

Religious Life in the Post-Vatican II Era

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Is religious life obsolete and coming to an end?

Statistics seem to demonstrate this trend. There is decline of membership in religious life because there is a decline in overall church membership.¹ The “unaffiliated” category is growing every year.² The reasons for the decline and perception of the church’s irrelevancy are many and complex. Some causes for the exodus of the faithful are the sexual abuse crises, patriarchy, gender and sexual orientations, women’s ordination, authoritarianism, closed-mindedness, and arrogance. Secularism, a complex and ambiguous term, but understood as a dismissal of the notion of transcendence, is growing in many democratic societies and has affected how we understand church-state relations.³

Attitudes toward the institutional church will effectively affect attitudes towards religious life, for both are intertwined with each other. A new consciousness is emerging where one does not have to be a Christian and follow regulations of an institution to promote the common good and to be compassionate toward one’s neighbor. People are making responsible decisions. Those decisions clearly exclude the church. So, is vowed religious life obsolete?

How we approach the question and what other questions are asked is important. What we do with the answers to those questions will depend on the courage of the one who becomes aware of new possibilities. Such possibilities emerge as an invitation to go deeper into the inquiry. Why is there decline in religious life? Those who join are they seeking nostalgia and a refuge or God and a mission? Do the evangelical counsels make sense today? Some adherents are convinced that religious life should never change; others claim that change gives life to the organization. These attitudes often clash and create a crisis in orientation. The basic question is are we able to face the situation and dig below the surface to see what underlies it?

¹ According to 2012 figures, women make up a higher percentage of those devoted to consecrated life: 702,529 sisters and nuns compared to 55,314 religious brothers and nearly 420,000 priests and bishops. E. Povoledo, “Women See Themselves as Left Out Amid Talk of Change in Catholic Church,” New York Times, March 7, 2015 [accessed online].

I will use small letter “c” for church to represent the institutional church and capital letter “C”, Church, for the community of the baptized, the People of God.

² The “unaffiliated” category is identified state by state. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/25/states-biggest-religious-group_n_6745314.html?cps=gravity_2677_-6519771776014446781

³ Charles Taylor, “What does Secularism mean?” in *Dilemmas and Connections. Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2011), 303-325, especially 305. The popular notion of secularism is one that deals with church and state relations, when “in fact it has to do with the (correct) response of the democratic state to diversity” (310).

Leadership of the diverse expressions of religious life has already manifested concern over the crisis and relevancy of the consecrated life style. Among the church leaders is the Swiss abbot Martin Werlen of the Abbey of Einsiedeln and Fahr and his appeal for church reform in *Embers in these Ashes*. He wants to wake up the Catholic Church by asking questions and bringing to light the contradictions and dishonest patterns of behavior of the church. What is at stake is religious life as a “believable sign of our times.”⁴

In a study on religious life, several collaborators offer insights and optimism in *A Monastic Vision for the 21st Century. Where do we go from here?* It is clear that if monastic life is not changed and updated, it will have nothing to say to the questions of future generations.⁵ In the introduction, the Cistercian Dom Bernardo Olivera writes with clarity what options must be thought through and considered for implementation. Benedictine Joan Chittister identifies this time of crisis as “crossover points” in history. She strongly believes that “only religion can possibly stop the violence being used in its name.”⁶

In *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, the Augustinian Tarcisius van Bavel reminds us that we are moving into a new period in religious life and we should not forget the original inspiration is about “forming a personal bond to Jesus, following him.”⁷ Even though this inspiration is a calling for all followers of Christ, it should not be exaggerated as a “distinctive character of the religious life.” Those in vowed religious communities are only one aspect of the Body of Christ, a body made up of diverse parts. The Jesuit Pope Francis echoes the same theme of renewal and updating in his writings like “Joy of the Gospel” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1-2) and the apostolic letter “To All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life.”

Purpose

The purpose of this reflection is to examine the crisis and trends of religious life from a phenomenological perspective in its broadest terms and in light of the words of 1 Peter 3:15: *Always be ready to bear witness to any who ask you of the hope that lives in you*. This pericope will serve as a leitmotiv for further reflection in three points: Part 1) a subjective inquiry into the *hope that lives in you*, Part 2) a consideration of the vision of the Second Vatican Council, *to bear witness*, and Part 3) the quality of appropriation of the Council fifty years later in religious life, *to any who ask you*. Is anyone “asking”? I will briefly expand on each point.

Considering the present state of affairs with religious life and the Church in general, Part 1 encompasses the question: Are the scientists, poets, politicians, economists, atheists, believers, Christian

⁴ Martin Werlen, *Embers in the Ashes: New Life in the Church* (Paulist Press ebook edition, 2013), Chapter 3.

⁵ Patrick Hart (ed.), *A Monastic Vision for the 21st Century: Where do we Go from Here?* (Cistercian Publications, 2006). See suggestions by Dom Bernardo Olivera, xvi.

⁶ A book review of *A Monastic Vision for the 21st Century* by Robert Reilly, ‘A Lifestyle in Trouble?’ in *America*, May 14, 2007, 25-26.

⁷ Tarcisius Van Bavel, *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1996), 44, 86-87.

and non-Christian, asking about the *hope that lives in you*? If not, why? Are religious of congregations even concerned with this question and its connection with the secular world and the violence people experience? Are member religious asking questions? Or is one drifting along knowing that the institution will provide basic needs, security, and comfort? We will use Bernard Lonergan's cognitional process of understanding to explore these questions.⁸ In other words, emphasis will be given between the *hope that lives in you* and the person as the reflecting subject and the desire to know. Lonergan's ideas can assist us in uncovering what underlies issues and the great questions. He is identified by one of the bishops as the "*peritus* (expert) of the *periti* (experts)" and the "intellectual vitality released by the Council."⁹

Reflection on religious life requires a correct understanding of the Vatican II context. In brief, the constitution on the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), which established the aims of the Council, foresees a Church that is primarily Eucharistic in nature and structure. A Vatican II ecclesiology has its centrality in both the Scripture and the Eucharist.¹⁰ This is a paradigm shift similar to the scientific revolution. In Part 2 we want to explore what is at stake with religious life in the post-Conciliar era of the 21st century. Does religious life highlight the Eucharistic Church that Vatican II envisioned? Has it adapted, developed and appropriated that vision, or has it been compromised? Is there "shift" or "drift"? New questions are pondered regarding obstacles and future possibilities. In our consideration of relevant questions and Conciliar context, we will examine once more our present situation through the lens of what Lonergan calls "Foundations."¹¹

However, there remains an older reactionary paradigm of the preconciliar Church that is hierarchically structured as the primary model of Christian witness in the world. This paradigm – called the "reform of the reform" – nullifies the inclusive nature of understanding what the Church is and refuses adjustment to the newer vision and maintains an identity, based on the "Preliminary Explanatory Note" attached to the end of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, that is primarily institutional, clerical,

⁸ "The key biography of Lonergan's life and works, at least for the first fifty years, is that of William A. Mathews, *Lonergan's Quest. A Study of Desire in the Authoring of Insight*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957, 1992), cited in Pierrot Lambert and Philip McShane. *Bernard Lonergan: His Life and Leading Ideas* (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2010), 8, note 6. Lonergan's masterpiece is *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 1957. His second major work is *Method In Theology*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1971, reprint 2007). For an update on Lonergan research and his kataphatic spirituality, see Richard M. Liddy, "The Mystery of Lonergan" in *America*, October 11, 2004 issue [access online]. Resources on the Web are www.lonerganresource.com and www.bernardlonergan.com.

⁹ The "intellectual vitality" referred to is Lonergan's *Method in Theology* – a book in tune with the Council. The claim of being the *peritus* was made in an *interview* given in 1995 by Mons. Gerald Emmet Carter, Auxiliary Bishop of Montreal during Vatican II and subsequently Cardinal Archbishop of Toronto. Cited in G. Whelan, "Bernard Lonergan and the Second Vatican Council" in *Gregoriana* 43 (special issue), 2013, 20-21.

¹⁰ Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform. Liturgy and Ecclesiology in 'Sacrosanctum Concilium*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 17-18.

¹¹ The section on "Foundation" is found in *Method In Theology*, 267-293. "So, as theology is an ongoing process, as religion and religious doctrine themselves develop, the functional specialty, foundations, will be concerned largely with the origins, the genesis, the present state, the possible developments and adaptations of the categories in which Christians understand themselves, communicate with one another, and preach the gospel to all nations" (293).

sexist, and patriarchal.¹² This “Explanatory Note” was a slight-of-hand by conservatives who opposed collegiality and a tool to maintain the status quo. This maneuver of deception has scarred the Church’s self-definition. The Church is terribly polarized and there is profound anguish among believers that bishops fail to recognize. The reintroduction of the Latin Mass as Extraordinary Form and the new English translation of the *Roman Missal* based on the new rules for interpretation from *Liturgiam Authenticam* are examples of this recalcitrance.¹³ Part 3 will examine this clash between these two paradigms and the extent that institutionalized religious life is caught in the conflict. We will use Lonergan’s notion of “Dialectic,” defined as an encounter between persons, appreciating and criticizing their values and actions, to understand the conflict and its root causes as well as the conditions for making the “shift” to the new Eucharistic paradigm of collegiality, inclusivity, and participation.¹⁴

Many people are anxious about the future of their institutes and wonder how to navigate the waters of these confusing times. The best approach is to face the situation intelligently, reasonably, responsibly and with courage. Lonergan highlights the tension of inquiry for understanding and reflection, and an awareness of what it means to be an “authentic and creative” person in the time of change.¹⁵ Following these cues, the structure of this essay is 1) the reflecting person as authentic and creative, 2) the “foundation” paradigm of a Eucharistic ecclesiology established by Vatican II and how religious life is understood within that paradigm, and 3) the conflict between old and new paradigms (dialectic) and questions confronting religious life and the conditions for a “shift” to the new paradigm. We will conclude by pointing toward new terrains in which all Christian living, and religious life in particular, is Eucharistic and can give effective testimony to following Christ, which is the *hope that lives in you*.

Part 1. Lonergan on the reflecting person: “hope that lives in you”

Authentic Christian living begins with an inspiration, an inner experience, motivated by a profound, “unrestricted desire to know,” marked by wonder and awe and not with dogma or doctrines. It is the relationship with someone or some thing that drives one forward. Augustine was aware of this deep inner impulse when he wrote in his *Soliloquies* and later a theme for the history of monasticism: “Let me know myself, let me know You, O God.” In his *Confessions* (10,33,50), he identifies the self as *quaestio*: “I have become an enigma to myself” (*mihi quaestio factus sum*). Pope Francis speaks of this relationship

¹² John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*. (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2008), 244-245.

¹³ John F. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy. A Response to Critics*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 105-133.

¹⁴ The section on “Dialectic” is found in *Method In Theology*, 235-266. “Dialectic, the fourth of our functional specialties, deals with conflicts. The conflicts may be overt or latent. They may lie in religious sources, in the religious tradition, in the pronouncements of authorities, or in the writings of theologians . . . They profoundly modify one’s mentality. They are to be overcome only through an intellectual, moral, religious conversion. The function of dialectic will be to bring such conflicts to light, and to provide a technique that objectifies subjective differences and promotes conversion” (235). Dialectic as encounter (247).

¹⁵ In a talk to young Jesuits, Lonergan highlights the importance of the expression “authenticity and creativity” in “*Existenz and Aggiornamento*,” in *Collection*, Collected Works of Lonergan (hereafter CWL), vol 4, 222-231.

with the person of Jesus in the *opening* lines of “Joy of the Gospel.” Doctrines have their roots in the inner experience.

Symbols disconnected from ordinary life

Hence, abstract ideas about God and the Christian way of life are formulated from a basic experience of encounter and relatedness. In other words, life comes before doctrines. Misunderstanding occurs when doctrines are uprooted from the experiences. A pastoral problem today is that symbols, sacraments, and rituals are disconnected from everyday living. From a recent study of the Pew Forum and CARA, about 45% of Catholics do not believe the sacraments are essential to the faith, *never* participate in the sacrament of reconciliation, and do not believe that Jesus is symbolically mediated in the bread and wine, the gathered assembly, and the proclamation of the scriptures.¹⁶

Cognition process and misguided attitude of “knowing is looking”

People no longer ask questions because the desire to know has faded away from conscious awareness. Christian life, with its worn out patterns, becomes like a woodchip curling around a center that does not exist. It is vital to recover that “center,” for it is from there that one *bears witness*. Lonergan’s classic work *Insight* can shed light on recovering the “center” and that *hope which lives in you*.¹⁷ Naturally, the whole of Lonergan’s thought on the operations of the mind and understanding cannot be treated here in its totality, but some indicators can be pursued regarding how one comes to know through experiencing, inquiring, reflecting, and judging – the cognition process – and how this is important for living authentically and creatively.

Knowing is not looking

Lonergan writes about what is going on in the knower as subject who wants to know, or what is the thinker thinking. How do those operations occur and what patterns of experience happen that give rise to inquiry? A basic approach begins with learning to “see” and not just “look.”¹⁸ “Seeing” asks questions for understanding; “looking” at the “already out there now real” is unreflective and more like empty entertainment. When one sees the stars, the snow falling to the ground, or the dogwood in the first

¹⁶ Kathleen Hughes, *Becoming the Sign. Sacramental Living in a Post-Conciliar Church*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), 73-75. Joseph Mudd, *Eucharist as Meaning. Critical Metaphysics and Contemporary Sacramental Theology*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, Kindle edition, 2014), location 764. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Mysterium Fidei* both refer to the various “presences” of Christ in the Eucharist. Also, John F. Baldovin, “An Active Presence” in *America*, May 27, 2013 issue [accessed online].

¹⁷ In *Insight*, chapters 1-8 explore understanding and chapters 9-13 deal with how correct understanding can be discerned (see p. xx). Terry J. Tekippe, *Bernard Lonergan. An Introductory Guide to Insight* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003) is a helpful aid. Tad Dunne, “Lonergan and Spirituality” can be accessed at www.lonerganresource.com. This work offers a fine introduction for those beginning with Lonergan’s ideas.

¹⁸ Lonergan has a polemic against this shortsighted form of reasoning that “looking” is enough to understand a situation. Tekippe, *Bernard Lonergan*, 18.

bloom of the season, one pauses and wonders at what is seen. This experience provides a kind of awakening that the stars, snow, and budding trees want to communicate with us as though they possess a certain kind of intelligence all their own.

But if I turn to myself and reflect on my capacity to wonder, I come to an awareness of an inner depth that is not empty space but a kind of presence and I ask “why?” Searching for answers to the “why” leads me to insight and then to more questions. Why do the stars twinkle? Why does snow sparkle? Motivated by the experience of wonder I begin to be more attentive and inquire about life that surrounds me and is within me (cf. Romans 5:5).

Capacity to wonder and desire to know: the “authentic” person

The capacity to wonder is what makes humans distinct from other animals. Dogs and cats do not wonder why it is raining outside or question why bells and nametags dangle from their collars. Animals respond to stimuli and instinct in an unconscious manner rather than wonder about String theory, black holes and if there is meaning, purpose, and direction in life. Human beings have a different capacity that is conscious: humans have the gifted ability to be aware and to be captivated by awe and Eros, which are linked to the pure, unrestricted desire to know.¹⁹

If one is attentive to the desire to know, one begins to ask questions for understanding and for critical reflection. Here I ask the reader to pause and to become aware of what is going on inside you when serious questions are posed to you. Why do I wonder? What does this mean? How is it related to other things? It is clear that knowing is not “looking.”²⁰ For example, a person can “look” at the Evening News, which is not the same as “to know” or “to being informed.”²¹ Being informed entails asking questions, making connections, and looking for insights. It is a dynamic process of reflection that begins to ask questions from different viewpoints and there are insights into the experience or issue at hand.

Once there is clarity and no more questions on the issue, then a judgment is made: “Is it so? True or false? Yes or no?” At this point, a decision is put into action. Lonergan calls this action the work of the “authentic” person.²² This is particularly important for the discussion on the paradigm shift in Part 3.

¹⁹ For fuller treatment of this theme, see *Insight*, 488-504.

²⁰ *Insight*, 441.

²¹ See the section on “Self-affirmation” in *Insight*, 352. In Chapter 9 of *Insight*, Lonergan makes the important point that there are two types of questions: questions for intelligence and questions for reflection. After one has acquired the necessary data on the experience, questions for intelligence ask “what, why, how, where,” etc. While maintaining the “tension of inquiry,” questions for reflection are concerned with “Is it so?” A judgment is made to the effect of being yes or no.

²² Bernard Lonergan, “The Response of the Jesuit as Priest and Apostle in the Modern World” in *A Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974, reprint 1996), 165-187. “Human authenticity is a matter of following the built-in law of the human spirit. Because we can experience, we should attend. Because we can understand, we should inquire. Because we can reach the truth, we should reflect and check. Because we can realize values in ourselves and promote them in others, we should deliberate. In the measure that we follow these precepts, in the measure we fulfill these conditions of being human persons, we also achieve self-transcendence both in the field of knowledge and in the field of action” (169-170).

Bias: derailment of the knowing process

The object of the knowing process is to come to a judgment. But that process can be truncated by other motives that are opposed to the unrestricted drive to know. The reader is surely aware of how many times people make judgments without having all the data or facts. Underlying emotions and interests influence the judgments. These motives emerge when the cognition process is affected by bias, because bias fails to follow the cognitional process. Lonergan speaks of several kinds of bias in Chapters 6 and 7 of *Insight*: dramatic bias, egoist bias, group bias, and common sense bias.

Bias occurs when one refuses to consider all the data at hand, or the necessary questions to be asked, and makes rash judgments based more on personal self-centeredness or group shortsightedness than dealing with the insights and new questions from the process of inquiry. This refusal to be attentive is the “flight from understanding” Lonergan refers to in the “Preface” to *Insight*. The person *prefers* not to understand. When one, as the unauthentic person, does not attend to the experiencing, inquiring, and reflecting *process*, then the accumulation of bias judgments will contribute to the “cycle of decline.”

Inner experience and knowing Reality

Thus far we have stressed the need to ask questions which touches on the *hope that lives in you*. If this inner experience is ambiguous and abstract, the quality of the hope and witnessing will be dubious. It is not enough just to ask questions; one must go to a deeper reality. I invite the reader to do an experiment.²³ Take and hold in your hand a pencil, cellphone, or any object. Say the word “it” several times; repeat it over to get a sense of its reality as it is. Say “it,” “it,” “it” . . . Get a feel for the sense of the object.

Then turn your attention from “it” and say “you.” Repeat it slowly and consciously several times, “you,” “you,” “you.” You might sense a shift that this “you” is somewhat responsible for the “it.” The “you” becomes a “You” and there is a sense of reality and interconnectedness with things around you; “everything suddenly becomes overwhelmingly personal.”²⁴ The “You” is connected to the notion of “following Christ” and becomes the *hope* that is within. The *hope* is in a “You.”

The Body of Christ: Religious life as one of many diverse parts

In our present reflection we have to ponder whether vowed religious life promotes creativity and authenticity as a focus among its members. Do religious gravitate toward the “You” that is within and live from that center? Some wonder, in the era of diminishment, if religious life concentrates too much on self-preservation and on the externals of its life style, rather than taking seriously their capacity to attend to the experiencing of the data, inquiring about the causes and implications, and reflecting and making decisions from these experiences. The challenge is to move from institutional anxiety to a community of

²³ Adapted from Tad Dunne, *We Cannot Find Words: The Foundations of Prayer* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1981), 18f. The author applies Lonergan’s ideas to understanding prayer.

²⁴ Dunne, *We Cannot Find Words*, 19.

individuals who are attentive to and want to follow the “You.” Are congregations ready and capable of giving voice to the knowledge of the *hope that lives in you*? This is the question.

To answer these questions we need to go beyond what Vatican II says about religious life in *Perfectae Caritatis* and Chapter VI of *Lumen Gentium*,²⁵ but to the radical baptismal call to follow Christ in the overall dynamic of the Council itself and to foster expression of a Eucharistic Church. To know this is to attend to what the Council wanted, to what Lonergan calls “Foundations” in *Method in Theology*, before jumping to conclusions on how *to bear witness*.²⁶

Part 2. Foundations: Vision of the Council: “to bear witness”

Three Dynamisms of the Vatican II Paradigm

Keeping in mind Lonergan’s process of knowing, or cognition, the vision of vowed community life must be taken within the whole context of Vatican II to which I refer to as “dynamisms.” The temptation is to hunt through the text of the “Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life” for answers, and not see the broader horizon that the Council set forth for conversion and reform of structures. This broader horizon is the “foundation” from which trends are taken into consideration.²⁷ There are three dynamisms or trends at the Council: *aggiornamento, ressourcement, and rapprochement*.²⁸ These dynamisms constitute a new paradigm in the Church’s self-understanding and mission in the world. The greatest impact of the new paradigm is with the understanding of the laity and the role of the bishops. Aside from the updating of the rules and constitutions, the structures of religious communities in general have not received the Vatican II paradigm. In fact, the reverse has taken hold in the era of the “reform of the reform,” in the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. That era is far from over, in spite of the presence of a Pope Francis.

When Pope John XXIII convoked the Vatican Council, he made it clear that it was a *pastoral* Council,²⁹ with the purpose not to correct errors in doctrine and condemn heresies, but to have a discerning attitude of openness to the movements of the Spirit in the Church and in the world, which he

²⁵ Vatican II. Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae Caritatis*, promulgated on October 28, 1965. Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated on November 21, 1964.

²⁶ See the article by Tad Dunne, “Method In Theology: A Summary” in www.lonerganresource.com on the functional specialties, especially “Foundations” and “Dialectic” for “Critical Theology” and “Theological Anthropology” (5).

²⁷ The category of “Foundations” is treated in *Method In Theology*, Chapter 7. “Foundations” deals with “deliberation, evaluation, decision . . . It is total surrender to the demands of the human spirit: be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible, be in love” (268). See footnote 9.

²⁸ Baldovin, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 36-43, 300. Also Baldovin, “An Active Presence.”

²⁹ Lonergan explores this theme in “Pope John’s Intention” in *A Third Collection. Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan*, S.J., Edited by F. Crowe, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 224-238.

called *aggiornamento*.³⁰ The underlying dynamic of all the discussions is a fundamental openness to the unknown and unfamiliar and an acceptance of the historical process.³¹

A dimension of “being open” to future possibilities involves another dynamic of “returning to the sources,” or *ressourcement*. This trend is an invitation to ground oneself in the Tradition, or a foundation. The return to the sources of wisdom accumulated over the centuries is a way of proceeding forward. This spawned a tremendous interest in research and new translations of the great texts of spiritual founders and the early Church.

The last dynamic trend is “approaching the other who is different,” or *rapprochement*. No text, constitution, or decree from the Council spoke specifically about *rapprochement*; rather it is that fundamental attitude that penetrated the texts, especially on how the Church relates with the world (*Gaudium et spes*), communicates with other non-Christian traditions (*Nostra Aetate*), collaborates ecumenically with other Christian churches (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), and listens and works together with the laity as partners in the mission of the Church (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*). These three dynamic trends form the framework against which religious life in its varied dimensions must be analyzed. Congregations ought to evaluate themselves with the criteria of *aggiornamento*, *ressourcement*, and *rapprochement*.³²

Aims of the Council and the link between liturgy and ecclesiology

Before moving on there is another factor about Vatican II that must be identified and brought into our focus: the aims of the Council itself. Keep in mind that these aims are not static but are a part of the dynamisms of *aggiornamento*, *ressourcement*, and *rapprochement*. The opening paragraph of the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) identifies the goals:³³

- 1) Renewal with “increasing vigor”
- 2) Adaptation of the structures to modern times
- 3) Ecumenism
- 4) Evangelization

³⁰ For a history of the development of *aggiornamento*, see John W. O'Malley, “Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II's *Aggiornamento*” in *Theological Studies*, 32 (1971): 573-601. [Accessed online].

³¹ Bernard Lonergan, “The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness” in *A Second Collection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974, reprint 1996), 1-9.

³² Faggioli, *True Reform*, 17-18 on the description of *rapprochement*. Olivera identifies various adjustments to these criteria in terms of size of buildings to the size of communities, reordering economic structures with view of the poor and globalization, readjusting work for spiritual purpose, inculturating liturgies and examining the meaningfulness of our symbols, etc. Hart, *A Monastic Vision for the 21st Century*, xvi.

³³ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), Vatican Council II, December 4, 1963, no.1: “This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigor 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. The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy.”

After identifying these goals, the document immediately declares: “The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy” and “structural revision of liturgical rites” (Nos. 21 and 23). This is very important. The manner in which the liturgy is celebrated and understood will point to a way of being Church. In other words, liturgy and ecclesiology are intimately connected and they give expression to each other.³⁴ This link is often not recognized by liturgy planners or by those who discuss the mission of the Church.

Liturgy was adapted to represent the Church it wanted to see realized. According to the brilliant liturgist Ralph Kiefer (1940-1987),³⁵ the repositioning of the altar to face the assembly is the major change effected. The change says something about a shift in the Church’s self-understanding from the institutional church as the primary model to that of a *sacramental* community on the move and a real presence of the living Christ in the world.³⁶ Where the traditional church was FOR the people, the new paradigm is calling for a living Church OF the people.³⁷

The ecclesiology found in the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” – based on baptism and the common priesthood of the faithful – projects an understanding of the Church as a “eucharistic people”—a community identity of sisters and brothers of Christ, daughters and sons of the Father. The task of the “Eucharistic people” is to “give flesh here and now to the crucified God by exercising true freedom in loving God and neighbor.”³⁸ Every time the community gathers for liturgy it is being a Eucharistic church and it is the “work of Christ himself” (Nos. 5 to 10). The community lives as an expression of “full, conscious, active participation” (No. 14). The intent is to do this not just “spiritually,” but in reality, as *communion, participation, and dialogue*, and this includes the structures as well.³⁹ Since this ecclesiology is so foundational to the Council, we can call Vatican II a “Eucharistic paradigm.” We might pause and ask ourselves if vowed religious communities have embraced the “Eucharistic paradigm” and have explicit structural, collegial expressions of “full, conscious, active participation” within the institutional church. What would those structures look like?

Polarization in the liturgy and ecclesiology

The connection between liturgy and ecclesiology is an insight that has developed over a century through the Liturgical Movement in Europe and the United States.⁴⁰ Upon closer examination, one discovers a different kind of ecclesiology in the “Constitution on the Church” (*Lumen gentium*), especially with the “Preliminary Note of Explanation” (*Nota Explicativa Praevia*) at the end of the document, which highlights in contradictory fashion a pre-Conciliar structure and hierarchy and an utter contradiction to the

³⁴ See Faggioli, *True Reform*.

³⁵ I had the fortunate opportunity to study liturgy and homiletics with Professor Kiefer at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

³⁶ Hughes, *Becoming the Sign*, 6-7. See Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy*, 105-133.

³⁷ Johann B. Metz, *Followers of Christ. Perspectives on the Religious Life*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, translated 1978), 33.

³⁸ Mudd, *Eucharist as Meaning*, loc. 744-755.

³⁹ J. F. Baldovin, “An Active Presence.”

⁴⁰ Faggioli, *True Reform*. See also Hughes, *Becoming the Sign*.

ecclesiology of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.⁴¹ The difference is striking and palpable. The tension and polarization in the Church today is between an understanding of Church as Eucharistic and one that is of the Appendix, between a constitution and a compromise. With the last two popes, the vision of the “Preliminary Note” has been elevated to a higher status and themes like the “People of God” and the “priesthood of the baptized” have been reduced in significance. This shift and contradiction to the idea of a “reform of the reform” should cause one to wonder how a Eucharistic church fits within a structure that sees itself as monarchical. One only has to examine the negative impact of the new English translation of the *Roman Missal* based on the instruction of *Liturgicam Authenticam*, issued in 2001.⁴² This document eliminated the guidelines for a free flowing translation that is sensitive to modern sensibilities, called *dynamic equivalence*, for a more formal translation of liturgical texts based on official Latin originals.⁴³

From polarization to communion, participation, and dialogue

The way to view this apparent contradiction and confusion is to be aware of its source. The Council has opened many doors and there are a multitude of interpretations. One must decide where one is going to stand in the interpretation of what it means to be Church in the world and how does that Church celebrates its liturgy and prayer. Hopefully, communities in general can move beyond polarization toward a greater reception of the Council: one that is committed to the horizon of *communion, participation, and dialogue*.

What does this discussion on Vatican II have for religious congregations and the meaning *to bear witness . . . to the hope that lives in you*? The act of bearing *witness* involves the horizon of *communion, participation, and dialogue*. The horizon of this new paradigm is an open-system that is willing to engage the unknown with courage and to risk being influenced toward greater change. The vision that is witnessed is one of companionship, hospitality, and compassion. Individual religious and communities need to ask questions and to probe deeper into issues to see where they are with bearing *witness* to this new horizon.

A person or organization has the right to critique others only if they themselves accept self-criticism. What is the criterion for change? Is it Christ and the world with all its complexities or is it the Order’s founders and supposed safety net and survival of closed institutional structures? In the Augustinian tradition, for example, “it is Christ, not Augustine; the world, not the Order.”⁴⁴ Some areas for

⁴¹ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 244-245, 311. The “Nota Explicativa Praevia” does not appear in any of the printed Spanish translations of *Lumen Gentium*. It does appear, however, in the online document at www.vatican.va.

⁴² Andrea Grillo, *Beyond Pius V. Conflicting Interpretations of the Liturgical Reform*. Translated by Barry Hudock, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013). Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012).

⁴³ The guidelines for dynamic equivalence and translation of liturgical texts are found in Paul VI’s instruction *Comme le Prevoit*, issued in 1969. See text: http://www.natcath.org/NCR_Online/documents/comme.htm

⁴⁴ This expression is from a conversation I had with Tarsicius van Bavel, OSA, at the monastery in Heverlee, Belgium.

change might be examining the symbols and customs, simplifying forms of authority and its relation with communities and each person, searching for new ways to live together, and discussing new forms of living traditional values, such as poverty, celibacy, fasting, austerity, silence, solitude, and fraternal correction.⁴⁵

Each religious must ponder the questions and decide where to stand in relation to the invitation to follow Christ: in creativity or in comfort; in authenticity or in conformity. As Church membership dwindles and religious orders diminish, it is no longer a luxury to postpone honest inquiry and confront the situation as is and move beyond “praying for vocations” and implementing complex marketing strategies. The Jesuit General Pedro Arrupe speaks to this congregational hesitancy.

“In all these experiences and encounters [in the countries of the third world] I am continually overcome by a concerned feeling of urgency. Do not we Christians hesitate too much and too long? Are not our plans often too long-term and do they not play safe too much? Surely we stick too readily to what is guaranteed and tested, and our courage deserts us too rapidly when we face open-ended and risk ventures. I do not want here to speak up for aimless panic. But if according to Scripture we are called on to read the signs of the times, then included in that today is essentially a feeling for the closeness of our deadlines and a readiness to act quickly.”⁴⁶

Where do we go from here? As we compare these two paradigms, we see the necessity for a “shift” or conversion in oneself from one horizon to another. Our focus in the next section is on the nature of this “shift” as the reception of the Council with its dynamisms of *aggiornamento*, *ressourcement* and *rapprochement* and whether or not vowed communities have appropriated the “shift” and dynamisms. In other words, have religious communities appropriated in its structures a sense of openness, a return to its sources, and the courage to risk and reach out to the unfamiliar?

Part 3. *Dialectic, Paradigm Shifts: “witness to any who ask you”*

To understand the situation better and religious life in the post-Vatican II era, we will apply Lonergan’s concept of “Dialectic” to the present reality. In *Method In Theology*, dialectic means an encounter or a meeting between persons. Dialectic involves an appreciation of one another’s values and deeds, a criticism of defects, and allows one’s living to be challenged by their words and actions.⁴⁷ Thus, the dialectic is the encounter of persons living between two paradigms: the new paradigm of Vatican II and the older paradigm of the “reform of the reform.” We will explore these two paradigms and the “shift” required to move from one to the other. Integral to the shift is the unique role of religious congregations to be “provocative” within its communities and the institutional church by raising important questions and

⁴⁵ Hart, *A Monastic Vision for the 21st Century*, xvi.

⁴⁶ From an address Arrupe gave in the Paulskirche at Frankfurt in 1976 - cited in Metz, *Followers of Christ*, 79-80.

⁴⁷ *Method In Theology*, 247.

encouraging conversion. We will conclude by pointing to possible future directions toward a resolution that would rely on the human's need for authenticity, a need that is expressed by fuller conversion.⁴⁸

Vatican II Paradigm in the dialectic

Most of the details of this Vatican II paradigm have already been worked out in Part 2: Foundations. Briefly, the theme that marks this paradigm is the Church's self-understanding (horizon) as a Eucharistic Church and the reform of the liturgy reflects that reality. Ecclesiology and liturgy are connected. Vatican II is a Eucharistic paradigm, characterized by the community of believers, centered on Word and Eucharist, and as an extension of Christ's bodily presence in history that is revolutionary and demanding. Words that depict this paradigm are "charism," "dialogue," "partnership," "cooperation," and "friendship" and they point to a new style of authority, thinking, speaking, and behaving.⁴⁹

The challenge today is to revisit how the changes in the liturgy, such as moving the altar away from the wall and the language of the ritual is in the vernacular all reflect a change in relationships between the faithful and hierarchy, between the understanding of ministry and ordination, and between Church and the world. A key phrase from the document on the liturgy is "full, conscious, active participation" in the liturgy (SC 14). But such active participation does not stop with the liturgy; it ought to overflow into the structures of the parish and diocese at all levels. The identity of the Church is not based on gender or hierarchical class, but on baptism and the common priesthood of all the faithful. The Jesuit Robert Taft says that the "Liturgy is the Christian life in a nutshell."⁵⁰ The role of the religious orders and congregations must reflect this new identity of "full, conscious, active participation" and the Church as Eucharistic.

The Eucharistic Church is a dynamic reality that is constantly moving and evolving. It is a living reality of engagement. As an event, the Council vibrated with significant attitudes that characterized itself as one of creative openness (*aggiornamento*), always finding its ground in the sources of tradition and wisdom (*ressourcement*), and a willing engagement of approaching the "other" that is different (*rapprochement*). Religious communities – in their formation programs, governance, and ministry -- ought to embrace these same attitudes of openness, return to the sources of its original inspiration, and engage the new, the strange, and the unknown. Five decades later the paradigm of Vatican II -- inclusive in participation, collegial in decisions, and open to inculturation -- is still not received in actuality.

Clash between Paradigms

From the beginning the sessions at the Vatican Council struggled to be unified in thought and in task. Different camps emerged immediately around various premises: Does doctrine change? Is

⁴⁸ *Method In Theology*, 254. Robert Doran has an interesting outlook on counterpositions. Describing his approach to the work of Rene Girard, Doran's attitude is to work with the positive aspects and eventually the counterposition will disappear. R. Doran, "A Response" in "Method. Journal of Lonergan Studies," n.s. 4.1 (2013): 62, 73.

⁴⁹ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 11.

⁵⁰ Baldwin, "An Active Presence."

collegiality dangerous? What are Tradition and the meaning of “the world”? Each camp had its own interpretive horizon. The seeds of division sprouted immediately after the Council and the attempt to implement adaptations and changes in church life. Religious communities were also caught up in this struggle as they attempted to study and update their rules and constitutions. The clash exacerbated itself to such an extent that real polarization between the conservative and progressive camps effected breakdown in dialogue. Still, conservatives call for a “reform of the reform” and progressives find themselves more in the minority and many leave the church completely. In spite of the progressive calls for reform by Pope Francis, the clash between an ideology and a movement for change becomes more toxic.

The division of fundamental attitudes in the Church between pro- and anti-Vatican II mindsets is found in the Conciliar documents. The document on the liturgy points to a Church that is centered on the Word of God and the Eucharist, and encourages “full, conscious, active participation” on the part of all the baptized, not just in the liturgy, but in its style of life and mission in the world (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-31). In preparation for the Synod on Marriage and Family Life, Pope Francis mandated a survey in which all the faithful were invited to answer. This survey is an example of “active participation” of the body of Christ. The body of Christ is represented as the *totus Christus*, all people of good will, as well as the sacrament on the altar. This image of Church is more inclusive and involves all the baptized and not just hierarchy, clerics and vowed religious.

The image of church in the “Explanatory Note” finds its expression in the nostalgia of the liturgy that privileges Latin as the “sacred” language for worship. The hierarchy is the ecclesial center and the faithful do not ask questions and are mere observers with the crumbs of pious devotions curled up in a privatized spirituality. Eucharist is for adoration: *look at Jesus as Jesus looks at you*.⁵¹ Augustine’s Eucharistic theology of *receive what you are, be what you receive* is strange language in this paradigm. In this closed liturgical environment, there are only altar boys who look like “miniature clerics” (Italian: *chiericetti*)⁵² and girls are prohibited in the sanctuary. Women wear veils and bells are rung at the consecration. The image of church in this paradigm, to which many religious are attached, is gender-specific and power, which lacks theological justification, lies with celibate male clerics. It is an image that does not connect well with the secular world of the 21st century.

In 2007, when Pope Benedict XVI issued the Apostolic Letter *Summorum Pontificum* that permitted the Latin Mass as the “Extraordinary Form” of the liturgy, the old ecclesiology of the pre-Vatican II era was re-established as a legitimate form for being a church community. This is precisely where the clash occurs and reverberates in religious communities. Much as in the time of Augustine and the

⁵¹ Taken from an ACTS Newsletter, “40 Things to do during Lent,” in El Paso, Texas.

⁵² See Werlen, *Embers in the Ashes*, Chapter 6. After the Council, altar boys and girls exchanged the black cassock and white surplus for a white alb (gown) that signified baptismal consecration. In recent times, the white alb has disappeared and replaced with the older black cassock and surplus. Symbols have meaning. Why the regression?

Donatists in the late 4th century, the Catholic Church has “two altars” that oppose each other. Time will tell how this situation will move forward. Schism is a possibility.⁵³

What are some of the underlying factors to the clash between these two paradigms? The issue is over the question of continuity. Critics of Vatican II claim that the Council failed to be one of continuity with Church tradition. Nevertheless, certain attitudes had to come to an end if the church is going to be effective in the world. In terms of discontinuity, it brought an end to clericalism that was inherited from the Edict of Milan (313). The liturgy was no longer the exclusive domain of the clergy. What this means is that the Constantinian Era, clericalism, and church privilege came to an end with Vatican II. It also brought to an end to the Church’s reactionary attitudes toward the Protestant Reform.⁵⁴ With the revival of the “reform of the reform” the clerical and negative attitudes are embraced once again, often promoted under the defensive banner of “apologetics.” The impact on religious communities is tremendous. Religious garb became the distinctive identity among communities; formation withdrew to isolated areas away from the city; liturgical correctness became the issue of the day. It is all about the exterior expressions and little with inner experience and religious conversion.

Closing of the mind as root cause for clash

What are the causes to this clash between two paradigms, between the Conciliar and “reform of the reform” ecclesiologies? Another way to pose the question is why is there a clash in the first place? Lonergan writes that bias is at the root of the clashes and accumulation of bias causes a spiral of decline. Bias is the closing of the mind for self-centered reasons, for either the individual or for a group. Individual and group bias see reality only in terms of what benefits itself, to the exclusion of others and their needs. Ultimately, it is self-destructive. No serious questions are asked. Understanding falters and there are no insights necessary for the move forward. The heart is closed to conversion and to God’s grace.

Such bias is operative on many levels in religious communities. Individual bias moves people toward joining a group because of its customs, nostalgia, and an enclosed community safe from the world. Its relationship with outsiders of the community tends to be minimal and clique-like. Women and young people are viewed as invisible persons in the common room. Ideologies are often formed and defended. As a result, religious communities become insignificant and contribute nothing to human flourishing. We must ask what happened to the congregation’s original inspiration and how does it contribute to a change in direction?

“Shock therapy:” Role for Religious Congregations

Vatican II is a clarion call to transition or what Robert M. Doran calls a “psychic conversion” – a notion endorsed by Lonergan -- from the old symbolic paradigm to the new, or from one’s horizon of

⁵³ Stephen Eisenhammer of Reuters, “Rogue Catholic bishops plan to grow schismatic challenge to Rome,” March 30, 2015, accessed at http://news.yahoo.com/rogue-catholic-bishops-plan-grow-schismatic-challenge-rome-200456706.html?soc_src=mail&soc_trk=ma

⁵⁴ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 3-5.

understanding to another.⁵⁵ What we want to concentrate on is the notion of the “shift” from the old to the new paradigm and the role for religious communities in this dynamic. This shift is really a shock, one that is abrupt and a jolt with serious repercussions. In this paradigm structures are altered through a paradigm shift; feelings are heightened; insights emerge; consequences lead to other courses of action. We have seen such shifts with the scientific revolution, as in the shift regarding the insights from a geocentric to a heliocentric horizon of understanding. In this section we want to analyze what elements contribute to the “shift.” Lonergan has much to say about this in how he understands the growth and decline of institutions, but first a word must be said about the role of all Christians in general, and of religious congregations in particular, in fostering the “shift.”

The reception of the Vatican II paradigm “shift” is incumbent on all baptized members of the church. The decisions of the Council are to become part of the lives of Christians throughout the world.⁵⁶ The role of the religious congregation is to move to a different viewpoint, to something beyond itself, namely, to help others “to follow Christ.” This is its “supreme rule” and reason for existence.⁵⁷ There are various expressions of what this means for the wider church. J. B. Metz says vowed religious congregations provide a kind of “shock therapy” to the institutional church.⁵⁸ The congregation is a protest movement when church structures begin to move away from the radical following of Christ of the Gospels and are more concerned with its own status and self-preservation. Pope Francis encourages vowed and monastic communities, and lay institutes, during the Year of Consecrated Life to embrace their “prophetic” dimension.⁵⁹

This “shock therapy” is also echoed in the Swiss Abbot Martin Werlen’s call for a “pro-vocation” in the church filled with ashes and worn out ideas and patterns of behavior. *Embers Under the Ashes* is meant to *provoke* questioning at the deepest levels.⁶⁰ The questions, asked by all the faithful and not just those in monastic vows, are like pebbles dropped in water and one waits and sees the ripple effects. Where do they go? Who is affected? Does anyone care?

Other individuals have lived out their prophetic call to stimulate the church into thinking about itself and its mission through “shock therapy.” Sister of St. Joseph Amy Hereford speaks of religious life

⁵⁵ I am grateful to Tad Dunne from Siena Heights University for bringing to my attention Doran’s notion of “psychic conversion.” A psychic conversion is where one drops one symbolic understanding of God’s work in the world and replaces it with one better grounded in scripture, history, and tradition. See Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990, 2001), 116-18, 421-39. For Lonergan’s endorsement of psychic conversion, see his *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1989*, vol. 17 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 390.

⁵⁶ G. Alberigo, J-P Jossua, and J. A. Komonchak (eds), *The Reception of Vatican II*. Matthew J. O’Connell (trans.), (Wash. DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987).

⁵⁷ *Perfectae Caritatis*, (Decree on the Up-To-Date Renewal of Religious Life), Vatican Council II, October 28, 1965, no. 2.

⁵⁸ Metz, *Followers of Christ*, 11-18.

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *To All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life*, 2014, II, 2. Pope Francis also addresses the laity in this letter, II,5; III,1-2; and to monastics of other religious traditions, III,3-4.

⁶⁰ Werlen, *Embers in the Ashes*, Chapter 5.

as “a school for mystics and prophets.”⁶¹ Franciscan Richard Rohr promotes ecumenical thinking and explorations through various mystical traditions in his conferences like *Conspire*, a program of the Center for Action and Contemplation. A frequent speaker at these events is the Franciscan scientist Ilia Delio who links faith and evolutionary science. Using social media, Benedictine Anthony Ruff raises challenging issues regarding the liturgy at *PrayTell*. Australian Jesuit Gerald O’Collins has called on all bishops to take a stand on the English translation of the 2011 liturgy and to implement the 1998 Sacramentary.⁶²

“Shock treatments” always spring from a connection with the deep inner self and the silent contact with “You.” Contemplative prayer is a path to the radical following of Christ. An emergence of various forms of prayer and lectio divina are found in the programs of the Cistercian Thomas Keating and the Benedictine Laurence Freeman, which spread to lay people in all walks of life. One can remember Karl Rahner’s statement that the Christian of the future will be a mystic or nothing at all.⁶³

Commitment to social justice is the fruit of contemplative prayer. Recently, the “Nuns on the Bus” crisscrossed the United States to raise the issue of the economy and the plight of the poor. Others have been radical in calling attention to social justice, like John Dear and Roy Bourgeois, both suffered consequences by the institutional church for their actions. All of these individuals touched the source of their spirituality in what it means to “follow Christ.” They are voices of courage that challenge the established structures within the confusion of the crisis.

Lonergan contributes to these prophetic voices by showing a direction one can choose to facilitate a paradigm shift and thereby growth into the new paradigm. Growth is built on asking questions and gaining insights; decline is infected by bias, in which shortcomings become cumulative, like a dumping ground. The situation degenerates to a point of no return and needs “healing.” Lonergan writes

“Growth, progress, is a matter of situations yielding insights, insights yielding policies and projects, policies and projects transforming the initial situation, and the transformed situation giving rise to further insights that correct and complement the deficiencies of previous insights. So the wheel of progress moves forward through the successive transformations of an initial situation in which are gathered coherently and cumulatively all the insights that occurred along the way.

But this wheel of progress becomes a wheel of decline when the process is distorted by bias. . . the more the objective situation becomes a mere dump, the less is there any possibility of human intelligence gathering from the situation anything more than a lengthy catalogue of the aberrations and the follies of the past.”⁶⁴

Shift happens

Many factors contribute to a shift from one paradigm to another. Lonergan offers one approach that involves the accumulation of insights through a continual process of inquiry that leads to intellectual

⁶¹ Amy Hereford, *Religious Life at the Crossroads. A School for Mystics and Prophets*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2013).

⁶² <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/letters/8/4883/open-letter-to-english-speaking-bishops>

⁶³ Karl Rahner, “Christian Living Formerly and Today,” in *Theological Investigations VII*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 15 as quoted in Harvey D. Egan, *Soundings in the Christian Mystical Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 338.

⁶⁴ Lonergan, “Healing and Creating in History” in *A Third Collection*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 105.

conversion. As individuals pursue questions for greater understanding and reflection, and move to higher viewpoints, communities are stimulated with insights that may contribute to acts of judgment and action. The insight contributes to a *prophetic* action and *shock*.

Communities are also free to reject such insights. Thus the tension within paradigm shifts becomes more felt. Whatever is the case, in order to be authentic to one self, serious questions, and the right questions⁶⁵ must be asked. Lonergan develops this line of thought in the transcendental precepts: Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible, and later adds Be in love.⁶⁶ This is why in the beginning of the essay the reader is asked about the habit of asking questions. Questions open the possibility for intellectual conversion and new values, which advances one to higher viewpoints and more questions and more insights. The “shift” happens when a person is open to conversion and grace and when there is the accumulation of insights from higher viewpoints toward a new horizon.

So, are members of religious communities asking any serious questions?

Final Thoughts for New Directions

This essay on religious life in the post-Vatican II era revolved around the verse from 1 *Peter*: *Always be ready to bear witness to any who ask you of the hope that lives in you*. We began with the question: Is religious life obsolete? For sure, many religious congregations will pass into extinction and this is not new in the history of the church.⁶⁷ Many more will remain irrelevant, without spark, and not address the needs in society. The communities that will thrive in their mission will be those comprised of individuals who ask the deep questions about the radical following of Christ and, like “shock therapy,” prophetically challenge the church institutions and others at the same time as to their fidelity in following the Gospel. We might ponder the question from a different viewpoint: Who gives “shock therapy” to the religious congregations?

Where do we go from here as the Vatican II event slips further into the past? Let me make a suggestion for a direction for all members of the Body of Christ, of which vowed religious communities are only a part. We begin with what perturbs (shocks?) all people--world violence and everything it entails. Serious people are becoming more aware that they can be good, compassionate, and loving people who can contribute to the building of a more just, non-violent society without becoming a Christian. This is obviously true. But they might *ask you of the hope that lives in you*. They might ask what solution do you have for the problem of evil and the pervasiveness of world violence?

Christianity makes sense because it does have a response to violence. The symbol of the crucifix is the *question mark* that embraces all the violence and death that surrounds the human race and planet. The symbol of the Cross asks: What are you going to do about it? Do we even care what is happening in the world? Do religious communities even care? Is there something in my inner experience that wakes

⁶⁵ *Insight*, 502.

⁶⁶ *Method In Theology*, 231-232.

⁶⁷ Van Bavel, *The Basic Inspiration*, 86-87.

me up to this reality? Is the vision of Vatican II of communion, participation, and dialogue really an alternative to the experience of violence?

The answer is “the table.” Table fellowship and inclusiveness where all people sit together as equals and break bread.⁶⁸ As a symbol, its meaning connects to eating, thriving, keeping company, discussing, debating, hosting, laughing, cooking, doing dishes, celebrating, family, remembering who we are.⁶⁹ The table, as a social and an alternative reality, is the place to be “shocked,” as Jesus was and continues to be in human hearts and in the Word.⁷⁰ This response is summed up in the words of the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin:

“At this table (Eucharist) we put aside every worldly separation based on culture, class, or other differences. This communion is why all prejudice, all racism, all sexism, all deference to wealth and power must be banished from our parishes, our homes, our lives.”⁷¹

The answer to the Cross is the paradigm *shock* of new grace and openness to a new horizon of what it means to be a Eucharistic Church. The old worn out forms and structures of religious life are obsolete and belong in a museum. It is not the end. It is the hour to be authentic, creative and to make responsible decisions.

So, what is the *hope that lives in you?*

April 4, 2015

Holy Saturday: *In anticipation of Resurrection-Shock*

(File: Religious Life in the Post Vat II draft 4.docx)

⁶⁸ Santos Yao, “The Table Fellowship of Jesus with the Marginalized: A Radical Inclusiveness.” This is a PDF file that can be accessed by opening the Google browser and writing the author’s name and title of the article in the search field. The first item – apollo.ws -- among the searches is the article.

⁶⁹ See Ghislain Lafont, *Eucharist. The Meal and the Word* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008). Mudd, *Eucharist as Meaning*.

⁷⁰ I am grateful to Prof. Liam Bergen at Boston College who suggested this connection with Jesus who often “provoked” others when he sat at table, as in the example of Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10).

⁷¹ Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, *Our Communion, Our Peace, Our Promise. Pastoral Letter on the Liturgy*. February 1984, in *Selected Works of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin. Homilies and Teaching Documents*, Vol. 1 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 11-26, quote at 22.