

Presidential Address
DIALOGUE, PROCLAMATION,
AND THE SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION

Our convention theme—"Theology in Dialogue"—echoes a *leitmotif* of the Second Vatican Council. In fact, in John O'Malley's assessment, "[t]here is scarcely a page in the Council documents on which dialogue or its equivalent does not occur."¹ That same theme was at the center of the first encyclical of Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, in 1964 which included a call for dialogue at all levels of the Church.² The 1971 Synod of Bishops identified a corollary of this dialogical emphasis, citing "the right of everyone to be heard in a spirit of dialogue which preserves a legitimate diversity within the Church."³ Pope John Paul II, while expressing concern about false irenicism in ecumenical dialogue, nevertheless affirmed its essential value in his own encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*, where he affirmed that "[d]ialogue is an indispensable step towards human self-realization. . . . [It] involves not only an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an 'exchange of gifts'."⁴ More recently, Pope Benedict XVI (then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) affirmed that "[t]he proclamation of the gospel must be necessarily a dialogical process. We are not telling the other person something that it entirely unknown. . . . The reverse is the case: the one who proclaims is not only the giver, [but also] the receiver."⁵

But concern about the emphasis of the Council on dialogue both *ad extra* and *ad intra* was registered at the time and has been voiced even more strongly in recent years as disputes continue regarding the authentic interpretation of the Council, the Church's identity and mission, the goal and possibilities of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, the politics of dialogue, and the vocation of the theologian.

¹John W. O'Malley, "Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?" *Theological Studies* 67 (March 2006): 28.

²See Avery Dulles, "Dialogue, Truth, and Communion," The Third Annual Lecture of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative (New York: National Pastoral Life Center, 2001) 6-7.

³Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1971) 45.

⁴John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 25 May 1995, 28; *Origins* 25 (8 June 1995): 49-72, at 56.

⁵Joseph Ratzinger, "The Dialogue of Religions and the Relationship between Judaism and Christianity," in *Many Religions—One Covenant*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998) 112, as cited by Francis X. Clooney, "Dialogue Not Monologue: Benedict XVI and Religious Pluralism," *Commonweal* 132/18 (21 October 2005): 12-17, at 17.

Many share Karl Barth's concern at the time of the Council, when after reading *Gaudium et Spes*, he queried: "Is it so certain that dialogue with the world is to be placed ahead of proclamation to the world?"⁶ Instead, some have proposed that the authentic vocation of the theologian is to unfold the beauty of the tradition and proclaim the uniqueness of Christian identity, not to seek to demonstrate the relevance or credibility of Christian faith by accommodating to "the signs of our times," a task that is not only misdirected, but futile. From that perspective, rather than attempting to dialogue with the late modern/postmodern world in the limited and distorted cultural categories of our day, the vocation of the Church—and hence of the theologian—is to make a specifically Christian contribution to the dilemmas facing humankind and the Earth by proclaiming the mystery of Christ in all of its beauty and richness. That witness carries its own power—the power of the Spirit—when it is rooted in the biblical and liturgical heritage which is the treasure entrusted to the Church especially as that has been handed on by the classic interpreters of the tradition from the patristic and medieval eras. As British theologian Aidan Nichols has summed up the concern that is shared by a variety of postconciliar theologians and even theological schools, the danger is that "Catholics might exchange the Church's bearing of the Gospel for a mere benign accompanying of those movements in culture and society which seem (or seemed) most hopeful for natural flourishing."⁷

Cast in those terms, it is evident that one of the underlying theological issues in these disputes remains the early twentieth-century nature/grace disputes which have now shifted into questions of the relationship between faith and culture or culture and the Gospel.⁸ One way of framing the question is to ask whether, on the one hand, the goal of theology is to contribute to the biblical and liturgical forma-

⁶Karl Barth, *Ad limina apostolorum* (ET Edinburgh, 1969) 9, as cited by Aidan Nichols, "Twenty-five Years On: A Catholic Commemoration of Karl Barth," *New Blackfriars* 74 (1993): 538-49, at 548.

⁷Nichols, "Twenty-five Years On," 547. Nichols notes that a similar concern was expressed by Joseph Ratzinger in his critique of the final session of the Council published in the same year of Barth's visit to the Vatican. See also Joseph Ratzinger, "The Church and Man's Calling; Introductory Article and Chapter 1, The Dignity of the Human Person," *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 5, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 115-63, esp. the section on freedom (article 17), 136-40.

⁸Walter Kasper, "Nature, Grace, and Culture: On the Meaning of Secularization," in *Catholicism and Secularization in America: Essays on Nature, Grace and Culture*, ed. David Schindler (Huntington IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1990) 31-51. The two sets of terms are not, however, strictly parallel. Karl Rahner offers some important distinctions and cautions in his chapter "The Order of Redemption within the Order of Creation," in *The Christian Commitment* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963) 38-74. Nevertheless, the basic unresolved theological tension focuses on how the divine and the human are related, and the impact of sin on that relationship. As the question is often posed in terms of preaching the Gospel: Is there some "point of contact" for encounter with God within the human person, in human culture, and/or in the broader realm of creation?

tion of Christian sensibilities, to form the Christian's "sacramental imagination" which at the same time is to shape a distinctively Christian and ecclesial ethical response to the dilemmas facing us today. Or, on the other hand, does Christian ethics call for a more inclusive, just, and participative church and liturgy and a criticism of ideology that can be found in even our most sacred texts?

A critical appropriation of the Catholic sacramental imagination and theological heritage shows these alternatives to pose a false dilemma that results in disputes and caricatures that we can little afford in a world where religious absolutism increasingly perpetuates violence and where polarization within the Church compromises the clarity of our witness in our world. At root are real theological differences among us which are representative of a legitimate theological diversity. The tensions those differences produce can be creative and productive, but they also have the potential to degenerate into ecclesial and theological "culture wars."

There have been multiple attempts in recent years to categorize these theological differences of emphasis in the contrasting frameworks of correlationist and manifestation theologies, accommodationists and neotraditionalists, liberal revisionists and postliberals who offer a "thick description" of the tradition, theologians of *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* theologians, liberation theology and radical orthodoxy, Rahnerians and Balthasarians, Concilium and Communio readers and contributors, Vatican II Catholics and evangelical Catholics, kingdom Catholics and communion Catholics, Augustinians and Thomists, and Whig Thomists and post-Augustinian Thomists, to name but some of them.⁹ In his April address to the

⁹For examples of these pairings and clarifications regarding the terminology, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Church in Crisis," *Commonweal* 32 (3 June 2005): 11-14; idem, "The Future of Theology in the Church," in *New Horizons in Theology*, ed. Terrence W. Tilley (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2005) 16-39, at 29; David Tracy, "The Uneasy Alliance Reconciled: Catholic Theological Method, Modernity, and Postmodernity," *Theological Studies* 50 (Spring 1989): 548-70; idem, "On Naming the Present," in *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1994) 3-24; James M. Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, the Church, and the University," *CTSA Proceedings* 40 (1985): 83-94; idem, *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004); Bradford E. Hinze, "Postliberal Theology and Roman Catholic Theology," *Religious Studies Review* 21/4 (October 1995): 299-303; William C. Placher, "Revisionist and Postliberal Theologies and the Public Character of Theology," *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 392-416; idem, "Conversations that Count," *The Christian Century* 121 (29 June 2004): 25-27; Marcellino D'Ambrosio, "Ressourcement Theology, Aggiornamento, and the Hermeneutics of Tradition," *Communio* 18 (Winter 1991): 530-55; William L. Portier, "Here Come the Evangelical Catholics," *Communio* 31 (Spring 2004): 35-66; Laurence Paul Hemming, ed., *Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Inquiry* (Aldershot UK; Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2000); Anthony J. Godzieba, "The Fear of Time and the Joys of Contingency," *Philosophy and Theology* 16/1 (2004): 77-87; Timothy Radcliffe, *What Is the Point of Being a Christian?* (London: Burns and Oates, 2005) 164-78; Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003); and John Milbank, "'Post-modern Critical Augustinianism': A Short Summa in Forty-Two Responses to Unasked Questions," *Modern Theology* 7/3 (April 1991): 225-37.

American Theological Society, Robert Neville identified a parallel tension within the broader realm of American theology, following the trajectories in twentieth-century Protestant Christian theology of Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. In Neville's estimation, the tension between what he called "truth-seeking theologies" and "identity theologies" often leads to "the dismissal of others in dialogue so that learning is blocked arbitrarily."¹⁰ Although many of us might want to dispute one or more of these characterizations or the figures that are assumed to fall within each category, I think we also recognize that there is truth in the depiction of our present ecclesial and theological situation as characterized by significant polarities.¹¹

Part of our task as theologians, however, is to seek the element of truth in the positions of those who remain "other" or with whom we disagree—whether within the Church, in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, or in the public arena. Handing on the living Catholic tradition requires both dialogue and proclamation, *ressourcement* precisely for the sake of *aggiornamento*, a theology of the incarnation and Trinity that probes the implications of the scandal that the Word became flesh and continues to dwell among us in concrete human history. It requires cultivation and exercise of a sacramental imagination that is shaped by our biblical and liturgical inheritance, but that is also able to glimpse the Spirit of God disclosed in the "signs of our times." Our theological vision does need to be focused by our distinctive Christian tradition if we are to exercise discernment in our reading of the signs of the times, to be authentic partners in interreligious dialogue, and to be converted from the multiple forms of bias that affect us. At the same time, doing theology in the freedom of the Spirit means that our individual and collective imaginations need to remain open to genuinely new expressions of grace. What might appear to be conflicting mandates in the apostle Paul's charge to the Thessalonian community, is really a single challenge to the Church in every new situation: "Do not stifle the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test everything; retain what is good" (1Thes 5: 19-21).

Given our time frame this morning, I have chosen to address briefly three polarities that need to be held in creative tension if we are to be faithful to our vocation to reactualize the rich Catholic theological heritage in our day. To

¹⁰Robert Cummings Neville, "Two Dimensions of Religious Belief," Presidential Address, American Theological Society (April 2006), typescript, 13.

¹¹Timothy Radcliffe wagers that these tensions are more pronounced in the United States than anywhere else in the world. See Radcliffe, "Overcoming Discord in the Church," *National Catholic Reporter* 42/27 (5 May 2006): 6-8. See also Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, "Called to be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril," Catholic Common Ground News Conference, 12 August 1996, online at <<http://www.nplc.org/commonground/calledcatholic.htm>>; Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005); John L. Allen, "Common Ground in a Global Key: International Lessons in Catholic Dialogue," the Sixth Annual Lecture of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative (New York: National Pastoral Life Center, 2004); and Bradford Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006).

highlight the distinct emphasis of each pole, let me present them as questions of “either/or,” but it will come as no surprise that in each case I want to argue that Catholic theology needs to hold the two together as “both/and.” (1) Is the theological focus that is needed today one of *ressourcement* or *aggiornamento*? (2) Is the Church’s mission primarily one of dialogue or proclamation? and (3) Does the “logic of the incarnation” mean that we are shaped by a sacred tradition that is handed on in a privileged way in our sacred scriptures and liturgy or that even those sacred texts and rituals are communicated only through fallible human communities and are always in need of interpretation and reform?

RESSOURCEMENT AND AGGIORNAMENTO

The virtual opposition of these two terms as distinct theological options that is at least implied in the way the terms are sometimes used four decades after the Council is mystifying when you consider the history of the movement now known as the *nouvelle théologie*, the diverse figures who were under suspicion as a result of their approaches to *ressourcement*, and the role that this movement played in the conciliar process of renewal that both John XXIII and Paul VI named as *aggiornamento*. One irony is that the original *ressourcement* theologians were viewed with suspicion partially because of the conviction expressed by the historical theologian Henri Bouillard that “a theology that fails to be contemporary is to that extent false.”¹² The original focus of the movement named pejoratively as the *nouvelle théologie* was two series launched by the Jesuits associated with the faculty at Lyons-Fourvière—*Sources Chrétiennes* under the editorship of Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac and *Théologie* under the direction of Bouillard.¹³ In particular, it was the emphasis on making the writings of the Greek Fathers more accessible that was viewed with suspicion as part of a larger “concerted enterprise of destabilization of the Scholastic method.”¹⁴ Likewise, the focus on interpreting doctrine in the context of the history of a living tradition in the series *Théologie* was

¹²See the conclusion to Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris, 1944), as cited by Adrian Nichols, “Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie,” *The Thomist* 64 (2000): 1-19, at 3.

¹³M-M. Labourdette, “La théologie et ses sources,” *Revue Thomiste* 46/2 (1946): 353-71. For a more detailed discussion of what follows and references to the original sources, see Nichols, “Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie”; David Coffey, “Some Resources for Students of *La Nouvelle Théologie*,” *Philosophy and Theology* 11/2 (1999): 367-402; T. M. Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology 1800–1970* (Paramus, New Jersey: Paulist Newman Press, 1970) 194-210; and Thomas O’Meara, “‘Raid on the Dominicans’: The Repression of 1954,” *America* 170/4 (5 February 1994): 8-16.

¹⁴E. Fouilloux, “Dialogue théologique? (1946–1948),” in S.-T. Bonino, ed., *Saint Thomas au XXe siècle: Actes du colloque Centenaire de la “Revue Thomiste.” Toulouse, 25-28 mars 1993* (Paris 1994) 159, as cited by Nichols, “Thomism and the Nouvelle Théologie,” 8. According to Jacques Maritain, the Fribourg Thomist Charles Journet was concerned that theologians were “reinventing the Fathers of the Church to the music of Hegel” (cited by Nichols, 7).

interpreted as a form of historical relativism that compromised universal and transhistorical speculative truth.

In a survey of trends in contemporary Catholic theology and philosophy published in 1946, Daniélou described the movement of *ressourcement* as a return to the inspiration of early Christianity through a revival of the study of biblical, patristic, and liturgical sources. But integral to that “return to the sources,” in his estimation, was an attempt to find a method that would allow Catholic thinkers to dialogue with the philosophical and cultural challenges of their day, particularly existentialism and Marxism. In addition, Daniélou argued that activists and the Catholic faithful were searching for a theology as well as a spirituality that would speak to their struggles and questions.

To call for a retrieval of classic sources in the tradition that addresses contemporary concerns does not mean that one always will judge the efforts of others who take up that challenge to be completely successful. However, as Bernard Lonergan, who was working in a different context on his own interpretation of Aquinas’s writings on grace noted, “speculative failure is not the same as heresy.”¹⁵ Daniélou, for example, praised Teilhard de Chardin and Gabriel Marcel for engaging the new philosophies of their day, but did not agree with all of their conclusions. Both Daniélou and de Lubac expressed serious concerns after the Second Vatican Council over aspects of the interpretation and implementation of conciliar documents. Nevertheless, these *ressourcement* theologians were convinced that attention both to the sources of the Christian tradition and to the contemporary situation had to be held together in any adequate theology.

While the names of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar are widely associated today with the term “*ressourcement* theologians,” the name Marie-Dominique Chenu is more often associated with a theology of *aggiornamento* in contemporary contrasting uses of those terms.¹⁶ Chenu is the one, of course, who was the inspiration behind the claim of *Gaudium et Spes* that “[i]n every age, the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task”(GS, #4).¹⁷ Yet Chenu was also one of the pioneers in the *ressourcement* movement who came under suspicion as part of the dangerous *nouvelle théologie*. It was precisely his work as a historical theologian and his careful attention to sources that led Chenu to

¹⁵Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 4.

¹⁶Joseph Komonchak points this out in several of his recent articles. See Komonchak, “The Church in Crisis”; “The Future of Theology in the Church”; and “Returning from Exile: Catholic Theology in the 1930s,” in *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, ed. Gregory Baum (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1999) 35-48.

¹⁷*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [Gaudium et Spes]*, paragraph 4. *The Basic Sixteen Documents Vatican Council II*, a Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1996) 165. Hereafter GS.

conclude that the modernist crisis earlier in the century need not be feared as a serious danger to Catholic faith. Rather, he argued that it could be seen as an opportunity for the authentic development of the tradition that was comparable to two earlier periods of revitalization and growth brought about by dialogue with the cultures of earlier eras—the Carolingian period and the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁸

Chenu was a committed Thomistic scholar and a careful historical theologian who specialized in the medieval period. The program in the history of doctrines that he founded at the Dominican studium in Paris, Le Saulchoir, was known for its focus on locating the classic works of medieval theology in their historical context which included not only their theological context, but also the economic, social, and cultural shifts of the time. That approach to medieval studies was considered a direct challenge to the ahistorical focus on the texts and their philosophical meaning that characterized the reigning neo-scholasticism of the time. As a result, Chenu's book describing the program of studies at Le Saulchoir was placed on the Index in 1942. At the heart of Chenu's theological method was a conviction about what he called "the law of Incarnation." Joseph Komonchak has described this Christological principle for theological method in the following way:

The most intimate and complete union with God did not destroy or even compromise but rather elevated and integrated the humanity of Christ, and any theology faithful to the logic of Incarnation had to respect the integrity of the human in all its dimensions—personal, communal, and social."¹⁹

The same principle that was operative in Chenu's historical scholarship was also at the root of his active engagement with the Catholic Action movement of the *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* and with his more well-known involvement with the worker-priest movement in France.²⁰ A discerning attention to one's own times (*présence au monde*) was, according to Chenu, a fundamental dimension of the historical consciousness necessary for good theological scholarship. For Chenu, writing in the 1930s, new movements within the Church of his day, particularly new youth movements in the Church and the growth of the lay apostolate, constituted genuine theological "loci in action" (*loci en acte*) for the doctrines of grace, incarnation, and redemption. In his words: "Poor theologians are they who, buried away in their folios and their scholastic disputes, are not open to these remarkable developments, and not only in the pious fervor of their hearts, but formally, in their science: here is a very profitable theological datum, in the *presence* of the Spirit."²¹

¹⁸Komonchak, "Returning from Exile," 37.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 41.

²⁰See Yves Marie Joseph Congar, "Dominicans and Worker-Priests," *Doctrine and Life* 40 (March 1990): 126-29; O'Meara, "'Raid on the Dominicans'"; and Komonchak, "Returning from Exile," 39-42.

²¹Cited by Komonchak, "Returning from Exile," 41.

There were, of course, significant differences between the theological perspectives of de Lubac and Chenu that included, but went beyond, the important differences in patristic and medieval theological methods and their differing interpretations of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Those differences were evident during the conciliar debates and even more so in the postconciliar reception and implementation of Vatican II. A study of this rich period in Catholic theology obviously cannot focus only on these two figures. My point here is simply to highlight two points: (1) True *ressourcement* is always for the sake of *aggiornamento* and authentic *aggiornamento* necessitates a return to the sources of our tradition. Creative retrieval in a new age is precisely how we remain faithful to the living tradition of the Church. (2) There was significant diversity among these *ressourcement* theologians, all of whom shared a common concern to return to the vital sources of the Christian tradition. They shared that commitment conscious that they lived in an era when that tradition was cut off not only from the cultural and social crises of the time, but also from the pastoral life of the Church, from theology's biblical and liturgical roots, and from the spiritual vitality that was the source of all authentic theology—all challenges facing us in new forms today.

DIALOGUE FOR THE SAKE OF PROCLAMATION

The difficulty in identifying, let alone interpreting and responding to, the “signs of the times” in a globalized and multicultural world of growing economic disparities, religious violence, and absolutism is daunting. But it is also necessary if Aquinas was correct in describing theology as speech not only about God, but also about all of reality in relation to God. Both the possibility and the value of dialogue between the Church and the broader contexts in which it is located are grounded in the sacramental conviction that the presence of the Creator God—a presence that a broad range of Catholic theologians would identify as salvific as well as creative—can be discovered throughout creation and history. Whether identified as in the Letter to the Hebrews as “God’s speaking in fragmentary ways” (Hebr. 1:1), or in Paul’s preaching in the Acts of the Apostles of “the unknown God you worship” (Acts 17:23), or in the language of Justin Martyr’s *logoi spermatikoi* spread throughout creation, or in the later categories of natural, general, or “anonymous” revelation, or in the reminder from *Gaudium et Spes* that “grace works invisibly in the hearts of all” (GS, #22), the Christian tradition has recognized from the beginning that God’s grace cannot be limited to the boundaries of the ecclesial community or the sacraments.²² Not only Christianity, but also other

²²Thomas Aquinas, *Commentariorum Fratris Dominici Soto . . . in Quartum Sententiarum* 1 (Venice, 1584): 266; *Summa theologiae* III 64, 3, as cited by Thomas O’Meara in “The School of Thomism at Salamanca and the Presence of Grace in the Americas,” *Angelicum* 71 (1994): 351n.64. See also O’Meara’s own reading of Aquinas’s theology of wider grace in Thomas F. O’Meara, “Tarzan, Las Casas, and Rahner: Aquinas’s Theology of Wider Grace,” *Theology Digest* 45 (1998): 319-27; idem, “The Presence of

religious traditions, and the world itself bear traces of the Wisdom of God who delighted in creation from the beginning. If that is the case, then dialogue with each of those sources of wisdom is necessary, not only to improve the Church's proclamation, but also for the Church's own reception of the Word of God in all of its fullness and power.

This is not to say that every aspect of our world or of various political and cultural contexts is a direct source of revelation or beyond critique. The "world of grace" remains a world devastated by sin, suffering, and injustice as well. Many theologians at the time of the Council, especially those from Germany (including both Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger) criticized what they saw as an overly optimistic assessment of the revelation to be discovered in the modern world according to *Gaudium et Spes*. As theologians such as Edward Schillebeeckx have proposed, however, to claim that God's Spirit can be detected in our late modern/postmodern world, does not identify culture and the Gospel. Rather that claim gives Christians the task of discerning where God is at work on the underside of the "negative contrast experiences" of our day.²³ This is a charge to the Church to respond to the Spirit's promptings to participate in movements of protest and resistance wherever human rights or God's beloved creation is violated and to listen when the Spirit speaks in "sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26).

Further, if as Chenu argued, the pastoral life of the Church provides evidence of the meaning of the doctrines of grace and incarnation, it is incumbent on the theological community as well as the hierarchical magisterium to attend to what may be new impulses of the Spirit at work within the Church. The difficulty is, of course, discerning where the Spirit is at work in new movements, cries of protest and pain, and calls for reform from all sides within the Church. But if we believe that an instinct for the authentic faith of the Church (the *sensus fidei*) has been bestowed on the whole body of believers by the Holy Spirit and that the "holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office" (LG #12),²⁴ intraecclesial dialogue is necessary for the sake of authentic Christian proclamation.

Consulting the *sensus fidelium* does not refer to something that can be determined easily by majority vote, but rather to a genuine discernment of revelation in the faith experience of Christians and Christian communities. Definitive and final judgments of what constitutes that authentic tradition are the

Grace Outside Evangelization, Baptism and Church in Thomas Aquinas's Theology," in *That Others May Know and Love: Essays in Honor of Zachary Hayes, O.F.M.*, ed. M. F. Cusato and F. Edward Coughlin (St. Bonaventure NY: Franciscan Institute, 1997) 91-131.

²³For key texts in Schillebeeckx's analysis of "negative contrast experiences," see Edward Schillebeeckx, *God the Future of Man*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968) 76-77, 136, 152-54, 159, and 191-92; *Understanding of Faith*, trans. N. D. Smith (London: Sheed and Ward, 1974) 91-101; *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury Press, 1980) 818 and 897n.158; and *Church, the Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 5-6.

²⁴*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium]*, paragraph 12. *The Basic Sixteen Documents Vatican Council II*, 16.

responsibility of the hierarchical magisterium, not the theological community. But offering theological interpretations of new experiences within the community and arguing for how they are, or are not, consistent with an authentic reading of the tradition of the Church *are* aspects of our task. It is also our responsibility to identify and interpret forgotten, as well as classic, sources within our tradition. Like the retrieval of the Greek Fathers by the French theologians of the so-called “new theology,” efforts in our own time to recover the voices of women and others who were marginalized or excluded from classic status, to explore resources from spirituality and popular religion as properly theological sources, to interpret the Bible with fresh hermeneutical methods, or to celebrate the liturgy in diverse inculturations, may be viewed as attempts to de-center the classic tradition. But the challenge more precisely is to rethink what constitutes the authentic tradition and to participate in constructing that tradition.²⁵

Many of the debates in each of these areas is over a conflict of interpretations as diverse sources within the tradition are given a new emphasis or interpreted in new ways, something that is not distinctive to the modern or postmodern era. We may disagree about whether an interpretation is faithful to the tradition, or why it does—or does not—serve the Church’s proclamation in our day, but that points again to the need for genuine dialogue in the service of proclamation.

One of the great concerns of those who find even the word “dialogue” to be so ideologically charged as to no longer be helpful²⁶ has been identified by our colleague (now Cardinal) Avery Dulles. In an article he penned two decades ago on the concept of *sensus fidelium*, Dulles pointed out that the notion of that the community of the baptized has a graced affinity for “right teaching” is part of a longstanding, if little emphasized, tradition in the Church supported by many fathers of the early Church including Augustine.²⁷ Later the notion was given

²⁵On this point, see Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury Press, 1980); idem, *Interim Report on the Books “Jesus” and “Christ”* (New York: Crossroad, 1980; repr. 1981, 1982); Lieven Boeve, “Bearing Witness to the Differend: A Model for Theologizing in the Postmodern Context,” *Louvain Studies* 20 (1995): 362-79; idem, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in the Postmodern Context* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2003); John E. Thiel, *Senses of Tradition: Continuity and Development in Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Terrence W. Tilley, *Inventing Christian Tradition* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2000); and Mary Catherine Hilkert, “Experience and Tradition—Can the Center Hold?” in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) 59-82.

²⁶Timothy Radcliffe attributes this claim to John Allen. See Radcliffe, “Overcoming Discord in the Church,” *National Catholic Reporter* 42/27 (5 May 2006): 5-8, at 6.

²⁷Avery Dulles, “Sensus Fidelium,” *America* 155 (1 Nov. 1986): 240-42, 263. See also J. M. R. Tillard, “Sensus Fidelium,” *One in Christ* 11 (1975): 2-29; John J. Burkhard, “Sensus Fidei: Theological Reflection Since Vatican II: I. 1965–1984,” *Heythrop Journal* 34 (1993): 41-59; and “Sensus Fidei: Theological Reflection Since Vatican II: II. 1985–1989,” *Heythrop Journal* 34 (1993): 123-26; and Edmund J. Dobbin, “Sensus Fidelium Reconsidered,” *New Theology Review* 2 (1989): 48-64.

theological support by Aquinas with his claim that because the baptized have a “share in the divine nature” through grace, they possess a certain “existential affinity” with the realities of faith and are inclined to reject heresies. Likewise John Henry Newman described this “instinct of faith” in his “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine” (1859), as an “instinct deep in the bosom of the mystical body of Christ.” But Dulles’s concern in that article and in subsequent writings about calling on the *sensus fidelium* as a basis for changing Church practice or for nonreception of a Church teaching—a concern shared by others—is the possibility of bias. In a later article, Dulles remarked that the views of many Catholics “seem to be influenced more by the expectations and practices of secular society than by properly theological reasons.”²⁸

The possibility of biased judgment on the part of a group as well as by individuals clearly needs to be acknowledged. The problem is that that same dilemma faces all members in the Body of Christ, regardless of our roles.²⁹ Just as “secular feminist ideology,” for example, can be a form of bias affecting the judgment of believers on questions of women’s roles in the Church and ministry, so too are patriarchy and clericalism forms of bias.³⁰ We all remain finite and sinful, both as individuals and as communities of faith. We stand in need of the Spirit’s conversion and of one another’s critique. But for that to happen and to benefit the whole Church we need genuine opportunities to speak and to listen.

Genuine dialogue is possible only when those who exercise authority within a community create and protect the necessary climate of freedom within which theologians and other believers can explore new ideas, articulate their experiences and struggles as persons of faith, wrestle with difficult issues, challenge one another’s perceptions, and disagree with one another without fear of sanctions. Many of us experienced that kind of dialogue in the service of proclamation in the processes that the United States Bishops used in the preparation of their pastoral letters on peace and on the economy two decades ago.³¹ Others among us have been involved for many years in creative and productive ecumenical, Jewish-Christian, and interreligious dialogues that have opened new possibilities for ecclesial

²⁸Avery Dulles, “Tradition Says No,” *The Tablet* (9 December 1995): 1572-73.

²⁹With reference even to the pope, Catherine of Siena advised Pope Urban VI in the fourteenth century that “so far as authority is concerned you can do everything, but in terms of vision, you can see no more than any one person can.” Letter to Pope Urban VI (T302), translation by Suzanne Noffke, unpublished vol. 4 of *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, as cited by Mary Catherine Hilkert in *Speaking with Authority: Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Women Today* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001) 80. For analysis of the dynamics of bias, see Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 191-203, and 218-42.

³⁰See Mary Collins, “The Refusal of Women in Clerical Circles,” in *Women in the Church I*, ed. Madonna Kolbenschlag (Washington DC: Pastoral Press, 1987) 51-63.

³¹See Kenneth Himes, “The Challenge of Peace and Economic Justice for All: Reflections Twenty Years Later,” *CTSA Proceedings* 56 (2001): 77-96; and Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue*, 90-111.

communion and interreligious collaboration and friendships as well as for a creative retrieval of the sources of our own tradition.

In our theological work we need to lament the loss of lay participation and broad theological consultation in many areas of the Church today and continue to call for ecclesial structures that foster genuine dialogue and the implementation of just processes in situations of conflict between bishops and theologians.³² At the same time, our own responsibility to create genuine and open dialogue in and for the Church in situations where we exercise authority and leadership remains. We can initiate attempts at dialogue by speaking or writing even when our voices appear to go unheeded or are not invited into formal dialogues. We can further dialogue by our attempts to represent one another's positions fairly, by taking seriously objections to our own positions, and by assuming our responsibility to offer theological critique of one another's work. We can do what we can to foster dialogue in our own Society, in parishes and pastoral and diocesan settings, in our universities, academic departments and classrooms, in religious congregations and centers of spirituality, and in ecumenical and interreligious dialogues. We can participate in national organizations such as the Common Ground Initiative, Call to Action, Voice of the Faithful, Pax Christi, the Encuentros for Hispanic pastoral leaders and youth groups, the National Black Catholic Congress, as well as the communities of faith that so many of our younger members and students are actively involved in such as the San Egidio communities, groups of student volunteers living in community, or Catholic Worker houses. Each of those venues is an arena where the faith of the Church is being shaped, lived, and transmitted today. Each of them can benefit from theological reflection from diverse perspectives and genuine dialogue as believers gather in search of deeper faith and more authentic witness to the Gospel. It is not only the hierarchical magisterium, but also theologians, who need to consult the *sensus fidelium* if we are not to neglect an important source of theology. As Chenu noted in his own day, these constitute genuine loci where the Spirit continues to reveal the Word of God in our day.

THE SACRAMENTAL IMAGINATION AND THE LOGIC OF INCARNATION

But here the concern of those who emphasize proclamation and identity as primary comes to the fore again. What shapes the faith, imagination, and judgment of those communities and others like them as specifically Christian? What enables

³²See Ladislav Orsy, "Justice Begins at Home," *The Tablet* 253 (16 January 1999): 78-81; and Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church*. Bishop Francis P. Murphy noted that the consultation process was the most serious concern raised by Vatican officials regarding the proposed U.S. Bishops' Pastoral on Women's Concerns. In his words, "they asserted that bishops are teachers, not learners; truth cannot emerge through consultation." Francis P. Murphy, "Let's Start Over: A Bishop Appraises the Pastoral on Women," *Commonweal* 119 (25 September 1992): 11-15, at 12.

them—and us—to represent the Catholic tradition and to discern authentically in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as well as to be effective witnesses of faith and to judge prudently in the public sphere? Initially the response seems evident: the concrete form of Christianity and of the Catholic sacramental imagination is found in Jesus Christ. The sacramental imagination is shaped by the biblical narratives, educated in the school of liturgy, and handed on in the living tradition of the Church in communion with its leaders. But the incarnational principle that Chenu identified points to the complexity of that claim in an age when we are aware not only of the multiple lenses through which we read that tradition, but also of political dynamics operative within the Church as well as in culture and society: “any theology faithful to the logic of the Incarnation has to respect the integrity of the human in all of its dimensions—personal, communal, and social.” Any theology faithful to the logic of the Incarnation has to respect how profoundly inculturated every aspect of our tradition is.

Thus, for example, I assume that there is wide agreement among us with the claim of *Gaudium et Spes* that Jesus Christ and the good news of his life, death, and resurrection provide the key to a Christian interpretation of the human situation, the human person, and genuine human community. Many in postconciliar debates about reception of the Council have argued that the doctrines of Christology and Trinity establish the basis for interpreting that conciliar constitution and for any genuinely theological, and specifically Christian, anthropology. As Walter Kasper has pointed out, however, that does not necessarily mean, as some would insist, that Christology or Trinitarian theology are the necessary starting points for a Christian anthropology or a discerning analysis of culture or the human situation. But it does mean that Christology provides a corrective and a lens for reading the human situation and that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus disclose dimensions of the mystery of human life otherwise inaccessible.³³

To grant that central insight does not yet resolve the hermeneutical dilemma: Which reading of Christology or of trinitarian life are we presuming when we speak about the shaping of human life and praxis? Eastern or Western theologies of the Trinity? Which interpretation of the contributions of Gregory of Nyssa or the Cappadocians? Which reading of Augustine? Antiochene or Alexandrian emphases in Christology—both of which are preserved in the Chalcedonian formulation? Further, we always need to distinguish between the mystery disclosed and the way it has been formulated. A contemporary retrieval of an orthodox incarnational theology, for example, need not be limited to a view filtered through the lenses of

³³Walter Kasper, “Christology and Anthropology,” in *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 73-93; idem, “The Theological Anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes*,” *Communio* 23 (Spring 1996): 129-40. David Tracy makes the point that Christian theology must be christomorphic, rather than christocentric. See “Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity,” *Theology Today* 51 (April 1994): 104-14, at 111. By way of contrast, see David L. Schindler, “Christology and the Imago Dei: Interpreting *Gaudium et Spes*,” *Communio* 23 (1996): 156-84.

modern personalist philosophy, nuptial symbolism, and/or gender essentialism. What new perspectives on the mystery of the Word made flesh are disclosed when Christian anthropology is derived from a retelling of the story of Jesus “from below” that emphasizes Jesus’ unsettling and parabolic preaching and liberating lifestyle, his table companionship with the outcast and radical fidelity to Abba in spite of what appeared to be the historical fiasco of his life and of much of history?³⁴ How is that mystery enriched when Jesus is named as a Mestizo messiah,³⁵ or the Black Christ³⁶ or the “minjung within the minjung” of Asian Christologies?³⁷ What new possibilities for proclamation and hearing emerge when the story is retold as the story of Wisdom Incarnate “sent to gather all the outcast under the wings of their gracious Sophia-God and bring them to shalom?”³⁸

The use of trinitarian theology to interpret theological anthropology is even more complex. Time precludes exploration of the multiple issues that arise there.³⁹ But to raise only one of the controverted issues, we might ask: Does trinitarian theology reveal a divinely intended hierarchical communion as the pattern for both anthropology and ecclesiology? Or as Catherine LaCugna has proposed, does the doctrine of the Trinity actually stand in opposition to any kind of subordination, inequality, or hierarchy, disclosing that “[p]atriarchy is not God’s *archē* [rule]; the rule of the *pater familias* is not the rule of God. God rules by love, in solidarity with the slave, the poor, the woman, the outcast, the uncircumcised”?⁴⁰

Every reading of Christology or Trinity is an interpretation of the tradition and more basically of the mysteries that gave rise to that tradition. Each of those interpretations was constructed in a specific historical and cultural context. To acknowledge the limits—and the contributions—of our language and context need not result in the kind of radical historicism that concludes that the value of those theologies does not extend beyond the era in which they developed. At the heart of Catholic confidence in the notion of tradition is the conviction that the Spirit of God continues to mediate the mystery of Christ in every age and culture—and does so

³⁴See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury, 1979).

³⁵See Virgilio P. Elizondo, *A God of Incredible Surprises: Jesus of Galilee* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

³⁶See Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*, the Bishop Henry McNeal Turner Studies in North American Black Religion 9 (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1994).

³⁷See Peter C. Phan, “Jesus the Christ with an Asian Face,” *Theological Studies* 57 (1996): 399-430.

³⁸Elizabeth A. Johnson, *SHE WHO IS: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 157. See also Johnson, “Redeeming the Name of Christ,” in *Freeing Theology*, 115-37.

³⁹Even if one grants a basis in revelation for speculation about the inner divine life and the appropriateness of doing so (claims disputed in themselves), it remains problematic to make direct application to human or ecclesial life, given the radical difference between the Creator and creature, human finitude and embodiment, and the impact of sin on human and ecclesial life.

⁴⁰Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “God in Communion with Us,” in *Freeing Theology*, 92.

precisely through concrete communities of faith and discipleship. Hence each of those theological formulations has a potential contribution to make to our ongoing appropriation—which is at the same time a real incarnation—of that living tradition. Yet, no one of them can be identified with the meaning preserved in the classic dogmatic and creedal proclamations, nor with the fullness of the mystery of Christ, let alone the very mystery of God.

The richness and diversity that make up our tradition extend to the primary sources of that tradition—scripture and the liturgy—as well. The insight of cultural-linguistic theorists, among others, that human experience is shaped and formed by the cultures, symbols, and practices in which we are immersed is indisputable in itself. At the same time, the logic of incarnation needs to be respected: human persons and human communities shaped our sacred texts, decided on their canonical status, created, revised and institutionalized liturgical practices. Our belief in faith is that the Spirit guided that process, but so too does the Spirit guide the ongoing interpretation of the scriptures and movements for reform of the liturgy. The Spirit's fidelity is not limited to ages past or prevailing forms.

We do indeed need to have our imaginations formed by a biblical worldview, but as we are well aware, biblical texts and versions of a biblical worldview have been used—and continue to be used—to perpetuate institutionalized racism, religious wars, claims about God's judgment on homosexual persons, patriarchal structures and language, anti-Jewish preaching, and abuse of the Earth. Nevertheless, our confidence in faith is that the Word of God is living and active, a creative and liberating power of God at work that can subvert any efforts to chain or domesticate it.⁴¹

The same dynamic is at work in the liturgy. Although expressed in diverse ways, there is a wide range of agreement among a number of sacramental and liturgical theologians, moral theologians and ethicists, and catechists and religious educators about the power of liturgical symbols and praxis to form the imagination and ethical praxis of the Christian community.⁴² Not all of them share the parallel

⁴¹See Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Bible and Feminism," *Freeing Theology*, 31-57; idem, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church*, rev. ed. (New York; Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 2004); idem, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); Phyllis Trible, "The Pilgrim Bible on a Feminist Journey," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 11 (1990): 232-39; and Elsa Tamez, "Women's Rereading of the Bible," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1994) 190-200.

⁴²See Tissa Balasuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1979); Michael Baxter, "Reintroducing Virgil Michel: Toward a Counter-Tradition of Catholic Social Ethics in the United States," *Communio* 24 (Fall 1997): 499-528; William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1995); Mary Collins, "Eucharist and Justice," in *Worship Renewal to Practice* (Washington DC: Pastoral Press, 1987) 247-63; idem, "Liturgical Spirituality in a Pluralistic Culture," *Doctrine and Life* 41 (1991): 59-67; idem, "Liturgy, Holiness, and Justice in Hard

conviction, however, that liturgical celebrations are at the same time always the ritual celebrations of finite and broken human communities and thus subject to human bias and manipulation. Not every celebration of the Eucharist is an incarnated proclamation of the Gospel as is clear even in the Pauline challenge to the Corinthian community that it is possible for Christians gathered together even in celebrations of the Eucharist to “eat and drink unto [our] own condemnation” (1 Cor. 11:29).

Recognition of the brokenness and even sinfulness in the Christian community does not mean denial of the Church’s identity as Body of Christ, its mission to be sacrament of salvation in the world, or the work of the Spirit animating the Church in every age. On the contrary, those who call attention to the need for liturgical critique, reform, and inculturation point to the Holy Spirit, the subject and guarantor of the authentic tradition, as the source of all impulses for authentic change within liturgical praxis. Calling for a diversity of cultural expressions as essential to keeping sacramental memorial in contrast to the notion that there is a single

Times,” *Origins* 25/29 (11 January 1996): 488-93; Mary Collins and David N. Power, eds. *Can We Always Celebrate the Eucharist?* Concilium 152 (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1982); Catherine Dooley, “Liturgical Catechesis: Mystagogy, Marriage, or Misnomer?” *Worship* 66 (1992): 386-97; James L. Empeur and Christopher G. Kiesling, *The Liturgy That Does Justice* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1990); Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975); Kenneth Himes, “Eucharist and Justice: Assessing the Legacy of Virgil Michel,” *Worship* 62/3 (1988): 201-24; David Hollenbach, “A Prophetic Church and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination,” *Faith That Does Justice*, ed. John C. Haughey (New York: Paulist, 1977) 234-63; Kathleen Hughes and Mark Francis, ed. *Living No Longer for Ourselves: Liturgy and Justice in the Nineties* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1991); Theresa Koernke, “Towards an Ethics of Liturgical Behavior,” *Worship* 66 (1992): 25-38; Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003); Nathan Mitchell, *Real Presence: The Work of Eucharist* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2001); Bruce T. Morrill, ed. *Bodies of Worship: Explorations in Theory and Practice* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1999); David N. Power, *Worship, Culture and Theology* (Washington DC: Pastoral Press, 1990); idem, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); idem, *Sacrament: The Language of God’s Giving* (New York: Crossroad, 1999); Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998); Don E. Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); Mark Searle, ed., *Liturgy and Social Justice* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1980); Kevin Seasoltz, “Justice and Eucharist,” *Worship* 66 (1992): 25-38; Christopher Steck, “Graced Encounters: Liturgy and Ethics from a Balthasarian Perspective,” *Horizons* 30 (Fall 2003): 255-79; Catherine Vincie, “The Cry for Justice and the Eucharist,” *Worship* 68 (1994): 194-210; idem, “Liturgical Assembly, Just Community and the Role of the Catechist,” *Liturgical Ministry* 3 (1994): 52-57; idem, “Liturgy and Justice—Keeping the Connections Alive,” in *The Renewal That Awaits Us*, ed. Eleanor Bernstein and Martin F. Connell (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997) 124-39; Rembert Weakland, “Liturgy and Social Justice,” in *Shaping English Liturgy: Essays in Honor of Archbishop Denis Hurley*, ed. P. Finn and J. Schellman (Washington DC: Pastoral Press, 1990) 343-57; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Justice as a Condition of Authentic Liturgy,” *Theology Today* 48 (1991): 6-32.

unchanging “metanarrative that governs the remembrance of divine *kenosis*,” David Power has argued that “the sacramental principle, the logic of the incarnation itself, is that Christ gives himself as divine gift and as Word of God to a people through the gift of the Spirit in a constantly creative way.”⁴³ The Spirit’s gifts are unceasingly given, but they are given to concrete communities of faith and ministers who interpret those gifts in human words and rituals. Human interpretations and the liturgical regulations that prescribe what is possible in liturgical celebrations have the power to distort or limit, as well as to mediate and celebrate, the gift of the Spirit to the community. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. The public prayer of the Church does form the faith and imagination of the people of God. That shared conviction is at the heart of the disputes going on presently even among the bishops or bishops’ conferences and Vatican congregations about which language and liturgical inculturations will facilitate “full, conscious, and active participation” of the baptized assembly in the sacramental life of the Church and ultimately in the trinitarian life of God.⁴⁴

Inevitably, we return to the paradox with which we began. Both our reading of the signs of the times and our biblical proclamation and liturgical performance—while graced—remain inculturated human endeavors. It is not as if the ambiguous signs of our times need interpretation in light of the clear meaning of the scriptures, a single reading of the classics of the tradition, unbiased preaching and catechesis, or liturgical celebrations that approximate the eschatological banquet. Rather there are aspects of our culture and other religious traditions that can reveal to us dimensions of our own heritage which we have not yet discovered. Likewise, dialogue with other cultures and religions can call into question and challenge long-accepted interpretations of what we name as our tradition. We need to attend to those promptings—the call to *aggiornamento*, if you will—and to discern wisely and in dialogue with one another if *ressourcement* is to be an authentic retrieval of a living tradition of faith and not simply a repetition of the past. At the same time,

⁴³David N. Power, “Foundation for Pluralism in Sacramental Expression: Keeping Memory,” *Worship* 75/3 (2001): 194-209. For a more extended discussion of this point, see Power, *Sacrament: The Language of God’s Giving*.

⁴⁴See John Wilkins, “Lost in Translation: The Bishops, the Vatican, and English in the Liturgy,” *Commonweal* 132/2 (2 December 2005): 12-20; and John L. Allen, Jr. “Liturgy Head Criticizes New Translation,” *National Catholic Reporter* (28 April 2006): 12-13. For the theological, liturgical, pastoral, and ethical issues at stake in these debates, see Keith F. Pecklers, *Dynamic Equivalence: The Living Language of Christian Worship* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2003); Donald W. Trautman, “Rome and ICEL,” *America* 182 (4 March 2000): 7-11; Joseph Jensen, “Watch Your Language! Of Princes and Music Directors,” *America* 174 (8-15 June 1996): 7-11; Kathleen Hughes, “Inclusive Language Revisited,” *Chicago Studies* 35/2 (1996): 115-27; Catherine M. LaCugna, “God in Communion with Us”; idem, “The Baptismal Formula, Feminist Objections, and Trinitarian Theology,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (1989): 235-50; Mary Collins, “Inclusive Language: A Cultural and Theological Question,” in *Worship: Renewal to Practice*, 197-214; idem, “Naming God in Public Prayer,” in *Worship: Renewal to Practice*, 215-32; Johnson, *SHE WHO IS: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*.

only a firm grounding in the Christian tradition and the fundamental biblical and liturgical sources of that tradition, can provide the necessary critical distance and clarity of perception that allows us to identify adequately the signs of our times, let alone to critique them in light of the Gospel.

The Reformed theologian Gerhard Ebeling once commented that “Theology is necessary in order to make preaching as hard for the preacher as it has to be.”⁴⁵ The ongoing theological dialogues—both *ad intra* and *ad extra*—that are needed for authentic proclamation in our day have their own challenges. But as Catherine of Siena learned in her own mystical dialogue with Divine Providence, openness to and need for “the other” is at the heart of what it means to be human as well as to be the Body of Christ. Her *Dialogue* records God’s revelation as follows:

In this mortal life, so long as you are pilgrims, I have bound you with the chain of charity. Whether you want it or not, you are so bound. If you should break loose by not wanting to live in charity for your neighbors, you will still be bound by it by force. . . . That you may practice charity in action and in will, I in my providence did not give to any one person or to each individually the knowledge for doing everything necessary in human life. No, I gave something to one, something else to another, so that each one’s need would be reason for recourse to the other. . . . Though you may lose your will for charity because of your wickedness, you will at least be forced by your own need to practice it in action.⁴⁶

On this Trinity Sunday we are reminded that the source of both genuine dialogue and bold proclamation is the Spirit of God. Dialogue, like the mystery of the incarnation itself, is indeed always “an exchange of gifts.”

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⁴⁵Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963) 424.

⁴⁶Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, #148, trans. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist, 1980) 311.