

“In *Catholicism and Citizenship*, an accomplished historian of the Vatican II Church situates the novelty of Pope Francis’s orientation—and the resistance it has provoked—on the complex, changing, and disturbing terrain of global politics and ‘the crisis of the nation state.’ Francis envisions the Church as an engaged member of world society—missionary and prophetic, yet nonideological and inclusive. To those dismayed by public vitriol, worried about international politics, or doubtful that the Church can change the world, this book will bring new breadth of insight and encouraging seeds of hope.”

—Lisa Sowle Cahill  
Boston College

“Massimo Faggioli is in the first rank of theologians to come of age since the Second Vatican Council and to study both the Council and the post-conciliar era. In this book he sets out from *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council’s document on the church in the modern world, to spur Catholic ecclesiology toward a new engagement with a globalizing world in political crisis, an engagement in line with Pope Francis’s vision of a missionary church of mercy. *Catholicism and Citizenship* displays the author’s usual skill at analyzing conciliar and later documents and providing their historical context. He brings to this task a unique perspective and familiarity not only with Italian but European experience and theology. Sparks of insight and information fly from every chapter.”

—Peter Steinfels  
Professor Emeritus  
Fordham University  
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“With this book, Massimo Faggioli cements his reputation as his generation’s premier interpreter of the relationship between American Catholics and the Church in Rome. He is incisive, insightful, and unfailingly constructive in his observations.”

—Cathleen Kaveny  
Libby Professor of Law and Theology  
Boston College



# Catholicism and Citizenship

Political Cultures of the Church  
in the Twenty-First Century

*Massimo Faggioli*



A Michael Glazier Book

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*To Sarah, Laura, and Gabriel*



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“This council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties, each according to their proper vocation.”

Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, par. 43



# Abbreviations

- SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, 1963
- IM *Inter Mirifica*, Decree on the Means of Social Communication, 1963
- LG *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1964
- OE *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite, 1964
- UR *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Decree on Ecumenism, 1964
- CD *Christus Dominus*, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, 1965
- PC *Perfectae Caritatis*, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, 1965
- OT *Optatam Totius*, Decree on Priestly Formation, 1965
- GE *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration on Christian Education, 1965
- NA *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, 1965
- DV *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 1965
- AA *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 1965
- DH *Dignitatis Humanae*, Declaration on Religious Freedom, 1965
- AG *Ad Gentes*, Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, 1965

PO *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, 1965

GS *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 1965

Given the differences in the quality of the translations into English of the conciliar documents, the quotations of conciliar documents are taken in some cases from the Vatican website; in other cases from *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996); and in other cases from *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter M. Abbott, SJ, and translation editor Joseph Gallagher (New York: Guild Press, 1966). I have sometimes made some minor changes.

# Acknowledgments

This book is the result of two decades of research on Vatican II. But it was not a coincidence that these pages were written and the project was conceived during a particular moment in the life of American politics, that is, during the campaign for the presidential election of November 2016. The election of Donald Trump indeed poses many questions to the Catholic Church about its recent political stances and its position in the future of the United States and in the world.

But the question of the social and political message and position of the Catholic Church in the modern world will continue to remain central even after the end of a political season marked by, among other things, a deep polarization within the Catholic Church and a crisis in the theological ethos of the public engagement of Catholics in the public square, particularly in the western world, which Roman Catholicism once used to identify as its historical and cultural cradle.

The crisis of that engagement is deeper and graver than the mere crisis of political Catholicism in terms of the political engagement of Catholics with or without a Catholic party. It is a crisis related to an interpretation of the trajectories of modernity, which in turn is closely connected to a historical and theological hermeneutic of the Second Vatican Council. The lectures delivered during the years 2015 and 2016 offered me the opportunity to link my research on Vatican II to a particular historical and theological Catholic moment in the United States. These pages represent an attempt to make clear what is at stake when the Catholic Church overlooks or misinterprets the conciliar ecclesiology of the church in the modern world—or better, in the original Latin, “in the world of this time”—the title of the constitution *Gaudium et Spes: De ecclesia in mundo huius temporis*.

This book is also a result of my experience as a European Catholic historian and theologian who came to the United States in 2008. In this sense, this book is one further step in my dealing in a deeper and

more direct way with global Catholicism from the particular angle of the Catholic Church in the United States. This is true for this book more than for my previous books, and it is a way of continuing my analysis of the pontificate of Pope Francis and in particular the reception of Francis by the Catholic Church in the United States.

I thank here the University of St. Thomas (St. Paul, Minnesota) for making possible the sabbatical semester granted during the spring semester 2016. Among my colleagues at the University of St. Thomas, I am grateful to those who were on the board of the Institute for Catholicism and Citizenship during the academic year 2015–2016, and in particular to Michael Hollerich and Gerald Schlabach for the continuing conversation on these matters. John O'Malley, SJ, continues to be my first partner in dialogue: his book *What Happened at Vatican II* (2008) opened a new season of reflections on the council, whose significance is now particularly clear in light of the pontificate of Pope Francis. Mark Massa, SJ, is a constant source of inspiration and much needed laughter, and he was the one who introduced me, in his graduate course as the Gasson Chair at Boston College in the spring semester of 2009, to the intricate issue of the relationship between America and Catholicism. Peter Hünermann, many years ago, held a seminar in Tübingen on Catholic ecclesiology in the twentieth century that was decisive in forming my approach to the Catholic tradition: most of all, he is for me an example of the way a citizen, a theologian, and a Catholic should engage the church, the academy, and the public square. I cannot forget here those with whom I have shared part of these reflections: Steven Millies in the United States; Marcello Neri, Serena Noceti, and Antonio Spadaro, SJ, in Italy; Ormond Rush and Michael Kelly, SJ, in Australia; Sandra Arenas and Carlos Schickendantz in Chile.

This book also builds a bridge between my seven years at the University of St. Thomas (2009–2016) and the beginning of my tenure at Villanova University in the fall semester of 2016. These reflections do not address directly Augustine's legacy and the reception of his thought in terms of the theology of the relationship between the church and the *polis*, and they express the intention of a renewed, close encounter with the Augustinian tradition.

My research on the ecclesiology and the reception of the Second Vatican Council culminated in a series of lectures delivered between 2015 and 2016. In the broad network of people who created the occasions and opportunities for this research to become a book I want to thank here those who invited me to share these reflections in the form of lectures: the Association of US Catholic Priests, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the Cathedral Ministry Conference, St. Mary's University (San Antonio, Texas), St. Norbert College (De Pere, Wisconsin), the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile and the Alberto Hurtado University (Santiago, Chile), the Loyola Institute at Trinity College Dublin, and the National Council of Priests of Australia. This book is also the result of my undergraduate and graduate courses on the Second Vatican Council, on ecclesiology, and on Catholicism and political modernity: the input coming from my students continues to be an integral part of my research.

Liturgical Press and in particular Hans Christoffersen have been very encouraging and welcomed this project from the beginning. It is always a great pleasure to work with Lauren L. Murphy, managing editor at Liturgical Press. The intellectual community formed by *Commonweal* has been a constant point of reference even before my arrival in the United States of America, and these reflections owe a great debt to that community of editors, authors, and readers. Robert Mickens at *La Croix International* helped me grow in my attempt to bridge theology and analysis of all things Catholic. My Italian friends and colleagues at the magazines *Il Regno*, *Jesus*, and *Il Mulino* encouraged me to reflect on my American experience in a way that I did not imagine possible when I arrived in the summer of 2008.

This book is dedicated to the many colleagues and friends that I have met thanks to the visible and invisible network that is the Catholic Church, a world in itself.

Villanova University  
November 20, 2016  
Feast of Christ the King



Two of the chapters of this book have appeared elsewhere and have been revised and updated for the present book. I wholeheartedly thank the editors and publishers of the journals and books in which they originally appeared.

The chapter “Inter-Ecclesial Relations and the Public Square: Bishops vs. Religious Orders Between Vatican II and the Post-Vatican II Era” was originally published as “The Ecclesiology of Vatican II as a New Framework for Consecrated Life,” in *Origins*, September 10, 2015, Volume 45, Number 15, pp. 255–62.

The chapter “Church and World in Pope Francis’s Ecclesiological Shift: Evolution or Crisis of the New Ecclesial Movements?” was originally published in German as “Die Ekklesiologie von Papst Franziskus und die neuen katholischen Bewegungen: Evolution oder Krise?” in *Una Sancta* 71, no. 1 (2016): 18–29.



# Introduction

Periodization is an important way for historians and theologians to understand the Catholic Church, and it is also important for the Catholic Church to understand itself. Periodization divides church history into periods marked by some kind of coherence, periods opened and closed by epoch-changing events. Periodization helps us structure history so that we can better understand what is distinctive of a particular period of time in the life of the church. From this point of view, there is no doubt that Catholicism today lives in the post-Vatican II period that started already during Vatican II. But the expression “post-conciliar period” is still a rather vague way to identify the last five decades of Catholicism. The unstable narratives of what the Catholic Church has become after Vatican II require, in this case, an undeniable elusiveness in the label.

The problem is that we know fairly well what happened at Vatican II, but we do not really know what happened during post-Vatican II Catholicism in the global church. Local experiences and narratives vary in a significant way; the points of view of historians, theologians, and pastors often diverge. Nevertheless, we know that within the first fifty years of this post-Vatican II period the global Catholic Church has gone through two major epoch-changing ruptures: the post-9/11 religiously inspired terrorist violence, and the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church.

For those who have paid attention to the effects of these events, it is clear that they question radically and publicly two key assumptions for a Catholic mind-set marked by the mantra of unchangeability: the idea of a perfect continuity in church history and the idea of the possibility of a church almost isolated and unperturbed by what happens outside, *extra ecclesiam*.

September 11, 2001, has redefined the pattern of relationship between the state, civil society, and religions that we have inherited from the early modern period and that lasted until the end of the twentieth century. September 11, 2001, has redrawn the space of theologies, including Catholic theology, not only in the academic context but also in the public sphere of living together. A theology that looks only to its own religious community has become an unusable artifact. The post-9/11 era of global terrorism has redefined the boundaries between church and state: the church is better equipped than the secular state for the delicate operation of symbolic resignification of these invisible but crucial boundaries—boundaries between church and state, between religion and politics, between faith and unbelief, and between different religions among themselves. This is one of the reasons that make world public opinion call the Catholic Church and especially the papacy to speak on the relations between Islam and terrorism, often hoping to obtain from the pope a theological condemnation of the political enemies of the secular state in the western world. This means that the nature of ecclesiology has changed in the post-9/11 world, in a way that may recall the seventeenth century and the end of the wars of religion in Europe. But the path of the ecclesiological self-understanding of Catholicism is still on the trajectory initiated by Vatican II more than fifty years ago.

On the other hand, the sexual abuse scandal had a chastening and humiliating effect on the self-awareness of the Catholic Church: in order to purify itself and start a process of reparation (which is right and just) and reconciliation (as much as possible in a preferential option for the victims), the church needed and still needs the power of the secular state to find the truth. Historically, this is one of the many examples in history in which Catholicism has been pushed from the outside to reform itself. Theologically, the sex abuse scandal is more evidence of the dangers of an ecclesiology of perfect society, the *societas perfecta*—both in its pre-Vatican II version and in its postmodern versions—but it is especially evidence of the end of that religious ideology typical of Christendom.

It is therefore clear to me that the beginning of the twenty-first century has provided the church with abundant evidence of the

necessity of reexamining the relationship between the church and the modern world. This book tries to proceed on this path with a focus on the meaning, legacy, and reception in the world of today of Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. In these chapters I make an argument in favor of the rediscovery of paragraph 43 of *Gaudium et Spes*, which amounts to an anti-sectarian statement in Catholicism today. This book is a call for a new engagement with the ecclesiology of Vatican II that went beyond the classical, pre-Vatican II division of work between clergy (dealing with the sacred) and the laity (reconquering the secular).

The focus on *Gaudium et Spes* is not only based on the importance of the constitution itself, the last document of the council, a recapitulation of the accomplishments of the council in terms of theological method, but also on the assumption that this particular moment in the life of the church, beginning with the pontificate of Pope Francis on March 13, 2013, cannot be understood without a new appraisal of this document. The pastoral constitution has aged considerably since Vatican II and needs a historically informed hermeneutic. At the same time, *Gaudium et Spes* is a key document in the conciliar identity of this church as well as a key to understanding Pope Francis, exactly because Francis sees in *Gaudium et Spes* not a list of formulations but the manifesto of a new theological method and a new ecclesiological orientation.

This book tries to reframe the ecclesiology of Vatican II for a world "of this time" that has changed enormously since the 1960s. At the same time, it is a world Catholicism that cannot be understood theologically without the ecclesiological reorientation of the council and its culmination in *Gaudium et Spes*. Francis's use of *Gaudium et Spes* (for example, in his teachings, in his intention of calling the Bishops' Synods of 2014–2015, and in his exchanges with the Synods' conclusions) is directly connected to the way the Catholic Church, and Francis in it, reads "the signs of the times": in particular, the shift in the dialogue between church and world from modernity to postmodernity, and with it the emergence of neo-sectarian temptations and neo-integralist and neo-traditionalist

nostalgia within western Christianity, including Roman Catholicism. Francis is also a response of the global Catholic Church to these reactions. Much of the resistance against Francis within Catholicism is rooted in the nostalgia for anti-modernist church teaching and was unleashed by the challenge that Francis brought to the ideologues of a self-sufficient ideological and cultural Catholicism.

A particular focus of this book is the issue of the political culture of Vatican II and its contribution to our public debate about the future of freedom and democracy. I move from the assumption that it is impossible to understand the crisis of democracy in the western world today without a theological framework: modern Catholicism and political modernity have a very complicated relationship that historical-theological literature will need to address soon again. This has become more complicated recently, because of the disconnect between theological discourse and political and cultural elites, and because of the unlearning of the vocabulary of political Catholicism by Catholics themselves—phenomena that are related to the extinction of the old elites of political Catholicism, but that must be explained also with what happened within the ecclesial and ecclesiastical sphere.

This book represents an attempt to contribute from a Catholic perspective to the debate on the role of the church in pluralistic democracy. It is a call for a renewed theological and ecclesial engagement with our political realm during a moment of deep crisis that undermines worldwide the legitimacy of democracy. Thus far the desacralization of politics did not mean taking distance from the idolatry of ideologies and of identities. Rather, desacralization of politics today translates into the loss of the sense of a mutual commitment to others. The radical secularization of our trust in politics as a commitment to the duty of becoming neighbors is something that should invite the Catholic Church to reflect more deeply about the relations between Christian faith and *polis*. In the still fairly recent history of the twentieth century, democratic systems respectful of human rights developed in many nation states around the world: it was part of the “joys and hopes” of Vatican II. But today the nation state is incapable of dealing with globalization, and the crisis of democracy is part of this heterogenesis of the democratic idea.

Confronted with this crisis, this book makes no big claims. Rather, it is an exercise in rediscovering what has been forgotten or dismissed about the political cultures and social imagination of the Second Vatican Council. The case for a public Catholicism needs to go back to Vatican II, which defined the church “as sacrament—a sign and instrument of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race” (GS 42). The emphasis in this book is on the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, but not without renewed attention to the whole corpus of Vatican II, including the Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*) (especially in light of the US bishops’ campaign on the subject during the latest decade) and the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis*). This book can also be read as another step in my research on the ecclesiology of Vatican II and its significance in the public square, which started with other two books published by Liturgical Press, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (2012), and *Sorting Out Catholicism: A Brief History of the New Ecclesial Movements* (2014).

These reflections open with an analysis of the deep political motivations for the balance of power, defined by Vatican II, between the papacy and the bishops on one side and the clergy and religious orders on the other side, and what that new balance of power meant for the prophetic voice of the Catholic Church. The second chapter addresses the issue of the role of the new Catholic movements *ad extra* during the pontificate of Pope Francis, who has changed significantly the emphasis of the papal magisterium about this Catholic vanguard in secular and pluralistic society. The third chapter challenges one of the paradigms for the church facing pluralism—hegemony or persecution—with particular attention to the church in the United States. In a similar way, chapters 4, 5, and 6 develop a few reflections around issues that are typical of American Christianity and of American Catholicism: the complex legacy of the Constantinian age, the theological issue of the modern world in American Catholicism, and the problem of polarization in a church that Pope Francis described as a polyhedron in the foundational document of his pontificate, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Francis has reopened the ecclesiological debate on the Christian character of the Roman Catholic Church, but he has also offered a view of politics, state, and government that comes from Vatican II and from his lived experience of the council in that key part of the contemporary global Catholic Church that is Latin America. This book wants to be a contribution to an analysis of the political cultures of the Catholic Church as they were expressed at the Second Vatican Council more than fifty years ago, and as they continue to be part of the deep theological and ecclesiological consciousness of the Catholic Church worldwide.

## Chapter One

# **Inter-Ecclesial Relations and the Public Square**

## **Bishops versus Religious Orders between Vatican II and the Post–Vatican II Era**

### **Introduction**

The discourse on Catholicism in the world of today is not just influenced by our perception of *what* happened to the church and the world in these last fifty years after Vatican II. It is also driven by a perception of *who* led the church in these last fifty years. In this sense, our perception is correctly focused on the episcopate, which at Vatican II and in the post–Vatican II church has retained and strengthened its role of leadership.

But in order to capture correctly what happened to the power within the Catholic Church in these last fifty years, it is necessary to take a look at other church actors, in particular at those ecclesial actors whose ecclesial-political trajectory after Vatican II has been very different from the trajectory of the bishops. The most interesting case is that of the religious orders, also because—this is especially true of women’s religious orders—they recently became the subject of investigations by the Vatican and the bishops in the United States.<sup>1</sup> The current instances of opposition between the episcopate and the religious orders are part of the long history of

<sup>1</sup> I am referring here to the six-year-long investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the main umbrella group for the leaders of women’s religious orders in the United States.

## 2 *Catholicism and Citizenship*

the church, which in some cases changed the course of the history of such key institutions as the universities, when Thomas Aquinas in Paris changed the idea of a university by defending, against the opposition of the secular (diocesan) clergy, the right of members of religious orders to become teaching faculty.<sup>2</sup>

But the tensions of these last few years are revelatory of deep tensions within the church between different kinds of actors. These tensions, along with his interpretation of Vatican II, came to a shift with the election of Pope Francis.

### **1. Francis, the Religious Orders, and the Interpretation of Vatican II**

The pontificate of Pope Francis has introduced a paradigm shift in the way the papacy interprets Vatican II both as a corpus of documents and as an event. It is not simply a more “liberal” or “progressive” interpretation of it; instead it is seeing Vatican II as a pivotal event in church history that cannot be overshadowed by the issues surrounding the interpretation of the post-Vatican II period.

Pope Francis, who was ordained a priest in 1969, after the conclusion of the council, moves the church forward with respect to the memory of the council and, for this reason, must manage a legacy that is not that simple: during the pontificate of Benedict XVI, the subject of “Vatican II” was again the cause of controversy so that it came to characterize the Vatican’s doctrinal policy in the Ratzinger period, beyond the intentions of Pope Benedict XVI. The way in which Pope Francis “speaks” of the council with his episcopal style is also indicative of his approach to the entire previous pontificate and of the magisterial legacy of Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Francis sees in the Second Vatican Council one of the conditions of the existence of the contemporary church, without the need for the pope himself to go into fine hermeneutic distinctions to apply the council’s teach-

<sup>2</sup> See Pasquale Porro, *Thomas Aquinas: A Historical and Philosophical Profile*, trans. Joseph Trabbick and Roger W. Nutt (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016).



ings.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, Francis, the first post-conciliar pope, has in a way liberated Vatican II from the period of controversies—something that only someone not personally involved in Vatican II itself, fifty years ago, could do.

The key role of Vatican II for the pontificate is very clear in Pope Francis's most important acts and documents, from the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013) to the encyclical *Laudato Si* (May 24, 2015), and including the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (*Misericordiae Vultus*, April 11, 2015). Despite the narrative of Vatican II as the beginning of the decline for religious orders, Francis has maintained his interpretation of Vatican II also in his addresses to the religious. In Pope Francis's Apostolic Letter to All Consecrated People on November 21, 2014, he acknowledges Vatican II as the beginning of a "fruitful path of renewal that, with its lights and shadows, has been a time of grace marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit."<sup>4</sup>

This rediscovery of Vatican II is not limited only to the words and acts of the pope; it has also affected the way the Vatican deals with the religious—and here I am not referring only to the tensions with the LCWR. Francis's interpretation of Vatican II is part of this new climate. The second Letter to All Consecrated People (*Scrutate*, September 23, 2014), published by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, issues an invitation "to re-examine the steps taken in the last fifty years. In this memory Vatican II emerges as an event of extreme importance for the renewal of consecrated life."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, *Pope Francis: Tradition in Transition* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015); Massimo Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Letter to All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, November 27, 2014, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_lettera-ap\\_20141121\\_lettera-consacrati.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacrati.html).

<sup>5</sup> See Congregazione per gli Istituti di Vita Consacrata e le Società di Vita Apostolica, *Scrutate. Ai consacrati e alle consacrate in cammino sui segni di Dio* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014).

In this particular time in the history of the pontificate and of the reception of Vatican II fifty years after its conclusion, and in light of the recent developments in the role of the religious orders in the Catholic Church, it is the task of a church historian and historian of Vatican II to say something: (1) on the history of Vatican II's Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfectae Caritatis*) in the wider perspective of the entire council; (2) on contextualizing the document and its reception in light of the magisterial reception of Vatican II; (3) on the attempts to formulate a few hypotheses about the particular role of the renewal of consecrated life not just in the history of the reception in the past but as a work still to be done.

In order to do this, I will proceed, first, with a section on ecclesiology and religious orders at Vatican II; second, with a section on the reception of the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* and the ecclesiology of Vatican II; third, with a section on the relationship between ecclesiology and socio-political change and its consequences for religious life; and finally, with a section on the good use of the ecclesiology of Vatican II for religious orders and for Catholicism in the public square.

## 2. Ecclesiology and Religious Orders at Vatican II

In an analysis of the debate on the renewal of religious life at Vatican II, the first interesting fact to emerge is that anxieties about the future of the religious orders were already present in the mid-twentieth century: “concerns about declining number of vocations, aging and overworked religious, ministerial burnout, and loss of an authentic religious spiritual life were major issues for the church hierarchy in the first half of the twentieth century; they were not simply a post-Vatican II phenomenon.”<sup>6</sup>

Between the pre-Vatican II years and the years in which the council was in session, the issue of religious orders was mostly “institutional,” that is, it concerned their relationship with Rome and

<sup>6</sup>Maryanne Confoy, “Religious Life in the Vatican II Era: ‘State of Perfection’ or Living Charism?,” in *50 Years On: Probing the Riches of Vatican II*, ed. David G. Schultenover (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 393.

with their members (whether the governance of the orders should be centralized or whether there should be federations of religious orders) and their relationship with the episcopate and the local bishops (the issues of the exemption).<sup>7</sup> In this sense the debate at Vatican II is more about the *place* of religious orders and much less about their *role*, and that is why the debate on the religious at Vatican II is more a continuation of arguments that were already taking place before the council than about something belonging to the council proper.

### 2.1. Other Documents of Vatican II and the Religious

The problem was not just with what eventually became the decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, but with the theology of religious orders at Vatican II. “A majority of the bishops were opposed to including a special section on religious life because there was a belief first that religious life was not a fundamental structure of the church but rather a beautiful decoration that had developed over the course of the centuries. They thought that while it beautified the church, it wasn’t essential to the church. You could dispense with it and the church would still stand.”<sup>8</sup>

The ecclesiology of Vatican II is not only in the ecclesiological constitution and in *Gaudium et Spes*, but in all the documents. Vatican II is an act before it is a corpus of documents. Therefore, the ecclesiology of Vatican II as it concerns the religious life is visible already in the act of the council, in the way it unfolded. A paradoxical fact is that the most important theologians and periti at the council were members of religious orders, especially Dominicans and Jesuits,

<sup>7</sup> I want to thank here Alessandro Cortesi for sharing with me the draft of his commentary on the decree *Perfectae Caritatis* for the forthcoming volume in the new commentary on the documents of Vatican II published in Italian by Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna and edited by Serena Noceti and Roberto Repole (9 vols., 2014–2018). See also Joachim Schmiedl, *Das Konzil und die Orden: Krise und Erneuerung des gottgeweihten Lebens* (Vallendar-Schönstatt: Patris, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Joseph W. Tobin, “How Did We Get Here? The Renewal of Religious Life in the Church since Vatican II,” in *A Future Built on Faith: Religious Life and the Legacy of Vatican II*, ed. Gemma Simmonds (Dublin: Columba, 2014), 20.

but they never managed to bring to the table the issue of the role of the religious orders; further, in the years before Vatican II these theologians had been marginalized within their own communities in the aftermath of the sanctions issued by the Holy Office against them. The very weak presence of the religious orders at the council is even more significant for the final text of *Perfectae Caritatis* because of the division between the majority and the minority at the council. Particularly absent is the idea that “essential to religious life is the commitment to a *community* as a way of intensifying obedience to the Gospel.”<sup>9</sup> Institutionally the ecclesiology of Vatican II deals with religious orders as an element that does not quite fit the transition from a universalist church to a church made up of local churches, from a sociological and juridical ecclesiological vocabulary to a communion and sacramental one, and from an exclusivist to an inclusivist and ecumenical idea of the church.

The ecclesiological shift in the documents of Vatican II begins with the debate on the liturgy. In my book *True Reform*, I made a case for the ecclesiological role of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), the first document debated and approved by the council.<sup>10</sup> In this constitution there is a strong christological and ecumenical recentring of the liturgy, but also present is the idea that there is in a sense “one” liturgy in which the diversity of Catholicity emerges: it is a model that assumes the limitation to monastic communities of certain liturgical practices such as the liturgy of the hours. (An attempt within the liturgical commission to “monasticize” the liturgical reform was defeated.)<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Gregory Baum, “Commentary,” in *The Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life of Vatican Council II*, trans. Austin Flannery (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), 41.

<sup>10</sup>See Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup>See Massimo Faggioli, “The Pre-Conciliar Liturgical Movement in the United States and the Liturgical Reform of Vatican II,” in *La théologie catholique entre intransigeance et renouveau. La réception des mouvements préconciliaires à Vatican II*, ed. Philippe J. Roy, Gilles Routhier, and Karim Schelkens (Leuven: Brepols, 2011), 69–89.

The most direct document on ecclesiology is the Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), whose ecclesiology manifests the shift from the *societas perfecta* to a church as a communion and a people of God, from a mostly juridical vocabulary to a biblical and spiritual description. But *Lumen Gentium* also elevates the episcopate to the highest level, thus making the bishop the point of reference or the standard for the idea of ordained ministry, and it articulates the concept of the priesthood of all believers and the universal call to holiness without specifically defining the religious and consecrated.<sup>12</sup> This is especially important if we connect *Lumen Gentium* to the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) and its key message of lay apostolate as genuine participation, together with the hierarchy, in the mission of the church.

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) touches on the role of the religious in the church in multiple ways, especially two. First, it redefines the relationship between the church and the world in a way that disavows the *fuga mundi* as an option if based on the idea of a necessary separateness between church and world. This challenges the religious to reconsider the language used to describe the lifestyle of certain communities and their traditions. Second, it brings back into Catholic theology the criterion of historicity—beginning with the “signs of the times” of GS 4—as a necessary element of the consciousness of modernity, and this constitutes a challenge for religious orders and spiritual traditions called to renew themselves in restoring the legacy of the founders, many of whom were chronologically situated in a period in the history of ecclesiology that Vatican II was leaving behind, especially the medieval and Counter Reformation periods.

The Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*) assumed a few ideas about the ministry: the parish is normative for ministry, the community is composed of the faithful (with obvious problems when we connect ministry and evangelization), and the minister is in hierarchical communion with his bishop. The same

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 6 (paragraphs 43–47) of *Lumen Gentium* reveals a striking distance between that text and the reality of religious life.

assumptions are operative in the Decree on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops (*Christus Dominus*). Quoting John O'Malley, we can say that "for all their merit *Christus Dominus*, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, and *Optatam Totius* do not take into sufficient account the tradition of ministry and priesthood in the religious orders."<sup>13</sup> In particular, the understanding of ministry found in *Presbyterorum Ordinis* is difficult to reconcile with the *ad extra* dimension of the church of Vatican II as described in the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), and in the views on atheism found in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*.

The ecclesiology of Vatican II opens a new path for the role of the religious in the church, but mostly in an indirect way—for the *spaces* opened by the council are for the church in general without a specific *role* for the religious. In this sense there is a precise historical-theological turn in the ecclesiology of Vatican II that is difficult to reconcile with the role of the religious. *First*, the ecclesiology of Vatican II comes from a *patristic model centered on the bishop, the local church, and its presbyterium*, with a substantial dismissal of other models of Christian community. *Second*, the other pole, the "universal church," is identified much more with *the papacy and the college of bishops* around him than with other expressions of Catholic "globalism," such as the religious orders. *Third*, the ecclesiology of Vatican II considers the patristic model and *the first millennium as much more normative than the second millennium* and especially sees itself as a new age after the end of the Counter Reformation period (including the "long nineteenth century" of which John O'Malley writes in his *What Happened at Vatican II*)<sup>14</sup>—which is exactly the period of expansion of the religious orders.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For this section, see John W. O'Malley, "Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life: Some Historical and Historiographical Considerations," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988): 223–57, at 253.

<sup>14</sup> See John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> See Neil Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church: An Experiment in Systematic-Historical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 329–31. See also

## 2.2. *Perfectae Caritatis* between Return to the Origins and *Aggiornamento*

Now if we look at the Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, the picture becomes more interesting in light of the history of the decree. It is not a mystery that the history of *Perfectae Caritatis* is one of the most complicated in the whole history of the documents of Vatican II. Here we see one of the “dark sides” of the very important—indeed, pivotal—focus of Vatican II on the episcopate and episcopal collegiality: not only the clergy but also the religious orders were overlooked in the council’s ecclesiological debate of Vatican II. The complicated history of *Perfectae Caritatis* is a good example of how the bishops at Vatican II dealt with an issue that was uncomfortable for most of them.

The schema on the religious started as a juridical-canonical text that avoided theological issues, which were reserved to the doctrinal commission steered by the Holy Office. Since the preparation period (1960–1962) and for a good part of the debate at the council, the attention was almost exclusively focused on the issue of the exemption of the religious orders from the jurisdiction of the local bishops in their dioceses: the bishops at Vatican II had a problem with both the Roman Curia and the religious orders because they were both limiting their monarchical power.

It became clear, as the council unfolded, that if it was true that a council was addressing the reform of religious orders for the first time after Trent (session XXV, *Decretum de Regularibus et Monialibus*), it was also true that the criterion of the *aggiornamento* was simply an invitation to the religious to restore the legacy of the founders in tension with a general renewal or reform of the church.<sup>16</sup> (Noteworthy here is the absence of women in the commission compared with the

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Severino Dianich, “L’episcopato, ovvero la figura dell’uno. Rilettura teologica,” in *Da Montini a Martini: il Vaticano II a Milano*, vol. 1: *Le figure*, ed. Gilles Routhier, Luca Bressan, and Luciano Vaccaro (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2012), 221–41.

<sup>16</sup> See Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Struggle for the Council during the Preparation of Vatican II (1960–1962),” in *History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, English version ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. 1 (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), esp. 185–87.

importance of women religious in the church). The tensions between these two poles—the return to the origins and *aggiornamento* in a church in a new relationship with the modern world—was also evident during the debate on chapter 4 of *De Ecclesia*, which became chapter 6 of *Lumen Gentium*. The marginalization of the debate on the religious during the second session in 1963 put the issue “in a limbo” that was revealing of the council’s lack of preparation to debate it.<sup>17</sup> The idea of *accommodata renovatio* (return to the origins and *aggiornamento* for the modern world) became the guiding principle given by the coordinating commission of the council to the commission *de religiosis* on November 29, 1963—but under the threat that many juridical aspects of the reform would be postponed to the reform of the Code of Canon Law. The commission decided on the title *De Accommodata Renovatio Vitae Religiosae* in October 1964, which was also the title of the Roman Curia Congregation’s decree *De Religiosis* of March 26, 1956.<sup>18</sup> (But interestingly enough, *Perfectae Caritatis* is the only Vatican II document that does *not* quote papal documents).

Now, *Perfectae Caritatis* (issued October 28, 1965) does not ignore the ecclesiological turn made at Vatican II; rather, it reflects the council’s ecclesiology and especially that of *Lumen Gentium*, of a church with a diversity of gifts in relation with one another and open to the kingdom. There is a clear change from the “hierarcological ecclesiology” described by Yves Congar as typical of the pre-Vatican II period, and there is an ecclesiology that makes room for the role of the Holy Spirit.

But *Perfectae Caritatis* also contains some of the limitations of the council’s ecclesiology, especially in the option not to use the term *charisma* that was mentioned in the speeches in the aula during the

<sup>17</sup> See Alberto Melloni, “The Beginning of the Second Period: The Great Debate on the Church,” in *History of Vatican II* (New York: Orbis, 2000), 3:91–93.

<sup>18</sup> See Joachim Schmiedl, commentary to *Perfectae Caritatis*, in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, ed. Peter Hünemann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2005), 3:512.



debate but was ultimately expunged from the texts in their final versions.<sup>19</sup> The uncertainty of the council's ecclesiology on religious orders is not completely different from the uncertainty about other charismatic presences in the life of the church, such as the new ecclesial movements.<sup>20</sup>

There is an oscillation between the council's emphasis on the baptismal dignity and its ecclesiology on the one hand, and, on the other, more traditional passages focused on the idea of the superiority and excellence of the "state of perfection" (PC 1; PC 5–6; PC 14). And there are other limitations not derived from the other Vatican II texts, especially a theology of religious life that draws on the traditional idea of the division between different "states of perfection."

What is clear in the ecclesiology of Vatican II is an emphasis on a given idea of ministry that is not part of the conciliar document on religious life: only paragraphs 8 and 20 of *Perfectae Caritatis* are devoted to ministry. What emerges clearly is that at Vatican II we have a paradox about the renewal of religious life and religious orders: the movement does not come from the religious orders themselves and not from the bishops belonging to a religious order (see the 1964 debate), but only from the whole ecclesiological debate that took place at the council. This is a key element to understanding the reception of the document and the renewal of the religious orders after Vatican II.

### **3. Religious Orders and Post-Conciliar Ecclesiology**

The reception of *Perfectae Caritatis* must be read in the context of the reception of Vatican II in general and of its ecclesiology in particular.

<sup>19</sup>The idea of "charisma of the founder" or "of the institute" is present only and in a very tangential way in the decree on missionary activity *Ad Gentes* 23. See Yuji Sugawara, "Concetto teologico e giuridico del "carisma di fondazione" degli istituti di vita consacrata," *Periodica* 9 (2002): 239–71.

<sup>20</sup>About this, see Massimo Faggioli, *Sorting Out Catholicism: A Brief History of the New Ecclesial Movements*, trans. Demetrio S. Yocum (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

The very first reception of Vatican II's ecclesiology happened during the council itself, with what German ecclesiologist Hermann Pottmeyer called the "unfortunate change" from *communio* to *hierarchica communio* in the "Nota Explicativa Praevia" to *Lumen Gentium* (November 1964)<sup>21</sup>—a change that corrected the course of post-Vatican II ecclesiology even before all the conciliar documents were approved. The tension emerging around the *Nota* was foreshadowing, if not creating, the tensions of the post-conciliar period.

We have in post-Vatican II ecclesiological discourse a series of tensions, but also a certain history of different ecclesiological "seasons": the decentralization of the 1970s (thanks also to the liturgical reform); the shift from the "ecclesiology of the people of God" to the "ecclesiology of *communio*" in the 1980s (especially after the 1985 Extraordinary Synod on the reception of Vatican II); the recentralization of the 1990s (letter of the CDF *Communio in Notio*, 1992; *motu proprio Apostolos Suos*, 1998); the "universal versus local" debate in the 2000s (the Ratzinger-Kasper public exchange); the rediscussion of the hermeneutic of Vatican II with all its ecclesiological repercussions during the pontificate of Benedict XVI.

All these ecclesiological tensions overshadow another simple fact. The post-conciliar period since the 1970s, after only a few years of lasting consensus, sees a growing rift between theologians and hierarchy who had worked well together at Vatican II. It is a period when the life of the church receives the message of Vatican II but at the same time the life of the church proves and develops much more quickly in directions not foreseen by the council fathers and the documents they approved. The new role of *the laity in the church on the one hand* and the renewed role of the *bishops and the papacy on the other hand* demonstrate a lack of attention paid to the clergy and the religious. In this sense, what we can call the "post-conciliar neo-institutionalism" embraced by the magisterium (especially with John Paul II) favored bishops (the backbone of the institution) and laity (who can easily bypass the institutional mechanisms), but put in

<sup>21</sup> Hermann J. Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I and II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1998), 113.

a difficult situation those called to mediate between the institution and the reality on the ground, that is, the clergy and, in a particularly complicated situation, the religious orders. Stephen Schloesser correctly identifies with the functionalist ecclesiology of Vatican II (especially in *Lumen Gentium*) whatever excluded (or tried to exclude) prophecy in the church and especially female influence in the church.<sup>22</sup>

The religious not only have a part in mediating between the institution and the reality on the ground; they must also negotiate between clerical identity and charismatic voice in the church and in their own communities, and between institutional status quo and prophetic call in the transition from a monocultural, Eurocentric, and western Catholic Church to a truly global church, in ways that are not always charted by the texts or even by the debates of Vatican II.<sup>23</sup>

This situation expresses itself in the documents of the post-conciliar period: the 1978 Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church (*Mutuae Relationes*) issued by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes;<sup>24</sup> the new Code of Canon Law promulgated by John Paul II in 1983; the 1983 document

<sup>22</sup> See Stephen R. Schloesser, “‘Dancing on the Edge of the Volcano’: Biopolitics and What Happened after Vatican II,” in *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Charting a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul Crowley (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 3–26, esp. 19–20.

<sup>23</sup> See Diana de Vallescar Palanca, *Ordensleben interkulturell: Eine neue Vision* (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2008); *Wind of Change. Orden am Beginn des dritten Jahrtausends*, ed. Andreas Redtenbacher and Joachim Schmiedl (Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and Sacred Congregation for the bishops, *Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church*, May 14, 1978, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsrlife\\_doc\\_14051978\\_mutuae-relationes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc_con_ccsrlife_doc_14051978_mutuae-relationes_en.html). At the meeting with religious superiors held November 29, 2013, Pope Francis urged a reform of the document regulating the relationship between bishops and religious congregations: see Pope Francis, *Illuminate il futuro. Una conversazione raccontata da Antonio Spadaro* (Milano: Ancora, 2015), 35–36.

*Essentials of Religious Life* that tended to reduce religious life to a monastic model;<sup>25</sup> and a year later the apostolic exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* to the religious and women religious about their consecration in the light of the mystery of redemption.<sup>26</sup> The publication of the new Code of Canon Law in 1983 is also crucial for the new terminology used to define the religious life in order to include the consideration of the forms of secular institutes and societies of apostolic life and the *ordo virginum*: it is the notion of “consecrated life” that is justified at the time for its rootedness in baptism, but it still reflects a vocabulary of separation, suggesting the clericalization of religious life rather than the prophetic call of the religious. “Consecration” is chosen over other options such as “sequela Christi.”

This becomes evident at the Synod on Consecrated Life in 1994, which was followed two years later by the publication of the apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, a document that, while presenting some meaningful insights, basically draws from a revival of a theological approach concerning the different “states of life”—the three traditional “states” of the laity, ordained ministers, and consecrated persons—and emphasizes the theology of consecration.<sup>27</sup> It is also interesting to see that in the *Lineamenta* for the Synod on evangelization of 2012 the consecrated life was mentioned *after* the new ecclesial movements.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching on Religious Life as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate*, May 31, 1983, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccsrlife\\_doc\\_31051983\\_magisterium-on-religious-life\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsrlife/documents/rc_con_ccsrlife_doc_31051983_magisterium-on-religious-life_en.html).

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, apostolic exhortation *Redemptionis Donum*, March 25, 1984, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031984\\_redemptionis-donum.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031984_redemptionis-donum.html).

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, March 25, 1996, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_25031996\\_vita-consecrata.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_25031996_vita-consecrata.html).

<sup>28</sup> See Vivienne Keely, “Aspects of Mission in Religious Life since the Second Vatican Council,” in *A Future Built on Faith: Religious Life and the Legacy of Vatican II*, ed. Gemma Simmonds (Dublin: Columba, 2014), 81–102.

In this sense, it is striking to see the difference between the trajectories of the role of the religious orders and of the new Catholic movements in the magisterium during these last thirty years. The new ecclesial movements were given a substantial preference over the religious orders. But it is interesting to remember that the leaders and apologists of Catholic ecclesial movements of the post-conciliar period have been eager to be identified in their official reconstructions and foundational myths with the origins of the religious orders. During the 1980s and 1990s, the rhetoric of the new Catholic movements as “heirs” of the medieval mendicant orders, the religious orders of the early modern age, and Tridentine Catholicism (especially of the Jesuits in the case of Opus Dei, which tried to reclaim for twentieth-century Catholicism the same role played by the Society of Jesus in the post-Trent period) became part of the apologetics of the post-conciliar Catholic movements.<sup>29</sup>

This rhetoric allowed the movements to avoid, once again, coming to terms with the ecclesiological turning point represented by Vatican II—a coming to terms that the religious orders could not avoid. From an ecclesiological viewpoint, we can observe that certain analogies between the new movements and the medieval mendicant orders, often reiterated for apologetic purposes, implied a dismissal of Vatican II, its ecclesiology, and its overall vision of the baptized as “people of God.” In an uncommonly clear fashion, the Italian ecclesiologist Severino Dianich observed that “the new Catholic groups arise from a constant spur, that is, the feeling of a fundamental inadequacy of the local church with regard to its mission and to the demands of an authentic evangelical existence. The question is, how far can we go with this verdict of inadequacy?”<sup>30</sup> It is now clear that this “verdict of inadequacy” extended also to the religious orders that do not have the luxury of the freedom to navigate the system of the Catholic Church with the same fluctuations typical of

<sup>29</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, *The Rising Laity: Ecclesial Movements since Vatican II* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016), 87–112.

<sup>30</sup> Severino Dianich, “Le nuove comunità e la “grande chiesa”: un problema ecclesologico,” *La Scuola Cattolica* 116 (1988): 512–29.

some of the new Catholic movements: between ultramontanism and neo-gallicanism, between hyperclericalism and lay empowerment, between radical openness to the world and withdrawal from the world, between democratic self-government and cult-like obedience to the charisma of the founder.

#### 4. Religious Orders in the Church after Vatican II: A Few Hypotheses

These last few decades have coincided with a moment of tension for the role of religious in the church, and not only because of Vatican doctrinal policy. As an ecclesiohistorian and a church historian, I have three hypotheses for these tensions, hypotheses that try to go beyond the caricature of a simple power struggle (granted that power struggles exist in the church) but that take seriously what Jorge Mario Bergoglio said in his intervention at the 1994 Synod on Consecrated Life: “we can reflect upon the consecrated life only from the inside of the church, looking at the inter-ecclesial relations that consecrated life implies.”<sup>31</sup>

The issue at the center of the first hypothesis is the relationship between religious and episcopate. *The first hypothesis* develops around the idea that, in order to understand the role of the religious in the church of tomorrow we also need a reflection on the *development of the relationship among church, society, and political community*, and not just an intra-Catholic analysis of the changes in ecclesiology compared to the changes in the real life of the church and of the religious. The big change in ecclesiology that had to do with the role of the religious in these last fifty years concerns the change in the perception of religious life after Vatican II. On the one hand there is the obvious consideration that the “universal call to holiness” has redefined the position of the clergy but especially of

<sup>31</sup> See Giuseppe Ferraro, *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi. Nona Assemblea Generale Ordinaria (2–30 ottobre 1994)* (Rome: La Civiltà Cattolica, 1998), 278 (“Non si può riflettere sulla vita consacrata se non dall’interno della Chiesa, sottolineando i rapporti inter-ecclesiali che essa implica”).

the consecrated and members of the religious orders. Less obvious, however, is the fact that the role of the religious has been redefined by factors that are non-theological and non-ecclesiological, but social and in a sense “political.” Many services provided by the religious orders in the last few centuries have been taken up by the political community and have become part of the social contract. In this sense, the hidden element in the redefinition of the religious in the post-Vatican II period is the new acknowledgment of the secular realm (decolonization and the rise of constitutional democracies, the state, the government, the welfare state) by the church at the council. The papacy, the episcopacy, and the clergy have *not* gone through the radical redefinition that religious orders had to go through: the history of the religious orders between the French Revolution and the 1905 “Law of Separation” between church and State in France is instructive in this respect.<sup>32</sup> Religious and consecrated *lost a significant part of their role in the church and in society and politics* and they did not get (at least symbolically) from the church nor from the secular state the “reparations” that the institutional Catholic Church (the Holy See and the bishops) got in terms of political recognition during the twentieth century.

*The second hypothesis* develops some reflections on the new forms of “religious lifestyles” in the Catholic Church in the last century and touches on the relationship between the religious and new forms of communal life in the church in light of the clerical/lay identity. The ecclesiology of the *duo genera Christianorum* was no longer normative even before Vatican II started, if we just remember the new developments for the new “secular institutes” already under Pius XI and Pius XII.<sup>33</sup> Vatican II underdevelops the already existing variety of forms of Christian life by enhancing the laity through the “universal call to holiness” and strengthening the power of the

<sup>32</sup> See Christian Sorrel, *La République contre les congregations. Histoire d'une passion française (1899–1904)* (Paris: Cerf, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> See here the contribution of the young Giuseppe Dossetti to the papal magisterium: see Enrico Galavotti, *Il giovane Dossetti. Gli anni della formazione 1916–1939* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006), 205–15.

bishops by a “constitutionalization” of collegiality, thus leaving the religious orders in a difficult situation. The council’s ecclesiology had ignored the specific role of the religious orders. We could say that if Vatican II—which for some is the equivalent of the French Revolution for Catholicism<sup>34</sup>—acknowledged the importance of freedom for the church (*liberté*) and equality of all the baptized (*égalité*), it nonetheless failed to include in the “constitution” of the Catholic Church the element of fraternity (*fraternité*) by failing, in its theology of the religious orders, to identify fraternity as the link between the society of citizens of the world and the community of men and women in the faith.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the specific social role of the religious orders was increasingly taken away by the secularization of social services in the modern administrative state, in an incongruous alliance between conciliar theology and the modern state.<sup>36</sup> On the one side, however, the work of charity is part of the essence of the church and cannot be outsourced or absorbed by the social services of the state;<sup>37</sup> on the other side, the legacy of the religious orders and of the different ways of being part of a religious order did not get lost. The services provided by many of the new Catholic movements are in the tradition of the religious orders (education, formation, welfare, prison ministry, and so forth). But what allows the new Catholic movements to play the role of the early religious orders is an institutional “lightness” (the non-clerical status of the members, their lifestyle, the relations with the church hierarchy, their relations with modern culture, their social and political engagement, and so forth) that the religious orders have lost in the centralization and

<sup>34</sup> About this accusation, originating from the Lefebvrites’ rejection of Vatican II, see John W. O’Malley, “The Style of Vatican II,” *America* (February 24, 2003): 12–15.

<sup>35</sup> About this, see Marcello Neri, *Giustizia come misericordia. Europa, cristianesimo e spiritualità dehoniana* (Bologna: EDB, 2016), 113.

<sup>36</sup> On this issue, see also Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), 185–205.

<sup>37</sup> See Benedict XVI, encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* 25–28; [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html).



clericalization of the church during the last couple of centuries.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the prophetic and radical nature of the religious could survive better in new Catholic groups that had a different kind of relationship with the institution, also because they were “protected” by their lay status. In a church that had become, for many reasons, less hospitable to them, religious orders had to carry the burden of their clerical status and of being on the margins, or the burden of being “differently clerical” (if you allow me) but without the benefits of the freedom of lay Catholics, who now have the luxury of behaving like the clergy and the consecrated with all the benefits that a situation *de facto* and *extra legem* provides.

*The third hypothesis* touches on the relationship between the role of the religious in the church of today and the history of the debate on Vatican II. *Both the nostalgic defense of the council and the anti-Vatican II traditionalist mind-set prove incapable of developing a creative vision for a new role of the religious in the church of tomorrow.* The veterans’ sentimentality for the church of Vatican II underestimates the weakness of the reflection of the council on the religious and the rapid development of new issues (ecclesiological and others) that require that we *begin from the council without stopping there.* The anti-Vatican II traditionalists are, on the other hand, ready to ignore that the issues surrounding the role of the religious orders were not created by the council but were there already. For the traditionalist narrative that is at the heart of the anti-Vatican II sentiment the need to preserve the prophetic role of the religious in the church is evidently missing because the anti-Vatican II narrative is largely (although not only) a “status quo ante narrative”<sup>39</sup>—and we all know that prophecy and status quo are not good travel companions. In this respect it would be interesting to see the relations

<sup>38</sup> About the different kinds of relationship between church and political power and its impact on religious orders, see Sandra Schneiders, *Buying the Field: Catholic Religious Life in Mission to the World*, Religious Life in a New Millennium 3 (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), esp. 10–23.

<sup>39</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012).

between the development of the “Jesus studies” in academia and the rise of Jesus as the paradigm of Christian life in our secular age, on the one hand, and the reception of these studies among traditionalist Catholics, on the other hand, in order to understand the impact of this “new” paradigm (much stronger than institutional ones) on the perception of the religious orders in the church. Studies of the life of Jesus have emphasized the prophetic nature of his actions: his close contact with poor people, his relationship to his social environment, his perception of the needs of others as a call to service, and a dedication to the gospel in line with listening to the signs of the times. Pope Francis said to the Poor Clare sisters in Assisi on October 4, 2013 that the typical element of the consecrated is to be prophets that witness the way Jesus lived on this earth, witnessing therefore also the humanity of Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup> But maybe in the life of the church, including the communities of consecrated, we are still far from comprehending the radical conversion required by the option of choosing the humanity of Jesus as a model. A definition of ministries established once and for all does not answer the needs of the mission, which should be not the description of what “we think of us” (as it is today in the corporate world), but a challenge. A lot of what defines mission and ministry in the church has changed in these last fifty years, and that is even truer for the role of the religious.

## **5. Vatican II, Religious Orders, and Catholicism in the Public Square Today**

Is it still worth looking at Vatican II for the future of the religious orders in the church? I think it is, provided we can distinguish between what we can learn from Vatican II, what we can leave behind, and what we can reclaim and develop for the future of the church.

*What we can leave behind* is the intellectual neglect of the particularity of the religious orders because of an ecclesiological debate

<sup>40</sup> See Pope Francis’s Address to the Cloistered Nuns in Assisi, October 4, 2013, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2013/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20131004\\_monache-assisi.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2013/october/documents/papa-francesco_20131004_monache-assisi.html).

centered on issues of power (clergy versus laity; universal versus local; bishops versus religious). The claim of the episcopacy to be the sole power holder in the church looks particularly old-fashioned today, and not primarily for theological reasons. The idea that the church is centered on the diocese and parish is something that Vatican II takes from Trent much more than is usually acknowledged. In the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy the council spoke of the parish in the context of the theology of a Eucharistic local church, but the issue of the parish and of the parish clergy was addressed very randomly and casually. On the other hand, in the post-conciliar ecclesiological magisterium the emphasis on *communio* (at the expense of the ecclesiology of the people of God) was one of the causes of the weakening of the theology of church structures.<sup>41</sup> The current parish model, if it is the only model, is clearly not sustainable for the future of the church. The centrality of the parish model developed in Christendom and modern Europe as the key institution of a Catholic Church with a territorial dimension and jurisdiction that was supposed to mirror the jurisdiction of the secular, political counterpart, that is, the state. That parallelism and competition no longer works theologically or politically: the relations between what is religious and what is political are no longer defined by church and state and by geographical and juridical boundaries, and the liminal characteristic of the religious orders corresponds to the needs of the church in the present situation, provided that is not too late to recover a role for the religious orders.

*What needs to be reclaimed and developed from Vatican II* is much, and in particular from the new emphasis on Vatican II under Pope Francis. First, Francis's ecclesiology has given new legitimacy to the idea of inculturation related to evangelization, something that the religious are in a privileged position to do if compared with the role of the hierarchical church.<sup>42</sup> Second, Francis's focus is eschatological

<sup>41</sup> See Giampietro Ziviani, *Una Chiesa di popolo. La parrocchia nel Vaticano II* (Bologna: EDB, 2011).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Francis's conversation with the Union of Superiors General at the end of their eighty-second assembly in Rome, on November 29, 2013, in Pope Francis, *Illuminate il futuro*, 22–23.

and prophetic much more than ecclesiological; in this sense the ecclesiological weaknesses of Vatican II for the religious orders are going to be less of an obstacle. Third, it is a matter of institution, which the council did not reform, and charisma. Francis's reading of the council favors a post-institutional ecclesiology that works not only through the system but also beyond and if necessary without it. The charismatic element is being rediscovered after it was undervalued and under suspicion for a long time, even in the post-conciliar period. In a church that defends the poor and marginalized, it is clear that the religious orders are a prime example of a church that is not a flight from the world, but "a flight from the power structures of the Empire" of today.<sup>43</sup> In an evangelizing church, the role of the religious is more important than it has been: "Religious live in the revolving door of the church, figuratively speaking. We meet people on their path into and on their way from the Church."<sup>44</sup>

Overall, if we want to understand the Second Vatican Council and its impact on the church we have to consider its macro-shifts, and in particular the three main insights of the council as recently summarized by one of its most important interpreters, German-French Jesuit Christoph Theobald.<sup>45</sup> The first insight of Vatican II is a "genetic vision of the Christian and ecclesial existence" (connected to the auto-revelation of God in Jesus Christ): the ultimate reference for the relationship between church and society (but also between the church and its members) is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and particularly normative is the "style of Jesus."<sup>46</sup> The *sequela Christi* finds a privileged example close to the margins, just as Jesus of Nazareth

<sup>43</sup> See Gemma Simmonds, "Epilogue I: Vatican II—Whose Inheritance?," in Simmonds, *A Future Built on Faith*, 150.

<sup>44</sup> Keely, "Aspects of Mission in Religious Life since the Second Vatican Council," in Simmonds, *A Future Built on Faith*, 96.

<sup>45</sup> See Christoph Theobald, *Le Concile Vatican II. Quel avenir?* (Paris: Cerf, 2015), 159–80.

<sup>46</sup> See also Christoph Theobald, *Christianisme comme style. Une manière de faire de la théologie en postmodernité*, 2 vols. (Paris: Cerf, 2007).

was a “marginal Jew” (to quote the title of John P. Meier’s work)—not only of society but also of the institutional church.<sup>47</sup>

The second is Vatican II’s intuition of a “manner of proceeding”: the church of Vatican II is a synodal and communional church that learns from the *modus agendi* of Christ and his *modus conversationis*. This marks the difference (but not a separation) between our “congregating” as Christians and our life in society and the “life in community.” The style of communal living is not just an example of a certain *modus conversationis* to the whole church (in which collegiality is severely underdeveloped) and to the world, but also part of the unfinished business of the council (it is noteworthy that at a certain moment in the debate on bishops and dioceses the council was about to recommend communal living for *all* diocesan priests).<sup>48</sup> The *modus conversationis* of the religious orders has a deep ecclesial meaning, but it also sends a political message about the relations between Catholicism and democracy: the way religious orders have governed themselves was the start of the history of democracy, no less than the history of conciliarism.<sup>49</sup> The “constitutional organization” of the religious orders has always been a great source of institutional wisdom in the Catholic Church, and Pope Francis’s innovations in church governance, especially the creation of the “Council of cardinals” announced four weeks after his election, are the latest evidence of that.

The third intuition is of “a Church in history and society”—a church that is “at the service of the Kingdom” where “Christian vocation is at the service of the call to be human” in a “diaconal way

<sup>47</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, “Vatican II and the Church of the Margins,” *Theological Studies* 74 (September 2013): 808–18.

<sup>48</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, *Il vescovo e il concilio. Modello episcopale e aggiornamento al Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> See Léon Moulin, “Sanior et major pars. Note sur l’évolution des techniques électorales dans les ordres religieux du VI<sup>e</sup> au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 35 (1958): 367–97 and 490–529; Léon Moulin, “Une source méconnue de la philosophie politique marsilienne : l’organisation constitutionnelle des ordres religieux,” *Revue française de science politique* 33, no. 1 (1983): 5–13.

to express what is distinctive about Christianity.”<sup>50</sup> This calls into question our hierarchical understanding of the church as well as what Theobald calls “all those authoritarian pastoral strategies that do not work through the charisms and through those signs given effectively to the local communities and societies.”<sup>51</sup> The charismatic element is one of the few safeguards for a truly Catholic countercultural agenda that does not want to turn ideological.

All this considered, the ecclesiology of Vatican II is a framework for the future of the religious, and the renewal of the church in light of the council relies on the contribution of the religious probably more than the institutional church is eager to concede. What happened in the post-conciliar church was not just a weakening of the role of religious orders in the church; it was also a shift toward a church relying more and more on a new kind of church membership, that of the new ecclesial movements, which could be seen not just as the new laity, but also as the successor of the religious orders in the role of the competitors of the parish-based church. In this sense, the pontificate of Francis offers new perspectives about the role of this particular kind of laity.

<sup>50</sup> Theobald, *Le Concile Vatican II*, 176.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.