

EDITORIAL ESSAY

Looking at Vatican I's *Pastor aeternus* 150 Years Later: A Fresh Consideration of the Council's Significance Yesterday and Today

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Many pressing issues facing the church today require a deeper appreciation of Vatican I, marking its one hundred and fiftieth year. We can now return it to its context and accept its "incompleteness" rather than insist upon its "wrongness." The distance provided by time shows that its teachings are not as rigid or extreme as they are often perceived to be, but rather stand open to significantly broader interpretations. Pastor Aeternus has faced Vatican II, the social leveling brought about by democracy and the mass media, and an erosion of confidence in hierarchical institutions. Yet the council cannot be left behind. This essay's goal is to contextualize Vatican I's voice so that we can hear what it intended to say in its own day and see how it might contribute to some of our own most urgent conversations today.

Keywords: Vatican I, *Pastor aeternus*, papal infallibility, ecclesiology

ON July 18, 2020, we will mark the 150th anniversary of the promulgation of Vatican I's First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Pastor aeternus* (PA). Reactions to the anniversary are as mixed as the council's ongoing reception. Vatican I unfolded during the "long nineteenth century" when many of our current ways of viewing the world developed, yet most people know very little about the tectonic events shaping the council or its internal deliberations and acts. A Google search of "Vatican I history" confirms a general lack of interest in the council with its

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response: “Did you mean Vatican II history?” For many who do know something about the events of 1869–70, Vatican I evokes a model of church best left in the past. Its teachings on papal primacy and infallibility seem incompatible with modern and postmodern sensibilities and appear to pose seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Yet the council cannot be left behind or consigned to oblivion. Advancing many of the most pressing issues facing the church today, including the need for renewed ecclesial structures, the desire to better understand and employ the *sensus fidelium* and a longing for ecumenical advance requires a deeper appreciation of Vatican I and what it means for us today. Surveying the path before us, it is clear that there is no way forward that does not involve a return to what happened 150 years ago.

Bringing Vatican I’s voice into contemporary conversations requires an attention to its context, which studies of the council have generally lacked. An enhanced understanding of the council’s complex contexts shows that its teachings are not as rigid or extreme as they are often perceived; rather, they stand open to significantly broader interpretations. In commenting on the definition of papal infallibility shortly after its promulgation in 1870, John Henry Newman observed that the definition did “not so much need to be undone, as to be completed.”¹ While Newman personally opposed the council’s decision to formally define this authority, he was able to recognize its teaching not as wrong, but incomplete. He understood that Vatican I, like its predecessors, presents formulations that validly express elements of the church’s nature and authority, yet are necessarily open to, and require, being held in tension with other true expressions. In 1969 at the time of the 100th anniversary of Vatican I, in the wake of *Humanae Vitae* and amid the turmoil of the 1960s, there was little appetite to reconsider Vatican I given that it was seen as a point of origin for many controversial developments; perhaps now, 150 years later, with the benefit of greater distance, including some critical distance from the council’s successor, we are well positioned to approach Vatican I anew and to accept its “incompleteness” rather than insist upon its “wrongness.”

This article seeks a fresh consideration of Vatican I in three parts. The first part describes the ecclesial importance of retrieving Vatican I’s voice. It argues that the council cannot be left behind because doing so violates commitments at the core of our ecclesial self-understanding and skews our approach to critical topics involving authority and ecclesiology. The second part narrates some of Vatican I’s story in order to contextualize its teachings

¹ John Henry Newman to Alfred Plummer, April 3, 1871, *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. Charles Dessain, et al., 32 vols. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), volume 24, 310.

and correct misunderstandings that have sometimes distorted its interpretation. The focus will be on *Pastor aeternus* because it contains the positions that are most often misunderstood or cited as reasons to forego the council's teachings altogether. The study's third part explores ways in which Vatican I's voice, when properly understood, can productively enter conversations about our current ecclesial and ecumenical goals. Most of the scholarly work done on Vatican I in recent decades has been directed at establishing its teachings as an expression of the church's opposition to modernity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Little attention has been directed at how the council's positions can contribute to contemporary conversations on the papacy and the episcopacy. Ultimately, the goal is to retrieve Vatican I's authentic voice so that we can hear what it intended to say in its own day and understand how it might contribute to some of our own most urgent conversations today.

I. The Ecclesial Importance of Vatican I

Vatican I has long been on the margins of theological discourse. Noncontextual readings of its texts have distorted its teachings and given the impression that it presents papal authority in a severe and unyielding way, one that is all but impossible to integrate with other models of ecclesial authority. Yet, contextualizing the council in its proper historical and theological settings makes possible a considerably more flexible interpretation than is generally presumed. Vatican I undoubtedly presents significant challenges, but marginalizing its status or content creates even greater ones. Minimizing the council's decrees forces believers into a type of schizophrenia or amnesia regarding the church's positions on subjects of critical significance.² Additionally, discounting Vatican I violates the fundamental belief that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit guarantees continuity in the church over time. Cardinal Walter Kasper highlights this point in his reflections on Vatican I:

An important concept, valid for all Councils: the church is the same in all centuries and in all Councils. This is why each council is to be interpreted in light of the whole tradition and of all Councils. The Holy Spirit who guides the church, particularly its Councils, cannot contradict Himself. What was true in the first millennium cannot be untrue in the second. Therefore, the older tradition should not be simply considered as the first phase of a further development. The other way around is also true:

² For more on this topic, see Kristin Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II: Councils in the Living Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 4–22.

the later developments should be interpreted in light of the wider, older tradition.³

A helpful image for conveying this reality is provided by Giuseppe Alberigo, who observes that the great conciliar assemblies constitute the “spinal column” of the Christian tradition. He notes that “knowledge of their unfolding offers the church an awareness of its basic choral dimensions and evidence of crucial instances of the Spirit’s interventions in history.”⁴ Achieving a more adequate interpretation of Vatican I adds to the symphonic character of the Christian tradition with its various points and counterpoints. As part of the larger whole of the Spirit’s disclosure to the People of God, an enhanced understanding of Vatican I exerts something of a domino effect. For example, a fresh appreciation of the council’s teachings offers the possibility of new perspectives on Vatican II. New insight on Vatican II, in turn, facilitates greater awareness of the significance and the character of the conversations that have followed it. Thus, retrieving Vatican I is not a matter of political correctness or esoteric interest; it is essential for the church to honor its own theological commitments and avoid an identity crisis.

A re-reception of Vatican I is critical for advancing many issues at the forefront of the Catholic Church’s agenda today. The sesquicentennial of Vatican I comes on the heels of an anniversary-rich time in the world of Catholic theology. We look back at key moments, in part, because history can be seen as “the story of how we got to be the way that we are.”⁵ In the years between 2012 and 2015, intense effort was devoted to reflecting on the accomplishments and ongoing reception of Vatican II fifty years later. In 2018, we saw numerous conferences, books, and articles that explore key events of 1968, including the promulgation of *Humanae Vitae* and the meeting of the Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM) in Medellín. We can safely say that the anniversaries associated with Vatican I will be met with considerably less fervor. Yet Vatican I plays a critical role in the story of “how we got to be the way we are today.” In his important book on the twenty-first ecumenical council, *What Happened at Vatican II*, John O’Malley, SJ, identifies three “issues under the issues” that undergird all of the council’s deliberations.

³ Walter Kasper, “Introduction to the Theme and Catholic Hermeneutics of the Dogmas of the First Vatican Council,” in *The Petrine Ministry: Catholics and Orthodox in Dialogue*, ed. Walter Kasper (Mahwah, NJ: Newman Press, 2006), 7–20, esp. 17.

⁴ Giuseppe Alberigo, “Preface,” in *History of Vatican II, vol. 1: Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II*, eds. Joseph Komanchak and Giuseppe Alberigo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), xi–xv, esp. xi.

⁵ John O’Malley, *Vatican I: The Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2018), 1.

They include: (1) the circumstances under which change in the church is appropriate, (2) the relationship in the church of center to periphery—or between Rome and the rest of the church, and (3) the style or model according to which authority should be exercised.⁶ Enthusiasm for Vatican II and its enduring power stem, in part, from the way that it identified and engaged these seminal issues of the church in the modern world. What some might be stunned to discover is that these themes were also vital “issues under the issues” in 1869–70. Vatican I was very much a council about change, the relationship between center and periphery and the proper style of authority. Also significant, yet perhaps less surprising, is that these three issues lay behind much of Francis’ efforts related to ecclesial reform. Certainly, the circumstances, emphases, and decisions related to these “issues under the issues” were different in 1869–70 than they were in 1962–65 or today, but these shared concerns provide an important thread connecting the church’s efforts at self-understanding and evangelization since the Enlightenment. Vatican I exists as an important link in this chain, and a deeper understanding of its teachings lends to theological advance on these defining issues.

The fact that Vatican I constitutes an important step in “how we got to be the way we are today” and speaks on timely issues of ecclesial identity makes a renewed understanding of the council a critical component of Francis’ reform agenda. From the beginning of his pontificate, Francis has been clear that ecclesial reform and moving toward greater synodality would be hallmarks of his papacy. Many see Vatican I as a distinct obstacle to realizing Francis’ vision. Francis, however, does not suggest that we sweep Vatican I under the rug; instead, he calls for a deeper understanding of the papacy and its ability to serve the church today. Along these lines, in a recent interview, he identified the need for a “maturing of the relationship between synodality and primacy.”⁷ The work required to move the church toward greater synodality, Francis admits, presents a significant challenge, yet it is unavoidable given that this path is what “God expects of the church in the third millennium.”⁸ Thus, while Vatican I registers for many as an outdated and

⁶ John O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2008), 8.

⁷ Anne Bentes, “Synodality, Collegiality: Two Keys to the Coming Francis Reform.” <https://cvcomment.org/2013/08/28/synodality-collegiality-two-keys-to-the-coming-francis-reform/>.

⁸ Pope Francis, “Address” Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, October 17, 2015. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

unpopular topic, this one-hundred-and-fifty-year-old council is of immense relevance for forging our path into the future.

II. Vatican I: Looking at What, Why, and How the Council Taught

a. *Why did Vatican I teach?*

Vatican I has been plagued by interpretive problems since the promulgation of its decrees. The late John Tracy Ellis, professor at The Catholic University of America, observed a “web of error, misunderstanding and misinterpretation” surrounding Vatican I that made it difficult to discern the council’s true meaning and import for contemporary theological discussions.⁹ Setting Vatican I in its proper theological and historical setting can be advanced by adopting a methodology developed in service of Vatican II’s interpretation. O’Malley transformed the study of Vatican II by arguing that in order to understand *what* the council taught one must recognize *how* it expresses its teaching. In other words, one must attend to the form or style of the council’s documents and not merely their content in order to discern their meaning.¹⁰ Steven Schloesser, SJ, extended O’Malley’s provocative thesis by emphasizing the role played by Vatican II’s historical location in determining what happened there.¹¹ He observed that to understand *what* Vatican II taught, readers have to consider *why* the council fathers opted to use such language. In other words, one must understand the situation of the mid-twentieth century and how it shaped the bishops’ orientation to the questions they faced. O’Malley’s and Schloesser’s insights about the importance of looking at questions of *why* and *how* Vatican II taught in order to appreciate *what* it taught can be profitably applied to Vatican I. In regard to Vatican I, all of these questions—*why* it taught, *how* it taught, and *what* it taught—are often answered incorrectly. Developing more adequate responses to these inquiries frees Vatican I from misrepresentations that have distorted its voice and kept it out of contemporary conversations.

Understanding *why* Vatican I taught is critically important to its interpretation; yet, the council’s intent is regularly misunderstood. In the decades

⁹ John Tracy Ellis, “The Church Faces the Modern World: The First Vatican Council,” in *The General Council: Special Studies in Doctrinal and Historical Background*, ed. William McDonald (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 135.

¹⁰ O’Malley has considered this question in several forums. Among these are: “Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 3–33 and *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

¹¹ Stephen Schloesser, SJ, “Against Forgetting: Memory, History, Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 275–319.

leading up to the council, myriad political, social, and philosophical developments sparked by the Enlightenment joined forces to challenge the church and, in particular, the papacy. These factors, famously described by German theologian Hermann Pottmeyer as the “three traumas of Rome,” contributed to an increasingly defensive sensibility, which at points reached nearly apocalyptic levels.¹² The first trauma facing Rome in the “long-nineteenth century” was political in nature. The emergence of a new, uncertain world born out of the French Revolution gave shape to the century for many in Europe. Klaus Schatz observes: “[T]here can scarcely have been any event in history that was so important in laying the groundwork for the ultimate victory of the papacy at Vatican I as the French Revolution.”¹³ The revolution devastated the dominant social, political, and ecclesiastical orders of France, and pulled much of Europe into the processes of critique and change. Concomitantly, the Catholic Church found itself in a weakened state as many of its remaining traditional civil prerogatives, properties, and sources of income were lost to secular authorities.¹⁴ The church’s sense of insecurity reached a climax in the Vatican’s battle to resist the loss of its autonomous papal states.¹⁵ The question of whether the church would be able to retain this territory and its independence was the cause of tremendous anxiety in Rome and influenced its thinking on a broad range of concerns.

In a context of fear and instability—and amid the vacuum of power among the national churches—many turned to Rome as the one remaining power capable of restoring order on the continent.¹⁶ The concentration of hopeful expectations in the Vatican became known as “Ultramontanism” in that it looked “beyond the alps” for a restoration of the church as a means of providing order and stability.¹⁷ Many bishops who had long resisted efforts to consolidate the church’s authority in the Vatican were increasingly eager for papal intervention to help salvage their losing campaigns in many local

¹² Hermann Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I and II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1998).

¹³ Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present*, trans. John Otto and Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 143.

¹⁴ See Roger Aubert, “*Welt und Kirche am Vorabend des Konzils*,” in *Vaticanum I* (Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald-Verlag, 1982), 9–46.

¹⁵ Ulrich Horst treats this sense of insecurity in his *Unfehlbarkeit und Geschichte: Studien zur Unfehlbarkeitsdiskussion von Melchior Cano bis zum I. Vatikanischen Konzil* (Mainz: Matthias-Grunewald-Verlag, 1982).

¹⁶ Cf. Schatz’s section “From the French Revolution to Vatican I,” in his *Papal Primacy*, 143–55.

¹⁷ On the development of the Ultramontanist position see J. van Arx, *Varieties of Ultramontanism* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998) and O’Malley’s chapter “The Ultramontanist Movement,” in his *Vatican I*, 33–95.

territories. Although it has often been suggested that the rise of Roman centralization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was instigated by the Vatican as a means of aggrandizing its own power, evidence suggests that the forces motivating this movement were largely centripetal. This dynamic was astutely observed by Alexis de Tocqueville in 1856 when he observed that the move toward Vatican centralization was “a matter more of the pope being compelled by the faithful to become absolute master of the church than of the faithful being compelled by him to become his subordinates.”¹⁸

One of the most dominant figures of the era was Pius IX who, in many ways, was charged with navigating the church’s path along the precipice between tradition and modernity. The “early Pius IX” who began his papacy as a reform-minded leader open to embracing modern developments gradually became the “later Pius IX” who developed a deep suspicion of liberal ideas and government by the people. The erosion of the papacy’s temporal powers, bitter disappointment over the way his subjects turned on him despite his initial efforts at reform, and his own terrifying experiences of powerlessness (including the assassination of his Secretary of State in the Vatican) hardened Pius’ attitude toward the modern world and shifted his energies from contemplating potential reforms to asserting certainties guaranteed by faith. In the face of chaotic times that discarded much of what he held dear, Pius clung to the idea that “religion is immutable; not an idea, but the truth. Truth knows no change.”¹⁹ Although the papacy experienced a formative nadir during the long nineteenth century, it also witnessed unprecedented expressions of authority, including the dismissal of the entire French episcopate and the ability to make increasing numbers of episcopal appointments with virtual autonomy. It is against the backdrop of extremely low lows and very high highs in the realm of papal power that Vatican I’s teachings on papal infallibility and primacy must be understood.

The revolution and its aftermath catalyzed a second trauma in the intellectual sphere with the ascendance of rationalism and liberalism. Rome rebelled against the elevation of human reason as the source of ultimate authority that subjected all authorities rooted in revelation to skepticism. The rise of a “cult of reason” was a radical turn of events for the church that had long been recognized as the organizing sensibility of society with the capacity to assimilate and interpret advances in all fields of human inquiry. Over the course of the

¹⁸ See Émile Ollivier, *L’église et l’état au Concile du Vatican* (Paris: Garnier frères, 1879), 314.

¹⁹ David I. Kertzer, *The Pope Who Would Be King: The Exile of Pius IX and the Emergence of Modern Europe* (New York: Random House, 2018), 341.

long nineteenth century, the church found its voice increasingly shunted to the margins of discourse as religious belief migrated from the center of decision-making to the realm of private opinion. These “liberal developments” were perceived by Rome as constituting a threat of an entirely different order than past challenges. Rather than calling into question a particular teaching or practice as had been the case with previous heretical claims or reform movements, the proponents of liberal thought challenged the very nature of the church itself and its authority to teach at all.

The tenor of the day is reflected in the dramatic and aggressive response these developments received from Rome. The pontiffs of this era concluded that a rationalism that rejected ecclesial and even divine authority constituted the common denominator running through all modern evils. Unable to respond to the spread of modern errors by exerting traditional temporal powers, these popes turned to their spiritual authority. Gregory XVI's encyclical *Mirari Vos* (*On Liberalism and Religious Indifferentism*) published on August 15, 1832, provides a vivid example of Rome's sense of the magnitude of the dangers posed by rationalism. Gregory writes:

We speak of the things which you see with your own eyes, which We both bemoan. Depravity exults; science is impudent; liberty, dissolute. The holiness of the sacred is despised; the majesty of divine worship is not only disapproved by evil men, but defiled and held up to ridicule. Hence sound doctrine is perverted and errors of all kinds spread boldly. The laws of the sacred, the rights, institutions, and discipline—none are safe from the audacity of those speaking evil.²⁰

For the church in the mid-nineteenth century, liberalism was a force too great to be ignored; two responses seemed possible: accommodation of modern ideas or a refutation against everything modernity stood for. Rome leaned into the latter and devoted its energies in the years leading up to Vatican I to defining the church against emerging modern worldviews.

The external traumas emanating from the political and philosophical spheres were not the only threats facing the church; a third trauma was internal. It was ecclesial in character and was characterized by debates over the relative weights of papal and conciliar authority that came to a head in the Great Schism (1378–1417) and lingered thereafter. At the center of the controversy stood the question of who holds supreme authority in the church—the pope, a council united with the pope, or a council, if necessary, acting without

²⁰ *Mirari vos* can be found at: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/gregorius-xvi/it/documents/encyclica-mirari-vos-15-augusti-1832.html>.

the pope?²¹ The conciliarist view was perceived as a danger by Rome not only because it challenged supreme papal power, but because it was also seen as a hindrance to the church's ability to act quickly and decisively when its interests were endangered. Although the challenges posed by conciliarism were primarily ecclesial in character, they included political dimensions as well. Questions regarding the balance of authority between the pope and the bishops were manifest in particularly challenging ways by French Gallicanism.²² The Gallicans were adamant that supreme authority rests in the consensus of the whole church and that the pope, while having legitimate primacy of jurisdiction, is not superior by himself to the church as a whole. They asserted that the pope must respect the customs of national churches and not assert his authority in ways that infringed on local practices. This position aligned with those of secular leaders who sought to curtail the pope's influence within their territories. In Rome's eyes, inefficiency in decision-making and the potential for nationalistic tendencies were inherent features within conciliarism and Gallicanism that threatened the church's ability to act in its own self-interest. Fortunately, the best remedy available for neutralizing this internal threat was also capable of defusing the church's external challenges: concentrating decision-making authority in Rome. Vatican I's teachings cannot be understood apart from the context of fear and insecurity wrought by traumas in the ecclesial, political, and philosophical spheres. Suffering from "an institutional version of post-traumatic stress disorder," Rome adopted a radically defensive mode that dominated its self-understanding in the years leading up to the council and would exercise a tremendous influence on its deliberations.²³

b. The Council Unfolds

Pius IX disclosed his plans to convene the twentieth ecumenical council on December 6, 1864. During a meeting of the Congregation of Rites, he confided to a select group of cardinals his intention to gather the universal church in order to "provide in this extraordinary way for the extraordinary needs of

²¹ On the rise of conciliarism, see Brian Tierney's *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) and Francis Oakley's *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church 1300–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²² For an excellent study of Gallicanism, consult Richard F. Costigan, SJ, *The Consensus of the Church and Papal Infallibility: A Study in the Background of Vatican I* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005).

²³ Von Arx, SJ, Jeffrey, "A Post-Traumatic Church," *America* 212, no. 20 (2015): 22–24, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/post-traumatic-church>.

the Christian flock.”²⁴ As preparations for the gathering progressed, there was growing interest in the idea that papal infallibility might provide a solution to both internal and external challenges. The subject of whether this authority would be formally defined was debated so widely throughout Europe that it came to be regarded as simply “the question.” The topic sparked such intense interest that Émile Ollivier, author of an important contemporary account of Vatican I, observed that discussions on this matter “began in the market-place, and every one took part, even society ladies between the acts at the Opera.”²⁵ While interest in “the question” mounted, the official plan devised by the council’s Central Commission called for a comprehensive decree on the church. To this end, a schema was produced entitled *Schema constitutionis dogmaticae de ecclesia Christi* (generally known as *De Ecclesia*).²⁶ The text consisted of fifteen chapters, none of which were dedicated to the issue of papal infallibility; however, the church’s infallibility was addressed in the ninth chapter, and the eleventh chapter focused on papal primacy. Soon after the council’s opening, however, it became clear that its agenda would have to be truncated because the outbreak of military conflict appeared inevitable with Italian troops nearing Rome. In light of these developments, a petition circulated among the bishops advocating that the question of papal infallibility be moved to the forefront of the conciliar deliberations. With Pius’ support, the measure passed. For a majority of bishops, this ordering was shrewd in that it allowed a chance for the council to capacitate the church with a powerful tool before its premature suspension; a minority of bishops disagreed, worried that this ordering burdened an already sensitive topic with distorting factors prior to its arrival on the council floor.

The council fathers were nearly unanimous in their sense of the gravity of the challenges facing the church, yet divided in how to respond. Generally, the participants at Vatican I are divided into two parties, a majority—composed of approximately 80 percent of the bishops who favored a definition of papal infallibility—and a minority—made up of the remaining 20 percent who opposed a definition. Such a neat distinction, however, obscures critical distinguishing factors within these groups. Among the majority, there was a small fraction of bishops who desired a maximal articulation of papal

²⁴ Cuthbert Butler, *The Vatican Council: The Story Told from Inside from Bishop Ullathorne’s Letters*, vol. 1 (London: Longman’s Green, 1930), 81.

²⁵ Émile Ollivier, *L’Église et l’État au Concile du Vatican*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2010), 57.

²⁶ This text and a helpful commentary are found in Fidelis van der Horst, *Das Schema über die Kirche auf dem I Vatikanischen Konzil* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1963).

power. These “maximalists” did not root their position in Scripture or tradition; they asserted the idea that Christ would necessarily endow his church with the best possible form of governance.²⁷ Such an ideal government would include a supreme judge who is unconditionally reliable and capable of arriving at definitive solutions. They believed that the promises made to Peter in the Gospels assured him and his successors of such authority (cf. Matt 16:17–19 and John 21:15–19); therefore, any conditions placed on this authority amounted to a denial of either Christ’s power or trustworthiness. This small group of bishops understood the pope’s power as *personal* in that it depended on the will of the pope alone, *absolute* in that it could not be limited by any conditions, and *separate* in that it did not rely on any formal consultation. Most members of the majority, however, were not so extreme in their views. A plurality of the majority, or the “center party” as they have been identified by Francis Sullivan, SJ, favored a formal definition of papal infallibility based on a sense that it provided the most effective response to contemporary challenges by allowing the pope to act quickly and definitively when the health of the church required it.²⁸ These bishops believed, in principle, that the pope should consult his brother bishops in formulating infallible statements; however, they recognized that “consulting the church” was a long and somewhat ambiguous process that might hinder the church at precisely the moments when quick and definitive action was required. This center party, which constituted the largest group at the council, favored defining papal infallibility not as a theological necessity but as an optimal strategy.

The minority party opposed the majority on the grounds that any assertion of the pope’s infallibility as separate from the bishops was a modern development inconsistent with the patrimony of the ancient church. This argument was voiced by leading German theologian Ignaz von Döllinger, a staunch and influential opponent to the definition, who wrote:

Before I could ever inscribe this modern invention [of papal infallibility] on my mind, I would first have to plunge my fifty years of theology, history and patristic studies into the [river] Lethe and then draw them out like a blank sheet of paper.²⁹

²⁷ See Costigan, *The Consensus of the Church and Papal Infallibility*, 35–62.

²⁸ Francis Sullivan, SJ, “The Meaning of Conciliar Documents,” in *The Convergence of Theology: A Festschrift Honoring Gerald O’Collins, SJ*, eds. Daniel Kendall and Stephen Davis (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 73–86, esp. 74.

²⁹ Thomas Albert Howard, *The Pope and the Professor: Pius IX, Ignaz von Dollinger, and the Quandary of the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 133.

Most in the minority were not opposed to affirming some form of papal infallibility so long as it included an explicit acknowledgment that this prerogative involves consulting the witness of the whole church. They favored a definition that followed the formula of St. Antonius, which stated that “the pope is not infallible when he acts as an individual and on his own initiative, but he is when he makes use of the advice and help of the entire church.”³⁰ Also of concern to the minority was the risk that defining papal infallibility would further alienate the church from contemporary society and harm relations with Protestants as well as those considering entering the Catholic Church. In the end, the minority’s resistance only galvanized the majority: the fact that the church faced a potentially catastrophic situation, yet some bishops continued to insist on formalizing time-consuming processes of deliberation, fueled the majority’s drive to empower the pope to act quickly when necessary.

The final voting on *Pastor aeternus* was as dramatic as the debate on it had been. The session on July 18, 1870, began with a formal reading of the final text. Once this concluded the bishops were presented with the question: “Right Reverend Fathers, do the decrees and canons contained in this Constitution please you?”³¹ As the roll call began in which each bishop would indicate whether he found the document was pleasing (*placet*) or not pleasing (*non placet*) a terrible storm raged outside the basilica. Thomas Mozley, an Anglican clergyman and special correspondent for the *London Times*, reported:

The storm, which had been threatening all morning, burst now with the utmost violence, and to many a superstitious mind might have conveyed the idea that it was an expression of Divine wrath, “as no doubt will be interpreted by numbers,” said one officer of the Palatine Guard. And so the *Placets* of the Fathers struggled through the storm, while the thunder pealed above and the lightning flashed in every window and down through the dome and every smaller cupola, dividing if not absorbing the attention of the crowd. *Placet*, shouted his Eminence or his Grace, and a loud clap of thunder followed in response, and then the lightning darted about the *baldacchino* and every part of the church and the conciliar hall, as if announcing the response.³²

When the roll call concluded, there were 533 votes of “*placet*” and 2 votes of “*non placet*.” Notably, sixty-one members of the minority had left Rome

³⁰ Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 83.

³¹ Butler, *The Vatican Council*, 2: 162.

³² T. Mozley, *Letters from Rome on the Occasion of the Oecumenical Council, 1869–70*, vol. 2, (London: Longmans, Green, 1891; Gregg International, 1969) 445–46. Mozley was Newman’s brother-in-law.

ahead of this session in order to avoid voting against a teaching supported by the pope and their brother bishops. Of the two “*non placet*” votes, one was cast by Bishop Edward Fitzgerald of Little Rock, Arkansas, who throughout the council had expressed concerns about the definition. Upon the pope’s confirmation of the Constitution, however, he approached the papal throne and bowed before Pius with the words: “*Modo credo, sancta Pater,*” or “Now I believe, Holy Father.”³³

Having settled what was considered the council’s most important business, the bishops hoped to proceed to other parts of *De Ecclesia*, continuing their work until November 11, St. Martin’s Day. On July 19, however, the day following the promulgation of *Pastor aeternus*, war was declared between France and Prussia. The turmoil that ensued hindered the council’s ability to function. On September 20, a siege of Rome began, and sections of the city’s wall fell within a matter of hours. A month later, on October 20, Pius issued his Apostolic Letter suspending the First Vatican Council indefinitely. Therefore, rather than a comprehensive constitution on the church as originally intended, the council fathers had to be content with *Pastor aeternus*, which treated one element of the church only partially.

c. How and What Pastor aeternus Teaches

To appreciate *what Pastor aeternus* teaches, it is important to start at the beginning. Too often, scholars make determinations about *what* the text presents by focusing exclusively on its last lines where the definition of papal infallibility is found. A close reading of the *Prologue* provides the theme of the document as well as vital “hermeneutical rules” for its interpretation.³⁴ The Constitution begins with the assertion that Christ, the “eternal shepherd (*Pastor aeternus*) and guardian of our souls,” determined to build a church where all the faithful should be united by the bond of “one faith and charity.”³⁵ This initial line introduces the document’s key theme: the importance of ecclesial unity and its soteriological dimensions.³⁶ Gerard Kelly of the Catholic Institute of Sydney captures the logic of what follows and ultimately the whole document in a succinct one-sentence summary:

³³ Butler, *The Vatican Council*, 2: 164.

³⁴ Cardinal Walter Kasper, email to author, December 11, 2018.

³⁵ All references to *Pastor aeternus* are taken from: Norman Tanner, ed., *The Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1990).

³⁶ This point is developed in Gerard Kelly’s excellent article “The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Papal Infallibility: A Response to Mark Powell,” *Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2013): 129–37.

God desires that the saving work of redemption be permanently active in the world; therefore, God has built a church; shepherds and teachers are in the church to make permanently present the same saving work of redemption; this episcopal office should be one and undivided; moreover, the apostle Peter has been instituted as head over the apostles and the permanent principle of both faith and communion.³⁷

After introducing this argument, the preface concludes by affirming that the teachings that follow should be “believed and held by the faithful” in accordance with “the ancient and unchanging faith of the whole church.” Thus, from the *Prologue* we see that *what Pastor aeternus* teaches is “a theology of salvation within the context of the church”; in that context it addresses the special role of the pope in this redeeming work.³⁸ We also see at least three interpretive rules governing the text’s teachings: (1) the papacy should be seen in light of the purpose of unity; (2) the context for understanding the papacy is ecclesiological and soteriological; and (3) what is proposed affirms and is not intended to conflict with the church’s tradition. Although these rules are not always explicitly referenced in the chapters that follow, they are essential for interpreting them.

What Vatican I teaches about the pope is captured in two definitions: one on papal primacy and the other on papal infallibility. The first topic did not garner nearly as much attention or catalyze the same level of controversy as “the question” of papal infallibility largely because the practice of recognizing some form of papal jurisdiction had a long-standing history in the church. The substance of Vatican I’s definition of papal primacy is as follows: the pope as head of the Roman Church and successor to Peter possesses a “preeminence” of power over the whole church; this power, which he exercises in Christ’s name, is “ordinary,” “immediate,” and “episcopal”; the clergy and the faithful are bound to submit to this power in matters of faith and morals as well as in matters of ecclesial discipline and governance (PA 3). After ascribing this power to the pope, the text goes on to explicitly state that his authority does not detract from the divinely given authority of his brother bishops, but is meant to “assert, support and defend” their rights (PA 3). A canon concludes the chapter stating the council’s position in a negative mode; it reads, in part: “If anyone says that the Roman pontiff has merely an office of supervision and guidance, and not the full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole church ... or that he has only the principle part, but not the absolute fullness, of this supreme power; or that this power

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

of his is not ordinary and immediate both over all and each of the churches ... let him be anathema.”

The language used to convey Vatican I’s teaching on papal primacy leads us to consider the council’s style or, in other words, *how* it taught. Misunderstandings regarding Vatican I’s style have long been a source of interpretive problems. Here it is important to note that *why* the council taught exerted a distinct influence on *how* it taught. In response to the traumas and uncertainties of the long nineteenth century, Vatican I sought to provide clear, precise, and unassailable definitions that would capacitate the pope to act with an ultimate and efficient authority similar to that of secular leaders. The majority bishops argued that theological concerns should be left out of the formal text given their potential to “blunt” the very weapon the definition was intended to provide. Such formulations were also opposed on the grounds that they were inappropriate to the genre of conciliar definitions, which traditionally operated in a legal mode.³⁹ Thus, for reasons of tradition and expediency, juridical or legal language was employed. Accordingly, *Pastor aeternus* presents the pope’s power as “ordinary” in the canonical sense that it is not delegated to the pope but belongs directly to his office and “immediate” in the sense that the pope can exercise the authority directly without need of working through an intermediary. These declarations were not intended to capture the full reality of *what* papal authority is, or even of *what* characterizes the relationship between the bishop of Rome and local churches, but to affirm *how* the pope is able to exercise the power of authoritative intervention when the health of the church requires it.

Although *Pastor aeternus*’ presentation of papal primacy can sound extreme, the power it presents is not unlimited. On the most general level, Sullivan points out that the pope is limited by revelation and tradition; this includes the divinely ordained structure of the church, one of the most

³⁹ This issue was at the heart of one of the council’s most critical moments: the intervention by Bishop Vincent Gasser charged by the *Deputation de Fide* to persuade the minority that the final version of *Pastor aeternus* was not in conflict with their views. In his address, Gasser states unequivocally that consultation between pope and bishops is a normal and appropriate element within the development of an infallible teaching and that this is not excluded by the present formulation. Yet he argued that it was inappropriate for the definition to formalize the necessity or means of such a consultation. Such consultation, he asserted, is a moral necessity and therefore “cannot have a place in the definition of a dogmatic constitution.” See Bishop Vincent Gasser, *The Gift of Infallibility: The Official Relatio on Infallibility of Bishop Vincent Gasser at Vatican Council I*, ed. James O’Connor (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1986), 51.

basic elements of which is the episcopacy.⁴⁰ *Pastor aeternus* acknowledges this limit by affirming the coexistence of primacy and collegiality including the participation of the episcopacy in the governance of the church. Yet, the text remains silent regarding what constitutes an exercise of primacy that respects the rights of bishops and local churches. This silence has been heard in a variety of ways. Some ultramontanist interpreters have asserted that the council's decision not to specify particular aspects of episcopal authority indicates that such authority is inconsequential. Others including Newman, and more recently Dulles and Pottmeyer, have argued that this silence is not a negation, but a reflection of the council's decision to leave this matter an open question.⁴¹ Significantly, it is how one interprets the council's silence on episcopal authority, more so than how one interprets any of its actual formulations, that often plays the greatest role in assessments of Vatican I as right, wrong, or incomplete.

A second critical dimension of *what* Vatican I teaches regards papal infallibility. This definition appears at the end of *Pastor aeternus'* last chapter and is often examined in isolation, yet it can only be properly understood within the wider horizon of the document including the "hermeneutical rules" presented in the *Prologue* and the description of papal primacy in the previous chapter. Keeping this context in mind, it is possible to see that, on a fundamental level, *what* Vatican I teaches about papal infallibility is that in order to foster the unity that constitutes the purpose of the papacy and comprises a key element of God's redeeming plan, the pope's primacy, in certain circumstances, extends to his teaching power. When the definition is severed from its wider context, as it often is, it is difficult to perceive its compatibility with other views of the church, other types of authority, and other elements of the Christian faith. Here, again, the issue of *how* Vatican I teaches is critical. As John Ford, CSC, points out, looking closely at the definition, it becomes clear that *Pastor aeternus* does not provide a theological understanding of *what* papal infallibility is as a theological reality; instead it describes *how* infallibility is properly exercised.⁴² Specifically, *what* Vatican I provides is a list of the conditions required for the pope's exercise of infallible teaching authority to be operative. These conditions can be summarized as: "(1) Rely on the divine assistance promised to Peter; (2) Act as pastor and teacher of all

⁴⁰ Francis Sullivan, SJ, "Primacy of the Pope," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11 (Farmington Hills, MI: Cengage Gale, 2002), 708–09, esp. 708.

⁴¹ Cf. Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion*, 51–109, and Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 121–40.

⁴² John Ford, CSC, "Infallibility—Terminology, Textual Analysis, and Theological Interpretation: A Response to Mark Powell," *Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2013): 119–28, esp. 22.

Christians; (3) Invoke his supreme apostolic authority; and (4) Teach on a matter of faith or morals."⁴³ Contemporary readers often approach the definition with questions about the theological significance of papal infallibility and its consistency with other elements of the tradition. They fail to recognize that the definition is answering a different question, namely, under what conditions is papal infallibility operative? Thus, a key factor in the misinterpretation of Vatican I's definition of papal infallibility is that we generally approach it with a *what* question when in reality it is answering a *how* question.

Although the definition of papal infallibility is cast in juridical terms, its soteriological character can be seen in examining the conditions of its exercise. These conditions include clear limits that disallow the extreme views favored by the maximalists. Thus, by looking at *how* papal infallibility is operative, we can begin to appreciate *what* its theological significance is. *Pastor aeternus* is clear that the prerogative of infallibility is not *personal*, but only in effect when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* in his role as the bishop of Rome, pastor, and teacher of all Christians. This condition reflects the reality that the pope's teaching authority is intended to foster the unity that constitutes an important element in God's plan of salvation. The pope exercises this authority not as an individual, but as an aspect of his office; stated more specifically, papal infallibility is a prerogative that is rooted not in a person, but in "the particular place of the Roman Church in God's plan."⁴⁴ As such, defining the pope's infallible teaching authority is not an innovation; it gives expression to an organic element of the church's constant belief that agreement with Rome is an essential means of building communion among local churches and ensuring continuity of the apostolic faith.⁴⁵ The condition that restricts the content of infallible pronouncements to matters of faith and morals conveys that this authority is not *absolute*; instead it communicates that the purpose of this authority is to protect precisely what has been divinely revealed and is necessary for salvation. Thus, papal infallibility is not necessary as a means of power, but because "the first condition of salvation is to maintain the rule of the true faith" (PA 4)." Finally, the stipulation that the pope must rely on the divine assistance promised to Peter in exercising his infallible teaching authority excludes the maximalists' claim that the pope's authority is *separate* from the church. This requirement demonstrates that the pope's ability to teach infallibly is rooted in a gift whose recipient is the entire church. Looking beyond its juridical framing, it is possible to see that *Pastor aeternus'* definition of papal

⁴³ Cf. *ibid.*, 123. Here I am building on the conditions identified by Ford.

⁴⁴ Kelly, "The Roman Catholic Doctrine of Papal Infallibility," 133.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

infallibility is open to a broader interpretation than it typically receives. We have to understand and accept the text for *what* it does offer and pursue the answers we seek in light of the answers it gives. Sometimes new insight on persistent theological problems is gained by realizing that what is needed are new questions.

People often misunderstand Vatican I because they presume that the maximalist position—an extreme view where the pope's authority is seen as *absolute, separate, and personal*—is *what* the council teaches. In short, they believe that *what* Vatican I teaches is that the pope has ultimate authority and is infallible *period*. *How* the council teaches often reinforces this misunderstanding. Reading *Pastor aeternus* in light of its historical and theological contexts, however, it is clear that the notion of a “galloping infallibility” that many associate with Vatican I was not what the vast majority of the council fathers intended and was, in fact, supported by only a small fraction of bishops. In fact, *Pastor aeternus'* presentation of papal infallibility is not as foreign to our understanding of the faith as we generally presume. Perhaps the most significant misunderstanding about *what* Vatican I teaches is the assumption that its definitions are primarily about wielding power. Properly understood, *Pastor aeternus'* definitions are not about power, but about a close and reliable connection between Christ and the church that affords the latter protection, stability, and access to truth. Papal primacy, and papal infallibility as one dimension of it, is intended to convey that a fundamental aspect of God's saving work is manifest in the church's structure and, in particular, in the papal office. *Pastor aeternus* presents a true, but incomplete presentation of papal authority as an element of that larger whole. *How* it presents this is with a style chosen for clarity and efficiency rather than as a means of reflecting theological commitments. Ultimately, Newman's words about the council one hundred and fifty years ago were prescient—its teachings do “not so much need to be undone as to be completed.”

II. Bringing Vatican I's Voice into the Conversation

Recognizing Vatican I's teachings as true but incomplete expressions of the Christian faith is a critical step that brings new energy and possibilities. Although this advance is important, in many ways it represents more of a beginning than an end. Retrieving Vatican I's voice allows and demands that we engage in critical work that in the past has either been impossible or side-stepped. A re-reception of Vatican I forces us to ask, What would a more complete view of the papacy look like? How can Vatican I's presentation of the church be seen as harmonious with contemporary understandings of

the *sensus fidelium*, ecclesial reform, and ecumenical priorities? Although papal infallibility was “the question” in 1870 and remains a flashpoint for controversy, what requires greater attention today is the exercise of papal primacy that impacts the church’s life in considerably more extensive and regular ways. Reaching a more complete notion of papal primacy involves bringing greater equilibrium to Vatican I’s treatment of the pope and the bishops.⁴⁶ Interestingly, the imbalance in each case arises from opposite deficiencies. On the one hand, Vatican I presents papal primacy in largely juridical terms with insufficient theological and pastoral development; on the other hand, the council affirms episcopal authority as a theological principle, but fails to give it proper specification and juridical status. Achieving equilibrium between these subjects is essential to the “maturing of the relationship between synodality and primacy” necessary for the church’s successful movement into the third millennium. This work entails enormous energy, and its final form lies beyond our vision; with a renewed understanding of Vatican I, however, it is possible to sketch certain initial steps.

Contemporary efforts at balancing Vatican I must be done in light of Vatican II’s initial attempt to bring a necessary complement to its predecessor. The bishops at Vatican II did not think that their predecessors’ work needed to be “undone” or left behind; rather, they engaged Vatican I’s one-sidedness as a primary task.⁴⁷ Although this goal impacted Vatican II’s unfolding across its deliberations and decrees, ground zero for these efforts is found in the third chapter of *Lumen gentium*. The import of this chapter is such that it was seen as the “backbone of the entire council” and the council’s “center of gravity.”⁴⁸ As is suggested in the chapter’s full title, “The Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular the Episcopate,” a key goal was to address some of the silences left in 1870 regarding the bishops. The chapter affirms Vatican I’s teachings while setting them within an understanding of the whole church as a sacrament. An example of such efforts is

⁴⁶ Bringing equilibrium to Vatican I’s understanding of these subjects of authority—and our overall understanding of ecclesial authority—requires developing our knowledge and exercise of other forms of authority, especially lay authority. Given Vatican I does not significantly treat this topic, however, our focus here will be on bringing greater balance to that which it does treat.

⁴⁷ For more on this see Kristin Colberg, “Recognizing Vatican I as a Context for Vatican II,” in *Vatican I and Vatican II: Councils in the Living Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 85–114.

⁴⁸ See Cardinal P. Eyt, “La collégialité épiscopale,” in *Le deuxième concile du Vatican 1959–65. Actes du colloque organisé par l’École française de Rome en collaboration avec l’Université de Lille 3* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1989), 54.

seen in the fact that Vatican II uses the term “primacy” in reference to the pope eight times, but it always does so without adding the phrase “of jurisdiction.”⁴⁹ The most critical way that Vatican II receives and contextualizes its predecessor is found in two of its key teachings on the bishops: the sacramental nature of the episcopate and the character of episcopal collegiality.⁵⁰ With these teachings, *Lumen gentium* shifts perspective from the juridical character of episcopal authority to considering other dimensions of its sacramental reality. Thus, while Vatican I can be seen as addressing the question “How is papal primacy exercised in times of crisis?” Vatican II engages the question: “What does papal primacy look like within an understanding of the church as communion?”⁵¹ Although Vatican II brought important contextualization to Vatican I and helps us to hear its voice more clearly, what it provides is often a juxtaposition of its positions and those of its predecessor rather than a synthesis of the two. Thus, true to the symphonic nature of the conciliar tradition, more work remains to bring harmony to Vatican I’s and Vatican II’s visions of the church.

Bringing greater equilibrium to Vatican I’s treatment of the papal primacy—and ultimately our own understanding of the primacy—requires achieving a theological interpretation of the council’s juridical declarations. What is needed is the development of a pastoral primacy that sets a horizon for the exercise of the pope’s jurisdictional authority. Although Vatican I does not offer this type of integration, an awareness of *what* it teaches—and *what* it does *not* teach—illuminates ways for achieving it. Vatican I defines the primacy of jurisdiction as an important element of the primacy, yet it does *not* presume that this definition captures all that constitutes the primacy, *nor* does it assume that primacy of jurisdiction is identical with administrative centralization. The fact that Vatican I teaches about the pope’s extraordinary magisterium and is largely silent on the character of the pope’s ordinary magisterium does not mean that the council saw these two dimensions of the papacy in the manner of an *either/or* choice; clearly, *both* the pope’s extraordinary *and* ordinary authorities are important, yet the council was unable to specify the character of the latter. Seeing Vatican I not as wrong but

⁴⁹ John Paul II’s 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint* makes the same choice to consider papal primacy without ever adding the phrase “of jurisdiction.” On the significance of this choice in efforts to receive Vatican I’s teachings, see Silvia Scatena, “From Medellín to Aparecida: The ‘Lesson’ of a Regional Experience in Searching for Forms and Styles of Effective Collegiality,” *For a Missionary Reform of the Church: The Civiltà Cattolica Seminar*, eds. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, and Carlos María Galli (New York: Paulist, 2018), 266–90.

⁵⁰ Cf. Colberg, *Vatican I and Vatican II*, 115–36.

⁵¹ Schatz, *The Origins of Papal Primacy*, 175.

incomplete allows us to stop avoiding essential conversations about papal authority and turn to productive questions about what constitutes authentic elements of papal primacy beyond its juridical and administrative dimensions.

Our efforts to develop a pastoral primacy or, as Francis says, to achieve a “pastoral conversion” of the “papacy and central structures of the church” must be rooted in the cause of unity that is the *raison d’être* of the papacy (EG [*Evangelii Gaudium*] 32). It is only from this vantage point that the health of the papacy can be judged. This corresponds with the first hermeneutic rule found in *Pastor aeternus*. This unity, however, as we see in the second hermeneutical rule, is not sought for its own sake or as a reflection of power; it is vital in the economy of salvation. As such, a pastoral primacy must be rooted in Scripture and tradition, and it must reflect the community’s faith. Primacy is not fundamentally a juridical concept, but a reality rooted in the witness of the Gospel and the life and ministry of Jesus. Given this foundation, the primacy should be understood in terms of service, not in terms of power. This is an emphasis of John Paul II’s *Ut unum sint* (UUS), which describes the pope as “the first servant of unity” and as one who is willing to lay down his own life so that the “the one voice of the Shepherd” may be heard (UUS 94).⁵² The return to a primarily biblical conception of the primacy catalyzes a variety of significant shifts. It encourages a change in our language leading us to speak less in terms of papal authority or office and more in terms of a Petrine ministry or Petrine service.⁵³ It allows us to move away from a universalist ecclesiology where members of the church are seen as related by external bonds of jurisdiction and to move toward a communion ecclesiology where diverse authorities in the church are related organically rather than hierarchically. Finally, it opens doors for ecumenical conversations about the varied ways that the papacy has served the church as a ministry of unity and what such a ministry might look like in the future.

Our efforts to move in the direction of a pastoral primacy cannot depart from the tradition and so must honor critical elements such as the episcopal constitution of the church. This is the substance of *Pastor aeternus*’ third hermeneutic rule. Papal primacy is fundamentally about relationships: the relationship between Christ and the church, the relationship between the pope and the episcopate, and ultimately the relationship among the entire

⁵² John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (May 25, 1995), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html.

⁵³ Kasper, “Introduction to the Theme and Catholic Hermeneutics of the Dogmas of the First Vatican Council,” 22.

people of God. Vatican I is clear that the pope and the bishops do not work in the manner of a zero-sum game; rather, both reflect and edify the divinely given authority that builds up the unity of the church for the salvation of God's people. Thus, reaching a more adequate understanding of the episcopate, which allows bishops—both individually and collectively—to exercise authority more effectively, promotes the health and development of the primacy *because these two subjects of authority share many of the same goals*. Understanding the shared ends of the papacy and the episcopacy illuminates the development of a pastoral primacy that does not call us to do away with a primacy of jurisdiction. Jurisdictional primacy is meant to give shape to certain aspects of the relationships that constitute the primacy. It gives authority to this serving office in order to advance the goals that these relationships were formed to achieve. Certainly, Vatican I's one-sided emphasis on the primacy of jurisdiction is problematic; it is steeped in the notions of political sovereignty popular in its day, which do not translate well into our day. We must work to free the teaching on papal primacy from any one particular historical expression so that we can identify its essence and discern how it might be best lived out today.

Turning to the question of episcopal authority, bringing equilibrium here requires moving beyond theological affirmations regarding the importance of consulting the bishops to specifying the nature of their authority individually, in regional bodies and as a college in relation to the pope. In *Evangelii gaudium*, a document that seems to be of ever-increasing importance for understanding Francis' papacy, Francis notes that several important objectives from the third chapter of *Lumen gentium* remain incomplete.⁵⁴ Among these he includes the desire to enhance local churches and to reassess aspects of the Roman curia, but what comes across as most urgent is the need to develop regional churches in the form of episcopal conferences. *Evangelii gaudium* 32 states:

The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal churches, episcopal conferences are in a position to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit. Yet, this desire has not been fully realized since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions,

⁵⁴ Multiple chapters in *For a Missionary Reform of the Church* deal with the significance of *Lumen gentium's* third chapter in Francis' papacy; particularly valuable is Hervé Legrand, OP's contribution entitled "*Communio Ecclesiae, Communio Ecclesiarum, Collegium Episcoporum*," 159–95. Also valuable on this topic is *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium at the Papal Agenda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the church's life and her missionary outreach.⁵⁵

As the first pope who served as the head of a regional conference of bishops, Francis recognizes the tremendous value of the various centripetal forces in the church. He understands that regional conferences provide opportunities for bishops to build relationships, develop ideas, and identify priorities that allow them to work more effectively as a college and in their work of advising the pope about the needs of the church. Specifying and strengthening the authority of episcopal conferences might include such measures as allowing them, in certain circumstances, to submit items for synodal agendas, appeal decisions of the Holy See, and consult on aspects of doctrinal decision-making.⁵⁶ Interestingly, the third chapter of *Lumen gentium*, which served as “ground zero” for efforts to bring balance to Vatican I and was seen as the “backbone” or “center of gravity” for Vatican II, can also be seen as a nexus for the current pontificate. Francis' focus on this particular section of *Lumen gentium* is a testament to the fact that important threads connect Vatican I, Vatican II, and our situation today; it reflects the reality that many of the “issues under the issues” in 1870 and 1965 are still “issues under the issues” today.

As we prepare this year to mark several anniversaries related to Vatican I, one of the few points of agreement is that people disagree about the council's meaning and import. As is often the case in consequential disagreements, initial reactions of anger or bewilderment can lead to separation, distortion, entrenched positions, and even abandonment. Perhaps now, 150 years later, with cooler heads and fresh eyes, we can better understand the ways in which Vatican I plays a crucial role not only in “the story of how we got to be the way we are today,” but also in the story of “where we go from here.” Efforts to give Vatican I a fresh consideration should not be seen as an effort by the church to “pull a fast one” or offer special privileges to “the one problematic council” that couldn't get things right the first time. Instead, re-reception of conciliar teachings is a normal and essential aspect of what it means to be a living church. The anniversaries of Vatican I provide a valuable opportunity to return to what happened 150 years ago as a critical resource for deepening our ecclesial understanding and advancing some of our most urgent goals. In light of a renewed understanding, it

⁵⁵ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁵⁶ Legrand, “*Communio Ecclesiae, Communio Ecclesiarum, Collegium Episcoporum*,” 184.

becomes clear that many of Vatican I's questions are not unlike our own and that the council's answers, properly understood, can inform our own efforts to speak meaningfully amid the dramatically shifting contexts of the church today.