

**For The Bulletin Of  
December 18, 2016**



**THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF  
ADVENT**

*From Father Robert*

Some events are so momentous that they effect immediate and dramatic change. “Katrina” changed New Orleans forever, and how FEMA responds to disaster. 9/11 changed our sense of national security, and brought about a new cabinet position and the eroding of an absolute right to privacy. Death physically separates us from a loved one, and calls us to spiritual love and memory. Marriage ends being single, and unites a man and a woman as one. The birth of a child creates a new family, and brings untold responsibility and joy to the parents. Who in the world would ever trust a dream solely to guide a momentous event? Joseph does! His life is about to change immediately and dramatically. Rather than taking Mary “into his home” to lead a quiet life, to look forward to having children, to enter into old age with his beloved, Joseph must make an unselfish and mystery-laden decision.

Today’s gospel describes events that led to “the birth of Jesus Christ” at the time of a whole new in-breaking of God into human history. This clearly would be no ordinary son of Joseph. This Child would be different from all others. This Child, from the moment of His conception, effected immediate and dramatic change. The Virgin Mary conceived by “the Holy Spirit” and the reassured Joseph “took his wife into his home.” Mary and Joseph say “yes” to God – and Emmanuel, “God is with us.” But the immediate and dramatic change effected by the birth of Emmanuel has to do with others besides Mary and Joseph.

From the beginning, this Child was not theirs, but was of God and belonged to the whole world. Mary and Joseph typify how we ourselves give “birth” to Jesus in our own time. By opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit and cooperating with God’s plan for our life, we, like Mary and Joseph, usher in a whole new in-breaking of God into human history. Truly, Emmanuel, “God is with us.”

This story, which begins with the “yes” of Joseph and Mary, continues through history with our “yes” to opening ourselves to God’s dwelling among us. The birth of this Child isn’t simply a historical event that happened long ago, but is a present experience of “God is with us.” Though unnamed in the gospels, we are to be the Josephs who dream dreams and the Marys who give birth to this Child Who saves. “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ comes about”: *we* say “yes” to God, even when we don’t understand what God is asking of us. We give birth to Emmanuel in our homes, cities, and nations. We are to be the risen Presence of Christ in our world,

we are to make His Gospel known, and we are to do all that God commands us, too. This is how “God is with us.” We are to give birth to Emmanuel, “God is with us.”

### ***Living The Paschal Mystery***

Christmas – the mystery of Emmanuel, “God is with us” – can’t be simply a day or season on our calendars. It is the eternal mystery of making incarnate through the goodness of our own lives the God Who loves us and saves us. Emmanuel is given birth through our being obedient to God’s will and encountering the Presence of this Savior all year long. Each of us is God’s betrothed overshadowed with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Each of us carries within ourselves this “God is with us” Who is Savior. Each of us has the capacity to embrace divine indwelling and make that Presence known to all the world.

As we enter into the Fourth and final week of Advent, what thoughts and feelings have today’s scripture brought about in your heart?

- The birth of Jesus comes about through me whenever...
- To receive Jesus into my “home,” I need to...
- My life witnesses to Emmanuel (“God is with us”) whenever I...

### ***About Liturgy: Advent Expecting***

The Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar simply describes Advent as “a period of devout and expectant delight” (No. 39). Naturally with this Fourth Sunday of Advent our expectation is heightened. Christmas is almost here! Yet we can so easily fool ourselves; once Christmas Day arrives we might think our

expectation is ended. Actually, it’s only begun!

Christian living is characterized by expectation: Christ continually comes in the most unexpected ways. Jesus’ birth so long ago unleashed a new and startling Presence of God in our midst. Since that time our expectation never ceases: we live for Christ’s comings. The surprise of the Good News of salvation is that God comes to dwell among us. Our wildest dreams, our most heartfelt expectations are fulfilled in the birth of this Savior, Emmanuel, “God is with us.”



You are invited to join us for one of the most beautiful services of the Advent Season when our Parish Choir, Cantors, and our Director of Music/Organist/Artist-in-Residence, **Don Pearson**, present “A Festival of Lessons and Carols.” Seven Scripture passages will be proclaimed, each followed by a choral anthem or carol of the season that herald the birth of the Savior. There could be no better way to prepare for the Feast of Christmas. The Festival, which lasts approximately one hour, is followed by a reception in the spirit of the season in our parish hall. It

begins at 3:00 p.m. this afternoon. I hope you will join us.

***Our Christmas Environment***

Each year, the environment of Christmas – its trees, poinsettias, wreathes, garlands, lights, and panels of festive cloth – is made possible by your generosity, contributions made either In Honor of or In Loving Memory of family members, friends and loved ones. For those of us who receive envelopes in the mail, an envelope was in our packet at the end of November. Additional envelopes are available on the Credenza beneath the Icon of St. Paul. Thank you for what you will do to help our Art & Environment Committee create a fitting environment that will say “Christmas” for its entire season. Your gifts will be acknowledged in one of the bulletins of the Christmas Season.



***Christmas At St. Ignatius of Antioch***

**Christmas Eve, Saturday,  
December 24, 2016,**

**4:00 p.m. Eucharist** - The Children tell the story of Christmas (Organ, Cantors; Carols; *No Incense*)

**10:00 p.m.**- Festive Celebration of Holy Eucharist for Christmas Night (The Parish Choir, Cantors, and Organ; The Blessing of the Christmas Trees and the Blessing of the Creche; Procession and Incense)

**Christmas Day, Sunday,  
December 25, 2016**

**8:00 a.m.** - Festive Celebration of Holy Eucharist for Christmas Morning; Procession, Cantors and Organ, Carols (No Incense)

**10:00 a.m.** - Festival Choral Eucharist for Christmas Day; The Parish Choir, Cantors, and Organ; Procession and Incense

**New Year’s Eve, Saturday,  
December 31, 2016 – The Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**

**4:00 p.m.** - Vigil Liturgy for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

**New Year’s Day, Sunday,  
January 1, 2017 – The Solemnity of Mary, New Year’s Day, The World Day of Prayer for Peace, The Octave Day of Christmas**

**8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.** - Festive Celebrations of Holy Eucharist; Birthday Blessing at each liturgy; the Christmas Season continues.

***Father Tom’s Book of Christmas Meditations***

A book of Father Tom Bonacci’s Christmas Meditations has been published by “blurb.com, 580 California Street, San Francisco, CA. 94104, Suite 300” and is available for \$19.95 plus shipping and tax, bringing the total to \$24.75. This will make a wonderful Christmas gift.

***Christmas Cards for Archbishop  
Brunett***

Please do not forget to include  
**Archbishop Alexander Brunett** in your  
Christmas card list. His address is:  
Archbishop Alexander J. Brunett  
Archbishop Emeritus  
Archdiocese of Seattle  
710 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98104

***Get Well Cards For San Francisco  
Police Officer Kevin Downs***

I invite you to join me in sending Get  
Well cards to San Francisco Police  
Officer Kevin Downs who was shot in  
the head and who has been released from  
the hospital and is recovering. Cards,  
good wishes, and remembrances of  
prayers may be sent to him as follows:

Officer Kevin Downs  
c/o San Francisco Police Officers  
Association  
800 Bryant St., Second Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94103

***A Personal Christmas Request***

Each year, many parishioners gift me  
with home-baked Christmas cookies,  
candy, pastries, breads, etc. as well as  
wonderful bottles of wine.  
Unfortunately, I am not able to enjoy  
these gifts of your love and appreciation  
as I have adopted a “No Sugar – No  
Grains” approach to my diet. While I  
appreciate your thoughtfulness and  
generosity, I am no longer eating  
anything with processed sugar, no  
breads, no pasta, no rice, no potatoes,  
etc. and that includes no alcohol. Thank  
you for your support and understanding.  
Perhaps you would consider making a  
donation to our Antioch Police Activities  
League for Children, or any one of our

local shelters, or Winter Nights Shelter,  
or any other worthy cause/charity.



***Thank You***

Each week we acknowledge our  
volunteer parishioners who serve in so  
many capacities to support our parish.  
Our thanks to:

...those who cleaned and prepared the  
church for the weekend and the week  
ahead: **Steve Rojek, Carole Miller,  
Cathy Romeo, Angela Bueno, Mency  
Osborne, Rose Salamanca, Jack  
Goncalves, and Jun Bajet.**

...to those who clean and maintain the  
bathrooms in both the church and parish  
hall: **Robert Goncalves, Mary Ewing,  
Patricia Britton, Harlan Young, and  
Virginia Noack**

...to **Dilcia Aparacio** who does such an  
excellent job of washing, ironing, and  
caring for the Sacred Linens.

...to our Sacristans and Altar Guild who  
prepare the sanctuary for the celebration  
of Eucharist each week:

**Peter Degl’Innocenti, Pam and Rich  
Confetti, Vincent Rodriguez, Harlan  
Young, Rowena Cayaban, Monika  
Kauer, Cynthia Enrique, Belen Farin,  
Nancy Santos and Rose Salamanca.**

...to our **counting teams** who are here  
every week to count the weekly  
collections.

...to our volunteers who assisted in the  
parish office last week: **Sofie  
Zimmerman, Melody Costanza,  
Harlan Young, Karen Oliver, Alicia**

**Perez, Jeannine Ford, Joe Fanfa, Bev Iacona and Lorraine Lohmeier.**

...to our St. Vincent de Paul and Mobile Mall volunteers who transported last week's donations: **Bob Carvalho and Barbara Jackson.**

...to our faithful weekly bulletin assembly team: **Bob Carvalho, Carole Miller, Dave Costanza, Judy Quicho and Belen Farin.**

***Parish Hosts Holiday Dinner at Los Medanos Village***

Los Medanos Village is a 71 unit affordable housing unit in Pittsburg. Contra Costa Interfaith Housing provides case management and coordinates a highly successful after school homework program for the children. On Wednesday, December 7, a group of parishioners served a delicious meal as part of the annual holiday party at the apartment complex. The menu consisted of a fresh green salad, barbequed chicken, scalloped potatoes and broccoli casserole. **Ali and Hawraa Aljanabi** joined us and contributed two excellent rice dishes. An assortment of Christmas cookies and sparkling apple cider rounded out the dinner.

This is the fifth year in a row that our parish hosted this event for some wonderful families. Many thanks to **Ali & Hawraa Aljanabi, Don Benson, Rich Confetti, Sue & Rick Howell, Vicki & Brian McCoy, and Jose Palomino** for their hard work on this parish outreach project.

***Annual St. Nicholas Dinner***

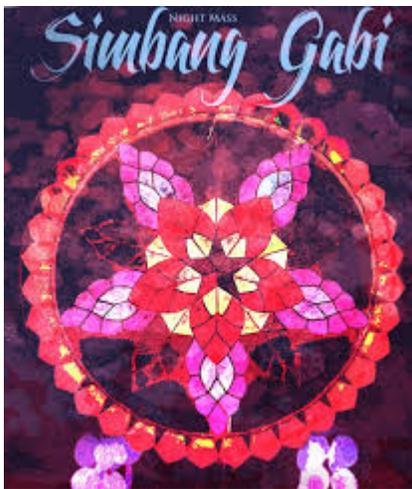
On Saturday December 3, 2016, our Social Events Committee hosted the 11th annual St. Nicholas Dinner after the Vigil Liturgy in the parish hall. This year's theme was "Come Home for

Christmas." Parishioners sponsored each of the tables and brought their table settings of flatware, stemware, china, and accents in keeping with the Advent/Christmas Season. A wonderful evening of good food, games, mystery envelopes, silent auction and a lively live auction was highlighted with a visit from St. Nicholas. This event is always a sellout and would not be possible were it not for all the volunteers who work so hard at organizing and assisting in so many ways. Thank you to our table sponsors: **Samantha Peralta, Rachelle Martin, Gail Burgarino, Reggia Desmond, Annette Pisani, Frances Rojek & Mary Anne Douville, Monika Kauer, Jeannine Ford, Pam Confetti & Fran Barbanica, Maryann Peddicord & Alicia Perez, June Stuhlreyer & Ruth Beck, Jane Sharpe, Melody Costanza, Sue Batterton and Marla Plurkowski;** our chef **Dave Costanza** and his kitchen crew - **Tomas Lucia, Carole Miller, Mark Costanza, Chad Curiel, Bob Plurkowski, and Will Auitable & Catherine Vidaurri;** the set up team of **Rich Confetti** and the **Knights of Columbus** and our faithful friends: **Mary Anne Douville & Faultless Cleaners** for our table cloths, **Pat Dunleavy** for the wonderful door prizes, **Judy Blakemore** for the beautiful handmade aprons and last but not least, St. Nicholas himself.

***Simbang Gabi***

Once again our parish is joining the **Deanery Celebration of Simbang Gabi**, a novena of nine days of liturgies in preparation for the Christmas Feast, sponsored by our Filipino Community. We will be with the parishes of our Deanery at Immaculate Heart of Mary

Church, Brentwood. The novena of Liturgies began last Friday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, and the liturgies continue to be celebrated through Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 a.m. each morning. **I will be presiding and preaching this Thursday, December 22nd and members of our Filipino Ministry will share in the ministry of the liturgy** and the traditional Filipino Breakfast that follows in their parish hall. All are invited!



### ***Four cardinals do not make a schism***

[Thomas Reese](#) | Dec. 8, 2016

I was asked by a journalist last week if I thought the Catholic church was in danger of schism over the question of Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics. This controversy has received renewed attention because of the [letter](#) from four cardinals challenging the pope's teaching in *Amoris Laetitia*. The controversy has received repeated attention from *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat.

My short answer was "no."

To have a schism, you need a bishop to break with the pope and ordain priests and other bishops for the schismatic church. You also need people to follow the bishop into schism.

The only major schism in the 20th century is the one led by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who opposed the revision and translation of the liturgy as well as Vatican II's teaching on ecumenism and relations with Jews. He founded the Society of St. Pius X in 1970 and was excommunicated for ordaining four bishops without papal approval in 1988. According to their [website](#), they claim to have 603 priests with 772 Mass centers, a significant number but miniscule in comparison with the Catholic church.

I doubt that any bishop, including these four cardinals, would be willing to lead a schism over the question of Communion for divorced Catholics. And even if they did, very few people would follow them.

Pope Francis is very popular with Catholics. In 2015, 81 to 90 percent of U.S. Catholics had a [favorable view of the pope](#). His unfavorable ratings ran between 4 and 8 percent. Politicians would kill for these kinds of ratings. None of his opponents has this kind of support among Catholics.

In addition, [two out of three Catholics](#) would like to see a change in the church's teaching on Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics. Only 31 percent of Catholics say that the church should not allow those remarried without an annulment to receive Communion.

True, 31 percent of Catholics is a lot of people, but do these Catholics care so strongly about this that they would leave the church? I doubt it.

In fact, Pope Francis has never said that all divorced and remarried Catholics should go to Communion. He objects to both the literalists, who say Communion is impossible for such people, and the unthinking liberals, who want to welcome everyone to Communion.

The problem with both sides is that they want a simple, universal answer to all situations. Francis does not think life is that simple. As a pastor, he met poor women who had been abandoned by their husbands and then remarried. They needed someone who could help them financially support their children as well as provide a father to them. They were good, loving people who were raising their children as good Catholics and contributing positively to their communities.

It is for such people that Francis describes the church as a field hospital for the wounded, not a country club for the beautiful. Communion is nourishment for the wounded, not a reward for the perfect, he says.

Francis would be sympathetic to the woman who put her husband through law school waiting tables but then got dumped for a pretty, younger associate. She is now married to a loving plumber who is a good father to the children from both marriages. Telling her to abandon her new husband or live as brother and sister is not only absurd, it is unjust. On the other hand, I doubt Francis would offer Communion to a billionaire, married for the third time, who has a

history of philandering and says he has nothing for which to be sorry.

The right and the left want easy answers. Francis refuses to give answers, rather he wants us to learn how to think, how to discern in complex situations.

Prior to the mid-20th century, divorce and remarriage was rare and almost always wrong because in a patriarchal society, the man could dump his wife and she had little recourse. In Jesus' time, she would not be accepted back in her father's house; she would not get alimony or child support; she was on the street with no means of support. That meant begging or prostitution. Jesus' opposition to divorce was more about protecting women and children than about sex.

In the history of the church, under the influence of Roman law, Jesus' teachings were systematized and codified. This made it easier to train priests to deal with most of the moral cases they would face.

The best of theologians and teachers always knew the need for flexibility in applying such laws, but many of their students simply applied the rules mechanically. For priests lacking education or sophistication, following the rule was safe. Too much flexibility would breed uncertainty and chaos. This led to a perversion of Jesus' teaching that forced women to stay in abusive relationships simply because they were married. As fewer women died in childbirth, as they became educated and capable of supporting themselves, and as couples lived longer together, marriage changed. It became more about human development and growth and less about economic

security. The decline of the extended family also had its effect.

Reality has changed. Divorce hits about 40 percent of marriages. Divorce and remarriage is a fact of life. Divorce is still tragic, but laws protect women and their children more than they did in the past.

How should the church respond to this new reality? Francis does not give simple answers; he asks us to reflect on the concrete circumstances of each case. Discernment, not a rule book, is required to find out where God is calling a person.

Divorced persons must ask themselves how they contributed to the breakdown of the marriage. Are they sorry for their sins? In justice, what do they owe their former spouses and children? Are they now where God wants them to be? What are their obligations now? Would abandoning a second spouse at this point be unjust and cruel? Is their love for their new spouse graced? How can they live this new life better?

I began writing this column on Tuesday when the first reading at Mass was from Isaiah 40: " 'Comfort, give comfort to my people,' says your God." On Monday, St. Luke's Gospel (5: 17-26) tells us about Jesus getting in trouble with the scribes and Pharisees for forgiving a man his sins.

When I was younger, I thought the stories about Jesus and the scribes and the Pharisees were about ancient events that had no relevance to contemporary life. Or worse, they were anti-Semitic.

Now I recognize that the Gospel writers included these stories because they knew

that thinking like the scribes and the Pharisees is a constant temptation in the church. There will always be people for whom rules are more important than compassion.

Pope Francis is under attack for being too compassionate. So was Jesus. [Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is a senior analyst and author of *Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church*]

### ***The Visit of William Cardinal Levada***

An historic event will take place in our parish on Sunday, January 15, 2017, when **William Cardinal Levada**, will preside and preach for our 10:00 a.m. Eucharist. Cardinal Levada was the second highest ranking member of the Vatican under Pope Benedict XVI when he became the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as well as a member of the Congregation of Bishops, charged with the selection of bishops world-wide. We look forward to the visit of His Eminence and the blessing that his presence will bring to our parish. I hope you will plan to be with us for this historic event.



## ***Criticism of Pope Francis rooted in misunderstanding of Vatican II***

[Michael Sean Winters](#) | December 12, 2016 [Distinctly Catholic](#)

***Editor's note:*** This is part one of a three-part series discussing the theologies of the papacies of Pope Francis and Pope Paul VI.

The opposition to Pope Francis is unprecedented. There have been disagreements in the life of the church before: How could there not be? And, in recent times, we have even seen some cardinals voice disappointment or even disagreement with directives coming from Rome. For example, Belgian Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens was not shy in voicing his concern about the manner in which the first synods of bishops after the Second Vatican Council were conducted. But claiming an apostolic exhortation is not magisterial? Publishing detailed challenges to the pope's teaching? This is uncharted territory.

I believe that the opposition to Francis is rooted in a flawed understanding of the post-conciliar era and, more specifically, where we are in the process of receiving the council. Francis, just last month, in an interview with Italian daily *Avvenire*, noted that it takes about 100 years to fully receive a council, and he is right. Some people thought that process was completed, and that they had mastered all the riddles of the Catholic faith in the post-conciliar age. They are very upset that their assumptions and some of their conclusions have been challenged.

Last week marked the 51st anniversary of the close of Vatican II. In the past four years, we marked the opening of the council, commemorated the

promulgation of key conciliar texts, held conferences to explore the meaning of the documents, and appropriately so, because Vatican II remains the most determinative event in the life of the Catholic church in our living memory. This year, there is no great anniversary to commemorate; we are just one more year into the process of receiving the council, of learning more about how the doctrines and insights articulated at the council challenge us as Catholics to deepen our faith. When you hit 30 or 50, you have a big party because it is a milestone. At 31 or 54, you are just getting older. So it is with the church: The 51st anniversary may lack fireworks, but the sense of continued growth and of normalcy is welcome. Milestones can distort, focusing on what happened then. Continued growth requires us to focus as well on what is happening now. Of all the different ways of assessing the pontificate of Francis, one of the most important is that he is attending to some of the unfinished business of Vatican II.

In this three-part series, I wish to examine how the opposition to Francis is rooted in a misinterpretation of both the council itself and, even more, of the significance of the popes who have, like Francis, overseen the implementation of the council.

One of the principal narratives that Francis has overturned is the idea that St. Pope John Paul II delivered the final, definitive interpretations on all the key issues that the council addressed. This narrative minimizes what went before and what followed the Polish pope.

Fr. Lou Cameli of the Chicago archdiocese, who serves as the

archbishop's delegate for formation and mission, explained the narrative drawn by right wing critics of Francis this way:

*They draw battle lines which are clear but false. The commentators in this camp read the conciliar and post-conciliar history as a movement from clarity, a robust assertiveness, and a demanding discipleship to hazy convictions, uncritical accommodation with an unfriendly world, and a generally and culturally inspired shallow discipleship. In this narrative, the seeds of weakness began in the ambiguous stances taken by Paul VI, and it has flowered today in a hollow version of Christianity proposed by Francis.*

*In between these two pontiffs, John Paul II tried valiantly to reclaim a robust and clear Christianity, and Benedict XVI aimed for greater theological precision. Even the positive developments fostered by John Paul II and Benedict XVI are threatened today by a kind of soft populist leadership exemplified by Francis, who is disparaged and dismissed as an ecclesiastical Peronista.*

He is quick to add: "I believe that this narrative is not only incorrect but also very unfair" and that he thinks the narrative is being used to discredit Francis.

Certainly John Paul II achieved much in terms of implementing the council. But the idea that one pontificate could achieve what historians and theologians mean by "receiving a council" is a mistaken idea. It is no less common for being mistaken. When you hear a priest describe himself as a "John Paul II priest," he is usually informing you he is not a fan of the current pope. A professor who taught seminarians told

me that if he wanted to get their attention, it was better to start with a document of John Paul II's than with a conciliar text or even a verse of Scripture. Whenever someone refers to the late Polish pontiff as "John Paul the Great," my alarm bells go off. All the popes since the council have played a role in the reception of it, and many more popes, bishops, theologians and lay faithful will continue to do so.

Relatedly, some would have you believe that John Paul II was essentially an American neo-conservative, so if you want to know what the Catholic church is really about, you should subscribe to *First Things* and read the *National Catholic Register*. The latter organ, especially, has been downright nasty about Pope Francis, [especially their Rome correspondent Edward Pentin](#). They not only believe John Paul II delivered the last word, but they insist that their interpretation of John Paul II's teaching [is the only valid interpretation](#). When Pope Francis highlights something they ignored, such as the church's teaching on the role of conscience, [they go ballistic](#).

The *Register* is owned by EWTN, and they, too, [have not been shy about challenging Francis](#). Regularly, they feature critics of the pope in their programming, yet they have bishops doing advertisements for them, and they get big checks from the Knights of Columbus, indicating that the opposition is not limited to a couple of media outlets.

The American neo-conservatives were always unwilling or unable to wrap their heads around the degree to which John Paul II was influenced by [Communio](#)

[theology](#), which sought to reintegrate the profound insight of the church fathers that the church is a communion of persons, not a quasi-political organization, into contemporary theology. They thought that the distinction between grace and nature had been overdrawn in the intervening years and that Christian theology had lost the sense of wonder that the early Christians possessed. They emphasized the communion of persons in the church, more than the stale articulation of doctrine, and they also were suspicious of certain liberalizing tendencies in the church, specifically the sloppy way theology and social science were fixed in together after the council. The neo-conservatives clung to natural law theories that sit uneasily with the theology of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar and others in the *Communio* school.

In his book, [What Happened at Vatican II](#), Jesuit Fr. John W. O'Malley wrote of Eastern Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh, a leading voice at Vatican II: "He was most daringly progressive because he was the most radically conservative. His interventions consistently invoked ancient traditions of the church to challenge the status quo, and he thus opened up for the council fathers a new breadth in the choices they had to make."

The same could be said of the *Communio* theologians, but for the neo-cons, any challenge to the status quo had to stop well before it got to any questioning of the market, and they were not really interested in opening up a breadth of choices. Just so, they failed to grasp the real significance of John Paul II's theological footprint.

In addition to the teaching on conscience and the influence of *Communio* theology, Catholic neo-conservatives offer a tendentious reading of Catholic social doctrine. They argue that the really important social encyclical of the post-conciliar era was John Paul II's 1991 encyclical on social issues, *Centesimus Annus*, and they direct you to the two or three paragraphs therein that they really like. They acknowledge John Paul II's 1981 first social encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*, very little, and his third encyclical on social issues, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), is neglected entirely.

When confronted with Pope Benedict XVI's social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, George Weigel, senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, famously suggested [reading the text with red and gold pens](#) to demarcate what was genuinely penned by the pope, which should be believed, from what had been proffered by the bureaucracy and could be ignored. Weigel was sure he knew which was which.

More remarkable than Weigel's lack of enthusiasm for Benedict was the lengths to which he was willing to disparage the pontificate of Blessed Pope Paul VI in order to make his hero John Paul II shine all the more. In his biography of John Paul II, *Witness to Hope*, he allowed that Pope Paul VI, or Papa Montini as the Italians are wont to designate popes by their surnames, compiled "an impressive record" but the rest of his summation of Paul VI's papacy is highly negative.

"Paul VI's intelligence led him to see every side of a question simultaneously, and the tension between the certainties in which he was intellectually formed and the ambiguities he had learned from life

and from widespread reading frequently led him into a tar-pit of uncertainty," Weigel writes. Tar-pit? Some of us know that tension between certainty of faith and ambiguity of life as adulthood. Weigel concludes his treatment of Montini with these damning observations:

*In another historical moment, he might have been a man who could have bent history to his purposes. In the time in which he was destined to be pope, he became the kind of man who is consumed by history. ... The fifteen-year pontificate of Giovanni Battista Montini raised a hitherto unthought question. Could anyone — and particularly anyone formed in the typical pattern of post-Reformation popes — do this job in the extraordinary internal and external circumstances of late twentieth-century Catholicism?*

Apart from the limits of the "great man of history" approach which Weigel obviously adopts, is religious leadership really about bending history to our purposes? And that italicized "anyone" suggests that Montini was not up to the job, but we know who Weigel thinks would be!

This is nonsense. Montini was a giant, and that is the thread I shall pick up tomorrow.

[Michael Sean Winters is *NCR* Washington columnist and a visiting fellow at Catholic University's Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies.]

*Editor's note: This is part two of a three-part series discussing the theologies of*

*the papacies of Pope Francis and Pope Paul VI.*

Pope Paul VI never got the credit he deserved for seeing the Second Vatican Council to a successful conclusion and for keeping virtually everyone on board in the tumultuous times that followed. Soon after the election of Pope Francis, it became clear that the new pope had an affinity for Paul. Why was he so great? And why were his accomplishments so easily ignored?

The second question is easier to answer. Giovanni Battista Montini was elected pope in 1963, taking the name Paul VI, after the death of Pope John XXIII who had convened the Vatican II in 1962. Paul would shepherd the Council until its close in 1965 and the church until his death in 1968. The Catholic right thought Paul was insufficiently rigorous in ferreting out those they thought were taking liberties with the implementation of the Council's reforms. The legalistic mentality, so evident in the opposition to Francis, faulted Montini for his ability to recognize the ambivalence of many of the issues facing the church. If you wanted clarity above all else, Montini's commitment to dialogue and acceptance of complexity were not your cup of tea. If you thought that the decentralization of decision-making was a fool's errand, Paul's commitment to synodality and to empowering episcopal conferences made you conclude he was foolish. The impatient often view patience as a fault. The left gave up on Paul after the 1968 encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* ("On Human Life") and its continuation of the ban on artificial birth control: They never forgave him. This was wrong and wrong-headed. For starters, they passed over Paul's statement that "[r]esponsible

parenthood, as we use the term here, has one further essential aspect of paramount importance. It concerns the objective moral order which was established by God, and of which a right conscience is the true interpreter." To be sure, conscience, then as now, must be linked to the teaching of the church and the objective moral order, but Paul never said conscience had no role to play. And, who can doubt that his fears that the neo-Malthusian agenda of the population control experts was a grave threat to human dignity? Consider this article by Melinda Henneberger about the [search for the perfect sperm and egg](#) at Harvard. It is also true that the disproportionate emphasis on *Humanae Vitae* in evaluating the pontificate of Paul was somewhat unique to the U.S.

"The importance of conscience was lost, but I have to say not everywhere. The American Catholic context seems to me a particular case (in this issue, like in others)," Massimo Faggioli of Villanova University explained to me in an email when I asked about Paul VI's legacy. "In the U.S. Catholic church, an authoritarian interpretation of *Humanae Vitae* left a footprint that is much deeper here than anywhere else in the world. This means that in the U.S. the reception of Paul VI is much more driven by *Humanae Vitae* than by all the rest of Paul VI's teaching. For most Catholics in the world, Paul VI is also the pope of *Populorum Progressio* (social and economic justice), of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (evangelization in a modern context), of *Octogesima Adveniens* (legitimate plurality of political options for Catholics)."

Faggioli's reply points to the first question with which I began, namely,

why was Montini such a great pope? From his first encyclical to his final apostolic exhortation, Paul's teachings not only shaped much of what Pope John Paul II had to say, they are clearly an inspiration for Francis' magisterial teachings. The linkages between *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in 1975 and *Evangelii Gaudium* in 2013 are obvious, especially the centrality of concern for the poor to the integrity of Christian efforts to evangelize and the sense of a church in mission.

What is more, Paul had to try and reform the structures of the church to bring them in line with the Second Vatican Council's clear call for greater collegiality in decision-making. To be clear, he did not always succeed.

Think of [the Synod of Bishops](#), which was the first institutional attempt to introduce collegial decision-making after the Council. The first one, held in 1967, tried to tackle five topics in four weeks. Only with the second synod, in 1969, did the synod fathers break into small discussion groups by language. The next synod, in 1971, tried to tackle two large topics, and the resulting text was a bit of a hash. In 1974, the synod fathers rejected the draft final statement prepared for them. [Historical footnote: the draft was the work of then-Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, who four years later would become Pope John Paul II.]

Some, even at the time, saw this as evidence that the synod had failed but Bishop Jean Guy Rakotondravahatra of Madagascar, who participated in the synod, saw it differently, saying, "We have had a chance, for the first time ever, to talk about our problems, our desires, our hopes and our eventual

disagreements. We have seen that the majority of our colleagues agree with us. The Holy Father has listened to it all. What is the point of reducing the great wealth of our discussions to a few poverty-stricken propositions." So, 10 years into the process, it was understandable that some thought it was stillborn. But, looking back, it is clear that what Paul was doing was experimenting, trying different ways to make the synods more successful. And, the stalemate at the 1974 synod led to his own greatest magisterial document, [\*Evangelii Nuntiandi\*](#), issued the following year.

"One reason that they did not come to full fruition during Montini's time," says Faggioli, "is the amount of resistance against that change which is a change brought about by Vatican II: Already seven months after the conclusion of Vatican II, on July 24, 1966, Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani (prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) sends a confidential letter to the bishops conferences about the 'errors' in the interpretation of Vatican II."

Faggioli also points to a parallel development that affected how synodality would take shape: the empowerment of episcopal conferences. "The first synods take place in a decade, the first decade after Vatican II, when the bishops' conferences have new, substantial power to make decisions for their own local churches (just think of the liturgical reform) and the hope is that the role of the Roman Curia and the Vatican will be different than in the past," explains Faggioli.

Here in the U.S., we had an experience of an episcopal conference starting

during World War I and, before that, the plenary councils of Baltimore. But, in most countries, collegiality was entirely new and the focus on the local conferences garnered more attention and interest than the synods in Rome. In Latin America, the development of synodality through the meetings of the Latin American Episcopal Conference, known by its Spanish acronym CELAM, would prove the most fruitful incarnation of synodality anywhere in the post-conciliar church, and paying attention to this was an Argentine Jesuit, Jorge Bergoglio, who would join CELAM when he became an auxiliary bishop (1992) and then archbishop of Buenos Aires (1997).

Paul wanted the adult conversations begun at the Second Vatican Council to continue. Synods under John Paul II were sad, largely rote, affairs. Benedict XVI, pope from 2005 to 2013, would introduce an hour of open mike time at the end of each session of the synods, to promote genuine discussion and dialogue, but Francis' synods were the most open of any in living memory.

Critics of Paul also need to recall that in the era when he became pope, he still thought he needed to use the royal "we" when speaking of himself, and he was still carried around on the *sedes gestatoria*. The atmosphere of "the court" had not been broken. There is only so much adult conversation you can have when people are bowing and scraping, and there is only so much change one institution can weather in a short amount of time.

The list of "firsts" that Montini accomplished is impressive: He was the first pope to meet with the Ecumenical

Patriarch in a thousand years, the first pope to visit the Western Hemisphere, the first pope to address the United Nations, the first pope to visit India and the Philippines and Africa.

But, his greatness lies in his first steps after the Council. On a range of issues, from collegiality to ecumenism to engagement with the world to supporting the development of new theological perspectives appropriate to the modern world to the reform of the liturgy, on each of these and more, Paul had to choose which path to begin in the wake of the Council. And, in each case, he set off in directions that would bear fruit in his own pontificate and beyond. He may have put a foot wrong here or there, but he did not choose any dead ends. His steps were measured, and the more excitable Catholics of both left and right found him impossibly moderate, but he not only kept the church together during tumultuous times, he began the implementation of Vatican II with intelligence and wisdom. I am not a fan of adding the words "the Great" to any pope until they have been dead for 500 years, but I will place my bet that when history's verdict is rendered, Montini will be seen as the greatest pontiff of the 20th century.

Tomorrow, I shall conclude this series by looking at the elements of continuity and discontinuity that have characterized the post-conciliar era, and how they help to explain both the direction Francis is taking and the opposition to him.

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*This is Part 3 of a three-part series discussing the theologies of the papacies of Pope Francis and Pope Paul VI.*

The Italians have a saying: "After a fat pope, a thin pope." Different men bring different personal qualities to the task, and their sense of the issues they face and their understanding of the Petrine ministry itself will have been shaped by their life experiences. It should be no surprise that there are differences from one pope to another. Just as it is rare for the American people to elect a presidential candidate from the same party more than twice in a row, cardinals tend to set the pendulum swinging every 30 years or so, between popes who are determined to press forward and popes who think it is time to consolidate the gains and clarify any stray developments.

It is important to note that the tensions that exist around Pope Francis' pontificate are often the result of fidelity to the entirety of the conciliar teaching. Take, for instance, the topic that became the most controversial during the twin synods on the family (October 2014 and October 2015): the relationship of conscience and moral law in determining whether the divorced and remarried can discern a path to the sacraments.

According to church historian Massimo Faggioli of Villanova University, "The tensions between the sovereignty of the conscience of the faithful (from the Second Vatican Council document [\*Gaudium et Spes\*](#), #16) and *obsequium religiosum* (religious submission to the authentic magisterium of the Church in the Vatican II document [\*Lumen Gentium\*](#), #25) are already part of the teaching of Vatican II: in this sense

Vatican II makes clear and does not resolve the paradoxes within the Catholic experience." "There are tensions that cannot be solved by the magisterium or by canon law," Faggioli continues. "Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular teach us to live with these tensions without (if possible) to make of these paradoxes a pattern of hypocrisy."

Faggioli believes Francis is restoring the balance between conscience and religious submission. He also thinks one of the biggest differences among the popes since Vatican II (1962-65) has been how they have dealt with bishops' conferences.

"Bishops' conferences are the single most important institutional innovation of Vatican II," he told *NCR*. "They had a decade of expansion of their power immediately after Vatican II, under Paul VI; [this period] is the honeymoon between the papacy and the bishops' conferences. This honeymoon ends with John Paul II and Benedict XVI, when there is a programmatic reduction of their influence. But the decentralizing effect of creating bishops' conferences cannot be reversed."

Faggioli contends that Francis has recognized the limits of trying to put this particular genie back into the bottle.

"The Catholic church today is globally too big and diverse to give up this new tool for church governance. Pope Francis' teaching is largely based on the previous teaching of bishops' conferences (national and continental) and in a way, this is Pope Francis' way to encourage bishops' conferences to develop and reclaim their own role. This

is not happening yet: bishops' conferences today are stuck in the change of paradigm between the Wojtyla-Ratzinger [Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI] era and the future. But this is a problem much more for the European and North American churches than for the rest of the Catholic church."

Fr. Lou Cameli, the Chicago archbishop's delegate for formation and mission, acknowledged the differences in outlook and style among the popes of the last 50 years, but he sees underlying, foundational points of continuity in the post-conciliar era. When asked to identify these, he highlighted six:

- Christocentrism: a retrieval of the centrality of Christ in the church (evident in evangelization, liturgy and personal spiritual formation).
- Communion: The church is a set of interlocking and dynamic relationships among people and with the Triune God (in contrast to a primarily organizational-institutional-structural model of church).
- Dialogue: The church is the place where believers speak and listen to each other, and it is the community of faith that speaks with and listens to the world. (This is the *ecclesia discens et docens* and, therefore, is a dynamic community instead of a static "container of truth.")
- Engagement with the world: The church senses a responsibility for the world not simply as another institutional presence but as a movement of salt, light and leaven for the world's transformation.
- Unencumbering the church: Two thousand years of history is a mixed blessing that along the way has resulted in elements that encumber the mission, and so there is a task of purification and

focusing necessary to make the mission more nimble and effective.

- Prominence accorded to more immediate experiences of faith and church: Every renewal across 2,000 years (e.g., Sts. Benedict, Francis, Ignatius) has fostered a retrieval of immediate experiences of faith and discipleship in the church.

Cameli is on to something important. Take Pope John Paul. The conciliar text he cited more than any other in his own magisterial writings was *Gaudium et Spes* 22, which placed Christ at the center of Christian anthropology. As noted [two days ago](#), John Paul was deeply influenced by *Communio* theology. His sense of the value of dialogue was stronger outside the church than inside, but he was fully conversant with the major intellectual and political trends of his time. He engaged the world, visiting many countries that the rest of us ignore. He declined to be crowned with a tiara and shed many of the accoutrements of the papal court. And, in varied ways, he highlighted the "immediate experiences of faith," Cameli notes, not least his support for new ecclesial groups that have grown to fruition since the council, like [Comunione e Liberazione](#) and [Focolare](#), both of which focus on inculcating lay spirituality that brings the faith into everyday life. It is not difficult to see how Pope Benedict embodied these six touchstones of post-conciliar life.

"Benedict XVI took up the very same themes of Christocentrism, communion, dialogue, worldly engagement, an unencumbering of church life, and the retrieval of more immediate experiences of faith and church," says Cameli. "He did so, however, primarily as a

theologian. In this, perhaps his greatest contribution was to link all of these themes of renewal to the Word of God contained in the Scriptures. Because of his erudition and authoritative representation of the tradition, he gave weight to these elements of renewal."

For Francis, with his long experience as a pastor, Cameli believes "the elements of renewal outlined above take on practical ramifications and real world engagement ... unless they can take on real shape in a real world, they are of negligible importance. In fact, much of his teaching (e.g. *Amoris Laetitia*, or "The Joy of Love," Francis' apostolic exhortation of the two synods of bishop on the family) is directed in this way, the way of real living in a real world."

"After a fat pope, a thin pope." Some of the opposition to Francis comes from those who forgot that a pendulum can only stay true if it swings back and forth. It doesn't keep going in one direction. (If it does, that is a sign the pendulum is broken.) The tension between a pope who expands the boundaries and one who reinforces them is part of the difficulty for some of those who oppose Francis.

But there is something different going on too. The discussion about continuity versus discontinuity here is different from the way Benedict used those two poles in his famous [2005 address to the Curia](#). According to Faggioli, Benedict's speech was "much more nuanced than a pure opposition 'continuity versus discontinuity': it was about 'continuity and reform' versus 'discontinuity and rupture.' Benedict XVI did not say that in the church nothing changes. He said that change happens in a certain way, in continuity and not with rupture."

Faggioli says the speech was nonetheless problematic because it entered into a theological debate in a way popes usually do not do. "Pope Benedict's was a highly sophisticated hermeneutical debate offered to the whole church and misused by ideologues."

Faggioli's comment points to the source of the fiercest opposition to Francis: the ideologues, and not just any ideologues, but those whose real problems are not with Francis but with Vatican II.

In *What Happened at Vatican II*, his history of the council, Jesuit Fr. John O'Malley writes of the minority at the council that they were, by and large, proponents of a particular kind of "Roman theology" that he describes as "heavily conditioned by canon law, indifferent to the problems raised by historical methods, and often hermeneutically naïve. [The bishops in the minority] had been schooled to disdain modern approaches to theology as passing novelties or, still influenced by *Pascendi* and *Lamentabili* [an encyclical and a syllabus, respectively, by Pope Pius X condemning 'modernism'], to attack them as dangerously subversive."

It is no coincidence that many, though certainly not all, of those with an affinity for the traditional Latin Mass or *ad orientem* worship are aligned with the opposition to Francis.

O'Malley goes on to observe of these bishops in the minority at Vatican II: "Of them the majority asked a great deal. By trying to convince them to go along with this or that position, the majority essentially asked them to adopt a new mind-set and a new value system and to

affirm assumptions they feared and abhorred."

Francis is asking the same, perhaps more, of them. But let us be clear. It is Vatican II that they are resisting, a council that is still being received, and about which future popes and bishops and lay faithful and theologians will have more to say.

If you hate history, or ignore its claims, or at least view the age in which we live with derision and scorn, Francis' commitment to engagement with the world is terrifying, but the council called for engagement. If you hold a theology overly influenced by canon law, Francis is a threat, but then so was the council. If syllogisms satisfy, experience holds no charms for you as they do for Francis. If you think the adult conversation that began at Vatican II and was continued by Pope Paul VI risks posing difficult questions and requiring you to stretch intellectually, you will view Francis' effort to rekindle that adult conversation with suspicion or dread.

But the problem is not him, it is Vatican II, and that was not a problem, and is not a problem: It was a council. We should, with charity, be about the business of receiving that council, not re-litigating it, and that is what some in the opposition really wants.

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