

**“The Faithful Revolution”  
An Introduction to Vatican II**

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**The Voice of Renewal/Lay Education National Working Group**

# The Faithful Revolution: Introduction to Vatican II

**Description:** This commentary is a companion to “The Faithful Revolution,” a set of five 60-minute videos that introduces to the hope and vision of the Second Vatican Council; describes its religious, historical, and cultural significance; and lets us hear in the words of the participants themselves what it was like to “be there.”

**Suggested Duration:** 4 sessions

**Package Contents:** A commentary to use as preparation for each session and tips on conducting a collaborative learning session

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## What You Need to Start

**A copy of the video series** “The Faithful Revolution,” produced by Thomas More, RCL Enterprises (address: 200 Bethany Drive, Allen TX 75002-3804; phone: 800-264-0368.)

If you reside in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, or Maine, you may schedule viewing sessions with members of the VOR/LE National Working Group and use our set of videos for the presentations.

**For the facilitator,** time to review the videos and select those portions pertinent to the discussion for the evening. Although your group may wish to see the entire video each session, to ensure there is enough time each evening for discussion, we suggest omitting some of the sequences that may not be relevant to the overall focus. One suggested sequence is as follows:

- Video I, “Genius of the Heart”—segments 1 and 2
- Video II, “Inspired Awakenings”—segment 2 and Video III, Human Dignity, segment 2
- Video IV, “A World Transformed”—segment 1
- Video V: “The Dynamics of Hope”—segment 2

### **Additional Suggested Readings**

- *Vatican Council II: The Sixteen Council Documents*, Austin Flannery, Erdmans Publishing Co., 1997
- *Vatican II in Plain English*, Bill Huebsch, Thomas More Association, 1997
- *History of Vatican II*, Alberigo and Komanchak, Orbis, 1997 and 2000
- *After 40 Years*, Whitehead and May, St. Augustines Press, 2006

## **Tips on Running a Collaborative Learning Session**

A collaborative learning environment does not use the traditional format where a speaker, standing at a lectern or podium, presents material to an audience seated in rows before the lectern, and then takes questions from the audience at the end. The collaborative setting is more like a book discussion group where attendees gather around a table or sit in chairs arranged in a circle. Although each session should have a clear “leader” to guide the discussion, this leader need not be the same from session to session.

More important than “who leads” in a collaborative session is the “how” of leading. Your goal is to involve as many attendees as possible in the discussion, to encourage respectful attention to opposing views, and to prevent one or two voices from dominating a session.

This does not mean cutting off a persistent voice. In any such setting, some people will speak more than others. But you can encourage those who are not contributing by asking them to read passages from the book, or to read a pertinent Bible passage. You can ask generally that those who have not yet contributed take the next question. You can follow up on someone’s first contribution with a question that allows them to elaborate on their answer (be sure it’s a simple enough follow-up that you don’t intimidate them!).

You may find the following format useful for conducting the session:

### **1. Greeting and Introductions**

Introduce yourself, ask each person to introduce themselves and, depending on the size of the group, perhaps say what they hope to learn or how they heard about the session. The goal is not to obtain answers to these questions but to “lubricate the voices” (get everyone talking from the start). [You may not need the introductions each time.]

### **2. Opening Prayer**

Use a multi-stanza prayer and go around the room having each person say a few lines of the prayer. Again, your goal is to lubricate the voices and let everyone become a participant from the beginning.

### **3. Ground Rules (remind attendees of this at each session)**

- a) Everyone is invited to contribute.
- b) Try not to speak twice until everyone has had a chance to speak once—but don’t force anyone to comment until they are ready.
- c) Respect each other’s opinions and contributions.

### **4. Session**

### **5. Closing Prayer (then distribute the Session notes for the next session)**

## **Session 1: Liturgy and Revelation**

### **Overview of the Council Documents**

As we begin, let us first consider a couple of cautions about the Council and about the documents from the Council.

- The Council was 40 years ago. Much has happened since then. In fact, it is probable that more has taken place in the universe, the world and the church in those 40 years than in the entire 1900+ years (of Christianity) prior to that. We can't go back to the Vatican Council; we cannot turn back the clock. But we need to use it as a springboard to the future.
- Although the “periti” (i.e. the experts in scripture, theology, canon law, etc. that the bishops brought with them to the Council) played roles of untold importance in developing the documents, the final output was the result of hundreds and perhaps thousands of compromises. For every passage a progressive might quote to support a position, a traditional Catholic can quote one supporting a contrary position.

With those cautions in mind, let me make some comments about the documents themselves.

The Council produced 16 documents, almost all of which received overwhelming majority votes—in the range of 2,000 “yes” to 50 “no” votes. But some of the documents clearly are less “finished” than other. Some are well formulated, developed with multiple interventions and discussion. Others are little more than outlines—perhaps designed to be filled out by future Councils.

Similarly, the documents are not of equal weight or importance. To distinguish their relative importance, the bishops gave the documents different types of titles. The two most important documents are called Dogmatic Constitutions. That is, they are foundational documents that contain doctrinal matters. Another document, labeled Constitution also is foundational, and Pope Paul VI created the title Pastoral Constitution for another document.

Of lesser importance than the Constitution documents are nine documents called Decrees and three called Declarations, apparently considered to be in that order of descending importance.

Here are the names of the documents, including their lengths. An asterisk (\*) next to a title indicates documents that we will discuss:

1. \* *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (16,200 words)
2. *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (2,996 words)

3. \* *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy* (7,806 words)
4. \* *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (23,335 words)
5. *Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication* (2,225 words)
6. \* *Decree on Ecumenism* (4,790 words)
7. *Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches* (1,806 words)
8. *Decree on the Bishops Pastoral Office in the Church* (5,982 words)
9. *Decree on Priestly Formation* (2,987 words)
10. *Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life* (3,189 words)
11. \* *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (7,016 words)
12. *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (7,896 words)
13. *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* (9,870 words)
14. *Declaration on Christian Education* (2,604 words)
15. \* *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (1,117 words)
16. \* *Declaration on Religious Freedom* (3,195 words)

## **Liturgy and Revelation**

Our first session will take us back to the heady days when Pope John XXIII announced that a Council would take place and takes us through the first session, ending with John's death after that first session. We will spend the discussion period talking about the changes that have most profoundly affected us in the last 40 years. I think we can capture some of the enthusiasm and joy that we experienced at that time, and hope to carry that through the subsequent discussions.

A major focus in the video session will be on the *Constitution on Sacred Liturgy*. However, as preparation for the session, we should consider the impact of another document: the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*. Although this document is not referred to in the videos we will watch, it has major relevance for theologians and Scripture scholars. I would like to emphasize three points, one of dogmatic importance and two of practical importance.

1. Remember in our Baltimore Catechism that we spoke of two sources of Revelation: Scripture and Tradition. The Protestants insisted that all revelation is found "sola scriptura": only in scripture. But Catholics insisted that what is not in Scripture can be found in Tradition and vice-versa. The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*,

however, asserts that there is only one source of revelation, and that is the divine self-revelation of God to creatures. The original document began with a distinction between scripture and tradition, but that opening was replaced with the one-source declaration—scripture and tradition were not distinguished as separate sources. Although the bishops took no explicit stand on the two-source theory, there is an implicit recognition in several documents, including this one, that doctrine develops over time. That is, the revelation that is found in Scripture can receive a new and fuller understanding over the history of the Church. This is quite different from the claim that there are two sources of revelation.

Here are some relevant quotations from the document on *Divine Revelation* that illustrate this point:

In His goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature. (Ch. 1:2)

God, who through the Word creates all things and keeps them in existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities. (Ch: 3)

To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation, the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts. (Ch. 1:5)

This tradition which comes from the apostles *develops* (my italics) in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a *growth* in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. (Ch 2:8)

2. In 1943, Pope Pius XII produced an important encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (“Under the Influence of the Divine Spirit”), which for the first time gave Catholic scripture scholars the approval to use critical techniques in understanding the scriptures—the same techniques that Protestants had employed for more than 100 years. The Vatican II document on Revelation expanded on that message and gave worldwide authorization to a new way of understanding the scriptures. It must be noted that the last 40 years have seen a dramatic burgeoning in understanding the scriptures as historical, cultural, and literary works written for specific audiences and with specific purposes in the mind of the author. In fact, many of the scriptural quotations used in this Vatican II document, and in the others, were called into question by scholars using these critical tools.

The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances as he used contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of perceiving, speaking and narrating which prevailed

at the time of the sacred writer, and to the customs men normally followed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another. (Ch. 3:12)

3. Although Protestants had always read and quoted widely from the Scriptures, it is likely that few Catholics had ever read the entire Bible before the Vatican Council. Of course, we had the scripture readings in the Mass and perhaps were introduced to “scripture stories” in our catechism classes, but we were seldom encouraged to read the Bible. Now, the Vatican Council explicitly encourages Catholics to read and assimilate the Scriptures for their own edification and spiritual awakening.

Easy access to sacred scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful.” (Ch 6:22) ... to provide the nourishment of the Scriptures for the people of God, thereby enlightening their minds, strengthening their wills, and setting men's hearts on fire with the love of God. (Ch 6:23)

### **Discussion Questions for the Session**

1. What did it mean, in the 1950s and 1960s, to be a “practicing Catholic”?
2. What does it mean to be a “practicing Catholic” today?
3. Have the liturgical changes since Vatican II enhanced or diminished your experience of worship?
4. Do you think the Church is more unified today than it was 40 years ago?



## **Session 2: Ecumenism, Religious Freedom and Relations with Non-Christians**

In this session we will discuss the impact of three of the most controversial documents of the Second Vatican Council: the *Decree on Ecumenism*, the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, and the Declaration on the *Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*.

These three documents began as chapters in the *Constitution on the Church*, but were quickly broken out and treated separately. After separation, the new document had five chapters: the first three on ecumenism, and the last two on freedom and non-Christian religions. But then the last two chapters were later converted into separate documents. These last two are the shortest documents produced by the Council and have been the most controversial.

### **Decree on Ecumenism**

The focus on ecumenism had been one of Pope John XXIII's most cherished dreams for the Council. He had planned to have both Protestants and Orthodox representatives at the Council and to provide a special Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity to be at the service of these observers. The ecumenical movement had long been afoot among Protestants and Orthodox, but the Catholic Church had been removed from most discussions.

In Pope John's address at the beginning of the Council, he made a remarkable statement for the times. He said: "The deposit of faith is one thing; the way that it is presented is another. For the truths preserved in our sacred doctrine can retain the same substance and meaning under different forms of expression." In this statement he was endorsing the concept of the development of doctrine. This concept is found often in Council documents, and is one of the most controversial for more conservative Catholics.

But within the Council there were only 11 negative votes on the final version.

The *Decree on Ecumenism* has incited much criticism from the right because it seems to undermine the concept that Catholics have "the truth" and the hope that others, especially Protestants, might be called to return to the one true Church. Instead, the emphasis in this decree is on a pilgrim Church moving toward Christ, rather than on a movement of "return" to the Roman Catholic Church. With this document the Church moved fully into the dialog with other Christians.

Of course, the document does begin with comments that assert the primacy of the Catholic Church: "For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. ...For it is through the Catholic Church alone, which is the all embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained." (3)

However, in the same section is this statement: “Nevertheless, all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honored by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers in the Lord by the sons of the Catholic Church.” (3)

Much of the rest of the document, however, points to union as a goal to be reached in the future as a result of sharing our understanding of the faith with our “separated brethren” and discovering the common elements that we share. We may even discover that we have simply expressed the same truths in different formulations, i.e., development of doctrine.

Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth. Therefore, if the influence of events or of the times has led to deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline, or even in the formulation of doctrine (which must be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith), these should be appropriately rectified at the proper moment. (6)

And again, as regards Eastern churches:

In the investigation of revealed truth, East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and proclaiming divine things. It is hardly surprising, then, if sometimes one tradition has come nearer than the other to an apt appreciation of certain aspects of a revealed mystery, or has expressed them in a clearer manner. (17)

Although the document called for prayer for unity, increasing dialog, changes of heart and repentance on both sides, and even sharing of worship on some occasions, the bishops did not think union would be easy, or that it should be achieved by disavowing any part of the “deposit of faith.”

Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its assured genuine meaning. (11)

### **The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church with Non-Christian Religions**

This is the shortest document produced by the Council, and probably the least complete. However, the section on relationships with the Jews was one of the most dramatic and controversial steps taken by the bishops.

Improving relationships with Jews was one of the highest priorities of Pope John, and he personally asked Cardinal Bea to prepare this text. Although the original document was to focus entirely on the Jews, the bishops moved to include short paragraphs on relations with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam as well. These short paragraphs are quite innocuous,

but leave open the door to respect for the presence of God within these religions. Before we treat of the Jews, a couple of quotations concerning these other religions are in order:

From ancient times down to the present, there has existed among diverse peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human life... (2)

Other religions to be found everywhere strive variously to answer the restless searchings of the human heart by proposing “ways” which consist of teachings, rules of life and sacred ceremonies. The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. (2)

The section on relationship with the Jews did not apologize for the history of Christian persecution of Jews, but it did remove the charges of deicide that had been levied against the Jews for centuries. In rejecting any form of discrimination against the Jews, the Council broadened that rejection to include any form of discrimination. Some excerpts:

True, authorities of the Jews and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ, still, what happened in his passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today. (4)

The Church repudiates all persecutions against any man. Moreover, mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews, and motivated by the gospel’s spiritual love and by no political considerations, she deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source. (4)

The Church rejects, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life or religion. (5)

## **The Declaration on Religious Freedom**

This document is the only one from Vatican II directed at the entire world. Its very format betrays the American influence of its primary author: Rev. John Courtney Murray, S.J. Ten years earlier, Murray had been silenced by Rome for his writings on religious freedom. However, when Cardinal Spellman brought him to Rome as his “peritus” at the Council, his previous writings were vindicated in this document. Unlike other documents that begin with quotations from sacred scripture, the first chapter of this document is a philosophical discussion of the nature of freedom. Only in the second chapter does Murray quote scripture in order to show that Jesus always invited people to faith, but never attempted to coerce anyone by any means.

Nevertheless, this document was the most disputed at the Council and received the most negative votes (240) of any document. But with nearly 2,400 bishops present, negative

votes still represent only 10% of the bishops. Many who voted against the document were fearful that the concept of freedom would open the doors to the acceptance of any heresy. Further, this document gave the most explicit acceptance of the notion of development of doctrine of any Council document. Although Pope John had insisted from the outset that doctrine does and must develop, many of the bishops were terrified at that thought.

Despite these concerns, the document's focus is not on a radical freedom of conscience, but on religious freedom. In fact, as John Courtney Murray expressed, "three doctrinal tenets are declared: the ethical doctrine of religious freedom as a human right (personal and collective); a political doctrine with regard to the functions and limits of government in matters religious; and the theological doctrine of the freedom of the Church as the fundamental principle in what concerns the relations between the Church and the socio-political order." (In the introduction to the text in Walter Abbot's edited version.)

Although the document does recognize freedom of conscience, it does not recognize radical subjectivity such that anything that anyone believes is therefore true:

The Synod declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself....The right to religious freedom has its foundation, not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature. (2)

Hence, every man has the duty, and therefore the right, to seek the truth in matters religious, in order that he may with prudence form for himself right and true judgments of conscience, with the use of all suitable means. (3)

In all his activity, a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. (3)

It is one of the major tenets of Catholic doctrine that man's response to God in faith must be free. Therefore, no one is to be forced to embrace the Christian faith against his own will. (9)

In the formation of their consciences, the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church. (14)

### **Progressive Versus Conservative Interpretations**

Although the general direction of the documents of Vatican II is quite progressive, there are passages that more conservative Catholics quote in order to counter some of the more radical interpretations. Here are some of these quotations that counter more radical interpretations of the concepts of freedom of conscience, ecumenism, and relations with non-Christian religions.

Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of soul. This religious assent of will and mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*. That is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known chiefly either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking. (*Lumen Gentium*, 25)

Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they can nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly. This is so, even when they are dispersed around the world, provided that while maintaining the bond of unity among themselves and with Peter's successor, and while teaching authentically on a matter of faith or morals, they concur in a single viewpoint as the one which must be held conclusively. (*Lumen Gentium* 25)

Keeping in mind the fullness of the sacrament of orders which the bishop enjoys, priests must respect in him the authority of Christ, the chief Shepherd. They must therefore stand by their own bishop in sincere charity and obedience. This priestly obedience animated with a spirit of cooperation is based on the very sharing in the episcopal ministry which is conferred on priests through the sacrament of orders and the canonical mission. (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, 7)

On the other hand, this strong emphasis on the teaching authority of bishops as binding on Catholics is tempered by the following quote from the *Decree on the Bishops Pastoral Office in the Church*:

The bishops should present Christian doctrine in a manner adapted to the needs of the times, that is to say, in a manner corresponding to the difficulties and problems by which people are most vexatiously burdened and troubled. They should also guard that doctrine, teaching the faithful to defend and spread it. In propounding it, bishops should manifest the Church's maternal solicitude for all men, believers or not....

Since it is the mission of the Church to converse with the human society in which she lives, bishops especially are called upon to approach men, seeking and fostering dialogue with them. These conversations on salvation ought to be distinguished for clarity of speech as well as for humility and gentleness so that truth may always be joined with charity and understanding with love. Likewise they should be characterized by due prudence allied, however, with that trustfulness which fosters friendship

and thus is naturally disposed to bring about a union of minds.” (13)

Many conservative Catholics claim that a misunderstanding of the three documents under consideration have led to increasing dissent from the teachings of the Church and to a watering down of doctrine. That is, they claim that an unrestricted ecumenism, where everyone is free to dialogue with people of other faiths or of no faith, necessarily leads to a “beigeing of Catholicism.”

It is also a fact that some major theologians think that an ecumenism aiming at a unity in the short term is, in fact, a wrong turn. Many progressive theologians argue for a respect for diversity and plurality without seeking unity. Here is a relevant quotation from David Tracy, a priest from the diocese of Bridgeport, CT and a professor of theology at Chicago University. Many consider him to be the most outstanding Catholic systematic theologian in the world today. He is, however, a theologian’s theologian, and many of his works are quite dense. He is given to lengthy, run-on sentences. This quote from him is *relatively* clear:

“The reality of diversity must be affirmed as fact in the New Testament, in the entire Christian tradition, in the contemporary Christian community, in the diverse life journeys and discernments in the contemporary situation. The reality of pluralism is a value: a value to enrich each by impelling new journeys into both particularity and ecumenicity—a journey into a particular personal and traditional way whose very vulnerability and self-exposure to other ways of being Christian promises to transform all: a journey where, for the Christian, each and all will be transformed together in witnessing to the proclamation and manifestation of the event of Jesus Christ.” (*The Analogical Imagination*, p.254)

Tracy argues that the only valid ecumenical dialog is one in which each participant accepts the entirety of his own religion’s “classics” (i.e., scriptures, images, symbols, doctrines, sacraments, witnesses and actions, etc. of the entire tradition) and attempts to express them as fully as possible. Then, each must listen carefully to the other’s explication with an “analogical ear.” Here is another relevant quote from Tracy:

“We understand one another, if at all, only through analogies. Each recognizes that any attempt to reduce the authentic otherness of another's focus to one’s own with our common habits of domination only seems to destroy us all, only increases the leveling power of the all too-common denominators making no one at home.” (p. 363)

## **Discussion Questions for Session 2**

1. Do you think it is possible for Christian churches to be united? What are the main issues that divide Christians?
2. Do you think Catholics are united today? What are some issues that divide them? What is needed to unite them?
3. What is the role of freedom of conscience in a church that accepts the right of Bishops to teach authoritatively?
4. What makes it possible or difficult to respect and understand beliefs that are different from yours?

## **Session 3: The Role of the Laity**

This week's video and discussion will be on the role of the laity in the Church as developed at the Second Vatican Council. We will focus especially on two documents from the Council: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. Included below are many quotations from these two documents; the passages selected are those that most strikingly express a new understanding of the laity. Please read them and highlight those passages you would most like to discuss. You can help to focus our discussion by your questions.

The Second Vatican Council has been called the Council of the Laity. This is not because the laity played a role at the Council, but because many of the documents point to the role of the laity in the Church. In fact, this Council, the 23<sup>rd</sup> in the history of the Church, is the first one to talk about the role of the laity. This is especially true in the two documents.

### **The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church**

The original draft of this Constitution began with a chapter on the role of bishops in the Church. However, the final version, after an opening chapter of quotations from Scripture, began instead with the original second chapter, on The People of God.

In other words, it is the community of the faithful who make up the Church, including both laity and hierarchy.

In addition, the fourth chapter in this Dogmatic Constitution is on the laity—it comes after a chapter on the bishops, priests and deacons. Here are some relevant quotations:

Christ instituted this new covenant ... by calling together a people made up of Jew and Gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be the new People of God. (And) are finally established as a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people. ... You who in times past were not a people are now the people of God. (I. Pet. 2:9-10) (LG 9).

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. (LG 10)

The term ‘laity’ is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in a religious state sanctioned by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ. They carry out their own part in the mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world. (LG 31)



**NOTE:** Pope Pius XII had frequently spoken of the “Apostolate of the Laity”; however, he always identified it as a participation in the apostolate of the hierarchy. Vatican II went out of its way in several places to insist that the laity have an apostolate in their own right and not just as a participation in the apostolate of the hierarchy.

The lay apostolate is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, through the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist, there is communicated and nourished that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the entire apostolate. Now, the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the salt of the earth. (LG 33)

Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation ever increasingly to all men of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, let every opportunity be given them so that according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church. (LG 33)

And the Constitution goes on to assert that the laity have a right to have their VOICES heard in the Church.

The laity have the right, as do all Christians, to receive in abundance from their sacred pastors the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the Word of God and the sacraments. Every layman should openly reveal to them his needs and desires with that freedom and confidence which befits a son of God and a brother in Christ. An individual layman, by reason of the knowledge, competence, or outstanding ability which he may enjoy, is permitted and sometimes even obliged to express his opinion on things which concern the good of the Church. (LG 37)

In this document and in several other places in Council documents, the Fathers indicated that canon law would have to be changed to accommodate new understandings. This “update” came with the new code adopted in the 1990s. Where Canon Law prior to the Council had only three sentences concerning the laity, the new code contains several new canons, including the following (from Canon 212) that uses the words of the Constitution on the Church itself:

They have the right, indeed at times the duty, in keeping with their knowledge, competence and position, to manifest to the sacred Pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church. They have the right also to make their views known to others of Christ's faithful, but in doing so they must always respect the integrity of faith and morals, show due reverence to the Pastors and take into account both the common good and the dignity of individuals. (Canon 212.3)

Of course, in spite of our focus on the role of the laity, we would be remiss if we did not notice that this same Constitution also initiated the concept of the collegiality of bishops. This concept received great attention in the years immediately after the Council, but has almost disappeared in importance in the last 25 years.

Just as, by the Lord's will, St. Peter and the other apostles constituted one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff as the successor of Peter, and the bishops as the successors of the apostles are joined together. The collegial nature and the meaning of the episcopal order found expression in the very ancient practice by which bishops appointed the world over were linked with one another and with the bishop of Rome by the bonds of unity, charity and peace. (LG 22)

### **Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity**

This decree repeats many of the concepts introduced in *Lumen Gentium*. It then goes on to spell out the goals of the apostolate and the many forms that apostolate can take. Here are passages that reinforce concepts from *Lumen Gentium*.

Wishing to intensify the apostolic activity of the People of God, this most holy Synod earnestly addresses itself to the laity, whose proper and indispensable role in the mission of the Church it has already called to mind in other documents. The layman's apostolate derives from his Christian vocation, and the Church can never be without it. (1)

The laity, too, share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own role to play in the mission of the whole People of God in the Church and in the world. (2)

The mission of the Church is not only to bring men the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the laity, therefore, exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders. (5)

Even more amazingly, the Decree explicitly notes the importance of women in the Church. However, this is the only sentence in the entire corpus of documents that explicitly mentions women. And it does so as if it is only in our times that women have become important.

Since in our times women have an ever more active share in the whole life of society, it is very important that they participate more widely also in the various fields of the Church's apostolate. (9)

### **Discussion Questions for Session 3**

1. What does the term “People of God” mean to you? How does it enrich or diminish your understanding of what it means to be church?
2. What are some of the roles that the laity can and should play in the church today?
3. What can be done to bridge the gaps between the laity and the hierarchy in the Catholic Church?
4. How has the sexual abuse crisis affected your view of the role of the hierarchy in the Catholic Church?

## **Session 4: Collegiality and Hope for the Future**

Our final video and discussion will focus on unity and plurality in the Church. We will consider the papacy of John Paul II and his efforts to preserve unity in a world that is filled with dissent.

One question we should ask about his papacy centers on his own life experiences. John Paul's entire experience before becoming Pope was in a totalitarian, authoritarian world. Has the fact that he has never truly lived in a democratic society like the United States affected the way he exercises his papacy, and the way he looks on America?

We will also discuss what was considered as one of the great breakthroughs of the Second Vatican Council: "collegiality" of the bishops.

The first Vatican Council had ended prematurely with only the "infallibility" of the Pope being discussed. Perhaps it was just as well that the role of the bishops in the Church was not discussed at that Council and was left to the Second Vatican Council.

Although Vatican II clearly identified collegiality of the bishops as a major position of the Council, every time collegiality is mentioned in the documents it is carefully circumscribed within the context of the primacy of the papacy. In fact, Pope Paul VI's "nota praevia" appended to *Lumen Gentium* went out of its way to emphasize this connection. Here are some relevant quotations from the documents.

### **The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church**

Just as, by the Lord's will, St. Peter and the other apostles constituted one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff as the successor of Peter, and the bishops as the successors of the apostles are joined together. The *collegial* (emphasis mine) nature and meaning of the episcopal order found expression in the very ancient practice by which bishops appointed the world over were linked with one another and with the Bishop of Rome by the bonds of unity, charity, and peace... (LG 22)

But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is simultaneously conceived of in terms of its head, the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and without any lessening of his power of primacy over all, pastors as well as the general faithful. For in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he can always exercise this power freely. (LG 22)

Together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head, the episcopal order is the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church. But this power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff. (LG 22)

And the expectation of unity within diversity is clearly expressed in this passage:

This college, insofar as it is composed of many, expresses the variety and universality of the People of God, but insofar as it is assembled under one head, it expresses the unity of the flock of Christ.

The same collegiate power can be exercised in union with the Pope by the bishops living in all parts of the world, provided that the head of the college calls them to collegiate action, or at least so approves or freely accepts the united action of the dispersed bishops, which makes it a true collegiate act. (LG 22)

### **Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church**

The same themes are repeated in this later decree on the pastoral office, a document which takes its lead from *Lumen Gentium*.

Sharing in solicitude for all the churches, bishops exercise this episcopal office of theirs, received through episcopal consecration, in communion with and under the authority of the Supreme Pontiff. All are united in a college with respect to teaching the universal Church or God and governing her as shepherds. (*Christus Dominus*, 3)

The same collegiate power can be exercised in union with the Pope by the bishops living in all parts of the world, provided that the head of the college calls them to collegiate action, or provided that at least he so approves or freely accepts the united action of the dispersed bishops that it is made a true collegiate act. (CD, 4)

The Council also called for the formation of a regular Synod of Bishops:

Bishops from various parts of the world, chosen through ways and procedures established or to be established by the Roman Pontiff, will render especially helpful assistance of the supreme pastor of the Church in a council to be known by the proper name of Synod of Bishops. (CD, 5)

In a move that caught the Curia off guard, the Council also clearly called for a reformation of the Roman Curia.

In exercising supreme, full and immediate power over the universal Church, the Roman Pontiff makes use of the departments of the Roman Curia. These, therefore, perform their duties in his name and with his authority for the good of the churches and in the service of the sacred pastors. The Fathers of this most sacred Council, however, strongly desire that these departments—which have rendered exceptional service to the Roman Pontiff and to the pastors of the Church—be reorganized and better adapted to the needs of the times, and of various regions and rites.” (CD, 9)

Finally, the Council called for collegial assemblies of bishops within regions of the world:

Nowadays especially, bishops are frequently unable to fulfill their office suitably and fruitfully unless the work more harmoniously and closely every day with other bishops. Episcopal conferences already established in many nations have furnished outstanding proofs of a more fruitful apostolate. Therefore, this most sacred Synod considers it supremely opportune everywhere that bishops belonging to the same nation or region form an association and meet together at fixed times. (CD 37)

Finally, I would like to quote a passage which identifies the pastoral role of bishops:

As those who lead others to perfection, bishops should be diligent in fostering holiness among their clerics, religious, and laity according to the special vocation of each. They should also be mindful of their obligation to give an example of holiness through charity, humility and simplicity of life. ...In exercising his office of father and pastor, a bishop should stand in the midst of his people as one who serves. Let him be a good shepherd who knows his sheep and whose sheep know him. Let him be a true father who excels in the spirit of love and solicitude for all and to whose divinely conferred authority all gratefully submit themselves. (CD, 16)

I would like to conclude with a lengthy passage from an excellent little book *The Beginnings of the Church* by Frederick Cwiekowski, which demonstrates the development of the teaching on the “hierarchy”:

The bishops at Vatican II recognized this development of church structure and did so in a very interesting way. The Council of Trent, in its twenty-third session (1563) dealing with the sacrament of order, added to its statement of doctrine the following canon: ‘If anyone says that in the Catholic Church there is not instituted a hierarchy by divine ordinance, which consists of bishops, priests and ministers, let that person be anathema.’ Vatican II, in chapter 3 of its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, took up the issue of the hierarchy; in article 28 it referred to the canon of Trent. But in the transmission of the teaching of Trent, Vatican II showed a careful sensitivity to the complex historical development we have been reviewing.

This is the statement of Vatican II: ‘Thus the *divinely instituted* ecclesiastical *ministry* is exercised in different degrees by those who even *from ancient times* have been called bishops, priests and deacons’ (italics added). There are three changes in the text. First, where Trent used the term hierarchy, Vatican II spoke of *ecclesiastical ministry*. In a section dealing with the early history of ministry, Vatican II wished to recognize that the term hierarchy is not found in the New Testament writings. Second, where in Trent the distinctions between the offices were said to be instituted by divine ordinance, Vatican II spoke simply of a *divinely instituted*

ecclesiastical ministry. The recent council recognized that ecclesiastical ministry is part of the divine plan for the church; but it was aware that the triad of episcopate, priesthood and diaconate is never mentioned as such in the New Testament. Finally, Vatican II states that the three orders mentioned are *very ancient*, implying that they may not have been in place from the beginning.

#### **Discussion Questions for Session 4**

1. What does collaborative ministry mean? What examples can you cite?
2. What is the status of “collegiality” in the church today? In your diocese? In your parish?
3. Where do you see signs of hope for the future of the American church?
4. What are your expectations from the papacy of Benedict XVI?

## **Some Final Thoughts and Quotations**

*From Ron DuBois*

There is much that is new and unprecedented in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Or perhaps it is better to say that there is much that is unprecedented because it is a development of doctrine that has been in progress since the days of the early church. In his opening address, Pope John XXIII set this development in motion with this phrase: “The deposit of faith is one thing; the way it is presented is another. For the truths preserved in our sacred doctrine can retain the same substance and meaning under different forms of expression.”

This concept of “development of doctrine” underlies much of the window-opening that occurred at the Council. We saw this in the quotations from the *Dogmatic Constitution on Sacred Revelation*. This document clearly gave Catholic Scripture scholars the go-ahead to use “textual criticism” —to ask, what is the most accurate text we can reconstruct; to use “historical criticism”—to ask, what is historical in the texts and what is a theological interpretation of the events; and to use “form criticism” —to ask, is this text poetry, prophecy, wisdom literature, historical narrative, catechetics, liturgical formulations, etc.

The Council documents display not only a new understanding of the Church as the People of God, but also a broader understanding of who is a member of the Church. This quotation found early in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* opens up the new understanding of the Church:

“This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, *subsists* in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor, although many elements of sanctification and truth can be found outside of her visible structure.” (LG, 8)

Note that the document does not state that the Church was founded by Jesus, but instead is constituted and organized in the world. In addition, the Church subsists in the Catholic Church, that is, it is not to be identified with the Catholic Church. And finally, there is an anticipation of understandings found in the Decree on Ecumenism, i.e. that sanctification and truth can be found outside of her visible structure.”

This same understanding can be found in the Declaration on Religious Freedom: “We believe that this one true religion subsists in the catholic and apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all men.” (DH, 1)

Although this latter document focuses on religious freedom, i.e. people should be free from coercion to believe and religion should suffer no interference from government, there is still a focus on the sanctity of conscience.



In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created. It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. (DH, 3)

And in *Gaudium et Spes*, this concept is confirmed:

Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths. In a wonderful manner, conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor.

In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals and from social relationships.

These concepts may seem to clash with the passages we quoted on collegiality, which emphasize the authority of the bishops and the supreme authority of the Pope, and with the requirement that Catholics be respectfully submissive to that authority. It is obvious that progressives seldom quote these latter passages, which are foremost in the minds of more conservative believers. And, of course, those passages that are the favorites of progressives are given a different twist when quoted by conservatives.

It is my conviction that Catholics cannot put aside either side in these apparent contradictions, but must cling to both of them “white-hot.” As my earlier quotations from David Tracy indicated, the true believer needs to cling to all the “classics” of the faith and to favor them and to savor them, even if we can't make immediate congruent sense of them all. In other words, the proper approach is that of “faith seeking understanding” rather than “understanding seeking faith;” although for many of us both routes can lead to the truth and ultimately to union with God.

I want to add a couple of quotations that seem to be relevant for our times. The first from St. Augustine:

*For you I am a bishop, but with you I am a Christian. The first is an office accepted, the second a grace received; one a danger, the other safety. ... I am gladder by far to be redeemed with you than I am to be placed over you, I shall, as the Lord commanded, be more completely your servant.*

And the second is from Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *Mater et Magister*:

We should not foolishly dream up an artificial opposition—where none really exists—between one's own spiritual perfection and one's active contact with the everyday world, as if a man could not perfect himself as a Christian except by putting aside all temporal activity.” (255)