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*Frederick J. Cwiekowski, PSS*

# The Church

Theology in History



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*To my brother Bob,  
to the memory of my sister Kathy,  
and to my sister Judith*



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## Preface

This book is born of two desires. The first: to share what I believe is the fascinating story of the various ways in which the church has been understood through the centuries. The second: to cast light on the spiritual riches often present in theological understandings of the church. This effort is intended for an educated readership, for those who wish to deepen their understanding of the church—where we are now, where we have come from, and what resources from the past might help us as we look to the future. It is also offered to those engaged in a formal study of the theology of the church, in senior years of college, perhaps, in seminaries, and in lay ministry and diaconate programs. I hope that it will enrich the lives of clergy, religious, and those contemplating life in the church. The book makes more readily accessible the good scholarly work that has been done on the theology of the church. The general readership may read the text as it stands and consult the notes only as interest leads them. Those engaged in formal study will find in the notes references for further academic pursuit of given topics.

Three assumptions have guided the preparation of the text. First, the experience of having done doctoral studies at the Catholic University of Louvain during the Second Vatican Council has given me an abiding appreciation for the value of studying the development of theology in its historical context. While true of all areas of theology, this is indispensable in understanding the theology of the church. Second, I am and want to be guided by Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, who taught that theology is not simply an intellectual endeavor but a participation in God's wisdom, leading to union with God. May this study of the lived and written efforts of others to express an understanding of church contribute to an embrace of the mystery of the church in God's plan. Third, the topic of the church

is not of first importance in the study of our faith; that place belongs to the triune God and the incarnation of God's Son. But the topic of the church is vitally important because the church is the community invited to share the very life of God through the risen Lord and the presence of his Spirit. It is also called to keep alive the memory of Jesus and to pass on—sometimes it does this better than others—the Gospel of God he has given us. Though we have not always seen it this way, all the baptized have a responsibility for being church and contributing to its mission. This study aspires to provide resources for the people of God making its way in this twenty-first century.

The contents page indicates the areas of study included in this work. If the first six chapters seem disproportionate to the rest of the book, it is because they treat the church's historical roots in the ministry of Jesus and the first generations of the church, along with the singularly important and seminal insights regarding the church in the New Testament and in the worship and writings of the patristic period. Chapter 7, on the medieval period, is somewhat longer than others because of the length of the period. The developments dealt with in chapter 9 are crucial to appreciating the place of Vatican II in ecclesial self-understanding. While I write this largely from a Roman Catholic perspective, I hope the work may be of interest to members of other Christian churches with whom Catholic Christians share a common heritage of many centuries.

With gratitude, I acknowledge my indebtedness to those who have inspired my theological interest or have taught me so much about the theology of the church. I single out Eugene A. Walsh, PSS, during my final years of college seminary; Raymond E. Brown, PSS, teacher and later colleague over many years; and Canon Roger Aubert, my thesis director at the Catholic University of Louvain. I would mention also Monsignor Gérard Philips, also of the University of Louvain, the works of Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac, and the writings of Joseph A. Komonchak. I thank the Society of St. Sulpice, Province of the United States, for underwriting my post-seminary studies and the students and faculties of St. Mary's Seminary and University of Baltimore and of St. Patrick's Seminary and University of Menlo Park, California, at each of which I have taught for many years. I am grateful to the library staffs of both schools for their invaluable assistance

in tracking down many of the resources I have used in this book. I thank Ronald D. Witherup, PSS, and James W. Lothamer, PSS, who have read the entire manuscript and have made helpful suggestions. The limitations of the final text I accept as my responsibility. Finally, I express gratitude to Dr. Margaret M. Turek and Dr. Michon M. Matthiesen for their encouragement and support throughout what has been a lengthy project, and to Hans Christoffersen, Stephanie Lancour, Colleen Stiller, Lauren L. Murphy, and Tara Durham, who have very graciously guided this project for Liturgical Press.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Christian Antiquity—Part 2: Constantine to Gregory I and John Damascene**

This second chapter on the patristic period, from the early fourth century to the period's end, will be organized broadly around two basic considerations: first, the impact of the church's becoming the official religion of the empire and, second, the various reflections on the theology of the church during the period. Some overlap is inevitable in the two considerations.

The fourth century opened with major events that would have a profound impact on the church's self-understanding. In 286, Emperor Diocletian reorganized the vast Roman Empire into a Greek-speaking East and a Latin-speaking West, each with its own imperial leadership. Constantine became emperor of the West after the defeat of his Western rival in 312.<sup>1</sup> Attributing his victory to the power of Christ and adopting in some way the faith of his Christian mother, Constantine and the Eastern emperor in 313 declared freedom of worship and a restoration of Christian properties confiscated during Diocletian's "Great Persecution" in 303.<sup>2</sup> While religious toleration (the so-called Edict of Milan) extended to all, Constantine clearly favored Christianity and granted it special privileges. "Few events," writes Jesuit historian John O'Malley, "more radically changed the Christian church than Constantine's recognition of it and his granting it a privileged status

<sup>1</sup> Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 27.

<sup>2</sup> An edict of toleration concerning Christians had been issued in 311 by the dying emperor Galerius, Diocletian's successor in the East, though persecutions still continued on a smaller scale after his death.

in his empire."<sup>3</sup> Constantine became sole emperor in 324 and held that position until his death in 337. In 380 Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity the official and only lawful religion of the empire.

### **The Church in the Empire**

An immediate sign of Christianity's new prominence in the empire was the construction with imperial funds of basilicas for Christian worship.<sup>4</sup> The basilica ("hall of the king," from Greek *basileus*, "king") was a rectangular structure, sometimes flanked by columns, often with a rounded apse at one or both ends. Romans used the basilica structure for audience halls, business offices, and other civic purposes. Christians built simple basilicas before the fourth century, but with Constantine's accession to power, magnificent basilica structures were erected, powerful and lasting symbols of the new alliance between church and empire.<sup>5</sup> Replacing the emperor's throne, the bishop's throne was often placed in the center of the apse with benches on either side for the college of presbyters. A freestanding altar around which the faithful could gather was placed in front of the apse. Often decorated with mosaics or frescoes, the apse frequently portrayed an image of the glorious Christ, seated on a throne, surrounded by the apostles, saints, and angels of the heavenly court. The scene provided a visual ecclesiology and supported the idea, popular in the West but especially so in the East, that through the Eucharist the assembly entered into the heavenly sanctuary and participated in its liturgy.

The structure of the basilica lent itself to a more imperial style of worship. Signs and gestures used to show respect to the emperor were incorporated into the liturgical rites: the use of incense; proces-

<sup>3</sup> John W. O'Malley, "'The Hermeneutic of Reform': A Historical Analysis," *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 517.

<sup>4</sup> Allan Doig, *Liturgy and Architecture: From the Early Church to the Middle Ages* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2008), chap. 2; and Edward Foley, *From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 79–93.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 77.

sions; choirs used, in part, to add solemnity to the processions; the introduction of luxurious vestments. As liturgical rites became more solemn and less personal and familial and the ranks of the clergy more institutionalized, references to “holy mother church” contributed to a process of personifying the church so that it would come to be seen as “an entity apart from and beyond the people who make it up,” which would in turn lead to identifying the church with its clerical ministers.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the basilica, baptisteries and buildings called *martyria*, over the tombs of the martyrs, were also built. These buildings often took the form of round structures modeled after the burial mausoleums in the pagan tradition. Christian belief in baptism as a participation in the death of Christ served to link the architectural similarity between baptisteries and the *martyria*. Christians in the East came to favor these central-plan domed church buildings. Under Constantine’s direction, churches of this second type were built in Byzantium, the new capital of the empire rebuilt and inaugurated as Constantinople in 330, and in Jerusalem. The style was most developed during the sixth-century reign of the emperor Justinian and became the pattern for churches in the Eastern Empire.

Other developments also influenced the church’s self-understanding. The marked increase in Christian numbers that came with religious toleration led to many more local congregations of various types, many of them called parishes. Used as early as the second century, the Greek term *paroikia* (Latin *paroecia*) was used of local congregations of believers. The term meant “those living near” or “beside” or “in the same neighborhood,” though its secondary meaning, “resident aliens, foreigners, nonnative sojourners,” was also operative when the term was first put to Christian use.<sup>7</sup> Assigned by the bishop, presbyters who ministered in local congregations in villages and market towns along the trade routes or in rural areas began to

<sup>6</sup> David Bohr, *The Diocesan Priest: Consecrated and Sent* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 39; and Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 66–67.

<sup>7</sup> James A. Coriden, *The Parish in Catholic Tradition: History, Theology, and Canon Law* (New York: Paulist Press 1997), 19.

be called priests (*hiereus* or *sacerdos*). In this development, the sense of a corporate presbyterate with collegial responsibility with the bishop gradually diminished. Mindful of the lack of clear distinction between *episkopos* and presbyter in the New Testament, the biblical scholar Jerome (d. 420) held that priest and bishop were equal in their power to consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ; differences centered on the bishops being seen as successors of the apostles, their power to ordain, and in the authority that came to them through church custom.<sup>8</sup> Again the apostolic and christological imagery diverged (recall Ignatius of Antioch): the bishop was regarded as apostolic in his authority; the presbyters, christological in their priesthood. In later centuries, the bishop came to be seen less as eucharistic presider and, in fact, more a manager of eucharistic communities. Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann wrote that this change “represents one of the most radical changes that ever took place in the Church.”<sup>9</sup>

In the early centuries, the church used the term *ordo* (order) in the general sense in which it was used in Roman society, to designate specific groups within a larger society. Christians belonged to different orders in the church: porters charged with maintenance and security; lectors who read at worship; exorcists who assisted at rites of initiation and repentance; acolytes who initially were secretaries and messengers for the bishop. There were orders of catechumens, of teachers, of widows or virgins, as well as the orders of deacons, presbyters, and bishops. In the fourth century that began to change. As Constantine and his successors granted special privileges to the bishops and as they were expected to take on the responsibilities of governors, judges, and servants of the state, the notion of *ordo* in a more restricted sense began to be used either of the entire body of the clergy or of particular grades within the clergy, with heightened emphasis

<sup>8</sup> Cooke, *Ministry*, 80, and Bohr, *Diocesan Priest*, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, “Towards a Theology of Councils,” *St. Vladimir’s Quarterly* 6 (1962): 177, cited in Paul G. McPartlan, “Priesthood, Priestliness, and Priests,” in Ronald D. Witherup and others, *Ministerial Priesthood in the Third Millennium: Faithfulness of Christ, Faithfulness of Priests* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 74–75, at 74.

given to rank or dignity. This contributed to an increasingly pronounced distinction within the church between those in ecclesiastical orders and those who lacked them, roughly parallel to the more restricted use of *ordo* for Roman senators, distinguishing them from the mass of the people (*plebs*). Even as the fourth century began, some bishops were already adopting a manner of exercising authority that resembled that of Roman governors.

The church's changed status also affected its relations with Judaism. As the church gained public support and then official status in the empire, Jewish critiques of Christianity ceased, although during the short reign of the emperor Julian (361–63) there were sharp tensions between church and synagogue. Julian's efforts to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and the discovery that many Christians in Antioch were attending Jewish Sabbath services and observing Jewish festivals led John Chrysostom (d. 407) to deliver a series of anti-Judaic homilies—a lamentable element of his otherwise notable legacy. Yet both he and Bishop Ambrose of Milan encouraged their congregations to emulate Jews in their prayer and their study of the Scriptures.<sup>10</sup> Gradually Roman laws from earlier periods protecting Jews were undermined, and political authority tolerated sporadic Christian persecution of the Jews. The goal of church and civil legislation seems to have been directed at isolating Jews and preventing their influence over Christians. Prior to the seventh century, the concept of a “Jewish witness” first proposed by Augustine (d. 430) seems to have generally guided policy toward the Jews: with restrictions, Jews were to be tolerated and not harmed, witnesses, it was thought, to their own wickedness and to the Christian truth, until they came to accept Christ at his second coming.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Church of the Empire**

Constantine decided to make Byzantium, now Constantinople, both the Eastern imperial capital and a “new Rome,” a Christian city unlike old Rome with its pagan monuments and culture. Even so, he

<sup>10</sup> Chadwick, *Church in Ancient Society*, 362 and 480.

<sup>11</sup> Kevin Madigan, *Medieval Christianity: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 27–28.



accepted many elements of the pagan system, giving him a sovereign position in both religious and civil affairs. In effect, he nurtured, especially in the East, “a concept of a Church within the framework of the Empire,”<sup>12</sup> relating the whole life of the church to him and to his authority.

Constantine regarded church unity as a valuable means of maintaining political unity in the empire. Almost immediately at the outset of his rule as emperor of the West, church unity was fractured by schism in Roman North Africa, a result of continuing disagreement concerning the return of those who capitulated during the Diocletian persecution. Efforts to resolve the schism through councils of bishops were unsuccessful. Some years later, in the very year Constantine became sole emperor and was about to move the imperial capital to Byzantium, a major theological dispute erupted concerning the status of the *Logos*, the Word of God incarnate in Jesus. A priest and popular preacher in the city of Alexandria, Arius (ca. 250–ca. 336), attracted a large following by preaching that the *Logos* was a divine intermediary created by the Father and subordinate to him, but not fully divine. His bishop, along with others, argued that Arius’s teaching was not faithful to the Scriptures: only if the Word were divine could humankind be saved. Eager to see the debate brought to an end lest it endanger civic unity so close to the capital city, Constantine summoned the bishops to Nicaea (modern Iznik, across the Bosphorus, in the Asian part of Turkey). The gathering at Nicaea brought together an estimated 250 to 300 bishops, mostly from the Greek-speaking Eastern Church, but some from both Greek and Latin North Africa, a few bishops from the West, and two priest delegates representing the bishop of Rome. The council produced a creedal statement and a rejection of any who held the Arian teaching. It also promulgated twenty canons, short prescriptive ordinances, sometimes including punishment for failure to comply. The use of this genre, at Nicaea and in many subsequent councils, as in regional councils before it, reflects the communicating style of the Roman

<sup>12</sup> Yves Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years: The Background of the Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1959), 7–8, at 7.

Senate, a legislative-judicial body.<sup>13</sup> While the decisions of the council were made by the bishops, Constantine, not yet baptized, involved himself in the working of the council. (He insisted, for example, that the compromise term *homoousios*, “of the same substance” or “consubstantial,” be included in the creed.) He confirmed the council’s work and sought to enforce it, in part by banishing bishops refusing to accept its decrees. In this the emperor set a precedent for civil intervention even in matters of church teaching.

Though local councils continued to be held, some convoked by imperial order, the gathering at Nicaea introduced a new structure, a universal council, representing the church in its entirety. The Council at Chalcedon (also on the Asian side of the Bosphorus, presently a district of Istanbul), again convoked by the emperor, established a list of what came to be regarded as the first four general councils: that at Nicaea in 325; a local council of Constantinople in 381, given status as a general council because of its creed; a council in Ephesus in 431; and the Council at Chalcedon in 451. The teachings of these councils came to be accepted as having binding authority in matters of faith. The four councils were designated ecumenical councils, distinguishing them from local councils of lesser authority. The word “ecumenical” (“inhabited world” from *oikein*, “to inhabit,” and *oikos*, “house”) refers to the whole “inhabited” Christian world. In these councils, and in the three that followed, imperial authority had an important role, both in their convocation and in the promulgation of their decrees. The councils were largely composed of bishops, though some who were not ordained also participated. A belief that the Spirit was guiding them and the desire for unanimity, or quasi-unanimity, were important features of the conciliar decision-making process, principles held to the present day.

These major councils raised a crucial question: Who holds ultimate decision-making authority in the church?<sup>14</sup> Pope Leo I (440–461) held

<sup>13</sup> John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 44–45.

<sup>14</sup> Robert B. Eno, *The Rise of the Papacy*, Theology and Life Series, vol. 32 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazer, 1990), 115–17.

that the decision of the bishop of Rome was definitive at the Council at Chalcedon: the council was not to debate his decision but to ratify it. In the Eastern view, a general council should take such a decision into account but come to a judgment after its own deliberations. Gradually, the East came to accept that Rome's approval of a council was necessary, but only in the context of unanimity with the other major sees. The bishop of Rome and the more collegial-minded bishops of the East participated in subsequent councils, each with quite different views on this matter.

The many benefits that Constantine brought to the church led many to speak of him in almost biblical terms. In the popular mind, many thought the messianic age foretold by the prophets appeared on the verge of being fulfilled. Constantine was regarded as God's anointed, the new head of the Christian people. The most prominent, if uncritical, appreciation of the emperor came from his friend and biographer, the learned historian Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea in Palestine (ca. 260–ca. 340).<sup>15</sup> Though initially sharing in this assessment, Augustine's enthusiasm cooled over time and he ultimately reversed himself on this question.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Church in the East and in the West**

Growth of the church led to greater sophistication in its structural organization, often adapted to the jurisdictional divisions of the empire: in the West, divisions were according to *diocese* (from the Greek for "administrative division"); in the East, *eparchy* (from the Greek for "province"). Metropolitan sees (Greek *meter*, "mother," and *polis*, "city") exercised certain provincial responsibilities. Already in the third century the sees of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch had acquired major prominence and were recognized as such at the Council of Nicaea. The Council of Constantinople in 381 placed the see of

<sup>15</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2009), 196.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, Blessed Pope John XXIII Lecture Series in Theology and Culture (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 34–38.

Constantinople as second after Rome. Jerusalem, for historical importance, was added to the others. In the fifth century, the terms “patriarchate” and “patriarch” (from Greek for “father” and “ruler”) began to be used with reference to these five sees. While Rome never accepted all of Constantinople’s prerogatives affirmed at Chalcedon, an idealized view of a single and undivided church governed by the five patriarchates, the Pentarchy, persisted through much of the first millennium, especially in the East. Besides exercising a supervisory function over the dioceses or eparchies of the region, these sees became centers of development in liturgy, theology, and church discipline, contributing to the rich diversity characteristic of the church during these early centuries. Regional diversity, at times, led to tensions, especially between Rome and Constantinople.

The bishops at Constantinople decreed that the See of Constantinople was to have preeminence in honor after the Church of Rome since Constantinople was the “new Rome.” Pope Damasus (366–84) and his successors resisted the implication that Rome’s importance came from its being the former capital of the empire rather than from its association with the apostles Peter and Paul. They insisted that Rome had a primacy over all the churches because of Christ’s promise to Peter (Matt 16). As Constantinople became a major Christian center, it also became a political and an ecclesiastical rival to Rome, seriously curtailing Rome’s influence on the church of the East but leaving the bishop of Rome to increase his authority not only in Italy but in the entire church of the West. These developments contributed to significant differences in ecclesial understanding.<sup>17</sup> The basic convictions about the church—the basic role of faith, baptism, Eucharist, the sacramental and hierarchical structure—were fundamentally the same throughout. But the Latin West saw the church as a whole with Rome as its center; the Greek East understood the church of the empire as an ellipse with two foci, Rome and Constantinople, virtually equal in jurisdictional authority in their respective domains but with a primacy of honor to be granted to the bishop of Old Rome as

<sup>17</sup> Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years*, 57–73.

representative of the Latin West.<sup>18</sup> Further, Rome based its conception of church on apostolic principle, while the ecclesiastical domain of the church at Constantinople coincided with the political and cultural domain of the empire.<sup>19</sup>

After Constantine's death, the bishops of Rome sought to recast the former imperial capital, still the center of the Mediterranean world, in a Christian light and to further the integration of Christianity with the empire and its culture. Since the late third century Latin had replaced Greek as the language of the Western Church. New Christian churches, observance of Sunday as a public holiday, and Christian festivals gave the city a more distinctively Christian character and led the Christian populace to see themselves as Roman.<sup>20</sup> With what were probably mixed motives—an element of worldliness along with genuine Christian convictions—Pope Damasus was particularly forceful in trying to “Latinise the church, and Christianise Latin.”<sup>21</sup> Under his direction, the learned biblical scholar Jerome made a new Latin translation of most of the Bible. The translation, known as the *Vulgate* (Latin *vulgata editio*, “popular edition”), used the language of Roman law courts to translate the covenant legislation of the Old Testament. Roman legal terms “binding” and “loosing” were used in translating Jesus' promise to Peter in Matthew 16:19.<sup>22</sup>

At times, bishops of Rome consciously adopted the style and procedures of the Roman state, most significantly in their manner of

<sup>18</sup> Chadwick, *Church in Ancient Society*, 189. See Brian E. Daley, “Position and Patronage in the Early Church: The Original Meaning of ‘Primacy of Honour,’” *The Journal of Theological Studies*, new series, 44 (1993): 529–53.

<sup>19</sup> Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years*, 57.

<sup>20</sup> Basil Studer, “The Situation of the Church,” in *The Patristic Period*, ed. Angelo de Berardino and Basil Studer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 255.

<sup>21</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Papacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with S4C, 1997), 29.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Whose Bible Is It? A History of the Scriptures Through the Ages* (New York: Viking, 2005), 124–25, and MacCulloch, *Christianity*, 294–96.

responding to queries sent to them from other churches.<sup>23</sup> The form was that of a decretal, modeled on imperial rescripts and providing authoritative rulings that were meant to establish legal precedents. This specific form of reply encouraged a legal mind-set that would strongly influence segments of Western thought about the church. Assuming a role as the church's supreme lawgiver, rescripts of Rome's bishops were placed on the same level as synodal decrees that until this time were the chief means of creating church law. These rescripts from Rome, especially to other churches in the West, would become the substance of papal canon law. Though originally claiming preeminence from its bonds with both Peter and Paul, fourth-century Roman bishops increasingly emphasized the Petrine foundation of the Roman See, insisting on Rome's headship over other churches and its primacy among the bishops. Damasus customarily referred to Rome as the "apostolic see"; Pope Siricius (384–399) claimed that in official statements Peter was speaking through him.<sup>24</sup> As emperors in Constantinople gave more of their attention to the Eastern part of the empire, bishops of Rome often filled the power vacuum created by their neglect or by weak Western emperors. Later papal claims to civil authority invoked the exercise of such authority during this period as a basis for those claims.

### **The Church and the Bishop of Rome**

A focus on the church of Rome and its bishop and their place in the universal church was much the concern of three Roman bishops in the latter part of the patristic period. The first of these, the very gifted Leo I, provided the formula of faith adopted at the Council of Chalcedon. He also continued the process begun by Popes Damasus and Siricius in the latter half of the fourth century in developing the doctrine of Roman primacy.<sup>25</sup> Leo drew on both the three classic

<sup>23</sup> Duffy, *Saints and Sinners*, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Popes: The Pontiffs from St. Peter to John Paul II* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 62–68.

<sup>25</sup> Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present*, trans. John A. Otto and Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 28–38. See also John Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity and Christian Divisions: The Church 450–680*

Petrine texts in the New Testament mentioned earlier (Matt 16:18-19; Luke 22:32; John 21:15-17) and Roman law to make his case for the bishop of Rome's authoritative role. From Roman law he invoked the provision concerning legal inheritance: the rights and duties of the deceased passed undiminished to the heir. Leo did not claim to be an equal of Peter and spoke of himself as his "unworthy heir" or Peter's "vicar" or "representative," as Peter was the vicar of Christ. He is seen to mark the final stage of "the translation in *juridical terms* of the apostolic *parádoxis* ['tradition'] as ultimate reference for the *communio* of the Church."<sup>26</sup> On the fifth anniversary of his ordination, Leo spoke of his sharing with his brother bishops a care "for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28). At other times, he spoke of his having the "fullness of power" and responsibility in the church, though he only intervened to safeguard the truth or to uphold respect for local church law. He also affirmed a Petrine "succession" in the episcopate in each province of the church and by the faithful of the entire church.<sup>27</sup> Leo varied the exercise of his primacy in different regions of the West; his claims regarding primacy were only partially accepted in the East.

Later in the century, Pope Gelasius (492–496) sought to distinguish ecclesial authority from imperial authority, especially in the areas of dogma but also in the areas of church law and discipline. In his famous letter to Emperor Anastasios in 494, the pope spoke of "two powers," both divinely established: the sacred authority of the bishops and the royal power of temporal affairs, the former being pre-eminent. Gelasius saw a hint of these two powers in Luke 22:38, the passage about the two swords in Jesus' instruction before his arrest. In theory, the two powers were to cooperate for the welfare of all; in practice that was often not the case.

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*A.D.* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989), 148–58, and John Jay Hughes, *Pontiffs: Popes Who Shaped History* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994), chap. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Klaus Schatz, "Historical Considerations Concerning the Problem of the Primacy," in *Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church: "Toward a Patient and Fraternal Dialogue,"* ed. James F. Puglisi (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 5 (italics in original).

<sup>27</sup> Olivier Clément, *You Are Peter: An Orthodox Theologian's Reflection on the Exercise of Papal Primacy*, trans. M. S. Laird (New York: New City Press, 2003), 30.

Pope Leo's theory about the primacy was implemented practically during the pontificate of Pope Gregory I (590–604).<sup>28</sup> He also sought, by the exercise of his administrative decisions, to give a greater theological grounding to the Petrine primacy. Gregory was given the epithet "the Great" because of his noble character, his selfless ministry, and the impact of his writings. He fully accepted the notion that the bishop of Rome's primacy over the universal church was inherited from the apostle Peter and saw that primacy as one of solicitude and responsibility. He saw a clear difference between his authority regarding the bishops of his province and his authority regarding the church at large.<sup>29</sup> To the patriarch of Alexandria who, in the exaggerated Eastern use of titles, addressed him as "universal pope," he wrote, reprovingly: "My honour is the honour of the universal Church. My honour is the solid strength of my brothers. Then I am truly honoured, when honour is not denied to each one [of the bishops] to whom it is due."<sup>30</sup> In a title taken from Augustine, he referred to himself as the *servus servorum Dei*, "servant of the servants of God." A monk himself before being called to official service in the church, Gregory saw in the monastic life the embodiment of the gospel ideal of discipleship and the paradigm of the Christian life. He spoke of a tripartite ordering within the church: the ordained cleric, the monk, and the layperson. His best-known work, *Regula pastoralis* (*Pastoral Rule*), emphasized the role of preaching and sought to give priests and bishops a counterpart to the monastic Rule of St. Benedict, encouraging thereby a separation of the clergy from the laity. In giving advice to questions from mission areas, Gregory urged flexibility, the Christianization of pagan shrines, not their destruction. The pope's many efforts to serve the people of Rome and Italy led to his de facto temporal authority, so

<sup>28</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 352–55; Chadwick, *Church in Ancient Society*, 658–74.

<sup>29</sup> Clément, *You Are Peter*, 30–31.

<sup>30</sup> J. M. R. Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome*, trans. John de Satgé (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983), 52–53, at 53. See the discussion in Meyendorff, *Imperial Unity*, 304–7.



contributing to the foundation of what would become the temporal power of the papacy.

### **The Monastic Vision of Church**

Mention of Gregory I's upholding the ideal of monastic life as a paradigm for the church may introduce the second principal consideration of this chapter, the varied theological understandings of church in the patristic period under discussion. Monasticism (from Greek *monachos*, "solitary") antedates Gregory by some centuries: it had its origins in the second-century ascetics, living in the towns and villages of Egypt.<sup>31</sup> The appeal of some type of monastic life greatly increased in the fourth century, influenced by the renown of the hermit Antony of Egypt (d. 356) and the widely read *Life of Antony* of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373). While many monks withdrew from society, others combined ascetical renunciation and contemplative prayer with active ministry to the urban poor and sick. (Along the Nile the desert may be only a few hundred feet away from villages alongside the river.) The *Life of Antony* sought to promote integration between the urban churches and those practicing the ascetic life. In the face of a rapidly growing church with a lessened observance of earlier ideals, monastics sought a distinctive life, meant to imitate the spirit of the primitive church in the early chapters of Acts. Basically a lay movement, early monasticism in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries "must be reckoned as a distinctive mark of classical Christianity along with the Eucharist and baptism, bishops, creeds, and the canon of Scripture."<sup>32</sup> The movement influenced the church's self-understanding by upholding gospel ideals and at times promoting reform.

The desire to return to a simpler life and more familial relationships, lost in the shift from house churches to the great basilicas, influenced the growth of monasticism in the West as well. Monasticism

<sup>31</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 260–63 and chap. 10, and Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society*, chap. 42.

<sup>32</sup> Wilken, *The First Thousand Years*, 108.

was well established before Benedict (ca. 480–ca. 550), but in time the extraordinary influence of Benedictine monasticism is attributable to the moderation of Benedict’s Rule (ca. 540), especially in the eighth and ninth centuries when it received royal support. Drawn from earlier rules and written in vernacular Latin, the Rule sought to guide the life of the community in a way of life more closely resembling the gospels. Another, less positive, influence came when clerics and monks, both men and women, came to be seen as the more committed members of the Christian community. In addition, besides the restricted use of “brother” to clerical groups, mentioned above, only in the monastic communities did the terms “brother” and “sister” live on. The familial terms lost meaning as the church became swollen with great new numbers, introducing, so Joseph Ratzinger noted on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, a state of affairs lasting for centuries “with all its inevitably damaging effects.”<sup>33</sup> This, of course, does not take away from the contribution of monasticism over the centuries to the church of which it is so integrally a part, both in the East and in the West.

### **Theological Reflection on the Church**

Increased numbers joining the church in the fourth and fifth centuries also led to the golden age of the catechumenate in which the entire community assumed responsibility for those preparing for their full incorporation into the body of Christ. The homilies of the great bishop-preachers given during the period of initiation before and after baptism at the Easter Vigil are among the most important expressions of the theology of the church during this period. There was a theology of the church understood very much in terms of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist and the new community life in Christ. (Only in the West about this same time did the chrismation associated with baptism become a separate sacrament of confirmation reserved to the bishop.) Insights into a theological understanding of church are also present in the homilies and commentaries on the

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Meaning of Christian Brotherhood* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 39–40. Original German edition published in 1960.

Scriptures given by the great bishop-theologians and exegetes of the time. If the canons of the councils and rescripts from the bishops of Rome reflected the Roman juridical tradition, the rhetoric of the fathers was cast in the classical rhetorical genre of panegyric, “the painting of an idealized portrait in order to excite admiration and appropriation.”<sup>34</sup> That genre must be kept in mind in reading their texts. Examples of such reflections appear in the twenty-four catechetical lectures, considered “one of the most precious treasures of Christian antiquity,”<sup>35</sup> of Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386); the fifteen homilies on the Song of Songs of Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–ca. 395); the homilies on the Letters of Paul and the Gospels according to Matthew and John by the brilliant orator and bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom (Greek for “golden-mouthed”); the *Commentary on St. John’s Gospel* by Cyril, the patriarch of Alexandria (ca. 375–444). To these must be added the many sermons and treatises of Augustine of Hippo, the letters and sermons of Pope Leo I, and the poems on Israel the betrothed and the church as bride, expressed in paradox and symbolism, of Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373).<sup>36</sup>

Several themes emerge in these writings. A major theme in both Eastern and Western reflection was the church as the body of Christ, a conscious development of the Pauline teaching on baptism and the church as body. This theme appeared in earlier patristic writings but came to full flower in the fourth and fifth centuries. Development of the theme took place in a threefold direction.<sup>37</sup> First, using the Pauline theme of Christ as the Second Adam, the fathers saw in the incarna-

<sup>34</sup> John W. O’Malley, “Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?,” in *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?*, ed. David G. Schultenover (New York: Continuum, 2007), 74. See also John W. O’Malley, *Four Cultures of the West* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), chap. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 3: *The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature, from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1960), 363.

<sup>36</sup> Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, Cistercian Studies 124 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), chap. 7.

<sup>37</sup> The next few paragraphs draw on the essay of Walter Burghardt, “The Body of Christ: Patristic Insights,” in K. E. Skjoldsgaard and others, *The Church as the Body of Christ* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 69–101.

tion Christ's becoming one with all of humanity. That initial oneness was completed on the cross, when the church, a new Eve, was born from Christ's pierced side; as Eve was taken from the side of Adam to become his wife, two in one flesh, so on the cross, Augustine says, the church was wed to Christ and the two became one, receiving life by the gift of the Spirit. From a sermon of Augustine: "What the soul is to the body of a man, this the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church: what the soul does in all the members of one body, this the Holy Spirit does in the whole Church."<sup>38</sup> The church's identity in Christ reaches its final stage in the resurrection and ascension: in Christ, the church is raised to the Father so that "we too might be called sons through Him and children of God."<sup>39</sup> Second, the church lives the life of the body through baptism and the Eucharist: by baptism the Spirit incorporates us into Christ; through the Eucharist the church lives as the body of Christ. Third, the fathers see the body of Christ expressed in a life lived in love of others.

A commentary on the Gospel of John by Cyril of Alexandria illustrates patristic thought on the church as the body of Christ:

The Only-begotten, through the wisdom which is his and through the counsel of the Father, found and wrought a means by which we might come into unity with God and with one another. . . . For by one body, and that his own he blesses those who believe in him by a mystical communion and makes them of one body with himself and one another. . . . For if we all partake of the one loaf, we are all made one body; for it is not possible that Christ be divided. Therefore the Church is called "Body of Christ" of which we are individually members, according to Paul's understanding. For we are all united to the one Christ through his holy body, inasmuch as we receive him who is one and undivided in our own bodies.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Augustine, *Sermon 267*, 4. Trans. in Burghardt, "Body of Christ," 78.

<sup>39</sup> Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), *Commentary on John*, cited in Burghardt, "Body of Christ," 81.

<sup>40</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 11:10, in Eric G. Jay, *The Church: Its Changing Image Through Twenty Centuries*, vol. 1: *The First Seventeen Centuries* (London: SPCK, 1977), 79.

From the same commentary, Cyril speaks about our unity in the Spirit:

With regard to our unity in the Spirit, we may say . . . that all of us who have received one and same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, are united intimately, both with one another and with God. Taken separately, we are many, and Christ sends the Spirit, who is both the Father's Spirit and his own, to dwell in each of us. Yet that Spirit, being one and indivisible, gathers together those who are distinct from each other as individuals, and causes them all to be seen as a unity in himself. Just as Christ's sacred flesh has power to make those in whom it is present into one body, so the one, indivisible Spirit of God, dwelling in all, causes all to become one in spirit.<sup>41</sup>

The understanding of church was closely related to the concern for holiness and, especially in the East, to the notion of "deification" that comes through participation in Christ through the liturgy and ministry of the church. Much was made of the text in 2 Peter 1:4, which speaks of our becoming "participants of the divine nature." Gregory of Nyssa, for example, speaks of our human nature becoming divine by the "conjoining" of the divine and human in Christ. In a short exposition on 1 Corinthians 15:28, he extends that to the church: by "being conjoined to the one body of Christ by participation, we become his one body." At the consummation (1 Cor 15:28), Christ will be subjected to the Father "mingled with his own body which is the Church."<sup>42</sup>

Added to the ideas about the holiness of the church and its unity and apostolicity was an affirmation of its catholicity. The four terms, later known as the notes of the church, were specifically mentioned in the addition to the creed at the Council of Constantinople in 381. An example of the breadth of the church's catholicity is seen in one of the twenty-three *Catechetical Lectures* of Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem.

<sup>41</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 11:11, in *The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite*, 4 vols. (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975–1976), 2:890.

<sup>42</sup> Jay, *The Church: Its Changing Image*, 1:78.

the teachings of Augustine and Aquinas, to make the case that, made in the image of God, all human beings are open to supernatural communion with God. Not without controversy, de Lubac challenged the hypothesis, developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and held by the neo-Thomists of his time, that there could have been a “state of pure nature” that could have enjoyed a purely natural happiness. The thesis of *Surnaturel*, already introduced in *Catholicisme* (“the vision of God is a free gift, and yet the desire for it is at the root of every soul”<sup>116</sup>) would have a bearing on the understanding of the church and the salvation of nonbelievers and non-Christian religions. *Surnaturel* gives the basic *anthropological* context for de Lubac’s theological understanding of the church.<sup>117</sup>

In his *Méditations sur l’Eglise*<sup>118</sup> de Lubac attempted to enter “into the very heart” of the mystery of the church.<sup>119</sup> Described as “the spirituality for the theology of *Catholicisme*,”<sup>120</sup> the work explores the paradox (a favorite notion in de Lubac’s thinking) of the one church that is visible and invisible, human and divine, both body and bride of Christ. The heart of the church, he says, is the Eucharist; the two are so related that each stands as cause to the other. The titles of the first and final chapters of this work would be virtually the same as the first and final chapters of Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

### The Church as Body of Christ

The 1920s through the 1940s also witnessed a great interest in the notion of the church as the (mystical) body of Christ. Contributing to this was the continuing influence of Johan Adam Möhler and by the wide popularity, through multiple translations, of *The Spirit of*

<sup>116</sup> De Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, 327.

<sup>117</sup> Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 9 and chap. 2.

<sup>118</sup> Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church*, trans. by Michael Mason (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956).

<sup>119</sup> De Lubac, *Splendour*, ix.

<sup>120</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Henri de Lubac: An Overview* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 107.

*Catholicism* (1924) by Karl Adam (d. 1966), a professor at Tübingen from 1919 to 1949. Two prominent works dealt with this theme: in 1933, *The Whole Christ: The Historical Development of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body in Scripture and Tradition* by the Belgian Jesuit Emile Mersch (d. 1940) and the 1937 work of the Dutch Jesuit Sebastian Tromp (d. 1975), *Corpus Christi quod est Ecclesia* (The Body of Christ which is the Church). The popularity of the theme led to some exaggerations that either paid little attention to the structural aspects of the church or spoke of a mysticism that seemed to eliminate any difference between the human and the divine. German theologian M. D. Koster in 1940 was severely critical of the attention given to the mystical body theme, a mere figure or metaphor, in his view. He argued instead for the use of the term “the people of God” to underscore the continuity between the two testaments.<sup>121</sup> Koster saw the new chosen people as “the assembly called together to hear the Word of God and to enter with God into a new alliance of mercy and love.”<sup>122</sup>

To counter exaggerations in the use of the term “mystical body,” Pius XII issued his encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943), in which he taught that in defining the church of Christ, identified with the Roman Catholic Church, “we shall find nothing more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the expression ‘the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ’—an expression which springs from and is, as it were, the fair flowering of the repeated teaching of the Sacred Scriptures and the Holy Fathers.”<sup>123</sup> The pope pointedly includes grace and charism in his understanding of church, so challenging the view of the prominent Jesuit neo-Thomist philosopher and theologian, Louis Billot (d. 1931). The latter’s treatise on the church (1898; third edition, 1909) regarded grace and charisms as conceptually distinct from the basic understanding of church as a “society which is a collection of members under a hierarchy set up with a twofold power [jurisdiction and

<sup>121</sup> Jerome Hamer, *The Church Is a Communion*, trans. Ronald Matthews (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 18–20.

<sup>122</sup> McNamara, “The Ecclesiological Movement in Germany,” 351.

<sup>123</sup> [w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_enc\\_29061943\\_mystici-corporis-christi.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html), no. 13 (accessed November 27, 2015).

order]."<sup>124</sup> Pius XII was able to challenge Billot by acceding to the request of the respected Jesuit philosopher-theologian Erich Przywara (d. 1972) "not to define the Church in terms of the mystical Body, but rather to define the mystical Body in terms of the Church, that is, in terms of a society."<sup>125</sup> The notion of church as society led the encyclical to identify membership in the church by the same three criteria used by Robert Bellarmine, though it also recognized that those who are not members of the church may have "a certain relationship" through "an unconscious desire and longing."<sup>126</sup> The encyclical, even with what in hindsight might be called its limitations, represents a major step in the official understanding of the theology of the church.

The mystical body of Christ was also the primary image of the church in the only formal systematic treatment of the church in the twentieth century, *Church of the Word Incarnate*, by Swiss theologian, seminary professor, and professed Thomist Charles Journet (d. 1975).<sup>127</sup> In the 1939 introduction to his work, he described his approach: In Augustine and Aquinas "I have found a theology of the Church more living, more far-reaching and more liberating than that which our manuals commonly contain. In them we feel the active presence of a vision of the Mystery of the Church understood as an extension of the Incarnation."<sup>128</sup> As in some manuals of the time, Journet used the four causes of Aristotle to speak of the church. The manuals generally saw the hierarchy as the formal cause of the church, along with sacraments and defined dogmas, and the laity as the material cause, so depicting the church as formally a hierarchical organization. Journet saw the formal cause of the church—that which makes the church to be what it is—as the Holy Spirit. In doing so, he overturned "the juridically based notion of the Church while maintaining an essential role for the hierarchy within the Church." The

<sup>124</sup> Cited by Yves Congar, "Moving Towards a Pilgrim Church," in *Vatican II Revisited by Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1986), 131.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. Congar's words refer to a 1940 article by Erich Przywara.

<sup>126</sup> No. 103 (see note 123 above.)

<sup>127</sup> Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 38–45.

<sup>128</sup> Cited by Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, 41.



hierarchy he regarded as “most fundamentally a service to help bring about the [Church’s] mystical communion.”<sup>129</sup> Though Journet differed in method from that used by the *ressourcement* theologians mentioned earlier, with them he looked at the church not only as something to be studied but, analogously, as a person, “someone to be recognized and loved.”<sup>130</sup>

Differences in method had long simmered between *ressourcement* theologians and Thomists at Rome’s Dominican-led Angelicum and at the studium of the Dominican province of Toulouse. Ultimately, Pius XII himself became involved.<sup>131</sup> We noted earlier the criticisms of the writings of Chenu, Congar, and Charlier and the published justification for the condemnations of some of their writings. In 1947 an article by Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange (d. 1964), longtime professor at Rome’s University of St. Thomas (the Angelicum) and adviser to the Holy Office, charged that the “new theology” was heading to skepticism and heresy, a return to modernism. Congar, de Lubac, and some of their colleagues were removed from their teaching positions. John Courtney Murray, trying to make the case for Catholic acceptance of constitutionally protected religious liberty, was asked by his superiors to refrain from further writings on the topic.

In mid-1950, Pius XII published his encyclical *Humani Generis*. An attempt to correct what were perceived as errors in the revival of Catholic theology in the previous two decades, the letter complained that the “nature and constitution of the Church” as expounded in papal encyclicals was habitually neglected in favor of “a certain vague notion which [theologians] profess to have found in the ancient Fathers, especially the Greeks.”<sup>132</sup> The letter objected to the use of ancient sources to explain the teaching of “recent constitutions and decrees” and insisted, citing Pius IX, that “the most noble office of

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>130</sup> John Seward, “L’Eglise a ravi son coeur: Charles Journet and the Theologians of *Ressourcement* on the Personality of the Church,” in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, 125–37, at 125.

<sup>131</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, “*Humani Generis* and *Nouvelle Théologie*,” in Flynn and Murray, *Ressourcement*, chap. 9.

<sup>132</sup> Pius XII, “*Humani Generis*: Encyclical Letter of Pope Pius XII” (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference [1950]), art. 18.

theology is to show how a doctrine defined by the Church is contained in the sources of revelation."<sup>133</sup> The encyclical condemned no individuals and was far more moderate in tone than Pius X's *Pascendi* against the modernists, though its dogmatic style was intended to end debate. The letter "was one of the last efforts to hold back a tide that was calling into question the near-monopoly in theology enjoyed by scholastic method, language, principles, and concepts."<sup>134</sup>

While some of the preparatory documents for the Second Vatican Council sought to continue in the spirit of the encyclical, the next chapter will show that the council largely took another direction in what it said about the church and in the way in which that was expressed.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., art. 21.

<sup>134</sup> Komonchak, "*Humani Generis* and *Nouvelle Théologie*," 155.

## CHAPTER TEN

### The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)

Yesterday, the theme of the Church seemed to be confined to the power of the Pope. Today it is extended to the episcopate, the religious, the laity and the whole body of the Church. Yesterday, we spoke of the rights of the Church by transferring the constitutive elements of civil society to the definition of a perfect society. Today, we have discovered other realities in the Church—the charisms of grace and holiness, for example—which cannot be defined by purely juridical ideas. Yesterday, we were above all interested in the external history of the Church. Today, we are equally concerned with its inner life, brought to life by the hidden presence of Christ in it.<sup>1</sup>

In reality the profound intention of the Second Vatican Council was clearly to insert the discourse on the church within and subordinate to the discourse on God, therefore proposing an ecclesiology which is truly theo-logical.<sup>2</sup>

These two citations, the first from Cardinal Montini of Milan at the end of the first session of Vatican II, the second from a commentary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, introduce us to the theology of the church as articulated by the Second Vatican Council and remind us of the deliberate and significant development that theology represents. This chapter begins with a historical overview

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, December 7, 1962, cited by Yves Congar, “Moving Towards a Pilgrim Church,” in *Vatican II Revisited by Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1986), 135.

<sup>2</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Commentary on Doctrinal Congregation Document,” *Origins* 37, no. 9 (July 19, 2007): 137.

of the “event” of the council, its preparation, and the four sessions that gave birth to its theology. The council must be seen in light of the past as we have seen it up until now, but, as “event,” the council also involved a “rupture” in the sense of a “break from routine” and “initiating a new routine,”<sup>3</sup> a new stage in the effort to articulate a theological understanding of church.<sup>4</sup> It helps to keep in mind three major projects of Vatican II: balancing Vatican I’s teaching on the papacy with an understanding of the role of the bishops; incorporating the riches of the church’s tradition in articulating a more adequate doctrine of the church; considering anew the relationship and role of the church in the world of the present day. The second part of the chapter will present an overview of the council’s vision of church.

Pope John XXIII (1958–1963) announced his intent to call the council in January 1959, three months after his election. In his opening address to the council he asked that it show the validity of the church’s teaching rather than make condemnations, that it be “predominantly pastoral in character,” and that it bring the church “up to date [*aggiornamento*] where required” to better enable the church to serve her apostolic mission.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the council’s opening, three and a half years were given to consultation regarding proposals for the agenda of the council and the preparation of some seventy documents, largely done under the supervision of the various Roman congregations, headed by what was then called the Supreme Con-

<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, “Vatican II as an ‘Event,’” in John W. O’Malley and others, *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* ed. David G. Schultenover (New York: Continuum, 2007), 24–51, at 27.

<sup>4</sup> Three studies may be mentioned. The shortest (141 pages) is Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew Sherry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006). John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008) deals with both the history and meaning of the council (380 pages). The most extensive study is that edited by Giuseppe Alberigo, English version edited by Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II*, 5 vols. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995–2006), henceforth Alberigo/Komonchak.

<sup>5</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 95. Full text in Floyd Anderson, ed., *Council Daybook, Vatican II: Session 1, Oct. 11 to Dec. 8, 1962; Session 2, Sept. 29 to Dec. 4, 1963* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965–1966), 25–29.

gregation of the Holy Office. The many documents were combined into twenty-two schemata (draft texts). The council met for four sessions, in the fall months of each year from 1962 to 1965. Valuable work was done by various commissions on individual texts during the intersessions. The members of the council were bishops of the Latin Rite, of the Eastern Catholic Churches, and major superiors of religious orders of men. There were 168 congregations over the four years; public sessions were held at the beginning of each of the four periods of the council and when texts approved by the pope and the council were solemnly promulgated. The work of the council is often spoken of in terms of two words: *aggiornamento*, updating, and *ressourcement*, a return to the basic fonts of the church's tradition, very especially but not exclusively the Scriptures and the early centuries of the church.

The first session of the council, in the fall of 1962, had three important developments regarding the theology of the church. First, the session began with a consideration of the liturgy, seen as providing a programmatic statement for the council as a whole: that the council give new vigor to Christian life, that it adapt changeable structures to better meet current needs, that it contribute to the union of all Christians, and that it promote the growth of the church. The second development regarded the schema "On the Sources of Revelation."<sup>6</sup> The draft text reflected anti-modernist concerns, showed minimal interest in the current methods of biblical study, and viewed revelation primarily as a "deposit" of faith, the basis for the church's dogmas and doctrines.<sup>7</sup> Where Trent applied the term "source" to the gospels, the draft text applied the term to both Scripture and tradition as two sources of revelation. At issue in this instance was the stance of the church: would it continue "the old policy of exclusiveness, condemnation and defense leading to an almost neurotic denial of all that was new" or "would the Church, after it had taken all the necessary precautions to protect the faith, turn over a new leaf and move on into a new and positive encounter with its own origins, with

<sup>6</sup> Giuseppe Ruggieri, "The First Doctrinal Clash," in Alberigo/Komonchak, vol. 2: *The Formation of the Council's Identity, First Period and Intersession, October 1962–1963*, 235.

<sup>7</sup> O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 141–52.

its brothers [*sic*] and with the world of today?"<sup>8</sup> A preliminary vote on the draft text on November 20 fell short of the number needed to begin anew, but Pope John intervened and called for a new schema to be prepared. Many participants saw this as a turning point of the council.

The third development concerned the much-awaited proposed draft on the church.<sup>9</sup> The text's eleven chapters continued the largely institutional emphasis set by Robert Bellarmine, with some elements from Pius XII's encyclical on the Mystical Body.<sup>10</sup> Many bishops were critical of the schema and looked to a different approach to understanding the church. The draft text represented only the scholastic tradition of preceding centuries and did not take into account the breadth of the church's tradition in the early Latin fathers and those of the Greek tradition; it was cast in predominantly juridical terms and preoccupied with the question of authority; it was faulted for its focus on the church as the body of Christ to the neglect of the theology of the people of God; and it stood at odds with the spirit of Pope John's address at the outset of the council.<sup>11</sup> Two speeches in the discussion that followed the introduction of the draft text to the council are especially noteworthy. Cardinal Léon-Josef Suenens of Malines, Belgium, proposed that the topic of the church be the central topic of the council, both the church's inner life and its relationship with the world.<sup>12</sup> Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro of Bologna proposed that "the Church of the poor" be the dominant idea of the council's vision of the church and of the council itself—its "synthesizing idea, the point that gives light and coherence to all the subjects thus far

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 44. Original published in 1966.

<sup>9</sup> Giuseppe Ruggieri, "Beyond an Ecclesiology of Polemics: The Debate on the Church," in Alberigo/Komonchak, vol. 2, 285–98.

<sup>10</sup> Hubert Jedin, "The Second Vatican Council," in Gabriel Adriansy and others, *The Church in the Modern Age*, trans. Anselm Biggs, vol. 10, *History of the Church*, ed. Hubert Jedin, Konrad Repgen, and John Dolan (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 113.

<sup>11</sup> Ruggieri, "Beyond an Ecclesiology of Polemics," 330–46.

<sup>12</sup> Leon-Josef Cardinal Suenens, "A Plan for the Whole Council," in Stacpoole, *Vatican II Revisited*, 97.

discussed and of all the work that we must undertake.”<sup>13</sup> Soon after the council opened, Suenens commissioned Gérard Philips of the University of Louvain to compose an alternate draft text on the church. The first version of Philips’s text gave the lion’s share of attention to the topic of bishops, reflecting the widely shared desire to bring balance to Vatican I’s teaching on the papacy. The day before the first session concluded, Cardinal Montini of Milan, anticipating the direction of the council, made the remarks in the first of the epigraphs above.

The intersession in 1963 saw the draft text on the church reduced to four chapters: (1) “On the Mystery of the Church,” (2) the episcopacy, (3) the laity, and (4) religious orders. The title of the first chapter is the same as the first chapter of Henri de Lubac’s *The Splendour of the Church*, an early indication of the impact the *ressourcement* movement would have not only on the conciliar teaching but also on the use of the rhetorical and sometimes poetic style of the early fathers of the church that became a hallmark of many texts of the council.<sup>14</sup> To expedite the council’s work, the council’s Coordinating Commission reduced the many draft texts before the council to seventeen, the last of which (later to become “Schema 13”) concerned the church in the modern world.

The work of the council was interrupted by the death of Pope John in June 1963, though his last encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, would help the council by its focus on the dignity of the human person and the right to honor God according to one’s conscience. Later that month Giovanni Battista Montini was elected pope, took the name of Paul VI, and announced his intent to have the council continue. His opening address at the second session of Vatican II in late September 1963 proposed four objectives for the council: (1) a “more thorough definition” of the church as “a reality imbued with the divine presence”; (2) the renewal of the church, honoring tradition but “stripping it of what is unworthy or defective”; (3) promoting the unity of the church while allowing for “a great variety of verbal expressions, movements, lawful institutions, and preference with regard to modes of acting”; and (4) building a “bridge toward the contemporary world.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cited by Ruggieri, “Beyond an Ecclesiology of Polemics,” 345–46.

<sup>14</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 163.

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, *Council Daybook: Sessions 1 and 2*, 143–50.

The second session of the council, in the fall of 1963, began with a yet further revised schema on the church, largely the work of Msgr. Philips.<sup>16</sup> The text had four chapters: (1) the mystery of the church; (2) the hierarchical constitution of the church, especially the bishops; (3) the people of God, especially the laity; (4) the call to holiness. The opening words were to be *Lumen gentium* ("light to the nations"), applied now to Christ and not, as had been proposed earlier, to the church. The new chapter 4, on the call to holiness, was a novelty: it affirmed the call to holiness given to all the baptized before turning to professed religious. The chapter on the episcopate gave much more attention to the role of bishops, even if it gave repeated affirmations of the papal prerogatives defined at Vatican I. The new text differed from the original schema in using a style of rhetoric reminiscent of the Bible and the fathers of the church. In the discussion, motions were made to place the chapter on the people of God before that on the hierarchy and to recognize that all baptized persons belong in some way to the mystical body of Christ, even if they do not belong to the visible Catholic Church.<sup>17</sup> Quite different views emerged in the discussions regarding the episcopacy and whether to include a treatment of Mary in the schema on the church or in a separate schema. Votes at the end of October narrowly placed Mary within the schema on the church and, a day later, showed widespread support for a sacramental view of the episcopacy and its responsibility as a college, of which the pope is the head, in exercising a governing authority in the church. Discussion of the schema on the bishops revealed an eagerness to have collegiality implemented in a practical way. Debate on the schema on ecumenism revealed two approaches. Some council fathers saw a need for a common Christian witness and sought to recognize the common elements between Catholics and other Christians. Others expressed concern about ecumenism's potential danger to the faith and looked only to the return of other Christians to the one true church. Discussion of the same schema's fourth and fifth chapters, on the church's attitude toward other religions, especially

<sup>16</sup> O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 173–77.

<sup>17</sup> Jedin, "The Second Vatican Council," 117.



the Jews, and on religious freedom, both very sensitive issues, was put off until later. At the end of the second session, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was promulgated by Pope Paul “in union with the venerable fathers,” a formula chosen by the pope to recognize the heightened collegial consciousness that emerged during the session.<sup>18</sup>

The period between the second and third sessions was marked by the pope’s unprecedented visit to the Holy Land and his meeting with Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras, the first meeting between pope and patriarch since the Council of Florence in the fifteenth century.

Gestures such as this—or when in 1996 John Paul II invited the archbishop of Canterbury, in miter and cope and with the pope’s gift of a gold pectoral cross, to process with him at Vespers celebrating the fourteen hundredth anniversary of Gregory the Great’s sending Augustine and his fellow monks to England, or when he invited both the archbishop and a representative of the Orthodox Church to assist him in opening the Holy Door in the Year of Jubilee 2000—have their own contribution to make in a developing understanding of church. Massimo Faggioli points out that Yves Congar faulted Paul VI for not articulating a theology implicit in such gestures. The ecumenist Fr. Pierre Duprey responded: “The pope must be left to make such gestures and messages. . . . The gestures will create a familiarity and when that has been done, one day, the formulas will be able to be accepted.”<sup>19</sup>

Conciliar commissions continued their work, especially on the delicate issue of the relationship between the college of bishops and its head and on a text on Mary that would become the final chapter of the Constitution on the Church. In early August, Pope Paul issued his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*. The letter spoke of three concerns:

<sup>18</sup> Claude Soetens, “The Ecumenical Commitment of the Catholic Church,” in Alberigo/Komonchak, vol. 3: *The Mature Council, Second Period and Intersession, September 1963–September 1964*, 328–29.

<sup>19</sup> Massimo Faggioli, “Off Script: What to Expect from Synod 2015,” *Commonweal* 142, no.16 (October 9, 2015): 12.

(1) the church's duty "to deepen the awareness that she must have of herself" regarding her origin, her nature, her mission, and her ultimate destiny; (2) the collaboration of the council in finding "greater courage to undertake the necessary reforms"; and (3) the need to explore "the relationships which the Church of today should establish with the world which surrounds it and in which it lives and labors."<sup>20</sup> The emphasis on dialogue in the encyclical would influence the final conciliar text on ecumenism and, especially so, the text on the church in the modern world.

The third session in the fall of 1964 began with Pope Paul's highlighting the council's need to deal with the nature and function of the episcopacy as successors of the apostles even as it confirmed the "sovereign prerogatives regarding the primacy and infallibility" defined at Vatican I. This, he said, was "the weightiest and most delicate" issue facing the council, one that would distinguish Vatican II in the memory of future ages.<sup>21</sup> The pope was expressing his own view but also trying to win over those who held to the conviction that an affirmation of episcopal collegiality would be a denial of past church teaching.

This third session witnessed intense debates that took place on what were the fourth and fifth chapters of the original schema on ecumenism, now treated as independent texts: one on religious freedom, the other on non-Christian religions.<sup>22</sup> The first was problematic on two counts: the classical Catholic position, maintained even in the 1950s, held that only truth had the right to freedom and that the state should support the truth given in Catholic faith, though for prudential reasons Catholics could tolerate separation of church and state and religious tolerance; second, that teaching was presupposed in various concordats between 1929 and 1954. At issue too was the fact that support for religious freedom ran counter to vigorous official

<sup>20</sup> Pope Paul VI, *His Church: Ecclesiam Suam* (Boston: St. Paul Editions [1964]).

<sup>21</sup> Text in Floyd Anderson, ed., *Council Daybook: Vatican II, Session 3* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), 6–10, at 8.

<sup>22</sup> Giovanni Miccoli, "Two Sensitive Issues: Religious Freedom and the Jews," in Alberigo/Komonchak, vol. 4: *Church as Communion, Third Period and Intersession, September 1964–September 1965*, 95–193.

opposition to two dramatic movements of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> The first was the movement from a sacral to a secular conception of society and state, a process by which the political functions of the secular rule were becoming separate from religious functions governed by church authority. Because this process in continental Europe was tainted by rationalist or atheist inspiration, it was totally opposed by Pius IX, though Leo XIII took steps toward a development of the notion of two distinct societies and two distinct powers. The second movement was the developing appreciation of the historicity of truth and human progress in understanding what is true. Entanglement of this development with modernist exaggerations provoked, we have seen, strong official opposition. American Jesuit John Courtney Murray had been making the case for a revision of the classical position regarding religious freedom in the light of the current political reality, quite different from that of the nineteenth century. While some council fathers rejected the text because it appeared to contradict papal condemnations of the previous century, bishops from the United States and from communist-controlled countries gave it strong support. Debate continued as well on the text on the Jews, now including mention of Islam. Some speakers wanted a stronger rejection of the charge of deicide, sometimes used in the past by Christian polemicists. Bishops from the Middle East continued to fear that the text would complicate the situation for Christian minorities in their countries.

On October 20, debate began on schema 13, now called On the Church in the Modern World.<sup>24</sup> The title contrasts with the ninth chapter of the original draft on the church that used the categories of church and state and religious tolerance. The new text would one day begin with the famous “The joys and the hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted,” which are the special concern of the followers of Christ.

<sup>23</sup> John Courtney Murray, “The Declaration on Religious Freedom,” *Concilium* 5, no. 2 (1966): 3–10.

<sup>24</sup> Analysis of the text in Henri Fesquet, *The Drama of Vatican II: The Ecumenical Council, June, 1962–December, 1965*, trans. Bernard Murchland (New York: Random House, 1967), 403–12.

Responsible for “reading the signs of the times,” the text adopts a “historically conscious” method that contrasts with a classicist approach that might have settled for a statement about the nature of the world.<sup>25</sup> Speakers clearly moved away from the siege mentality and negative stance vis-à-vis modernity and the world characteristic of the official stance taken in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>26</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger would later say that the final version of this schema, along with those on religious freedom and world religions, was “a kind of countersyllabus” to the “one-sidedness of the position adopted by the Church under Pius IX and Pius X.”<sup>27</sup> Encyclicals from Leo XIII to John XXIII had, of course, already been moving the church toward engagement with modern social issues. The schema already contained some of the basic themes appearing in the final version: an emphasis on human dignity, human solidarity, and human activity directed to the common good of all. The text spoke of the church’s servant role in the world even as it learned from the world.

The final week of the third session showed the complexity of the council’s working out what it wanted to say about the church.<sup>28</sup> Tensions still surfaced regarding the schema on religious freedom, though the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions passed with a wide margin. The day before a final vote was to be taken on the Decree on Ecumenism, the assembly learned of nineteen “kind suggestions authoritatively expressed” regarding the proposed decree. Though it is not clear who proposed the changes, it was clear that the pope wanted them made. Many were stylistic, but some thought they saw possible doctrinal concerns in three of

<sup>25</sup> Frederick J. Cwiekowski, “Vatican Council II,” in *New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 965–66.

<sup>26</sup> For the debates in the third session, see Norman Tanner, “The Church in the World (*Ecclesia ad Extra*),” in Alberigo/Komonchak, vol. 4, 269–328.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Francis McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 381. German original published in 1982.

<sup>28</sup> See Luis Antonio G. Tagle, “The ‘Black Week’ of Vatican II (November 14–21, 1964),” in Alberigo/Komonchak, vol. 4, 387–452.

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