

## Vatican II: An Exchange of Gifts

### Introduction

Vatican II was ushered in by an unusually far-sighted pope, St John XXIII, whose announcement of the Council took his own cardinals by surprise, but whose genius for affability won the world over to his plans. It was also accompanied by an unusually gifted reporter, Xavier Rynne, whose verve and insider approach made him pass on to an avid public both babe and bath with. Indeed, Rynne's real identity, as Redemptorist Father Francis Xavier Murphy, professor at the Lateran University, was one of the best-kept secrets for years after the Council. Starting with his *Letters from Vatican City*, first published in the pages of *The New Yorker*, and then as a four-volume work to cover the Council's four sessions, Rynne's account is credited with having fixed on the collective imagination the idea that Vatican II was a prolonged tug of war between conservatives and liberals.<sup>1</sup> Such sociological tags cannot, however, fully satisfy theological concerns. Here we want to go beyond such journalistic oversimplifications, and go to the heart of the matter by turning to one of Vatican II's most profound but neglected thoughts: *exchange of gifts*.

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<sup>1</sup> Xavier Rynne [Francis Xavier Murphy], *Letters from Vatican City*, 4 vols. (London: Faber & Faber, 1963-66). The first volume consisted of 13 letters. A Redemptorist, Fr Francis Xavier Murphy (1915-2002) used a pseudonym made of his middle name, Xavier, and his mother's surname, Rynne. In 1959 he had just been appointed professor of moral theology at the Lateran University.

## Exchange of Gifts

Gifts underline our solidarity with people at significant events of the calendar, and at the same time help renew or deepen our attitude towards those to whom we plan to give them, as at Christmas.<sup>2</sup> Exchange, however, rings a bell. Is this a case of the famous “do ut des,” against which good morals and common sense warn as being destructive of the very gift, denaturalizing it to a self-centred bank account regulated by the laws of intelligent egoism? Exchange has to be a real give-and-take, enriching both parties if it is to convince. Yet rather than indulge in a philosophical disquisition of the term let us plunge *in medias res*.

## Epiphany 6 January 1964: Exchanging Gifts in Jerusalem

At mid-term of the Council, in December 1963, Pope Paul VI announced his imminent pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Its purpose was to go back to the roots, draw the world's attention to the origins of Christianity, and at the same time meet representatives of the Orthodox Church. This leap across the centuries for church hierarchs accustomed to ignore one another, was a no mean diplomatic feat, as it had to enlist the good will not only of Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople,<sup>3</sup> but also of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Benedict and the Armenian Patriarch Derderian, both of Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> What riveted the attention of the world was the hug and the kiss, immortalized in a commemorative icon made soon after for the occasion, and known as *The Two Brother Apostles*.<sup>5</sup> Most eloquent was the

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<sup>2</sup> It is remarkable that the prime time for changing gifts, Christmastime, is associated with an Eastern saint, St Nicholas of Myra; the second, with St Martin of Tours (ca. 316-397), too an Eastern saint who hailed from Pannonia, roughly modern Hungary. Exchange of gifts is also present in other religions, e.g. gift giving during the Jewish festival of Hannukah, and exchange of food between households during the other Jewish celebration of Purim (see below). The Romans of old gave gifts on the feast of Saturnalia, which occurred in December, see *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Act 5, Scene 2, where Cleopatra tells Augustus: that she has reserved for him “some immoment toys, things of such dignity / as we greet modern friends withal,” Charles Knight, ed. *The Works of William Shakespeare*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: H.G. Bohn, 1857), 950.

<sup>3</sup> Rynne, *Letters from Vatican City (Second Session)*, 2:307. Athenagoras' initial openness, in spite of his reservations, to send observers to the Council was soon marred by the negative reaction of several Orthodox Churches, and especially Moscow's first reaction as *non possumus*, Valeria Martano, *Athenagoras, il patriarca 1886-1972; un Cristiano fra crisi della coabitazione e utopia ecumenica* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), 445-452.

<sup>4</sup> Rynne, *Letters from Vatican City (Second Session)*, 2:311-312.

<sup>5</sup> Forty years later, celebrating the solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul (29 June 2004) in the presence of Bartholomew I, John Paul II had this to say: “In the beautiful icon given by Patriarch Athenagoras I to Pope Paul VI on 5 January 1964, the two Holy Apostles, Peter the leader and Andrew the Protoklitos [the First-Called], embrace in an eloquent language of love,

exchange of gifts between pope and patriarch. While the pope gave Athenagoras a golden chalice and a gold medal commemorating the pilgrimage,<sup>6</sup> and unaware of the fact that Athenagoras would speak of the chalice in his speech, Athenagoras gave the pope an *encolpion*, a pectoral chain with a medallion of the Mother of God, the *Panhagia* (Mary All-Holy), which Orthodox bishops wear as a sign of their apostolic succession.<sup>7</sup> The meaning could not be lost on the gathering or still less on posterity.

In view of the questioning of the validity of Catholic sacraments in the past, nothing could have dramatically denied the negation and affirmed its contrary, as Athenagoras' spontaneous reaction as he accompanied the pope hand in hand: "I ardently hope that Pope Paul VI and I will one day mix water and wine in this chalice."<sup>8</sup> For all intents and purposes Paul VI was, for Athenagoras a bishop of the Eastern Church. On that occasion Athenagoras pronounced the famous words: "There was a man sent by God whose name was John ...."<sup>9</sup> In his work *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope*, Peter Hebblethwaite comments on the Jerusalem encounter: "It was ... a master-stroke which dramatized the goals of the Council and caught the imagination of the world. It was a return to the sources, the *retour aux sources*, which was the basis for the biblical, patristic and liturgical movements which flowed into the Council."<sup>10</sup> And again: "A thousand years of history were, if not swept aside, at least consigned to God's mercy and forgiveness."<sup>11</sup>

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beneath the glorious Christ; Andrew was the first to place himself in the following of the Lord, Peter was called to confirm the brothers in the faith," <http://yourcatholicvoice.org//insight.php?article=1106>. Olivier Clement, *Dialogues avec le Patriarche Athénagoras* (Paris : A Fayard, 1969), 362 reports Athenagoras as saying: "Nous nous sommes embrassés une fois, deux fois, et puis encore. Comme deux frères qui se retrouvent après une très longue séparation." The icon now hangs in the reception room of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Unity among Christians.

<sup>6</sup> Rynne, *Letters from Vatican City (Second Session)*, 2:313.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 318. Clément recalls the scene: Paul VI passed the chain round of Athenagoras, while several orthodox members of those present cried out as at the ordination of a bishop "Axios! Axios!" Clement, *Dialogues avec le Patriarche Athénagoras*, 364.

<sup>8</sup> Rynne, *Letters from Vatican City (Second Session)*, 2:313.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 318; Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: Paulist Press, 1993), 371. Athenagoras had already quoted Jn1:6 on hearing of John XXIII's election; Martano, *Athenagoras il patriarca*, 391-392.

<sup>10</sup> Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 370.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 372.

### What's in a Gift?: The Giver, the Gift and the Receiver

Towards the end of that same year 1964 another event took place which highlighted albeit negatively the nature of gifts. Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), who in that year had been nominated for the Nobel Prize, turned it down saying that a writer should not let himself be converted into an institution: a gift enslaves.<sup>12</sup> The question thus arises whether a gift is not an attempt to exercise undue pressure on a free exchange of opinions and convictions.

On this point, the renowned Orthodox theologian Fr André Scrima (1930-2000),<sup>13</sup> who was present for the Jerusalem encounter, offers rich food for thought. The title of his reflection is "Epiphany - East and West."<sup>14</sup> Epiphany is the time when we remember the Magi travelling afar to bear gifts. Dialogue, like the traffic, needs signs if it is to proceed in an orderly fashion; to reject these signs and to pretend that no accidents would happen smacks of lunacy. Dialogue ultimately is less about facts than about attitudes; not about ideas but about ourselves. Only when we see others in a new light can we open ourselves up to listen for the first time to their real views, and not reduce them to our preconceptions. We need signs, and Jerusalem was such a sign; we need traffic lights, and Jerusalem showed us the way that things are going. To let oneself be put into question is to see one's own convictions in a new light; the ultimate sense of dialogue is to make a gift of oneself. Fr Scrima makes the following point: The East is presence; for this reason, the very feast of the Epiphany is known in the East as "Theophany," the revelation of the Trinity.<sup>15</sup> The West is more concerned about activity and transmission; God constantly making of himself as a gift.<sup>16</sup> As Athenagoras told Paul VI, "We came to Jerusalem to meet each other and together we found - not instead, but through that very meeting - Jesus Christ."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Sartre has developed this idea in his play, *Le diable et le bon Dieu; trois actes et onze tableaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951). For a quick critical review of freedom in Sartre, see Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (London: Search Press, 1975), 9:354-360.

<sup>13</sup> Mircea Păcurariu, "Scrima, Andrei," in *Enciclopedia Ortodoxiei Românești* (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, 2010), 571.

<sup>14</sup> André Scrima, "Epiphanie: Orient und Okzident," in Ludwig Kaufmann, ed., *Begegnung im Heiligen Land* (Frankfurt a.M.: C.J. Bucher, 1964), 129-135.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 132. Once more, Clément recalls the scene: After reciting together the Our Father, the Latins present expected the Pope to end with Amen, but they, following the Orthodox usage now common among Catholics, replied: "For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory now and forever. Amen," Clément, *Dialogues avec le Patriarche Athénagoras*, 364.

<sup>16</sup> Scrima, "Epiphanie: Orient und Okzident," 133.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 131.

## The Exchange of Gifts

The term whose meaning we are most likely to gloss over is that of “exchange.” Going by the exchange of money, we may easily reduce such operation to the transfer of that money’s worth into another currency. But what about an exchange of words, not to say an exchange of blows? In such instances, obviously, the weightier person is likely to carry the day with his glib gift of the tongue, or his potential boxer qualities. Even in the case of money exchange, one is charged for the operation, the point being that an exchange of gifts rarely ever translates or transfers in terms of complete equality. One Church hymn admirably underlines this with the classic expression: *O admirabile commercium* - Oh admirable exchange!: without stopping to be God, the Lord abandoned his rank to raise us to his own! (cf. Phil 2:5-11).<sup>18</sup> Likewise, in the exchange of gifts symbolized at that Jerusalem Epiphany of 1964, both sides left each other enriched and better equipped to face their many challenges, especially in re-establishing communion. And in the exchange of gifts which animates the texts of the Council, we see that this happens not on a level of a superior-inferior relationship, but as free mutual interchange meant to liberate or at least ennoble both partners. Do not the Acts put on Christ’s lips: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35)?<sup>19</sup> Actually, God does not simply bestow gifts, known as graces; God gives us himself, his own life to share, in what is called inhabitation of the Spirit or deification.<sup>20</sup> On that analogy we may say: a true exchange of gifts takes place when we come out of hiding, “let our hair down” and disclose ourselves as we are; drop our habitual defence mechanisms and rise to the occasion, thereby rendering ourselves vulnerable but inviting our partner to do the same.<sup>21</sup> The examples of St Nicholas and St Martin, both hailing from the East,<sup>22</sup> are too well known to require elaboration.

From the viewpoint of sociology, comparative religion and the study of religions, exchange of gifts is both socially and religiously one of the most telling

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<sup>18</sup> *Liber Usualis Missae e Officii ... a Solesmensibus Monachis Diligenter Ornato* (Rome: Desclee, 1957), 442-443: “O admirabile commercium! Creator generis humani, animatum corpus sumens, de Virgine nasci dignatus est: et procedens homo sine semine, largitus est nobis suam deitatem.” A medieval hymn, it was sung in the second Vespers of the feast of the Circumcision of the Lord on 1 January.

<sup>19</sup> This is known as an *anagraphon* (Greek: literally “not written”), a saying attributed to Christ but not found in the four Gospels.

<sup>20</sup> The mystery is that of deification; as St Athanasius puts it: “God became man, so that man may become God,” Athanasius Patriarch of Alexandria, *De incarnatione*, no. 54.

<sup>21</sup> See Scrima, “Epiphany: Orient und Okzident,” 129-130.

<sup>22</sup> On St Nicholas of Myra (fourth century), see David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 364-365; St Martin of Tours, *ibid.*, 333-334.

characteristics of human and religious cultures.<sup>23</sup> As a transaction, gifts usually reveal ranked status, but, inasmuch as they surpass strict reciprocity, they also transmit the sense of an intangible value. The exchange of rings in wedding is one such example. Gifts play a role in most religious setups. Jews, for example, exchange gifts during the feasts of Purim<sup>24</sup> and Hanukkah.<sup>25</sup> Christianity, not only in its liturgy, is permeated with the idea of gift and gift-giving, whose prototype is embodied in the Magi.<sup>26</sup> One of the best expressions of the worth surpassing reciprocity is given by T. S. Eliot in his *Journey of the Magi*, where Christ's birth reminds the Magi more of death than of birth, with their rebirth as an exchange gift.<sup>27</sup> A real exchange of gifts leaves part of the giver in the receiver, religiously bringing about a regeneration, a rebirth. Old enmities vanish, like snow in the sun; and with the old slack gone, new connections are created. Long untapped sources are released.

With regards to Vatican II, the prime text comes in *Lumen Gentium* (LG), no. 13:

Between all the various parts of the Church there is a bond of intimate communion whereby spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal resources are shared. For the members of the people of God are called upon to share their goods, and the words of the Apostle apply also to each of the churches, "according to the gift that each has received, administer it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet 4:10).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "The exchange of gifts is one of the most telling characteristics of human culture and, according to some authorities, may form the original basis of economics," Charles S.J. White, "Gift giving," in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eleade (New York, 1993), 5:552.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 555-556. Purim recalls the story of Esther and is celebrated in carnival style, given Amman's dramatic reversal of fortune.

<sup>25</sup> Called in John's Gospel the Feast of the Dedication (Jn 10:22-23) Hannukah which brings to mind the rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabee (1 Macc. 4-6) in 164 BC, is celebrated in December, Joachim Czech et al., *Judentum Weltreligionen: Judentum* (Frankfurt a.M.: M. Diesterweg, 1978), 58-59.

<sup>26</sup> White, "Gift giving," 552.

<sup>27</sup> "Were we led all that way for / Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly, / We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death, / But had thought they were different; this Birth was / Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death. / We returned to our places, these Kingdoms, / But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, / With an alien people clutching their gods. / I should be glad of another death," Thomas S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi," in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), 98.

<sup>28</sup> Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations: The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996), 19; see Vittorio Peri, *Lo scambio fraterno tra le Chiese: Componenti storiche della comunione* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), 7-27.



## Vatican II and the Key of Exchange of Gifts

If we needed proof as to how much the interpretative key “exchange of gifts” can help us read Vatican II as event and in its texts, we need only compare the beginning and the end, i.e. John XXIII’s inauguration speech and Paul VI’s conclusion; the beginning of the Council as it came across through the media and to the gathered audience, and the Council’s conclusion with the promise that the end of the schism that had rocked the Church for nine hundred years,<sup>29</sup> if not immediately tangible, had at least become a realistic goal.

## The Agenda and its Realization

John XXIII,<sup>30</sup> in his letter convoking the Council,<sup>31</sup> set the tone for great expectations, realistic in his awareness of Church deficit, and yet untrammelled by pessimism, against which he urged the need to distinguish the “signs of the times.”<sup>32</sup> If anything, wars and false ideologies have sharpened our awareness of limitations. For its part, the Church has not, however, remained a passive observer, but has shown vitality under persecution.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Yves Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years: The Background of the Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches*, trans. P. Mailleux (New York: Fordham University Press, 1959).

<sup>30</sup> As an example of how misleading the interpretative conceptual pair conservative/liberal can be Jan Grootaers, *Actes et acteurs à Vatican II* (Leuven: University Press, 1998), 1, so describes Pope John XXIII: “Si le titre de ‘protagoniste du concile Vatican II’ ne devait revenir qu’à une seule personne, cette personne serait sans aucun doute le pape Jean XXIII: personnage étonnant et parfois insaisissable, ni progressiste ni conservateur, mais proche de l’Évangile, souvent variable dans ses initiatives et pourtant immuable quant aux traits profonds de son caractère et de sa vie spirituelle, attaché à la tradition la plus ancienne de l’Église et cependant sensible aux besoins les plus urgents de ses contemporains. C’est dans le cœur de ce pape, destiné à ne rester que quelques années dites de ‘transition’, qu’a germé tout de suite le projet de convoquer le concile du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ce pontificat, qui n’a pas duré cinq années complètes (octobre 1958 - juin 1963), a ouvert un nouveau chapitre dans l’histoire de l’Église catholique, mais aussi dans l’attitude des catholiques devant la désunion des chrétiens et devant les grandes interrogations du siècle.”

<sup>31</sup> “Documenti ufficiali del Concilio Vaticano II, 1962-1965,” in *Enchiridion Vaticanum [EV]* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1976), 1:2-9. The *Apostolic Constitution* bears the date of 25.12.1961 (“Constitutio Apostolica qua Ss. Oecumenicum concilium Vaticanum II indicitur”).

<sup>32</sup> *EV*, 1:5. The “signs of the times,” taken from the Gospels (Mt 16:2-3; cf. Lk 12:54), was to become a catchword of Vatican II.

<sup>33</sup> *EV*, 1:7.

## Opening Address

Taking his tack from Christ as a sign of contradiction,<sup>34</sup> the Pope expressed his disagreement with the prophets of doom,<sup>35</sup> at a moment when Providence was guiding the Church to re-order human relations. How sad, exclaimed the Pope, that so many bishops were languishing in prison, instead of being present with their brethren for the Council. The main scope of the Council was to defend and diffuse doctrine<sup>36</sup> by trying to penetrate deeply into it.<sup>37</sup> Errors were to be combated with the “medicine of mercy,”<sup>38</sup> instead of that of severity. Instead of renewing condemnations, the Church wanted to demonstrate the validity of her teaching - let the truth shine by its own light! The Church wanted to show herself to be a merciful mother of all.<sup>39</sup> God wanted all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4)! It was a motive of sorrow that the vast majority of the human race did not share in the riches of the Catholic Church!<sup>40</sup> A new day was dawning, there, in St Peter’s, where heaven and earth joined hands on Peter’s tomb.<sup>41</sup>

## The Closing Address

On 4 December 1965, at the United Nations, just a few days before the Council’s closure, Paul VI had occasion to re-echo the “Word to the World” which he had eloquently pronounced during his visit to the Holy Land.<sup>42</sup> Never again the ones against the others; never again war!<sup>43</sup> On the eve of Council’s closure, 7 December 1965,<sup>44</sup> Paul VI recalled the inaugural words of John XXIII - that the deposit of faith be guarded and taught in a more efficient way - but first of all the Church had to “seek the Kingdom of God!”<sup>45</sup> The Church was living in times in which laicism and secularization seemed to be the logical

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<sup>34</sup> “Summi Pontificis Ioannis XXIII allocutio in solemnibus Ss. Concilii inauguratione” (11 Oct. 1962), *Ibid.*, 1:35.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:39.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:43.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:45.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:47.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:49.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:53.

<sup>42</sup> Paul VI pronounced the speech at Bethlehem; see Rynne, *Letters from Vatican City* (Second Session), 2: 313-317.

<sup>43</sup> “Discorso di Paolo VI all’Assemblea delle Nazioni Unite,” in *EV*, 1: 229-231.

<sup>44</sup> “Omelia di Paolo VI nella 9° Sessione del Concilio (7 dicembre 1965),” in *EV*, 1: 273.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.



consequence of modern thought,<sup>46</sup> a foreboding of what was to follow in the aftermath. Throughout the Pope's entire speech one has the feeling that the goals set at the outset of the Council had been reached, and one had now to sing praise to the Lord.<sup>47</sup> The anthropocentric orientation of modern culture could be good news if seen in the light of the Gospel.<sup>48</sup> In his homily on 8 December 1965, at the closing of the Council, Paul VI made the point: Christ did not eliminate suffering nor did he reveal its mystery fully - he took it upon himself!<sup>49</sup>

## Vatican II's Documents in the Light of the "Exchange of Gifts"

In order to re-read the sixteen Documents produced by Vatican II as an "exchange of gifts" we have first of all to bear in mind the significance of the Council as a whole. In the words of one of its more prominent experts and interpreters, Karl Rahner, Vatican II was a Council where the Church for the first time acted as a universal Church in its representation and composition, and whose theme was the Church in its nature and varied activities.<sup>50</sup> The interpretative key of the exchange of gifts, may it be added, is readily seen to fit into this ecclesial picture if we keep in mind that *Lumen Gentium* no. 13 speaks primarily of the inter-relationship of sister Churches, all contributing reciprocally to the catholicity of the Church by lending a hand where they are strong and showing willingness to receive help from others where others are strong.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 275-277.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 279. Here the pope quotes St Augustine: "Cantare amantis est!" (ibid., 278; "Sermo," 336 in *Patrologia Latina* [PL], 38.1472).

<sup>48</sup> "Omelia di Paolo VI nella 9<sup>a</sup> Sessione del Concilio (7 dicembre 1965)," in *EV*, 1:287.

<sup>49</sup> Paul VI, "Messaggi del Concilio all'Umanità," in *EV*, 1:311-313.

<sup>50</sup> Karl Rahner, Herbert vor Vorgrimler, eds., *Kleines Konzilskompendium: Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums mit Einführungen* (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), 13-33; Karl Rahner, "Theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils," in *Schriften zur Theologie* (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1980), 14: 287-302; Rahner, "Die bleibende Bedewtung des II. Vatikanischen Konzils," ibid., 14:303-318. For a development of this theme see Edward G. Farrugia, "'Orientalium Ecclesiarum' alla ecclesiologia del XX secolo: Una valutazione teologica del Decreto," *Folia Athanasiana* 7 (2005): 7-25.

<sup>51</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, "The People of God," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (London: Burns & Oats, 1967), 1:166-168. The catholicity of the Church as here envisaged, according to Cardinal Grillmeier, is not merely geographical, but also "formed by the multiplicity of the peoples of the earth, with their various customs, talents and energies, which are to be preserved for them insofar as they are genuine values and used to bring into the family of Christ all those who are called to the one people of God. When the message of Christ has been received by a people and the missionary task is properly carried out, the supernatural gifts of the Spirit combine with the natural endowments of the people to form a local Church

From what we have just said, it is clear that *Lumen Gentium*, with its interpretative model of Bishops with and under the Pope, can be well interpreted in the light of the exchange of gifts. As Jean Zizioulas would later say, citing Canon 34 of the Apostles, the *protos* can do nothing without the others, nor the others without the *protos*, the latter being a venerable term for the head of a Church. Here we have the distributive form of justice, one to many, combined with the contributory form of collaboration, whereby one is invested with the authority of all. Yet, collegiality as understood by Vatican II is more than that: it is the participation of all the heads of the particular Churches in the supreme and jurisdictional power invested in the head (*LG* nos. 19, 22-23).

In *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (*SC*), participation of the faithful is so ingrained that during Holy Mass the celebrant moves from being a sole actor to becoming president of the assembly, this being especially evident if we take into consideration the reforms that ensued from Vatican II (*SC*, no. 14). From being a one-man show, Holy Mass is now the participatory rite of all the members of the Church. The use of the vernacular has also acted as a bridge with the ecclesial communities which had emerged with the Reformation; while the logical re-ordering of *epiclesis*, *anaphoras* and the structure of the divine liturgy and the Liturgy of the Hours has created a bridge with the venerable Eastern liturgies of the first millennium. The resultant rite of Holy Mass may thus be compared to a symphony, where everyone's voice contributes to the harmony, but where the orchestra would not start without the director.

The Council's Constitution *Dei Verbum* (*DV*) has likewise demythologized the idea that revelation is a series of sentences which have been whispered into the ears of a scriptural writer, but refers to a collaboration on the exchange model of the redaction of Scriptures themselves (*DV*, nos. 2, 6). In this way, revelation has been conceived in an interpersonal rather than as a one-way model where God simply dictate as if to a passive instrument.

In the Council's Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (*UR*), not only is the "return" model abandoned once and for all, but the differences between East and West

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with its own way of living the Christian life. The full catholicity of the Church only comes about when this combination of natural and supernatural goods in the local and regional Churches has been fused in mutual communion in the universal Church. One of the achievements of the Council was the rediscovery of the universal Church as the sum and communion of the local Churches, understood as fully themselves, and the rediscovery of the universal Church in the local Church (see Article 28). The local Churches enrich each other and also the universal Church," *ibid.*, 167. See also Peter Hünemann, "Lumen Gentium," in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*. II, Peter Hünemann, Bernd Jochen Hilberath eds.,<sup>9</sup> (Freiburg: Herder, 2009), 387-389.

are described as *complementary*, almost to a fault. Are then no rationalities or differences hard to account for between East and West? (cf. *UR*, no. 17). Are there no areas in which one may agree to disagree, as Paul V, in 1607, had enjoined both Jesuits and Dominicans to do during the controversy *De Auxiliis*?

The Council's Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (*GS*) no longer looks at the world as the potential antagonist of the Church, but carries throughout a keynote of joy aroused by hope as a means of building the world together (cf. *GS*, no. 93).

### ***Aggiornamento or Interpretation?***

In order to understand this question we need to understand the problem: how much had Vatican II unsettled people through its policy of redistributing gifts.

(a) Although we have to be careful not to read into the texts of Vatican II, often a result of compromise, a harmoniously preformed mould impressed on them, it is true that we may discover *various moments* which we could describe as a *sharing of gifts*. This is more easily gathered if we think of certain resistances the texts encountered.

For example, in *Lumen Gentium* itself, the universal call to holiness comes *before* the religious life, and this seems to relativize if not minimize altogether the charisms which characterize the different religious orders. In fact, it is the other way round: members of religious orders stand out not so much by access to special graces to which the laity have no access - the greatest of all means of grace is the Eucharist, and it is accessible to everyone who has fulfilled the necessary conditions - but as *paladins of the universal call to sanctity*.<sup>52</sup> Through their various charisms, which together constitute the catholicity of gifts in the Church, members of religious orders show that there is no area in life which is not open to holiness.

For a superficial reader, the Council's decree on the missions seems to belittle the importance of foreign missionary work, because the decree shows that the whole Church is missionary, and that there is a mission for all faithful wherever the Church is present. But since through the catholicity of gifts there is also those who are capable of facing the challenge of being at home away from home, the *missionary* becomes a *Christ symbol in a special way for those who through their different call have to be missionaries on the home front*.

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<sup>52</sup> See Irénée Hausherr, "I fondamenti teologici della vita religiosa," in *Études de spiritualité religieuse*, ed. Tomas Spidlik Rome 1969, 347-359.

The Council's Decree on the Eastern Churches (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum [OE]*) threatened to become yet another exhortation towards a return to the Catholic Church, a return theology which undervalues communion as the sharing of gifts between sister Churches, so long, of course as these recognize the charisma of Peter's office. Precisely, this sharing of gifts between sister churches is the best expression of the deepest catholicity in the Church. As a matter of fact, out of the preliminary discussions over the decree of Eastern Churches, the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the scheme on ecumenism were created. To the superficial, ecumenism also seems to breed indifference; but such readers would be surprised to discover that the heart of ecumenism is defined in *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 8 by the exact opposite, a conversion of heart. *Instead* of calling this a *paradigm shift*, as Thomas Kuhn did for the natural sciences, *we may aptly call it a sharing of gifts*.

(b) Aggiornamento *and* interpretation. The two terms have sometimes been opposed as if the one excludes the other. It would be hardy, in a kind of *tour de force*, to try and show such an exchange of gifts in the texts. We might say that the Council was one of surprises, blow by blow. Its convocation certainly did, for there was no overt crisis.<sup>53</sup> Though very popular, it put into question many of the deeply ensconced pre-conceptions which many Catholic cherished, such as, that they belonged to a Church impermeable to change, a conception that was shattered by the discussions on the liturgy, which revealed that the canon did not drop down from heaven.<sup>54</sup> Actually, aggiornamento and the right interpretation of the Council, superficially identified with John XXIII's and Benedict XVI's programmes respectively, are two inevitable phases of the same process of reception without which no agreement would ever be reached - two indispensable phases so that the gifts may be distributed equitably. For one thing, in spite of its attractively modern appeal, aggiornamento in the Church is another word for *ecclesia semper reformanda*, the banner of the Gregorian Reform.<sup>55</sup> In this way, it was a most successful word of achieving reform under the banner of being up-to-date. Secondly, seeking the right interpretation of a charter so as to implement it properly belongs to the intelligent use of a text. If we stumble on the meaning of a text, we have to return to it as we return to the sources. As Bernard Lonergan has pointed out, it is the controversialist

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<sup>53</sup> John W. O'Malley, *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1989), 11.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>55</sup> For a comparison between the Gregorian Reform and the Lutheran Reformation, see *ibid.*, 82-126; see also Yves Congar, *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église* (Paris: Ducerf, 1968).

who demonstrates errors triumphantly, while the interpreter rereads to better understand the text.<sup>56</sup>

### *The Council after the Council*

After feasting comes fasting - after rejoicing a sobering up. Aggiornamento or Interpretation? Both are necessarily continuing phases, but the best way to honour the memory of a great council is to live up to it - to do that task known as reconstruction, building very often from the very shrapnels a hymn of joy. Every life, retold in the light of the incarnation, is a Christmas carol; every sorrow and defeat, sickness and death, revisited in the light of Easter, is an *Exultet*, a *felix culpa*, a gift to be given to others so that they may learn from our expense; not delapidating our own memory or patrimony, but redoubling it by enriching others.

After feasting comes fasting; after rejoicing a sobering up period. It is this phase that calls for reconstruction - building with the blocks of the past the place of the future.

## **Post-Vatican II Period Interpreted as an Exchange of Gifts**

The period of Vatican II has affected not only post-Vatican II theology, but also post-Vatican II way of life. We have to ask in which sense both life and thought express an exchange of gifts, both in the relations between Churches and also in interpersonal relations.

### **1.1 Charisma: The Signature Tune of Post-Vatican II's Ecclesial Mode of Existence**

If we consider aggiornamento as being the signature tune of the Johannine period of the Council, we may take charisma as constituting the hallmark of post-Vatican II. Everything, from pope to politician, from life-style to ecclesial policies, had to be charismatic. Now charisma is another word for gift, and charismatic has come to designate someone who knows how to relate and engender trust through a personal touch. Moreover, a charismatic figure is supposed to engender a charismatic following, eager to carry out his or her

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<sup>56</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 158.

policies.<sup>57</sup> There is here a transfer of gifts: the followers become an extension of the charismatic leader's programme. In the case of Vatican II, the charismatic programme had two dimensions, summed up in characteristic words: *dialogue* and *service*. Any leader in the post-Vatican II era, who was self-respecting, was supposed to be a man of dialogue, able to cut through the generation leap and the cultural barriers. If this was the ideal, the medium was service. Authority was supposed to be service, rather than power. This exchange of gifts, in effect, has led to a perennial round of visits by heads of Churches, joint ecumenical commissions, and the priority of a dialogue of love over that of truth. Primacy itself became conceived as presiding over the dialogue of love: giving testimony to other Churches, helping them out in difficulties, employing one's talents to build the neighbouring Church's dilapidated finances.<sup>58</sup>

### Charisma as Key-Note of Post-Vatican II Thought

This search for charisma has also affected the realm of thought. Researchers have sought to refrain from a one-sided treatment of history and have concentrated on writing ecumenical histories. *Audietur et altera pars* became the rule of scholarly faith. Whereas previously many a scholar felt bound to write a confessional version of history, one is now encouraged to write a two-dimensional version of history, so that even the well-entrenched facts of what really happened are now subjected to scrutiny. Coinciding largely as it did with

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<sup>57</sup> What is usually meant by charism is a supernatural gift which goes beyond the established common means of procuring grace such as the sacraments, and yet is meant for the building of the body of Christ. Given the special facility which charisms bestow on the individual there is an undeniable temptation of the recipient's becoming self-centred and distorting what was meant to be Church service to self-service. Indeed, charismatic figures run the risk of impairing others' freedom by their 'supererogatory' authority if they lose track of their Church orientation. The common understanding of charism has thus to be further specified. Although there is no contrast in principle between the Church's ministries and non-ministerial charisms - the Church itself and its ministries being themselves charisms - a falsely conceived idea of charism can easily lead to a conflict between institution and charism, Wilfrid J. Harrington, "Charism," in *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 180-183; Karl Rahner, "Charisma," in *Samtliche Werke*, ed. Karl Rahner et al., vol. 17, *Enzyklopadie Theologie: die Lexikonbeiträge der Jahre 1956-1973*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2002), 172-175. Precisely, this conflict was a dominant theme of the post-Vatican II ethos and theology.

<sup>58</sup> Peri, *Lo scambio fraterno tra le chiese*. This work has tried to translate the import of *LG*, no. 37 into historical method. The present study has tried to apply the insight of *LG*, no. 38, which has impressed on the post-Vatican ethos the need of sharing at all levels, as a key to all of Vatican II, both as an event and its documents.



the full onset of post-modernism - a period defined largely by the negation of modernism - Vatican II led to an abandonment of the rigidity of the system (be it Thomism). Pluralism of views was encouraged, at least so long as these did not obstruct faith allegiance to one's Church, with the result that many began to identify more with authors from outside their Church than within.

### **Critical Assessment of Exchange of Gifts**

Without doubt, this new mentality has released long untapped sources, and many aspects of Church life and thought which had previously gone awry suddenly came to life. The spirit of ecumenism, long suspected of indifference, and even of endangering salvation, became the order of the day. With the indefinite suspension of the *Index of Forbidden Books* the prevalent suspicion that praying with other Christian denominations could be a sort of disallowed *communicatio in sacris* seemed to definitely lose its hold. With the insistence on a charismatic exercise of authority, crises of authority were factually abetted, even in religious life. For many, Tradition became suspect, and to appeal to it lost its sense.

On the positive side, scruples seem to have suffered a huge setback, as confessors can affirm without betraying any secrets. Inter-Church relations have become much more positive, old hostilities became a thing of the past, and new vistas of "opening up" have established a new reality. A fresh creativity in theology, though minor in comparison to the pre-War period, has become manifest, accompanied by extensive interests in sociology and psychology. Confessions, where they had survived at all, have become more human, and sacraments more meaningfully administered. In many quarters Catholics in prayer groups have been studying the Scriptures as avidly as their Protestant counterparts, and icons and other Orthodox items of devotion are now fashionable in Catholic households.

### **Conclusion**

By now it should be clear that "exchange of gifts" is indeed a key to reading Vatican II. Not *the* key, however, for no construction of the complexity of this Council could possibly be well served by just one main key term; yet it is a key which yields access to the whole. If anathemas were removed on the eve of the closure of Vatican II, this goes a long way into telling us where the exchange of gifts has led to. One of the ecclesiastical hierarchs, Orthodox Patriarch Nikodim, who had initially opposed participation as observer at Vatican II, not only accepted but also wanted to found, as Metropolitan of Leningrad, a branch of Orthodox

Jesuits.<sup>59</sup> Eventually, he died in the presence of John Paul I. The honorific Latin patriarchates were abolished, save the Latin one of Jerusalem, which was nonetheless given a new lustre by being entrusted to the administration of locals. All this highlights that the gift became as fully received as when a message in Morse code has been decoded. It remains to see how long this period will give way to another and what will remain of our attitudes. Certainly, a gift will be passed on to future generations: such exchange of gifts resolves more difficulties than crozier-stamping. But how far this will go, only the future can tell.

Who could have foreseen that, less than two years after this paper was read at a conference in Malta,<sup>60</sup> the theme of “exchange of gifts” would be once more in the limelight: within the same scenario, Jerusalem; with the same splendid gift of communion as a promise; and with only just a change of protagonists; Pope Francis as the successor of Pope Paul VI meeting Patriarch Bartholomew I as successor of Athenagoras I? This dream came true on 20 May 2014, with so much of the way already covered, and still so much hope in the road-map towards full Christian communion.

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<sup>59</sup> Miguel Arranz, “Arrupe e Nikodim,” in *Pedro Arrupe: un uomo per gli altri*, ed. Gianni La Bella (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 629-641.

<sup>60</sup> Conference held on Thursday, 8 November 2012, at the Archbishop’s Seminary, Tal-Virtù, Rabat, Malta. The original paper in Maltese *Il-Koncilju Vatikan II: Taqsim tad-Doni, Tkattir tal-Gid* was accompanied by an English translation prepared for the purpose: *Vatican II (1962-2012): Participation in Gifts, Multiplication of Goods*.