

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL – STARTING POINT FOR BECOMING A GLOBAL CHURCH

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Abstract:

The essay recalls the world-Church awakening of the Second Vatican Council *60 years ago*. Particularly in view of the synodal processes of the present, it is a matter of remembering the becoming of the world church on and with the 2nd Vatican Council and of leading it into a new breadth on the background of current intercultural and post- and decolonial hermeneutics. This is precisely the context of the project “Vatican II: Legacy and Mandate,” an intercontinental commentary on the Council’s texts, in which various study groups have been bringing together Council research on the different continents since 2016, and around 120 theologians worldwide are working together to comment on the 16 Council documents in intercontinental working groups. For the new phase of the reception of the Council in the pontificate of Pope Francis, this new commentary attempts to provide a theological, ecclesiological, and pastoral orientation in the polyphonic concert of the local Churches of the South and the North Atlantic or European region. These new hermeneutical guidelines for a world Church are briefly named in this essay.

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1. A New Phase of the Reception of the Second Vatican Council in Global Church Perspectives

The Second Vatican Council opened on 11 October 1962. In these years, we commemorate the opening of the Second Vatican Council 60 years ago and with it the reform process and departure of the Roman Catholic Church towards a new understanding of becoming the Global Church from the depth of the foundation of the Church, the Gospel of Jesus Christ: in the diversity of local churches and in dialogue with other Christian churches, the world religions, and all people of “good will,” in the service of the human community, and of justice and peace for all creation. Since taking office, Pope Francis has highlighted this paradigm shift in the Church's self-understanding and the reform process in a special way: the Pope from the South, from the “periphery,” has in mind the origins of the Church, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the attention to the “signs of the times,” and from these perspectives he envisages the pastoral challenges of the global Church, attaches central importance to the local Churches and their questions, and places the dynamics of interactions in a global Church under the leitmotif of synodality. In this sense, his pontificate stands for a new phase in the reception of the Second Vatican Council, which takes seriously the principle of pastorality that Pope John XXIII put into the centre when he convened the Council, and is open to the questions, challenges, inconsistencies, and ambivalences of a global Church embedded in the plurality of cultural, socio-political, and religious constellations. This has become clear in the staged processes of preparing the last Synods of Bishops, such as the Synod on the Family or the differentiated local Church preparation and follow-up of the Amazon Synod, whose significance for the global Church was also emphasised by the Pope.¹

The necessity of the “*aggiornamento*,” which John XXIII wrote into the heart of the Church, is no longer in question, nor are debates about the continuity or discontinuity of the Second

¹ See also: *Margit Eckholt*, “Das Gesicht des Südens. Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil in weltkirchlicher Perspektive,” *Herder Korrespondenz* 76 (2022), 13-16.

Vatican Council with the preceding ecumenical councils, above all the First Vatican Council, as they characterised the dispute about the hermeneutics of the Council in the pontificate of Benedict XVI.² With the principle of synodality, Francis brings dynamism into the structure of the authority of the Magisterium, into the tension between Pope and bishops, and into complex coordination and decision-making processes in a global Church in view of the most diverse regional dynamics, cultural factors, and likewise plural theological positions. A central moment, which is founded in the Vatican II Constitutions on the Church and on Revelation, now moves to the foreground and places this structure of tension on a new horizon, thereby also revealing the challenges of current ecclesial practises that go beyond the Second Vatican Council, is the significance that is attributed to the whole people of God: the “*sensus fidelium*” of all the baptised and thus also the laity. This means that the liberation theology of the Church and of the laity is also being developed.³ This makes the liberation-theological and contextual pastoral perspectives that have shaped the new way of becoming church in the South, Latin America, Africa, and Asia after the Council, the “breaking in” (Juan Carlos Scannone) of new subjects, especially the poor, in all their diversity, as indigenous and feminist-liberation theological works will point out, of a hitherto “unheard-of” relevance for the Magisterium and the restructuring of coordination and decision-making processes in the Roman Catholic Church. The “beginning of the beginning,”⁴ which was

² Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils: Formulierung - Vermittlung - Deutung* [= Collected Writings Vol. 7/1 and 7/2], Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 2012.

³ Cf. International Theological Commission, “*Sensus fidei und sensus fidelium im Leben der Kirche. Der Text der Internationalen Theologischen Kommission von 2014*,” in: Thomas Söding (ed.), *Der Spürsinn des Gottesvolkes: Eine Diskussion mit der Internationalen Theologischen Kommission*, Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 2016, 13-76; Margit Eckholt, “*Sensus fidelium: La sinodalità e i laici che divengono soggetto*,” in: Rafael Luciani/Serena Noceti/Carlos Schickendantz (eds.), *Sinodalità e riforma: Una sfida ecclesiale: Prefacio del card. Mario Grech*, Brescia/Italia: Editrice Queriniana, 2022, 147-161.

⁴ Cf. Karl Rahner, *Das Konzil - ein neuer Beginn*, ed. by Andreas R. Batlogg and Albert Raffelt, Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2012, 37/38; Karl Rahner, “*Die bleibende Bedeutung des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*,” in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Vol. 14, Zurich/Einsiedeln/Cologne: Benziger Verlag, 1980, 303-318; Karl Rahner,

set with Vatican II, to become a truly global Church, to break out of a Church that is still Gregorian, focused on the primacy of the Pope's jurisdiction and, in institutional and theological terms, Western European, as Karl Rahner called it at the end of Vatican II, thus becomes concrete. In the sense of a real "beginning" in view of the synodal processes worldwide and the Bishops' Synod convened for October 2023 and October 2024, this calls for intensified common theological thinking in all regions of the world and, on the part of the Magisterium, the courage to go beyond legal clarifications and decisions on these paths of a synodal Church. This is precisely what is involved in the world church's examination of the questions of power and participation, and the legal clarification of participation opportunities for lay people, as they were included, for example, in the project of the "*Lex ecclesiae fundamentalis*" after the Second Vatican Council, which was interrupted in the pontificate of John Paul II and in the course of the Codex reform. These are questions which were the focus of the Synodal Way of the German local Church⁵ and which are of central world ecclesial relevance in view of the new phase of the reception of the Second Vatican Council.

2. New Ways of Hermeneutics of the Council in Intercultural Dynamics

To be able to walk the synodal paths around the world on a good ecclesiological and theological foundation, it is important to remember and re-evaluate how the Second Vatican Council was received on the different continents from a theological point of view. Karl Rahner's or Marie-Dominique Chenu's thesis that the Second Vatican Council was a "Council of the global Church" gains new relevance today in Francis' pontificate. Certainly, most of the Council participants came from the European core countries - many from the countries of the South belonged to the missionary bishops - but among the bishops of the South there

"Theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils," in: *Schriften zur Theologie*, Vol. 14, Zurich/Einsiedeln/Cologne: Benziger Verlag 1980, 287-302.

⁵ Information on the Synodal Path and the adopted documents can be found at: <https://www.synodalerweg.de/dokumente-reden-und-beitraege> (9/6/2023)

was a growing awareness of how important it is to shape the Church “locally,” to name the specific questions and challenges of the respective cultural, social, political, and economic contexts, and to be open to an inculturated pastoral and theological approach. The initiative of the “Church of the Poor,” which was formed at the Council and led to the conclusion of the “Catacomb Pact”⁶ in November 1965, united the local churches of the South. It was supported by Paul VI, and its basic idea of a “poor Church for the poor” has been inscribed in Pope Francis’ pontificate from the beginning. This recognises the pastoral and theological developments in the local churches of the South that were stopped and aborted in the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI - such as the liberation theological work and indigenous pastoral projects in Latin America or interreligious theological approaches in the Asian countries. The pontificate of Francis reveals the extent to which the Magisterium reacted to these new local ecclesial developments with “Western” standards, and how little the world ecclesial awakening of the Second Vatican Council was received by the papacy and the Curia. As never before, theological work in the “West” is coming to grips with post- and decolonial philosophical and theological approaches.⁷

In this context, a look at the changing shape of Catholicism also underlines how necessary it is to become a truly global Church. Around 1960, the Catholic Church counted about 577 million baptised members worldwide, of whom 245 million (= 42.5% of all Catholics worldwide) lived in Europe, 54 million (9.4%) in North America, 198 million (34.3%) in Latin America, 48 million (8.3%) in Asia and Oceania, and 32 million (5.5%) in Africa. Europe and North America accounted for more than half of all Church members with 299 million Catholics. By 2010, the total number of Catholics had more than doubled, to 1,196 million, combined with a southward shift of the Christian world, a trend that, however, was already apparent at the time of the

⁶ Cf. Norbert Arntz, *Der Katakombenpakt: Für eine dienende und arme Kirche*, Kevelaer: topos plus, 2015.

⁷ Cf. e.g., Stefan Silber, *Postkoloniale Theologien: Eine Einführung*, Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2021.

Council. In 2010, 41.5% of Catholics lived in Latin America (496 million), in Asia and Oceania 11.7% (140 million), in Africa 15.5% (185 million); Europe and North America no longer represent even a third of all believers worldwide; in Europe 23.8% (285 million), in North America 7.5% (90 million). Catholicism has changed, it now wears the face of the South. Theologians from the southern hemisphere have gained influence on Roman commissions in recent years. The appointment of cardinals not from the large European and North American dioceses, but from countries with Christian minorities or from the “end of the world,” such as Oceania, shows the shift in power in the Roman Catholic Church. In Latin America, Africa and Asia, powerful research centres have emerged that take theological research out of a Eurocentric-North American context and introduce new postcolonial approaches. In his Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* (2017), the Pope identifies the importance of theological work that addresses social, political and cultural challenges, networks across cultures and continents, and accompanies the current cultural paradigm shift.⁸ With the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (2022), he has given corresponding impulses for the reform of the Curia, which are oriented on the one hand to the importance of evangelisation, and on the other hand to the social questions in a globalised world that is at the same time reaching its limits.

Sixty years after the Second Vatican Council, it is therefore important to make visible the potential of the Council, which is particularly evident in the transformations that have taken place during the reception process since 1965, taking into account, the “signs of the times.” Thus, in the local Churches in Latin American, African, and Asian countries and the changes in their environment as well as in the environment itself, the dynamics and the inspiring motivation released from the conciliar recollection of the Gospel are breaking out. This is the memory of the Gospel of the beatitude of the poor, the memory of the

⁸ Cf. e.g., Margit Eckholt, “Lokale Theologien und interkulturelle Dynamiken. *Veritatis Gaudium* und Leitkriterien einer Theologie der Welt-Kirche,” in: Annette Schavan (ed.), *Relevante Theologie: “Veritatis gaudium” – die kulturelle Revolution von Papst Franziskus*, Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2019, 41-60.

prophets and prophetesses of Israel who demand justice above all for those who are marginalised, for the poor, the sick, the weak, strangers, for people on the run, for widows and orphans. This is precisely the guiding perspective which unites the continental receptions, which is oriented towards the pastoral nature of the Council, and which shapes the work of the pastoral institutes of CELAM, the Latin American Bishops' Council, or the FABC, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Today, further research in the various continents is to be strived for, which opens the real potential of the Council by inquiring into the situation of the respective local church and its special faith structures at the time of the Council and the contrast in the subsequent history of reception. This means taking seriously the questions of Karl Rahner or Johann Baptist Metz from the 1970s about the extent to which the Council can provide "sustainable" answers to the challenges of the post-conciliar period, but nevertheless opening the potential of the Council anew.⁹ It is precisely here that stories of colonialism and the entanglement of the Church and its mission in Western expansionist projects must be recalled stories of guilt must be named, but also stories of liberation and of a spirit-led departure to new ways of living the Church of Jesus Christ alongside the poor.

The reception histories of the Council in the various continents are complex. In addition to the new local church developments, liberation theologies, contextual, indigenous, and feminist theologies, and Western-colonial patterns of thought and practises continued to have an effect, especially at the level of priestly training. And the reprimand of liberation theology and

⁹ Rahner has written "that the issues explicitly dealt with at Vatican II are not the actual central problems of the post-conciliar Church. If one perhaps disregards the pastoral decree on the Church in the world today and the problematic that is somehow given with it, then I think that all purely conciliar problems relating to the Church as such are secondary to the really urgent problems of the Church today." (Karl Rahner, "Die Antwort der Theologen. Karl Rahner – Johann Baptist Metz [1969]," in: *Sämtliche Werke* 24/1, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2011, 163–176, 163). Walter Kasper has written that the Council did not sufficiently recognise "the transitional stage" in which the "human being of today" finds himself, who "only with difficulty submits to an authority coming from outside" (Walter Kasper, "Lehre der Kirche – Glaube der Gläubigen [1971]," in: *Gesammelte Schriften* 7, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2015, 794–814, 804).

theologians and bishops associated with it since the 1980s has often made a reception process of these approaches in theological faculties, within the Church hierarchy, and at the level of official pastoral plans impossible. The works of Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo Boff, Fernando Castillo, Pablo Richard, Juan Luis Segundo, Enrique Dussel, Ignacio Ellacuría, and Jon Sobrino have not been forgotten; the younger generation of theologians is beginning to engage with the “voices” of their continent and, in times of post- and decolonial hermeneutics, to tap into the potential inherent in liberation theologies.¹⁰ What this will mean for the new phase of the reception of the Council is certainly still an open question, especially if the actors and subjects are given a hearing who were excluded from a Western and clergy-centred hermeneutics of the Council: indigenous peoples, lay people, and above all women. María Pilar Aquino and Ivone Gebara, pioneers of Latin American feminist theology from Mexico and Brazil, have not found a place in theological faculties, and the works of the younger generation, such as the theologian Geraldina Céspedes from the Dominican Republic or indigenous theologians, still need to be opened up and brought into conversation with bishops and other responsible persons at the national and continental level.¹¹ Certainly, there are initial important approaches at the level of CELAM and its associated Pastoral Institute in Bogotá, and the processes associated with the Amazon Synod (2019) and the Asamblea eclesial (2021/22) in Latin America have contributed precisely to this.

However, the inculturation of the Gospel and thus the development of inculturated ecclesial practices and theologies continues to be a challenge in the various indigenous contexts of

¹⁰ An overview of theology in Latin America: Sergio Silva, “Theologiegeschichte Lateinamerikas seit 1945,” in: Johannes Meier/Veit Straßner (eds.), *Kirche und Katholizismus seit 1945. Band 6: Lateinamerika und Karibik*, Paderborn/Munich/Vienna/Zurich: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 2009, 29-58; Margit Eckholt, “Religionen und Kirchen,” in: Günther Maihold/Hartmut Sangmeister/Nikolaus Werz (eds.), *Lateinamerika. Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Studium*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2019.

¹¹ The Argentinian theologians’ association Teologanda has published various volumes on feminist theology, cf. e.g., Virginia R. Azcuy/M. Marcela Mazzini/Nancy V. Raimondo (coord.), *Antología de Textos de Autoras en América Latina, el Caribe y Estados Unidos*, Buenos Aires: San Pablo-Teologanda, 2008.

the countries of the South. Here it will be important to give greater voice to African theological voices; “how can the kingdom of God be embodied in a concrete, life-transforming practice for African Christians, given their deep hunger for God and their search for meaning and hope in a complex world?” asks African theologian Stan Chu Ilo¹². The churches in Africa are still under the “protection” of Propaganda Fide today, they are still dependent, in “material, spiritual, theological, and pastoral terms on the Western churches and the Roman centre.”¹³ The question that was already asked before Vatican II, how it is possible to be African and Christian,¹⁴ is still virulent today in the same way, and theological approaches by Lamin Sanneh, Agbonkhianmegher Orobator, Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, Jean Marc Ela or Engelbert Mveng are still to be opened up in the contexts of the North and on a magisterial level. “Vatican II has hardly been digested in the Church in Africa, not necessarily for lack of effort, but because the Second Vatican Council has been more than a council; it is a way of being Church that is both challenging and going further on,” says Nigerian theologian Emmanuel-Mary Mbam¹⁵. Whether this means a deepened reception of the Second Vatican Council, or the way to a Third Vatican Council, is an open question here. In African theology, but also in indigenous approaches from the Latin, Asian or Oceanic regions, the embedding of the Church in its institutional form and in its theological reflection in the Western tradition is questioned in a massive way. These are challenges that point much more to fault lines than the reform perspectives that have emerged from the Synodal Path of the German local Church.

¹² Stan Chu Ilo, “African Ecclesiologies,” in: Paul Avis (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 613-637, 619.

¹³ Ilo, “African Ecclesiologies,” 623.

¹⁴ See the debate: Tharcisuis Tshibangu and A. Vanneste, “Débat sur la théologie africaine,” in: *Revue du Clergé Africain* 15 (1960) 333-352; on the Council and the African Church: Tharcisse T. Tshibangu, *Le Concile Vatican II et l’Église africaine. Mise en route du Concile dans l’Église d’Afrique* (1960-2010), Kinshasa: Épiphanie; Paris: Karthala, 2012.

¹⁵ Emmanuel-Mary Mbam, “Vatican II, 50 Years After: Lessons for the Church in Africa,” *Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Theology APT* 6 (2016) 173-202, 202.

Perhaps experiences from Asian contexts can be helpful in synodal journeys where tensions and incongruities between pastoral and religious experiences are increasing. The Church in Asia - with the exception of a region shaped by the Spanish and then the USA as colonial powers, such as the Philippines - has always been a minority, embedded in a pluralism of cultures and religions, challenged to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, often far gone in processes of inculturation and encounter with indigenous traditions, as in China, India or Sri Lanka, but often painfully curtailed, as in the rites controversy over the encounter of Christian mission with indigenous religions such as Confucianism.¹⁶ It is a Church that is itself characterised by great plurality through the presence of various churches united with the Roman Catholic Church. The oriental churches in India - such as the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara churches - received new recognition with the Second Vatican Council, the "Latinisation" of these churches was overcome, and indigenous forms of thought were brought into dialogue with Western philosophy and theology. "Multi-jurisdiction" and plurality characterise the Indian Church without giving up unity, as the Indian theologian Shaji Kochuthara makes clear.¹⁷ The extent to which these experiences can also be helpful in the synodal processes of the global Church will become clear along the way. But in this new phase of the reception of the Second Vatican Council, it is becoming increasingly clear that the foundations for a new constitution must be worked out for a global Church which - to use Pope Francis' image - can only be realised in a "polyhedral" form. The Jesuit Paul Béré from Burkina Faso, advisor to the Pontifical Council for Culture (today the Dicastery for Culture and Education) and member of the Theological Commission of the World Synod 2021-2023, speaks in this sense of a "real epochal change" having to "question structures and

¹⁶ An overview of developments in Asia: Felix Wilfred (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 95-96.

¹⁷ Shaji George Kochuthara, "Post-Colonial Asian Church-A Few Considerations," in: Sandra Arenas et al. (eds.), *General Introduction and Hermeneutical Reflection for Re-Reading the Council Documents in a Global Church*, Vol. 1, Leuven: Peeters, 2024 (in preparation).

institutions;¹⁸ he points to the need to develop “multicultural structures” as a “remedy to a monocultural interpretation of the Gospels and their implementation in the life and mission of the Church.”¹⁹

3. The Project of an Intercontinental Commentary on the Council

What the global Church means, especially in the sense of the prophetic impulses of Karl Rahner and Marie-Dominique Chenu, is still a task to be realised. It is an open process to be a Church in the plurality of cultural expressions and different contexts, to realise Catholicity in this mixture of pastoral and religious, cultural, and socio-political disparities, and to struggle for the appropriate structures. In these years of commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, it will be a matter of opening up exactly this depth of the awakenings of the global Church for the upcoming synodal processes in order to lead the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church in global times, in which world maps are turned upside down and decolonial epistemologies must also shape Magisterial discourses and theologies, into the breadth that they had from the beginning.

This is precisely the context of the project “Vatican II: Legacy and Mandate,” an intercontinental commentary on the Council texts, in which various study groups have been bringing together Council research in the different continents since 2016, and in which around 120 theologians worldwide are now working together to jointly comment on the 16 Council documents in intercontinental working groups.²⁰ For the new phase of the reception of the Council in the pontificate of Pope Francis, this new commentary attempts to provide a theological, ecclesiological and pastoral orientation in the many-voiced

¹⁸ Paul Béré, “Wellen der Transformation: die Weltsynode und ihre Bedeutung für die Mission,” *Forum Weltkirche* 141, 3 (2022) 25-27, at 27.

¹⁹ Paul Béré, “Wellen der Transformation,” 26.

²⁰ Cf. <https://vatican2legacy.com/>; on this: Margit Eckholt, “Vatican II: Legacy and Mandate. An Intercontinental Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II,” *ET Studies* 13 (2022), 349-354; Margit Eckholt, “Eine interkontinentale Kommentierung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Hermeneutische Fragen und ekklesiologische Herausforderungen”, *ZMR* 104 (2020) 68-83.

concert of the local churches of the South and the North Atlantic and European regions. In a joint working process, the aim is to break down the eurocentrism that still strongly characterised the debates at the Council and the process of drafting the documents to give space to the diversity of receptions and interpretations. The inspiring and orienting power of the Council is shown anew in view of the differentiation and polarisation in large cultural areas, both in theology and in church organisation.

Thus, the project of an intercontinental commentary on the texts of the Second Vatican Council realises the change of perspective of the Second Vatican Council, which is expressed in a special way in the pontificate of Pope Francis: that being 'world-Church' or 'global Church' involves a constant *ecclesio genesis*, is a dynamic, fragile and tense process, in which it is of importance to listen to the plurality of voices and to pay attention to the inconsistencies of the reception of the Council in the different world contexts - conditioned by political, social and cultural factors. The Council is the "end point" of the Latin Church as it was formed in the Gregorian Reform and then identified with the Roman Catholic Church. Precisely because the world horizon of the Council and the basic principle of pastorality are strengthened in Francis' pontificate, an intercontinental commentary on the texts relevant to the Magisterium and binding can help to accompany this upcoming institutional change of the Catholic Church. In this context, it is of central relevance to comment on the founding documents of the global Church in the polyphonic concert of the local Churches of the South and the North Atlantic and European regions. The pastoral hermeneutics of the Council has been unfolded in the various contexts in a "polyphonic" way; bringing these voices together in a "multi-handed" commentary is an important starting point for further reflections on the institutional change of a "world Church."

These are processes that have hardly been considered so far regarding dogmatic hermeneutics and the status of Magisterial texts. The intercontinental commentary can only prepare this new perspective for the perception of Church authority and for

the development of new approaches to decision-making processes that are sustainable for the global Church, but it will also be able to lay important and necessary foundations and make it clear that the Second Vatican Council cannot offer the answers to all new challenges. However, because it has initiated a more far-reaching process of transmission, it opens new paths in the sense of the Revelation Constitution *Dei Verbum*, which are to be explored in the “critical dialogue” of the diverse voices from the different world contexts. The central significance of the intercontinental project is that the voices from all the different contexts of the global Church are brought into a common conversation and critical dialogue, and thus the ecclesial, pastoral, and theological perspectives of the countries of the South and Southeast gain significance. With Pope Francis, the weights of “centre” and “periphery” have shifted; only on common paths, in discovering inequalities and uncovering asymmetries of power and exclusions do new horizons open for the Roman Catholic Church.

By commenting on the Council texts, the inspiring and orienting power of the Council can be shown anew in view of the differentiations and polarisations in the large cultural areas, in theology and in Church organisation. The Council took place in the transition to globalised industrialisation; today, completely new social relationships are crystallising for the Church in multi-optional contexts. What “being Church” means must be redefined by listening to the many voices from the contexts of the South. But it is also a matter of making visible the potential of the Council and the inspiring motivation that was released from the conciliar return to the Gospel; they are evident in the transformations that have occurred in the course of the reception process from 1965 onwards, taking into account the “signs of the times,” especially in the local churches in the Latin American, African and Asian countries. Therefore, the real potential of the Council can only be discovered by asking about the situation of the respective local Church and its specific forms of faith at the time of the Council and the contrast in the subsequent history of reception.

This will mean realising Church in a common world-Church and intercultural exchange, in action, discursively and openly in view of the manifold dynamics connected with the common work in the project. In this process, Church remains the common place for the basic determination of theological identity; but the respective new self-relativisation of Church will become clear through the orientation towards the Kingdom of God perspective. In this way, the guiding idea of the Second Vatican Council - the orientation of the Church to the Gospel of Jesus Christ - is continued and at the same time the critical perspective is taken up, as it is reflected today in postcolonial approaches: There is always the danger of "exclusion" in view of the perception of the other or others, but the Council texts have the potential, and a commentary on the world Church can work this out anew and make it clear, to deconstruct the power politics of the Church itself through their orientation towards the Kingdom of God perspective and the evangelising mission of the Church. In this way, they remain the central reference for decision-making processes and identity and actions in a global Church, they themselves provide criteria for dealing with power, with a view to drawing boundaries and the danger of wanting to distinguish one's own identity at the expense of others, whether internally with regard to the new actors - laity, women, indigenous peoples - or externally with regard to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. This then means a new perspective on what catholicity is; in a world church, according to Robert Schreiter, it is the "ability to hold different things together in a tension-filled way,"²¹ a dynamic concept oriented towards the Kingdom of God message, which allows catholicity to be understood as a concept of fulfilment and, in this sense, becoming, embedded in the power of God's Spirit. Catholicity is, according to Robert Schreiter, "an inclusive wholeness and fullness of faith along with intercultural exchange and intercultural communication."²²

²¹ Robert Schreiter, *Die neue Katholizität: Globalisierung und die Theologie*, Frankfurt am Main: IKO - Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1997, 218/219.

²² Schreiter, *Die neue Katholizität*, 225.

Such a common and intercontinental reading of the Council's texts is especially important in times when the reference to the Second Vatican Council as a binding and unifying Magisterial basis for the shape of being Church and the realisation of Christian practices in the many dialogues of the modern world, with other denominations and religions and in the different cultural contexts of the world marked by power asymmetries is not undisputed. In his work on the reception of the Council, the Italian church historian Massimo Faggioli, who works in the USA, points to the "anti-Vatican II movement," which is gaining strength in the USA and which clings to an institutional shape of the Church in a traditional sense.²³ Here, the global Church is not understood as the polyhedral togetherness of local churches realising themselves in the plurality of cultural and religious contexts, but - and this is exactly what becomes clear in some criticisms of the Synodal Path in Germany - as a "uniform" global Church that is still characterised by a rigid doctrinal system not embedded in historical and cultural processes. The dynamics of the practices of faith that are always in search of new forms of fit to overcome the rupture between Gospel and culture, between faith and life, to which Paul VI referred in *Evangelium nuntiandi* (1975), a concern that is a leitmotif for the pontificate of Pope Francis and has already been taken up in *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), is not seen here.²⁴

The intercontinental working groups of the Council project are concerned with giving space to the voices of the South. They illuminate the realisation of the world Church from a critical perspective and point out that, in view of the discussion about the normativity of the Council's texts, it must be worked out that these texts were created in the European context and against the background of European categories of thought. The perspectives

²³ See e.g., Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The battle for meaning*, New York: Paulist Press, 2012.

²⁴ Cf. Margit Eckholt, "An die Peripherie gehen (Papst Franziskus). Gegenwartskulturen als locus theologicus," in: Theodor Kettmann/Johannes Wübbe (eds.), *ZeitGeist?! Heutige Lebenswelten als heilsame Provokation für Theologie und Kirche. Festgabe für Bischof Dr. Franz-Josef Bode zum 25. Jahrestag seiner Bischofsweihe*, Regensburg: Pustet, 2016, 75-96.

of the South help to work out processes of inclusion and exclusion and borderlines between identities that no longer correspond to the dynamics and multiple identities of a world Church. The Council texts remain the central reference for decision-making processes and identity negotiations in a world Church. They themselves provide criteria for dealing with power, in regard to the drawing of boundaries and the danger of wanting to distinguish one's own identity at the expense of others, whether internally concerning the new actors - laity, women, indigenous peoples - or externally concerning the public, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue. What is important from the perspective of the reception processes in the countries of the South: Here, the new subjects and actors and their "voices" have gained authority in the "polyphonic" concert of the global Church, and it is precisely this that must also change the power structure of the deliberative and decision-making processes in the Roman Catholic Church in synodal ways. The Nigerian theologian Emmanuel-Mary Mbam had formulated on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Council: "Vatican II was fundamentally determined by the courage to think differently with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit... We need the same spirit of courage to think creatively and innovatively."²⁵ This is equally true today, 60 years after the Second Vatican Council, and so the intercontinental commentary on the Council's texts stimulates a new reflection on the institutional form of the Catholic Church, which promotes becoming a world Church through the reconnection to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the service of the Kingdom of God as a perspective of hope for a humanity that continues to grow together.

²⁵ Mbam, "Vatican II, 50 Years After," *APT* 6 (2016) 173-202, at 200.