An Evangelizing Communion: The Church, the Holy Spirit, and Vatican II

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Featuring Special Guest
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BIOGRAPHY OF LECTURER

Msgr. Paul McPartlan is a priest of the diocese of Westminster, UK, and Carl J. Peter Professor of Systematic Theology and Ecumenism at the Catholic University of America (CUA). He is currently serving as acting dean of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at CUA. Having gained his DPhil from the University of Oxford, he taught Systematic Theology at Heythrop College, London, before coming to the USA. He is a member of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, and has participated in international Catholic-Methodist and Catholic-Anglican dialogues. He was a member of the Catholic Church’s International Theological Commission from 2004-2014. Author of The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue (1993, 2006), Sacrament of Salvation: An Introduction to Eucharistic Ecclesiology (1995), A Service of Love: Papal Primacy, the Eucharist and Church Unity (2013), and many articles on ecclesiology and ecumenism, he also edited John Zizioulas’ book, Communion and Otherness (2006).
In his Apostolic Constitution formally convoking the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), Pope St John XXIII recalled how the early Church was united in prayer after the Ascension of Christ into heaven, and he invited the Church to be united once again in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit. He himself prayed to the Spirit: “Renew in this our time your marvels as if by a new Pentecost [per novam veluti Pentecosten], and grant to the holy Church that persevering in earnest and heartfelt prayer with Mary, the Mother of God, and guided by St Peter, she may extend the kingdom of her divine Savior, a kingdom of truth and justice, a kingdom of love and peace. Amen.”1 He wanted the Council to be a powerful occasion of renewal for the Church in her mission to the modern world.

Commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the ending of Vatican II, the Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, called by Pope St John Paul II in 1985, repeated Pope John’s prayer for a new Pentecost, for the salvation of the world.2 However, it also said that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council’s documents,”3 which seems to imply a sense of gathering and turning inward. Pneumatology is the essential key to holding these two seemingly contrasting ideas together: the Spirit of Pentecost and mission is also the Spirit of communion and fellowship. The Spirit breathed by Jesus upon the disciples on the evening of Easter day, with the words, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn 20:21-22), is the same Spirit invoked by St Paul when he prayed that the Corinthians might be blessed with the communion or koinonia of the Holy Spirit (2Cor 13:13). The Gospel that the Church is sent out to proclaim is precisely the good news of Jesus Christ who came “to gather into one the scattered children of God” (Jn 11:52). If the Church itself is to be understood as “the universal sacrament of salvation,”4 in the words of Lumen Gentium (LG), the council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, we might well say that its own communion life is intrinsic to the sacramental sign. As the Synod said succinctly: “The Church as communion is a sacrament for the salvation of the world.”5

In short, it seems that the Church in the power of the Spirit goes out to gather in, it goes out to gather in, like a heartbeat; it is an evangelizing
communion. Lumen Gentium spoke of “[the] apostolate which belongs to absolutely ever Christian.” “Through Baptism and Confirmation,” it said, “all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself” (LG 33). But it also taught, in its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC), that “the goal of apostolic endeavor is that all who are made [children] of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord’s Supper” (SC 10). Pope John Paul II once said that “the Church’s mystery” is “a mystery of Trinitarian communion in missionary tension.”

As part of the extended celebration of the 50th anniversary of Vatican II, currently underway, I would like to explore the council’s broad vision of the Church, in the Spirit, as an evangelizing communion. I would like to do so by considering the four main constitutions of the council, the four key documents out of its total of sixteen documents, namely Sacrosanctum Concilium, Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum (DV), and the final great Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes (GS). In particular, I would like to consider some of the ways in which those four constitutions, respectively, speak of the Holy Spirit, and I would like ultimately to suggest how the four constitutions might be regarded as correlating with one another in an overall configuration that gives us, so to speak, the shape of the council itself.

As a member of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church since 2005, I am aware that the idea of the Church as an evangelizing communion has a particular value in bridging between the tendency of Catholics to emphasize mission and the tendency of Orthodox to emphasize liturgy and communion, and I would like to suggest that the focus on the Eucharist, indeed the eucharistic ecclesiology, that has characterized the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue since its first document in 1982, is absolutely in harmony with the idea of the Church as an evangelizing communion, because the Church gathers for the Eucharist, as we often say, but just as important is the fact that it is from the Eucharist that the Church is regularly sent out: Ite missa est.

**1. SACROSANCTUM CONCILIIUM**

Let us begin by considering Sacrosanctum Concilium, the fruit of the liturgical movement, which can be traced back to the Abbey of Solesmes,
re-founded in the 1830s by Prosper Guéranger, but which really gathered momentum under the influence of Lambert Beauduin after the National Congress on Catholic Works held at Malines, Belgium, in 1909. It has to be admitted that, at first sight, this constitution seems rather weak from the point of view of pneumatology. It has far fewer references to the Holy Spirit than the other three constitutions. However, those it does have are by no means insignificant. It refers to the liturgical movement itself as a distinctive sign of the Spirit’s activity in the Church (SC 43), a notable sign of the times, in the later terminology of Gaudium et Spes (cf. GS 4, 11, 44).

More particularly, it says that the Son of God took flesh and was anointed by the Holy Spirit (SC 5), that Christ in turn sent his apostles, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” to preach the Gospel (SC 6), and that the liturgy builds up the members of the Church into “a dwelling-place for God in the Spirit” (SC 2). Most valuably, describing the liturgy as centered on the sacrifice of Christ and the sacraments, it says: “the Church has never failed to come together to celebrate the paschal mystery,” reading the scriptures, celebrating the Eucharist, and “‘giving thanks to God for his inexpressible gift’ in Christ Jesus ... through the power of the Holy Spirit” (SC 6). Implicitly, therefore, we should understand the Spirit as empowering all the aspects of liturgy that the constitution describes.

Several of those few references to the Spirit were actually added to the draft after the first draft was criticized in the conciliar debate for its lack of references to the Trinity and particularly to the Holy Spirit, described by one council father as “the intimate agent of the entire liturgical life [totius vitae liturgicae intimus actor].” However, it would surely be mistaken to regard the additions as simply ornamental. Rather, the council was being pressed to be more explicit about the activity of the Spirit, and not simply to take the presence and the work of the Spirit for granted, in a rather vague and implicit way, which has been and still is a danger in Catholic theology. Happily, the danger is diminished now because the Spirit is much more mentioned in Catholic worship. At the time of the council and for many centuries beforehand, there was only one eucharistic prayer used in the Catholic Mass, namely the Roman Canon, and that canon famously has no explicit reference to the Holy Spirit. If the principle of lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi applies, then that lack of a liturgical mention of the Spirit in the Roman Canon can surely be seen as a major factor in Western inattentiveness to the Spirit in theology and in the life of the Church in general.
Very soon after the council, however, and in closest connection to it, three new eucharistic prayers were introduced into the Roman rite, and that makes us recognize that there was much more going on in and around the council’s constitution on the liturgy than meets the eye. A renewed awareness of the *epiclesis*, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, and a corresponding awareness of the shortcomings of the Roman Canon, had been a significant aspect of the liturgical movement in the decades before the council.¹⁰ The conciliar constitution primarily gave simply the principles to guide a major revision of the liturgy, and the latter was immediately entrusted to a consilium, consisting of various working groups, one being coetus X, which worked on the Mass itself.

At first, various revisions and reorderings of the Roman Canon itself were proposed, but Pope Paul VI directed in 1966 that the Roman Canon was to remain unchanged, because of its venerable character, and that additional eucharistic prayers, or anaphoras, could be introduced¹¹ in order to satisfy the desire for more variety and for an explicit *epiclesis* of the Spirit, both of which were strong features of the Christian East. It can broadly be said that, in accordance with the Eastern pattern, the available prayers had a single *epiclesis following* the words of institution, and a centuries-old tension between East and West reared its head again, regarding whether the words of institution were themselves consecratory or whether the subsequent *epiclesis* was.¹² The eventual solution was to adapt the additional anaphoras, now known as Eucharistic Prayers II, III, and IV, so as to include a *double epiclesis*: one over the elements of bread and wine before the words of institution, and one over the people afterwards, thereby paradoxically both drawing from the East but also instituting a new difference from the East.

Not everyone was happy with that solution. Aidan Kavanagh, for instance, expressed his misgivings “that the hallowing and unifying functions of the Spirit have been split, as it were, into two separate moments.” “The inclusion of a pneumatic epiclesis just before the institution account” he added, “interrupts the flow of sequence in narrating the divine mercies for which eucharistic prayer is made and sets the institution account off from this cursus.” He described it as “exasperating beyond words” that that structure had been adopted in all of the new eucharistic prayers.¹³

I would like to make two further points regarding *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, one of which connects it with *Lumen Gentium*, while the other connects it with *Dei Verbum* - some of the interconnections of the constitutions becoming apparent. First, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is a highly
ecclesiological document. It makes numerous statements linking the liturgy to the Church which are echoed and further developed by *Lumen Gentium*, to such an extent that the latter text can almost be said to be a dogmatic commentary on the former. For instance, SC 2 says that it is especially through the liturgy that “the faithful are enabled to express in their lives and manifest to others the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church,” which it then describes as both human and divine, visible and invisible, a description that LG 8 subsequently developed, acknowledging the profound parallel between such a description of the Church and the Christological doctrine of the council of Chalcedon. Both SC 10 and LG 11 describe the Eucharist as the source and summit of the life of the Church, and, with reference to the writings of St Ignatius of Antioch, both SC 41 and LG 26 teach that the principal gathering and manifestation of the Church is the assembly of the local church with its bishop for the celebration of the Eucharist. LG 26 indeed states that it is from the Eucharist that “the Church ever derives its life.”¹⁴ In other words, as the famous principle coined by Henri de Lubac says, “the Eucharist makes the Church.”¹⁵

Secondly, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* makes it clear that the “two parts which in a sense go to make up the Mass, viz. the liturgy of the word and the eucharistic liturgy, are so closely connected with each other that they form but one single act of worship” (SC 56), and it speaks of the two-fold nourishment of the faithful in the Mass from “the table of God’s word” (SC 51) and “the table of the Lord’s body” (SC 48). *Dei Verbum* subsequently drew those two tables together and taught that the Church “never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ” (DV 21). It may be noted that another liturgical issue that had arisen concerned the correct terminology for the two parts of the Mass, and indeed the relationship between them. In his monumental work, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, published in two volumes in 1950 and 1955, respectively, Joseph Jungmann actually referred to “the service of readings” within the “Mass-liturgy” as the “fore-Mass,” which seems to indicate some ambiguity as to whether “the Mass” is the whole service or just what takes place at the altar after the readings. “The reading of Holy Scripture represents the proper content of the fore-Mass,” he said, “in much the same way as the Sacrament forms the heart of the Mass proper; they are both precious treasures which the Church safeguards for mankind.”¹⁶ While the council definitely regarded both the readings and the sacrament as integral to the Mass, it nevertheless
tended to use the term “Eucharist” just for the second main part of the Mass, and not as a synonym for the “Mass,” which in turn raises the interesting question as to whether de Lubac had both parts of the Mass or just the second part in mind when he said that “the Eucharist makes the Church.”

So, as an interim conclusion, we can say that, if we were to depict the relationship between Sacrosanctum Concilium and Lumen Gentium, it would be appropriate to draw two circles, with the circle for the former inside the circle for the latter, and that, in turn, we would place the proclamation of the word within the circle representing Sacrosanctum Concilium, since in the teaching of the council the proclamation of the word is an intrinsic part of the liturgy and especially of the Mass.

Plan of the Council

Let us now turn to the relationship between the two great conciliar constitutions on the Church, Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes. Clarifying the relationship between these two documents is very important for our purpose here. A draft of what was to become Lumen Gentium was in the hands of the bishops at the very start of the council, and it was duly refined through three years of hard work, being finally promulgated in 1964. No draft of Gaudium et Spes existed as the council began. The idea for such a document was conceived only at the council itself, and it took even longer to complete the text, Gaudium et Spes being the final conciliar document promulgated in 1965. However, I would like to suggest that that final text expressed the whole purpose of the council, in that it was the ultimate working out of Pope John’s prayer for a new Pentecost.

Gaudium et Spes is sometimes treated as an appendix to Lumen Gentium, an afterword, a final message of goodwill towards the world. However, it is much more than that. In his book, Sources of Renewal, written in the 1970s to explain the council to his diocese of Krakow, Karol Wojtyla said that GS complements and completes LG, which sounds as if indeed it should be regarded as the secondary text. However, he then explained in what way GS complements and completes LG, namely “because it reveals what the Church essentially is,” which suddenly reverses the priority. It is GS which expresses the very essence of the Church. How might that be? Well, he explained: “The redemptive work of Jesus Christ which determines the inmost nature of the Church is in fact the redemption of the world.” The clear implication is that the inmost nature of the Church, which is what LG considers in great depth, is in fact determined by the Church’s mission in the
world, profoundly pondered in GS, which results from the redemption of the world by Christ, and that therefore it is GS that provides the essential context for LG.

In order to know how the Church should be structured, we have to know what purpose it is meant to fulfill. In short, as GS explains, the Church is essentially outward going, on mission in the world, and LG explains the inner composition and structure of such a Church. The clue is already there in the opening words of LG: *Lumen gentium cum sit Christus* (LG 1); since Christ is the light of the world, it is the Church’s task to transmit that light, and everything that follows serves that purpose. GS is like an extended commentary on those opening five words of LG, making sure that everyone understands the big picture.

That twofold idea of the Church in its inner and outer aspects was, in fact, a key organizing principle of the council, formulated by one of its leading figures, Cardinal Léon-Josef Suenens of Malines-Brussels, one of the pioneers of Catholic awareness of the Holy Spirit, in 1962. Suenens recalls that Pope John asked him early in 1962 who was looking after the overall plan of the council. He frankly replied that no one was! Pope John asked him to draw up such a plan, not to be imposed on the council, but to be offered as and when necessary. By the end of December 1962, the need for some kind of programme was apparent to all, and Suenens presented his idea. He proposed that all the council’s texts should be grouped under two headings: first, those dealing with the Church *ad extra*, “that is the Church as it faces the world of today,” and, secondly, those dealing with the Church *ad intra*, namely with “the Church in itself,” but, as he said, “with the aim of helping it better to respond to its mission in the world.”

So, there again is the idea that inner considerations are at the service of the Church’s outward orientation. Suenens summarized his point very simply: “the central question for the whole Council,” he said, “could be this: How is the Church of the twentieth century measuring up to the Master’s last command: Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.”

“To respond to the Savior’s command,” he said, “the whole Church must be put ‘on a mission footing.’”

It may be noted that Pope Francis’ recent urging, which he himself described as having “programmatic significance,” that the Church “throughout the world” should be “permanently in a state of mission” strikingly echoes the programmatic proposal of Suenens, which was adopted by the council.
So LG and GS should be seen as intimately united. The Church examined in such detail in LG is a Church in the modern world, called to work for the world’s salvation. Its nature cannot be separated from its mission, or perhaps better its nature is one of mission. Let us pursue that point. The idea of communion is fundamental both to LG and to GS. Quoting St Cyprian, LG teaches that the Church is “a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (LG 4);23 it is “a communion of life, love and truth” (LG 9). GS reiterates that point, saying that when Jesus prayed to the Father “that they may all be one ... even as we are one” (Jn 17:21-22), he “opened up new horizons closed to human reason by implying that there is a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of the [children] of God in truth and love” (GS 24). God wants “everyone to be saved” (1Tim 2:4); “Christ died for all,” as GS says in its most famous section 22, to which we shall return, and salvation is to be found in a life of communion, participating in the very life of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And the fact is that that very God has gone out of himself on mission, so to speak, by his whole purpose of creation and redemption, with immediate consequences for the Church which participates in his life. On the penultimate day of the council, along with GS, the council promulgated its Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, Ad Gentes (AG), in which it said: “The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Spirit” (AG 1). We might therefore aptly say that the Church is an evangelizing communion, a missionary communion, because the God whose life we share is a missionary communion.

In its communion life, in other words, the Church is forever looking outwards to the world; it is a sacrament, sign and instrument, of communion. That idea - sacrament of unity, universal sacrament of salvation, sacrament of God’s love for humanity - ripples not only through LG (1, 9, 48) and GS (42, 45), but also through SC (5, 26), again uniting the great texts on the Church, and now connecting them both with the constitution on the liturgy. The Church is constituted as a missionary communion, and, as Joseph Ratzinger once said: “Its worship is its constitution,” since, as he explained, “of its nature it is itself the service of God and thus of men and women, the service of transforming the world.”24

Returning to our interim picture of the relationship between the council’s constitutions, therefore, we might say that the circle representing LG, which contains the circle for SC, is radiating outwards to the world, GS being the
expression of that radiance.

II. **Gaudium et Spes**

So, let us consider *Gaudium et Spes* and the big picture, and then work back inwards, and let us pay particular attention, as we do so, to some further remarkable teachings of the council on the work of the Holy Spirit. There is great power and scope of the council’s statement in GS 11 that: “The people of God believes that it is led by the Spirit of the Lord who fills the whole world.” We see how the council understands the world at large; it is a world filled by the Spirit, who blows where he wills (cf. Jn 3:8). The Spirit blows everywhere, calling everyone to salvation in Christ, as GS 22 explains. This passage maps a vital middle ground between two well-known extremes, respectively known as exclusivism and pluralism, the first of which says that unless a person expressly acknowledges Jesus Christ as their God and savior they cannot be saved, which seems to be hard on those who have never even heard the holy name of Jesus, while the second says that there are many paths to God and that the way of Christ is only one of them, which contradicts the Christian conviction that Christ is the one savior of the world.

The council carefully steered between those extremes, and said: “since Christ died for all, and since all ... are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery” (GS 22). Yes, there is only one way of salvation, namely through the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, and the Church knows and celebrates that mystery regularly in its sacraments, as GS 22 says, incidentally echoing SC 6, but, in ways known only to God, every single human being is invited by the Spirit to participate in that same mystery and so to find salvation. It follows that only God can judge what the response of each one has been, but we might perhaps say that a certain likeness to Christ in terms of a life of love and self-sacrifice for others would be likely signs of a salvific response to the invitation of the Spirit, even if the person concerned had never even heard of Christ.

So, once again, here with regard to the world at large, there is more going on than meets the eye! The Spirit is at work everywhere with an invitation to salvation, and the Church which is led by the same Spirit exists in that context as the sacrament of salvation, the authorized presence of Christ and interpreter of the works of the Spirit in the midst of a world saved by Christ and full of the Spirit, the place where the God who is implicitly
active everywhere is explicitly named and praised, the true home for those who respond to the Spirit.

It is no surprise to see the famous quote from St Augustine at the very end of GS 21, leading into the crucial teaching of GS 22: “You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”25 The Spirit responds to the restlessness in every human heart, and perhaps even kindles that restlessness. It is the natural restlessness for God in those who are made in the image of God, a restlessness fulfilled only through union with Christ, who is the true “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), as GS 22 says, citing St Paul. In a memorable phrase, which echoes Henri de Lubac and perhaps has links with Pascal’s Pensées, the council says: “Christ the Lord ... in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself, and brings to light his most high calling” (GS 22).26

Since the Spirit is at work in the whole world, and the Church has no monopoly of the Spirit, it follows that the Church needs to be attentive to the world for possible signs of the Spirit’s activity, which will always be of relevance to the Church. GS says that the Church “tries to discern in the events, the needs, and the longings which it shares with other people of our time, what may be genuine signs of the presence or of the purpose of God” (GS 11). The same Holy Spirit guides that very discernment, which is the task of all the faithful. “With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the whole people of God, particularly its pastors and theologians, to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of the divine Word, in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood, and more suitably presented” (GS 44). In short, while the world certainly has much to learn from the Church, it is also true that the Church learns from the world. In its document, Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria (2012), the International Theological Commission (ITC) emphasized the need for theologians to be in dialogue with the world, precisely because the Spirit is active there, too, and it pointed to a particular fruit of that dialogue: “the more acute understanding of the world that results,” it said, “cannot fail to prompt a more penetrating appreciation of Christ the Lord and of the Gospel, since Christ is the Savior of the world.”27

III. Lumen Gentium

Having clarified the Spirit-filled context within which the Spirit-filled Church exists, let us now move inwards, so to speak, and return to LG. The
idea of GS that with the help of the Holy Spirit the whole people of God has the responsibility of reading the signs of the times (GS 44, cf. 4) is closely related to the ground-breaking teaching of LG that, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the people of God as a whole shares in the prophetic office of Christ (LG 12). That teaching, in turn, owes much to the influence of Yves Congar, who, along with others such as de Lubac, understood there to have been a major change in the understanding of the Church in the West around the start of the second millennium, a change which contributed to the schism between West and East, Catholics and Orthodox, traditionally dated to 1054, a change which they sought to reverse through their own work, which exerted a major influence on Vatican II. Congar referred to it as a change from “an ecclesiology of the ecclesia” or of “communion” to “an ecclesiology of powers.”28 The powers he intended were twofold, power of order and power of jurisdiction, both of which were exercised in various ways by the Church’s hierarchy of ordained ministers in a Church pyramidally understood, the pope at the top of the pyramid having the fullness of power, plenitudo potestatis,29 and the laity at the bottom being powerless. Vatican II says nothing about those two powers, which had dominated scholastic discussion of the Church until the twentieth century, and speaks instead of the three offices (munera) of Christ, as prophet, priest and king, respectively, in which all of the baptized, and not just the ordained ministers, participate in their own proper ways.30 So, everyone has gifts that they are called to exercise for the benefit of the Church and the world at large. Congar’s book, Jalons pour une théologie du laïcat (1953, 1964), translated as Lay People in the Church (1957, 1965), played a large part in the recovery of the patristic idea of the three offices.

The second half of LG 12 speaks broadly about the “special graces” distributed by the Holy Spirit “among the faithful of every rank” so as to make them “fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church.” Congar himself saw that as a prime example of the council’s teaching on charisms, which was one of the most important ways in which the council had developed what he called a “pneumatological ecclesiology,” which had given the Church “a new face ... quite different from the one that the earlier pyramidal and clerical ecclesiology presented.”31 That new face was reflected in the revised ordering of the chapters in LG itself, whereby the chapter on the people of God as a whole, chapter two, which includes section 12, precedes rather than following the chapter on the hierarchy, to show that the members of the hierarchy are themselves first
baptized members of the people of God, whom they are then called to serve, rather than being superior to the people.32

The idea that the people of God as a whole participates in the prophetic office of Christ, presented in the first half of LG 12, probably needs to be distinguished from the subsequent discussion of charisms strictly speaking, since that participation is enjoyed by all the faithful, rather than being one of many specific gifts distributed to different members of the faithful. Nevertheless, the council places the two ideas in close proximity, and they are clearly related, as works of the Spirit.

The council links the participation of all the faithful in Christ's prophetic office, thanks to the anointing of the Spirit (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 27), to the sensus fidei, namely the “supernatural appreciation of the faith” that all the baptized have, which in turn means, as it says, that “the whole body of the faithful ... cannot err in matters of belief” (LG 12). The sensus fidei, it says, is “aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth,” and thanks to it “the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (magisterium), and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (cf. 1Th 2:13)” (LG 12). In its most recent document, the ITC gives considerable thought to the sensus fidei, traditionally understood as an instinct by which the faithful recognize the truth of the Gospel and reject false teaching, rather as a music lover might react to false notes in a musical performance,33 and it suggests that while that reactive understanding of the sensus fidei is most familiar, just as important is the prospective and proactive aspect of the sensus fidei. The sensus fidei “gives an intuition of the right way forward” for the Christian and the Church. “It animates the life of faith and guides authentic Christian action.”34 That fits with the council’s association of the sensus fidei with participation in the prophetic office of Christ, which presumably entails witness in word and action, and with the council’s teaching that thanks to the sensus fidei, the people of God not only adhere to the faith and penetrate it more deeply, but also “[apply] it more fully in daily life” (LG 12). That prospective and proactive aspect makes the sensus fidei “a vital resource for the new evangelization” to which Pope Francis,35 like Pope St John Paul II,36 has committed the Church.

IV. Dei Verbum

The relationship between the sensus fidei and the magisterium37 is a delicate and very topical issue.38 For a proper understanding of the relationship, both need to be recognized as manifestations of the Spirit’s work
in the Church, and that is helpfully clarified by the remaining constitution of Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, to which I would like finally to turn.

As Robert Murray says, *Dei Verbum* is “theologically the most fundamental of the documents of Vatican II,” and “the most theologically concentrated” of the four constitutions. It and LG are the only ones designated as “dogmatic” constitutions. The discussion of this particular draft extended over all four sessions of the council, from 1962-65, and in some ways encapsulated the overall drama of the council itself. Ratzinger says that the discussion “took place in an atmosphere of restless theological ferment and sometimes almost risked being overwhelmed by it.” The story began when a schema or draft text entitled, “The Sources of Divine Revelation,” was rejected on 20 November 1962. Congar commented that that date and action would “be recognized in the history of the Church as marking the definitive close of the counter-Reformation, because on that day the Council Fathers by a majority vote rejected a document that was too little ecumenical and too inspired by anti-Protestant Catholicism.” Pope John directed that a new draft should be prepared by a new joint commission, co-chaired by Cardinal Ottaviani of the Holy Office and Cardinal Bea, the president of the newly established Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity and a long-respected biblical scholar.

In the end, *Dei Verbum* resolved the polemic between Catholics and Protestants regarding whether there were two sources of revelation, namely scripture and tradition, or only one, *scriptura sola*, by getting behind the issue, so to speak. Prior to both scripture and tradition is the person of Christ, and DV proclaimed that he “himself [is] both the mediator and the sum total of Revelation” (DV 2). His Gospel is “the source [n.b., in the singular] of all saving truth and moral discipline” (DV 7). “Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God,” it said, and then specified that that deposit is “entrusted to the Church,” that is, to “the entire holy people, united to its pastors” (DV 10), a remarkable statement, indicating the responsibility of the Church as a whole, and not just of the bishops, for maintaining and transmitting the Gospel.

The *sensus fidei* is again relevant here, and DV gives crucial teaching regarding the role of the faithful as a whole and the specific role of the magisterium, both being placed under the sign of the Holy Spirit. First of all, “the Tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit” (DV 8), it says, and this happens primarily “through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things
in their hearts.” It happens thanks to what DV calls the “intimate knowledge [intelligentia] of spiritual realities which they experience” (DV 8), implicitly recognizing, it would seem, the sensus fidei. But at that point the council also invokes the charisma veritatis certum, as St Irenaeus called it, given by the Holy Spirit to the bishops. The tradition makes progress, it says, also “from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth” (DV 8), and it specifies that “the task of giving an authentic [i.e. authoritative] interpretation of the Word of God ... has been entrusted to the living Magisterium of the Church alone,” which it hastens to stress “is not superior to the Word of God, but its servant” (DV 10). Thus it is that the Church as a whole, as a communion, under the guidance of its pastors, is maintained in the truth by the Holy Spirit.

Catholic biblical scholars describe Pope Pius XII’s encyclical letter, Divino Afflante Spiritu (1943) as a Magna Carta. It permitted them to use “modern tools,” long suspected by the Catholic Church, in their exegesis. DV endorsed that permission and directed exegetes to pay attention among other things to “literary forms” so as to determine what each sacred writer, in his own time and culture, intended to express (DV 12). However, it pointed out that while such techniques are necessary, they are not in themselves sufficient for a proper understanding of the biblical text. As the draft text developed, council fathers urged that attention should also be paid to the unity of scripture as a whole, to the tradition of the Church, and to the analogy of faith, but in the final text, probably thanks to a remarkable speech at the council by the Melkite Archbishop Edelby of Edessa in October 1964, a remarkable principle was stated to introduce those three extra conditions and to explain their profound rationale. They are important, it was said, “because sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same Spirit [with a capital “S”] in whom [or “by whom”] it was written [cum Sacra Scriptura eodem Spiritu quo scripta est etiam legenda et interpretanda sit]” (DV 12).

In his speech, offering an invaluable Eastern contribution to the council’s deliberations, Edelby promoted that basic principle of patristic exegesis: the scriptures must be read in the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit inspired the whole of Scripture, guided and guides the course of tradition, and gives the gift of faith with its interconnected fabric of belief, all of those must be taken into account when the meaning of any particular passage inspired by the same Spirit is sought. By the same logic, it may be said that the scriptures must also be interpreted under the guidance of the pastors whom the same Spirit has
given to the Church. The necessary role of the magisterium is thereby readily acknowledged and integrated into the overall framework of a truly spiritual exegesis, which can likewise be described as a truly ecclesial exegesis, since the Spirit is the Spirit of communion and *koinonia*. The manifold works of the Spirit thus constitute the necessary matrix for the authentic interpretation of scripture.

Edelby believed that just as the Spirit was invoked in the eucharistic *epiclesis* to transform bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, an *epiclesis* was likewise needed so that the written word might become the living Word of God. “Sacred Tradition” was that *epiclesis*, “the theophany of the Holy Spirit, without which the history of the world is in comprehensible, and Scripture a dead letter.” Moreover, he believed that the primary place for such a proclamation of the word was in the celebration of the Eucharist. Scripture is “the testimony of the Holy Spirit about the Christ event,” and the “privileged moment” of that testimony is “the Eucharistic celebration.”

**Conclusion**

That conviction takes us back to the constitution on the liturgy, the first of the council’s constitutions, where the various presences of Christ in the liturgy were identified. The council repeated the teaching of Pope Pius XII in another major encyclical letter, *Mediator Dei* (1947), but with a notable addition. Pope Pius had said that Christ was present in the sacrifice of the altar, in the person of his minister, and especially “under the Eucharistic species”; also, that he was present in the sacraments and finally in the community at prayer, in accordance with his promise: “When two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).

SC 7 repeated that teaching, but added mention of another presence: “He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church.”

That teaching, I would like to suggest, can provide a key to the synthesis of the council’s teaching that I have been developing here. It gives us good grounds for locating DV within the circle for SC in the diagram I have been constructing to show the relationship between the council’s four constitutions. At the very center of the whole diagram stands Christ himself, and DV describes how we should understand him within the whole saving purpose of God. “It pleased God,” says DV, “in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will (Eph 1:9).” “His will was that [human beings] should have access to the Father,
through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2Pet 1:4). By this revelation, then, the invisible God (cf. Col 1:15; 1Tim 1:17), from the fullness of his love, addresses men [and women] as his friends (cf. Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15), and moves among them (cf. Bar 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company” (DV 2; cf. 21, 25).

That dramatic and compelling idea of God sending his only Son to dialogue with humanity and to draw us into communion with him and with one another in the Holy Spirit can indeed serve as the unifying motif for the teaching of the council as a whole. In the liturgy, most of all, Christ comes among us and dialogues with his people, drawing us into an ever deeper union with him, as the liturgy of the word progresses into the liturgy of the Eucharist and we receive the body and blood of the Lord, the effect of which, as LG says, quoting Pope St Leo the Great, is “to accomplish our transformation into that which we receive” (LG 26). Transformed into Christ, the Church itself is then sent out, *Ite missa est*, so that in and through its members Christ may continue the dialogue of salvation with the people of today.

On 19 October 1964, in the midst of the third session of the council, Vatican radio broadcast a talk in Polish by Archbishop Karol Wojtyła of Krakow, in which he said: “Although none of the completed constitutions or directives has the human person as its specific topic, the person lies deep within the entire conciliar teaching that is slowly emerging from our labors.” Properly to understand the work of the Church in relation to the human person, he said, “will be an enormous contribution, as far as the pastoral aim of the Council is concerned.” That is a most interesting interpretation of what it means to call Vatican II a “pastoral council,” indicating that it has to do with understanding the saving purpose of God as being personal, focused on the person of his Son, the Word of God, who took flesh by the power of the Spirit to dialogue with human persons and to draw us and the whole of creation to himself and so to God in the power of the same Spirit.

Suddenly we see that the four constitutions all have that personal key. Christ himself is “both the mediator and the sum total of revelation,” says DV 2. Christ himself is “the light of humanity,” says LG 1, and “by his incarnation” he has united himself with every single human being, revealing not only God to man, but “man to man himself,” says GS 22.50 In a way known to God, all are invited by the Holy Spirit to participate in his paschal mystery and so to find salvation (GS 22), and the purpose of all the Church’s
apostolic endeavor, as SC teaches, is that those who are made children of God by faith and baptism should “come together to praise God in the midst of his Church,” taking part in the Lord’s Supper and the sacrifice of Christ (SC 10), because that is what the liturgy is, Christ’s own act of praise and worship, in which he “always associates the Church with himself” (SC 7).

In other words, as the circles of the diagram show (see the figure), representing the four constitutions of Vatican II, the life and work of the Church ripple outwards from the person of Christ at the centre, the Word made flesh, most powerfully present in the liturgy, and especially in the Eucharist, which makes the Church, gathering it, but then sending it back out into the world - so the arrows point outwards. But ultimately all is gathered back to him. The purpose of our going out is precisely to gather in, and that is why the dotted arrows turn back inwards, so that, in the words of the council, we and all creation might ultimately give thanks to God “for his inexpressible gift’ (2 Cor 9:15) in Christ Jesus, ... through the power of the Holy Spirit” (SC 6).
ENDNOTES


3 Final *Relatio*, II, C, 1.


5 Final *Relatio*, II, D, 1.


14 See also, LG 3, 7, 11, regarding the link between the Eucharist and the Church.


17 See, e.g., the apparent distinction between reading the scriptures and celebrating the Eucharist in SC 6, 106; also in the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus* (1965), 11.


21 “A Plan for the Whole Council,” 98.

23 See St Cyprian, *De Orat. Dom.*, 23 (PL 4, 556).


25 St Augustine, *Confessions* 1, 1, 1.

26 See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p.339: “By revealing the Father and by being revealed by him, Christ completes the revelation of man to himself.” Also, Pascal, *Pensées*, n.547 (548): “Not only do we know God by Jesus Christ alone, but we know ourselves only by Jesus Christ.”


30 See *LG* 31, 21, 28, 29, respectively, for the participation of the faithful, bishops, presbyters and deacons in the three offices of Christ, each in their own way.


34 *Sensus fidei in the Life of the Church*, n.70.
35 See Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn.119-120.


38 See, e.g., the recent Extraordinary Synod on “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization” (2014).


42 See St Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 4, 26, 2.


44 Amended translation.


47 Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, Mediator Dei (1947), n.19 (DS 3840).

48 St Leo, Serm. 63, 7 (PL 54, 357C).


50 Amended translation.


_____. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium (1964), nn. 1-17.


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