

DOES VATICAN II REPRESENT CONTINUITY OR DISCONTINUITY?

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The article examines changes in teaching and practice endorsed by Vatican II. What “combination of continuity and discontinuity” (Pope Benedict XVI) shaped those reforms? Several conciliar documents set out principles guiding the changes by retrieving neglected traditions (ressourcement) and bringing the church’s life up to date (aggiornamento). The article suggests going beyond such schemes as “changing forms and permanent principles” or changes in “nonessentials but not in essentials” and instead recognizing that the council embraced reform with a view to renewing the church’s apostolic identity.

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY of Vatican II (1962–1965), publications, conferences, and other events probe and celebrate its achievements. What has the council represented in the history of Christianity and how should it be evaluated? The council obviously brought far-reaching changes in the life of the Catholic Church and in its relationship with “the others.” Has this change involved discontinuity with past teaching and practice? Or are the changes compatible with claims about Vatican II being in (total?) continuity with what went before? An address by Pope Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia on December 22, 2005, reinvigorated the debate about this issue.¹

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¹ *Acta apostolicae sedis* (AAS) 98 (2006) 40–53; ET, “Interpreting Vatican II: Address to the Roman Curia,” *Origins* 35 (2006) 534–39. Apropos of this address, see Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2012) 109–12; Joseph A. Komonchak, “Novelty in Continuity: Pope Benedict’s Interpretation of Vatican II,” *America* 200.3 (February 2, 2009) 10–14, 16. An expanded version of this article (“Benedict XVI and the Interpretation of

In that address the pope contrasted two contrary hermeneutics: “a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” over against “a hermeneutic of reform, of renewal in the continuity of the subject-church that the Lord has given us. She is the subject that increases in time and develops yet always remains the same.” The pope, however, went on to bring together “discontinuity,” “reform,” and “continuity” but not “rupture,” when he said, “It is precisely [in a] combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of reform consists.”²

How might we understand and interpret “continuity” and “discontinuity,” as well as the closely related language of “reform,” “renewal,” “review,” “revise,” or “rupture”? What reasons have we to recognize continuity and discontinuity? We should pay adequate attention to *both* continuity and discontinuity,³ unlike many contributors to *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* who failed to face up to the elements of discontinuity found in the council’s 16 documents.⁴ Renewal and innovation are unthinkable without some measure of discontinuity, at least discontinuity with the recent, or not-so-recent past. We need to examine in detail those texts if we are going to construct a well-founded position on the continuity and/or discontinuity that they embody. No position here will be convincing unless it recognizes the amount of change Vatican II ushered in. To introduce the discussion, I turn first to what the council itself had to say about continuity and discontinuity in the changes it mandated, and examine, in particular, three of its 16 documents.

Vatican II”) is found in *The Crisis of Authority in Catholic Modernity*, ed. Michael J. Lacey and Francis Oakley (New York: Oxford University, 2011) 93–110; the section of the pope’s address that concerns interpreting Vatican II is reprinted in *ibid.* 357–62. See also John W. O’Malley, “Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006) 3–33; O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University, 2008); Neil Ormerod, “Vatican II—Continuity or Discontinuity?: Toward an Ontology of Meaning,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2010) 609–36.

² Benedict XVI, “Interpreting Vatican II” 536, 538. As Komonchak remarks, “a hermeneutics of reform, it turns out, acknowledges some important discontinuities” (“Novelty in Continuity” 13). In fact, if there were no discontinuity, there could be no reform. Moreover, unless discontinuity amounts to *total* discontinuity, there could be no real rupture or complete break. For a rich, historical reflection on the language of reform(ation), its partial equivalents, and its use by the pope in his December 2005 address, see John W. O’Malley, “The Hermeneutic of Reform’: A Historical Analysis,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 517–46.

³ See Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist) 79–80.

⁴ Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, eds., *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* (New York: Oxford University, 2008); see Komonchak, “Benedict XVI and the Interpretation of Vatican II” 110 n. 22; and Komonchak, “Rewriting History,” *Commonweal* 31.2 (January 30, 2009) 22–24.

WHAT THE COUNCIL SAID ABOUT CHANGES

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy

The first document to be approved and promulgated by Vatican II was *Sacrosanctum concilium* (SC), the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (December 4, 1963). It is in the liturgical changes prescribed by the council and introduced later that the question of continuity/discontinuity would become most visible. How did Vatican II understand and express what it was doing in changing the liturgy and revising the rites?

In commenting on the constitution, Josef Jungmann wrote of its aiming at the “renewal of liturgical life,” the “revival” and “reform” of the liturgy, and, in particular, the “reform of the Mass.”⁵ Yet, while closely related and often overlapping, “renewal,” “revival,” and “reform” are not strictly synonyms, if indeed any completely synonymous terms ever truly exist. Let us look at the terms the council used to describe its teaching on the liturgy and the changes ushered in by that teaching.⁶

In one place the constitution speaks of “reviewing/revising (*recognoscantur*)” the rites and “giving them new vigor (*novo vigore donentur*)” (no. 4). In another article, it prescribes that the “prayer of the faithful” should “be restored (*restituatur*)” (no. 53). But the favored term was *instaurare*, which means “to renew” or “to restore.”

Thus the very first article speaks of the council’s commitment “to renew and foster the Liturgy (*instaurandam atque fovendam Liturgiam*).”⁷

⁵ Josef Jungmann, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” trans. Lalit Adolphus, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols., ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967–1969) 1:1–88, at 2, 6, 8, 31.

⁶ SC, as Massimo Faggioli has argued, proved to be a “pillar” of the council’s eucharistic ecclesiology (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*), which has rediscovered “the centrality of Scripture” and, one can add, the central image of the church as the (worshipping) people of God (see SC no. 33). Faggioli also recognizes how the liturgical constitution prepared the way for the *rapprochement* manifestoes of Vatican II (*Unitatis redintegratio*, *Nostra aetate*, and *Gaudium et spes*) and initiated the council’s *ressourcement* procedure (see below). In short, he champions “a hermeneutics of the council based on *Sacrosanctum concilium*” (Massimo Faggioli, “*Sacrosanctum concilium* and the Meaning of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 1 [2010] 437–52, at 450–52).

⁷ Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, eds., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America, 1965), translate the passage as providing for “the renewal and fostering of the liturgy” (137). In *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, rev. ed., ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1988) 1, this becomes undertaking “the reform and promotion of the liturgy.” But the original text does not read “*reformandam atque promovendam liturgiam*.” In Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (Washington: Georgetown University, 1990), the phrase is rendered as “the renewal and growth of the liturgy” (2:820), and

In reverse order the two verbs recur in article 3, where the constitution indicates that it will introduce principles and norms concerned “with the fostering and renewing of the Liturgy (*de fovenda atque instauranda Liturgia*).” Chapter 1 puts the same verbs into its title: “On general principles for the renewal and fostering of the sacred Liturgy (*De principiis generalibus ad sacram Liturgiam instaurandam atque fovendam*).” Later, in no. 21 of chapter 1, *SC* uses the noun *instauratio* when indicating its “desire to undertake with great care the general renewal of the Liturgy itself (*ipsius Liturgiae generalem instauracionem sedulo curare cupit*).” Similar words provide the heading for section three: “On the renewal of the sacred Liturgy (*De sacrae Liturgiae instauracione*).” But two translations, those edited by Walter Abbott (with Joseph Gallagher) and Austin Flannery, both render the chapter heading as “The Reform of the Sacred Liturgy.”⁸ The translation edited by Norman Tanner rightly makes the heading “The Renewal of the Liturgy,” but then presses on at once to render “*Liturgiae generalem instauracionem*” as “a general reform of the liturgy” (2:825). The constitution prefers, however, to present its task in the language of *instaurare* and *instauratio* and not in that of *reformare* and *reformatio*.

Unitatis redintegratio (*UR*), the Decree on Ecumenism, promulgated a year after the Constitution on the Liturgy, famously introduced the terminology of “reformation” when calling not only for a “renewal (*renovatio*)” of the church but also for her “constant reformation (*perennem reformationem*)” (no. 6). The lexical meaning of “*reformare*” is (a) “to transform” or “change radically for the better” and (b), simply and less dramatically, “to restore.” Inevitably, however, in *UR*, a decree dealing in part with churches and ecclesial communities that came into existence in the 16th century, to speak of “reformation” inevitably conjures up nuances of “improving by removing faults and errors.”

Putting matters within the focus of this article, however, one can ask: where the decision is taken through the liturgical constitution to give up some things, remove certain faults and even errors, and change matters radically for the better, are we not facing a situation of “reformation”? Without using the explicit language of “reformation” or “reform,” *SC* gave

then “*de fovenda atque instauranda Liturgia*” (no. 3) is translated as “the renewal and progress of the liturgy” (820). But *fovere* means “foster” or “nourish”; the result will or can be “growth” and “progress.” Somewhat dissatisfied with the Abbott, Flannery, and Tanner translations, I use my own translations throughout this article.

⁸ Flannery (p. 9) follows Abbott (p. 146) in rendering *Liturgiae generalem instauracionem* as “a general restoration of the liturgy,” and, when *instauracione* recurs later in no. 21, again both render it as “restoration.” Where *SC* puts “Liturgy” in the upper case, Abbott, Flannery, and Tanner persistently reduce it to lower case.

up certain things (e.g., the obligatory use of the Latin language in the Roman rite [no. 36]), prescribed the removal of such faulty things as “useless repetitions” in the liturgy (no. 34; see no. 50), and wanted to change liturgical matters radically for the better by, for instance, introducing the Scriptures more abundantly and with a better representation from all “the treasures of the Bible” (no. 51). In fact, by allowing the liturgy to be celebrated in the vernacular, by stressing “the table of God’s word” along with the importance of the homily (no. 52), and by granting to the laity—although restricted to certain circumstances—communion “under both kinds” (no. 55), Vatican II conceded the demands of Martin Luther and other 16th-century Protestant reformers, albeit in the 20th century. In short, while *SC* did not use explicitly the language of “reform” or “reformation,” what it enacted can and should be described in those terms.⁹

In pressing for the renewal (or reform) of the liturgy, *SC* prescribed a revision “according to the mind of healthy tradition (*ad mentem sanae traditionis*),” which might give the rites new vigor “for the sake of today’s circumstances and needs” (no. 4). The twin principles recurred in a later article, which spoke of both “retaining healthy tradition” and “opening the way to legitimate progress” (no. 23). This was to set up two procedures: retrieving healthy tradition inherited from the past and discerning what present conditions call for. Thus the two procedures, retrieval (*ressourcement*) and updating to meet pastoral needs in the new contexts of the modern world (the *aggiornamento* that Pope John XXIII called for when convoking the council), featured right in the introduction to the first document promulgated by Vatican II. Some people continue to present *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento* as if they were opposed principles and procedures. But this is a mistake: remembering and recovering forgotten or neglected teaching and practice from the Scriptures and the great tradition serve the church’s adaptation in the present and progress into the future. The postconciliar liturgical changes offer spectacular examples of the two procedures working in tandem: for instance, the Second Eucharistic Prayer retrieved from the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus (d. ca. 236);¹⁰ the restoration of the ancient Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (no. 64); and the reintroduction of the “prayer of the faithful,” based on 1 Timothy 2:1–2 and now restored after the gospel reading and homily (no. 53). The process of retrieval concerns a major resource for renewal, whereas the task of *aggiornamento* may include retrieval but always

⁹ Hence recent calling into question of some of the changes mandated by *SC* have been widely called “the reform of the reform”; see Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* 102–5.

¹⁰ See “The Apostolic Tradition,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. Frank Leslie Cross, 3rd ed., ed. Elizabeth Anne Livingstone (New York: Oxford University, 2005) 92.

involves discerning what should be changed and what should be introduced as being pastorally desirable. Thus *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, far from being in competition, are different but complementary principles and procedures, with the former often, but not always, making a major contribution to the latter.¹¹

These two principles could be translated in terms of inherited *tradition* and contemporary *experience*. The constitution prescribes taking into account “the general laws of the structure and intention” of the liturgy (which obviously derive from Christian tradition), and doing so in the light of “the experience coming from more recent liturgical renewal” (no. 23). The spirit of *ressourcement* encourages retrieving healthy traditions that have fallen into abeyance,¹² while the spirit of *aggiornamento* encourages discerning the contemporary experience of liturgy and other areas of Christian life and practice.

When introducing norms for the renewal (or reform) of the liturgy and, in particular, what *aggiornamento* entailed, *SC* distinguished in the liturgy between (a) “a part that cannot be changed, inasmuch as it is divinely instituted (*parte immutabili, utpote divinitus instituta*),” and (b) “parts that are subject to change (*partibus mutationi obnoxiiis*).” Apropos of (b), the constitution added at once that these parts can and indeed ought to be changed, “if by chance there have crept into them things that might respond less well to the inner nature of the liturgy or that might have become less suitable [than they once were].” After dealing with elements that might be inappropriate or unsuitable, the document pressed ahead to express what it positively expected from the renewal of the rites. They should, in their revised form, “express more clearly (*clarius exprimant*) the holy things that they signify,” so that “the Christian people” can “understand [these things] easily and share in them through a community celebration that is full, active and proper” (no. 21). In this way *SC* set out the principles governing the changes in the liturgy that a discerning *aggiornamento* calls for.¹³

¹¹ See Gabriel Flynn and Paul Murray, eds., *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology* (New York: Oxford University, 2012).

¹² Thus *SC* prescribed that valuable elements in the rites, which had been lost over the centuries, “should be restored (*restituantur*).”

¹³ In “Theologischer Kommentar zur Konstitution über die heilige Liturgie, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,” *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, 5 vols., ed. Peter Hünemann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2004-2005), Reiner Kaczynski sums up the prescriptions of no. 21: “the outer form of the liturgical celebration must allow its inner content to be experienced, in order that the community can in the easiest way possible grasp [this content] and celebrate the divine service with a fuller, more active, and more community [-oriented] participation” (1:87; translation mine).

The document came back to these principles when treating the sacraments (other than the Eucharist) and the sacramentals (chap. 3). It noted how “in the course of time, there have crept into the rites of the sacraments and sacramentals certain things by which their nature and purpose have become less clear (*minus eluceant*) in our days.” Hence “there is much more need to adapt certain things in them [the rites] to the needs of our age” (no. 62). With the aim of purging what is unsuitable and fails to communicate clearly and of adapting to the needs of our times (*aggiornamento*), the constitution then enjoined that the rites of baptism, confirmation, penance, the “anointing of the sick” (a new name to replace “Extreme Unction”), ordination, marriage, and various sacramentals (e.g., the rites for burial) should be “reviewed/ revised (*recognoscantur*)” (nos. 66–82). Over and over again the reason given for such changes was to let significant elements at the heart of the rites “become clearer (*magis pateant*)” (no. 67), to indicate them “more openly and more suitably (*apertius et congruentius*)” (no. 69), to express them “more clearly (*clarius*)” (no. 72), and to “signify more clearly (*clarius*) the grace of the sacrament” (no. 77). The desire for the rites to exercise more successfully their pedagogical function motivated and fashioned the far-reaching changes being prescribed.

Finally, two further principles were consciously operative to shape the changes the constitution envisaged. First, there were to be “no innovations unless a true and certain advantage of the church requires it (*innovationes ne fiant nisi vera et certa utilitas Ecclesiae id exigat*).” In other words, changes were not to be admitted unless obvious needs demanded them; and still less did *SC* tolerate change for its own sake. Second, and more importantly for the scope of what I am examining, “new forms should in some way *grow organically* from the already existing forms (*novae formae ex formis iam exstantibus organice quodammodo crescant*)” (no. 23, emphasis added).¹⁴

The first principle expressed the good sense enshrined in the proverbial wisdom of the question, “If it works, why fix it?” The second moves us toward John Henry Newman’s first “note of a genuine development, preservation of type,” which is “readily suggested by the analogy of physical growth.” Newman explains this analogy of organic development as follows: “The parts and proportions of the developed form, however altered, correspond to those which belong to its rudiments. The adult animal has the same make as it had on its birth; young birds do not grow into fishes, nor

¹⁴ When commenting on no. 23, Kaczynski, has nothing to say about the “organic” analogy of development; he contents himself with remarking that “liturgical renewal stands in the field of tension between the preservation of healthy tradition and courageous, justified progress” (“Theologischer Kommentar” 89; translation mine).

does the child degenerate into the brute, wild or domestic, of which he is by inheritance lord." To clinch his case, Newman quotes Vincent of Lerins, who adopted the same analogy to illustrate the development of doctrine: "Let the soul's religion imitate the law of the body, which, as years go on, develops indeed and opens out its due proportions, and yet remains identically what it was. Small are the baby's limbs, a youth's are larger, yet they are the same."¹⁵ Thus organic growth illustrates classically how, along with many obvious changes in size, in the capacity to do things, and in other regards, animals, birds, and human beings remain the same, identical beings. While passing through radical alterations, a certain correspondence persists between their rudimentary shape and their mature form. An unbroken succession or organic continuity links together the different stages of their lives and maintains their uninterrupted identity. Along with innumerable "alterations," which we might call "secondary discontinuities," at no point do they suffer a radical discontinuity, a deep break or "rupture" that would sever the connection with their past and cause them to go out of existence.

To sum up, *SC* never explicitly raises the question of continuity versus discontinuity. Nevertheless, on the one hand, the comprehensive and far-reaching changes it mandates cannot be reconciled with any thesis of total continuity. On the other hand, it obviously rules out any suggestion of total discontinuity, in particular by insisting that "the divinely instituted part of the liturgy cannot be changed."¹⁶ After mediating between tradition (*ressourcement*) and experience (from which discerning eyes can conclude to suitable and even necessary changes), the constitution aims at giving the rites new vigor and enhancing their pedagogical function. Throughout, *SC* embodies a deep pastoral desire to renew the church by renewing her liturgy. Like a growing organism, the liturgy can preserve an unbroken continuity with the past, but it will be a continuity amenable to widespread external adaptations and inner changes.

The Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life

In the immediate aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, Friedrich Wulf wrote prophetically about one major area of renewal: "the Council's

¹⁵ John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Doubleday 1960) 177; Newman cites Vincent of Lerin's *Commonitorium* 9. After proposing "preservation of type" as his first "note of a genuine development," Newman suggests a second, which also enjoys obvious relevance to the issue of appropriate liturgical change: "the continuity of principles" (*Essay* 183–89) or what he calls "the continuous identity of principles" (*ibid.* 309–36, at 312).

¹⁶ *SC* does not specify what comes under such a "divinely instituted" part, but presumably it would include, for instance, the trinitarian formula of baptism (Mt 28:19).

Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life, despite its shortness and shortcomings, is a turning point in the history of religious orders” and “will, indeed, initiate that turning, the full sweep of which cannot yet be seen.”¹⁷ Whatever we conclude if we work our way through the stories of various religious institutes over the past 50 years, Wulf was correct in observing that the decree, *Perfectae caritatis* (*PC*), introduced into those institutes “a new theological and spiritual mentality.”¹⁸ In fashioning and promoting such a mentality, this document clearly endorsed two principles for change: *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*. It emphasized that “an updated renewal of religious life comprises *both* a continual return to the sources of the whole Christian life and to the original inspiration of the institutes *and* their adaptation to the changed conditions of the times.” Starting from the “supreme rule,” “the following of Christ proposed in the Gospel,” the decree spelled out norms for this renewal, which should be “promoted under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Church” (no. 2, emphasis added).

The role of *ressourcement* comes into view constantly. Apropos of the prayer life for religious men and women, the decree recommends that they should “draw from the fitting sources of Christian spirituality.” This means drawing not only from the Eucharist but also from daily contact with “the Sacred Scripture, so that by reading and meditating on the divine scriptures they might learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:8)” (no. 6). The return to the sources also involves “faithfully recognizing and observing the spirit and particular aims of the founders, as well as the healthy traditions; all of these constitute the patrimony of each institute” (no. 2).

While stressing the indispensable role of “spiritual renewal” (*ibid.*), the decree called on religious to take into account “the conditions of the times,” “the needs of the Church” (*ibid.*), “the present-day physical and psychological condition of the members,” “the requirements of the culture” (no. 3), and so forth. All this amounted to acknowledging the place of *aggiornamento* in changing the legislation and customs that guide the life of religious institutes. *PC* spoke of “right updating/adaptation (*recta accomodatio*)” and of “the norms of an updated/adapted renewal (*normas accomodatae renovationis*)” (no. 4).

“Up-to-date renewal (*accommodata renovatio*)” entered, of course, into the very title of the decree. Abbott renders the two Latin words as “the

¹⁷ Friedrich Wulf, “Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life,” trans. Ronald Walls, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 2:301–70, at 370.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 330. See also Joachim Schmiedl’s characterization of *PC* as one component in the larger paradigm shift to be found in Vatican II, in *Das Konzil und die Orden: Krise und Erneuerung des Gottgeweihten Lebens* (Vallendar-Schönstatt: Patis, 1999) 472.

Appropriate Renewal,” whereas Tanner moves further away from the Latin and has “the Sensitive Renewal.” Flannery’s “the Up-to-date Renewal” opens up memories of John XXIII’s call for *aggiornamento* and fills out what kind of “updating/adapting (*accommodatio*)” was intended. The words from the title, “up-to-date renewal (*accommodata renovatio*),” were to recur once in no. 2 and twice in no. 4.

PC initiated wide-ranging changes in religious life. Whatever one’s verdict on those changes in postconciliar history, Vatican II fashioned its decree in the light of two principles, *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, which amounted to retrieving life-giving traditions and acting on a prayerful discernment of present experience. As with *SC*, these two principles brought about continuity-in-discontinuity, or what Newman might call “preservation of type” in a situation of far-reaching development.

Declaration on Religious Freedom

A third Vatican II document not only introduced change but also explicitly reflected, albeit more briefly, on the dramatic change it was mandating. According to Basil Mitchell, with *Dignitatis humanae* (*DH*), the Declaration on Religious Liberty, promulgated on December 7, 1965, the Catholic Church “finally abandoned the traditional doctrine that ‘error has no rights’ and embraced a more liberal theory based upon the rights of the person, and the individual’s duty to follow his conscience.”¹⁹ *DH* went through six drafts before being finally approved on the last working day of the council, with 2,308 votes in favor and 70 votes against. An article that appeared in the Turin-based newspaper, *La Stampa*, spoke, not of the church “abandoning” a traditional doctrine and “embracing” a “more liberal theory,” but of development of doctrine: “The schema which deals with religious freedom constitutes by itself a genuine development of doctrine, perhaps the greatest and most characteristic progress achieved by the Council.”²⁰

In teaching the right of individuals to religious liberty—that is to say, their freedom in civil society to worship God according to their conscience—the council “intended to develop (*evolvere*) the teaching of more recent popes about the inviolable rights of the human person and about the juridical regulation of society” (no. 1). The declaration ended by calling this religious

¹⁹ Basil Mitchell, “The Christian Conscience,” in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, ed. John McManners (New York: Oxford University, 1990) 602–27, at 602–3.

²⁰ Quoted by Pietro Pavan, “Declaration on Religious Freedom,” trans. Hilda Graef, in *Commentary on Vatican II* (1969) 4:49–86, at 62. For a thorough treatment of the writing of *DH*, see Silvia Scatena, *La fatica della libertà: L’Elaborazione della dichiarazione “Dignitatis humanae” sulla libertà umana del Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

freedom “the greatest of the duties and rights of human beings” (no. 15). When, however, we recall how the Syllabus of Errors, published by Pope Pius IX in 1864, excluded public religious freedom, how could the council allege that its declaration represented a development in official teaching? In a footnote that accompanied no. 2, the document cited prior teaching by John XXIII, Pius XII, Pius XI, and Leo XIII. But, pointedly, it did not attempt to enlist any support from Pius IX. The “more recent popes” stopped at Leo XIII (pope 1878–1903). *DH*, when set over against the Syllabus of Errors, looks more like a reversal rather than a development of doctrine.²¹

In the Syllabus of Errors, Pius IX had condemned the proposition that “everyone is free to embrace and profess the religion which by the light of reason one judges to be true.”²² Set this over against the statement from *DH* that “the human person has the right to religious freedom” (no. 1). The Syllabus rejected the notion of the Catholic Church’s surrendering or losing its position where it enjoyed a monopoly as state church, and so condemned the proposition: “In our age it is no longer advisable that the Catholic religion be the only state religion, excluding all the other cults.”²³ For *DH*, “the other cults” were not to be excluded in countries where the Catholic Church or any other religious group was constitutionally recognized: “If in view of the particular circumstances of peoples, special recognition is assigned in the constitution to one religious community, the right of all citizens and religious communities to freedom in religious matters must at the same time be recognized and respected” (no. 6).

Earlier in its introduction, *DH* showed its readiness to hear the voices of our times (*Gaudium et spes* [*GS*] no. 44) and, in particular, the widespread “desires (*appetitiones*)” for “the free exercise of religion in society.” The council “declared” these desires to be “in conformity with truth and justice” (*DH* no. 1). Later the text observed not only that “people of today

²¹ See Francis A. Sullivan, “Catholic Tradition and Traditions,” in *Crisis of Authority in Catholic Modernity* 113–33, at 126–27. Joseph Ratzinger called *DH*, along with *Nostra aetate* (*NA*) and *Gaudium et spes* (*GS*), “a revision of the Syllabus of Pius IX, a kind of counter syllabus” (*Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987] 381).

²² *Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum*, 17th ed., ed. Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann (hereafter DzH) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder 1991) 2915; *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 7th ed., ed. Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis (hereafter ND) (New York: Alba House, 2001) ND 1013/15.

²³ DzH 2977; ND 1103/77. In the spirit of “error has no rights,” the Syllabus also condemned the proposition: “it is praiseworthy that in some Catholic regions the law has allowed people immigrating there to exercise publicly their own cult” (DzH 2978; ND 1013/78).

want to be able to profess their religion in public and in private,” but also that “religious liberty is already declared a civil right in many constitutions and solemnly recognized in international documents” (no. 15).²⁴ When *DH* disclosed its intention of catching up with the true and just concerns of contemporary humanity, the spirit of *aggiornamento* came into view.

But then at once, in the spirit of *ressourcement*, the council announced that it would “examine the sacred tradition and doctrine of the church, from which it produces new things always consistent (*congruentia*) with the old” (ibid.).²⁵ Obviously *DH* produced something strikingly “new,” by insisting that governments should safeguard religious freedom. But what could be “the old things” that were consistent with this new teaching on religious freedom? They were certainly not “old things” authorized by the Syllabus of Errors, but rather things known “through the revealed word of God and reason” (no. 2). A later article reversed this order and, following the order in which *DH* treated matters, clarified the role of “reason”: (a) “The demands [of human dignity] have become more fully known to human reason through the experience of centuries.” (b) Furthermore, “this doctrine of [religious] freedom has roots in divine revelation” (no. 9).

When nos. 2–8 expressed what “centuries” of experience had made known, the declaration appealed to philosophical anthropology and insights into a constitutional order of society, based on justice (no. 3) and “human dignity.” That phrase formed the title of the document and recurred in articles 2, 3, and 9. It was from the dignity of the human person created in the divine image that John XXIII in his 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in terris*, had drawn his extensive treatment of natural rights, which concerned such matters as life, education, and religious freedom.²⁶ This encyclical, cited four times in the footnotes to nos. 2–8, provided a major witness supporting the case for civil authority protecting the inviolable rights of citizens—in particular, religious freedom and equality of all before the law. The *ressourcement* at work in establishing “the general principle of religious freedom” (nos. 2–8) retrieved past teaching but only as far back as Leo XIII.

²⁴ There is an obvious reference to no. 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

²⁵ Talking of *nova et vetera* inevitably conjures up the implied signature of the author of Matthew’s Gospel, when he speaks about a “scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven bringing out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt 13:52). But the evangelist does not (explicitly) claim that the “new” will be consistent with the “old.”

²⁶ DzH 3956–72; ND 2026–42.

The process of retrieval showed up much more clearly in what came next, in the theological appeal to the revelation mediated through Christ and his apostles (nos. 9–15). Christ always respected human freedom, and specifically religious freedom, which meant that one's faith could not be coerced. His disciples followed him by maintaining that the human response to God must be free, as well as by asserting their own right to proclaim the good news (nos. 9–11).²⁷ As part of this theological defense of religious freedom, *DH* cited the teaching of four Fathers of the Church (from Lactantius to Gregory the Great), as well as that of two medieval popes (Clement III and Innocent III). Here the document might also have referenced Pope Nicholas I. In a letter sent to the ruler of Bulgaria, he rejected any violent means for forcing people to accept the Christian faith, which had just been officially accepted in the country.²⁸

Retrieving the past also involved acknowledging that, while the church maintained the teaching that “no one should be coerced into believing,” it had at times behaved in ways “not in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel and even opposed to it” (no. 12). Notoriously in 1252, Pope Innocent IV, in *Ad extirpanda*, authorized the use of torture to force suspected heretics to “confess,” retract their errors, and reveal the names of “other heretics.”²⁹ Catholic Christianity countenanced torture during the 13th-century anti-Albigensian crusade and later—all in the cause of maintaining religious unity which underpinned social and political stability. Through the 16th century and beyond, faith commitments were woven into the fabric of life: bishops, rulers, and their officials felt themselves answerable to God for supporting what they believed to be the true religion. Those who spread “heresy” brought eternal ruin on any who accepted their false views, and hence were deemed worse than thieves and murderers.³⁰ As *DH* acknowledged, it took “the course of time” for “the leaven of the Gospel” to contribute to the conviction that “in religious matters” the human person should be free from any “coercion” (no. 12). This section of *DH*, when retrieving the past, acknowledged past practice that must be judged incompatible with the Christian gospel. The principle of *ressourcement* can operate negatively as well as positively.

²⁷ Commenting on this example of *ressourcement*, Benedict XVI judged that the Declaration on Religious Freedom had “recovered the deepest patrimony of the church” by being “in full harmony with the teaching of Jesus himself” (“Interpreting Vatican II” 538).

²⁸ DzH 647–48.

²⁹ “Innocent IV, Pope,” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 840.

³⁰ For a cross-confessional study of (mainly) 16th-century Protestant, Anabaptist, and Catholic martyrs, see Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1999).

By retrieving the teaching and practice of Jesus, *DH* showed how Scripture can correct distorted and false traditions, in particular, the long-standing conviction that “errors has no rights.” Where *Dei Verbum* (*DV*), the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, did not offer guidance about the role of the Scriptures in evaluating and criticizing particular traditions, we find such guidance embodied in *DH* and other Vatican II documents. They illustrated effectively how particular traditions can be corrected and even eliminated by the retrieval of the Scriptures.

Thus far I have examined three documents of Vatican II, which, respectively, mandated changes in the liturgy, updated religious life, and reversed 19th-century papal teaching in order to support religious freedom in civil society. I have shown how, when introducing these changes and so creating some discontinuity with the past, the council consciously invoked two complementary principles: that of *ressourcement* (retrieval of past tradition) and *aggiornamento* (an updating in the light of experience and contemporary society). I turn now to two further documents that brought far-reaching changes but with less self-conscious attention to the underlying principles involved when they embraced innovation.

SOME CHANGES INTRODUCED BY TWO FURTHER DOCUMENTS

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

Albert Outler called *Lumen gentium* (*LG*), the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, promulgated on November 21, 1964, “the first full-orbed conciliar exposition of the doctrine of the Church in Christian history.”³¹ As a perceptive observer of the working of Vatican II, he also judged that “the Council intended the Constitution to be the major resource in the renovation and reform of the Catholic Church.”³² Through what changes did this “renovation and reform” express itself in *LG*? Let me single out four changes that concerned sharing in Christ’s triple “office” as priest, prophet, and king; the collegiate authority of bishops; a positive vision of non-Catholic Christian churches and communities; and the religious situation of Jews, Muslims, and followers of other faiths.

(1) First, earlier work by John Henry Newman, Joseph Lécuyer, Yves Congar, Gérard Philips, and others on Christ’s triple office as priest/prophet/king or shepherd had prepared the way for the constitution to

³¹ Albert C. Outler, “A Response,” in *Documents of Vatican II* 102–10, at 102.

³² Ibid. 106. On *LG* see Peter Hünemann, “*Lumen Gentium*,” in *Herders theologischer Kommentar* 2:269–563; Gérard Philips, “History of the Constitution [*LG*],” trans. Kevin Smyth, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 1:105–37; Philips, *L’Église et son mystère au IIe Concile de Vatican: Histoire, texte, et commentaire de la Constitution “Lumen Gentium,”* 2 vols. (Paris: Desclée, 1967).

incorporate this major theme in its new vision of the church.³³ Vatican II wished Catholics at large to relearn the long-neglected or even forgotten truth that each of the baptized shares in the dignity and responsibility of Christ's triple office. They are all priests, prophets/teachers, and kings/shepherds; some of them are ordained to ministry as deacons, priests, and bishops.³⁴

LG names Christ as "Teacher, Shepherd, and Priest" (no. 21) or, using one equivalent title to express his threefold office, calls him "Teacher, King, and Priest" (no. 13). Distinguishing "the common priesthood of the faithful" from "the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood," the constitution adds that that "each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ," which is a "*royal* priesthood" (no. 10, emphasis added). *LG* completes the threefold scheme when it moves on to say that "the holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office" (no. 12).

Given its scope as a document on the church, *LG* does not set itself to explore and define the triple office of Christ himself. It is concerned rather to illustrate in detail how others participate in his priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices. Nevertheless, before doing that, it sets out the living presence and continuous activity of "the Lord Jesus Christ": in "the person of the bishops, to whom the priests render assistance," this "supreme High Priest is present in the midst of the faithful. Though seated at the right hand of God the Father, he is not absent." But, through the service of the bishops, he "preaches the Word of God to all peoples, administers ceaselessly" the "sacraments of faith," and "directs and guides the people of the New Testament on their journey toward eternal beatitude" (no. 21). This fresh vision of Christ as the ever-active prophet, priest, and shepherd/king shapes what the constitution wishes to say about the bishops as "teachers of doctrine, ministers of sacred worship, and holders of office in government" (no. 20).³⁵

LG invests further in unpacking the prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles of *bishops* first as preachers, teachers, and "heralds of the faith" (no. 25); second as "stewards of the grace" of the fullness of priesthood (no. 26); and

³³ For the ways Newman and others had already developed the triple office, see Gerald O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (New York: Oxford University, 2010) 206–34.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 273–91.

³⁵ In *Unitatis redintegratio* (UR), the Decree on Ecumenism, Vatican II pictures the triple office of the bishops and its hoped-for outcome: "Through their faithful preaching of the Gospel, administering the *sacraments*, and governing in love, Jesus Christ wishes his people to increase, under the action of the Holy Spirit, and he perfects his people's communion in unity: in the confession of one faith, in the common celebration of divine worship, and in the fraternal harmony of God's family" (no. 2, emphasis added).

third as “*vicars* and legates of Christ,” who “govern the particular churches assigned to them” (no. 27, emphasis added).³⁶ The text then applies the threefold office to *priests*: “they are consecrated in order to preach the Gospel and shepherd the faithful, as well as to celebrate divine worship” (no. 28). Where the bishops are pictured in their prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles, at least here the order is varied for priests: they “preach,” “shepherd,” and “celebrate divine worship.”

Finally, chapter 4 of *Lumen gentium* elaborates the threefold office of the laity as priests, prophets, and kings (in that order). First of all, “Christ Jesus, the supreme and eternal Priest,” “intimately joins” all the baptized to “his life and mission,” and gives them “a share in his priestly office” to offer spiritual worship in the Holy Spirit “for the glory of the Father and the salvation of the world” (no. 34). Second, Christ, “the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father,” now “fulfills this prophetic office not only by the hierarchy who teach in his name . . . but also by the laity.” He “establishes them as witnesses” and “powerful heralds of the faith” (no. 35). Third, “the Lord also desires that his kingdom be spread by the lay faithful” through their kingly office, which is described at even more length than their priestly and prophetic offices (no. 36).

In its fourth and final session, the council promulgated six decrees, three of which concern us here: *Christus Dominus* (CD), the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church; *Apostolicam actuositatem* (AA), the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People; and *Presbyterorum ordinis* (PO), the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests. These three decrees developed *LG* by spelling out in detail what sharing in the threefold office of Christ entailed in the lives of bishops, laypersons, and priests, respectively. Never before in the history of Roman Catholicism had a general council published documents dedicated to the life and ministry of bishops, laypersons, and priests. Never before had a council attended to the royal priesthood and prophetic office conferred on all the baptized. Even if the Council of Trent in its decrees on the Mass and the sacrament of order taught something about the ordained priesthood,³⁷ *Presbyterorum ordinis*, along with what we gleaned above from *Lumen gentium*, went beyond the limited view of priesthood offered by Trent. Most importantly, Vatican II insisted that preaching the word is an essential and, indeed, primary obligation of ministerial priests.

(2) A second change that *Lumen gentium* introduced and that caught the imagination of many commentators was its teaching about all the Catholic

³⁶ Here *LG* corrected the long-standing habit of limiting the title “vicar of Christ” to the bishop of Rome (see no. 19 on the pope as the vicar of Christ).

³⁷ DzH 1743, 1763–78; ND 1548, 1706–21.

bishops around the world forming with the bishop of Rome a college (nos. 22–23), like “the one apostolic college constituted by St. Peter and the rest of the apostles” (no. 22).³⁸ What grounds membership in this college for local bishops is their episcopal ordination and “communion with the head and members of this college” (no. 22).

Expressing the organic unity between the pope and bishops and their joint responsibility for the universal church, this new doctrine of collegiality did not subordinate the pope to the bishops (even when they all meet in a general council) or make the episcopal college merely a gathering of equals (as happens in such bodies as national colleges of surgeons). Attention to the college of bishops filled out the one-sided picture left by the First Vatican Council with its definitions of papal primacy and infallibility. Episcopal collegiality complements rather than challenges the primacy of the pope.

LG reasserted the collegial authority of the bishops, who, in communion with the pope and united among themselves, share responsibility for the “shepherding” of the whole church. While primarily exercised by all the bishops meeting in an ecumenical council, collegiality also applies, analogously, to national bishops’ conferences³⁹ and to other groups and situations: for instance, to the coresponsibility of laypersons, priests, and religious who constitute parishes.⁴⁰ How well or badly has collegiality functioned in the primary case of the worldwide episcopate and in particular through three organs: the synods of bishops in Rome, the national episcopal conferences, and such international bodies as CELAM (the Consejo

³⁸ See also the “explanatory note (*nota praevia*)” added by the council’s doctrinal commission to clarify the nature of collegiality.

³⁹ As no. 23 states, “the episcopal conferences can today make a manifold and fruitful contribution to the concrete application of the collegial disposition.”

⁴⁰ In a 1968 article that was a swinging attack on the wide scope of collegiality, Archbishop Marcel-François Lefebvre recognized what was involved, even if he dismissed collegiality as a modern introduction rather than acknowledging it as retrieving what we find in, e.g., the Acts of the Apostles (esp. chaps. 1–15): “The democratization of the magisterium has been naturally followed by the democratization of government. Modern ideas on this point have been translated into the Church by the famous slogan of ‘collegiality.’ It is supposed to be necessary to ‘collegialize’ the government: that of the pope or that of the bishops with a presbyteral college, that of the parish priest with a pastoral college of lay persons, all of it flanked by commissions, councils, assemblies etc., before authorities can think of giving orders and directives. The battle of collegiality, supported by the whole Communist, Protestant, and progressive press, will remain famous [he meant “infamous”] in the annals of the Council” (“Un peu de lumière sur la crise actuelle de l’Église” [“A Little Light on the Present Crisis in the Church”], <http://lacriseintegriste.typepad.fr/weblog/1968/03/article-de-mgr-lefebvre-dans-rivarol.html>, translation mine).

Episcopal Latinoamericano), and FABC (the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences)? Neither the synods nor the bishops' conferences show collegiality to be already functioning fully.⁴¹

(3) A third, strikingly new development initiated by *LG* concerns relations with the other Christians. Apropos of the identity of the Roman Catholic Church as "the holy Church" founded by Christ (no. 5), the constitution famously left behind the 1943 encyclical of Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, by saying that the holy church "continues to exist [fully] (*subsistit*)" in the Roman Catholic Church but is not simply identical with it. To be sure, the meaning of *subsistit in* remains controversial, with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith offering over the years varying translations, as Francis Sullivan has pointed out.⁴² But the conclusion that the church of God is not *tout court* identical with the Roman Catholic Church does not simply depend on the translation of *subsistit in*; it emerges clearly from several passages in Vatican II documents.

Recognizing how "many elements of sanctification and grace" are found outside the "visible" Roman Catholic Church (no. 8), *LG* went on to specify some of these elements present among other Christian churches and communities: "believing the Sacred Scripture" to be "the norm of faith and life"; faith in the Trinity; and the reception of baptism and "other sacraments in their own churches and ecclesial communities" (no. 15).⁴³ Here the council acknowledged as "churches" various bodies of Christians not (or not yet) in union with the Roman Catholic Church. Even more emphatically, in *UR*, which was promulgated on the same day as *LG* (November 21, 1964) and extended and applied to practice the teaching of the constitution, Vatican II broke new ground by recognizing how the principle "the Eucharist makes

⁴¹ On the counter-collegial current, see Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* 10, 13–15, 24, 87; and Gerald O'Collins, *Living Vatican II: The 21st Council for the 21st Century* (New York: Paulist, 2006) 35–38, 154–56.

⁴² For a guide to the meaning of *subsistit in* in this context and in some of the controversy surrounding its meaning, see the following by Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., "A Response to Karl Becker, S.J., on the Meaning of *Subsistit in*," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006) 395–409; "The Meaning of *Subsistit in* as Explained by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," *Theological Studies* 69 (2008) 116–24; and "Further Thoughts on the Meaning of *Subsistit in*," *Theological Studies* 71 (2010) 133–47. Alexandra von Teuffenbach, using the council diaries of Sebastian Tromp, has argued for a narrow version of *subsistit in* (as simply *is*) in *Die Bedeutung des "Subsistit in" (LG 8): Zum Selbstverständnis der katholischen Kirche* (Munich: Herbert Utz, 2002).

⁴³ Apropos of no. 15, the official *relatio* explained that the "elements of sanctification and grace" belong primarily not to individuals but to the heritage and life of the ecclesial communities, which were now turning to each other through dialogue and in quest of visible unity: *Acta synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. 3, part 1 (Vatican City: Vatican, 1973) 204.

the church” operates also for the Eastern churches not in communion with the bishop of Rome: “through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these churches, the church of God is built up and grows” (no. 15).⁴⁴ In other words, while the church of God continues to exist fully in the Roman Catholic Church, it also continues to exist in other churches or ecclesial communities, especially in the Eastern churches, which enjoy almost all the elements of Christian sanctification and truth. Here Vatican II innovated by officially recognizing that, beyond the visible Roman Catholic Church, the church of God also lives and grows among those whom the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent had labeled “heretics” and “schismatics”—language never used by *LG* or any other Vatican II document.

A sea change had taken place. The Catholic Church was a latecomer to the ecumenical movement in which many members of other churches were far ahead. There had been some Catholic trailblazers like Abbé Paul Couturier (1881–1953).⁴⁵ Through his vast correspondence and tracts on prayer for Christian unity, Couturier enjoyed contacts with Christians around the world and encouraged innumerable people to pray for “the unity Christ wills, by the means he wills.” Nevertheless, praying with other Christians remained forbidden by the Catholic Church. The 1928 encyclical of Pius XI, *Mortalium animos*, forbade Catholics even to take part in conferences with non-Roman Christians; such participation, he believed, would imply that the Catholic Church was but one of the denominations. When the World Council of Churches began, Catholic observers were not allowed to attend the first assemblies (Amsterdam in 1948 and Evanston in 1954).

Vatican II expressed and approved an “important change to a positive vision of non-Catholic Christian communities,”⁴⁶ a change deeply desired by John XXIII and his great collaborator, Cardinal Augustin Bea. *UR* strongly endorsed theological dialogue with “the separated brethren” (no. 9), and opened the way for the establishment of numerous ecumenical commissions at an international, national, and diocesan level. It recommended that Catholics join in prayer with other Christians, not least at ecumenical gatherings and especially at services for Christian unity (no. 8).

(4) With its positive statements first about (a) Jews and then about (b) Muslims, *LG* (no. 16) signaled a fourth change, which closely paralleled the official “about face” on relations with other Christians. (a) For the first

⁴⁴ On this principle, see the encyclical by John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, AAS 95 (2003) 433–75.

⁴⁵ “Couturier, Paul Irénée,” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* 428.

⁴⁶ Johannes Feiner, “Commentary on the Decree [*Unitatis redintegratio*],” trans. R. A. Wilson, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 2:57–164, at 61.

time in the story of Catholic Christianity, an ecumenical council had something positive to say about Jews. Citing Romans 11:28–29, *LG* declared that the chosen people remain “most dear” to God, who never “repents” of his “gifts and calling.” Commenting on *Nostra aetate* (*NA*), the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, promulgated on October 28, 1965, John Oesterreicher wrote: “It is the first time that the Church has publicly made her own the Pauline view of the mystery of Israel,” and “given glory to God for his enduring faithfulness toward this chosen people, the Jews.”⁴⁷ *NA* would have more to say about Paul’s view of the mystery of Israel. Nevertheless, it was a year earlier, when promulgating *LG* in November 1964 that for “the first time the Church publicly made her own the Pauline view.”

(b) Apropos of Muslims, Georges Anawati correctly observed that “up to the beginning of the twentieth century, the constant attitude of the Church toward Islam was one of condemnation.” But he ignored the official change embodied a year earlier in *LG* (November 1964), when he went on at once to attribute to *NA* (October 1965) “a change in the Church’s attitude to Islam.”⁴⁸ Eleven months before (in *LG*)—and for the first time since the Arab prophet Muhammad (d. 632) founded Islam—an ecumenical council of the Catholic Church offered some positive teaching on Islam.⁴⁹ This teaching highlighted common ground: the divine “plan of salvation also embraces those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims. They profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, who will judge human beings on the last day” (no. 16).⁵⁰ While describing Muslims as those “who profess to hold the faith of Abraham” rather than simply state that Muslims hold the faith of Abraham, the council agreed that they “acknowledge the Creator,” “adore with us the one, merciful God,” and also share with Christians an expectation of a general judgment “on the last day.” A year later in *NA*, Vatican II would fill out its positive view of Islam and Judaism.

⁴⁷ John M. Oesterreicher, “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” trans. Simon Young, Erika Young, and Hilda Graef, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 3:1–136, at 1.

⁴⁸ George C. Anawati, “Excursus on Islam,” trans. Simon and Erika Young, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 3:151–54, at 151.

⁴⁹ Meeting soon after the failure of the fifth and final (major) crusade, the Second Council of Lyons (1274) described “the Saracens” as “blasphemous,” “faithless,” and “the impious enemies of the Christian name” (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* 1:309).

⁵⁰ In no. 107 of his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam suam* (August 6, 1964), Paul VI had anticipated by a few months the positive teaching on Islam found in *LG*. He wrote of Muslims, “whom we do well to admire on account of those things that are true and commendable (*vera et probanda*) in their worship” (AAS 56 [1964] 609–59, at 654).

After the Muslims, the same article in *LG* turns to other believers in God: “Nor is this God distant from others who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, since to all he gives life and breath and all things (cf. Acts 17:23–28) and since the Savior wills all human beings to be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2:4).” Because God is both the Creator who gives life to all human beings and the Savior who wishes all to be saved, the council holds that the divine presence also enfolds all God-seekers, even if it is “in shadows and images” that they seek “the unknown God.” Hence “those who through no fault [of their own] do not know Christ’s Gospel and his Church and who, nevertheless, seek God with a sincere heart and, under the influence of grace, try in their actions to fulfill his will made known through the dictate of their conscience—those too may obtain eternal salvation.”

When this article in *LG* considers believers in God other than Jews and Muslims, it prioritizes the divine initiative. It is God who comes close to all (as Creator) by giving them life and (as Savior) by willing them to be saved. It is through “the influence of grace” that these “others” can try to follow their conscience and do God’s will. But when they “seek the unknown God” and “seek God with a sincere heart,” can they do this only because God draws them? When they seek God, is this only because God has first found them? While not clearly stated, an affirmative answer seems presupposed when no. 16 speaks earlier of “all human beings without exception” being “called by God’s grace to salvation.”

While speaking of their salvation, *LG* remains silent about the other, inseparable dimension of the divine self-communication: revelation. This particular passage of *LG* has nothing to say, at least explicitly, about divine revelation and its correlative in human faith. Nevertheless, we should ask, While the voice of conscience dictates what the “God-seekers” should do, how has the will of God been “made known” to them at the heart of their conscience? Does the “making known” imply some measure of revelation? Although they can be described as seeking “the unknown God” and doing so “in shadows and images,” this language suggests that something has been disclosed to them. Shadows are not equivalent to total darkness, and images imply some resemblance to truth and reality.

These reflections in *LG* on the religious situation of those who are neither Jews nor Muslims, which retrieve teaching from Acts and 1 Timothy, broke new ground in the history of ecumenical councils. Writing about a later conciliar document (*NA*), Osterreicher forgot that *LG* had already acknowledged “the universal presence of grace and its activity in the many religions of mankind.” It was in this constitution (and not in *NA*) that a general council had “for the first time in history” “honored the truth and holiness in other religions as the work of the one living God.”⁵¹ Unquestionably,

⁵¹ Osterreicher, “Declaration on the Relationship” 1.

NA would have more to say, but it was a year earlier that *LG* had spoken up positively on the other religions.

Thus far we have recalled four pieces of new teaching found in *LG*: all Christians share in Christ's "triple office" as priest, prophet, and king; the bishops enjoy universal, "collegiate" authority; a positive vision of non-Catholic Christian communities committed the Catholic Church firmly to the ecumenical movement; and the council recognized the work of God in other living faiths and in all who seek God. All four changes were intended to impact (a) life within the Catholic Church (through the teaching on the triple office and on episcopal collegiality) and (b) her relationship with "others" (through a transformed vision of non-Catholic Christians and followers of other faiths). Furthermore, these changes, as well as embodying something new, also drew on ancient testimony—notably the Holy Scriptures (e.g., biblical teaching on the triple office). Thus the very changes themselves express a radical continuity with the past.

Beyond question, one could press on to list further changes of doctrine and practice incorporated in *LG*: the many biblical images that express the mystery of the church (no. 6); the universal call to holiness of all the baptized (nos. 39–42), which retrieves teaching from St. Paul and other ancient sources; the restoration of the permanent diaconate⁵² in the Latin rite; and much else besides. But let me turn to the remarkable changes found in *NA*.⁵³

The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

While *LG* no. 16 had already broken new ground in the history of the 21 ecumenical councils of Catholic Christianity by its positive remarks

⁵² If Vatican II had met today, it might well have proposed the restoration of the diaconate for women. See Phyllis Zagano, "Remembering Tradition: Women's Monastic Rituals and the Diaconate," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011) 787–811; and the International Theological Commission, *From the Diakonia of Christ to the Diakonia of the Apostles* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2003); the English title is a tendentious translation of the original French, "Le Diakonat: Évolution et perspectives," *La documentation catholique* 2.2284 (January 19, 2003) 58–107.

⁵³ On the production of *NA*, see Giovanni Miccoli, "Two Sensitive Issues: Religious Freedom and the Jews," in *History of Vatican II* 4:135–93; Riccardo Burigana and Giovanni Turbanti, "The Intersession: Preparing the Conclusion of the Council," *ibid.* 5:546–59; Mauro Velati, "Completing the Conciliar Agenda" *ibid.* 185–273, at 211–31. On the theological impact of the declaration, see Michael Fitzgerald, "*Nostra Aetate*, A Key to Interreligious Dialogue," *Gregorianum* 87 (2006) 700–13; Daniel A. Madigan, "*Nostra Aetate* and the Questions It Chose to Leave Open," *ibid.* 781–96; Gerald O'Collins, "Implementing *Nostra Aetate*," *ibid.* 714–26; Jacques Scheuer, "The Dialogue with the Traditions of India and the Far East," *ibid.* 797–809; Roman A. Siebenrock, "Theologischer Kommentar zur Erklärung über die Haltung der Kirche zu den nichtchristlichen Religionen *Nostra Aetate*," in *Herders theologischer Kommentar* 3:591–693.

about Judaism and Islam, *NA* took matters further by reflecting on other religions (in particular, on Hinduism and Buddhism) and by considering the human condition and “the riddles of the human condition” to which different religions provide an answer (no. 1). The opening words of the declaration (on human beings drawing closer together) loomed large as the first time any ecumenical council had ever reflected on the state of global humanity.⁵⁴ Popes had done so, notably John XXIII in *Pacem in terris* (1963), but never before was that kind of pronouncement to be found in any ecumenical council. *NA* named three basic reasons for acknowledging what all nations have in common, to the point of making them “one community”: their origin in God, the divine providence that extends to all, and their common, heavenly destiny.

After having shown that the unity among all human beings has its foundation in what God has done, is doing, and will do, *NA* turns next to the common self-questioning that also—but this time, on the side of humanity—bonds everyone (no. 1). The declaration’s eloquent exposé of the deep questions that haunt human beings has no precedent in the teaching of earlier councils. The same is true when the document reflects explicitly and positively on some aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism, two religious ways of life that existed centuries before the coming of Christ himself. In the history of Catholic Christianity no previous ecumenical council had ever reflected on these ancient Asian religions.

Before moving to Islam and Judaism, *NA* observes that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy in these [other] religions.” Rather, “it is with sincere respect that she considers those ways of acting and living, those precepts and doctrines, which, although they differ in many [respects] from what she herself holds and proposes, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that Truth, which illuminates all human beings” (no.2). By recognizing what is “true and holy” in other religions, the declaration follows the lead of *LG* in using a Johannine, double-sided terminology that distinguishes but does not separate the two dimensions of the divine self-communication, revelation and salvation. What, or rather who, has given rise to “those things which are true and holy” in the other religions? *NA* responds by pointing to the person of Christ.

Without condemning various “ways of acting and living,” as well as various “precepts and doctrines” to be found in other religions but simply noting that they may “differ” in many respects from what the Catholic Church teaches, the declaration then acknowledges something extraordinarily

⁵⁴ *LG* had already adverted, albeit very briefly, to “the conditions of this time” and the way “all human beings are more closely joined today by various social, technical, and cultural bonds” (no. 1; see also the closing words of no. 28).

positive: the beliefs and practices of other religions “often reflect a ray of that Truth that illuminates all human beings” (Jn 1:9). Since what is “true” among the others reflects “the Truth” that is the Word of God, presumably what is “holy” among them also comes from the Word who is the life of human kind (Jn 1:4). If Christ is “the truth” for everyone, he is also “the life” for them. This paragraph does not expressly state that Christ is both universal Revealer and universal Savior, but what it says amounts to that. How can he “illuminate” all human beings, without conveying to them (through a personal divine self-disclosure) something of God’s self-revelation and hence also the offer of salvation? All of this teaching, which retrieves and applies what we find in John’s Gospel, boldly develops doctrine and, in fact, reverses the ugly way the Council of Florence in its decree for the Copts had indiscriminately relegated “pagans” (as well as “Jews, heretics, and schismatics”) to eternal damnation.⁵⁵

After its fuller treatment of Islam (no. 3) and Judaism (no. 4), *NA* recalls a theme from the Book of Genesis that fills out what has already been said about all people having a common origin in God (no. 5). Right from the very first, all human beings have been “created in the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26, 27). Seeing all men and women as not only created by God but also created in the divine image will prove an effective mindset; it dramatically puts back on display how we should interpret and understand “the religious others,” whoever they may be. The declaration draws a practical conclusion from the doctrine of all people being created in the divine image: there is no basis for any “discrimination” that offends or curtails “human dignity and the rights that flow from it” (no. 5). “Human dignity” would become a major theme of the Declaration on Religious Liberty, promulgated a few weeks later on December 7, 1965. *GS*, promulgated on the same day, would insist at greater length on “the extraordinary dignity of the human person” and the basic rights that flow from that dignity” (no. 26; see also no. 29). The use that *NA* (briefly) and *GS* (more fully) made of Genesis 1:26, 27 enjoys no precedent in any earlier councils. Here once again Vatican II innovated, this time by applying a basic biblical theme about the creation of humanity.

UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING CHANGES

Thus far this article has set itself to illustrate how Vatican II introduced sweeping changes in liturgical practice and religious life, reversed set positions about religious freedom and relations with other Christians, and, for the first time in the story of 21 general councils, offered positive teaching on Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions. *LG*, as we

⁵⁵ DzH 1351; ND 810.

saw, besides breaking new ground with its positive vision of other Christian communities and other living faiths, also innovated by teaching that all the baptized share in the triple office of Christ, and that the bishops enjoy universal, “collegiate” authority.

Much more could be added about the extent and nature of change in doctrine and practice brought about by Vatican II. For example, it retrieved the central importance of Sacred Scripture for liturgy, theology, and the whole life of the church (*SC* nos. 24, 51–52; *DV* nos. 21–26), and encouraged a theology of the local church (e.g., *Ad gentes*, the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church nos. 19–23). It rejected the institution of slavery and the use of torture (*GS* no. 27), both of which the Catholic Church had for centuries found acceptable.⁵⁶ A dramatic language shift involved not only dropping standard talk about “pagans,” “heretics,” and “schismatics,” but also introducing such positive terms as “collegiality,” “dialogue,” and “dignity.” *Ressourcement* also meant retrieving biblical language that had long been neglected. In giving the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests the name of *Presbyterorum ordinis* (of the order of presbyters), Vatican II retrieved from early Christianity a typical term for church leaders.⁵⁷ We could amass further examples inspired by *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement*—not least the extent to which the retrieval of biblical themes such as creation in the divine image impacted deeply *NA* and *GS*.⁵⁸

But what should we make of all these changes brought by Vatican II? Let me respond by citing Neil Ormerod and Benedict XVI and then adding some suggestions of my own.

(1) Ormerod rightly warns that if we locate the changes within any “larger theory” of social and cultural crisis and change, we face something “extremely complex.”⁵⁹ He himself speaks of “authentic” and “inauthentic” developments. Old ways of promoting the church’s mission have become dysfunctional and need, after discernment, to be discarded and replaced.

⁵⁶ On the church’s longstanding approval or at least tolerance of slavery, see John T. Noonan Jr., *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2005) 110–23; Sullivan, “Catholic Tradition and Traditions” 118–25. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (articles 4 and 5) outlawed slavery and torture.

⁵⁷ See Friedrich Wulf, “Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests: Commentary on the Decree,” trans. Ronald Walls, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 4:210–14; and Gerard Kelly, “Ordination in the Presbyteral Order,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 73 (1996) 259–72.

⁵⁸ Significantly in opposing Vatican II and its implementation, Archbishop Lefebvre appealed to his own vision of “the church” and “tradition,” but avoided the challenge of the Scriptures. Thus in an interview that appeared in *Newsweek* for December 19, 1977, he spoke 13 times of “the church” but never referred to the New Testament or Jesus Christ.

⁵⁹ Ormerod, “Vatican II—Continuity or Discontinuity?” 611, 612.

Ormerod also applies the language of Bernard Lonergan and speaks of the church being called to an intellectual, moral, and religious conversion.⁶⁰

(2) In his 2005 address to the Roman Curia, Pope Benedict uses the scheme of permanent principles and changing forms to interpret the changes brought by Vatican II. In the “innovation in continuity,” “only the principles” express “the permanent aspect.” While he allows that “the practical forms depend on the historical situation and are therefore subject to change,” he maintains “the continuity of principles.”⁶¹ This proposal opens up memories of Newman’s “continuity of principles,” his second “note” for distinguishing between “the genuine development of an idea” and its “corruption.” While “doctrines grow and are enlarged,” principles are “permanent.”⁶²

Along with the scheme of permanent principles and changing forms, the pope also introduces a term, “identity,” when remarking: “in apparent discontinuity it [the church] has actually preserved and deepened her inmost nature and true identity.”⁶³ That brief remark opens the way to my closing observations. But before examining “identity,” I want to explore briefly the possibility of distinguishing between essentials and nonessentials.

(3) The widespread innovations sanctioned by Vatican II inevitably meant widespread discontinuities with the past—sometimes with the more recent past but sometimes (e.g., in the case of the toleration of torture and slavery) with a past that reached back to the early centuries of Christendom. One might comment that in all these changes no essential or substantial belief (e.g., faith in the Trinity) or practice (e.g., baptism) was dropped, and so substantial continuity remained intact. Following *SC* no. 21, one might then distinguish between the permanence of essentials and change in what is nonessential. Nothing essential has been lost or removed, and nothing essentially or substantially new has been added. Thus a scheme of “essential” and “nonessential” (or “substantial/substantive” and “accidental”) could be pressed into service.

Yet Pope Benedict’s term “identity” may offer a richer theme to pursue and could lead us to ask, Is the pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II church one and the same corporate subject? Has there been a loss of identity? Or has the church retained her authentic identity, so that all the faithful can continue to participate in a church structured by the same values and goals and living by the same essential beliefs and practices? There can be only one reply. The indwelling Holy Spirit maintains the church’s true, deep, and lasting trinitarian identity as the body of Christ and the people of God.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 613, 633.

⁶¹ Benedict XVI, “Interpreting Vatican II” 538.

⁶² Newman, *Essay* 183–89, at 183; see also 309–36.

⁶³ Benedict XVI, “Interpreting Vatican II” 538.

Far from threatening the enduring continuity of the church, change makes possible that continuous identity of this corporate subject profoundly shaped by the tripersonal God. As with any living organism, for the church not to change would be to die. Or, making this point positively and with Newman's words, one can say, "In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often."⁶⁴

Finally, we need to enlarge our vision of the identity between the pre-Vatican II and post-Vatican II church. The continuous identity at stake is nothing less than *apostolic* identity. Newman admitted "the abstract possibility of extreme changes" that would bring a loss of "identity" and a kind of "counterfeit Christianity." But he argued for a "real continuity" that made Christianity of later centuries "in its substance the very religion which Christ and his apostles taught in the first, whatever may be the modifications for good or for evil which lapse of years, or the vicissitudes of human affairs, have impressed upon it."⁶⁵

What Newman calls "real continuity" is nothing less than the continuity of apostolic identity. Far from threatening that "real continuity," Vatican II renewed the church's apostolic identity or its "real continuity," through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with what the crucified and risen Christ and the original witnesses did in founding and propagating the church. With a reverential nod toward Newman, some have understood "development" to be *the* issue underlying both the events that constituted the council and the texts that it produced. Yet one goes closer to the heart of the matter by naming as *the* conciliar challenge that of maintaining and renewing the church's apostolic identity.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Newman, *Essay* 63.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 33.

⁶⁶ On the apostolic character and identity of the church, see Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *The Apostolicity of the Church: Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University, 2006). The author wishes to thank Jared Wicks, Ormond Rush, and two anonymous referees for generous help in providing valuable suggestions and corrections.