THE FIFTH ANNUAL LECTURE
OF THE CATHOLIC COMMON GROUND INITIATIVE

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY AND DISAGREEMENT
VATICAN II AND BEYOND

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RESPONSE
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Fr. Joseph A. Komonchak has earned the distinction of being the foremost interpreter of the Second Vatican Council in the English-speaking world. In this lecture, his intimate knowledge of the history, persons, and developments at the council inform his analysis of the conflicts and disagreements evident in the debates. Rejecting the notion of simple polarities, he describes what was at stake for the participants and how that varied from issue to issue.

Fr. Komonchak describes differences of opinion about tactics, disagreements over the kind of documents that should be written, and wide ranges of opinion within the "conservative" and "progressive" camps. Moreover, the alignment of those camps shifted from issue to issue. Finally, Fr. Komonchak suggests that the council "provides a model for the kinds of conversations that would enable us to deal non-coercively with our own diversity and our disagreements."

In his appreciative and original response, Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk contends that "reality is essentially binary," and so influences the optimist/pessimist polarity which often colors responses to pastoral issues. Within that analysis, the Catholic Common Ground Initiative is both pessimistic in that it is concerned about divisions in the church, and optimistic that "bringing people together for humane conversation contributes to the well-being of the church."

These churchmen describe in their talks and model in their lives the civil and informed conversation that is the heart and goal of the Initiative. On behalf of the committee and all who were present at the Fifth Annual Lecture, I am very grateful to both speaker and respondent for their considerable contributions.

Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb
Chair
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The Second Vatican Council was a dramatic event. By this I do not mean only that, whatever might have been intended by its protagonists, it had consequences significant enough to represent a turning-point in the history of modern Catholicism. I mean also that the nearly seven years between January 25, 1959, when Pope John XXIII announced his intention to convolve an ecumenical council, and December 8, 1965, the day it closed, Vatican II was marked by the encounter of persons, the clashes of ideas, the conflicts of purpose, the coincidences of decisions that make for good tragedy—or comedy. But this drama was not fictional but real. While it was unfolding, participants and observers might have known (or thought they knew) what the protagonists desired or intended, but they could not know what would happen next, whether one protagonist's ideas and purposes would prevail and another's fail, whether some unforeseen event would occur or some third party intervene and utterly change the course of the drama. To be in Rome at the time was to be at a theatre.

Between his announcement of the council and its opening on October 11, 1962, Pope John had set out three main goals for it: the spiritual renewal of the church (its growth in faith and holiness); aggiornamento ("appropriate adaptation of church discipline to the needs and conditions of our times"); and the furtherance of Christian unity. During almost two years of work, texts were prepared for conciliar debate. Of the practical, pastoral texts, only the schema on the liturgy went much beyond tinkering with church regulations; the texts on doctrine largely reproduced the orientations and emphases of popes over the previous century and a half, with much emphasis on what errors needed to be condemned. When in the spring of 1962, six
months before the council was to open, the content and character of these official texts began to be known, several important churchmen told the pope of their concern that such documents would not achieve the goals he had set out and would greatly disappoint the high hopes for the council entertained in and outside the church. Some bishops and theologians began to discuss strategies for improving and even for rejecting some of these texts. When the council opened, then, the stage was set for a dramatic confrontation.

In his opening speech, Pope John XXIII himself pointed out some contrasting ideas about the purposes of the council. He said that he disagreed with people he called "prophets of doom," who see nothing but prevarication and ruin in the world today and are unwilling to admit that God might be opening a new age for the church; he wanted a positive presentation of the truth rather than a series of condemnations ("17 centimeters of condemnations," the pope was said to have measured in one document); he did not want a simple repetition of familiar truths but a faithful representation of the ancient faith in a manner intelligible and attractive to contemporaries—the substance of the faith was one thing, he said, and the way in which it is expressed is another, in short, he wanted the council to be pastoral rather than dogmatic. To anyone familiar with the official texts prepared for discussion, it seems obvious that Pope John was inviting the bishops, if they agreed, to set a different agenda and to follow a different method than the ones that had guided the preparation. The pope's speech itself, then, already outlined the elements of a possible confrontation.

EMERGING CONFLICTS
And conflict there was. It became clear in the first discussion, which was on the liturgy; roughly half the speakers spoke for the draft and half against. The main topics of disagreement concerned practical reforms: the language of the liturgy, communion under both kinds, and concelebration; but running throughout these and other topics there was the thread of another concern: how much authority for liturgical reform should be reserved to Rome and how much entrusted to local or regional bishops' conferences? Where the hearts and minds of the bishops lay became clear when no fewer than 97% of them voted to accept this text as the basis for what the council would decree with respect to liturgical reform.

More theoretical issues arose when the council turned to the first of the doctrinal decrees, a schema on the sources of revelation. Three major areas quickly emerged as points of disagreement. The first concerned the relation between Scripture and Tradition which the draft was going to settle in favor of the view that Tradition handed on revealed truths not found in the Scriptures. Critics of the schema argued that it would prematurely settle an issue still under debate among scholars and theologians and thus set up a perhaps insuperable obstacle to ecumenical conversation. Supporters claimed that the issue had already been settled at the Council of Trent and reminded others that the first principle of any genuine ecumenical conversation should be stating the truth clearly and firmly.

The second issue concerned the use of the historical-critical method in biblical interpretation. Critics felt that the schema was too suspicious with regard to the work of biblical scholars and that it would bring Catholic scholarship back to the poor state in which it had been before Pope Pius XII issued his encyclical Divino afflante Spiritu. Defenders of the draft raised examples of recent books and articles in which Catholic scholars were calling into question the historical character not only of many Old Testament stories but even of events recorded in the Gospels.

The third issue was more general: the question of what it meant for the council to be 'pastoral,' the term Pope John had used in his opening speech. Some argued that this ran contrary to the whole tradition of ecumenical councils whose main purpose had always been stating and defending the faith, after the council, bishops and priests
could worry about communicating it to the faithful. Others argued that from the beginning of the task of reappropriating the tradition, the council had to have in mind those to whom it would be speaking in the last third of the twentieth century; for them fidelity to the doctrinal heritage and effective communication were inseparable tasks. Very few noted something that became very clear soon after the council: that there is no single audience in the world today, which raises the question whether it is possible to be pastoral on a worldwide scale.

As is well known, when it came time to vote on whether to remove this text from the table, 61% of the bishops voted to do so, fewer than the two-thirds needed for such an action. On the next day, however, Pope John intervened and ordered the text remanded to a special committee for revision. This vote indicated that the conciliar majority did not wish to issue doctrinal texts of the sort that they had before them, and now the pope was backing them. Shortly after, he established a coordinating committee to review all of the materials prepared for the council and to decide which texts should be retained and how they must be revised in order to reflect the goals that he had set out and the conciliar majority had confirmed by their votes. While the composition of the new committee was balanced, it very soon became clear that the governance of the council had passed from those who had directed its preparation to bishops and theologians who had been marginalized during that process. Something like a coup d'État had taken place.

Or at least that was the way the first session was experienced by participants and observers of all stripes, by those who were pleased with it and by those who deplored it. Slogans began to be coined: it is the end of the Counter-Reformation, of Tridentine Catholicism, even of the age of Constantine. Bishop-participants spoke of having undergone a conversion in their understanding of their own offices and of their relations with Roman authority. Catholics around the world had the novel experience of watching the teaching office of the church, at its highest level, being exercised in an open and collegial fashion, with give and take, conflict, conciliation, compromise for the sake of consensus.

EXPLANATIONS OF DIFFERENCES

From the end of the first session on, observers and participants attempted to explain the differences that had appeared at the council. Edward Schillebeeckx thought it inadequate simply to speak of a conflict between conservatives and progressives; he spoke rather of two mindsets, an essentialist orientation that saw the faith as something that could be contained in traditional concepts, was at home with abstractions and concerned above all with clarity and precision, and an existential tendency that was concrete, pragmatic, pastorally and ecumenically sensitive. Perhaps the most influential essay was by Gérard Philips, a theologian at the University of Louvain, the man who in the last three sessions of the council was the executive secretary of the Doctrinal Commission. Philips also distinguished two basic orientations, differing, not on the need for dogma and doctrine, but in their basic views of the mission of the council and of the church. The first was primarily concerned with fidelity to the deposit of faith, the second with effective communication to contemporaries. Of the first group Philips uses adjectives such as: abstract, imperturbable, conceptualistic, anxious, cautious, suspicious, monolithic, tutioristic, polemical, negative, scholastic, bookish, juridical, neglectful of ancient tradition in favor of fairly recent traditions; his list for the second group is rather shorter, and not at all damning: historically conscious, ecumenical, grounded in the sources, pastoral, concerned with effective communication.

The great weakness in these characterizations, of course, is that they are bipolar, which does not permit one to notice, to describe, or to explain differences, often important, within the camps of the
cowboys and Indians. This weakness was perhaps less visible during the first session of the council when a fairly coherent front formed in opposition to the texts prepared for the bishops. The two important votes taken during this session (liturgy and sources of revelation) were posed in terms of Yes or No (placet or non placet), and this may have suggested the bipolar opposition. Its inadequacy would become clear quite quickly as the council had to move on toward what Jan Grootaers has called the "second preparation" of Vatican II. For now, as a young peritus for Cardinal Frings (Cologne), Joseph Ratzinger, put it: "... the preparatory work was unsatisfactory, and the council rejected the extant texts. But the question at this point was: What now?"

Other dramatic moments were to follow in the next three sessions as the council moved to answer that question. Disagreements were expressed, sometimes passionately, occasionally even bitterly, over topics such as the relation between papal primacy and episcopal collegiality, the role of episcopal conferences, the nature of religious life, the revival of the diaconate, the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the ecclesial character of other Christian communities, the church's relationship with the Jews, the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas; religious freedom; the nature and purposes of marriage, a possible condemnation of communism, war and peace. The lines of force could differ with each matter, and it oversimplifies greatly to think that there were compact blocs facing off against each other. The council provided a forum for these issues to be debated publicly and provoked new historical, theological, and canonical studies that were taken seriously in the course of moving toward statements on which the great majority could agree. Little of this drama may be discernible in the sixteen texts that can be found published in a paperback book today, but familiarity with the history of these documents is often the key to interpreting them properly both in their content and in their historical significance.

From the beginning there were differences over tactics in the ranks of the progressive bishops and theologians. A week into the council, at a meeting among German and French bishops and theologians, Yves Congar noted that the Germans simply wanted to reject the prepared doctrinal schemas and to substitute a text kerygmatic in content and style. The French, including Congar himself, were also severely critical of the texts for not meeting Pope John's pastoral goal, but they thought that the prepared texts could be revised in that direction. In fact, the council would adopt the method favored by the French, trying to salvage as much of the good in the prepared texts as possible in order to achieve as large a consensus as possible. This was a choice that some deeply regretted, and regret even today, regarding it as almost guaranteeing that the council would not live up to Pope John's hopes for it.

Hans Kung, for perhaps different reasons, also was impatient with the aims and methods of consensus. On the eve of the council, he met with Congar and proposed holding a meeting of theologians in Rome in order to urge a reformist agenda. Congar cautioned against it on the grounds that it would appear that theologians were usurping the role of the bishops and that it would give the appearance of a plot. He himself would not attend any such meeting, he told Kling, unless representatives of all theological orientations were invited. During the second session, Kung became impatient at the slow progress of the liturgy decree and at certain compromises that were made in the text by Fr. Martimort. Congar contrasted the two: Martimort worked with what is possible, "he's a reformist, a possibilist; Kung is an exigeant of a revolutionary sort. I am, I think, between the two of them. I am aware of what has ALREADY been done, which is fantastic.... We also have to look at what was possible and what is possible. The Catholic Church is made up ALSO of Ottaviani and of Parente, of Tromp and of the Archbishop of Benevent. Kung considers only facts, texts, what they impose as questions and as conclusions."
In fact, when Kung’s proposal that Cardinal Ottaviani be replaced as head of the doctrinal commission and that a new commission be elected was turned down, he turned down an invitation to join that commission with the result that his participation in the work of the council was limited to drafting speeches for bishops and to lecturing on the council to many audiences in Rome. So dissatisfied was he with the text on the church that was being prepared that he decided to see if he could not have a book on the nature of the church, cast in radically different fashion, ready at the same time as Lumen gentium would be published.

CONGAR, RATZINGER, & DOSSETTI
But there were also substantive disagreements over what kind of documents to write in place of the rejected ones. One of the major differences can be illustrated by contrasting comments about the whole of the conciliar achievement made by Yves Congar and Joseph Ratzinger. Congar, reflecting on the much-reduced presence of St. Thomas Aquinas in the final texts, claimed that, nevertheless, "Saint Thomas, the Doctor communis, furnished the redactors of the dogmatic texts of Vatican II with the foundations and the structure of their thought." In addition, if in Gaudium et spes and Dignitatis humanae, the council was able to break with the last remnants of theocratic thought, it was because it achieved something similar to what St. Albert and St. Thomas had effected in the thirteenth century. Ratzinger saw things differently. "Those forces that really had made Vatican II possible and shaped it" he identified as "a theology and a piety which essentially were based on the Holy Scriptures, on the church Fathers, and on the great liturgical heritage of the universal church." The comments point to two different eras of the history of the church and of theology for a model of how to deal with contemporary challenges: Ratzinger to the patristic and Congar to the medieval. The first period saw the creation of a new distinctive Christian worldview, distinct from anything the world had seen before, heir of that heritage, the second saw a new challenge raised which, in the view of some, meant the recasting of traditional theology.

Elsewhere I have illustrated these theological differences by reference to the final redaction and early reception of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes). A team dominated by French-speaking theologians had completed a revision of the text in the spring of 1965. The text was heavily influenced by M.-D. Chenu who for decades had been urging the church to read "the signs of the times" in order to discern "the appeals and the solicitations of the Spirit." In the great webs of historical process, he argued, the world was more or less consciously displaying its openness to and need of the Word of God. Chenu's favorite metaphor for this openness was "pierres d'attente," tooth-stones jutting out at the end of a wall in expectation of an addition. Such an approach rested also upon a theology of the Incarnation as the assumption into Christ of the whole of human existence, including the social, political, and cultural.

During the summer of 1965 German-speaking experts and bishops subjected this draft to severe criticisms. Karl Rahner found the text uncritical in its analyses, confusing in its attempts to relate the natural and the supernatural, moralizing in its interpretation of contemporary movements. It lacked, he said, an adequate theology of sin and its ineradicable depths, as well as of the cross and its implications. The draft's optimism replaced "the legitimate and necessary 'pessimism' that Christians must profess before the world," "the antagonism between a world under the power of the Evil One and the disciples of Christ [that] will never be mitigated but will grow ever more bitter in the course of time." Ratzinger made similar criticisms.

This was more than a conflict between French-speaking and German-speaking theologians; behind it lay deeper disagreements, as, for example, on whether to place the Incarnation or the cross at the
heart of the church's evaluation of the modern world (Do let us remember that neither would have agreed to the absurd choice between the two necessary mysteries!). Joseph Ratzinger thought it should be the cross, which stood as a symbol that no superficial dialogue such as the one undertaken in this text could succeed. Instead, it should have chosen a kerygmatic "proclamation of the gospel—thus opening up the faith to the non-believer and abdicating all claim to authority other than the intrinsic authority of God's truth, manifesting itself to the hearer of the message." "An orientation of the church towards the world which would mean a turning away from the cross," Ratzinger went on, "would lead not to a renewal of the church but to its decline and eventual decay." The purpose of the council was not to do away with this constitutive Christian scandal but to remove the secondary scandals represented by outmoded forms of the church's relationship with the world. In a commentary soon after the council, he criticized the authors of the text for preferring Thomism and the Greek Fathers, as well as Teilhard de Chardin, to preachers of the cross such as, say, Luther. Too little emphasis was placed on sin; the emphasis, Ratzinger said, falls instead on the redemption that has already taken place, and the final text could "easily tend to give a slightly semi-Pelagian impression."

There was a third voice in the debate, that of Giuseppe Dossetti (1913-1996). Not very well known outside Italy, Dossetti played important roles at two of the most important events in twentieth-century Italian history, as a layman at the constituent assembly of 1948 that produced the constitution for the new Italian Republic, and at the Second Vatican Council, where he was the chief adviser to Giacomo Cardinal Lercaro of Bologna. After Vatican II, he withdrew into the quasi-monastic community he had founded.

A very evangelical vision inspired the speeches Dossetti prepared for Lercaro and a few other bishops and the memoranda he composed during and after Vatican II. (To try to locate Dossetti, who is largely unknown to Americans, I suggest trying to imagine what Vatican II might have done and said if Dorothy Day had set the agenda)! If the council did not embody and call for a very radical conversion to the gospel (sine glossa, he liked to call it—without extenuating commentary), it would fall short of the epochal intentions of Pope John. The council, of course, did not go down that road, and Dossetti regarded its final texts greatly compromised by Paul VI's caution and his desire for near-unanimity. Nowhere was this Christian radicalism more displayed than in his observations about the draft and then the final text of Gaudium et spes.

Dossetti found the draft's analysis of the contemporary world nothing but "common sense propositions," "journalistic popularization." The schema should be revised in order to give the response of the gospel to concrete problems and to do this "in the immediacy and relevance of its most vigorous statements." He too wished the council to offer an optimistic and positive message; but, he said, there is a great difference between "an utterly supernatural Christian optimism" that anticipates "a transfiguration and regeneration that is like a resurrection from the dead, solely in virtue of the blessed passion of Christ," and a naturalistic optimism that "indulges in a phenomenology of human progress and ignores or flees the principle that everyone and everything must be 'salted with fire' (Mk 9:49), by the fire of the cross and of the Spirit of Christ." The schema's optimism was not so salted; it conformed to common opinions, was uncritical and timid.

This affected, most particularly, the text's treatment of war and peace. The text tried so hard to be non-judgmental that it ignored the judgments on contemporary evils the church is called to make in the name of Christ. On so crucial a point as war, Dossetti wanted the council's discourse to be "absolute, synthetic, evangelical." Only this could respond to the anxiety of peoples; only this could "banish war and make peace, not by human calculation but by the creative force of the Word of God." This is the witness to faith in Jesus Christ that the
whole church is called to give; in this moment of supreme danger, she could give no truer response that to say to the world: “Entrust yourself not to defense by arms and by political prudence, but only to the protection of the Lord Jesus.”

When the bishops failed to follow this evangelical call, articulated at the council by Lercaro and a few others, Dossetti thought that the value of the council as a whole was called into question. The failure demonstrated that certain institutional and theological knots were so tight that they could never be loosened “except by a sword, by the sword of the Word of God, clear and simple, beyond all other theological reflection.”

The three views of *Gaudium et spes*, to repeat, are views that emerged within the “progressive” majority of bishops and theologians at Vatican II. One is tempted to see behind the differences between Chenu and Ratzinger differences in basic theological approach and, perhaps, in spirituality, Chenu being most at home in a Thomist world, Ratzinger within the patristic and in particular the Augustinian tradition. Where Dominicans such as Chenu and his colleague Yves Congar praised *Gaudium et spes* for identifying appeals for grace found in the world as grounds for a dialogue, Ratzinger saw instead Pelagian ambitions and warned that Christians could not let dialogue replace proclamation. In this respect, Dossetti, the evangelical, came closer to Ratzinger than to Chenu, though one suspects he might find such differentiations idle when compared to the threats under which humanity lies and to the gospel, *sine glossa*, which alone rescues from them.

I have reviewed these examples of difference and disagreement at Vatican II in order to offer a fuller view of some of the dynamics of the council than is provided when it is described or interpreted solely in terms of progressives vs. conservatives, good guys vs. bad guys. Similar differentiation needs to be made within the ranks of the conservatives, who were by no means a uniform group. The most intransigent bloc were the members of the *Coetus Internationalis Patrum*, an international group founded and directed by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, the Italian bishop Luigi Carli, and the Brazilian bishop Gerald de Proença Sigaud. They were vigorously opposed to what was proposed about episcopal collegiality, ecumenism, and especially religious freedom. Their stances on these issues coincided with their fundamental view that for a century and a half the church had rightly opposed the principles of the French Revolution. The council, they believed, was not only calling into question the doctrine and the church structure that had so successfully opposed those principles, it was even introducing those principles into the church herself. This group numbered somewhere between 250 and 350 members, depending on the issue at stake. That other members of the conciliar minority steered clear of this group is an indication that there were also disagreements among them with regard to tactics.

On the issues themselves, people could move back and forth from one group to another. Cardinal Suenens was one of the heroes of the progressive majority, but he broke with it when he said in the hall that the draft on the Blessed Virgin was too Christ-centered. Archbishop Parente was associated with the Holy Office, but he gave one of the most important speeches on behalf of episcopal collegiality. Cardinal Ottaviani was one of the bogeymen of the majority, but he urged a strong and explicit condemnation of the use and even possession of atomic, biological, and chemical weapons. I am sure that other examples could be found by close examination of speeches and of votes.

**WHAT MIGHT THE COUNCIL TEACH US?**

But it might also be that the council has something to teach us about things that divide Catholics today. We might ask whether our present divisions coincide with those of the council and then whether the council’s own method for dealing with diversity and disagreement could provide a model for dealing with them today.
Within theology I think that the differences that became visible in later stages of the council, and which I have typified in terms of Thomism and Augustinianism, are still with us. They roughly coincide with the distinction David Tracy made between a correlational theology and a manifestation or epiphanic theology. The former institutes a conversation between the biblical and traditional heritage and the questions and assumptions of a particular era or culture. Each is considered capable of illuminating and criticizing the other. An epiphanic theology desires simply to present the faith in its wisdom and beauty, and it is perhaps an ideal of this orientation that the proclamation of the gospel does not need to be culturally mediated. This is what Ratzinger has called "the positivism of faith": proclaim the gospel and its truth and beauty will attract.

At the moment I would say that it is this epiphanic approach that is most in favor. If one were to personalize it, one could say that interest in Karl Rahner has been replaced by interest in Hans Urs von Balthasar. This shift is also visible in moves in catechetics away from emphasis on personal experience to emphasis on the content of the faith. The difference tends to become an unfortunate dichotomy when people try to identify modern theologians as interested mainly in ressourcement (recovery of the tradition) and aggiornamento (presence to one’s time), a distinction I don’t think is helpful either historically or analytically. Perhaps this is the place to point out also that most defenders of an Augustinian approach, and I am thinking here in particular of Cardinal Ratzinger, do not desire a return to the state of theology before Vatican II, that is, a return to neo-scholasticism. They consider themselves, instead, to be heirs of the earlier, greater, deeper tradition that was in good part neglected by theologians who considered that because theology was not "scientific" before medieval scholasticism, it was not worth studying. In this sense, Cardinal Ratzinger is not at all a restorationist.

TWO APPROACHES TO THE MODERN WORLD

The differences between Augustinians and Thomists have their parallels in the way Catholics approach the modern world, whether they look for points of contact, whether they set up sharp dichotomies, how they conceive the task of preaching and catechesis, etc. The Thomist approach typically works with an elaborated theory of human nature, that beyond which grace elevates us, that below which sin sinks us. It tends, therefore, to recognize that the created world, including the world humans have constructed, has an intelligible substance, worth knowing in and for itself, and for this effort it acknowledges a certain autonomy in the sciences that study it. Correspondingly, this approach tends to have a more nuanced view of contemporary events and movements, is inclined to look at "the signs of the times" for signs of grace at work, hopes to discover movements or events that await the supernatural, Chenu’s pierres d’attente. All this is in continuity with an emphasis upon the incarnation and on the redemption already accomplished.

A typical Augustinian approach, on the other hand, tends rather to emphasize the cross and the rupture that it demands as the price of conversion. It tends simply to contrast the mental attitude of faith and the mental attitude of contemporary culture. Correspondingly, very alert to the danger of Pelagianism in appeals to movements and events, it tends to notice discontinuities rather than continuities. If the effort to discern "signs of the times" is made at all, it tends to see them all as negative. Where the Thomist sees the need for three conversions: religious, moral, and intellectual, the Augustinian typically is content with religious and moral conversion (Bernard Lonergan).

While on the subject of interpretations of the world, let me note that both at the council and since, there was visible a tendency to identify political options with religious motivations. At the council this appeared in efforts to defend the ideal of the Catholic confession-
al state and to secure an explicit condemnation of communism. After
the council, it appeared in some proponents of a theology of revolu-
tion or a theology of liberation, where political options claimed to be
drawn, without mediation, from the pure gospel. Today one still sees a
certain amount of *adulteric*ism at work in Catholic conversations. On
affective and intellectual levels a greater affinity is often felt for people
of similar political views than with one’s fellow Catholics of different
political persuasion. There need not be anything wrong with that, so
long as the link is not made so close that it leads people to close
themselves off from others and even from other Catholics and
Christians, who should not on account of their political orientations
be considered to be outside the fold.

A NEW PROBLEM
There is one problem in the contemporary church to which I don’t
think there is a parallel in the experience of Vatican II. At the council
the differences I have pointed to were differences within the house-
hold of faith, and by faith here I mean the substantive sets of mean-
ings and truths that constitute the church. The council fathers may
have argued fiercely over particular points, including whether a partic-
ular matter had been settled by Trent or by the ordinary magisterium;
but they were at one in recognizing the constitutive role of doctrine
and the importance of defending the faith once delivered to the saints.
They took it for granted that the church is first of all the community
of those who believe that God was in Christ reconciling the world to
himself.

But I think what Charles Taylor describes as “the new individual-
ism” is very widespread in our culture and even among Catholics. This
is the tendency to reduce religion to one’s own very personal,
even private, spirituality (“following your bliss,” “being true to your
own inner Self”), which then becomes the criterion by which to
decide what tradition, if any, to follow, what community, if any, to
enter, what beliefs to hold, if any. As Taylor argues, this is an almost
perfect exemplification of William James’ definition of religion as “the
feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far
as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they
may consider divine.” Out of this inner reality, James said, “theologies,
philosophies and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow.”
This seems to me different from the often deplored “cafeteria
Catholicism” (although it may be one of its inspirations), that is, pick-
ing and choosing among church teachings, that at least allowed that
there were church teachings. For those whom I am describing it is
as widespread as Taylor thinks it is; then it may be that many of the
disputes about doctrines or worship or morality that so often occupy
Catholics are rather missing the point: there are many people claiming
to be Catholic who couldn’t care less.

CAN VATICAN II HELP US TO DEAL WITH DIFFERENCE?
Does Vatican II have anything to offer to help us deal with difference
and disagreement? Granted that the church cannot always be living in
the state of an ecumenical council, still are there not some things to
learn from the experience, still *fresh* in some minds, of that collegial
exercise of the teaching office? Consider the process by which a text
was elaborated at Vatican II. A first draft was drawn up by a commit-
tee, usually after some internal debate, it was then presented to the
body of the whole where it was criticized or praised; a general up-or-
down vote was taken on whether to use it as the basis of what the
council wanted to say, individual chapters were voted on now with
three options: *Placet*, *Non placet*, *Placet iuxta modum* (Yes, No, Yes with
this amendment). The work went back to committee where criticisms
were taken into account and proposed amendments were reviewed.
The committee was particularly concerned not to try to settle legiti-
mately discussed matters of theology, and to seek ways of stating things that left room for diversity within the expression of the one faith they sought to articulate. The revised text was then printed with all changes from the previous draft clearly indicated, often in parallel columns, and given to the whole body of bishops. Another vote was then taken on whether to accept the changes, still with an opportunity to offer yet further amendments. These were then considered, the text was returned to the floor, and a final up-or-down vote was taken on the work.

That was the basic method and structure followed at Vatican II, the mechanics of the council if you will. It provided ample room for discussion, for debate, for disagreement, and, as often as not, these were dealt with by conciliation and compromise for the sake of as broad a consensus as possible. (There are Catholics on both the left and the right who regret this ideal of consensus, particularly if reached by compromise: *on ne transige pas avec la vérité*.) Many letters, diaries, and testimonies indicate how the freedom that the structure permitted and even required transformed the minds and hearts of participants and gave them a new sense of their own rights and responsibilities as bishops. (This is why Yves Congar insisted so much on the aspect of a council as a physical coming together of bishops, of mutual exchange and learning, something that would be impossible with, say, "an ecumenical council by letter," which a few people have actually suggested for the future.) What the church-in-council wished to say and how to say it were things that emerged in the course of this conversation among representatives of the world's churches.

What often emerged was also the decision not to resolve a disputed issue, but to leave it for further theological or canonical clarification. This happened, for example, with the disputed question about Scripture and Tradition and with the relation, both in theory and in practice, between papal primacy and episcopal collegiality. This choice disappointed some people on both sides, but there was large agreement that it was a wise policy. The result, of course, is that a good number of disputed points since Vatican II cannot be resolved by going back to the conciliar documents, because the council decided not to settle them. It also at times made for rather bland documents, which explains why new readers of the texts today often wonder what all the fuss was about.

Another element in the conciliar experience was the universal participation. The whole church, that is, the individual churches living in communion, participated in the persons of their bishops. This ensured that all voices from all regions could in principle be heard, although it does have to be said that the council was primarily concerned with problems in the northern hemisphere (the so-called First and Second Worlds). No one person and no one church were considered to have a monopoly. The rights and responsibilities of the papacy were acknowledged, but so were those of the bishops, and the two were found not to exclude one another. I do not know why this might not provide a general model for official teaching in the future. Such a model was used, somewhat imperfectly, it has to be said, in the cases of the new Code of Canon Law and of the Catechism of the Catholic Church; it was not used adequately in the case of the Vatican document on episcopal conferences and it was notably not used in the case of *Dominus Iesus*, with the well-known results.

In any case, it provides a model for the kinds of conversations that would enable us too to deal non-coercively with our own diversity and our disagreements. I do not know any reason why this sort of process should be permissible, or should be expected to be fruitful, only at an ecumenical council or only among bishops. Why should it not apply also in conversations between clergy and laity and indeed among the laity also? To judge from a few internet discussions I'm part of, many Catholics could learn a thing or two about elementary courtesy, about how to listen and how to speak, about give and take, from the example of the Second Vatican Council.
As with the bishops at the council, appropriate opportunities should be given for as wide a participation as possible, so that everyone may enter the conversation with something to say but also with something, perhaps much more, to learn. This means that no one should claim a monopoly on the truth or consider his own view to exhaust the matter under discussion. Some forty years ago, a year before Vatican II opened, Yves Congar gave a lecture with a similar title to mine tonight: "Diversity and Divisions." Toward the end, he spoke of what he called "a law of communion," whose implications he then spelled out:

Although external authority has a place within it, the church is a society not by coercion but by communion: communion of the members in the same objects of faith and love, communion of the members with one another. The great requirement of this communion is openness, a readiness to welcome, to give, and to exchange. Individuals, groups, peoples, we distinguish ourselves by ways of thinking that are different, perhaps even in certain respects opposed. But there is one way which must be common to us, because it derives from Christianity itself. The spiritual principle which makes us Christians necessarily entails the consciousness that we are not alone, that others also are subjects. It necessarily entails an invitation not to lock myself in a system or a situation, but to accept that systems of ideas and situations be called into question.

We have to remember, Congar said, that "only the totality of this people, only the church in her historical and geographical, anthropological and spiritual universality, is the adequate subject of the totality of faith and grace which come to her from Christ." Within this vision, "in practice to give what I have been able to perceive of it the absolute character of the totality is profoundly to misunderstand what that totality can truly be." He adduced a helpful image from the French essayist Jean Guéhenno:

Let our ideas be clear, let us present them in all their rigor. This is a condition of honesty. Let us serve them with all our might. This is the exercise of our courage. But just as we leave a margin on our writing paper for revisions, for corrections, for things not yet found, for the truth for which we can still only hope, let us leave around our ideas the margin of fraternity.

The image is attractive. We ought to leave room in the margins, even of our manifestos, for corrections, additions, new emphases, someone else's insights. Above all, we ought to leave room, at least in the margins, for our brothers and sisters in Christ.
NOTES
1 See his inaugural encyclical, *Ad Petri cathedram*, no. 61-62.
3 Gérard Philips, “Deux tendances dans la thologie contempo-
6 Yves Congar, *Mon journal du Concile* (Paris: du Cerf, 2002) I, 466. During the fourth session, Congar would repeat the criticism: “Kung is still very radical. He says things that are true but in them the critical search for the true is not sufficiently tempered by concern for concrete situations”; ibid. II, 498.
8 I sometimes compare this to what happened in Poland. A very disparate group of people united themselves in Solidarnost in order to bring about regime change, but when this finally happened and the question now was what should take its place, all the old disagreements surfaced. The differences weren’t as great at the Council, of course, but the analogy has some usefulness.
10 Yves Congar, “Église et monde dans la perspective de Vatican II,” in *L’Église dans le monde de ce temps*, ed. Y. Congar and M. Peuchmard (Paris: du Cerf, 1967), III, 31, where he adds in a note: “This point about correspondence is, of course, one of those that allow good commentators to regard GS as profoundly Thomist in inspiration.”
11 Joseph Ratzinger, “Zehn Jahre nach Konzilsbeginn: Wo ste-
12 For what follows, see Joseph A. Komonchak, “Le valutazion
14 Giuseppe Dossetti, “Alcune linee dinamiche del contributo
del Cardinale G. Lercaro al Concilio ecumenico Vaticano II,” in *Il Vaticano II: Frammenti di una riflessione*, pp. 103-90, where Dossetti reviews Lercaro’s activities and interventions, many of these inspired, if not written, by Dossetti himself.
As quoted by Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today*, 5.

Those who have rejected the council for these compromises are well known; at the other end of the spectrum, Hans Küng wrote, even before the council ended: "An intelligent interpretation of a decree...will not be snagged by the terms of the decree, which are often the result of a compromise." (The Changing Church: Reflections on the Progress of the Second Vatican Council [London: Sheed and Ward, 1965], 139)


First of all, three comments about some specific points in Fr. Komonchak’s presentation that I found very interesting. First, he notes that underlying the struggles over the liturgy in the council was the issue of control. How much authority for liturgical reform should be reserved to Rome and how much entrusted to the local or regional bishops’ conferences? Some forty years later this issue is still being dealt with. It is, in my opinion, what lies behind Liturgiam Authenticam and the new statutes from Rome for the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL).

Second, I was grateful for the insight that fidelity to the doctrinal heritage and effective communication are two inseparable tasks but that there is no single audience in the world today with which the church is called to communicate. Consequently there arises the question of whether it is possible to be pastoral on a worldwide scale. I find this a very interesting question. It might be recast as follows: how much pastoral directive can come from a central authority before it stops being pastoral and becomes exclusively canonical.

Thirdly, I have to admit that, although I have done a bit of reading about the council and its teaching, and have taught courses on the Vatican II documents, I don’t believe I ever heard of Giuseppe Dossetti, the radical who came from Bologna with Cardinal Lercaro. My embarrassment was mitigated when I discovered that Dossetti is not
mentioned once in the indices of the five volume commentary on the council documents edited by Herbert Vorgrimler. This proves two things. One is that some of the most interesting people involved with the council didn’t make much of a splash in its history. The other is that, not surprisingly, Fr. Komonchak is well versed even in what some of us consider the most arcane elements of the council’s history.

As I read over Fr. Komonchak’s presentation it occurred to me that a recurrent theme is binary opposition. We hear about the prophets of doom and those who wanted a more positive presentation of the truth, about an essentialist orientation opposed to an existential tendency, St. Augustine versus St. Thomas, progressives versus conservatives. Fr. Komonchak is careful to point out that these characterizations are bipolar “which does not permit one to notice, to describe, or to explain differences, often important, within the camps of the cowboys and the Indians.” But, even though there may be wide differences of opinion, tonality, and background in each camp, and although there are many ways to be a cowboy and many ways to be an Indian, the cowboys are not Indians and the Indians are not cowboys. There are basic differences between them.

There are a couple more pairs of opposition that Fr. Komonchak did not mention, but which he could have. Antioch and Alexandria, Plato and Aristotle.

All this leads me to offer some thoughts about my own way of looking at theology, church history, and pastoral ministry. It’s all essentially (or at least existentially) binary because reality is essentially binary, and this inherent dimension of opposition in almost everything we deal with provides both tension and energy. Light and darkness, birth and death, pain and pleasure: these are the realities that occur in every human life. In Christian revelation we have sin and grace, Christ both human and divine, God of one nature yet triune, time and eternity, unchanging truth and the development of doctrine. Everywhere we look there are pairs of realities that call for our attention.

OPTIMISM VS. PESSIMISM

In terms of pastoral ministry and pastoral leadership, I have found that more often than not the basic operative realities are optimism and pessimism. Of course optimism and pessimism each have their place in basic Christian life and doctrine: law versus liberty, fear versus confidence, the threat of hell versus the promise of heaven. But I think that optimism and pessimism also have roles to play in the way in which the gospel is proclaimed and in which the local church is directed.

What does the priest preach about most of the time: damnation or salvation? What motivation is offered for behaviors such as church support: obligation or opportunity?

The same sorts of questions can be addressed to the administrative styles of bishops, and these styles can be characterized as optimistic or pessimistic. The basic question is one of management. Does the bishop micro-manage or macro-manage? Is he inclined to send out detailed directives or is he inclined to let people alone? I am inclined to think that micro-management is based on pessimism, on a conviction that people need lots of direction or they will mess things up. Macro-management, on the other hand, seems to me to be a result of optimism, a conviction that priests and people will generally do all right if they are left to follow their own experiences of grace.

I think that the sex abuse scandal can have both an optimistic and a pessimistic response. Obviously the behaviors of some of the church’s agents have been inexcusable and there is no way to justify them. But what about the future? Will this mess lead only to disillusionment or will it contribute to a heightened awareness of a hitherto unheeded social problem? One’s answer to that depends on whether one is a pessimist or an optimist.
THREE GENERAL REMARKS

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Three more general remarks before I come to conclusion. First general remark: while persons of Christian faith must be long term optimists, it is not the case that, in the interim, it is always appropriate to be optimistic or always appropriate to be pessimistic. It is not the case that one is always correct and the other is always wrong. While individual human beings may be more inclined to one than to the other, there are circumstances when one or the other is simply inappropriate. It is almost inhuman to say that the inmates of the Soviet gulags should have had a brighter outlook on life, or that the pope's historic visit to the Italian Parliament was an inexcusable inconvenience to Roman traffic.

Second general remark: there is a whole range or spectrum in either approach to Christian life and ministry and doctrine. It is not the case that you are either a pessimist or an optimist, and that, whatever you are, you are the same as everybody else on your side of the middle. There are all kinds of optimists and all kinds of pessimists from the gloomiest of Gusses to the brightest of Pollyannas. It's dangerous to generalize about either tendency. One is inclined to remind oneself that there are neither optimists nor pessimists, simpliciter dici, but only human persons who tend to be more optimistic or more pessimistic.

Third general remark: unadulterated optimism is dangerous. So is unadulterated pessimism. Reality does not come in unmixed essences. It's always a mixture of good and bad, of possible and impossible, of desperate and hopeful. One of my favorite little theological theories is that the most important word in theology is the adversative conjunction, but. God is merciful, but God is just. Jesus is true man, but also true God. The liturgy is the work of the Christian people, but also of the Holy Spirit. If we neglect our adversative conjunction, we run the risk of gross oversimplification. Even though individual persons may be generally optimistic or generally pessimistic, every thoughtful posture, every leadership style has to be a combination of liberal and conservative, Antiochian and Alexandrian, Thomistic and Augustinian, optimistic and pessimistic. I believe that that's just the way things are.

Two concluding observations. First: it might be amusing sometime to try to line up all the pairs that we have been talking about this evening under the general headings of optimism and pessimism. Does Augustine go under pessimism? Why? To what extent? Is being a liberal inherently optimistic? Are existential theologians pessimists? Should we be optimistic or pessimistic about the liturgical reform of Vatican II—its intent and its outcome?

Finally, a word from our sponsor. The Catholic Common Ground Initiative is both optimistic and pessimistic. It acknowledges that there are divisions in the church that do not appear to be healthy, but it also holds that there is blessing in trying to bring together people of differing perspectives. It holds that the middle ground may be wider and more varied than people realize and that bringing people together for human and humane conversation contributes to the well-being of the church. Cowboys may still be cowboys and Indians may still be Indians, but arguably the world and the church will be better off if they are talking to one another rather than shooting at one another.