a process of growth and efflorescence that has resulted in the status quo. It suggests, even, that the process might well continue to give us more of the same. It is thus profoundly confirmatory of the status quo and, as a theory, a formidable defense against *ressourcement* interpreted as reform. Development delivers the message "all's well" or "more of the same," which is precisely what reform denies.

Ressourcement, though it certainly can result in findings confirmatory of the present, most characteristically looks to the sources to see how the status quo needs to be modified, corrected, or replaced. It challenges the status quo, and it has in the history of the church sometimes challenged it radically. It might, moreover, call a halt to certain developments, as

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[44] On the *Nota praevia* see O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* 244–45.

happened at Vatican II with the strong movement to define more prerogatives of the Virgin Mary.

Mariology was a booming industry before the council, fueled by the apparitions at Lourdes, La Salette, Fatima, and elsewhere, but from a doctrinal viewpoint fueled especially by the definition in 1854 of the Immaculate Conception and in 1950 by the definition of the Assumption. Many bishops and theologians promoted and expected a further definition at Vatican II, such as, perhaps, Mary as coredemptrix.

But as the result of the heated debate over whether the council would issue a separate document on her, development in the form of a further definition went no further. *Ressourcement* was much responsible for this halt. Scholars argued for the patristic tradition of Mary as the model member of the church and not as someone enthroned above it.

In assessing the impact *ressourcement* had upon the council, however, we must avoid the big, but altogether common, hermeneutical mistake of resting content with examining the documents individually, one by one, and failing to take the crucial further step of examining them as a single corpus. Commentaries on the documents of the council commonly analyze them as discreet units, without reckoning in any consistent fashion with how they relate to one another and build upon one another.

The most authoritative of the early studies on the council is the multiauthored, five-volume commentary edited by Herbert Vorgrimler and written by theologians who took part in the council, including the young Joseph Ratzinger.[45] The most recent publication of similar scope is another five-volume commentary edited by Peter Hünermann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath.[46]

Commentaries like these are basic and absolutely indispensable, but they pave the way for the further, absolutely essential step of considering the documents as constituting a single corpus and thus of showing how each document is in some measure an expression of larger orientations and part of an integral and coherent whole. Unlike the determinations of previous councils, those of Vatican II are not a grab bag of ordinances without intrinsic relationship to one another. They 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.

Once the documents are thus examined, they are striking in that they express themselves in a style different from the legislative, judicial, and

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[45] ET, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967–1969).
[46] *Herder theologischer Kommentar zum zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, 5 vols. (Freiburg i/Br: Herder, 2004–2006).

often punitive style employed by previous councils. That style, a consistent and characteristic feature of the council, is the result of a deliberate, even if somewhat haphazard, attempt to recover what the Council Fathers believed was the style of "Scripture and the Fathers." It is, therefore, a *ressourcement*.

It is, moreover, a *ressourcement* or reform that is a system replacement or paradigm replacement, not merely an adjustment or correction of the status quo. The Roman Synod of 1960, the purported "dress rehearsal" for Vatican II, issued 773 canons. Canons, prescriptive ordinances that often carried penalties for failure to comply, were not the only, but certainly the most characteristic, literary form of councils from Nicaea (325) forward. Vatican II issued not a single canon.

Two system replacements result from this seemingly innocuous style shift. In the first place, Vatican II replaced with an altogether different system the legislative/judicial system of councils operative since at least the local synods of the third century but authoritatively codified with Nicaea. It thereby redefined what a council is and is supposed to do. In a gentle and unobtrusive way, Vatican II effected a major replacement of one system with another.

The style shift, in the second place, conveyed a values shift that was also a system shift or paradigm shift. It called for new attitudes on the part of the church and of all Catholics. The values it conveyed were anything but new in Christianity and to that extent were in continuity with tradition, but they were a break with the official mode in place up to that point. In its vocabulary the style promoted a change in mind-set and in the modus operandi of the church, as from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from fault finding to a search for common ground.[47] The profound and far-reaching implications of such a shift in how the church conducts itself, in how it "does business," and how it relates to real, live human beings should be obvious.

The Hermeneutic of Reform

When Pope Benedict XVI proposed a hermeneutic of reform for interpreting Vatican II, he stepped away from the sharp dichotomy of rupture/continuity that he had earlier insisted upon. Historians, surely, must welcome the new category. They know that the sharp dichotomy of rupture/continuity is never verified in historical events, which are always a mix of the old and the new. An event as radical as the French Revolution did not destroy the deep bond that continued to define what it meant to be French.

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[47] For an elaboration of the implications of this shift in style, see O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* 43–52, 305–11.

Continuities in history are always deeper and more long lasting than any rupture, no matter how drastic that rupture might be, which is true even of paradigm replacement. This simple truth obtains a fortiori for the church, whose reason for being is to pass on a message received long ago. However, to press continuity to the exclusion of any discontinuity is in effect to say that nothing happened. As applied to Vatican II, it reduces the council to a nonevent.

In his allocution the pope explicitly recognizes that reform, a self-aware effort to effect change, partakes of both realities: "It is precisely in this blending, at different levels, of continuity and discontinuity that the nature of true reform consists."[48] Reform is, according to him, a process that within continuity produces something new.[49] The council, while faithful to the tradition, did not receive it as inert but as somehow dynamic.[50] These are important statements, and they seem to be a change in the position the pope held before his election.

Scholars immediately went to work analyzing the allocution. How did this "hermeneutic of reform" relate to the "hermeneutic of continuity" that it replaced in the template the pope as Cardinal Ratzinger had insisted upon, beginning with the famous *Ratzinger Report* published in 1985?[51] Not surprisingly, scholars have found strong affinities between the new and the old.

Present in the allocution, for instance, is the same rejection of a "hermeneutic of rupture" as an instrument of interpretation for Vatican II that the pope had long insisted upon. As in the *Ratzinger Report*, the pope asserts, "The church is, as much before as after the council, the same church."[52] As that assertion stands, he would find little disagreement except from

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[48] *AAS*, allocution 49: "È proprio in questo insieme di continuità e discontinuità a livelli diversi che consiste la natura della vera riforma" (my translation, as in every instance below).

[49] Ibid.: "In questo processo di novità nella continuità."

[50] Ibid. 47: "come in un Concilio dinamica e fedeltà debbano diventare una cosa sola."

[51] *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985). See, e.g., Joseph A. Komanchak, "Benedict XVI and the Interpretation of Vatican II," *Cristianesimo nella storia* 28 (2007) 323–37; Lieven Boeve, "'La vraie réception de Vatican II n'a pas encore commencé': Joseph Ratzinger, révelation, et autorité de Vatican II," in *L'autorité et les autorités: L'herméneutique théologique de Vatican II*, ed. Gilles Routhier and Guy Jobin (Paris: Cerf, 2010) 13–50; Karim Schelkens, "La réception de 'Dei Verbum' entre théologie et histoire," ibid. 51–68; Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist, 2012) esp. 50–53, 68–75, 106–13, 133–38; and Gilles Routhier, "The Hermeneutic of Reform as a Task for Theology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 77 (2012) forthcoming.

[52] *AAS*, allocution 51: "La Chiesa è, tanto prima quanto dope il Concilio, la stessa Chiesa, una, santa."

members of the Society of Saint Pius X, who reject the council as heretical and an illegitimate break with tradition. Gilles Routhier has argued, in fact, that here and elsewhere the pope's hermeneutical proposals must be understood against his desire to effect an accommodation with that group.[53]

In any case, the assertion of no-before-and-after in itself weights the argument against change. The pontiff's definition of "principles" as immune to contingency, even though applicable to contingent circumstances, weights it in the same way.[54] When Benedict goes on to warn that we should not be deceived by "apparent discontinuities" he seems to take away with one hand what he gives with the other.

But he provides examples to clarify his meaning in these regards. Decisions of the church regarding something as contingent as 19th-century Liberalism, for instance, must themselves be regarded as contingent and therefore subject to change to meet changing circumstances. The "recent crimes of the Nazi regime" made it necessary to "define in a new way the relationship between the church and the faith of Israel." Although Benedict does not adduce the word *aggiornamento*, these examples of reconciliation with something outside the church fit the term's standard definition.

Regarding the council's affirmation of religious liberty in *Dignitatis humanae*, Benedict says, "The Council, recognizing and making its own a principle of the modern state, once again recovered [in that regard] the most profound patrimony of the church."[55] He therefore sees the affirmation as, on the one hand, an instance of returning to the sources ("the patrimony")—hence, *ressourcement*—and, on the other hand, an adaptation to a contemporary contingency—hence, *aggiornamento*. His is a fair analysis of precisely what the council did in this instance, which is a telling example of how in a particular circumstance more than one model of change may be operative.

At the very beginning of the section of the allocution related to hermeneutics, Benedict equates reform with development. In fact, for him development seems to be the model that best encapsulates what "true

[53] See Routhier, "Hermeneutic of Reform." On January 31, 2012, Father Jean-Michel Gleize of the Society of Saint Pius X published on the Internet "A Crucial Question." It was a reply to an article dealing with the magisterial authority of Vatican II that appeared in the Osservatore Romano, December 2, 2011, by Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, one of four experts representing the Holy See in conversation with the Society. In "A Crucial Question," Father Gleize comments extensively on the allocution of December 22, 2005, and thereby lends indirect support to Routhier's position. See http://www.sspx.org/theological_commission/a_crucial_question_gleize_1-31-2012.pdf.

[54] See *AAS*, allocution 49–50.

[55] Ibid. 50: "Il Concilio Vaticano II, riconoscendo e facendo suo con il Decreto sulla libertà religiosa un principio essenziale dello Stato moderno, ha ripreso novamente il patrimonio più profondo della Chiesa."

reform" is all about: "[The proper lens for understanding the council] is the 'hermeneutic of reform,' of renewal within the continuity of the one subject, the church, which [continuity] the Lord has granted her. The church is a subject that grows in time and develops, remaining, however, always the same, the unique subject of the People of God in journey."[56] This statement provides the occasion for Benedict to insist that there is no disjunction between the church before and after the council.

His Holiness thus blurs the distinction among the three categories of *aggiornamento*, development, and reform (or *ressourcement*). He cannot be too much faulted for such blurring. It is still common among interpreters of the council and does not lack, as we have seen, a basis in historical reality itself. Nonetheless, the distinction among the three is crucial for a fruitful exploration of the implications of a "hermeneutic of reform" as applied to Vatican II. Especially crucial is the distinction between reform and development.

Of course, the allocution of December 22, 2005, was just that, an allocution. It was not, nor was it intended to be, a theological treatise. It was not intended, we must assume, to provide a fully elaborated "theology of the hermeneutics of reform." Such an elaboration is, rather, the task the allocution opened up for theologians.

In that regard it is important to stress the pope's clear recognition of the fact of change, expressed in terms we can break down into the three categories. The function even of development is, we must remember, to explain why and how things today are different from the way they were yesterday. To use the lens of reform as the primary hermeneutical instrument to interpret the council imbues Vatican II with a dynamic character. It puts change at the very center of the interpretative enterprise, and it throws a glaring spotlight on the crucially important yet often forgotten assertion in the Decree on Ecumenism that Christ summons the church to ongoing reformation.

Because the word *reform* is not, except for one instance, explicitly present in the documents, a "hermeneutic of reform" might seem like an unwarranted imposition upon them from outside. I have shown, however, how the problem of change "as improvement" is a basic orientation of the council that runs through its debates and enactments as an issue-under-the issues. Reform is thus based on the documents but in its pervasiveness transcends them taken individually. The council, we might now say, was animated by a *spirit of reform*.

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[56] Ibid. 46: "C'è l'‘ermeneutica della riforma,' del rinnovamento nella continuità dell'unico soggetto-Chiesa, che il Signore ci ha donato; è un soggetto che cresce nel tempo e si sviluppa, rimanendo però sempre lo stesso, unico suggetto del Popolo di Dio in cammino."

Finally, no matter what else is to be said about the allocution, the description of reform Pope Benedict provides would be difficult to improve upon: "It is precisely in this blending, at different levels, of continuity and discontinuity that the nature of true reform consists." This is a description in accord with *ressourcement* as its proponents at the council understood it, and it is, as far as it goes, in accord with how reform has been understood in the West in the past millennium.

Theologians and historians now have license to address the council with a category that formerly was virtually off limits. In so doing they can assess in each instance and "at different levels" the degree present, respectively, of continuity and discontinuity. They will thereby be able to judge and then to tell us just how wide and deep (or how narrow and superficial) the reform of Vatican II was. In what areas and to what extent, we will perhaps then know, was Vatican II engaged in paradigm replacement and/or where and to what extent in paradigm adjustment.