

# origins

CNS documentary service

## Vatican II: Toward a Multifaceted Unity

### Cardinal Kasper

*The positive progress made toward greater unity among divided Christians during the 50 years since the Second Vatican Council should not be taken for granted, German Cardinal Walter Kasper suggested in a May 23 address. He made the comments at an international Ecclesiological Investigations conference held in Washington May 21-24. He asked, "What will the future of ecumenism be in the 21st century?" The 20th century "aroused great hopes" for Christian unity, he noted. Yet, in the current century "clear signs of fatigue have become apparent." Cardinal Kasper is past president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The 82-year-old cardinal spoke at the Washington National Cathedral, the Episcopal Church's*

*"Ecumenism ... is not a marginal issue; it is anchored in God's plan of salvation. It is the way of the church for the salvation of the world."*

*cathedral in the U.S. capital. Despite the progress made, especially the rediscovered sense of "Christian fraternity" among Christians of different churches, "significant questions remain," said Cardinal Kasper. He explained the fundamental questions "and for many the dead end, in which dialogue is at the moment at a standstill: What is the concrete goal of the ecumenical endeavor? What does unity mean or what does full communion mean in concrete terms?" The conference he addressed was co-sponsored by Jesuit-run Georgetown University in Washington, Marymount University in Virginia, Washington National Cathedral and the Ecclesiological Investigations international network of theologians, religious leaders, ministers and other scholars and researchers. The theme was "Vatican II: Remembering the Future," and the conference looked at ecumenical, interfaith and secular perspectives on the council. The cardinal's speech follows.*

**r**emembering the future is a difficult, indeed virtually impossible task. In spite of that, the burning question for all of us remains: What will the future bring for the church and for the churches? What will the future of ecumenism be in the 21st century? The 20th century brought a good deal of progress and aroused great hopes, but in the 21st century, by contrast, clear signs of fatigue have become apparent.<sup>1</sup>

The theological answer in regard to the  
*continued on page 154*



#### contents

- 153 Vatican II: Toward a Multifaceted Unity  
*by Cardinal Walter Kasper*
- 160 Vatican II: Remembering the Future  
*by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran*
- 163 Vatican II: Turning Point in Catholic-Muslim Relations  
*by Abdulaziz Sachedina*
- 168 Datebook
- 168 On File

July 2, 2015  
Volume 45  
Number 9

The Second Vatican Council opened the church to the world in ways essential to the faith community's self-understanding today, said other speakers at the May 21-24 conference in Washington.

The church is a mystery and a communion, but it is not "self-centered," Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila, Philippines, told the conference. He said, "The church focused on itself will lose its identity."

When Pope Francis underscores the importance of witnessing to Christ in the world and recognizing the dignity "of human beings who have been forgotten," he is not expressing "a new idea" but is reminding people of Vatican II, said Cardinal Tagle.

The church's opening to the world is neither "a strategy" nor "a fad," the cardinal stated. It involves "the identity of the church."

The cardinal spoke May 22 at Georgetown University.

Gerard Mannion, a Georgetown University theologian who is chairman of the 10-year-old Ecclesiological Investigations network, explained that the theme of the conference, "Remembering the Future," was "linked to 2015 being the final year of the round of years marking" the council's 50th anniversary.

But Mannion told the conference's opening session that the theme also offered an opportunity to hear "what people from other churches, other religions and secular thinkers made of Vatican II."

The council "isn't ancient history," he said. "Above all else," he added, "we are going to explore what is going to happen to Vatican II and its legacy in the future."

Thus, conference speakers, who included Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants, Jews, Muslims and others, turned their attention to the council's future implications for their relationships and work in the world.

Cardinal Tagle reminded

continued from page 153

future is only possible if we remember the future that dawned once and for all with Jesus Christ. This is the path taken in response by the Second Vatican Council and by the most recent document of the Commission on Faith and Order, "The Church: Toward a Common Vision,"<sup>2</sup> which grounds the *Oikomene* in God's *Oikonomia*, encompassing all in Christ (Eph 1:10).

In Jesus Christ God reconciled the world with himself and entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). According to a foundational statement of the Second Vatican Council, the church is in Jesus Christ the visible and effective sign of unity with God and between all humanity (*Lumen Gentium*, 1; 9; 48). Unfortunately the world doesn't look like that.

In order that the paradoxical biblical testimony may still inspire belief in view of the unreconciled condition of the world, we Christians ourselves must be reconciled human beings and reconciled with one another. To that end, on the night before his death, Jesus prayed "that all may be one, so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21). Ecumenism is grounded in this prayer of Jesus *ut unum sint*. It is not a marginal issue; it is anchored in God's plan of salvation. It is the way of the church for the salvation of the world (*Ut Unum Sint*, 7).

The Second Vatican Council took up this idea. In his memorable opening address *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, Pope John XXIII proposed the theme of the council; and Pope Paul VI confirmed it in his opening address for the second sitting period of the council. The council fathers already in the first document, the Constitution on the Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1) adopted ecumenism programmatically among the goals they set for the council, and the ecumenism decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* declared it to be one of the major tasks of the church assembly (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1).

The foundation was laid in the Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (LG, 8; 15). Upon this foundation, ecumenism became

the *cantus firmus* that the council again and again addressed anew in many documents and handed on as binding to the postconciliar church for the way ahead.<sup>3</sup>

Just two words sufficed for this ecumenical breakthrough: *subsistit in* (LG, 8; cf. UR, 4). In these two words the entire ecumenical problem of church and churches is implied *in nuce*.<sup>4</sup> After the council a controversy arose as to its precise meaning.<sup>5</sup> The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith saw itself constrained on two occasions to intervene in the controversy.<sup>6</sup>

But even 50 years after the end of the council many questions remain open. As the far-sighted Karl Rahner saw immediately after the council, it was only the beginning of a beginning; its reception has only just begun.<sup>7</sup>

It is indisputable: The *subsistit in* in the final text replaces the *est* of the previous drafts. While *est* declares the Catholic Church to be identical with the church of Jesus Christ, *subsistit in* annuls this strict identification and, notwithstanding the claim of the Catholic Church that the church of Christ is concretely present in her — means to make room outside its institutional boundaries for churches and ecclesial communities in which elements of sanctification and truth are to be found, which as gifts belonging to the church of Christ urge catholic unity (LG, 8; 15; UR, 3; *Ut Unum Sint*, 10-14).

Thus there is no ecclesiological vacuum outside the Catholic Church (UUS, 13). Through the one baptism all the baptized are members of the one body of Christ (UR, 13), deeply wounded by the existing divisions.

So far the statements of the council. Their interpretation must take place on the basis of the totality of the council's statements and of the conciliar vision of the church *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

*Ad intra* the church is the reflection of the unity of the triune God (LG, 4; UR, 2). It is a unity in the variety of churches. The one church exists "in and of" local churches (LG, 23), which make the one church present in legitimate diversity (LG, 13; CD, 11; AG, 6; 15).

This insight led to the rediscovery of the

ISSN 0093-609X, Origins, CNS Documentary Service, is published weekly (except biweekly during July, August and December's last week) by Catholic News Service, 3211 4th Street N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100. Copyright © 2015 by Catholic News Service/U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Periodical-class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Editor, Edmond Brosnan; Associate Editor, Mary Esslinger; Director of CNS, Tony Spence. Editorial: (202) 541-3284. Circulation: (202) 541-3290. Email: cns@catholicnews.com. Web: www.originsonline.com.

Subscriptions: One year, \$114; two years, \$199; three years, \$284; foreign postage additional. Single copy: \$8. Back issues: Inquire for availability and rates. Attach mailing label to change of address requests and subscription correspondence. Postmaster: Send address changes to Origins, CNS Documentary Service, 3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100.

Documentation in Origins is selected on the basis of interest and usefulness in reference to current issues. Publication does not signify endorsement by Origins or its sponsoring body, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

original meaning of *catholicity* (LG, 13).<sup>8</sup> According to Ignatius of Antioch, the Catholic Church is where Jesus Christ is.<sup>9</sup> Since Jesus Christ is present in all local churches, the Catholic Church is concretely present in the *communio* of all local churches.<sup>10</sup> Since Jesus Christ also works in and through the other churches (UR, 3), and these often give clearer expression to individual elements of being church than the Catholic Church (UR, 15), the complete realization of catholicity is only possible in ecumenical exchange and reciprocal enrichment. Catholic and ecumenical are therefore not opposites but two sides of the same coin.

---

***“The ‘subsistit in’ in the final text replaces the est of the previous drafts. While ‘est’ declares the Catholic Church to be identical with the church of Jesus Christ, ‘subsistit in’ annuls this strict identification.”***

---

Thus the view toward *ad intra* opens out to the prospect *ad extra* of the other churches, the religions and the world in the variety of its cultures. The church has been sent out to the periphery of the earth (Mt 28:19f) in order to leaven all like a sourdough and in order to take shape in diverse languages and cultures, social orders and national forms as well as in all honorable life patterns of a people (*Ad Gentes*, 15).

Division hinders this mission (UR, 1; AG, 6). Therefore ecumenism and world mission have belonged indissolubly together from the beginning of the ecumenical movement. Only ecumenically can the church as a messianic people of God be a sign of hope, *gaudium et spes*, for all mankind and in particular for the poor and those oppressed in any way (GS, 1).<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between ecumenism and world mission demands an ecumenism that is not limited to academic theological dialogue but is rather an ecumenism of real life, a down-to earth ecumenism. That does not mean replacing questions about truth with questions about praxis. That was a wrong turn in the ecumenical movement that has proven to be illusory.<sup>12</sup>

But it does indeed mean that in considering the conflicts of the 11th and 16th centuries we must ask after their significance with regard to life and salvation in our missionary

situation here and now. That involves ecumenism in the original sense of the term, that is, *oikumene* in the sense of the whole of the inhabited globe and the concern that the earth remain habitable and that humanity has a shared future in justice, peace and freedom and in peace with nature, and that all can find salvation in Jesus Christ.

This task was entrusted to us 50 years ago by the council in view of the “signs of the times” (LG, 1; UR, 4). In view of the signs of the times today, the global ecological, economic, cultural, social, religious and political crises, this task has if anything become more urgent. The unity of the church and the unity of humanity are fatefully interwoven with one another today. Therefore it is our sacred duty that for the sake of world peace and the salvation of mankind we do not come to accept division between Christians.

### **Three Basic Types of Church Division**

God’s plan for humanity and the church was thwarted by sin. The church, which is holy, also includes sinners at its heart (LG, 8). There are not only the sins of individual members but also structures of sin within the framework of the church itself (UUS, 34).

The divisions within the church are such structures of sin. They thwart God’s plan of salvation, contradict the will of Christ Jesus and are an offense to the world and an obstacle to the most essential mission of the church (UR 1; AG, 6). They are deep wounds in the body of Christ.

The blame lies mostly with all sides (UR, 3). If we look at the present state of Christendom, it does not present an attractive sight, with only 340 member-churches in the World Council of Churches and many others that are not represented there. The Catholic Church, which is not a member though numerically the largest church, is only about half of entire Christendom. This situation must give us cause for disquiet.

The situation is highly complex since it involves not only a quantitative multiplicity of churches but also three qualitatively different types of division.

In the New Testament we encounter the word church (*ekklesia*) in the singular and in the plural. Even the New Testament already reports on tensions and splits within the local churches as well as between them. The resulting estrangements led to the separation of whole groups of local churches. That occurred in the fourth-fifth centuries with the Oriental Orthodox churches and in the 11th century between the Eastern and Western church.<sup>13</sup>

Those divisions took place between local

*conference participants that for the church, “Jesus is the reference point.” However, he said, “being referred to Jesus refers us to the world.”*

*With Vatican II, he commented, the world became “the horizon for the church.” Within this horizon the church is called to be present to the created world and the environment, and to human beings and the world constructed by them.*

*The church must be present to the world as it actually is, with all its volatility, complexity and ambiguity, the cardinal said.*

*Jesuit Father John W. O’Malley, a Georgetown University theologian, affirmed in a conference presentation that calling Vatican II a pastoral council does not imply it did not teach, even though it “did not define a single doctrine.”*

*Father O’Malley listed numerous Vatican II teachings that are not “trivial” and are not “platitudes.”*

*For example, he said, the council “taught that it was the duty of the church and of every Catholic to respect the religious beliefs of others and to work for reconciliation among the Christian churches.”*

*Vatican II taught that the church’s structure “is hierarchical,” but “also collegial, that is, participatory.”*

*Moreover, said Father O’Malley, “the council taught that ‘the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ.’”*

*Father O’Malley concluded that “Vatican II was a pastoral council, not in the conventional sense of ensuring proper public order in the church but in teaching” truths that help people live lives of holiness and increase their faith.*

*The 1965 council declara-*

tion “*Nostra Aetate*” said that the “Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy” in the world’s other religions.

Leo Lefebure, a Georgetown University theologian, mentioned that statement and remarked that in rejecting nothing that is true and holy in other religions, the council paved the way to discovering all that actually is true and holy in them.

The Rev. Gary Hall, dean of Washington National Cathedral, discussed Vatican II’s “rediscovery of the primacy of baptism” in a presentation to the cathedral session of the Ecclesiological Investigations conference.

Vatican II “ushered in a process of rethinking baptism” as a sacrament in which all ministries are grounded, he said. After Vatican II, Christians across a denominational spectrum expanded their understanding of baptism and its implications for ministries in the church and the world.

Rev. Hall told CNS that Vatican II was “a seminal moment,” but not only for Catholics. It had a large impact, for example, on his seminary education through its emphasis on the importance of Scripture study.

A prayer service celebrated May 23 in the Washington National Cathedral commemorated a Dec. 4, 1965, ecumenical prayer service in Rome’s Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls at the Second Vatican Council’s conclusion.

The Rome service took place in the very basilica where St. John XXIII in January 1959 announced he would convoke an ecumenical council. Blessed Paul VI invited Vatican II’s official observers, representing Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Christians, to join him in the 1965 prayer service.

The famed neo-Gothic Washington National Cathedral is known to many as the site of the funerals for

churches that had from the outset taken up the one apostolic legacy in different forms and in different ways (UR, 14; 16). Through lack of understanding and love it came to a schism, but they remained sister churches in almost full communion. Full ecclesial communion between them can therefore only occur in mutual recognition of different individual liturgical, institutional and disciplinary manifestations, in a patient process of a renewed mutual recognition.<sup>14</sup>

The 16th-century Reformation resulted in a new form of division that today is generally described as the formation of denominations.<sup>15</sup> The confessional churches came about not — as in the first centuries — on the foundation of local churches, but on the foundation of confessions (in the first instance the Augsburg Confession 1530). This gave rise to churches of a new type. The Catholic Church has never understood itself as a confessional church but through the decrees of the Council of Trent, the Trent confession and the Trent catechism factually adopted characteristics of a confessional church. That resulted in a situation that had never existed before: confessional churches existing alongside one another that differed and differ not only in individual questions of the confession of faith, the sacraments and the understanding of their ministries but also in their ecclesial self-understanding.

All these churches include in their confessions the term *catholic*, so the Catholic Church increasingly sought to distinguish itself from them by calling itself Roman Catholic. The Second Vatican Council broke down this confessional constriction of catholicity once more. Thus the council signifies the end of the confessional age and the beginning of an ecumenical epoch (UUS, 4).

When we commemorate the Reformation in two years’ time, we are not standing in the same place as in 1517 and the following period. Far-reaching rapprochements have been achieved in many divisive questions, so we can now look together to the future and address the fundamental issue of differing ecclesial self-perceptions.<sup>16</sup> We need to ask once more what catholic unity in the original sense of the word really means and how we can make it a concrete reality today. I will return to this question later.

The 20th century was not only an ecumenical century but at the same time the century of the rapid spread of a third form of church division. When one speaks of the evangelical movement, one needs to know that *evangelical* is a term with many meanings and many faces.<sup>17</sup> Precursors are found already in the

Anabaptist and spiritual movements of the Reformation period, in the revival movements of Methodism and Pietism. At the same time there are charismatic evangelical movements within the traditional churches: They sparked the ecumenical movement and its missionary orientation and have decisively influenced it.

Alongside them there are independent evangelical and Pentecostal communities who reject the idea of unity within a “super-church” — as they express it — with a remote or dismissive attitude toward the ecumenical movement. Only in recent years has it been possible to involve them, however loosely, with the ecumenical movement in the Global Christian Forum. Pope Francis, above all, has now energetically opened the door to a new encounter.

It is not easy to define the various charismatic, evangelical and Pentecostal communities under one heading. They are very different, different also in their ecumenical or, not seldom, anti-ecumenical orientation and by their often fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture. In contrast to the confessional churches, they have no binding confessional foundation and no binding institutional constitution. For them, church is an event. In that they correspond to a situation in which traditional social orders and milieus — including denominational milieus — are breaking down. They equate to the postmodern process of individualization and digital networks that each person can log on to individually.<sup>18</sup>

It is therefore understandable that for a growing number of people the evangelical movement is able to satisfy the hunger and thirst for personal religious experience better than the traditional churches, which appear to many to be doctrinally and institutionally rigid and unbending. While many mainline churches are declining, the evangelical and Pentecostal communities are experiencing growth.

Certainly one can ask whether they can have a future in the long term without ultimately developing into new forms of ecclesial institutions. But in a similar way the traditional churches need to ask themselves how they intend to effectively counter the new challenges and whether they may not themselves be in need of a profound spiritual renewal.

### **New Challenges Facing Ecumenism**

The ecumenical movement of the 20th century was the response of the Holy Spirit to the signs of the times as a countermovement to the constantly renewed division process (UR, 1; 4). Also in previous centuries there had indeed been conversations and prayer

for unity.

The ecumenical movement of the 20th century was nevertheless something new: dialogue instead of controversy, the endeavor to overcome misunderstanding and prejudice, to learn from one another and to see what one had in common despite the differences.<sup>19</sup>

The most important fruit of ecumenism is not the multitude of documents but the rediscovered Christian fraternity, the mutual recognition of one another as Christians (UUS, 41). What we have in common is more than that that divides us. That has already led to a new ecclesial reality that has so far been too little considered: a still incomplete but nevertheless profound spiritual community in one God and Father, in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the one body of Jesus Christ.

---

***“The divisions within the church are ... structures of sin. They thwart God’s plan of salvation, contradict the will of Christ Jesus and are an offense to the world and an obstacle to the most essential mission of the church.”***

---

Anyone who has experienced the previous denominational estrangement as I did in my childhood and youth, in my time as a student and even as a priest in the first years can only be amazed at all that has grown in the last decades of the previous century and be infinitely thankful for it. We were of course not able to simply fill in the trenches between the churches, but we have succeeded in building bridges over the trenches that are passable on both sides and through which people can encounter one another.

Significant questions remain, questions of a doctrinal nature and more recently ethical questions that directly affect human lives. The fundamental question, and for many the dead end, in which dialogue is at the moment at a standstill is: What is the concrete goal of the ecumenical endeavor? What does unity mean or what does full communion mean in concrete terms? What is necessary for unity and what is legitimate diversity? Or in the framework of our topic: How can we concretely be the one church of Jesus Christ within the many churches?<sup>20</sup>

In response, the various churches have developed different models of unity on

the basis of their different ecclesiologies. Agreement is nowhere in sight. This situation is extremely dangerous: If we are not in agreement on where we are going, there is a great danger that we will disperse in different directions and in the end find ourselves further apart than at the start.

So the great expectations following the council have not been fulfilled. We have neither fully implemented the council nor really received the postconciliar documents; they have remained without consequences. We are at a standstill. There are signs of a regression into the old self-satisfied denominationalism. Often we are so anxious for our own denominational identity that we forget that this identity is only possible in ecumenical coexistence.

So old sensitivities that we had believed to be overcome long ago rise up from their graves like ghosts. Healing of memories, an ecumenism of love, of encounter, listening and friendship are what is needed.<sup>21</sup> Without a hermeneutic of trust, any result of dialogue, no matter how positive, will be talked down, and the bar for agreement will be raised ever higher.

This neodenominationalism does not meet the needs of most people in the reality of their lives. The denominational milieus are disappearing. Members of various denominations and different religions, believers and nonbelievers, today often live next door to one another and even in the same family. Within the denominations themselves there is a pluralism of liberal-progressive, traditional-conservative and evangelical-charismatic Christians.

The conservatives with church affiliations in all denominations are often closer to one another than the conservatives and progressives within their own ranks. Confessional boundaries are only partially valid; church and denominational affiliation has become flexible and porous

On the other hand, all churches are confronted with the shared challenge of the growth of secularism, which involves all churches, and even more by the new persecution of Christians. Persecution of Christians does not discriminate between Catholics, Protestants or Orthodox: Christians are oppressed, persecuted and murdered simply because they are Christians. Thus the 20th and 21st centuries have given rise to an ecumenism written not in ink or printer’s ink but with the blood of martyrs. We Christians are all sitting together in the one boat on stormy seas.

What does this new situation mean for our subject of church and churches? That ques-

*Presidents Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford and Dwight Eisenhower.*

*While the 1965 Rome prayer service was ecumenical, a celebration among divided Christians, the Washington commemoration had an interreligious character, simply because of the different world religions represented among those present.*

*Indeed, while the Ecclesiological Investigations conference focused intently on future directions in the relationships of divided Christians, its sessions focused equally on the future of interreligious relationships.*

*The commemoration took the form of a Liturgy of the Word. It included prayer, music by a cathedral choir, congregational singing and three readings from Vatican II documents.*

*A reading from the council’s Decree on Ecumenism (“Unitatis Redintegratio”) recalled that “the restoration of unity among all Christians” was “one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council.”*

*At the time of Vatican II, many were astonished to learn that members of other Christian churches would attend it as observers. But by December 1965 there was a sense that friendships given birth during the council signaled the possibility of much greater Christian unity.*

*During the service at St. Paul Outside the Walls, Blessed Paul VI addressed the observers, saying: “Your departure with the end of the council leaves in us a loneliness which before the council we did not know and which now makes us feel sad. We would like to have you with us always.”*

*The pope acknowledged that a long road lay ahead for ecumenical relationships. But “we have begun to love one another,” he said.*

tion leads me to the last chapter of my deliberations. I have no ready-made solution. I can only point toward several innovative elements that I have encountered in Pope Francis. He communicates to us original Gospel-oriented perspectives for a hopeful future.

### **Gospel-Oriented Ecumenical Future Perspectives**

Pope Francis, in his thinking and in his language, is an evangelical pope through and through. In his programmatic apostolic letter *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), he proceeds from the primary biblical concept of the “Gospel” referring back to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) by Paul VI.<sup>22</sup> There it states, “Evangelization is the real calling of the church, her most profound identity. She exists in order to evangelize” (No. 14).

The appeal to the Gospel has always been the fundamental motif of renewal movements: in the early church monastic renewal, in the medieval renewal movement, especially the Franciscan, as well as in the Reformation and in the more recent evangelical movement. Today reputable observers say that the Catholic Church of the 21st century will have a charismatic face.<sup>23</sup>

The pope has understood the heartbeat of the current church. At the same time, he is no innovator. He stands in the best tradition of church renewal movements, which all referred back to the Gospel. His reference point is especially Thomas Aquinas, who himself came out of the evangelical movement of Francis of Assisi and Dominic.<sup>24</sup>

Since the doctrines and the sacramental orders have been drawn from the source of the Gospel, they must be interpreted in the sense of the hierarchy of truths (UR, 11), in the light of the core of the Gospel. The evangelical message also throws light on our question of church and churches. Four points of view seem to me to be significant according to the four *notae ecclesiae*.

—1. *The vision of unity.* Jorge Bergoglio referred to Oscar Cullmann’s “unity and diversity” already at an early stage.<sup>25</sup> In doing so he addressed a fundamental concern of the Orthodox and Reformation churches. But unity is not like a puzzle that is simply pieced together out of many parts. The whole is greater than the parts and is therefore not the sum of its parts (*Evangelii*

*Gaudium*, 234-237). Therefore the path to unity is not the path of institutional merger. The pope however goes beyond the image of concentric circles familiar to all Catholics. The model he proposes is that of the polyhedron, a multifaceted body in which all the parts form a whole, but they participate in the whole in different ways, and it is precisely because they maintain their uniqueness that they contribute to the beauty and attraction of the whole.<sup>26</sup>

The idea of a polyhedron is an image. If one wishes to translate the image into conceptual language, one can learn from Johann Adam Möhler (+1838),<sup>27</sup> the great precursor of ecclesiological and ecumenical renewal. According to him, the church is from the very beginning a unity in diversity in the Holy Spirit. But over time the lived diversity that was taken for granted has turned into contradictions because individual aspects have in self-interest become absolutized.

---

***“What is necessary for unity and what is legitimate diversity? Or in the framework of our topic: How can we concretely be the one church of Jesus Christ within the many churches?”***

---

The whole has not been simply destroyed, but it has developed deep cracks, and all its parts have become poorer and less attractive. Healing is only possible when one withdraws from the individual parts the poison of mutually exclusive self-centeredness so that they can form a harmonic whole once more in a new way. The newfound reconciliation in a new, deliberate, mutually enriching unity in reconciled diversity presupposes conversion on all sides.

—2. *Conversion of the churches.* The church, which is holy, is in need of renewal and reform; she is an *ecclesia semper renovanda* (LG, 8; GS, 43 etc.). To use an image: The polyhedron must be polished so that it becomes a jewel reflecting the light that strikes it in a wonderfully varied way. There is no ecumenism without conversion,

renewal and reform (UR, 4; UUS, 15-17; 33-35). The Dombes Group pointed to that in the important document, “For the Conversion of the Churches” (1993).

Every conversion begins with each individual in person. There are, however, not only the sins of the sons and daughters of the church, there are also structures of sin (UUS, 34).<sup>28</sup> They may be grounded in the past, but they reach into the present in hardened structures. Therefore Francis speaks — in a quite unusually open manner for a pope — of the conversion of the episcopacy, the conversion of the primacy and a conversion of the pastoral (EG, 25f; 30; 32; 51). He makes concrete proposals for this and leads the way with his own good example.

So ecumenism does not involve the conversion of one church into another; that will always occur again and again for reasons of conscience.<sup>29</sup> Ecumenism involves the conversion of all to Jesus Christ. To the extent that we are one in Christ we will also be one with one another. Without such a conversion to Christ, all structural reforms, no matter how necessary they may be, are like threshing empty straw.

The ecumenical movement began in the 19th century with ecumenical prayer: Prayer and penitence must constantly be the soul of ecumenism (UR 8; UUS, 21-24). In the end, we cannot make unity nor program or organize it. The unity of the church is the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit, who invites, enables and urges us to collaborate as God’s fellow workers (1 Cor 3:9).

But the primacy, i.e. the initiative, the main agent and the soul of all our activities, is the Pentecost Spirit; we only can implore so that his storm may bring down the walls that divide us, his fire may inspire us and burn out all the prejudices, faintheartedness, narrowness, inner resistance and hesitation, and fill us with the spirit of reconciliation and love that gives magnanimity, i.e., the spirit for the great horizon of God’s universal design for his church.

—3. *Concrete Catholicity.* Conversion to God and conversion to our neighbor belong indissolubly together. Conversion to the Gospel therefore includes opening up to other Christians and other churches. Only in this way is the full realization of the church’s unique catholicity and the realization of

her mission possible.

Catholicity includes all: women and men, young and old, clergy and laity. The laity are not merely recipients but also actors, not only objects but above all subjects in the church. So the doctrine of the *sensus fidei* given by baptism to all is important.<sup>30</sup> It was emphasized by the council but then unfortunately suppressed again. Francis now wishes to give it concrete validity (EG, 119; 139; 198). He wants a listening magisterium that makes its decisions after it has heard what the Spirit says to the churches (Rv 2:7, etc.)

---

***“Unity is not like a puzzle that is simply pieced together out of many parts. The whole is greater than the parts and is therefore not the sum of its parts (‘Evangelii Gaudium,’ 234-237). Therefore the path to unity is not the path of institutional merger.”***

---

Catholicity therefore means the reinforcement of the synodical elements in the Catholic Church. Following the model of the apostolic council in Jerusalem (Acts 15), church tradition recognizes synodical traditions in all churches in both the first and the second millennia. Leadership in the church on all levels — local, regional and universal — and synodality are not mutually exclusive; they should complement one another. That signifies a great step closer toward the Orthodox and also to the Protestant understanding of the church. With this in mind, Francis has taken up the offer made by John Paul and renewed by Benedict XVI to enter into a conversation regarding a new form of exercising primacy.<sup>31</sup>

Since the council, the word *dialogue* has become common parlance for such initiatives. But dialogue is oriented toward encounter between two individuals. For the constructive, creative encounter between ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups, the word *transversal* has in the meantime come into common interdisciplinary use.<sup>32</sup>

What it signifies is not hierarchical thinking but “cross-thinking” that unites identity and plurality creatively.

Individual identity is not to be given up in favor of a postmodern relativism in which all things are equally valid nor should it withdraw into itself and declare itself to be the sole norm: It is to be open to valuing the others, seeking commonalities and entering into a reciprocal learning process and creative collaboration. It would be desirable to reflect upon what this transversal method means ecumenically for the realization of a polyhedric catholicity.

—4. *Apostolicity of the church.* So that the transversal communication processes cannot end up in an indefinable amalgam a criterion is necessary. The Apostles’ Creed serves in all churches as the standard set once and for all (*depositum fidei*). There can be no new or other church but only a renewed church on the basis of the original apostolic foundation laid down once and for all (1 Cor 3:11; Gal 1:6-9; Jude 3) (*Dei Verbum*, 7).

The Gospel is the same at all times and in all places, and yet it is always new. Francis speaks of the eternal novelty of the Gospel and means by that its inexhaustible riches, which in its original freshness bursts all categories and clichés (EG, 11). Again and again we can and must allow ourselves to be surprised by God and his Spirit. In this sense ecumenism occurs not in standing still but in moving on. Only water that flows remains fresh, while standing water turns bad and becomes stagnant.

In this sense, remembering the origins can become a “dangerous remembrance” (Johannes B. Metz) that brings forgotten traditions back into the light of day and stirs us up to go forth, away from cherished habits. A church that goes back to its apostolic origins also goes forward to the future. Pope Francis calls it the “church that goes forth” (EG, 20-24): by that he means a missionary journey, an apostolic church as church in permanent mission.

Apostolicity must be lived apostolicity, *vita apostolica*, as a poor church for the poor. Thus the criterion of apostolicity is freed from a historicizing constriction and is to be understood in a holistic sense. Apostolicity is both, apostolicity of its origin and apostolicity of the missionary journey, and ultimately concretely lived apostolicity.

Ecumenically this concept seems to me to be of great significance, since it reframes the subject of continuity with the apostolic origins that is fundamental for all churches but evokes among the churches a controversial response. The hermeneutic of continuity must for the sake of the future sustain the ability of Christianity always to be a hermeneutic of reform.<sup>33</sup> As John XXIII said, we must hand on not the ashes but the glow. We must cast aside the gathered ashes, including some denominationalist ashes, so that the fire of the Gospel can glow more brightly and its glow warm hearts.

All of that does not constitute a complete concept: They are only the elements of a new vision of ecumenism oriented toward the Gospel in view of the signs of the times. Vatican II followed this path, and in that it has an abiding actuality. But the council was, as already Karl Rahner told us, only the beginning of a beginning. With the current pontificate, a new phase of its reception has begun or, expressed in the words of John XXIII, a new leap forward is possible and necessary. To have the courage for such a leap to a Gospel-oriented ecumenical future is our fidelity to the Gospel.

Let me close then with the prophet Isaiah (Is 43:19): “Behold, I am doing a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” Let us not be robbed of hope, the hope and courage for the new. “Unity has already begun.”

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Zum gegenwärtigen Stand: W. Kasper, *Wege zur Einheit der Christen* (WKG 14), Freiburg i. Br. 2012, bes. 17-34; K. Koch, “Ökumene im Wandel. Zum Zukunftspotential des Ökumenismus-Dekrets *Unitatis Redintegratio*,” in: J.-H. Tück, *Erinnerung an die Zukunft. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Freiburg i. Br. 2013, 403-336; D. Ansoerge, “Sichtbare oder versöhnte Verschiedenheit? *Unitatis Redintegratio* und der ökumenische Dialog,” in: D. Ansoerge, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, Münster, 2013, 160-198.
- <sup>2</sup> UR, 2; ebenso Johannes Paul II. in der Enzyklika *Ut Unum Sint 5f* (im Folgenden zit. UUS) und nach vielen anderen ökumenischen Dokumenten die Studie der *Kommission für Glauben und Kirchenverfassung The Church, Towards a Common Vision* (2014), 1-4.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup> G. Philips, *L’Église et son mystère au deuxième Concile du Vatican. Histoire, texte et commentaire de la Constitution Lumen Gentium*, Vol. 1, Paris 1967, 119.
- <sup>5</sup> A. Grillmeier, in *LThK Erg.* Bd. I, Vat. II, 1996, 170-176; M. Kehl, *Die eine Kirche und die vielen Kirchen*, in: *StDZ* 219 (2001) 3-16; P. Hünemann, in: *Herders Theol. Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Bd. 2, Freiburg i. Br. 2004, 368f; K.J. Becker, “*Subsistit in*,” in: *Oss. Rom.* 5/6 Dezember 2005, 6-7f. A. Sullivan, “*Quaestio disputata. A Response to Karl Becker on the Meaning of subsistit in*,” in: *Theol. Studies* 67 (2006) 395-409; “Further Thoughts on the Meaning of *subsistit in*,” in: ebd. 71 (2010) 133-147. D. Valentini, “*Art. Subsistit in*,” in: *Dizionario di ecclesiologia*, Roma 2010, 1383-1408; W. Kasper, *Katholische*

- Kirche. *Wesen, Wirklichkeit Sendung*, Freiburg i. Br. 2011, 234-238. A. Teuffenbach, *Die Bedeutung des 'subsistit in' (LG 8)*, München 2002 im Anschluss an S. Tromp, den Sekretär der Theologischen Kommission. Maßgebend ist jedoch die Deutung der Kommission selbst. Vgl. *Lumen gentium. Synopsis histoica*, ed. G. A Iberigo-F. Magistretti, Bologna 1975, 38; 440. In anderer Weise versucht J. Ratzinger, "Die Ekklesiologie der Konstitution *Lumen gentium*," in: *Weggemeinschaft des Glaubens. Kirche als Communio*, Augsburg 2002, 127 das *subsistit in* im Sinn der scholastischen *subsistentia* zu verstehen ist, die es nur im Singular, aber nicht im Plural gibt. Doch abgesehen davon, dass der Begriff *subsistentia* in der Scholastik keineswegs einheitlich ist (vgl. Subsistenz, in: HWPh 10, 1998, 486-93), ist in UR nicht von *subsistentia* sondern von *subsistit in* die Rede, was eine neue Formulierung ad hoc ist, kst es aus den Akten nicht ersichtlich, dass def Begriff in diesem technischen Sinn gebraucht werden sollte; es handelt sich eher um eine pragmatische Lösung um die strikte Identifikation der einen Kirche Jesu Christi mit der katholischen Kirche aufzulösen. So auch unter Berufung auf K. Lehmann D. Ansoorge, a.a.O. 179-182.
- 6 Erklärung def Glaubenskongregation *Dominus Iesus* über die Einzigkeit und Heilsuniversalität Jesu Christi und der Kirche (2000); Antworten auf Fragen bezüglich einiger Aspekte der Lehre über die Kirche (2007).
- 7 K. Rahner, *Das Konzil — ein neuer Beginn* (1965), neu hg. von K. Lehmann, Freiburg i. Br. 2012. Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte vgl. J.-H. Tüick, *Erinnerung an die Zukunft* (Anm. 1).
- 8 Zur Neuentdeckung der Katholizität bei K. Adam, H. de Lubac, Y. Congar, A. Dulles u.a. vgl. W. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 254-265.
- 9 Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Smyrn* 8, 2.
- 10 Zu der Diskussion um diese Frage mit J. Ratzinger: zusammenfassend: M. Kehl, "Zum jüngsten Disput um das Verhältnis von Universalkirche und Ortskirche," in: *Kirche in ökumenischer Perspektive* (FS W. Kasper), Freiburg i. Br. 2003, 81-101; W. Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, 387-392.
- 11 K. Lehmann, "Die Heilmöglichkeit für die Nichtchristen und für die Nichtglaubenden nach den Aussagen des 2. Vatikanischen Konzils," in: D. Sattler-V. Leppin (Hg.), *Heil für alle! Ökumenische Reflexionen* (Dialog der Kirche 15), Freiburg i. Br. 2012, 124-152.
- 12 Dagegen zu Recht J. Ratzinger, *Zur Lage der Ökumene* (1995) (JRGS 8/2) Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 744-247.
- 13 Y. Congar, *Neuf cents après, Note sur le schisme oriental*, 1954 (dt. Zerrissene Christenheit, Wien 1959).
- 14 J. Ratzinger, *Prognosen für die Zukunft des Ökumenismus* (1977), in: JRGS 8/2, 717-730.
- 15 W. Kasper, Barmherzigkeit, 105; *Das Evangelium von der Familie*, 55f.
- 16 Vgl. die Studie Lehrverurteilend kirchentrennend. Rechtfertigung, Sakramente und Amt im Zeitalter der Reformation und heute. Hg. von K. Lehmann und W. Pannenberg (Dialog der Kirchen 4), Freiburg i. Br.-Göttingen 1986 und die Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999). W. Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits*, New York 2009; J.A. Radano, (ed.), *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism, Exploring the Achievements of International Dialogue*, Grand Rapids, Mich. 2012; *From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, Leipzig-Paderborn 2013; *Reformation 1517-2017* (vgl. o. Anm. 15).
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Vgl. H. Witte, "Is Catholicity Still an Appropriate Concept in a Postmodern World?" in: XVIIIth Academic Consultation of the Societas Oecumenica, 2014.
- 19 Vgl. Dokumente wachsender Übereinstimmung, 4 Bde. Paderborn-Frankfurt a.M. 1983-2012; J. Borelli-J.E. Erickson (ed.), *The Quest for Unity. Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue*. Crestwood, N.Y. 1996.
- 20 H. Meyer, *Ökumenische Zielvorstellungen*, Göttingen 1996.
- 21 P. Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning. Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, Oxford-New York 2008.
- 22 Dazu ausführlich W. Kasper, *Papst Franziskus — Revolution der Zärtlichkeit und der Liebe. Theologische Wurzeln und pastorale Perspektiven*, Stuttgart 2015.
- 23 Ph. Jenkins, *Die Zukunft des Christentums. Eine Analyse der weltweiten Entwicklung* im 21. Jahrhundert, 2006; J. Allen, *Das neue Gesicht der Kirche. Die Zukunft des Katholizismus*, 2010.
- 24 Thomas v. A., S. Th. I/II q. 106 a. 1 und 2. Zum Hintergrund der damaligen evangelischen Bewegung M.-D. Chenu, *Das Werk des Hl. Thomas von Aquin*, Deutsche Thomas-Ausgabe, Erg. Bd. 2 (1982) 39-46.
- 25 O. Cullmann, *Einheit durch Vielfalt. Grundlegung und Beitrag zur Diskussion über die Möglichkeiten ihrer Verwirklichung*, Tübingen 1986. Dazu positiv J. Ratzinger, *Zum Fortgang der Ökumene* (JRGS 8/2), Freiburg i. Br. 2010, 734-736.
- 26 Das Bild des Polyeders wird in EG 236 nur allgemein beschrieben aber bei der Begegnung mit einer pentekostalen Gemeinde in Caserta am 28. Juli 2014 als Beschreibung der ökumenische Einheit gebraucht.
- 27 J.A. Möhler, *Die Einheit in der Kirche* (1825) § 46, hg. von J.R. Geiselmann, Darmstadt 1957, 152-157. Vgl. W. Kasper, "Einheit in versöhnter Verschiedenheit," in: *Wege zur Einheit der Christen*, 230-232 (mit weiteren Literaturhinweisen).
- 28 Eine Anerkennung def Mitschuld an der Reformation hat schon Papst Hadrian VI. beim Nürnberger Reichstag 1522 ausgesprochen. Papst Paul VI. hat eine Vergebungsbitte bei der Eröffnung der 2. Session des II Vatikanischen Konzils 1963 und Papst Johannes Paul II hat am ersten Fastensonntag des Jubiläumjahres 2000 ein solches Schuldbekenntnis abgelegt. Vgl. die Internationale Theologenkommission *Erinnern und Versöhnen. Die Kirche und die Verfehlungen in ihrer Vergangenheit* (2000).
- 29 UR, 4 sagt zu Recht, dass die Konversion Einzelner nicht im Gegensatz steht zur ökumenischen Anliegen.
- 30 Vgl. Internationale Theologenkommission *Sensus fidei im Leben der Kirche* (2014).
- 31 Johannes Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (1995) 95; Ansprache von Benedikt XVI. bei der seinem Besuch im Fanar am 30. November 2006. Papst Franziskus scheint dabei Anliegen von Erzbischof J.R. Quinn aufzunehmen: *The Reform of the Papacy. The Costly Call to Christian Unity*, New York 1999 (deutsch *Die Reform des Papsttums* [QD 188]), Freiburg I. Br. 2001. Vgl. J.F.-Puglisi (ed.), *How Can the Petrine Ministry Be a Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?* Grand Rapids, Mich. 2010.
- 32 Dieser Denkansatz findet sich u.a. bei dem aus Argentinien stammenden E. Dussel, Der Gegendiskurs der Moderne. Kölner Vorlesungen, Wien 2012, im deutschen Sprachraum bei W. Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*. Berlin 2002; Vernunft. Die zeitgenössische Vernunftkritik und das Konzept der transversalen Vernunft, Frankfurt a.M. 2007.
- 33 Das erinnert an die bekannte Rede, welche Benedikt XVI. im Anschluss an John Henry Newman (+1890) am 22. Dezember 2005 an die Römische Kurie über die Hermeneutik def Kontinuität als Hermeneutik der Reform gehalten hat. ■

*Dialogue, said May 21 at Georgetown University in Washington. Cardinal Tauran gave the opening address at a four-day conference with the theme, "Vatican II: Remembering the Future," which looked at ecumenical, interfaith and secular perspectives on the council. The conference was co-sponsored by Jesuit-run Georgetown University in Washington, Marymount University in Virginia, Washington National Cathedral and the Ecclesiological Investigations international network of theologians, religious leaders, ministers and other scholars and researchers. The cardinal said, "The council tried to better understand the relationship between Christ and humanity." Today, Cardinal Tauran commented, few council themes seem "quite so important" as the consideration given to Muslims in its Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions ("Nostra Aetate") — "these Muslims whom we must come to know and whose culture we are called to understand." Highlighting Vatican II's characteristic as a pastoral council, Cardinal Tauran pointed out that in the council "there is no condemnation, no dogmatic definition." But, he said, this does not mean that the council did not teach. The council taught much, Cardinal Tauran told the conference. It did this "not by imposing definitions but by breathing a style of relationship that has helped the church to move from commandment to invitation, from threat to proposition and from monologue to dialogue." Cardinal Tauran's speech follows.*

I am happy indeed to be here in your midst participating in this encounter on "Vatican II: Remembering the Future." I am deeply grateful to Georgetown University for the honor and privilege given to me to deliver the opening address.

Georgetown University, as is well known, has always been in the forefront of igniting minds and hearts on issues and challenges of the times. In the name of all present here, I wish to express our deep gratitude for the entire university and its generous collaborators, especially the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network, Marymount University and Washington National Cathedral for organizing this important event.

## Vatican II: Remembering the Future

### Cardinal Tauran

*The Second Vatican Council "renewed the question of the relationship between church and society," French Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious*

My sincere thanks also go to Dr. John Borelli, the special assistant to the president for interreligious initiatives for his contribution to promoting dialogue and understanding among the followers of different religious traditions.

When Cardinal Giuseppe Roncalli was pope in October 1958, many foresaw that it would be a transitional pontificate. But on Jan. 25, 1959, in the Basilica of St. Paul, the pope announced his decision to celebrate an ecumenical council. The pontiff thought that the council would not have the goal of holding the modern world in contempt or of complaining about the presence of evil therein; rather the church was called to use the medicine of goodness more than the medicine of severity, avoiding as much as possible the language of condemnation.

On Oct. 11, 1962, the pontiff opened the Second Vatican Council together with 2,800 bishops, saying that it “wishes to transmit the doctrine, pure and integral, without any attenuation or distortion” (speech opening the Second Vatican Council). Although John XXIII died on June 3, 1963, his successor, Paul VI, decided to continue the council.

Without pronouncing dogmatic sentences, the Second Vatican Council expresses its teaching on many questions that occupy the conscience and activity of man. There is no doubt that the Second Vatican Council has been the most significant religious event of the 20th century. General de Gaulle said once to Archbishop Paulo Bertoli, the apostolic nuncio in Paris, that according to him, the Second Vatican Council was “the most important event of the century because you cannot change the prayer of millions of men and women without affecting the balance of the planet.”

The council fathers asked themselves how to guide the church in a more collegial manner. They learned to look with benevolence at others who belong to different religious traditions or who are agnostic. At the end of the council the conciliar fathers addressed a message to the governments, to the intellectual community, to artists, to women, to workers, to the poor, to all those who are suffering, to the youth.

Yves Congar stressed very well the difference between a council and a synod. A synod is consultation. A coun-

cil is more than consultation; it is communion. The style of the conciliar documents is indicative of this. The words that return very often are benevolence, fraternity, collaboration, dialogue and collegiality.

At the end of the council in 1965 the climate was optimistic. Most of the bishops agreed with the words used by the pope (first John XXIII and then Paul VI). They believed in the “springtime of the church” and a “new Pentecost.”

---

***“After the celebration of the council came the time of its implementation. Many believed in a linear path, without discontinuity and without return to the past. John XXIII had spoken of the springtime of the church and the new Pentecost. In reality, the life of the church following the council was a time of renewal but also provoked certain shifts.”***

---

What is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council? The council established a point of reference for the church, opening it up to the breeze of the Holy Spirit. It took an important stand on various subjects, offering to the church documents of doctrine and of action: four constitutions (one liturgical, two dogmatic and one pastoral), nine decrees and three declarations.

Vatican II is considered to be the council of the church. It explored the mystery and the nature of the church, very often called the people of God. Opening the second period of the council in September 1963, Paul VI declared, “May this council have always in mind the relationship between us and Jesus Christ. ... Let no other light shine on this assembly that is not the Christ, light of the world.”

The reference to Christ enlivens the constitutions of *Dei Verbum* and *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. They indicate in the word of God and liturgy the

fundamental forms of his presence. The constitution *Gaudium et Spes* expounds the council’s view on such important issues as the vocation of man, the dignity of the human person, atheism, marriage, hunger, social and economic life, peace, war, community of populations.

St. John Paul II declared that Vatican II remains the fundamental event of the life of the contemporary church: fundamental for the deepening richness given to it by Christ; fundamental for highlighting the fruitful relationship with the world in the perspective of evangelization and dialogue. The council laid down the new work of the contemporary church. It prepared the church for its passage from the second to the third millennium.

After the celebration of the council came the time of its implementation. Many believed in a linear path, without discontinuity and without return to the past. John XXIII had spoken of the springtime of the church and the new Pentecost. In reality, the life of the church following the council was a time of renewal but also provoked certain shifts. For the ordinary Christian, the first change regarded the liturgy, that is to say, the use of the vernacular language, the priest celebrating the Mass facing the people and the importance given to the Liturgy of the Word.

In a lecture given in 1992, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger distinguished three phases of the postconciliar period: time of euphoria (1965-1968); a period of disillusion (1970-1980); and then a period of synthesis (from 1990 on). What are the positive results generated by the council? I should say, first of all, the rediscovery of the Bible read in modern languages, especially in the context of the liturgy. For the first time Catholics were called to develop friendly relationships with non-Catholic Christians; and for the first time the magisterium of the church recognized that there are elements of truth in other religions.

At this point, as president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, allow me to note that the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, had not been adopted easily. On the contrary, a group of council fathers wanted to withdraw from the agenda when John XXIII himself had put it there.

In the first version, the text treated only the theme of the Shoah; then many of the Eastern fathers claimed that the document would be ill received by the Arabic countries, seeing in it the first step toward the normalization of the relations between the Holy See and the state of Israel. Following this, a group of council fathers reassured the fathers that *Nostra Aetate* had nothing to do in particular with the state of Israel, and they expanded their consideration to other religions, to the Muslims in particular: these Muslims whom we must come to know and whose culture we are called to understand so as to protect for all men social justice, moral values, peace and freedom.

In passing I would like to stress that very few themes of the council seem to be quite so important today as this one.

After the liturgy, the attention of the fathers was fixed on catechesis, that is, the way in which one learns about Jesus and the church, and we know we had to wait until 1992 before we could receive the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

A third theme addressed by the council was the hierarchical government of the church. The pope, and the Roman Curia, with Vatican II had given an impulse to the collegiality of bishops with the institution of the Synod of Bishops, the establishment of episcopal conferences, the valorization of diocesan synods. All this had modified in a radical way the relationship between the local churches and the universal church around the world.

These changes have been presented to public opinion by the mass media. Never had the church seemed so diversified and yet united. We cannot but recall what No. 13 in *Lumen Gentium* said:

“There are also particular churches that retain their own traditions, without prejudice to the chair of Peter, which presides over the whole assembly of charity and protects their legitimate variety while at the same time taking care that these differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute to it.”

During these last 50 years, two dimensions of the church have clearly appeared: a) a theological dimension with a deepening of the text regarding revelation, transmission of the faith, freedom of conscience and liturgy; b) a horizontal and dialogical dimension.

Vatican II is the first council to have preoccupied itself with the relationship between the church and separated Christians as well as non-Christian religions. *Lumen Gentium* begins by defining the church as sacrament, that is to say, “as a sign and instrument both of a closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.”

---

***“In 50 years we have passed from the regime of Christianity to a church of communion, and the question today is how is the church to be presented in the world of today? It is not a question of creating a Christian world separate from the secular world; rather the goal is to create the Christian in the world, and it is for this world that Christ died.”***

---

The celebration of a council is one thing; its implementation is another. Blessed Paul VI, St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have had the courage to guide the church through the postconciliar time: liturgical reform; publication of a new Code of Canon Law; the convocation of the Synod of Bishops; the boost given to the episcopal conferences; the importance given to the local churches, especially through diocesan churches; the increased number of countries with diplomatic relations with the Holy See; the importance of the laity; interreligious dialogue. All of this is the fruit of Vatican II.

On the other hand, we cannot remain silent in front of obstacles and exaggerations: Secularization and consumerism have favored religious indifference and contributed to a severe decrease in the number of regular churchgoers; contestation inside the church, wounded by fundamentalist groups; the defection of many priests and religious men and women; the decline of vocations; the political instabilities in many countries; the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli

situation. But in 1978 the election of the bishop of Krakow and in 1989 the return of countries coming from Eastern and Central Europe have given much hope, while the fall of the Berlin Wall demonstrated the flaws in a system that some considered invincible.

### **A Council Different From Others**

Vatican II has not been followed by schism. The greatest problem is that the majority of people have not read the council documents. *Lumen Gentium* has been the spinal column of the entire council. We must remember that all of these texts were approved with an almost unanimous vote.

Today many people ask if Vatican II is a council like the other ones that preceded it. It is certain that each council has its own physiognomy, but we can discover the difference of Vatican II in its origin, in its content and in its interpretation:

a) In its origin: John XXIII convoked the council not to answer a crisis; in his speech opening the council John XXIII said: “Our duty is not only to guard this precious treasure as if we were concerned only with antiquity, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to do that work our era demands of us, pursuing thus the path that the church has followed for 20 centuries” (Oct. 11, 1962, speech).

b) In its content: There is no condemnation, no dogmatic definition; but according to Pope Paul VI the church wanted to proclaim itself the “servant of humanity.” Vatican II is a great theological council with a strong focus on the church.

c) In its interpretation: Some people see in Vatican II a theological interpretation of political concepts coming from the French Revolution. Freedom becomes freedom to choose one’s religion; equality inspires the doctrine of collegiality; fraternity is also to be practiced with heretics who are not separated brothers. From this perspective, the council would be nothing more than the religious translation of revolutionary dogma (Marxism included).

To sum up, I should say that the church *ad intra* is presented as a mystery of communion linked with the Trinity and manifested as the people of God.

The church *ad extra*. Pope Paul VI, in

his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, declared that the church enters into conversation with the world. The church must introduce men to new life in Christ.

The church is a mystery. I should say that the council has renewed the question of the relationship between church and society. For example, let us simply list the names of the documents: *Lumen Gentium cum sit Christus*; *Dei Verbum*, the dogmatic constitution that proclaims that Christ is the Word of God; *Christus Dominus*, the decree on the pastoral duty of bishops. As we can see, it is the name of Christ that emerges from the texts. The council tried to better understand the relationship between Christ and humanity. Christ, God-made-man, is the revelation of man, the transmission of the truth about man, and the church has no other ambition than that of proclaiming, serving and manifesting in history that fundamental relationship of God with humanity through Christ.

### Conclusion

In 50 years we have passed from the regime of Christianity to a church of communion, and the question today is how is the church to be presented in the world of today? It is not a question of creating a Christian world separate from the secular world; rather the goal is to create the Christian in the world, and it is for this world that Christ died.

The church has always been inserted in the world, and the constitution *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us, "Thus the church, at once 'a visible organization and a spiritual community,' travels the same journey as all humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world" (No. 40).

The Second Vatican Council offers to humanity the genuine concern of the church "in fostering a sense of brotherhood to correspond to this destiny of theirs. The church is not motivated by an earthly ambition but is interested in one thing only — to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (GS, 3).

This 50th anniversary of the council is an appropriate opportunity to remember that the church is hierarchically structured: Jesus chose his Twelve Apostles in order to be the columns of the spiritual temple. It is remarkable also that in the Acts of the Apostles we see this collegial attitude articulated in

a hierarchical way. I think of the First Council of Jerusalem. In a council the bishops are not the delegates of their communities; their power does not come from below but from above. They are witnesses of the deposit of the faith.

In a council the law is not that of the majority but the law of unanimity: unanimity and communion, which are two attributes of the Holy Spirit. During the council sessions, the Bible is opened and placed on the altar just to remember that in reality Christ is presiding over the assembly. The ritual formula says, rightly, that the Holy Spirit presides over the assembly and Christ is invisibly present; from here comes the infallibility traditionally attributed to the councils in matters of faith and morals.

In a divided world where hatred, massacres and wars seem to prevail, it is a consolation to hear the Catholic Church affirming "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time ... are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well" (GS, 1).

The Vatican Council II was guided by two popes, obviously each one having his own charism: St. John XXIII was convinced that the church had the capacity to answer the questions of the men and women of our times. Blessed Paul VI accepted the heritage of the council, favoring its application and keeping the unity of the church.

The Second Vatican Council has self-proclaimed itself as a pastoral council, but it is one that has taught so much as well. Not by imposing definitions but by breathing a style of relationship that has helped the church to move from commandment to invitation, from threat to proposition and from monologue to dialogue.

Let us hope that many Christians and non-Christians will be helped to find in the richness of the conciliar documents what they need to answer the three great questions of Emmanuel Kant: "What can I know? What ought I to do? What may I hope?" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1787).

We Christians know the answer: God "raised Jesus from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God" (1 Pt 1:21). I am tempted to say, Amen.

Thank you for your attention. ■

## Vatican II: Turning Point in Catholic-Muslim Relations

Abdulaziz Sachedina

*The Second Vatican Council Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions ("Nostra Aetate") was "a turning point in interfaith relations," a Muslim scholar said May 24 at Georgetown University in Washington. Abdulaziz Sachedina, a professor of Islamic studies at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, spoke at a four-day conference with the theme, "Vatican II: Remembering the Future," which looked at ecumenical, interfaith and secular perspectives on the council. The conference was co-sponsored by Jesuit-run Georgetown University in Washington, Marymount University in Virginia, Washington National Cathedral and the Ecclesiological Investigations international network of theologians, religious leaders, ministers and other scholars and researchers. The Vatican II declaration "delivers substantive advancement in accepting a post-Christianity faith like Islam as a witness to God's existence," Sachedina said. To fully appreciate this achievement, the turbulence in Christian-Muslim relations over the course of history "is worth keeping in mind," he said. Sachedina acknowledged, however, that some Christians and Muslims shun efforts to improve relations between the religions out of an apprehension that their faith's true identity will be compromised in the process. "It is clear to me," he said, that "for any Christian leader to say that there is some validity in a faith other than Christianity to witness God's existence and worship God as God would require enormous wisdom and courage." Sachedina's speech follows.*

For Catholics, Vatican II will be remembered as a turning point in interfaith relations. The proclamation regarding Catholic and other faiths is regarded as the most significant step that the church under the leadership of Pope Paul VI took in improving relations with peoples of all faiths.

Although the largest section in this proclamation is understandably devoted to Catholic-Jewish relations in a post-Holocaust era, the section on Catholic-Muslim relations delivers substantive advancement in accepting a post-Christianity faith like Islam as a witness to God's existence.

To fully appreciate the proclamation, the context of turbulent Christian-Muslim relations throughout the history of Christendom and Islamdom is worth keeping in mind. My own assessment of this watershed moment is that Vatican II deserves to be emulated by other exclusionary faith communities.

Another context that needs to be kept in mind as we begin to analyze the interfaith dimension of Vatican II is the modern age. Modernity and liberal democratic politics have universally imposed the principle of coexistence among peoples of world religions at a time when a majority of the exclusionary monotheistic traditions had felt threatened by the theological implications of "religious pluralism." Right or wrong, religious communities have not come to terms with the demand that their own tradition should be regarded as one among many that claim exclusive truth for their own communal and individual identification.

As I write these lines in Iraq, I can still hear clear and loud anti-pluralistic sentiments coming from almost all monotheistic traditions in the region, especially in war-torn areas of the Middle East and Africa. To my personal anguish, I have often heard a number of Muslim religious figures condemning the "conspiracy" of the Western political and Christian leaders engaged in a perpetual war to destabilize the Muslim world and even to encourage religious sectarianism among Sunni and Shiite communities.

The conspiracy theory is so deeply entrenched in the suspicious minds in the Middle East that to suggest even minimal, formal dialogue with other faiths appears to be out of the question. A visionary leader from the Shiite community, who runs Al-Khui Research Institute in Najaf, Iraq, and has the financial means, called a meeting of the Sunni, Shiite and Christian Iraqi leaders in Rome — regarded as "neutral" territory for the Iraqi religious adversaries — to discuss and advance inter- and

intrafaith dialogue.

Consequently, to utter the word *pluralism* in some Muslim societies is inviting angry reaction among one's audience, and even deep-seated suspicion of neocolonialism and imaginary Christian domination coming from Western powers trying to ram the Muslim peoples of the Middle East. For instance, people in Iraq have not forgotten that following the American invasion in 2003, Christian denominations poured in Bibles for distribution among Muslims to save the "lost souls" of Iraqis.

---

***"Every now and then there are comments praising the Catholic stance on the issue of Islamophobia and reverent mention of the name of Pope Francis, whose poignant and sensitive comments when asked about Muslim violent reaction to the Prophet's cartoons published in France have been received in the Muslim world with much gratitude. With one such sympathetic comment Pope Francis has endeared himself to Muslims all over."***

---

Paradoxically, the Western governments and the human rights advocates cry foul as soon as Christian minorities are the targets of ethnic or cultural violence in the Middle East, while ignoring to criticize Muslim Sunni governments engaged in systematic violence against their Shiite or other ethnic minorities.

This selective indignation works against organizations like Amnesty International and other human rights nongovernmental organizations which have little or no credibility in the Muslim world and are seen as part of the Christian-Western hegemonic conspiracy against Muslims. Under the present crisis created by the Islamic

State — Da'ish — religious ideology, the notion of foreign Christian domination is so fervent that whereas in criticizing Da'ish violence and destruction of innocent human life one can sense disunity and hesitation among all the "bystanders" in the region, when it comes to put the blame on Christians being involved in this violent theology among Muslims, the same "bystanders" share an almost unanimous religious conviction.

Such scapegoating is not unknown in the region of the world that has been living under guns and bombs and different kinds of domestic and foreign intrigue for over a half-century. And yet, every now and then, there are comments praising the Catholic stance on the issue of Islamophobia and reverent mention of the name of Pope Francis, whose poignant and sensitive comments when asked about Muslim violent reaction to the Prophet's cartoons published in France have been received in the Muslim world with much gratitude. With one such sympathetic comment Pope Francis has endeared himself to Muslims all over.

Christian-Muslim dialogues have a long history. I have myself participated in a number of these formal, civil and mostly "academic" dialogues for a number of years. Among the sore points in that dialogue that are usually hushed up in a very civilized encounter of not being "within the scope of dialogical conversation" are the Muslim demands to acknowledge the religious validity of the prophethood of Muhammad and the Quran as the revealed message of God. These points have always generated friction and mistrust among dialogue participants that usually ends in achieving nothing for the faith community's edification to tone down their anti-so-and-so religious discourse.

The historical stance assumed by Christian denominations, for instance, about the invalidity of Muhammad's religious claim and refusal to accept the Quran as a Scripture have almost defeated the purpose of Christian-Muslim dialogue. These are real thorny issues that have blocked chances for better intercommunal relations in the poor countries of Africa, South Asia and the Far East.

In Africa the religious claim to "exclusionary truth" translates into violent extremism. One needs to work in the

field to hear real, and by *real* I mean cruel and hateful name-calling conversations among Muslims and Christians about one another. The hate theology is hard at work to burn all bridges of understanding between these communities. In desperation, I often ask: "Who to turn to in order to make these followers of Islam and Christianity treat one another at least minimally as human beings!"

It was on Oct. 28, 1965, that Vatican II was proclaimed by Pope Paul VI. This was a bold step, and it was taken by one of the most visionary popes in recent memory. Pope Paul VI will always be remembered for his realistic accommodation in the world torn by interfaith mistrust. His visit to the Holy Land in 1964 served as the symbol of Catholic commitment to the question of justice in that part of the world.

This emphasis on peace with justice needs to be evaluated in the context of strong Jewish criticism of the Christian church having abandoned Jewish peoples to suffer from the anti-Semitism of the 1940s. In the contemporary discourse on anti-Semitism, I have often noticed the discomfort that Christian leaders feel when blame is imputed on Christian passion that targets the "deniers" of the messianic Savior.

Taking the case of Islam in light of Christian-Jewish relations, it is not easy for any Christian leader to concede, however partially, the validity of another faith that has been competing with Christianity to save the "misguided" souls in the most distant corners of the earth. Muslims have lived with a triumphant theology for a long time in their highly successful political history in the past. There is also a sense of superiority and, to an extent, of self-righteousness engendered by the doctrine of "the best community" (*khayra ummatin*) ever to come forth on this earth.

Moreover, Muslim missionary tendencies are based on the uniqueness of Islamic witness and another essential doctrine that speaks of the message of Islam being revealed for the entire humanity (*kaffatu-n-nas*). It is not unusual to find that even among the modernly educated Muslims there are those who shun the idea of interfaith relations and coexistence on the basis of this self-proclaimed uniqueness and perfection.

If we turn our attention to the Christian side of the missionary narrative we come across similar sensibilities of being in charge of salvation and granting it to whoever bears witness to Christ's sole propriety over deliverance of humanity at the end of time. It is clear to me that for any Christian leader to say that there is some validity in a faith other than Christianity to witness God's existence and worship God as God would require enormous wisdom and courage, so as not to appear as a "compromiser" of one's exclusive hold on the truth of the faith community.

---

***"Among the sore points in that dialogue that are usually hushed up in a very civilized encounter of not being 'within the scope of dialogical conversation' are the Muslim demands to acknowledge the religious validity of the prophethood of Muhammad and the Quran as the revealed message of God."***

---

The statement of Vatican II in the context of Eastern traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism that the "Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions" says volumes about the new understanding of multifaith societies around the globe and the right attitude that Christians should adopt in dealing with them with respect and tolerance.

The groundbreaking acknowledgment of Muslim faith comes as the third item in this section of the document. The carefully worded declaration avoids mentioning Muhammad or his prophecy. Understandably, the "Mahound" of medieval Christianity was hard to rehabilitate in one stroke in Vatican II. Following is the unique text that ushered a new period in Christian-Muslim relations:

"The church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in himself;

merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even his inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, his virgin mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their desserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting."

A casual reading of the declaration makes one notice the following highlights of the document:

1) Abraham is mentioned implicitly as a common patriarch "with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself." The document avoids any connection between Abraham and Muhammad as a descendant of Ishmael. For Muslim tradition, it is Muhammad who sought linkage with Abraham through Ishmael.

2) Muslim devotion to Mary is mentioned without any reference to the Quran or the fact that it is the Quran that accepts the immaculate birth of Christ.

3) There is a conspicuous absence of any mention of the turbulent relations between Christendom and Islamdom. Undoubtedly, no mention of Muhammad draws attention to the theological difficulties of accommodating post-Christian prophecy. While some Jewish rejection of Christ is noted in the section on Jewish-Catholic relations because of the common biblical roots and the messianic role Jesus plays as the savior of the children of Israel, no such problems are detected in Christian-Muslim relations. Overall, despite the obvious omission about Muhammad and the Quran, the declaration scores positive intention in validating Muslim belief in God and the Muslim sense of devotion to God.

My overall assessment of the impact of Vatican II is that I am cautiously optimistic that the document moves the interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslim a step forward. By affording Islam at least a qualified validity as one of the many paths humanity has been offered on their way to salvation, the

document is responding to the modern demographic reality of multicultural and multifaith societies. At the same time, it is important to raise this question that many have done in the past: Does disagreement on a fundamental doctrine mean guaranteed failure of dialogue in the Abrahamic family?

In a dialogical conversation between traditions, the tendency has been to avoid thorny issues that spark further distancing between peoples engaged in dialogue. Tough issues with political implications have been swept under the rug.

While it is true that dialogue is supposed to build bridges of understanding and mutual respect, we can no longer afford to construct bridges that cannot carry the weight of disagreements. In order to build a strong foundation of understanding and mutual cooperation to advance a legacy of empathetic relations between communities for our future generations, we need to face hard questions that confront the Abrahamic communities, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, today.

What is there in the Scriptures of these traditions that sparks conflict and continuation of violence that kills innocent peoples in the name of God? For instance, the sore point in Jewish-Muslim relations has undoubtedly been the strong attachment that the Semitic peoples have to the land. In Judaism it is the Holy Land whose borders are fixed in the Jewish tradition and that serves the national claim of the Jewish people as their divinely gifted Promised Land. The divine covenant that the children of Israel have as a people with their Creator is also affirmed by the Quran. And yet the same covenant serves as the absolute claim of Jewish people to the exclusion of other “cousins” — the Arabs.

It is time to revisit our scriptural sources, especially dealing with Abraham and his progeny through a free woman, Sarah, and a slave girl, Hagar. This historical fact still sparks controversy and, in Israel, condescending reference to Arabs as the children of that “slave woman” is not uncommon.

At the same time, the biblical narrative of Abraham’s conversation with God and the promise given to both of the sons of Abraham, Ishmael (the slave’s son) and Isaac (the free woman’s son), underscores the acknowledgment that

Abraham needed to be assured through further divine blessing for Ishmael. In other words, the divine covenant with Abraham covers both the sons of Abraham, without any discrimination, and in keeping with the Hebrew Bible’s notion of universal justice.

More poignantly, references to Abraham in the Quran emphasize Abraham’s role as the patriarch of all monotheists. He is “muslim” and “unitarian” (*muwahhid*). He is the founder of the cult of Kaaba, as the house of God, and the paradigm for the worshippers of one God until the end of time. Even when references to Moses as the lawgiver and the speech of God are far more numerous throughout the Islamic revelation, Abraham occupies an exclusive place in providing the role model for uniting all those who submit to God.

---

***“While it is true that dialogue is supposed to build bridges of understanding and mutual respect, we can no longer afford to construct bridges that cannot carry the weight of disagreements.”***

---

And yet it is Abraham’s legacy that continues to divide Noah’s one nation under the divine law — the *ummatah wahida*. It is not simply the divide between Banu Ishaq and Banu Ismail, the two sons of Abraham. Nor is it simply the rivalry between Jerusalem and Mecca, the two centers of spiritual compass ascribed to the two spots of Abraham’s test regarding the sacrifice of his “firstborn.” Rather, Abraham’s encounter with God at that particular moment in the religious history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam provides further occasion for the children of Abraham to contest their position in God’s covenant with Abraham.

In all of these three traditions God’s encounter with Abraham is closely interwoven with the end of history — messianic expectation and deliverance of humanity. And, although there are points of sharp disagreement and moments of tense claims and counterclaims between and among the three

monotheistic communities on the interpretation of God’s covenant with Abraham, in the context of our deliberations on Vatican II I will concentrate on what this covenant holds for humanity and the way it challenges the children of Abraham to work diligently toward achieving the ideal future for all the peoples of the world.

I do submit that there are insurmountable problems that the messianic tradition as part of the covenant poses to Muslims in their interfaith and intra-faith relations. There are, for instance, a large number of traditions in the two most authoritative Sunni collections of traditions by the Imam Bukhari and Imam Muslim that foretell the deterioration of relations between Muslims, Jews and Christians as the hour draws nigh. In spite of that, having spent my lifetime studying these traditions, they suggest to me that critical evaluation of their substance reflects intercommunal polemics and politics — not unlike the modern-day media-perpetrated hostilities between imagined or real political groups. To be sure, none of us in academia, despite all the good will and intention to be positive, are in a position to resolve the politics that mar the intercommunal relationships.

Hence, I will concentrate on the positive side of the subject under consideration because of my own vision and personal commitment to the philosophy that as long as we are in this life we need to follow the dictum of “live and let live,” and let God, the merciful and the compassionate, take care of the life to come.

In recording the conversation between God and Abraham, the Quran provides further reflection over the episode that followed Abraham’s defining moments of his obedience to God in sacrificing his “firstborn” on the altar of the temple. The first question that has appeared for the Quranic exegetes is about the “firstborn” son: Who is he? Isaac, as the Jewish tradition asserts, or Ishmael, as the Muslim tradition claims. Superficial analysis of the historical record shows clearly that Sarah’s jealousy was sparked by the birth of a son that Hagar had. But Hagar had no status as a free woman.

Interestingly, this thread of the argument was picked up by some Quran scholars. However, the most impor-

tant part of the divine covenant with Abraham is the promise that God gives. When Abraham asked about his descendants being included in the promise of becoming the leaders of humanity, God responded, “Yes, but my promise does not include unjust [among your descendants].” This proclamation, as far as my knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures goes, is not present in the Bible.

This leads us to the future of the communities under their messianic theology, Will the qualified descendant of Abraham (both in the line of Isaac or Ishmael, who are blessed in the Quran) become the world leader as a messianic figure? What is important about the messianic future in these communities? The social-political conditions around much of the world are not looking too promising for justice or peace to come about in the foreseeable future.

In the otherwise token hope for the improvement of human conditions and the overall inability of religions in either diverting the negative destructive human energies or controlling the self-righteous attitudes that generate endless conflicts among the faithful, I began to search for the reward that was promised to Abraham for his total fidelity to God.

The Hebrew Bible’s account of Genesis has a lot to say about Abraham’s encounter with his Lord. But the Quran, with its usual style of brief reference to Abraham, mostly to underscore the moral and spiritual purport of the instances that it highlights, affords one brief mention of the Abrahamic cove-

nant that speaks of God’s promise to the patriarch about the future of humanity under the just leadership of one of the descendants of Abraham. Nonetheless, the account is so significant that it has served as the theological foundation for the Muslim leadership in the postprophetic period.

The Abrahamic covenant in the Quran is the only text that has served as revelatory justification for demanding immaculate leadership as the most critical prerequisite for anyone who assumes the leadership in the Muslim community. Moreover, restricting the future ideal leader, the caliph of God, to Muhammad’s progeny is the direct consequence of the Abrahamic covenant in the Quran.

The final observation about the Vatican II document that has implications for the future of religion as such is the ability of religions to draw people together. We had great hopes in the “Dialogue of Civilizations” initiated by Mr. Mohamed Khatami of Iran. The dialogue never took off to a good start since it was proposed by a Third-World country, and the First World never regarded any Third-World country as its equal as a dialogue partner. The “Dialogue of Religions” has been on the horizon for a longer period and, relatively speaking, was successful to some extent in opening the possibilities of cooperation among faith communities to further the humanitarian aspects of social life.

In that respect, I find Vatican II a positive and honest proclamation that offers points to ponder about the human need

to work together on numerous issues related to human conditions, without abandoning its theological exclusivity. Vatican II reflects pluralism as a principle of coexistence and common moral pursuits. The emphasis on the oneness of the human community is tied to the divine purposes that include the whole human race to live as human community tied together in unity and love. God has extended his mercy to all humans.

Although one of the hopes of the church is that one day all humans will walk in God’s light (as shown by Christianity), all peoples have struggled to comprehend divine mystery and express their encounter with the divine in their own idiom and to seek freedom from the “anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust.”

The question that has haunted contemporary Muslim leaders, more particularly Sunni leaders, is the phenomenon of the “Islamic State” under the “Sunni Caliphate.” The fact is that any violence in the name of Islam shocks them and others. It confirms the image that the media have perpetrated about “Islamic” violence and extremism.

Yet there has been no criticism of the Muslim rulers whose atrocious behavior toward their own people has been intentionally ignored. If Vatican II had appeared now, what would the pope have said about Muslims and their religion? ■

**ORIGINS - Now three subscription types to meet your needs!**

## 1 Origins PRINT

Each week you quickly receive Origins by mail, 47 issues a year — some 800 pages of the latest church documents.



## 2 Origins ONLINE

Gain online access to the full Origins archives back to 1971. Our powerful search engine instantly locates information you require at any given moment — for classes, homilies, presentations, discussion groups, etc. This online archive — some 7,700 texts now — expands with each week’s Origins issue.

## 3 Origins PLUS

Have it all! You receive 47 issues of the print edition PLUS 24/7 access to the fully searchable online Origins archives back to 1971.


+


print
online

**Special online rates for institutions such as libraries, parish staffs, schools, seminaries, etc.  
For more information call (202) 541-3284 or go to [www.originsonline.com](http://www.originsonline.com)**

## July 19-21

Annual Social Action Summer Institute. Sponsors: Roundtable Association of Catholic Diocesan Social Action Directors and U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Theme: "Cherishing Creation: Called to the Common Good." University of Portland. Portland, Ore. <http://catholicroundtable.org>

## July 21-24

Association for Student Affairs at Catholic Colleges and Universities Annual Conference. Theme: "Widening Our Embrace: Inclusive Excellence Through Hospitality, Solidarity and Love." Providence College. Providence, R.I. [www.asaccu.org](http://www.asaccu.org)

## July 22-26

Annual Tekakwitha Conference. Theme: "St. Kateri Embraces the Wetlands." Alexandria Riverfront Center. Alexandria, La. [www.tekconf.org](http://www.tekconf.org)

## Aug. 1-4

Catholic Biblical Association of America Annual International Meeting. Xavier University. New Orleans, La. <http://catholicbiblical.org>

## Aug. 11-15

Leadership Conference of Women Religious Annual Assembly. Theme: "Springs of the Great Deep Burst Forth: Meeting the Thirsts of the World." Houston, Texas. [www.lcwr.org](http://www.lcwr.org)

## \*Aug. 31-Sept. 3

National Association of Hispanic Priests in the US Annual Convention. Theme: "The Family: The Strength of the Priest." Francis Marion Hotel. Charleston, S.C. [www.ansh.org](http://www.ansh.org)

## \*Sept. 4-5

International Conference: "Patents on Life: Through the Lenses of Law, Religious Faith and Social Justice." Sponsors: St. Edmund's College, Cambridge University and University of St. Thomas Murphy Institute for Catholic Thought, Law and Public Policy. Cambridge University. United Kingdom. [www.stthomas.edu/murphyinstitute](http://www.stthomas.edu/murphyinstitute)

\*signifies new listing

## On File

The working document for this fall's Synod of Bishops on the family called for expanded discussion and pastoral solutions to challenges such as how economic disparity and environmental degradation affect families as well as the impact of infertility, aging and disability. The church seeks to address the actual and concrete situation of today's families, who are "all in need of mercy, beginning with those who are suffering the most," the document said. The Vatican released the 77-page *instrumentum laboris* June 23 in Italian during a news conference. Translations into other languages are still being worked on. Pope Francis convoked the Synod of Bishops on the family for Oct. 4-25; it is to be the conclusion of a process that included a discussion within the College of Cardinals and an extraordinary Synod of Bishops last October. The synod's working document is a compilation of the final *relatio*, or report, that had been approved by the bishops during the extraordinary assembly in October and includes further "responses, observations and contributions" received from bishops' conferences, religious congregations, Vatican offices, academicians, lay organizations and other members of the church.

Sister Nirmala Joshi, who succeeded Blessed Teresa of Kolkata as superior general of the Missionaries of Charity and led the order for 12 years until retiring in 2009, died early June 23 in Kolkata at age 81. Church and political

leaders paid tribute to Sister Nirmala for her devotion to serving poor, sick and hungry people. "She indeed carried forward the legacy of Mother Teresa, a legacy of love and service to the poorest of the poor through her nuns all around the world," said Archbishop Thomas D'Souza of Kolkata, where the order's global headquarters is based. Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered "deepest condolences to the Missionaries of Charity family on the passing away of Sister Nirmala. Sister Nirmala's life was devoted to service, caring for the poor and underprivileged. Saddened by her demise. May her soul rest in peace," Modi tweeted.

Mexico's Supreme Court has declared state-level laws that define marriage only as the union of a man and a woman discriminatory and unconstitutional. The decision, in effect, legalizes same-sex marriages in all 31 of the country's states. The court's decision, published June 19 in the *Judicial Weekly* journal, said procreation was not a purpose for marriage and therefore limiting marriages to heterosexual couples amounted to discrimination against other couples seeking marriage. The Mexican bishops' conference expressed disappointment with the court's decree and said it disagreed with its reasoning.

Readers: After this edition, *Origins* will begin its summer biweekly schedule. The next edition will be dated July 16, 2015.