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# Catholicism Opening to the World and Other Confessions Vatican II and its Impact

Edited by  
Vladimir Latinovic · Gerard Mannion  
Jason Welle, O.F.M.

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Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious  
Dialogue

Series Editors  
Gerard Mannion  
Department of Theology  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC, USA

Mark D. Chapman  
Ripon College  
University of Oxford  
Oxford, UK

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*Editors*

Vladimir Latinovic  
University of Tübingen  
Tübingen, Baden-Württemberg  
Germany

Jason Welle, O.F.M.  
Pontifical Institute of Arabic and  
Islamic Studies  
Rome, Italy

Gerard Mannion  
Department of Theology  
Georgetown University  
Washington, DC, USA

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*For John O'Malley, S.J.—with gratitude—  
Who reminded the world just how much happened at Vatican II*

# FOREWORD

## THE GOLDEN SIGNIFICANCE OF VATICAN II AT 50

The Jubilee of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council provided extraordinary opportunities for scholars, theologians and others to reflect, engage in lively conversations, and study further the importance of this monumental meeting and the initiatives flowing from it. Pope John XXIII announced Vatican II on January 25, 1959, with the dual purpose of “the spiritual good and joy of the Christian people but also an invitation to the separated communities to seek again that unity for which so many souls are longing in these days throughout the world.”<sup>1</sup> His dual purpose of renewal and promotion of ecumenical relations expanded to three discernable goals by the time the Council convened on October 11, 1964: the spiritual renewal of the church; *aggiornamento* or updating church discipline to the needs and conditions of the present; and the promotion of Christian unity.<sup>2</sup>

John O’Malley, S.J., has suggested that Pope John’s announcement launched a process that led and to “quite possibly the biggest meeting

<sup>1</sup>John XXIII, alloc. *Questa festiva*, AAS 51 (1959): 65–69, at 69; *L’Osservatore Romano*, January 26/27, 1959; see also comments by Thomas F. Stransky, C. S. P., “The Foundation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity,” *Vatican II Revisited by Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1986), 64.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph A. Komonchak, “Is Christ Divided? Dealing with Diversity and Disagreement,” 2003 Common Ground Initiative Lecture, published in *Origins: CNS Documentary Service* 33, no. 9 (July 17, 2003), 141.

in the history of the world.”<sup>3</sup> Whatever its size in comparison with other world convocations, Vatican II was a religious event of major portions and probably the most important and influential religious event of the twentieth century.

Its Jubilee began tentatively in 2009, much like the process that Pope John launched, with few, if any, having any real idea of what would happen over the next few years.

Already in 2012, there were some conferences marking the anniversary of the opening of Vatican II. Dialogue was much to the forefront of such commemorations. For example, at Georgetown University, 300 scholars, church leaders and interested people gathered around the theme “Vatican II after Fifty Years: Dialogue and Catholic Identity,” beginning on the anniversary of the Council’s opening day, October 11. Attention was also given to the council in April, earlier that same year, when the EI Network, itself, gathered over 250 scholars and interested persons in Assisi on the same theme of dialogue: “Where We Dwell in Common: Pathways for Dialogue in 21st Century.” While many enjoyed reliving the exciting times of the Vatican II era, few seemed to know with much certainty in 2012 that its initiatives were about to become lively again.

### VATICAN II RE-ORIENTED AND RE-ENERGIZED: PARALLELS IN PAPAL TRANSITION

Then, a major shift occurred and the Jubilee took on new energy. This shared some striking parallels with what had taken place at a crucial juncture of the council, itself. During Vatican II, there had been a shift between the first and second sessions that provided a more certain direction for the future, so a similar change took place during the Jubilee. In June 1963, Pope John succumbed to cancer and Pope Paul VI was elected to take his place. Pope John did his part to envision a council, to establish the mechanisms for it to become a reality, to provide inspiration for its work, and to offer trust that the assembled bishops would find a way to make the meeting effective. Pope Paul VI gathered the disparate efforts and suggestions, somewhat disorganized after the first period of meetings, and sought to provide a direction for the future. He organized

<sup>3</sup> John W. O’Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008, 18.

the themes around the nature and mission of the church and outlined them for the council fathers in his truly remarkable and substantive opening address for the second period on September 29, 1963.<sup>4</sup> Later, Pope Paul developed a new vision of the church around the theme of dialogue in his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* (August 6, 1964). Paul VI used the term “dialogue” over 70 times in the text, a term that had been absent from church documents before Vatican II.

Similarly, nearly 50 years later, in February 2013, Pope Benedict XVI resigned as pope, in what some considered to be an extraordinary gesture of humility, ecclesiological insight, and service to the church universal. Pope Francis was elected to take his place two weeks later. The first Jesuit, Latin American, and successor bold enough to take the name of the poor little saint of Assisi, Jorge Bergoglio as Pope Francis brought a new confidence to the Catholic Church and around the world with his novel style of living and acting as pope. The Jubilee of Vatican II also took on a new character of hope and direction. At first, Pope Francis with his many surprises reminded everyone of Pope John—getting out of the Vatican on quick trips around Rome, acknowledging the advantages of living simply, showing a sense of humor, and willing to change the way things were done by 180 degrees; but by the time of Pope Francis’s first major writing, *Evangelii Gaudium*, comparisons with Pope Paul were also becoming significantly obvious.<sup>5</sup>

## A HALF-CENTURY OF OPEN DOORS

By default, the annual gatherings of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network (EI) to date have been ecumenical in orientation and participation. And several of these gatherings (as detailed in the volume introduction, see p. 6), have taken explicit ecumenical themes, challenges, aspirations and opportunities for their focus. These

<sup>4</sup>Paul VI, alloc. *Salvete fratres*, AAS 55 (1963): 841–859. The address is published in translation in its entirety in several places, for example, in Xavier Rynne, *The Second Session* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Company, 1963), 347–363, and “*The Church in the World*,” *Inaugural Address of Pope Paul VI at the Second Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Congress*, ed. Vincent Yzermans, and pub. Most Rev. Leo Binz, Archbishop of St. Paul (Saint Paul: North Central Pub. Co., 1963).

<sup>5</sup>Many have commented at length on the wide-ranging and striking parallels between Pope Francis and John XXIII, somewhat fewer on the parallels with Paul VI.

gatherings have always been intentionally about engaging participants in dialogue as much as having them listen to and present scholarly papers about ecumenical dialogue. So, also, have these gatherings been aimed toward reflection upon and the engagement in interreligious dialogue and engagement.

The 2015 EI Network conference, “Vatican II: Remembering the Future—Ecumenical, Interfaith and Secular Explorations of the Council’s Legacy and Promise,” was an event which placed such intentions very much to the forefront, along with promoting reflection upon Catholicism’s dialogue with and engagement in the wider world.

These three strands come together—ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and encounter, as well as dialogue with and engagement with the wider world have social and practical outcomes.

What was distinctive about this gathering was that it also sought to both mark the fiftieth anniversary of the monumental church council that was Vatican II and to hear from voices throughout and from far beyond the Catholic Church with regard to the council’s achievements, legacy and ongoing energy and power.

So the gathering out of which this volume arose primarily hosted at Georgetown University itself reflected both the achievements of the council in transforming the church’s understanding of and relationship with other Christians, other religions and the wider human family, as well as the promise and hope that the Pontificate of Francis offers for the church and all people of good will.

While volume II explores the transformation of Catholicism’s relationship with people of other faiths, this first volume of papers touches broadly on the important themes of ecclesiology and ecumenism, along with the church’s relationship with the wider world. Collectively, its chapters demonstrate that Vatican II was a fresh start for the Catholic Church, offered both doctrinal statements and pastoral direction, engaged the laity as never before, especially encouraging women to grasp leadership roles in the church, challenged all churches to consider both their identity and their relationship with other churches, gave new hope and direction to an already vibrant ecumenical movement, and launched a new creativity among theologians and church leaders in envisioning a church that was more human, more spiritually alive, more consequential to the lives of all people, and more open to improvement than in previous centuries.

This volume discerns the church’s present and looks forward as much as, indeed, for most contributors, even more so than it looks back.

In considering some aspects of what the contributors envisage as the future unfolding of the council's mission, let us turn to offer some reflections on how the wider mission of the church has been unfolding of late and what the signs of the present times signs might be pointing toward in years to come.

## THE FRANCIS ERA AND THE COUNCIL'S LEGACY AND FUTURE

With all humanity, Christians, including Catholics, are being drawn into an unknown future of tumultuous change (see GS 5–8). At the time of the Second Vatican Council, it was revolutions in the sciences, a new historical consciousness, the advance of economic development, migrations to cities, the expansion of means of communications, the networking of peoples across societies and nations, and the spreading aspirations for greater liberty. The Council tutored us on reading “the signs of the times” (GS 4), finding the hand of God in those changes (GS 11); and it counseled us on exercising our freedom to direct the course of history in the midst of tumultuous change (GS 9).<sup>6</sup>

Today the world experiences the pervasive presence of social media, cyber insecurity, the rise of populist authoritarianism, the return of great power rivalries and increased threat of nuclear war, global climate change, commercial integration through a new wave of trade agreements without the US, and the expansion of global institutions. People today find themselves being drawn back first into the future, trying to keep their bearings amidst a host of daunting challenges. Others include: the collapse of vast ecosystems like the oceans and the staggering loss of plant and animal species; the unwitting capture of the human world by artificial intelligence and the invasion of internet security by social media giants, national adversaries and predatory hackers; the loss of political order across wide areas, especially the Middle East, and the consolidation of Chinese and Russian power. All this takes place when the post-1945 liberal political order has been enfeebled and cooperation among the leading states is at low ebb.

Such are “the dangers, toils and snares” through which Pope Francis leads the Vatican II Church in its ongoing dialogue with the world. If the Council took place in a time of optimism with a sense of possibility, today's world is marked by a sense of uncertainty and loss of human

<sup>6</sup> “[Humanity] is becoming aware that it is [its] responsibility to guide aright the forces which [it] has unleashed...”

control in face of the dangers human ingenuity has unleashed. The dialogue the Council initiated with the world and with other churches requires a new imaginative, flexible style of leadership.

## GUERRILLA PASTORING AS THE WORLD MOVES BACK FIRST INTO THE FUTURE

With so many complex problems, Francis's leadership style is not that of a supreme pontiff reigning above the fray or a commander leading an assault. He is like an inventive guerrilla pastor, sometimes acting on his own, sometimes engaging others, like Pax Christi International, in extended dialogue, at others summoning the crowds to join him, as in his convening of meetings of popular movements. As the Vatican II Church matures, Pope Francis has the subtlety to rouse the energies of the People of God in direct and indirect ways and to martial the resources of the Holy See and the hierarchy in new ways. He leads with indirection, tacking into the wind, edging forward against breaking waves.

When it came to family life, he summoned a pair of synods to gather the collective wisdom of the Church, first through encouraging the bishops to poll the laity and then drawing on the collective wisdom of the world's bishops to draw up *Amoris Laetitia*, the apostolic exhortation concluding the synod, but then in the critical chapter eight laying out his own discernment model for pastoral care of divorced and remarried Catholics.<sup>7</sup> Notably, he identified it as his own approach, acknowledging others within the church might address it differently. He acknowledges that "those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But, I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness ..."<sup>8</sup>

Francis addressed the issue of climate change, in *Laudato Si'*, his environmental encyclical, published in advance of the Paris Climate Summit, where the encyclical and his message were greeted with appreciation by world leaders.<sup>9</sup> The letter itself was assembled with input from secular

<sup>7</sup>Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, AAS 108, no. 4 (2016): 311–446, see esp. Chapter 8, "Accompanying, Discerning, and Integrating Weakness," nos. 291–312.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 308.

<sup>9</sup>Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, AAS 107, no. 9 (2015): 847–945.

scholars, presented with the collaboration of nonbelieving scientists and environmental activists, and published as a letter not just to the Church but the whole world. Under Francis the engagement with the world has grown in intensity and depth. It has become clear that, as the Council hoped, in this time of crisis the Church can be “a leaven in the world” (LG 31).

A similar process can be seen in the field of nuclear disarmament. Senior statesmen, like George Shultz and William Perry, have united to urge the abolition of nuclear weapons. The Vatican diplomatic corps has been at the vanguard of the abolition movement. Its presence was quite visible in the 2017 UN Conference that negotiated the Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons. The Conference opened in March with a message from the Holy Father; and he was the first head of state to ratify the treaty. In November, that same year, at a Vatican conference on integral disarmament and development he openly condemned deterrence in contradistinction to the just-war thinkers who normally address these issues; and in his 2017 address to the diplomatic corps he called for “serene and wide-ranging debate on the subject.”<sup>10</sup>

The Vatican policy on nuclear abolition is a case of moving back first into the future. While Pope Francis announced his condemnation of deterrence at the November 2017 Vatican symposium, saying “the threat of [the] use [of nuclear weapons], as well as their very possession, is to be firmly condemned,” the Vatican is only gradually preparing the ground for preachers and teachers to educate the faithful and the public on its updated teaching on the morality of nuclear weapons and training pastoral workers to accompany Catholic military and national security personnel in the vocational decisions posed by that condemnation and for the wider church to receive this teaching.<sup>11</sup> Given the accelerating nuclear arms race and the threat of nuclear war on the Korean Peninsula, the papal condemnation was timely, but it will take time to reach even those whom this teaching will impact most directly, military and defense personnel and national security specialists.

<sup>10</sup>See Pope Francis, 2018 Address to the Diplomatic Corps at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/january/documents/papa-francesco\\_20180108\\_corpo-diplomatico.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/january/documents/papa-francesco_20180108_corpo-diplomatico.html).

<sup>11</sup>See Pope Francis, Address to the Symposium “Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament,” at [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20171110\\_convegno-disarmo-integrale.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/november/documents/papa-francesco_20171110_convegno-disarmo-integrale.html).

## GOSPEL ECUMENISM

There are surprises on every front, including ecumenical relations, one of the principal areas discussed by several contributors to this first volume. Francis's meeting with Russian Patriarch Kirill at the Havana Airport in February, 2016, with their 14-point declaration on world affairs was a major step forward in the long-blocked relations with the largest Orthodox Church.<sup>12</sup> While it was not a formal ecumenical encounter aimed at church unity, it was nonetheless a significant moment of mutual recognition and shared exercise of responsibility toward the world.

The observance of the Quincentennial of the Reformation in 2017 represented a long step forward in the relation between the Lutheran and Catholic churches. Earlier anniversaries had been occasion to note differences and expose old wounds. The 2017 anniversary, by contrast, was occasion to own historic faults, offer hope-filled expressions of mutual respect and to demonstrate comfortable, open relations between church leaders and the faithful of the respective churches.<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis, in a private exchange with parishioners at Rome's Lutheran church, expressed his impatience with theological quibbles on the question of Eucharistic sharing.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the Holy Father's familiarity in annual meetings with Pentecostals, Methodists and Waldensians

<sup>12</sup>See "The Historic Meeting of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill: Havana, 20 February 2017," Information Service of Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, no. 147 (2016/I), at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/information\\_service/pdf/information\\_service\\_147\\_en.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/information_service/pdf/information_service_147_en.pdf).

<sup>13</sup>The complete documentation may be found at "The Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Sweden for the Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation," Information Service of Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, no. 148 (2016/II), 18–26 at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/information\\_service/pdf/information\\_service\\_148\\_en.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/information_service/pdf/information_service_148_en.pdf).

<sup>14</sup>The Pope's actual remarks are reported here, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151115\\_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151115_chiesa-evangelica-luterana.html). For samples of the commentary and interpretation they generated, see <https://www.ecumenicalnews.com/article/pope-francis-prayers-at-service-with-romes-lutherans-hailed-by-lwf/35865.htm>; and especially David Gibson, "Did Pope Francis Say that Lutherans Can Take Communion at Catholic Mass?," *National Catholic Reporter*, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/did-pope-francis-say-lutherans-can-take-communion-catholic-mass>.

witnesses to the growing intimacy between Christians of different denominations at the grassroots, an unheralded fruit of fifty years of ecumenism, but real nonetheless, and pregnant with promise for the future.<sup>15</sup>

In his closing address to the conference that inspired this volume, presented at the Episcopalian Washington National Cathedral, Cardinal Walter Kasper, the longtime president of the Vatican's Council for Promoting Christian Unity, imagined these less formal communal interchanges, especially with Evangelicals and Pentecostals, as "a Gospel-oriented" ecumenism of the future.<sup>16</sup> For these less traditional churches, fitted by their individualism to post-modernity, Kasper noted "the church is an event."<sup>17</sup> His Gospel-oriented ecumenism understands that "the path to unity is not the path to institutional merger." The new ecumenism sprung from the Gospel, Kasper argues, is found in the *sensus fidei* shared by all believers and expressed in a catholicity that will be concretely realized in synodality (the communal governance of the several churches).<sup>18</sup> "Catholicity involves all," he writes. "The laity are not merely recipients but also actors, not only objects but above all subjects in the church." For this reason, he asserts, Pope Francis "wants a listening magisterium that makes its decisions after it has heard what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev 2:7, etc.)."<sup>19</sup>

## WOMEN AND THE MAGISTERIUM

Nowhere is a listening magisterium as necessary as with women in the Church.<sup>20</sup> Pope Francis's record with respect to women has been modest at best. He called off the investigations of American religious women and

<sup>15</sup>For a list of identifiable fruits of Vatican II Ecumenism, see Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

<sup>16</sup>See Cardinal Walter Kasper, 'Church and Churches Remembering the Future: Towards Multi-Faceted Unity', Chapter 20 of the present volume at 329–346, esp. 340–346.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 341–344.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 344.

<sup>20</sup>On the attitudes of US Catholic women, see the recent *America*/CARA survey, "Proud to be Catholic? A groundbreaking *America* survey asks women about their lives in the Catholic Church," *America*, January 16, 2018 at <https://www.americamagazine.org/fait/2018/01/16/proud-be-catholic-groundbreaking-america-survey-asks-women-about-their-lives>.

met in person with their representative leaders. He appointed a committee to advise him on opening the diaconate for women<sup>21</sup> and appointed a couple of women to curial positions, though in the Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life, where traditional women's concerns for children and family would make them an easy fit.<sup>22</sup>

Since 1970 the Church has named four women doctors of the church: Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Therese of Lisieux and Hildegard of Bingen.<sup>23</sup> Teresa had run-ins with the male religious leaders of her day, Catherine took it upon herself to lecture the pope on his weakness, and Hildegard, a polymath mystic, had been adopted as a model by feminists and New Agers before Benedict XVI named her a doctor. It is no big stretch, then, for Gerard Mannion to offer reflections on "Women and the Art of the Magisterium." Of the contribution of women to post-Vatican II theology, Mannion writes, "Much needs to be done to increase awareness, acknowledgement and appreciation of the contribution of women to church teaching authority, and, most importantly of all, to increase their participation in the same."<sup>24</sup>

Teaching authority (*magisterium*), Mannion argues in a bold move, is a matter of what people teach, not who they happen to be.<sup>25</sup> It is more about action and particular activities than the actors and their positions within the church. Mannion traces the history of the women who have taught the church "with authority" from Saint Clare of Assisi to Mary Ward, or famous women dissenters who brought the church to greater insight through their dissent—from Catherine of Siena who chastised a pope, to Australia's first saint, Mary MacKillop to the countless activists such as Dorothy Day.<sup>26</sup> The modern exercise of this role includes the

<sup>21</sup>See "Francis Institutes Commission to Study Female Deacons," *National Catholic Reporter*, August 2, 2016 at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-institutes-commission-study-female-deacons-appointing-gender-balanced>.

<sup>22</sup>See "Francis Appoints Two Laywomen to Key Positions in the Roman Curia," *America*, Nov. 7, 2017 at <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2017/11/07/pope-francis-appoints-two-laywomen-key-positions-roman-curia>.

<sup>23</sup>See Mary T. Malone, *Four Women Doctors of the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015).

<sup>24</sup>See Chapter 9 of the present volume, Gerard Mannion, 'Women and the Art of Magisterium: Reflections on Vatican II and the Postconciliar Church', 119–147 at 120.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 133–134.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 137.

women observers at Vatican II, like Mary Luke Tobin and Rosemarie Goldie, who ultimately served also as *periti and* members of subcommissions. (Pope Paul referred to Rosemarie Goldie as *nostra collaboratrice*, “our collaborator.”) Mannion backs the historical argument with the growing appreciation of the Council’s teaching of the *sensus fidei* as a gift of all the faithful.<sup>27</sup> He concludes, Women “have taught the church much and will continue to do so” and “Magisterium deserves aggiornamento as much as any other part of the church and its theological enquiries.”<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, integrating the multifold gifts of women into the life of the church is essential to its future vitality. Given the variety of cultures the Catholic Church embraces, there will be differences in the pace, the direction and even the content of that integrative process. But, given the changing status of women in society to which the church has given repeated support, the activism even of poor and less-educated women, and the enormous service of women to the church’s pastoral activities, there is no doubt the future phases in the unfolding of the Vatican II church will involve women and their gifts. The time of “prudent” hesitation, symbolic action and progress by indirection will pass. The time when the church and especially its women of faith are drawn back-first into the future is fast passing.

After more than half a century of a concerted effort by this global church to throw open its doors, it is right and fitting, indeed necessary, that we discern and explore the implications and outcomes of what was set in motion by John XXIII back in January, 1959, when he announced the council. All in all, this volume demonstrates that the Golden Jubilee of the council was not just a remembrance of a creative period fifty years ago but also an occasion to reflect creatively on the present, now fully a post-Vatican II period, and, above all, to look toward the future. While pointing toward remaining challenges, unfinished business and much

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 146. On the central role of the *sensus fidei*, see International Theological Commission, “Theology Today: Perspective, Principles and Criteria” (2009) at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_doc\\_20111129\\_tologia-oggi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_tologia-oggi_en.html), nos. 33–35. The text is important for resting the teaching authority of the bishops on the *sensus* possessed by all the baptized. Similarly, see Pope Francis’ comments on “thinking with the church” as thinking with the whole church, faithful and bishops together in Antonio Spadaro, S.J., *A Big Heart Open to God: A Conversation with Pope Francis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013).

<sup>28</sup>Mannion, ‘Women and the Art of Magisterium’, 147, 144, respectively.

work to be done, these essays collectively demonstrate the impact, legacy and future promise of Vatican II. They point to bright future indeed.

Washington, DC, USA

John Borelli  
Special Assistant to the President  
for Catholic Identity and Dialogue,  
University of Georgetown

Drew Christiansen S.J.  
Berkley Center for Religion, Peace,  
and World Affairs, University of Georgetown

**John Borelli** is special assistant Catholic Identity and Dialogue to President DeGioia of Georgetown University. Returning from a tour in Vietnam, Borelli finished his doctorate in the history of religions and theology in 1976 while teaching full-time. After 11 years of teaching in New York, he accepted a position with the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, promoting ecumenical and interreligious relations. Since 2003, Borelli has been at Georgetown University. Borelli has B.A. from St. Louis University and Ph.D. from Fordham University.

**Drew Christiansen, S.J.** is Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Global Human Development in Georgetown's School of Foreign Service and a senior research fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. His current areas of research include nuclear disarmament, nonviolence and just peacemaking, Catholic social teaching and ecumenical public advocacy. He is a frequent consultant to the Holy See and a member of the steering committee of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network.

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and Global Development, Georgetown University; Brian Flanagan, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology, Marymount University, VA.; Miriam Haar, then of Trinity College, Dublin and Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg, Germany (now at the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva); Peter Herman, one of our Graduate Students in Religious Pluralism at Georgetown University, USA; Leo Lefebure, Matteo Ricci, S.J., Chair in Theology, Georgetown University; Peter De Mey, Professor of Ecclesiology and Ecumenism and Director of the Center for Ecumenical Research, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium; Peter C. Phan, Ignacio Ellacuria Professor of Catholic Social Thought, Georgetown University; and Sam Wagner, Special Assistant to the President, Georgetown University. Among this band of heroes, a special word of acknowledgement for supererogatory efforts must be said also to John, Brian, Peter De Mey, Peter Herman and Sam who did so much heavy lifting behind the scenes throughout.

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Gerard Mannion  
Jason Welle, O.F.M.  
Vladimir Latinovic

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Agnes M. Brazal** is co-founder and past President of the Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines, former Coordinator of the Ecclesia of Women in Asia, and professor at St. Vincent School of Theology. She is co-author of *Intercultural Church: Bridge of Solidarity in the Migration Context* (Borderless Press, 2015), and co-editor of several books, including *Living With(Out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migration of Peoples* (Orbis, 2016), *Feminist Cyberethics in Asia* (Palgrave, 2014) and *Body and Sexuality* (AdMU Press, 2008).

**Mark D. Chapman** is Reader in Modern Theology at the University of Oxford, Visiting Professor at Oxford Brookes University and Vice-Principal of Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford. His most recent books include *Theology and Society in Theology and Society in Three Cities: Berlin, Oxford and Chicago, 1800–1914* (James Clarke, 2014); *The Fantasy of Reunion: Anglicanism, Catholicism and Ecumenism, 1833–1882* (Oxford, 2014); and *Anglican Theology* (T & T Clark, 2012).

**Charles E. Curran** is the Elizabeth Scurlock University Professor of Human Values at Southern Methodist University. He has written extensively in moral theology and Catholic social ethics, especially in the Moral Traditions series from Georgetown University Press. He has served as president of three national academic societies—the American Theological Society, the Catholic Theological Society of America and the Society of Christian Ethics.

**Agnes de Dreuzy** teaches Church history and ecclesiology at St. Mark's College, the Catholic Theological College at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. She holds her Ph.D. in Church History from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC and is also a graduate from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, France, where she specialized in foreign affairs. Her research interests are interdisciplinary and include the history of papal diplomacy in the modern period as well as interreligious dialogue and diplomacy. She recently published *Vrai et saint: Ecritures chrétiennes et autres religions* (Lit Verlag, 2017), the French translation of Leo Lefebure's *True and Holy*.

**Brian Flanagan** is Associate Professor in Theology/Religious Studies at Marymount University. He completed his Ph.D. in 2007, writing a dissertation on the ecumenist and theologian Jean-Marie Tillard, O.P. He continues his research in ecclesiology, ecumenism and Jewish-Christian dialogue, particularly through the Ecclesiological Investigations Network and the Ecclesiological Investigations Group of the American Academy of Religion. At Marymount University, he is able to indulge both his research and his passion for teaching. He draws upon the diversity of his students' experiences and his own study of Christian theology to create a classroom focused on shared critical inquiry.

**Mary McClintock Fulkerson** teaches theology at Duke Divinity School. Her books include *A Body Broken, a Body Betrayed: Race, Memory, and Eucharist in White-Dominant Churches*, co-authored with Marcia W Mount Shoop (Cascade, 2015); *Places of Redemption* (Oxford, 2010); and *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theology* (Wipf and Stock, 2001). Her co-edited volumes include *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (Oxford, 2013) and *Theological Interpretation for Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness: Public Intellectuals for the 21st Century* (Palgrave, 2013).

**Patrick J. Hayes** is the archivist for the Redemptorists of the Baltimore Province and an active church historian. He is the editor of several books and the author of *A Catholic Brain Trust: The Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs, 1945–1965* (University of Notre Dame, 2011), and most recently, a monograph on a Philadelphia parish, *St. Peter the Apostle, A History: 1842–2017* (Custombrook, 2017).

**Dagmar Heller** is ordained in the (United) Protestant Church in Baden, Germany and, since 2007, has been a lecturer of Ecumenical

Theology at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland and Programme Executive for the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Since 2014 she has also served as Academic Dean at the Bossey Institute.

**Dale T. Irvin** is President and Professor of World Christianity at New York Theological Seminary. His publications include *History of the World Christian Movement, Volumes 1 & 2*, written with Scott W. Sunquist (Orbis, 2001), as well as several other books and numerous articles. He is also a founding editor of the *Journal of World Christianity*. Among his various academic interests, he lists ecumenical studies, multifaith studies and global Pentecostalism.

**H. E. Cardinal W. Kasper** is a native of Heidenheim-Brenz, Germany. He both studied at and later was Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Tübingen. He was ordained for the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart in 1957, and became bishop of that diocese in 1989. He is the author of many influential and ground-breaking books including *Pope Francis' Revolution of Love and Tenderness* (Paulist, 2015) and *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (Paulist, 2014), which Pope Francis started reading during the conclave and has praised repeatedly. A veteran of many ecumenical and inter-faith initiatives, he served as a Catholic member of the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission, as co-chair of the Lutheran-Catholic Commission of Unity, and as secretary and later president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Under his leadership, the Pontifical Council advanced the cause of dialogue between Roman Catholics and many different Christian traditions and he equally left a deeply positive impression on Christian–Jewish relations.

**Vladimir Latinovic** is a lecturer in Patristics and Church History at Tübingen University, where he previously was a research fellow at the Institute for Ecumenical and Interreligious Studies. He is also project manager of the project "Treasure of the Orient," which seeks to improve the integration and visibility of Near Eastern and Orthodox Christians in Germany. As an undergraduate, he studied Orthodox Christian theology at the University of Belgrade and did his doctorate at the Catholic Theological Faculty at Tübingen University on homoousian Christology and its repercussions for the reception of the Eucharist (the first volume of the fruits of these researches, *Christologie und Kommunion*, was

published by the Aschendorff-Verlag in 2018). He is vice-chair of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network.

**Patricia Madigan, O.P.** is the Executive Director of CIMER, the Dominican Centre for Interfaith, Ministry, Education and Research ([www.cimer.org.au](http://www.cimer.org.au)). She lectures regularly in Australian universities and has worked on research projects with organisations such as the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference. Her publications include *Women and Fundamentalism in Islam and Catholicism* (Peter Lang, 2011) and *Iraqi Women of Three Generations* (San Antonio, 2014).

**Gerard Mannion** holds the Joseph and Winifred Amaturio Chair in Catholic Studies at Georgetown University, where he is also a Senior Research Fellow of the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. Educated at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, he has held visiting professorships and fellowships at universities such as Tübingen (Germany), the Dominican Institute for Theology and University of St Michael's College, Toronto (Canada), the Australian Catholic University, the Institute of Religious Sciences in Trento (Italy) and at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (in Belgium). He serves as chair of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network and has published numerous books and articles particularly in fields such as ecclesiology, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, ethics and social justice. He is the current President of the International Network of Societies for Catholic Theology (INSeCT).

**Paul G. Monson** is Assistant Professor of Church History at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology in Wisconsin. He holds a doctorate from Marquette University, where he defended a dissertation on transatlantic monasticism. His research and publications focus on the relationship between theology, history and culture in American Catholicism, with a distinct transnational lens.

**Jan Nielen** has served as program officer at CORDAID for almost 30 years. He received his Ph.D. in social sciences from Free University in Amsterdam, specializing in the anthropology and sociology of South Asia. During the last 10 years he has focused on the role of religion in conflict transformation and peacebuilding. He initiated several linking and learning programs on interreligious dialogue in close collaboration with the church in and of Asia.

**John O'Malley, S.J.** is University Professor in the Theology Department at Georgetown University. A specialist in the religious culture of early modern Europe, his best-known book is *The First Jesuits* (Harvard, 1993), now in thirteen languages. For more than four decades, he has written extensively on Vatican II, including his monograph, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Harvard, 2008), now in six languages.

**Anne E. Patrick, S.N.J.M.** was William H. Laird Professor of Religion and Liberal Arts, at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, and a Sister of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. A former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America, her books include *Conscience and Calling: Ethical Reflections on Catholic Women's Church Vocations* (Bloomsbury/T & T Clark, 2013) and *On Being Unfinished: Collected Writings* (Orbis, 2017). She passed away in 2016.

**Dorothea Sattler** professor of Ecumenical Theology and Dogmatics at the University of Münster since 2000, obtained her doctorate in 1992 with an ecumenical thesis on the Sacrament of Reconciliation and habilitated in 1996 with a study of the Doctrine of Salvation. She is the Scientific Director of the Ecumenical Study Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians in Germany and delegate of the German Bishops' Conference in the National Council of the Churches.

**Matthew A. Shadle** is Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia. He has been published in journals such as *Horizons*, the *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, the *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, and *Political Theology*. He also serves as the editor of the Catholic Social Ethics section of the *Political Theology Today* blog, and also writes for the *Catholic Moral Theology* blog.

**Jason Welle, O.F.M.** is Dean of Studies at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome. His teaching and research focus on interreligious dialogue, Muslim-Christian relations, the Franciscan intellectual tradition and Islamic mysticism, particularly in the medieval period. He has published articles in a number of scholarly journals, including *The Muslim World*, *Islamochristiana*, and the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. He is presently engaged on a major project focusing on the notion of companionship in the writings of the eleventh-century Ṣūfī master Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, including English translations of some of his treatises. He holds a Ph.D. in Theological and

Religious Studies from Georgetown University and master's degrees from the University of Notre Dame and the Catholic Theological Union.

**Susan K. Wood S.C.L.** is a professor at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and a past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America. Very active in ecumenical work, she serves on the International Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, the US Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, and the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation. Her most recent book is *A Shared Spiritual Journey: Lutherans and Catholics Traveling Toward Unity* (Paulist, 2016), co-authored with Timothy J. Wengert.

**Anastacia Wooden** defended her doctoral dissertation on the ecclesiology of Fr. Nicholas Afanasiev at The Catholic University of America, Washington, DC., in late 2018. She researches the theological and historical aspects of ecumenical interactions between the Catholic and the Russian Orthodox theologians on the eve of Vatican II. A native of Belarus, she resides with her husband and four children in Maryland, USA.