

## **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. The “unaffiliated” category is growing every year. 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, issues of gender and sexual orientations, women’s ordination, authoritarianism, closed-mindedness and arrogance. 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 religious life obsolete?

How we approach the question and what other questions are asked are 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?

Leadership of the diverse expressions of religious life has already manifested concern over the crisis and relevancy of the consecrated life style. Among these 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.<sup>1</sup> What is at stake is religious life as a “believable sign of our times.” In a study on religious life, several collaborators offer insights and optimism in *A Monastic Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Where do we go from here?*<sup>2</sup> It is clear that if monastic life is not changed and updated, it will have nothing to say to the questions of future generations. 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.”<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> But because this inspiration is a calling for all people, it should not be exaggerated as a “distinctive character of the religious life.” The Jesuit Pope Francis echoes the same theme of renewal and updating in his writings like “Joy of the Gospel”

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Werlen, *Embers in the Ashes: New Life in the Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press ebook edition, 2013), Chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Hart (ed.), *A Monastic Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Where do we Go from Here?* (Cistercian Publications, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Hart (ed.), *A Monastic Vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Where do we Go from Here?* (Cistercian Publications, 2006), 92 and 101. Kofi Annan is quoted: “The world cannot find peace without the cooperation of the religions of the world” (101-102).

<sup>4</sup> Tarcisius Van Bavel, *The Basic Inspiration of Religious Life*, (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1996), 44, 86-87.

(*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1-2) and the apostolic letter “To All Consecrated People on the Occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life.”<sup>5</sup>

### 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 the 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 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 and security and provide comfort? We will use Bernard Lonergan’s cognitional process of understanding to explore these questions. In

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<sup>5</sup> Accessed on April 8, 2016, at <https://goo.gl/1YdJG7>

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." But one can greatly benefit from Lonergan's thought without being a "Lonergan specialist" or a theological scholar. Many of his insights can be quite readily appreciated and appropriated, as they regard why we question, how we approach wonder, the possible effect of bias upon us and what authenticity really demand of us.

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. This is a paradigm shift similar to the scientific revolutions. In Part 2, we want to explore what is at stake with religious life in the post-Conciliar era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Does religious life highlight the Eucharistic Church that Vatican II imagined? 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."

However, there remains an older reactionary paradigm of the pre-conciliar Church that is hierarchically structured as the primary model of Christian witness in the world. This paradigm—called the "reform of the reform"—refuses adjustment to the newer

vision and maintains an identity that is primarily institutional, clerical, sexist, and patriarchal. 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. Part 3 will examine this clash between these two paradigms and the extent that religious life is caught in the conflict. We will use Lonergan's notion of "Dialectic" to understand the conflict and its root causes as well as the conditions for making the "shift" to the new Eucharistic paradigm.

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 and with integrity. 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.<sup>6</sup> Following these cues, the structure of this essay is 1) the reflecting person as authentic and creative, 2) the "foundation" paradigm of a Eucharistic Church 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 religious life is Eucharistic and can give effective testimony to following Christ, which is the *hope that lives in you*.

Part I: 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

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<sup>6</sup> See Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History" in *A Third Collection*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 100-109.

not with dogma or doctrines. It is the relationship with someone or something that drives one forward. Augustine was aware of this deep inner impulse when he wrote in his *Soliloquies* a theme for the later history of monasticism: "Let me know myself, let me know You, O God."<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis speaks of this relationship 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 the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, about forty-five per cent 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 really present in the Eucharist.<sup>8</sup>

### *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

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<sup>7</sup> Augustine, full text: "O God, always the same, let me know myself, let me know you. This is prayer." *Deus semper idem, noverim me, noverim te. Oratum est. (Soliloquies 2.1.1.)*

<sup>8</sup> Statistic from the Pew Forum and CARA studies in Kathleen Hughes, *Becoming the Sign. Sacramental Living in a Post-Conciliar Church.* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), 74.

there that one *bears witness*. Lonergan's 1957 classic work *Insight*<sup>9</sup> can shed light on recovering the "center" and that *hope* which *lives in you*. 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, and reflecting – the cognition process – and how this is important for religious life.

### *Knowing is not looking*

Lonergan<sup>10</sup> writes about what is going on in the knower as subject who wants to know, or what the thinker is 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." "Seeing" asks questions for understanding; "looking" is unreflective and more like empty entertainment. When one sees the stars, the snow falling to the ground, or the dogwood in the first 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

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<sup>9</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 3, edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992 [1957]). The aim of this almost 800-page work is to guide the reader to become aware and reflect on one's own inner process of understanding and how one comes to know anything. Once the process is understood, then there is a kind of template for understanding other fields of knowledge. All human beings experience wonder and awe, have a desire to know, ask and answer questions, receive insights and new connections, verifies the results, makes judgments and decisions. This set of operations in one's consciousness is common to everyone. Lonergan's aim in this work is delineated on pages 22 and 769.

<sup>10</sup> See "knowing and looking" in the index of *Insight* for page references (845).

“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 captivated by awe and Eros, which are linked to the pure, unrestricted desire to know.

If one is attentive to the desire to know, one begins to ask questions for understanding and for critical reflection. Here I address 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.” For example, a person can “look” at the Evening News, which is not the same as “to know” or “to being informed.” 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. This is particularly important for the discussion on the paradigm shift in Part 3 below.

*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 touch 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. For the religious person, it is not enough just to ask questions; one must go to a deeper reality. I invite the reader to do an experiment. 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.” The “You” is connected to the notion of “following Christ” and becomes the *hope* that is within. The *hope* is a “You.”

### Religious life and the Eucharistic Church

In our present reflection we have to ponder whether 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 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 this question we need to go beyond what Vatican II says about religious life in *Perfectae Caritatis* and Chapter VI of *Lumen Gentium* to the radical 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.

## Part II: 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 religious life must be taken within the whole context of Vatican II to which I refer 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. There are three dynamisms or trends at the Council: *aggiornamento*, *ressourcement*, and *rapprochement*. 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 life in general have not adapted to the 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, 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 called *aggiornamento*. The underlying dynamic of all the discussions is a fundamental openness to the unknown and unfamiliar.

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*.

*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 awareness: the aims of the Council itself. The opening paragraph of the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) identifies the goals:

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

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. 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), 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 as the primary model to that of a *sacramental* community on the move and a real presence of the living Christ in the world. Where the traditional church was FOR the people, the new paradigm is calling for a living Church OF the people.

The ecclesiology found in the “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” – based on baptism and the common priesthood of the faithful -- is profoundly Eucharistic. 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. We might pause and ask ourselves if religious communities have explicit structural 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. 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” at the end of the document, which highlights in contradictory fashion a pre-Conciliar structure and hierarchy. 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. 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 latinized translation of the *Roman Missal* based on the hermeneutics of *Liturgicam Authenticam*.

*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 that Church celebrates its liturgy and prayer. Hopefully, communities 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 communities 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. The criterion for change is: Christ and the world with all its complexities or the Order's founders and supposed safety net and survival of closed institutional structures. Some areas for change might be simplifying forms of authority and its relation with communities and each person, examining the symbols and customs, 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.

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 that confronts the situation as it is so as to 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.”<sup>11</sup>

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 and whether or not religious communities have appropriated the “shift.”

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<sup>11</sup> From an address Arrupe gave in the Paulskirche at Frankfurt in 1976 - cited in Johann B. Metz, *Followers of Christ. Perspectives on the Religious Life*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, translated 1978), 79-80.



### Part III: Dialectic, Paradigm Shifts: “witness to any who ask you”

To understand the Church situation and religious life as well in the post-Vatican II era, we will apply Lonergan’s concept of “Dialectic” to the present reality. In *Method In Theology*, dialectic means to analyze the conflicts and the root causes that underlie them. The most that we can do is try to understand better the nature of the conflict and find a handle on how to move with it toward a resolution. Thus, the dialectic is 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 life to be “provocative” within its communities and the institutional church by raising important questions and encouraging conversion. We will conclude by pointing to possible future directions.

#### *Eucharistic Paradigm in the dialectic*

Most of the details of this 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 identity. Ecclesiology and liturgy are connected. Vatican II is a Eucharistic paradigm.

The challenge today is to revisit how the changes in the liturgy, such as moving the altar away from the wall and using the vernacular for the language of the ritual, all reflect a change in relationships between the faithful and hierarchy and in the understanding of ministry, Church and 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.” 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 their original inspiration, and engage the new, the strange and the unknown. Five decades later this image of an inclusive Church did not resonate well with the church of the older paradigm.

### *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 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 conservative 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. We already mentioned that the document on the liturgy points to a Church that is Eucharistic 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). The body of Christ is represented in the sacrament on the altar and the *Totus Christus* on the earth. This image of Church is more inclusive and involves all the faithful and not just hierarchy, clerics and vowed religious.

Where does one find a statement about the “reform of the reform” trend in the documents? I propose that it is the “Explanatory Note” attached to the end of the constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*). This note, regardless of what the constitution says, reinforces the hierarchical structure of the Church as the primary structure. This addition nullifies the inclusive nature of the Eucharistic Church set out in the constitution on the liturgy.

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*. 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*) and girls are prohibited in the sanctuary. Women wear veils and bells are rung at the consecration. This paradigm image of church, to which many religious are attached, is gender-specific with power belonging to celibate male clerics, situations without theological justification. It is an image that does not connect well with the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> 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. As in the time of Augustine and the Donatists, the Catholic Church has two “altars” and a parallel and opposed church. Time will tell how this situation will move forward.

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 came to an end with Vatican II. It also brought an end to the Church’s reactionary attitudes toward the Protestant Reform. With the revival of the “reform of the reform” the clerical and negative attitudes are embraced once again, often promoted under the banner of “apologetics.” The impact on religious communities

has been tremendous. The 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 with little about religious conversion.

### *Closing of the mind as root cause for clash*

What are the causes of this clash between two paradigms, between the Conciliar and “reform of the reform” ecclesiologies? Another way to pose the question is to ask why there is 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 sees 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. Ideologies are often formed. We must ask what happened to the congregation’s original inspiration and how does it contribute to a change in direction?

### *Religious Congregations and “Shock therapy”*

Vatican II is a clarion call to transition from one paradigm to another, or from one's horizon of understanding to another. 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. A shift is not necessarily a smooth transition, but can be one that is abrupt and a jolt with serious repercussions. 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 revolutions, as 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 history, but first a word must be said about the role of religious congregations in creating conditions for "shift."

The religious institution points to something greater, to a light beyond itself, namely "to follow Christ." This is its "supreme rule" and reason for existence (PC, 2). There are various expressions of what this means for the wider church. J. B. Metz says religious congregations provide a kind of "shock therapy" to the institutional church. It 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 their own status and self-preservation.<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis encourages communities during the Year of Consecrated Life to embrace their "prophetic" dimension.

This "shock therapy" is also echoed in the Swiss Abbot Martin Werlen's call for a "pro-vocation"<sup>13</sup> 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.

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<sup>12</sup> Metz, *Followers of Christ*, 11-18.

<sup>13</sup> Werlen, *Embers in the Ashes*, Chapter 5.

The questions 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.” 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.

“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.”<sup>15</sup>

Commitment to social justice is the fruit of contemplative prayer. Recently, the “Nuns on the Bus”<sup>16</sup> 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

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<sup>14</sup> See the website for the Center for Action and Contemplation: <https://cac.org/>

<sup>15</sup> Karl Rahner, “Christian Living Formerly and Today,” in *Theological Investigations VII*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 15.

<sup>16</sup> As an event of Networklobby.org and conscious of the polarization in politics, “Nuns on the Bus” travel around the United States to listen to people’s stories of injustice. These stories will be taken to Congress in an effort to stimulate change. The religious sisters are responding to Pope Francis’ call that we must change our politics and not just our policies. One can also take a pledge to be an agent of change and to be bridge builders in politics (<http://networklobby.org/bus2015/pledge>).

John Deer and Roy Bougeois, both suffering consequences from 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.”<sup>17</sup>

### *Shift happens*

Many factors can 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 conversion. As individuals pursue questions

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<sup>17</sup>Bernard Lonergan, “Healing and Creating in History” in *A Third Collection*. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985),105.



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 might contribute 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's self, serious questions--and the right questions--must be asked. Lonergan develops this line of thought in the transcendental precepts: Be attentive. Be intelligent. Be reasonable. Be responsible.<sup>18</sup> He later adds Be in love. This is why in the beginning of this essay the reader is asked about the habit of asking questions. Questions open the possibility for intellectual conversion and new values, which advance 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*. But 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. Many more will remain irrelevant 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,"

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<sup>18</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method In Theology*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1971, reprint 2007), 11-20.

prophetically challenge the church institutions and others at the same time as to their fidelity in following the Gospel.

Where do we go from here as the Vatican II event slips further into the past? Let me make a suggestion for a direction. We begin with what perturbs 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 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 you have for world violence.

My reply would be that Christianity makes sense because it does have a response to violence. For me, the symbol of the crucifix is the **question mark** that embraces all the violence and death that surrounds the human race and planet. The Cross asks: What are you going to do about it? My answer is “the table.” The table of fellowship and inclusiveness is where all people sit together as equals and break bread. The table, as an alternative reality, is the place to be “provocative,” as Jesus was and continues to be in human hearts and in the Word. 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.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> <sup>19</sup> 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.

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

You better have a good answer.