

A Panel on Vatican II

Since Martin Luther's reformation, three major events in the life of the Roman Catholic Church have marked its reaction not only to Protestantism but also to developments in the modern culture: The Council of Trent (1545–1563), Vatican I (1869–1870), and most recently Vatican II (1962–1965). Whereas the first two are often considered as hardening the arteries of the church in their reaffirmation and defense of traditional doctrine, Vatican II is seen as a renovation that makes the life blood of the Roman church flow swifter, opening a way to greater receptiveness to the world, bringing hope for a new ecumenical era with respect to Protestantism and openness to other religions. But since then, what has happened, and where is the Roman church headed? Italy, Poland, and Spain are important pillars of the church in Europe, and we asked three Reformed theologians to comment on how things have fared for their country.

ITALY, LEONARDO DE CHIRICO

1. How did Roman Catholic theology change in your country after Vatican II?

Vatican II brought significant changes in the theological landscape of Roman Catholicism. Roman theology found itself pushed toward a season of *aggiornamento* (update). The retrieval of patristic influences introduced by the *nouvelle théologie* softened the rigidity of neo-Thomism as the main theological grid and nuanced many clear-cut boundaries that were prevalent before. Modern biblical criticism was introduced into biblical studies, thus blurring Rome's previous commitment to a high view of biblical inspiration. After Vatican II, there has been practically no distinction between critical scholarship done by Catholic exegetes and that done by liberal Protestants in their study on Scripture. More broadly, after Vatican II, Roman Catholic theology connected with many modern trends like

evolutionism, political theories, existentialism, feminism, and religious studies, all developed in a highly sophisticated “sacramental” way that is typical of Rome. Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology has become more “catholic” and diverse in the sense of being more open to anything, embracing all trends, and hospitable to all kinds of tendencies without losing its Roman institutional outlook. “Dialogue” seems to be its catchword: dialogue with religions, dialogue with other Christian traditions, dialogue with the sciences, dialogue with social trajectories, dialogue with the secular world.... We need to understand what dialogue means, though. I think it means expanding the boundaries, stretching the borders, rounding the edges, but not changing or moving the institutional center. Roman theology seems to reflect the catholicity project launched at Vatican II.

2. How has it continued to change, and what new directions do you note since the turn of the twenty-first century?

At times the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (i.e., the former Inquisition) felt it right and necessary to warn about possible theological derailments. For example, the 2000 document *Dominus Iesus* reaffirmed the centrality of the role of the Roman Catholic Church in God’s salvific purposes, trying to silence dangerous moves towards universalism and relativism. The 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tried to provide a comprehensive magisterial presentation of Catholic doctrine that would define and confirm the basic contours of Roman teaching in an age of much theological diversity and confusion. The catholicity of Rome does not mean that anything goes. It is always and organically related to the focal center of the system on Rome. The former is at the service of the ever-expanding, universal scope of the catholic vision; the latter maintains the whole process connected to the sacramental, institutional, and political hardware of the Church.

With Pope Francis, a new development that can be seen is the increasing role of the “theology of the people,” a specific theological motif that has been shaping Latin American theology over the last few decades. It is a version of theology “from below.” Instead of jumping top-down from the official magisterium to the peripheries of the world, it makes the voices, concerns, and traditions of the “people” central for theology. This insistence on the “people” explains Francis’s endorsement of folk traditions and devotions, even ones that are idiosyncratic with regards to biblical teaching.

3. Are there signs of biblical renewal because of Bible reading by Roman Catholics?

After centuries of stigmatization if not prohibition of the use of Bible translations in the vernacular languages, the Bible is finally accessible to the

people. Official documents are replete with Bible quotations. The present pope gives a short daily homily based on Scripture, focusing on a kind of sacramental-existential reading of it but often missing the redemptive flow of the Bible. There are some lay movements that encourage a spirituality that gives Scripture a significant role. The theological framework of Vatican II, though, while recognizing the importance of Scripture in the life of the Church, has placed it within the context of Tradition (capital T), which precedes and exceeds the Bible and which ultimately speaks through the magisterium of the Church. Besides these positive developments, post-Vatican II theology has increasingly aligned itself to a critical reading of the Bible: the last document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission (“The Inspiration and the Truth of Sacred Scripture,” 2014) echoes the typical liberal skepticism on the reliability of the Old Testament stories, the miraculous nature of certain events, and the full inerrancy of the Bible, thus needing the magisterium to fill the vacuum with its authoritative teaching.

So the Bible is important but not conclusive. It is trustworthy, but only in a limited sense. It is therefore read as a written record of Tradition that surpasses Scripture in its being the living form of the Word of God. In spite of all this, *Scripture alone* is an alien concept, as it was at Trent. The accessibility of Scripture gives a new opportunity to promote biblical literacy in terms of evangelism and apologetics, but the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Bible is in no way coming closer to an Evangelical account of it.

4. How is Pope Francis changing things now?

Francis is the first Jesuit pope in history. It is sort of an irony to think that a pope who appears to be close to Evangelicals actually belongs to the religious order that was founded to fight Protestantism. The former soldier Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1566) gathered a group of friends who called themselves The Society of Jesus (*Societas Jesu*), and eventually they were commissioned by the pope to stop the spread of Protestantism. Their task was to imitate the strengths of Protestantism, that is, spiritual depth and intellectual brightness, but to use them as Catholic weapons against it. The Jesuit order provided the “alternative” Catholic way to the Protestant faith. It comes as no surprise then that the first saint that Pope Francis proclaimed in 2013 was Pierre Favre (1506–1546), a first-generation French Jesuit with a “smiling face,” who more than others tried to look like a Protestant in order to drive people back to the Roman Church.

Furthermore, the Jesuit side of Pope Francis is clear enough, given his published (and never retracted) opinion that Luther and Calvin destroyed man, poisoned society, and ruined the church! In his 1985 lecture on the

history of the Jesuit order, he gave severe evaluations of Luther (a “heretic”), and especially of Calvin (a “heretic” and “schismatic”), accusing them of bringing about the “Calvinist squalor” in society, in the church, and in man’s heart. According to that lecture, Protestantism lies at the root of all evils in the modern West. The fact that this lecture was republished unchanged in 2013 in Spanish and translated in 2014 into Italian with his permission, but without a mitigating word of explanation, indicates that this assessment still lingers in the pope’s heart and mind.

In a recent book, *Pope Francis’ Revolution of Tenderness and Love* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2015), Cardinal Walter Kasper argues that Francis is not a liberal but a radical in the etymological sense of the Latin word “radix,” meaning root or originating principle. According to Kasper, the pope is challenging the church to be radical in the sense of rediscovering the roots of the gospel, which are joy, mission, frugality, solidarity with the poor, freedom from legalism, and collegiality. Kasper’s reading of Francis is clever and insightful. It encourages us to move beyond the usual polarizations between “liberals” and “conservatives” within the church by introducing a third category, that of “radicals.”

Francis appears to be radical on certain issues, but much less so with others. He is radical on poverty, but silent on the massive financial power of his church. He seems to be radical on mercy, but never mentions original sin and divine judgment of all sinners outside of Christ. He is radical in advocating for simplicity, but keeps the expansive apparatus of the empire of which he is the head. He is radical in denouncing the tragedies of unethical capitalism, but seems to be much less outspoken toward the immoral deviations of one’s personal sexual life. In other words, his radicalism is somewhat selective: radical in one area, much less so in another. In a certain sense, “liberals” are radical on social issues, while “conservatives” are radical on doctrinal issues. Everyone is radical in some sense. There are different shades of radicalism. Francis’s radicalism is much closer to the liberal version than the conservative one. Therefore, playing a bit with words, I ask whether his radicalism is radically different from a more liberal tendency. The historical root of theological liberalism is the preference given to religious feelings over doctrinal expressions. And this is exactly what the pope seems also fond of.

5. What can we expect from the Roman church in future?

In our fragmented and violent world, *unity* is one of the catchwords that many people are attracted to. Francis is strongly advocating for Christian unity and ultimately the unity of mankind. His passion for unity makes many Evangelicals think that he is the person who may achieve it. Francis

developed his idea of ecumenism as a polyhedron, a geometric figure with different angles and lines. All different parts have their own peculiarity. It's a figure that brings together unity and diversity.

Where does this view of unity come from? In pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic ecumenism, other Christians were invited to "come back" into the Catholic fold and to conform to its doctrines and practices under the rule of the pope. With Vatican II, Roman Catholicism updated its ecumenical project and embraced a concentric circle type of unity in which the one and only church "subsists in" the Roman Catholic Church; other churches and communities gravitate around this center according to their degree of nearness or distance from it. According to Vatican II and subsequent magisterial teachings, Christian unity is threefold: (1) professing the same faith, (2) celebrating the same Eucharist (i.e., the Roman Catholic way), and (3) being united under the same sacramental ministry in apostolic succession (i.e., under the pope).

How does the polyhedron kind of unity as advocated by Pope Francis fit with this post-Vatican II view of unity? For example, as far as the second mark of unity is concerned, is the pope saying that the sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist and the theology of transubstantiation belong at the center of Christian unity, or are they particulars that can accommodate differences? Or is the pope saying that apostolic succession, which is the basis of the hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church, is still part of the center, or is it a variable that is secondary to Christian unity?

Polyhedrons are fascinating figures, and Francis's use of the image of a polyhedron is thought provoking. However, the problem for Christian unity lies primarily not in the metaphors used, but in the theological vision that nurtures it. If the Catholic Eucharist and the Catholic sacramental system are part of the center of Christian unity, one can make reference to spheres or polyhedrons all one likes, but the substance of the problem still remains. The unity proposed by Francis still gravitates around the Roman Catholic Church and its distinct outlook, and not around the biblical gospel that calls all Christians to conform to the mind of Christ.

Certainly, with Vatican II a different period began that needs to be understood. It is wrong to have a flattened or static view of Catholicism. On the other hand, Vatican II and Pope Francis, who is its most successful incarnation, are only the latest evolutionary step in a system that was born and developed with an "original sin" from which it has not yet been redeemed, but which instead has been consolidated. No ecumenical diplomacy will be able to change it, nor will even the addition of a new Evangelical offer to the traditional menu. The real new time, God willing, will be when Roman

Catholicism breaks the imperial ecclesiological pattern and reforms its own catholicity, basing it no longer on its assimilation project, but on the basis of faithfulness to the gospel.

POLAND, DARIUSZ M. BRYĆKO

1. How did Roman Catholic theology change in your country after Vatican II?

In the sixties, Polish Roman Catholics were preoccupied with the struggle against communism, and later Poland's peaceful overthrow of the regime in the nineties had much to do with Catholic leadership in the post-Vatican II era (which has been well explained by George Weigel and others).

Even though Vatican II assisted in that anticommunist struggle, my sense is that laypeople in Poland, early on, did not understand the changes introduced by the Roman magisterium. As a high school student, at the time when Communism fell in Poland and religion was reintroduced into public school, hardly anyone in my class owned a Bible or knew much about it. Also, I do not recall our new religion instructor being well versed in the Bible, but he did talk to us about Søren Kierkegaard (an interest which I suppose could develop easier after Vatican II). Many people found non-Catholic Christians rather odd and often confused them with Jehovah's Witnesses at that time.

On the other hand, there were also several factors which made many Catholics much more open to interacting with Protestants. These included two renewal movements, the Oasis and the Light Life Movement, as well as pilgrimages to a French ecumenical monastic community in Taizé, France. It is also important to mention Polish Catholicism's close and vibrant cooperation with Campus Crusade for Christ (in Poland called the New Life Movement), which continues until today.

Interestingly, some of these post-Vatican II renewal groups later departed from Roman orthodoxy to such an extent that they were asked to leave the Catholic communion, or they left on their own. As a result, they have formed independent quasi-Protestant congregations (usually with a mishmash of charismatic and Evangelical theology) or joined already-existing small Protestant congregations. However, arguably, this exodus did not really strengthen Polish Evangelicalism, as the new Evangelicals could not find much-needed doctrinal (and intellectual) leadership in these mostly anti-intellectual and pietistic churches (which have a strong anti-Calvinist bias).

Also, Poland has received considerably fewer Evangelical missionaries than countries like Ukraine or Romania; this has not helped to build up Polish Protestantism. In effect, Catholic renewals, even though often fueled by American Evangelicals and charismatics, came temporarily as a source of blessing to Catholics but did not benefit Evangelicals in the long run,

except perhaps in establishing some sort of unofficial Catholic-Evangelical pact of non-aggression. So now various tiny Evangelical communities operate without being bothered, but also without really making any substantial impact on Polish society. Catholic Poles seem to treat Protestants less as “heretics” and more as “separate brothers,” a sentiment which is not always returned by Polish Evangelicals, since so many of them are former Catholics who see serious doctrinal error in the Roman Church.

2. How has it continued to change and what new directions do you note since the turn of the twenty-first century?

In 2006, while working on my doctoral dissertation, I spent one year in Poland and audited a year-long course, “The Primacy of the Pope and the Holy See,” at Cardinal Wyszyński University in Warsaw. This course was taught by a well-known and prolific Polish Dominican professor, Jacek Salij, OP. While I was the only Protestant and my classmates were mostly priests, monks, and nuns, along with a few lay theologians, I was welcomed with genuine hospitality and felt that my dissident views were respected. Interestingly, despite the very ecumenical spirit, many of my fellow classmates were skeptical of the reforms introduced by Vatican II and were much more drawn to the Council of Trent and Latin Mass. Many of them associated Vatican II with liberalism and a kind of slippery slope into compromise with secularism and/or Protestantism. (I am not sure if my professor shared these sentiments.) Also, most of the students seemed well versed in the Scriptures and took its authority seriously, but within the bounds of the interpretive framework of the Holy See, also known as Tradition.

3. Are there signs of biblical renewal because of Bible reading by Roman Catholics?

Yes. Over the last twenty years, Polish Catholics have been increasingly interested in the Bible. For instance, during my last visit to a Polish post office, I noticed several Bible editions (including one for children) for sale.

4. How is Pope Francis changing things now?

That is hard to say at this point. Polish Catholicism is rather conservative, and I sense that much of his leadership is being questioned or found provocative.

5. What can we expect from the Roman Church in future?

I think there will be an increasing emphasis on uniting global Christianity under one bishop, the Bishop of Rome. In my conversations with Catholic seminary students at the Cardinal Wyszyński seminary I sensed openness to tolerating a certain amount of Protestant distinctiveness (married clergy,

simplicity of worship, justification by grace as understood in current dialogue with mainline Lutherans, etc.) as long as the primacy of the Pope and the Holy See is recognized. This was already done once at the end of the sixteenth century, in the establishment of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which the Eastern Church viewed (and still views) as a stab in the back. Naturally, this unquestionably genuine desire for unity is still at the expense of truth and thus altogether invalid. The Reformers addressed this already in their exchanges with Erasmus as well as with Catholic apologists of the Reformation and post-Reformation periods.

SPAIN, JOSÉ DE SEGOVIA

1. How did Roman Catholic theology change in your country after Vatican II?

The news of the *Aggiornamento* brought in by Pope John XXIII (1958–63) with the Second Vatican Council created unmistakable tensions within Spanish Roman Catholicism. Spain was then still under the dictatorship of General Franco, who imposed a national Catholicism in which there was no place for religious liberty, an issue discussed by the Council. The first signs of tolerance came with the Law of 1967, which allowed the right of religious liberty, using the language of the Council, even though this tolerance did not become freedom until the further Law of 1980.

The pressures from within the Roman Church for a change in Spain were only reinforcements of world opinion. A secret meeting of the Metropolitan Council, composed of fifteen ranking prelates, met in Madrid in early 1963 to discuss a religious liberty law. They approved the Foreign Affairs Minister Castiella's *Statute for Non-Catholic Religions*. The substance of the statute, while prohibiting proselytizing, allowed judicial recognition to the major Protestant churches as religious groups.

The irony of it all is that the consideration of a law for religious liberty did not keep the Spanish delegation from opposing the idea when it was presented in session at the Vatican Council. We still were more popish than the pope! The Spanish and Italian delegates and some Latin American delegates fought back. Cardinal de Arriba y Castro opposed free worship, saying that it “will ruin the Catholic Church if it is put in effect in those states where Catholicism is the leading religion,” because “only the Catholic Church has the right to preach the Gospel” (Paul Blanshard, *Paul Blanshard on Vatican II* [Boston: Beacon, 1966], 78).

2. The Problem of Religious Liberty

The opposition of the Latin delegates to the declaration on religious liberty of Vatican II brought instant criticism from around the world. The political

maneuverings behind the scenes by the Spanish and Italian delegates caused delays and almost succeeded in keeping the proposal from reaching the floor for a vote. In the year I was born, 1964, the pope told one of the Spanish cardinals, "Don't be afraid of religious liberty. I know full well that the circumstances in Spain are very special, and I will be with Spain, but the Spanish should be with the pope: they must not fear religious liberty" (Ya, October 10, 1964).

In Barcelona the Catalanian Reformed theologian José Grau and his printer Salvador Salvado were sentenced to a month and a day in prison for publishing an unauthorized religious book ("American Money and Spanish Tyranny," *Christian Century* 79.3 [January 17, 1962]: 76). Early in 1963 ten more Evangelical churches were allowed to reopen, but six churches were refused permission. On February 15, 1964, it was reported in the London *Sunday Telegraph* that the pope had received for study the text of a proposed Spanish law to grant more freedom to the Protestants, and in March 1964 the Supreme Court ruled against the government and authorized an Evangelical church in Valencia.

Eugen Gerstenmaier, President of the West German Bundestag, came to Spain to discuss the possibilities of Spain's entrance into the European Common Market. At the press conference he stated that "the treatment of problems of the Protestants in Spain is the touchstone of Spain's earnestness in joining the other European nations." The Spanish Archbishop Alonso Muñoyerro of Sión answered that full religious liberty would enslave the conscience of the country's Roman Catholic majority and destroy the Catholic unity in Spain (Betty Thompson, "Protestants, Catholic View Religious Liberty," *Christian Century* 82.24 [June 16, 1965]: 788–90). This fear was not only propagated by the majority of prelates, but had also become the focal point for conservative political leaders.

During the debate to approve the 1967 law in the *Cortes* (Franco's Parliament), the dominate theme of the opposition was to preserve the unity of the state. Mr. Barcena expressed it this way: "We do not fear religious liberty, but that our unity will be undermined by harmful proselytizing." Another member of the *Cortes*, Coronel de Palma, added, "In the name of 30,000 persons who do not profess our religion, they seek to limit the rights of the 30 million Catholics" (Juan Antonio Monroy, "Los debates en las Cortes," *Restauración* [July/August, 1972]: 20). Even at the time of the final vote to approve the Law, the Minister of Justice took special care to reassure the *Cortes* that the Law would not in any way disrupt the unity of the state.

Spain, like other traditional Catholic countries, found its unity in religion. This is why Franco used the expression *national Catholicism* to bring back

the unity imposed by the Catholic monarchs when Spain was founded in the fifteenth century, expelling the Jews and Muslims or forcing them to convert to Christianity. Since then, to be Spanish is to be Catholic. Historic Catalanian and Basque nationalisms have also a strong Catholic uniting factor.

3. *The Influence of Vatican II and Changes*

Vatican II brought many changes in image and language, but not in dogma. A similar ambiguous ethos is expressed by the present pope when he says, “Who am I to judge a homosexual?” At the same time, however, he vetoes the appointment of a French homosexual ambassador to the Holy See and campaigns against homosexual marriage in Italy. The same happens with regard to communion for divorced Catholics. Pope Francis says they have to be accepted, but at the same time there is still no communion for the divorced and remarried. In the language of Lampedusa’s Gattopardo, “Everything needs to change, so everything can stay the same.”

What John XXIII did was “to open the windows.” There is fresh air, but a change of climate is not a change of dogma. Vatican II updated the position of the Roman Catholic Church in relation to the world, but the trick is that it has done so without changing the traditional doctrine. Francis is not the first pope known for his fatherly and warm attitude. “Good Pope John” was gentle in spirit, meek in manners, and approachable by the people. Roncalli was the first modern pope to be seen not as a king, but as a pastor. His language was simple and his human demeanor was humble. Like Francis, John XXIII did not want a rigidly “doctrinal” church that judges the mistakes of the world, but a loving “mother” who would offer protection and understanding for all, as Leonardo de Chirico says in *A Christian’s Pocket Guide to the Papacy* ([Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2015], 72).

There are two main schools of thought about Vatican II. One sees it as breaking with the traditional and bringing a progressive trend to the Church. According to this interpretation, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI imposed a rigid reading in areas of potential change in ecclesiology, liturgy, and morality. The mainstream school insists that Vatican II stands in continuity with Vatican I (1870–71), completing what was left unfinished. There is no doctrinal change. It is a pastoral approach to what Benedict XVI called a reform-in-continuity, a dynamic restatement of the well-established Roman Catholic heritage.

The leading Spanish Reformed theologian José Grau (1931–2014) used to say that the key word for understanding the Second Vatican Council is integration. There are theological values modern Catholicism wants to integrate and make part of its framework, like interest in the study of the Bible, the use

of common language in the liturgy, the importance of preaching, the place of the laity in the life of the Church, a notion of episcopal collegiality, and the admission of certain pluralism. Even more, modern Roman Catholicism wants to integrate “all the values of humanity.” Why? As Paul VI said, “all is Catholic.”

According to the Vatican II decree on ecumenism, “Everything comes from Christ and leads to Him, because it belongs by natural right to the only Church of Christ” (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3). The idea “to make the world Catholic” comes from the notion of *totus Christus*, Rome as the continuity of the incarnation of Christ in history, not by delegation, but by substitution. According to Paul VI in *Ecclesiam Suam* (I), quoting John XXIII in *Mystici Corporis*, “we have to get used to seeing the Church as Christ himself.” This is still for us today, according to a former Catholic scholar, the Spanish Reformed theologian Francisco Lacueva (1911–2005), the main problem with Roman Catholicism. *Totus Christus* is *alter Christus*!