by reason of the number and difficulty of the issues it chose to address. Its adoption of a new genre to express itself adds to the complexity and to the difficulty in interpreting it in the full breadth of its significance. Taking account of the genre is, however, the first and most essential interpretative principle required to unlock that significance. When that principle is employed, it reveals that Vatican II is a council so unlike any other that it redefined what a council is because it redefined what a council does.

What, then, is a council? The original definition stands, a meeting principally of bishops gathered in Christ's name to make decisions binding on the church. But with Vatican II the nature of the deci- sions changed. Vatican II thus became, I repeat, a meeting in which the church explored and articu- lated anew its identity, recalled and developed its most precious values, and proclaimed to the world its sublime vision for humanity.

# 2

# Does Church Teaching Change?

ALTHOUGH the documents of the early councils of the church recognized that bad customs and bad teaching had to be uprooted, which is a form of change, they most characteristically betray a sense of continuity with previous Christian teaching and prac- tice. They called for continuation and implementa- tion of ancient customs and ancient traditions— *antiqua lex, antiqua traditio.*

The documents of the medieval councils very much follow the same pattern. Although they in fact deal with the twists and turns in culture and institu- tional structures of their day, they lack a keen sense of discrepancy between past and present, and thus the councils never felt the necessity to address the dis- crepancy directly. Only with the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century and then the Reformation

early in the next century did this ahistorical mind-set receive its first serious challenges. The Council of Trent was, therefore, the first council that had to take those challenges into account.

## The Council of Trent

Luther saw his doctrine of justification by faith alone as the very core of the Gospel message. To reject it was to reject Christianity itself. As he began to experience hostility from the church hierarchy and from theologians concerning his teaching, he concluded that the church had not only failed to proclaim the Gospel but had proclaimed its antithesis, the heresy of justification by good works. The church had betrayed the teaching of Christ and had thereby ceased being the true church. In the course of the centuries, the church had changed, Luther maintained, and changed radically for the worse. Between it and the congregation of Christian faithful founded by Christ yawned a gap of many centuries. The church of his day was discontinuous with the teaching of Christ and the apostles.

When the bishops convened at Trent in 1545, they soon realized that justification was the key doctrinal issue at stake. After seven months of sometimes ac-

rimonious discussion, they were finally able to articulate a statement that won their overwhelming approval. Neither at this nor at any other point did the council explicitly discuss whether the church had failed to proclaim the true doctrine. The prelates at Trent assumed that church teaching was continuous with the teaching of the Gospel, and they therefore simply affirmed or implied that what they taught was orthodox and true to the tradition.

In the early twentieth century, the important English historian and philosopher R. G. Collingwood designated this style of historical thinking "substantialism," and he saw it as the chief defect of the ancient Roman historians. Livy, for instance, took for granted that Rome was an unchanging substance that sailed through the sea of the centuries without being affected by it. Christian thinkers inherited this tradition and without examining it applied it to the church.

By the time of the council, however, an awareness of living in particularly evil times gripped many Europeans. Their times were the worst of all, the low point in a long process of decline from a purer and more authentic past. The church, they believed, was not exempt from this process. For Catholics and especially for the bishops gathered at Trent,

the upheavals in the wake of the Reformation con-
firmed and exacerbated the awareness of a pervasive
darkness. On at least three occasions, the bishops
at the council lamented how calamitous were the
times in which the council was taking place. They
therefore accepted the idea of change for the worse,
but they did not see it applying to doctrine, which
somehow was immune to the historical process.

They did see change as applying to the discipline
of "the clergy and the Christian people." The expres-
sion implies that the morals and mores of the
people living within the institution of the church
had declined, but not the institution itself, and most
certainly not its doctrine. The documents of Trent
rest, therefore, on an operative distinction between
the church and its members. The former exists un-
changed and apart from the contingencies to which
the members are subject.

The council directed its changes therefore to the
members, especially the clergy who occupied the
three official pastoral offices in the church—pope,
bishop, pastor of parishes. In trying to enforce
changes in the behavior of officeholders, the council
did not see itself as innovating but, rather, as re-
storing former norms and practices.

What was required to counter the evils of the age
was a recovery and restoration of the healthy eccle-
siastical discipline of the past. The reforms of Trent
for the most part consisted, therefore, in strength-
ening or significantly reformulating older canonical
regulations, especially as those regulations related to
the clergy. The council restored, revived, and called
back into operation the good norms of the past—
*restituere, innovare, revocare.*

In actual fact, however, the council made changes
that were innovations, not simply a burnishing of
past laws. The decree *Tametsi* is the clearest example
of such innovations. It stipulated that henceforth the
church would consider no marriage valid unless wit-
nessed by a priest. The council intended the decree
to stamp out the abuse of so-called clandestine mar-
riages, that is, the exchange of vows between the two
partners with no witness present. Such marriages
made it possible for one of the spouses, usually the
man, to deny later that a marriage had taken place
and to abandon his wife and, often, his children.

There was no precedent for *Tametsi* in the entire
history of the church, a fact of which the bishops at
Trent were aware. They were aware, therefore, that
sometimes measures had to be adopted that were

real changes from past practice and standards of behavior. The debate at Trent on *Tametsi* was heated, however, because it did not concern merely sacramental practice but seemed to have doctrinal implications.

The problem was this: If the consent of the spouses constituted the sacrament, which everybody agreed was the case, how could the church legitimately declare a consented-to union invalid? Did the church have the right and the authority to impose a condition on the validity of marriages that intruded on the partners' exchange of vows, the constitutive element of the sacrament? How could the church declare invalid in the future marriages that in the past it had recognized as valid, even if forbidden? The bishops discussed these objections and somehow came to the conclusion that they could pass the decree. At Trent, therefore, the problem of doctrinal change lurked in the shadows, poised to strike in the open at any moment.

But when Trent treated doctrine directly, it spoke clearly and declared, "No change!" It reformed mores, but it "confirmed" doctrine. In reaction to Luther, no previous council ever insisted as explicitly or implied so regularly that the present teaching of the church was identical with that of the apos-

tolic age and that there had been no change in it in the intervening centuries. When the council affirmed that in the Catholic church "the ancient, absolute, and in every respect perfect faith and doctrine" of the Eucharist had been retained unchanged, it was only making explicit for one of its doctrinal pronouncements what underlay them all.

## Vatican I

In Italy by the middle of the fifteenth century, new critical methods for dealing with historical texts had developed. The Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla led the way. In his *Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum*, he showed how the Latin Vulgate failed in many instances to convey the sense of the original Greek text, and through philological criticism he showed that the document known as "The Donation of Constantine" was a forgery. With these works Valla founded the discipline of philology and in so doing gave impetus to a newly keen sense of anachronism. He thus sowed the seeds of what developed into modern historical consciousness.

The critical approach to historical texts and to the past that Valla and later humanists such as Erasmus pioneered caught on, gained momentum, and

reached a culminating turning point in the nineteenth century. It was a century in which awareness of historical change began conditioning scholars' approach to virtually every text in every discipline, including sacred texts. It was, moreover, the century of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species.* Evolution, development, progress, change—these words marked the culture of the age.

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had largely rejected any role for the past in prescribing norms for the present, and it had thrown history's goal into the future. The liberal philosophies of the nineteenth century assumed that progress was inevitable in virtually every aspect of human life and endeavor. The world moved forward in a process of change for the better, as Darwin showed. To the delight of some and to the horror of others, Darwin seemed to reduce the story of Adam and Eve to a naïve fable.

The Bible as well as the history of the church now came under newly skeptical criticism in the universities, which revived in the nineteenth century after a long period of stagnation. Germany was the revival's epicenter, most especially the University of Berlin. Sharpening the methods pioneered by Renaissance humanists, Leopold von Ranke trained

generations of talented students in rigorous methods of historical analysis and textual criticism.

This development, long in the making, moved the discipline of history from its former base in rhetoric and moral philosophy to more controlled methods of research, which at a certain point began to be described as scientific. The methods professed objectivity in evaluating evidence and freedom from contamination by apologetic concerns. They likewise professed freedom from what the maintenance of received opinions might require. For professional historians, these methods spelled the end of substantialism. Every historical reality had a history. Simply by being historical, each and every historical reality changed—at least to some degree. As did other scholars of the era, Catholic exegetes and historians felt the impact of such methods and had to reckon with them. At Vatican I in that regard, Catholic bishops had to deal with historical objections to the doctrine of papal infallibility, that is, the pope's prerogative to declare with absolute finality that a truth is divinely revealed and must be believed by all faithful Catholics.

When on June 26, 1867, Pius IX made known to bishops and pilgrims present in Rome his intention to convoke a council, he described its purpose in the

most general terms: to review the problems facing the church and to find appropriate remedies for them. He established commissions to prepare the agenda, which resulted in a wide range of topics for the council to deal with. Among those topics, however, was none dealing with the popes' infallibility. But because the Catholic press, especially in France, had carried on such a vigorous campaign for it before the council opened, the early emergence of infallibility at the council as the issue that would dominate it was almost inevitable.

A sizeable minority of bishops coming especially from Germany, Austria, and Hungary opposed defining the doctrine and based their objections in large part on historical grounds. According to those bishops, the doctrine lacked historical foundation in the church's doctrine and in the church's practice. According to them also, there were instances where a pope had taught a heterodox opinion. Among those most adamantly opposed to infallibility on such grounds was Karl-Josef Hefele, bishop of Rottenburg, who had already published several volumes of his highly respected history of the councils.

Leaders of the majority at the council tried to show, however, that the supposed instances of papal fallibility could be explained or were irrelevant. The

assumption that the church and especially its teachings did not change had by the nineteenth century become axiomatic in most Catholic circles, which to some extent was the legacy of the Council of Trent. According to this assumption, the present church related to the past through a bond of virtually unqualified continuity.

In this mode of thinking, historical arguments were irrelevant in the face of seemingly irrefutable texts from Scripture or later documents of the church. The abstract and ahistorical method of the Scholastic system of theology further helped shield doctrine from historical contingency. A historical naiveté that took the present situation as the norm for interpreting the past and that projected present practice and understanding onto it also contributed to this substantialistic mode of thinking.

The clearest statement of the majority's stance on the matter occurred in the *Relatio* (explanatory notes) that accompanied the first draft of the infallibility decree:

As has without exception been shown above from the most important texts [*monumentis*], the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff is a truth divinely revealed. Therefore, it is impossible

that it can ever be proved false by any historical facts. If, however, such facts are brought forward to oppose it, they must themselves be deemed false insofar as they seem opposed.

In their wording, neither of the council's two decrees—*Dei Filius* and *Pastor Aeternus*—directly engaged with the historical issues that were germane to them, but the statement in the *Relatio* reveals the mind-set that underlay them. Although Vatican Council I shut its eyes to the problem of change, the problem did not go away. It exploded onto the scene with the Modernist crisis some decades later.

In the late nineteenth century, advocacy among Catholics of a sometimes undiscriminating adoption of the new historical approach to sacred texts and sacred doctrines became part of the amorphous phenomenon known as Modernism. The inclusiveness of the seemingly all-encompassing label "Modernism" suggests why it is difficult to find a common thread linking so-called Modernists to one another beyond their desire to help the church reconcile itself with what they thought was best in intellectual culture as it had evolved into the present. However, a general though not universally accepted premise of the movement (if it can be called that) was the

pervasiveness of change and the need to come to terms with it.

The storm broke on July 3, 1907. On that day, the Holy Office issued the decree *Lamentabili* condemning sixty-five propositions supposedly held by the Modernists. Two months later, Pope Pius X (r. 1903–1914) followed up with his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. For the sweep of its accusations, the accusatory style of its language, and the severity of its provisions, *Pascendi* had few, if any, precedents in the annals of the modern papacy. A veritable purge followed, which, besides the damage it did to Catholic intellectual life, confirmed among many Catholics an already pervasive readiness to ignore change. The Catholic church, it was often proudly said, does not change.

## Vatican II

Despite the severe measures taken by the Holy See against exegetes and church historians accused of being Modernists, a relatively small but well-trained number of Catholic scholars in the early decades of the twentieth century continued to apply historical modes of research and analysis to ecclesiastical texts and to problems in church practice. As surveillance

over such scholars diminished, their numbers grew and their methods began to receive a positive or at least tolerant reception. When in 1943 Pope Pius XII published his encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu,* he validated historical and archeological methods for the study of the Bible, which was an implicit validation of similar approaches for other areas of sacred studies. Bit by bit, scholars began to show that every aspect of church life and teaching had been affected by change.

For winning acceptance of the idea that change affected even doctrine, no book was more important than John Henry Newman's *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,* published in 1845. The book appeared, therefore, fourteen years before Darwin's *On the Origin of Species.* Like Darwin's work, it reflected the preoccupation of the age with evolution, development, progress, and the implications of the historical process.

By using different analogies, Newman showed how teachings evolved while remaining true to their origins. Teachings were both continuous and discontinuous with their earlier articulation. The book, still the classic in the field, put the problem of change in doctrine on the stage of theological discourse to a degree unknown before. Although published well

before Vatican Council I, it had no significant impact on the council's debates, but in the decades leading up to Vatican II most Catholic bishops and theologians accepted its basic premise in some form or other.

In France in the middle of the nineteenth century Prosper Guéranger, abbot of the monastery of Solesmes, set in motion a movement in which critical methods were applied to liturgical texts. By the middle of the next century liturgical scholars were calling for changes in how the liturgy was celebrated to bring it more into conformity with what they saw as its true character, which had been obscured by accretions through the centuries. Pope Pius XII responded to them in part through two decrees, in 1951 and 1955, in which he completely reorganized the liturgies for the last three days of Holy Week to bring them in line with liturgists' recommendations.

The stage had thus been set for Vatican II to take a stance on the problem of change radically different from that of the two previous councils. The bishops and theologians at the council accepted the reality of change as a matter of course. Their only questions were about how to explain it, about how far it could legitimately go, and what the criteria were for making changes.

Change—the word appeared in the first sentence of the first paragraph of the first document the council published, *Sacrosanctum Concilium,* "On the Sacred Liturgy." The sentence stated that the council intended to adapt to contemporary conditions those aspects of the liturgy that were subject to change *(mutatio). Sacrosanctum Concilium* thus sounded the first note in what was to be an underlying and pervasive issue at the council.

This keener sense of historical change took three forms in the council, captured in three words current at the time—*aggiornamento* (Italian for updating or modernizing), development (an unfolding or evolution, sometimes the equivalent of progress), and *ressourcement* (French for a return to the sources). A basic assumption undergirded the council's employment of these three modes in which change might take place: The Catholic tradition was richer, broader, and more malleable than often perceived in the past. The bishops who appropriated that assumption did so not as an abstract truth but as a license to undertake a thorough examination of the status quo. They reacted against interpretations of Catholic doctrine and practice that reduced it to simplistic and ahistorical formulae. They reacted against substantialism.

Of the three terms, interpreters of the council and especially the popular media most often invoked *aggiornamento* to explain what Vatican II was all about. The term, generally attributed to Pope John XXIII, equivalently occurred in his charge to the council in his opening address, in which he told the fathers of the council to make "appropriate changes" *(opportunis emendationibus)* that would help the church in its pastoral mission.

In principle, *aggiornamento* was nothing new. The church had perforce always adapted to new situations. In recent times, the Vatican adopted microphones and amplifiers before the House of Commons and typewriters before the British Foreign Office. But in at least four regards the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II was new. First, some of the changes made in its name touched upon things ordinary Catholics assumed were normative, such as Latin liturgy, and hence they had a startling impact. Second, no previous council had taken *aggiornamento* as a broad principle rather than as a rare exception.

Third, the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II related not to modern inventions or polite conventions of society but to certain cultural assumptions and values of "the modern world," the most basic of which, such as liberty, equality, and fraternity, stemmed

most directly from the Enlightenment. These were assumptions and values that Vatican Council I implicitly rejected and, hence, the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II marked a turn in the road. Fourth, the broad adoption of deliberate reconciliation of the church with certain changes taking place outside it provided an entry point for a more dynamic understanding of how the church functioned.

Dynamism was even more relevant to the concept of development, which was by definition a movement—a movement to a further point along a given path. It was a cumulative though sometimes also a pruning process by which the tradition of the church became richer or perhaps clearer than before. Development suggested progress, which was itself a word the council did not hesitate to use. *Dei Verbum,* "On Divine Revelation," stated that the tradition of the church stemming from the apostles "makes progress in the church and grows" (*proficit et crescit,* n. 8). Tradition is not inert but dynamic.

Although the idea that tradition evolved won broad acceptance at the council, it was not without its problems, the most acute of which occurred in the debate on *Dignitatis Humanae,* "On Religious Liberty." Since the French Revolution, the popes had repeatedly condemned religious liberty and separa-

tion of church and state. But proponents of them at the council argued that they were legitimate developments of church teaching, an argument that to their opponents seemed like legerdemain. Development was supposedly movement to a further point along a given path, but *Dignitatis Humanae* seemed to jump off the given path to forge a new one.

Proponents of the change defended their position by making use of *ressourcement.* They maintained that popes in condemning separation of church and state were reacting against a specific historical situation that no longer prevailed. To discover how the church could now legitimately adapt to the new situation, it had to "return to the sources." In past tradition, it would find the fundamental truths that could guide it in the present situation. In this case, those truths were the church's consistent teaching that the act of faith had to be free and that for all individuals following their conscience was the ultimate moral norm.

Unlike development, a theory first straightforwardly proposed in the nineteenth century, *ressourcement* had enjoyed *avant la lettre* a truly venerable history in the Western church, beginning in the earliest centuries but emerging most notably with the Gregorian Reform of the eleventh century, the

campaign of popes and others to restore older canonical traditions. The reformers understood the changes they fought to implement as a restoration of the more authentic practice of an earlier era, which implied a mandate to reinstate it.

*Ressourcement* was in its Latin form the motto of the great humanists of the Renaissance—*Ad fontes!* Return to the sources was, moreover, what motivated the Protestant reformers as they sought to restore the authentic Gospel that in their opinion the papal church had discarded and perverted. It lay behind Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris,* 1879, initiating the revival of the study of Thomas Aquinas. In fact, it lay behind virtually every reform movement in the church and society in Western culture at least up to the Enlightenment.

In the mid-twentieth century, return to the sources, now explicitly under the neologism *ressourcement,* drove much of the theological ferment in France that played such a major role in Vatican II. At the council virtually all the participants accepted the validity of the return-to-the-sources principle. Disputes over it arose only when it seemed to be applied too radically. Those who balked at such application had a point because *ressourcement* had more potent implications than development. While

development implies further movement along a given path, *ressourcement* says that we are no longer going to move along Path X. We are going back to a fork in the road and will now move along a better and different path.

Development and *ressourcement* are both about corporate memory, the memory that is constitutive of identity. What institutions wittingly or unwittingly chose to remember and chose to forget from their past makes them what they are. The great battles at Vatican II were battles over the identity of the church: not over its fundamental dogmas, but over the place, relevance, and respective weight of certain fundamental values in the tradition.

Vatican II did not solve the theoretical problem of how an institution by definition conservative handles the problem of change, nor was it the council's intention to do so. Councils are meetings that make decisions binding on the church. They are not meetings that solve theoretical problems, even though they must deal with the practical implications of such problems.

What is special about Vatican II in relationship to the two previous councils is, therefore, that it made its decisions with full awareness of the reality of change and full awareness that that reality affected

the church in all its aspects. For a council to act with such an awareness of change is itself a significant change. Underlying the boldness with which the council accepted the reality of change was the assumption that appropriate change did not mean losing one's identity but, rather, enhancing it or salvaging it from ossification. If such change achieved its goal, it entailed a process of redefinition that was both continuous and discontinuous with the past.

# 3

# Who Is in Charge?

From the earliest centuries, the governance of the Christian church was both collegial and hierarchical. By the second century, bishops emerged as overseers and leaders of their respective communities and over the other ministers who served in them—deacons, presbyters, and, eventually, priests. As we have seen, in collegial fashion bishops called together their priests and others in councils / synods to deal with issues that had arisen in their domain. They sometimes joined in colleagueship with other bishops of the vicinity or province to deal with issues of wider import. A structure both collegial and hierarchical was in place.

No later than the third century, however, bishops were paying deference to the opinions of the bishop of Rome, and, once Christianity became the