

“Vatican II: Preparing the Catholic Church for Dialogue  
Reflections Approaching the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Council”

National Workshop on Christian Unity  
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John Borelli  
Georgetown University

Paulist Father Thomas Stransky recently told me how surprised he was when Pope John XXIII, after the liturgy on Pentecost Sunday in 1960 at St. Peter’s Basilica, announced that among the preparatory bodies for the upcoming council there would be a Secretariat for Christian Unity.<sup>1</sup> He was present, visiting Rome on class break from the University of Münster and had no inkling of an idea that, before summer’s end, he would be among the four who would constitute the Secretariat’s initial staff.<sup>2</sup>

Tom Stransky was a regular speaker/participant at this National Workshop on Christian Unity in its early years until in the mid-1980s when he began serving as Rector of Tantur Ecumenical Study Center on the road to Bethlehem from Jerusalem. In fact, Fr. Stransky gave the keynote address at the first National Workshop on Christian Unity, an almost entirely Catholic meeting held in Baltimore, 15-17 June 1964.<sup>3</sup> For an audience representing 68 dioceses,

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<sup>1</sup> On June 5, 1960, Pope John XXIII announced ten topical commissions, a central preparatory commission and two secretariats, one for the media and the second for relating to other Christians. See: *Superno Dei nutu* (June 5, 1960). Eventually there were other preparatory bodies. See Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Struggle for the Council during the Preparation of Vatican II (1960-1962),” in *History of Vatican II*, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. 1 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), pp. 171-271.

<sup>2</sup> Fr. Stransky’s extended reflections on the initial stage of the Secretariat for Christian Unity can be found in “The Foundation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity,” *Vatican II Revisited: By Those Who Were There*. Edited by Alberic Stacpoole. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986, pp. 62-87.

<sup>3</sup> *Proceedings of the National Workshop on Christian Unity* sponsored by the Baltimore Archdiocesan Commission For Christian Unity, June 15-17, 1964, Sheraton-Belvedere Hotel, Baltimore, MD. The only Protestant speaker was Paul Minear. Other speakers at the workshop were: the host, Archbishop Lawrence J. Shehan of Baltimore, John Long, S.J., Gregory Baum, O.S.A., and Bernard Häring, C.S.S.R. Other theologians and scholars present were: Thomas Bird, Walter Burghardt, S.J., Terrence Cambias, Avery Dulles, S.J., Placidus Riley, O.S.B., Richard Rousseau, S.J., Denis Statham, O.S.B., John Thomas, Charles Van Euw, and Meletius Wojnar, O.S.B.M. Besides Archbishop Shehan, bishops and future bishops present were: Bishop Stephen Leven, Bishop John Spence, Fr. William Baum, Msgr. Joseph Bernardin, Fr. John Cummins, Fr. Joseph Gossman, Msgr. James Hickey, and Fr.

his topic forty-eight years ago was “Reflections on the Schema ‘De Oecumenismo,’” with the future *Decree on Ecumenism* facing certain approval during the third session of Vatican II the following November.

Sent by his superiors to Europe in 1958 to find out what Protestants were thinking about missiology, Stransky was the first Catholic to register with the Protestant faculty at the University of Münster. To his good fortune, he connected with a network of Catholic theologians studying the topics under discussion at meetings of the World Council of Churches. That Catholic study group of the World Council was the Catholic Committee for Ecumenical Questions, founded by the Dutchmen, Msgr. Johannes Willebrands and Fr. Frans Thijssen.

I met Fr. Stransky many years later in 1981, at Collegeville, Minnesota, where he and another long-time presence at this national workshop, Fr. John Hotchkin, were facilitating the first NADEO (now CADEIO) Institute for Ecumenical Leadership.<sup>4</sup> Jack Hotchkin, for whom I had the great privilege to work for many years until his death on 24 June 2001, served as the Executive Director of the Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for thirty years. Since 2006, I have had the honor of working closely again with Tom Stransky in getting the story of the genesis and development of the conciliar declaration on interreligious dialogue, *Nostra aetate*, into a volume.<sup>5</sup>

### Fifty Years Ago

Fifty years ago earlier this month, on 3 April 1962, Dr. Willem A. Visser ’t Hooft, the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, hosted Msgr. Willebrands, the first to

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William Keeler. Within two years, the National Workshop became truly ecumenical with joint sponsorship and planning by offices and associations representing various Christian communities in the United States.

<sup>4</sup> The National Association of Diocesan Ecumenical Officers was the name for the network of Catholic diocesan ecumenical staff until 2005 when the membership changed the name to the Catholic Association of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers

<sup>5</sup> Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P., inaugurated the Presidential *Nostra Aetate* Lecture Series at Georgetown University with four lectures in October and November 2006.

serve as Secretary for the Secretariat for Christian Unity, so that Willebrands could report on “the possibility, position, and function of Council observers from other Christian Churches.” Present on that historic occasion were the general secretaries of the Lutheran World Federation, the World Presbyterian Alliance, the World Methodist Council, the Baptist World Alliance, the International Congregational Council, and the World Convention of the Churches of Christ (Disciples of Christ) and representatives of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, the Constantinople Patriarchate at the World Council, the Moscow Patriarchate at the World Council, and the Old Catholic Churches.<sup>6</sup>

That meeting in April 1962 was possible only because a few months earlier Cardinal Augustin Bea, the first President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, had negotiated the approval for Christian observers through the Central Preparatory Commission for the council.<sup>7</sup> In the Apostolic Constitution, *Humanae salutis*, convoking the Second Vatican Council and dated 25 December 1961, Pope John XXIII announced this agreement and expressed the hope that other Christian communities “be able to send to the Council, in the name of their Communities, their own representatives who will make it possible for them to follow the Council proceedings more closely.”<sup>8</sup> The Secretariat for Christian Unity, in creating the protocol for the Christian observers, could finally act officially in reaching out to other Christian groups giving them time

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<sup>6</sup> See Willebrands’ Introduction, *Peace among Christians*, New York Herder and Herder, 1967, pp. 18-19, coauthored by Augustin Bea and Willem Visser ’t Hooft.

<sup>7</sup> Mauro Velati, ed., *Dialogo e rinnovamento. Verbali e testi del segretariato per l’unità dei cristiani nella preparazione del concilio Vaticano II (1960-1962)*, Istituto per le scienze religiose, Serie: Fonti e strumenti di ricerca, 5 (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), pp. 176-186. This volume is the most complete study of the preparatory work of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

<sup>8</sup> See: Thomas F. Stransky, CSP, “The Foundation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity,” in *Vatican II Revisited by those who were there*, edited by Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1986), p. 77; see also by Stransky, “Paul VI and the Delegated Observers/Guests to Vatican Council II” in *Paolo VI e L’Ecumenismo. Colloquio Internazionale di Studio*, pp. 25-27 Settembre 1998, Brescia, Pubblicazioni dell’Istituto Paolo VI, 23 (Roma: Edizioni Studium, 2004), pp. 118-128; also see, Joseph A. Komonachak, “The Ecumenical Presence at the Council,” in his “The Struggle for the Council during the Preparation of Vatican II (1960-1962),” in *History of Vatican II*, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. 1 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), pp. 318-326.

to consider if they could accept invitations to delegate observers before the council's opening in October. What had the Secretariat done before that?

Before continuing let me remind you that Cardinal Johannes Willebrands last spoke at this national workshop in 1987. That year we met in Atlanta, and Cardinal Willebrands' topic was the expression "*subsistit in*" in the conciliar *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen gentium*, and in the *Decree on Ecumenism (Redintegratio unitatis)*.<sup>9</sup>

Also before returning to those early days of ecumenical relations, let me state briefly what I am already doing in this address and what I intend to convey to you today. I am looking at the Second Vatican Council as a complex event, that is, as a series of interrelated developments unfolding into a set of circumstances that takes on a life of its own and continues to unfold well into the future, beyond the immediate decisions and acts of a confined historical occurrence, and giving rise to unexpected outcomes, including the transformation of structures.<sup>10</sup> Such a sequence begins with a clear indication of a change or, put more radically, a rupture of some kind. Put too strongly, change implies that there were no related developments preceding the turn of events.

Certainly the surprise calling of a council by Pope John XXIII on 25 January 1959 signaled a change was in store for the church. Fr. Stransky has shown that as early as 1927, during Archbishop Angelo Roncalli's initial diplomatic assignment as the first Vatican diplomat to Bulgaria, the future Pope John XXIII realized the pressing need to reach out in charity to other Christians to return to unity.<sup>11</sup> Thus, on 25 January 1959, Pope John mentioned his intentions for

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<sup>9</sup> Cardinal Willebrands, "Vatican II's Ecclesiology of Communion, *Origins. Catholic News Service Documentary Service*, 17, 2 (May 28, 1987), pp. 27-33.

<sup>10</sup> See Joseph A. Komonchak, "Vatican II as an 'Event,'" in *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?*, edited by David Schultenover (New York: Continuum, 2007), especially pp. 26-31.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Stransky, "John XXIII 1881-1963," in *Ecumenical Pilgrims: Profiles of Pioneers in Christian Reconciliation*, edited by Ion Bria and Dagmar Heller (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), p. 114.

a council in private to those cardinals in Rome who had attended the closing of the Church Unity Octave with him at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. *L'Osservatore Romano* published the announcement the next day, give Pope John's ecumenical intention that the council will be of service "not only for the spiritual good and joy of the Christian people but also an invitation to the separated communities to seek again that unity for which so many souls are longing in these days throughout the world."<sup>12</sup> To understand why this explicit goal was such a break from the past, though a change that was not completely random, one should look back from the beginning of Vatican II fifty years ago another fifty years or more and then step back and survey the fifty years subsequent to the historical circumstances of the council, where we are privileged to stand today.

One of the questions Tom Stransky and I have faced in looking at the declaration that launched the Catholic Church in interreligious relations is where to start? Do we begin at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago? Catholic bishops and other officials, priests and laity, participated, but in 1895 they received a notice of grave concern from Pope Leo XIII. He advised them not to participate any longer in "assemblies to which both Catholics and those who dissent from the Catholic Church come promiscuously to discuss together religion and morals."<sup>13</sup> The letter was not entirely negative for while Pope Leo recommended that Catholics have their meetings apart, he also suggested that they invite other Christians and any others who

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<sup>12</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 26/27, 1959. See also: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 51 (1959) 69; commented on by Stransky, "The Foundation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity," p. 62. Please note that it was unusual, if not historic, that a pope would personally close the church unity octave, as Pope John did in 1959; hence, not all the cardinals living in Rome chose to attend and did not hear the announcement Pope John made privately in the sacristy afterwards to those who attended that he intended to call a universal council of the church.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Archbishop Satolli, 18 September 1895, *Leonis XIII Acta* 14, 323-324; see Francis J. Connell, "Pope Leo XIII's Message to America," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 109, 4 (October 1943), 244-256; James F. Cleary, "Catholic Participation in the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893," *The Catholic Historical Review* 55, 4 (January 1970), 585-609.

might be interested in attending. The Pope Leo's letter applied both to ecumenical relations and interreligious relations.

When looking for a beginning to our study of Vatican II document on interreligious dialogue and cooperation, should we begin alternatively with the establishment of the National Conference of Christians and Jews in late 1927 with its three chairs—a Jew, a Protestant, and a Catholic? It was the flagship interfaith organization in the world.<sup>14</sup> Continuing Catholic participation in the NCCJ was always measured against that 1895 advisory letter of Leo XIII, and bishops continued to pull it out of the files well into the beginnings of World War II, when NCCJ and denominational officials pressed bishops, and especially the leadership of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, predecessor of today's U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, to make joint statements. Joint actions, Catholic bishops were willing to allow, but they remained reluctant to make joint statements.<sup>15</sup> There were few exceptions. One remarkable one, hardly anyone ever mentions, occurred on 23 December 1938, more than a month after Kristallnacht, a Nazi-organized campaign of violence against Jews in Germany. Archbishop Edward Mooney, Chairman of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, joined the Rev. George Butterick, President of the Federal Council of Churches, Rt. Rev. Henry St. George Tucker, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, and officials of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Presbyterian Church in the United States in denouncing German atrocities against Jews.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Fund for Religious Amity. Conference of Jews and Christians Plan \$250,000 Drive," *The New York Times* (July 2, 1927); "Aims to Harmonize National Groups. Conference Outlines a Wide Campaign of Good-Will Among All Classes," *The New York Times* (December 11, 1927). The first three chairmen were: Roger W. Straus, Newton D. Baker, and Professor Carlton J. H. Hayes. Hayes, a convert to Catholicism, was a professor of history at Columbia University, while Straus was a rabbi and Baker was a minister.

<sup>15</sup> See Earl Boyea, *The National Catholic Welfare Conference: An Experience in Episcopal leadership, 1935-1945*, Ph.D. Thesis, Catholic University of America, 1987, p. 287.

<sup>16</sup> "U.S. Christians Join in Reich Protest," *The New York Times* (December 24, 1938), p. 6

Where should one begin a study of the *Decree on Ecumenism*? In 1926, the Protestant theologian, Otto Dibelius, published *Das Jahrhundert der Kirche*, the century of the church.<sup>17</sup> Although Dibelius was speaking of the freedom of the church from the German state in the post-World War I era, his title proved prophetic since the ecumenical movement thrived in the twentieth century around the question, how do we perceive ourselves as church? The ecumenical trajectory was already taking shape in a series of conferences: 1910 Edinburgh (World Mission); Stockholm in 1925 (Life and Works); 1927 Lausanne (Faith and Order); 1928 Jerusalem (International Missionary Conference). In early 1928 and in response to the Faith and Order meeting in Lausanne, Pope Pius XI issued *Mortalium animos*, invoking the zeal of Catholic bishops to avoid the evil of attempts at unity by “pan-Christians.”

Should one begin a study of contemporary ecumenism instead with the foundational assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1948? Delayed by the Second World War, it received stronger impetus in the hearts of Christians because of their wartime cooperative resistance. *Ecclesia cattolica*, a statement of the Vatican’s Holy Office, predecessor to today’s Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, followed the WCC’s foundation in a little over a year’s time, judiciously reminding Catholic bishops that such efforts at unity, “although inspired by the best of intentions, and even when sprung from sound principles, they do not avoid besetting particular dangers, as past experience has shown.”<sup>18</sup> The Holy Office’s Instruction allowed new exceptions, conceding that local bishops could appoint trustworthy and sufficiently educated priests to attend ecumenical meetings as observers because there was

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<sup>17</sup> Berlin: Furche, 1926; see Avery Dulles, “A Half Century of Ecclesiology,” *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 419; Joseph A. Komonchak, *Foundations in Ecclesiology*. Supplementary Issue of the *Loneragan Workshop Journal*, Vol. 11. Boston College, 1995, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 42 (1950) 143; English translation taken from *Instruction on the Ecumenical Movement*, Unity Studies 1, Commentary by Rev. William Conway (Garrison, NY: Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, 1954), p. 3.

evidence that the Holy Spirit was at work in the desire to restore unity and in the prayers for God to bring unity to Christians. This made possible the attendance of Paulist Father John Sheerin and Jesuit Father Gustave Weigel to attend the North American Faith and Order Conference at Oberlin College in 1957.<sup>19</sup> The ecumenical movement was beginning to make sense, and the longer the Catholic Church remained on the sidelines, it risked loss of credibility.

Fr. George Tavard is another ghost of this National Workshop, who spoke here last in 2005 at the workshop in New Orleans for a session on the fortieth anniversary of the promulgation of *Nostra aetate*. For his last book, *Vatican II and the Ecumenical Way*, published a year later, he wrote about this decreasing credibility:

To his lasting merit, John XXIII perceived this discrepancy. And he began to close the gap. The council that he called was to be both a means to slow down the increasing irrelevancy of the papacy and therefore of the Church to the world at large, as well as an instrument to unify the laity and the hierarchy in a new vision of the Catholic purpose.<sup>20</sup>

Fr. Tavard served as a *peritus*, a scholar/consultant, to the Secretariat for Christian Unity from its beginning in 1960.

Another original *peritus* to the Secretariat, Gregory Baum, was noticed because of his doctoral thesis, later published in 1958 in English as *That They May Be One: A Study of Papal Doctrine (Leo XII to Pius XII)*.<sup>21</sup> Stransky recently mentioned that he saw a copy of Baum's book in its original French version, with the reader's notations, in Pope Paul VI's private collection, now at the Istituto Paolo VI in Brescia. Baum had chosen the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII for his starting point in the study of Catholic ecumenism. He was working before he had any

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<sup>19</sup> See Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ, "The Search for Unity since 1957: A Catholic Perspective," and John Borelli, "How the Work of Christian Unity Relates to Interreligious Relations and Dialogue: When Good News Sounds Bad," in *Ecumenical Directions in the United States Today*, edited by Antonios Kireopoulos with Juliana Mecera (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), pp. 207-208; 305-308.

<sup>20</sup> George H. Tavard, *Vatican II and the Ecumenical Way* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1958. Baum wrote in his introduction, p. viii: "While the popes decry anything that looks like dogmatic compromise or even tends to make Catholic truth appear relative, they do not want to discourage that contact with dissident thought which is essential for shaping the Catholic ecumenical witness."



idea that a universal council would be called and that he too would serve actively the entry of the Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement, analyzing those slim but positive threads toward an encouraging assessment of ecumenical movement. Gregory Baum, now in his late 80s, continues writing and lecturing. In November 2010, he was present at Georgetown University to speak in the President's *Nostra Aetate* Lecture Series and told me that he would have written his thesis on the pre-ecumenical signs in the Catholic Church very differently just four years after it was published because those four years of hindsight made considerable difference in perspective. He and Stransky are the two left standing from the original group of members, consultors and staff who attended the first plenary of the Secretariat for Christian Unity on 14-15 November 1960.

If Fr. John O'Malley, S.J., were here to give this keynote address, he might begin by calling attention to the historic dimensions of the council. His book, *What Happened at Vatican II*, remains the best single volume account of the Council, capturing eloquently the drama and complexities that make up the council.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the sheer size and numbers of Vatican II, there were its unique historical circumstances. Vatican II had one foot in the colonial world and one in the post-colonial world. Many nations came into existence during those four years. Vatican II took place during the Cold War; with restrictions imposed by Communist regimes, many bishops had difficulty getting to the council. Recall too the Cuban Missile Crisis in October-November 1962, soon after the council was underway, perhaps the closest crisis point ever to nuclear war but prompting John XXIII to write his most memorable encyclical addressed to all humanity, *Pacem in terris*. Next year at this time, we will be celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. The Middle East was heating up towards the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and was quickly becoming the major pre-occupation of American foreign policy since World War II. This had

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<sup>22</sup> *What Happened at Vatican II* (Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 35.

everything to do with the Catholic Church attempting a statement on relations with Jews. The Civil Rights Movement was gaining strength and shape in the United States; recall its ecumenical dimensions. Then, there were the papal pilgrimages, journeys prompted by the council, to the Holy Land in January 1964, to India in December 1964, and to New York and the United Nations in October 1965.

#### Advice from outside the Catholic Church

Fr. Joseph Komonchak has observed that between the announcement on 25 January 1959 and its opening on 11 October 1962, John XXIII had set out three main goals for the council: the spiritual renewal of the church (its growth in faith and holiness); *aggiornamento* (“appropriate adaptation of church discipline to the needs and conditions of our times”); and the furtherance of Christian unity.<sup>23</sup> These goals only gradually became clear. His announcement in January 1959 was vague about the relationship of the council to other Christians.

Six months later in his first encyclical, *To the Throne of Peter*, Pope John observed:

We have taken note that almost all those who are adorned with the name of Christian even though separated from Us and from one another have sought to forge bonds of unity by means of many congresses and by establishing councils. This is evidence that they are moved by an intense desire for unity of some kind. [*Ad Petri Cathedram* (29 June 1959) 64]

A few weeks, the pope, while speaking to Italian Catholic Action (9 August 1959), urged separated Christians that the way lies open for meeting and for homecoming: “come, take, or resume, that place which is yours, which for many was your father’s place.”<sup>24</sup>

A rather embarrassing incident associated with a WCC Central Committee meeting in Rhodes that was really an awkward attempt by Catholics to connect with Orthodox Christian

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<sup>23</sup>Joseph A. Komonchak, “Is Christ Divided? Dealing with Diversity and Disagreement,” 2003 Common Ground Initiative Lecture, published in *Origins*, *CNS Documentary Service*, 33, 9 (July 17, 2003)141.

<sup>24</sup> *L’Osservatore Romano* (11 August 1959). Cited in Thomas F. Stransky, “The Vatican Council,” *Wiseman Review* (1962) 206.

leaders proved the need for a special office to handle relations.<sup>25</sup> Even before Augustin Bea was made a cardinal at the end of 1959, the aged Jesuit scripture scholar and former confessor for Pope Pius XII, was active behind the scenes. He had written to Edward Stakemeier, director of the Johann-Adam Möhler Institute that Archbishop Lorenz Jäger had established in Paderborn. Bea eventually persuaded the archbishop to make a recommendation for a commission for unity within the Roman curia. He even offered to review Jäger's draft and to present the final copy in person to Pope John. By 13 March 1960, Pope John informed Bea that he agreed in principle but preferred "secretariat" to commission to allow the new entity greater flexibility among the established Roman curial offices. Pope John invited Bea to begin drafting its statutes.<sup>26</sup>

In May 1960, Frans Thijssen and Jan Willebrands were in Milan planning a meeting of the Catholic Conference on Ecumenical Questions. They met with Cardinal Montini of Milan, the future Pope Paul VI, to propose their intention to hold a gathering of their group in his diocese, meeting in parallel with a World Council meeting. Thijssen and Willebrands had formed the Catholic Conference on Ecumenical Questions, in a positive response to the Holy Office's instruction of 1949 mentioned earlier. After each meeting of their group, the two Dutchmen would make a report in person to the Holy Office, and Fr. Augustin Bea was the one appointed by the Holy Office to hear their reports. In May 1960, after meeting with Montini in Milan, they traveled to Rome to ask the newly designated Cardinal Bea if Catholic observers could attend a Faith and Order Conference in St. Andrews, Scotland, in August of that year and could remain for the subsequent meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council. They also wanted to lobby him for Catholic observers to the WCC assembly planned for New Delhi in late 1961.

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<sup>25</sup>Willebrands refers only generally to it in the Introduction, *Peace among Christians*, New York Herder and Herder, 1967, pp. 10-11.

<sup>26</sup> "The Foundation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity," pp. 65-66.

Bea informed Thijssen and Willebrands that there was going to be a Secretariat for Christian Unity and that he was going to be its President. Willebrands writes:

Cardinal Bea expressly instructed me to go to Geneva and explain the founding of the Secretariat to Dr. Visser 't Hooft in his behalf. Furthermore, Cardinal Bea himself wanted to meet Dr. Visser 't Hooft unofficially. "I cannot invite him to Rome, and I cannot go to Geneva myself, he said. . . "Tell Dr. Visser 't Hooft that I would do this with the greatest of pleasure and joy. Dr. Visser 't Hooft should tell me whether and how he considers such a meeting possible."<sup>27</sup>

On 5 June 1960: Pentecost, John XXIII signed the *motu proprio, Superno Dei nutu*, putting into place the preparatory phase of the council. The Secretariat for Christian Unity was given the task to contact "those who bear the name of Christians but are separated from this Apostolic See . . . to follow the work of the Council and to find more easily the path by which they may arrive at that unity."<sup>28</sup> On 8 June 1960, Thijssen and Willebrands visited Dr. Visser 't Hooft and arranged for an unofficial meeting between Visser 't Hooft and Bea in Milan on 22 September 1960. We should also not underestimate the importance of the fact that Willebrands and Visser 't Hooft could speak with one another in their native Dutch. That made a huge difference in their developing trust.

Visser 't Hooft writes in his *Memoirs*:

In the light of the later developments it seems almost ridiculous that this meeting was so secret that I did not even tell my wife Jetty or my colleagues about it, and that the concierge of the convent where we met in Milan was not even allowed to ask my name. But we were at the beginning of a new development and had to be careful to make sure that in this delicate process of establishing relationships we would not be disturbed by the kind of public discussion which could so easily have complicated our difficult task."<sup>29</sup>

Visser 't Hooft's first recommendation to Bea was that the council needed to address the issue of religious freedom in a broad way to insure that the commitment to ecumenism was genuine.

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<sup>27</sup> The future Cardinal Willebrands reviewed these developments in his Introduction to *Peace among Christians*, New York Herder and Herder, 1967, co-authored by Visser 't Hooft and Bea.

<sup>28</sup> Stransky, "The Vatican Council," p. 210, citing *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 52 (1960) 436.

<sup>29</sup> Visser 't Hooft, Willem Adolf. *Memoirs*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987, p. 328.

Thus, already in 1960, an outsider, a Protestant Christian and one of considerable stature and importance, made a recommendation that contributed substantially to the work of the council.

Far more out in the open was the visit to Rome of Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher of Canterbury in early December 1960. Fisher first suggested the idea of visiting Rome in August 1960 to Willebrands attending that WCC meeting in St. Andrews, for Willebrands had sought Bea's approval the previous May.<sup>30</sup> Archbishop Fisher had already planned the last international trip of his tenure to include Jerusalem and Istanbul and told Willebrands that he wanted to visit Rome on his return and meet with Pope John. Receiving this request from Willebrands, Bea then asked Pope John, who responded, "Why not?" Archbishop Fisher received criticism from both Anglicans and Catholics when he made public the intended visit. Cardinal Domenico Tardini, the Vatican Secretary of State, did what he could to make the visit difficult and placed several restrictions on the meeting—no press coverage, no photos and no official visit with the President of the newly assembled Secretariat for Christian Unity. With good will prevailing, the meeting took place on 2 December 1960. Archbishop Fisher reported that at some point, Pope John read from one of his addresses, probably the one cited earlier to Italian Catholic Action, in which the Pope referred to the time when our separated brethren should return home to the Mother Church. Fisher at once said, "Your Holiness, not return." Looking puzzled, John asked, why not? Fisher replied, "None of us can go backwards. We are each now running on parallel courses; we are looking forward until, in God's good time, our two courses approximate and meet. After a moment's pause, John replied, "You are right." Archbishop Fisher thanked the pope for setting up a new department under Cardinal Bea, and John replied with a twinkle in his eye, "Yes, and this afternoon you shall see Cardinal Bea." John

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<sup>30</sup> Stransky, "The Foundation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity," pp. 73-74.

had overruled Tardini.<sup>31</sup> The reception was not at the Secretariat office but offsite at the Brazilian College where Cardinal Bea lived. Here yet another Christian leader was offering instruction on the nascent Catholic ecumenical efforts.

Earlier in 1960, still another outsider to the Catholic Church, a man of great importance, made another council changing suggestion to Pope John. It seems true that John XXIII did not have in his mind the idea that the council would address relations with Jews until the visit of Jules Isaac on 13 June 1960. Cardinal Tardini opposed this meeting as well, but the President of France intervened and demanded that Isaac be allowed an audience. Isaac met with Pope John less than a week after the announcement of the establishment of the Secretariat. Then two days afterwards, Isaac met with Cardinal Bea, handing the cardinal a portfolio of materials, largely based on discussions among Jews and Christians since the close of World War II for addressing what Isaac termed “the teaching of contempt for Jews.” He had spent his years in hiding and then after the liberation of France researching what contributed to a situation in Europe which allowed the Holocaust to happen. Isaac, a Holocaust survivor, who had lost his wife, daughter and son-in-law to the murderous death camps, had dedicated the rest of his long life to dissolving the Christian anti-Semitic tradition, which was intermingled with a pervasive anti-Jewish theology.<sup>32</sup> There had been a meeting in Oxford in 1946 to form an International Conference of Christians and Jews, followed by a second, emergency meeting on anti-Semitism in Seelisberg, Switzerland, in 1947, which Isaac had attended and which prepared a list of 10 points Christians

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<sup>31</sup>William Purcell covers these events in his biography of Archbishop Fisher, *Fisher of Lambeth: A Portrait From Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), pp. 268-287.

<sup>32</sup>Recent studies of Jules Isaac include Marco Morselli, “Jules Isaac and the Origins of *Nostra Aetate*,” in *Nostra Aetate: Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Catholic Relations*, edited by Neville M. Lamdan and Alberto Melloni (Muenster: LIT, 2007), pp. 21-28; Norman Tobias, *The Influence of Jules Isaac on Roman Catholic Teaching about Jews and Judaism*, unpublished M.A. thesis, School of Theology, University of Toronto, 2008; and André Kaspi, *Jules Isaac ou la passion de la vérité* (Paris: Plon, 2002). Isaac’s report about his audience with John XXIII appeared after his death in “La Réception de Jules Isaac par Jean XXIII, *La Documentation Catholique* 65/1528(17 November 1968) 2015-6.

needed to incorporate into their lives to reverse centuries of negative teaching on Jews. I wish to call your attention to a very recently published volume. Like several before it, it reviews these developments to Seelisburg and to Vatican II; yet, it does so in the larger context of the slowly emerging theological insight, especially among German-speaking Europeans and a few others, several of whom were converts from Judaism to Christianity, that the anti-Jewish theology of Christianity had a pernicious effect on Christians, even those who nobly tried to combat the ultimately murderous anti-Semitism between 1933 and 1945. John Connelly's *From Enemy to Brother, The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Harvard University Press, 2012), is probably the best study to date of the theological developments before, during and out of the Holocaust.<sup>33</sup>

In 1960, it came down to three eighty-year old men, a Holocaust survivor, a pope who had called a surprise council and a Jesuit cardinal and biblical scholar, who headed the council's most surprising commission. In September 1960, John approved Bea's suggestion that a statement on the Jews could be written. Two of the three gentlemen would not be alive by the time the second session of the council got underway in autumn 1963 and a statement on the Jews was back on the agenda.<sup>34</sup> Only Bea survived and carried the initiative forward.

Why did it take a visit from Isaac to put a statement on the agenda of the council? Very few were writing on the holocaust. Anne Franks' diary and a few other books were circulating, but only in 1961, with Raul Hilberg's publication of *The Destruction of European Jews*, was

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<sup>33</sup>On Seelisberg and Isaac see John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 176-179, 240-242.

<sup>34</sup>I say "back on the agenda," because, as will be stated briefly later, the original draft *De Iudaeis* was removed from the submitted drafts by the Central Preparatory Commission due to certain political reactions sparked by the announcement of the World Jewish Congress that an Israeli official for religious relations with Christians would mistakenly serve as an observer to the Council. The most recently published account of this is Connelly, p. 249.

there a scholarly study of the Shoah.<sup>35</sup> Not many were writing about the Holocaust, and not many Jews were reflecting in public on its reality. It took another set of outside events unfolding during the preparatory phase of the council to awaken the world from its Second World War trauma with regard to the Shoah, namely the trial of its Nazi architect, Adolph Eichmann. On 23 May 1960, Israeli Prime David Ben-Gurion announced Eichmann's arrest. The trial lasted from April until August 1961, broadcast worldwide and making public the dimension of the Holocaust to the largest audience ever. Eichmann was executed on 31 May 1962.

The Secretariat's pre-conciliar meetings unfolded during this time, and at its first plenary in November 1960, ten topics were suggested by Bea and his staff for an agenda: relation of separated baptized to the Church; hierarchical structure of the church; the conversion of individuals and communities; the priesthood of all believers; the Word of God in the Church; liturgical questions; mixed marriages; the week of prayer for Christian unity; central ecumenical problems, according to WCC and its concept of unity; and the Jews.<sup>36</sup> Nine of these points would be explored and then whittled down to four propositions over a series of five more plenaries. A one page draft on the Jews would be the eventual outcome of the fifth proposal, forwarded to the Central Preparatory Commission for its June 1962 meeting deciding on the agenda for the council.

#### Dramatic Developments at the Council

Of the Second Vatican Council's 16 promulgated statements, a total of over 100,000 words, by far the shortest is the "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," what that one page statement on the Jews eventually became. The initial draft,

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<sup>35</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961; rev., 3 volumes. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985. One very early book proved prophetic: *Like a Mighty Army, Hitler versus Established Religion* by George N. Shuster (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company), 1935.

<sup>36</sup> Stransky, "The Foundation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity," p. 82.



prepared by the Secretariat, was removed from the council's agenda at the June 1962 meeting of the Central Planning Committee. The World Jewish Congress just prior to the June 1962 meeting announced that an Israeli official would serve as its "observer" to the council, and Arab governments charged that the council was preparing to recognize the State of Israel. This was not true, but it was politically expedient to remove the draft from the agenda. It remained off for the first session, but a few days after the first session had ended, on 13 December 1962, John XXIII, in his own hand restored the schema on the Jews (*De Judaeis*) to the agenda. Cardinal Bea had sent him a memorandum suggesting that a theological statement on relations with Jews was still possible, and Pope John was favorable.<sup>37</sup>

John O'Malley and others have portrayed well the drama of that first session. The bishops took charge of the agenda from the curia, rejecting nearly all initial drafts or schemata with little exception, the one on the liturgy being such an example. Just as the Secretariat for Christian Unity had to struggle with the Theological Commission to produce drafts of its own for the Central Preparatory Commission, its working role at the council was uncertain until Pope John's intervention granting it continuing status on 22 October 1962 and declaring it an official organ of the Council with right to prepare drafts, present them for discussion, emendation and vote, and to cooperate in joint commissions. Toward the end of that first session, Cardinal Leon-Joseph Suenens (Malines-Brussels), asked by Pope John to do so, proposed that the council needed a central theme and suggested an earlier stated theme of Pope John's, the church of Christ, light of the world. It had two parts, the interior question of what we say to ourselves and a second part, the relationship of the church to the outside world. The next day, Cardinal Montini of Milan took the floor to endorse Suenens' recommendation and proceeded to criticize the

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<sup>37</sup> J. Oscar Beozzo covers the removal from the agenda in "The External Climate," *History of Vatican II*, vol. I, pp. 396-398; Giuseppe Alberigo covers the restoration to the agenda in "The Conciliar Experience 'Learning on Their Own,'" *History of Vatican II*, vol. II (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), p. 573.

inadequacies of the present schema on the church.<sup>38</sup> The majority rejected the schema on the church and approved an ecclesiological project relating all aspects of the Council's major work to the inner life and external engagement of the church.

Giovanni Battista Montini, as you know, was elected Pope Paul VI on 21 June 1963, less than three weeks after the death of Pope John. In and around the conclave that elected him, considerable discussion among the bishops from Asia, generated especially by missionary bishops and priests, resulted in a letter at the end of July from Cardinal Tien (Thomas Ken-sin) of Taipei to the new pope requesting that another secretariat be established to relate to those of other religions. Soon after that, in his apostolic letter *Quod Apostolici* to Cardinal Tisserant (12 September 1963), in which he outlined his changes in the procedures and direction of the council, Pope Paul stated that in due time another secretariat would be established.<sup>39</sup>

Already though, before these steps from the bishops of Asia, there were efforts to include a mention of Muslims in the work of the council as our recent research on *Nostra aetate* has discovered. As early as the end of January 1961, two months after the Secretariat's first plenary, the Congregation for the Oriental Church, under the leadership of Cardinal Amletto Cicognani, who was soon to become Secretary of State, sought the counsel of the leadership of the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) on whether it would be advisable to establish a section in the Congregation devoted to activities in those counties with a strong Muslim presence and if this religious order could supply someone, a specialist in Islamic studies, who could organize and direct this section. You will not find evidence of this in the *Annuario Pontificio* but there is a file at the archives of the Missionaries of Africa giving the story of how by September 1961, Fr.

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<sup>38</sup> O'Malley, pp. 57-59.

<sup>39</sup> Ralph M. Wiltgen gives the details of these developments in *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber: the Unknown Council* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1967), pp. 73-78.

Joseph Cuoq was appointed to the Oriental Congregation and remained there until he was re-assigned in March 1965 to serve as Under-Secretary in the new Secretariat for Non-Christians.<sup>40</sup>

On 29 November 1963, towards the end of the second period of the council and after the initial draft of the document on the Jews had been presented to the council, Fr. Georges Anawati, O.P. delivered a lecture at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas (Angelicum) for a conference of two hundred person entitled “L’Islam à l’heure du Concile: prolégomènes à un dialogue islamo-chrétien.”<sup>41</sup> Cardinal Eugene Tisserant, Dean of the College of Cardinals, presided at the session. Fr. Anawati, who arrived in Rome in August 1963 to serve as a *peritus* for the Secretariat’s work in relations with eastern Christians, would be one of four experts invited by Cardinal Bea to assist with drafting section 3 of *Nostra aetate* on relations with Muslims.

Montini’s letter to Tisserant was only a first official papal step. On 29 September, during his first address to the Second Vatican Council as pope, Paul VI indicated that he wanted to add the self-reflection on the church to the three stated goals of his predecessor—renewal, updating, and ecumenical relations. Then, in a passage that was beyond what many at Vatican II could have expected, he invited the Council fathers to look beyond their “own sphere and observe those other religions that uphold the meaning and the concept of God as one, Creator, provident, most high and transcendent, that worship God with acts of sincere piety and upon whose beliefs and practices the principles of moral and social life are founded.”<sup>42</sup> Several months later, on Pentecost Sunday (17 May 1964), Paul VI formally announced that “we are establishing

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<sup>40</sup> I first revealed this material in “The Origins and Early Development of Interreligious Relations during the Century of the Church (1910-2010),” *U. S. Catholic Historian* 28, 2 (Spring 2010) 93-94.

<sup>41</sup> Anawati’s paper appeared in *Angelicum* 41 (1964): 145-68. See also, Dominique Avon, *Le Frères prêcheurs en Orient, Les dominicains du Caire (années 1910 –années 1960)* (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2005) 785-786.

<sup>42</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 55 (1963), 857-858. The address is published in translation in its entirety in several places, for example, in Xavier Rynne, *The Second Session* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Company, 1963), 347-363. The key two paragraphs are in *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)*, edited by Francesco Gioia (Boston: Pauline Books and Media; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006), p. 157.

precisely in these days here in Rome the ‘Secretariat for Non-Christians,’” which would have quite different functions but an analogous structure to that of the current secretariat. He added that “no pilgrim, no matter how distant he may be religiously or geographically, no matter his country of origin, will any longer be a complete stranger in this Rome.”<sup>43</sup>

Then, in August 1964, in *Ecclesiam Suam*, his first encyclical, Paul VI introduced the concept of dialogue for the first time in any major Catholic magisterial document and used it with abandon, some 77 times.<sup>44</sup> The encyclical appeared a month ahead of the convening of the third period of the council when the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and the *Decree on Ecumenism* would receive final approval. Pope Paul’s encyclical also addressed interreligious dialogue, distinguishing relations with Jews, Muslims, and the followers of the great Afro-Asiatic religions.<sup>45</sup> According to Pope Paul’s encyclical, all dialogue falls under the rubric of the dialogue of salvation, “opened spontaneously on the initiative of God: ‘He (God) loved us first’ (1Jn 4:10); it will be up to us to take the initiative in extending to all peoples this same dialogue, without waiting to be summoned to it.” (71-72)

In mid-November 1963, during the second session of the Council, the Secretariat finally presented its draft on ecumenism to the council, and in two chapters were declarations on the Jews and on religious liberty. By 20 November of the second session, Cardinal Bea and his

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<sup>43</sup> *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56 (1964), 432-433. *Interreligious Dialogue*, 161.

<sup>44</sup> John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 204.

<sup>45</sup> *Ecclesiam Suam* (107), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56. A point should be made about the Latin word “dialogus,” a neologism and not the preference of Latinists. Pope Paul, influenced as he was by the French intellectual tradition, with Jacques Maritain and Jean Guitton among his person consultants, used the Latin *colloquium*, which could also be translated as “conversation.” The latter English word did not convey what Paul intended by the French and English concept of “dialogue.” This was understood by some for AAS 56 lists “*colloquium (seu dialogus)*.” *Dialogus* first appears in a major magisterial text of the Catholic Church in the *Decree on Ecumenism (Redintegratio unitatis)*, promulgated after *ES* but certainly in draft form well before Paul VI was elected. The final version of *Nostra aetate* does not use the plural of “*dialogus*” but instead follows *ES* with “*colloquia*.” Both Fr. Thomas Stransky, C.S.P. and Fr. John Long, S.J., who also served on the staff of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, have each told the author that the Secretariat members, consultants and staff, preferred to save the word for “dialogue” (*dialogus*) for ecumenical relations and therefore used the word for “conversations” (*colloquia*) in *Nostra aetate*. Whatever their preferences, dialogue became the universal term for religious conversations whether among Christians or between Christians and others.

secretariat were emerging among curial offices as their work came together in a single draft of five chapters, three of ecumenical relations, one mainly on Jewish relations, and one on religious freedom. Bea gave the concluding remarks on 2 December 1963, and two days later, at the conclusion of the second session came the surprise announcement by Pope Paul that he was going to the Holy Land. The pilgrimage gave a further boost to the ecumenical, Jewish, and even interreligious initiatives of the council because of the papal address from Bethlehem included Muslims in its audience.<sup>46</sup> By the beginning of the third session, when Bea appeared at the microphone on 25 September 1964, he was greeted by thunderous applause, which was repeated when he concluded his report on the current draft on the Jews, *Declaratio de Judaeis et de non-Christianis*.<sup>47</sup> By the final session, the Secretariat, a body that had come into existence “as a simple bureau supplying non-Catholics with information about the Council, but by putting on the agenda subjects most central to the *aggiornamento* (updating to the modern world) desired by John XXIII, it had acquired decisive influence on the Council’s work.”<sup>48</sup>

#### Relating the Work of the Council

The *Decree on Ecumenism* is closely linked to the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, expanding on the constitution’s themes. The *Decree*’s messages on spiritual ecumenism, conversion of heart, prayer, role of the Holy Spirit, Catholic principles for ecumenism, prayer in common and how to proceed in dialogue with various Christian communities were collectively just an opening, a beginning. Much was left to dialogue for clarification and development.

National and regional conferences of bishops were urged to set up ecumenical commissions and host dialogues, and bishops were asked to appoint ecumenical representatives and encouraged to

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<sup>46</sup> Claude Soetens, “The Ecumenical Commitment of the Catholic Church,” *History of Vatican II*, vol. 3 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), pp. 340-345.

<sup>47</sup> Giovanni Miccoli, “Jews and Other Non-Christians,” *History of Vatican II*, vol. 4 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), p. 135.

<sup>48</sup> Mauro Velati, “Completing the Conciliar Agenda,” *History of Vatican II*, vol. 5 (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006), p. 231.

have good relations with fellow Christians. It was acknowledged in 1963, during the second session, when the first draft of the *Decree* was presented and debated, that a directory was needed and being prepared. The Secretariat assumed the authority of the Council to continue with its preparation. Fr. John Hotchkin reiterated and developed that link between the ecumenical directory and Vatican II when he spoke when this workshop gathered in Providence in 1994.<sup>49</sup>

Midway through Vatican II, just after Pope Paul VI returned from his historic trip in January 1964 to the Holy Land, the pope received a worried message from Cardinal Albert Meyer of Chicago. If the last two chapters of *On Ecumenism*—the Jews and religious freedom, “are rejected and not acted upon favorably,” Meyer wrote, “I fear very much for the cause of the whole ecumenical movement, and indeed of anything that comes out of the Council” Furthermore, he stated, “Without these two chapters, the cause of the Catholic Church in the United States, I am afraid, will suffer greatly.” Meyer and other Americans linked the credibility of Vatican II, and thus the future of Catholic involvement in ecumenism, to the eventual statements on religious liberty and on the Jews.<sup>50</sup>

When presented to the council fathers the following September, the declaration, “On the Jews and Non-Christians,” still hardly resembled what the text would become. Throughout the month of October 1964, teams of scholars were added to the task. Robert Caspar, M.Afr., Georges Anawati, O.P., Joseph Cuoq, M.Afr., and Jean Corbon, staffed by John Long, S.J., expanded the few sentences on Islam. Josef Neuner, S.J., Josef Pfister, S.J., Charles Moeller,

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<sup>49</sup>John F. Hotchkin, “Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism,” *Ecumenism* 117 (March 1995) 4-12. Fr. Hotchkin at the time was presenting the revised directory of 1993 to the workshop. See also, Claude Soetens, “The Ecumenical Commitment of the Catholic Church,” *History of Vatican II*, vol. 3, pp. 266-67. Hotchkin apparently dates Martin’s intervention incorrectly in 1964 and not 1963.

<sup>50</sup>Peter Hebblethwaite first mentions two letters (25 January from Meyer and Paul’s reply on 1 February) in his *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (NY: Paulist, 1993), p. 375. A letter from Meyer making similar points to Cardinal Bea was found in the archives of Fr. Stransky and also of Fr. Long. At the time, *Nostra aetate* was still chapter 4 to the draft on ecumenism,

Yves Congar, O.P., and staffed by Fr. Stransky, expanded the opening and concluding sections. When represented to the council fathers in November 1964, it finally bore the title, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christians* and began with the phrase, in our time (*nostra aetate*).

In its new form, the declaration provided a basis for interreligious relations in the oneness of the human family, the common search for God, especially in answering the age-old enigmas of life, and the gospel values to preserve and foster what is true and good in other religions, which often reflect a ray of that same truth that enlightens all. It then specifically talked about “animism,” if you will, without naming it, Hinduism and Buddhism, urging the sons and daughters of the church to enter into dialogue, Muslims and exhorting cooperation and respect, despite the history of hostilities, for “social justice, moral welfare, and peace and freedom for all humankind,” and condemned “any discrimination against persons or harassment of them because of their race or color, condition in life or religion.” It would have to endure yet another year of attempted sabotage by various negative groups. To the critics among most of the eastern Catholic bishops, those who lived cheek by jowl with Muslims and often as minorities in Muslim countries, Bea and his staff made many appeals and adjustments in the text to win their support. A few bishops opposed the text because its final form had been weakened. An Oklahoman, Bishop Stephen Leven, was among those, who argued for restoring the word “deicide” to the text, which Paul VI had waned removed. Leven wanted the despicable term identified and rejected.<sup>51</sup> But the major opponents were the group of international fathers, *Coetus internationalis patrum*. They probably represented the bulk of the 88 negative votes against the text when it was promulgated on 28 October 28 1965. Paul VI wanted consensus and no more

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<sup>51</sup> See Mauro Velati, “Completing the Conciliar Agenda,” *History of Vatican II*, vol. 5, p. 216. Stransky and this author found a note to this effect from Bishop Leven in the archives of Cardinal Lawrence Shehan, Baltimore.

than 400 negative votes. When the text was voted on section by section only 250 negative votes were raised on any one point.<sup>52</sup>

You can interpret the *Decree on Ecumenism* and indeed this declaration, *Nostra aetate*, in light of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen gentium*, in light of the Vatican II understanding of degrees of communion. There are varying degrees of communion which Catholics share sacramentally and in other ways with other Christians and, analogously, some degrees of communion, which Catholics can acknowledge with Jews, with Muslims who trace their faith to that of Abraham, and then with all companions on the spiritual journey.

In another manner, you can interpret the declaration *Nostra aetate*, the *Decree on Ecumenism* in light of the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* and the final act of Vatican II, the *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes)* in light of the church's engagement with public issues and the implications of religious liberty. Although Vatican II and the structures subsequent to the council kept politics and theological dialogue separate in theory, practice has not been the case. The dialogue based on exploring communion takes time, trust, and theological lifting with differing goals, depending on whether with Christians we are restoring unity, with Jews we are seeking reconciliation and mutual understanding of what we share and what differences we have, or with other believers through cooperation, mutual respect and spiritual companionship. The mixing of religious and political perspectives has caused all sorts of grief; yet, political and public issues cannot be ignored. The methods of dialogue differ and the goals are somewhat different. Coalition building is not exploration of communion. The structures of dialogue encouraged by the council and developed in various bilateral and multi-

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<sup>52</sup> Summaries of these proceedings are in Miccoli, *History of Vatican II*, vol. 4, p. 135-166; Ricardo Burigana and Giovanni Turbanti, *History of Vatican II*, vol. 4, pp. 546-559; and Velati, *History of Vatican II*, vol. 5, pp. 211-220.



lateral examples have served us well in ecumenical relations over the last five decades, with more considerably theological progress achieved than in Jewish and interreligious relations.

The three conciliar statements of the Secretariat were on new and controversial topics—ecumenism, Jewish and interreligious relations, and religious liberty, and were not intended to be final statements. They were invitations to dialogue. The use of the terms, like “subsisted in” and “ecclesial communities,” were intended to invite dialogue with our fellow Christian and to deepen our mutual understanding of the church.<sup>53</sup> Clearly also, the *Decree* should not be taken alone but with the *Ecumenical Directory* (first appearing in 1967 and 70 and revised in 1993) and John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*. There has not been a synod of bishops on ecumenism, but there is an encyclical. The three major texts, the foundational *Decree*, elaborating *Directory*, and reviewing encyclical, constitute a formidable package not easily undone by any statement of a Roman congregation. The developed view of the theology of communion of John Paul II’s encyclical and his suggestions, for example, that we learn from one another and come to learn that various dimensions of Christian life are lived better and with more authenticity in communities outside of our own would have been too much for the fathers at Vatican II to approve. The encyclical came appropriately 30 years later, after considerable ecumenical experience, and is the most significant piece of evidence that the *Decree* was an invitation rather than a line in the sand. You, our Christian partners in dialogue have served an essential role in this theological progression.

### Continuing the Work of Vatican II

In just two decades, at the time of the 1985 Synod of Bishops that marked the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the council, there were already a number of post-Vatican II

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<sup>53</sup> See John F. Hotchkin’s address to the Canon Law Society, “Canon Law and Ecumenism: Giving Shape to the Future,” *Origins* 30, 19 (19 October 2000), 289, 291-298; also Jared Wicks, SJ, “The Significance of the ‘Ecclesial Communities’ of the Reformation,” *Ecumenical Trends* (December 2001) 170-173.

“surprises,” to use the term Tom Stransky employed in this 1986 article, “Surprises and Fears of Ecumenism: Twenty Years After Vatican II.”<sup>54</sup> The first major realization, within just two decades of the council, was the expansiveness of ecumenical dialogue. As churches have moved into relationships of communion, dialogue has not let up but has increased. We have such libraries, volumes and electronic records upon records containing agreed statements, supporting papers, academic studies with solid ecumenical dimensions, theological treatises building on these for the future, summaries of developments, and published covenants and concords of communion testifying to how much bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogues have accomplished in the last five decades. Major theological breakthroughs are not necessary major pastoral achievements. These take time to be received. Whereas twenty to twenty-five years after the council, ecumenical dialogue addressed the classical divisions between east and west and within the west in an arena based on North Atlantic-European history, now fifty years after the council the arena is more global. Younger Christians today are accustomed to pluralism and do not see it as a problem but as a rich cultural backdrop.

A second lesson we have learned in the past five decades is that the severances among Christians during the Reformation were more than 450 ago and are not easily remedied in 45 years of dialogue. It was far easier for communities of Christians to split apart than it has been for them to come back together. New severances today add further to the need for a creative reconsideration of the ecumenical problem. Furthermore, nowadays there is a more inclusive tent in Catholic ecumenical outreach including Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and smaller groups such as Mennonites.

The next and third lesson follows on this: the centuries apart calcified negative identities and freer identities need to develop based on ecumenical achievements as well as greater

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<sup>54</sup> *America* (January 25, 1986) 44-48.

appreciation of ecumenical diversity. Speaking on the breakthrough on justification by faith that the U. S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission had achieved as long ago as 1983, a text that became a resource for the international JDDJ, John F. Hotchkin made this interesting point about dialogue and church identity.

The impulse to stereotype one's own church and one's religious confession and commitment derives from the impulse to define one's community and self *over and against others*. This begins to produce a negative and counter-identity: "I am who I am precisely because I am not who you are."<sup>55</sup>

Fr. Hotchkin concluded that Catholics should become stronger and freer Catholics, and Lutheran, stronger and freer Lutherans.

A fourth lesson, though, is that few churches in the ecumenical movement have stood still but continue to act on decisions that may or may not slow the progress towards unity by reconciling past differences. The larger task ahead at times seems even further out than it did back then in the mid-1960s when we had little experience of the dynamics of dialogue and in the 1980s when we were coming to understand how dialogue led to slow but determined progress. Yet, think back to the first half of the twentieth century and how impossible the achievement of the ecumenical movement must have seemed.

Cardinal Walter Kasper published *Harvesting the Fruits*, in which he assesses the fruits of the dialogues with the Lutherans, Christians of the Reformed tradition, Anglicans, and Methodists, to keep alive the memory of the achievements of dialogue and to initiate processes of reception of these agreements. In the introduction to the book, the cardinal writes: "The original enthusiasm has given way to a new sobriety; questions about the ecumenical methods and achievements of the past decades, and doubts about the future are being expressed."<sup>56</sup> He

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<sup>55</sup> His address was on October 27, 1983, at Manhattan College at a commemoration "Martin Luther: 500 Years." A condensed version of the address appeared in *Clergy Report* (Archdiocese of New York) 14, 1 (January 1984).

<sup>56</sup> Cardinal Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits* (New York: Continuum, 2009), p. 2.

identified some of these achievements: affirmation of our common foundation in Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity as expressed in our common creed and in the doctrines of the first ecumenical councils; progress in an ecclesiology of communion, the relationship between sacred Scripture and tradition, the sacramental nature of the church, apostolic succession and ministries; and convergences on the Eucharist. Kasper did not ignore remaining problems and new issues. These pertain to some theological problem of interpretation (biblical hermeneutics) involving historical-critical reading of the Bible and the church's tradition and self-awareness, and questions of the magisterium, namely the major question of how churches exercise authority, particularly with interpreting scripture. He was also concerned with how to translate and interpret the message revealed once and for all into the contemporary context and how to sustain the ongoing relevance of the Gospel message without falling into the trap either of fundamentalism or of relativism. New questions arise in theological anthropology, what does it mean to be human, ethical ones, questions of human sexuality, bioethics, ecology, human rights, social justice and peace seem to consume the energies of the churches more so than the traditional church dividing issues.

Fifty years ago, when the Secretariat for Christian Unity assembled a few experts in ecumenism and began planning for implementation of an ecumenical agenda for the Vatican Council, church life was considerably different than it is today. That generation is mostly gone and the generation whom they instructed is nearing retirement. We are learning a new lesson from ecumenism, namely how significant a generational change can be for the churches.

We have so much ecumenical output of which all of us are aware. It is significant to remember too that in the fields of relations with Jews and with Muslims responses to the invitations to dialogue have also been produced only in more recent years. Dabru Emet

(“speaking the truth,” September 2000), despite the criticisms it has received, is the first broadly representative statement by Jewish scholars and leaders, stating that it was high time that Jews took account of Christianity.<sup>57</sup> The broadly representative statement signed initially by 138 Muslim leaders and scholars, *A Common Word between Us and You*, is probably the first Muslim response of its kind to *Nostra aetate*. That effort was sponsored by the Kingdom of Jordan.<sup>58</sup>

The next 50 to 100 years will be a period of continuing absorption of these changes and developments. This will not be so focused on an international or national level as the previous fifty years, but I see a shift to other Catholic contexts than those offices associated with episcopal leadership. Universities, religious orders, congregations, ecumenical and interfaith affiliations, wherever Christians find themselves engaged in ongoing exchanges with other Christians, with Jews, with Muslims, and with many others, might carry the dialogues forward on all levels of exchange.

John O’Malley quotes John Courtney Murray towards the end of the council that the issue under all issues at Vatican II was the development of doctrine.<sup>59</sup> Mark Massa, another Jesuit historian, begins his recent book, *The American Catholic Revolution, How the ‘60s Changed the World Forever* with an insight from Garry Will, “the church’s secret, hidden away in official teaching, minimized when it could not be ignored, was change.”<sup>60</sup>

O’Malley makes a careful distinction between three conciliar terms for change: *aggiornamento* or a radical updating of the church to modern times; development which implies continuity with the past and is less radical in its implication; and *resourcement*, retrieving the past because it is more authentic. How these are interpreted today reveal one’s attitude towards

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<sup>57</sup> Dabru Emet is easily available on the internet; *Origins* published it in vol. 30, no. 18 (September 21, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> There is a dedicated website for *A Common Word*; *Origins* published it in vol. 37, no. 20 (October 25, 2007).

<sup>59</sup> O’Malley, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> *The American Catholic Revolution, How the ‘60s Changed the World Forever* (Oxford University Press, 2010), xvi; *Bared Ruined Choirs, Doubt, Prophecy and Radical Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971).

the council. In fact, there was a little bit of all three at Vatican II. Liturgical reform had much to do with resourcement, *Nostra aetate* with radical change and the presentation of something new, and *Lumen gentium* with development. Was Vatican II a reform council? Was Vatican II a break from the past? Yes, both are true. One can celebrate it today by attempting to provide the authentic interpretation of the sixteen documents or one can look at Vatican II as incorporating dialogue as a constitutive of Christian identity. How much change is one of the three issues under all issues according to John O'Malley.

The second has as much ecumenical significance as the first, the relationship between the center and the periphery in the church, which played out in the debate on episcopal primacy and collegiality at the council. The issue finds further expression in all sets of relationships in the church, especially regarding the laity that has no formal authority and the clergy that does. All this came to be expressed in a new, more pastoral language through the council, with such examples as charism, dialogue, partnership, cooperation. This new language emphasized the newness of Vatican II's directions and hence was vague and untested. We needed the past 50 years to test dialogue as we have done. With so much emphasis in the Catholic Church on the center in implementing the council, perhaps the next 50 years implementation will be lived out, more freely, on the frontiers.

The third undergirding issue relates to the style of the council. How did the council "do business"? To describe Vatican II merely in terms of reform is to miss the profound implications of the council's literary genre and vocabulary. The council fathers wanted a style that was biblical and patristic and got it. They also chose to praise the positive aspects of Catholicism and to establish the church's identity on that basis rather than making others look bad by comparison. The emergence of dialogue manifested this shift in style and interior understanding.

John O'Malley emphasizes the distinctiveness of the kind of documents produced at Vatican II, unlike any other council, even the synod of the diocese of Rome, which John XXIII had also announced on 25 January 1959. It convened before the council and produced 755 canons, like countless synods and councils before it. Vatican II broke from this style. The 1985 Synod of Bishops reiterated something that Pope Paul VI seemed to indicate at the close of the council—that it should be taken as a whole and that the texts form a complete context. The documents cohere; they quote one another and follow from one another. They vary in quality and style too, but collectively they seem more interested in winning approval than in condemning error. Vatican II was as much a language event as anything else. Vatican II was a teaching council, not by definition but by invitation and presentation. In this way, Vatican II was a departure from the long nineteenth century of isolation toward a search for communion with others.

We have an extraordinary opportunity over the next four years as we live through the jubilee of Vatican II. I wish to call attention to yet another recently published book, Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning*.<sup>61</sup> Faggioli picks up from where's John O'Malley's one volume history leaves off. Faggioli surveys the past fifty years of interpretation, but especially he focuses on the decade from the completion of the five volume *History of Vatican II*, edited by Alberigo and Komonchak, right up to the fiftieth anniversary of the council, the very time in which we are doing today's reflections.

If with Vatican II there is an analogy with a paradigm shift in science, Faggioli points out, that with every major breakthrough, the advance is always over-estimated in the short run

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<sup>61</sup> New York: Paulist Press, 2012.

and underestimated in the long run.<sup>62</sup> We are now at that crucial juncture between the short run and the long run.

When Pope John XXIII opened the council, he called our attention to Matthew 16:3, and Jesus' harsh words to religious authorities "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times." The signs of the times are different today than they were fifty years ago, especially regarding ecumenical and interreligious relations, and these call for our serious and creative attention. In the final weeks of Vatican II, Karl Rahner gave his famous lecture, "The Council: Beginning of a Beginning."<sup>63</sup> We are now at the beginning of the next fifty years. Any serious interpretation of Vatican II, fifty years ago, assumed in the context of developments fifty or more years before the council convened, must be carried out today looking back over developments since the end of the council while anticipating another fifty years from the perspective of the present situation in which we find ourselves today. Our ecumenical relations and our relations collectively with Jews, with Muslims, and with others are so much richer and promising today because the Second Vatican Council stands out as one of the most important events in that century of the church.

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<sup>62</sup> Faggioli, p. 139.

<sup>63</sup> See Faggioli, p. 179, n. 4.