

The Legacy of Vatican II: Untying the Knots of a Difficult Reception

As part of our wider conversation on the “Reshaping of Catholicism” and the challenge of Catholic self-identity in the present social-cultural context, I have been invited to address the rather broad topic of “Vatican II and Its Legacy.” I have taken this as an invitation to approach the question of Catholic self-identity according to an ecclesiological perspective. The struggle for a renewed understanding of the church is perhaps the most important touchstone of Catholic self-identity in the past century. The vision of the nature and mission of the church is an immediate reflection of who we understand ourselves to be – including the inner life and the structuring of relations within the Catholic Church and who we understand ourselves to be in relation to the wider world. Identities are not shaped in isolation. Rather, we come to be who we are and develop an awareness of our unique self-identity in and through the process of interacting with those around us. This is as true for the church as a human community as it is for each of us as individual persons.

It is widely acknowledged that the Second Vatican Council, which met in four sessions from 1962 to 1965, was a pivotal moment of self-reflection by the Catholic Church. Its reflections were ordered, according to the plan laid out by Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens,¹ by the consideration of the inner life and activities of the church or the church *ad intra* and by a

1 A French version of the text of Suenens’s “plan” can be found in “Aux origines du concile Vatican II,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 107 (1985) 3-21 ; [English translation : « A Plan for the Whole Council, » in A. Stacpoole, ed. *Vatican II by those Who Were There* (London: 1986) 88-105.] See also L-J. Suenens, *Souvenirs et espérances* (Paris: Fayard, 1991) 55-131; For Suenens’s intervention *in aula* on December 4, 1962, see: AS I/4, 222-224. See also: Mathijs Lamberigts and Leo Declerck “The Role of Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens at Vatican II,” in D. Donnelly, J. Famarée, M. Lamberigts, K. Schelkens, eds. *The Belgian Contribution to the Second Vatican Council* (Leuven: Peeters, 2008) 61-217. Lamberigts and Declerck see parallels between Suenens’s plan and John XXIII’s Radio Address of September 11, 1962, on the eve of the council (p. 74). For the text of his speech: AAS 54 (1962) 678-685.

deliberation on its relations with other Christian churches, with non-Christian religions, and with the world at large – the church *ad extra*. The former gave rise to the Constitutions on Divine Revelation, on the Sacred Liturgy, and to the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. The latter is complemented by a series of decrees on the various vocations and charisms of the baptized: on the Apostolate of the Laity, the Renewal of Religious Life, the Life, Ministry, and Formation of Priests, the Pastoral Office of the Bishops, and on Eastern Catholic Churches. The council's reflections on the "external relations" of the church, so to speak, can be found in the Decrees on Mission and on Ecumenism, in the Declarations on Religious Liberty and on Non-Christian Religions, and in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

The Second Vatican Council was a crucial moment in the redefinition of Catholic self-identity in the context of a changing world and a response to the crisis of modernity which Catholicism had long resisted.² The new self-consciousness reflected in the council documents did not easily or immediately take root. The last half century has been marked by a sustained effort – with mixed results – to receive this renewed self-understanding in a social and cultural context marked by an accelerated pace of change. A deeper understanding of the difficult reception of the council's fundamental orientations can help us to appreciate both the magnitude of the transition that it unleashed, and the continuing challenge of unravelling the tightly knotted resistance to the council's ideal of a poor church in solidarity with and in service to all of humanity, especially to the poor. The pontificate of Pope Francis has ushered in a new period, a fresh reception of Vatican II's vision of a humble, mission-driven community of Christ's followers.

This paper will explore the difficult reception of two fundamental insights of the council's ecclesiology which exemplify the difficulty of embracing this redefinition of Catholicism. The

² See, for example, John W. O'Malley, "Vatican II Revisited as Reconciliation: The Francis Factor," in Massimo Faggioli and Andrea Vicini, eds. *The Legacy of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist, 2015), 3-25.

first, drawn from the councils' renewed self-understanding and rooted in its reflections on the church *ad intra*, is the recovery of the biblical image of the church as "people of God." The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, dedicates a full chapter to this theme, which runs like a thread through all of the council documents (where the term appears more than a hundred times).³ The second insight, difficult to sum up in a single term, is that of the church's dialogical engagement with the world. The text renowned for its consideration of the church's stance toward the world *ad extra*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, speaks of the "law of all evangelization" in terms of a *mutual* exchange between the church and contemporary culture (GS 44).⁴ It sees the world – though not untouched by sin – as the locus of the Spirit's activity inviting our attentive discernment. I contend that the struggle to embrace the renewal of Catholic identity articulated by the Second Vatican Council is epitomized in the eclipse of people of God ecclesiology and in a certain retreat into a negative evaluation of the world. Finally, I will consider briefly how Pope Francis is once again drawing our attention to these central insights of the council's ecclesiology. Deeply imbued with the theology of the people – a uniquely Argentinian flavor of liberation theology, he is carrying forward in our time the council's legacy and vision of a missionary people in solidarity with all of humanity.

I. Catholic Self-Identity and the Church as People of God

3 H. Tardif et G. Pelloquin, eds. *Index et Concordance Vatican II* (Paris : Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1969), 193.

4 Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [*Lumen gentium*]," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. 2 Vols. Edited by Norman P. Tanner (Washington, DC Georgetown UP / London: Sheed and Ward, 1990). All citations from the council documents are taken from this edition. All subsequent citations will be indicated by the use of the accepted abbreviations in parentheses within the body of the text (e.g.: GS, LG, etc.).

In 1984 the International Theological Commission (ITC) published a study on “Select Themes of Ecclesiology” to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council.⁵ This document devotes considerable space to a reflection on the church as the “new” people of God, underlining how the council gave it “pride of place” by devoting the entire second chapter of *Lumen gentium* to this theme. The commission did not hesitate to affirm “that the expression ‘people of God’ has come to stand for the ecclesiology of the council,” even preferring it to “Body of Christ” or “Temple of the Holy Spirit” (II.1). Reflecting on the theological and pastoral motives of the council fathers in according this priority, the commission observes:

The expression “people of God” had an advantage over other designations in that it could render better that sacramental reality that all the baptized share in common, both as a dignity in the Church and as a responsibility in the world. At the same time, it could underline the communitarian nature and historical dimension of the Church—as many of the fathers wanted (II.1).

The Extraordinary Synod of 1985

In retrospect, it is remarkable that the ITC document accords so little attention – a few brief paragraphs – to the notion of the church as sacrament and mystery of communion (VIII), the theme of the first chapter of *Lumen gentium*. It is at great pains to emphasize the necessity of holding together in balance an understanding of the church as “mystery” and as “historic subject” (III). Cautioning against the dangers of treating these two images – church as mystery and church

⁵ International Theological Commission, “Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council,” at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1984_ecclesiologia_en.html. All subsequent references and citations from this text will be given in parentheses, using the numbering of sections provided in the document.

as people of God – in a “dualistic fashion or as opposed terms,” the ITC insists that the latter’s drawing our attention to the reality of the church as a concrete, historical subject is integral to the nature of the church as mystery or sacrament (III.1). Finally, it acknowledges that this people, constituted by the new covenant in Christ and formed by the Spirit through baptism, is essentially missional – called to bring the transformative power of the Gospel to bear on the realization of the reign of God in solidarity with all peoples.

It is striking to set the work of the ITC alongside the Final Report⁶ of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, called to commemorate the twentieth anniversary since the close of Vatican II. Much of the debate at the synod centered on the limited and inadequate reception of the council’s ecclesiology, including the misuse of the notion of the church as people of God.⁷ While many pre-synodal reports had used the term “people of God” with positive effect, the prevailing discourse at the synod emphasized its misuse. Cardinal Godfried Danniels attempted to summarize concerns raised regarding the incomplete or superficial reception of the council’s teaching on the church in his Initial Report:

Some ideological and false ideas have been brought in under the notion “people.” In addition, the mystery of the church and its sacramental condition are often neglected. The church as institution is sometimes separated from the church as mystery, and an opposition is claimed between the church as communion and the church as institution, between the popular church and the hierarchical church.⁸

6 “Report (1985) Extraordinary Synod,” *Origins* 15 (1985) 441-450.

7 For a detailed study, see Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Synod of 1985 and the Notion of the Church,” *Chicago Studies* 26/3 (November 1987) 330-345.

8 Cardinal Danneels, 25 Nov. 1985, report to extraordinary Synod: Synthesis of response to preparatory questionnaires. *La Documentation Catholique* 83 (1986): 31-35. Cited in Komonchak, “The Synod of 1985,” 331.

In an effort to counter these tendencies, the Final Report chose to give prioritize the notion of the church as communion and maintained, “The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea in the council’s documents” (II, C, 1). The image of people of God is mentioned only once – alongside four other images enumerated in the context of the report’s discussion of the church as “mystery:”⁹

The whole importance of the church derives from her connection with Christ. The council has described the church in diverse ways: as the People of God, the Body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the family of God. These descriptions of the church complement one another and must be understood in light of the mystery of Christ or of the church in Christ. We cannot replace a false one-sided view of the church as purely hierarchical with a new and equally one-sided sociological conception (II, A, 3).

A clue to the synodal fathers’ pre-occupation with a reductionist use of the image of church as people of God might be gleaned from the “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation,” issued in 1984 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.¹⁰ That document had warned against misappropriations of people of God language by certain currents of liberation theology which, it maintained, were tainted by the classism of Marxist theory. It

9 Joseph A. Komonchak sees this as an “astonishing denigration” of a central element of the council’s teaching. “Introduction,” *Synode extraordinaire: Célébration de Vatican II* (Paris : Cerf, 1986) 9-32. English version at: <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/introduction-to-synode-extraordinaire.pdf>, p. 9.

10 Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation [4 August, 1984],” at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_1984_0806_theology-liberation_en.html. For a pointed critique of this document, see Juan Luis Segundo, *Theology and the Church: A Response to Cardinal Ratzinger and a Warning to the Whole Church* (New York: Seabury, 1985).

warned against tendencies to pit a “church of the people” – understood especially as a church of the poor – over and against the hierarchical church, where the hierarchy were identified with “the ruling class which has to be opposed” (IX, 13). Further, the instruction claimed that ideological uses of people of God language had led to an unfortunate juxtaposition between a church “from below” and a church “from above,” or to challenge the structures of ecclesiastical power with pleas for democratic forms of participation drawn from the world of liberal democratic society. Lost from view in this entire debate is the fact that in mid-century biblical scholars and theologians had attempted to recover the biblical image of church as people of God, pointing to its prevalence in the New Testament.¹¹ The fathers of Vatican II had deliberately chosen to give it a central place in order to correct an imbalance in Catholic ecclesiology which had overemphasized the clerical and hierarchical or the mystical and vertical dimensions of the church to the virtual exclusion of the human and horizontal dimensions. Vatican II’s emphasis on the church as people of God served to underline the equal dignity of all the baptized and to re-center the church’s theology of ministry as service rather than dominance over the laity. Where Catholic ecclesiology had historically focused on the exercise of institutional and sacramental power, often framed in triumphal terms, the image of the church as the pilgrim people of God implied the embrace of a humbler self-understanding. This is a people that has not fully arrived at the fulfilment of its calling, and thus stands in constant need of purification, renewal, and reform (LG 8; UR 6). As the ITC had rightly noted, the image of church as people of God serves to emphasize the community of the baptized as a concrete historical subject, subject to the contingencies of history and to the all the particularities of diverse cultural and social contexts.

¹¹ See, for example: Lucien Cerfaux, *La théologie de l’Église suivant Saint Paul*. 3ème édition. Unam Sanctam, 54 (Paris : Cerf, 1965; Original Edition: 1942), especially pp. 13-135; M. D. Koster, *Ekklesiologie im Werden* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1940); Anscar Vonier, *The People of God* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1937).

The Extraordinary Synod's decision to emphasize the council's communion ecclesiology, while fostering renewed attention to an ecclesiology that has born much fruit in contemporary ecclesiology and ecumenical dialogue, had the perhaps unintended consequence of minimizing, if not eclipsing, the counter-balancing image of the church as people of God in official Catholic teaching and in the systematic study of the church in the years that followed. It can rightfully be argued that the Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod failed to reflect the more balanced approach of the council's own teaching, which sought to hold together in harmony the divine and human dimensions of the church (LG 8).

Writing in the wake of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, the American ecclesiologist Joseph Komonchak averred, "One can only agree that the one-sided hierarchical ecclesiology of the recent past should not be replaced by a one-sided sociological view of the church, but neither is great progress made if it is replaced by a one-sided mystical view."¹² Komonchak observes that the Final Report of the Extraordinary Synod echoed the views of the German language group at the synod, in particular those expressed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in the series of interviews with the journalist Vittorio Messori in the months immediately preceding the Synod. In those interviews, Ratzinger shared his conviction that the root of the crisis confronting the church in the wake of the council was to be found in a mistaken idea of the church. I cite these remarks at length because they reveal a certain ecclesiological dualism, one which *Lumen gentium* was at pains to redress:¹³

12 Komonchak, "The Synod of 1985," 336.

13 Particularly instructive is the commentary of Aloys Grillmeier, *peritus* of the Doctrinal Commission at the Council, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*. Vol. I. Ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967. He notes, "The Constitution aims at a particular view of the activity of the Spirit *in and through* the social structure of the Church" (149; Emphasis mine). Elsewhere, he observes, "The 'people of God' does not mean here the mass of the faithful in contrast to the hierarchy, but the Church as a whole, with every group of its members. (...) The title also serves a profounder realization of the Church as *communion*,

For a Catholic ... the church is indeed composed of men [*sic*] who organize her external visage. But behind this, the fundamental structures are willed by God himself [*sic*], and therefore they are inviolable. Behind the *human* exterior stands the mystery of a *more than human reality*, in which reformers, sociologists, organizers have no authority whatsoever. If the church, instead, is viewed as a human construction, the product of our own efforts, even the contents of the faith end up assuming an arbitrary character: the faith, in fact, no longer has an authentic, guaranteed instrument through which to express itself. Thus, without a view of the mystery of the church that is also *supernatural* and not only *sociological*, Christology itself loses its reference to the divine in favor of a purely human project: the Gospel becomes the *Jesus-project*, the social-liberation project or other merely historical, immanent projects that can still seem religious in appearance, but which are atheistic in substance.¹⁴

The ghosts of liberation theology and of Marxist social analysis lurk unmistakably in the background. This becomes more evident when Ratzinger turns his attention to the idea of the church as people of God and to what he perceives as a reductive, immanentist tendency in its interpretation. He contends:

Behind the concept of the church as People of God, which has been so exclusively thrust into the foreground today, hide influences of ecclesiologies that revert to the Old

koinonia" (153).

¹⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*. Translated by Salvator Attanasio and Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 46.

Testament; and perhaps also political, partisan and collectivist influences. In reality, there is no truly New Testament, Catholic concept of the church without a direct and vital relation not only with sociology but first of all with Christology. The church does not exhaust herself in the ‘collective’ of believers: being the ‘Body of Christ’ she is much more than the simple sum of her members.¹⁵

Human Community and Agent of Divine Grace in History

Writing in the wake of response to the “Ratzinger Report,” Gustav Thils could not hide his unease with these remarks which seemed to juxtapose a human “façade” of the church with its supposedly true identity – a mystical, supernatural, supra-human essence.¹⁶ Ratzinger’s effort to combat what may have been real distortions of people of God ecclesiology and his dualistic framing of the problem reveal a preference for a more abstract, mystical ideal. In effect, such an approach tends to disparage the concrete historical and human reality of the community that God has called “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet 2:20). In Thils’ view, Ratzinger’s dichotomy between the human façade and the genuine mystery of the church is a betrayal of *Lumen gentium*’s affirmation that “the mystical body of Christ, a visible assembly and a spiritual community, an earthly church and a church enriched with heavenly gifts, must not be considered as two things, but as forming one complex reality comprising a human and a divine element” (LG 8).

The *relatio* presented to the council fathers introducing the second chapter of *Lumen gentium* had emphasized that “the presentation ‘on the People of God’ truly pertains to the *very mystery of the church* considered in itself.” As such, it maintained, this chapter “cannot be

¹⁵ Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 47.

¹⁶ Gustav Thils, *En dialogue avec l’ “Entretien sur la foi”* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Peeters, 1986), 49-52.

separated from the basic statement of the church's nature and purpose."¹⁷ Where chapter one on the mystery of the communion treats the church in God's plan beginning from the moment of creation and moving through the history of salvation, chapter two turns its attention to the people of the new covenant in Christ, moving through history toward its eschatological fulfilment. The grace of communion with God and participation in the divine life through baptism builds on nature, raises up the human community to form a people that is at once eminently human and subject to sin, yet called to be a prophetic sign and instrument of grace in the world. Any failure to take seriously the human element of the church as an integral dimension of the church as mystery and sacrament of God's saving plan (LG 9) unfolding in history, This argued, does not do justice to the council's presentation of the church, and thus, to the fullness of Catholic self-identity.

Perhaps the most searing critique of the "reversal" of the 1985 Synod and of Cardinal Ratzinger's highly influential theology came in the year 2002, with the publication of a call for the retrieval of Vatican II's teaching on the church as people of God by the Belgian born, Latin American theologian, José Comblin.¹⁸ He does not mince words. Comblin paints the systematic resistance to liberation theology and to the council's empowering ecclesiology as a deliberate attempt to protect a highly centralized church dominated by clerical power and clinging to the obsolete ideal of a Constantinian church. A generation after the Extraordinary Synod of 1985, he laments the consequences of its ecclesiological determinations. He views the displacement of Vatican II's people of God ecclesiology and its replacement by an almost exclusive insistence on

¹⁷ *Constitutiones Dogmaticae Lumen Gentium Synopsis Historica*. Edited by Guiseppe Alberigo (Bologna: Istituto di Studi Religiosi, 1975), 441. Cited in Komonchak, "The Synod of 1985," 336-337. Emphasis in Komonchak.

¹⁸ José Comblin, *People of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004); Original version: *Povo de Deus* (Sao Paulo: Paulus Editoria, 2002).

“hierarchical communion”¹⁹ in the discourse of the official magisterium of the church as a refusal to embrace the council’s espousal of the biblical vision of a humble church in need of constant self-examination and reform. This is tantamount, Comblin contends, to a refusal to take seriously the church as a human community. He writes:

The hierarchy tends to spiritualize the church and silence its human reality, or it exalts it as communion, peace, truth, happiness – which amounts to the same thing. By concealing the human reality, it seeks to escape all criticism. The Catholic hierarchy does not willingly submit to sociological or anthropological analysis, as if being a divine communion puts it beyond the reach of such disciplines. (...)

Indeed, the church gains nothing by seeking to conceal its human character, which inevitably sneaks back in. If the people of God disappears what reappears as the church’s human reality is the clerical bureaucracy, the bureaucratic centralization of the Roman Curia and its very human (in the pejorative sense) and scarcely Christian politics. When the people of God is denied, what is left is the post-Tridentine church, centered on its own juridical, clerical, bureaucratic structure, stuck in a defensive, polemic stance; a church at war with Protestantism and modernity.²⁰

Revisiting this chapter in the reception of Vatican II helps to illustrate the struggle to receive one of the council’s central insights, namely, that church means the baptized faithful – all of whom participate in the threefold office of Christ as priest, prophet, and servant king, and all of whom

¹⁹ This term appears only twice in *Lumen gentium* (nos. 21 and 22), and five times in the *Nota Praevia*, or explanatory note appended to the constitution.

²⁰ Comblin, *People of God*, 60.

are co-responsible for the life and mission of the church. It sheds light on the mind-set of a self-perpetuating and closed clerical culture that to date has been unable to reform itself, as so painfully demonstrated by the continuing crisis of accountability that surrounds the administration of cases of sexual abuse by members of the clergy.²¹

A persistent failure to take seriously the co-responsibility of all the faithful has contributed greatly to a half-hearted implementation of the structures of participation and dialogue needed for the full unfolding of the gifts and charisms of the laity in service to the church's mission. Neglect of the council's reflections on the dignity and equality of the people of God has favoured the continuation of a passive "father knows best" culture among many and fostered an understanding of the laity's participation in the mission of the church in liturgically and ecclesially-centered terms. Few of the baptized lay faithful are truly conscious of themselves as actors or as responsible agents of evangelical transformation in the world of their everyday experience. They do not imagine themselves as witnesses or servants of the Gospel as they go about their quotidian tasks as parents, co-workers, citizens. They have little awareness of their calling to what Pope Francis has aptly called the "middle-class of holiness," to become the saints

21 Pope Francis has often warned of the need to uproot the culture of clericalism, noting how it creates a context where abuse can fester and go unchecked. E.g.: "Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium, On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* [The Joy of the Gospel, (2013)]," no. 102, at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html. All subsequent citations from this edition. References will be indicated in parentheses by the abbreviation "EG". See also, "Meeting with the Bishops: Greeting of the Holy Father, Santiago Cathedral, 16 January 2018," at http://m2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/january/documents/papa-francesco_20180116_cile-santiago-vescovi.html.

next door.²² They have not been empowered for mission. This brings us to the second dimension of Catholic ecclesial identity, the relationship of the church to the world.

II. Church and World: The Law of Evangelization

In his 1985 interview, Cardinal Ratzinger revealed a profound sense of unease with the direction of theological and pastoral initiatives that displayed a new optimism and openness regarding the church-world relationship. He acknowledged the necessity for Vatican II to revise its stance toward a modern world that it had long resisted, affirming that there are “values” originating outside the church that can “find their place – provided they are clarified and corrected – in her perspective.” Nevertheless, he insisted, “whoever thinks that these two realities can meet each other or even be identical would betray that he knows neither the church nor the world.” His perspective on the church-world relationship, marked by an Augustinian outlook,²³ betrayed a conviction that many Catholics had fallen into a naïve optimism regarding the world, having overlooked a fundamental opposition:

22 Francis, *Rejoice and be Glad: On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World* (New York: Paulist, 2018), no. 7, p. 5. Francis borrows this term from Joseph Malegou, *Pierres noires. Les classes moyennes du salut* (Paris : 1958). See note 4, p. 5.

23 See Joseph A. Komonchak, “Vatican II and the Encounter between Catholicism and Liberalism,” in *Catholicism and Liberalism*. Edited by R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 77-89; “The Legislative History of *Gaudium et Spes*: An Original Tension at Vatican II and Interpretations of Catholic Social Thought,” *Journal of Law, Philosophy and Cultures* 2/1 (2008): 89-120. See also, Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2012), 66-90; Lieven Boeve, “Vatican II and the Crisis of Modernity: The End of Dialogue with the World?” in *The Legacy of Vatican II*. Edited by M. Lamberigts and L. Kenis (Leuven: KU Leuven, 2002), 83-94; James Gerard McEvoy, *Leaving Christendom for Good: Church-World Dialogue in a Secular Age* (Lexington Books, 2016), 143-162.

It is not Christians who oppose the world, but rather, the world that opposes itself to them when the truth about God, about Christ and about man [*sic*] is proclaimed. The world waxes indignant when sin and grace are called by their names. After the phase of indiscriminate “openness” it is time for Christians to reacquire the consciousness of belonging to a minority and of often being in opposition to what is obvious, plausible, and natural for that mentality which the New Testament calls – and certainly not in a positive sense – the “spirit of the world.” It is time to find again the courage of non-conformism, the capacity to oppose many of the trends of the surrounding culture, renouncing a certain euphoric post-conciliar solidarity.²⁴

In these remarks, Cardinal Ratzinger envisioned a new phase in the reception of Vatican II, a “*restoration*” that would involve “the search for a new balance after all the exaggerations of an indiscriminate opening to the world, after the overly positive interpretations of an agnostic and atheistic world”²⁵ which depart from “the intentions of the council fathers.”²⁶ These remarks are widely seen today as programmatic orientations which would guide the work of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith for a generation.

The Project of a New Evangelization

One of the terms that is most emblematic of Catholicism’s struggle to embrace a renewed understanding of its place in the world and a rethinking of missional stance is that of the “new evangelization.”²⁷ The use of this term and some approaches to the project of a new

24 Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 36-37.

25 Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 37.

26 Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 39.

27 For a more comprehensive reflection on this concept, see: Paul Grogan and Kersteen Kim, *The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context, and Practice* (London: T&T Clark, 2015).

evangelization betrays an ambivalent attitude toward the world, often reflected in a persistent inability to conceive a positive and dialogical engagement with the contemporary world, and in a pattern of self-referential or ecclesially-centered thinking. In the North American context, “new evangelization” is often used as a code word to cover an effort to reach out to the many disaffected baptized Catholics, especially the young, who no longer take part in the organized activities of church life.²⁸ In the European context, one might consider the preoccupation of Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI (a name chosen with the express intention of recalling the Christian roots of European civilization), to denounce the dangers of secularization and modernity while neglecting opportunities for constructive cooperation.²⁹ These approaches fall short of Vatican II’s vision of missional engagement as a confident – though not naïve – turn to the world in a process of mutual dialogue. *Gaudium et Spes*, builds on *Lumen gentium*’s teaching that the church is at once a “spiritual community” and a concrete human community, locating it *in* the world, where it moves “*with* the whole of humanity” and shares in solidarity “the world’s earthly lot.” It is from this position of partnership and solidarity that the church carries out its transforming mission – not standing over and against the world in judgment but working from within as “a leaven and a sort of soul of human society” (GS 40).

28 See, for example: Ralph Martin, *The Urgency of the New Evangelization: Answering the Call* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2013).

29 Joseph Ratzinger, *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Crossroad, 2006); *Wendezeit für Europa? Diagnosen und Prognosen zur Lage von Kirche und Welt* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1991); English Version: *A Turning Point for Europe? The Church in the Modern World: Assessment and Forecast*. Translated by Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010); Marcella Pella and Joseph Ratzinger, *Ohne Wurzeln: Der Relativismus und die Krise der Europäischen Kultur* (Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich Verlag, 2004); English version: *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 2006). For an overview, see Lieven Boeve, “Europe in Crisis: A Question of Belief or Unbelief? Perspectives from the Vatican,” in *Modern Theology* 23/2 (2007) 205-227.

Pope John Paul II first coined the expression “new evangelization” during his 1979 pilgrimage to Poland, calling on the people of his homeland to a renewal of faith after a millennium of Christianity in their land.³⁰ His use of this language was then extended to the context of the “New World” in an address delivered to the assembly of the Latin American Conference of Bishops (CELAM) in 1983 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Mindful of the approach of the 500th anniversary since the arrival of the first European missionaries in the Americas, he suggested that its commemoration must include “not a re-evangelization, but a new evangelization. New in its fervor, in its methods, in its expression.”³¹ Pope John Paul called for a movement of deepening fidelity and renewed proclamation of the Gospel that would be characterized by a fuller reception of the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World and of the orientations of CELAM’s 1979 Puebla document. The latter carries forward CELAM’s prophetic embrace of a preferential option for the poor, its critique of the systemic denial of a just standard of living to the masses, and its commitment to work for liberation from unjust social structures set out at Medellín in 1968.³²

30 John Paul II, “Homily at the Shrine of the Holy Cross, Mogila, Poland, 9 June 1979,” at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790609_polonia-mogila-nowa-huta.html.

31 John Paul II, “The Task of Latin America’s Bishops, Address of Pope John Paul II to the Latin American Bishops’ Council,” *Origins* 12 (1983) 659-62, at 661. “Discurso del Santo Padre Juan Pablo II a la Asamblea del CELAM (9 March 1983, Port-au-Prince, Haiti),” at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/speeches/1983/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19830309_asamblea-celam.html.

32 Medellín *Conclusiones* (Bogotá: Secretariado General del CELAM, 1976). One commentator on the Medellín conference, which gave an overarching orientation to the reception of Vatican II in Latin America, observed, “The bishops made a remarkable effort to criticize and analyze the structures of society. The philosophical and historical orientation of the document in itself constitutes a victory over the old triumphal and anti-historical heritage of the Church. They openly and concretely affirm the world and their commitment to it, while trying to educate people to the radical awareness that the situation is not an inevitable condition because *Dios lo quiere* (God wills it so). The transition from fatalism to conscious agents of change marks the beginning of an authentic revolution.” Cf. David Abalos, “The Medellín Conference,” *Cross Currents* (1969) 113-132, at 131-132. For a detailed account of the resistance to the commitments of Medellín and the context of the Puebla conference in 1979, see the papers by Penny Lernoux and Moises Sandoval in *Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary*. Edited by John Eagleson and Philip Sharper (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 3-27 and 28-43 respectively. The Fourth General Conference of CELAM in Santo Domingo is viewed by many as a departure from the pattern of Medellín and Puebla, as it does not follow the inductive method of beginning from a reading of the present reality and discerning

In 1990, Pope John Paul II issued an urgent call to renew the missionary activity of the church in his letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, noting that Vatican II “sought to renew the church’s life and activity in light of the needs of the contemporary world” (RM 1).³³ In it he cautions that “missionary activity ‘to the nations’ appears to be waning” and laments the increasing numbers of those “who do not know Christ and do not belong to the church” (RM 2). In the course of his reflections the pope identifies 3 situations or contexts in which the missional activity of the church is to be carried out: first, the mission *ad gentes* (to the nations), or to those peoples “who do not yet know Christ . . . and whose cultures have not yet been influenced by the gospel;” second, the pastoral care of active Christians; and finally, the mission to “groups of the baptized [who] have lost a living sense of faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the church” (RM 33). Here Pope John Paul II reserves the terms “new evangelization” and “re-evangelization” for this last category of missional activity. A rather unfortunate, and perhaps unintended result of this move was that many Catholic thinkers and leaders took this text as a jumping off point for a program of renewal that was inwardly and ecclesially focussed, rather than outgoing and Christ-centered. They envisioned the effort of evangelization as a program centered primarily on outreach to the disenchanting, the uncatechised and fallen away Catholics. In so doing, they failed to hear Pope John Paul’s echo of Vatican II and its call to be rethink

the signs of the times. Its abstract and ahistorical approach misses the opportunity to build on the positive movements present in the culture. Others lamented the domineering role of Vatican officials who pushed aside the working documents generated by years of preparation. See O. Ernesto Valiente, “The Reception of Vatican II in Latin America,” *Theological Studies* 73/4 (2012) 795-823; and Alfred Hennelly, ed. *Santo Domingo and Beyond: Documents and Commentaries from the Historic Meetings of the Latin American Bishops Conference* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

33 Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990), at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html . All subsequent citations of this document will be indicated by the abbreviation “RM” in parentheses. This encyclical was occasioned by the 25th anniversary of Vatican II’s Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, *Ad Gentes*.

mission as a response to the changing needs of the contemporary world – the whole world, and all its peoples. They have not sought ways to engage those who do not know Christ.

Disaffected former Catholics were not, however, the primary concern of the bishops that gathered more than a generation after *Redemptoris Missio* in 2012 for the Synod on the new evangelization. In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis no longer makes a sharp distinction between a mission “to the nations” and a mission to baptized Christians. He applies the term “new evangelization” to all three of these areas of ecclesial life without distinction. He contends, however, that priority must be given to “*those who do not know Jesus Christ or who have always rejected him*. Many of these,” he observes, “are quietly seeking God led by a yearning to see his face even in countries of ancient Christian tradition.” Further, Francis insists, “All of them have a right to receive the Gospel. Christians have the duty to proclaim the Gospel without excluding anyone” (EG 34).

Admittedly, *Redemptoris Missio* points to the interdependence of missionary activity in these varied situations. Nonetheless, a tendency to read into this teaching a sharp distinction between “the nations” and the baptized suggests the persistence of an operative a model of the church and culture that no longer holds – namely, a model that is based on a worldview of “Christendom.” In such a view, there once existed a harmonious and uniformly Christian society on one hand and a non-Christian world on the other; a Christianized culture and un-Christian, or un-evangelized cultures; a world identified naively with the order of God’s kingdom, and a world devoid of grace. In the pre-modern worldview of Christendom, the church enjoyed a privileged stature in society. Its activities were sanctioned by the state, at times by coercive practices. Some approaches to mission reflect a romantic idealism or a nostalgia for such a world.

The Second Vatican Council, faced with a collapse of the old partnership of church and state, as well as a rising consciousness of the dignity of the human person, the fact of religious pluralism, and the freedom of conscience, now saw the “non-Christian” or “un-evangelized” world no longer as the object of conquest and proselytism, but as a partner and collaborator in the transformative project of serving the kingdom of God. The recovery of an incarnational worldview opened the way to a more positive assessment of the world and of culture, in all of its diversity. A new world context required new ways of being church, new ways of engaging in mission, if the church was to be an effective agent of God’s own mission of love signified in the sending of Christ and the Spirit into the world. The council embraced this vision not as a “strategy” for growth or church planting, but as a response to what it discerned that God was doing in the world. To understand the magnitude of this shift, let us return for a moment to the context of Vatican II.

The Context of Vatican II: Epochal Social and Cultural Change

In his official letter for the convocation for the Second Vatican Council, on December 25 of 1961, Pope John XXIII said something quite remarkable. Less than twenty years had passed since the end of the Second World War, which saw the systematic extermination of six million Jews and the use of atomic weapons against civilian populations. It was the height of the Cold War. The age of space travel and satellite communications had begun. He noted the tragedy of human suffering, the advances of technology with ambivalent results, and the accompanying rise of materialism. Nonetheless, Pope John saw reasons for hope in the growing recognition of the dignity of the human person, in the desire for peace among nations, and in the increasing desire for unity among Christians. He declared rather boldly that the human community stood at the

threshold of a “new era.” Witnessing this transition, the church, he said, did not remain a “lifeless spectator.” It was “in great part transformed and renewed,” “more conscious of its responsibilities.”³⁴ This is remarkable assertion. Before a single bishop had arrived in Rome to begin the deliberations of the council, John XXIII could point to a new awareness of the church’s mission to humanity. He relates this new consciousness of the church’s self-identity to a new understanding of humanity and of humanity’s place in the world. The progress of science had resulted in a radically new capacity for creativity (and destruction). At the same time, it brought about a profound new awareness of the interdependence of humankind and of all creation. This shift in human consciousness, inseparable from the self-consciousness and identity of the church, would be reflected in Vatican II’s reflections on the dialectic relationship between the church and the world in *Gaudium et Spes*. Acknowledging that they were living in a time of profound social and cultural change, the council fathers attempted to describe the defining features of this “new age” of human history:

There is a growing number of men and women in every country who are conscious of being architects and authors of their own community. Throughout the world there is a continual increase in the awareness of autonomy as well as of responsibility, which is of greatest significance for the spiritual and moral maturity of humankind. This is more evident if we consider the unification of the world in terms of truth and justice. Thus, we are witnesses that a new humanism is being born in which the human is defined above all in terms of our responsibility to our sisters and brothers and to history (GS 55).

34 John XXIII, Apostolic Constitution Convoking the Second Vatican Council, *Humanae Salutis* (25 December 1961). (Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1963).

The context for discerning this responsibility, according to the council, is culture – the diverse cultures which shape our ways of living – including our sets of values, institutions, family and civic life, and expressions of spirituality. *Gaudium Spes* affirms that the church contributes to the “humanization” and the progress of peoples through the development of culture (GS 53-54).

Culture and the Law of Evangelization (GS 44)

In this new context, the Catholic Church, which until this period had been highly resistant to modernity,³⁵ adopted a stance of solidarity with all peoples, especially with the poor. This dialogical stance toward the world was grounded in a renewed confidence that the Lord of history was present and active in the world and is reflected in the council’s teaching on the dialectical tension between the Gospel and culture. In an attitude of humility, the church acknowledges that while Christians bring the spirit of the Gospel to the world, the church has always received from “advances in the sciences and the treasures hidden in various forms of human culture, which disclose human nature more completely and indicate new ways to the truth” (GS 44). The people of God have always made use of the language, the thought-world, and philosophies of different peoples in its effort to express the Christian faith and are called to “listen to the various voices of our day” with discernment in order to better understand and express the message of the gospel (GS 44). The process of mutual dialogue with the world is essential if the church is to grow in its understanding of God’s self-revelation. This process of continual discernment and adaptation is referred to as “the law of all evangelization,” a phrase drawn from the thought of the French Dominican Friar, Marie-Dominique Chenu.³⁶

35 Joseph A. Komonchak, “Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism,” *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 18 (1997) 353-385.

36 Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La Parole de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1964). See also: Christophe Potworowski, “History and Incarnation in the Theology of Marie-Dominique Chenu,” *Science et Esprit* 62/3 (1990) 237-265. For Chenu, the “law of evangelization” is inseparable from the “law

Yves Congar comments on *Gaudium et Spes* ' new approach to the temporal reality of the world, describing it as a response to the changing conditions of the church in society. Without identifying fully with the movement of the world, the church “espouses that movement in a life-for-the-world that one can call Mission, Apostolate, or Pastoral.”³⁷ This means taking seriously the concrete circumstances of humanity and is not without conflict or tension. Nonetheless, Congar insists, because the church looks upon humankind against the horizon of its eschatological goal, in view of its supernatural end, we can say that “the church and world are seeking the same things: the perfection or the flourishing of humankind.” He observes: “More than once GS proclaims that the reason the church speaks in this document, and speaks of things like love, property or war, *is humankind*. The church and the world are indeed made of, if one might say so, the same matter – humanity, and are basically seeking the same thing: to help humankind succeed and with humankind, the world.”³⁸ The fundamental attitude of the church is one of service, in the hope of and helping others to share in the condition of the people of God. It desires to serve to the world “to the extent or wherever it finds the truth of *the human person* at work.”³⁹

Pope Francis echoes John XXIII’s seminal insight into the “new age” that we are witnessing in human history. In a speech given during a visit to Florence in November of 2015, he observed, “we are not living in an epochal change so much as in a change of epoch.”⁴⁰ In his

of the incarnation.”

37 Yves M.-J. Congar, “Eglise et monde dans la perspective de Vatican II,” in *L’Eglise dans le monde de ce temps: Constitution pastorale “Gaudium et spes,”* Una Sanctam 65c. (Dir.) M.-J. Congar and M. Peuchmaurd (Paris: Cerf, 1967), III: 17-41, at 29. My free translation.

38 Congar, “Eglise et monde,” 31.

39 Congar, “Eglise et monde,” 33.

40 Francis, “Meeting with the Participants of the Convention for the Italian Church (10 November 2015),”

https://m.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151110_firenze-convegno-chiesa-italiana.html

teaching it is possible to discern a new reception of Vatican II's teaching. Of note are his return to the council's emphasis on the church as people of God and his call for all the baptized to rediscover their vocation as a people of missionary disciples in and at the service of the world.

III. Pope Francis and the Theology of the People

Pope Francis' approach to the church-world relationship is reflected in his presentation of the new evangelization and in particular of the evangelization of culture. His views have matured within the context of the church in Argentina and are shaped by the unique manner in which the Latin American bishops have received the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. The roots of this vision can be traced to the General Conferences of CELAM at Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979), held in the wake of Vatican II. The Medellin document, entitled "The Poverty of the Poor," committed the church to embrace evangelical poverty as a path to living in solidarity with the majority of Latin Americans who live in extreme poverty, and as an expression of God's preferential option for the poor. The method of evangelization adopted by CELAM was that of "conscientization." This Latin American Bishops affirmed, "Our pastoral mission is essentially a service of encouraging and educating the conscience of believers, to help them to perceive the responsibilities of their faith in their personal life and in their social life" (Medellin 6).⁴¹ Right on the heels of this meeting, in 1969, the Bishops of Argentina gathered in San Miguel to develop a set of orientations that would guide the implementation of this vision. The profound note of solidarity in their pastoral approach is summed up by Rafael Tello:

⁴¹ *The Church in Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in Light of the Council* (Bogota, Colombia: General Secretariat of CELAM, 1970).

The Argentine Church must see itself and its problems from the standpoint of the people. The people would then be the illuminating and unifying element of the problematic of the church. That means seeing it not in terms of internal conflicts, its internal difficulties, or its internal issues, but in terms of its insertion, as people of God, in the Argentine people. This would lead to a course of action connected to that insertion, the retrieval of Christian values that are in the people ... seeing from the standpoint of the people and adopting a people-centered approach to pastoral action.⁴²

This vision of the church-world relationship reflects a deep trust in the presence and action of God's Spirit in the lives of ordinary people. At the same time, its implementation would not be possible without the practice of discernment – weighing the values and practices of the culture in the light of the gospel, welcoming and building upon all that is good, and challenging all that falls short of love's design. An overriding theme of the San Miguel document is a profound respect and confidence in the poor as agents of their own liberation:

The church must discern its liberating or saving action from the perspective of the people and their interests, for inasmuch as the people are the subject and agent of human history, which is intimately linked with salvation history, the signs of the times become present and decipherable in the events proper to the people or that affect them.

42 Rafael Tello, *Reunión de los peritos de la Coepal, 30 marzo de 1969* (Ediciones Volveré, 2015). Cited in Rafael Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People*. Translated by Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 6-7.

... that means, loving the people, becoming attuned to them and comprehending them; trusting their creative capacity and in their transforming power.⁴³

Ten years later, at their third General Conference in Puebla in 1979, the Latin American bishops continued their effort to receive the ecclesiology of Vatican II. The final document of that meeting devoted considerable space to a reflection on the church which “Lives its Mystery of Communion as the People of God,” noting a certain cultural affinity between the popular practice of pilgrimage and the church “pictured as the people of God on pilgrimage through history journeying toward the Lord.” Puebla emphasizes the convergence between the council’s retrieval of this biblical image of the church and the emerging self-identity of the Latin American Catholics, observing:

Vatican II took place at a time when our Latin American peoples were facing great difficulties. They were years fraught with problems and an anxious quest for self-identity. The rising awareness of the masses of the common people and efforts at CELAM prepared the groundwork for the Catholic Church to open up somewhat more easily to a church that would describe itself as a People. This universal People permeates other peoples to help them grow toward greater communion and brotherhood that Latin America itself was beginning to envisage. The Medellin Conference spread the new vision, which is as old as biblical history itself.⁴⁴

43 Conference of Bishops of Argentina, *San Miguel Document*. Cited in Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People*, 7-8. Original version: Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, *Documento de San Miguel, Declaración del Episcopado Argentino sobre la adaptación a la realidad actual del país de las Conclusiones de la II Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano [Medellín]*, 1969.

44 “Evangelization in Latin America’s Present and Future: Final Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate (Puebla de Los Angeles, Mexico, 27 January – 13

Puebla's Final Document goes on to describe the pilgrim people of God as "family of God," "a holy people," "a pilgrim people," "sent by God," "a servant people," and "sign of communion." Its theology is imbued with a sense of the agency of God's people in the world as it calls for the whole church to become "a school that educates human beings who will be capable of making history, who will join Christ in effectively moving the history of our peoples toward the kingdom."⁴⁵

Jorge Bergoglio, then Archbishop of Buenos Aires, carried this vision forward into the fifth general conference of the Latin American Bishops Conference in 2007 at Aparecida, Brazil, where he chaired the drafting commission. If the Aparecida document does not include an extended reflection on the church as people of God, the image is woven into its reflections on the church as a communion of missionary disciples.⁴⁶ Faced with new challenges in a social context deeply divided by the effects of globalization, the bishops of CELAM sought to help their people rediscover a sense of themselves as active subjects and agents of the Gospel. Many themes drawn from the Aparecida document find their way into Pope Bergoglio's Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*. We hear a faint echo of its insight into the church's insertion into the

February 1979)," in *Puebla and Beyond*, 123-288, at 153, no. 232. This paragraph is linked explicitly to the affirmation of LG 9: "It pleased God, however, to make men holy not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves him in holiness. He therefore chose the race of Israel as a people unto himself. With it he set up a covenant. Step by step he taught this people by manifesting in its history both Himself and the degree of His will, by making it holy unto Himself. (...) This people was a figure of the church, the unique and definitive People of God founded by Jesus Christ."

45 "Final Document – Puebla," 160, nos. 274-279, especially 274.

46 V General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, "Disciples and Missionaries of Jesus Christ, So That Our Peoples May Have Life in Him – Concluding Document (Aparecida, 13-31 May 2007)," at <https://www.scribd.com/document/257681153/General-Conference-of-the-Bishops-of-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean-concluding-document>.

culture of the peoples when Francis writes, “The People of God is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture” (EG 115). The dialectic between the church and culture is reaffirmed when he says, “It is imperative to evangelize cultures in order to inculturate the gospel” (EG 69).

The Venezuelan theologian Raphael Luciani has written on the influence of a uniquely Argentinian movement of liberation theology on the vision of Pope Francis. The “Theology of the People,” moves beyond the approach of social analysis that characterized the earliest movements of liberation theology to engage in what Luciani calls the “hermeneutics of the culture of the people” in a “prophetic” rather than a dogmatic key. Liberating praxis is not seen primarily in the overturning unjust structures but begins from the practice of Jesus as the model for all pastoral activity which aims to bring about a process of change. A leading proponent of this approach, Lucio Gera, writes that the theology of the people “did not seek to change social and political structures in themselves, but to promote the discernment of the mission and the identity of the ecclesial institution based on the explicit option for poor people and their culture.”⁴⁷ It is possible to discern this priority in Pope Francis’ approach to the work of evangelizing, beginning with the practice of listening and dialogue in “proximity,” or “closeness” to the poor, to all those on the periphery of our communities and of society.

The theology of the people insists that the social location of the church must be the social location of the people, especially the poor and the dispossessed. It calls the church – once comfortably at home among the aristocracy of Argentina – to be converted to the world of the poor. Francis does not define the world of the poor in purely economic categories as some social analysts might do. He goes deeper, inviting us to consider their culture – their world of meaning and values, including their unique form of religiosity and piety, or “popular religion.”

⁴⁷ Luciani, 5.

He insists that this “popular piety itself can be a starting point for the healing and liberation” of whatever deficiencies we might discern in their ways of living (EG 69).

Francis underlines the agency of the poor when he speaks about their unique “sense of faith,” that innate capacity to discern the truth of the gospel that is given to each of us through the anointing of God’s Spirit in baptism. Because the poor have a unique insight into the sufferings of Christ, he says, we need to be evangelized by them (EG 169). None of this is intended to glorify the reality of material poverty, nor to instill a passive or fatalistic acceptance of the unjust conditions that have created a world where the vast majority of the human community lack the most basic necessities – food, water, shelter, a dignified job, a just wage. Francis might be seen as building on the insight of Lucio Gera who writes:

When we speak of the poor we are thinking of human beings situated in their social and economic (or possibly other type) of condition, which makes them experience a lack of power ... Being poor ultimately implies a moral condition the basic characteristic of which is humble openness to others, to God, and to human beings ... The experience of being unable leads the poor to feel the need for human beings, the need to ask, to claim, and to demand of others, of those who have power, the justice and sympathy due to them. The first condition for belonging to a people is the consciousness of needing others, and this is, in the poor, a living and wounded consciousness. They are therefore more capable of being in solidarity – of giving to others and expecting from them – more capable of being a people.⁴⁸

48 Luciani, 17.

Here the condition of material poverty is related to the beatitude: “Bless are the poor.” The poor are already touching into the ways of God’s kingdom, the way of the people of God which is to be a people poured out for others. Pope Francis consistently links the experience of God’s liberating love and conversion with our belonging to, and vocation as, a people. He insists that when we are converted this is never an individualistic experience, our whole world of relationship is transformed. Similarly, he insists that the call to become a missionary disciple is “inescapably social.” “The Christian is not an isolated person,” he insists, “they belong to a people. One cannot be a Christian without such belonging to a communion.”⁴⁹ Without a sense of belonging to this people “we cannot understand our deepest identity” (EG 268). Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God “is a new design for society, one of life in kinship” (EG 180-181). The church is to be the embodiment of that message as the prophetic and humble people of God. For Pope Francis, this is not simply an experience of fraternity and communion, but participation in a common mission which is also constitutive of our Christian identity. If the church loses this sense of mission, he says “we stop being a people (EG 273).”

In his most recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Rejoice and Be Glad: On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World*, Pope Francis “re-proposes” yet another of Vatican II’s neglected teachings, that of the universal call to holiness (LG, chapter V). He emphasizes that all those who have received God’s Spirit in baptism are called to holiness not as individuals, but as members of God’s holy people:

In salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people. That is why no one is saved alone, as an isolated individual.

⁴⁹ Francis, “Message for the Angelus, Sunday, 27 May 2018,” at: <http://www.lastampa.it/2018/05/27/vaticaninsider/one-is-not-a-christian-without-belonging-to-a-people-flt6OOuSMMI9ryZ2D4oXKN/pagina.html>.

Rather, God draws us to himself, taking into account the complex fabric of interpersonal relationships present in a human community. God wanted to enter into the life and history of a people.⁵⁰

In this teaching Pope Francis once again affirms the dignity of the baptized faithful called to be agents of God's loving presence in the quotidian tasks of each day. At the same time, he holds before us the corporate dimension of all those who belong to God's people, "a holy nation," (1 Pet 2:9), a communion of saints.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to survey of the trajectory of two significant aspects of Catholic self-identity reflected in the ecclesiology of Vatican II, namely, the image of the church as people of God and the understanding of the church-world relationship. Suggesting that they are emblematic of Catholic self-consciousness, I hope that a deeper understanding of the ambivalence toward these central teachings and of their difficult reception might contribute to a fuller picture of contemporary Catholicism's struggle to come to terms with a shifting self-awareness. One might choose other examples to illustrate this changing sense of Catholic identity. By way of example, the changing demography of the global Catholic community in the past half-century might invite further reflection on the diversity of local churches, on increasing diversity in the cultural expression of the faith, and on the necessity for greater decentralization in church governance. Catholic identity is no longer Roman-centered and can no longer be

⁵⁰ Francis, *Rejoice and Be Glad: On the Call to Holiness in Today's World. Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete et Exsultate* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2018), 3-4, no. 6.

envisioned from a single cultural frame of reference. We are witnessing the emergence of a new sense of catholicity in a fast-changing world context.

The Second Vatican Council's legacy in ecclesiological terms, but also in terms of church structures and practice, is fraught and weighed down by the burdens of history and the inertia that Pope Francis has described as *pastoral acedia* (EG 81-83). As the first Pope since the 1960s who did not participate in the council, he seems far less interested in prolonging its battles than in carrying forward its orientations in the radically new context of the twenty-first century. As I have attempted to show, Pope Francis' pastoral impulses are profoundly shaped by the reception of the Second Vatican Council in Latin America – a milieu less burdened by the freight of European theological agendas, and more deeply conscious of the need for healing and liberation from a colonial view of mission. In remarkable ways he is untying the knots that have bound up key aspects of the council's legacy to such an extent that they had been lost from view or were in danger of being forgotten. He is unbinding this inheritance, in the hopes of awakening a new sense of vitality and mission among Christians everywhere.

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