

Doctrine and discernment: an approach on the changeable and unchangeable aspects of Christian doctrine

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Doctrine and Discernment

*An approach on the changeable and unchangeable
aspects of Christian Doctrine*

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*An approach on the changeable and unchangeable aspects of
Christian Doctrine*

A thesis submitted in fulfillment
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*To my grandmother Bia
and Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, SJ*

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Introduction

Sailing without crossing the Rubicon

This middle term is not something that is ever given in itself but rather is an awareness that is only reachable in referring to the thing affirmed.

David Pellauer — Ricoeur: a Guide for the Perplexed

No wild surrender to feeling, no empty love of an “unknown god”. The love that crowns and stimulates it is the repose in the known other, the repose of the intellect in truth.

Pierre Johanns, S.J. — To Christ through Vedânta

Gaul or Rome, Jerusalem or Athens, conservative or progressive? As much as dichotomies help us to hold a general picture of history, seldom do they promote processes of consensus building and collaboration. In 49 BC, Julius Caesar left Gaul and crossed the Rubicon. As it is widely known, the crossing of the river was the first step in his long walk towards Rome, where he finally defeated Pompey. In recent years, as we take part in the slow process of receiving the legacy of Vatican II, many local churches — as well as the Church in general — have witnessed many crossings over the Rubicon. Surprisingly, these crossings have been in different directions: from conservative bishops to progressive ones, and back to conservative bishops again. Some laity have grown weary over these situations. Some have become more conservative than their own bishops, and protest the lack of firmness from ecclesial authorities on aspects where the social and/or moral teachings of the Church do not seem to be sufficiently cherished, exposed and lived.

During Pope Francis' papacy a new style appears to have emerged, one that does not seem concerned with crossing the Rubicon but with sailing in the Rubicon. He is not concerned with choosing a side. Rather, his interest lies in placing the Church amongst the people, where all voices can be heard and understood in their own terms. This *modus procedendi* consists in integrating spiritual discernment into the life of the Church, and it has become a hallmark of Pope Francis' papacy. According to his program of governance, expressed in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Church lives an ongoing discernment that allows her to distinguish the unchangeable from the changeable aspects of doctrine.

In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs are not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them. At the same time, the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people's lives.¹

This affirmation offers us the perfect setting for the question that this thesis takes up: *how did the Church, and how can the Church today, discern the changeable from the unchangeable aspects of doctrine?* This question is not merely a twenty-first century concern, but its roots are in the desire to promote the renewal of doctrine, as promulgated by Vatican II.² In line with this desire, the Argentinian Pope points towards a criterion of discernment between the changeable and the unchangeable — namely, the criterion of what communicates or fails to communicate the Gospel. These sentiments emphasize the importance of what Pope John XXIII described in his opening address at the Second Vatican Council as “a magisterium which is predominantly

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* 43 (November 2013), in: www.vatican.va [Consulted: 03—15—2019].

² Cf. Avery Dulles, *Resilient Church* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 52.

pastoral in character.”³ However, as we shall see, the reception of the Council was more centered around the debate on the new contextualization of faith and the continuity of Church doctrine than the criterion of pastoral character given by Pope John XXIII.

The advocates for a new contextualization of faith are often associated with the first phase of reception of Vatican II, whereas the theologians who advocate for continuity in doctrine are usually associated with the second phase of reception. It is the position of this thesis that the gravest consequence of the debate between these phases of reception was the divorce between two dimensions of the Church’s mission: first, a horizontal understanding that stresses the nature of the Church as *ad extra*, a focus that promotes a mutual exchange between faith and modern culture; and second, a vertical understanding that defines the nature of the Church as primarily *ad intra*, a focus that promotes a visible continuity between the contemporary proclamation of faith and the long historical and divinely guided experience of the Church. Is there a *via media* between these two legitimate understandings? Can the above mentioned pastoral character represent that *via media*? And, if so, can this *via media* shed some light over the problem of the changeable and unchangeable aspects of Christian doctrine? Furthermore, what model of Church would emerge out of a deep reception of this *via media* or pastoral character?

In order to address these complex questions in a systematic way, this thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will introduce the question of the changeable and unchangeable from the historical and interpretative perspectives. After presenting the opening speech of Vatican II by Pope John XXIII, who suggested to the conciliar fathers the distinction between a substance of doctrine and a manner of presenting it, I will explore the historical

³ Pope John XXIII, “The Opening Address of the Second Vatican Council,” *The Teachings of the Second Vatican Council* (Maryland: The Newman Press, 1966), 7—8.

background for this distinction. Here I am referring to the gradual reception of the concept of ‘historicity’ within Catholic theology. Next, I will take an interpretative stance by analyzing the three ways in which this particular distinction was received by different groups of post-conciliar theologians, while exploring their distinct views about the Church’s doctrine and mission. I will argue that there is a third phase of reception which, characterized by the concept of ‘pastoral character’ and the practice of ‘spiritual discernment’, offers a way of articulating the tensions generated by the two above mentioned phases, thus offering a *via media* to the Church.

The second chapter will argue that the concept of ‘pastoral character’, held by the third phase of reception, is in line with Vatican II’s concept of ‘mission’. After, I will introduce the concept of ‘spiritual discernment’, presenting it as a praxis that is capable of uniting the tensions generated by two first phases of conciliar reception (i.e. the horizontal and the vertical). In order to explain how discernment can bring about this unitive influence, I will approach Acts 17, a paradigmatic moment of the Church’s mission, where, as I will argue, the changeable and the unchangeable aspects of doctrine were discerned by Paul at Areopagus.

Based on these insights about spiritual discernment, the third chapter will turn its attention towards three cases of Church history where processes of discernment can be recognized as capable of holding together the horizontal and vertical dimensions of mission. The cases of study will be: (1) the Arian Controversy; (2) the Council of Constance; and (3) the early Jesuit mission in India. From this it will become evident that the Church can only integrate properly the concept of historicity by living in an attitude of discernment or active listening.

This attitude of discernment becomes an ecclesial *modus procedendi* under the name of ‘synodality’. Therefore, this thesis will conclude that if the pastoral character of the Church is

going to function as a *via media* within the body of the faithful, then it has to become a new ecclesial form. Synodality is that ecclesial form. Concretely, Synodality allows the Church to embody discernment as a *modus procedendi*, attentive both to God alive in His people and to the life of the people in God. Avoiding the ideological biases of both sides, synodality represents the middle ground, where all voices can be heard.

Before concluding, I would like to say that much of the analysis in this thesis about types or groups of theologians is based on a model of typology, pursued in order to foster consensus and collaboration. As all typologies, there are always aspects of reality that can be omitted or slightly misrepresented in the case of this or that theologian. On the one hand, that represents the limits of the author of this thesis, and more to the point, any human attempt to write and think about events that took place only a short while ago. On the other hand, I wish that what may initially look like a misrepresentation can gradually become a re-representation in the reader's perception. But that is now in the hands of whoever holds these pages...

A. M. D. G.

ON THE CHANGEABLE AND UNCHANGABLE ASPECTS OF DOCTRINE

Everything must be measured in the form and proportion of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.

John XXIII — The Opening Address of the Second Vatican Council

I — The history of the distinction between changeable and unchangeable

This section, on the conciliar and post-conciliar debate over the definition of the changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine, is not concerned with providing a sole dogmatic account of the problem. I will introduce the debate from a historical and interpretative perspective, in other words, this debate will be presented from the perspective of its historical background and subsequent receptions. Thus, after presenting the opening speech of Vatican II by Pope John XXIII, who suggested to the conciliar fathers the distinction between a substance of doctrine and a manner of presenting it, I will explore the historical background for this distinction. I am referring to the gradual reception of the concept of historicity within Catholic Theology.⁴ From here I will take an interpretative stance, considering three ways in which this

⁴ By 'historicity' I mean here that faith is always tied with historical expressions of culture, and thus its meaning unfolds within the processes of cultural reception, both in dogmatic formulations and lived religion.

particular distinction was received by different groups of post-conciliar theologians. This exposition will open up the quest for the fittest way of receiving the distinction of John XXIII.

1.1. On the changeable and unchangeable and the reception process of Vatican II

In order to trace back to the moment when the distinction between changeable and unchangeable was proposed to the conciliar fathers, we have to go back to October 11 of 1962. Then, Pope John XXIII addressed many bishops of the world in the Basilica of St Peter in Rome. In this speech the pope invited the conciliar fathers to adopt a new language, a pastoral tone that would draw on the advances of the human genius and recognize the value of human good will with a language of mercy, without issuing condemnations to the world and while not forgetting the central aspects of catholic doctrine. For this to happen, the Pontiff declared that a new attitude had to be assumed in regards to doctrine and its exposition:

The substance of the ancient doctrine of the *depositum fidei* is one thing; the manner in which it is presented is another. This latter must be taken into great consideration; if necessary, with patience. Everything must be measured in the form and proportion of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.⁵

This distinction/invitation of the Pope would have a deep impact in many of the conciliar documents.⁶ Nevertheless, its formulation also raises some questions for debate: in our era of the

⁵ Pope John XXIII, "The Opening Address of the Second Vatican Council," 7-8.

⁶ (1) The reference to the development of doctrine in *Dei Verbum* 8, by using the word *proficit* opens an understanding of doctrine which is less propositional than the one held by Vatican I. The dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, although genuinely rejecting rationalism and fideism, was still committed to this propositional emphasis of faith, by conceiving Revelation as means for conveying Truth. The problem of this propositional emphasis is that the identification with the Truth about God with the propositions with which philosophy expresses metaphysical truths lacks some level of distinction between substance and mode of presentation, since it opens the door for confusing God's Truth (being) with the historical propositions which express God's mystery with greater difference than similitude. Therefore, in order to correct this metaphysical emphasis, *DV* 8 does not regard the knowledge of doctrine as a matter of positive affirmations alone but, mainly, as a personal reality. Thus, something which has a

post-linguistic turn, to what extent can we make a clear distinction between meaning and linguistic expression? After the later Wittgenstein, philosophers proceeded to affirm that language is always entangled within specific families of meaning, from which the divorce between language and meaning, as code from use, becomes hard if not impossible.⁷ Conversely, to what extent can we separate the unchangeable substance from its linguistic formulation or presentation? More than that, in looking to the Pope's words, are there any criteria to make that separation? And, if so, can those criteria be confirmed in Church history as valid and useful ones? In order to consider these questions, I will start by looking at the historical background of this distinction, exploring the integration of the concept of historicity in Catholic theology by the nineteenth century theologians. Finally, I will shift my attention to the reception of Vatican II as a way of recognizing different interpretations of the above mentioned distinction of John XXIII.

1.2. Historicity as background for the debate of the Changeable and Unchangeable

As much as the background for the debate concerning the changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine is the reception of the concept of historicity by nineteenth century theologians, its roots can be traced back to the controversies between Reformers and Counter-Reformers. On the one hand, Reformation theology strived to formulate one theological

'substance', which the faithful can know in an ever deeper way through new historical experiences and formulations. **(2)** *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 9 and 10 mentions that the activity of the Church is not exhausted in sacred liturgy, while recognizing, at the same time, that fount and finality of her activity rests in liturgy. Thus, even within the life of the Church, there is a union without confusion between that which is the substance of the ecclesial life (liturgy) and that which is the manner in which this substance is exercised and lived in the world (works of charity, piety and the apostolate). **(3)** By presenting the Church as being "in Christ like a sacrament," in *Lumen Gentium* 1, the word *veluti* (like) refers to an analogical similitude in difference, which allows us to conclude that Christ is the unchangeable and the Church the manner in which He chose to be presented. Other examples could be given, but this ones, by focusing on some of the most central topics of the Council (Word of God, liturgical reform, and Ecclesiology), are enough to show the impact of the intuition of John XXIII in the conciliar documents.

⁷ Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 23.

criterion for distinguishing the changeable from the unchangeable. For Philip Melanchthon, Scripture alone was that criteria. Conversely, all other mediations and human traditions had to be given a second place and eventually be subject to change, if they became an obstacle to the message of Scripture.⁸ Martin Chemnitz, in his *Examen Concilii Tridentini* (1574), deepened this distinction between divinely instituted traditions (Scripture) and other mediations and human traditions by differentiating uppercase “T” Tradition (the *depositum fidei*) and lowercase “t” tradition (pious practices).⁹

On the other hand, the counter-reformers affirmed that the *depositum fidei* can be found both in Scripture and in the Tradition(s) of the Church. Melchior Cano and Francisco de Suárez were arguably the two theologians that most influenced Catholic theology in this regard. Cano attributed to Tradition the same importance that Melanchthon did give to the Scripture. And for Catholic theology this was not a problematic option since the importance of Scripture lies in its centrality to Revelation; however, Revelation is not to be fully identified with the Scripture. Hence, Revelation is greater than Scripture and includes thus the traditions of the Church. As for Suárez, his thinking determined post-tridentine theology as much as he regarded Scriptural events as *mediums* for the Revelation of God’s Truth, which the theologian ought to translate into positive and rational propositions.¹⁰ Thus, the Suárezian account of Revelation caused Catholic post-tridentine theology to conceive Tradition as the propositional version of the Scriptural events. These two positions led Catholic theology to progressively conceive of Tradition as a separate source of Revelation parallel to the Scripture, containing objective and

⁸ Cf. Ángel Cordovilla, *El ejercicio de la teología*, (Salamanca: Ed. Sígueme, 2007), 248-249.

⁹ Cf. Tracey Rowland, “Tradition,” in: Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, Graham Ward (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Theology & Modern European Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 278.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*.

ahistorical contents of Truth. However, during the nineteenth century, under the influence of German philosophy, different schools of theology started to give a renewed importance to historicity as the means by which ideas develop within the consciousness of communities.

1.1.1. *The Tübingen School*

The first Catholic group to open consistently the debate around ‘History and Dogma’ was the school of Tübingen, under the decisive role of Johann Sebastian von Drey and Johann Adam Möhler. Instead of presenting the Church as a *societas perfecta*, as visible as the kingdom of France or the republic of Venice — according to the wording of Cardinal Bellarmine — the Tübingen school shifts the emphasis towards an interior dimension of the Church, characterizing her as a living organism. In this living organism, Christ is more than a divine teacher and the Spirit more than an hidden agent of Church authority.¹¹ For both authors, Christ is the incarnate *logos* and the Spirit an active participant in human life.¹² Consequently, the work of the Church is to continue this work of incarnation, being herself an ongoing incarnation.¹³

If we consider the debate during the Reformation period we can perceive that this organic vision of the Church provides us with some level of continuity between what Chemnitz distinguished as Tradition and tradition. If the Church is a continued process of incarnation of the *logos* of Christ in time, then there is some plausibility that lowercase traditions can be temporal

¹¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 281.

¹² “In this transit of the divine contents of the Sacred Scriptures into possession of the human intellect, no gross illusion or general misrepresentation may occur, it is taught, that the Divine Spirit, to which are entrusted the guidance and vivification of the Church, becomes, in its union with the human spirit in the Church, a peculiarly Christian tact a deep sure-guiding feeling, which, as it abideth in Truth, leads also into all truth.” (Johann Möhler, *Symbolism: Exposition of the Doctrinal Differences between Catholics and Protestants as Evidenced by Their Symbolical Writings* (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 277.

¹³ “Dull, therefore, it is, to find any other then mere formal distinction, (...) between the primitive and the later tradition of the Church. The blame of these formal difference arises from overlooking the fact, that Christ was a God man, and wished to continue working in a manner conformable to his two-fold nature.” (*Ibidem*, 290-291)

and organic expressions of the same *logos* in time. Furthermore, if Melchior Cano appreciated the contribution of history to theology only as academically written history,¹⁴ the perspective of Tübingen was more inclined to conceive this relationship within a deeper personal status, as a relationship between life and doctrine.¹⁵

According to Yves Congar, the only critique to be given to the Tübingen school is related to its lack of ecclesial consequences to this agency of the Spirit. The Spirit is present as an agent in the individual life of the believer, in that which Schleiermacher conceptualized as ‘piety’, conceived as something individual and previous to doctrine and theology.¹⁶ Nonetheless, that is not extended from the individual life of believers to the life of the Church as a whole. The school of Tübingen then offered an ecclesiology which emphasized more resolutely the christological over the pneumatological pole.¹⁷

1.1.2. *The Oxford Movement*

In England, the issues of history and dogma that the Tübingen scholars were dealing with in the context of German philosophy were also being addressed by the Oxford Movement. According to its leaders, the movement’s beginning can be traced back to John Keble (1833), interpreting as *National Apostasy* the fact of the state having made a decision on religious matters against the Church’s opinion.¹⁸ It was not merely a matter of state that was at stake but

¹⁴ Cf. Anselm M. Townsend, O.P., “The Relation Of History To Theology According To Melchior Cano,” *Dominicana* 16, no 2 (1931), 138-147.

¹⁵ “The history of Christian doctrines must be viewed as the continuous and uninterrupted action of Christian ideas on the human mind. (...) Since the ideas of Christianity are by nature living realities, they originally spread abroad as living realities and through all centuries have been communicated in the same way in the church through the agency of the teaching office established by Christ.” (Johann Drey, *Brief Introduction to the Study of Theology*, (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 88 [#190 and 195])

¹⁶ Cf. Ángel Cordovilla, *El ejercicio de la teología*, 251.

¹⁷ Cf. Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol I (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 154-155.

¹⁸ “The same legislature has also ratified, to its full extent, this principle — that the apostolical Church in this realm is henceforth only to stand, in the eyes of the state as *one sect among many*, depending, for any preeminence she

mainly of doctrine. If Church authority is grounded on the power of the state, then the latter would impose legitimately its sense of *utilitas* on the former. Nonetheless, for the Oxford Movement the authority of the Church rests on the Apostolic Descent; henceforth the power of the state could not deprive clergy of their power or confiscate the Church's authority at will.¹⁹ From the doctrinal and humanistic point of view, what was at stake here was the imposition of a strict utilitarian *sola ratio* upon all British institutions, including the Church, as a sign of "a shallow sense of history and as politically and religiously divisive."²⁰ Conversely, the Oxford Movement possessed a romantic regard for the ancient ways of the Church and her love for the symbolical and for the mystical, for the paradox and for the spiritual.²¹

The most significant member of this movement was John Henry Newman, whose studies on the historical development of faith led him to embrace the Catholic faith in 1845. For Newman, the keeping of Tradition did not contradict certain forms of historical development of the doctrine, thus underlining the continuity in identity between the Apostolic Church and her current existence.²² Whenever the interpretations of a particular aspect of doctrine got into

may still appear to retain, merely upon the accident of her having a strong party in the country. (...) And, if it be true anywhere, that such enactments are forced on the legislature by public opinion, is *apostasy* too hard a word to describe the temper of that nation?" ([John Keble's sermon *National Apostasy*, preached before His Majesty's Judges of Assize at Oxford on July 14, 1833] James Livingston, "The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century" [2nd ed.], *Modern Christian Thought*, vol 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 164.

¹⁹ "There are some who rest their divine mission on their own unsupported assertion; others, who rest it on their popularity; others on their success; and others, who rest it upon their temporal distinctions. This last case has, perhaps, been to much our own; I fear we have neglected the real ground on which our authority is built — our *apostolic descent*." ([John H. Newman's tract entitled *Thoughts on the Ministerial Commission Respectfully Addressed to the Clergy*] in: *Ibidem*, 165)

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 162.

²¹ "Christ has continued the line of His apostles onwards through every age, and all troubles and perils of the world. Here then surely is somewhat of encouragement for us amid our loneliness and weakness. The presence of every Bishop suggests a long history of conflicts and trials, sufferings and victories, hopes and fears, through many centuries. His presence at this day is the fruit of them all. He is a living monument of those who are dead." ([John H. Newman's *Parochial Sermon*] in: *Ibidem*, 171)

²² "The Christianity of the second, fourth, seventh, twelfth, sixteenth, and intermediate centuries is in its substance the very religion which Christ and His Apostles taught in the first, whatever may be the modifications for good or

conflict, time, praxis, and study would lead to various types of doctrinal development.²³ This development would find the proper organ of ultimate *auctoritas* in the *potestas* of the Magisterium.²⁴ Nonetheless, these developments are not the fiat of the magisterium; they are made in dialogue with the whole People of God.²⁵

On the one hand, considering the continuity between these arguments and the Reformation's controversy, Newman's arguments provide us with (a) a clear possibility for arguing for a continuity between upper and lowercase concepts of T/tradition, under the list of seven criteria of true development of doctrine,²⁶ and (b) a strong opposition to the Suárezian propositional take on Tradition as a narrow, notional and alienated from the subjective and historical experiences of real assent which ground the faithful's religious life.²⁷

On the other hand, considering the differences between the School of Tübingen and the Oxford Movement, there is a philosophical change that offers a great deal of theological consequences. If the language of Hegelian philosophy was more concerned with the general than

for evil which lapse of years, or the vicissitudes of human affairs, have impressed upon it." (John H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 5).

²³ "Development will be one or other of the last five kinds. Taking the Incarnation as its central doctrine, the Episcopate, as taught by St Ignatius, will be an instance of political development, the *Theotokos* of logical, the determination of the date of our Lord's birth of historical, the Holy Eucharist of moral, and the Athanasian Creed of the metaphysical." (*Ibidem*, 54)

²⁴ "As obedience to conscience, even supposing conscience illinformed, tends to the improvement of our moral nature, and ultimately of our knowledge, so obedience to our ecclesiastical superior may subserve our growth in illumination and sanctity, even though he should command what is extreme and inexpedient, or teach what is external to his legitimate province." (*Ibidem*, 87)

²⁵ "Its *consensus* [of the faithful] is to be regarded: 1. as a testimony to the fact of the apostolic dogma; 2. as a sort of instinct deep in the bosom of the mystical body of Christ; 3. as a direction of the Holy Ghost; 4. as an answer to its prayer; 5. as a jealousy of error, which it at once feels as a scandal." (John H. Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1961), 73)

²⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, 169-206.

²⁷ "We are now able to determine what a dogma of faith is, and what it is to believe it. A dogma is a proposition; it stands for a notion or for a thing; and to believe it is to give the assent of the mind to it, as it stands for the one or for the other. To give a real assent to it is an act of religion; to give a notional, is a theological act. It is discerned, rested in, and appropriated as a reality, by the religious imagination; it is held as a truth, by the theological intellect." (John H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, (London: Burns & Oates, 1881), 98)

the particular, as existentialists would argue, so the language of the School of Tübingen was more focused over the life of the Church as a whole than on the implication of believers in the organic process of dogmatic development. However, the empiricist tradition of British philosophy, provided the Oxford Movement with a mentalist and experience-based language about dogma that was both anthropological and ecclesiological.²⁸ Hence, the Oxford Movement provided the theology of dogma with an integration of historicity within ecclesiology and anthropology.

1.1.3. *The Roman School, Modernism and the hypothesis of Maurice Blondel*

For the Roman School, if accepted without question, the integration of historicity within ecclesiology and anthropology could easily slip into historical relativism. Concerned with this danger, the Roman School assumed contrasting positions to those of Tübingen and Oxford, and embarked on a theological war against the Modernist Movement. This movement, closely associated with the writings of Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell, was described by Pope Pius X, in his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, as composed of “methods and doctrines brimming over with errors, made not for the edification but for destruction, nor for the formation of Catholics but for the plunging of Catholics into heresy.”²⁹ For modernists, there was no visible continuity between the preaching of Christ and the subsequent models of Church life. Human interiority was the central criteria for verifying the faithfulness of doctrine to the unchangeable

²⁸ “Newman débute, comme Hegel, par une expérience religieuse de type protestant: lui aussi applique à l’histoire l’esprit de système, quand il échafaude sa *Via Media*. Mais il reste un britannique: il garde le goût des faits, les sens de l’expérience personnelle. De la dialectique, ou de la mécanique, il n’a sul souci. Il préfère explorer les abîmes de sa conscience.” (In: Jean Guitton, *La Philosophie de Newman* (Paris: Boivin et Compagnie, 1933), 143.

²⁹ Pope Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907), in: www.vatican.va [Consulted: 02-25-2019].

desires of Christ expressed in Scripture. And, in that sense, the mission of the Church is to interpret and adapt her tradition to the varying conditions of humanity.³⁰

Confronted with this, the Roman School tied tradition closely to the teachings of the Magisterium by operating three specific distinctions: (1) *active magisterium* — that of the hierarchy of the Church transferring the doctrine both to the faithful and to the next generations; (2) *objective tradition* — the unchangeable tradition which is handed down actively by the Church; (3) *passive magisterium* — that of the faithful accepting in faith and living with zeal the objective tradition handed down by the Church.³¹

It was in this context that the French philosopher Maurice Blondel exposed his doctrine of Tradition. As a critical reader of Newman,³² Blondel tried to search for the *via media* between two excesses: i.e. the extrinsicism of the Roman School and the subjective historicism — also described as immanentism — of the Modernists. In his doctoral thesis, *L'Action*, Blondel tried to present human action as the *via media* between empiricism and idealism. Also, when articulating his vision of Church tradition, history and dogma were to be united by mutual exchange. A synthesis of life and grace that does not occur in facts or ideas alone but which, embracing the facts of history and relying on the efforts of human reason, takes place within the lived experience of the faithful.³³ Comparing the integration of historicity in Newman and Blondel, for

³⁰ “Jesus did not systematize beforehand the constitution of the Church as that of a government established on earth and destined to endure for a long series of centuries. But a conception far more foreign still to His thoughts and that to His authentic teaching is that of an invisible society formed for ever of those who have in their hearts faith in the goodness of God. We have seen that the gospel of Jesus already contained a rudiment of social organization, and that the kingdom also was announced as a society. Jesus foretold the kingdom, and it was the Church that came.” (Alfred Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 166)

³¹ Cf. Yves Congar, “Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality” (1972), in: G. Mannion, R. Gaillardetz, J. Kerkhofs, K. Wilson (eds), *Readings in Church Authority* (Cornwall: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 322; Tracey Rowland, *Tradition*, 286.

³² Cf. Didier Rance, “Gilson—Newman—Blondel?,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 4, no 1 (2015), 75–92.

³³ “Christian practice nourishes man’s knowledge of the divine and bears within its action what is progressively discerned by the theologian’s initiative. The synthesis of dogma and facts is scientifically effected because there is a

the former the anthropology of development of doctrine was centered around a mentalist and experience-based language, whereas for the latter it was to a more vitalist language, proper to the early French phenomenology. In this sense, following Newman from a different philosophical background, Blondel's vitalist language broadened the opportunity for theological language to ground Tradition within the lived experience of the faithful.

1.1.4. *From Vatican I to Vatican II*

In 1867, the Holy See convoked the First Vatican Council in order to deal with contemporary problems. The Council fathers condemned both fideism and rationalism, and affirmed how reason was not intrinsically autonomous but depended on God's light with which humans could be capacitated to know God naturally. A knowledge that would become perfect by a reasoned submission to the "divine deposit, delivered by the Spouse of Christ, to be kept faithfully and declared infallibly."³⁴ Hence, the Council declared, though not unanimously,³⁵ that whenever the Pope spoke *ex cathedra* about some issues of doctrine pertaining to the whole Church, it had to be accepted as a truthful matter of faith.³⁶

We can perceive in Vatican I a severe and ahistorical tone that fostered a disposition of immobilism, and an opposition by principle towards everything that seemed liberal and modern.

synthesis of thought and grace in the life of the believer, a union of man and God, reproducing in the individual consciousness the history of Christianity itself." (Maurice Blondel, "History and Dogma," *The Letter on Apologetics & History and Dogma* (New York: Rinehart & Winston, 1964), 287.

³⁴ Vatican I, *Dei Filius* (1870), in: www.vatican.va [Consulted: February 26, 2019]

³⁵ With the dissent of bishops: Aloisio Riccio and Edward Fitzgerald.

³⁶ "We teach and define that it is a dogma Divinely revealed that the Roman pontiff when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the Divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, irreformable." (Vatican I, *Pastor Aeternus* (1870), in: www.vatican.va [Consulted: February 26, 2019])

However, it is important not to forget that this tone was meant to address the aggressive measures of many emancipated states, inspired by Joseph II of Augsburg, and the hostile tone of the intelligentsia of the Enlightenment, convinced that faith was a faulty mode of reason.³⁷ Under these circumstances, the Council defined Catholic doctrine in a way that was much closer to the language of the Roman School, affirming the immutability of doctrine in substance and in mode of presenting. In other words, an ahistorical notion of doctrine, closely tied up to the authority of the magisterium and its Supreme head, the Pontiff.³⁸ Based on the propositional logic of F. Suárez, the theological language of the Vatican I defended a strict continuity between the deposit of faith and Church traditions, since the Truth conveyed through Revelation was contained both in written books (Scripture) and unwritten Tradition.³⁹

In this sense, Vatican I represents an affirmation of the post-tridentine quasi separation between Scripture and Tradition as parallel sources of Revelation as well as the identification of Revelation with ahistorical propositions. However, after Vatican I, in spite of the above mentioned controversy with Modernism and the unfortunate repression of many theologians, there were also significant changes in the Magisterium, as well as new trends of thought and action among theologians, clergy and laity, that started to pave the way for a renewed synthesis of faith. In 1919, Benedict XV wrote the encyclical *Maximum Illiud* in which he promoted the formation of indigenous clergy in territories of mission, rejected the eurocentrism and nationalism among missionaries, and called for a renewed cultural accommodation to local

³⁷ Cf. Klaus Schatz, *Historia de la Iglesia Contemporánea*, (Barcelona: Editorial Herder, 1992), 102-112; Charles Taylor, "Why we need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism," E. Mendieta & J. Vanantwerpen (eds), *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 51.

³⁸ Cf. Tracey Rowland, *Tradition*, 285.

³⁹ "This supernatural revelation, according to the belief of the universal church, as declared by the sacred council of Trent, is contained both in written books and unwritten traditions, which were received by the apostles from the lips of Christ himself, or came to the apostles by the dictation of the holy Spirit." (Vatican I, *Dei Filius*)

cultures. Both Pope Pius XI and Pope Pius XII maintained this course of action by strengthening indigenous churches, promoting greater autonomy between the missions and colonial authorities, as well as ordaining the first non-European bishops of the second millennium (e.g. from India, Tiburtius Roche, SJ in 1923; from China, six bishops were ordained in Rome, in 1926; from Uganda, Msgn. Kiwanuka, in 1939).⁴⁰ This transformation of mission churches into native churches, or in the words of K. Schatz, this passage from a mission among the pagans to the care of the young churches,⁴¹ meant a step towards the decentralization from a eurocentric church, enmeshed with an ahistorical and propositional language of faith. The consequence of this decentralization was the opening toward a greater theological acceptance of the diversity of modes of believing and celebrating of non-European churches. This consequence is of great relevance to our considerations on the changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine, since it regards the *modus procedendi* of European churches as one among the many churches.

On the theological side, between the beginning of the twentieth century and Vatican II, France and Germany were the main sources of novelty. From the French world, a powerful association between Dominicans and Jesuits gave rise to a *Nouvelle Theologie*, a group which argued for a new way of doing theology, deeply rooted in the patristic sources of the Church (*Ressourcement*), nurturing theological debate with a language which was to be more spiritual than juridical. On the German side, from Odo Casel to Romano Guardini, the *Liturgical Movement* gave rise to an awareness of a spiritual/ritual dimension of the ecclesial community that, although not at odds with the visible Church of post-tridentine theology, claimed a higher standard.⁴² Finally, it is central to mention here the importance of some encyclicals of Pius XII:

⁴⁰ Cf. Klaus Schatz, *Historia de la Iglesia Contemporánea*, 174-182.

⁴¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 174.

⁴² Cf. *Ibidem*, 191-196.

(1) *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, a sign of the ecclesial integration of the historico-critical methods into the ecclesiastic curriculums;⁴³ (2) *Mediator Dei*, a confirmation of the theological impetus of the *Liturgical Movement*.⁴⁴ No less important, in the Catholic milieu, were also the historiographical revolution of Joseph Lortz's balanced account of the history of Martin Luther and the Reformation and Karl Rahner's first writings on a project of a transcendental anthropology.⁴⁵ On a pastoral level, new movements of clergy and laity were increasingly gathered around popular piety (e.g., International Eucharistic Congress) and social concerns (e.g., Young Catholic Workers).⁴⁶

It was in this dynamic context that the bishops of the universal Church gathered in Rome, under the *ispirazione* of John XXIII, for the Second Vatican Council. Concerned with adopting a tone that was more pastoral than condemnatory, the Council offered a less rigid, conceptual and authoritarian view of Tradition. This departure from a Suárezian account of revelation sought to overcome the Scripture-Tradition dualism — a consequence of post-tridentine theology — by asserting the unique source of Revelation: the triune God. This Revelation is referred to as being offered to the believer through *deeds and words* which, with an inner unity, illuminate and explain each other mutually (Cf. *Dei Verbum*, 2-4). Thus, Revelation becomes a theological

⁴³ “Today therefore, since this branch of science has attained to such high perfection, it is the honorable, though not always easy, task of students of the Bible to procure by every means that as soon as possible may be duly published by Catholics editions of the Sacred Books and of ancient versions, brought out in accordance with these standards, which, that is to say, unite the greatest reverence for the sacred text with an exact observance of all the rules of criticism.” (Pope Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943), in: www.vatican.va [Consulted: February 26, 2019])

⁴⁴ You are of course familiar with the fact, Venerable Brethren, that a remarkably widespread revival of scholarly interest in the sacred liturgy took place towards the end of the last century and has continued through the early years of this one. The movement owed its rise to commendable private initiative and more particularly to the zealous and persistent labor of several monasteries within the distinguished Order of Saint Benedict. (Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei* (1947), in: www.vatican.va [Consulted: February 26, 2019])

⁴⁵ Cf. Joseph Lortz, *How the Reformation Came* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963); Karl Rahner, “Antropología Teológica,” in: VVAA, *Sacramentum Mundi*, vol. I (Barcelona: Herder, 1976).

⁴⁶ Cf. Klaus Schatz, *Historia de la Iglesia Contemporánea*, 117-130 and 197-200.

event, which happens in history and is handed on through the Scripture to the faithful together with all that helps the People of God to live faithfully, i.e. the living tradition of the Church (Cf. *DV* 8-10). Conversely, the distinction between an uppercase and lowercase T/tradition is partially accepted, as long as both are understood as inseparable mirrors with which the Church contemplates that which comes from God (Cf. *DV* 7). This contemplation, together with the study of God's Revelation and its preaching, are the fitting mediums for the development of doctrine in the hearts of believers, in communion with their bishops (Cf. *DV* 8).

Following Avery Dulles, Vatican II's concept of doctrine can be summarized in three points which will provide us with a synthesis of what has been previously said: (1) doctrine regarded not as an end or an object in itself, but as a *medium* with which the Church and all the faithful can enter into a historical relationship with God; (2) doctrine regarded not as a set of propositions, but as history of salvation and its liturgical re-presentations for the sanctification of the People of God; (3) doctrine regarded not as a static *locus* but something which develops in the hearts of the faithful, through prayer, contemplation, and other religious experience.⁴⁷ These points represent the integration of the *via media* between history and dogma, proposed by Newman and Blondel among others, as well as a renewed response to the debates of Reformation around the role of Scripture and Tradition.

1.1.5. *Theological Reflection*

This historical background gives us an account of four aspects: (1) the debate over the changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine has its roots in the Reformation controversy,

⁴⁷ Cf. Avery Dulles, "Vatican II and the Recovery of Tradition," *The Reshaping of Catholicism: Current Challenges in the Theology of the Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 91.

which was defined by the debate between Scripture and Tradition; (2) the theologies of the School of Tubingen, the Oxford Movement and Blondel consist in an appropriation of the concept of historicity in the development of dogma, which provides us with a gradual integration of this concept within ecclesiology and anthropology; (3) the organic appropriation of historicity was regarded as suspicious and relativistic by the Roman school and the bishops at Vatican I, whose theologies were more ahistorical and propositional, according to a certain post-Tridentine theology; (4) the legacy of Vatican II consists in a major appropriation of the concept of historicity by receiving many of the insights of Newman and Blondel.

By organic concept of historicity, I refer to the following dimensions: (1) reception of historicity within the theology of dogma, which is represented both in Scripture and Tradition; (2) reception within ecclesiology, referring to the consciousness of all the baptized, under the Holy Spirit; (3) reception within anthropology, referring to each baptized but, ultimately to all human persons, since the order creation is already oriented towards the economy of salvation.⁴⁸ By appropriating this organic concept of historicity, Vatican II's legacy has two main implications: one, regarding the Church's self-understanding; the other, regarding the Church's relation with the world. Regarding her self-understanding, *Dei Verbum* states that God's Revelation, reflected both in Scripture and Tradition, cannot be fully understood and deepened independently of the spiritual dispositions and practices of the baptized as a whole and in its

⁴⁸ "Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ, a prophet in its informations, a monarch in its peremptoriness, a priest in its blessings and anathemas, and, even though the eternal priesthood throughout the church could cease to be, in it the sacerdotal principle would remain and would have a sway." In: J. H. NEWMAN, *A letter Addressed to His Grace, the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr Gladstone's Recent Expostulation*, In: G. O'COLLINS, M. K. JONES, *Jesus, Our Priest*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) Other sources on creational as the basis for the sacramental work: Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Ser cristiano*, (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1967); Cf. Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Live of the World. Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002); Cf. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

particulars (Cf. *DV* 8) — since it is through the prayer and study of the baptized that Revelation develops in the hearts of the faithful. Regarding her relation with the world, the Church affirms that she can only convey in a fitting manner the unchangeable “mystery of the Word made flesh” (*GS* 22) by welcoming in her life the experiences of joy and hope, grief and anguish of the world (Cf. *GS* 1); because her mission cannot be understood independently of the human mystery in general, since the “mystery of the Word made flesh [was made present in the world so that] the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear” (*GS* 22). In short, the integration of this organic concept of historicity truly has to affect the Church’s understanding about her nature and activity. However, were these insights received in post-conciliar theologies?

II — The reception of the distinction between changeable and unchangeable

With this background on the organic concept of historicity, it becomes easier to understand the distinction of John XXIII between the substance of the *depositum* and the manner of presenting it. Since the mystery of Christianity is an ineffable one which cannot be reduced to a proposition or an ethical norm,⁴⁹ it can be communicated and lived through a wide variety of cultural and charismatic ways within the communion of the Church. And, since modes of expression change or develop under the circumstances of history and/or the impulses of the Spirit, it is not repugnant to the intellect to imagine that new ways of expressing God’s ineffable mystery can emerge throughout history. However, from the Council onward, much has been

⁴⁹ “Christianity is not a ‘religion’ or a confession in the way the last three hundred years would have understood the word: a system of more or less dogmatically certain truths to be accepted and confessed, and of moral commands to be observed or at least accorded recognition. Both elements belong, of course, to Christianity, intellectual structure and moral law; but neither exhaust its essence. (...) St Paul thinks Christianity, the good news, as ‘a mystery’; but not merely in the sense of hidden. (...) Rather for him *mysterium* means first of all a deed of God’s, the execution of an everlasting plan of his through an act which proceeds from his eternity, realized in time and in the world, and returning once more to him its goal in eternity.” (Odo Casel, *The Mystery of Christian Worship, and other writings* (Westminster: Newman Press, 1962), 9)

debated about the conditions of possibility of the distinction between an unchangeable *depositum* and a changeable manner of presenting it.

2.1. The debate over substance and manner of presenting

As Cardinal Francis George has rightly said, “Pope John’s statement seems to support an instrumental view of language, regarding language as the means whereby a speaker gives expression to thoughts which exist independently of language. (...) By contrast, an expressivist view holds that thought has no determinate content until it is expressed in a shared language.”⁵⁰ Consequently, the history of reception of the Council has mainly divided itself between those who interpret doctrinal statements from an instrumental point of view and those who understand it from an expressivist standpoint. We will now present and evaluate these two positions regarding their understanding of Church doctrine and her mission to the world.

2.1.1. Instrumentalist Vision or First Phase of Reception

The instrumental understanding, more than stressing a clear separation between substance and language, ratifies the potential of new cultural languages to serve as fitting expressions to the unchanging doctrine. Theologians like Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Kung are suitable representatives of this view, which is commonly associated with the first phase of reception of the Council, “characterized by discussions on the theological qualification of the texts at theoretical level and by a sort of unregulated effervescence” and pastoral experimentation.⁵¹ For these theologians, the *depositum* is associated with the unchangeable catalogues of doctrines, and

⁵⁰ Francis E. George, *Inculturation and Ecclesial Communion* (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 1990), 47 and 88.

⁵¹ Stella Morra, “Mercy (re)Forms the Church: a structural perspective”, *Concilium* 4 (2017), 47.

lower case traditions “are of little interest since these are usually of their nature historically and culturally relative, and thus not easily amenable to being subject of doctrinal formulations.”⁵² Consequently, the project of theology should be that of *re-contextualizing* the Catholic unchangeable faith into today’s historico-cultural context.⁵³

Therefore, when dealing with the new cultures of today’s world, the instrumentalist vision stresses more the importance and fluidity of the *manner in which doctrine is presented*. Since substance and manner of presenting are different aspects, then the effort of re-contextualizing the *depositum* opens up a more experimental role to theology, trying out new forms and means available in our cultural time. By regarding the Christian dogma as fundamentally fluid in manner of exposition, this group of theologians has tended to emphasize more a horizontal dimension of the Church’s activity. By horizontal dimension I mean the tendency to evaluate the Church’s faithfulness to the mission given to her by Christ through the historical and sociological effects of her preaching in the secular society.⁵⁴

⁵² Tracey Rowland, *Tradition*, 296.

⁵³ “Theology only exists, therefore, as contextual theology, and the development of tradition only as an ongoing process of recontextualisation. It is for this reason that ‘contextual theology’ is not only the business of missiologists or sub-culture and third-world theologians. Rather, it is inalienably at work in every legitimate theology. The present-day demand for a theological recontextualisation of the Christian tradition in diverse (non-European) cultural contexts is only a synchronic realisation of a diachronic process that has been at work for centuries. Moreover, evident shifts in the European context seem to suggest that European theology is, more than ever before, itself in need of recontextualisation. (In: Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context* (Lovain: Peeters, 2003), 26)

⁵⁴ “God’s revelation is not reducible to a good argument or addressed only to those who belong to a culturally favored group. Most of humankind, in the past and at present, is formed by “disposable” and “insignificant” peoples and persons — disposable and insignificant according to the beneficiaries of the dominant power asymmetries. If there are universal human experiences, one of them undoubtedly is the real daily — life experience of power asymmetries, within all societies for the benefit of the few and the historical and cultural “insignificance” of the many. This universal experience shapes and has shaped human understandings of what it means to be human and the meaning of history and culture, as it has modeled — indeed infected — much that is religion. This universal human experience, therefore, is the opposite of the Reign of God.” (In: Orlando Espin, *Idol and Grace: On Traditioning and Subversive Hope* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2014), 117)

According to M. Garijo-Guembe, the central point of this horizontalist view is to promote in the Church a corrective criticism towards a highly privatized Catholic spirituality, by overstressing the vertical dimension of mission.⁵⁵ In the same way, J. B. Metz affirms: “Political theology is a critical corrective of a certain tendency to confine theology to the realm of the private and personal, and in its transcendent, existential and personalist forms” as well as re-contextualizing the eschatological message of Christian doctrine within the cultural precincts of present day society.⁵⁶

I find particularly valuable the positive way in which this group of theologians regard culture and new ways of cultural expression as significant to the Church’s interpretation of the *depositum* that she received. However, it seems to me particularly problematic in this vision that, by directing most of its energy towards being critical of both Church and society, they forget that deep down the act of intellectual and practical criticism there is an ‘enlightenment creed’ that runs the risk of being passively accepted. This is a creed which, under various forms of desolation viz-à-viz ecclesial institutions, tends to disregard the institutional and promote the personal as if they were naturally at odds with each other. Conversely, there is a risk of leaving the culture unchallenged and even of buying into some dominant values.⁵⁷

2.1.2. *Expressionist Vision or Second Phase of Reception*

The expressionist vision, on the contrary, affirms the impossibility of a clear cut separation between changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine. Their rationale is that “uppercase T tradition cannot be reduced to Cano’s ‘container of doctrines’, and the lowercase t

⁵⁵ Cf. Miguel Garijo-Guembe, *Communion of the Saints* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 235.

⁵⁶ J. B. Metz, “Political Theology,” In: K. Rahner (ed), *Encyclopedia of Theology, The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 1238-1239.

⁵⁷ Cf. Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 137.

traditions are vitally important for the transmission of uppercase T tradition and indeed the liturgical life of the Church is the place where the tradition” is powerfully mediated.⁵⁸ Theologians like Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar are suitable representatives of this vision, which represents the second phase of reception of the Council, characterized by “the attempt to control the effervescence around the categories of ‘ecclesiology of communion’ and of ‘new evangelization’ at life level.”⁵⁹ Thus, the project of theology is that of looking at postmodern culture as a pre-Christian culture that needs to be wounded by the prophetic voice of Christian tradition, in order to graft a new tree. In other words, it is not doctrine that needs to be recontextualised but culture that needs a sort of medicinal wounding before evangelization.

Therefore, when dealing with modern culture, the expressionist vision emphasizes more the *substance of the depositum fidei* which has to be announced according to the experience and linguistic habitat of the Church, since both substance and manner of presenting cannot be so easily distinguished. Thus, for these theologians, post-Conciliar theology should be framed within a hermeneutic or reform of continuity rather than of rupture with the past. By regarding the Christian dogma as deeply expressed by the dogmatic formulations of the Church, since she was guided by the Holy Spirit to reach those formulations, this group of theologians has tended to emphasize more a vertical dimension of the Church’s activity. By ‘vertical dimension’ I mean the tendency to evaluate the Church’s faithfulness to her mission through the recognition of a logical and organic continuity between her contemporary preaching and historical heritage.

Accordingly, this verticalist view can be described as a critical correction of the former critical correction [the horizontalist]. This form of orthodoxy is different from the theological

⁵⁸ Tracey Rowland, *Tradition*, 296.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*.

traditionalism promoted by bishop Marcel Lefèvre, since some representatives of the vertical view agree that there is a risk of Catholic spirituality being overly individualistic.⁶⁰ However, representatives of this position, such as Avery Dulles, do not think it is by stressing the importance of the historical and social implications of the Gospel above the traditions and experience of the Church, that the ecclesial mission will be necessarily renewed.⁶¹

It is of great importance to recognize in this vision a boldness in confronting some naivete that some ecclesial groups can have vis-à-vis our modern culture. Furthermore, this groups seems to give voice to a valid concern of not treating the history and traditions of the Church as mere objects of the past, articles of a museum. They are also fruits of processes of prayer and ecclesial discernments, and it would be very poor if Christians simply discarded them, by principle, as old and irrelevant, as something that does not have anything to teach us anymore. However, the problem of this vision is that it has been fortifying, even in our days, a generation of Christians who, under various forms of desolation vis-à-vis modern culture, think they have to protect themselves “from cultural pollution by maintaining strong church loyalty as a defense against these invading worlds of superficiality.” In less nuanced critiques than those offered by Avery Dulles, the problem is less in the content than in the tone because, since it lacks “genuine listening or love for the situation of the people, the fruits will be unproductive, and religion can even sound like fanaticism.”⁶²

⁶⁰ As criticized above by J. B. Metz.

⁶¹ Cf. Avery Dulles, “Rethinking the Mission of the Church,” *The Resilient Church* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977).

⁶² Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 136.

2.1.3. *Theological Reflection*

As was said above, the integration of an organic concept of historicity shaped the understanding of Vatican II regarding the nature of the Church's doctrinal formulations and the understanding about her own mission. Therefore, any weak reception of that organic concept of historicity will necessarily have its consequences on a partial understanding of the Church's doctrinal formulations and mission. This is clearly reflected in the partial understandings of the two first phases of reception of the Council that were exposed above. On the one hand, the first phase regarded doctrinal formulations of the past as language with no substantial connection with the *depositum*. Moreover, stressing the horizontal dimension of the Church's activity, it evaluated the effectiveness of mission only by its socio-historical implications. On the other hand, the second phase elevated doctrinal formulations to its substantial similitude to the *depositum*, forgetting that no linguistic definition is free of cultural and historical contingencies. Furthermore, stressing the vertical dimension of the Church's activity, it evaluated the effectiveness of mission only by its continuity with the doctrinal heritage of the Church.

In regards to the doctrinal formulations, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith tried to clarify the meaning of the words of Pope John XXIII by issuing a Declaration in June 1973, '*Declaratio circa catholicam doctrinam de Ecclesia contra nonnullos errores hodiernos tuendam*' (In defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church against certain errors of the present day). The declaration explains: "what is new and what he [John XXIII] recommends in view of the needs of the times pertains only to the modes of studying, expounding and

presenting that doctrine while keeping its permanent meaning.”⁶³ However, in my opinion, to stress the importance of the changeable or to emphasize the continuity of the unchangeable does not provide us with a suitable understanding of the problem at hand. As a matter of fact, Karl Rahner was able to affirm the good of both visions when he maintained, on the one hand, that the dogmatic expressions of faith always remain under historical, cultural and linguistic limitations from which we all try to release ourselves from in order to draw nearer to God,⁶⁴ and, on the other hand, that “the changeable and the unchangeable are not two entities simply existing side by side as immediately empirically apprehensible each in its own right.”⁶⁵ So what to do?

In regards to the horizontal and vertical understandings about the Church’s mission, this separation is a terrible wound in a Church which strives to be a sign and an instrument of deep union with God and of unity among the human family. Therefore, the Synod of Bishops gathered in Rome in 1977 affirmed: “the dichotomy must be overcome, specifically through a dialectical tension between the orientations, so that they mutually enrich one another.”⁶⁶ In other words, what the Synod was asking for was a *via media* between an historicist view, which stressed more the instrumental character of dogmatic language, the horizontal dimension of mission and the personal/social character of the Gospel, and a dogmatic view, which stressed more the theandric character of dogmatic language, the vertical dimension of mission and the institutional binding character of Church tradition. However, in the subsequent years, the Church is still searching for

⁶³ Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *In defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church against certain errors of the present day* (June 1973) in: www.vatican.va [Consulted: February 26, 2019].

⁶⁴ “We shall never stop trying to release ourselves from it, not so as to abandon it but to understand it, understand with mind and heart, so that through it we might drawn to the ineffable, unapproachable, nameless God.” (Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol I (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), 150.

⁶⁵ Karl Rahner, “Basic Observations on the Subject of the Changeable and Unchangeable Factors in the Church,” *Theological Investigations*, vol XIV (New York: Seabury, 1976), 7.

⁶⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradende* (October 1979), in: www.vatican.va [consulted: 03-12-2019].

the most effective ways to achieve this *via media* or dialectic tension towards mutual enrichment. So, I ask again, what to do?

2.2. Changeable and unchangeable and pastoral character: towards a new interpretation

If we pay close attention to the opening speech of John XXIII we realize that, besides separating the changeable manner of presenting faith from the unchangeable substance of the *depositum*, he also affirmed: “Everything must be measured in the form and proportion of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.” Therefore, instead of affirming a clear cut distinction between the changeable and the unchangeable aspects of doctrine, John XXIII pointed towards the pastoral character of the Magisterium as the criteria for distinguishing both. This pastoral character is not simply a matter of changing the language without reconsidering the doctrinal premises or a communicative principle which respects the audience without accepting “historicity within, and not outside, the ecclesial subjectivity and the relation between the Church, its nature (trinitary foundation, not only Christological) and its mission.”⁶⁷

As a matter of fact, this characterizes what some have been referring to as a third phase of reception of the Council. This phase, which can be associated with the writings of Christoph Theobald, Pierangelo Sequeri, Stella Morra, Michael Paul Gallagher among others, and very much influenced by so many meaningful actions and writings of Pope Francis, poses the problem of the changeable and the unchangeable aspects of doctrine under a new light. The debate between instrumentalists and expressionists centered the conversation around the *expositio* and the horizontal dimension of the Church’s mission or the *depositum* and the vertical dimension of the Church’s mission. However, the third phase of reception appears to offer a pastoral

⁶⁷ Stella Morra, *Mercy (re)Forms the Church*, 48.

hermeneutical principle as the *via media* between these two seemingly opposed views. I think that Christoph Theobald expresses this point with singular clarity when he says:

What is at stake is to integrate the classical question of regulation and normativity to Vatican II and of Vatican II in the most inclusive perspective ‘of a teaching of prevalently pastoral character’, such as was bequeathed by John XXIII to the Council. The questions [here at stake] can be defined as: is the canonical value of a pastoral council more or less valuable than the preceding ‘dogmatic’ councils? (...) Or are we caught up in a council of a new type which has inaugurated the very change of the ‘dogmatic’ and the ‘doctrinal’ as also of the type of normativeness that they transmit, placing it in the very heart of the pastoral relation — always shaped by its historical context?⁶⁸

This pastoral principle promises to discern the changeable from the unchangeable, not only by re-contextualizing the *depositum* while keeping a one-directional way of evangelizing: from those who know about doctrine towards those who do not — i.e. proper of the first mode of reception of the Council. Neither will that discernment be done only by conceiving pastorality as an application principle. An application which wounds culture with a prophetic voice, but claiming to have a position that comes somehow from out of history and culture or coming from a historical and cultural heritage where life and faith were better understood — i.e. proper to the second mode of reception of the council. In this sense, the third phase of reception is different from the two previous phases. However, what is the specificity of this group of theologians that can help them to claim for a full integration of the organic concept of historicity with sounding consequences over their understanding about the Church’s doctrine and mission?

⁶⁸ Christoph Theobald, *L'avvenire del Concilio. Nuovi approcci al Vaticano II*, (Bologna: EDB, 2016), 118 [personal translation].

2.2.1. Pastoral Character and the unity between doctrine and mission

The distinction between doctrine and mission is ultimately an illusory one. According to the tradition of the Church, Christian doctrine refers to the missioning of the Son and of the Spirit by God. And, conversely, God's mission is the doctrine of the Church, i.e. the missioning of the Son and Spirit from God is reflected in the Creed as the Church's *raison d'être*. Moreover, if the Church's mission to the world — by the word of Christ and the impulse of the Spirit — is both the ecclesial mission and doctrine, then the mission of the Church to the world cannot be understood separately from her doctrine and vice versa.

If this connection between doctrine and mission was already true for the Fathers of the first millennium, its impression in theology becomes deeper if we take into account the theological integration of historicity as an organic concept. The integration of historicity provokes a decentralization from a horizontal sense of mission or a vertical sense of doctrine as the criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of the Church's mission. Historicity promotes a broader and more comprehensive method of understanding how doctrine and mission are bound together through the subjectivity of the people of God. Because, both in the subjective experience of the ecclesial community and of each individual baptized, lies together the missionary doctrine of God and, in her, the seeds for a personal collaboration with it.⁶⁹

According to Stella Morra, this integration is rooted in Vatican II and appears to be clearly present in the pastoral character of Pope Francis' *modus procedendi*.

Vatican II steers this change, in an initial approximation, according to the principle of pastorality. As an effective creative reception of all this, we think we can view the option of Pope Francis to restore the center of his rule: not as

⁶⁹ Michael Paul Gallagher, "Pierangelo Sequeri: horizons of trust", *Faith Maps* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 119-131.

doctrinal theme (object, for example, of catechesis, or of an educational act, selecting it as argument of an encyclical), but rather, we should say, in a 'multimedia' way. Mercy is a theme that returns in his speeches, in homilies and documents, but it is also a personal attitude of his, a canonical choice, the operation of the imagination and of examples. The choice of the jubilee is one example: a call to subjectivity of the people of God and of the churches to set off, moved by an inspiration that is not simply teaching, but 'doing', corporeal and popular. We could say a performative operation which, in the same way, effectuates the decentralization of the doctrinal dimension, not simply proposing a subject (a chapter of doctrine), but acting out 'words that do something'.⁷⁰

This pastoral approach suggests an understanding of the Church's mission that is both vertical, since the subjective inspiration comes from above, and vertical, since the experience of God's action also activates the concern for the spiritual and material welfare of one's fellow citizens. Here, there is no distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, but an understanding that the focus of both the dogmatic formulations and practices of the faithful are not analogous to the distinction between religious theory and praxis. They are as two mirrors of the same Christian life as much as they help to convey the message of the Gospel.⁷¹ However, how can the Church know that these formulations and practices still convey the unchanging message of the Gospel?

2.2.2. Spiritual Discernment and the unity between faith and cultures

Spiritual discernment in situations of evangelization is the measure by which the Church knows how to differentiate the changeable from the unchangeable aspects of doctrine. Because spiritual discernment corresponds to a practice that helps the Church to integrate the concept of historicity in an organic manner. As much as historicity has to be integrated not only in the study of dogma but also in the understanding of the subjective processes of the Church as a whole and in her particular members, discernment binds these three elements (dogma, community, and

⁷⁰ Stella Morra, *Mercy (re)Forms the Church*, 50.

⁷¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 43.

individuals) in one single process of searching for God's presence and will.⁷² This connection between historicity and evangelization was expressed in the following manner by Pope Francis:

Time is greater than space. This principle (...) invites us to accept the tension between fullness and limitation, and to give a priority to time. One of the faults which we occasionally observe in socio political activity is that spaces and power are preferred to time and processes. This criterion also applies to evangelization, which calls for attention to the bigger picture, openness to suitable processes and concern for the long run.⁷³

This integration of historicity as a process opens the door for the practice of spiritual discernment, not only of the meaning of revelation to our *today*, but also a discernment of the deep hungers and potentials of the various cultures of our world. Looking back to the two first phases of reception of the Council, their stances towards culture are very different but they hold something in common. The first phase of reception had an almost innate appreciation for modern culture, and the second a very high recognition of the old and traditional ways of the Church. However, in spite of these differences, both instrumentalists and expressionists tend to present culture as a singular word and a presupposed concept — whereas what characterizes our modern cultures is their plurality and lack of definite lines.⁷⁴

The third phase of reception, points towards spiritual discernment as the *modus operandi* of the Church when dealing with our modern cultures. Examples of this can be found in the works of the Jesuits: Michael Paul Gallagher and Michel De Certeau.⁷⁵ This emphasis on a discerning attitude integrates both a sympathy and a suspicion towards culture that, as a *modus*

⁷² Cf. Yves Congar, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 182-3.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, 222-225.

⁷⁴ As a matter of fact, when Zygmunt Bauman affirmed that we live in a *liquid modern world*, he did not mean that there is one liquid culture, but that it is impossible to determine one alone. In that sense, modern cultures cannot, by any means, be solely evaluated and addressed by their common element, whether it is with the image of the 'liquid' or of the 'fragmented'.

⁷⁵ Cf. Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003); Cf. Michel De Certeau, "Walking in the City", in: Graham Ward (ed.), *The Certeau Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

operandi, is more suitably described under the name of prudence. In this sense, spiritual discernment binds both faith and culture in two levels: (a) through processes of discernment within communities of believers, immersed in their historical and cultural circumstances; and (b) through processes of discernment about the practices of everyday life of the cultural contexts in which Christian communities are immersed.

2.2.3. *Pastoral Character as a vertical and horizontal understanding of mission*

What is the meaning of pastoral? According to the Gospel of John, “God so loved the word that He sent His only begotten Son” (Jn 3:16). If mission represents the act of sending, John appears to underline a motive for this sending: “God so loved the word that...” This “that” has a causative significance: God’s love is the motive for the missioning of the Son and of the Spirit, as well as all the other missions associated to these — i.e. the Church’s. From the many images that have been used to describe this ‘love’ one of the most significant in all of the Scriptures, and particularly in John’s Gospel, is that of the shepherd.⁷⁶ Since the word ‘shepherd’ is the synonym of the Latin word *‘pastor, pastoris’*, then we can affirm that the love by which God visits us as a missionary is pastoral in character. A pastoral character that leads Christ to start a process of discernment of the authentic aspects of Jewish faith from those that failed to convey the message kept at the heart of the Law (Cf. Mt 23:23). A pastoral character that incites

⁷⁶ In the Old Testament: from the Pentateuch (Genesis 4:2; 46:34; 48:15; 49:24; Numbers 27:17) to the Historical Books (1 Samuel 17:20; 17:34; 21:7; 2 Samuel 5:2; 7:7; 1 Kings 22:17; 1 Chronicles 17:6; 2 Chronicles 18:16) reaching the Sapiential (Psalms 23:1; 28:9; 49:14; 78:71; 78:72; 80:1; Ecclesiastes 12:11) and the Prophetic books (Isaiah 13:14.20; 40:11; 44:28; 61:5; 63:11; Jeremiah 17:16; 22:22; 31:10; 43:12; 49:19; 50:44; 51:23; Ezekiel 34:5-24; Amos 3:12; 7:14; Micah 5:4-6; 7:14; Zechariah 10:2; 11:4-17; 13:7). In the New Testament: from the four Gospels (Matthew 2:6; 9:36; 25:32; 26:31; Mark 6:34; 14:27; John 10:2-16; 21:16) to the Book of Acts (Acts 20:28) and the Letters (Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2-4; Revelation 2:27; 7:17; 12:5; 19:15).

the Church to discern the central aspects of her *depositum* viz-à-viz the new cultures which she also had to discern (Cf. Act 10:14-15; 17:16-34).

Under this light, the main concern of discernment is to understand if, in a particular context of Church life, the doctrinal formulations and practices of the Church are still means of communicating this love, which is pastoral in character. So, discernment aims to tie together the cultural and historical dispositions of our time with the pastoral character of God's love. Between these two, the culture and God's love, are the dogmatic formulas and practices of the Church that should always be promoted and proposed as much as they help the Church in the task of conveying God's pastoral love to the world. However, the Church should be free to let these formulas and practices go as much as they become an impediment to the communication of this love, which is pastoral in character. Thus, the changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine are to be discerned in concrete contexts of mission or local churches, and through an attitude of immense freedom in front of the Church's rich tradition and experience. A freedom that is not justified in a mere desire for adaptation to the claims of culture, but in order to find the most appropriate way of conveying God's love to the world.

In this chapter I started by presenting the occasion in which Pope John XXIII offered the distinction between a substance and a manner of presenting doctrine. The chapter proceeded in presenting the background for this distinction and the processes of its reception. From this exposition, I determined that the appropriate reception of the Council would depend in a large measure from the correct integration of historicity — not only within the theology of dogma, but

also within ecclesial subjectivity and anthropology.⁷⁷ Afterwards, I argued that the theologians of the third phase of reception propose a model of conciliar reception which found a *via media* between many of the dichotomies caused by the two previous phases of reception; a *via media* that was asserted by means of a new model of integration of historicity, through the theme of pastoral character and the praxis of spiritual discernment. In other words, the pastoral character appears to bind together the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of mission and doctrine through spiritual discernment. The next chapter will give two steps. As it was said before, the third phase of reception is characterized by the theme of pastoral character and the practice of spiritual discernment as ways of finding a *via media* between horizontal and vertical dimensions of the Church. Therefore, the first step of the next chapter will consist in highlighting how Vatican II is congruent with this vision about pastoral character. The second step, will explain how discernment exercises an unitive dynamism over mission and doctrine, between the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of the Church.

⁷⁷ In the writings of E. Schillebeeckx and H. de Lubac during Vatican II, both affirm that the great problem of the Roman theologians is their ahistorical way of thinking about faith. It is interesting to see this affirmation so vividly present in the writings of theologians who can suitably represent the visions of both the first and second phases of Conciliar reception. Thus, it can be testified that these two groups, though different in conclusions, share the same aim of a rightful integration of 'historicity' within theology, ecclesiology and theological anthropology. Cf. Santiago Madrigal, *Triptico Conciliar* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 2012), 185; Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Dialogo sobre el Vaticano II*, (Madrid: BAC Popular, 1985), 19.

SECOND

MISSION AS GIFT AND TASK, AS AN ONGOING DISCERNMENT

A much keener discernment too is necessary if mistakes are to be avoided. So the work that is called for at the present day is in many respects far more delicate than that required in the patristic age, in St Thomas Aquinas' time or even at the "humanist" epoch. It demands a comprehensive combination of opposing qualities, each of them brought to a high degree of excellence, one buttressed, so to say, on another, and braced with the greatest tension.

Henri de Lubac — Catholicism, A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind

In the last chapter, I demonstrated how the theme of pastoral character appears to bind together the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of mission and doctrine through spiritual discernment. Thus, pastoral character appeared as the proper measure for distinguishing the substance of doctrine (vertical) from the way of presenting it (horizontal). However, it may be asked, is this conceptual binding of the horizontal task of presenting faith and the vertical gift of its substance an idea explicitly presented in the texts of Vatican II? And, how does spiritual discernment really offer this unitive dynamism between the horizontal and the vertical? Before answering these questions, there are two terminological clarifications that I need to anticipate

here. Firstly, since mission and doctrine are so deeply referred to each other,⁷⁸ and can be respectively paralleled with the words horizontal (mission) and vertical (doctrine): (1) I will start, for the matter of convenience, to use the expression ‘horizontal dimension of mission’ to refer to what I was previously calling ‘mission’; and (2) I will start to use the expression ‘vertical dimension of mission’ to refer to what I was previously calling ‘doctrine’.

Based on these clarifications, I will proceed to explore the concepts of ‘pastoral character’ and ‘spiritual discernment’ — the rationale of the third phase of reception — with regard to the concept of mission in Vatican II. Firstly, the study of conciliar documents will allow me to conclude that Vatican II binds together the horizontal and vertical dimensions of mission. This bond, between horizontal and vertical, consists in an integral concept of mission, which is congruent with the concerns expressed under the theme of ‘pastoral character’ by the third phase of conciliar reception. Secondly, considering the preaching of the apostle Paul in the Areopagus (Cf. Acts 17:16-31), I will argue that we are in the presence of a paradigmatic moment of spiritual discernment, where there is a pastoral harmonization of many of the tensions that emerged from the debates between the two first phases of conciliar reception (horizontal and vertical, pastoral and dogmatic, etc).

Finally, it is important to clarify that my approach to Acts 17 is not concerned with giving an exegetical account. Rather, its main focus is to offer a reflection on a symbolic moment and an heuristic approach to the matter at hand. By a ‘reflection on a symbolic moment,’ I mean that Acts 17 is a paradigmatic moment of the Church’s mission which unites the aspects taken up by this thesis: keeping the faithfulness to the kerygma while opting for new manners of

⁷⁸ As it was said above, the doctrine of the Church is the missioning of the Son and of the Spirit, and the mission of God is the doctrine and *raison d’être* of the Church.

presenting it. By an ‘heuristic approach,’ I mean that my desire is not to expose the rationale of spiritual discernment as a technique to be applied to situations, but rather as a reality that emerges from the lived experience of the Church. In this sense, opposed to a logico-deductive approach where the theory is presupposed and applied to practice, I want to argue that the wisdom of spiritual discernment emerges from events (Acts 17) and therefore can be suggested as a model of reading the events which will be studied in the last chapter.

Now, one could question my heuristic approach, by affirming that biblical events do not necessarily have the same status of historical eventuality as the other events which will occupy us in the next chapter (Arian Controversy; Council of Constance; Early Jesuit Mission in India); therefore, it would be irrelevant to argue for the historical implementation of spiritual discernment in the Church based on an event with no sure historical basis. My response to this possible critique is that the presence of the apostle Paul in the Areopagus, regardless of our proofs of its historicity, forms part of the canon of Scripture, which has plenty of spiritual and practical impact over many historical moments of the Church’s mission — i.e. the reception of these texts by the Church has affected her history. For this reason, to study Acts 17 is a way of studying discernment from within ecclesial eventfulness and from events whose ecclesial importance is consensual both to horizontalist and verticalist Catholic theologians.

Towards an integral concept of mission

1. What is mission for the Church?

Before the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic bishops of the world were consulted in order to assert which themes were going to be important for the Council. If for the First Vatican

Council only 47 bishops were consulted, the preparation of the new Council considered the preparatory advice of 2800 people. From these consultations, the preparatory commission elaborated the so called *schemata*, where each individual view was systematically gathered under common themes.⁷⁹ A man of great relevance in this process was the Belgian Cardinal Joseph Suenens. After reading the 72 *schemata* and realizing their dispersion and lack of unity, he proposed a separation between two kinds of *schemata*: those which refer to the Church in herself (*ecclesia ad intra*) and those who refer to the Church in her relation with the world (*ecclesia ad extra*). The biblical base for this insight of Suenens was the missionary mandate of Matthew's Gospel (Cf. Mt 28:19-20), where Jesus promises to be with His disciples while sending them into the world.⁸⁰

This separation was very influential over the conciliar documents, especially if we consider the centrality of *Lumen Gentium* (*ad intra*) and *Gaudium et Spes* (*ad extra*) under this hermeneutical light. Even more interesting is to realize that both references to the Church — identity (*ad intra*) and activity (*ad extra*) — were framed within the missionary mandate of Matthew's Gospel. Thus, not only the apostolic activity or horizontal dimension of the Church fell under the category of mission but also her theandric being or vertical dimension. There is here an overarching concept of mission, as much as the *ad intra* refers to the verticality of this mission as received from God, and the *ad extra* refers to the horizontal dimension of mission as the twofold mission of living in community and extending the community to others who do not

⁷⁹ Klaus Schatz, *Los concilios ecuménicos. Encrucijadas en la historia de la Iglesia*, (Madrid: Trotta, 2000), 254-274.

⁸⁰ Santiago Madrigal, "El Liderazgo carismático de Suenens y Lercaro en el Vaticano II," *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 352 (2015), 15.

[yet] believe. In order to deepen this perception, I will look now at the documents of Vatican II in order to see how they display this particular concept of mission.

1.1. *Mission as vertical and horizontal in Vatican II documents*

In *Lumen Gentium* 4, the missionary character of the Church is based first on God's sending of the Son (Cf. Jn 17:4) and of the Spirit of life (Cf. Act 2:1-4), through whom the Church is sent (Cf. Mt 28:19), inhabited by the Spirit as a temple (Cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), praying (vertical) and bearing witness (horizontal). Furthermore, the same Church should not only announce faith but also search for the means that will bring an effective unfolding of God's plan in the world (Cf. *LG* 17), receiving from her religious mission a commitment, a light and a strength to consolidate the human community according to God's desire (Cf. *GS* 42). In the Decree *Ad Gentes*, in the articles 5 and 7, it is affirmed that, on the one hand, the Church is sent by Christ and moved by the Spirit towards all nations, in order to announce faith, freedom, and peace in Christ, by the example of life, exercises of preaching, through the sacraments and other means of grace; on the other hand, the Decree affirms that this evangelization has consequences for human development (Cf. *AG* 8).

The Council binds together these two dimensions (the expansion of God's Kingdom — vertical — and the restoration of the temporal order of the world — horizontal) in two different ways: a negative and a positive one. Although these ways are different, if understood in the light of the concept of analogy, they can offer us a very interesting balance. Following the Thomist Tradition, the classical *vias negativa et positiva* are to be integrated within the concept of

proportional analogy.⁸¹ Thus, the *via negativa* becomes an acknowledgement of the dissimilarity between two entities; and the *via positiva* the acknowledgement of their similarity. In this sense, *Apostolica Actuositatem* combines the vertical and horizontal dimensions of mission in a negative sense, by affirming the presence of ‘sin in the world’ — dissimilarity between God and Humanity — and deriving from this presence the necessity of evangelization as the “task of the church as a whole to make women and men capable of establishing the proper scale of values in the temporal order and to direct it towards God through Christ” (*AA* 7). This approach is a *via negativa* since it affirms that humanity needs to be restored so that the concurrence of human development and divine perfection may be effective. *Gaudium et Spes* offers a *via positiva* in binding human development and divine perfection. The text says,

“when man develops the earth by the work of his hands or with the aid of technology, in order that it might bear fruit and become a dwelling worthy of the whole human family and when he consciously takes part in the life of social groups, he carries out the design of God manifested at the beginning of time, that he should subdue the earth, perfect creation and develop himself. At the same time he obeys the commandment of Christ that he place himself at the service of his brethren” (*GS* 57).

These two *vias* or ways of binding the vertical and horizontal dimensions of mission are complementary insofar as the *via negativa* finds in God’s missioning of the Son and the Spirit a willingness to redeem a humanity turned apart by a sin which has social consequences. Conversely, the *via positiva* of *Gaudium et Spes* affirms that the order of redemption embraces the order of creation. Therefore, because “the Church on earth is by its nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (*AG* 2), her mission entails both preservation of the Christian faith and the nurturing of the

⁸¹ On the non-univocal but analogic use of the *via negativa et positiva*: Cf. George P. Klubertanz, SJ, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960), 151; Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 87.

Christian community, the vertical and the horizontal. I thus conclude that, in Vatican II documents, both the nature and activity of the Church are articulated into a unified concept of mission.

1.2. *Theological Reflection*

The Conciliar concept of mission is a clear integration of the horizontal and vertical dimensions. However, the limitations of the Conciliar texts are that they affirm clearly ‘what’ should be done but not ‘how’ it should be done. Nonetheless, this limitation of the text consists also in its challenge and possibility. Councils cannot substitute the agency of local churches, as it is in local churches that the reception of this overarching concept of mission is to take place. Accordingly, the third phase of reception of the Council, based on the theme of pastoral character and the practice of spiritual discernment, has suggested a programmatic way of facilitating the emergence of a renewed ecclesial model, where the overarching understanding of mission becomes livable.

This overarching understanding of mission consists in a *via media* or dialectic tension between the horizontalist and verticalist groups of theologians. Thus, this integral understanding (horizontal and vertical) represents a path of unity between all the polarities that have emerged from the discussions between horizontalist and verticalist theologians: christological and pneumatological poles; doctrinal and ecclesial-human historicity; substance and manner of presenting doctrine; expressionist and instrumental views of language; vertical and horizontal concepts of mission.

It unites the christological and pneumatological poles because the mission of the Church cannot be reduced to a logical development of the structures instituted by Christ, but it also has

to be opened to the charismatic newness which is inspired by the Spirit.⁸² It unites the historicity of doctrine, ecclesial and human experience under the same eschatological call, since mission consists in the communion between God's self offering and humanity's cultural accommodation and expression of that gift.⁸³ Mission unites both the substance of doctrine and the various manners of presenting it by the constant search for what is the most fitting way for expressing the *depositum fidei*, according to the lived experience of local churches, with its traditions and circumstances.⁸⁴ Finally, on the one hand, mission unites expressionist and instrumentalist views of doctrinal language, since in it [mission] the ongoing discernment of the Church takes place, experimenting and adjusting its missionary impetus to the potentialities and obstacles of human cultures, in order to accommodate the message of the Gospel;⁸⁵ and, on the other hand, mission unites the horizontal and vertical views of the Church, because the potentialities and obstacles of human cultures can be a manifestation of God's call for the Church to re-read Scripture and Tradition, discerning anew God's voice.⁸⁶

Although, this articulation is not only a gift but also a task, and therefore it is not a happening independent of the Church's self-implication. It is a union that emerges under the impulse of the Spirit, tenaciously followed by the Church through continued exercises of discernment. Conversely, discernment, by uniting all the above mentioned polarities of mission, becomes an effective *via media* between horizontalism and verticalism. This answers to the question 'what is the contribution of discernment to mission?' However, another question needs to be answered: 'how does discernment offer this unifying dynamism to mission?'

⁸² Cf. Yves Congar, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. II, 12.

⁸³ Cf. Orlando Espín, *Traditioning: A Theological proposal*, 130-132.

⁸⁴ Cf. John Zizioulas, "Reception," *One in Christ* 21 (1985), 189.

⁸⁵ Cf. Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 141.

⁸⁶ Cf. Gregory Baum, *Faith and Doctrine* (New York: Newman Press, 1969), 107-108.

2. How does discernment offer a unifying dynamism to mission?

In order to answer this question, I want to retell a biblical passage which is paradigmatic to the Church's understanding of mission. I will proceed in analyzing the passage not with exegetical lenses but in order to understand the manner in which discernment is a plausible word for describing this instance of mission, and how that can help us to highlight the contribution of discernment to mission. The passage on which I will be focusing is Paul's speech at the Areopagus, in Acts 17. Verse sixteen starts with describing Paul as growing in exasperation at the idolatry of the Athenians. After his debates in synagogues and even with some philosophers (vv. 17-21), Paul is taken to the Areopagus, and speaks about his God in a surprising way (vv. 22-31).⁸⁷ To what extent can this biblical event be understood as one of spiritual discernment?

2.1. Can we understand Acts 17 as an event of spiritual discernment?

Paul's initial exasperation at the sight of idolatry (v. 16) seems to be unexpectedly changed when we hear his speech at the Areopagus, when his outreach to pagan culture appears so positive (vv. 22-31). By acknowledging their religious sensibility and poetry, Paul

⁸⁷ "Men of Athens, [he said,] I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and examined your objects of worship, I even found an altar with the inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore what you worship as something unknown, I now proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by human hands. Nor is He served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man He made every nation of men, to inhabit the whole earth; and He determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands. God intended that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. 'For in Him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His offspring.' Therefore, being offspring of God, we should not think that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by man's skill and imagination. Although God overlooked the ignorance of earlier times, He now commands all men everywhere to repent. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead." Acts 17:22-31.

recontextualizes the revelation of Jesus Christ within the human aspirations of the Athenians. However, Paul's initial exasperation (v. 16) as well as the critique of idolatry on verse 24 ("the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by human hands") and, finally, his mentioning of the resurrection from the dead (v. 31), seems to give voice to that medicinal wounding of culture by the authentic faith. Once more, we appear to have two possible interpretations: a horizontal one which is benevolent to culture and a vertical one which is self-confident in the purity of dogmatic language. The third possibility is that Paul, embodying a discerning attitude, was able to hold both positions without conflict. How was that possible?

Paul's change of attitude from disgust with the culture to identifying seeds of the gospel within pagan religiousness seems a perfect example of the contrast between desolation and consolation that underlies all discernment. Contact with a new culture can easily provoke judgemental and negative reactions. (...) How did Paul move from disgust to generosity? Perhaps he prayed as he climbed the hill to the Areopagus. At all events he arrived at a more positive intuition into the values of Athenian culture. Behind the frivolous appearances lay deeper spiritual hungers. Behind the games of argumentativeness lay a poetry and a spirituality that he began to appreciate in a new way. Paul's whole disposition seemed to have undergone a sea change; such a graced conversion of attitude is a key to any Christian discernment.⁸⁸

According to Michael Paul Gallagher, Paul's insight into pagan culture allowed him to find God at work in the human aspirations and cultural expressions of the Athenians. For the Irish Jesuit, this passage from a spiritual state of desolation to one of consolation is central to the language which the Church has identified with discernment. However, one could argue that Gallagher's use of the terms 'consolation' and 'desolation,' more than an exegesis, is a retrojection of discernment into Acts 17. By retrojection I mean here an anachronistic usage of the terminology of spiritual discernment, i.e. an inappropriate question for Paul's time. Nevertheless, some reasons give plausibility to his argument.

⁸⁸ Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 140.

The passage from a state of exasperation to one of deep sympathy toward the inscription ‘to the unknown god’ is more suitably described as a passage from desolation to consolation for the following reasons: (a) the word ‘exasperation’ is a translation from the Greek expression ‘παρωξύνετο τὸ πνεῦμα’; thus the feeling is located as a spiritual one (τὸ πνεῦμα) and not just a temperamental one; (b) if the feeling of exasperation toward idolatry was the overarching disposition of this event, than Paul’s speech would be a tremendous display of refined irony, which would not be congruent with Paul’s ideal of a Christian who puts the interests of others above his or her own (Cf. Phil 2:4) and neither is congruent with Christian love which, according to Paul, does not get exasperated (Cf. 1 Cor 13:5);⁸⁹ (c) if the feeling of exasperation was based on an initial misunderstanding of culture, which gave place to a positive account of pagan culture, then Paul would not have mentioned some core values of the Gospel which he might have known to be difficult to accept in any culture in general (e.g., need for repentance) as well as in the Greek culture in particular (e.g., critique to idolatry and the mentioning of resurrection).

Based on these reasons, the passage from desolation to consolation is not a mere transformation of a negative view into a positive one. It is rather, on the one hand, an insight into a reality that, although in need of being purified from idolatry, allows the apostle to find a deeper structure worth being engaged and potentiated by the living word of Jesus and the powerful unction of the Spirit.⁹⁰ On the other hand, it is not an *époche* of the superficial, but a spiritual consideration of the whole reality of culture, with its lights and shadows, joys and griefs, hopes and anguishes. Conversely, discernment holds together both a critical and a positive view, an

⁸⁹ Cf. Silvano Fausti, *Atti Degli Apostoli*, vol. 2 (Bologna: EDB, 2014), 240.

⁹⁰ I am referring here to the concept of *theologia naturalis*, as a theme already discussed both by Philo of Alexandria and the Stoics, which was clearly appropriated by Paul in Rom 1:20. (In: Bertil Gartner, *The Areopagus speech and Natural Revelation* (Ejnar Munksgaard: Uppsala, 1955), 105-144)

analogical image of culture⁹¹ whose emergence in the heart of Paul and of any baptized person is, in itself, a missionary act and not only a preparatory act for mission. In other words, the discernment of culture is as pastoral as it is dogmatic, horizontal and vertical. However, how does Paul's discernment integrate these two aspects?

2.2. *How is Paul's discernment simultaneously horizontal and vertical?*

It is surprising that, in Paul's speech, there is no mention of Christ's crucifixion. Legitimate doubts can arise about Luke's faithfulness to Paul's speech if we acknowledge the centrality of the message of the Cross in Pauline theology (Cf. 1 Cor 1:22-23; 2:2). Nonetheless, the speech in the Areopagus refers very clearly to the resurrection of the dead; an aspect which a man who was acquainted with Greek thought would know to be difficult to accept at first. However, if we remember some Socratic dialogues, such as Phaedon, which were concerned with the immortality of the soul we can guess that Paul's strategy was aiming at something deeper. In order to convey any message, the communicant should express the message *ad modum recipientis recipitur* (according to the mode of the receiver). In this sense, to preach the Christian kerygma from the images and ideas that are more familiar to the audience is a very notable way of being both creative and faithful to the Gospel message.⁹²

This leads us back to the topic of historicity that the first chapter of this thesis has addressed. Paul's faithfulness to the *depositum* is not oblivious to the historical situation of the

⁹¹ "For the Christian in responding to the event of Jesus Christ senses that the very concreteness of that focus intensifies, clarifies, transforms the experience always-already, not-yet present in all human experience. The principal focus remains on the event of Jesus Christ now renamed grace. Yet the focus of radical grace is itself always focussed by and towards the event of Jesus Christ." (In: David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 424)

⁹² Cf. Hans Conzelmann, "The Address of Paul on the Areopagus" In: Ward Blanton & Hent De Vries (eds) *Paul and the Philosophers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 41-51.

Athenian culture, of their worldview (philosophical sensibility) and subjective references (aspirations of the Athenians) for engaging at that particular moment the Christian message. Thus, Paul establishes here a “hierarchy of truths,” aiming to offer a presentation of the substance of doctrine in a manner that his auditory can understand.⁹³ However, Paul’s preaching of the resurrection, although more in line with Greek philosophical reflection, did not avoid an element of scandal, expressed in the ironic reaction of his public (v. 32). Therefore, this reaction is a sign of how Paul’s speech cannot be separated from the scandal of the mystery of the Cross, which implies the worldly rejection of Christ and his disciples (Cf. 2 Cor 4:10).

On the dogmatic level, we can conclude that Paul is being faithful to the apostolic kerygma (*antiquitatis*), presenting it in a catholic or universal manner which is relatable both to the Church of Jerusalem as it is for the new communities among the Gentile world (*universitas*), and which envisions a possible consensus of the Athenians with the kerygma (*consensus*). On the pastoral level, Paul’s equation between the unchanging message of the Gospel and the philosophical and poetic language of the Athenians, by the employment of a “hierarchy of truths” when presenting the Christian kerygma, is an incredible model of discernment and creative faithfulness. Henceforth, Paul’s discernment of the Athenian culture shows a very inspired balance between horizontal and vertical dimensions.

⁹³ The expression “hierarchy of truths” was used by Vatican II, in the 11th article of *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Its goal was to invite Catholics to use a language about faith that would be helpful to be understood by the members of the other churches. In this sense, the usage of the “hierarchy of truths” in order to generate greater unity in faith can be analogously used in this context of Paul’s address to the Gentiles, since he was aiming at bringing into reality a unity in faith between Jews and Gentiles.

2.3. *How can we systematize Paul's horizontal and vertical discernment?*

Paul's discernment can be systematized from two perspectives: (a) from the level of human dispositions, in which I will be following the thinking of Michael Paul Gallagher, and (b) from a programmatic level, in which I will be drawing from some reflections of Yves Congar. From the dispositional point of view, discernment presupposes: (a.1) the openness or freedom to be surprised by perceiving the other's culture with eyes of faith that, although understanding that divine Revelation is complete, God's communication is not over; (a.2) the willingness to discover in culture the direction in which people's hearts and lives are moving, and which human dimensions are being potentiated or blocked by that movement; (a.3) the fortitude to make decisions, based on the discernment, in a path towards lived priorities and commitments.⁹⁴ From what we have previously said, it is evident that Paul was an active practitioner of each of these dispositions.

From the programmatic point of view, i.e. from the perspective of someone who wants to find a criterion in Paul's action or taking this event as a programmatic memory for the Church, his discernment takes into consideration three dimensions: (b.1) the doctrinal or objective dimension of the apostolic kerygma; (b.2) the subjective implications of opting for a specific "hierarchy of truths" that will help his audience to better understand the Christian message; (b.3) the communitarian or ecclesial implications of the equation between the doctrinal and the subjective, which is clear in Paul's search for an linguistic/experiential consensus with a potential community of believers in Athens.⁹⁵ What I mean here is that Paul's "hierarchy of

⁹⁴ Cf. Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols*, 141.

⁹⁵ Cf. Yves Congar, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 182-3.

truths,” by emphasizing an article of faith which can be more easily engaged by the Athenian culture (i.e., the resurrection of the dead), is established in function of a possible consensus between the general truth of Christianity and its local accommodation.

Behind this dispositional and programmatic description, is there a specific language of spiritual discernment that can characterize and suitably describe Paul’s discernment? What set of rules can help us understand Paul’s progress in a spiritual discernment of culture and of God’s voice in it?

2.4. What set of rules can help us understand Paul’s progress in a spiritual discernment of culture and of God’s voice in it?

“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil,” says the apostle Paul (1 Thes 5:19-22). From the ‘Shepherd of Hermas’ to the writings of the desert fathers and the ‘Spiritual Exercises’ of Ignatius of Loyola, the Church has extensively elaborated on discernment. Nonetheless, this thesis will be drawing from the tradition of Ignatius of Loyola for two main reasons: (1) because it is the most systematized and programmatic elaboration of the topic; (2) because the interest in his work on discernment has been a subject of increasing attention, due to Pope Francis’ emphasis on the importance of applying these rules to the life of the Church.

The rules of discernment of Ignatius of Loyola are inserted in the Spiritual Exercises, a practical program of exams, meditations, and contemplations that aim to help Christians to find God and the divine will within one’s life and spiritual dispositions. From the epistemological level, the process of discernment is based on human experience, that of Saint Ignatius of Loyola together with the spiritual references that shaped his rich inner life (e.g., *Vita Christi* or the

Imitatio Christi). Thus, discernment can be best understood by a constant reference to experience. From the realm of experience, there are two contexts and three steps which become central to the process. The contexts are: (1) the outer reality in which the faithful person is called to find God's presence and will;⁹⁶ (2) the inner reality of the person, with its moods and thoughts, where spiritual affective movements happen, causing the person to experience consolation and desolation.⁹⁷ In a very simple way, consolation and desolation can be briefly defined in terms of their object, which is God. Whenever someone is consoled, there is in the heart an attraction towards God and God's mission. Whenever someone is desolated, the heart feels the opposite, distance from what is of God.

The three steps to perceive these movements are the following: (1) to become aware of these affective movements; (2) to understand them in terms of consolation or desolation; (3) to take action, by accepting consolation and/or rejecting desolation. Spiritual awareness does not consist in a psychological awareness, as a mere awareness to personal thoughts, neither a moral awareness, i.e. a perception of one's own moral value, sinfulness or virtuousness. It is rather a spiritual awareness, i.e. an attentiveness toward the spontaneous affective movements which are prior to human volition.⁹⁸ Furthermore, Ignatius presents three agents in human thinking: an internal one, which is from the individual, and two external influences, one from the good spirit and another from the evil spirit, facilitating or impeding one's union with God. This distinction is

⁹⁶ Cf. Adolfo Nicolás, *Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today* (México, April 23, 2010) In: <http://www.sjweb.info> [consulted: December 26 of 2018].

⁹⁷ Cf. Timothy Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005) 1-3.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, 21.

central, in order not to confuse consolation and desolation with satisfaction or anguish, but with its direction, i.e. “if this feeling or affective state tends toward God or departs from Him.”⁹⁹

The second step, understanding, is a central one which can be emphasized in two ways. Firstly, we have the rules in themselves. We will not explain them here, since not all the rules are always applicable to each discernment, so this would be unnecessary. Furthermore, since their base is found in experience, their explanation can be more suitably given in the next chapter, where we will explore some experiences of the universal Church undergoing concrete discernments over the changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine.

Secondly, we can understand discernment within two sets of rules: the rules of First Week and those of Second Week. I will explain them briefly in relation to the spiritual state of the person who undergoes each type of discernment. For Ignatius, the rules of discernment for the First Week are intended for those persons who are being openly tempted, therefore the discernment of consolation and desolation is appreciated in reference to the object of desire: good or bad. Thus, if someone desires what is openly good, then he or she is progressing; and, if the desire is clearly bad, then that person is in regression. As for the rules of Second Week, they are intended to help those who are tempted under the appearance of good. Therefore, discernment here is not so much focused on the objects under consideration, which are seemingly good, but on the effects they produce over time. The effect can be of immediate consolation, which only comes from God, or of mediated consolation, which has to be examined in relation to its temporal development in the heart of the believer.¹⁰⁰ However, these two sets of

⁹⁹ Michael Buckley, “Discernimiento,” *In*: J. G. Castro, P. Cebollada; J. C. Coupeau; J. Meloni; D. Molina; R. Zas Fris (eds.) *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana (A—F)*, (Bilbao—Santander: Mensajero—Sal Terrae, 2007), 609 [personal translation].

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, 607-608.

rules do not consist in independent stages, since the First Week rules of discernment are presupposed for those who advance towards Second Week rules. Thus, they are not to be seen as two independent levels of spiritual life, but as two levels of depth sharing the same direction.

As we will illustrate in the practical examples of the next section, it is central to the process of discernment to understand which type of discernment is at stake in each situation, otherwise the whole process can be misguided. On the one hand, if one person is confronted with a First Week discernment but perceives his or her state as being that of a person in a Second Week discernment, that person runs the risk of being caught up within details about his or her spiritual movements, that will impede that person of making any decision — the third step of discernment. On the other hand, when a person in Second Week acts as if being in a First Week discernment, that person runs the risk of being caught up within his or her scrupulosity, which will impede that person of making any decision — the third step of discernment. Therefore, an improper understanding of one's spiritual state either impedes a decision or, at least, provokes a decision which does not flow from understanding.

For this reason, it is central for the person who is undergoing a process of discernment to be accompanied by a third person, who represents that communitarian or ecclesial dimension of discernment that was mentioned above. Acting as a sort of a mirror, not trying to impose ideas on the person under discernment but only facilitating the encounter with God, the company of someone in the process is an essential agent for any ecclesial discernment. This agent helps the person in discernment to balance the demands of faith with the cultural and existential situation at stake. For this motive, Avery Dulles provides us with five principles that are very important for the discernment of a rightful decision: (1) that before the decision the person should seek for

the best advice from truly competent experts; (2) that the decision process may be fully known by the community or by the agent of the Church; (3) that the person who is discerning expresses him or herself in a manner that invites to thoughtful agreement; (4) that the person in discernment clearly agrees that, if there are spiritual or theological authorities contrary to the decision, he or she should be interiorly free to rethink the whole process of discernment; and (5) the decision should not only be followed up by words but by concrete action(s).¹⁰¹ Now, are all these dimensions and distinctions present in the apostle Paul's discernment at the Areopagus?

Firstly, we see Paul with a great desire of engaging with the world of the Gentiles (Cf. Act 15:1-35). Secondly, the depiction of Paul's exasperation (Cf. Act 17:16) changing in a manner similar to the passage from desolation to consolation, attests to the scenery of the inner reality which we have mentioned above. As for the steps of discernment, Paul seems to become aware of the spiritual hungers that lie behind the idolatry of the Athenians. Therefore, we are not talking about a psychological awareness or a moral condemnation and subsequent appraisal of Greek culture. The type of awareness to be perceived in Paul's speech at the Areopagus seems to be spiritual (τὸ πνεῦμα), since Paul's insight consists in realizing how much Athenian culture expresses spiritual hungers that can be satiated in the life offered from God in Christ. Finally, Paul takes the decision of addressing the Athenians in a creative and faithful manner.

As for the moment of understanding, it follows a clear structure of passing from consolation to desolation, as it was previously stated, and seems to be more easily framed within a Second Week discernment. Paul's initial exasperation embodies his Jewish aversion of idolatry, which is a good in itself. However, in the course of time, this good feeling in that

¹⁰¹ Cf. Avery Dulles, *The Resilient Church*, 22.

circumstance appeared to be an appearance of good, an “angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14), impeding his sight to discover the deep spiritual hungers of the Athenians. Finally, his accompaniment by an ecclesial agent can be more problematic, since there was apparently no instituted church in Athens. However, Paul’s conversation with local Jews and philosophers allows him to follow at least four of the criteria given by Avery Dulles: (1) seek the advice of the most qualified people; (2) present his arguments in a manner which invites to thoughtful agreement; (3) employ, in his speech, the available authorities of the Athenians (e.g., poets, references to immortality in his way of exposing the kerygma); (4) concrete action in engaging the Athenians at the Areopagus as well as those who were genuinely interested in his preaching. Consequently, there is ground to apply the rules of Ignatius of Loyola to this instance of the Church’s mission.

2.5. Theological Reflection

In order to summarize the previous point, I will present two tables of contents. The first table of contents will give us a summary of Acts 17, taking into account my assessment of Paul’s attitudes through the language of discernment, as well as the polarities of mission which are united through discernment. Thus, this table of contents offers a summarized vision of a overarching concept of mission (horizontal and vertical), the main topic of the first part of this chapter. On the second table of contents, the focus will be shifted toward the practice of discernment in itself, schematizing the wisdom of the previous subsections. This will provide me with the tools to explore, in the next chapter, how discernment was present in the three cases of Church history where changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine were in question.

| ACTS 17 | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Paul's attitudes</i> | Exasperation caused by idolatry | Insight into the religiosity of the Athenians, connecting it to the God of Jesus Christ |
| <i>Discernment</i> | Desolation | Consolation |
| <i>Towards a greater unity within mission</i> | ‘EITHER OR’ POLARITIES | |
| | <u>Desolation with the Church</u> | <u>Desolation with Culture</u> |
| | <i>Horizontal</i> | <i>Vertical</i> |
| | <i>Recontextualize</i> | <i>Criticize culture</i> |
| | <i>Pastoral</i> | <i>Dogmatic</i> |
| | | |
| | | UNITY OF POLARITIES Horizontal and Vertical Recontextualization and Critique Pastoral and Dogmatic |

As it was previously said (2.1. and 2.2.), Acts 17 depicts an apparent transformation in Paul’s attitude toward the idolatry of the Athenians, an exasperation that offers an insight on their religious and human aspirations. This transformation, which can be arguably understood as a passage from desolation to consolation, frames Paul’s interaction with Greek culture within a discernment of spirits. If Paul remained in desolation he would either be desolated about the Church and accept the Athenian culture with no question, or he would have been desolated because of the culture, and thus would only criticize it. As the speech at the Areopagus unfolds, none of these were the options of Paul. Instead of these ‘either or’ polarities, the consolation of the apostle of the gentiles allowed him to go behind the cultural crust of the Athenians, penetrate their spiritual and cultural desires and bind them with the apostolic kerygma. In this sense, consolation in particular but discernment in general triggered a unitive process in mission, between horizontal and vertical dimensions of mission, recontextualizing and criticizing approaches to culture, pastoral and dogmatic languages. Furthermore, in presenting the kerygma, Paul’s cultural discernment allowed him to articulate the manner of presenting the substance of

doctrine in a way that could be relatable to the deepest reflections of the Athenians on the immortality of the soul.

| DISCERNMENT | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|---|
| <i>Contexts</i> | External and Internal | | |
| <i>Dispositions</i> | Eyes of faith to find God in the culture/situation | Awareness of the spiritual effects of culture/situation | Fortitude to take decisions |
| <i>Language</i> | Consolation and Desolation | | |
| <i>Sets of Rules</i> | 1 st Week: for those who are openly tempted, discernment focused on the object of desire; | | 2 nd Week: for those who are tempted under the appearance of good; discernment focused on the spiritual effects of the desired object; |
| <i>Steps</i> | <u>Awareness</u> (not psychological or moral, but spiritual) | <u>Understand</u> (one's mood and thoughts through the rules, and the sets of rules which are applicable to the particular case) | To <u>act</u> accordingly |

| | | | |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>Dimensions</i> | <u>Objective</u> (Scripture and Tradition) | <u>Subjective</u> appropriation | <u>Community</u> implications (seeking the best advice; being transparent with the community or with a spiritual advisor; exposing decisions in a way that invites to thoughtful agreement; being interiorly free to rethink the decision if new authorities are found on the subject; take decisions which imply concrete actions) |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------|---|

Based both on the account of Luke, about Paul’s presence in Athens, and on the rules for spiritual discernment given to the Church by Ignatius of Loyola, I derived a comprehensive set of themes¹⁰² that will allow me to explore the three cases of Church discernment that will be studied in the next chapter. Nevertheless, before that, there are a few considerations that need to be acknowledged. First of all, discernment is a spiritual and prayerful process and thus it can be more easily compared to an art rather than with a technique. It must be derived from here that all the subsequent considerations are plausible conjectures, not certainties that stand independently of the spiritual experience and language of those who, in subsequent years, strived to reflect on the art of spiritual discernment. Secondly, the previous analyses about discernment are more proper to an individual process, while church councils or controversies pertain to more than one person. Therefore, whenever necessary, we shall introduce the concepts which are necessary to extend the personal rules of discernment into the big frame of the universal community of the baptized. However, this communitarian emphasis does not invalidate the subjective dimension of any discernment; it simply places its importance in a different level. As a matter of fact, no

¹⁰² The human dispositions for discernment (with Michael Paul Gallagher) and the dimensions included in a fitting program of discernment (with Yves Congar) in section 2.3. On the discernment of culture in 2.4.

community can accept or reject a certain spiritual feeling if the individuals who constitute that community are not personally implicated in the process.

Finally, as I am searching for a new way of welcoming Vatican II into the life of the Church, it may sound strange to study cases of the ancient Church. My point here is that the new mode of Church that embodies the pastoral character is not only an *accommodation* of the Church into modern times neither a simple *ressourcement* into a more primitive model of Church. It is a recognition of how did the Spirit worked in the Church throughout history. Between *accommodation* and *ressourcement*, this itinerary of recognition offers a spiritual biography of three historical discernments of the Church. Three cases of Church history will integrate our trajectory: (1) the Arian controversy; (2) the Council of Constance; (3) the Early Jesuit Mission in India. Each of these cases will include three steps: (1) awareness of the context, history and main arguments; (2) understanding the major agents or movements in these discernments; (3) based on the previous points, recognizing the major rules of spiritual discernment which were operative in the dogmatic/pastoral decisions produced in each case.

THIRD

EXPERIENCES OF DISCERNMENT IN CHURCH HISTORY

The tradition of the Apostles, committed to the whole Church in its various constituents and functions, manifests itself variously at various times, sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies and customs, by events, disputes, movements, and all those other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history.

John Henry Newman — On the Consultation of the Faithful in Matters
of Doctrine

A Triptych of Ecclesial Ongoing Discernments

The integration of an organic concept of historicity within theology requires from theologians an attentive regard towards Church history. This ecclesial self-perception is very important to fight against two spiritual diseases: those of amnesia or inertia. A spiritual amnesia that makes the Church forget that some aspect of her doctrine was not always self-evident, but subjected to a spiritual, theological and even political considerations; or that a particular problem of our times was already addressed in past resolutions of the Church. And a spiritual inertia that consists in the Church becoming paralyzed by confusing the preservation of ecclesial means with the ecclesial goal. By ecclesial means, I mean here any form of absolutizing either the heritage of

the Church (verticalism) or the need for her social engagement (horizontalism). By ecclesial goal, I mean here the communication of the Gospel. Under this concern, I will shift now my attention to these cases of discernment in the Church, where the manner of presenting doctrine was discerned and altered in faithfulness to Church tradition and in accordance with the spiritual and human demands of mission.

1. *On the Arian Controversy*

1.1. *Background, History and Arguments*

The Arian Crisis was one of the most significant controversies within the Church of the first millennium. The name ‘Arian’ points us to the name of its main figure, the priest Arius from Alexandria (256-336 AD). However, the roots of the problem go deeper than one person and developed from an earlier time. Saint Justin, in his ‘Dialogue with Trypho,’ explains the generation of the Logos like a fire kindled from another fire — the Father — before creation.¹⁰³ This bright account of the eternal generation of the Logos opens the following question: if the Logos was generated before creation and in order to bring creation to the full, is it not possible to see the Logos as a second-rank divinity? Not in full possession of the divine substance, at least in the same way the Father does?

Thus, the root of this controversy was already operative from the time of the first Apologists. On the one hand, the Alexandrian presbyter Arius argued that if the Father begat the Son, then the Son had a beginning in time. Conversely, since only creatures are born in time, the Son could not possess a full divine category. Hence, he claimed that the Christian kerygma,

¹⁰³ Cf. Saint Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 62:3.

found in Matthew 28:19 (“Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”), should be analogically interpreted in light of the voice of Wisdom, God’s special creature, as depicted in Proverbs 8:22 (“The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old”).¹⁰⁴ Besides this biblical basis, Arius counted on great support among the philosophical resources of his time, highly influenced by the neoplatonist theosophy, which regarded unity and indivisibility as the most important attributes of the divine substance. Thus, the substance of God, although mysteriously attributed to the Son, was only possessed by the Father; as if the Father possessed the divine substance *de jure* and the Son only *de facto*.

On the other hand, confessors of faith like St Athanasius affirmed that if our humanity was not personally assumed by God in Jesus, then our salvation was an illusion; therefore, it was necessary to affirm the divinity of the Son.

For man had not been deified if joined to a creature, or unless the Son were very God; nor had man been brought into the Father's presence, unless He had been His natural and true Word who had put on the body. And as we had not been delivered from sin and the curse, unless it had been by nature human flesh, which the Word put on (for we should have had nothing common with what was foreign), so also the man had not been deified, unless the Word who became flesh had been by nature from the Father and true and proper to Him. For therefore the union was of this kind, that He might unite what is man by nature to Him who is in the nature of the Godhead, and his salvation and deification might be sure.¹⁰⁵

In order to bring an end to this controversy, the Emperor Constantine gathered a Council in Nicea during the year of 325. The Nicene Creed professes the Triune God as equally divine, thus affirming that the Father is not the sole bearer of divinity but the personal and ontological base for the divinity of the other persons. In this sense, Hilary of Poitiers affirmed: “The Giver is

¹⁰⁴ Ángel Cordovilla, *El misterio de Dios trinitario*, (Madrid: BAC, 2012), 284.

¹⁰⁵ Saint Athanasius, *Against Arrius* II:70.

greater: but the Receiver is not less, for to Him it is given to be one with the Giver.”¹⁰⁶ This personal unity was condensed in the non-biblical term *homoousios* (consubstantial). However, to what extent can a non-biblical term be a suitable description of the unchanging message of the Gospel? Moreover, the term *homoousios* had just been condemned in the previous century, when used by Paul of Samosata.¹⁰⁷

Paul of Samosata’s usage of the term wanted to affirm the divinity of the persons and ended stressing a unity in the Trinity to an extent that almost left no space for the diversity of persons. Many bishops lined with Arius perhaps because they thought that the usage of this term, under whatever form or interpretation, was not the most fitting way of reconciling the unchanging faith on the unity of God and the diversity of Persons. So, how can we be sure that the subsequent acceptance of this term was a change which allowed the Church to maintain her faithfulness to the unchanging *depositum*? The question is not aimed at finding a logical sequence between the earliest Christology of the Church and the Nicene creed, nor is it trying to discern the authenticity of this development of doctrine, although its goal is connected. This question is aiming at the validity of this spiritual discernment, as a prayerful process of the Church trying to understand how to better communicate the unchanging Gospel within changing cultural circumstances.

¹⁰⁶ Saint Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* IX:54.

¹⁰⁷ It can sound contradictory to say that one unchangeable aspect only pertains to a specific moment of history. If it is unchangeable, shouldn’t it be attributed to every circumstance of Church history? The condemnation of Paul of Samosata can be a good example here for advocating how an unchangeable aspect can be presented for a particular moment alone. On the III century, many Church fathers, synods, one council condemned Paul of Samosata’s trinitarian theology for affirming too much its monarchic unity to a point that the diversity of persons would be unrecognizable. This condemnation included the refusal of the term ‘homoousios’ used by the heretic bishop — Paul of Samosata. Later, when the Arian crisis became a significant issue for the Church, the term was rescued in order to affirm the equal divinity between the Father and the Son. Conversely, in order to affirm two different theological truths — firstly, that there is diversity of persons in the one God and, secondly, that divinity equally shared among the Trinitarian persons — the same theological term was once condemned and then affirmed.

1.2. The thesis of John Henry Newman 'On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine'

For John H. Newman, at the time of the Arian controversy "the body of the episcopate was unfaithful to its commission, while the body of the laity was faithful to its baptism."¹⁰⁸ He continues: "The Nicene dogma was maintained during the greater part of the fourth century, not by the unanswering firmness of the Holy See, Councils, or Bishops, but by the *consensus fidelium*."¹⁰⁹ What basis does the author claim in order to make such strong affirmations?

Cardinal Newman provides the reader of his essay with twenty examples of Church history of reception of the Nicene dogma, showing how much at that time the many councils did nothing but excommunicate the Nicene confessors of faith, promulgate an unending list of Creeds and explanations *ad hoc* that did never clarify the matter fully. From Cappadocia to Egypt, Antioch to Armenia, and many other places, many members of laity as well as monks, were firm in defending the Nicene faith, sometimes by confessing faith in public, other times by challenging ecclesial or state authorities, who with time leaned more on the side of the Arian doctrine.¹¹⁰

As a consequence, Newman concludes that although "historically speaking, the fourth century is the age of doctors, illustrated, as it was, by the saints Athanasius, Hilary, the two Gregories, Basil, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, (...) nevertheless, in that very day the divine tradition committed to the infallible Church was proclaimed and maintained far more by the faithful than by the Episcopate."¹¹¹ "It was the Christian people who, under Providence, were the ecclesiastical strength of Athanasius, Hilary, Eusebius of Versallae, and

¹⁰⁸ John H. Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, 76.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, 77.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, 73-101.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 75.

other great solitary confessors, who would have failed without them.”¹¹² Conversely, from the theological point of view,

the tradition of the Apostles, committed to the whole Church in its various constituents and functions manifests itself variously at various times, sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies and customs, by events, disputes, movements, and all those other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history. It follows that none of these channels of tradition may be treated with disrespect; granting at the same time fully that the gift of discerning, discriminating, defining, promulgating, and enforcing any portion of that tradition resides in the *Ecclesia Docens*.¹¹³

Based on these historical and ecclesiological studies, I conclude that the Arian controversy is concerned both with a debate over changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine, and, as we can see by the active participation of the faithful, the implications of this debate are as pastoral as they are dogmatic, horizontal in what regards to historical unity in the Church and vertical in what regards to ecclesial unity in faith. Thus, we have gathered all the conditions (changeable and unchangeable, pastoral and dogmatic, horizontal and vertical) to study this ecclesial event within the framework of a spiritual discernment.

1.3. The Arian Controversy as a process of spiritual discernment

The Arian crisis consists of an ecclesial process which can be described as a Second Week discernment. Taking into account the external context of the council, i.e. the validity of Arius’s philosophical claims and the condemnation of the term *homoousios* at the Council of Antioch in 269, it is not immediately obvious which of the parties was being faithful to the *depositum*. As it is said in the rules for Second Week discernments, “it is characteristic to the

¹¹² Cf. *Ibidem*, 76.

¹¹³ Cf. *Ibidem*, 63.

enemy to fight against (...) spiritual consolation, by using specious reasonings, subtilities, and persistent deceits.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, our focus should not be that of searching for an object of desire, in this or that doctrinal definition, but to the spiritual effects caused by each definition.

In the encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI defines consolation as “*being with the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude.*”¹¹⁵ This *being with the other* is the spiritual framework in which John H. Newman understands the support given by the faithful to confessors such as Athanasius and Hillary. In his rules for spiritual discernment, Ignatius of Loyola points out that consolation leads to communion, since one is enabled to love all that is in God, united with God.¹¹⁶ This union between the confessors and the faithful in God in nothing but that which Ignatius attributes to the language of God in the soul, an intensification of the bounds of love and friendship through hope, faith and love.¹¹⁷ Therefore, this union is both vertical and horizontal, since it united the confessor with God and with His faithful.

On the contrary, as it was stated above in our synthesis of Newman’s work, the supporters of Arius, together with the military forces of Constantine, promoted a great deal of communitarian division. In terms of a communitary discernment, this is the equivalent to a collective subjectivism, a sort of a double game between ecclesial and political forces, which leaves the concerns of some communities unheard and uncared for.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, to the confessors and to the faithful, the Arian view on Christology did not seem to be in harmony with

¹¹⁴ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* n° 329 (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992) 126.

¹¹⁵ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi* 38 (November 2007), in www.vatican.va [consulted: March 29 of 2019].

¹¹⁶ “As a result [of consolation] it [the soul] can love no created thing in itself, but only in the Creator of them all.” (Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* n° 316, 122)

¹¹⁷ Cf. Santiago Arzubialde, *Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio* (Miliaño & Bilbao: Sal Terrae & Mensajero, 2009), 723.

¹¹⁸ Edward Mercieca, “Discernimiento Comunitario,” *In*: J. G. Castro, P. Cebollada; J. C. Coupeau; J. Meloni; D. Molina; R. Zas Fris (eds.) *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana (A—F)*, 614 [personal translation].

the lived faith, a sort of a “foreign substance in the body”.¹¹⁹ These two aspects, communitary division and uncongeniality of the Arian doctrine, echo two important aspects of spiritual discernment: (a) *contrary mode* — both in First and Second Week discernments, the good and the bad spirit act in opposing modes, if one encourages something the other discourages, if one unites the other disunites; (b) *contrary effects* — when the soul is in consolation, it is proper for the good spirit to touch “like a drop of water going into a sponge,” and the bad spirit “like a drop of water falling onto a stone.”¹²⁰ Now, the spiritual effects that can be identified in the relationship of communion between the confessors and the laity seems to be more appropriately associated with spiritual consolation; and military actions performed or accepted by many Arian supporters appears to be the contrary in mode and in effects to those of the confessors. Thus, it seems to me that it is more plausible to associate the actions of the confessors with the agency of the good spirit and those of the Arians with the agency of the bad spirit.

As for the dimensions of discernment, the two previous sections on the Arian crisis are enough to conclude the confessors of the Nicene dogma counted with a strong basis on both Revelation and Tradition, i.e. the objective dimension of discernment. As for the former paragraphs, the subjective and communitary dimensions were articulated around the concept of spiritual consolation and its effects of mutual support between the faithful and the confessors of the Nicene dogma. Henceforth, we conclude that this process of discerning how to maintain the unchangeable doctrine on Christ with a new theological formulation, resulted in an authentic development of faith, since it was assisted by a proper ecclesial discernment of spirits, which validates the intentions and conclusions of the confessors of the Nicene dogma.

¹¹⁹ John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 74.

¹²⁰ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* n° 335, 127-128.

2. *On the Council of Constance*

2.1. *Background, History and Arguments*

In the first quarter of the fifteenth century, three bishops claimed the See of Rome as popes. They were John XXIII, Benedict XIII, and Gregory XII. A mix of political intrigue, popular anger, stubborn bishops and failed councils had given rise to this schismatic situation. Between 1414 and 1418 the Council of Constance brought this conflict between papal claimants to an end. Gregory XII, Pope in Rome, and John XXIII (successor of the Pisan Pope — a failed attempt to elect a new Pope and end the schism) had agreed to resign. Only Benedict XIII refused to stand down, and was therefore excommunicated by the council. However, the gathering of bishops was not a spontaneous wish of the resigning popes. The Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg was actually the main architect of the whole conciliar enterprise, convincing popes to resign, persuading several European courts and doctors to support him and, even, making the first call to gather a council in Constance.

The response to this call was outstanding. The participants in this council included 29 cardinals, 33 archbishops, 150 bishops, more than 100 abbots, 300 doctors. About 2000 participants in total.¹²¹ However, an unprecedented situation would overturn the high expectations of this council. Pope John XXIII, dressed as a server of Emperor Sigismund, fled from the council to Schaffhausen, leaving the conciliar fathers without head and thus without apparent source of authority for its decrees and promulgations.

Despite the Council fathers' continuous efforts to negotiate the return of the Pope through several embassies, once the Pope tried to escape through the Rhine, the Council decided to start the formalities of the deposition process. During the 3rd

¹²¹ Cf. Klaus Schatz, *Los concilios ecuménicos: Encrucijadas en la historia de la Iglesia*, 129.

session celebrated on 26th March 1415, the Council openly opposed any attempt of dissolution and as it had done during the 1st Session, expressed its decision of resolving the issues of *causa unionis, fidei et reformationis*.

The following session, chaired by cardinal Corsini, took place three days later and produced a highly significant text. Cardinal Zabarella was in charge of the public reading of the document and caused a great commotion when he omitted a passage affirming the power of the Council to enact without papal support the reform *in capite et membris*, which apparently had been already accepted. On Saturday 6th April, after Easter, it was decided to call a new Session, at which the previous decree was rewritten and the problematic sentence about the reform was finally included. As a result of this session the decree known as *Haec sancta synodus* was produced; the document established that even without a papal head the Council had sufficient authority to restore the union of the Church. The competence of the Council rested on Christological grounds since the Council held its *potestas* immediately from Christ. Even the Pope was subject to this *potestas*. The text explicitly added that those who disregarded this authority would be punished, including the Supreme Pontiff.¹²²

Sebastián Provvidente's account depicts in a vivid way the presence of two opposing forces in the conciliar aula: those who, like Cardinal Zabarella, wanted the union of the Church without conferring a significant authority to conciliarism, and those who, like the doctors from Paris, claimed divine authority for councils, to be exercised under similar circumstances. On one hand, there is an evident question over the changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine at stake: the usage of a new and more robust theological-juridical language on the authority of the councils, based on the unchanging authority conferred by Christ to the whole body of the Apostles. On the other hand, since the main reasons for the decree were to bring an end to the schism in the Church, the pastoral value of the decree is evident. However, its dogmatic value is not that evident. As a matter of fact, after Vatican II, theologians argued about the dogmatic or disciplinary value of *Haec Sancta*. Those who defend its dogmatic value, like Hans Kung and Paul de Vooght, claim that this document legitimates the establishment of limits to papal

¹²² Cf. Sebastián Provvidente, "The meaning of Haec Sancta: between theology, canon law and history," *Temas medievales* 20 (2012), 197-200.

authority based on the christological legitimization of councils. Among those who claim its disciplinary value but deny the dogmatic one, like Yves Congar, it is claimed that, although *Haec Sancta* has a paradigmatic place in Church history, its intention was circumstantial and thus it is exaggerated to attribute it a dogmatic value.¹²³

It seems to me that the opinion of Yves Congar is the most valid one, since the other decrees of the council, especially *Frequens*, do not regard councils as a constitutional body for the control of the papacy, but rather as a body of legitimate apostolic authority which places the successor of Peter at the head of the council but not above or separated from the council.¹²⁴ However, by denying the dogmatic value of *Haec Sancta*, this position seems to question the claim that discernment unites both the dogmatic and pastoral dimensions of mission. In order to answer this question, it is essential to remember the role of the doctors of theology in this council.

2.2. *The method, the doctors of Paris and the causes of 'Haec Sancta'*

An important aspect to underline about the schism is that it did not correspond only to an intra-religious division, but also to a European division. If it is true that Tomás de Torquemada contributed to the undervaluation of *Haec Sancta* by mistakenly considering it as a byproduct of the thought of Marsilio of Padua and William of Ockham, he was right to recognize in this decree a strong influence of models of political 'representativeness'.¹²⁵ The truth is that the members of the council felt that they had to be representatives of two groups: on one hand, they

¹²³ Wolfgang Beinert, "¿Conciliarismo o Papalismo? Un problema de concepción de la Iglesia Católica," *Selecciones de Teología* 55 (2016), 6.

¹²⁴ Cf. Klaus Schatz, *Los concilios ecuménicos*, 139.

¹²⁵ Cf. Sebastián Provvidente, *The meaning of Haec Sancta*, 203.

represented the *congregatio fidelium*, on the other hand, they represented the European nations. The goal for the usage of this methodology was to rebuild networks of obedience and trust, which were so fragile within the Church and the Europe of that time. Thus, the Council decided to follow the methodology that was then used by European universities; a model which had been already adopted, for the first time, at the council of Pisa. Hence, the participants were divided into their respective nations: Italy, France, England and Germany, to which "the Spanish nation" was later added — constituted by Castile, Aragon and Portugal. Within each group, the vote was individual and the vote of the majority of each national corporation became the vote of the "nation". In this way, each nation was represented by a single vote.¹²⁶

Besides this sophisticated method of representation, the presence of doctors in theology was highly significant to finding creative and faithful ways of addressing the three main tasks of the council: (1) the end of the schism or *causa unionis*; (2) the reform of the Church or *causa reformationis*; and (3) the condemnation of the neo-donatist ecclesiologies of Jan Huss and John Wickliff or *causa fidei*.¹²⁷ In this regard, two Parisian theologians should receive special emphasis: Jean Gerson and Pierre d'Ailly. As for the first, three days after John XXIII's escape and fifteen days before the issuing of *Haec Sancta*, addressing the members of the council in a sermon (*Ambulate dum lucem habetis*), Gerson affirmed that the council had received enough light and authority by Christ. And, if by Christ's decree, the council could not suppress the authority of the Pope, it could however limit its exercise if that contributes to the edification of the Church.¹²⁸ More determined in his cause, Pierre d'Ailly "Affirmed decidedly the superior

¹²⁶ Cf. Klaus Schatz, *Los concilios ecuménicos*, 130-131.

¹²⁷ Cf. Bernard Sesboue, *La infalibilidad de la Iglesia, Historia y Teología*. (Maliaño: Sal Terrae, 2014), 212.

¹²⁸ Cf. Klaus Schatz, *Los concilios ecuménicos*, 133.

authority of the council over the pope" because "he considered that the exceptional situation in which the Church was, required the resignation of the three popes."¹²⁹

From this presentation of the methodology and of the theologians, it can be affirmed that: (a) the methodology that gave rise to *Haec Sancta* was meant to establish trust among European countries and networks of obedience within the Western church (horizontal and vertical); (b) although *Haec Sancta* is not, in itself, a dogmatic text, the process of conciliar consensus around its themes as well as its disciplinary assertions for the edification of the church (pastoral or horizontal) are grounded in an insight of plain dogmatic value: that the Pope does not derive his authority from the Council nor the Council from the Pope, but both derive it immediately from Christ (doctrinal or vertical). Thus, we have gathered all the conditions (changeable and unchangeable, pastoral and dogmatic, horizontal and vertical) to study this conciliar event within the framework of a spiritual discernment.

2.3. *The Council of Constance as a process of spiritual discernment*

One of the essential points for a communitary discernment is the definition of three aspects: (1) what is there to be decided; (2) how is it to be decided; and (3) by whom.¹³⁰ As it was said above, the matter to be decided in the case of *Haec Sancta* was the authority of the Council, the methodology of the universities, and the agents of that decision were the representatives of the European nations. However, in spite of this external context, the escape of

¹²⁹ Cf. Bernard Sesboue, *La infalibilidad de la Iglesia*, 212 [personal translation]. On this respect, it is interesting to remember that, when the council was condemning the doctrines of John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, Jean de Maroux, Latin Patriarch of Antioch, claimed that the heretics should be condemned in the name of the Pope but using the formula *hoc sacro aprobante concilio*, given that the council *nullam auctoritatem habere nisi ex capite*. Pierre d'Ailly was vehemently opposed this, claiming that the condemnation should be made in the name of the council, since *concilium est maius papa cum sit totum, et papa sit pars eiusdem*. (Cf. Thomas Fudge, *The Trial of Jan Hus: Medieval Heresy and Criminal Procedure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 327.

¹³⁰ Cf. Edward Mercieca, *Discernimiento Comunitario*, 612.

John XXIII did create a great uncertainty and desolation, since it threatened to jeopardize the whole purpose of the gathering. The temptation seems so obvious, i.e. to leave the council and thus not to address the ecclesial schism and the European division, that it makes more sense to frame this event within the rules of a First Week discernment.

In this sense, it is important now to consider three resolutions of the council which were implicit or explicit in the decree *Haec Sancta*: (1) to proceed with the works of the council; (2) to affirm the authority of the council as directly received from Christ; (3) to call for further councils in order to continue to promote the reform of the church. Let us consider each decision under the scope of the rules for First Week discernments. *To proceed with the council*, corresponds to that which Ignatius of Loyola defends as the attitude to face desolation: “during the time of desolation one should never make a change (...) [but] should remain firm and constant in the resolutions and in the decision which one had on the day before the desolation.”¹³¹ *To affirm the authority of the council* is a way of respectfully limiting papal jurisdiction on theological grounds. This is a refined way of fighting against ecclesial desolation, since, according to Ignatius, one of the causes for desolation is when the soul tries to build a “nest in a house which belongs to Another.”¹³² In other words, to confuse papal authority with owning the church of God is a problem which generates spiritual desolation, i.e. a lack of communal love or unity. Finally, *to call for further councils*, as it was done both in *Haec Sancta* and *Frequens*, resonates with a spiritual movement which Ignatius of Loyola described in the following manner: “one who is in consolation should consider how he or she will act in future desolation, and store up new strength for that time.”¹³³

¹³¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises* n° 318, 123.

¹³² *Ibidem* n° 322, 124.

¹³³ *Ibidem* n° 323.

To conclude this consideration, I want to shift my attention to the doctors of theology from Paris, Gerson and d'Ailly. Their influence was clear in animating the prelates, through images and reasons, to assert the authority of the Council. Gerson's homily, based on the Johannine verse *Ambulate dum lucem habetis* (Cf. Jn 12:35), offers a profound image to animate the conciliar members not to be discouraged in their intent of reform. The strong argumentation of Pierre d'Ailly, on the equal immediacy with which Peter and the Apostles received their authority from Christ, confirmed this same point amidst theological discussions. According to Ignatius of Loyola, both the good and the bad spirit communicate through images and reasons. Nonetheless, the images and reasons of the good spirit, contrary to those of the bad, lead to authentic consolation and unity, which was the fruit of the influence of the Parisian doctors over the council.¹³⁴ Henceforth, we conclude that the Council of Constance, concerned with the manner of presenting the unchangeable doctrine of the authority given by Christ to Peter and to the Apostles, was assisted by a proper ecclesial discernment of spirits, which validates the intentions, methods and conclusions of the nations congregated in Constance.

3. *On the case of the Early Jesuit Mission in India*

3.1. *Background, History and Arguments*

From the early times of the Society of Jesus, the behavior of Jesuits has always been a source of wonder, contempt and controversy, especially in missionary contexts. An example of this can be taken from a confrontation between the Jesuit Constitutions and the missionary activity of St. Francis Xavier while he was in India. In the second chapter of the seventh part of

¹³⁴ Cf. Edward Mercieca, *Discernimiento Comunitario*, 614-615.

the Jesuit Constitutions, article 622 points out that Jesuits should strive to preach first the message of the Gospel to people who have more public status, since those can provoke a trickle down spreading of the Gospel in society.¹³⁵ However, St. Francis Xavier's activity in India manifests a clear preference for the lower social groups, since he found greater spiritual fruit among them. Furthermore, the same Ignatius of Loyola who wrote the Constitutions was the same who approved Xavier's methods.¹³⁶ Is this a lack of consistency in the action of the Basque saint? According to John O'Malley, this is not a sign of inconsistency but of the distinctiveness of the Society of Jesus: the ability to prescribe a general course of action but giving flexibility for decisions to be received or transformed according to the circumstances of peoples, times and places.¹³⁷

Xavier's method was kept by Jesuits in India, especially by subsequent superiors of the mission in Tamil Nadu, FF. Criminali and Henriques. The latter, also known as the apostle of the fishery coast, was a master of friendship with all, through which he started a magnificent collaboration with local laymen who would help the missionaries as catechists. Some Portuguese, who had been serving the army in India, were attracted by this model and decided to join the Society of Jesus. One of them was Fr. Gonçalo Fernandes, who would later be sent on to the region of Madurai. However, in spite of his ascetic life and contact with local Hindus, he could not win new converts to Christianity. This would change with the arrival of Fr. Roberto de Nobili. The Italian Jesuit, after being sent to Madurai, understood that local Hindus did not join faith because of a vicious circle: since Christians were usually with poor fisherman, they were

¹³⁵ Cf. Ignacio de Loyola, *Obras Completas* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1997) 598.

¹³⁶ Cf. Francis Xavier, *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 63-74.

¹³⁷ Cf. John O'Malley, "The Distinctiveness of the Society of Jesus," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 3 (2016), 1-16.

considered impure at the eyes of Brahmins, who would thus avoid the presence of Christians; as a consequence, since the Brahmins — the high and learned cast — did not convert to Christianity, other Hindus did not find any particular attraction for Christianity.¹³⁸

As a consequence, De Nobili asked and received permission from his superiors to live outside of Jesuit houses, to wear earrings and to dress a *kavi*, the garment of a Hindu ascetic, while using also a powder mark in his forehead and a small crucifix in his chest. Dressed as a Brahmin, devoted primarily to study and contemplation, living an ascetic life, claiming to be a Brahmin from Rome and avoiding any contact with members of other casts, De Nobili had baptised more than fifty Brahmins in less than a year.¹³⁹ Based on a deep study of Hindu culture, by himself and together with other Brahmins, De Nobili used the thomistic concept of ‘adiaphora’ to differentiate Hindu practices between those that have a religious goal, and thus were considered superstitious, from those that had a civic goal but were confused with superstitions just by being performed by Hindus.¹⁴⁰ With this distinction, De Nobili was able to creatively translate Catholic theological words, instead of using Latin or Portuguese as Xavier had done, as well as adapting some rituals and sacraments, by introducing some Hindu civic practices. Thus, De Nobili was not only bringing Hindus to Christ but also recognizing how the deeds of the locals, while ignorant of the Gospel, were already a fruit of God’s grace.¹⁴¹ Based on this recognition, Christianity was becoming culturally acceptable to Indians.

However, the strong characters of De Nobili and Gonçalves would cause an immense controversy around this case, a controversy that was only concluded in Rome; not with a

¹³⁸ Cf. Leonard Fernando, *Jesuits and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-6.

¹³⁹ Cf. Jan P. Schouten, “A Foreign Culture Baptised: Roberto de Nobili and the Jesuits,” *Exchange* 47 (2018), 188.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Ines Zurpanov, *Disputed Mission* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 97-98.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Jan Peter Schouten, *A Foreign Culture Baptised*, 194-195.

decision from the General of the Society but from the Pope. Initially, Gonçalves wrote a letter to his superiors questioning De Nobili's methods, since they were dividing the Christian community in two — the Brahmins and the rest. After this, the mission superior changed and De Nobili's protection came to an end. Questions about De Nobili's position reached Robert Bellarmine, in Rome, as well as the Superior Generals Claudio Acquaviva and Mutio Vitelleschi. The first sent Fr. Pimenta, a Jesuit whose task was to visit the mission and ascertain a correct version of the facts, but to no avail. With the help and signature of many Brahmins, De Nobili wrote a document in defense of his practices, where he attested the civic meaning of the Hindu habits he adopted and wrote a letter to the General Acquaviva, accusing Gonçalves of having a poor theological competence and Pimenta of not being spiritual enough to understand the matter at stake.¹⁴² As a consequence of this controversy that mixed doctrine and egos, the Holy See appointed the Inquisitor Fernão Pedro Mascarenhas to revise the whole case and inform Pope Gregory XV on the best course of action. Finally, the Pope approved the adaptationist method of de Nobili.

3.2. The Inquisitor, the Hindu convert and the Pontiff

The case of Fr. Roberto de Nobili involves a discernment on the changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine. Not that the controversy originated a new doctrinal statement. However, in a time when in Europe there was a great controversy around the union between the substance of faith and its ecclesial mode of presentation received from tradition, it is surprising that in India the Holy See would eventually allow the Jesuits to keep the substance of doctrine under new forms of ecclesial expression, which were clearly new to the tradition of the Roman

¹⁴² Cf. Ines Zurpanov, *Disputed Mission*, 48-67.

Church. No wonder that many of the adversaries of De Nobili, like his superior F. Pimenta, accused him of being similar to the Reformers in Europe in his dissociation between a substance of faith and the modes of celebrating and living faith.¹⁴³ Besides this accusation, it is important to remember here that, in spite of De Nobili's insult to Goçalves intellectual abilities, his critique stood as one of the strongest until the end of the controversy: that De Nobili divided the Christian community and that his new customs were pagan. Opposed to this vision, those who defended De Nobili's vision argued that his adaptation of certain customs were political, not religious.

The Inquisitor Mascarenhas, in *the Solution of the problem as to whether the Brahmans of the East Indies should be allowed the string, the tuft of hair, and other ceremonies which they used before their conversion*, favoured the position of De Nobili, distinguishing civic from religious acts and accepting the former into the rites of local Christian communities.¹⁴⁴ This decision influenced in a clear manner the papal verdict, the Apostolic Constitution *Romanae Sedis Antistes*, which favoured De Nobili's changes in the manner of presenting Christian doctrine to the Brahmans. This represents a vertical concern for doctrinal orthodoxy within new cultural parameters — those of the Hindu culture. However, it is very important to remember here that this does not represent a victory for De Nobili, since the Pope also integrates Gonçalves's criticism by saying: "It is not convenient that those who are nourished by the same word, who are satiated by the same bread and will participate one day in the celestial kingdom, occupy in the church separate places, as if out of disdain for the people of low birth."¹⁴⁵ This reference to

¹⁴³ Cf. *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*, 95-96.

¹⁴⁵ Gregory XV, "Appendix Two: Apostolic Constitution *Romanae Sedis Antistes*", in: Thomas Anchukandam sdb, *Roberto de Nobili's 'Responsio' (1610)*, (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1996), 125.

Gonçalves' critique allows the reader to find in the papal words not only a concern for doctrinal orthodoxy, but also for a horizontal or historical communion within the Church.

Finally, it is important to look behind the scenes of the Madurai mission controversy. Although most of the controversy circle around the opposing views of two Jesuits, Gonçalves and De Nobili, the progress of both in the knowledge of Hindu culture could not have happened without the help of the locals. One of them is Bonifacio Xastri, a young Brahmin who genuinely converted to Catholicism under De Nobili. It was with him that the Italian Jesuit was introduced to the practices and rituals of Hindu culture, while learning how to discern their civic or religious goals. In the words of Margherita Trento,

taking into account Bonifacio's character, that Madurai mission cannot be considered merely the theater of the clash between the two gigantic personalities of Nobili and Fernandes. It was rather the scene of a complex network of people and events in which the agency of the first converts was as crucial as that of the pioneering missionaries.¹⁴⁶

This involvement is an indicium that the present controversy was not only concerned with the vertical structures of the Church, but also with its horizontal networks. Thus, we have gathered all the conditions (changeable and unchangeable, pastoral and dogmatic, horizontal and vertical) to study this event within the framework of a spiritual discernment.

3.3. The case of the Early Jesuit Mission in India as a process of spiritual discernment

Although the Society of Jesus is deeply characterized by a spirituality of discernment, at this moment of history egos stood on the way of its proper exercise. Nevertheless, balancing both the good desires of De Nobili with the risks he ran of dividing the church, as pointed out by

¹⁴⁶ Margherita Trento, "Sivadharmā or Bonifacio? Behind the Scenes of the Madurai Mission Controversy (1608-1619)," In: Ines Zurpanov & Pierre Antoine Fabre (eds) *The Rites Controversies in the Early Modern World* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2018), 118.

Gonçalves, the issue at hand is far from being a First Week discernment. Conversely, the discernment of both sides of the controversy appeared to be good in their own right. In these situations, Saint Ignatius suggests that the exercitant “pay attention to the whole train of our thoughts. If the beginning, middle and end are all good and tend toward what is wholly good, it is a sign of the good angel.”¹⁴⁷ If we look to Gonçalves’ accusation, it is not clear if he was moved from the start by a correct intention or by jealousy over his fellow Jesuit companion. As for De Nobili, although the beginning is moved by zeal and genuine appreciation for the Hindu culture, the middle and the end of the process start being tinted with judgements and with decisions that divide both the Christian community and the Society of Jesus. Conversely, the Pontiff appears to have confronted the pros and cons of both visions in order to come with the final resolution.

According to Mercieca, “when a religious and/or ecclesial confirmation is required (...) [on a communitary discernment, it] should not be regarded as something external or juxtaposed to the final consensus, but as an integral part of the communitary discernment.”¹⁴⁸ This aspect indicates the need not to separate the intervention of the Inquisition and the final decision of Gregory XV as forces external to the discernment process initiated by the controversy between De Nobili and Gonçalves. As a matter of fact, by reconciling both positions in his Apostolic Constitution, the Pope generated a consensus which cannot but be understood as congruent with the spiritual effects of consolation, understood as a project of unity between the Christian communities of both missionaries (horizontal) and with the Pontiff, whose mission is to confirm the believers in the authentic faith (vertical). This process of consolation can be also identified

¹⁴⁷ Saint Ignatius, *Spiritual Exercises* n° 333, 127.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Edward Mercieca, *Discernimiento Comunitario*, 614.

with the collaboration between De Nobili and the local baptized Brahmins, especially Bonifacio, whose collaboration attests to the support of the faithful to his accommodating work.

This process of discerning after understanding the matter at stake by considering its pros and cons is proper of a type of election which Ignatius calls: a *second time election*. It consists in receiving knowledge of what to decide from the consideration of the consolations and desolations undergone in the whole process.¹⁴⁹ This is a form of election which is proper both in individual and communitary processes of discernment.¹⁵⁰ Henceforth, we conclude that on this process of discerning how to maintain the unchangeable doctrine of the Catholic faith within the new context of Hindu culture, the final decision was assisted by a proper magisterial discernment of spirits, which validated and corrected the intentions, methods and conclusions of both FF. Gonçalves and De Nobili.

The three cases we have presented are a vivid depiction of Newman's words when he said that "the tradition of the Apostles, committed to the whole Church in its various constituents and functions manifests itself variously at various times, sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies and customs, by events, disputes, movements, and all those other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history."¹⁵¹ In the case of the Arian Crisis, the unchangeable doctrine was manifested more through the laity, in the Council of Constance through the doctors of theology, and in the case of the Early Jesuit mission in India by the Holy See. And it was through events, disputes and movements, both social and spiritual, that new expressions and

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 76.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Edward Mercieca, *Discernimiento Comunitario*, 615.

¹⁵¹ John H. Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 63.

articulations of faith emerged from ecclesial discernments. Discernment or inner dialogues which require a mutual hearing between all the members of the Church, i.e. the three agents of ecclesial communion: the episcopacy, the theologians, and the laity.

Based on this position, I conclude that the authentic development of tradition is a spiritual gift nourished not only by the coherence of the theological truth that is affirmed (vertical dimension), nor only by the consciousness of being moved by a pastoral impetus toward culture (horizontal dimension). Development is authentic when it is nourished by the Church's encounter with herself in prayerful and mutual hearing, in and through the Spirit; between solitary discernment and solidarity in the quest for a synthesis that does justice to the integrity of faith and the integral experience of culture. And since these elements (integrity of faith, cultural experience, mutual listening and support) are constitutive elements of any spiritual discernment (objective, subjective, communitary), I am led to conclude that the distinction between changeable and unchangeable aspects of doctrine is only possible when the conditions for a spiritual discernment are put forth. A discernment which, ultimately, belongs to the *Ecclesia Docens* or to the Magisterium of the Church.

Nonetheless, it is essential not to forget that there cannot be a teaching Church — magisterium in the active sense — if there is not a listening Church.¹⁵² *Ecclesia docet quia attendit* — the Church teaches because she listens. It was in this sense that Bishop Hincmar of Rheims said that the task of the magisterium is to receive the doctrine lived by the faithful under the guidance of the Spirit.¹⁵³ In the same line, for Saint Augustine, “in matters whereupon the Scripture has not spoken clearly, the custom of the people of God, or the institutions of our

¹⁵² I do not mean here that the Faithful are not members of the teaching Church, but that they teach in as much as they are heard and they listen to the ecclesial community in order to be taught by the Spirit.

¹⁵³ Yves Congar, *Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality*, 51.

predecessors, are to be held as law.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, doctrinal definitions are not so much innovations as acknowledgments of collective anticipations which, while acknowledged by the Church, become constructed definitions over time.¹⁵⁵ In other words, the binary changeable-unchangeable refers to a communal renewal of the lived synthesis of faith, a synthesis that emerges from the awareness and understanding of the spiritual and cultural life of the people of God, together with the decisions that result from that awareness and understanding.

In this sense, the unity that historical discernments bring into the concept of mission is a unity which derives both from the life of God in His faithful people as well as from the life of the faithful people in God, i.e. from the lived experience of the Church. Conversely, the Church cannot discern the changeable from the unchangeable aspects of doctrine without turning her attention to mission, as life of God in His people (vertical) and life of the people in God (horizontal). Again, *Ecclesia docet quia attendit* — the Church teaches because she listens. This is the program of a Church which does not separate the listening of God’s Word in Christ from the discernment of God’s movement through the Spirit, in the whole faithful people of God. This unity in mission, this synergy between *depositum et expositio*, this overarching and ongoing discernment becomes an ecclesial *modus procedendi* under the name of synodality.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. John H. Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful*, 72.

¹⁵⁵ Maurice Blondel, *History and Dogma*, 287.

Conclusion

Ecclesia Docet Quia Adtendit

It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium. What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word “synod”. Journeying together — laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome — is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice.

Pope Francis — Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops

At the end of this itinerary, it is important to recognize the steps that were given. This thesis started by acknowledging the event in which Pope John XXIII offered, to the conciliar Fathers, a surprising distinction between the substance of doctrine and the manner of presenting it. Moreover, he said that this distinction ought to be made by a magisterium which is pastoral in character. The subsequent section exposed the gradual reception of the concept of historicity within theology, thus allowing us to see two aspects: (1) that the integration [of historicity] was the background for the distinction between an unchangeable substance of doctrine and the changeable manner of its presentation; and (2) that this distinction [substance of doctrine and manner of presenting it] can be fully operationalized only by an organic reception of the concept of historicity. By organic reception I mean an integration of the role of history not only within the theology of dogma, but also as a reception of the role of the subjective processes of the whole Catholic community and the individual baptized within the ecclesial discernment of doctrine.

This subjective reception represents the image of a Church that can only deepen her knowledge of the mystery of the Word made flesh by being attentive to the spiritual and cultural life of her members, as well as to the joys and hopes of the world in which and to whom she ministers. Karl Rahner describes the urgency of this attentiveness with singular accuracy when he says,

The Church continues to give the impression that she makes known moral alternatives between which people must choose for their salvation or their perdition. That is the prevailing impression, while teachings about God's saving activity have a slighter impact. At the same time, compared with former times, people worry much less about their eternal salvation. Rather than feeling guilty in the presence of God they ask God to answer for the dreadful world he has created. Might not such remarks lead to a very important shift of emphasis in official teachings, without the need for the Church to deny any dogma that she has already proclaimed?¹⁵⁶

The first two phases of reception of Vatican II, however, did not center the theological debate around this pastoral integration of the faithful's spiritual concern, but rather around the need either for a new recontextualization of faith or for continuity in doctrine. These postures did not allow the Church to draw much profit from Vatican II's concept of pastoral character, as bequeathed by John XXIII. In this context, a new phase of conciliar reception has emerged in the last three decades, aiming to recenter the theological conversation around the theme of pastoral character, while harmonizing the polarities generated by the two former phases of reception: a horizontal and a vertical dimension of mission. This harmonization, I argued, should be attained through an exercise of spiritual discernment. After verifying that this harmonized sense of mission (horizontal and vertical) was congruent with Vatican II's concept of mission, I went on to explore how discernment can offer this unitive dynamism to mission, reconciling all the polarities left by the initial post-conciliar discussions. A unitive dynamism that the Congregation

¹⁵⁶ Karl Rahner, "What the Church Officially Teaches and What the People Actually Believe," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 22 (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 173.

for the Doctrine of Faith has expressed by presenting ecclesial discernment as a way of binding together history (horizontal) and *kairós* (vertical):

The ecclesiology of communion and the specific spirituality and praxis that follow on from it involve the mission of the entire People of God, so that it becomes necessary today more than ever to be formed in the principles and methods of a way of discernment that is not only personal but also communitarian. It is a matter of the Church, by means of the theological interpretation of the signs of the times under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, travelling the path that is to be followed in service of God's plan brought to eschatological fulfilment in Christ, which also has to be fulfilled in every *kairós* throughout history. Communal discernment allows us to discover God's call in a particular historical situation.¹⁵⁷

Hence, the first chapter affirmed that the integration of historicity within theology required that no dogmatic declaration can be done or undone without taking into account what is subjectively lived by the People of God; whereas the second chapter looked for a theoretical frame for this insight, demonstrating the congruence between the theme of pastoral character and Vatican II's concept of mission as well as the unitive dynamism of discernment over the horizontal and vertical dimensions of mission. From this theoretical frame, the third chapter proceeded in studying three cases of Church history in which the faithfulness towards the unchangeable doctrine of the Church was recognized and distinguished from the manner of presenting it, through intersubjective processes of ecclesial discernment. Each of the three cases are suitably summed up in the following words of Pope Francis:

In her ongoing discernment, the Church can also come to see that certain customs not directly connected to the heart of the Gospel, even some which have deep historical roots, are no longer properly understood and appreciated. Some of these customs may be beautiful, but they no longer serve as means of communicating the Gospel. We should not be afraid to re-examine them.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* n° 113 (March 2nd of 2018) <https://w2.vatican.va/> [Consulted: 01/04/2019]

¹⁵⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* n° 43.

Interestingly enough, I was led, by the study of these facts, to verify that in the Arian Controversy it was through the Laity that the unchangeable faith was kept; in the Council of Constance through the Theologians; and in the Early Jesuit Mission in India, through the Magisterium. Thus, it is in the mutual hearing of the members of the Church, and in particular contexts, that the changeable and the unchangeable aspects of doctrine are discerned. As a consequence, I derived two conclusions: (a) that the integration of historicity requires a Magisterium for whom the pastoral exercise of the ecclesial *munera* (*regendi, docendi, sanctificandi*) emerges from an attentive listening of the People of God, since sometimes the Apostolic Tradition is kept more in the *sensus fidei* of some ecclesial members than others, or partially kept in the *sensus fidelium* of various groups; (b) this lack of a particular group which is uninterruptedly a bearer of the true faith becomes an urgent call for discernment as an ongoing attitude of the Church.¹⁵⁹

These two aspects, pointing towards the discernment of the *sensus fidei fidelium* — described in the last chapter as the life of God in His people and the life of the People in God, — becomes an ecclesial form under the name of synodality. This form of Church consists in grounding the epistemology of ecclesial communion in the subjectivity of the People of God as well as a form of obeying the words of Christ: “where two or three gather in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). The grounding of the epistemology of ecclesial communion is crucial since there cannot be an eschatological call to communion that does not embrace the historical order of creation. Thus, the intersubjective reception of doctrine cannot be conceived as a threat

¹⁵⁹ It is not my intention here to downplay the fact that the Church cannot err in matters of faith and morals, since the Holy Spirit always assists the Church in a discernment that ultimately has to be confirmed by the Magisterium. What I want to affirm here, however, is that there cannot be a theory of Christianity which always relies on the judgments of a particular ecclesial group over others, since the voice of the Spirit blows wherever it wills. Our task is to be aware of that voice, understand it and act accordingly.

to a substance of truth that stands as true without the need of being subjectively accepted, since there cannot be a recognition of truth without the exercise of subjective reception.¹⁶⁰ As a matter of fact, the recognition of a substance of doctrine can be apprehended only by the intersubjective exercise of ecclesial discernment, as it became clear in chapter 3. As for obedience to Christ's words in Mt 18:20, the call to synodality holds two realities together: (a) the Church understood as a community that journeys together;¹⁶¹ and (b) the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the *convenire in unum* of the Christian community.¹⁶²

It is important to highlight that this Synodal Church is not only concerned with listening to the Spirit's voice within the Christian community, but also outside, discerning the new cultures that are constantly born in places where Christianity never was or is not anymore the sole interpreter or generator of meaning.¹⁶³ It is a matter of adopting "a relational way of viewing the world, which then becomes a form of shared knowledge, vision through the eyes of another and a shared vision of all that exists."¹⁶⁴ In this sense, like Paul in the Areopagus or the Early Jesuits in India, a Synodal Church has to listen to the spiritual hungers of culture for two reasons: one pedagogical and one theological.¹⁶⁵ As a matter of pedagogy, in order to communicate the Gospel by being in close touch with the changing cultures and social contexts of the faithful;¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Joseph Komonchak, "The Epistemology of Reception," *The Jurist* 57 (1997), 180-203.

¹⁶¹ "Composed of a preposition *συν* (with) and the noun *ὁδός* (path), it indicates the path along which the People of God walk together. Equally, it refers to the Lord Jesus, who presents Himself as "the way, the truth and the life" (*Jn* 14,6), and to the fact that Christians, His followers, were originally called "followers of the Way" (*cf. Acts* 9,2; *et alii*)." (International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* n° 3)

¹⁶² "The *convenire in unum* around the Bishop of Rome is indeed an event of grace, in which episcopal collegiality is made manifest in a path of spiritual and pastoral discernment." (*In: Pope Francis, Address of His Holiness Pope Francis during the Meeting on the Family* (Vatican City, October 4, 2014), <https://w2.vatican.va/> [Consulted: 04/20/2018].)

¹⁶³ Cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* n° 73.

¹⁶⁴ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei* n° 27 (29 June 2013), <https://w2.vatican.va/> [Consulted: 04/20/2018].

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Ormond Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid: The Sensus Fidelium in a Synodal Church", *Theological Studies* 78 (2017), 320-321.

¹⁶⁶ "The *convenire in unum* around the Bishop of Rome is indeed an event of grace (...) to find what the Lord asks of his Church today, we must lend an ear to the debates of our time and perceive the "fragrance" of the men of this age,

and for the sake of theology, in order to listen to what the Spirit is asking of the Church through its people.¹⁶⁷ This means that synodality aims at an articulation of the horizontal concern for the evangelization of culture and the vertical search for the voice of the Spirit.

Just like in the Council of Constance, however, it is useless to articulate this reforming vision in the ecclesial documents if synodality fails to be materialized into methods and institutional mediations of governance. Thus, synodality has to become a reality in all instances of ecclesial life, from the smallest parish to the largest diocese. Nevertheless, it is important not to reduce synodality to a mere method of horizontal consultation. “The synodal renewal of the Church happens through the revitalisation of synodal structures, of course, but expresses itself first and foremost in response to God’s gracious call to live as His People, who journey through history towards the fulfilment of the Kingdom.”¹⁶⁸ Therefore, although the practice of synodality has to be grounded in specific synodal structures, the principle in which synodality is based is the equal dignity and responsibility of all the baptized in God’s mission — as exemplified in the agency of the laity in the case of the Arian controversy.¹⁶⁹ That is why it is indispensable for the Church to root the exercise of her *munera* in the act of listening to the spiritual and cultural experience of those who are involved in the situations under decision as well as in the spiritual/sacramental life of the Church.¹⁷⁰ However, the necessity of involving in the process of

so as to be permeated with their joys and hopes, with their griefs and anxieties (cf. *GS* 1).” (In: FRANCIS I, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis during the Meeting on the Family”)

¹⁶⁷ “For the Synod Fathers we ask (...) the gift of listening: to listen to God, so that with him we may hear the cry of his people; to listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.” (In: *Ibidem*)

¹⁶⁸ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* n° 103.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. *Ibidem* 107-108.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. International Theological Commission, *The Sensus Fidei in the life of the Church* n° 12, (June 26 of 2014) in: <http://www.vatican.va> [Consulted: 04/13/2018].

discernment those whom the matter concern, has always to be decided in accordance with the specific nature and matter of the discernment at hand.

Finally, going back to the beginning, let me recall here the question that this thesis takes up: *how did the Church, and how can the Church today, discern the changeable from the unchangeable aspects of doctrine?* The Church in her history, as illustrated in the cases considered here, has discerned the changeable from the unchangeable aspects of doctrine whenever has been attentive both to the vertical demands of faith and to the horizontal aspirations of culture. This specific attention was made concrete in specific methods of mutual listening (e.g., Council of Constance), and founded on a principle of equal dignity and responsibility of all the baptized in mission (e.g., Arian Controversy), while searching for creative ways of living the unchanging message of the Gospel in specific times and places (e.g., Early Jesuit Mission in India). In all these cases, discernment was the *modus procedendi* for the Church to distinguish the substance of doctrine from the modes of presenting it. And this *modus procedendi* can only be an ecclesial reality under the form of a Synodal Church. And, although the project of a Synodal Church represents the end of the itinerary of this thesis, as an ecclesial reality it is nothing but a new beginning for the Church of the Third Millennium. And what will come out of this beginning? Of this ecclesial journey?

To walk together is *the constitutive way* of the Church; *the figure* that enables us to interpret reality with the eyes and heart of God; *the condition* for following the Lord Jesus and being servants of life in this wounded time. The breath and pace of the Synod show what we are, and the dynamism of communion that animates our decisions; only in this way can we truly renew our pastoral ministry and adapt it to the mission of the Church in today's world; only in this way can we address the complexity of this time, thankful for the journey accomplished thus far, and determined to continue it with *parrhesia*.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Pope Francis, *Address at the Opening of the 70th General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference* (22 May 2017), in: <http://www.vatican.va> [Consulted: 04/13/2018].

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