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## Vatican II and the Humility of the Church

Christian ethics has made the recovery of virtue central to contemporary moral reflection. Recently, Gerard Mannion has suggested that contemporary ecclesiology follow suit, calling for a kind of "virtue ecclesiology."<sup>1</sup> Such an ecclesiology would hold together what the Church is and what the Church does.<sup>2</sup> His focus is on offering an ecclesiology more attuned to the shape and demands of postmodernity, one that is more elastic and open to pluralism. In his 2011 plenary address to the Catholic Theological Society of America, Paul Lakeland adopted a similar tack, presenting helpful reflections on the ecclesial virtue of humility.<sup>3</sup> I would like to follow suit in a consideration of the teaching of the Council. I will argue that we can find in the documents of Vatican II a solid basis for speaking of humility as an ecclesial virtue. This will require, however, some preliminary reflections on the virtue of humility itself.

### BRIEF REFLECTIONS ON THE VIRTUE OF HUMILITY

The Christian ethicist Lisa Fullam has made a case for the recovery of the virtue of humility in Christian ethics. She has argued persuasively that the virtue has suffered neglect because

it has been mistakenly associated with self-abasement.<sup>4</sup> This emphasis was particularly strong in the Augustinian tradition, where self-abasement was explicitly linked to one's sinfulness. Within that moral context, self-abasement knew no limits. This was not the approach of Thomas Aquinas, however. For Thomas, Fullam contends, self-abasement is not central to the virtue but functions merely as a corrective toward the innate human tendency toward "self-celebration." "But the practice of self-abasement is not the essence of humility, just as the virtue of sobriety cannot simply be equated with abstinence from alcohol."<sup>5</sup> Thomas oriented humility's self-abasement toward a healthy assessment of the truth of one's situation before God and the world. In the end, humility is concerned with honest self-knowledge. Thomas followed the Aristotelian pattern of seeing a virtue as pursuing a mean between excess and deficit. Consequently, self-abasement was not an end in itself and was not limitless but functioned as a means rather than an end where the end was accurate self-understanding.

We see this emphasis on true self-knowledge in the distinctive way in which Thomas binds the virtue of humility to the virtue of magnanimity.<sup>6</sup> The latter virtue is oriented toward a celebration of honor and achievement as it relates to the gifts one possesses from God. "Magnanimity makes a man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, both magnanimity and humility are concerned with honest self-understanding; magnanimity honestly acknowledges one's gifts and urges one to make the greatest possible use of them, and humility honestly acknowledges one's deficiencies.<sup>8</sup> When paired together, humility and magnanimity can be seen as a kind of twofold virtue that urges one to a honest self-assessment of both one's gifts and deficiencies. Although in this essay I will refer only to the virtue of humility, it is always with an awareness of its integral relationship to magnanimity.

Humility is an intrinsically other-centered virtue, principally because honest self-assessment can only occur within the framework of one's relationship to God.<sup>9</sup> Humility, in a basic sense, is concerned with a profound reverence for the greatness of God, a reverence that inevitably brings one's own failings and

inadequacies into sharper focus. At the same time, humility is also exercised in view of the goodness of all God's creatures and the gifts that they possess. As Fullam puts it, "Humility invites us not to rest in our own gifts but to look outside ourselves and to see what else God has been up to."<sup>10</sup>

James Keenan has noted the renewed attention to the place of humility and the other virtues in his history of modern Catholic moral theology, noting in particular its centrality in the work of twentieth century theologians like Fritz Tillmann and Bernard Häring.<sup>11</sup> Keenan, a leading figure in the development of contemporary virtue ethics, makes his own helpful contribution to our consideration of the virtue of humility. For Keenan the heart of humility lies in overcoming the vice of presumption. In this vein Keenan will link humility with the proper exercise of power.

Humility is not self-deprecation, but rather the virtue for knowing the place of one's power in God's world. This is the humility of Jesus before Pilate, of Mary in the Magnificat, of Paul narrating his call, and of the incredible Mary Magdalene holding on to the risen Christ in the garden. In each instance they recognize their power in God's world and they do so as an act of indebtedness to the God who gave them this power. Humility is the virtue, therefore, that trains us in the exercise of that power. The more we practice humility, the more we understand the power that we, as leaders, are called to exercise.<sup>12</sup>

Keenan's explicit linking of humility and the exercise of power provides a further avenue for reflection on humility as an ecclesial virtue.

In this very brief treatment I have proposed three characteristics of the virtue of humility: (1) humility is tethered to magnanimity insofar as it is oriented toward honest self-assessment in general, and distinguished from magnanimity by its acknowledgment of one's deficiencies in particular; (2) humility is an intrinsically relational and other-centered virtue, eager to

celebrate the greatness of God and the gifts of others; and (3) humility is concerned with the proper exercise of power.

## VATICAN II AND THE HUMILITY OF THE CHURCH

We now turn to the teaching of the Council. There are, of course, multiple methodological approaches to the study of the Council that have been employed over the last five decades. John O'Malley has emphasized the value of genre analysis. O'Malley argues that one of the most distinctive features of Vatican II was its employment of a consistent rhetorical style he refers to as *panegyric*, "the painting of an idealized portrait in order to excite admiration and appropriation."<sup>13</sup> The recourse to this rhetorical genre marked a departure from earlier conciliar preferences for a more juridical style of discourse, one more inclined to render legal pronouncements and canonical penalties. The Council, by contrast, articulated an idealized account or vision of the Church intended to inspire believers and move the Church to implement the reforms necessary to realize the Council's vision in the practical order. In this essay I will argue that a principal feature of the Council's account of the Church was its consistent emphasis on the ecclesial virtue of humility.

## HUMILITY AND ECCLESIAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

As we saw above, the virtue of humility requires an honest self-assessment that attends to one's deficiencies even as magnanimity attends to one's gifts. The Council is certainly not shy, nor is the larger Catholic Tradition, about affirming the gifts the Church offers the world as "universal sacrament of salvation" (*Lumen Gentium* 48). In several passages the Council emphasizes the fullness of the "means of sanctification and truth" that belong to the Catholic Church, even as many of these elements

are found "outside its visible structures" (*Lumen Gentium* 8; *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3). What was most distinctive about the Council's teaching, however, was not this more modest articulation of the gifts the Church offers the world but its willingness to undergo a searching and critical ecclesial self-assessment.

The Council seemed to have recognized that ecclesial self-assessment provided a necessary foundation for authentic ecclesial reform. Within the limits of this essay, I cannot provide a comprehensive survey of every instance of the Council's call to reform and renewal.<sup>14</sup> Instead I offer some representative examples of the Council's determination to engage in a comprehensive self-assessment of the state of the Church as the necessary precondition for ecclesial reform.

### John XXIII's Opening Address: *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*

This commitment to serious ecclesial self-assessment makes its first appearance at the very outset in Pope John XXIII's opening address. The liturgy to celebrate the opening of the Council was, by today's standards, remarkable in its length. Filled with Roman ceremonial, the opening liturgy lasted over seven hours.<sup>15</sup> For those who remained through it all, the highlight was Pope John XXIII's remarkable address, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*.<sup>16</sup> Here, for the first time, the bishops and indeed, through the media covering the event, the entire world, heard a comprehensive articulation of the pope's hopes for the Council. After some introductory comments on the historical role of ecumenical councils, Pope John XXIII offered his reasons for calling an ecumenical Council. The Church must bring herself "up to date where required." A tame statement today, but at that time such an admission was at odds with the dominant view of the Church as a *societas perfecta*, a Church hovering serenely above the turmoil of human history. It is true that "perfect," in the neo-Scholastic sense of the claim, meant simply that the Church possessed all that was necessary for the fulfillment of its mission, but the pope chose to emphasize the Church seen as a historical reality in need of reform and renewal.

The next section of his address considered the defense of Church teaching, followed by a section on the repression of error. There we find this remarkable statement:

At the outset of the Second Vatican Council, it is evident, as always, that the truth of the Lord will remain forever. We see, in fact, as one age succeeds another, that the opinions of men follow one another and exclude each other. And often errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.

This passage offers the daring admission that traditional approaches to error were no longer appropriate for the Church today.

The final section turns to the unity of the Church.

Unfortunately, the entire Christian family has not yet fully attained this visible unity in truth. The Catholic Church, therefore, considers it her duty to work actively so that there may be fulfilled the great mystery of that unity, which Jesus Christ invoked with fervent prayer from His heavenly Father on the eve of His sacrifice.

In the pope's frank acknowledgment of division in the church, there is embedded a provocative ecclesial claim. The pope could admit that the "Christian family" had not fully attained visible unity only on the assumption that non-Catholic Christians were part of that family. This new ecumenical starting point was difficult to reconcile with Pope Pius XI's exhortation to dissident non-Catholics, in the encyclical *Mortalium Animos* (1928), to return to the fold.

This short address introduced a new ecclesial tone at the very outset of the Council. It was a tone filled with hope yet sober in its self-assessment and forthright in its admission that not all was well within the Church. The pope sang, loud and clear, the first chorus in the Council's plea for greater ecclesial humility.

### *Sacrosanctum Concilium and the Humble Acknowledgment of the Need for Reform*

Debates regarding the Council's liturgy constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, inevitably center on controversies related to the need and character of ongoing liturgical reform. However, as Massimo Faggioli has persuasively argued, considerations of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* must not be limited to the proper implementation of liturgical reform; this document contains, in germ, a compelling ecclesial vision, one only partially followed in the Council's subsequent documents.<sup>17</sup> Central to the liturgy constitution's larger ecclesial contributions is the precedent it set for ecclesial reform built on the foundation of rigorous ecclesial self-examination. The Council begins with an implicit admission of the need for reform.

The sacred council has set out to impart an ever increasing vigor to the lives of the faithful; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change; to encourage whatever can promote the union of all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever serves to call all of humanity into the church's fold. Accordingly it sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 1)

The liturgy constitution follows John XXIII in its forceful move beyond the post-Tridentine *societas perfecta* ecclesiology to one that is more thoroughly rooted in history.<sup>18</sup>

The Council then introduces what would be a central theme throughout the Council documents, the Church on pilgrimage:

"For what marks out the church is that it is at once human and divine, visible and endowed with invisible realities, vigorously active and yet making space in its life for contemplation, present in the world and yet in pilgrimage (*peregrinam*) beyond" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 2).<sup>19</sup> The image reinforces a sense of the Church's historical embeddedness which, in turn, opens up the possibility of authentic reform:

The liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time, if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become less suitable. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 21)

The reality of historical change extends to the liturgical rites themselves: "The Council also desires that, where necessary the rites be revised carefully in the light of sound tradition, and that they be given new vigor to meet present-day circumstances" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 4). Regarding the Eucharist, in particular, the bishops insisted that liturgical revisions be undertaken such that

the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as well as the connection between them, may be more clearly shown, and that devout and active participation by the faithful may be more easily achieved. To this end, the rites are to be simplified, due care being taken to preserve their substance. Duplications made with the passage of time are to be omitted, as are less useful additions. Other parts which were lost through the vicissitudes of history are to be restored according to the ancient tradition of the holy Fathers, as may seem appropriate or necessary. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 50)

In the Council's first official document it follows the pope's example in exercising an honest ecclesial self-assessment.

### A Pilgrim Church Ever in Need of Reform and Renewal

We have already seen the "pilgrim" metaphor applied to the Church in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The constitution *Lumen Gentium* describes the Church as "clasping sinners to its bosom," even as it avoided the direct attribution of sinfulness to the Church. The painful presence of sin in the Church demands purification and the ecclesial pursuit of the path of "penance and renewal" (*Lumen Gentium* 8).<sup>20</sup> For the Council, this is the inevitable path of human pilgrimage.

The church "proceeds on its pilgrim way amidst the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God," proclaiming the cross and death of the Lord until he comes. But it draws strength from the power of the risen Lord, to overcome with patience and charity its afflictions and difficulties, from within and without; and reveals his mystery faithfully in the world—albeit amid shadows—until in the end it will be made manifest in the fullness of the light. (*Lumen Gentium* 8)<sup>21</sup>

The theme of pilgrimage finds further exposition in chapter 7 of *Lumen Gentium*, as is evident in the very chapter title, "The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Its Union with the Heavenly Church." By conceiving of the Church not just as a collection of individual pilgrims but as itself pilgrim, the Council adopted a tone of deep eschatological humility. Thus the Council could write,

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which we acquire sanctity through the grace of God, will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things. (*Lumen Gentium* 48)

The Church lives as a people *on the way* who have the promise of God's presence and guidance but who still await the consummation of God's plan. As a pilgrim community living in

history, the Church must always be willing to assess its faithfulness to the gospel. In the "Declaration on Religious Freedom," *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Council admits the Church's own role in ignoring the proper demands of religious freedom:

In the life of the people of God in its pilgrimage, through the vicissitudes of human history, there have at times appeared patterns of behavior which were not in keeping with the spirit of the Gospel and were even opposed to it. (*Dignitatis Humanae* 12)

This rigorous examination of Church conduct, past and present, is also displayed in the "Decree on Ecumenism," *Unitatis Redintegratio*:

In this one and only church of God from its very beginnings there arose certain rifts, which the Apostle strongly censures as damnable. But in subsequent centuries much more serious dissensions appeared and large communities became separated from full communion with the Catholic Church—for which, often enough, people on both sides were to blame. (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 3)

An honest assessment of the Church's failings is, according to the Council, a necessary precondition for any genuine ecumenical endeavor. The bishops wrote that the primary ecumenical duty of Catholics was

to make a careful and honest appraisal of whatever needs to be renewed and done in the catholic household itself, in order that its life may bear witness more clearly and more faithfully to the teachings and institutions which have been handed down from Christ through the apostles. (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 4)

The ecumenical decree then specifies what getting the "Catholic household" in order may require:

Consequently, if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated—to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these should be set right at the opportune moment and in the proper way. (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 6)

The Council demonstrated a consistent commitment to move from a static and immutable Church that lives on some ethereal plane in favor of a more historically grounded account of the Church. The bishops did not yield in their belief in the holiness of the Church, yet they demonstrated a willingness to undertake a much more historically responsible ecclesial assessment. They thereby pursued a path that marked out one of the central characteristics of the virtue of humility.

## HUMILITY AND OTHER-CENTEREDNESS

A relational other-centeredness is a second characteristic of the virtue of humility; humility habituates us to focus not on our own accomplishments, but on the other and, preeminently, on the divine Other. Transposed into an ecclesial key, a truly humble Church would eschew any form of ecclesial triumphalism and, in the place of any hint of ecclesial self-congratulation, would give prominence to the Church's utter dependence for its life and mission on the trinitarian missions of Word and Spirit. Vatican II moved decisively in this direction, repeatedly repudiating ecclesial triumphalism. The latter move is most evident in *Dei Verbum*, the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation."

### *Dei Verbum* and the Church's Receptivity to the Word

Jared Wicks has remarked on the typical ordering of the Council documents in various editions:

Some editions place *Lumen Gentium* at the head of the Vatican II constitutions, but would not the conciliar

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ecclesiology be better contextualized if placed after the council text starting with "hearing the word of God reverently and proclaiming it confidently..." and ending with "the word of God...stands forever," as does *Dei Verbum*?<sup>22</sup>

Wicks contends that a theological reading of the Council ought to begin with the Church's humble response to a Word that is not its own. The Church must maintain a stance of receptivity to the revelation of the triune God. Consider the opening passage of the constitution:

Hearing the word of God reverently and proclaiming it confidently, this holy synod makes its own the words of St. John: "We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." (*Dei Verbum* 1)

Before the Church can preach or teach with any integrity, it must first listen. It is in view of this ecclesial receptivity that the Council acknowledges that all the Christian faithful are given that supernatural instinct for the faith, the *sensus fidei*, to allow them to receive God's word, penetrate its meaning and apply it more fully in their lives (*Lumen Gentium* 12). Dependence on the revelatory word led the Council to insist that although the task of giving an authoritative interpretation of the word of God is entrusted to the magisterium, "this magisterium is not superior to the word of God, but is rather its servant" (*Dei Verbum* 10).

*Dei Verbum* turned away from a more propositional view of revelation as a set of truths to be mastered. This revelation stands as an invitation into relationship. The Church is called into communion with God in Christ:

By this revelation, then, the invisible God, from the fullness of his love, addresses men and women as his

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friends and lives among them, in order to invite and receive them into his own company...The most intimate truth thus revealed about God and human salvation shines forth for us in Christ, who is himself both the mediator and the sum total of revelation. (*Dei Verbum* 2)

The Christocentrism evident in this passage plays an important role in the Council's evocation of a humbler Church more aware of its radical dependence on God's saving work. Too often overlooked are the many conciliar texts that ground the life and mission of the Church in Christ.<sup>23</sup> Some forget that the Latin title of the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium*, "light of the nations," refers not to the Church but to Christ. That constitution opens with these lines:

Christ is the light of the nations and consequently this holy synod, gathered together in the Holy Spirit, ardently desires to bring to all humanity that light of Christ which is resplendent on the face of the church, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature. (*Lumen Gentium* 1)

The Church is to be focused not on itself but on Christ, the subject of the Church's proclamation.

Even as the Council insists on the centrality of Christ, it avoids a reductive ecclesial Christomonism by also recalling the mission of the Holy Spirit. *Dei Verbum* develops the fully trinitarian shape of divine revelation in its assertion that the Church's response and reception of the divine word is dependent on the action of the Spirit "who moves the heart and converts it to God, and opens the eyes of the mind and makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth" (*Dei Verbum* 5). Ormond Rush has developed a rich theology of ecclesial reception built on the conciliar teaching that it is the function of the Holy Spirit to bring "to realization God's revelatory and salvific purposes."<sup>24</sup> The Holy Spirit constitutes the Church as a community of reception,

wherein what is received is nothing less than the grace and revelation of Christ.

This reception must not be imagined, however, as if it were a one-time event. It is not the case that the Church simply received Christ at some definitive point in the past such that what was once received is now possessed. Rather, since what is received is not propositional information, in the first instance, but the offer of divine communion, the Church's posture of receptivity and dependence is characteristic of its entire historical existence. The Council affirms this in the second chapter of *Dei Verbum*, "The Transmission of Divine Revelation." There the bishops present Scripture and Tradition as a kind of mirror "in which the church, during its pilgrim journey here on earth, contemplates God, from whom it receives everything, until such time as it is brought to see him face to face as he really is" (*Dei Verbum* 7).

It is at this juncture that we might speak of a form of "doctrinal humility." Catherine Cornille notes that when humility is related to doctrine "it has more often been regarded as an attitude to be adopted *toward* rather than *about* the truth of Christian doctrines."<sup>25</sup> Individual Christians are reminded of the limits of human reason and exhorted to adopt a humble posture of docile obedience in the face of Church doctrine. Yet the Council invites us to pursue a different understanding of doctrinal humility. *Dei Verbum* 8 presents a dynamic account of Tradition's development and then offers the remarkable admission that the Church lives in history moving "toward the plenitude of divine truth." This brief clause presents revealed truth as both historically conditioned and subject to eschatological fulfillment. The Church does not so much possess revelation as it is possessed by it.

A stance of doctrinal humility is also reflected in the Council's presentation of the hierarchy of truths in *Unitatis Redintegratio* 11:

When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or "hierarchy" of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith.

Here the "foundation of the Christian faith" refers to divine revelation itself.

The doctrinal humility of the Council leads it to turn away from any arrogant claim to a comprehensive grasp of divine revelation in favor of a stance of receptivity toward the revealing God.

### *The Dialogical Imperative of the Church*

The other-centered character of humility is not limited to relationship with God but extends as well to an appreciation of the created "other." The Council's evocation of a more humble Church open to the gifts of the other is most evident in the Council's dialogical imperative. Pope Paul VI's first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, was promulgated on August 6, 1964, five weeks prior to the third session of the Council. The encyclical was dedicated almost entirely to a dialogical vision of the Church and, since it was promulgated about a month before the opening of the third session of the Council, it exerted an influence on conciliar deliberations. Its influence is certainly evident in *Gaudium et Spes*, the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," which calls for an intra-ecclesial dialogue:

Such a mission requires us first of all to create in the church itself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, and to acknowledge all legitimate diversity; in this way all who constitute the one people of God will be able to engage in ever more fruitful dialogue, whether they are pastors or other members of the faithful. For the ties which unite the faithful together are stronger than those which separate them: let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is doubtful, and charity in everything. (*Gaudium et Spes* 92)

Intra-ecclesial dialogue, that is dialogue within the Catholic Church, presumes a shared commitment to the apostolic faith, the "unity in what is necessary." Yet at the same time, it is both this unity in essentials and the "charity in everything" that frees the Church to be open to dialogue on "doubtful matters."



The Council was not being romantic about the demands of dialogue. It acknowledged that there would be disagreement in the Church, particularly regarding how to apply gospel values to the daily circumstances of our lives. Catholics are bound to disagree on the concrete implications of what it means to follow Jesus in their ordinary lives. When they found they were in disagreement, the bishops said,

No one is permitted to identify the authority of the church exclusively with his or her own opinion. Let them, then try to guide each other by sincere dialogue in a spirit of mutual charity and with a genuine concern for the common good above all. (*Gaudium et Spes* 43)

The suggestion here is that a genuine openness to those with whom we disagree can yield new insight and a renewed commitment to the common good.

This spirit of dialogue was carried over into the Catholic encounters with other Christians in ecumenical relationships. This dialogue requires, on the part of Catholics, that they "become familiar with the outlook of the separated churches and communities" (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 9). In the presentation of Catholic teaching, Catholics should be cognizant of "the hierarchy of truths" that reminds us that Catholic doctrines "vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith" (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 11).

This dialogical imperative was extended as well to those who belong to non-Christian religions. The Council asserted that the origins of the religious traditions of the world often lie in the effort to seek answers to the great questions that have long preoccupied the human spirit (*Nostra Aetate* 1). In its "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Nostra Aetate*, the Council affirmed that in these great religions one can find "a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women" and it exhorted Catholics to prudent and charitable "discussion and collaboration with members of other religions" (*Nostra Aetate* 2).

Finally, we must acknowledge the dialogical spirit manifested in the Council's attitude toward the world itself. In the pastoral constitution we find a key text that captures the Council's deep ecclesial humility:

The church is guardian of the deposit of God's word and draws religious and moral principles from it, but it does not always have a ready answer to every question. Still, it is eager to associate the light of revelation with the experience of humanity in trying to clarify the course upon which it has recently entered. (*Gaudium et Spes* 33).

This passage establishes the fundamental basis for dialogue with the world; the Church has both something to offer and something to learn from the world.

*Gaudium et Spes* offers an apt ecclesial example of the tethering of humility with magnanimity. In an exercise of magnanimity, the Council fathers honored the Church's gift of the good news of Jesus Christ that it offers to a wounded world in need of healing and reconciliation (*Gaudium et Spes* 37). In an exercise of ecclesial humility the Council readily acknowledged what it receives from the world:

Just as it is in the world's interest to acknowledge the church as a social reality and a driving force in history, so too the church is not unaware how much it has profited from the history and development of humankind. It profits from the experience of past ages, from the progress of the sciences, and from the riches hidden in various cultures, through which greater light is thrown on human nature and new avenues to truth are opened up. (*Gaudium et Spes* 44)

This openness and receptivity to the world manifests that radical other-centeredness that is essential to the virtue of ecclesial humility.

## HUMILITY AND THE EXERCISE OF POWER

Finally we turn to the third characteristic of the virtue of humility. As Keenan reminded us, humility is the virtue that trains us in the exercise of power. A Church that lives out of the virtue of humility will be a Church that exercises power and authority in imitation of Christ who saw power and authority as service.

Any consideration of the Council's treatment of power in the Church must recognize its important retrieval of the long neglected pneumatological conditioning of the Church. For all ecclesial power is in some sense a participation in the presence and activity of the Spirit in the life of the Church. According to the Council it is the Holy Spirit who

guides the church in the way of all truth and, uniting it in fellowship and ministry, bestows upon it different hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs it and adorns it with his fruits. By the power of the Gospel he rejuvenates the church, constantly renewing it and leading it to perfect union with its spouse. (*Lumen Gentium* 4)

By baptism all the *Christifideles* are empowered by the Spirit for Christian life and ministry. Within the life of the Church, "power" can be thought of as the Spirit active in the life of believers enabling them to fulfill their baptismal call and engage in effective action in service of the Church's life and mission.

The Council did not offer any developed theological reflections on the relationship between baptismal empowerment and the particular empowerment that occurs by way of ministerial ordination. Yet it did affirm in numerous places that the exercise of ministerial power is always in service of the mission of the people of God. Power is never exercised for its own sake. The Council avoided the typical neo-Scholastic debates regarding the proper scope and limits for the exercise of jurisdictional power or of the relationship between the power of orders and

the power of jurisdiction. Rather, it directed its attention toward the exercise of ministerial power configured for Christian service. Consider this key text in *Lumen Gentium* introducing the chapter on the hierarchical character of the Church:

In order to ensure that the people of God would have pastors and would enjoy continual growth, Christ the Lord set up in his church a variety of offices whose aim is the good of the whole body. Ministers, invested with sacred power, *are at the service of their brothers and sisters*, so that all who belong to the people of God and therefore enjoy true Christian dignity may attain to salvation through their free, combined and well-ordered efforts in pursuit of a common goal. (*Lumen Gentium* 18)

A few paragraphs down we see another articulation of this sense of ministerial power as service: "The bishops, therefore, have undertaken along with their fellow-workers, the priests and deacons, *the service of the community*" (*Lumen Gentium* 20).<sup>26</sup> In the "Decree on Priestly Ministry and Life," *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the power conferred on priests by ordination, the Council teaches, is "a power whose purpose is to build up the church. And in building up the church priests ought to treat everybody with the greatest kindness after the example of our Lord" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 6). The Council insists that "priests, in common with all who have been reborn in the font of Baptism, are brothers and sisters as members of the same body of Christ which all are commanded to build" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 9). The ministerial leadership of priests requires that they "unite their efforts with those of the lay faithful."

Priests are to be sincere in their appreciation and promotion of lay people's dignity and of the special role the laity have to play in the church's mission....They should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes, and recognize their experience and competence in the different fields of

human activity...While testing the spirits to discover if they be of God, they must discover with faith, recognize with joy, and foster diligently the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity, whether these be of a humble or more exalted kind. Among the other gifts of God which are found abundantly among the faithful..Priests should confidently entrust to the laity duties in the service of the church, giving them freedom and opportunity for activity and even inviting them, when opportunity offers, to undertake projects on their own initiative. (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 9; see also *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 3).

Almost completely absent from the Council documents is the appearance of any notion of ministerial power presented as either a coercive/punitive power over others or as a matter of simply "ruling" over others. Rather the Council consistently opted for the language of service and collaboration and in the place of "ruling imagery" we find instead the dominance of the pastoral image of shepherding and its associative responsibilities to learn and care for one's flock (*Christus Dominus* 11, 16).

In this essay I have argued that the Council offers a compelling vision of a Church deeply shaped by ecclesial humility. Vatican II invites us to contemplate the simple face of a renewed, humble yet confident Church. This Church embraces both its divine origins and its historical embodiment. This Church acknowledges its indefectible holiness, yet is committed to honest and courageous ecclesial self-assessment. It is not preoccupied with its own gifts and contributions but remains attentive to the self-communication of God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. This Church rejects the arrogant assumption that divine truth is its exclusive possession. It sloughs off any and all pretensions to triumphalism in favor of patient and open dialogue—dialogue among Catholics, with other Christians, other religions, and the world itself. In this Church the authentic exercise of Christian power is never coercive, never abusive, never authoritarian. The Council's vision of a humble Church stands before us today as both a challenge and, sadly, a reproach.

## Notes

1. Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 195–225.
2. *Ibid.*, 196.
3. Paul Lakeland, "I Want to Be in That Number': Desire, Inclusivity and the Church," *CTSA Proceedings* 66 (2011): 16–28. Lakeland further explored Mannion's ecclesial virtue of humility in "Reflections on the Grace of Self-Doubt," in *Ecclesiology and Exclusion: Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Postmodern Times*, ed. Dennis M. Doyle, Timothy J. Furry, and Pascal D. Bazzell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012), 13–17. In that same volume, see Mannion's response to Lakeland and others, "Ecclesiology and the Humility of God: Embracing the Risk of Loving the World," 24–41.
4. Lisa Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility: A Thomistic Apologetic* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 3–4.
5. *Ibid.*, 4.
6. Thomas relates humility to magnanimity in *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 161, a 1, ad. 3. He treats magnanimity directly in *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 129.
7. *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 129, a. 3, ad 4.
8. For a careful analysis of how Thomas correlates these two virtues, see Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility*, 59–82.
9. *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 161, a 1.
10. Fullam, *The Virtue of Humility*, 132.
11. James Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 63–64, 92–93.
12. James Keenan, *Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2010), 162–63.
13. John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 47.
14. For such a comprehensive survey, see Peter De Mey, "Church Renewal and Reform in the Documents of Vatican II: History, Theology, Terminology," *The Jurist* 71 (2011): 369–400.
15. Andrea Riccardi, "The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council," in *History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, trans. Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 1:14.

16. The English translation of the pope's speech opening the Council is taken from *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter Abbott (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 1:710–19.

17. Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012).

18. *Ibid.*, *True Reform*, 83.

19. Translation from Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:820. Curiously, Flannery translates *peregrinam* as “migrant” rather than “pilgrim.”

20. As Peter De Mey has noted, commentators disagree on whether LG 8 justifies attributing sinfulness to the Church qua Church. De Mey, “Church Renewal,” 372, n. 6.

21. The translation is from Tanner, *Decrees of Ecumenical Councils*, 2:854.

22. Jared Wicks, “Vatican II on Revelation—From Behind the Scenes,” *Theological Studies* 71 (2010): 637–50, at 639. Similar calls for the theological priority of *Dei Verbum* can be found in Christoph Theobald, “‘Dans les traces...’ de la constitution ‘Dei Verbum’ du concile Vatican II: Bible, théologie et pratiques de lecture (Paris: Cerf, 2009); Christoph Theobald, *La réception du concile Vatican II: Vol. I Accéder à la source* (Paris: Cerf, 2009); Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004).

23. One sees the christological grounding of the Church in such texts as SC 2, 7; GS 22, 45; NA 4; PO 5; OT 16.

24. Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 26.

25. Catherine Cornille, *The Im-possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 27–28.

26. Translation from Tanner, *Decrees of Ecumenical Councils*.

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## Liturgical Reform and the Public Role of the Catholic Church

On November 22, 1963, the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, assembled for the second session of Vatican II, voted on the last draft of the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*). A few hours later President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. On December 4, a few weeks later, the constitution was formally approved by the Council. No doubt the Kennedy assassination loomed much larger in the world's consciousness than the approval of the liturgy constitution, but like the election of the first Roman Catholic president of the United States, the liturgy constitution was to have a significant impact on how Catholics related to the world (at least in the American context) and vice versa. It is the aim of this essay to argue that the liturgy constitution and the reform that it sanctioned had a significant impact not only on the way Catholics perceived and lived their own faith, but also on how they related to others and on how others perceived them. I suspect that one might be able to make the case for other parts of the world (especially cultures in which religious pluralism thrives), but I will concentrate on the United States.

As I begin, what theologian and canonist Ladislav Orsy has said about ecumenical councils is worth remembering:

# THE LEGACY OF VATICAN II

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