

SIXTY YEARS FROM VATICAN II: POINTS OF NO RETURN AND NEW UNCERTAINTIES. TOWARDS A GLOBAL AND SYNODAL RECEPTION OF THE COUNCIL

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI¹

Abstract. This article aims to highlight some of the key issues for understanding the current moment in the reception of Vatican II and for a new phase in the research and implementation of its message at sixty years of its conclusion (1965–2025). The greatest novelty to consider, also in light of pope Francis's pontificate, is the complexity of global Catholicism in the 21st century: this brings to the fore questions and interpretative frameworks of the Second Vatican Council that are both connected and partly different from those typical of the English-speaking, American and European theology, which dominated the interpretation of the council's message for the first decades after Vatican II.

Keywords: Vatican II, reception, global Catholicism, Catholic traditionalism, neo-conservatives.

A New Historical and Ecclesial Situation

At sixty years from its conclusion, Vatican II has long ceased to be the natural meeting point between different theological cultures within the Catholic Church. It's not only the rift between different theological schools, but today also between different "brands" of Catholicism represented by bishops, cardinals, and even more by public figures in the media and social media that are influencing the ecclesial self-awareness. The relationship with Vatican II has changed, not only in terms of theological orientations, but also as a presence or absence of the event of the council and familiarity with its texts in the biographies, self-representation, imagination, and the lived faith of Catholics today. This fragmented picture is not

1 Massimo Faggioli is Professor in Historical and Contemporary Ecclesiology, Loyola Institute at the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies, Trinity College Dublin. Email: massimo.faggioli@gmail.com, faggiolm@tcd.ie.

Article history: Received 30.10.2025; Revised 12.11.2025; Accepted 14.11.2025

Available online: 22.12.2025; Available print: 30.01.2026.

©2025 Studia UBB Theologia Catholica Latina. Published by Babeş-Bolyai University.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

simply the result of a natural shift in the role of Vatican II in the transition from generation to generation, but rather the result of processes of transmission *and* interruption of the conciliar tradition.² It is often said – last but not least also by Pope Francis – about the process of reception in the Church, that “it takes a century to implement a council”.³ This dictum was sometimes taken as an automatic, self-fulfilling prophecy. But the present situation complicates the expectations about what the possible role of Vatican II for the future of the Church.

In the early post-conciliar period, there emerged various and alternative, but not frontally opposed, approaches to the hermeneutics of Vatican II. In the 1980s, a process of mutual alienation began between opposing models of reception (and sometimes non-reception) of Vatican II. On the one hand, there was a largely US-based “neoconservative” theological-political revision of the Council’s effects, in the name of and in defense of a pre-Vatican II past (which many believed Vatican II had rendered unusable) and against a liberal-progressive interpretation of the Council’s teaching. The late 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of the neoconservative theological and political project in the West: first in journalism and public intellectuals in the United States, and then in academia and in the Church hierarchy – a “long march” that bore bitter fruit in the new millennium. Initially, this occurred without attacking the legitimacy of Vatican II itself. But it already expressed a theological and political critique of the council’s teachings that proceeded from a *post hoc, propter hoc* perspective – an identification of Vatican II as *the cause* of secularization and of the ruptures in the Western world’s social and cultural model since the late 1960s.⁴ In the first decade of the 21st century and in conjunction with shifts in the international debate on religion and politics after September 11, 2001, this neo-conservative Vatican II revisionism gained broader scope, with more frequent attacks against the theology of Vatican II, which later turned into an active attempt to evict conciliar theology from our common home. This deepening of the traditionalist turn within US Catholic conservatism became a systematic

2 An earlier version of this article appeared in Italian in “Rivista del Clero Italiano”, 106.5 (2025), 344–355, with the title *Una nuova fase di recezione globale e sinodale. A sessant’anni dal Vaticano II*. This article represents an expanded and updated version.

3 Gerard O’CONNELL, “Pope Francis says Vatican II was ‘a Visit of God to His Church’ in New Interview”, *America* (February 28, 2023), <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2023/02/28/pope-francis-synod-tertio-244818/>.

4 See Massimo FAGGIOLI, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning*, New York: Paulist, 2012, (also in Italian and Portuguese).

targeting of pope Francis's teaching in ways that sought to delegitimize both his pontificate *and* Vatican II.⁵

On the other end of the spectrum, in more liberal and progressive quarters, during those same thirty years there was a process of self-congratulatory and often complacent "monumentalisation" of Vatican II. This took place in a theological system in which the focus on the promises of the post-conciliar era often came at the expense of a reliable understanding of the council's teaching and of the theological Tradition (with a capital T, in the Congarian sense) – thus indirectly making the theology of Vatican II hard to know and to understand for the younger generations. This was not an attack on Vatican II, but a defence of it that turned into a silent process of isolating the council from the previous tradition: in favour of a post-conciliar, but also of a post-traditional and post-institutional idea of Christianity. This phenomenon had causes both internal to the theological academy (the precarious position of theology in Catholic and public universities; the system of academic recruitment and career development shaped by a technocratic culture) and external (frustration over the Church's perceived failure to deliver on the promises of Vatican II). This form of "monumentalisation" of Vatican II was particularly evident in the Anglo-American Catholic theological scene, and the consequences of it became serious especially during the pontificate of Francis when the defence of the Catholic social teaching (especially on the issue of immigration) could not count on a solid basis of systematic theology and on the ability to appeal to the tradition in a broad sense.

These two different forms of reductionism of Vatican II have created a void that is now, at sixty years from the council, being filled by other theological-political-evangelistic projects, both within university theology and beyond the university, and within the Church – with far-reaching effects even on seminaries for the formation of priests and religious: catechetical and theological programs in which Vatican II plays a marginal role, at best. This is one of the symptoms of the end, even for theology, of the monopoly of universities and the institutional Church in the production of knowledge, including theological knowledge. This entails also the end of a certain institutional protection that Vatican II theology enjoyed by the gatekeepers of mainstream religious culture. Those gatekeepers are in large

5 See Massimo BORGHESI, *Francesco. La Chiesa tra ideologia teocon e «ospedale da campo»*, Milano: Jaca Book, 2021. English translation: *Catholic Discordance. Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2021.

part gone, and Vatican II has become fair game, or a favourite target of attacks in the “culture wars” in which religion plays a key role.

Some of the best interpreters of Church history saw this problem already at the beginning of the new century. The book by American Jesuit historian John O’Malley (1927–2022), *What Happened at Vatican II*, published in 2008 by Harvard University Press, a non-religious academic press, and translated into numerous languages, helped save the history and theology of the council from oblivion, as well as from subtle forms of abrogation and delegitimization.⁶ O’Malley saw the urgent need to develop a new argument about Vatican II in the Catholic Church, where the memory of the council was often kept alive by a “veteran mentality”, of “those who were there”, incapable of talking to the new generations and those on the periphery of the post-Vatican II academic establishment. When his book on the council was published, it posed with great foresight the question of the place of Vatican II in the Church, in academia, and at the intersections between academia and the Church, but also in relation to the broader dialogue within and about Catholicism.

The issues raised by O’Malley nearly twenty years ago have acquired new relevance in light of changes in our ecclesial and political order: the rise of digital networks and social media, the collapse of institutional authority, the dogmatization of political identities and the politicization of religious identity in antagonistic terms, the return of illiberalism and of “Christian nationalism” even in the USA. O’Malley foresaw the risk of the emergence of a “non-conciliar” and “non-anti-conciliar” theological and religious culture, which has also taken root in Catholic universities, para-university institutions of higher learning, and on social media populated by Catholic thinkers and “culturally Catholic” politicians.

O’Malley’s intuition was confirmed in the golden age of the Catholic social media and performative anti-intellectualism beginning in the 2010s. According to some, a “non-conciliar and non-anti-conciliar” theology could be a solution to avoid the American-derived “culture wars” that have invaded intra-Catholic debate. But this comes, in the long-term, at heavy costs for our understanding of the tradition, as it seeks to isolate a particular slice of the “Catholic intellectual tradition” (whether it dates back to John Henry Newman or the early twentieth century, before the antimodernist crisis) and treat the Catholic theological tradition

6 John W. O’MALLEY, *What Happened at Vatican II*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008, translated in several languages.

as if it were somehow unaffected by the doctrinal, cultural, and social changes over the last century.

Within the intellectual world of the Catholic Church, today much more global than at the time of Vatican II, Catholic universities and Catholic theology today reflect a growing plurality and fragmentation in which Vatican II plays different roles in different contexts – but evidently more marginal than even twenty years ago. There is a temptation to appeal to a strong and coherent “Catholic identity” as a persecuted minority, or to identify Catholicism with a cultural or political movement, a religious order, or a particular ecclesial agenda. Other schools of thought, which are compelled to operate in the mainstream and in the market of education and publishing, are attracted to a less distinct idea of Catholic identity in their attempt to blend contradictory identities, but in a spirit more of technocratic paradigm than of evangelization.

The attempt to translate “Catholic” as *universal* has become much more complicated in a *global* culture that prizes the marketing of particular identities. The very definition of Catholic theology and the Catholic university – faithful to the etymological roots of *katholikos* and *universitas* – has become increasingly difficult to specify and generate consensus among those who work and support them, but also to generate interest in a missionary church. The crisis of the standing of the council as part of the theological tradition is visible in the difficulty to transmit Vatican II to the younger generation: it is a symptom of the isolation of a minority within the church, namely intellectuals and theologians, who over the past two centuries have not always been able to communicate with a broad audience, and have recently even stopped communicating with the clerical and episcopal elites who, in turn, do not miss having theologians as part of ecclesial dialogue. Then there is the broader question of a Catholic culture that has never ceased to be ultramontane and considers the pope the only legal executor of the *mens*, of the intention of Vatican II.

After Pope Francis and with Leo XIV

Pope Francis (2013-2025) ushered in a new phase in the reception of Vatican II, trying to move beyond the usual theological-political alignments of “liberal-progressive” versus “conservative” – attracting much sympathy from the advocates of a continuing development of the theology of Vatican II and opposition from those who hold that Vatican II went far enough. Francis’ hermeneutics of Vatican II found

its most visible expressions in his pastoral perspective drawing on the legacy of John XXIII, his Jesuit formation, and his experience as a teacher and pastor in Argentina.

Francis did not use diplomatic language when he reminded the faithful about the binding value of Vatican II. On January 11, 2021, in a letter to the then Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Luis F. Ladaria, SJ, accompanying the *motu proprio* opening the ministries of lector and acolyte to women, the Pope described his decision in terms of “the horizon of renewal outlined by the Second Vatican Council” and “in line with the Second Vatican Council.”⁷ Later that month, on January 29, 2021, further pointed observations arrived in his address to the National Catechetical Office of the Italian Episcopal Conference:

This is magisterium: the Council is magisterium of the Church. Either you are with the Church and therefore follow the Council, and if you don't follow the Council or you interpret it your own way, as you wish, you are not with the Church. We must be demanding and severe on this point. The Council should not be negotiated to obtain more of these... No, the Council is like this. And this problem we are experiencing, of selectivity with respect to the Council, has recurred throughout history with other Councils.⁸

Since its beginning, Francis's pontificate highlighted that in today's church, on the spectrum between faithful reception of the conciliar magisterium and open rejection, there is more than one theological interpretation to consider, as well as particular local and national ecclesial situations. For example, the USA is a particular case in point. The alliance of parts of conservative American Catholicism with Trump's “Make America Great Again” movement also speaks volumes about the failures in the reception of Vatican II: the fascination many Catholics have with a Caesarian political messianism is a symptom of the crisis of religious (and not just theological) reception of the council in the United States. However, while this is more evident among extreme voices on the conservative side, it is not a problem

7 “Lettera del Santo Padre Francesco al Prefetto della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede circa l'accesso delle donne ai ministeri del Lettorato e dell'Accolitato”, 11 January 2021, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/01/11/0016/00033.html>.

8 “Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco ai partecipanti all'incontro promosso dall'Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale della Conferenza episcopale italiana”, 30 January 2021 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2021/january/documents/papa-francesco_20210130_ufficio-catechistico-cei.html?fbclid=IwAR00ByhgFWSpifdezxB7jin-Tc-DCyHsOt15uBL30AcJ5B73zWBGnqJUhaY.

unique to that end of the spectrum. There are broader systemic phenomena at play that in recent years have led to fault lines even within the liberal-progressive side. The first is a disruption of a tradition of Vatican II studies in Catholic seminaries and universities outside Europe and Latin America. Studying and transmitting the Council requires mastery or at least some knowledge of Latin. It also requires an intellectual ecosystem in which theology is grounded in – and in dialogue with – the history of the Church and the history of theology, and not merely with the social sciences. A problem closely related to this fracture is the breakdown of the coexistence and collaboration that characterized the working relationship between theologians, lay Catholics, and the hierarchical Church – a collaboration that made possible Vatican II.

The US-based Catholic academic establishment and ecclesiastical ecosystem, in which I have worked for almost seventeen years, is an extreme case but not an absolute exception. What I have witnessed in recent years is the emergence of tensions, both at the ecclesiastical and political level, around conciliar theology. It is undeniable that the new generation of Catholic militantism in the USA has marginalized and dismissed much of the academic literature on Vatican II, as well as the papal magisterium that unapologetically articulated a theological reception of the council. It seems that there is now more room in the academic conversations for two non-conciliar versions of Catholic theology: a pre-Vatican II and anti-Vatican II theology on the one hand, and a radically post-Vatican II theology with little contact with the tradition and the real life of the faithful on the other. In the United States today, the theology of Vatican II (the event, the documents, and their development in the magisterium) seems to be trapped in a kind of intellectual and ecclesial no-man's land. The sexual and financial scandals of the last forty years have provoked a moral and legal emergency, but also a theological and magisterial crisis. Anger toward an institutional and hierarchical structure that is perceived as insensitive (at best) on key social issues has led many Catholics to the idea that the Church has lost all religious and moral authority, and therefore that Vatican II has also lost that authority.⁹

Resentment and distrust of the institutional Church are rooted not only in an anti-historical or puritan mentality present in the DNA of the USA as a political and religious project. This distrust stems today also from the belief that Vatican

9 See *The Legacy and Limits of Vatican II in an Age of Crisis*, edited by Catherine E. CLIFFORD, Kristin COLBERG, Massimo FAGGIOLI, Edward P. HAHNENBERG, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2025.

II failed to address issues of gender and racism in a way appropriate to the times and the reading of the Gospel. The perception has emerged that the debates of Vatican II, its final documents, as well as the post-conciliar historical and hermeneutical debate, were dominated by the clergy and later by academics that were male, white and/or of European origin. Vatican II appears to have little to say about the role of women in the Church and even less effective regarding the issue of abuse, whether sexual abuse, abuse of authority, or abuse of power.

Today, the appeals to Vatican II cannot hide the shortcomings of a teaching originating from the best theological minds of the 1950s and early 1960s, developed by a clerical elite born and raised in the age of empires, a generation which was just beginning to see the dawn of the post-colonial world on the horizon and its consequences. There is also a global, ecumenical, and interreligious factor that is different from the early post-Vatican II period: the shift in perception of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue between the time of the council and our post-9/11, 21st-century world. We have moved from a narrative of dialogue and encounter to one of encounter and conflict. Catholicism must now engage with more assertive post-secular faiths (both religiously and politically) around the world, as well as a more challenging secularism in which the nation-state is no longer the sole interlocutor. This has coincided with a rise of a new generation of Catholics who bring a different set of expectations to their understanding of the Church's tradition, one that places greater emphasis on the Fathers of the Church, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, the Catechism, and the papal magisterium than on Vatican II. This is especially consequential in the cases of high-profile "conversion" to Catholicism of public figures – politicians, public intellectuals, and hierarchical leaders from other Christian (non-Catholic) Churches and communities. In this sense, once again Catholicism in the United States is an extreme example and does not represent the general state of the relationship between the Church and Vatican II. In Latin America, for example, the scenario is very different, as seen from the contribution of that post-conciliar church to the synodal process. But it is undeniable that the global crisis we are experiencing has precedents in the fractures of the council's reception in specific areas and local areas of Catholicism, such as the United States of today, compared to the much more robust engagement of that same Church with the conciliar teaching in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰

10 See Joseph P. CHINNICI, *American Catholicism Transformed: From the Cold War Through the Council*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

What has happened since the early 2000s, both ecclesiastically and globally, raises questions about the role of Vatican II in Church history and the modern theological tradition. Was Vatican II a moment of opening to a new era (theology of the laity, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue), the beginning of a new chapter in history? Was it the last gasp of Catholic European Christendom? Or was it merely a parenthesis in the broader post-1945 era of the liberal international order which is now evidently struggling to survive? On the one hand, there is a revanchist rhetoric that sees Vatican II as the beginning of Catholicism's intellectual and moral demise: a naïve nostalgia for the pre-conciliar period that never existed, the desire to return what was allegedly taken away sixty years ago – less a recovery than a reinvention. On the other hand, there is an equally naïve progressive rhetoric about Vatican II as the last or the only heroic moment in the history of modern Catholicism: it is nostalgia for the mythology of the conciliar event and of the first period after the council.

Francis's pontificate demonstrated the crucial contribution of Vatican II theology to the transition from a European-centered Catholicism to a global Catholicism, following Karl Rahner's fundamental intuition.¹¹ However, this transition to a model other than the Euro-Western and colonial one is encountering strong resistance and is more complicated than expected.¹² The opposition to pope Francis was rooted in opposition to his expansive interpretation of Vatican II, necessitated by the departure from the European paradigm. Vatican II has found new life in local and national expressions of synodality, energizing the ecclesial process and, at the same time, addressing some of the gaps left by the theology and teachings of the Council. This moment in the globalization of the Church is exposing the limits of the ways in which Vatican II has played a role in the post-conciliar magisterium, especially at the episcopal level (national and local), as well as in the lived theology of the militant Catholic laity.

The election of Leo XIV on May 8, 2025, opened a new page: the first pope born after the end of World War II, the first Augustinian, and the first pope born in the USA (and in Chicago, one of the capitals of US Catholicism in its great cultural and racial diversities) where today the interpretation of Vatican II is particularly

¹¹ See Karl RAHNER, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II", *Theological Studies* 40.4 (1979) 716–727.

¹² See Massimo FAGGIOLI and Bryan FROEHLE, *Global Catholicism: Between Disruption and Encounter*, Leiden: Brill, 2024; John T. McGREEVY, *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2022.

polarized. Leo XIV was elected pope at a time of a “Thomistic revival” which is visible in important theological centers both in America and in Rome.¹³ But the first months of his pontificate revealed pope Leo’s clear intention to continue the reception of Vatican II: as he said on October 29, on the 60th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, “It should not be forgotten that the first focus of *Nostra Aetate* was towards the Jewish world, which Saint John XXIII intended to re-establish the original relationship. For the first time in the history of the Church, a doctrinal treatise on the Jewish roots of Christianity was to take shape, which on a biblical and theological level would represent a point of no return”.¹⁴

Vatican II and Synodality in the Global Church

The “thirty-year theological war” over the council, from the late 1980s and early 1990s until the pontificate of Francis, is over, or at least has entered a new phase. The “synodal process” initiated by Francis in 2021 was preceded and accompanied, not coincidentally, by a new era of studies on Vatican II characterized by a global historical-theological perspective, albeit still conceived and guided by European and Latin American Catholic scholars.¹⁵ The situation of theological studies on the council in other areas is much more fragmented: it is dealing with more urgent and existential issues, but also uncertain vis-à-vis Vatican II and its promoters that are sometimes perceived as academic agents of a Western neo-colonial political and cultural agenda. At the same time, Catholic theology in the United States is gripped by a “cold civil war” - not only in politics, but also in the church and universities.¹⁶

13 See Thomas Joseph WHITE OP, “A Leonine Revival”, *First Things* (13 May 2025), <https://firstthings.com/a-leonine-revival/>

14 Leo XIV, *Catechesis on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the conciliar Declaration Nostra aetate*, October 29, 2025 <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2025/10/29/0809/01439.html>

15 See *Commentario ai documenti del Vaticano II*, cur. Serena NOCETI e Roberto REPOLE, 9 vols., Bologna: EDB, 2014–2022; *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, cur. Catherine E. CLIFFORD e Massimo FAGGIOLI, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.

16 See *Vatican II in North America, Australia and Oceania*. Vol. 5 of the series *Vatican II – Event and Mandate. Intercontinental Commentary of Vatican II*, edited by Catherine CLIFFORD, Massimo FAGGIOLI, Richard LENNAN, and Ormond RUSH, Leuven: Peeters, 2025, available also in open access https://www.peeters-leuven.be/detail.php?search_key=9789042953987 (German translation: *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil in Nordamerika, Australien und*

More than another celebration or commemoration of the Second Vatican Council, today we need to contribute to a new phase in the academic research, but also in the pastoral implementation of Vatican II: a new phase that reflects both a broader awareness of the global dimensions of Catholicism in the 21st century and a deeper engagement with the challenges now facing all local churches. The post-European, post-Western, and global Catholicism that is leaving the paradigms of second millennium behind is not just somewhere else on the world map: it is everywhere, taking roots in many local Catholic churches today, especially in settings changed by migration and urbanization, social isolation and the breaking of inter-generational links.

This globalization of Catholic theology entails a relativization of the value and relevance for the life of the Church of much of the theological commentary published between 1965 and today. It also requires a reconsideration of the practical, pastoral, and catechetical theology implemented in the name of Vatican II in the last sixty years. The fact that this challenge takes often the shape of an ideologically motivated attack against Vatican II coming from traditionalist Catholic militanism does not detract from the substance of the problem. We need to reexamine the teaching of Vatican II from the perspective of the current ecclesial crisis in the context of the global “polycrisis.”¹⁷ A renewed study and fruitful reception of the council should take into account critical considerations: we need a new synthesis that can be meaningful for a new generation of pastors, educators, and Church leaders.¹⁸ A new approach must build on the collaboration between different disciplines in a truly global manner, incorporating a diversity of scholarly voices and perspectives casting a light on why Vatican II was a real moment of grace.¹⁹

Ozeanien, Hrsg. Catherine C. CLIFFORD, Massimo FAGGIOLI, Richard LENNAN und Ormond RUSH, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil – Ereignis und Auftrag* Bd. 5, Freiburg: Herder 2025

17 See Massimo FAGGIOLI, “Que reste-t-il de Vatican II? Sexisme, racisme, crise des abus et régimes d’historicité dans l’Église”, *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 55.2 (2024) 194–212, DOI: 10.2143/RTL.55.2.3293499.

18 See the masterful book by Australian theologian Ormond RUSH, *The Vision of Vatican II. Its Fundamental Principles*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2019, and the recent volume of Christoph THEOBALD’s “opus magnum”, *La réception du Concile Vatican II*, vol. 2: *L’Église dans l’histoire et la société. L’Évangile et l’Église*, vol. II/A, Paris: Cerf, 2023.

19 See, for example, Brenna MOORE, *Kindred Spirits: Friendship and Resistance at the Edges of Modern Catholicism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Much of the new phase of reception of Vatican II will take place in synodal settings – at the local, national, and universal level – as synodality is a continuation of the trajectories of Vatican II in the third millennium, extending into a vastly changed theological, ecclesial, and social landscape. In this sense, synodality is an opportunity to de-ideologize the debate on Vatican II. It is revealing that the opposition to synodality is often a version of the opposition against the mainstream narrative of Vatican II as a council of radical change. It is not always another version of the opposition against Vatican II *per se*.²⁰

Francis brought to the hermeneutics of the council his lived experience as a Jesuit, a bishop, and as pope. This is one of the legacies of pope Francis' pontificate, of its enthusiastic reception as well as of the strong rejection of it in some quarters of the global Church. There are lessons to be learned from first pope born in Latin America, and there will be other lessons coming from Leo XIV, the first pope born in the USA.

Conclusions

In a global world where the secular and the post-secular coexist, marked by religious and intra-ecclesial divisions, radical identity claims, and a quest for meaning, Vatican II remains a vital resource for thinking and living faith in tension with contemporary realities. A conciliar hermeneutics of discernment is necessary, aware that the founding intuitions of Vatican II cannot be found in their entirety in the written and approved sixteen final texts. Vatican II is not just a *corpus* or a canon of final documents, but also as an act, a gesture, an event. At the same time, the new phase of reception of Vatican II cannot happen without a renewed attention to the documents, their intention, legacy, and limits for the global Catholic Church. These texts are today often barely known by priests and students of theology, let alone Catholics in the pews or those attending Catholic

20 See Carlo FANTAPPIÈ, *Metamorfosi della sinodalità. Dal Vaticano II a papa Francesco*, Venezia: Marcianum, 2023; Christoph THEOBALD, *Un concile qui ne dit pas son nom. Le synode sur la synodalité, voie de pacification et de créativité*, Paris: Salvator, 2023; *Sinodalità e riforma. Una sfida ecclesiale*, edited by Rafael LUCIANI, Serena NOCETI, and Carlos SCHICKENDANTZ, Brescia: Queriniana, 2022; Kristin M. COLBERG and Jos MOONS, SJ, *The Future of Synodality. How We Move Forward from Here*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2025.

school. It's often more a matter of oblivion than opposition, more a problem of perceived irrelevance than resistance against them.

It is necessary to continue a dual dynamic of *ressourcement* within tradition and of *aggiornamento*, which constitute both the most important legacies of Vatican II. We must return to the sources, beginning with Scripture and tradition continuing through Vatican II, which is an integral part of this tradition. At the same time, we must update our theologies and church structures in light of the faith lived by the people of God, in a Church and world that have profoundly changed in the last sixty years.²¹

Bibliography

Francesco: Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco ai partecipanti all'incontro promosso dall'Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale della Conferenza episcopale italiana, 30 January 2021 https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2021/january/documents/papa-francesco_20210130_ufficio-catechistico-cei.html?fbclid=IwAR00ByhgFWSpifdezxB7jin-Tc-DCyHsOt15uBL30AcJ5B73zWBGnqJUhaY.

Francesco: Lettera del Santo Padre Francesco al Prefetto della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede circa l'accesso delle donne ai ministeri del Lettorato e dell'Accolitato, 11 January 2021, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/01/11/0016/00033.html>.

Leo XIV, Catechesis on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra aetate*, October 29, 2025 <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2025/10/29/0809/01439.html>

Arenas Pérez, Sandra Ester, Edoh F. Bedjra, Catherine E. Clifford, Margit Eckholt, Massimo Faggioli, Nontando Margaret Hadebe, Peter Hünermann, Shaji George

21 For the hermeneutical challenges of an intercontinental commentary of Vatican II today, see *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Allgemeine Einführung und Hermeneutik. Einführung und Hermeneutik*, vol. 1 of *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil – Ereignis und Auftrag*, edited by Sandra Ester ARENAS PÉREZ, Edoh F. BEDJRA, Catherine E. CLIFFORD, Margit ECKHOLT, Massimo FAGGIOLI, Nontando Margaret HADEBE, Peter HÜNERMANN, Shaji George KOCHUTHARA, Carlos SCHICKENDANTZ, Klaus VELLGUTH, and Mary MEE-YIN YUEN, Freiburg: Herder, 2024; English translation: *Vatican II: General Introduction and Hermeneutics*, volume 1 of the series “Vatican II – Event and Mandate”, Leuven: Peeters, 2025, available in open access https://www.peeters-leuven.be/detail.php?search_key=9789042954755.

Kochuthara, Carlos Schickendantz, Klaus Vellguth, and Mary Mee-Yin Yuen, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil – Ereignis und Auftrag* Bd. 1: *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Allgemeine Einführung und Hermeneutik. Einführung und Hermeneutik*, Freiburg: Herder, 2024 (English translation *Vatican II: General Introduction and Hermeneutics*, volume 1 of the series *Vatican II – Event and Mandate*, Leuven: Peeters, 2025).

Borghesi, Massimo, *Francesco. La Chiesa tra ideologia teocon e «ospedale da campo»*, Milano: Jaca Book, 2021 (*Catholic Discordance. Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2021).

Chinnici, Joseph P., *American Catholicism Transformed: From the Cold War Through the Council*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Clifford, Catherine and Massimo Faggioli (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023.

Clifford, Catherine E., Kristin Colberg, Massimo Faggioli, Edward P. Hahnenberg (eds.), *The Legacy and Limits of Vatican II in an Age of Crisis*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2025.

Clifford, Catherine, Massimo Faggioli, Richard Lennan, and Ormond Rush (eds.), *Vatican II – Event and Mandate. Intercontinental Commentary of Vatican II*, vol. 5: *Vatican II in North America, Australia and Oceania*. Vol. 5, Leuven: Peeters, 2025 (*Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil – Ereignis und Auftrag* Bd. 5: *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil in Nordamerika, Australien und Ozeanien*, Freiburg: Herder 2025).

Colberg, Kristin M. and Jos Moons, SJ, *The Future of Synodality. How We Move Forward from Here*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2025.

Faggioli, Massimo and Bryan Froehle, *Global Catholicism: Between Disruption and Encounter*, Leiden: Brill, 2024.

Faggioli, Massimo, “Que reste-t-il de Vatican II? Sexisme, racisme, crise des abus et régimes d’historicité dans l’Église”, *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 55.2 (2024) 194–212, DOI: 10.2143/RTL.55.2.3293499.

Faggioli, Massimo, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning*, New York: Paulist, 2012.

Fantappiè, Carlo, *Metamorfosi della sinodalità. Dal Vaticano II a papa Francesco*, Venezia: Marcianum, 2023.

Luciani, Rafael, Serena Noceti, Carlos Schickendantz (eds.), *Sinodalità e riforma. Una sfida ecclesiale*, Brescia: Queriniana 2022.

McGreevy, John T., *Catholicism: A Global History from the French Revolution to Pope Francis*, New York: W. W. Norton, 2022.

Moore, Brenna, *Kindred Spirits: Friendship and Resistance at the Edges of Modern Catholicism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Noceti, Serena and Roberto Repole, *Commentario ai documenti del Vaticano II*, 9 vols., Bologna: EDB, 2014–2022.

O'Connell, Gerard, "Pope Francis Says Vatican II Was 'a Visit of God to His Church' in New Interview", *America* (February 28, 2023), <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2023/02/28/pope-francis-synod-tertio-244818/>.

O'Malley, John W., *What Happened at Vatican II*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Rahner, Karl, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II", *Theological Studies* 40.4 (1979) 716–727.

Rush, Ormond, *The Vision of Vatican II. Its Fundamental Principles*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2019.

Theobald, Christoph, *La réception du Concile Vatican II*, vol. 2: *L'Église dans l'histoire et la société. L'Évangile et l'Église*, vol. II/A, Paris: Cerf, 2023.

Theobald, Christoph, *Un concile qui ne dit pas son nom. Le synode sur la synodalité, voie de pacification et de créativité*, Paris: Salvator, 2023.

White, Thomas Joseph OP, "A Leonine Revival", *First Things* (13 May 2025), <https://firstthings.com/a-leonine-revival/>.