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HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT ASSIST THE CHURCH IN ITS TEACHING?

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DR. RICHARD R. GAILLARDETZ

*The Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology, Boston College
President of the Catholic Theological Society of America*



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THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM:

"The Spirit in the New Millennium: The Duquesne University Annual Holy Spirit Lecture and Colloquium" was initiated in 2005 by Duquesne University President Charles J. Dougherty as an expression of Duquesne's mission and charism as a university both founded by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and dedicated to the Holy Spirit. It is hoped that this ongoing series of lectures and accompanying colloquia will encourage the exploration of ideas pertaining to the theology of the Holy Spirit. Besides fostering scholarship on the Holy Spirit within an ecumenical context, this event is intended to heighten awareness of how pneumatology (the study of the Spirit) might be relevantly integrated into the various academic disciplines in general.

A video recording of the lecture, as well as the present text may be accessed online at www.duq.edu/holyspirit. You can contact us at holyspirit@duq.edu. Radu Bordeianu, Ph.D., serves as the director.

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Associate Professor of Christian Ethics and the Theology of World Church, University of Notre Dame

BIOGRAPHY OF LECTURER

Dr. Richard R. Gaillardetz is the Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology at Boston College and the director of the Theology Graduate Program. He received his Ph.D. in systematic theology from the University of Notre Dame. Dr. Gaillardetz has published numerous articles and has authored eight books and edited two others. Some of his more recent books include: *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (co-authored with Catherine Clifford, Liturgical Press, 2012), *When the Magisterium Intervenes* (editor, Liturgical Press, 2012), *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Orbis, 2008) and *The Church in the Making* (Paulist, 2006).

Gaillardetz was a delegate on the U.S. Catholic – Methodist Ecumenical Dialogue from 2001 to 2005. He is currently the president of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT ASSIST THE CHURCH IN ITS TEACHING?

Richard R. Gaillardetz

We Christians do not simply make things up as we go. The church is not its own Lord. In baptism we are claimed by a story not of our making, a story of a God who addresses us as friends and invites us into his company. It is a story of scandalous, profligate love embodied in the person of Jesus of Nazareth; it is a story of a God who showers us with mercy and forgiveness and requires us to extend that mercy and forgiveness to others. We gather weekly that this story may be bodied forth in bread broken and wine poured out for us and for our salvation. This church, constituted by baptism and nourished at the Lord's Table, is a school of discipleship wherein we learn how to both live this story and keep it alive for others. It is a school that sends us into the world with hearts aflame with the love of God. We call this story "Good News," the announcement of the Spirit-led in-breaking of God's reign in Jesus of Nazareth. It is a story that must be told and re-told, heard and re-heard, enacted and adapted to time and place. And yet, even as the story acquires new forms, it must remain grounded in its initial telling. The story we tell today, in all its freshness, must remain faithful to its origins in the Christ Event. Since the apostles were the first tellers of that story, we use the term, "apostolicity," to name this enduring connection between the story once told by tongues of fire and the story we tell today. As Eastern Christians remind us, the church's apostolicity is grounded in its worship such that, paradoxically, we remember not only our apostolic origins but our apostolic future. Our Eucharistic worship is an anticipation of the eschaton, the final fulfillment of the in-breaking of God's reign.¹ Yet whether remembering the ancient apostolic testimony or looking in hope to that future convocation of all God's creation, as Christians we are rightly concerned with remaining faithful to the great story of our faith.

In the early centuries of Christianity, two ecclesial structures emerged to help the church preserve the essential features of the Christian story. The first was the construction of a biblical canon, a collection of sacred texts that gave reliable, "God-breathed" testimony to the Good News of God's saving love for the world. The second structure, which emerged quickly over the course of the second century, was the rise of the office the bishop. The ministry of *episcopē* or apostolic oversight became an enduring ministry charged with

giving normative witness to that apostolic faith. Episcopal teaching was to preserve the *regula fidei*, the “rule of faith” or the *regula veritatis*, the “rule of truth.” “This episcopal teaching was not meant to replace or supersede the Scriptures,” John Burkhard notes, “but to assist the believer in understanding the Scriptures, which always remained the point of reference.”²

All Christians have embraced the providential development of the first structure, the sacred Scriptures; those within the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican communions, and to a certain extent select other churches of the Reformation, have seen God’s hand in the development of the apostolic office of the bishop as well. We must remember, however, that both the biblical canon and the teaching office of the bishop, including the bishop of Rome, presuppose a more fundamental conviction, one too easily forgotten today. The apostolic faith testified to in Scripture and preserved by the apostolic office, has always resided, first and foremost in the life witness of the Christian community itself.

My lecture tonight, despite the embarrassing prosaic title, is really about how the church preserves its fidelity to the Good News. Given the time constraints, I will focus my reflections, not on the role of the biblical canon, but on that of the bishops. In particular, I want to explore one key question: what do Catholics really mean when we claim, as the Second Vatican Council did, that the Holy Spirit assists the bishops in their teaching ministry?

I recognize that this might seem to be a rather technical question of only ancillary interest to the life of the church. In fact, I am convinced that the Catholic Church has suffered from inadequate and reductive understandings of how the Holy Spirit assists bishops in their teaching (Let me add here that whenever I am speaking of the teaching of the bishops, I am including in my consideration the unique teaching responsibilities of the bishop of Rome). For much of the last one hundred and fifty years, the teaching authority of the pope and bishops has been exercised in a predominantly juridical mode, the mode of “command and obey.” This juridical mode, focuses narrowly on discrete, magisterial teaching acts, too easily closes off debate, suppresses disagreement and impedes the discovery of new insight on the part of the Christian faithful.

What the church today requires is a more adequate theological account of the assistance of the Spirit in church teaching. This account will draw on two seminal insights of the Second Vatican Council. The first is the council’s teaching that the church is constituted by its participation in the triune life of God. This church is “co-instituted,” as Yves Congar put it, by

the dual Trinitarian missions of the Word and the Spirit.³ The second insight lies in the council's teaching that the church is pilgrim, subject to all the conditions and limitations of human history even as it lives in anticipation of its eschatological fulfillment. I will divide my presentation into two sections dedicated to each of these conciliar teachings as I draw out their implications for the topic at hand.

I. THE TRINITARIAN FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHURCH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EXERCISE OF MAGISTERIAL TEACHING

Vatican II took decisive steps to recover the long neglected place of Trinitarian theology in Catholic ecclesiology. The Christological foundations had already received renewed attention in the Catholic ecclesiology of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The early 19th century Tübingen theologian, Johan Adam Möhler⁴ offered a rich theology of the church as the mystical body of Christ and, in a sense, as the continuation of the incarnation. The Roman School of neoscholastic manualists carried this Christological focus forward.⁵ The mystical body theology was given a new impetus in the twentieth century in the work of Emile Mersch⁶ and in Pope Pius XII's 1943 encyclical, *Mystici Corporis Christi*. This mystical body theology obviously foregrounded the church's relationship to Christ but it was not entirely lacking a reference to the Holy Spirit. However, the tendency was to draw on the Augustinian view of the Spirit as the animating soul of the ecclesial body. The difficulty with this approach is that it presents the Spirit as a secondary adjunct to Christ; the Spirit is too easily presented as the Trinitarian person who comes along later to animate and guarantee what Christ has already established.

A. Vatican II's Teaching on the Trinitarian Foundations of the Church

The council benefited from the work of *periti* like Yves Congar who had been calling for a more thoroughly Trinitarian account of the church. Congar was shaped by his extraordinary grasp of the Christian theological tradition, East and West. Yet we should not overlook the significance of his exposure to the diverse Orthodox theologians who at one time or another taught on the faculty of the St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris. Over the course of two generations the distinguished faculty at St. Sergius helped create a profound neo-patristic synthesis in the work of figures like Sergei Bulgakov, George Florovsky, Nicholas Afanasiev, Paul Evdokimov, Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff. Afanasiev, Schmemmann and another

figure not associated with St. Sergius, the Romanian theologian, Dumitru Staniloae, contributed to a more thoroughly Trinitarian and Eucharistic ecclesiology, elements of which would find their way into the texts of the council.

The council's retrieval of the Trinitarian foundations of the church allowed it, for the most part, to avoid two common dangers in ecclesiology. The first privileges the role of Christ in the church while neglecting the mission of the Spirit, leading to what some have called a Christomonism.⁷ The second attends exclusively to the activity of the Spirit in the church, and can devolve into an ecclesial pneumatocentrism.⁸ The council, however, presented the missions of Christ and the Spirit working jointly to sustain the church in its life and mission.⁹ For example, in *Lumen Gentium* 8 the analogy of the hypostatic union is employed to establish the vivifying work of the Spirit of Christ with respect to the "social structure of the church." The council drew on a famous passage from the third century bishop, St. Cyprian of Carthage, declaring "[i]n this way the universal church appears as 'a people made one by the unity of the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit'" (LG 4). In that same document the council wrote: "Christ, when he was lifted up from the earth, drew all people to himself; rising from the dead, he sent his life-giving Spirit down on his disciples and through him he constituted his body which is the church as the universal sacrament of salvation" (LG 48).¹⁰ The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, describes the church's sacramental life as a Trinitarian participation in the paschal mystery. In *Dei Verbum*, The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, the council eschewed the more propositional theology of revelation dominant in the dogmatic manual tradition that imagined revelation as a collection of propositional truths. In its place the council presented revelation as nothing less than the self-communication of God in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit:

It has pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the secret purpose of his will. This brings it about that through Christ, God's Word made flesh, and in his holy Spirit, human beings can draw near to the Father and become sharers in the divine nature (DV 2).

This deeply Trinitarian account of God's self-communication with us in love portrays the Holy Spirit as active in believers, giving "to all facility in

accepting and believing the truth” (DV 5). Here the Spirit is the divine principle at work in both the individual and the community, making possible the active reception and appropriation of God’s Word.

We also find something of this Trinitarian framework in the council’s consideration of the teaching office of the bishops, what Catholics refer to as the magisterium. In *Dei Verbum* 10 the council acknowledged the assistance of the Holy Spirit in the teaching ministry of the bishops:

This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit...¹¹

We should not overlook the significance of the council’s insistence that the magisterium always works at the service of God’s Word and with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

The council resisted any claim that the magisterium had an exclusive role to play in the transmission of the apostolic faith. All the Christian faithful play a role in receiving God’s Word. *Lumen Gentium* 12 teaches that every Christian, by virtue of their baptism, receives from the Holy Spirit a supernatural instinct for the faith, the *sensus fidei*:

Through this sense of faith which is aroused and sustained by the spirit of truth, the people of God, under the guidance of the sacred magisterium to which it is faithfully obedient, receives no longer the words of human beings but truly the word of God; it adheres indefectibly to “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”; it penetrates more deeply into that same faith through right judgment and applies it more fully to life.

This acknowledgement of the work of the Spirit in the lives of all believers appears as well in *Dei Verbum*’s presentation of the dynamics at work in the growth and development of tradition. According to the council, tradition grows and develops

through the contemplation and study by believers, who “ponder these things in their hearts;” through the intimate understanding of spiritual things which they experience; and through the

preaching of those who, on succeeding to the office of bishop, receive the sure charism of truth (DV 8).

This passage marks out an important insight; the sense of the faithful and the teaching of the bishops are intrinsically related because both reflect the action of the Spirit. Unfortunately, the council largely failed to consider what concrete consequences must follow from this conviction that the same Spirit active in the teaching of the bishops is active as well in the spiritual instinct for the faith given to all Christians.

The council invoked St. Irenaeus' teaching that the bishop receives a *charisma veritatis certum* at ordination.¹² Although Irenaeus believed that the bishop had special access to the apostolic faith, he did not see that apostolic faith as the bishop's private possession; the bishop shared the faith of his church. This conviction was at the heart of the early Christian rejection of absolute or titular ordinations, the practice of ordaining a bishop to serve as an auxiliary or in a diplomatic or bureaucratic post, and assigning to the bishop a titular or non-existent local church. It was inconceivable that a bishop could teach the apostolic faith without being embedded in a living apostolic community of faith. Indeed, I contend that the modern practice of titular ordination has indirectly contributed to the idea that the *charisma veritatis* refers to some supernaturally infused knowledge conferred at ordination without any reference to the faith of a local church.

What we see in the council teaching is the beginnings of a Trinitarian ecclesiology that could offer a coherent account of the church, whole and entire, as a listening church, a community of reception, as Ormond Rush puts it.¹³ Yet when it came time to focus on the exercise of the doctrinal teaching authority of the magisterium in chapter three of *Lumen Gentium*, this Trinitarian framework is attenuated. For example, the chapter begins with the following statement:

For the nourishment and continual growth of the people of God, Christ the lord instituted a variety of ministries which are directed towards the good of the whole body. Ministers who are endowed with sacred power are at the service of their brothers and sisters, so that all who belong to the people of God, and therefore enjoy real christian dignity, by cooperating with each other freely and in an orderly manner in pursuit of the same goal, may attain salvation (LG 18).

Although this passage offers a welcome emphasis on power as service, it refers to Christ's institution of the ordained ministries of the church without any mention of the Holy Spirit. In the place of an explicit consideration of pneumatology we have the first of a series of problematic assertions regarding the conferral of "sacred power" upon bishops, an assertion that lacks a necessary pneumatological conditioning, as I will indicate later.

Scattered throughout the chapter are various references to the Holy Spirit but without an exposition of how it is that the Spirit works through the bishops' ministry and, more importantly, how this is conjoined to the Spirit's work among all the faithful. The one interesting exception occurs in LG 25 in the council's treatment of papal infallibility where the council insists that the assent of the church to papal definitions will never be lacking "on account of the activity of that same Holy Spirit, by which the whole flock of Christ is preserved and progresses in unity of faith" (LG 25). Here we find the only suggestion in the entire chapter that, due to the Holy Spirit, the teaching office of the pope and bishops must be linked to the Spirit's work in the life of all the Christian faithful.

Lumen Gentium 4 affirms that the same Spirit directs the church "through a diversity of gifts both hierarchical and charismatic." Yet this is left largely undeveloped. This theological lacuna marks out an area where Roman Catholicism could benefit from the work of prominent Orthodox theologians like Nicholas Afanasiev and Dumitru Staniloae. In his book, *The Church of the Holy Spirit*, Afanasiev contended that there was a basic theological sense in which all church members, ordained and non-ordained, were "charismatics."¹⁴ For his part, the Romanian theologian Staniloae would write:

If the variety of gifts derives from the same Spirit who is at work in all and is revealed in the service of the common good, then we can conclude that the institution is not devoid of spirituality while spirituality on the other hand is not inevitably lacking in structure and institutional order.¹⁵

As Duquesne's own scholar, Radu Bordeianu, has pointed out, Staniloae insisted on both "the Christological character of charism and the pneumatic character of the institution."¹⁶ Afanasiev and Staniloae both resisted any sense that we can speak of Christ first instituting church office and the Spirit subsequently guaranteeing the efficacy of that office.

B. The Trinitarian Foundations of the Teaching Ministry of the Bishop in Post-Conciliar Ecumenical Documents

The Trinitarian foundations of the teaching ministry of the bishops were more fully and fruitfully explored in post-conciliar ecumenical dialogue. The Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue offers an ecclesiological vision deeply informed by the conjoined missions of Word and Spirit in the life of the church. In an ecumenical statement published in 1982, often referred to as the Munich Statement, we find the assertion that: “The church is continually in a state of *epiclesis*.”¹⁷ The active work of the Spirit is evident in every moment of the church’s life. The interrelationship between the witness of all the faithful and the apostolic ministry of the bishop can only be grasped within a Eucharistic context. The document insists:

The function of the bishop is closely bound to the eucharistic assembly over which he presides. The eucharistic unity of the local church implies communion between he who presides and the people to whom he delivers the word of salvation and the eucharistic gifts. *Further, the minister is also the one who “receives” from his church, which is faithful to tradition, the word he transmits.*¹⁸

As the servant of communion, the bishop presides over the Eucharistic gift exchange. This exchange, however, consists not only in the offering of bread and wine, which are returned to the people as the Body and Blood of Christ, but also in the apostolic faith offered by the people to the bishop who receives this faith witness from the people and returns it in his own apostolic teaching. The bishop’s apostolic ministry then finds its proper context in the Eucharistic synaxis where his apostolic teaching office is situated within and not above the apostolic community. If the bishop’s teaching office is inextricably linked to the faith of the people, then any understanding of the apostolic succession of the bishops must be linked to the apostolic faith of the churches. This leads the Munich statement to assert:

Apostolic succession, therefore, means something more than a mere transmission of powers. It is succession in a Church which witnesses to the apostolic faith, in communion with the other Churches witnessing to the same apostolic faith.¹⁹

A similar perspective is explored in the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue. In the document, "Authority in the Church, I" we find this passage:

The perception of God's will for his Church does not belong only to the ordained ministry but is shared by all its members. All who live faithfully within the *koinonia* may become sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and be brought towards a deeper understanding of the gospel and of its implications in diverse cultures and changing situations. Ordained ministers commissioned to discern these insights and give authoritative expression to them, are part of the community, sharing its quest for understanding the gospel in obedience to Christ and receptive to the needs and concerns of all. The community, for its part, must respond to and assess the insights and teaching of the ordained ministers. Through this continuing process of discernment and response, in which the faith is expressed and the Gospel is pastorally applied, the Holy Spirit declares the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the faithful may live freely under the discipline of the Gospel.²⁰

We must note here the emphasis on shared learning and discernment on the part of bishops and people. This is further developed in the influential document of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "The Gift of Authority." There we find the interaction of bishops, theologians and all the faithful sketched out within a dynamic account of tradition:

The people of God as a whole is the bearer of the living Tradition. In changing situations producing fresh challenges to the Gospel, the discernment, actualisation and communication of the Word of God is the responsibility of the whole people of God. The Holy Spirit works through all members of the community, using the gifts he gives to each for the good of all. Theologians in particular serve the communion of the whole Church by exploring whether and how new insights should be integrated into the ongoing stream of Tradition. In each community there is an exchange, a mutual give-and-take, in which bishops, clergy and lay people receive from as well as give to others within the whole body.²¹

In these texts there is little emphasis on “sacred power” conferred upon some groups and withheld from others. Power is nothing less than the activity of the Holy Spirit manifested in the mutual gift exchange among the various component elements in the church, including, the witness of the whole Christian faithful, the normative witness of the bishops and the scholarly contributions of theologians.

We find in these ecumenical statements a theological attention to the teaching ministry of the bishops that moves away from neoscholastic preoccupations with the distinctive powers conferred on the bishop through ordination and toward a consideration of episcopal ordination within a more relational, ecclesiological framework. This merits further discussion.

C. Episcopal Ordination Reconceived within a Trinitarian Schema

The neoscholastic theology of orders that predominated in the Catholic tradition in the decades prior to Vatican II was metaphysically underwritten by what we might call a “substance ontology” that attended primarily to those changes effected in a particular individual (whether through baptism or ordination). In much neoscholastic sacramental theology, claims were made regarding the new ontological status of the individual conferred by baptism, confirmation or holy orders.

It is this reductive and reified sacramental theology that promoted the idea that episcopal ordination was, at its core, a conferral of special powers on the *ordinand*. I have argued elsewhere,²² influenced by the work of the Greek Orthodox theologian and Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas, that what is required within Catholicism is not a rejection of ontology itself, as some would propose, but rather a shift to a “relational ontology” in which attention is drawn not to the isolated individual, but to the person-in-relation. In keeping with traditional Catholic theological reflection we can affirm the ontological effects of sacramental ordination. However, any such “ontological change” is grounded not in the conferral of powers on an individual but on the reconfiguration of the person into a new ecclesial and therefore Christological relationship. Ordination effects a fundamental “ecclesial re-positioning.”

Within this relational framework conferral of ministerial power at ordination takes on a different meaning entirely. Again, the Orthodox-Roman Catholic ecumenical dialogue indicates a helpful direction in the 1988 Valamo document that begins its treatment of ordination with a reference to the inseparability of the missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit.²³

The dialogue explicitly ties sacramental empowerment with ministerial function: “Through his ordination, the bishop receives all the powers necessary for fulfilling his function.”²⁴ Put simply, it is not the conferral of power that makes the ordained minister; rather it is the reconfiguration of the person into a new ministerial and ecclesial relationship that requires that empowerment by the Holy Spirit necessary for that ministry. The pneumatic “empowerment” is a function of the new ministerial relationship.

From a more Western perspective we might consider the observation of the German Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner, who contends that the ordained pastor must “have all the powers which necessarily belong to such a leader of a Church in a particular locality in the light of the theological nature of the Church as such.”²⁵ The sacramental power conferred through ordination follows from ordination’s reconfiguration of the *ordinand* into a new ecclesial relationship. James Puglisi’s careful study of the ancient ordination rituals of the Western church confirms our analysis. In the conclusion of the first volume of his study he writes:

Throughout this study we have seen that the process of ordination includes a complex of actions and roles which inaugurate new, personal, and enduring relationships between the new minister, his Christian brethren and God. Moreover, in the early church the ordained ministry was seen in the context of a sacramental and Trinitarian ecclesiology in which ordination is presented as one of the communal, liturgical, and juridical actions through which the Church is built up.²⁶

Returning to the Catholic-Orthodox ecumenical dialogue, the 2007 Ravenna Statement insists that the authority of the bishop, as apostolic teacher, cannot be separated from the apostolic authority of the community for both are empowered by the same Spirit:

The authority linked with the grace received in ordination is not the private possession of those who receive it nor something delegated from the community; rather, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit destined for the service (*diakonia*) of the community and never exercised outside of it. Its exercise includes the participation of the whole community, the bishop being in the Church and the Church in the bishop (cf. St Cyprian, *Ep.* 66, 8).²⁷

Within a developed Trinitarian framework, the language of “power” is only intelligible as a participation in the life of the Spirit at work in the church. Remove the Trinitarian framework and power is inevitably juridicized within a kind of “zero-sum” game in which some members of the church are given “power” at the expense of others. A Trinitarian theology of ecclesial power does not exclude the need for canon law and the right ordering of the life of the church, but this necessary juridical element of the life of the church will always be in service of the activity of the Spirit in the pluriform relations and practices that comprise much of what the church is.

Another way of foregrounding the need for an adequate Trinitarian framework for our understanding of ecclesial power will attend to the operative theologies of grace in play in the life of the church. Whereas St. Thomas Aquinas saw grace primarily as a participation in the triune life of God,²⁸ Baroque Catholic theologies of grace migrated to a more reified conception of grace as a transient force injected, as it were, into the field of ecclesial activity. This reified view of grace, the result of a deficient pneumatology, must be challenged. We shall return to this below.

In this first section I have argued that one of the Second Vatican Council’s most significant contributions was the work of *ressourcement* in recovering the Trinitarian foundations of the church. The implications of this development have yet to be fully realized in the Catholic Church. For example, fifty years removed from the council we have still failed to acknowledge that the work of the Spirit in the teaching of the bishops must not be isolated from the Spirit active in the discernment of all God’s people.²⁹ This isolation has haunted post-conciliar Catholicism. It is evident in the 1983 Code of Canon Law that offers a number of possibilities for the bishops to consult the faithful, but makes virtually none of them mandatory. As simply the most recent example, consider the reluctance of our own bishops’ conference to encourage the wide dissemination to all the faithful of a questionnaire on church teaching on marriage and family against the expressed wishes of the Holy Father. Only when structures of dialogue and conversation are treated, not as politically expedient, but as necessary contexts for the work of the Spirit in the church, will it be possible to speak of an authentic assistance of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the bishop. I have also proposed that a properly Trinitarian account of the church will lead us away from a theology of ordination as the conferral of sacred power on the *ordinand* in favor of ordination as an ecclesial re-positioning of the *ordinand* with its consequent ministerial empowerment.

II. THE COUNCIL'S TEACHING ON THE PILGRIM CHURCH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EXERCISE OF EPISCOPAL TEACHING

Let us now consider a second teaching of the council, its emphasis on the pilgrim nature of the church. This conciliar theme has received renewed attention under Pope Francis. In his remarkable apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* he insists that the church is “first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God” (111).³⁰

A. The Historical Conditioning of the Pilgrim Church

What does it mean for the people of God to live as pilgrim? It means, first of all, that the church lives in history. Grounded in the scandalous vulnerability of the incarnation in which God dared to “pitch his tent” with us in Jesus of Nazareth, it is no longer sufficient to attend exclusively to the church as a “perfect society” hovering above the vagaries of human history, waiting, as it were, for the world to catch up. As an historical reality, the church is subject to all the conditions of human history. It experiences the constraints of all human institutions: limited resources, systemic dysfunctions, human sinfulness, and yes, scandal. To acknowledge the pilgrim status of the church is to see the church as it really is, with all of its gifts and aspirations, fissures and wounds, and to love it all the same.

The key moment in the council's bold rediscovery of the historicity of the church came in the opening address of Pope John XXIII, *Gaudet mater ecclesia*,³¹ in which he offered his rationale for the council. He asserted that the church must be brought “up-to-date where required.” This simple admission was at odds with the dominant post-Tridentine view of the church as a *societas perfecta*, a “perfect society” hovering serenely above the turmoil of human history. The pope's opening address set a distinctive ecclesial tone. The first document debated at the council, the liturgy schema, continued Pope John's efforts to move the church beyond the *societas perfecta* ecclesiology to one more thoroughly rooted in history.³²

For what marks out the church is that it is at once human and divine, visible and endowed with invisible realities, vigorously active and yet making space in its life for contemplation, present in the world and yet in pilgrimage (*peregrinam*) beyond...(SC 2).

This passage first introduces into the conciliar corpus the theme of the church on pilgrimage. The theme receives further development in *Lumen Gentium*, which draws on St. Augustine: “The church ‘proceeds on its pilgrim way amidst the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God,’ proclaiming the cross and death of the Lord until he comes” (LG 8).

If the church is pilgrim, then its official teachers must share in that pilgrim status. The Holy Spirit, to be sure, assists them in the exercise of their ministry, but always under the conditions and limitations of human history, finitude, and sin. Heribert Mühlen’s evocation of the *kenosis* of the Holy Spirit may be helpful here.³³ Mühlen reminds us of the Pauline teaching that the Word embraced human limitation in Jesus of Nazareth as an act of *kenosis*, a divine self-emptying in which God in Christ embraced the full limitations of human history. Mühlen contends that we can also speak of a “self-emptying” of the Spirit in history such that it too must act within the constraints of human limitation. This *kenosis* of the Spirit suggests the Spirit’s consent, if you will, to act in the church in accord with the conditions and limits of human history.

B. The Call to Conversion for Leadership in the Pilgrim Church

The *kenosis* of the Spirit in the church is subject to the effects not only of human finitude but also of human sin. Consequently the Spirit’s work includes calling Christians to conversion. Bernard Lonergan’s account of conversion can be useful here. For Lonergan, conversion is oriented toward the transformation of horizons and the unending task of overcoming the various forms of bias that can impede our capacity for intellectual, moral and spiritual authenticity.³⁴ Lonergan described four different forms of bias that call for our conversion: (1) *dramatic bias*, which inhibits our ability to enter into the drama of life fully; (2) *individual bias*, which is concerned with the dangers of egoism wherein a person will interpret a situation in the light of one’s own self-interest; (3) *group bias*, which is in play when we give undue deference to our membership in a particular group as we assess a situation or conflict; (4) *common sense bias*, in which we tend toward simplistic understandings that overlook the true complexity of a situation or issue. All humans are tempted by egotism, arrogance, pride, lust for power, and desire for control and therefore all stand in need of conversion. Is there any reason to assume that church officeholders are somehow immune to these forms of bias and therefore exempt from the call to conversion? Surely not. Indeed, the rhetoric of many bishops today is filled with generally sincere professions

of humility. What is lacking in these expressions of humility, however, is any connection between their ongoing need for personal repentance and conversion and the possibility that the impact of bias and the consequent need for conversion may extend to the exercise of their teaching office.

C. The Eschatological Conditioning of the Pilgrim Church

The church, embedded in human history, is so constituted by the Word and Spirit that it is always looking ahead toward its eschatological fulfillment. By conceiving of the church not just as a collection of individual pilgrims but also as itself pilgrim, the council asserted that the church lives as a people *on the way* who have the promise of God's presence and guidance but who still await the consummation of God's plan. Here we can recall distinctive orientation of Eastern Christianity, reflected particularly in the work of Zizioulas that orients the church's apostolicity toward its future eschatological fulfillment. If the church's apostolicity orients us toward the future, how does this relate to our authentic appropriation of divine revelation?

I suggest that, among others things, it calls the church to a form of "doctrinal humility." Catherine Cornille notes that, in the Roman Catholic pre-conciliar tradition, any invocation of doctrinal humility would have been understood as an encouragement of individual docility in the face of church doctrine.³⁵ Christians were reminded of the limits of human reason and exhorted to adopt a humble posture of obedience before church doctrine. The tendency endures today. Whereas early Christian thought presented revelation as a divine pedagogy aimed at the transformation of humankind, an overly juridical and even mechanistic understanding of the exercise of ecclesiastical teaching authority has often reduced the richness of the Christian faith to a "digital genre," as Juan Luis Segundo put it. This "digital" presentation of the Christian story purges dogma of its imaginative character within an eschatological horizon and renders it strictly informational—a collection of truths subject to mere intellectual assent.³⁶

Yet, council teaching invites us to appropriate doctrinal humility in a quite different sense. *Dei Verbum* 8 presents a dynamic account of tradition's development and then offers the remarkable admission that the church lives in history moving "towards the fullness of God's truth." This brief clause presents revealed truth as both historically conditioned and awaiting its future eschatological fulfillment. As is often noted in this regard, the church does not so much possess revelation as it is possessed by it. The church is

guided by the Spirit to live into divine truth, as it were. We see evidence of this doctrinal humility in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World:

The church, as guardian of the deposit of God's word, draws religious and moral principles from it, but it does not always have a ready answer to particular questions, wishing to combine the light of revelation with universal experience so that illumination can be forthcoming on the direction which humanity has recently begun to take (GS 33).

Are not all Christians, including the bishops, called to this doctrinal humility grounded in an acknowledgement of the inexhaustible nature of divine truth?

D. Moving Beyond a "Mechanics of Grace"

We must return now to consider the significance of an adequate theology of grace for our topic. Over the last four centuries Catholicism has too often treated the Spirit's assistance to the bishops in a mechanistic fashion, as though the bishops were exempt from any real effort or preparation in their teaching ministry. Thomas O'Meara has observed that in this regard we are still under the thrall of a Baroque theology preoccupied with actual grace.³⁷ Episcopal action is reduced to a weak instrumental causality within a crass "mechanics of grace," as O'Meara puts it.³⁸ One imagines the action of divine grace episodically influencing the apostolic officeholder in discrete teaching acts and with little consideration of a more comprehensive account of the learning and teaching process. We can recognize other examples of this reductive and transitory conception of a discrete moment of graced activity. It is evident in certain dictation theories of biblical inspiration and even in the tendency of many Catholics to imagine that there must be some precise "moment of consecration" when the bread and wine are supernaturally transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Of course Catholics affirm both biblical inspiration and Eucharistic real presence, but one need not imagine St. Paul being dramatically "zapped" when composing a letter to Corinth anymore than one should fixate on a precise moment of Eucharistic consecration in preference to a sense of the work of grace in the entire Eucharistic action.

The church needs to pay greater attention to the human processes necessary for authentic learning and teaching. O'Meara reminds us that "teaching always involves study, learning, and reflection. It seems unlikely that when those three are absent a divine power replaces them."³⁹ Karl Rahner warns of the danger of imagining that God's grace takes over where human abilities reach their limit:

On this question there is a tendency tacitly to proceed from the assumption that there is a kind of 'synergism' at work here, to point to forces that are extrinsic to human debate, and so to regard God's intervention as commencing only at that point at which human efforts are suspended. In reality, however, God works precisely in and through these human efforts and his activity does not constitute a distinct factor apart from this. Precisely for this reason we should bring these human factors into the open. Instead of concealing them we should throw light upon them and make it possible to assess them at their true worth. For in themselves they constitute something more than merely a supplement to the divine activity, a prior condition for it, or an obscure residue, otherwise unaccounted for, in the exercise of the teaching office. Rather these human factors constitute an intrinsic element in the exercise of the teaching office itself.⁴⁰

Richard McCormick argued that the divine assistance promised the bishops is only effective when conjoined with the proper engagement of basic human processes.⁴¹ McCormick divided the relevant human processes into two categories: evidence gathering and evidence assessing. *Evidence gathering* refers to the manifold ways in which the human person, in this case the bishop, inquires after the truth through study, consultation, debate and investigation. With respect to the teaching ministry of the bishops, this would involve a study of scripture and tradition, a consultation of scholars and theologians (representing diverse schools of thought and theological/historical perspectives), a consideration of the insights of pertinent related fields (e.g., the contributions of the social sciences, genetics), and an attempt to discern the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful in and through whom the Spirit speaks. Insufficient attention to this evidence-gathering can hamper the activity of the Spirit in bringing forth wisdom and insight. *Evidence*

assessing involves the proper consideration and assessment of the “evidence” gathered. Here again recourse to a diversity of theological scholarship will be important, but so will patient reflection and authentic conversation in contexts where the free exchange of views is clearly welcomed. We must recall the ancient conviction that a bishop must be rooted in an apostolic community of faith.

This more comprehensive framework for grasping the action of the Spirit in episcopal teaching suggests the need for a form of ecclesiastical “due diligence.” The term “due diligence” of course comes from the legal profession and refers to the obligation to proper investigation before entering into a binding contract of some kind. We can import this term into an ecclesiastical context wherein it would now refer to the obligation of the bishops to engage in requisite prayer, consultation, dialogue, and study before exercising their teaching responsibilities. Again, this manifold engagement does not merely establish the conditions for the assistance of the Spirit—they are not mere “natural” processes necessary before the work of the Spirit can “kick in.” Rather, we must affirm the action of the Spirit in these human processes.

In a 1996 address to the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA), Margaret O’Gara and her husband Michael Vertin considered our topic from a Lonerganian perspective. They contended that most standard accounts of the assistance of the Holy Spirit presuppose a “classical cognitivist” framework in which God communicates a divine message through doctrines that are taught by the magisterium and passively received by the Christian faithful. A commitment to the epistemic objectivity of church doctrines overrides any concerns for subjective appropriation. The classical cognitivist perspective emphasizes a sharp distinction between the assistance of the Holy Spirit given to the bishops and the work of the Spirit in the life of the whole people of God. O’Gara and Vertin challenged the adequacy of this account and called for a shift toward an historical cognitivist framework in which the learning church takes priority over the teaching church and in which normative doctrine is “authentically discovered by the church.”⁴²

To see the church first and foremost as a learning community invites us back to the image of the church as a school of Christian discipleship. Communities of discipleship do need the ministry of *episcop* but not in a form that reduces the bishops to purveyors of timeless certitudes. A community of discipleship requires ministers capable of guiding the community of faith in the quest

for a deeper and more profound appropriation of the Christian *kerygma*. Nicholas Lash puts it well:

The craft or process we call “teaching” is the art of helping people to understand. They have to do this for themselves, and it is a dangerous, exhilarating, fragile, never finished process...this achievement we call “understanding,” which each of us has to do for ourself, is done in us by God...If “teaching” were a mere matter of declaration or instruction, of telling people what is the case, or what they ought to do, then indeed spreading knowledge would be as easy as spreading butter. But this is not the traditional Christian understanding of what “teaching” involves.⁴³

The renewal of our church calls us to greater theological reflection on what John Henry Newman called the *conspiratio fidelium ac pastorum*, “the breathing together of the faithful and the pastors.”⁴⁴ This theology refuses to think of the episcopal office as the privileged repository of sacred power and divine truth but rather as a necessary element of a pneumatically charged ecclesial body in which the Spirit’s empowerment of the bishops is inextricably bound up in the Spirit’s work in the lives of all Christians. This pilgrim Church will be most faithful to its truest identity when all the baptized acknowledge the wisdom of listening before speaking, of learning before teaching, of praying before pronouncing. It raises the demand for, not just a pastorally expedient “consultation” of the laity, but an essential ecclesial dialogue between bishops and people governed by the admonition of St. Paulinus of Nola: “Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes.”⁴⁵

ENDNOTES

¹John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 171-208.

²John Burkhard, *Apostolicity Then and Now: An Ecumenical Church in a Postmodern World* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 53.

³Yves Congar, "The Church Made by the Spirit," in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, (New York: Crossroad, 1997), II: 5-14, at 7.

⁴Johann Adam Möhler, *Symbolik. oder, Darstellung der dogmatischen Gegensätze der Katholiken und Protestanten nach ihren öffentlichen Bekenntnisschriften* (Regensburg: G.J. Manz, 1924). For an extensive study of his ecclesiology see Michael Himes, *Ongoing Incarnation: Johann Adam Möhler and the Beginnings of Modern Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

⁵The Roman School included such figures as Giovanni Perrone, Carlo Passaglia, and J. B. Franzelin.

⁶Emile Mersch, *La théologie du corps mystique* (Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1937).

⁷Yves Congar, "Pneumatologie ou 'Christomonisme' dans la tradition latine," in *Ecclesia a Spiritu Sancto edocta* [Festschrift for Gérard Philips] (Louvain: Duculot, 1970), 41-63.

⁸Yves Congar, "The Pneumatology of Vatican II," in *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, I: 167-73, at 167-8.

⁹Yves Congar, "The Church Made by the Spirit," 5-14.

¹⁰Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the Vatican II documents will ordinarily be taken from Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, Volume II (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

¹¹Translation from Flannery.

¹²St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Adversus Haereses*, 4, 26, 2.

¹³Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation* (Washington DC: The Catholic University Press, 2009).

¹⁴Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit* (originally published in 1971, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2007), 2-3.

¹⁵Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 39-40.

¹⁶Radu Bordeianu, *Dumitru Staniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 134.

¹⁷The Joint Theological Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, "The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity," I: #5. The document can be accessed on-line at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/ch_orthodox_docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820706_munich_en.html .

¹⁸Emphasis is mine. Ibid., II: #3.

¹⁹Ibid., II: #4.

²⁰Anglican-Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission, "Authority in the Church I," # 6. This document can be accessed on-line at: http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/doc/e_arcic_authority1.html .

²¹Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, "The Gift of Authority," # 28. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_12051999_gift-of-aurity_en.html .

²²Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Ecclesiological Foundations of Ministry within an Ordered Communion" in *Ordering of the Baptismal Priesthood*, edited by Susan Wood (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 26-51.

²³The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, "The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church with Particular Reference to the Importance of Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God," #6. The document can be accessed on-line at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/ch_orthodox_docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19880626_finland_en.html .

²⁴Ibid., 29.

²⁵Karl Rahner, "Pastoral Ministries and Community Leadership," in *Theological Investigations*, volume 19 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 75.

²⁶James Puglisi, *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry: A Comparative Study* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), I: 205.

²⁷The Joint Theological Commission for the Theological Dialogue Between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, "Ecclesiological and Canonical Consequences of the Sacramental Nature of the Church: Ecclesial Communion, Conciliarity and Authority," #13. This document can be accessed on-line at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/ch_orthodox_docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20071013_documento-ravenna_en.html .

²⁸St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1-2, q. 112, a. 1.

²⁹One of the most helpful attempts at overcoming this failure is found in the recent International Theological Commission document, "Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria." It can be accessed on-line at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20120308_comunicato-theology-today_en.html .

³⁰This can be accessed on-line at: <http://www.vatican.va/evangelii-gaudium/en/index.html> .

³¹The English translation of the pope's speech opening the council is taken from *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Walter Abbott (New York: Crossroad, 1989), I: 710-19.

³²Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 83.

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³⁸*Ibid.*, 689.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 694.

⁴⁰Karl Rahner, "The Teaching Office of the Church," in *Confrontations [Theological Investigations XII]* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 3-30, at 12.

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⁴²Margaret O'Gara and Michael Vertin, "The Holy Spirit's Assistance to the Magisterium in Teaching: Theological and Philosophical Issues," *CTSA Proceedings* 51 (1996): 125-42, at 128. On the distinction between classical and historical consciousness see Bernard Lonergan, "The Transition from a Classicist Worldview to Historical-Mindedness," in Bernard Lonergan, *A Second Collection: Papers*, ed. William F. Ryan and Bernard Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1974) 1–9.

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