

LUMEN GENTIUM

I thank you for inviting me tonight to give this fourth lecture in the Year of Faith Series on the ‘Four Constitutions of Vatican II.’ The topic is *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. In this paper, I will discuss, first, aspects of the hermeneutics of the Council – or to put it more simply, how to read the documents – then, the constitution *Lumen Gentium* itself, and finally, some current issues.

1. Aspects of the Hermeneutics of the Council

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, an assembly of the bishops of the Catholic Church held in St. Peter’s Basilica, Rome from 1962 to 1965, comprised four plenary sessions attended by most of the world’s then 2500 bishops, and by many ecumenical observers, theological experts and the secular media. In addition, working behind the scenes, from the time the Council was announced in 1959, were a number of preparatory commissions that drafted the sixteen documents the Council would issue, then redrafted or amended them as the debates and discussions went along and afterwards enacted the follow-up. The Council was thus a real-live, complex process lasting several years, marked by all the realities of human interaction, with tensions between modernisers and the ‘old guard’, different continental groupings, and local versus universal concerns. Moreover, as it got underway, it took on a life of its own and the bishops realised that what was happening was an ecclesial ‘event’ of historic significance;¹ indeed, some see Vatican II as the single most significant religious event of the twentieth century.² Today, 50 years on, there is more of an historical perspective, but even so, the Council was so important for the Church that it will still be many more decades, perhaps centuries, before a balanced evaluation can be reached.

In recent years a number of historical studies have appeared, notably the five-volume classic, completed in 2006 and edited by Guiseppe Alberigo, *The History of Vatican II*.³ For a more theological guide to what was happening at the Council, may I (humbly) recommend Chapter Two from my own *Philosophy and Catholic Theology*.⁴ Last year, the daily diaries of Yves Congar, the great French Dominican theologian, were published.⁵ He, along with the then Cardinal Ratzinger, Karl Rahner, Piet Schmulders and others, was one of the chief theological experts who helped draft the proposed texts. Congar affords many fascinating insights into the plenary sessions in St. Peter’s: how there were insufficient toilets, how some of the bishops found the hard wooden benches uncomfortable, how the bishops were arranged by seniority, to mix them up, and how in

¹ See R. Gaillardetz *The Church in the Making* (New York, Paulist: 2006) xiiiif. Cf. J. Komonchak ‘Vatican II as an Event’ *Theology Digest* 46 (1999) 337-352.

² See for instance G. Alberigo *A Brief History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books: 2006).

³ See G. Alberigo and J. Komonchak, ed. *History of Vatican II*. Five Volumes (Maryknoll, Orbis: 1995, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2006). A select bibliography would include: R. Gaillardetz and C. Clifford *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville, Liturgical Press: 2012), E. Hahnenberg *A Concise Guide to the Documents of Vatican II* (Cincinnati, Franciscan Media: 2007) and M. Faggioli *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York, Paulist: 2012).

⁴ P. Egan *Philosophy and Catholic Theology: A Primer* (Collegeville, Liturgical Press: 2009)

⁵ Y. Congar *My Journal of the Council* (Collegeville, Liturgical Press: 2012).

the breaks many of them packed into the two temporary coffee bars set up in the crypt beneath the basilica, Bar-Jonah and Bar-Abbas.

Ecumenical councils are usually called to deal with a crisis in doctrine or discipline, but Pope John XXIII wanted Vatican II to be a ‘pastoral’ council.⁶ It would not make new definitions of doctrine but pursue an *aggiornamento*, an updating, a modernisation of the Church’s style, discipline, thinking and *modus operandi* for the sake of evangelising the modern world. He wanted the Council to respond positively to modernity and to update those aspects of the Church that could be updated.⁷ He also hoped it would bring about unity among Christians. It would occasion a spiritual renewal, a ‘new Pentecost’ to reinvigorate the Church’s mission in the world; it would open the windows to let in some fresh air.⁸ Consequently, the key question that lay behind everything the Council sought to achieve was: What does it mean to be the Church of Christ in the modern world? It was a Council, in other words, concerned with ecclesiology, that is, the theological meaning and purpose of the Church.

Vatican II produced sixteen documents: nine decrees and three declarations on specific areas of pastoral concern, and four great doctrinal constitutions dealing with the nature of the Church herself: in order *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the 1963 constitution on the liturgy, *Lumen Gentium*, on the Church (1964), *Dei Verbum*, on divine revelation and *Gaudium et Spes*, on the Church in the modern world, both 1965. *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* can be paired together; one is about the Church *ad intra*, its internal nature, and the other about its relationship *ad extra* to the world. All the documents are marked by a two-fold *leitmotif* of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, that is, going back to the sources in the Bible and the Tradition and then applying what has been retrieved to the needs of the present. It is a process, as it were, of: ‘What does Jesus say? What does the Bible say? What does the Church’s Tradition say?’ then ‘In the light of this, what should the Church do now?’ This is a remarkably different approach from the pre-conciliar Scholastic theology, that was propositional and deductive, an approach that takes seriously history, culture, the modern world and human experience. Vatican II assimilated all the new insights of twentieth century theology, especially those of the liturgical movement, scripture scholarship and historical studies. The documents adopt an attitude of openness to the modern world, free from adversarial stances, whilst aiming to engage in dialogue with anyone of good will.

To study the documents of Vatican II, certain principles need to be born in mind. Unlike Trent and Vatican I, which evince a tightly defined conceptual framework, the texts of

⁶ The announcement of the Council came after Pope John XXIII visited the basilica of St. Paul’s Outside the Walls, Rome on 25th January 1959 to a group of his advisors: see Gaillardetz *The Church in the Making* 1. For John XXIII’s *Opening Speech* given at the Council itself, see www.ourladywarriors.org/teach/v2open.htm (October 2013).

⁷ Hahnenberg 2

⁸ Cf. M. Sullivan *101 Questions and Answers on Vatican II* (New York, Paulist Press: 2002) 17. The Preface to the first document of the Council, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, neatly sums up the Council’s aims and acts as a preface to everything else that would follow:

“This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church”
(*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 1)

Vatican II are more discursive; like a river with incoming streams, they synthesise numerous traditions; biblical references alternate with historical analyses, citations of previous councils and papal magisterium with legislative provisions. Consequently, one has to ask what was written, how it was written, and why it was written. More, as Richard Gaillardetz points out, Paul VI wanted the documents to be approved not only by the statutory two-thirds majority, but by overwhelming majorities. As a result, alternative formulations and positions, rather than being resolved in favour of one side or the other, are simply juxtaposed even in the same paragraph.⁹ The final products are consensus documents with many strands. They cannot be proof-texted in the manner of biblical fundamentalists.¹⁰ As Anthony Barratt has said, it “is a risky thing to take just one sentence or paragraph in isolation”.¹¹ As with using the New Testament, individual sentences and paragraphs and even whole documents must be read within the context of the whole, and, importantly, in the light of their post-conciliar interpretation.

There are two false hermeneutics or ideological approaches that Pope Benedict XVI warns against.¹² The first is to apply a ‘hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture’ rather than a ‘hermeneutic of reform.’ In other words, Benedict insists that Vatican II must be read within the flow of Catholic Tradition and teaching, even when there are specific discontinuities and developments. The Council was such a massive event for the Church that it inevitably engendered a strong sense of a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ whilst the post-conciliar period coincided with an era of explosive historical, social and technological upheaval in the secular world. There were significant shifts in thinking that occurred yet the Council cannot be interpreted, Benedict avers, as *de facto* rupturing the Church into a pre- and post-conciliar reality. Moreover, Benedict also warns against a split between the ‘spirit’ of Vatican II and the ‘letter’, as if the real message of the Council was its impulse towards the new, and not the fact that the texts themselves confirm many old things that some might deem no longer relevant. The best way to catch the spirit of the Council, he argues, is to steep oneself first-hand in its texts.

In fact, the sum of Vatican II is greater than its individual parts. In my view, this Council was unique. It instituted an on-going process that remains unfinished. Its documents continue to be alive, to prompt dialogue within the Church between competing positions, to encourage deeper understanding and ever-new applications. In other words, the reception of the Council over the last fifty years is part of the very

⁹ Gaillardetz and Clifford *Keys to the Council* xv.

¹⁰ See A. Barratt ‘Interpreting Vatican II Forty Years on: A Case of *Caveat lector*’ *The Heythrop Journal* 47.1 (January 2006) 75-96.

¹¹ A. Barratt ‘Parish Convening 2006: How can we read the Documents of Vatican II?’ (unpublished)

¹² Benedict XVI ‘Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia’, 22 December 2005: see www.vatican.va (October 2013). “On the one hand, there is an interpretation that I would call ‘a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture’; it has frequently availed itself of the sympathies of the mass media, and also one trend of modern theology. On the other, there is the ‘hermeneutic of reform’, of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God. The hermeneutic of discontinuity risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar Church and the post-conciliar Church. It asserts that the texts of the Council as such do not yet express the true spirit of the Council. It claims that they are the result of compromises in which, to reach unanimity, it was found necessary to keep and reconfirm many old things that are now pointless. However, the true spirit of the Council is not to be found in these compromises but instead in the impulses toward the new that are contained in the texts.”

process it initiated. Within this trajectory, papal and episcopal magisterium, the prudential judgments of the Roman curia, continuing discussion among theologians, as well as the on-going study of the documents by the whole Church, continue to be crucial for an authentic reception of its message. Fruits of this include the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* and the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. To sum up, the thesis here is that, unlike any other Council before it, Vatican II is a work in progress; its work continues, and calls for a Vatican III seem somewhat premature.

2. *Lumen Gentium*

What does it mean to be the Church of God in the modern world? *Lumen Gentium* is in many ways “the crowning achievement” of Vatican II.¹³ The constitution went through three drafts and it was approved at the end of the third session of the Council in 1964. The first draft, put forward by the Preparatory Commission, was roundly rejected. It comprised eleven chapters, beginning with two on “the Church Militant”, an extensive section on the hierarchy, a discussion of the nature of authority and the role of the Magisterium, as well as chapters on the laity and the need for ecumenism.¹⁴

To understand why the Council fathers rejected this schema, it is important to note the direction and climate of ecclesiology in the ‘Tridentine’ period, that is, the period after the Council of Trent down to Vatican II. This was an era tending towards Ultramontanism, literally ‘beyond the mountains’, an exaggerated emphasis on the powers and prerogatives of the papacy and on the centralisation of the Church. Catholic theology, in rising to meet the challenge of the Protestant reformers who rejected the papacy, the priesthood and the divine structure of the Church itself, emphasised the visible, institutional structures of the Church as a perfect society, a pyramid with the pope at the top, the bishops and priests below, and the laity along the base. Moreover, in the following centuries, the Enlightenment, the French revolution, the birth of democracy, the new nation-states of Europe, the rise of empirical science, and nineteenth and twentieth century developments in biblical scholarship and theology each in their own way posed radical and wide-ranging challenges to the Catholic dogmatic Tradition. Against this ‘modernity,’ the Church adopted an increasingly defensive stance. The stronger, monarchical conception of the papacy found expression in the dogmatic constitution of the First Vatican Council (1870) *Pastor Aeternus*, which solemnly defined the dogma of papal infallibility. The Council had intended to articulate a more comprehensive ecclesiology than this, but its work was interrupted by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war. The result was arguably an unbalanced ecclesiology that undervalued the role of the bishops and the local churches. It neglected the laity whilst the spiritual nature of the Church, a mystery, the Body of Christ, was eclipsed by concerns with its authority and juridical structure.

Vatican II set out with a new openness to modernity and a real desire to correct the previous imbalances. The Council fathers sought to present a richer, more biblical and

¹³ Hahnenberg 37.

¹⁴ See Hahnenberg 38-39

nanced account of the nature and mission of the Church. *Lumen Gentium*, along with *Gaudium et Spes*, were thus the key documents. The first draft of *Lumen Gentium* was disappointing precisely because it was marked by caution, defensiveness and an excessive focus on structures. It was rejected at the end of the first week as triumphalist, with a romanticised vision of the Church, clericalist, in its pyramidal structure, and overly juridical, because it underplayed the spiritual dimensions.¹⁵

A new text was composed by the Belgian ecclesiologist, Gerard Philips, and this was presented at the second session of the Council in 1963. This second draft comprised just four chapters: the mystery of the Church, the hierarchy of the Church (especially bishops), the people of God (in particular the laity), and the universal call to holiness. An improvement to the schema was proposed immediately: that Chapter Three ‘the People of God and the Laity in Particular’ be split into two, with the material on the People of God placed before a chapter on the hierarchy and the laity. This proposal symbolised the theological transformation going forward during the conciliar debates: that the Church is not first and foremost the clergy but rather the whole people of God. By baptism every Christian is equally a member of the Church before any respective roles in the community can be differentiated. At the same time, a contentious debate arose as to the relationship of the pope and the bishops and their shared and respective authority over the Church. Some argued that pope and bishops together belong to a college, which exercises supreme governance in the Church, whereas others emphasised the unique authority of the pope over the bishops.

Paul VI became involved directly in the third and final draft of *Lumen Gentium*. He was keen to address the concerns of the minority and to tranquilise contentious issues, and in this he was successful: the constitution was approved overwhelmingly, with only five negative votes. *Lumen Gentium* has sixty-nine paragraphs, divided into eight chapters: One and Two on the Mystery of the Church and the People of God (its transcendent origins and its historical dimension), Three and Four on the Church’s hierarchical structure (the episcopate and the role of the laity), Five and Six on the call to holiness (first, for every member of the Church but then, the specific vocation to religious life), and Seven and Eight on the eschatological dimension of the Church (its relationship to the Church in heaven) and the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church.

The first two chapters of *Lumen Gentium* (LG) explore the Church’s theological foundations in the mission of the Trinity (LG 1-4). Christ is the Light of the world, the *Lumen Gentium*, and like the moon from the sun, the Church reflects that Light as the sacrament of Christ, that is, a “sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all people” (LG 1). The Church is a sacred mystery and the bible uses various images such as a sheepfold, a farm, a field, a building, God’s temple, the Bride of Christ, the mystical Body of Christ, and the People of God (LG 5-7). Of these, the Council favoured the term ‘People of God,’ since it affirmed the common identity and equal dignity of every member of the Church, while at the same time suggesting the Church is dynamic, in history, on a journey.¹⁶ This People of God

¹⁵ Hahnenberg 39-40

¹⁶ Hahnenberg 44

continues the three-fold work of Christ as priest, prophet and king. Thus every single member of the Church shares in Christ's priesthood, although this common priesthood of the faithful "differs essentially and not only in degree ... from the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood" which is at its service (LG 10). Moreover, this people is related in various manners to those explicitly outside its fold. Starting from the Catholic faithful, the constitution moves outwards, first to catechumens, then to brothers and sisters in the other Christian communities, next to the Jewish people, beyond to Muslims, to those of other religions, and lastly, to those who do not know God (LG 14-17). The Church is hopeful that anyone who lives a good life can be saved, but the Evil One is deceptive and can expose people to "ultimate despair" and so the mission of the Church remains as urgent as ever (LG 16).

One of the most discussed topics in Chapter One is the statement that the Church of Christ, a spiritual community that is also a visible organisation, a complex reality formed of a human and a divine element, the sole Church of Christ professed in the Creed to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, and entrusted to Peter's pastoral care, "subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him" (LG 8). The second draft of *Lumen Gentium* repeated the teaching of Pius XII that the Mystical Body of Christ and the Catholic Church are one and the same thing;¹⁷ it simply said *est* ('is'), that the Church of Christ *is* the visible Catholic Church. But now, the final draft made what Gaillardetz and others claim was the single most significant word change in the history of the Council: that the Church of Christ subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church.¹⁸ This suggests that whilst the Church of Christ exists in its fullness in the Catholic Church, it was not found there exclusively; it could also be found in some manner in the non-Catholic Christian communities too. In the past this was implied by the Church's recognition of the Orthodox Churches. But by saying *subsistit in*, *Lumen Gentium* 8 brought about a significant change in the way the Church generally saw her relationship with other Christians. It gave an enormous stimulus to ecumenism. In the postconciliar period, the discussion of *subsistit in* led Paul VI to warn that the term should not be interpreted in such a manner as to reverse previous teaching.¹⁹ Continued debate eventually prompted an intervention from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In its 2007 document *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church*, the CDF tackled three issues: whether *Lumen Gentium* changed the Church's teaching, the meaning of *subsistit in* and why *subsistit in* was used rather than *est*.²⁰ It claims that no reversal of previous teaching should be

¹⁷ See Pius XII *Humani Generis* 27: see www.vatican.va (October 2013)

¹⁸ Gaillardetz *The Church in the Making* 22

¹⁹ Paul VI *Ecclesiam Suam* 31: see www.vatican.va (October 2103)

²⁰ It is worth quoting here this CDF document at length:

"Did the Second Vatican Council change the Catholic doctrine on the Church?"

The Vatican: The Second Vatican Council neither changed nor intended to change this doctrine, rather it developed, deepened and more fully explained it. This was exactly what John XXIII said at the beginning of the Council. Paul VI affirmed it and commented in the act of promulgating the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*: "There is no better comment to make than to say that this promulgation really changes nothing of the traditional doctrine. What Christ willed, we also will. What was, still is. What the Church has taught down through the centuries, we also teach. In simple terms that which was assumed, is now explicit; that which was uncertain, is now clarified; that which was meditated upon, discussed and sometimes argued over, is now put together in one clear formulation". The Bishops repeatedly expressed and fulfilled this intention.

implied, that *subsistit in* represents a development, deepening and filling out of the traditional teaching, that it means the Church of Christ ‘continues to exist in’ the Catholic Church whilst outside it are found many means and elements of truth and sanctification that impel towards Catholic unity, and that the Council fathers, although believing the other communities suffer from defects, nevertheless wished to value those communities positively as instruments of salvation.

Chapter Three on the nature of the hierarchy and collegiality, the shared authority of pope and bishops, has a momentous quality and more than many other documents of the Council expresses and embeds the fresh lines of thinking characteristic of Vatican II. It was the Chapter that complemented and completed the ecclesiological work begun at the First Vatican Council. It was also the most debated Chapter and as a consequence the final text, as Hahnenberg avers, is “full of qualifications, technical distinctions and repeated explanations necessary to develop consensus.”²¹ The majority of bishops favoured greater collaboration within the Church; they wished to affirm that the pope and bishops together hold supreme authority. Christ chose twelve apostles, among whom Peter had primacy, yet he shared his authority with both Peter and the apostles together (LG 19). The Church is governed by the bishops *cum et sub Petro*, with Peter and under Peter.²² *Lumen Gentium* states that bishops by consecration receive the “fullness of the Sacrament of Orders” (LG 21). This phrase was a compromise formula. Since mediaeval times the precise sacramental difference between a priest and a bishop had been much discussed. Episcopacy however does not come from the pope, the local bishop being a kind of papal representative; *Lumen Gentium* states clearly that the ministry and power of a bishop derives from his sacramental ordination. Bishops have a unique role within their particular church, which is not a branch office of a universal corporation, but truly the Church of God in a particular place. In and from these particular churches “the one and unique Catholic

What is the meaning of the affirmation that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church?

The Vatican: Christ “established here on earth” only one Church and instituted it as a “visible and spiritual community”, that from its beginning and throughout the centuries has always existed and will always exist, and in which alone are found all the elements that Christ himself instituted. “This one Church of Christ, which we confess in the Creed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic [...]. This Church, constituted and organised in this world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him”. In number 8 of the Constitution *Lumen gentium* “subsistence” means this perduring, historical continuity and the permanence of all the elements instituted by Christ in the Catholic Church, in which the Church of Christ is concretely found on this earth. It is possible, according to Catholic doctrine, to affirm correctly that the Church of Christ is present and operative in the churches and ecclesial communities not yet fully in communion with the Catholic Church, on account of the elements of sanctification and truth that are present in them. Nevertheless, the word “subsists” can only be attributed to the Catholic Church alone precisely because it refers to the mark of unity that we profess in the symbols of the faith (I believe... in the “one” Church); and this “one” Church subsists in the Catholic Church.

Why was the expression “subsists in” adopted instead of the simple word “is”?

The use of this expression, which indicates the full identity of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church, does not change the doctrine on the Church. Rather, it comes from and brings out more clearly the fact that there are “numerous elements of sanctification and of truth” which are found outside her structure, but which “as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, impel towards Catholic Unity”. “It follows that these separated churches and Communities, though we believe they suffer from defects, are deprived neither of significance nor importance in the mystery of salvation. In fact the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as instruments of salvation, whose value derives from that fullness of grace and of truth which has been entrusted to the Catholic Church”.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church* (200&): see www.vatican.va (October 2013)

²¹ Hahnenberg 46

²² Elsewhere this has been put as: “Never Peter without the Eleven, never the Eleven without Peter.”

Church exists” (LG 23). Moreover, bishops with the pope share in the ability to teach infallibly on matters of faith and morals when gathered in an ecumenical council, or when, scattered throughout the world, they agree that a particular teaching is to be held definitively (LG 25-27). Most of the paragraphs of Chapter Three have a momentous quality and the last paragraph is no exception. It expresses the desire of the Council fathers to restore the ancient practice of the diaconate as a permanent order within the Church, and to open it to married men (LG 29). Many bishops were strongly resistant to the idea of married deacons, but others from missionary areas were eager to meet the pastoral needs arising.

Mention should also be made at this point of the footnote to the constitution, which Paul VI requested of the Theological Commission. This footnote, called the *nota explicitiva praevia*, seeks to clarify exactly what Chapter Three means by the collegiality of the pope and bishops. It was a way of meeting the concerns of the minority. The footnote stresses that the word ‘college’ does not imply a group of equals in a legal sense, that admission to this college takes place through *both* episcopal ordination *and* hierarchical communion with the pope, that the college does not exist and cannot function without the pope, its head, and that the pope as head of the college always retains the right to exercise his power *sui juris*.

Chapter Four is the first comprehensive exposition in a magisterial document of the role and function of the laity in the life of the Church. It leads into Chapter Five on the vocation of all Christians to perfection in charity and holiness. Chapter Six is about the religious life and its meaning for the Church today, while Chapter Seven affirms the pilgrim character of the Church and its need for ongoing reform and renewal.

Chapter Eight “Our Lady”, like Chapter Three, was also much discussed. Some had argued for a separate document on Mary that would emphasise her unique relationship with Christ and her involvement in the work of salvation, whilst others stressed her relationship to the Church community as the leading disciple and Mother of the Church. In the end, the latter group prevailed, although the chapter is typical of many parts of *Lumen Gentium* in that it seeks to hold in tension both approaches, that is, those who favoured Christocentric approaches to Mariology, the theology of Mary and her role in salvation, and those who favoured ecclesiocentric approaches.

3. Some Current Issues

To turn now briefly in conclusion to three current developments, all pressing issues from *Lumen Gentium* fifty years on: collegiality, synodality and the role of the laity.

In his 1976 classic *Models of the Church*,²³ Avery Dulles opined that many disagreements among people in the Church can be traced to differing visions of what the Church is. The dominant pre-conciliar model of the Church was the Church as an

²³ A. Dulles *Models of the Church* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan: 1976). In this work, Dulles presented five different models of the Church held by Catholics: institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald and servant. In his 1987 and 2002 revisions, he added a sixth model: community of disciples.

institution, a perfect hierarchically ordered society. *Lumen Gentium*, however, initiated a different trajectory that focused on the Church as mystery; it offered a welter of images, notably that of the Church as the People of God. By the 1980s, an integrating concept had come to the fore that has dominated ecclesiology ever since, namely, the Church as a communion. As the 1985 Extraordinary Synod put it: “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council’s documents.”²⁴ Communion ecclesiology highlights both the spiritual and the relational aspects of the Church, linking the horizontal communion of believers to their vertical communion with God, and the Eucharist as the *locus* where this twofold union is actualised. This communion ecclesiology was further explored in *Communione Notio*, a ‘Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion’, issued by the CDF in 1992.²⁵

Communion ecclesiology has led to the ascendance of two concepts currently much discussed in Pope Francis’s efforts at reform: collegiality and synodality. Collegiality refers to the pope and bishops governing the Church collaboratively, whilst respecting proper autonomy and permitting legitimate diversity. Synodality is the practical expression of the participation of the local Church in the governance of the universal Church, through appropriate deliberative bodies. Francis’s evident wish is for the local Church, the dioceses and the bishops’ conferences to play a larger part in the decisions that affect them, whilst ensuring that Rome, the Vatican congregations and the Petrine ministry better serve the needs of the Church worldwide. One expression of this is the national bishops conferences, although many would say their *modus operandi* are not entirely successful and at times are not always genuinely collegial. Their teaching role is circumscribed and they tend arguably to overseeing or managing the bishops rather than serving and facilitating them.

The discussion of collegiality, synodality and primacy raises the important issue of how authority is exercised at all levels in the Church: between bishops and priests, and between bishops, priests and laity. In the early decades after Vatican II, in the rush to initiate participative structures at various levels, such as parish councils and diocesan pastoral councils, the Church unwittingly borrowed models from the corporate world of business and also from governmental democracy. The vocation of the laity, as *Lumen Gentium* 31 puts it, is to “seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will”. Rather than stressing and supporting this, dioceses have tended to focus attention, at a time of perceived clergy shortage, on involving the laity in the day-to-day pastoral ministry of the Church. Many have employed lay administrators and pastoral workers, such as lay chaplains and youth ministers, devolving to them the various tasks to be done. Although these

²⁴ The Final Report of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops (1985) *The Church, in the Word of God, Celebrates the Mysteries of Christ for the Salvation of the World*, II, C, 1 (www.vatican.va: October 2013). See also R. Latourelle (ed.) *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives 25 Years Later* (New York, Paulist Press: 1988) and M. Cardinal Ouellet “The Ecclesiology of Communion, 50 Years after the Opening of Vatican Council II” address given to International Theology Symposium in June 2012 in Dublin (available at www.zenit.org/en/articles/cardinal-ouellet-at-international-theology-symposium: October 2013)

²⁵ Text available on line at www.vatican.va (October 2013). See also the article published in 2000 by Cardinal Ratzinger on *Lumen Gentium*: J. Ratzinger ‘The Ecclesiology of the Constitution on the Church, Vatican II, ‘Lumen Gentium’: available at <https://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/cdfeccl.htm> (October 2013)

developments might be laudable, in some cases, notably in the US, powerful diocesan and even parish bureaucracies have been created. In the meantime, the vast majority of the laity appear dormant, have little voice or appear to be excluded from effective responsibility for the Church. There are arguably few opportunities for lay people to share their experience and give public testimony to their faith within the ecclesial community. My own view is that new models and new approaches need to be developed to bring about a greater degree of collegiality between bishops, priests and the laity in order to enable the laity to participate within the Church and more effectively to carry out their apostolate in the world.

As an aside, this is a major aspiration in the current reorganization of the Diocese of Portsmouth. The aim is to establish lay-led teams at local and diocesan level, focused less on performing tasks and more on devising policy and sponsoring projects. More, a New Evangelisation Team ('The NET') is envisaged precisely as a successor to the Diocesan Pastoral Council and to act as a voice for the laity at the level of the Bishop's Council, assisting the formulation and direction of diocesan policy. Careful discernment, selection and formation is needed if this is to work. However, the issue of the rightful involvement of the laity in the sanctifying, teaching and governing ministry of the Church, both locally and internationally, remains an important issue still to be resolved.

In conclusion, it must be said that *Lumen Gentium* is not a systematic treatise on ecclesiology. It is instead a nuanced statement of the Church's self-understanding, her nature, structure and purpose within God's plan for the Church today. If the thesis presented here is correct, then it is merely the beginning of a work still very much in progress. In this way, the continued study of *Lumen Gentium* should prompt dialogue within the Church on the numerous matters outstanding and on the new needs arising. Indeed, it could be said that this is exactly the project Pope Francis is currently engaged in.