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CATHOLICITY AS WITNESS AND DIALOGUE
The Council's Foundation of Faith in *Dei verbum* as Hermeneutical Key

Martin Kirschner♦
Tübingen University, Germany

In this article I want to stress the epistemological relevance of *Dei verbum* and *Dignitatis humanae* in the context of the corpus of documents and of the conflicts about the reception of the Second Vatican Council.[1] What Christoph Theobald develops as the "vertical axis" of the council documents, constitutes the "style" and the hermeneutics for the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council.[2]

♦**Martin Kirschner** teaches Dogmatic theology at Tübingen University (Germany), and is engaged in pastoral work as permanent deacon. Studies of catholic theology and political sciences in Trier and Tübingen; doctoral dissertation (2006) on ecclesiology in a late modern society (Gotteszeugnis in der Spätmoderne. Theologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Reflexionen zur Sozialgestalt der katholischen Kirche, Würzburg, 2006); professorial dissertation (2011) on Anselm of Canterbury and the rationality of theology. Research fields: Second Vatican Council (2001-2006 as assistant of Prof. Hünermann), theological reason and epistemology, ecclesiology, political and public theology in Europe. Email: martin.kirschner@uni-tuebingen.de

[1]As an overview of the reception-process and its debates cf. Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning,* New York – Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2012; Christoph Theobald, *La réception du concile Vatican II,* Paris, 2009. To emphasize DV and SC as the "hermeneutical axis of the corpus of Vatican II" goes back to Giuseppe Dosetti (Faggioli 126); Theobald focuses on DV, DH and GS to develop the theological hermeneutics of the Council (l.c. 701-887).

[2]The approach of Christoph Theobald is developed in: *La réception*; *Dans les traces de la constitution "Dei verbum" du concile Vatican II. Bible, théologie et pratiques de lecture*. Paris 2009; "L'hermeneutique de réforme" implique-t-elle une réforme de l´hermeneutique? In: *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 100 (2012) 65–84. In a different way, *Dei Verbum* is emphasized as a key for the reading of the Council documents by

The ecclesiological focus, dominating most of the reception of the Council, has to be understood and developed from this foundation of faith which is at the time theo-logical (in a strict sense of the word, grounded in the revelation of the Triune God) and anthropological (comprehensible only in the free and fully human answer). This event of God´s revelation in the human answer takes place in time and is expressed in human witness. The hermeneutics of God´s revelation in history then depends on a broad dialogue of all witness-bearers within the community of the faithful, the Church and its tradition in its broad catholicity, but also with anything which is true, just and beautiful in any religion and culture.[3]

I develop my argument in seven steps: starting with 1) the challenge of our context, 50 years after the Council, and 2) the blockade of a polarized Church failing to fulfil its mission. I argue 3) that the Council can be the "compass" to overcome this blockade, depending on the hermeneutics of the Council. The hermeneutical key lies in the foundation of faith in the revelation of the Triune God, 4) in the truly human answer, 5) becoming concrete and operative in the communion of the Church in the dynamics of its still unfulfilled catholicity 6) which demands an open dialogue with all people of good will (GS 2, 40-44, 92). At the end I draw some conclusions for the Council hermeneutics and the corresponding vision for the renewal of the Church.

1. Today, there is the challenge to give credible witness of God and for humanity in a global, pluralistic and complex world, which is in a

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Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI, who favours a dialectic, personalistic and christocentric view, cf. Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI.), *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils- Formulierung – Vermittlung – Deutung* (Gesammelte Schriften 7-1 / 2), Freiburg – Basel Wien, 2012; cf. also the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*, sept. 30th 2010. At the conference "Revisiting Vatican II," which took place Jan 31 – Feb 3, 2013 in Bangalore, it was Cardinal Grocholewski in his inaugural address who focused on "Catholicity as an interpretative key for our times."

[3]This broad view of catholicity can be developed in terms of the loci theologici. For the catholicity as an epistemological category see Max Seckler, *Die Communio-Ekklesiologie, die theologische Methode und die Loci-theologici-Lehre Melchior Canos*. In *ThQ* 187 (2007) 1–20; for its aspect of non-exclusion and heterotopy, see the contributions of Hansjoachim Sander, in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil* (= HThK Vat.II), vol. 5, Freiburg – Basel – Wien, 2006, 134-144, 186-200, 349-356, 381-394, 434-439; for a systematic development and differentiation of the "loci theologici poprii et alieni" today, as they are recognized by the Second Vatican Council, cf. Peter Hünermann, *Dogmatische Prinzipienlehre. Glaube - Überlieferung - Theologie als Sprach- und Wahrheitsgeschehen*, Münster, 2003.

deep economic, political, ecological and moral crisis. Technical and social modernization, globalization, the growing independence and influence of the global south, the spread of mass-media and the turn to an "information age,"[4] an insight in the limits and dialectics of progress, the reflection of the human catastrophes of the 20th century—all this was already present at the council (cf. GS 4-10[5]). Still, the dynamics, the speed and complexity of change, the self-reflexivity of modernization [6]and the consciousness of unintended and unpredicted risks of human planning indicate, that the world has radically changed in the last 50 years. Looking back, the Australian theologian Neil J. Ormerod writes:

> The 1960s was a period of great change and of consciousness of change[…] The youth wanted emancipation from the forces of tradition, of social and cultural conservatism. Perhaps naively we did not realize that forces of change were already reshaping the world and had been doing so for centuries. Now, 40 years later, our concern is not one of promoting change in the world, but of questioning its direction and pace. Where are we going, and are we simply moving too fast?[7]

The conditions have changed, but also their perception and interpretation, the individual and collective "feeling" and "mood", the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" (GS 1)—and so have the "griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ," which are not always the shared preoccupations of the afflicted, but sometimes very special ones. I want to name three main differences to the situation 50 years ago, which make clear the challenging global situation—for humanity as well as for the witness of hope which the Church owes to the people:

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[4]Cf. Manuel **Castells, *The Information Age*, 3 vol.,** 2nd ed. with a new preface, Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

[5]Cf. Peter Hünermann, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die Zeichen der Zeit heute*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2006, especially the contrasting relecture of GS 4-10: 29-60; Stephen Schloesser, "Against Forgetting: Memory, History, Vatican II," in John W. O'Malley - David G. Schultenover, ed., *Vatican II. Did anything Happen?,* New York, 2007, 92–152; Theobald, *La réception*, 45-46.

[6]Cf. Ulrich Beck, *Weltrisikogesellschaft. Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Sicherheit*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007; Ulrich Beck - Christoph Lau, *Entgrenzung und Entscheidung. Was ist neu an der Theorie reflexiver Modernisierung?* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004.

[7]Neil J. Ormerod, "The Times They Are A-Changin": A Response to O´Malley and Schloesser, in O'Malley – Schultenover, *Vatican II*, 153–183, here 176.

- The *global political situation* has shifted from the confrontation between two hegemonic world powers to a complex, multi-centred world, where no one actor has enough power to solve the problems alone, where a great part of the conflicts are below the level of states and where religious terrorism is one of the main challenges for peace and security. That means that the "soft skills" and "cultural factors"—questions of identity, communication, negotiation and cooperation, ways of reconciliation, the dialogue of cultures and religions—are "hard facts" for international peace, security and the necessary collective action to solve global problems.

- The *technological and economical promise* of progress, growing wealth and dominion of nature as well as the trust in the ability to plan the future is fading away, admitting growing risks for humanity that can neither be overseen in their consequences nor can they be managed with traditional forms of government and central planning; there is at the same time a necessity for close cooperation and a lack of shared convictions that could bridge the differing interests. In particular, there is a lack of trust, common interests and moral credibility between the main actors.

- The *ideological situation* has changed dramatically: in the 1960s and ´70s there were traditional and conservative world-views losing ground, and two "modern" ideologies of progress competing with each other (liberal capitalism and socialistic communism). Today the ideological orientation of parties and states is even difficult to identify; pragmatism and self-interest dominate; and the main ideological identifications and conflicts are religious ones! Just think of Islamism (e.g. in Iran), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Christian-right as a powerful political player in the US since the 1970s, the political implications of the competing liberation theologies and the so called protestant sects in Latin America, the influence of Hindu-nationalism in India, 9/11, global terrorism and counter-terrorism, and so on… That does not mean that (some) religions are *per se* violent, but the other way round: social and political functions of political ideologies have passed on to religious movements, to radical and highly conflictive fractions inside the great world religions, which use some very particular "identity markers" of their tradition to construct a strong collective identity and a program for collective political action. In this situation, the task of theology as a critical, faithful and committed self-reflection of religious belief is as

crucial as the integrating force of the Church, her commitment to catholicity and dialogue.

In sum: there is a new search for orientation, for defining personal and social identity and for sources of hope confronted with a complex and unsure future. In this context one main factor of orientation is religion: in its disturbing and conflicting ambivalence. The conflict is not only between different confessions as such but between different "cultures of belief" throughout and inside the denominations. In the Catholic Church these conflicts about the understanding of faith in the world today, about the "style" and "way of life" which corresponds to the gospel, and the "clash" between different "cultures of belief" inside the Church is focused on the interpretation and reception of the Second Vatican Council.

2. Within the Catholic Church, there is a growing polarization between different fractions and interests, which threatens the Church´s unity, hinders her mission, makes it difficult for "outsiders" even to identify the gospel and blocks out the Church´s ability to be "sign and instrument" for a reconciled unity of the humanity in God as "sacramentum salutis."[8]

Instead of realizing her mission "to the nations of the world" as "a 'universal sacrament of salvation' … driven by the inner necessity of her own catholicity, and obeying the mandate of her Founder (cf. Mk 16:16)," as it is defined in *Ad gentes* 1, the Church seems deeply concerned with its own identity. Its fractions are fighting to establish their own "culture of belief" as the only way of being truly Catholic or truly up to date. While one part is afraid of modern liberalism, postmodern relativism and a loss of faith, others perceive a turning back to doctrinarism, traditionalism and even fundamentalism, a loss of contact with the contemporary world. There is a tendency to polemic and intolerance, abandoning the specific catholic capacity to bring together opposed positions so that they can correct each other and broaden the view to the mystery of God and men. This tendency is exactly the opposite of the vision of catholicity, as Johann Adam Möhler develops it in his *Die Einheit der Kirche* (*The Unity in the Church)* and which inspired the Second Vatican Council:[9] Möhler sees

[8]Cf. LG 1, 48, 59, SC 26, AG 1, 5, PO 4, GS 45.

[9]Cf. Johann Adam Möhler, *Die Einheit der Kirche oder das Princip des Catholicismus,* Tübingen: Laupp, 1843, English: *Unity in the Church or The Principle of Catholicism Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, Washington,

the principle of Catholicism in the living unity of opposing points of view, which are bound together in love and in the communion of the Church, grounded in the love of God. Only the plurality of perspectives and their living encounter opens the view to the mystery of God and the mystery of the human existence. The unity in the plurality is not an abstract or theoretical one. It is rather the unity of communion, which is made possible through the Holy Spirit, grounded in Christ and realized through the love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross, who overcomes the forces of separation, sin and enmity. At the core of Church unity there is not one hermeneutical principle, one concept of Christianity or one strategy to fulfil her mission. At the core is the celebration of the Eucharist as actualization of the "paschal mystery". The unity is a "performative" and "living" one, in which the Word of God, the *symbolum*, and the performance and the bonds of Church communion come together, pointing back to the deeds of God in Christ, taking place here and now, while simultaneously pointing forward to the eschatological fulfilment in God who is greater than our concepts of Him.[10] In contrast, Möhler defines heresy as the negation of such differences in unity, which takes its own insight for the whole and turns differences into contradictions that destroy the living communion of love. He calls such a logic of heresy "churchly Egoism": it is a logic of separation, isolation and identification of a particle of truth with absolute truth turning the living God into an idol.[11]

In this sense, orthodoxy and religious truth is only possible through witness and dialogue. It thus entails giving witness of God without claiming to represent him, listening to the other and being committed to everything he or she says as far as it is true, good, beautiful, while remaining always in search for the divine reality of God which is higher and better than our concepts of him (Anselms "maior cogitari nequit—maius quam cogitari possit"). It follows that

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D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1996, esp. §18 and §46: 122-127, 194-201; Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme. Les aspects sociaux du dogme*, 5th édition rev. et augm. Paris: Cerf, 1952; Walter Kasper, "'Vom Geist und Wesen des Katholizismus': Bedeutung, Wirkungsgeschichte und Aktualität von Johann Sebastian Dreys und Johann Adam Möhlers Wesensbestimmung des Katholizismus," in *ThQ* 183 (2003) 196–212.

[10]See also my considerations in Martin Kirschner, *Gotteszeugnis in der Spätmoderne: theologische und sozialwissenschaftliche Reflexionen zur Sozialgestalt der katholischen Kirche*, Würzburg: Echter, 2006, 388-465; "Mit Gott beginnen? Prolegomena zur Dogmatik als Suche nach dem rechten Anfang," in *ThQ* 193 (2013) 44–62.

[11]Cf. Möhler, *Unity*, 122ff.

the Church in her unity and catholicity "contains all antitheses and […] embraces in itself all Christian truth of both contradictory schools." Separation and division in different, even opposing Churches signifies a loss of catholicity and truth because, on the one hand, "each took a part of the Church with itself," and, on the other hand, the Church in its orthodoxy "formed the unconscious unity of all heresies before the division."[12]

The true Church is not defined by possession of the truth—which is the infinite, living God Himself—but as a "complexio oppositorum," a communion of (potential) heresies, which serve the truth as long as they admit their own particularity and recognize the elements of true and good in the opposite position. Regarding the polarization of right and left wing Catholics, the Church might be compared with a bird that only can fly with both wings, moving freely and each one cooperating with the other. The question is: How can this catholicity and this force for unity in difference be regained?

3. John Paul II spoke of the Second Vatican Council as God's "gift and grace" and the "compass"[13] for the Church in the 21st Century. But whether the Council gives orientation for the renewal of faith or whether it just reproduces the conflicts strongly depends on the hermeneutics of the Council. Here, I will argue with Peter Hünermann for an interpretation of the text-corpus as a "constitutional text of faith."[14] That does not mean that the Council

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[12]Möhler, *Unity*, 197f.

[13]John Paul II in his Apostolic letter "Novo millenio ineunte," Jan 6th 2001, nr. 2 speaks of the celebration of the Millennium "as a providential opportunity during which the Church, thirty-five years after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, would examine how far she had renewed herself, in order to be able to take up her evangelizing mission with fresh enthusiasm." For him the "Great Jubilee" is an opportunity, a "kairos", to read the signs of the time and to renew the Church. This renewal is oriented on Christ, listening to the Word of God and facing the present challenges for the Church's mission. Such orientation is possible taking the Second Vatican Council as a kind of hermeneutical key: "in the light of the Council." So in Nr. 57 John Paul II points "to the Council as *the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century:* there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning."

[14]Cf. P. Hünermann, *Der Text: Werden – Gestalt – Bedeutung. Eine hermeneutische Reflexion*, in *HThK Vat.II*, vol. 5, Freiburg - Basel - Wien: Herder, 2006, 5-101; "Der 'Text'. Eine Ergänzung zur Hermeneutik des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils," in *Cristianesimo nella storia* 28 (2007) 339–358; "Quo vadis? Au sujet de l´importance du concile Vatican II pour l´église, l´oecuménisme et la société aujourd´hui," in *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 100 (2012) 27–44; "… in mundo huius temporis … Die

was "a sort of constituent that eliminates an old constitution and creates a new one"—a position Pope Benedict rightly rejected in his Christmas address to the Roman Curia 2005.[15] The Council was not a mandatory assembly to reinvent Catholic faith; it was a sacramental assembly of bishops together with the pope, with theologians as advisors and experts, in communication with the global public inside and outside the Church, with ecumenical observers taking an active part. As such the Council was an assembly representing the Catholic Church in an ecumenical process of communication, defining and explaining her self-understanding and her mission to the world. For that purpose the Council fathers went back to the sources of faith (*ressourcement*) to present the gospel in its relevance and dynamics for our present times (*aggiornamento*).[16] The outcome is a complex and voluminous text-corpus, with the four constitutions at its core. This text is normative and binding, it gives orientation for the Church, her teaching, theology and institutions. It does this not through isolated juridical paragraphs but through a constitutional text that lays a foundation, that is open for the future, that needs and demands further interpretation and creative reception. A reading of the texts as "constitutional texts of faith" puts them into a twofold relationship to the sources of faith in scripture and the whole tradition, on the one

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Bedeutung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils im kulturellen Transformationsprozess der Gegenwart: Das Textcorpus des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils ist ein konstitutioneller Text des Glaubens," in Jan Heiner Tück, ed., *Erinnerung an die Zukunft*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2012, 31–53.

[15]Hünermann himself makes the differences between the council and a constitutional assembly very clear. Pope Benedict rejects the idea of any quasi-democratic, mandatory authority "because the essential constitution of the Church comes from the Lord and was given to us so that we might attain eternal life and, starting from this perspective, be able to illuminate life in time and time itself." Cf. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html. There is a lot of new interpretations and analyses of the Pope's "hermeneutic of reform," cf. Theobald, *"L´hermeneutique de réforme"*; John O'Malley, "The Hermeneutic of Reform. A Historical Analysis," in *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 517–546; Kurt Koch, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Die Hermeneutik der Reform*, Augsburg: Sankt Ulrich, 2012; Jan-Heiner Tück, "Die Verbindlichkeit des Konzils. Die Hermeneutik der Reform als Interpretationsschlüssel," in Tück, *Erinnerung an die Zukunft,* 85–104.

[16]O'Malley shows how the two orientations on *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* are not opposed to each other but are the key motors for change and reformation in Church history: cf. John O'Malley, "Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?," in O'Malley – Schultenover, *Vatican II,* 52–91, here 63-67; "Ressourcement und Reform im II. Vaticanum," in *Concilium* 48 (2012) 270–278.

hand, *and* to the world of today, its struggle and hope, its experiences and challenges on the other hand. At the same time it makes clear that the formal authority of the Council and its texts is closely linked to the singular event of this Council, that text and spirit disclose and interpret each other. By establishing a new "style" (O'Malley, Theobald), that corresponds to the dynamics of the Holy Spirit as well as to the insights in human freedom and the event-character of truth, the council initiates a process of ongoing rereading of the gospel and of the tradition as a whole, reading the signs of the times in the light of the gospel.[17]

I take the "hermeneutics of reform," the interpretation of the text as a "constitutional text of faith," and reception of the Council as a reinterpretation of the tradition following a "new style," led by the spirit, as *complementary approaches* that exclude some hermeneutical traps. Just to mention two of them: The "spirit" of the council and the "event" may not be separated from the end-text and its letter, it cannot be identified with the (supposed) intention of the majority. The dogmatic authority of the Council must not be reduced to a "formal authority," a juridical interpretation or a small dogmatic "core," surrounded by some "pastoral" advice. The understanding of normativity, the relation of dogma and pastoral, and the development of doctrine without using definitions and exclusions has to be understood from the event of the second Vatican Council itself; it cannot be taken from Vatican I. At this point it is necessary to briefly examine the foundation of faith given on the Council. I cannot give a close interpretation here nor can I go into detail,[18] but I want to highlight some of its main lines in order to show how the normativity of faith is accessible only in a complex, ecclesiologically structured dialogue in which freedom and authority give room to each other. The truth of faith neither can be fixed in "objective" doctrine nor may it be left aside in a form of relativism or subjectivism. Instead it has to be developed in explicitly theological categories: in the incarnational

[17]Cf. Theobald, *La reception 683-900;* John W. O'Malley, *What happened at Vatican II,* Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2008.

[18]For the interpretation of *Dei Verbum* my main references are the commentaries of Joseph Ratzinger (now accessible in: *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils* [Gesammelte Schriften Vol. 7/1-2], Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2012); of Helmut Hoping in *HThK Vat.II*, vol. 3, Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2005, 695-831; and of Christoph Theobald in *La reception* 701-900, *Dans les traces*.

concreteness founded in Jesus Christ and in the living and free dynamics of the Spirit.

4. The point of departure and hermeneutical key is the foundation of faith in the revelation of the Triune God in history, which is accessible only through true and fully human witness in the event of the Spirit. The first chapter of *Dei verbum* starts with the "Revelation itself": "In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph 2:18; 2 Pet 1:4)." In doing so the focus changes: it turns from a positivistic view of revelation which concentrates on its mediations, formally authorized doctrines and "instructions"[19] to a personal, dialogical and theocentric view, in which the mystery of God and Humans is preserved and made accessible in terms of personal encounter and communion. This far-reaching change concerns not only the theological perspective or approach but the form of rationality and the metaphysical categories used. Joseph Ratzinger put the emphasis in his commentary on this point, with reference to the influence of Karl Barth, and the personalism of Ferdinand Ebner and Martin Buber,[20] and his entire theology is strongly shaped by personalistic and dialogical thought. The truth of faith reveals itself only in relations—grounded in God's relation to the world and in the free human response to him, it is not an abstract concept but a living encounter that takes place in time.

Consequently, this truth can neither be objectively fixed in doctrine and concepts nor can it be reduced to subjective conceptions or interests. It rather has to be defined in relation to Jesus Christ "who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation" (DV 2) and in the dynamics of the Spirit, who "must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God" to enable "freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him" (DV 5). One could say that the objectivity—the "extra nos" of revelation—is personalized and can only be handed over by living persons "by deeds and words having an inner unity"

[19]Such a view dominates the prepared schema "De fontibus revelationis". For a direct comparison of the different schemata, cf. the synopsis of Francisco Gil Hellín, *Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis in ordinem redigens schemata cum relationibus patrum orationes atque animadversiones: constitutio dogmatica Dei verbum*, Città del Vaticano: LibreriaEditrice Vaticana, 1993.

[20]Cf. Ratzinger, *Zur Lehre,* 736.

(DV 2, 7-10): doctrine, dogma and concepts have a sacramental and regulatory function for this process. The subjective, individual, even intimate side of faith—the most intimate revelation ("more inward than the most inward part of me"[21])—then cannot be identified with self-interest, self-concepts or subjective wants but it is also seen as a relation—constituted through God in His Holy Spirit. Objectivism and subjectivism both miss the point, are completely misleading alternatives. Instead theology has to be conceived from the truth-event in history,[22] that is the living encounter of God and humans, which points to the liberty of God (his grace), to the liberty of humans (their responsibility), and to the visible and concrete expression and shape of this encounter in the sacramental structure of the Church. The Christological definiteness and the Pneumatological openness require each other: no incarnated, concrete and binding Christian faith without the dynamics of the Spirit that enables understanding and assent; no Christian spirituality without the concreteness of God's word in Christ, its testimony in scripture and its transmission through the Church that enables discernment (DV 10).

This theological or "vertical" axis of the council, as expressed especially in *Dei verbum*, *Dignitatis humanae* and *Gaudium et spes,*[23] leads necessarily to the ecclesiological or horizontal axis with its core in *Lumen gentium*. The expression of the incarnate witness of faith is "*sacramental*"—in a broad sense of the word. The mystery of Christ and its presence through the spirit are seen together with the Church as sacrament for the world and communion of the faithful.[24] In this context the Council speaks in metaphors of "shining" and "reflecting" the light of Christ, for which Church and tradition are just mirrors, through which we see "dimly, not face to face" (1 Cor

[21]Augustine, *Confessions,* III,6,11

[22]Cf. Hünermann, *Dogmatische Prinzipienlehre*.

[23]Cf. Theobald, *La réception,* 48. Theobald sees the unity of the texts and the identity of the council constituted by these two axes, which is grounded theologically in a strict sense, binding the event of the Council as well as its reception to the unpredictable work of the spirit and interpreting the gospel from the twofold relationship to tradition and to present time. Cf. *La réception,* 25-29.

[24]The centre of this encounter of God and humans is the God-Man Jesus Christ. God, Men, Church, and Christ can be named as mysterion / sacramentum: Cf. e.g. SC 2, 6, LG 1, 8; DV 2; GS 10, 22, 45. Cf. the reflections of Peter Hünermann in *HThK Vat.II*, vol. 2, 324-336, 353-357 and in Martin Kirschner – Joachim Schmiedl, ed., *Diakonia – Der Dienst der Kirche in der Welt* (Katholische Kirche im Dialog 1), Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2013.

13:12): "By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man *shines* out for our sake in Christ…" (DV 2). "Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod... desires... to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church" (LG 1). "This sacred tradition, therefore, and Sacred Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments are like a mirror in which the pilgrim Church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is, face to face (see 1 Jn 3:2)" (*Dei verbum* 7).

This sacramental view makes it possible and necessary to reflect the institutions, traditions and attitudes of the Church in a theological way, corresponding to the free self-communication of God and the free answer of humanity. That implies the necessity of ongoing reform and renewal of the Church, and it implies that the truth of tradition can only be found through the critique of tradition. It is the tragedy of the Catholic Church to have such a highly developed and well-grounded theology of tradition—and at the same time to fail in such an obvious way to undertake this process of reform. Joseph Ratzinger has clearly named this problem and even strongly criticized the Second Vatican Council for neglecting the necessary critique of tradition[25]—on the other hand it seems to me that his resentments against modern and postmodern attitudes, against a sociological analysis of the Church and its institutions, fear of "relativism" and neglect of the destroying impact of traditionalism in Church politics have played a crucial role in the insufficient institutional implementation of the Council.

One last point: If revelation is the living event of God's self-communication to humanity in history which constitutes communion with God and between humans (DV 2, LG 1), that means that God's enduring initiative and sovereignty is pronounced as well as the free initiative of humans. Ecclesiastical authority then results from authentic and true witness of the encounter of God and humans through history, tracing back to Jesus Christ, witnessed by the apostles, documented in the Holy Scripture and handed on and

[25]Cf. Ratzinger, *Zur Lehre,* 751-775, see also, "Achim Buckenmaier, Treue und Dynamik. Joseph Ratzingers Kommentar zu *Dei Verbum* neu gelesen," in Michaela C. Hastetter – Ioan Moga – Christoph Ohly, Hg., *Symphonie des Wortes. Beiträge zur Offenbarungskonstitution "Dei Verbum" im katholisch-orthodoxen Dialog*, St Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2012, 72–99.

developed through the generations by the Church in its living tradition (DV 7-13, 21-26). In this context, Vatican II further develops the Christological grammar of Chalcedon—Jesus Christ: "truly God and truly human," "two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly and inseparably." It applies it to scripture (DV 11-13[26]), living tradition (DV 8), and Church communion (LG 8). And it understands it in a historical way and in terms of human freedom and responsibility. That means that the theocentric view (DV) enables and requires an anthropological approach (DH, GS). Theology and anthropology imply each other. The crucial question is how to conceive the human response as a free one, empowered by the free grace of God. Here it would be necessary to have a closer look on *Dignitatis humanae* and especially on *Gaudium et spes*.[27]

5. The **human answer as a response to God** can be credible, morally right and true only if it is a free and responsible one: "The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power" (DH 1). There can be no credible truth-claim without human freedom and no true freedom without faithfulness to the truth and search for the deeper truth. The insight that the commitment of liberty to the recognition of the truth cannot be understood as a limitation of human freedom: objective truth cannot be found without subjective evidence, and this evidence cannot be imposed by external human authority. As Peter Hünermann argued in his statement in Bangalore,[28] the council here recognizes the philosophical insight in the reflexivity of all knowledge: cognitive moments and constitutive ones are connected with each other. Human rationality involves the identity, the free and responsible personal act of discernment and recognition of the true and right. The philosophical recognition of free and personal responsibility, the political recognition of religious freedom and the theological recognition of the act of faith as based on divine grace and human freedom are closely connected with each other. Human dignity *and* revelation as God's graceful relationship to

[26]DV 12: "God speaks in sacred Scripture through men in human fashion…"

[27]Cf. the interpretation of Roman Siebenrock in *HThK Vat.II,* vol 4, 125-218; vol 5, 311-379; and my considerations in Kirschner, *Gotteszeugnis,* 261-320.

[28]Peter Hünermann, "The Debate on Hermeneutics of Vatican II: At the Core of the World Wide Struggle for Orientation in the Church," paper of the International Conference "Revisiting Vatican II. 50 Years of Renewal," Bangalore, India, 31 Jan–3 Feb, 2013.

humanity demand the *unconditional recognition of religious freedom*. Here, indeed, the Catholic Church had to undergo a conversion, not because the freedom of consciousness was alien to its tradition (cf. DH 10) but because fighting its opponents the Church had forgotten and often betrayed this core insight of faith (cf. DH 12 GS 19). It is Jesus Christ himself who is the expression, fulfilment and incarnation of this true freedom (DH 9-15, GS 10, 12-17, 22). He is the centre of God's dialogue with the world, so that the Church can trust that the dialogue with the world will lead to Him as "the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history" (GS 10).[29] In his homily at the Touristic airport in Freiburg on Sunday, 25 September 2011, Pope Benedict pointed to the foundation of human freedom in God Himself Who "has placed a limit on his power, by recognizing the freedom of his creatures. […] God respects our freedom. He does not constrain us. He is waiting for us to say 'yes', he as it were begs us to say 'yes'."

6. This relational foundation of faith becomes and has to become concrete, visible and operative in the **communion of the Church**, in its sacramental structure and sacramental life (SC, LG 10-12), in its institutions, its way of life and its service to humanity, in the relations of the Church "ad intra" and "ad extra". That means that the Church, its institutions, traditions and attitudes have to correspond to the unconditional recognition of human freedom and dignity, and to the overwhelming but respectful, patient and "decent" love of God, who "calls men to serve Him in spirit and in truth, hence they are bound in conscience but they stand under no compulsion. God has regard for the dignity of the human person whom He Himself created and man is to be guided by his own judgment and he is to enjoy freedom" (DH 11).

Further, it means that the identity of the Church itself is relational, defined in relation to the other who is a constitutive part of the Church´s self-identity. There are at least two relations that fall out of the categories "ad intra/ad extra": The ecumenical relations with Christians and Christian Churches who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church; and the relationship to Israel and Judaism who is the first addressee of revelation and covenant, the root of the "olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the

[29]Cf. the reflections of R. Siebenrock, H. Sander, O. Fuchs on identity, dialogue and witness in *HThK Vat.II*, vol. 5, 311-380.

Gentiles“ (NA 4, Rom 9-11). Here, the other is a (sometimes disturbing) part of self-identity, so that it becomes clear that this identity is not at the disposal of the Church nor has it yet reached its fullness. It is not completely realized.[30] So, the self-reflection of the Church as “locus theologicus” is as necessary as it is incomplete: it does not yet represent the whole catholicity, it is still on the way, in sorrows and challenges (LG 8, 17, 48-51, GS 1-10 40-45 92-93). The problem of incompleteness and struggle for real catholicity leads to the much more dramatic problem of the Church giving a “counter-testimony”, betraying the gift of Holiness, even perverting the gospel.[31] The “Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal” (LG 8). Only as ecclesia peregrinans the Church can be sacrament of salvation and reflect Christ as the “Lumen gentium”(LG 1), only as “semper reformanda”, on the way of renewal and conversion the Church can be herald of the good news, symbol of God’s love and agent of the reign of God.

The *catholicity of the Church* (LG 13—then developed in LG 14-17) recognizes the fullness of the true, of the good and beautiful that has not yet been realized although it is included in the fullness of the mystery of Christ. So in history *no true witness may be excluded.*[32] The universality of God’s salvific purpose in Christ is the theological foundation of dialogue: the still unrealized aim “to bring all

[30]Cf. LG 8, 9, 13, UR 1-4, AG 1-9, NA.

[31]The “betrayel” as risk of *traditio* and – de facto – as a moment in historical tradition, cf. Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Gottes letztes Wort. Grundriss der Fundamentaltheologie*, 3. Ed., Regensburg: Pustet, 2000, 203-206; Manuel Schlögl, Tradition als Christusbegegnung, in Hastetter – Moga – Ohly, *Symphonie,* 119-139. Benedict XVI in his speech in Freiburg, in the context of child abuse in the Church, spoke of the necessary scandal of the cross which “has unfortunately been overshadowed in recent times by other painful scandals on the part of the preachers of the faith. A dangerous situation arises when these scandals take the place of the primary *skandalon* of the Cross and in so doing they put it beyond reach…” cf. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110925_catholics-freiburg_en.html. John Paul II had initiated a process of renewal, conversion and public repentance in the Church culminating in his journey to Israel in 2000 and in the pledge for forgiveness for the sins of the Church on Good Friday. Cf. Roman Siebenrock’s theological commentaries on DH and NA, including their “Wirkungsgeschichte” in the pontificate of John Paul II: *HThK Vat.II*, vol. 3, 666-677; vol. 4, 197-207; Luigi Accatoli, *Quando il Papa chiede perdono. Tutti I mea culpa di Giovanni Paolo II*, Milano: Mondadori, 1997.

[32]Cf. the commentaries and articles of Hansjoachim Sander in *HThK Vat.II*, vol. 4-5.

humanity and all its possessions back to its source in Christ, with Him as its head and united in His Spirit" (LG 13, with reference to saint Irenaeus). That implies exchange, dialogue, learning from the other and ongoing conversion (GS 40-44), so that Christ is revealed as the "alpha et omega" of time: "While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass. For every benefit which the People of God during its earthly pilgrimage can offer to the human family stems from the fact that the Church is "the universal sacrament of salvation" (24) simultaneously manifesting and exercising the mystery of God's love" (GS 45).

7. At the end I want to draw some conclusions regarding the reception of the Second Vatican Council, its hermeneutics and the renewal of the Church, 50 years after the Council. Both aspects are closely linked together. The challenge for the reception of the Council lies in the concreteness of its implementation, and that includes to translate the recognition of human liberty and the faithfulness to God's forgiving love into the institutions and organization of the Church, and to establish a corresponding "culture of belief" and "habits of the heart" in the communion of the faithful. That implies a clear rejection of "fundamentalist" attitudes which are recently rising in Catholicism among those who reject the Second Vatican Council.[33]

The interrelation of catholicity, witness and dialogue as a framework to conceive the free human response to God's self-revelation in history can be connected with the "hermeneutic of reform" of Pope Benedict XVI.[34] Pope Benedict sharply rejects a

[33] I identify the fundamentalist temptation as an (typical "modern") attempt to reconstruct and establish a collective identity using out-of-place pieces of tradition. It was a typical temptation of Protestantism and Shiite Islam, whereas Catholicism tended towards traditionalism or authoritarianism. That changed when parts of "catholic" traditionalism turned to a "hermeneutics of rupture" and claimed Rome and the actual magisterium to be "modernist" and—more or less explicitly—heretics. Cf. Kirschner, *Gotteszeugnis* 109-158.

[34] Cf. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html; Cf. Theobald, *L´hermeneutique de réforme*; John O´Malley, "*The Hermeneutic of Reform*. A Historical Analysis," in *Theological Studies* 73 (2012) 517–546; Kurt Koch, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil. Die Hermeneutik der Reform*, Augsburg: Sankt-Ulrich-Verlag, 2012; Jan-Heiner Tück, "Die Verbindlichkeit des Konzils. Die Hermeneutik der Reform als

"hermeneutic of discontinuity," but at the same time he recognizes a "certain discontinuity" of reform which is embedded in a broader continuity of tradition and its principles. In his commentary on *Dei verbum* he made very clear that the normativity of tradition depends on a critical discernment that is orientated on scripture: it would be naïve optimism to see tradition just as a continuing progress.[35] This perspective of reform, which has to correct the discontinuity of sin within Church traditions, has to be emphasized: a "hermeneutic of mere continuity" would turn II Vatican Council into a "non-event" and "to press continuity to the exclusion of any discontinuity" would mean "in effect to say that nothing has happened."[36] The debate today cannot be about continuity or discontinuity; the point is to discern the signs of the time in the light of the gospel in such a way that the Church fulfils a conversion to the gospel today. That means radical discontinuity to all men made traditions which contradict the gospel and, at the same time, full obedience to the continuity of true Tradition. It might help to emphasize Pope Benedict's call for "Holiness" as core of any true Church reform.[37] The impact of such a conversion—if taken serious and applied also to the structure of the Church—is much more radical than any strategy of accommodation could be. It presupposes—as Christoph Theobald has argued—a

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Interpretationsschlüssel," in Jan Heiner Tück, ed., *Erinnerung an die Zukunft*. Freiburg i. Br. – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2012, 85–104.

[35]Cf. Ratzinger's commentaries on DV 3, 7-9 and GS 12-13: *Zur Lehre* 740-741, 756-772, 795-804. Ratzinger here refers in a broad way to protestant theologians and theology. See also, Buckenmaier, *Treue und Dynamik,* 86-99. A profound and critical analysis of Ratzinger's position to Revelation, tradition and the reception of Vatican II gives Lieven Boeve, "La vraie réception de Vatican II n'a pas encore commencé: Joseph Ratzinger, révélation et autorité de Vatican II," in Gilles Routhier – Guy Jobin, Hg., *L'autorité et les autorités. L'herméneutique théologique de Vatican II,* Paris: Cerf, 2010, 13–50.

[36]O'Malley, *Hermeneutic of Reform,* 543; Ratzinger's hermeneutics are often interpreted in an unbalanced way, stressing just the continuity and using it for a broad polemics against main part of theological research on Vatican II, cf. e.g. Walter Brandmüller – Agostino Marchetto - Nicola Bux (Hg.), *Le "chiavi" di Benedetto XVI per interpretare il Vaticano II*, Siena: Cantagalli, 2012; Agostino Marchetto, *Il Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II: Per la sua coretta ermeneutica*, Città del Vaticano, 2012; Giovanni Cavalcoli, *Progresso nella continuità. La questione del Concilio vaticano II e del post-concilio*, Verona, 2011; Ralph Weimann, "*Dei verbum* und die Frage nach der Rezeption," in Hastetter – Mola – Ohly, *Symphonie,* 57-71.

[37]Cf. Ratzinger, *Zur Lehre,* 1040-1078, cf. Theobald, *La réception,* 533.

"reform of hermeneutic,"[38] that is open for the other, for true dialogue and conversion, an ongoing struggle to model oneself and the whole Church on Christ's ideal (Paul VI.[39]), which implies a dialogue of conversion and repentance (John Paul II). The consequence would be a radical and ongoing reform of the Church. The criterion of such a spiritual conversion and structural reform will be "the humility and self-sacrifice" of Jesus, so that the Church has to turn to "all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder" (LG 8[40]). So the strategies of liberal modernization vs. exclusivist traditionalization are to be interrupted and corrected by a conversion to the poor and afflicted, the Church realizing its messianic mission for the world.

[38]Theobald, "*L'hermeneutique de réforme*," 65–84. Theobald sees the "universal vocation to holiness" as the inner centre of the Council's hermeneutics of faith, which opens also space for dialogue with postmodern philosophy. His second volume on the reception of the Council is planned to finish with a broad chapter on the holiness of the Church.

[39]Paul VI., Encyclical "*Ecclesiam suam,*" aug. 6th 1964, aims an "impatient struggle for renewal: the struggle to correct those flaws introduced by its members which its own self-examination, mirroring its exemplar, Christ..." (nr. 11). "Our intense desire is to see the Church become what Christ intended it to be: one, holy, and entirely dedicated to the pursuit of that perfection to which Christ called it and for which He qualified it. In its pilgrimage through the world the Church must really strive to manifest that ideal of perfection envisaged for it by the divine Redeemer. Here, therefore, we have the greatest problem confronting the living Church. It is a problem which shows how powerful and effective the Church really is. It goads it into action, submits it to searching criticism and keeps it true to its purpose. It engenders in the Church prayer and compunction, repentance and hope, toil and confidence, the spirit of adventure and achievement" (nr. 41).

[40]Cf. also AG 5 and *Verbum Domini* 99-108.