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From the Editor's Desk [Theological Studies, March 2013]

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I suggest that the most significant basis for meeting men of different religious traditions is the level of fear and trembling, of humility, of contrition, where our individual moments of faith are mere waves in the endless ocean of mankind's reaching out for God, where all formulations and articulations appear as understatements, where our souls are swept away by the awareness of the urgency of answering God's commandment, while stripped of pretension and conceit we sense the tragic insufficiency of human faith.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion Is an Island."

Has Catholicism entered upon that humbler sense of faith, without gainsaying the deposit of faith but hearkening to Joseph Ratzinger's *Glaube und Zukunft* (1970, translated as *Faith and the Future*, 1971; 2009)? Ratzinger muses about the Catholic Church's marked diminishment, particularly in Europe, due to the progressive secularization of thought and culture since the French Revolution. While his prediction for church membership in the West was dire (and presumably remains so), he takes hope from the Gospel parable of the mustard seed and is confident that "when the trial of this sifting is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified Church." Those who have left the Church for the secularized world "will find themselves unspeakably lonely" and "will feel the whole horror of their poverty. Then they will discover the little flock of believers as something wholly new. They will discover it as a hope that is meant for them, an answer for which they have always been searching in secret" (116–18). Then the renaissance will begin again.

Nothing has happened since 1970 to gainsay Benedict's assessment of the Church's future. On October 11, 2011, he issued his *motu proprio Porta fidei* calling for a Year of Faith beginning October 11, 2012, the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II and the 20th anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which he called "an authentic fruit" of the council.

Benedict invites us to engage in an "intensified" reflection on the faith "so as to help all believers in Christ to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel, especially at a time of profound change such as humanity is currently experiencing" (no. 8). To be included in this effort, Benedict writes, is concerted reflection on the texts of Vatican II, because—quoting Pope John Paul II's *Novo millennio ineunte* closing the Great Jubilee Year and opening the new millennium—these texts

"have lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church's Tradition. . . . I feel more than ever in duty bound to point to the Council as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning" (no. 57, emphases original).

Porta fidei urges us to study and understand the conciliar texts as an important aspect of "an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord" (no. 6). But while Benedict highlights the need to grow in and profess the Church's faith, he does not neglect the other theological virtues of hope and love—all three are

thematic for his letter. Quoting 2 Corinthians 5:14 (“for the love of Christ impels us. . .”), he argues that

faith grows when it is lived as an experience of *love* received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in *hope* and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord’s invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples (no. 7, emphases added).

These words recall Benedict’s encyclicals *Deus caritas est* (2005, on love) and *Spe salvi* (2007, on hope). It would be surprising, during this Year of Faith, if Benedict were not to publish an encyclical on faith.

Theological Studies is attempting to do its part to assist believers everywhere to appropriate or reappropriate the Vatican II documents, especially by helping them read the texts correctly, as John Paul urges. We have already published two sets of articles on the council. With this issue, we offer our third set (and look forward to two more sets).

Anne Hunt takes us through a trinitarian analysis of the conciliar texts, arguing that among the most significant insights of the council was “a fundamental rediscovery: the church’s origin in the mystery of the Trinity.” Indeed, she maintains, this rediscovery led to four conciliar leitmotifs: the church as mystery, as *communio*, as mission to the world, and as community of dialogue. (Not surprisingly, *Porta fidei* is imbued with an explicit trinitarian theology.)

Speaking of dialogue, following Hunt’s article is one by Richard Gaillardetz on the historical significance of the Groupe des Dombes, an unofficial group of Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians who have been unobtrusively but importantly carrying on ecumenical dialogue since 1937 at two abbeys near Lyon, France.

Then come two articles on Catholic-Jewish relations after *Nostra aetate*: one by Edward Kessler, executive director of The Woolf Institute at the University of Cambridge, dedicated to the study of relations between Jews, Christians, and Muslims; the other by Mary Boys of Union Theological Seminary, a leading US scholar on Jewish-Catholic relations, who gives us a Catholic perspective on inter-religious dialogue in the postconciliar years. Not grouped with these three are James Keenan’s expanded Moral Note on theological ethics since Vatican II; a *quaestio disputata* on papal infallibility by Free Church scholar Mark Powell, followed by replies from John Ford and Gerard Kelly, a discussion that would not have happened prior to the council; and a review article by John Burkhard on Ghislain Lafont and post-Vatican II ecclesiology.

At the head of my editorial I quoted Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972), one of the 20th century’s greatest figures and an observer at Vatican II. While the passage cited references “the tragic insufficiency of human faith” (thus implying a mandate for dialogue), Heschel’s thought across hundreds of publications eddies around the awareness of not only the insufficiency of our *faith* but also—if I might paraphrase Krista Tippett’s observation in December 6’s NPR program on Heschel—the insufficiency of our religious *ideas*. And, in fact, to acknowledge this insufficiency is a virtue. In this humility, then, let dialogue begin!

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