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## From the Editor's Desk, "Theological Studies" June 2012

David G. Schultenover

Marquette University, david.schultenover@marquette.edu

### *From the Editor's Desk*

It seemed to come entirely out of the blue when, in a private conversation on January 20, 1959, 78-year-old Pope John XXIII told his secretary of state, Cardinal Domenico Tardini, that he intended to call a council. It was a world-changing moment, a moment of the divine inspiration to which this plump peasant of Bergamo become pope was especially alive. Call it he did, and in God's Spirit he convened Vatican II on October 11, 1962. Ninety-two years earlier, Pope Pius IX had suspended Vatican I when Garibaldi captured Rome following the Germans' capture of Napoleon III during the Franco-Prussian War. This ended the Vatican's protective alliance with France and precipitated for the church a new paradigm shift with numerous complex implications that were left for Vatican II's consideration.

October 2012 marks the 50th anniversary of Vatican II's opening. A proliferation of conferences and publications on the council and its effects and promise will commemorate the anniversary. *Theological Studies* will contribute to this retrospect and prospect by publishing a series of articles, beginning with our September 2012 issue and continuing through September 2013, and perhaps beyond, as noteworthy manuscripts find their way to us. Several articles on the council will appear in each successive issue.

Our series intends to focus less on individual documents as such, and more on the broader issue of ecclesiology that underlies all the documents. Our first set will include a historical contextualization of the council (John O'Malley) followed by articles on the hermeneutics of the council's reception (Ormond Rush) and on developments in teaching authority since Vatican II (Francis A. Sullivan). In subsequent issues, Massimo Faggioli will discuss the council's history and its subsequent interpretive narratives. In this connection Hermann Pottmeyer will describe the crisis of the postconciliar church and consider prospects for a fuller reception of the council. Also on the theme of reception, a series will cover the council's reception in various quarters of the world: Latin America (Ernesto Valiente), Asia (Peter Phan), and Africa (Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator). Several articles will consider ecclesiology under the aspect of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue—Edward Kessler providing a Jewish perspective on Catholic-Jewish relations after *Nostra aetate*, and Mary Boys a Catholic perspective. Allied with this, Stephen Bevans will treat the council's missiology and related subsequent developments. Additional contributions will come from Lieven Boeve, Anne Hunt, Peter de Mey, Karim Schelkens, Jared Wicks, and Susan Wood. In effect our series will provide readers a common course on Vatican II and postconciliar developments.

As useful background for all the projected articles I recommend a paper delivered by Joseph Komonchak at a 1996 symposium in Bologna in which he considered the council according to the terms "event," "experience," and "final documents." His paper (a version of which was published in *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?* [2007] 24–51) cogently argues for a historiographical shift away from studying the council exclusively within the context of *la longue durée* to studying it as an "event." Komonchak defined this term in various ways taken from sociological studies: An event "has to be detached in one way or another from the whole set of repetitions and regularities

that constitute the course of daily life” (Pierre Grégoire); and events are “sequences of occurrences that result in transformations of structures” (William Sewell).

Those old enough to have experienced both the pre- and post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church might realize how apt is Komonchak’s application of “event” in this sense to the council. The changes effected by the initial stages of appropriation of the conciliar documents have been dramatic: from the new liturgy, the role of the laity in how parishes function, the establishment of episcopal conferences, parish councils, etc.—the council surely led to “transformations of structures.”

Our readers are well aware of the tension in the church over the question of just how transformative conciliar and postconciliar structures are. Some church members have charged that new structures have so transformed the church as to throw it into heresy (e.g., Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and followers). Others argue that the new structures, while transformative, are in essential continuity with the church from its beginnings, even though what happened with the council can be described as a “break” (e.g., from the attempt to make the church uniform by insisting on a single, unified application of neo-Thomist manuals). Still others argue that the new structures are not new at all; they represent a repristinization of the church’s authentic tradition through modest adaptations to a rapidly changing world. Most readers will probably not find themselves decidedly in any one of these camps, but in some hybrid of them.

Reactions to the changes effected by Vatican II have varied widely, from euphoric welcome, to begrudging acceptance, to schismatic rejection. In any case, the effect should have been and probably was anticipated, along the lines described by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), in which he argues that reigning paradigms are displaced by new ones only with considerable resistance on the part of those with an invested interest in the threatened paradigms.

Certainly students of the council emphasized continuity with the tradition—no one claimed that the council was inventing the church ab ovo; but numerous commentators have argued that the council, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was in some sense re-founding the church—sparked by John XXIII, whose 1959 prayer to the Holy Spirit for the council’s success referred to the council as “a new Pentecost.” He clearly hoped that the council would be a church-changing “event.” Not in the sense of inventing a new church, but in the sense of retrieving the original event of church-founding in the age of the apostles and bringing it with all its qualities as event into the age of globalization effected by the World Wars and the profusion of new technologies that enable humanity to explore and appropriate realities unimaginable in ages past.

God is patient. Even as the appropriation of the Council of Trent remains incomplete after 450 years—note the recently signed agreement on the doctrine of justification (1999 with Lutherans, 2006 with Methodists and most other Christian churches)—so we can expect that the church’s appropriation of the graces of Vatican II will remain incomplete even until what may be the next ecumenical council.

*David G. Schultenover, S.J.*  
*Editor in Chief*