

CENTER ON RELIGION AND CULTURE FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

Searching for Vatican II: Why a Transformative Moment Remains So Elusive

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Speaker

Rev. Joseph A. Komonchak, *Professor Emeritus of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America and a priest of the archdiocese of New York.*

Moderator

Paul Baumann, *Editor of Commonweal magazine.*

Respondents

Melissa Wilde, *Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania.*

Peter Steinfels, *Co-director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture.*

MARGARET STEINFELS: Good evening. Welcome to Fordham and to the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture's Headline Forum, "Searching for Vatican II: Why a Transformative Moment Remains So Elusive."

Before we invite the moderator and panelists up to the stage to make their presentations, we'd like to show you a very brief video, using images from the makers of a film called *Vatican II: The Faithful Revolution*. In 2005, we made in a very brief selection from that series. We thought it would be a useful introduction to tonight's discussion.

Those of us who are old enough to have lived through the Council may think we remember how it went. But polls indicate that of Catholics born since the Council, about half say that they have never heard a thing about it. So for the whole audience let's go to the video. We hope this helps everyone kind of remember what happened.

[Video presentation: *The Faithful Revolution*]

MARGARET STEINFELS: You have been transported back into the past. I hope that little clip gave us all some either remembrance or some news about the Council and some of the things that went on there.

Let me once again welcome you here and say good evening. I am Margaret Steinfels, Co-director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture. Once again, as we begin, I ask you, I beg you, to turn off all your electronic devices — beepers, trippers, and whatever. It will be very helpful for everyone to be able to hear what's going on this evening.

Tonight's Forum will consist of a presentation by Joseph Komonchak and brief comments from Peter Steinfels and Melissa Wilde, followed by a discussion among the speakers and then questions from the audience. That's where, as most of you know, those cards and pencils on the chairs come in. They are for writing any questions you might have during

the presentation and discussion. Write, please, very clearly as those questions occur to you. If you raise your hand, some of these wonderful Fordham students are on the sides, and they will come and get your question from you and bring it up front.

Let me just now introduce our moderator for the evening, Paul Baumann, journalist and editor, who joined the *Commonweal* staff in 1990 and was appointed editor in 2003. His writing has appeared in many publications — *The New York Times*, *The Washington Monthly*, *the Columbia Journalism Review*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and, from time to time, in *Commonweal* itself. He is the co-editor of *Commonweal Confronts the Century*, a collection that celebrated seventy-five years of the magazine's articles, essays, and stories.

Paul was born in 1951. So he was a mere lad on the soccer fields during the Second Vatican Council. But I can assure you that he has heard a lot about it since then and is up to speed on the subject.

Paul.

PAUL BAUMANN: Thank you, Peggy. It's great to be here, and it's especially a great pleasure for me tonight to introduce Father Joseph Komonchak.

Father Komonchak is Professor Emeritus of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America and a priest of the Archdiocese of New York. He is a member of the international editorial team that produced the acclaimed five-volume *History of Vatican II*. He was an editor of the very valuable *Dictionary of Theology* and is the author of many articles in general and scholarly journals.

He blogs at dotCommonweal — perhaps I should repeat that, he blogs at dotCommonweal — where he has most recently treated us to a series of posts on John Henry Newman's writings under the rubric "Newmania."

I am eagerly awaiting Father Komonchak's remarks tonight. Please welcome Father Komonchak.

FR. JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: Thank you very much. Thank you all for coming.

"Searching for Vatican II" implies that it hasn't been found yet — or, if it has been found, not everyone agrees about what it is that has been found. So I will begin with a general description that perhaps everyone can agree upon.

The Second Vatican Council was a gathering of the world's Catholic bishops convoked by Pope John XXIII and led by him and his successor, Paul VI, which, after two years of preparation, met in four sessions between October 11, 1962, and December 8, 1965, and issued sixteen documents on the Roman Catholic Church and on its role in the world.

The Council sought to achieve the three purposes the popes had set for it: an inner spiritual renewal of the Church and updating of its pastoral attitudes, behavior and institutions, and the promotion of unity among Christians. The Council was accompanied and followed in remarkably short time by significant changes in the Church's inner life and in its relationship to the world.

After that description, however, things get more complicated, and debates arise as to the character and the significance of the Council and of its aftermath. In these debates, it is not always clear that people mean the same thing by the phrase "Vatican II."

For some, the essential referent of the term should be the sixteen final documents, which

can be found set out in a fairly small book. These are the permanent record of what the Council determined and the criterion by which to evaluate what came after it.

For others, Vatican II refers to the series of occurrences that took place between Pope John's announcement of his intention to convoke a Council and the day that Pope Paul VI brought it to a close. This second meaning may be enlarged to include not only what the protagonists did in Rome, but also what was occurring in the larger Church as the Church observed more or less closely what was going on in Rome. For many people, these occurrences constitute the events of the Council, which they regard as more, something richer, even something other, than what was expressed in the final conciliar texts.

I would prefer myself to speak of these occurrences, instead, as the experience of the Council — that is, the experience that was the Council — and I would prefer to use the word “event” for a third way of seeing the Council. That way places what happened against the broad backdrop of the history of the Catholic Church.

At the time of the Council, some people spoke of the end of certain historical periods of greater or lesser extent. The Council represented the end of the Counter-Reformation, the end of the Middle Ages, the end of the Age of Constantine. There was even talk of a new Pentecost. All of those descriptions implied that something historic was under way, that something was ending and something new and different was beginning.

Even before the Council closed, some of the reforms that had been proposed or mandated in the everyday life of the Catholic Church began to go into effect, particularly in the area of liturgical practice. These and other authorized changes were accompanied by many other changes, many of them not authorized, in almost all areas of Church life and in the relationships between Catholics and many others — non-Catholic Christians, Jews, other theists, agnostics, atheists, et cetera.

All of those changes some people bundle together under the term “Vatican II.” In other words, its aftermath is included within the term, as in the judgments of historians, that the Council was the most important religious event since the Protestant Reformation or that the Catholic Church changed more in ten years after the Council than it had in the previous 100. If an event is an occurrence that does not leave things as they were, then it would appear that we can count Vatican II as an event.

Having set out those three different meanings that may come up when people use the term “Vatican II,” let me now outline three different interpretations of the Council and of its aftermath. I am going to call them the progressive, the traditionalist, and the reformist. The first two interpretations, the progressive and the traditionalist, draw a sharp contrast between the Catholic Church as it was before Vatican II and the Church as it was after it.

Progressives tend to speak disparagingly of the pre-conciliar Church and praise the Council for its long-overdue option for significant renewal and reform and for long-needed accommodations to the modern world. If confusion followed the Council, it was to be attributed to the conservative elements who remained in power in the Vatican after the bishops went home.

Traditionalists reverse the polarities. They tend to praise the pre-conciliar Church — not only its liturgical and devotional practices, but also its resolute opposition to the principles and developments that resulted in the modern secularized society and culture. They blame the Council itself, not just what happened afterwards. They blame the Council itself for decisions that had the effect of dissolving the tight Catholic subculture and of leading the Church to capitulate to the modernity that it had rightly opposed ever

since it displayed its satanic character in the French Revolution.

Against both groups the reformists downplay the elements of discontinuity that the other two accentuate. For the reformists, as the final texts indicate, the popes and bishops of Vatican II did not intend a revolutionary break with the past, but rather reform and renewal in the light of and continuous with its broad and deep tradition. This is the true spirit of Vatican II, and not the one that focuses on breaks, ruptures, discontinuities, as both the progressives and the traditionalists do.

For twenty-five years, the chief representative of the reformist interpretation has been Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. The position he set out in his famous interview in 1984, he expressed again in a speech to the Roman Curia in December of 2005. In fact, already right after the close of the Council, he warned against the tendency to picture everything in black and white, to which a positive summary of the Council almost inevitably leads when the Council's progress is highlighted by contrasting the new gains with the much less satisfactory state of affairs prior to the Council.

He said that the people are complaining that they are hearing so many sermons that begin, "You have heard that it was said of old, but I say to you." To this tendency, the Pope in 2005 gave the name the hermeneutics of discontinuity or of rupture. It tends to split the pre-conciliar from the post-conciliar Church, to emphasize what is novel in the conciliar texts, which it regards as compromised texts, that as such do not represent the true spirit of the Council. This tendency may even regard the Council as a kind of constitutional convention that offered a new constitution for the Church.

To this tendency the Pope opposed what he called a hermeneutic of reform, and he devotes by far the larger part of that speech to explaining and illustrating the need for the Council to rethink the Church's relationship to the modern world. His argument, in fact, recalls criticism of the pre-conciliar Church that he had made right after the Council: the Church was alienated from the modern world as a result of a series of developments and bitter oppositions.

A document like *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Council's declaration on religious freedom, corrected earlier decisions and attitudes. It gave a fundamental "yes" to the modern age, even while it at the same time was recovering the deepest patrimony of the Church and preserving and deepening her inmost nature and true identity. It was, the Pope said, precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists. I want to repeat that. It is in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists.

It is unfortunate then that Pope Benedict's position is often described as a hermeneutics of continuity, since continuity points to only one element of his analysis. His view is a good deal more balanced than those of many who claim this speech as their inspiration. In fact, of course, it would be hard to find any serious theologian or historian who would maintain that Vatican II was marked exclusively by continuity or exclusively by discontinuity or rupture. Everyone speaks of continuity and discontinuity at different levels. The difference lies in what they choose to emphasize.

Let me now say a few things about attempts to understand what was the event of the Council. There are two ways in which that question is addressed. When the last two popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, spoke or speak of Vatican II as a great spiritual event, the most important event of the 20th century, they were and are speaking of its impact first and chiefly upon the Catholic Church itself, and they are doing so in theological terms. It was a moment in which God gave to the Church the great grace of the Council, when the Church and the Council submitted itself once again to the word of

God and to a proclamation of the word of God in a manner appropriate to the modern age.

Perhaps the most famous theological interpretation of Vatican II is the one proposed by Karl Rahner. His thesis was that the Second Vatican Council was the beginning of a tentative approach by the Catholic Church to the discovery and official realization of itself as a world church, a global church. He divided all of churches into three great epochs — Judeo-Christianity, Hellenistic European Christianity, and the epoch now opening the age of the global church. St. Paul, he said, was the initiator and the great defender of the shift from the first to the second age, from Jewish Christianity to Hellenistic Christianity, and Rahner provided a vigorous theological argument for the break that this represented when the Gospel was brought to non-Jewish peoples. Rahner proposed that there is a similarity between that great shift and the one on which the Church embarked at Vatican II, a shift from a Eurocentric church to a church that knows it must interact with all other great cultures and adapt itself to them.

Now I have to say when I reread this text I was struck by the fact that Rahner insists from beginning to end that his essay is tentative, his considerations preliminary, rudimentary, vague, unsystematic, and unclear, adjectives with which I happen to agree. But it has not prevented it from gaining a great deal of attention and approval.

What is striking in theological interpretations of the Council is how little awareness or interest they show in how the term “event” is used by historians and sociologists — that is, in terms of breaks with routine or ruptures or discontinuities. Let me give you an example from one sociologist, named William Sewell. He has worked out a theory of events that has close affinities with what historians mean by the term “event.” Sewell conceives of events as “sequences of occurrences that result in transformations of structures.” Such a sequence begins with a rupture of some kind, which produces reinforcing ruptures in other locations. These ruptures spiral into transformative historical events when a sequence of interrelated ruptures disarticulates a previous structural network, makes repair difficult, and makes a novel re-articulation possible. Sewell illustrates his thesis by a consideration of how the event at the Bastille on July 14, 1779, was transformed into that permanent change known as the French Revolution.

On Sewell’s theory and the illustration Andrew Greeley has drawn to argue that Vatican II represents another example of an event. I think you might give some thought, those of you who are old enough, to try to figure out what was the rupture of some kind that began reinforcing ruptures in other locations, transformative historical events, sequence of interrelated ruptures, et cetera. One might note that on this view it is not enough to reconstruct the experience of the participants in the Council and to think that one has thereby fulfilled the historian’s or the sociologist’s role.

The historian’s Vatican II is not that of the protagonists of Vatican II. One can only identify an event by placing it within a series defined by a plot. Applied to our subject, that raises the question: Into what series of other events should we place the Second Vatican Council? How far back does the sequence of events have to go that will make it intelligible? And must not that series also include the more than fifty years that have by now passed since the Council was first announced? We can’t pretend that fifty years of Church history have not gone on since the Council was announced.

For the historian and sociologist, whether something constitutes an event can only be settled in the long run. The story is told that Mao Tse Tung, when asked what he thought of the French Revolution, is said to have replied, “It’s too soon to say.”
[Laughter]

Pope Benedict XVI is one who is aware of that meaning of event as rupture, but on

theological grounds he denies that it can apply to Vatican II. There is no pre- or post-conciliar church, he said in his 1984 interview. In his speech to the Roman Curia he repeated this: “There is but one single church that walks the path toward the Lord, ever deepening and ever better understanding the treasure of faith that he himself has entrusted to her. There are no leaps in this history. There are no fractures. There is no break in continuity.”

A historian will be rightly puzzled by that claim; but so will many a theologian. In fact, I think one can quote the younger Ratzinger against himself. He wrote: “Christianity has never existed in a perfectly world-less state. Because it exists in people whose behavior is the world, it never appears concretely except in a relationship to some world. But those relationships differ, often dramatically, even contradictorily, from age to age and from place to place”—that’s a commonplace with historians and sociologists and a problem only for those whose ecclesiology abstracts the Church out of the churches.

What then was the break, if there was a break? If one takes event in the historian’s or sociologist’s sense of an occurrence or sequence of occurrences that constitute or bring about difference, perhaps even breaks and discontinuity, then one has to be able to say what was the former state disrupted by the event — in other words, one has to be able to identify a before and an after.

Here are some of the descriptions of what the form of Catholicism was from which the Council is thought to have departed.

The historian Jean Danielou makes it a post-Reformation construction. He argues that Catholicism in this sense of a particular social form is an effect of the Reformation.

Father Congar, following my lamented colleague Giuseppe Alberigo, calls it Tridentinism (the Council of Trentism) and Congar describes this “as a system that embraced absolutely everything: theology, ethics, Christian behavior, religious practice, the liturgy, the organization, Roman centralization, the constant intervention of Roman congregations in the life of the Church.” For Congar Vatican II represented a departure from that system.

Within the post-Tridentine era, I have proposed in other writings that a distinctively modern Roman Catholicism was constructed in the 19th century in opposition to new, and even revolutionary, economic, social, political, and cultural developments. The result of this is similar in my view to what Ratzinger once criticized as “the little Catholic *zondeveldt* [phonetic], the little Catholic particular world, the little Catholic world or sub-world.” Seeing defamations of what it is to be a Christian — I’m now summarizing this view of Ratzinger — already in the Constantinian turn, the establishment of Christianity, in Medieval Christendom and the narrowness of the Counter-Reformation, Ratzinger was particularly critical that what it means to be a Christian was narrowed down in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries by the syllabi, the lists of condemnations, of Pius IX and Pius X.

In another work, Ratzinger spoke of the Church before the Council as being “in the late phases of a cult culture that no longer looks forward but backwards.” “Theology” — and here he’s describing theology before Vatican II — “seemed to have thought its way through everything, piety to have practiced and crystallized everything that could possibly be done and formulated. Every space had been filled up with the data of tradition, just like a church building packed with altars, pictures, and testimonies to the piety of former generations.” That description corresponds very closely to what Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac described as a “suffocating system apparently in control of the pre-Vatican II Church.”

Father Congar offers in a couple of writings — not in any systematic way, but I found this, and I think it's extremely important — a larger context in which to insert the Council, and that is the context of a world that he describes as “no longer understanding itself in terms of a metaphysics of fixed and hierarchically ordered natures.” The world, he says, has been historicized. It was now what counts as the world is what human beings have made, are making, and will make of themselves. “Humanity,” he wrote, “has taken charge of itself,” and that is the context in which to place the Council.

Bernard Lonergan used almost the same language as Congar did. What Lonergan called the “massive breakthrough” effected at Vatican II was part of what he called “the Church’s disengagement from the forms of classicist culture and a transposition into the forms of modern culture.” Both Congar and Lonergan used the term, the crisis that resulted after Vatican II was not a crisis of faith but a crisis of culture. By “classicist culture,” Lonergan meant a notion developed in the early modern era that was content with the universal and the abstract and the normative in its treatment of individual and collective human life.

Beginning with the scientific revolution, the Enlightenment, the rise of historical consciousness, the development of the human sciences, and the economic, social, political, and cultural revolutions of the last two centuries, Westerners had made use of and made dominant a modern notion of culture that is impatient with the abstract and the universal, that glories in the particular and concrete, and makes few, if any, normative claims. Most distinctively, it is historically conscious — that is, self-aware.

And Lonergan writes: “Modern culture is the culture that knows about itself and other cultures. It is aware that they are manmade. It is aware that the cultural may sustain or destroy or refashion the social. So it is that modern man not only individually is responsible for the life he leads, but also collectively is responsible for the world in which he leads it.”

These aspects of contemporary modern culture are highlighted in *Gaudium et Spes* in paragraph 55: “In every group or nation,” the Council wrote, “there is an ever-increasing number of people who are aware that they themselves are the artisans and originators of the culture of their community. Throughout the world there is constantly growing a sense of both autonomy and responsibility that is of the greatest importance for the spiritual and moral maturity of the human race. . . . We are witnessing the birth of a new humanism, one in which man is defined first of all by his responsibility towards his brothers and towards history.”

Now, that description of the growing sense of self-responsibility and of autonomy that characterizes modern culture I believe could also be extended to the Catholic Church’s greater sense of its own responsibility for itself. In other words, I think — this is a thesis that I would like to argue — the Council represented a moment in which the Catholic Church became aware of how many ways there are in which the Church is responsible for itself and for its own future. That self-consciousness, of course, always has to be an awareness of our utter dependence upon God’s word and grace, but that dependence is hardly incompatible with human freedom and responsibility, any more than it is in any other circumstance.

I think that at Vatican II the Church took fuller and more conscious responsibility for itself than it ever had before. If I had more time, I would try to show this by reference to texts of the Council.

I want to conclude with a statement about what was new at Vatican II. Here I am going back to the question of whether the people who emphasize discontinuity are wrong in emphasizing what was novel. I think it is, first of all, important to recognize that it is only

natural that emphasis should fall upon the elements of novelty, and even of discontinuity. We do not tend to pay much attention to, much less to accentuate, or even to notice, the familiar and the ordinary. If you have corn flakes for breakfast every morning, then there is no need to note it in your diary. If you suddenly decide to have bran flakes, then maybe that should go in.

And, God knows, there was much that was not familiar and not ordinary about the Second Vatican Council. There is, first of all, the very fact that it took place. Ecumenical councils are not all that common. There have only been twenty in the history of the Church.

Second, there was the agenda given to the Council by John XXIII and Paul VI to undertake spiritual renewal and pastoral updating and to heighten the Church's internal self-awareness for the sake of its mission in and to the world. Now, such self-reflection is not an everyday occurrence. I know they say an unexamined life is not worth living. But how many of us examine our lives that closely every day? Not many. And neither do institutions.

Third, this pastoral goal for the Council departed from one of the familiar goals of previous ecumenical councils, which were called in order to deal with some general crisis in the Church, particularly with the threat of errors, which they commonly dealt with by passing anathemas. Pope John made it clear in his opening address that he did not want the Council, in opposing error, to use the weapons of severity, but rather the medicine of mercy. He thought that errors could be made to disappear like the morning mist by a positive presentation of the ancient faith, one that displayed its rich and deep truth in terms intelligible and attractive to people in the last decades of the 20th century.

Fourth, in warning the Council not to heed the prophets of doom who saw nothing in the modern world but prevarication and ruin, Pope John was proposing a new relationship between the Church and the modern world, one that focused more on the opportunities than on the threats of the world. Ratified by Paul VI, this new attitude resulted in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, and in the Declaration on Religious Freedom, which constituted, according to Joseph Ratzinger, a counter-syllabus, the correction of the attitudes and strategies that had marked official Catholicism for the previous century and a half.

Fifth, the rejection of condemnations and the new relationship with the world was reflected, as John O'Malley has pointed out, in the new style used in the conciliar documents. They are not written in the telegraphically brief and colorless language common in earlier councils. They are written in a discursive style that exhorts rather than threatens, seeks to persuade rather than to command, invites rather than repels.

Finally, the four years during which the Council met gave the Church an illustration of how the supreme authority could be exercised collegially — that is, not by the Pope alone, but by the Pope along with the whole body of bishops who brought to the common conversation the faith of their several churches as they sought to live the Gospel in various circumstances and in the face of differing challenges. The Council, not only in its teaching, but also in its unfolding, reinserted the Pope into the College of Bishops and exemplified the universal Church as a communion of churches.

Now, all of those elements were, in addition to particular emphases, brought to the fore in the sixteen documents of the Council. Among them are conscious participation in the liturgy, the Trinitarian foundations of the Church, the theology of the local church, the recognition of all we have in common with other Christians, the collegiality of bishops, the role of the laity in the Church's life and mission, the universal call to holiness, the missionary character of the Church, the individual and communal right to religious

freedom, the overcoming of anti-Semitism, openness to other religions, et cetera.

Now, some of those emphases represent the acceptance of doctrinal developments that had been under way for decades as a result of the theological renewal within Roman Catholicism in the 20th century. Almost all of them differed from — and some even contradicted — the emphases typical of the neo-scholasticism that had prevailed in universities and seminaries and that was mistakenly identified with the great tradition. That the Council adopted these emphases, even — and perhaps particularly — when they represented the recovery of a richer and deeper tradition, also constituted a break with the attitudes and strategies that had prevailed in modern Catholicism sanctioned as they were by high Roman authority.

It is for all of those reasons that I do not believe that one can deny that there were important breaks, or discontinuities, in the Council itself as an event, and even in the documents it promulgated. I thank you very much. [Applause]

PAUL BAUMANN: Thank you, Joe. I trust that in this setting Peter Steinfels needs only the briefest introduction. Peter is Co-director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture and university professor at Fordham. He served as senior religion correspondent for *The New York Times*, where he created and for two decades wrote the bi-weekly column “Beliefs.” He is the author of *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* and *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing American Politics*. He has also written a couple thousand articles for scores of papers and magazines. He graduated from Loyola University in Chicago and earned a Ph.D. in European history from Columbia. Peter.

PETER STEINFELS: Thank you very much, Paul.

Vatican II — why does a transformative moment remain so elusive? One reason, Father Komonchak tells us, is simply that it is not always clear that people mean the same thing by the phrase “Vatican II.”

We owe him many thanks for leading us through three ways of understanding the Council — as text, as experience, and as event — and for expanding on the idea of event and on the controversial question of continuity and discontinuity. I have only a few minutes, and I am responsible for that fact. I must speak in broad strokes and I will add only a few little words. The words are authority, power, sexuality and gender, fundamentalism, post-conciliar, and open-ended — nothing major.

First, authority. An ecumenical council is authoritative. It is authoritative in the doctrinal sense that theologians can specify and in the moral sense, like appeals to America’s founding values or the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr. Unable to disavow Vatican II’s authority, Catholics must turn to arguments about what constitutes its essential nature and core.

Second, power. Behind those arguments are two factors. One is power. Vatican II called for a redistribution of power — to the bishops clearly, and less clearly to the laity. Power is never redistributed without resistance. People with power fear that if it shifts into other hands something very dear will be in danger. In the case of Curial officials, this is not simply prestige and perks and luxuries, absolutely negligible by today’s world standards, but control over Catholic teaching and identity and what they consider the well-being of the Church.

Third, sexuality and gender. The second factor is that in the wake of the Council entirely new and potentially disruptive questions arose. The most immediately pressing

concerned new understandings of sexuality and a world historical movement against restrictions on women's equality and dignity. These were matters that the Council fathers had not really considered. So advocacy of change inevitably took the form of: What would Vatican II have done? It makes me think of those bracelets that people wore that said "WWJD" — What Would Jesus Do? Well, many of us probably were wearing imaginary bracelets saying "WWVIID" — What Would Vatican II Do? That, in turn, took the form of what was Vatican II? How much continuity or discontinuity did it legitimate?

Four, fundamentalism. Opponents of change began insisting on the texts as litmus tests for any appeal to the Council. Such insistence on texts reflects a fundamentalist impulse, a desire for a barrier against slippery slopes and loss of identity. This impulse is by no means irrational. History demonstrates that there are slippery slopes and losses of identity. The problem is that relying on texts doesn't work. Texts of any complexity — whether the *Bible*, the documents of Vatican II, the Constitution of the United States, or the Health Affordability Act — are not self-interpreting. Of course, they can be interpreted by those in power who issue new texts, whether Supreme Court decisions or regs for ensuring preexisting conditions, or the Code of Canon Law, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and Papal instructions. If these new texts are not to appear arbitrary, however, they must hearken back to the experience, or what gets called the legislative record, that shaped the original texts.

Fifth, post-conciliar. No one knows Vatican II's legislative record better than Joseph Komonchak. Yet he insists that — and I quote him — “the historian's Vatican II is not that of the protagonists of Vatican II” and that “an historical event can only be understood by placing it within a before and an after.”

John O'Malley's history, *What Happened at Vatican II*, brilliantly uses preceding councils and Church history to illuminate the meaning of Vatican II. But just as we cannot satisfactorily derive the meaning of the American Constitution from the texts and experience of its 18th-century white male authors and preceding political thinkers without including its meaning for abolitionists, Civil War leaders, freed slaves, immigrants, suffragettes, and many others, we cannot understand Vatican II without examining these post-conciliar experiences.

And so my final word, open-ended. Vatican II as event is the most open-ended of the three approaches. But it is also one that invites, and in fact demands, a narrative that will probably challenge the agendas of progressives, traditionalists, and reformers alike. Mao Tse Tung's comment that it is too soon to reach a conclusion about the French Revolution put me in mind of the reply of a greater Asian leader, Mahatma Gandhi, when asked what he thought about Western civilization: “I think it would be a good idea,” he said. Sometimes, amid all the jousting about the meaning of Vatican II, I fall back on that thought. Vatican II, it would be a good idea. Thank you.

PAUL BAUMANN: Thank you, Peter. We'd like to remind you all now that if you have questions you should be writing them down, passing them to the students at the end of your aisles. Thank you.

Our third panelist is Melissa Wilde. Melissa Wilde is associate professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. She received her Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley in 2002. Her research focuses on the processes and factors that direct religious change. Her book, *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change*, won the 2008 Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. She has also examined the demographic factors behind the shift in influence and popularity within American Protestantism from the old mainline congregations to more conservative evangelical churches. Professor Wilde is currently pursuing a comparative

historical study of the major American religious groups' reactions to changing norms regarding birth control, abortion, divorce, women's ordination, and homosexuality. Professor Wilde.

MELISSA WILDE: Thank you. Peter gave me five minutes, and I'm going to blame him. So I am going to keep my comments brief and focus on two main points in what Joe talked about, and they are going to touch on some of what Peter just mentioned as well.

First of all, I'd like to talk about the subtitle of the Forum tonight, which is, "Why does Vatican II remain so elusive?" I think that Joe has given us a great deal to think about in relationship to that. The text/experience/event typology is useful, but I think perhaps not as sociologically interesting as the more political differences that appear when people talk about the Council. So I think that the doctrinal, theological, sociological, and historical analyses is one really important difference when you are thinking about people's perspective on the Council, but, more importantly, whether people come from a conservative or progressive perspective. Joe mentioned reformists. I'm going to add, because I think Joe believes in — and I know that I do as well — an objective perspective.

By my count there are eight. We can talk about whether objectivity is possible, but I'd rather not. I think that in search of Cliffs Notes in relationship to what researchers have to say about the Council, which I spent a great deal of time looking for, to no avail, I realize that much can be learned by simply articulating the questions that are being asked by a particular scholar.

Sometimes that's really easy. So O'Malley, whom Peter mentioned, was kind and he titled his book *What Happened at Vatican II*. I must admit I did not title my book a question, but I did at least put "A sociological analysis" in the subtitle. So that should be some hit. But when you think about a question like "What happened at Vatican II?" clearly it's a historical question, although his work touches on theological and doctrinal issues too. But it focuses on describing in broad brush strokes what happened. I think that you can tell that from the title, from the question.

As a second example of distilling the main impact of a work by thinking about the questions that they focus on, I'll offer what I think are the most important questions that I answer in my book. There are two. The first is: Who wanted what and why at the Council? The second is: Once we know who wanted what, how do we know why who won won?

They were, I think, good questions, and they took me a long time to answer. But they are necessarily reductionistic in their answers. I don't say that with perhaps the flinch that a historian might, because I do think sociology is by its very nature reductionistic. And the questions are causal. I want to know who wanted what and why, what determined their priorities. Those are two examples of the ways in which I think the questions people ask about the Council can indicate the perspective they are coming from.

In contrast to what I think are fairly objective questions, like O'Malley's and mine, there are some very easy-to-identify books, such as *What Went Wrong at Vatican II?* That doesn't need any further explanation, I don't think.

Finally, we can talk about Joe's work, his five volumes of questions, which would take the rest of my remaining time to list, much less categorize, so I can't do that. But suffice it to say that looking at the histories it is fairly easy to see that one is getting the opposite of O'Malley's work and my own work in many ways, with detailed, careful stories of the way issues, events, in both the Sewellian sense and the non-Sewellian sense — meaning event as just as occurrences, when we use the word "event" in a non-sociological or non-

historical way.

But beyond thinking about Vatican II and thinking about why it perhaps remains so elusive in relationship to the numerous perspectives that are out there — the eight that I have identified, I think — I do want to talk a little bit more about thinking about Vatican II as an event sociologically.

I have done a significant amount of thinking about this myself. But in doing so, most of my work has focused on the outcome of the Council itself and, thus, on the occurrences that added up to the event of the Council. I must admit that the later occurrences that helped to further solidify the eventfulness, which Joe rightly points to and which Peter mentioned, do not factor into my analysis, simply because I needed to get tenure.

On the one hand, I agree with Joe that much needs to be done in terms of examining the effects of the Council, and Peter as well. In fact, Andrew Greeley, who was one of my advisors, also pushed me to do this in my research as well. One of the reasons I ended up researching the Council and not the effects of the Council as a sociologist was because I noticed that sociologists, in particular, were almost flippant with their characterizations of the Council, with almost all analyses of Catholicism post-Vatican II starting with something akin to, “Well, Vatican II happened and that changed everything, and that the Church something, something, something.” I was really frustrated with this and thought that this was bad sociology.

I noticed, more importantly, that almost all of this was biased from an American point of view. For example, it is a commonly believed conclusion in American sociology that Vatican II destroyed the health of the Church in the United States. There are a number of pieces of evidence given for this, from the decline in priests and nuns, both those entering seminary and the exodus post-Vatican II, lower rates of participation in Mass, lower rates of retention within generations, many other measures, such as the decline in papal authority on surveys. But other sociologists have shown that *Humanae Vitae* was actually the big problem, and not the Council, that caused many of these measures to plummet, at least in terms of survey research.

Furthermore, I think it’s important to note that Council reforms were not evenly instituted across the world. If one wants to speak about the effects of the Council and the later train of occurrences to speak, in terms of Bill Sewell’s analysis of events, that created or defined and keep reconstituting the eventfulness of the Council, one needs to do so globally and systematically. Doing so will certainly take at least another five volumes, Joe. I hope you’re up to the task. Thank you.

PAUL BAUMANN: We want to thank all the panelists for following Pope John’s advice in plying the medicine of mercy by keeping to their deadlines. I have several questions. But I just want to make sure if any of the panelists want to ask a question of any other right off the bat.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: I want to comment on that very last sentence of Melissa. She said something quite significant when she talked about occurrences since the Council, including occurrences happening today, that are reconstituting, continue to reconstitute, the Council as an event.

I think that that is quite a profound comment. What Vatican II, if we think about Mao Tse Tung’s quip, was as an event is something that is still being determined, and it is being determined by the way in which Catholics are living today. So that the historic meaning of the Council as an event within a series of events is something that is still being determined, just as what precisely the French Revolution was and what it did and didn’t

do is, you could argue, still being determined. I really liked that one thing and I wanted to thank you for it.

PAUL BAUMANN: Anyone else? Peter?

PETER STEINFELS: One of the things I was thinking of is asking Joe about a phrase that he quoted from William Sewell, in which he spoke of the series of occurrences each one setting in motion the next, or leading to the next in some way, and finally resulting in a transformation of structures.

If I read Andrew Greeley right, which is the only place I have read about Sewell, by “structures” he means something different, I suspect, than most of us would think of when we use the word “structures,” which we usually think of in kind of institutional senses. I think he is using that term in the sense of somehow regular patterns of behavior.

But for the lay reader, they might find that puzzling. They might look around, and I know many people have expressed this in frustration as we deal with headlines about the sex abuse crisis: “My goodness, four decades later, what structures have really changed?”

In terms of institutionalized things, certainly other things in the Sewellian sense of change. But things like the Synod of the Bishops or most of the decision-making structures suddenly seem maybe pretty much like they were.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: I think you are correct that Sewell uses the term also of habits of thought and cultural presuppositions. I think there have been transformations of structures in that sense since the Council. I think it is a legitimate criticism that the bishops did not spend enough time precisely on structural implementation of their insights. So it has been pointed out that they didn’t have much time for canon law. At the time, I think we probably felt: “Well, that’s a good thing. Canon law is so boring, let’s go with the spirit.” But in any organization, law has a base both of sustaining and, if you want, a constraining but also an enabling power and usefulness. I don’t think they did enough in those respects.

For example, it says vaguely somewhere institutions should be established that will enable lay people to give their input into Church decisions, et cetera. But that is pretty vague. I don’t know if any of you know of any such institutions. I think that we have a tendency to reify structures. Structures, including even structures that we think are the most rigid, exist only because people choose that they exist. I do think that there is a problem. I would place a problem in the first place with many bishops, that they do regard themselves, contrary to what Vatican II said, as vicars of the Pope and they don’t have enough sense of themselves as a co-constitutive structural element in the Church.

But I have no question, and I think under the reign of John Paul II many of the very nascent structures for co-responsibility and collaboration were allowed to atrophy at almost every level, from the universal down to the parish.

PAUL BAUMANN: Yes, Melissa?

MELISSA WILDE: Not that I want to add more jargon to the conversation, but I think one of the useful concepts Sewell uses in relationship to this idea, in relationship to the transformation of structures, is the polysemy of resources. In plain speak, that is simply that structures matter because they distribute power and other sorts of resources. So most likely the reason you are intrigued by the idea of a transformation of structures is because it comes along with transformations in power and in the resources available.

Where I think about this in relationship to the Council itself is in relationship to the position of the Curia in the first session, from the very first day to the end of the first session, where they had lost all sorts of legitimacy, where there were calls for an actual official reform of the Curia, from kind of a sense of criticism to a sense of their very positions being in jeopardy. As an example, I think of potential transformation of structure that ultimately wasn't really carried out, that would have had really serious effects in terms of the resources and power structures of the Church.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: I remember Bernard Lonergan once saying — and this would be probably back in the early 1970s — “the present crop of bishops were at the Council and they had the experience of the Council.” It was for many people a quite transformative event in their lives. There are any number of testimonies of that. But, he said, the next crop of bishops is going to be selected from those who stayed home and worked in the chancery offices, and they are not going to bring to these questions the experience of having been at the Council. And of course there is not a single diocese in the whole Catholic world today that is headed by a bishop who was at Vatican II. They have all surpassed mandatory retirement age or died. So there are none.

PAUL BAUMANN: I'd like to follow up along this line of questions about structures with reference to an analysis offered of the Council by George Lindbeck. George Lindbeck is a distinguished Lutheran theologian and he was an official Protestant observer at the Council. He was very much in favor of the reforms that the Council was advancing. But by the mid-1970s he felt compelled to offer a rather somber analysis of the state of the Catholic Church. In fact, Lindbeck thought that the Church was in crisis.

He described the crisis as follows: “It is true that all institutions are under attack these days. But what has happened in Roman Catholicism is that Church authorities have unwittingly delegitimized themselves. This has happened in a rather precise, almost juridical, way. What might be called a constitutional crisis has erupted. There are radical and fundamental ambiguities in the most authoritative formulations of the Second Vatican Council. Comparable equivocity would be a recipe for disaster in any large and highly organized society. When the supreme law of the land directly authorizes rival, perhaps contradictory, positions and provides no way of settling the disputes, conflict becomes inevitable and, unless changes are made in the supreme law, irresolvable.”

“The ambiguities I have in mind can be easily illustrated,” Lindbeck wrote. “Principles were laid down at Vatican II which theologically justify sweeping reforms in the structures, procedures, and goals of the Church. At the same time that these revolutionary principles were enunciated, the old formulations were also repeated. What the First Vatican Council said 100 years ago about the papacy, for example, were simply reiterated and inserted without modification or reinterpretation in what is a radically different vision of both Church and world. Thus, Biblicists, modernizers, traditionalists, and papalists can all appeal quite consistently to this or that aspect of the Council's teaching and can argue that the features they choose as primary provide the hermeneutical key for the interpretation of the whole. There is no publicly persuasive way of showing who is a faithful Catholic, simply because the Council is equivocal on these and a whole range of other questions.”

So my question to the panel is: Do you feel that the ambiguity of the texts themselves is the greatest source of the ongoing crisis?

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: I think, first of all, that many of the texts were deliberately left open, that the Council chose not to settle disputed theological or canonical issues — for example, the relationship between the universal authority of the pope and the universal authority of the College of Bishops. The paragraph that is devoted to that

question simply has one sentence about the College of Bishops, and then a sentence, “but don’t forget the pope”; a sentence about the College of Bishops, don’t forget the pope, don’t forget the pope. As someone said, the statements simply sit there like beads on a rosary. Now, it would not have been possible at the time to come to any kind of theoretical resolution of the tensions that are involved in the set of affirmations that are made there.

The same thing is true with regard to the authority of Episcopal conferences. They could not decide whether Episcopal conferences represented an example or an instance of collegiality. So they removed the adverb “collegially” and replace it with “conjointly” or “jointly” — not in order to deny collegiality, but to leave the issue open. And there are many other questions like that.

The Council is a council of transition, there’s no question about it. So I do think that the texts are in many respects open-ended, in a different sense I suppose from what Peter was saying. But I think that Lindbeck’s analysis was very astute.

It is somewhat similar to the question of Newman: Which Newman are we canonizing or beatifying? It’s the same thing here. Which Vatican II? Will the real Vatican II please stand up?

PAUL BAUMANN: Peter?

PETER STEINFELS: Yes, I think a big issue is the ambiguity of the texts. I agree that that ambiguity results from a concern about not closing things that couldn’t be resolved at that time.

But I wonder whether the ambiguity of the texts — it would be interesting to see when in the wider Church discussion that became such an issue. It seems to me that there was a decisiveness of the experience which led to a certain way of reading the texts up until some moments of crisis or confrontation, at which point then one delved into the texts to find readings on one side or the other. Whether that moment was *Humanae Vitae* nearly three years after the closing of the Council, or whether it was something that occurred later, I’m not sure.

But I throw out that phrase, “the decisiveness of the experience.” I think for a while there was a certain consensus and a certain movement that somehow was confronted with new issues or came to moments of confrontation and crisis.

MELISSA WILDE: I would like to say two things about that. The first is that yes, I think where the Council left things open-ended is probably where we have seen the most conflict since. We can really see that comparatively by thinking about issues such as the Declaration on Religious Freedom, which was a declaration, and it wasn’t very open-ended. Many people think that it has been the source of public legitimacy on the part of the church in forums such as the United Nations ever since. So I do think, when clear statements were made, they were listened to.

Some sociologists believe that the biggest fault in the Council stemmed from the fact that it eliminated things that people liked or didn’t have a problem with, like fish on Friday — who doesn’t like fish on Friday? — but it didn’t give them the things that really mattered, like birth control.

Unfortunately, we don’t have a good experiment where both things were given, neither thing was given, and the reverse happened, which I would prefer. But perhaps by looking at the global ways in which the Council was implemented we might be able to get some sort of handle on that question. For example, something like 95–98 percent of practicing

Catholics in the United States today use birth control. So we might be able to say we could at least look at this society as one that has rejected that decision on the part of the Church. And we probably can find places where people still believe that they need to eat fish on Friday. So we might be able to look at that more systematically.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: Peter spoke before about what would Vatican II have done. I must say you still hear people talking about that, the issues that the Council never even thought of or addressed or settled. That's one of the broader meanings of the spirit of Vatican II. The spirit of Vatican II in the minds of some people is what Vatican II would have done if there had not been any conservatives there [laughter], or what Vatican II should have done, or what Vatican II would have done if I had been pope — that kind of thing. So the term begins to move out.

There is no question about the fact that — I quoted before Emile Poulat, that the Catholic Church changed more in ten years after Vatican II than it had in the previous century, which is true. He said that the Church of Pope Pius IX in the 19th century was closer to the Church of Pius XII in the 10th than it was to the Church of Paul VI.

Something happened. I think everybody can agree that something happened. Whether it should have happened is another question. And why it happened also after the Council is a good question.

But some of these issues get — take, for example, the question: Should the priest face the people or should the priest offer his prayers facing towards Christ and the east, as the people are? There are people who want to argue that the turned-around altar is a result of Vatican II. Well, we start to go into the question: What does that mean? It is not mandated; there is nothing said in the Council text on the liturgy about which way the priest should face. But it is so wrapped up in a series of events that were taking place as the impact of the Council began to spread out across the ecclesiastical pond in the late 1960s.

I went into a parish in 1964, and the first job I was given by my pastor was to train the first lay readers at Mass because the changes came into effect in the advent of 1964. So my whole priesthood has been in this context. I vividly remember all that was going on in the Catholic Church at the time, some of which was authorized by Vatican II and some of which was not, some of which would have pleased the Council fathers and some of which would have appalled them. All of this was going on.

So something was happening, and it's not all due to the Council, but a great deal of it is, and if not to the conciliar text, then to that experience that Peter was talking about, that something was happening — what George Weigel in that little snippet there talked about, reenergizing the Catholic Church.

That's one of the experiences that I vividly recall back in, say, during the Council, from 1965–1975, was tremendous energy going on. It seemed everything was possible. What's that line of Wordsworth about it was a joy to be young, or something like that, in those days.

PAUL BAUMANN: Joe, perhaps another question for you: In your analysis of how people approach the Council and trying to figure out what was going on, you provided these very helpful categories — doctrinal, theological, and historical. I think those distinctions —

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: That's the part I didn't read.

PAUL BAUMANN: In the part I read, I was wondering in trying to make those distinctions if you think you need to draw them closer together, the historical analysis and the theological analysis.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: That was in the last section of my paper. I was afraid that I would run over time. I tried to distinguish in looking at the Council a doctrinal, a theological, and a historical approach, or three viewpoints.

The doctrinal — I was arguing that there was continuity there. The Council did not promulgate any new dogmas, and it certainly didn't repudiate any old ones. On the other hand, it did emphasize certain aspects of Catholic doctrine that had been neglected in previous centuries, in part because of the polemics against the reformers.

Theologically, the Council was the fruit of a number of moments of renewal that had taken place in the Catholic Church in the decades before. I wrote an essay on how the renewal began in the 1930s. Most of those movements of renewal fell under suspicion in the decade or two before the Council opened. Think of the biblical renewal. There was a controversy even as the Council was being prepared about that issue. Liturgical — people were too interested in liturgy — especially vernacular, were under Roman suspicion. Ecumenical movement, there was a problem there. New approaches to the Church world, relationship like the worker-priest movement, and several others, including the last decade of Pius XII's reign from roughly 1948–1958, saw the disciplining of theologians like Father Congar, Father Rahner, Father de Lubac, Danielou, and others, the crackdown on the French Dominicans and the French Jesuits.

All of that had taken place in the decade before, and now what you found at the Council was that people like Father Congar, Father Rahner, Father Danielou, Father de Lubac, were all — John Courtney Murray, who was also silenced — all of them were architects of some of the Council's major texts. So I don't see how anyone can deny a certain amount of discontinuity. I may have exaggerated when I spoke of it as a *coup d'avis* [phonetic]. But anyway, something happened there.

Historically, it seems to me historians and sociologists have to emphasize the discontinuities. That's the most remarkable thing. The Catholic Church in 1975 was not in many respects the same Catholic Church as in 1955, and in twenty years transformations had taken place, for good or for ill. But something happened in that period.

So that's where I was suggesting that there would be different ways of answering this question of continuity and discontinuity. I do think it is a mistake to offer a theological response to a historical or a sociological analysis.

For the present Pope to say there are no discontinuities in Church history, there are no breaks, there is no before or no after — I mean he says that there is a single historical subject, that is the Church ever progressing — I think that is not only historically and sociologically incorrect, I think it's actually theologically incorrect.

PAUL BAUMANN: Thank you. We'll try to stick to what you actually said now.

We have questions from the audience. The first one is: "Do we need a Vatican III to examine and respond to the tremendous changes and events that have affected or have happened in the Church and the world post Vatican II?"

Who would like to take that one on?

PETER STEINFELS: The Fordham Center on Religion and Culture will be sponsoring Vatican III. [Laughter/applause] Seriously —

MELISSA WILDE: Will women be allowed to speak? [Applause]

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: I was a student in Rome during the first two sessions of the Council. A quip that was going on then was that at Vatican III bishops would bring their wives —

MELISSA WILDE: How about their husbands? [Applause]

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: — and at Vatican IV — you stole my line.

MELISSA WILDE: Sorry, Joe.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: She stole my line. And at Vatican IV bishops would bring their husbands.

PETER STEINFELS: I think that we need some kind of institutional response to the kinds of changes that we have faced, whether that, somehow or other — I am skeptical about a Vatican III on the model of Vatican II. I'm not sure what exactly is the basis of my skepticism. Maybe only because of something with which I have been long connected, which was mentioned in the video, which we haven't discussed, but which is the presence of the media. The thought of Vatican III in the current media context may simply frightens me too much.

But I think that there might be other ways, primarily really a revitalization of the Synod of Bishops, which I think we have referred to several times.

PAUL BAUMANN: Another question for each of the panelists: "Are the problems with Vatican II more a function of the Church leaders' unwillingness to change or the unwillingness of the faithful to change?" I assume that means the faithful are not listening to the bishops.

PETER STEINFELS: I think the sociologist should answer that.

MELISSA WILDE: Could you repeat the question, please?

PAUL BAUMANN: Yes. "Are the problems with Vatican II more a function of the Church leaders' unwillingness to change or the unwillingness of the faithful to change?" I assume they are suggesting that the faithful are not listening to the bishops.

MELISSA WILDE: I guess it depends on your perspective. I think it really depends on which problem you're referring to.

If you are thinking about the decline in papal authority, that seems to be a result of anger on the part of practicing Catholics, being perhaps swept up in a feeling that any sort of reform was possible, feeling like they were about to be listened to, and only then being disappointed on birth control.

But I'm sure there are plenty of other reforms that people could point to, saying that the problem was the laity failed to take up the reforms. But Vatican II was a first time in some sense where the laity was being incorporated at all. So perhaps one needs to give them a little bit of leeway.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: I want first of all just to make this point, that Vatican II has not been repealed. [Applause] I think that some of the descriptions of the problems, and even that there is an explicit effort on the part of people in Rome to take back the Council, et cetera, are exaggerated. I think that by and large the positive changes that the Council brought about are here to stay and that the typical parish is still living those. In that respect, there is a fundamental core, it seems to me, of transformations of attitudes, strategies, and even of some institutions, that has taken place that is not going to be undone. In that respect, I might question the presupposition of that last question.

PAUL BAUMANN: Joe, how would you place within that notion what seems to be quite evident, that the Council authorized bishops around the world, specifically the English-language bishops, to come up with their own translations of liturgical texts? That process was taken out of the hands of the bishops by Rome in what many people considered to be a fairly brutal power move. How does that fit into your assessment?

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: It doesn't. But you need to keep in mind here in terms of the two aspects of the question is Rome did not intervene on its own. Rome intervened in response to a good number of complaints about what was happening with ICEL [International Commission on English in the Liturgy] that were coming from the English-speaking world.

One of the questions that was coming up was the question of gender-inclusive language, so called, and the use of male pronouns with regard to God. There were strong representations made to Rome by people from around the English-speaking world. I do think that it represented a break with what the Council intended when it gave the responsibility for liturgical translations. Primary responsibility lay in the hands of Episcopal conferences. But I think the story of all what happened remains to be written.

PAUL BAUMANN: Peter, did you want to add anything to that?

PETER STEINFELS: No.

PAUL BAUMANN: Along this line: "If Vatican II emphasized the collegiality of the bishops, why are the bishops so hesitant to exercise their collegiality and permit the Pope virtually to rule with little of the bishops' input?"

MELISSA WILDE: Because we need Vatican III. Where we see collegiality exercised most effectively is in councils of the entire Episcopate. We haven't seen that since. And Episcopal conferences are only national and so don't have the same authority as the whole Church.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: I think one of the things that happened with Episcopal conferences, for example, was that they took the most restrictive possible reading of the chapter on the hierarchy in *Lumen Gentium* and of the Decree on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops and made that normative and claimed that as the interpretation of the Council, whereas, as I said before, I think the Council left those issues open.

But they have essentially emasculated the authority of the Episcopal conferences so that you have the authority of the Pope, which is *de jure divino* (of divine right) and the authority of the individual bishop in his diocese, which is *de jure divino*, but this intermediate institution for collaboration and cooperation among the bishops has really been reduced in significance. I think because of that it is harder for an individual bishop to resist all on his own, and you don't have the collective weight of a bishops conference that you did have back in the 1970s and the 1980s.

PETER STEINFELS: I am trying to tie thoughts together on this question with something that was discussed earlier about Lindbeck's analysis pointing to ambiguities in the Council's documents and then Melissa's remark about the Declaration on Religious Freedom being one in which there were not very many such ambiguities and that that had become sort of a signature and in a certain sense a legitimating element in the Church's global position these days since then.

I just began to think about that. I am not the expert on the texts themselves. But it was five years ago that the video [shown at the opening of this forum] was made originally for an all-day conference that we had on the Declaration on Religious Liberty. If I recall right, there are ambiguities in that document too. What is very striking is that we have had a series of popes who were deeply committed to that — John Paul II, for whom this was a core question, and now Benedict XVI, who makes this question of religious freedom in a sense the very example that Joe brought forth in his remarks of the reform, the discontinuity seen in positive terms in the Church's history.

That made me engage in this kind of dangerous game of hypothetical history and think of what if those popes, and particularly the pope who had such a long tenure, John Paul II, came out of an environment which for one reason or another made them as committed to collegial elements, like the Synod of the Bishops, as they happen to have been to the question of religious freedom? How different might this history be now? We would see ambiguities and openness in that document, but they might have been resolved in a very, very different way.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: I thought when Paul was reading the paragraph from George Lindbeck of John Paul II, because you could argue that he conceived of his own papacy as precisely trying to get us out of the morass that had been caused by all of those ambiguities, that would be by a powerful reassertion of — not so much a reassertion — a re-display of the authority of the Pope.

I'd just second what Peter said. I think that John Paul II went far beyond *Dignitatis Humanae* in his defense of religious freedom. There is none of the ambiguity. There is some ambiguity in that text. There is no ambiguity in John Paul II's defense of religious freedom, and he took it far. It did not have to have the scruples that were necessary, or the caution that was necessary, in order to bring over the 350 bishops who were resolutely opposed to *Dignitatis Humanae*, and John Paul II didn't have to face that problem.

PAUL BAUMANN: Next question: "I am a convert to Catholicism and have many friends who are also converts. I can't imagine joining the pre-conciliar Church." The question is addressed to Melissa: "While the Council has been blamed for the loss of many of the faithful Catholics, is there any research on converts impelled to become part of the post-conciliar Church?"

That is an interesting question. Is there any research that suggests converts have joined embracing the Second Vatican Council, or have there been more converts of a more traditionalist approach?

MELISSA WILDE: It's a really good question. There are too many moving parts to answer it definitively. I can say that as many people — well, let's see. I can go through some facts.

Retention in the Roman Catholic Church is down from a high of about 84 percent to now about — I think it's around 74–75 percent — retention meaning inter-generational, those individuals raised Catholic remain Catholic. So you could say you're still at three-quarters — it's not bad — or you could say you've lost 10 percent. It depends on your perspective.

Converts have not ever played a significant part of that in the United States. They haven't stayed that decline. The biggest demographic factor in the health of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States is immigration. That actually has been for the past 100 years, although we had much better retention in the past.

Whether more people were willing to convert post-Vatican II than pre I could look at. I don't know. My guess is that it probably didn't go up dramatically, but I'm not sure.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: That's a very good question. Have any sociologists sat down and tried to do a study of those? I know we've had studies of Catholics who leave. What about of converts? That would make for a very interesting study, why have people become Catholic.

MELISSA WILDE: I can tell you what I do know is that they tend to come from denominations that are the closest to the Roman Catholic Church. So they tend to be Anglican, Episcopalian. The biggest reason is marriage, intermarriage. But as many Catholics who marry non-Catholics convert to the other religion as vice versa. So marriage is a wash.

PETER STEINFELS: Let me risk, sitting next to a sociologist, throwing in what data I know. The 2006 Pew Religious Landscape Study, which is the largest such study that anybody has, came up with to me the very disturbing finding that for every three Catholics who reported that they had been raised as Catholic, one now reports that he or she is no longer Catholic. That would mean a terrific loss. Now, America is a religious churn. That could be found at higher rates among all sorts of other groups, except that among Protestant Christians most of the switches are among other denominations. In the case of Catholics, about half of those who no longer identify themselves as Catholic having been raised that way identify themselves now as part of the largest growing religious group in the country, the nones, people who say that they do not belong to any specific religious affiliation — although in fact many of them also report religious beliefs and practices. The other half go to Protestant churches for the most part, and they split a little bit more to conservative evangelical groups than to mainline churches.

I think in terms of converts, first I would just insert the comment that converts have been very important as individual intellectuals and leaders in American Catholic history. But in terms of converts, now I do really think that there is a change across the board, in other religious groups as well as Catholicism, where people no longer convert as much for unity within the family. More people now say that if they convert they don't give that as their reason for doing so. I'll stop there.

PAUL BAUMANN: "Isn't it true that along with traditionalists, progressives, and reformers there is a fourth faction with regard to the Council, the restorationists or reactionary party? And isn't it clear that this party has triumphed in the last two papacies?"

I guess I can answer that question for the panel, that no, they don't think the reactionary party has triumphed. But perhaps you could offer an assessment of the strength and influence of so-called restorationists.

JOSEPH KOMONCHAK: I suppose I would identify the restorationists with the traditionalists. I probably would include them in it. And I certainly don't think that they have triumphed. What precisely do you think they have successfully restored? If you want to refer to the Tridentine rite, the Tridentine rite gave the option of celebrating the Mass the way it used to be in the unreformed form. There were some of us who didn't think

that should ever have been banned. Why all of a sudden somewhere around 1971 was it no longer licit — although the Pope denies that this was the case, in fact de facto it was — why was it no longer licit to say Mass in the Tridentine rite, when you had priests running around in clown clothing and makeup celebrating Mass and people writing their own Eucharistic prayers about babbling brooks and beautiful butterflies, a casual mention of Jesus of Nazareth, and then all of a sudden you can't celebrate the Tridentine rite anymore? I really wonder whether, if it had been permitted, it would not just simply have died away. So I do not understand why the Pope is so concerned about reconciling the Lefebvrites myself. I just don't understand it. They are such a minuscule body. I know we just had the Parable of the Lost Sheep, where the ninety-nine are left defenseless while he goes off after that one. So maybe that's what Benedict XVI is doing. But the restorationists have not triumphed.

PAUL BAUMANN: Yes, Peter?

PETER STEINFELS: I want to add something to my last answer because it pertains to the question that was asked that had to do with converts. In the Pew Religious Landscape Study, when they tried to have people rank reasons why they left the Catholic Church, either to become nones or to go to other Christian denominations for the most part, very low on the ranking of either group was any mention that the Church had disappointed them because it was no longer standing true to earlier religious forms and practices.

PAUL BAUMANN: All right. Now the final question from our audience: "Do any of the speakers think Vatican II is less elusive after tonight's presentation?"

MELISSA WILDE: I think we should ask the audience that.

PETER STEINFELS: Yes, I think it is less elusive after tonight's presentation.

MELISSA WILDE: Thank you, Peter.

PAUL BAUMANN: Yes. Thank you.

MARGARET STEINFELS: Thank you, Paul. Before you all get up and leave, the final hymn has to be sung. That is one last word about our next event, which will take place on Wednesday, November 10, "The Ecology of Caring," a look with a distinguished group of panelists at what happens when the local meets the global. There will be a focus on untold stories, unsung heroes, and the obviously unresolved quandaries of caring in an interconnected world. If you have not done so, please sign up for the mailing list and we'll get you a notice of that.

Miraculously, we were provided more copies of *Commonweal*, which we ran out of early on. So get your copy at the back.

And now to close the evening, let us thank our moderator and panelists. [Applause]