

EDITORIAL ESSAY

Jesus and the World of Grace, 1968–2016: An Idiosyncratic Theological Memoir

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This article¹ offers an impressionistic look back over the past five decades, from 1968 to 2016, in Catholic theology in the United States. At the heart of this story are Christology, the world of grace, and their relationship. This memoir unfolds in three parts: “Running on Empty, 1968–1980”; “Jesus and the World of Grace, 1980–2016”; “Can Liberal Catholics Come Back?” It identifies the most neuralgic question left to us from this period: How is Christ related to the world of grace?

Keywords: Christology, world of grace, Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, seeking God in all things

IN a well-known passage in the introduction to *Gaudium et Spes*,² the Second Vatican Council reminds the church of its “duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in light of the gospel” (§4). The purpose of this is to “offer in a manner appropriate to each generation replies to the continual human questionings on the meaning of this life and the life to come and on how they are related.” In

¹ This article began as a presentation at the “Receiving Vatican II” section at the 2014 meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America in San Diego, June 2, 2014. I am grateful to Robert Imbelli and Christopher Ruddy for the invitation to participate in this section, and to my research assistants, Laura Eloë and Dara Delgado.

² Norman E. Tanner, SJ, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (London and Washington, DC: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:1070. Subsequent quotations from *Gaudium et Spes* are taken from this source.

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this passage, the church reads the signs of the times to help “continue the work of Christ who came into the world to give witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served” (§3).

Would-be sign readers need to recall Jesus’ rebuke to the Pharisees and Sadducees in Matthew 16:1–4. They could predict the weather from the signs in the sky, but they couldn’t see what God was doing in front of their noses. With all of this in mind, I offer in this article a particular, necessarily impressionistic theological reading of the posthistory of Vatican II. The main themes are Christology and the world of grace. My purpose is to stimulate reflection on what theologians might do to continue the work of Christ and appropriately address the questions of our time.

Running on Empty, 1968–1980

That *annus mirabilis* 1968 began with the Tet Offensive, a massive coordinated eruption of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops all over South Vietnam. Tet shocked the United States. It was eventually repelled, but it changed everything. In Tet’s aftermath, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara resigned, and President Lyndon Johnson announced in March that he would not seek reelection. Even as the Selective Service System continued to draft men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, the Vietnam War now appeared a hopeless stalemate. In the spring, assassins shot both Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. As Chicago police teargassed and beat young people in the streets, a deeply divided Democratic National Convention reflected a nation split by the war.

On July 25, 1968, Pope Paul VI put his signature to the encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*. By early August it had reached bookshops in Cleveland, where, having just finished my senior year at Loyola University (Chicago), I was working in a summer program on the east side of the city. *Mutatis mutandis*, as Tet was to the nation, so *Humanae Vitae* was to the church. Just as people expected the United States to win in Vietnam, so they expected Paul VI to follow the recommendation of the commission appointed during the council to study the question and soften or lift the ban on so-called artificial birth control. These were the days of the sexual revolution. Though Paul VI did not step down as McNamara and Johnson had, the encyclical’s aftermath fatally damaged the church’s authority to teach on matters sexual precisely at the time when its voice was most needed. The encyclical decisively darkened the mood of the post-Vatican II church and cemented growing divisions among the faithful.

Two months after *Humanae Vitae* appeared, I began theological studies at the Washington Theological Union, a few miles from The Catholic University of America, the academic home of Fr. Charles Curran and epicenter of the controversy over the encyclical in the United States. Fundamental moral theology was at risk of being consumed by the birth-control controversy. Bishops' conferences in Canada, Belgium, Scandinavia, and elsewhere assured Catholics that conscientious disagreement with the encyclical's teaching on birth control would not separate them from the church. Many of our professors signed letters of protest against the encyclical.³ "Dissent," something religious people used to engage in against states, entered the theological lexicon. A chronic adversarial posture toward authority, not unlike "sticking it to the Man," came to characterize much theological discourse. Soon the self-styled "orthodox" joined the "dissenters" in a decades-long Manichean moral theology dance of left and right. During that period, even future cardinal Avery Dulles could be a radical theological dissenter.⁴

The peculiar effervescence known as the 1960s coincided with the stormy implementation of the council after 1968. Also, this period marked the demographic point at which the grandchildren of Catholic immigrants became statistically indistinguishable from other Americans in terms of such indicators as income and education: the dissolution of the twentieth-century immigrant Catholic subculture was at hand. Though their Catholic subcultures were not immigrant-based, West German and Dutch Catholics had similar experiences. Karl Rahner, Hans Küng (who taught in Germany), and Edward Schillebeeckx, three of the most widely translated conciliar theologians, wrote at the end of what Joseph Komonchak has called "modern Roman Catholicism," in a context of postwar subcultural dissolution.⁵ This helps to explain their tremendous popularity in the United States.

The French theologians who had done so much to prepare the way for Vatican II tended to fade from the scene. They now appeared insufficiently engaged with "the world," too ecclesiocentric. The Third Republic in which they were educated and wrote seemed a much less inviting form of "the world" than postwar West Germany, the Netherlands, or the United States.

³ Richard A. McCormick, SJ, "'Humanae Vitae' 25 Years Later," *America*, July 17, 1993. McCormick concluded this article describing "a malaise of polarization" from which "only the Spirit can deliver us."

⁴ Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983). Chapter 36, "Radical Theological Dissent," treats Dulles together with McCormick and Curran.

⁵ Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Enlightenment and the Construction of Modern Roman Catholicism," *Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs Annual*, 1985, 31–89.

It is difficult to exaggerate the influence that the dissolution of the immigrant Catholic subculture had on the positive valence given to “the world” with which the council called the church to dialogue. I remember a strong prevailing sense that “the world” was somehow more real than our subcultural enclaves. One could see this attitude expressed by the American Catholic educators who authored the 1967 “Statement on the Nature of the Contemporary Catholic University” (known as the Land O’ Lakes Statement). They wanted Catholic universities to be “universities first”—real universities.⁶

As the 1970s began, the stock market took a big dip from which it did not really rebound until the Reagan years. This was called “stagflation.” In 1971, the Temptations pronounced the “world of today” (the *mundus huius temporis* of *Gaudium et Spes*) a “Ball of Confusion” (“that’s how the world is today. ... Eve of destruction, tax deduction ... suicide, too many bills, hippies moving to the hills, people all over the world are shouting end the war and the band played on”). That same year, Don McLean released the album “American Pie.” Atop the charts for a full month in 1972, the title song mourned “the day the music died” and closed with these dirge-like lines: “Not a word was spoken, the church bells all were broken. And the three men I admired most, the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, they caught the last train for the coast, the day the music died.”⁷ However one interprets these enigmatic lines in an even more enigmatic song, one thing is clear: it is a lament for something precious that was lost, a passage from lost hope to decadence and excess. “American Pie” signaled the end of the 1960s and McLean cast it in theological terms, indeed in Trinitarian terms. It was in 1973 that Karl Rahner began to speak of a “wintry season” in the church.⁸

In the wake of these several tumultuous years, the reelection of Richard Nixon, and in the midst of economic stagflation, I wrote “The Visions of Androphilos Theoreticus,” an apocalypse for renewal refugees. A brief selection captures the mood of those years, or at least my mood: “In the beginning was Vatican II, Teilhard and the *National Catholic Reporter*. Old friends ... ‘a

⁶ For the text of this statement, see <http://archives.nd.edu/episodes/visitors/lo/idea.htm>. For an analysis, see David J. O’Brien, “The Land O’ Lakes Statement,” *Boston College Magazine* (Winter 1998), <http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/mission/pdf1/cu7.pdf>.

⁷ Full lyrics for both songs at <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/temptations/ballofconfusion-thatswhattheworldistoday.html> (“Ball of Confusion”) and <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/donmclean/americanpie.html> (“American Pie”).

⁸ Karl Rahner, *Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*, ed. Paul Imhoff and Hubert Biallowons, translation ed. Harvey D. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 5.

time of innocence, a time of confidences.’ Now in a more pedestrian time, my ragged *Documents of Vatican II* can only serve as a sanctuary for pilgrim particles of dust. An Omega of dog-ears and dust for Rahner and Teilhard.”⁹

In the fall of 1973, I began doctoral studies at the University of St. Michael’s College in the University of Toronto. At the Union we had read a lot of Rahner, especially the essays on Christology in the early volumes of *Theological Investigations*. But Rahner’s classical theological bent—even inflected with German idealism—did not fit very well with what we were learning in our New Testament courses. Beginning in the 1970s, Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx undertook serious Christological projects based more on New Testament data about Jesus than on the dogmatic tradition. Graduate students of my generation read Küng and Schillebeeckx with enthusiasm, but generally not within the context of classes.

In a recent survey of the last fifty years of Christology, Gerald O’Collins wrote: “If asked to name *the* outstanding contribution to Christology from the 1970s, many would pick *Jesus the Christ* [1974, Eng. trans. 1976] by Walter Kasper.”¹⁰ Perhaps this is true in retrospect, and Kasper is the real keeper from that dismal decade. But in the actual 1970s, Hans Küng’s *On Being a Christian* (1974, Eng. trans. 1976) and Edward Schillebeeckx’s *Jesus* (1974, Eng. trans. 1979) and *Christ* (1977, Eng. trans. 1980) were immensely popular and sold better than Kasper. O’Collins’ survey omits Küng entirely and mentions Schillebeeckx only in passing to comment on his “somewhat ill-conceived use of scriptural material” in the *Jesus* book.¹¹

Despite O’Collins’ omission, Küng and Schillebeeckx, especially the former, represent a significant trend in Christology in the 1970s, a turn away from classical Christology to an almost exclusive reliance on history problematically conceived, and a certain impasse between exegesis as a historical discipline and theology. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza wondered whether Küng had simply reproduced liberal Protestant Christology: “Specifically, the question is whether he is closer to Albrecht Ritschl’s critique of metaphysics and to Harnack’s critique of the Hellenization implicit in Christian doctrine than he is to traditional Roman Catholic affirmations of the value of tradition, doctrinal development, and metaphysics.”¹² The Christologies of Küng and

⁹ “The Visions of Androphilos Theoreticus,” *U.S. Catholic* (January 1974): 34–37, at 34.

¹⁰ Gerald O’Collins, SJ, *Christology, Origins, Development, Debates* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

¹² James C. Livingston, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, with Sarah Coakley and James H. Evans, Jr., *Modern Christian Thought: The Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 252. Another way to put it might be that Küng had a bad case of the “Theodore Parker Blues.” Parker was the American transcendentalist who read David

Schillebeeckx were among the first postconciliar attempts to integrate the results of New Testament criticism into Christology. Schillebeeckx was by far the more sophisticated of the two, but even his project eventually gave way to newer and less skeptical approaches to the New Testament.

With heart-wrenching images of South Vietnamese clinging to the rope ladders hanging from the helicopters that flew the last Americans out of Saigon, the long Vietnam War finally ended in 1975. Even more heart-wrenching images of boat people soon followed. It was at this time, in 1975, that the sexual revolution finally came to the Catholic Theological Society of America in the form of Anthony Kosnik et al., *Research Report: CTSA Committee on the Study of Human Sexuality*.¹³ I remember reading this report in the cafeteria of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on the campus of The Catholic University of America. It represents a turning point in my life. I thought that it was just too crazy to be true; we had gone too far.

In October 1976, during my last year of course work, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) published *Inter Insigniores*, its *Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*. Twenty-three years before, in *Pacem in Terris*, during the council, Pope Saint John XXIII identified three characteristics of the present age.¹⁴ The second was a development in the roles of women. “Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity,” he wrote. “Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding, both in domestic and in public life, the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons” (PT §§39–42). *Gaudium et Spes*

Friedrich Strauss in German at Brook Farm and became one of the first theologians to be blown away by a historical critic. In a pathos-filled 1841 Unitarian ordination discourse, he pioneered a preemptive theological strategy that allowed historical critics to do their worst: “So if it could be proved—as it cannot—in opposition to the greatest amount of historical evidence on any similar point, that the Gospels were the fabrication of designing and artful men, that Jesus of Nazareth had never lived, still Christianity would stand firm, and fear no evil.” Theodore Parker, “A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity,” in *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology*, ed. Perry Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 259–83, at 272.

¹³ Anthony Kosnik, William Carroll, Agnes Cunningham, Ronald Modras, and James Schulte, *Human Sexuality: New Direction in American Catholic Thought; A Study Commissioned by the Catholic Theological Society of America* (New York, Paramus, and Toronto: Paulist Press, 1977). This study was “received” by the CTSA board in 1976. Chapter 4, “Toward a Theology of Human Sexuality,” is representative of the study’s tone and direction.

¹⁴ Pope John XXIII, Encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, April 11, 1963, w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html.

repeated this reading of the signs of the times (§9). In 1974, Baltimore's newly appointed archbishop, William D. Borders, had welcomed the Women's Ordination Conference to his see. Hopes were high.

Inter Insigniores actually began by quoting Pope John XXIII on developments in the roles of women. It concluded, however, that the church was not authorized to ordain women to the ministerial priesthood. As *Humanae Vitae* had eight years before, *Inter Insigniores* sharpened theological divisions. I cannot forget the anger and sadness of many of my classmates. This was a turning point for an entire generational cohort of theologians. With respect to what we have come to call gender, things would never be the same. Archbishop Borders served as bishop of Baltimore until 1989, but he was never made a cardinal. Later, the United States bishops decided not to pursue completing the "Women's Pastoral" they intended as a companion to their letters on peace (1983) and the economy (1986). By this time, Rosemary Ruether had already asked: "Can a Male Savior Save Women?"¹⁵

I studied graduate theology from 1968 to 1980. Often I wonder how I survived. If you think I exaggerate, try reading Avery Dulles' *The Survival of Dogma* (1971). In a personal and confidential conversation with me, one senior scholar described theology at this time as "fading into a creedless twilight." In retrospect, the 1970s appear as a theological deluge accompanied by disco music. In addition to disco, the decade did see the ascendance of Christine McVie and Stevie Nicks, as well as Bruce Springsteen and Jackson Browne. Browne's 1974 song "Before the Deluge" captured the end of the 1960s: "When the sand was gone and the time arrived, in the naked dawn only a few survived, and in trying to understand a thing so simple and so huge, believed that they were meant to live, after the deluge." In 1977 Browne released "Running on Empty," a signature for the 1970s.¹⁶ In 1979, the album of the same name received two Grammy nominations, one for Album of the Year and one for Pop Male Vocalist. The awards went instead to the soundtrack album for "Saturday Night Fever" and to Barry Manilow for "Copacabana."

Jesus and the World of Grace, 1980–2016 **Seeking God in All Things**

In Georges Bernanos' 1936 novel, *Diary of a Country Priest*, the *curé* of the title lies dying of stomach cancer. He finds himself in the home of one of

¹⁵ Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 116–38. The question is the title of chapter 5.

¹⁶ Full lyrics for both songs at <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jacksonbrowne/beforethedeluge.html> ("Before the Deluge") and <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jacksonbrowne/runningonempty.html> ("Running on Empty").

his former classmates who has left the priesthood and become a pharmacist. They call for a priest to administer last rites, but he does not arrive in time. The dying *curé* is left with only his former classmate's blessing. His last words are, in Pamela Morris' 1937 translation, "Does it matter? Grace is everywhere..."¹⁷ In French he says, "Tout est grâce." All is grace. All is grace. Bernanos appears to have borrowed the dying priest's words from Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. His novel was one of Dorothy Day's favorites. She quoted this line in a 1954 "On Pilgrimage" column. Jim Forest took it for the title of his 2011 biography of Day, *All Is Grace*.¹⁸

In 1980 Leo O'Donovan edited a much reprinted introduction to Karl Rahner's theology entitled *A World of Grace*.¹⁹ If there is one phrase that epitomizes the content and spirit of postconciliar Catholic theology in the United States, it is "world of grace." We are all convinced that we live in a world of grace, and woe to anyone who might even seem to deny the graced character of our world, the goodness of creation, or its "sacramentality."²⁰ These affirmations are most often associated with the name of Karl Rahner. The differences between "a world of grace" in 1980 and the "all is grace" of the Little Flower, Bernanos, and Day, with its dark aesthetic, probably have to do with what *world* came to mean for Catholics in the United States after Vatican II, how we understand the *mundus huius temporis* of *Gaudium et Spes*. The connections probably go back to Saint Ignatius Loyola and the "Principle and Foundation" of the *Spiritual Exercises* as mediated by modern French Jesuit spiritual writers and in our own day by Karl Rahner and others.

I propose that reading Catholic theology after the council is in good measure reading Henri de Lubac, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Bernard Lonergan, Jacques Dupuis, even Michel de Certeau, and many others, each in his own way, reading Saint Ignatius

¹⁷ Georges Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, trans. Pamela Morris (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 298. In the French text, the dying priest's last words are, "Qu'est-ce que cela fait? Tout est grâce."

¹⁸ Jim Forest, *All Is Grace: A Biography of Dorothy Day* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011). Forest uses the quotation from the 1954 "On Pilgrimage" column as the book's epigraph.

¹⁹ Leo J. O'Donovan, SJ, ed., *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

²⁰ The Catholic pathos of the world of grace comes through in Anthony J. Godzieba's critique of John Milbank. For Godzieba, Milbank's unforgivable sin is that his critiques of modernity fail to acknowledge sufficiently, and hence obscure, the graced character of our world: "In short, our world at the turn of the millennium is one which retains the capacity to feel the touch of incarnation and experience the possibility of resurrection, even after modernity." Anthony J. Godzieba, Review of J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* in *Augustinian Studies* 28, no. 2 (1997): 147–58, at 158.

on considering “how God dwells in creatures.”²¹ Here are a few examples of what it means to say that reading postconciliar theology is quite often reading Jesuits reading Saint Ignatius. I concluded a recent Christology course with Teilhard’s *The Divine Milieu*. Since the late 1960s, I have read this book many times. This time, for some reason, it dawned on me that, though it can surely stand on its own, *The Divine Milieu* is tremendously enriched if it is read with a copy of the *Spiritual Exercises* close by. Indeed, it can be read as a long meditation on the entire “Principle and Foundation,” attachment and detachment, in an evolutionary understanding of created things, the “all things” that recur so often in the New Testament Christological hymns. Balthasar’s seemingly outrageous claims about hell, the “effigies,” and even Holy Saturday, look different in light of the Fifth Exercise of the First Week, the “meditation on hell.” A couple of years ago, I taught Lonergan’s *Grace and Freedom*. Students pressed me on Lonergan’s seeming soft-pedaling of Aquinas on predestination. It occurred to me that Ignatius’ “Rules for Thinking with the Church” having to do with predestination, faith, and free will (15–17) framed Lonergan’s treatment as well as Molina’s. And even in Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*, one hears post-1968 echoes of early modern Jesuit masters such as Jean-Pierre de Caussade and Louis Lallement. Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’* (2015) also belongs in this company. Maybe all this is obvious to Jesuit theologians, and they are just modest. I am not a Jesuit, and, if it is safe to use the word, I find it “illuminating.”²²

In his *Constitutions*, Saint Ignatius exhorts Jesuits “to seek God our Lord in all things.”²³ The “Principle and Foundation” of the *Spiritual Exercises* explains: “Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of this to save their souls. The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in working toward the end for which they are created.”²⁴ The theme of “seeking God

²¹ Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss, SJ, with the collaboration of Parmananda R. Divarkar, SJ, Edward J. Malatesta, SJ, and Martin Palmer, SJ, preface by John W. Padberg, SJ (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), 177.

²² See Avery Dulles, SJ, “Jesuits and Theology: Yesterday and Today,” *Theological Studies* 52 (1991): 524–38, esp. 532–36, on “the age of Vatican II.” See also Dulles’ preface to Louis J. Puhl, SJ’s edition of *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), xiii–xxiii; and Christopher Ruddy, “The Ignatian Matrix of Henri de Lubac’s Thought on Temptation, Ascesis, and the *Homo Ecclesiasticus*,” *Heythrop Journal*, forthcoming.

²³ *Constitutions*, chap. 1, 26, in *Spiritual Exercises*, 292.

²⁴ The “Principle and Foundation” continues: “From this it follows that I should use these things to the extent that they help me toward my end, and rid myself of them to the

in all things” is also clear in the second and third points of the fourth week’s “Contemplation to Attain Divine Love.”²⁵ A good part of *The Spiritual Exercises* is taken up with meditations on the mysteries of Jesus’ life. Hugo Rahner’s *Ignatius the Theologian* includes a chapter of more than seventy pages on the Christology of the *Spiritual Exercises*.²⁶ Saint Ignatius knew that created things could easily lead us away from the God we sought in them. The mysteries of Jesus’ life offer a pattern and narrative guide for the search for God in all things. Pope Francis’ seeming habitual dwelling in the narratives of Jesus’ life illustrates how this might work in a person’s life. It is precisely the relation of Jesus to our seeking God in what we have come to call the world of grace that has become a live question in the years after the council.

Not all theologians in the United States are Jesuits. There are no women Jesuits. But Jesuits have had a major influence on postconciliar theology. For the sake of space, I will focus briefly on Karl Rahner as emblematic for much postconciliar theology. His American reception illustrates what is at stake in questions about the relationship of Jesus to our graced world. Is the world graced because of Christ? Is Jesus Christ the “prime analogate” for the world of grace?²⁷ In the compelling final section of *Spirit in the World* (1939), which was not translated into English until after the council, Rahner bade his readers look for God in earthly times and places: “[God’s] word must encounter us where we already and always are, in an earthly place, at an earthly hour.”²⁸ Later essays, such as “The Experience of God

extent that they hinder me.” The next paragraph is much closer to the aesthetic shared by the Little Flower, Bernanos, and Day than to our own ethos: “To do this, I must make myself indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to my freedom of will and not forbidden. Consequently, on my own part I ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all other matters. I ought to desire and elect only the thing which is more conducive to the end for which I am created” *Spiritual Exercises*, 130.

²⁵ *Spiritual Exercises*, 177.

²⁶ Hugo Rahner, SJ, *Ignatius the Theologian*, trans. Michael Barry (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 53–135.

²⁷ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 2, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 61–62. To say that Christ is the prime analogate for the world of grace means that grace takes its meaning from Christ. It is to take very seriously New Testament texts, such as John’s Prologue, Colossians 1:1–20, Philippians 2:5–11, and Ephesians 1, for example, that associate Christ with creation, and, to have a sense, like de Lubac’s, of the simultaneity of the gifts of creation and redemption.

²⁸ Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych, SJ (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 408.

Today,” epitomize this approach and strike a high Christological note. Christianity not only has the task of pointing “ever anew to this basic experience of God,” but Christianity precisely is this experience “in its pure form and as related to Jesus Christ as its seal of authenticity.”²⁹ Rahner’s is a Johannine, Logos Christology of the Incarnation, which makes possible such notions as “anonymous Christians,” the “experience of God,” and an understanding of other religious traditions much like that of *Nostra Aetate*.

In the days of and after the council, when Rahner’s works crossed the Atlantic in translation, it did not take long, especially after the Christological developments of the 1970s, for the Christological/incarnational basis to be elided from his anthropological affirmations about human transcendence and the “world of grace.” In a hyperpluralistic context, the popular understanding of Rahner was too often that the only difference between Christians and non-Christians was one of self-understanding. I have heard preachers proclaim at liturgy that nothing happens in the church and the sacraments that does not happen in the world all the time: the sacraments and the church just symbolize it.

When one reads literature on the sacraments from the 1970s and early 1980s, it is hard to avoid the impression that sacraments are more about us than about Jesus. As “festive action[s] in which Christians assemble to celebrate their lived experience and to call to heart their common story,” they do not really do anything.³⁰ Rahner’s rich theology of the symbol is lost. To paraphrase Flannery O’Connor on the Eucharist, if Christ is just a symbol, then the hell with him! Jesus Christ is male and quite particular—he is neither Krishna nor the Buddha. In the midst of gender strife and cultural and religious pluralism, Jesus can be a bit of an embarrassment. That Rahner thought we experienced God in the world because of Christ the Logos can seem quaintly preconciliar.

Nature and Grace Again

What, then, is the relation of Jesus Christ to the world of grace, the sacramental world, and the good creation we all think we inhabit? This is a question about God and the world, nature and grace. Questions about nature and

²⁹ Karl Rahner, “The Experience of God Today,” in *Theological Investigations* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1974), 11:149–65, at 164–65.

³⁰ Tad Guzie, SJ, *The Book of Sacramental Basics* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 53. See also the three-page conclusion to Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1982), 527–29.

grace tended to be at the heart of Catholic theology in the first half of the twentieth century as Jesuit theologians seeking God in all things—perhaps to separate Saint Ignatius from his fellow Spaniard Francisco Suarez or Dominican theologians seeking to articulate the goodness of creation—tried to overcome the dualism of modern neo-Scholastic theology. They succeeded, it seems, though Christ tended to remain in the background, more assumed than integral in these arguments. In his 1989 *Mémoire*, de Lubac reflected back on *Surnaturel* (1946) as lacking in “consideration of historic revelation or of creation in Christ.”³¹

In the United States after the council, the great postwar cultural shifts included not only the dissolution of the immigrant Catholic subculture, but also the end of mainline Protestant cultural hegemony. Stanley Hauerwas speaks of this period as *After Christendom*.³² H. Richard Niebuhr saw it coming as early as 1941, and distinguished “internal and external history” or “the duality of the history in which there is revelation and of the history in which there is none.” We can speak of revelation, he thought, “only in connection with our own history without affirming or denying its reality in the history of other communities.”³³

For most of their history in the United States, Catholics have struggled for cultural legitimacy and access. With the dissolution of the subculture, they rushed to map themselves onto the Protestant story in the United States and the two divergent strategies for dealing with the “end of Christendom,” that is, the end of their Catholic subculture. Niebuhr’s student James M. Gustafson, who taught both Hauerwas at Yale and many Catholics at Chicago, has been a key figure in this history. While Gustafson focused on Niebuhr’s “external history” at Chicago, Hauerwas and the postliberals focused on Niebuhr’s “internal history.” In terms of Niebuhr’s later (1951) Christ and culture typology, most Catholics are drawn to Christ Transformer of Culture, to “public theology,” as Martin Marty articulated it

³¹ Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances That Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press/Communio Books, 1993), 198–200, at 199.

³² Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (1991; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999).

³³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (1941; New York: Macmillan, 1960), 44–54, selections therefrom as reprinted in Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997), 21–44; citations at 40. I am grateful to David McCarthy for bringing Niebuhr’s chapter 2 to my attention, especially the sections “History as Lived and as Seen” and “Relations of Internal and External History.” Niebuhr’s distinction between internal and external history bears the seeds of the Yale-Chicago split, the aftereffects of which, in my opinion, continue to shape theology in the United States.

in the 1970s, rather than to Christ against Culture, an emphasis on the integrity of the church and its counterwitness in society.

But neither Niebuhr's culture nor the society to which postliberals hope to witness has the theological power or analogical valence to deliver the "world of grace" that Catholics want. It is hard to explain the gift of grace, why Christ is important, without some minimal, even if simultaneous, logically prior gift against which grace and Christ appear. In Catholic discourse, this has tended to be called "nature" and, without requiring a separate metaphysical realm, it grants to "the world" what *Gaudium et Spes* calls the *iusta autonomia* (§36) of "earthly realities" and the *legitimam autonomiam* (§59) "of human culture and especially of the sciences." Thus, if questions of nature and grace were repressed in the decades after the council, they are now back with a vengeance, and de Lubac appears beset from both left and right.³⁴

Not long after the council, de Lubac famously resigned from the editorial board of *Concilium* and soon became involved with Balthasar, Ratzinger, and others in the beginnings of *Communio*. He turned "conservative," it is often said. But de Lubac had substantive theological concerns having to do with Christ's relationship to the "world of grace." He had worked on Schema 13, which became *Gaudium et Spes*. His hand is evident in paragraphs 18 to 22, but especially in this oft-cited passage: "For Adam, the first human being, was a representation of the future (*figura futuri*), namely of Christ the Lord. It is Christ, the last Adam, who fully discloses humankind to itself and unfolds its noble calling by revealing the Mystery of the Father and the Father's love" (§22). De Lubac came to think that the Christological anthropology of the first part of *Gaudium et Spes* was being separated from the concerns of part 2 about the urgent problems of the "world." He feared that the schema was being taken as a failure of nerve, "the expression of an inferiority complex with respect to the 'world.'" The separation between faith and life in the world that he had long struggled to overcome was being reenacted in a new way within the church itself. The world seemed more real than the church.³⁵

By 1969, de Lubac was speaking of the "love of Jesus Christ," the first condition for righting the church's course, as "under attack," dismissed as "sentimental" and "passé." The real "Jesus of history" was not available to us, and vast differences of time and culture separate us from the faith of the ancient

³⁴ For an illuminating reframing of this wide-ranging discussion, see David Grumett, "De Lubac, Grace, and the Pure Nature Debate," *Modern Theology* 31, no. 1 (January 2015): 123–46.

³⁵ William L. Portier, "What Kind of a World of Grace? De Lubac and the Council's Christological Center," *Communio* 39, nos. 1–2 (Spring-Summer 2012): 136–51, at 140–42.

church.³⁶ It would be easy to dismiss these concerns as the exaggerations of a bitterly disappointed old man. But de Lubac never lost hope in the council and never missed an opportunity to remind people that the implementation of Trent in France had taken a century. His *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (1980), in an engagement with Schillebeeckx on the church as “sacrament of the world,” offered a substantive (more than forty pages) theological account of the displacement of Christ he had earlier decried. The arguments are textual and too detailed to recount here. At issue is the relationship of Christ to the “world of grace.” Is Christ indeed the “prime analogate,” as it were, for a sacramental or incarnational understanding of the world as graced? In Susan Wood’s summary, at issue between de Lubac and Schillebeeckx is how grace is present in the world: “within the temporal order by creation or through the Christ event mediated through the church sacramentally.”³⁷

This is the most neuralgic question left to us from the council. How is Christ related to the world of grace? Can we really seek God in all things without what Hugo Rahner calls “the Christology of the *Spiritual Exercises*”?³⁸ In the divine economy, can we have a world of grace without Christ? A sharp distinction between the orders of creation and redemption would only return us to the dualism of modern theology and convey a false sense of temporal sequence, whereas the New Testament texts about the cosmic Christ and his role in creation suggest, from the divine perspective insofar as we can comprehend it, a mysterious simultaneity such as de Lubac proposes in *The Mystery of the Supernatural*.³⁹ There is a strong strand of postconciliar Christology that would leave these texts behind as poetic pieces of mythology mistakenly Hellenized in the early centuries.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 142 n. 19.

³⁷ Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace*, trans. Brother Richard Arnandez, FSC (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), Appendix B, “The Sacrament of the World?,” 191–234. Wood’s summary appears in her entry on de Lubac in Patrick W. Carey and Joseph T. Lienhard, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 332–33. Wood continues: “The terms of the conversation had shifted. Schillebeeckx spoke in terms of the relationship between the world and the eschatological Kingdom while de Lubac spoke of the relationship between nature and the supernatural. This shifted the categories from the relationship between nature and grace to the relationship between grace and history. If Schillebeeckx was a fair representative, the fundamental difference between de Lubac and his later interlocutors lies in their theologies of history and the necessity of Christ and the church to mediate grace.”

³⁸ See Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian*, chap. 3.

³⁹ Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, intro. David L. Schindler (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1988), chap. 5, at 79–80.

From Don Cupitt and *The Myth of God Incarnate* in the 1970s to Bart Ehrman's most recent work, this liberal Protestant narrative, with its Catholic variants, leads inexorably away from historic Christianity.⁴⁰ If it were true, we would be bound to follow it, but, over the past 150 years, this path has proved itself not only fraught with unexamined philosophical pre-suppositions, but also with tragic misunderstandings of Judaism and its various forms.

Along with the kenosis hymn in Philippians 2, the Prologue of John is at the heart of the church's Christology. Developments in biblical studies and scholarship on the literature of the Judaisms of the Second Temple period show the deep roots of texts such as John 1 in the patterns of thought and devotion of Second Temple Judaism. They show as well the deep resonances of Jewish mysticisms and practices with the liturgy and theology of Eastern Christians who first articulated the church's Christology and with their Orthodox descendants. Daniel Boyarin reads the Prologue as a midrash on Genesis 1. Alan Segal, Gilles Quispel, and Jarl Fossum have demonstrated the pervasiveness of Second Temple Jewish preoccupation with manifestations of the Divine Glory (*kavôd, doxa*) and/or the hypostasized Name of God.⁴¹ These same historians have shown that the Prologue and the kenosis hymn, and other New Testament examples of exalted Christology, as well as the ancient church's practices of devotion to Christ-as-Glory or as-Name-of-God are examples of these Jewish phenomena. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Western developments such as liberal Protestant interpretations of Jesus needlessly separate Moses from the prophets and Jesus from Judaism.

A strong contextual reading of the New Testament hymns to Christ connecting him to creation and the cosmos brings together the orders of creation and redemption, relating creation to the Christ event in its fullness. This is the approach we find in part 1 of *Gaudium et Spes* (§§11–45). The introduction concludes by affirming Christ as “the key and the focus and culmination of

⁴⁰ See John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977); Michael Goulder, ed., *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmanns, 1979); Bart D. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2014).

⁴¹ See, for example, Daniel Boyarin, “The Gospel of *Memra*: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue of John,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 3 (July 2001): 243–84; Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (2002; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012). I am grateful to my colleagues Silviu Bunta, Michael Cox, and especially Ethan Smith, for introducing me to the literature of what is sometimes called the “New History of Religions School.” My familiarity with it remains rudimentary.

all human history.” It continues: “It is accordingly in the light of Christ, who is the image of the invisible God and the first-born of all creation, that the council proposes to elucidate the mystery of humankind, and, in addressing all people, to contribute to discovering a solution to the outstanding questions of our day” (§10).⁴² This approach to the role of Christ in the world of grace needs to be more rigorously developed and more clearly related to questions about nature and grace and analogy central to the Catholic theological tradition.⁴³

Can Liberal Catholics Come Back? For and Against Pope Saint John Paul II

Karol Wojtyła was elected pope at the end of the decade of disco and the *Research Report: CTSA Committee on the Study of Human Sexuality*. He inherited a church in turmoil and took strong measures to redraw its boundaries. On December 18, 1979, Hans Küng became the first of many theologians to feel the force of the new papacy. Küng had denied the defined dogma of papal infallibility, and a central part of his argument had to do with *Humanae Vitae*. According to the terms of its agreement with the German government, the Vatican withdrew Küng’s “canonical mission” to teach on the Catholic faculty at Tübingen. He was no longer considered a “Catholic theologian.”

Pope Saint John Paul II staked his papacy on the defense of *Humanae Vitae* and *Inter Insigniores*. In the face of doubts about the binding character of the latter, he issued *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* in 1994. It offered a supplementary set of arguments for the conclusion that the church is not authorized to ordain women and taught that this conclusion was to be “definitively held” by all the faithful. As Pope Francis correctly observed shortly after his election, its teaching is a “definitive formula.” Precisely what theological note 1950s manualist Ludwig Ott might have assigned to it, however, is not clear.

By the end of the 1970s, gender was a vexed question, especially in the industrial West. John Paul II used his Wednesday audiences to develop an innovative form of nuptial theology and a heavily gendered anthropology that has come to be called the “theology of the body.” Perhaps realizing just how innovative it was, and the extent to which it was based on his opinions

⁴² As a young *peritus*, Joseph Ratzinger worked extensively on the revisions that resulted in para. 10. See Jared Wicks, SJ, “Six Texts by Prof. Joseph Ratzinger as *peritus* before and during Vatican Council II,” *Gregorianum* 89, no. 2 (2008): 233–311, at 246–49; 291–93; 309–10.

⁴³ For such an attempt, see D. C. Schindler, “‘Ever Ancient, Ever New’: Jesus Christ as the Concrete Analogy of Being,” *Communio* 39, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Summer 2012): 33–48; and at length in Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013).

as a private theologian, he never enshrined the “theology of the body” in a magisterial document.⁴⁴ But, beginning with his lengthy apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), on the role of the Christian family in the modern world, he gave his most serious attention to questions of marriage and family. His magisterial teaching together with instructions from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and the “theology of the body,” offer a picture of marriage in terms of total self-gift that is both rigorous and beautiful in its idealization of family life.

With the collapse of the subcultures that supported it, the massively objective edifice of post-Tridentine moral theology could not stand. Subjective aspects such as conscience and casuistry that allowed penitents and confessors to navigate this moral universe went untethered. Pope Saint John Paul II responded to this situation on two fronts. First, he shrank ecclesial space to make sure that “the church” spoke with a single voice. Beginning with Küng, he cracked down on theologians, greatly limiting the scope of theological debate. In a series of moves over two decades, he successfully challenged the status and teaching authority of episcopal conferences, such as the ones that had dissented from *Humanae Vitae*, took control of episcopal synods, and generally circumscribed the council’s teaching on episcopal collegiality.

Second, in the context of *Humanae Vitae* and the subsequent controversy over it, John Paul II changed the face of moral theology as I had learned it a mere decade before his election. If he did not kill casuistry with such interventions as *Veritatis Splendor* (1994), he did try to limit the scope of a moral subject’s conscientious discretion in many areas. His concern flowed from an integral theology of nature and grace that refused simply to scatter elements of Jesus’ gospel over a freestanding natural law ethic. In *Fides et Ratio* (1998), he brilliantly applied it to the relationship of faith and reason, philosophy and theology. In other writings, he applied it to such fields of moral inquiry as war and capital punishment, the principle of double effect, the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means in health care, end-of-life issues such as hydration and feeding, and most strongly the question of abortion. *Evangelium Vitae* (1996) revealed marriage and abortion as social questions and stands as the most eloquent expression of his moral teaching. Despite the compelling theology of nature and grace on which this body of teaching is based, it is hard to come away from a survey of it without the impression

⁴⁴ For a sustained critique of “nuptial mysticism” emphasizing its innovative character, see Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neo-Scholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (London: Blackwell, 2006). See also William L. Portier, “Thomist Resurgence: A Review Essay on *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* by Fergus Kerr,” *Communio* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 494–504.

that it is characterized by a near-Kantian rigor that is most difficult to sustain both personally and intellectually. The difficulty in transposing an integral theology of nature and grace directly onto political and moral life suggests that a return of casuistry could be salutary.⁴⁵ Casuistry might work differently in such a theology of nature and grace than it did in the dualism of modern theology.

We have lived to see Gustavo Gutierrez coauthor a book with Cardinal Gerhard Müller, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It was not always so. The two CDF Instructions of 1984 and 1986 authoritatively expressed Pope John Paul II's suspicion that liberation theology was too heavily influenced by the Marxism against which he struggled all his life in Poland. Nevertheless, with his three social encyclicals, *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), and *Centesimus Annus* (1991), he developed the tradition of Catholic social thought in powerful ways, emphasizing solidarity and structural or social sin. *Centesimus Annus* represents the most forceful denunciation of war ever to come from the papal magisterium. As with Catholic social teaching in general, however, these encyclicals were not always well received in the West. Fr. Richard Neuhaus and other neocons, for example, co-opted these documents for Wall Street, forcing them to fit their political and cultural narratives.⁴⁶

Pope John Paul II was a rock star. Bob Dylan performed for him in Bologna. Bono once gave him a pair of his signature sunglasses. This brief survey hardly does justice to the accomplishments of a twenty-five-year papacy. There is much more to say about John Paul II, not all of it complimentary. Many questioned his choice of bishops, his impact on the reception of the council's teaching on episcopal collegiality, not to mention his innovative constriction of moral space. Most weighty, perhaps, is the question of whether it was wise to stake so much of the name *Catholic* on opposition to women's ordination and artificial birth control. Nevertheless, it would be hard to deny that during his long papacy he restored to the church its Christological center. In the days after the council, it was not always clear that *Lumen Gentium* and *Dei Verbum* referred to Christ. Christ is the light of nations and the Word of God. In the opening line of *Redemptor Hominis*, his first encyclical, Pope Saint John Paul II echoed *Gaudium et Spes*, a text on which he had worked

⁴⁵ See, for example, M. Cathleen Kaveny, "Retrieving and Reframing Catholic Casuistry," in *The Crisis of Authority in Catholic Modernity*, ed. Michael J. Lacey and Francis Oakley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 225–58; *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (Summer 2015); the entire issue, edited by John Zeis, is devoted to revisiting the principle of double effect.

⁴⁶ I have always wondered whether the pope could read English well enough to know what the neocons had done with his writings.

extensively, when he called Christ “the center of the universe and of history.”⁴⁷ John Paul II insisted on a Christological interpretation of the council centered on the anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes* §22: “In fact, it is only in the mystery of the Word incarnate that light is shed on the mystery of humankind.” In my judgment, this was his most important contribution to the church, and it is one for which I will always be grateful.

The Difference Pope Francis Makes

Pope Francis shares this Christological reading of the council. As Eamon Duffy has pointed out, Francis is “the first pope to have been ordained after the Second Vatican Council: his commitment to conciliar values is instinctive, strong, and different in kind from that of either of his immediate predecessors.”⁴⁸ Pope Benedict XVI left his encyclical on faith, *Lumen Fidei*, the third in his trilogy on the theological virtues, to Pope Francis to complete.⁴⁹ Its introduction, clearly written by Francis, speaks of Vatican II as “a council on faith inasmuch as it asked us to restore the primacy of God in Christ to the center of our lives” (LF §6). Francis’ hand is also evident in the encyclical’s final two chapters, where quotations from the council’s documents replace the many quotations from Saint Augustine in chapters 1 and 2.⁵⁰ “Christ, Christ is the center,” Francis told the cardinals who had just elected him. “Christ is the fundamental point of reference, the heart of the Church. Without him, Peter and the Church would not exist.”⁵¹ He canonized Pope John XXIII. He also canonized Pope John Paul II. As we know from history, councils take time to percolate, to be received and fully integrated into the life of the church.

With his well-timed talks on topics dear to the pope’s heart, and especially his 2014 books *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel* and *The Gospel of the Family*

⁴⁷ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, March 4, 1979, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html, §1.

⁴⁸ Eamon Duffy, “Who Is the Pope?” in *The New York Review of Books*, February 19, 2015, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/02/19/who-is-pope-francis/>.

⁴⁹ Pope Francis, Encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_encyclica-lumen-fidei.html.

⁵⁰ For a more complete analysis of *Lumen Fidei*, see William L. Portier, “The First Encyclical of Francis?,” *Commonweal*, July 22, 2013, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/first-encyclical-francis>.

⁵¹ Pope Francis, “Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis to Representatives of the Communications Media,” March 16, 2013, [par. 4], http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130316_rappresentanti-media.html.

(originally a presynodal address to the consistory of cardinals), Cardinal Walter Kasper has become Pope Francis' theological stalking horse. Within weeks of Pope Francis' 2013 election, Kasper announced that we had entered a new phase in the reception of Vatican II. He returned to Rahner's 1973 image and described the church of which Francis was now the chief pastor as having "a wintry look," showing "clear signs of crisis." From the beginning, Kasper wrote, Francis "has given what I would call his prophetic interpretation of the council, and has inaugurated a new phase in its reception. He has changed the agenda: at the top are the problems of the Southern hemisphere."⁵²

Not without conflict, John Paul II and his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, accomplished a course correction in the church made necessary by the often uncontrollable effervescence and excess of the iconoclastic period between 1968 and 1980. For many, this course correction was too extreme and lasted too long. Nevertheless, their hard-won and learned Christocentrism remains in place. Their redrawing of contested boundaries, however, has made it possible for the advent of Pope Francis. Neither an American culture warrior nor an advocate of a smaller, purer church, he does not propose a circle-your-wagons, draw-tight-the-boundaries Christocentrism. It is rather a no-fear Christocentrism that comes with its palms wide open. His Christ-like openness reminds us of the pope who called the council. He unapologetically continues the agenda of a Latin American theology that combines a preferential option for the poor with a deep appreciation for the religion of the people. His reform of the Roman Curia, his reexamination of episcopal collegiality and the appointment of bishops, his expansion of moral space, all of this pushes the institutional and theological boundaries drawn by his predecessors while continuing on the Christological course they set.

In the context of mercy, Pope Francis talked much of "matrimonial ministry," especially the question of the Eucharist for the divorced and remarried. The Eucharist, he wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."⁵³ Anticipating the 2015 synod on marriage and the family, he called for a preliminary synod in 2014. In preparation for it, he undertook an unprecedented consultation of the faithful, made possible by the Internet. Sometimes in spite of the bishops, he consulted the *sensus fidei* he talks about in *Evangelii Gaudium*,

⁵² See John Thavis' April 11, 2013, post on his blog, *Decoding the Vatican*, at <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/senior-cardinal-says-francis-will-bring-new-life-vatican-ii>.

⁵³ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, §47, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

and about which the International Theological Commission subsequently wrote.

In a recovery of Vatican II's approach to collegiality and the role of the *sensus fidei*, ecclesial space expanded. Before the preliminary synod, Francis told the bishops: "Let no one say 'I cannot say this.'" They were not to remain silent out of deference to him, "perhaps believing that the Pope might think something else."⁵⁴ They argued and disagreed. Married couples were present and spoke. Economic analysis played a central role in the synod's discussions of issues surrounding the family, such as cohabitation, same sex unions with adopted children, single-parent families, polygamy, and so on.

In his closing speech, Francis reminded the bishops that they had embarked on a journey of "synodality" that would continue in October 2015. "I would be very worried and saddened," he said, "if all were in a state of agreement, or silent in a false and quietist peace."⁵⁵

Despite unsuccessful attempts by some participants to shut debate down, discussion continued right up through the synod of 2015. On April 8, 2016, Pope Francis published his postsynodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.⁵⁶ Offering no generalized solutions to vexed questions debated during the preceding year, such as communion for the divorced and remarried, it disappointed people on all sides. Instead Francis urged "a healthy dose of self-criticism" for "excessive idealization" that at times proposes "a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families" (AL §36). Whatever its failings, *Amoris Laetitia* succeeds in clearing a space for pastoral discernment (§6) that lies between a moral discourse that theorizes on the basis of exceptions to general norms and one that multiplies exception-less norms, or, as Francis puts it, "an attitude that would solve everything by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations" (§2). For Francis general principles need to be inculcated,

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, Greeting of Pope Francis to the Synod Fathers During the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 6, 2014, [par. 8], http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141006_padri-sinodali.html.

⁵⁵ "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops," October 18, 2014, [par. 13], http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141018_conclusionone-sinodo-dei-vescovi.html.

⁵⁶ Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, March 19, 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html.

and “not all discussions of doctrinal, moral, or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium” (§3).

There is much to say about *Amoris Laetitia*, and, as Pope Francis intends, the discussions it has begun will no doubt continue.⁵⁷ One thing seems clear. Especially in its application of the figure of Christ and the church in Ephesians 5 to married couples (§122), *Amoris Laetitia* is to John Paul’s theology of the body as *Fides et Ratio* (1998) was to Thomism. It makes clear that a respected theological school is not to be identified with the teaching of the church. Those seeking a pastoral alternative to theology of the body popularizer Christopher West need look no further than sections such as chapter 4 and the conclusion.⁵⁸

Francis has been accused of relativism and of writing something that would make Jesus and the Blessed Mother weep. A quick comparison with chapter 4 of *Human Sexuality*, however, confirms that *Amoris Laetitia* has not returned to the 1970s. It does clear space for a possible return to casuistry, but not to the kind of untethered moral calculus often practiced at that time. *Amoris Laetitia* is Christ-centered rather than dualistic. The narrative logic of Jesus in the Gospels clearly controls its return to cases. Rather than worrying about abstractions such as relativism, we might allow figures such as the Pharisee at prayer (Luke 18:9–14) and the elder brother (Luke 15:11–32) to convict us. Most of all, we need to take seriously Francis’ repeated claim that time is greater than space, and consider that following Jesus’ admonition to “go and sin no more” might be part of a process of continuing conversion.

If anyone is about a Christ-centered seeking for God in all things, it is this Jesuit pope, who began his encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si’)* with Saint Francis’ “Canticle of the Creatures.”⁵⁹ Clinging mightily to the Christological center is more important than policing the boundaries of Christ’s body. Maintaining the church’s internal life is subordinate to its mission and witness in the world. If *Amoris Laetitia* pertains more to the former, *Laudato Si’* is more about the latter. Its global perspective reaches far beyond dominant economic and political powers such as the United States, China, and the European Union. In Argentina, “peripheries” are the places beyond urban centers where poorer people live. As the pope of the peripheries, Francis does not approach questions such as the family or the

⁵⁷ On reading *Amoris Laetitia*, see the symposium entitled “A Balancing Act,” in *Commonweal*, May 20, 2016, 13–21.

⁵⁸ For information about West’s popular approach to the theology of the body, see his website at <http://corproject.com/about-christopher-west/>.

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, Encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si’)*, May 24, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

environment exclusively, or even primarily, in terms dominant in Washington, Beijing, Bonn, or even Rome. Rather, he is interested in how these issues look from the Global South. Nowhere is this clearer than in the integral ecology he proposes in *Laudato Si'*.

For the small percentage of the world's Catholics who live in the United States, part of the difference Pope Francis makes is this: with a strong Christological center to work from and the boundaries marked out by his two predecessors in place to push against, as liberals are wont to do, Francis' expansion of ecclesial and moral space makes it possible to be a liberal Catholic once again. Let us hope that, rather than firing all their guns at once and exploding into space, as they often did in the days of disco, liberal Catholics might grasp this moment.

Some issues internal to the church, such as the role of women, the protection of children, and the real inclusion of those who are not white, cannot be ignored and must continue to be vigilantly and vigorously pursued in the church. During his days in the United States in September 2015, however, Pope Francis, by both his words and his deeds, spoke strongly for a wider inclusion. With his consistent use of "America" in the singular to name what "Americans" think of as two continents, his own self-presentation as an immigrant, and his emphasis on immigration at every stop along his way, he seemed to envision himself as representing the Global South in a micro South-North encounter. In the name of Jesus and the prophets, he challenged our narrow "Americanism," asking us to expand both our church and our country to welcome the immigrant and the stranger. May we respond with grace in Christ for the good of both church and world!