

**WE THE PEOPLE:
A VISION OF THE CHURCH STILL UNACHIEVED
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The Power of Ideas and the Idea of the Church

In a Jesuit university, with all the encouragement and concern in the air to create habits of service within students, I sometimes feel a little “ivory tower” that my specific academic focus has a lot more to do with ideas. This can seem a little more abstract and removed from the immediate needs of specific persons. But I also know that the ideas we have in our heads – the ways we interpret reality – then lead us to shape reality in concrete ways. By addressing ideas specifically, I try to help students see how their concepts lead directly to their priorities and their choices, and that their ideas therefore are among the most practical of all their efforts, resulting not just in philosophies and theologies, but in different political, social, cultural, and economic results.

Tonight I will talk about the idea of the Church. In formal theological studies, we call this kind of theologizing about the Church “ecclesiology.” That’s my chief vocabulary term for you tonight, and I apologize if it’s new or awkward: it’s what one of my childhood friends called a “nine-dollar college word.” Ecclesiology: the study of the Church, from the Greek work for the Church. You more commonly hear those roots in words like “ecclesiastical” or “ecclesial.” In Catholic theology in particular, the field of ecclesiology is a prominent one: we spend a great deal of effort reflecting upon – and arguing over – the idea of the Church. If the power and shape of our ideas can lead to significantly different results, this helps us understand why the idea of the Church has been and is worth thinking about, arguing over, and returning to again and again through the centuries.

Tonight I will consider some of the concrete results of some of our ideas about the Church, and whether we might refine or improve upon those ideas. I will recall the work on the idea of the Church that has been done in the last fifty years since the Second Vatican Council. I will then highlight a particular American theologian and his role in helping articulate an aspect of the new language of the theology of the Church at that time, but also look at how this key idea from the Council has been left underdeveloped and unachieved. And I will consider what avenues for enrichment that that line of thought still may open up for us. My goal is to try to make sure that our idea of the Church is the one that best lives up to the ideal of the Church as we are given it by Christ and in the New Testament, and in the Tradition of the Church, with the concrete results in daily life that best reflect that ideal.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65)

In 2012 we will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, or “Vatican II,” which met each autumn from 1962 to 1965. To many of my traditional undergraduate students, this might seem an impossibly long time ago. But there are others here who might remember the Council occurring. In terms of the Church’s history, the Council is still a recent event: it is a matter of living memory, with our current Pope, Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, having been a young, thirty-something *wunderkind* of a theologian, who took a leading role among theologians advising the bishops despite his young age.

The Second Vatican Council was what we call an “ecumenical council” in the Catholic Church: a meeting of the leadership of the entire church. The one that began in 1962 was only the 21st such meeting in the history of the Church, and so these meetings are quite rare, and are usually called to address some major problem. In this case, however, it was not so much a specific crisis that the Church was facing, as it was Pope John XXIII’s sense that the Church needed to meditate upon its own nature in light of the many new circumstance of the modern world: these circumstances included the industrial revolution, the new insights of history, politics, and of the physical sciences, and the experience of two world wars.

The People of God and the Universal Call to Holiness

At Vatican II, one of the shifts in how the idea of the Church was expressed was in new images of the Church taking the forefront. Prominent among these images was the language of the Church as “the People of God.” To speak of the Church as a “people” was to hearken back to the language of the Hebrew Scriptures, to their language of Israel as a “Chosen People,” and thus to recall Paul’s language of the Christian Church (then beginning to also be filled with people who were not Jewish) as something added to the covenant with Israel, a “wild vine” grafted onto the cultivated vine that was the people who had inherited the covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David.

The main document that the Council put out on the Church, describing in official form the idea of the Church, was the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, also sometimes called by the Latin name, *Lumen Gentium*. The second chapter of the *Constitution* was entitled “The People of God,” and explored this specific idea, describing the Church as a communion of those who have responded to the call of God by uniting with God in Christ *and with one another* in the love of the Holy Spirit. This calling and this unity are expressed in terms of a response to a universal call to a holy life. People are united with God by choosing to live a certain kind of life, to become a certain kind of person. This unity with God and with one another – Jesus’s “love of God” and “love of neighbor” – is expressed as a natural consequence of the authentic response to a call to holiness, because all people who respond to the true calling of God will become a people predisposed to the unity created by peace, goodwill, and love. This call and unity are both explicitly identified with Jesus Christ. He is both the exemplar of a human being who responds correctly to such a calling, and is the divine originator of that call, because he is himself, the *Logos*, the incarnation of the divine call. Thus Christ is both exemplar and guarantor of this unity God calls forth from humanity.

The Turn to the Laity

One of the most striking consequences of this new attention to the image of the Church as a people called by God was what has been called Vatican II's "turn to the laity." The Council, which was the single most significant "event" in the history of the Church in the 20th century, was focused on the relationship of the Church to the Modern world, in both what Modernity had to offer to the Church and what the Church had to offer to Modernity. One of the most important changes that the Modern world had brought was the high level of education that Catholic laypeople had now achieved. In light of this, it no longer made sense to have the hierarchy of the Church taking full responsibility for the activities of the Church. This was, in fact, a restoration of the activity or activism of the laity seen in the ancient Church, but which had faded away as an (originally) unintended consequence of the increasing institutionalization of the Church.

So the bishops, the leaders of the Council, recognized that this situation needed correction. They called upon laypeople (those not clergy or under religious vows) to take a more consciously active role in being the Church – to actively be Christians out in the world, and not to be more passive participants of a Church which the clergy was responsible for "operating." This call to the laity to take greater ownership of their faith has been one of the great successes of the Council. There has been tremendous change of exactly this sort in the fifty years since the Council: parish councils, lay religious educators involved in teaching or evangelism, liturgical and music ministers, especially Eucharistic ministers, the huge variety of social justice ministries we see lay Catholics taking initiative in, ministries to the sick and dying, counseling of various sorts, prayer and Bible study groups, and more. Even someone like me, a lay professor of theology, was pretty much inconceivable fifty years ago.

New Ecclesiologies

Along with this shift toward emphasizing the laity fully taking their part in the Church as part of the whole People of God, there were also new forms of ecclesiology – new forms of talking about the Church. Professional theology found the need for new modes of talking about the Church in light of what the Council had taught, and, more popularly, these new forms began to express themselves in new ways people's imaginations and language after the Council. The two chief ways in which the theology of the Church came to be expressed was in the language of "models" of the Church, and in what came to be called "communion" ecclesiology.

The late American Jesuit theologian, Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., set the tone for the first of these modes of ecclesiology with his influential book, *Models of the Church*, published in 1974. In this approach to looking at the Church, the analytical tool of "models" was borrowed from the physical and social sciences, and applied with great fruitfulness within theology. Here the stress is on the different dimensions of the Church. Because the Church is such a multi-faceted reality, speaking of the Church according to different models, allows each of these facets to be recognized and highlighted accordingly.

And so there is the model of the Church as an Institution, which is probably the most commonly-used model, and the one that still dominates media discussion of the Church, and arguably dominates popular Catholic conception of the Church as well. It is an obvious one

because the organizational or institutional aspect of the Roman Catholic Church is both distinctive and is what allows the Roman Catholic Church its universal scope. The other models that Dulles proposes are to consider the Church as a Mystical Communion, as a Sacrament, as Herald, as Servant, and in a later addition to his book, as a Community of Disciples. Mystical Communion highlights the spiritual unity that is manifested within the Church, while the model of Church as Sacrament draws particularly upon the Eucharistic spirituality within the Church to express both God's presence and the experience of unity. Seeing the Church through the model of a Herald emphasizes the proclamation of the Word of God, while the image of the Church as a Servant is one that strongly expresses the ministerial and social justice or activist components of the Gospel. The Church as a Community of Disciples highlights especially a learning aspect of the Church, drawn together by Christ the Teacher, and being made into the Church by that shared experience. The Church is such a complex reality that this approach of using a variety of models has proven to be very successful simply for allowing that diversity to be realistically addressed.

The other major thrust in the theology of the Church since Vatican II is what has been called "communion ecclesiology." This emphasis is one we already saw recognized in one of Avery Dulles "models of the Church," his model of the Church as a Mystical Communion, and perhaps in some aspects of Dulles's model of the Church as a Sacrament. A great deal has been written on communion ecclesiology since the Council, since even someone as prominent as Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, has referred to communion ecclesiology as essentially being "the" ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. In his book, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions*,¹ Dennis M. Doyle defined communion ecclesiology this way:

Communion ecclesiology is an ... attempt to move beyond the merely juridical and institutional understandings by emphasizing the mystical, sacramental, and historical dimensions of the Church. It focuses on relationships, whether among the persons of the Trinity, among human beings and God, among the members of the Communion of Saints, among members of a parish, or among the bishops dispersed throughout the world. It emphasizes the dynamic interplay between the Church universal and the local churches. Communion ecclesiology stresses that the Church is not simply the receiver of revelation, but as the Mystical Body of Christ is bound up with revelation itself. [... It] places a high value on the need for visible unity as symbolically realized through shared participation in the Eucharist.

The obvious strength of such an approach to the Church is in its relationality. This theology of the Church both directs attention toward the divine relationship of the Trinity, as well as the relationships between church communities and individuals. To see the Church as a communion is a powerful tool for both recognizing and creating community or unity within the Church.

Some Potential Limits of These Ideas of the Church

As I studied these approaches in the theology of the Church as part of my own research, I recognized how useful they have been in the last fifty years for clarifying the idea of the Church. But I also began to suspect that there were limits to their usefulness.

With the approach of Models of the Church, the diversity of different tendencies highlighted, even celebrated, and skillfully employed. Dulles's intention, at a certain level,

¹ Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), pp.12-13.

seems to be to relativize each of the models against one another, by showing the inability of each model to fully account for the actual reality and experience of the Church. I wondered, however, whether or not it was possible to find a common language for the Church that did not simply surrender to the fact of the Church's diversities without trying to demonstrate a true unity within those diversities. The models tend to provide their own distinct justifications for unity, such as the Institutional model's controversial (but easy and often effective) attempt to describe unity in juridical terms – of the force of law. It seemed to me that the Church could profit from the attempt to find some sort of more comprehensive idiom than the language of Models of the Church provides.

For communion ecclesiology, simply put, I began to wonder whether the language of this dominant form of the theology of the Church was burdened by a more rhetorical problem. In logic, there is a common fallacy called “assuming the conclusion.” This is where someone mistakenly uses an idea to try to prove the same idea: “All cool movies have explosions because only explosions make movies cool.” (Usually, however, people do not confuse themselves quite so clearly as that.) In the case of communion ecclesiology, I began to wonder whether the usefulness of the approach might perhaps be limited because it, too, sort of “assumed its conclusion.” It seems reasonable to describe something you are studying by means of its major characteristics, and so if you want to describe the idea of the Church, then it may seem that there is no better starting point than this characteristic of the communion of divine and human love. But if your goal *is* to describe and to achieve that communion, then is *starting with* the language of communion and unity, and organizing your thoughts with “communion” as your main metaphor, the best approach for such a task? That is, if “communion” is what is most characteristic of the Church, might the Church fool itself if it used a language of unity as its main way of studying and describing itself, as though you were trying to describe the Church according to its “churchiness?” If your language is primarily a language of unity, might it not be a danger that you end up describing things as much more unified than they are, overlooking legitimate diversities and failing to recognize problematic disunities? Or worse, trying to force either legitimate diversities or problematic disunities into a false semblance of unity simply because our language causes us to expect them too easily?

That is only a very brief treatment of some of the reservations I had about these two approaches to the theologies of the Church that have received the most attention since the Council. Other reservations or critiques have been voiced. Are there any available alternatives, especially ones that do not neglect the strengths that these theologies have brought to the Church? Curiously, I think that such an alternative avenue of Catholic ecclesiology was proposed at the Council itself, but strangely ended up being neglected within a few years of the Council's conclusion. To explain how that happened, I now need to tell you a short story.

Charisms at Vatican II

At the Council, during the sessions where the Constitution on the Church was being formed, one of the chief topics of debate was the idea of charisms. A charism is a “gift of grace,” literally, and charisms are often described as “spiritual gifts.” How a charism actually should be defined became a matter of debate. While the word or idea has become more common since the Council, at the time, what was called the “traditional” understanding of charisms was

that they were extraordinary gifts given only to the most exceptional mystics. So extraordinary were they, in fact, that the word was rather obscure at the time. But one of the factors that had led to the Second Vatican Council was the vast amount of academic research being done by Catholic scholars in the areas of biblical studies and of historical studies in the 1940s and 1950s. Among the greatest of these scholars was the French Dominican friar Yves Congar, who had done a considerable amount of work to retrieve the concept of charisms.

In the New Testament, Paul writes of charisms not as rare and extraordinary, but as manifestations of the Holy Spirit given to each believer. This biblical understanding was being recovered and endorsed by the majority of the bishops at the Council, but there were vast implications to the idea of the Holy Spirit being distinctively at work in each believer, particularly since “ministry” was seen to be the purview of those who were ordained or under religious vows. A considerable amount of further education and re-imagining the Church would be necessary in order to truly retrieve this New Testament understanding, not least among the bishops themselves.

The American bishops were at a bit of a loss during the beginnings of this discussion, with many of them not at all sure what a charism *was*. Frequently during the Council sessions, a group of bishops would gather and have a theologian who was expert in one area or another speak to them, to help bring them to a greater level of familiarity with a topic current being discussed. In this case, they turned to a Boston Jesuit then teaching in Rome, Francis Sullivan.

Francis Sullivan at Vatican II

Francis Sullivan had come to the Jesuits’ university in Rome, the Gregorian University, for his doctoral studies. He had understood that he would be returning home to Boston to teach in the Jesuit’s school of Theology there, and after his graduation in 1955 he was making his way back home, taking some time to see a bit of Europe on the way. While he was at the Jesuit house in Barcelona, he was informed that his assignment had changed and he was now being re-assigned to the Gregorian, back where he had just completed his work as a student. That was how he suddenly found himself as the new professor of ecclesiology in Rome, just a few years before the Council began. He was far too junior – what we would call an assistant professor in the United States – to be called up to the Council as a theological expert, and so although he was living in Rome when the Council began, he remained as much in the dark about what was going on as anyone else. The drafts of the Council documents were restricted, and the news releases and reporting regarding the Council could be as uncertain and as up for revision as any reporting about current events could be.

In the fall of 1963, however, when the topic of charisms was being debated, someone suggested that Sullivan might be able to help the U.S. bishops understand the topic. Sullivan heard what he was being asked to explain to the bishops, and wondered at it, feeling like he did not have much of an idea of what charisms were, either. But he hit the books, finding little in the standard reference works of the time. He then discovered Congar’s historical work on the topic, and a seminal essay on the significance of charisms for the contemporary church by the great German theologian Karl Rahner. He was also given access to the Council’s working draft of the

Constitution on the Church, the only such access this junior faculty member gained during the Council.

Once he gave his talk explaining the theology of charisms to the bishops of the United States, he found himself looking at the main passage in the draft Constitution that was being proposed on the subject. And he found himself thinking, “I could write something better than that...” His former superior was now bishop of Kingston, Jamaica, and had told Sullivan to pass on any idea that he might have. Only members of the Council could offer suggestions for improvement or correction to documents of the Council. The theological experts acting as advisors to the various bishops and abbots in attendance could only submit proposed changes to those they were advising, and not directly by themselves. Sullivan wrote up his version, making it more strongly based in the biblical text, and then passed it on to Bishop John J. McEleney of Kingston. The bishop submitted the proposed correction, which was accepted, and became part of *Lumen Gentium*, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. And thus Francis Sullivan, a junior faculty member from Boston now living in Rome, found himself contributing one small piece to the Second Vatican Council.

The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church on the Charisms of the Faithful*

The text on charisms in the *Dogmatic Constitution* is critical for considering the theology of the Church the Council was proposing, and which seems a little different than either doing ecclesiology through Models of the Church or in the mode of Communion Ecclesiology. The paragraph is worth looking at in full:

It is not only through the sacraments and official ministries that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the People of God and enriches it with virtues. Granting his gifts “to each one as he chooses” (1 Cor 12:11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank, by which he makes them able and willing to undertake various tasks or services advantageous for the renewal and upbuilding of the church, according to the words of the Apostle: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for a useful purpose” (1 Cor 12:7).

So, in other words, the Holy Spirit is making people holy and leading them in three ways: not just the sacraments and the official, structural ministries of the Church, but also on the individual level through the granting of these spiritual gifts, among “the faithful of every rank.” The Church for too long had excessively focused on the “official” avenues of “the sacraments and official ministries” of the Church, which were easily-recognized and more easily-managed. It was this recognition that provoked the Council Fathers into insisting on a corrective return to the core of the Tradition, and to draw upon the Holy Spirit’s gifts among the laity in their fullness. The paragraph continues:

These charisms, whether they be the more unusual or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation, for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the church. At the same time, extraordinary gifts are not to be rashly sought after, nor are the fruits of apostolic labor to be presumptuously expected from them. In any case, judgment as to their genuineness and proper use belongs to those who preside in the church, upon whom especially falls the obligations not to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to that which is good (cf. 1 Thes 5:19-21).²

² *Lumen Gentium* 12. Francis Sullivan’s translation of the second paragraph of 12, found in Sullivan, *Charisms and Charismatic Renewal*, 11-12.

So there is recognition of the different nature of the gifts – far more common ones and unusual ones – but all of which are useful. God being God and naturally quite clever at arranging things that way.) What are they useful for? “For the renewal and upbuilding of the church.” The charisms have a goal that goes beyond each of these spiritual gifts in themselves. There then follows a warning not to engage in the kind of spiritual elitism and adventuring that so crippled the Church in the city of Corinth in the first century, which Paul addresses in his *First Letter to the Corinthians*, where the people emphasized unusual and dramatic gifts to the neglect of the more common but more spiritual central gifts.

You also can see here that the bishops of the council throw in a caveat that people should not presumptuously expect “the fruits of apostolic labor” as a result of possessing these gifts: that is, that the attention being restored to the Holy Spirit’s work among the laity does not mean that the bishops are legislating themselves out of existence. They note the spiritual gift and role that is supposed to be part of the office of bishop: to judge the genuineness of spiritual gifts (we humans having a notable talent for fooling ourselves) and to order them accordingly for the good of the whole Church. They also issue themselves a warning that goes straight to the heart of how bishops can misuse or fail to enact their own spiritual gift here, which is to extinguish and stifle the Holy Spirit. The Council thus warns that an imperial or micromanaging bishop, one who impedes rather than nurtures the spiritual gifts of the laity, is thus failing in their own role. Similarly, a bishop who fails to provide actual leadership can allow the laity to slide into disorganized ineffectiveness, or into the kind of criminal mismanagement we have seen in the sexual abuse crisis within the Church. Bishops, therefore, participating in an organizational dynamic in the Church, have to walk a path between temptations. Thus the Council’s last word here is to try to encourage bishops to make this change to a “charisms-managing” leadership style under the guiding principle of holding fast “to that which is good.”

Sullivan’s text draws heavily on the New Testament discussion of the Church found in Paul’s letters. This marks once more the amazing fruitfulness of Catholic biblical and historical scholarship in the decades before the Council. One of the surprising results of that historical scholarship was that several features of Church habit considered “traditional” or “ancient” (and still are considered such by some today) were in fact early modern. The retrieval of the Church Fathers (the writers of the early Church) and of the medieval period, both of which were far more diversely Catholic than had been remembered, was the basis for the bishops’ motivation in restoring a truly more traditional Church. (Although, just to create confusion, it might seem, these bishops were labeled “progressives,” while the champions of the sort of evolution the Church had undergone in the 19th century were labeled “traditionalists. People who are not historians tend to have rather short historical memories, it seems.)

Francis Sullivan never brought up his own minor role in forming this small piece of the Constitution on the Church until being interviewed about the Council nearly forty years later. But the language of charisms, of the role of these spiritual gifts in the life of the Church, clearly made an impact that could be seen in his later writing. The Council’s attention to this topic helped him come to understand that Paul thought that the Church was *constituted* by the possession of charisms. This is a critical point. The Church is constituted, is made up of, composed by, or brought into existence by the fact of the Holy Spirit being active among people

in this way: it is not legislated into existence; it is not a voluntary service organization; it is not a club of like-minded individuals gathered together for some chosen purpose. The Spirit, unpredictably doing what it does, “like the wind,” in Jesus’s memorable comparison, brings the Church into existence by the distribution of these gifts of grace: all of which, as Paul reminds us, are to then draw us together in mutual love, or otherwise are generally worthless – even dangerous – gifts.

Enter The Charismatic Movement

So why has this way of looking at the Church that the Council proposed – this “ecclesiology of charisms” – never become a major way of understanding the Church since Vatican II? Oddly enough, it seems to me that the rise of the Catholic Charismatic Movement ended up being a significant factor in losing this language of charisms. In 1967-68, an outbreak of spiritual experiences occurred among a group of Catholic faculty and students at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. These phenomena, chief among which was the gift of speaking or praying in tongues, had hitherto been associated with Pentecostal Christianity in the United States. But despite its novelty among Catholics, it soon spread to Catholic student groups at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Michigan, and from there became a significant movement among both lay and ordained Catholics.

But the Charismatic Renewal, as it was often called, became something of a sub-group or subculture within the Catholic Church. It had a tendency to be seen as, or to see itself as, something a little separate: a “church within a church,” rather than as one of many diverse and equally-worthy schools of spirituality within the Catholic Church. As a result, it seems that the language of charisms quickly became seen as “copyright” of the Charismatic Renewal. For Catholics who did not care for that style of worship or who had no gift for that style of spontaneous prayer, a “charismatic” Catholic was “them,” not “me.”

Without Language of Charisms, Turn to the Laity Loses Justification or Logic

Francis Sullivan, who himself later became very involved in a charismatic prayer group in Rome, saw this as disastrous, as did Yves Congar, the historian who had done the initial historical retrieval work on charisms among the laity. The point of the Council’s return to a theology of charisms was that gifts of grace from the Holy Spirit were manifested throughout the Church. The Spirit gives all believers gifts of grace; therefore all believers are “charismatic.” But it was too late: the language – and the perceptions that went along with that language – had become set. The language of charisms was effectively ceded to this one group within the Church, and general Catholic reflection upon the wide distribution of charisms became muted.

With that rapid decline of the use of the language of charisms, an unforeseen problem arose. The renewal of the Church’s older language of charisms had led the bishops to highlight that idea in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. Paul’s scriptural description of the Holy Spirit’s work among all people was central to the bishops’ emphasizing the Church as the whole People of God. Likewise, these scriptural roots were central to the bishops’ calling upon lay believers to fully enter into their vocations as Catholic Christians. If the language of charisms

was removed from the central role intended for it, the bishops' turn to the laity suddenly lost its justification or logic.

In other words, the bishops' decision at the Council to draw out lay believers to a much more fulsome living out of their Christian vocations was based upon the recognition that it was God who was instigating this turn to the laity. God had always intended the full People of God to be the Church in a more active way, but various circumstances in the history of the Church had made lay Catholics more passive than they might or ought to have been. Now it was understood that the full Church was being summoned to exercise the full strength given to it by God in the Holy Spirit. But it was going to require a significant re-imagination or re-education of the Church in order to bring this change about. So losing the language of *why* this change needed to come about was an immediate complication for actually making it happen.

Problems of Losing This Logic

The Church has proceeded to establish an enormous amount of new roles and opportunities for lay believers to employ their gifts, but it has largely neglected the Council's *reason* for doing so. While the language of charism occasionally sees the light of day, it seems much more frequent to hear political philosophy employed to justify the turn to the laity: language of rights, equality, democracy and such features of political philosophy being invoked, rather than the language of gifts of grace and of the leading action of the Holy Spirit. To some, this seems good, sufficient and right, for after all we have seen enormous benefits and great goods come from such ideas and features of liberal democracy in the modern period. But the twentieth century also had horrifying lessons for us, as well, not least of which is that political goods – “order” and “prosperity” for the political Right and “equality” and “freedom” for the political Left – can equally be invoked for atrocity. The unchecked Left and Right both led to the totalitarianism of the camps.

I am very leery of invoking such political frames of mind for conceiving of the Church or for conducting its work. First, because I do not want to submit the activity of the Church to any political framework or party; second, because it seems to me that even the good goals of politics can lead to very different ends than the spiritual goals of Christian faith, both in behavior and mentality. For example, a popular political ideal today, like “tolerance,” is a great deal more desirable than massacres, but it is pretty weak beer next to “love,” and asks very little of us by comparison. A third reason this seems problematic to me is the way in which so much contemporary political thinking lends itself to polarized views of the world and of our neighbors, especially in a nation with an effective two party political system such as we have in the United States. A vision of human affairs where one group (*my* group) is correct about everything, and the other group is wrong about everything is suspiciously convenient, and it encourages an enormously affirming and comforting self-righteousness. Fourth and lastly, political categories encourage us to conceive of human relations in terms of power. I do not mean to be naïve, and to suggest that one can avoid awareness of power relationships or to transcend them entirely, but I think it is the death of any human relationship – friendship, romantic love, even civic relationships – to be primarily about power. This is surely the case for the Church, where Paul stressed that the primary effect of our different gifts of grace would be to call us together out of the recognition of mutual need and thus into the primary charism of love.

If we have an historical difficulty in moving away from a dominant “default setting” of thinking of the Church according to the model of an Institution or Organization, these political tendencies will not help us raise the other aspects of the Church to equal prominence and use. Too many Catholics after the Council, it seems to me, defaulted to this sort of politicized thinking. Those called “Progressives,” I suspect, ended up reinforcing the dominance of the Institutional Model of the Church because they so zealously embraced an adversarial role and self-narrative as the opponents of the nefarious, mustache-twirling Vatican Curia: the administrative structure of the Church in Rome. (Or the Magisterium, the Pope and bishops as the official teaching authority in the Church.) In this narrative, they *defined* “the Church” as the Magisterium and thus effectively surrendered the very language and insight of the Council that the Church was the full people of God: the insight the Progressives most wanted to promote. Those called “Traditionalists” seemed, in their eagerness to defend the Magisterium against all threats from people not judged to be truly Catholic enough, to simply ignore whatever things the Magisterium had taught in the Council that the Traditionalists found objectionable. (Not that the Magisterium ever seemed to ask the Traditionalists for such help, much of which would equally be an administrative and leadership headache for the Curia.) Thus in the Traditionalists’ self-narrative, while they intended to be the defenders of the Church in its fullness, they all too often seemed to be as willing to try to bend Rome to their conceptions of the Church as they accused the Progressives of doing. These sorts of contemporary tensions within the Church in our decades after the Council propelled me to look back at the Council itself, and to see whether perhaps something had gotten lost. I believe that a recovered awareness of the Holy Spirit’s gifts among all believers – ordained and laity – could help retrieve some of that original justification, logic, and balance behind the Council’s turn to the laity.

Potentials in an Ecclesiology of Charisms

Vatican II recognized the importance of Paul’s teaching that “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for a useful purpose.” This activity of God among us is what the Church *is*, and in a theology of the Church or ecclesiology that remembers and starts from this understanding, we can find a variety of potentials for development past current difficulties.

One basic advantage of this theology of the Church is that it is rooted in the New Testament’s chief description of what the Church is. In other words, describing the Church by means of its charisms is a biblical form of describing the Church. Since Catholics are still notoriously biblically illiterate, such a turn to Scripture has the advantage of encouraging familiarity with, and meditation upon, the core texts of the Christian community.

Because of this biblical depth to an ecclesiology built on charisms, there is significant ecumenical potential here as well. In the Protestant traditions especially, whether in the older “mainstream” denominations, or in the contemporary mainstream of Evangelicalism, there is a much more conscious engagement with the texts of scripture. A Catholic theology of the Church that showed itself to be so rooted would find a greater basis for dialogue and collaboration with these other traditions, far more so than it ever gained by appealing to selected “proof texts” of the sort used after the Reformation to try to demonstrate a biblical foundation for the centralized papacy.

A theology of the Church that begins with charisms also begins with God. Charisms are gifts of grace: the chief manifestations of the Holy Spirit loose and at work among and within us. To talk about them, we must talk about the Spirit, and the Spirit's life within God. So there is a natural "wing" in this theology of the Church that leans toward the theology of the Spirit and the theology of God, what we more formally call "pneumatology" (*pneuma* is Greek for "spirit") and Trinitarian theology. This is important because the more integrated our various topics in theology are, the more we can trust in them. A theology of the Church that has little reference or similarity to our theology of God is one that is suspect.

Likewise, a theology of the Church that begins with charisms also has a natural wing toward spirituality. The Pentecostal and Charismatic movements clearly had very experiential spiritualities that appealed to a great number of people. To reclaim a wider notion of charisms that takes in their full range is to give the Church a vocabulary or an idiom that would include all its forms of spirituality, and to tie them more explicitly to our language about the Church.

This theology of the Church is also more realistic and historical. That is, it takes into account the variety of ways God is active among us at different points in history and in a variety of ways at any given point in history. This theology or ecclesiology does not marry the Church to a particular human form or institution – such a monarchy, representative democracy, or corporation – and make the mistake of imagining any of these to be a perfect representation of the divine. Reality is complicated. This approach, taking the diversity of reality into account, gives the Church a shot at understanding itself without trying to streamline its own reality to fit an ideal or system.

More specifically, an ecclesiology built upon the idea of charisms is also balanced with respect to both office and the laity. *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, in the passage we examined earlier, spoke of the Church according to sacraments, official ministries and charisms. One early mistake among some theologians in trying to develop a theology of the Church based on the idea of charisms (you can see this in Hans Küng and Leonardo Boff) was simply to see these gifts of grace as a kind of democratic political force in the Church, and so to set charisms against office. That is, charisms were identified with the laity, and set against the bishops and pope, reducing the dynamics of grace to tools in political power struggles within the Church. The German Jesuit Karl Rahner much more wisely cautioned us to remember that leadership within the Church is also a charism, not something that can be set against charisms. Office within the Church remains part of a single, more complicated reality rather than offset against it.

To recognize the work of God in all the charisms among believers is to have a divine mandate for achieving balance between the drives for unity and diversity within the Church. Neither a theology "from above" or "from below," it is a theology "from the middle." That is, it neither tilts in favour of God or the institutional Church against individual experience, nor prioritizes individual experience over the action of God as experienced directly or collectively by humanity. This theology begins with the direct encounter of the human being with God: it begins at the charism, where God and the human being most directly interact. If the approach to understanding the Church by using various "Models of the Church" fails to show how and why those different aspects are united in a single reality, the universal experience of God in our

charisms provides such a basis for unity. Likewise, if the approach of “Communion Ecclesiology” so emphasizes the unity of the Church that it might assume a union that has not yet been fully achieved, or try to simply legislate one, then starting with charisms shows us the legitimate diversity that is the necessary basis for drawing together in love to form a communion, and which is not eliminated by that communion.

Lastly, in all of the potential advantages to this theology listed above, an ecclesiology based upon the idea of charisms is catechizable. It can be taught more easily because of its biblical roots, instead of being a product of purely speculative or abstract theology. It can be taught more easily because of its deep ties to our understanding of God as Spirit and as Trinity, and not as some distinct theology of the Church that remains disconnected from our experience of God. This theology of the Church’s recognition of the variety of spiritualities among believers roots itself in the experience of believers and does not remain just an exercise of theory. Its realism and recognition of historical variety in the activity of God make it more persuasive as an accurate and useful language about the Church. All of these factors are useful in effectively teaching the theology of the Church as part of the Catholic Church’s passing on of its own faith – a hugely critical skill in which Catholicism has been notoriously ineffective over the last few generations.

Warning: Realism! Not All Charisms Come to Fruition

I do not mean to paint an entirely rosy picture by the positive description I give of the potential in an ecclesiology of charisms. I described one of this theology’s virtues as “realism” because of its recognition of the diverse complexities of human and spiritual circumstances. A theology of charisms recognizes that Christ and the Spirit are working out the Father’s will through historical processes, and not through a static maintenance of an already-complete perfection. This picture of grace as a work in progress also returns to Paul’s understanding of the Church, for Paul’s description of charisms to the Corinthian church was a description of the Church he wanted the Corinthians to aspire to become, and was not one he was praising them for already having achieved. The tendencies and tensions of the various charisms work out in their collaborations and conflicts the end to which the Church is called: the unity of love. That unity has never been *offered* as a single charism. It has never been a finished product which the Church could merely receive as a feat already accomplished. The unity of love is always a *product* of having together gone through the historical process of loving one another in our diverse circumstances and by means of our diverse charisms. The product is inseparable from the process. The result is composed of the experience.

One of the stark facts of reality and complexity is that not everything happens as we wish it would or think that it should. When you consider the millions upon millions of gifts of grace distributed by God among people, and to that total add the interpretations and impulses that come with those gifts, it is inevitable that not all charisms come to fruition, or at least the fruition that each individual imagines for them. (And this is not even to take into account the horribly confusing and distorting fact of sin within all of us.) Here we pay one of the prices of freedom: billions of complex freedoms intersecting with one another in an open system.

A charisma that does not come to fruition at a particular time may fail to do so for a variety of reasons. It may be that such a gift, calling, or leadership insight has yet to come to its possible time of fulfillment. For example, it never occurred to the beleaguered minority of the early Christians to try to dismantle the ancient world's institution of slavery: despite their high view of human freedom and worth that came with the Gospel, broad social change of that systemic sort had yet to be conceived of, simply because Christians lacked anything like the numbers to create such shifts in consensus. Other people's gifts may hedge another's gifts. Some gifts at a given moment in history may be more prized or seen as fulfilling the needs of the moment than other gifts.

In all of this, as Karl Rahner pointed out, "One's own gift is always limited and humbled by another's gift." That humility is always a gift, too, at least in potential. It is an easy and common political game today to argue that one's own gift or vision is unduly ignored, and that a call for humility is simply a rhetorical ploy of the powerful: a political "passive-aggressive" tactic for silencing the undesired option. The successes of movements to try to correct old injustices, such as the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, have made it rhetorically powerful to assume such a pose and language of victimization. It is equally easy to assume that such language is itself only a rhetorical power ploy and lacks sufficient content to be taken seriously. A theology of the Church based on charisms has to gain the courage to raise itself above the forms of contemporary political language, and to recall the full scope of Jesus's command to love one's enemies. Humility is called for on all sides in discerning one another's charisms and where these may show us the Spirit to be leading the Church. I have to learn the lesson that my own charisms are not, after all, my own.

Love is the Most Important Charism

The differences among our gifts are supposed to bring us together in a greater whole. In Paul's discussion of the charisms, he famously likened the Church to a body. In that particular church, the church of the city of Corinth, he pointed out that people were valuing certain gifts to the neglect of others, making the church all about being like themselves. But, Paul argued, if all the body were an eye, how could it hear? And if it were all an ear, how could it see? If our specific issues are different than those of the Corinthians, our tendency to only judge those who agree with our positions as "truly Christians" sounds embarrassingly similar. But the *differences* among our gifts are supposed to bring us together in a greater whole. Francis of Assisi had a powerful gift to be shared. But it took Pope Innocent III, Bishop Guido of Assisi, and the subsequent leadership of the Church to channel the charisma of one man (who all too easily could have been dismissed as a nut) into a sustained charisma that has served the world for centuries. Different gifts here combined in that unity we call love. The end and goal of all charisms is love.

I feel like I have to go to great lengths to make clear to my students the depth and radicalness of this word, "love." I often feel that we are perhaps impoverished in the English language for having this one word into which we pour so many shades of meaning: "I love potato chips." "I love my family." These are *not* equivalent statements! When we read in the First Letter of John, "God is love," we are not having a sentimental "Hallmark moment" in early Christian literature: a profound statement about the identity and nature of God is being made. God exists as Love. Noun. Trinitarian persons in communion with one another. I occasionally

manage *to* love. Verb. This existence of mine is something different than God's. When Paul then talks about love in the famous passage in the First Letter to the Corinthians, he, too, is not being sweetly sentimental, looking forward to the day when his passage would become a common reading at Christian weddings. His argument about charisms being the pieces by which the Church was built climaxes in this passage about love, where he describes it as the highest and most essential of all the charisms.

If the language of charisms does provide a potentially more useful language and theology of the Church, as I have argued, Paul reminds us that it still remains worthless until we live the spirituality that comes with it. The crowning charism of love demands that I actually love the person (and the charisms) that I fail to see much use in. Such a theology of the Church demands that we, the People of God, raise our conversation above the level endorsed and allowed by the politics of our culture, where journalism encourages us to simply think in terms of the Bad Guys (them, conveniently) and the Good Guys (us, naturally). Liberals need to get a lot more liberal with love than is currently fashionable. Conservatives need to conserve a lot more love for others than is currently required. Laity and bishops need to work harder at collaboration than buying into fantasies of purely democratic or monarchical structures of the Church.

Jesus taught us that the two greatest commandments, inextricably linked for Christians, are the love of God and the love of neighbor as we love ourselves. A human gift is only supernaturally extended into being a charism when it is directed toward the goal of creating such a love. True charisms, culminating in Love, create communion and community. Any love that deems it sufficient to not submit itself in love to one's neighbor is not sufficient for the Church (whether that excusing of ourselves from the obligations of love and communion is for the sin of the neighbor's being too liberal, too conservative, too ordained, too lay, too traditional, too progressive, too much a sinner, or too righteous). "Love" may be a vague word, sometimes, but its requirements are all too concrete for us. In a theology of the Church built upon the possession of the Holy Spirit's gifts of grace given to the People of God, this particular gift of grace, this charism, remains our fixed "northern star" in trying to live as such a Church.

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