

**ECCLESIAL CONVERSION AFTER VATICAN II:
RENEWING “THE FACE OF THE CHURCH” TO REFLECT “THE
GENUINE FACE OF GOD”**

(as presented on Saturday, June 8, 2013)

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Conversion for the individual Christian is a constant calling, embedded in the tug of faith itself. God is always drawing the believer to deeper and deeper intimacy with God, away from a self-absorbed life to a Godward-directed life, and to a way of living that embraces self-giving love—“Love God with all your heart”; “Love your neighbor as yourself.” So too with ecclesial conversion. God continually calls the church, as a people, to greater fidelity to God in its covenant commitment as a community of faith, to a more authentic worship, to a spirit of reconciliation within and outside the community, and to a deeper commitment to generosity, justice, and compassion.

Like other councils before it, the Second Vatican Council set out to reform the Catholic Church. As Pope John Paul II later saw it, in *Ut Unum Sint*: “In the teaching of the Second Vatican Council there is a clear connection between renewal, conversion and reform.”¹ Moreover, he says: “The council calls for personal conversion as well as for communal conversion.”² According to Ladislav Štýrsky, the council meeting was “an event of conversion.”³ Joseph Ratzinger called it a “spiritual awakening” for the church.⁴ This conversion event and the call to ecclesial conversion, which its documents encapsulate, continue to challenge us.

In my paper this morning, I propose that Vatican II, in turning anew to God, marks a conversion of the Catholic ecclesial imagination. Specifically, I argue this entails a refashioning of the church’s understanding of the divine-human relationship in history. This includes the divine-ecclesial relationship and, consequently, relationships within the church. I will then select just two particular dimensions of the council’s call for ongoing ecclesial conversion that remain unfulfilled.

Part I

The actual Latin noun *conversio* appears only 12 times in the Vatican II documents; the verb *convertere*, 26 times.⁵ Many references relate either to new

¹ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, no. 16.

² *Ibid.*, no. 15.

³ Ladislav Štýrsky, “Law for Life: Canon Law After the Council,” in *Receiving the Council: Theological and Canonical Insights and Debates* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), 74–90, at 79.

⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 194.

⁵ See Philippe Delhaye, Michel Guéret, and Paul Tombeur, eds., *Concilium Vaticanum II: Concordance, Index, Listes de fréquence, Tables comparatives*, Informatique et étude de textes 7 (Louvain: Publications du CETÉDOC, 1974), 148.

Christian converts or, for those already converted, to a closer adherence to Christian life. For example, *Lumen Gentium* speaks of “continual conversion” (*conversione continua*) in the lives of lay people.⁶ *Unitatis Redintegratio*, in the context of “spiritual ecumenism,” states: “There can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without interior conversion (*interiore conversione*).”⁷

However, a philological analysis of the technical words for “conversion” throughout the documents does not give us the full picture. We need also to examine the word usage of other overlapping, related themes, concerning the church “turning to God.” A cluster of Latin nouns and their verb forms captures the themes most closely related to ecclesial conversion: renewal, purification, reform, restoration, change, updating, adaptation, development.⁸ Of these, renewal and renew (*renovatio* and *renovare*) are the most often used.⁹

The post-conciliar literature tends to focus on the pair of terms “renewal” and “reform.”¹⁰ There are different views among the interpreters of Vatican II. Some propose that the council makes a clear distinction between their meanings—“renewal” relates only to personal and collective spiritual transformation, and “reform” only to institutional and structural change. For example, Christoph Theobald proposes that the two terms “renewal” and “reform” in the final documents capture two juxtaposed perspectives, one in *Lumen Gentium* and the other in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, both promulgated on the same day.¹¹ Others, including Joseph Ratzinger, propose that, according to the council, only personal conversion is needed, and reform of the church as a collective will automatically follow, including institutional change.¹²

I believe the conclusion of Peter de Mey is convincing in his study of these terms in the council debates and final documents. He proposes that, although these two terms are not exactly synonymous and each term has its own nuances, the council

⁶ LG, no. 35.

⁷ UR, no. 7.

⁸ The Latin forms are *renovatio*, *purificatio*, *reformatio*, *instauratio*, *mutatio*, *accommodatio*, *aptatio*, *evolutio*. The verb forms are *renovare*, *purificare*, *reformare*, *instaurare*, *mutare*, *accommodare*, *aptare*, and *evolvere*. In a few cases, only the noun or the verb form is found.

⁹ For a discussion of all instances of these words, see Peter De Mey, “Church renewal and Reform in the Documents of Vatican II: History, Theology, Terminology,” *The Jurist* 71 (2011): 360–400. See also, John O’Malley, “‘The Hermeneutic of Reform’: A Historical Analysis,” *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 517–46, at 536–42.

¹⁰ With regards to the related terms “renewal” and “reform”, Peter de Mey writes: “a more profound study on renewal and reform in the documents of Vatican II would also need to pay attention to the relation between the council’s explicit references to renewal and reform and its entire ecclesiology” (De Mey, “Church renewal and Reform,” 400).

¹¹ For Theobald’s interpretation, see Christoph Theobald, “The Theological Options of Vatican II: Seeking an ‘Internal’ Principle of Interpretation,” in *Vatican II: A Forgotten Future?*, ed. Alberto Melloni and Christoph Theobald (London: SCM Press, 2005), 87–107.

¹² On this position in the thought of Joseph Ratzinger, see Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology. Fundamentals of Ecclesiology with Reference to Lumen Gentium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 194–97; 425–29.

was using these two overlapping terms in reference to individual and collective spiritual transformation, as well as structural change on the institutional level.¹³

Vatican II called for conversion on all levels of ecclesial life: personal, collective, institutional, and structural. Setting up any sharp dichotomy between any of these levels, for example, between the spiritual renewal of individuals in the church, and organizational, structural reform of the institutional church is a false dichotomy. Ecclesial conversion involves all levels. The great historian of ecclesial reform, Gerhart Ladner, highlighted that writers in the early centuries mainly conceived of reform as “personal transformation.”¹⁴ Yet recent commentators have rejected Ladner’s sharp distinction between the categories of “reform” and “conversion.”¹⁵ Certainly, as Avery Dulles notes: “In the ancient church, the idea of reform was operative almost from the beginnings, but the early [patristic] reformers were concerned with the reformation of persons in the Church rather than with the reformation of the Church itself.” However, as Dulles goes on to note, “Only in the middle ages did it become apparent that in some cases moral and spiritual reform could not be achieved without doctrinal and structural reform.”¹⁶ Yves Congar’s work highlights examples in church history that demonstrate the ideal; he calls them “reforms which were both spiritual and structural.”¹⁷ This is certainly the vision of Vatican II.¹⁸

¹³ De Mey concludes his careful examination of the philological usage in all the relevant final documents, as well as the oral and written interventions of the bishops during their drafting: “My historical research has...shown that the majority of the fathers intervening in the debate on *De oecumenismo* did not in the first instance make a contrast between renewal and reform but rather asked that the plea for internal church renewal be complemented with the issue of the (external) renewal of the church...When the bishops proposed to improve the paragraph on church renewal, they found inspiration in the *aggiornamento* programme of Pope John XXIII; but they also regularly referred to Paul VI. In my opinion one should not separate *Unitatis Redintegratio* and *Lumen Gentium* too much. The reflections on ecumenism in the former presuppose what the latter had to say on the relation of communion which the Catholic Church maintains with non-Catholics”(De Mey, “Church Renewal and Reform,” 386). Regarding the original pastoral vision of Pope John XXIII, which was deliberately endorsed and became the agenda of the council body itself, Yves Congar notes: “John XXIII more than once described the aim of the Second Vatican Council as, optimally, both a renewal of the pastoral structures of the Church (the emphasis was often put, at first, on the revision of canon law), and a renewal—an increase—of faith and Christian life” (Yves Congar, “Renewal of the Spirit and Reform of the Institution,” in *Readings in Church Authority: Gifts and Challenges for Contemporary Catholicism*, ed. Gerard Mannion, et al. [Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2003], 512–17, at 515).

¹⁴ See Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, Rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

¹⁵ See the introduction and essays in Christopher M. Bellitto and David Zachariah Flanagan, eds., *Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Renewal* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Avery Dulles, “The Church Always in Need of Reform: *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda*,” in *The Church Inside and Out* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1974), 37–50, at 37.

¹⁷ Congar, “Renewal of the Spirit and Reform of the Institution,” 514. Congar adds here: “It is true that purely spiritual attitudes also have an impact on social structures...It is necessary; yet it is not sufficient. There is in fact a density proper to impersonal and collective

The biblical category of conversion is helpful in these discussions, since it captures many nuances regarding renewal and reform, in its *individual*, *collective*, and *institutional* dimensions, and referring both to *spiritual* as well as *structural* change. The approach of the Groupe de Dombes has influenced the debate, as Catherine Clifford's work shows.¹⁹ For the Groupe, *metanoia* is "a New Testament term currently translated by 'conversion' or 'repentance'. We use it to indicate a change affecting not just interior dispositions and personal behaviour, but also the manner in which ecclesial institutions function, and even, if necessary, their structure."²⁰

To summarize this discussion: *The continual divine call to ecclesial conversion demands spiritual renewal at both the individual and collective levels; institutional ecclesial conversion demands both spiritual and structural reform.*

Part II

Presupposing the work of writers on reform and its history, particularly Yves Congar,²¹ Gerhart Ladner,²² and John O'Malley,²³ Avery Dulles has provided a historical survey of the notion of *ecclesia semper reformanda*. His framework is helpful for examining ecclesial conversion during and after Vatican II. With his characteristic sharpness, Dulles analyzes reform under three captions: *types*, *areas*, and *arguments*.²⁴ Throughout the church's history, he notes five *types* of reform:

structures which has to be reached: otherwise the most generous reformist intentions would exhaust themselves in a never-ending effort that the opposing structures, keeping their place, would condemn to remain only half-effective."

¹⁸ Dulles uses the word "reform" for both the individual and the institutional levels, speaking of "personal reform" and "institutional reform," and intends by the latter phrase no distinction between "institutional" and "structural" reform. Avery Dulles, "True and False Reform," *First Things* 135 (2003): 14–19.

¹⁹ See, for example, Catherine E. Clifford, *The Groupe des Dombes: A Dialogue of Conversion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

²⁰ Groupe des Dombes, "The Episcopal Ministry: Reflections and Proposals Concerning the Ministry of Vigilance and Unity in the Particular Church," in *For the Communion of the Churches: The Contribution of the Groupe des Dombes*, ed. Catherine E. Clifford (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2010), 37–58, at 38n2 (no. 7). Quoted in Groupe des Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), 25 (article 36).

²¹ Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2011). See the critique of Congar in Joseph Famerée, "True or False Reform: What Are the Criteria? The Reflections of Y. Congar," *The Jurist* 71 (2011): 7–9. See Dulles, "True and False Reform."

²² Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*. For review and critique of Ladner's contribution to reform studies, see the contributions in Bellitto and Flanagan, eds., *Reassessing Reform: A Historical Investigation into Church Renewal*.

²³ John O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*," *Theological Studies* 32 (1971): 573–601. This was later published as O'Malley, "Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*," in *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989), 44–81).

²⁴ For the following, see Dulles, "The Church Always in Need of Reform."

purification, adaptation, accretion (i.e., accumulation), development, and creative transformation. These, he says, have been applied to four major *areas* of church life: morality, discipline, governing structures, and doctrine. In addition, he sees two major *arguments* for reform: sinfulness and historicity.

Dulles notes that the Catholic Church since the Protestant Reformation has strongly resisted calls for reform in two of those four *areas* in particular: the areas of governing structures and doctrine.²⁵ I will come to doctrinal reform later. Regarding calls for reform of the Church's governing structures, one need only read the recent history of the Council of Trent by John O'Malley to see that calls for reform of the Roman Curia are not new, and popes and the Curia have long resisted them.²⁶

The election of Pope Francis gives hope that he will address the pre-conclave desire of so many cardinals for reform in the governance of the church, and in particular of the Roman Curia. His decision to create a globally-representative group of mainly non-curial cardinals to assist him in structural reform seems to be a deliberate move towards a more collegial governance of the church. Time will tell. Many have written—and I need not expand—on the unfulfilled dimensions of what Vatican II was calling for: genuine episcopal collegiality; the participation of lay women and men in the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest and king (the teaching, sanctifying, and governing dimensions of church life); respect for the integrity of the lived faith and liturgical rituals of local churches within their own culture and circumstance; the need not only for dialogue with those outside the church, but also within—if indeed the church is to be a credible witness in its dialogue with others (in other words: regarding dialogue, put your own house in order). Full conversion to the vision of Vatican II regarding all these matters of governance not only requires attitudinal, cultural change but also structural reform, including new “structures of participation,” as John Paul II called them.²⁷

What is missing from the types of reform in the past (as Dulles lists them) is reform relating to *the way* the church fulfills its mission in the world, what O'Malley calls “style.”²⁸ Vatican II shows a particular concern for the kind of face the church is presenting to the world. Vatican II wants to stop the scowl and give a smile—and even shed a tear. In attempting to balance the centripetal and centrifugal forces of *communio* and *missio*, the council gives equal attention to the church's life *ad intra* and its mission *ad extra*. Likewise, with Pope Francis, it seems that *ad intra* reform of governance will certainly not be his only focus. He has already spoken often of a more missionary church, and one that is less “self-referential.”²⁹ Coming from Argentina, he sees the church differently. I come from a land down-under, and in Australia tourist shops sell maps of the world with the world turned upside down—

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁶ John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

²⁷ On the relationship between “a spirituality of communion” and “structures of participation,” see John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte. Apostolic Letter of John Paul II* (Strathfield, Australia: St Pauls Publications, 2001), art. 43–45.

²⁸ For a recent formulation of this thesis, see throughout John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Reported in a summation of pre-conclave meetings of cardinals, from 4–11 March, 2013.

the southern hemisphere up top, and Europe in a bottom corner. Not only is this the emerging demographic reality of the church, but also I suspect this is Pope Francis' mental image of the church—turned upside down, with the poor of the global south a prominent concern. He has stated to a gathering of journalists: “Oh, how I would like a poor Church, and for the poor.”³⁰ With this dimension of his *ad extra* focus, Pope Francis may well be deliberately echoing the spiritual conversion evident at Vatican II, which Pope Paul VI referred to in his address to the council on its last working day on 7 December 1965, when he said: “The old story of the Good Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the council. A feeling of boundless sympathy has permeated the whole of it. The attention of our council has been absorbed by the discovery of human needs.”³¹ This conciliar impulse has echoes of some elements of what Letty Russell would later call for when she says that “justice” should be “the fifth mark of the church,” along with unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.³²

Although we are only early into the pontificate of Pope Francis, there are signs of hope regarding reform in these above issues. Therefore, I would rather like to focus now on what Dulles lists as the two major arguments for reform, *sinfulness* and *historicity*—to see them at work at Vatican II and to assess reception of the council's vision of reform fifty years on.

The first argument for reform is *sinfulness*—a central theme of the biblical vision regarding conversion with its call for ongoing personal and communal faithfulness to the demands of the covenant, the demands of the Gospel. Here the type of ecclesial reform demanded, in Dulles' schema, is “purification,” a term used by Vatican II.³³ Central to its pastoral aim of ecclesial renewal and reform is, as expressed in chapter 5 of *Lumen Gentium* (39–42), the council's “universal call to holiness,” to greater fidelity to Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit—a call from which we theologians, of course, are not excluded. This call to holiness has a collective

³⁰ During an audience for journalists, Saturday 16 March, soon after his election.

³¹ Final Address by Pope Paul VI, Last Working Day of the Council, 7 December 1965. Floyd Anderson, ed. *Council Daybook: Vatican II, Session 4* (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1966), 360. Translation corrected. The Latin text reads: “Vetus illa de bono Samaritano narratio exemplum fuit atque norma, ad quam Concilii nostri spiritualis ratio directa est. Etenim, immensus quidam erga homines amor Concilium penitus pervasit. Perspectae et iterum consideratae hominum necessitates, quae eo molestiores fiunt, quo magis huius terrae filius crescit, totum nostrae huius Synodi studium detinuerunt.”

³² See Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1993), 135. If anything captures the hopes that might just be fulfilled in Pope Francis, it is John O'Malley's summary of Vatican II's shift in ecclesial self-understanding and the face it wishes the church to project to the world. He states: “[A]t stake were almost two different visions of Catholicism: from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from definition to mystery, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from rivalry to partnership, from suspicion to trust, from static to ongoing, from passive acceptance to active engagement, from fault-finding to appreciation, from prescriptive to principled, from behavior modification to inner appropriation” (O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 307).

³³ LG, 8; 15.

dimension, as the Decree on Ecumenism states: “Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling.”³⁴

In our own time, sinfulness at all levels of our Catholic ecclesial life has become scandalously public—from child sexual abuse by clergy, to ecclesial corruption and inner power struggles, to what Pope Francis has already on several occasions decried as “careerism” and “clericalism” in the church.³⁵ There are certain kinds of collective culture that can only enfeeble the church. What is clear is that this sinfulness *in* the church goes beyond just a matter of individual sin. In the fifty years since the council, diverse theologies have highlighted the social dimension of sin and the need in the church for *collective* ecclesial conversion. This includes conversion from the sins of patriarchy, clericalism, sexism, racism, collusion with economic, political, and social exclusion and oppression, all of which can become ideologically embedded in ecclesial collective and institutional culture and structures.³⁶ Whatever its form, such structural sin is, in the words of Oscar Romero, “the crystallization of individual egoisms in permanent structures which maintain this sin and exert its power over the great majorities.”³⁷ All are forms of individual and structural sin that deface the church.

This metaphor of “the face” is used on several occasions throughout the council documents. *Lumen Gentium* in its very first paragraph boldly proclaims: “the light of Christ...is resplendent on the face of the church (*super faciem ecclesiae*).” That this is not quite the case in the church’s history the document acknowledges a little later in article 8: “The church...clasping sinners to its bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification (*sancta simul et semper purificanda*), follows constantly the path of penance and renewal (*poenitentiam et renovationem*).” Further on, article 15 states, “Mother church...exhorts her children to purification and renewal (*purificationem et renovationem*) so that the sign of Christ may shine more brightly over the face (*super faciem*) of the church.” And in its last document, when reflecting on why people do not believe or no longer believe, the council in *Gaudium et Spes* 19 laments that Christian believers (*credentes*) themselves are often the very ones to blame for such

³⁴ UR, 6.

³⁵ On 6 June 2013, Pope Francis, when speaking to the members of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, which trains priests for the diplomatic corps and the Secretariat of State of the Holy See, stated: “Careerism is leprosy! Leprosy! Please, no careerism!” Available at http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/06/06/pope_franis_to_future_diplomats:_no_to_careerism/en1-698966 [accessed 13 July 2013].

³⁶ On the social, structural dimension of sin, see Patrick Kerans, *Sinful Social Structures* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974). Specifically on conversion, see Peter J. Henriot, “Social Sin and Conversion: A Theology of the Church’s Social Involvement,” in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn (New York: Alba House, 1978), 315–26. For a summary of the issues, see Roger Haight, “Sin and Grace,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, second and re. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 375–430, at 398–402.

³⁷ Oscar Romero’s Second Pastoral Letter (1977), quoted in José Ignacio González Faus, “Sin,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 532–42, at 537.

non-belief—because they fail to reveal “the genuine face of God (*revelare...Dei genuinum vultum*).”

The acknowledgement that the face of the church is not always resplendent with the light of Christ constitutes a fundamental concern in the overall pastoral and reform agenda of Vatican II: that the face of the church would faithfully mirror *the genuine face of the God whom she proclaims*. Some have written on the implications of ecclesial sinfulness for ecclesial repentance, raising the issue of whether sinfulness in the church means that we must indeed speak, as Karl Rahner does, of “a sinful church.”³⁸ Brad Hinze has highlighted the importance of public acts of ecclesial repentance, so tellingly expressed in Pope John Paul II’s public *mea culpas*.³⁹ Ongoing ecclesial conversion demands processes of ecclesial repentance.

Alongside liberationist critiques of patriarchy and oppressive structures, of increasing importance for this theological reflection are background theories from ancillary disciplines that study group cultures and dynamics.⁴⁰ One such discipline is the dialogue partner of business studies. I sit on the Board of the Faculty of Business at Australian Catholic University. I have come to learn something of that discipline’s language and terms, particularly recent research into the pathology of business companies. For example, the area of what is termed “organizational change” examines how to bring about transformation in dysfunctional company cultures.⁴¹ If

³⁸ Karl Rahner, in an article tellingly titled “The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II,” has proposed that a distinction be made between objective and subjective holiness of the church, and that within the latter category the church is de facto a sinful church. See Karl Rahner, “The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II,” in *Theological Investigations: Volume 6* (New York: Seabury, 1976), 6:270–94. Regarding the statement in LG 8, that the church is “at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification (*sancta simul et semper purificanda*),” Peter Hünermann interprets this phrase as stating that the church is here “identified as equally holy and sinful (*als eine zugleich heilige und sündhafte bezeichnet*.” Peter Hünermann, “Theologischer Kommentar zur dogmatischen Konstitution über die Kirche,” in *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, ed. Peter Hünermann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 2:265–582, at 369. Likewise, Michael Becht sees in GS 43 the possibility of a similar interpretation open to seeing the church itself as sinful. See Michael Becht, “*Ecclesia semper purificanda*. Die Sündigkeit der Kirche als Thema des II. Vatikanischen Konzils,” *Catholic* 49 (1995): 218–37, 239–60, at 254. Yves Congar too refers to the need for reform of the whole church as a collective body, not just the sinful members of the church. See the discussion of Congar on this point in De Mey, “Church renewal and Reform,” 388.

³⁹ Brad Hinze has developed the proposal of Rahner and its implications for ecclesial repentance. See Bradford Hinze, “Ecclesial Repentance and the Demands of dialogue,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2000): 207–38. On Pope John Paul II’s petitions for forgiveness, see Luigi Accatoli, *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness: The Mea Culpa's of John Paul II* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998). See also the International Theological Commission, *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past* (Strathfield, NSW: St. Pauls Publications, 2000).

⁴⁰ For a cultural anthropological perspective, see, for example, Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Violence, Society, and the Church: A Cultural Approach* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004).

⁴¹ See, for example, Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework*, Third edition. ed. (San Francisco, Cal.: Jossey-Bass, 2011); Dianne Waddell, Thomas G. Cummings, and Christopher

culture is simply “the way we do things around here,” then ecclesial conversion means cultural change, from the local parish level with its sub-organizations through to the culture of episcopal and papal leadership and of the Roman Curia. The well-known thesis of John O’Malley proposes that the fundamental aim of Vatican II’s reform was to change the style, the how, of being a Catholic Church. In other words, Vatican II set out to reform the culture of the Catholic Church.

The second impulse for reform is *historicity*, the condition of the church in time and place. That ongoing reform is always necessary throughout history, Dulles notes, arises of course from the very nature of the divine-human encounter: “The revelation of God cannot be received except in fragile human vessels, limited by the particularities of time and place.”⁴² His formulation has echoes of the medieval scholastic axiom: *quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* (That which is received is received in the mode of the receiver).⁴³ The bishops at Vatican II begin to understand this ancient reception principle in a new way. Dulles’ description of the argument from historicity has parallels with what Christoph Theobald sees as *the* hermeneutical key for interpreting Vatican II, what he calls the “principle of pastorality,”⁴⁴ called for by John XXIII in his opening conciliar address. Theobald summarizes this principle of pastorality with the axiom: “there can be no proclamation of the gospel without taking account of its recipients.”⁴⁵ For the teaching office, as I will touch on later, taking account of the recipients of the Gospel means taking seriously the *sensus fidelium*,⁴⁶ “the intimate sense of spiritual realities which [believers] experience.”⁴⁷ The council’s emphasis on inculturation and vernacular liturgies are just two other examples of this principle of reception coming to the fore at the council.

With this focus on reception we are now at the heart of the conversion of the church’s Catholic imagination begun at Vatican II. Types of reform attempted in the past, and also evident at Vatican II, have been accretion, adaptation, and development. At Vatican II, however, we see also the beginnings of a new sense of historicity and the opening up to a new understanding of the relationship between faith and history. This is evident throughout the council and in its documents in a number of ways.

Firstly, as Giuseppe Alberigo has shown, a whole new vocabulary of “history words” appears regularly throughout the documents, for the first time in any council; he lists 38 of them.⁴⁸ Secondly, according to John O’Malley, “historical consciousness” for the first time in the church’s history becomes explicit in the

G. Worley, *Organisational Change: Development and Transformation*, Asia Pacific 4th ed. (South Melbourne, Vic.: Cengage Learning, 2011).

⁴² Dulles, “The Church Always in Need of Reform.”

⁴³ For example, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 75, a. 5; 3a, q. 5.

⁴⁴ On the council’s reception of John XXIII’s “principle of pastorality” and its centrality for a hermeneutics of the council and its documents, see Christoph Theobald, *La réception du concile Vatican II: I. Accéder à la source* (Paris: Cerf, 2009), 281–493.

⁴⁵ Theobald, “The Theological Options of Vatican II,” 94.

⁴⁶ LG 12. The passage refers to the *supernaturalis sensus fidei totius populi*. This is generally referred to in the literature as *sensus fidelium*.

⁴⁷ DV 8.

⁴⁸ For a list of 38 such Latin words, see Giuseppe Alberigo, “Cristianesimo e storia nel Vaticano II,” *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 5 (1984): 577–92, at 577n1.

thinking of the bishops;⁴⁹ Joseph Ratzinger wrote of the “historical thinking” informing their decisions.⁵⁰ This historical consciousness begins to shape the bishops’ imagination via the work of *ressourcement* theologians, who, as *periti*, are highlighting richly diverse forms and practices of Catholicism beyond the monolithic Tridentine Catholicism of the previous centuries.⁵¹ They come to see that things have been different in the past, and could be now. Thirdly, this historical consciousness underlies a basic intuition of the leitmotif *aggiornamento*, an intuition that (according to O’Malley) is “new in the history of the idea of reform and reformation.”⁵² Fourthly, this new historical approach is evident in the shifts away from static to dynamic understandings of God, of human being, and of the nature of divine revelation and human faith, understood now primarily as an ongoing personal encounter in history. These perceptions then come to underpin leitmotifs such as “living tradition” and “the signs of the times.”

Taken together, these four features of the conciliar vision alone show how Vatican II, in its approach to faith and history, constitutes *an opening up* to a model of reform beyond what is captured either individually or collectively by the three key terms “*ressourcement*,” “development,” and “*aggiornamento*.”⁵³ There is something new happening here; the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Yves Congar, writing in 1972, hints at such a different and indeed new model of reform, which is present at Vatican II, albeit in an inchoate way:

Our epoch of rapid change and cultural transformation (philosophical ferments and sociological conditions different from those which the Church has accustomed itself to until now) calls for a revision of “traditional” forms which goes beyond the level of adaptation or *aggiornamento*, and which

⁴⁹ O’Malley, “Tradition and Transition.”

⁵⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, in commenting on the “bitterness” injected into the conciliar assembly by the late and non-conciliar addition of the *Nota Explicativa Praevia* to *Lumen Gentium*, remarks on the “historical thinking” being attacked in this addition: “The conservatism of this view is based on its aloofness from history and so it basically suffers from a lack of tradition—i.e., of openness to the totality of Christian history. It is important that we see this because it gives us an insight into the inner pattern of the opposing alignments of thought in the Council, often mistakenly described as an opposition between progressives and conservatives. It would be more correct to speak of a contrast between historical thinking and formally juridical thinking. The ‘progressives’ (at least the large majority of them) were in fact concerned precisely with ‘tradition,’ with a new awareness of both the breadth and depth of what had been handed down in Christian tradition. This was where they found the norms for renewal which permitted them to be fearless and broad in their outlook. It was an outlook which came from the intrinsic catholicity of the Church.” Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 171–72.

⁵¹ See, for example, Gerald O’Collins, “*Ressourcement* and Vatican II,” in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 372–91.

⁵² John W. O’Malley, “Developments, Reform, and Two Great Reformations, :Towards a Historical Assessment of Vatican II,” in *Tradition and Transition*, 82–125, at 108.

⁵³ For example, see this triad in John O’Malley’s work, for example, O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 299–302; O’Malley, “The Hermeneutic of Reform’,” at 536–42.

would be instead a new creation. *It is no longer sufficient to maintain, by adapting it, what has already been; it is necessary to reconstruct it.*⁵⁴

Likewise, Avery Dulles, writing in 1974, notes the implications of the new type of reform beginning to emerge at Vatican II, a type of reform he calls “creative transformation”: “In dialogue with the contemporary world, the Church can make innovations that do not simply grow out of its own previous tradition.”⁵⁵

Such a shift constitutes nothing less than a conversion of the Catholic imagination regarding God and humanity, faith and history. One could well call it something of a hermeneutical turn in the history of the Catholic Church’s self-understanding regarding its life, doctrine and worship. As the church moves into ever-new historical contexts, new questions arise and are addressed to the tradition that the church has never asked before, nor even envisaged—because it was inconceivable to have even thought of them, due to the worldviews at the time. The authoritative past here needs the present receiver to find answers. Vatican II marks a significant re-calibration of the Catholic imagination concerning a truth always held but now newly perceived: *the present* too, not just the past, is revelatory and authoritative. As the Holy Spirit leads the church in history through conversion to the fullness of truth, God is challenging the church to discern the new things that God is doing in Christ through the Spirit—by scrutinizing the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel.

In that quest for the fullness of truth, the answers to such new questions proposed by other Christian churches and ecclesial communities may well too be promptings from the Holy Spirit for the Catholic Church to embrace. As our esteemed colleague Margaret O’Gara would have put it: in an “ecumenical gift exchange,” the other may just have a gift from the Holy Spirit not to my liking! Something of a conversion in one’s perspective may be what the Spirit is demanding.⁵⁶ This ecumenical openness was central to the council’s vision for ecclesial conversion.

Over the decades since the council ended, “historical consciousness” has had its own history and turned critically towards itself.⁵⁷ It has become more reflexive, more

⁵⁴ Congar, “Renewal of Wpirit and Reform of the Institution,” 516. Italics added.

⁵⁵ Dulles, “The Church Always in Need of Reform,” at 42–43. The full passage states: “I would hold that, although the Church cannot accept what is simply alien, it can discern the presence of Christ in the signs of the times. In dialogue with the contemporary world, the Church can make innovations that do not simply grow out of its own previous tradition. Reform by development and assimilation may have seemed an adequate model when the Church was the controlling influence in Western culture. But today [1974] a proper respect for the autonomy of human culture demands a less possessive and a more dialogic relationship. The Church must creatively respond to the initiatives of others.”

⁵⁶ See Margaret O’Gara, *The Ecumenical Gift Exchange* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998). On Catholic learning from other churches, see Ormond Rush, “Receptive Ecumenism and the *Sensus Fidelium*: Expanding the Categories for Catholic Ecclesial Discerning,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learnin: Learning to Be Church Together, Joint 2nd International receptive Ecumenism Conference*, ed. Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming, 2014).

⁵⁷ See Mark Day, *The Philosophy of History: An Introduction* (New York: Continuum, 2008).

aware of distortions in the tradition, and more acutely aware of the distorting lenses through which present-day receivers of the council can view the past—and the present.⁵⁸ So many examples could be given of diverse contextual theologies that have emerged over the last fifty years, faithful to the emerging model of reform embedded in the conciliar vision when taken as a whole. In the light of this more critical historical consciousness, ongoing ecclesial conversion to the vision of Vatican II also includes attention to possible distorting elements in the conciliar vision itself, so that any retrieval in the present does not perpetuate any distortions of the past. For example, to state the obvious, Vatican II was an all-male affair, except for the women on some sub-commissions and the women auditors in the third and fourth sessions.⁵⁹ New questions have arisen in the last fifty years and are posed to the conciliar texts for answers—questions, however, that the individual conciliar texts did not intend to answer, or questions that the bishops could not have even envisaged at that time. Receivers may indeed find answers to those new questions, nevertheless, from a comprehensive interpretation of the council and all its documents, as they imagine the whole conciliar vision realized in their new context.⁶⁰

Part III

The council's vision has some of the structural elements of conversion as presented throughout the Old and New Testaments.⁶¹ For example, God is the one

⁵⁸ On this, the literature is vast. As an example of the importance of Foucault for theology, see, Vincent J. Miller, "History or Geography? Gadamer, Foucault, and Theologies of Tradition," in *Theology and the New Histories*, ed. Gary Macy (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 56–85. Further on Foucault and history, see Alun Munslow, *Deconstructing History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 129–48.

⁵⁹ See Carmel Elizabeth McEnroy, *Guests in Their Own House: The Women of Vatican II* (New York: Crossroad, 1996).

⁶⁰ On principles for reconstructing the vision of the council, see Ormond Rush, "Towards a Comprehensive Interpretation of the Council and Its Documents," *Theological Studies* 73 (2012): 547–69.

⁶¹ On the theme of conversion in the Bible, see, for example, Frederick J. Gaiser, "A Biblical Theology of Conversion," in *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1992), 93–107; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Conversion," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol.1, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), I:1131–33; A. Hulsbosch, *The Bible on Conversion* (De Pere, Wis.: St. Norbert Abbey Press, 1966); S. Kim, "Repentance/Conversion," in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Xavier Léon-Dufour, 2d ed. (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 486–91; Francis J. Moloney, "Conversion, I (In the Bible)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 4 (New York: Gale, 2003), 4:231–34; Marc-François Lacan, "Conversion and Grace in the Old Testament," in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn (New York: Alba House, 1978), 75–96; Marc-François Lacan, "Conversion and Kingdom in the Synoptic Gospels," in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn (New York: Alba House, 1978), 97–118; Ronald D. Witherup, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994); Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986); Roy A. Harrisville, *The Concept of Newness in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1960).

who brings about conversion; it is an event of divine grace. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is the agent of conversion. Also, in the Bible, God not only demands conversion away from sinful deeds, but also from spiritual blindness and hardness of heart. Furthermore, as the biblical scholar Ronald Witherup notes, “conversion [in the Bible] takes place in the context of relationship,”⁶² and, he says, such relational conversion has interrelated *vertical* and *horizontal* dimensions. Conversion to God always has implications for human relationships. We find these structural elements in the council’s call for conversion.

Vatican II’s most profound *ressourcement* [returning to the sources] was above all its turning *to God*, a turning of its mind and heart to the God of revelation.⁶³ In the council’s turning to God, there emerged over the four years a new perspective on *how* God works in history, and how, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church must respond to God working in history. From that new understanding of its own relationship to God, it perceived a new style of relationship *within* the church, and of relating to those *outside* it, even though the bishops deliberately eschewed the “us” and “them” language of previous eras.

The council’s call for a more outward-looking church becomes increasing clear as the council proceeds; we could say, to take up the words of Pope Francis, the council did not want its vision to be “self-referential.” Primarily, it is more about God than about us. The church is a sign or instrument of something greater than itself. Nevertheless, the directions *ad intra* and *ad extra*, and the aspects of *communio* and *missio* are necessarily interrelated. How we are in our inner life will determine the face we present to the world, and ultimately our credibility in mission.

Vatican II’s call to conversion is multi-dimensional. I would like to select just two dimensions of the council’s call to ecclesial conversion that deal with the church’s inner life, but dimensions that determine the face the church presents to outsiders. In reference to *vertical* and *horizontal* conversion, I call these two the pneumatological dimension of conversion and the horizontal relational dimension of conversion. Both of these impinge directly on the last of the areas of reform listed by Dulles: doctrinal reform. Fifty years on, conversion in these two dimensions is far from profound.

The first dimension relates to vertical conversion—ecclesial conversion is fundamentally the church relating to God in a new way. With its trinitarian theology of revelation and the focus on *communio* in God, the council calls on the church to mirror the trinitarian life, to reflect “the genuine face of God” to the world as the universal sacrament of salvation. In *Lumen Gentium* 17, the church is named, at once, “the People of God,” “the Body of Christ,” and “the Temple of the Holy Spirit.” However, from the personal, to the collective, to the institutional, canonical and structural levels—the church *de facto* still lacks this trinitarian balance in its life. We are still far from conversion to a genuinely trinitarian church. A major issue is that the Holy Spirit, the Breath of God, is given little institutional breathing room.

⁶² Witherup, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 17.

⁶³ On this see, Bishop Michael Putney, “Vatican II: A New Relationship with God” (unpublished paper, presented for the eConference, “Vatican II: An Event of Grace” on Wednesday, 10 October 2012, sponsored by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Broken Bay Institute).

Ecclesial conversion cannot take place if the very divine agent of conversion is not given opportunities to convert the church.

The council's teachings on the Holy Spirit—such as the Spirit's gift of diverse charisms, or the *sensus fidei* given by the Spirit to all the baptized, or the Spirit working discernibly in history through attention to the signs of the times—still have yet to impact deeply on the spiritual and institutional life of the whole church. Concerning the governing office in the church, the 1983 Code of Canon Law lacks any mention of the Holy Spirit and structures for discernment of the Spirit, an ecclesial process so critical to the New Testament ecclesiological vision, especially in the Pauline and the Johannine literature.⁶⁴ Concerning the teaching office in the church, there are no concrete “structures of participation” for explicitly acknowledging the authority of the *sensus fidelium*, that gift of the Holy Spirit—as *Lumen Gentium* emphatically teaches—that ensures the church's infallibility in believing.⁶⁵ This downplaying of the Spirit has of course long been a problem; the Council of Constantinople, for example, condemned those “Spirit-fighters,” the Pneumatomachians, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶ If we are not recognizing and acknowledging the Spirit at work *within*, we will have no gift for discernment of the Spirit also at work *outside* the church.

Secondly, this relational vertical conversion to the Triune God, especially concerning the role of the Holy Spirit, demands relational conversion on the horizontal level, *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Not wanting to be too “self-referential” here, I have time now only to focus on aspects of the church as a *communio*, which nevertheless do have implications for the church's mission *ad extra*, and the necessary *perichoresis* between communion and mission.

The primary way in which Vatican II envisaged vertical and horizontal ecclesial relationships *ad intra* was in terms of *communio*: *communio* in God, *communio* in the church. The council documents use those three expressions which capture key

⁶⁴ Concerning canon law, Walter Kasper notes: “The degree to which a full reception of the council is still lacking in this respect is shown even by the new *Codex Juris Canonici*, which—contrary to *Lumen Gentium* 14—in describing the full *communio* with the church, manages to get by without mentioning the Holy Spirit at all, confining itself to institutional criteria. This shows with sufficient clarity that we are only at the beginning of a reception of the council.” Walter Kasper, “The Church as Communion: Reflections on the Guiding Ecclesiological Idea of the Second Vatican Council,” in *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 148–65, at 153. On the lack of recognition of the Holy Spirit in the Code of Canon Law, James Coriden writes: “The exclusion of the Holy Spirit and charisms from the code was not due to ignorance or casual neglect; it seems to have been a conscious choice. It is difficult to detect the real reasons for this deliberate exclusion. It may have been motivated by a fear of a mysterious charismatic element that might be difficult to verify or control, and that might prove disruptive or dangerous. Or the revisers of the code may have been reluctant to acknowledge any source of authority in the Church other than the exclusively Christocentric and hierarchic sources recognized for centuries. They may have been unwilling to recognize the Spirit who dwells within each one of the Christian faithful and gives them gifts for the building of the Church” (“The Holy Spirit and Church Governance,” *The Jurist* 66 (2006): 339–73, at 372).

⁶⁵ LG, 12.

⁶⁶ See Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:31.

aspects of the church's visible and invisible mystery: *communio hierarchica* (hierarchical communion, expressed in the council's teaching on collegiality);⁶⁷ *communio ecclesiarum* (communion of local churches, "in which and out of which"⁶⁸ the one church of Christ exists); and, the often-forgotten third, *communio fidelium* (the communion of the faithful throughout the world-church, all the individual baptised believers).⁶⁹ If the invisible mystery of the church is to be realized, all three modes of *communio* must be given structural expression.

However, despite Vatican II's deliberate desire to balance out a juridical image of the church with one that highlights the church as mystery, a juridical emphasis still lingers, with priority de facto given to a church seen primarily as a hierarchical communion. "Relational conversion" on the horizontal level, and a proper balancing of its three modes of *communio*, fifty years after Vatican II, are still in need of spiritual and structural realization. A genuine *affectus collegialis* ("collegial spirit," LG 23) between pope and bishops needs to be complemented by a genuine respect for the integrity of local churches and their lived faith within a diversity of cultures, and a respect for the *communio fidelium* and the Spirit speaking to the church of churches through the *sensus fidelium*. This becomes highly significant for any discussion of Dulles' last area of reform, doctrine. Horizontal relational conversion presupposes a "culture of dialogue,"⁷⁰ and doctrinal reform must be the result of dialogue within the church between the three voices of the *sensus fidelium*, theologians, and the magisterium.

If one takes *Dei Verbum* as one's lens, with its focus on the fundamental Christian realities of divine revelation and its reception in faith down through history, the church is first and foremost a community of faith. It is a *communio fidelium*, a communion of those baptised faithful who have responded to God's revelatory offer of salvation in Christ through the Spirit. Faith is the Spirit's gift for receiving revelation, and accompanying the gift of faith, the Spirit gives a sense for the faith, a *sensus fidei*. All the baptised individually and the church as a whole receive this gift for interpreting and applying the Gospel. Here is the powerhouse for incarnating the faith in diverse localities, cultures, times, and circumstances. It is here, on the ground, that personal and communal conversion begins.

If, as *Dei Verbum* 8 teaches, God "continues to converse" with the Church through the Holy Spirit,⁷¹ and a significant voice box for the Spirit is the *sensus fidelium*, then genuine ecclesial conversion demands more than lip-service to the role

⁶⁷ LG, 21.

⁶⁸ LG, 23.

⁶⁹ UR, 2; LG, 13; AA, 18. On these three terms in the council, see Kasper, "The Church as Communion."

⁷⁰ Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "Die Mitsprache der Gläubigen in Glaubenssachen. Eine alte Praxis und ihre Wiederentdeckung," *Internationale katholische Zeitschrift "Communio"* 25 (1996): 135–47, at 146–47.

⁷¹ DV 8: "Thus God, who spoke in the past, continues to converse (*sine intermissione...colloquitur*) with the spouse of his beloved Son [i.e., the church]. And the Holy Spirit, through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the church—and through it in the world—leads believers to the full truth and makes the word of Christ dwell in them in all richness."

of the Holy Spirit in the church, and to the Spirit's instrument for all things related to the faithful interpretation and application of the Gospel in daily life, the *sensus fidelium*.

To conclude briefly. In his work on the development of doctrine, John Henry Newman highlights a particular class of development, which he called "historical development." Such development, he said, is:

the gradual formation of opinion concerning persons, facts, and events. Judgments, which were at one time confined to a few, at length spread through a community, and attain general reception by the accumulation and concurrence of testimony. Thus some authoritative accounts die away; others gain a footing, and are ultimately received as truths.⁷²

Vatican II was just such an event of accelerated and concentrated "historical development" over four years. Using a more critical hermeneutical model than the organic one of "development," Vatican II was certainly an event of ecclesial conversion to a new worldview, a new way of seeing, a new ecclesial self-understanding, a conversion of the Catholic imagination regarding faith and history.

⁷² John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 46–47.