

Pope John XXIII, Conciliar and Contemporary Episcopal Pastoral Governance

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Abstract

This article will discuss the emergence of an increasingly cogent argument made by Pope John XXIII for a redefined role of episcopal pastoral governance in the (ante) preparatory phase of the Second Vatican Council and during early conciliar debate. Pope John will be presented as encouraging a renewed role for bishops in his public orations preceding the Council. This continued in his support of the conciliar process and encouragement given to senior bishops at critical moments during its first session. As contemporary understandings of episcopal governance were questioned before and at the Council, increasing numbers of bishops saw the possibilities of revitalising their governance role in a pastoral mode. Its contemporary relevance lies in Pope Francis' call to build a synodal church in which episcopal governance is exercised at the local and universal levels. Today, this requires individual bishops 'to assume their responsibilities to govern their own diocese, always in consultation with the faithful.'¹

Keywords

Pope John XXIII, Episcopal governance, pastoral

Pope John XXIII: A Council to renew the episcopal role

The cardinals who chose Angelo Roncalli as successor to Pope Pius XII understood they were choosing a man who would lead the church differently. His leadership style would need to be more engaging and open to the modern world. Pope John XXIII fit their 'job description'. His life and ministerial experience were unique among the College of Cardinals. From military service in the First World War to working

¹ Gerard F. O'Hanlon, "Ireland and the Quiet Revolution in the Catholic Church," *The Furrow* 68, no. 5 (2017), p. 261.

as a seminary teacher during the modernist crisis. From ministry as bishop's secretary to Vatican diplomatic service in countries with small Catholic populations and those fractured by the Second World War. In 1952 he became Patriarch of Venice. In all these positions he built community by focussing on what united humankind.²

On 25th January 1959, John XXIII announced two momentous events: a Roman Synod, and the calling of a general Council.³ The latter he envisaged as facilitating the revision of the Code of Canon Law.⁴ Later, he framed the three main goals of the Council: ecclesial spiritual renewal; *aggiornamento* ('appropriate adaptation of Church discipline to the needs and conditions of our times'); and the continuance of Christian unity.⁵

There were other, early indications of the nature of John XXIII's papacy. In 1959, as Bishop of Rome, he took personal, solemn possession of the Lateran Basilica, Rome's cathedral Church. In more recent times popes had disregarded a local episcopal role. Pope John's action 'implied a real consideration of bishops and a re-evaluation of their role and that of the local Churches, which were to become major participants once again in ecclesial life and not just the recipients of Roman decisions.'⁶ At the same time, John XXIII inaugurated a pastoral programme for the diocese of Rome. This included the visitation of hospitals, prisons, and parishes.

The Roman Synod, the first of its kind, took place in January 1960 and encouraged the diocese to reflect on itself as a discreet entity aside from its historic role as centre of the Church. Pope John's new Secretary of State, Cardinal Domenico Tardini, understood the Synod 'as a sort of pilot venture',⁷ helping the Church in its preparations

² See: Gerard Mannion, "Pope Francis's Agenda for the Church - *Evangelii Gaudium* as Papal Manifesto," in *Pope Francis and the future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the papal agenda*, ed. Gerard Mannion (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 2.

³ Pope John XXIII was elected on 28 October 1958. On 25 January 1959 he announced: 'We propose to call a diocesan synod for Rome, and an ecumenical Council for the Universal Church [leading] to the desired and long awaited modernisation of the Code of Canon Law, which is expected to accompany and to crown these two efforts in the practical application of the rules of ecclesiastical discipline, applications the Spirit of the Lord will surely suggest to Us as We proceed.' *The Encyclicals and Other Messages of John XXIII*, (Washington D.C.: TPS Press, 1964), p. 21.

⁴ *Questa festiva*: AAS 51 (1959), pp. 65-69, at p. 68. Later in the encyclical *Ad Petri cathedram*: AAS 51 (1959), pp. 497-531, n. 3.

⁵ *Ad Petri cathedram*, nn. 61-62.

⁶ Giuseppe Alberigo, "John XXIII," in *The Papacy: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Philippe Levillain and John W. O'Malley (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 854.

⁷ *The Encyclicals and Other Messages of John XXIII*, p. 4. Synodal texts were promulgated 25-27 January 1960. See Pope John XXIII's Apostolic Constitution, *Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum* (1960). An address of 24 November, 1960 to the Clergy of Rome entitled 'The Roman Synod and the Priest' may be found in: *ibid.*, pp. 112-128. Pope

for Vatican II.⁸ Familiar as he was with the writings of St Charles Borromeo, the idea of a local synod appealed to the Pope.

Pope John's actions highlighted an episcopal governance role that was pastoral in its exercise and encouraged the development of a richer paradigm of papal ministry. In its turn, this new paradigm encouraged a renewed focus on the ministry of bishops of local Churches and their relationship with the Bishop of Rome and vice versa. The First Vatican Council (1869-70) had not envisaged the bishop as the local agent of a Roman Church, but in practice this is what he had become. After Vatican II was announced, some bishops began to vocalise concerns that, over time, their office had been 'deprived of many of its rightful prerogatives and that the bishops had been reduced to simple executors of decisions of the Roman Curia.'⁹ For Archbishop Joseph Cordeiro of Karachi this meant 'the concept of a bishop as a "successor of the Apostles" would be stressed early in the Council.'¹⁰ These concerns were heard more frequently and more clearly after the Council began.

The Pope used opportunities before the Council began to encourage the bishops to reflect on their episcopal ministry and its exercise.¹¹ This may be seen in three documents:

- (1) John XXIII's speech inaugurating the Preparatory Commission (1960);
- (2) Apostolic constitution, *Humanae salutis* (1961);
- (3) The Pope's opening address: *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* (1962).

Emeritus Benedict XVI commented on the Roman Synod: 'I remember that [it] was thought of as a negative model. It was said - I don't know whether this was true - that they had read out prepared texts in the Basilica of Saint John, and that the members of the Synod had acclaimed, approved with applause, and that the Synod had been conducted thus. The [conciliar] bishops said: no, let's not do that.' Pope Benedict XVI, "Meeting with the Parish Priests and Clergy of Rome," Papal Address, (2013).

⁸ See: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/speeches/1960/index_en.htm. The proceedings were published in: *Prima Romana Synodus* A.D. MDCCCCLX (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1960).

⁹ John W. O'Malley, *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II*, Theology and Life series (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989), p. 12.

¹⁰ Walter M. Abbott, *Twelve Council Fathers: Exclusive Interviews with Twelve of the Most Important Figures Guiding the Vatican Council* (New York/London: The Macmillan Company/Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1963), p. 23.

¹¹ His preparations included 'two programmatic speeches [...] on September 11th (radio message) and on October 11th (opening speech).' Mathijs Lamberigts and Alois Greiler, "'Concilium episcoporum est': The Interventions of Liénart and Frings Revisited, October 13th, 1962," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 73, no. 1 (1997), p. 56.

When read together, they demonstrate the Pope's desire to convey a *new* paradigm of pastoral governance to all bishops.

John XXIII's inaugural speech

Addressing the Preparatory Commissions, John XXIII reminded them that theirs was a pastoral task on behalf of the Council, over which he was presiding.¹² The Pope reflected on the forthcoming exercise of the Magisterium. It would not be about identifying and fixing doctrinal challenges. It would be used as an affirmative restoration of 'Christian thinking and living.'¹³ He also clarified his role: he presided over the Central Commission, which coordinated the other commissions. He also acknowledged that his plans for the Council had been well supported by all involved – what today might be referred to as 'spin'.

In the anti-preparatory phase, the bishops' *vota* identified material for conciliar discussion.¹⁴ As the preparatory phase commenced, the commissions were instructed to 'pay particular attention to the desires and proposals of the bishops, the venerable fathers of our noble assembly.'¹⁵ It was Pope John's understanding that the commissions served the bishops. The response to those who tried to undermine this relationship was one of renewed patience and vigilance as the Pope John was filled with positive expectations of the coming event. He offered encouragement to members of the commissions and invited the conciliar bishops to make 'their own special contribution of prayer, advice and activity'.¹⁶

¹² Pope John XXIII, "Towards the Ecumenical Council," *The Pope Speaks* 1960, pp. 376-385. Delivered 14 November 1960 in St. Peter's to around five hundred members of the commissions and secretariats.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

¹⁴ For their responses (*vota*) see: *Acta et documenta Concilio Vaticano II apparando. Series prima (Antepreparatoria)*. For a discussion of the *vota* see: Étienne Fouilloux, "The Antepreparatory Phase: The Slow Emergence from Inertia (January, 1959 – October 1962)," in *History of Vatican II: Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y./Leuven: Orbis/Peeters, 1995), pp. 91-149. For an overview see: Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew Sherry (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), pp. 12-13. Subjects for conciliar discussion were also sought, for example, from Catholic universities. For details of a letter from the president of the Antepreparatory Committee, Cardinal Tardini, to the Rector of the Catholic University of Leuven, Mgr. Henri van Waeyenberg, in 1959, and the response from the University, the Belgian bishops and Religious see: Erik Borgman, "Introduction," in *Catholic Theology of Revelation on the Eve of Vatican II: a Redaction History of the Schema De fontibus revelationis (1960-1962)*, ed. Karim Schelkens (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2012), pp. 10-24.

¹⁵ John XXIII, "Towards the Ecumenical Council," p. 381.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

Pope John and *Humanae salutis* (1961)

The Council was formally convoked with the publication of the apostolic constitution *Humanae salutis*.¹⁷ The Pope spoke about issues facing the contemporary Church: it was witnessing a crisis within human society. He urged people to trust in God and to learn to distinguish ‘the signs of the times,’¹⁸ thus developing a more positive view of society beyond the Church. A more pastorally sensitive, open Church was better able to befriend, collaborate with and influence society. The time for this development was now. Pope John’s secretary, Archbishop Louis Capovilla, identified the phrase’s biblical origin (Mt 16:3), referencing an ‘overriding pastoral concern’ for an anxious, modern world.¹⁹

As the preparatory phase had almost concluded, its work would shortly be sent to the bishops, whom Pope John clearly identified as the central participants in the Council. Those involved with its preparation had a clear role: to provide support to both pope and bishops.

Pope John’s opening address to the Council: *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* (1962)

In his opening address, John XXIII outlined his conciliar vision, presenting himself as asserting ‘the magisterium (teaching authority) [...] in order that this magisterium, taking into account the errors, the requirements, and the opportunities of our time’²⁰ can be presented to all. This magisterium was the teaching authority of the Pope together with the bishops. The address marked the Pope’s intention to give the conciliar bishops ‘a personal and authoritative instruction that would link this assembly with the great conciliar tradition of the Church.’²¹

The Council would assist the Church in looking forward without anxiety, aided ‘by bringing [itself] up to date where required.’²² He

¹⁷ 25 December, 1961 in: “The Documents of Vatican II,” ed. Walter M. Abbott (London/Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), pp. 703-709.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 704.

¹⁹ Loris F. Capovilla, “Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary,” in *Vatican II Revisited: By Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis, Mn.: Winston Press, 1986), p. 118.

²⁰ “The Documents of Vatican II,” p. 710.

²¹ Andrea Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Days of the Council,” in *History of Vatican II: Formation of the Council’s Identity, First Period and Intersession, October 1962 - September 1963*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y./Leuven: Orbis/Peeters, 1997), p. 15.

²² “The Documents of Vatican II,” p. 712.

contrasted this position with those ‘prophets of gloom [...] always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were on hand’.²³ They saw little positive in the current era compared with previous eras and ‘behaved as if they had learned nothing from history, [...] the teacher of life.’²⁴ During his time as papal nuncio to France he read Congar’s *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l’Église* (1950). His response: ‘A reform of the Church: is such a thing really possible?’ As pope, John called a reforming Council ‘to update the Church’s capacity to explain herself to the world’.²⁵ He used Congar’s language in his address to describe this task.

Pope John understood the central task of the Church to be one of teaching and influencing humanity. Reflecting on the Fathers and modern research methods assisted the Church to evangelise the modern world. In his mind: ‘[t]he substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith [is] one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.’²⁶ The latter was to be carried out with great patience to reflect a magisterium predominantly pastoral in character, as a pastoral approach would be better received by the modern world.

Errors encountered by the contemporary Church should also be dealt with in this pastoral manner as it ‘prefers to use the medicine of mercy rather than of severity [meeting] the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.’²⁷ The Pope accepted that the time had passed when the Church spoke on a subject and all automatically listened and obeyed.

While his style was emphatic it did not emphasise the juridical. If he and the bishops were to exercise their magisterium, to teach and

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ In the ‘Introduction’ to: Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert, Rev. ed. (Collegeville, Mn.: Liturgical Press, 2011), iii. Congar identified four necessary conditions for the discernment and realisation of genuine reform - one that does not result in schism. First, it advocates the centrality of charity and pastoral care i.e. avoiding merely rational system-building. Second, it demonstrates a continuing commitment to communion with the entire Church, especially committed to by the bishops. Thirdly, while reform is a task requiring patience, the hierarchy avoids straining the patience of reformers through carelessness or pointless disruptions. Finally, reform reflects fidelity to Catholic tradition. Tradition does not consist merely of the accumulated treasury of the past, but is dynamic: ‘the continuity of development arising from the initial gift of the Church’. Ibid., p. 117. While Nuncio in Paris (1944 -53), Roncalli was reacquainted with his friend, Lambert Beauduin, while the latter was co-founding the *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique*, Paris (from 1943). See: Richard G. Leggett, ‘Lambert Beauduin,’ in *How Firm a Foundation: Leaders of the Liturgical Movement*, ed. Robert L. Tuzik (Chicago, Ill.: Liturgy Training Publications, 1990), p. 27.

²⁶ ‘The Documents of Vatican II,’ p. 715.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 716.

govern the modern Church and influence the world beyond, their task was best carried out in a reasoned, non-condemnatory manner; that is, in a *pastoral* manner. His allocution was ‘the act, not of a “sovereign” imposing his will but that of the primate among Catholic bishops, providing authoritative suggestions about the path their work should take.’²⁸ This considered methodology better served the Church’s wish to evangelise modern society and his wish to encourage an expansive view of episcopal governance.

Finally, John XXIII gave the exercise of the magisterium into the hands of his fellow bishops, not to the Roman Curia.²⁹ His concluding prayer called on Mary, ‘Help of Bishops.’³⁰ Pope John clarified that it was the task of the Pope and the bishops to discuss, debate, and deliberate in ways they deemed fruitful and on matters they deemed necessary. Their outcomes were the fruits of the magisterium, one that was exercised collegially.

His speech responded to concerns expressed by bishops and their *periti* regarding the pastoral nature of the Council. He tactfully outlined ‘a conciliar agenda quite different from the one reflected in the prepared texts and in effect authorising the bishops, should they agree, to choose another direction for their work. The bishops accepted the challenge.’³¹ The signing of the confession of faith followed the opening address. One gesture was received with particular thanks from the Eastern Churches. Pope John signed: “John, Bishop of the Catholic Church.” No pretentious titles; just the simple official designation which united him with his brethren, the bishops of the universal Church of God.’³²

This action communicated Pope John’s wish for a truly ecumenical Council and suggested to the bishops that he was their conciliar *confrère* - a bishop among bishops. For many, his speech was liberating.³³ Others suggest guarding against an understanding that the Pope had given ‘birth to a fully formed Council.’³⁴

²⁸ Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Days of the Council,” p. 18.

²⁹ “The Documents of Vatican II,” p. 718.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 719.

³¹ Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Significance of Vatican Council II for Ecclesiology,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B.*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, Mn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 73.

³² Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), p. 22.

³³ Karim Schelkens, *The Council Notes of Edward Schillebeeckx 1962-1963* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), p. 11.

³⁴ Giuseppe Alberigo, “The Announcement of the Council from the Security of the Fortress to the Lure of the Quest,” in *History of Vatican II: Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis ; Leuven : Peeters, 1995), p. 34.

John XXIII's historical approach

The Pope supported an historical approach to theology and encouraged the Council to follow his lead. This has its origins in his time as a seminary teacher in Bergamo and earlier as secretary to Bishop Radini Tedeschi, bishop of Bergamo.³⁵ During the latter he made an important historical discovery. While browsing in the Archbishop's library he discovered the *Archivo Spirituale - Bergamo* of St. Charles Borromeo, who understood that episcopal reform of the local Church was achieved by thorough parish visitation, 'followed by a diocesan Synod.

He decided to edit the thirty-nine volumes of Borromeo's *Archivo*.³⁶ The project shaped his understanding of the Council of Trent,³⁷ 'not as an anti-Protestant polemic, but as a reforming Council.'³⁸ In the mind of Trent, the bishop, not some Curial interloper from Rome, was the proper agent of reform. In joining Tedeschi on parish visitations he walked in Borromeo's footsteps. This built a sense of Church history that was 'not exclusively Rome-centric.'³⁹ Before Roncalli left for the conclave he commented:

"The Church is young; it remains, as constantly in its history, amenable to change." The statement is that of a program. As a Church historian, familiar with the historical change of the Church in a constantly changing world, Pope John was convinced that the Church must adapt its preaching, organization, and pastoral methods to the fundamentally changed world, and for this he coined the much-disputed notion of *aggiornamento*. In an effort to realise it he convoked the Council.⁴⁰

John XXIII valued what history brought to the study of theology and encouraged a more historical view of theological investigation.⁴¹

³⁵ John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 103.

³⁶ The five volumes were published in 1936, 1937, 1938, 1946 and 1957.

³⁷ Borromeo's 'work as Archbishop of Milan (1564-84) enormously influenced the implementation of the Council of Trent.' Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), p. 6.

³⁸ Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 30. Jared Wicks notes the importance of Borromeo's *Archivo* and of Trent to John XXIII. See: Jared Wicks, "Tridentine Motivations of Pope John XXIII before and during Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2014).

³⁹ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, p. 103.

⁴⁰ Hubert Jedin, Kongad Reppen, and John Patrick Dolan, eds., *History of the Church*, 10 vols., vol. 10 (London: Burns & Oates, 1981), p. 99.

⁴¹ Faggioli also notes its importance for Pope John. Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform: Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegetown, Mn.: Liturgical Press, 2012), p. 29.

Noting the Pope's credentials, Joseph Komonchak viewed it as natural for him to sidestep bureaucratic tinkering and 'recall ancient and rather neglected forms for the renewal and reform of the Church.'⁴² Pope John's approach engaged with Pope Pius XII's stance. In his encyclical *Humani generis* Pius XII suggested 'not to study historical theology too deeply, but to concentrate on speculative (deductive) theology.'⁴³ An historical-theological view, as developed, for example, by Marie-Dominique Chenu and his student, Yves Congar, confirmed 'that Church doctrine was not as unchangeable as had traditionally been asserted.'⁴⁴ This act of stepping over the line between the historical and theological abandoned Roman Catholic certitude 'to accept the historically conditioned, reformable, and essentially provisional nature of all doctrinal formulations, ecclesiologies, and church structures'.⁴⁵ While Pope did not make such a radical statement, his historical perspective on the process of theological investigation encouraged the conciliar bishops to consider that governance should always be exercised in a pastoral, synodal key. He was also grounded enough to offer a view of progress by the Curia and commissions that was congruent with *his* visions for the Council and supported a far greater episcopal role.

A pastoral methodology

From the outset, John XXIII's methodology for the Council was pastoral, and may be identified in five discrete yet related steps. First, in *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, the Pope's opening speech to the Council, he stressed the benefits of the fruits of modern research methodologies, which, in turn, gave impetus to his theme of *aggiornamento*. This central tenet has been described as part of a broader conciliar vision. It encouraged 'a thorough and deeply spiritual renewal of the Church and to undertake the pastoral adaptations, *aggiornamento*, that would enable it to be a more effective redemptive presence in a changed and changing world.'⁴⁶

⁴² Joseph A. Komonchak, "Convening Vatican II," *Commonweal* 126, no. 3 (1999), p. 10.

⁴³ Marcel Heyndriks, *Towards Another Future: On the Christian Faith and Its Shape between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs (Louvain: Peeters, 2006), p. 92.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Francis Oakley, "Authoritative and Ignored: The Overlooked Council of Constance," *Doctrine and Life* 64, no. 9 (2014), p. 31.

⁴⁶ Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Struggle for the Council During the Preparation of Vatican II (1960-1962)," in *History of Vatican II: Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y./Leuven: Orbis/Peeters, 1995), p. 350.

Second, bishops were welcomed to Rome by the Bishop of Rome as individuals and as equals. Third, the Council was an environment in which the bishops reflected further on their own episcopal role. Fourth, coming together as bishops and as a college, the bishops learned how to govern the Church in a pastoral manner, at both the local and universal level. This also supports a more synodal approach to the exercise of episcopal governance. The Pope understood that this approach honoured the past and used the fruits of modernity to work for the future renewal of the Church and of humankind. Finally, and most fundamentally, John XXIII encouraged the bishops to express themselves freely.⁴⁷ This showed faith in the conciliar process and in the role the bishops would play. Rather than imposing his views, the Pope ‘had sought simply to grant freedom and reasons for speaking and thinking.’⁴⁸

Some members of the preparatory commissions and Curia found Pope John’s approach incomprehensible. Their model of governance promoted a less prominent role for the bishops.⁴⁹ While some bishops differed, expecting their governance role to be discussed, the subject did not appear in the voluminous schemas.⁵⁰ For Congar, the scholasticism underpinning these schemas ‘hardly has a place in the pastoral government of dioceses, and it is this that now has the floor.’⁵¹ However, events were to take an important turn.

The first session of the Council

From the earliest possible moment the bishops began to experience their governance of the Council.⁵² This was demonstrated at the beginning of the first session as Cardinal Achille Liénart of Lille (1884-1973) motioned that a postponement of conciliar business was in order.⁵³ This would encourage the bishops to get to know one another and to consult, not as individuals, but more importantly

⁴⁷ Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Days of the Council,” p. 66.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁹ See Riccardi: ‘In the view of Siri, as of Ottaviani and others, the duty of the Council fathers was to go also with the great stream of the Church’s tradition in theology and government, and to do it quickly and with brevity. Rome and the Curia were the best interpreters in that tradition.’ *ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵⁰ Gerald P. Fogarty, “The Council Gets Underway,” *ibid.*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, p. 70.

⁵¹ Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, trans. Mary John Ronayne, M. Cecily Boulding, and Denis Minns (Dublin: Dominican Publication, 2012), p. 89.

⁵² First session: 13 October - 8 December 1962.

⁵³ Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, pp. 91-92.

in regional groups and episcopal conferences.⁵⁴ This growing sense of collegial, synodal episcopal action encouraged the bishops to learn the language of collaboration.⁵⁵ Within these groups the bishop would discuss elections to the ten commissions, whose members would have the important role of redrafting and (re)presenting *schemata*.⁵⁶

This postponement was supported by Cardinal Frings of Cologne, who spoke on behalf of Cardinals Julius Döpfner and Franz König. Liénart's intervention 'demonstrated the fathers' determination to govern themselves as an assembly [and] voiced the uneasiness of the bishops with the electoral mechanics planned for that October 13.'⁵⁷ The postponement of conciliar business at the very beginning of the Council was 'a decisive moment for Vatican II.'⁵⁸ These suggestions, which contravened any curial control, were supported by loud, episcopal applause and it was agreed.⁵⁹ But were their interventions so spontaneous and original?

Spontaneity queried

Cardinal Frings' spontaneity has been questioned as 'two currents', linked to the preparatory work of the Council, may be identified.⁶⁰ The first, 'a predominantly curial influence',⁶¹ generated unease among the more open bishops (including Liénart and Frings). The *schemata* produced by the Curia did not match the varied pastoral situation of the bishops, nor the pope's '*aggiornamento*'.⁶² Frings' unease also focussed on the second current: the elections to conciliar commissions. While the latter was questioned during the preparatory

⁵⁴ At Vatican II, episcopal conferences became 'an important instrument for the exchange of information and for the construction of opinion among the bishops of particular nations or regions.' Joseph A. Komonchak, "Introduction: Episcopal Conferences under Criticism," in *Episcopal Conferences: Historical, Canonical and Theological Studies*, ed. Thomas J. Reese (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1989), p. 3.

⁵⁵ Bishop Remi J. De Roo, "Experiences of a Council Father," *The Downside Review* 121, no. 422 (2003), p. 58.

⁵⁶ 'Bishops were told not to rush to complete their voting forms.' *ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁷ Riccardi, "The Tumultuous Days of the Council," p. 34.

⁵⁸ Schelkens, *The Council Notes of Edward Schillebeeckx 1962-1963*, p. 3. Fn.4.

⁵⁹ Massimo Faggioli, "Reform of the Curia at and After Vatican II," *Concilium*, no. 5 (2013), p. 26.

⁶⁰ Lamberigts and Greiler, "'Concilium episcoporum est': The Interventions of Liénart and Frings Revisited, October 13th, 1962," p. 56.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* The second 'current' concerned groups who influenced the formulation of the *schemata* and 'indicated how the Council should proceed, according to the mind of the Curialists.' *ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

period,⁶³ the critical nature of their membership became a concern.⁶⁴

Membership concerns revealed themselves more fully at the opening of the Council and the desire for action was supported by the Pope's opening speech. As many bishops did not have great expectations of the Council, a more direct, public engagement was required. Liénart's intervention was such an occasion. It was 'not spontaneous'.⁶⁵ It was planned and supported the Pope's call to pastoral governance.⁶⁶

Pope John's attitude to conciliar preparations

In his opening speech, the Pontiff spoke against 'the prophets of doom' and identified those unable to distinguish 'the signs of the times.' His stance was further clarified when he personally intervened in conciliar business, against the Council's own regulations, to remove the schema *De fontibus revelationis* from the conciliar agenda. His statements and actions communicated his personal encouragement of critical episcopal engagement with the restrictive view of episcopal governance in the original *schemata*, and what he - and the Church, required of a bishop.

While the Pope's attitude reflected his understanding that the Curia and Council were separate, he did not wish to force his will on the Curia's work.⁶⁷ Perhaps a more important reason reflected the episcopal vision that John XXIII wished to develop. The Pope allowed the bishops their full authority, to 'get on' and govern the Council. This process would then naturally relegate the Curia and its theology reflected in the *schemata*.⁶⁸

Pope John's leadership allowed the bishops to develop a clearer vision of what they wanted and what they did not want of the Council. This encouraged them to develop their identity in a measured way,

⁶³ See footnote 5: 'Minutes of the subcommission for the organisational preparation of the Council show that different ideas were expressed on the future commissions, with Liénart and Frings present. Finally, a compromise was accepted between appointments by the Pope and elections.' *ibid*.

⁶⁴ The conciliar rules were published, *motu proprio*, *Appropinquante Concilio* 6 September 1962. The importance of influencing elections to the commissions was pointed out by Hubert Jedin to Cardinal Frings. Lamberigts and Greiler suggested the information was probably discussed by 'Suenens, Léger, Montini, J. Döpfner [...], Frings, Liénart, and others during the meetings of the central preparatory commission' *ibid.*, p. 57.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶⁶ Remi J. De Roo, "Experiences of a Council Father," p. 54.

⁶⁷ Lamberigts and Greiler, "'Concilium episcoporum est': The Interventions of Liénart and Frings Revisited, October 13th, 1962," p. 56.

⁶⁸ Komonchak, "The Struggle for the Council During the Preparation of Vatican II (1960-1962)," p. 356. This stance is reflected in the Pope's personal diary. See: *Agende*, November 19, 1962. Cited in: Riccardi, "The Tumultuous Days of the Council," p. 67.

placing them in a strong position to debate and enunciate a more expansive understanding of the episcopal role by including statements outlining collegiality, synodality, of episcopal governance and leadership throughout all conciliar documents.

The Bishops consult

The confusion of the opening day of the Council was followed by a three-day pause during which the bishops consulted on the membership of the commissions. Some curial members were elected, but membership also included those from outside the Curia and from previously underrepresented countries and regions.⁶⁹ Congar viewed this as, 'THE FIRST *CONCILIAR* ACT, a refusal to accept even the possibility of prefabrication.'⁷⁰ The consultation was greatly welcomed by (banned) applause, which underlined its importance. As *peritus*, Joseph Ratzinger noted: 'The Council had shown its resolve to act independently and autonomously, rather than be degraded to the status of a mere executive organ of the preparatory commissions.'⁷¹ This three-day interlude also confirmed the growing importance of episcopal conferences.⁷² Their meetings provided opportunities for many bishops to receive informed briefings from *periti* and to hear reports from other episcopal conferences.

These three days provided not only an opportunity for conciliar action but also for episcopal engagement. Bishops could engage with conciliar business as individuals, but also as members of their episcopal conferences, in a renewed, collegial *and* increasingly synodal manner. Congar commented: 'ONE OF THE RESULTS OF THE COUNCIL COULD WELL BE THE BIRTH OF AN ORGANISED AND STRUCTURED WORLD-WIDE EPISCOPAL COLLEGIALITY.'⁷³

⁶⁹ For a list of the initial 160 elected members see: Floyd Anderson, ed. *Council Daybook, Vatican II: Sessions 1 & 2 (1962-3)*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Washington: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), pp. 42-44. These numbers were subsequently increased. See: 'List of New Appointees to Council Commissions' *ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

⁷⁰ Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, p. 92. Capitalisation and emphasis original.

⁷¹ Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, p. 23.

⁷² For example: 'The Pan-African group [...], gave birth to "a committee of theologians for all of Africa." The "strategy workshop," a French-speaking group that would hold meetings on Wednesdays, also got under way [...]. The best organised conferences (the French, the German-speaking, the Dutch, the Polish, the Canadians, and others) had calendars of meetings to listen to views on the work they were resuming.' Alberto Melloni, "The Beginning of the Second Period: The Great Debate on the Church," in *History of Vatican II: The Mature Council, Second Period and Intersession, September 1963 - September 1964*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y./Leuven: Orbis/Peeters, 2000), p. 41.

⁷³ On 15 October, 1962. Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, p. 95. Capitalisation and emphasis original. Congar's comment was made after the preparation of lists for the various

Message to Humanity (1962)

These actions were reflected in a message published by the bishops a few days later. Their *Message to Humanity* (1962),⁷⁴ spoke on three separate occasions about renewal. Firstly, the Council was an opportunity for episcopal renewal, ‘so that we may be found increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ.’⁷⁵ Secondly, as shepherds and ‘pastors [we] devote all our energies and thoughts to the renewal of ourselves and the flocks committed to us.’⁷⁶ Thirdly, the bishops hoped for a ‘spiritual renewal from which will also flow a happy impulse on behalf of human values such as scientific discoveries, technological advances, and a wider diffusion of knowledge.’⁷⁷ This represented the reality of independent, autonomous episcopal action presented in a public document for the first time.

At the same time a plan was devised by Cardinal Suenens of Mechelin-Brussels and Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini of Milan to address the seventy *schemata* prepared for the Council by the Preparatory Commissions. This ‘distressing’ volume was challenged to reduce possible episcopal frustrations.⁷⁸ The *schemata* represented the Curia’s way of reiterating its authority ‘as Christ’s juridically empowered agent in the world.’⁷⁹ However, Cardinal Montini could not identify how the *schemata* reflected Pope John’s conciliar agenda.⁸⁰ With papal support they sat about creating a more thematic and condensed view of the material. In a note set to the Pope by Cardinal Suenens’ in March 1962 he spoke of removing the ‘dead wood [to] set the Council on a truly pastoral course. The Pope approved this verbally to me [Suenens]; and it then paved the way for

commissions by the episcopal conferences. See: Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Days of the Council,” p. 34. See also: Congar, *My Journal of the Council*, p. 140.

⁷⁴ “The Documents of Vatican II,” pp. 3-7. Its full title is: *Message to Humanity: Issued at the Beginning of the Second Vatican Council by its Fathers, with the Endorsement of the Supreme Pontiff*. The first paragraph is headed ‘The Fathers of the Council to all Men’. Abbott comments: ‘For the first time in the history of Ecumenical Councils, a Council addresses itself to all men, not just to members of the Catholic Church. In the following year, Pope John XXIII added, for the first time, the salutation “and to all men of good will” as the opening of a papal encyclical (See: *Pacem in terris*, 11 April, 1963).’ *ibid.*, p. 3. Fn. 2. For background to its authorship see: Xavier Rynne, *Letters from Vatican City: Vatican Council II (First Session) Background and Debates* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 88-92.

⁷⁵ “The Documents of Vatican II,” p. 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁷⁸ See: Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, pp. 19-20.

⁷⁹ Joseph A. Komonchak, “What’s Happening to Doctrine?,” *Commonweal* 112 (1985), p. 456.

⁸⁰ Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Days of the Council,” p. 56.

future work.’⁸¹ The choice of the liturgy as the first subject to be debated represented a familiar topic and support a positive, initial collegial experience.

The first session ends

By the end of the first session a more expansive episcopal consciousness and governance role was emerging. The bishops began to think and act autonomously, avoiding ‘a Council that merely approved prepared texts. It had gained its own momentum. A coordinating commission was set up with wider representation, and the *schemata* had gone back to much broader commissions for rewriting.’⁸² The re-formed commissions were given norms to guide their work. One norm reflected a papal theme: ‘The stress is on the *pastoral*, rather than doctrinal or juridical, nature of the Council.’⁸³ As the first conciliar session ended the bishops began to emerge from behind their reserve and what emerged was ‘a gathering of holy and pastorally-minded men, united in a spirit of faith to seek not their personal gain but a better understanding of the evangelical message.’⁸⁴ The bishops understood more clearly that they had a right, indeed a duty to speak at the Council and to govern its procedures.

In his pre-conciliar orations and writings, John XXIII encouraged the bishops to attend a ‘pastoral’ Council at which they, rather than the Roman Curia, presided and presented the Church to the modern world. As they gathered together as bishops of a worldwide, rather than a Euro-centric Catholic Church, they experienced conciliarity. Gathered as a college around the pope, the Bishop of Rome, they learned to act collegially and synodally. Congar observed that during the first session:

The episcopate has discovered itself. It has become aware of itself. Given that, the formulas will emerge. They will come spontaneously, because the way has been cleared for them. [...] As a result, each of the participants becomes, in many respects, another person: he sees

⁸¹ Leon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, “A Plan for the Whole Council,” in *Vatican II Revisited: By Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis, Mn.: Winston Press, 1986), p. 89. The note is added as Appendix I: *ibid.*, pp. 92-94.

⁸² Paul Collins, *Papal Power: A Proposal for Change in Catholicism’s Third Millennium* (London: Fount, 1997), p. 76.

⁸³ Richard McBrien, “The Church (*Lumen gentium*),” in *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*, ed. Adrian Hastings (London/New York: SPCK/Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 85. Emphasis added.

⁸⁴ Henri Fesquet, *The Drama of Vatican II: The Ecumenical Council June, 1962 - December, 1965*, trans. Bernard Murchland (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1967), p. 72.

things differently; tendencies asleep within him come fully alive, while others that had been dominant quietly withdraw; he is excited at sharing in other types of humanity, in other horizons; finally, he realises fully the world-wide solidarity and responsibility of the episcopate. Gone are the trite images of the life of a bishop in his see, alone there at the head of a diocese with its daily and sometimes petty problems. Each bishop feels himself to be a member of a body not limited by place or time: the body of the apostolic pastorate of which Jesus Christ is the invisible head, the one whose universal pastoral office is reflected in that of the successor of Peter.⁸⁵

With the death of Pope John XXIII on 3rd June 1963, this self-discovery now required the continuing support of a new pope.

The state of pastoral governance

A deep reassessment of the episcopal governance role had taken root. It stressed the collegiality of the bishops, who gather the universal Church (LG 19) and govern as the apostles (LG 20, 21) with and never without the pope. The task, however, required a new understanding of how the bishop carries out his ministry. O'Malley identifies the *pastoral* style of the Council as epideictic – the art of persuasion, of winning consensus.⁸⁶ In future, *pastoral governance* would involve the bishop in more than an exercise of jurisdiction. *Ad intra*, the bishop would be involved in an ongoing dialogue with the lay faithful and clergy of the local church, to interrogate not just what the bishop *does*, but *how* he does it, *with whom*, and to consider the consequences. Via the episcopal conference, and later the Synod of Bishops, he would assist in governing the universal Church. *Ad extra*, the dialogue would extend to other Christian communities, world religions and the secular authorities. In future, episcopal pastoral governance will be open to learning lessons from secular leadership, while continuing to model itself on the leadership of Jesus.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Referenced by: Giuseppe Alberigo, "The Conciliar Experience "Learning on Their Own"," in *History of Vatican II: Formation of the Council's Identity, First Period and Inter-session, October 1962 - September 1963*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y./Leuven: Orbis/Peeters, 1997), pp. 575-576.

⁸⁶ John W. O'Malley, "Vatican II Revisited as Reconciliation: The Francis Factor," in *The Legacy of Vatican II*, ed. Massimo Faggioli and Andrea Vicini (New York / Mahwah N.J.: Paulist Press, 2015), p. 17.

⁸⁷ For a deeper discussion of leadership see: Paul Gadie, "Episcopal Pastoral Governance and Leadership," *Doctrine and Life* 66, no. 7 (2016), pp. 13-22.

Pope John XXIII's death and legacy

In his memorial address delivered at the opening of the Council's second session on 29th September 1963, Cardinal Suenens clarified the centrality of the role of the episcopate in the late Pope John XXIII's ecclesiology, and in the hermeneutical understanding of the ecclesiology operating within the Council. Pope John changed the orientation of the relationship of bishops and Pope, as:

[T]he Council was not first of all a meeting of the bishops with the Pope, a horizontal coming together. It was first and above all a collective gathering of the whole episcopal college with the Holy Spirit, a vertical coming together, and entire openness to an immense outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a kind of new Pentecost.⁸⁸

The late Pope trusted and expressed confidence in the episcopate.⁸⁹ Their reciprocal appreciation was something to celebrate and to continue: by governing the Council in a pastoral manner and supporting Pope Paul VI.⁹⁰

Conclusion

In the late 1950s, bishops exercised a limited governance role. Some heard Pope John's initial invitation to govern the Council in a pastoral manner, which encouraged a more expansive view of episcopal governance. The Curia's function at the Council was redefined: to serve the Pope and bishops.⁹¹

Episcopal action was supported by a growing understanding of episcopal collegiality. Meeting together in their episcopal conferences encouraged reflection on Pope John's invitation to govern the

⁸⁸ Leon-Joseph Cardinal Suenens, *A Man Sent From God* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1992), p. 10.

⁸⁹ Hebblethwaite comments on Pope John's approval of episcopal initiatives by Cardinals Suenens, Lercaro, and Montini, to ensure the smoother passage of the Council into a second session. Peter Hebblethwaite, "John XXIII," in *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*, ed. Adrian Hastings (London/New York: SPCK/Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 32.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11. Gerard Mannion speaks of the 'Roncalli Factor'. The Pope had a great capacity for pastoral sensitivity as a priest, shaped by his humble background. John XXIII was also shaped by living in a variety of 'cultures and multi-faith contexts and his experiences and perception of what happens when there is a suspension of the ethical and ugly realpolitik, such as in Vichy France. But, of equally vital importance were also his own studies and researches as a historian, especially of the Church, itself.' Gerard Mannion, "Pacem in Terris@50: Gifts Old and New for Church and Society in Recent Times," in *Human Dignity in World Affairs: Celebrating Pacem in Terris and its Legacy* (Georgetown University, Washington 2013), p. 1.

⁹¹ Faggioli, "Reform of the Curia at and After Vatican II," pp. 25-26.

Council, and to identify something very tradition within Pope John's call. The call was to a return to resources such as the Scriptures and the Fathers.

When the bishops were ready to engage with the *schemata* on the liturgy, a greater number had a more profound and expansive understanding of their identity, of the conciliar task, and the invitation to govern the Council. They understood themselves as bishops of the Church, chosen by the Spirit, following in the footsteps of the Apostles, with John as their leader. Their future task was to govern the local Church and to assist in universal Church governance, in a similarly pastoral, collegial and synodal mode.⁹²

Pope Francis, like Pope John sees himself as Bishop of Rome and as head and member of the College of Bishops. He has *re-received* the Council's doctrine. His synodal church of the third millennium requires locally sourced and emotionally intelligent individuals with proven leadership skills. They will chime with the pastoral direction encouraged by Popes John and Francis. With the faithful they serve, they will welcome the mission to present the mercy, justice and love of God to today's world.

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⁹² 'Synodal' connotes a way of working 'though group dialogue and discernment.' Bradford Hinze, "The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis and the Future of the Church in Africa," *Journal of Global Catholicism* 2, no. 1 (2017), p. 14. Today, the concept of pastoral governance continues to challenge the bishops to working in a synodal manner with other bishops *and* with all of Christ's faithful.