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—Massimo Faggioli
Assistant Professor of Theology,
University of St. Thomas
Author of *Reforming the Liturgy*,
Reforming the Church at Vatican II

Keys to the Council

Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II

Richard R. Gaillardetz
Catherine E. Clifford



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*For Francis A. Sullivan, SJ,
who has inspired us with his careful scholarship
and commitment to the teaching of the council*

Contents

Abbreviations	ix
Introduction	xi
Chapter One: Through Baptism We Are Implanted in the Paschal Mystery	1 (<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> 6)
Chapter Two: Christ Is Always Present in His Church	11 (<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> 7)
Chapter Three: Full, Conscious, Active Participation in the Liturgy	22 (<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> 14)
Chapter Four: A Theology of Divine Revelation	31 (<i>Dei Verbum</i> 2)
Chapter Five: A Theology of Tradition	39 (<i>Dei Verbum</i> 8)
Chapter Six: The Church Is Like a Sacrament	47 (<i>Lumen Gentium</i> 1)
Chapter Seven: The Holy Spirit in the Church	57 (<i>Lumen Gentium</i> 4)
Chapter Eight: Eucharistic Ecclesiology	66 (<i>Lumen Gentium</i> 7)
Chapter Nine: The Baptismal and Ministerial Priesthood	76 (<i>Lumen Gentium</i> 10)
Chapter Ten: The Church's Mission in the World	87 (<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> 40)
Chapter Eleven: The Role of the Laity in the World	95 (<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> 43)
Chapter Twelve: Christian Marriage and Family	102 (<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> 48)
Chapter Thirteen: The Ministry of the Bishop	111 (<i>Christus Dominus</i> 11)

Chapter Fourteen: Episcopal Collegiality	120
<i>(Lumen Gentium 23)</i>	
Chapter Fifteen: The Global Catholicity of the Church	129
<i>(Lumen Gentium 13)</i>	
Chapter Sixteen: The Right to Religious Freedom	138
<i>(Dignitatis Humanae 2)</i>	
Chapter Seventeen: Communion in Faith with Other Christians	148
<i>(Unitatis Redintegratio 3)</i>	
Chapter Eighteen: Reform of the Church	160
<i>(Unitatis Redintegratio 6)</i>	
Chapter Nineteen: Hierarchy of Truths	170
<i>(Unitatis Redintegratio 11)</i>	
Chapter Twenty: The Church and World Religions	180
<i>(Nostra Aetate 2)</i>	
Conclusion	188
Further Readings	194
Index to Conciliar Document References	196

Abbreviations

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i>
AG	<i>Ad Gentes Divinitus</i>
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i>
CIC	Code of Canon Law
CCEC	Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches
CT	<i>Catechesi Tradendae</i>
DH	<i>Dignitatis Humanae</i>
DS	Denzinger-Schönmetzer, <i>Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum</i>
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
NA	<i>Nostra Aetate</i>
OE	<i>Orientalium Ecclesiarum</i>
PA	<i>Pastor Aeternus</i>
PC	<i>Perfectae Caritatis</i>
PO	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i>
SC	<i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i>
UR	<i>Unitatis Redintegratio</i>

Introduction

January 25, 1959. Few days in the last four centuries would equal its impact on the Roman Catholic Church. Yet that day passed largely without notice for the Catholic Church's nearly one billion members. To appreciate its significance we have to go back three months earlier.

On October 28, 1958, Angelo Roncalli was elected pope. He was a rotund, lifelong church diplomat, an elderly prelate known more for his self-deprecating humor than for his erudition. He succeeded the saintly but severe Pius XII who wielded an unprecedented spiritual authority in the church. Indeed, so far-reaching was his authority that some theologians and ecclesiastical figures speculated that ecumenical councils, formal gatherings of all the bishops of the universal church, had become obsolete. There was nothing a council could do, many felt, that a pope could not accomplish more effectively.

In some respects Roncalli's election was unsurprising. A custom had developed of electing a "caretaker pope" to succeed a papacy of extended length and influence. The theory, not without merit, was that after an extended papacy, the church needed a chance to stop and catch its breath before determining what new direction it must take. Pius's momentous papacy of almost two decades certainly qualified, leading to the election of Roncalli (who took the name John XXIII) as the ideal caretaker.

It is not difficult, then, to imagine the surprise of the small group of cardinals who had gathered on January 25 for a meeting with the elderly pontiff at the Basilica of St. Paul-outside-the-Walls. The context of the meeting was the celebration of Vespers for the conclusion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. At that modest gathering, Pope John announced what were to be the three central planks of his pontificate: (1) the convocation of a diocesan synod for the diocese of Rome, (2) the reform of the Code of Canon Law, and (3) the convocation of a new ecumenical council. It was the last announcement that was most surprising. The last ecumenical council, Vatican I, had ended rather unceremoniously in 1870.

The onset of the Franco-Prussian War required the French emperor to remove the garrison of French troops that had been stationed in Rome to protect the pope. This action, in turn, opened the door for the Italian nationalist army, eager to seize the Papal States and unify Italy, to march

Ecumenical councils are formal gatherings of all the bishops of the universal church. The Catholic Church traditionally recognizes twenty-one such councils, though some scholars consider only the first seven as truly ecumenical councils since they were the only councils to have voting representation of the East and the West. In this schema the fourteen subsequent councils are referred to as *general* councils or synods of the Western church. Councils are generally named after the places where they are held.

church reform and renewal. Still others saw it as a chance for the church to demonstrate the relevance of the Christian message to a world in the midst of unprecedented social upheaval. Many parts of the so-called developing world were breaking free of the influence of European colonialism. The world had just witnessed a horrific global war, the unprecedented genocide of six million Jews, and the first use of a nuclear weapon, leading to the destruction of tens of thousands of civilians. New forms of modern communication, including the widespread exposure to television, dramatically transformed people's experience of the world around them.

For still others the council would serve as but another ecclesiastical tool for both condemning the evil forces at work in the world and purging the church of dangerous heretical movements. As preparations for the council proceeded over the three and a half years following the

The "Roman Curia" refers to various ecclesiastical departments in the Vatican that serve the pope and bishops in the exercise of their leadership over the universal church. These departments or "dicasteries" include congregations, councils, and tribunals.

unchallenged into Rome. The turmoil that followed led to the hasty suspension of the council. It had been almost ninety years since that sad event. No bishop alive in 1959 had any personal recollection of an ecumenical council; councils were simply not part of the consciousness of the church.

The pope's announcement of a new council stirred the imaginations of many. For some bishops and theologians it represented a remarkable opportunity for

the pope's shocking announcement, the likely outcome of the council was far from clear. The pope had handed over responsibility for the planning of the council to leading officials of the Roman Curia. Under this curial leadership, the preparatory commissions drew on the expertise of mostly "safe" theo-

logians, and the draft documents they produced, with a few exceptions, did not advance topics beyond the status quo. The rules for the actual conduct of the council were not well developed, and the council was further hampered by the decision to have the entire council conducted in

Latin without the benefit of a translation service. As the actual opening of the council approached in the summer of 1962, some leading bishops and theologians feared the council was doomed to failure.

The reasons why the council did not, in fact, fail present a fascinating story that cannot be fully recounted here.¹ It is fair, however, to attribute the remarkable success of the council to the following factors. First, Pope John XXIII offered a remarkable address at the opening Mass of the council. In it he called for an *aggiornamento*, the task, that is, of bringing the church “up to date.” He quite pointedly distanced himself from some negative voices in the church, including some of his closest advisers who were pessimistic about the state of both the world and the church itself. He called for a deeper penetration of church teaching in order to present its great wisdom in a manner intelligible to humanity today. He spoke of the need to replace the harsh medicine of condemnation with the “medicine of mercy.” Catholics must learn to persuade others of the truth of the Catholic faith.

A second factor had to do with the representation on the conciliar commissions. On the first day of the council itself, the bishops needed to elect sixteen bishops to serve on each of ten conciliar commissions. There was some subtle pressure placed on the bishops to simply reelect those bishops who had served on the preparatory commissions. Through some shrewd parliamentary maneuvering, the bishops were able to arrange a recess in order to meet in five different language groups to propose their own slate of candidates. The result was a more ideologically and geographically balanced representation on these important commissions.

Third, for many of these bishops, the council provided a remarkable opportunity for their own ongoing education. Many of these bishops had not picked up a theology textbook since their priestly ordination. Now in Rome for several months each fall from 1962 to 1965, a total of four sessions, the bishops were able to attend evening lectures conducted by some of the world’s leading scholars. Also, because the bishops were seated not geographically but in terms of seniority, they often had the opportunity to sit with bishops from other countries and even continents. This allowed them to considerably broaden their own ecclesial horizons. The well-known Vaticanologist Giancarlo Zizola tells the story of visiting Bishop Albino Luciani (the future Pope John Paul I) during the council where he was staying at a Roman *pensione* run by some Italian sisters. Luciani admitted that he tried to spend each afternoon in his room studying, because, as he put it,

everything I learned at the Gregorian is useless now. I have to become a student again. Fortunately I have an African bishop as a neighbor in the bleachers in the council hall, who gives me the texts of the experts of the German bishops. That way I can better prepare myself.²

Fourth, many council bishops found ways to organize and communicate with one another to further discuss various proposals. One such group was called the *Domus Mariae*. This group consisted of only twenty-two bishops, all generally committed to the cause of conciliar reform. They met weekly to discuss topics being considered by the council. What was significant about this small group was their organizational structure. They sought out bishops who were connected to the various national episcopal conferences. The *Domus Mariae* group then served as a sort of clearinghouse for the consideration of various topics. They would debate issues and offer compromise proposals that would then be communicated to the bishops of the various conferences. In an age without e-mail or even widespread photocopying, this allowed for the rapid dissemination of ideas and proposals while providing a forum for individual episcopal conferences to raise their concerns.³

These and many other factors contributed to a dramatic reorientation of the council that surprised and often frustrated the minority group of bishops resistant to any agenda for ecclesial reform. By the end of the fourth and final session, the council would promulgate sixteen documents: four constitutions, nine decrees, and three declarations. The quality of the material, not surprisingly, was uneven. All four constitutions would make crucial contributions, as would the decrees on ecumenism, the office of the bishop, the apostolate of the laity, the missionary life of the church, and the ministry and life of priests. The declarations on religious freedom and the church's relationship to non-Christian religions would also be important. Other documents, however, suffered from being hastily composed and are rarely cited today.

Appropriating the council's teaching has proved to be a daunting task. There are several reasons for this. The first concerns the massive volume of the conciliar documents. The twenty-one ecumenical councils together produced 37,727 lines of text. Of those some 37,000 lines, Vatican II alone produced 12,179 (approx. 32 percent), whereas the Council of Trent, the next most prolific council, produced 5,637 lines of conciliar text. It is very difficult to digest and synthesize such a large body of material. We must add to this difficulty the lack of a common theological or philosophical foundation to the documents of Vatican II. This becomes

clearer if we compare Vatican II to the previous two councils, Vatican I (1869–70) and the Council of Trent (1545–63). The documents of those two councils exhibit a relative conceptual precision, unambiguous definition of positions and unity of genre that cannot be found in the documents of Vatican II. Both Trent and Vatican I were grounded in a theological scholasticism that gave to each council a real, if limited, conceptual unity. By contrast, in Vatican II's texts we find biblical references alternating with historical expositions, analyses of contemporary issues, citations of previous councils (half of them from Trent and Vatican I), and references to papal texts (half were to the texts of Pius XII).

Scholasticism refers to a broadly conceived approach to theology that emerged in the Middle Ages with the rise of the medieval university. It presupposed a clear distinction between human reason and divine revelation and sought to use the categories of rhetoric and philosophy to bring a certain conceptual rigor to the exposition of the Christian faith. This task was made possible, in large part, by the medieval rediscovery of the texts of early Greek philosophers. Scholasticism is most often associated with the contributions of Peter Abelard, St. Anselm of Canterbury, St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. Bonaventure.

Yet another difficulty in grasping the council's teaching has to do with a pastoral judgment of Pope Paul VI. Early in his pontificate, Pope Paul expressed a concern that some of the teachings of the council might create harmful church divisions. Consequently, though the rules of the council allowed a document to be approved with a two-thirds majority, Pope Paul made it known that he wished the documents to be approved by a much more significant majority among the bishops. A cursory review of the final voting suggests that the pope got what he desired; no document was opposed in the final vote by more than a handful of bishops. But there was a price to be paid for this high level of unanimity. Significant compromises were made. When achieving full consensus was unlikely, the support of opposing sides of an issue was often secured by juxtaposing, sometimes in the same paragraph, alternative formulations. Of course, to some extent this kind of compromise is evident at every council. It is why conciliar documents should never be read as if they were systematic treatises. Indeed, anyone who has ever served on a committee to draft a common document like a mission statement is aware of this fact. Nevertheless, because of the uniquely transitional character of Vatican II, juxtaposition played a more prominent role than usual. The use of juxtaposition ultimately enabled passage of sixteen documents. It also made it possible, however, for

various ideological camps to appeal to certain passages that appeared to support their particular ecclesiastical agenda while excluding other texts. Any responsible approach to interpreting the council documents has to be aware of the danger of the kind of proof-texting that biblical fundamentalists often employ. The best way to avoid this tendency is to follow a more comprehensive approach to the interpretation of the council documents.

Ormond Rush contends that an adequate interpretation of Vatican II must incorporate three complementary strategies. The first will focus on how the texts of the council developed over time.⁴ The focus here is on discovering what the council bishops meant in a particular passage by looking at the history of the text itself. We will want to ask, for example, how a text or passage changed from the preparatory documents to its final form. We will want to look at the teaching of the church prior to the council and ask how this text received that teaching: What principles continued to be asserted? What changes were made? Where was there development? Notes from the conciliar commissions that drafted and revised the texts will be important in arriving at an adequate interpretation of a text, as will the various speeches and debates that transpired during the council. An excellent example of this can be found in the voluminous scholarly literature that is dedicated to *Lumen Gentium* 8 and its teaching that the church of Jesus Christ *subsists in* the Roman Catholic Church. Numerous studies have focused on the use of the term “subsists” and have tried to discern the meaning of this word, in the council’s intention, by carefully studying various council speeches and the notes from those who participated in the drafting of this text. Rush refers

to this interpretive strategy as a “hermeneutics of the authors.”

A second strategy will focus on the final form of a particular

text or passage.⁵ Here, special attention will be given to the genre of the text and the rhetorical style that is being employed. An excellent example of this can be found in the work of the Jesuit church historian John O’Malley. O’Malley has argued that one of the most overlooked features of the teaching of Vatican II is its distinctive rhetorical style.⁶

Most documents from prior councils fairly closely followed a more juridical or legal rhetorical style common to Roman law. We should remember that it was Emperor Constantine who actually convened the first Council of Nicea. Councils themselves were often viewed as judicial and legislative bodies that rendered judgments and issued decrees. Often

“Hermeneutics” is the term for any theory of the interpretation of a text.

included in these documents were penalties, known as canons, to be assigned to those who failed to comply.

For O'Malley, the most striking feature of Vatican II was its dramatic departure from this rhetorical style. Vatican II employed a literary genre taken from the ancient rhetorical tradition known as the epideictic genre, also known as "panegyric." According to O'Malley, a panegyric "is the painting of an idealized portrait in order to excite admiration and appropriation."⁷ The key idea here is that this genre seeks to *persuade* the reader toward the emulation of an ideal. This new rhetorical approach is reflected in the council's distinctive terminology. In place of the harsh language of condemnations and penalties, the council makes considerable use of "horizontal" terms like "brothers and sisters," "people of God," "the priesthood of all believers," and "collegiality." O'Malley also notes the use of "terms of reciprocity" like "cooperation," "partnership," and "collaboration."⁸ Third, he finds "humility-words" like "pilgrim" and "servant." Finally, he identifies "interiority words" like "charism," "conscience," and "joy and hope, grief and anguish." In O'Malley's view, attending to this linguistic shift is essential for arriving at an adequate appreciation of what the council was trying to communicate in its documents. What we encounter in these linguistic changes is nothing less than a new understanding of the church and a new way of communicating the Christian message.

Rush also considers within this second interpretive strategy (which he refers to as a "hermeneutics of texts") the need to attend carefully to the specific context of a passage, that is, how it fits in both the larger document in which it appears and how it relates to other conciliar texts. Here, one must ask, going back to the example of the *subsistit* passage, how the authentic meaning of this passage in *Lumen Gentium* 8 might be enriched and clarified by the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) 3.

Finally, Rush claims that an adequate interpretation of the council's teaching must also look at what has happened in the almost five decades since the close of the council. How have people read the council's teaching? How has it been appropriated, developed, and/or reinterpreted in later church documents, canon law, church practices, and the lived faith of the church? This he refers to as a "hermeneutics of receivers."⁹

This slim volume cannot possibly provide a comprehensive interpretation of the council's teaching. Rather, our hope is to guide the reader into a direct engagement with the conciliar documents themselves. The difficulty is that the sheer volume of the council documents can overwhelm the reader. To address this problem we have identified twenty passages

from the council documents that we believe provide interpretive “keys.” Drawing on the considerable scholarship on Vatican II, including the fruit of all three of the interpretive strategies we have discussed above, we have identified twenty passages that can lead the reader to a greater appreciation for the larger vision of the council. These passages provide, we believe, an important entry point into the council documents and a lens for comprehending the council’s overall teaching.

As one might imagine, identifying these passages has not been easy. To be honest, the selection process began as a kind of “five books you would take on a desert island” exercise. The first list included forty passages! We were able to pare down that list to twenty, largely because we realized that many other related passages could be considered in the process of exploring each of the twenty we have chosen. Both of the authors of this volume are ecclesiologists by training, that is, we specialize in theological questions related to the nature and mission of the church. Our interest in the theology of the church has doubtless influenced the passages we have selected. For example, the council documents have some very important things to say about the church’s moral teaching that we were unable to explore in any detail.

It is our hope that this volume will serve not as a substitute for the documents of Vatican II but rather as a helpful guide to lead the reader into a more informed study of the council documents themselves. A majority of Catholics alive today have no personal recollection of the church before Vatican II or even of the crucial period that immediately followed the council when many of the council’s teachings were first being implemented. For many of the students we teach, Vatican II is simply the last of twenty-one different ecumenical councils with little more relevance to their lives than the Third Council of Constantinople. It is our hope that this volume will help to remedy this regrettable situation. We are convinced that Vatican II remains the most important event in Roman Catholic history since the Protestant Reformation. At a time in our church when much of the council’s teaching is being minimized, dangerously reinterpreted, or altogether ignored, an authentic and informed understanding of the council is more important than ever. We hope that these “keys” to the council will unlock a vision of the church that remains both challenging and liberating, a vision capable of guiding our church in the decades to come.

Notes

¹ Richard R. Gaillardetz, “What Can We Learn from Vatican II?,” in *The Catholic Church in the 21st Century*, ed. Michael J. Himes (St. Louis: Liguori Publications, 2004), 80–95.

² Giancarlo Zizola, “He Answered Papal Summons to Journalism,” *National Catholic Reporter* (October 4, 2002): 10.

³ A fascinating study of this group can be found in Melissa J. Wilde, *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁴ Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist, 2004), 1–34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 35–51.

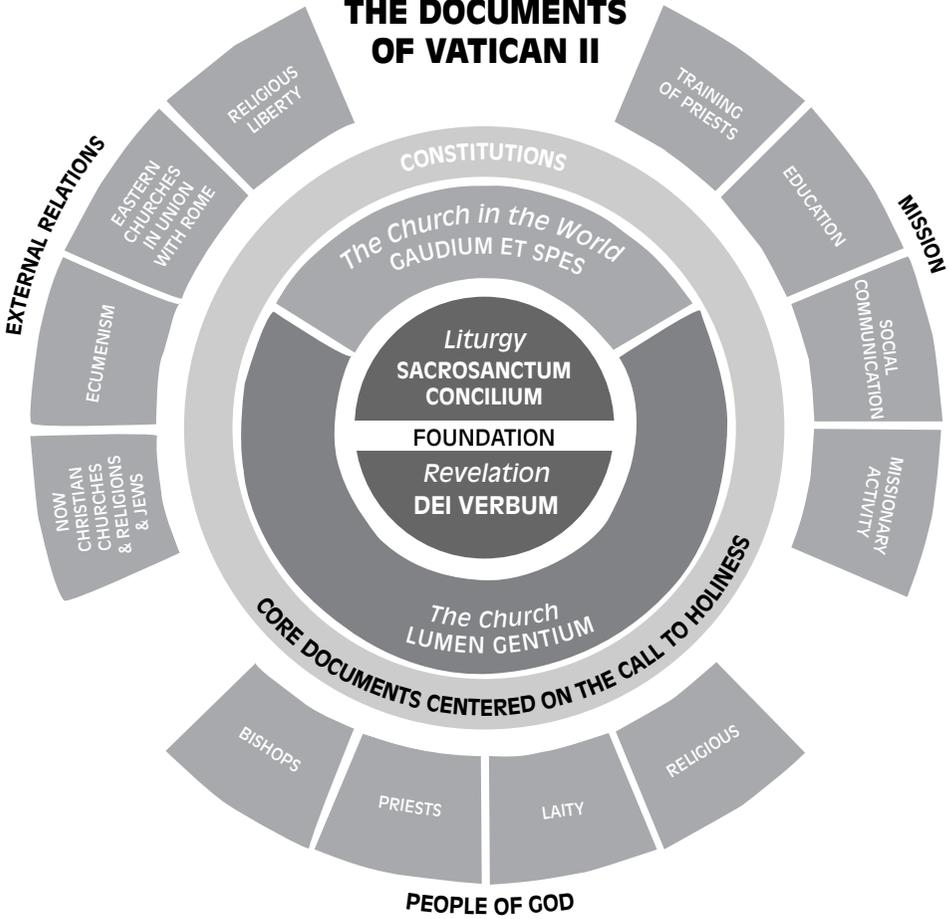
⁶ John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

⁹ Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II*, 52–68.

THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II



PEOPLE OF GOD

Through Baptism We Are Implanted in the Paschal Mystery

(Sacrosanctum Concilium 6)

Just as Christ was sent by the Father so also he sent the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit. This he did so that they might preach the Gospel to every creature (see Mk 16:15) and proclaim that the Son of God by his death and resurrection had freed us from the power of Satan (see Acts 26:18) and from death, and brought us into the Kingdom of his Father. But he also willed that the work of salvation which they preached they should enact through the sacrifice and sacraments around which the entire liturgical life revolves. Thus by Baptism men and women are implanted in the paschal mystery of Christ; they die with him, are buried with him, and rise with him.

Background

All of Christian faith hinges on the death and resurrection of Christ. The centrality of the paschal mystery in the life and prayer of the church is an important key to understanding the liturgical renewal proposed by the Second Vatican Council. This same insight informs the council's reflections on the sacraments, the life of holiness, the vocation of humanity, and the mission of the church in the world. For Catholics who lived through the period during and immediately following the Second Vatican Council, the changes brought about in the liturgy—the prayer of the church—were perhaps the most visible and immediate expression of the reforms the council effected. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* [SC]) was the first major document debated during the council and one of the first to be promulgated at the end of the council's second session, on December 4, 1963. It was received more readily than some of the other draft documents presented

Liturgy: The public worship of the church, from the Greek, *leitourgía*, which means, literally, “the work of the people.”
The liturgy is the ritual activity of the community, as distinguished from private prayer or pious practices.

to the bishops at the council, as it embodied more than others the direction laid out for the work of the council by Pope John XXIII: to bring the life of the church up to date (*aggiornamento*) while remaining faithful to the tradition. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the product of a protracted effort on the part of liturgists and other scholars to return to the ancient sources and, at the same time, to update and renew the pastoral dimension of the liturgy.

For over a century, a movement of liturgical renewal had been stirring in the church, especially in Germany and France. This movement was nourished by a renewed attention to Scripture, to early Christian writings,

to the history of the early church, and to the renewal of monastic life and prayer. Its twentieth-century expression received its orientation from the Benedictine Dom Lambert Beauduin during a congress of lay Catholics in Malines, Belgium, in 1909. In 1940, the German bishops' conference established a study group to explore the renewal of the liturgy, and in 1943 the influential Centre National de Pastorale Liturgique (National Center for Pastoral Liturgy) was founded in Paris. Pope Pius XII undertook a series of initiatives that prepared the way for the more substantial reform that would follow at Vatican II. His 1947 encyclical letter, *Mediator Dei*, spoke in favor of liturgical renewal. During the pontificate of Pius XII, a new translation of the psalms was produced for use in a revised edition of the Liturgy of the Hours. From 1951 to 1956

Liturgy of the Hours: Hymns and prayers organized around the daily recitation of the psalms, especially at Morning and Evening Prayer. This prayer of the whole church is also known as the Divine Office or the Breviary. The celebration of the liturgy at various intervals throughout the day contributes to the sanctification of time. This very ancient form of the church's prayer was clericalized and began to be recited in private in the Middle Ages when its daily recitation was required of all clergy. The Second Vatican Council encourages a recovery of the communal celebration of the Hours so as to include the laity, especially in the office of Evening Prayer, on Sundays and solemn feasts (SC 100).

Triduum: The period of three high holy days in the liturgical year that are marked by one continuous celebration of prayer in three "acts": Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.

the rites of the Easter Triduum were reformed, in particular, restoring the observance of the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night. Efforts were made to simplify rubrics and to update the calendar of feast days. Rules were relaxed for fasting before Mass, for the use of hymnody, and for some use

of the vernacular, and experiments were authorized for the use of a more “dialogical” form of the liturgy.

Many protagonists of the liturgical renewal were named as members and consultants to the Preparatory Commission on Sacred Liturgy in the fall of 1960. They worked during the preparatory phase of the council to prepare the draft text that was presented to the bishops in October 1962. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy did not claim to be an exhaustive reflection on the prayer of the church. Rather, it sought to lay out a number of general norms and principles to be followed in a subsequent reform of the rites of the church—a task that would be carried out in the years that immediately followed the council.¹ The constitution opens with the recognition of the council’s intention “to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change” and recognizes “cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy” (SC 1).² The relatively quick passage through the process of drafting, conciliar debate, and voting is an indication that the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the fruit of a long process of maturation reaching back into the preceding century.

The Centrality of the Paschal Mystery in the Prayer of the Church

The first chapter of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is a reflection on the nature of the liturgy and its importance in the life of the church. At the center of the church’s prayer we find the heart of our faith, the source of our salvation, in the paschal mystery of Christ. The term “paschal” comes from the Greek *pascha*, which is, in turn, a translation of the Hebrew *pesach*, or Passover. In the feast of Passover the people of Israel recall the moment of salvation when they were set free from bondage in Egypt, thanks to God’s intervention. Just as the blood of the Passover lamb protected the Jewish people from death, and the ritual eating of the lamb was for them a remembrance of Israel’s passage from slavery into the freedom of the Promised Land (Exod 12:1-50), for the earliest Christians, Christ was the sign of a new Passover. In his first letter to the Corinthians

Mystery: From the Greek term *mysterion*, applied to Christ in the New Testament (Col 4:3). It refers literally to a reality that is hidden, veiled, beyond the complete grasp of human comprehension. God is utterly mysterious and incomprehensible yet freely discloses God’s self to us through the humanity of Jesus Christ. In the early church the term “mystery” was also applied to the sacraments, visible signs that manifest the action of God.

St. Paul writes, “our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). John’s gospel draws a clear parallel between the liberation of Israel and the redemptive death of Christ by suggesting that Jesus was crucified at the very hour when the paschal lambs were being slaughtered in the temple for the Passover feast (John 19:31).

The paschal mystery refers to the mystery of God’s saving work in the history of the world. To accomplish our redemption, God sent God’s Son, who became incarnate in the human nature of Jesus of Nazareth—the long-expected Messiah, or Christ. Through Jesus’ life, teaching, and ministry, and especially in his death and resurrection, the depth of God’s love for humankind is revealed. For every Christian, the meaning of human history is manifested in this act of divine self-giving. Through his cross, Christ establishes a new covenant between God and humankind. It is through his passing through death to resurrection that we are freed from sin and death and born to new life. While Christ has died and is risen once and for all (Heb 9:25-26), the unrepeatable gift of his total self-giving on Calvary—the mystery of his love—is at work in our lives in and through the prayer of the church. It is manifested in our lives whenever we choose not to live for ourselves but to turn away from our inclinations to self-centeredness in order to love and serve others. In the liturgy, the council affirms, “the work of our redemption takes place, . . . enabling the faithful to express in their lives and portray to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true church” (SC 2).

Sharing in the Paschal Mystery through the Sacraments

Our sharing in the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection begins from the moment of baptism. The prayers of the initiation rite draw clear parallels between the waters of baptism and the symbol of water in the great moments of salvation history, beginning from the dawn of creation:

In baptism we use your gift of water,
which you have made a rich symbol of the grace
you give us in this sacrament.
At the very dawn of creation
your Spirit breathed on the waters,
making them the wellspring of all holiness.
The waters of the great flood
you made a sign of the waters of baptism
that make an end of sin
and a new beginning of goodness.

Through the waters of the Red Sea
you led Israel out of slavery
to be an image of God's holy people,
set free from sin by baptism.
In the waters of the Jordan
your Son was baptized by John
and anointed with the Spirit.
Your Son willed that water and blood should flow from his side
as he hung upon the cross.³

The evocative image of the water and blood flowing from the side of Christ is an image of our rebirth through his death and resurrection. It symbolizes, as well, the water of baptism and the Blood of Christ that we receive in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The mystery of God's self-gift to us in Christ continues to work in and through the sacramental life of the church. As the council teaches, "the liturgy of the sacraments and sacramentals sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. From this source all the sacraments and sacramentals draw their power" (SC 61). In the sacraments we encounter the person of Christ whose loving self-gift, when we are properly disposed and open to receive it, transforms and draws us into the pattern of his self-giving.

It is especially in the Sunday Eucharist, the memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ, that we celebrate the paschal mystery. The council recalls that this weekly celebration of the Lord's Day is "the original feast day" of Christians. Indeed, every Sunday is a "little Easter," recalling the central mystery of our faith in the risen Christ. In each celebration of the Eucharist the faithful gather to renew their baptismal commitment, "so that, by hearing the word of God and taking part in the Eucharist, they may commemorate the suffering, resurrection, and glory of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God who 'has given us a new birth into a living hope

Sacramentals: Sacred signs authorized for use by the church that bring about some spiritual effect or occasion a personal encounter with the grace of Christ, apart from the seven liturgical signs of the church that have been designated as "sacraments." Examples include holy water, the sign of the cross, ashes, the rings exchanged by spouses to symbolize their marriage vows, or blessings. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy observes, "There is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot . . . be directed toward people's sanctification and the praise of God" (SC 61).

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' (1 Pet 1:3)" (SC 106). In the Eucharist we join in the church's great prayer of thanksgiving for the gift of God's own self revealed to us in Jesus. In the eucharistic prayer we join the gift of our own lives to his sacrifice, in a response of gratitude. Through the sacramental signs of bread and wine we receive his body and blood—gifts that symbolize his life poured out for us—food and drink to nourish us on life's journey, where each day we are called to make an offering of our lives for others. In this ritual prayer of the church we are schooled in the most fundamental attitudes and habits needed for Christian living. The pedagogy of the paschal mystery comes to shape the logic of our daily lives.

The Paschal Character of the Liturgical Year

The Second Vatican Council sought to restore the "paschal character" of the Sunday liturgy and, indeed, of the entire liturgical year.⁴ The celebration of memorials for saints and martyrs, which had accumulated through the centuries in the liturgical calendar, was no longer to obscure or take precedence over the Sunday memorial of Christ's death and resurrection (SC 111). As a result, the calendar of Sunday celebrations throughout the liturgical year and the revised Sunday Lectionary were ordered in such a way as to mark the mysteries of Christ's life and ministry throughout the year (SC 107), with the high point centered on the Easter Triduum, the "most solemn of all feasts" (SC 102). The commemoration of saints' days, then, was resituated in a proper relationship to the mysteries of our redemption that orient the liturgical seasons, inasmuch as the saints themselves point toward Christ, who alone is the source of saving grace: "[T]he church proclaims the paschal mystery in the saints who have suffered and been glorified with Christ" (SC 104). We honor and venerate the saints in the prayer of the church to the extent that their lives of holiness are an icon or image pointing toward Christ's own self-giving love. Their example inspires us in our own path to holiness.

The paschal character of the season of Lent, in particular, has been restored so that we mark it as a time to repent and deepen our baptismal covenant, which is properly renewed when we reaffirm our baptismal promises in the Easter liturgy. The restoration of the corporate dimension of penance on the Sundays of Lent and of the liturgical rites for catechumens (*Ad Gentes Divinitus* [AG] 14)—those who will be baptized into the faith on Easter night—help us to see the entire Lenten season as a journey toward the celebration of our redemption in the Triduum. Notably, it is through

the liturgy itself, in the proclamation of the Word and the commemoration of the mysteries of salvation throughout the year, in particular through the season of Lent, that catechumens are to prepare for baptism:

The catechumens should be properly initiated into the mystery of salvation and the practice of the evangelical virtues, and they should be introduced into the life of faith, liturgy, and charity of the people of God by successive sacred rites. . . .

It is desirable that the liturgy of Lent and Paschal time should be restored in such a way that it will serve to prepare the hearts of the catechumens for the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, at whose solemn ceremonies they are reborn to Christ in baptism. (AG 14)

Through their attentive listening to the word of God and attending to the action of the liturgy, the lives of the catechumens are progressively transformed and converted until they become a living witness to the love of Christ. Through their baptism on Easter night, we celebrate the mystery of their rebirth and renew our own participation in the paschal mystery through the renewal of our baptismal promises.

New Life and the Vocation of Humanity

As Christians, we do not live as if this world were a kind of waiting room where we simply bide our time and place all our hope in the glory of a resurrection in the afterlife. If we take St. Paul at his word, our new life in the risen Christ has already begun: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4). Our resurrection is not something that we await beyond the moment of our physical death. Our new life has already begun. In baptism, we set aside our old self, the self that was “enslaved to sin” (Rom 6:6), and we are reborn. As Paul says, we must consider ourselves “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11). Though we remain weak and sinful human beings, wounded by the consequences of sin in our lives, we know that sin, evil, and even death itself will not have the last word. While we await the fullness of the resurrection at the end of time, we already enjoy the firstfruits of that life here and now, as we respond to the invitation of Christ to share life in all its fullness. The redeeming love of God has been revealed to us in Christ, and, in and through the church, it continues to overturn the forces of sin in

human history each time we forgive, bring healing, and redress the effects of injustice in the world. The church is the community of the baptized, a community of redeemed sinners, a sign of humanity reconciled with God.

The centrality of the paschal mystery is reflected in the Second Vatican Council's understanding of God's design for all humanity. This vision is laid out most clearly in the council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS]), especially in this text's development of a Christian anthropology, a vision of the new humanity established through Christ. Christ himself is the embodiment of that new humanity, the "new Adam" who reveals to us the love of God and in so doing "fully reveals humanity to itself and brings to light its very high calling" (GS 22). This Christ-centered view of human history is at the heart of the church's conviction regarding the unequivocal dignity of the human person. Because the divine Word has entered into human history and taken up our human nature in Jesus Christ, all of history is changed and all of humanity is raised up. Every human person enjoys the offer of God's gift revealed in Jesus (1 Tim 2:4). His death and resurrection have overcome all that separates us from God and from one another. A new creation has begun. Christ, the new Adam,

who is the "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his incarnation, he, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each individual. . . . [H]e has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin.

As an innocent lamb he merited life for us by his blood which he freely shed. In him God reconciled us to himself and to one another. (GS 22)

Jesus invites his disciples to follow in his footsteps, to wash one another's feet (John 13:1-15), and to lay down their lives for one another in loving service (John 10:11-18). He calls us to reproduce the pattern of his dying and rising in our own lives, to pour out our lives for others. According to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, this high calling is not reserved to Christians. It applies to "all people of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly" (GS 22). The vocation of humanity will be realized only when all people learn to live together in self-transcending love. All of humanity is called to share in the outpouring

of divine love. By reproducing the pattern of the paschal mystery in our lives, we bring about God's plan for all the world: "For since Christ died for everyone, and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery" (GS 22).

Sharing in the Divine Life

All are called to become participants and sharers in the divine life. This mystery is expressed sacramentally in baptism where we are incorporated into Christ and drawn into the exchange of self-giving love among the three Divine Persons of the Trinity. This mutual exchange of love and of life is the gift that we call grace. Karl Rahner spoke of grace as the love of God outside the Trinity, the overflowing of God's self-giving in the exchange of love between Father, Son, and Spirit.⁵ God sends the Son to reveal God's love for humanity. Jesus is faithful to his covenant of love with God, whom he calls *Abba*, "Father," even unto death. In love, the Father raises him up from death. Through his death and resurrection, Christ reconciles fallen humanity to God and opens up the path to new life. Jesus is guided and strengthened throughout his life by the Spirit, whom the tradition has understood to be the love between the Father and the Son. In baptism we are anointed by God's Spirit to become sons and daughters of God (Rom 8:12-17). The anointing of the Spirit makes us a priestly people (1 Pet 2:9) and enables us, as partners in the paschal mystery, to offer the sacrifice of our whole lives to God in gratitude and praise.⁶ This offering is realized in the many ordinary acts of our everyday lives: in encounters with family and friends, with colleagues and strangers—at home, in schools and factories, in offices and places of commerce, in the many relationships that shape us and our lives with others wherever we live. In every meeting, in each decision, every moment of each day, we are called to be bearers of the divine life and artisans of a new creation. In each moment, we are called to witness to and proclaim the good news of God's saving love for us revealed in Jesus Christ. The paschal mystery that we celebrate in the liturgy shapes our daily living and makes us agents of transforming love in the world.

Notes

¹ For a detailed account of the revision of the Roman Rite through this period, see Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990).

² Unless explicitly noted, all quotations from the council documents are taken from Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996). Minor authorial changes in the translations are indicated by brackets.

³ RCIA 222, in *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press / Pueblo, 1990).

⁴ In this discussion we are drawing from Josef A. Jungmann, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, 5 vols., ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967–69), vol. I, 1–87, at 72.

⁵ See Karl Rahner, “Remarks on the Dogmatic Treatise ‘De Trinitate,’” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. IV (New York: Seabury / London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1974), 77–102, at 96.

⁶ See Paul Philibert, *The Priesthood of the Faithful: Key to a Living Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005).