



# PASTORAL CONVERSION ACCORDING TO THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY:

## A Critical Reading of the Instruction ‘The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the Service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church’ (2020)

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### Introduction

Essentially, the Instruction “The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the Service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church”, published in 2020 by the Congregation for the Clergy,<sup>1</sup> deals with the reform of parish structures. In line with earlier documents, the Congregation wishes to safeguard the priest’s role and to avoid a possible confusion about the laity’s co-responsibility in the Church. However, as the document’s title indicates, the Congregation situates the reflection on these matters in the context of the pastoral conversion promoted by Pope Francis.

The combination of these two concerns – the structural reform of parishes and pastoral conversion – is not obvious. Pope Francis mentions the notion in various of his communications, yet without a systematic elaboration. Consequently, the word pastoral is sometimes understood as ‘in relation to the parishioners’ needs’ or ‘in relation to



the parishioners' reality'. Put simply, pastors should present the faith in such a way that it 'works' and 'makes sense' to the faithful; they should adapt their words, manners and style, or organization (Reforming parish structures could be such an adaptation). Yet according to another, more radical interpretation, the term 'pastoral conversion' involves a profound openness to change on the part of the pastors. Understood thus, pastoral conversion does not call for pastoral adaptations, such as, e.g., reforming parish structures, but for personal adaptation. It requires a great humility, especially from the pastors, so that they may understand and live the gospel more faithfully.

Which of these two approaches does the Instruction embrace? And which is the better interpretation – and indeed, are these two only two interpretations? In the following contribution, I hope to complement (and challenge) the Instruction with a reflection on these questions. I will first analyze possible meanings of the term pastoral conversion, starting from John XXIII, to whom we owe the term, and the Second Vatican Council<sup>2</sup>. I will then argue that the Instruction embraces a minimal version of pastoral conversion. I will conclude by suggesting how it could (and should) deepen its commitment to pastoral conversion.

## 1. 'Pastoral': Its Origin and Possible Meanings

The word pastoral, that we usually use to describe pastoral work in parishes, hospitals, and so on, was used by the Second Vatican Council as a specific, technical term. Pope John XXIII used the word in his famous opening address, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*<sup>3</sup>. While he considered it obvious that doctrine remained unchanged and that "loyal submission is due", he hoped for another presentation of the faith, more in line with contemporary standards. This was as much an agenda as an *anti-agenda*. To make the treasure of Christian



faith shine again, the Church needed another presentation that did not merely repeat well-known words from the past. As John XXIII stated, “But our task is not only to guard this precious treasure, as if we were concerned only with an antiquity”. Evidently, these new words and new approaches must be critically evaluated, yet, as the Pope added, in that evaluation the magisterium needed to be pastoral:

The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the formulation in which it is clothed is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great account, with patience if necessary, measuring everything by the forms and proportions of a teaching authority primarily pastoral in character<sup>4</sup>.

This requires an open mindset. Pope John’s opening *Address* contains indications of such a mindset, the roots of which go back to Pope John’s spiritual and pastoral life<sup>5</sup>. For example, he criticized those who saw only calamity in modern times and spoke of discerning the signs of the times. The Council took over this orientation. During the opening days of the Council, the fathers decided to send out the so-called ‘Message to the World’ (*Message au monde*), a message of fraternity with the world drafted by the French Dominicans Marie-Dominique Chenu and Yves Congar; it was the Council’s first document. Significantly, its intention was to set another tone than the closed, pessimistic, and traditionalistic tone that characterized the *schemata* that had been sent out<sup>6</sup>.

The word pastoral also featured prominently in the title of the last document to be promulgated, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. A footnote explained the word pastoral as pointing to a wish to relate to the modern world, but in fact it did not



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clarify very much what that meant for the dogmatic content that communicated<sup>7</sup>.

That is a (very short) introduction to the origin of the technical term pastoral. What does it mean? I will develop four possibilities<sup>8</sup>.

a) Firstly, pastoral may mean: to look at the world and the signs of the times in order to present the faith more adequately. In this interpretation, the focus is on presentation. A pastoral approach involves learning, yet that learning relates more to presentation than to content. That is what Pope John XXIII seemed to say when he distinguished in *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* between the content of the faith and its presentation: it is the presentation that needs to change. As I have shown elsewhere, that is also how most of the Council fathers thought<sup>9</sup>.

b) A more radical reading, however, stretches learning beyond presentation. A pastoral way of proceeding comes with such a degree of openness to the faithful and the actual context that faith conceptualization may be affected too. One learns more about God – not just on how to speak about God, but about who God is.

Theologically, this proposal grounds in the conviction that God is beyond human beings' limited comprehension and that, consequently, the Church (including its pastors and the magisterium) is a pilgrim continuously in need of reform – *ecclesia semper reformanda*. There is no end to this pilgrimage, except in heaven. Even thinking in terms of progress – like 'we have never understood God as well as we do now' – is risky. We do not grasp God better than previously, but we do so as best as we can for our time.

While the Council did not explicitly embrace this perspective, its practice – its words and its attitude – at times went in this direction, for example when it spoke about the



'signs of the times', that the Church should learn from (*Gaudium et spes* nos. 4 and 44). That means that the sources for (re)conceiving doctrine are located in the present as well: the Church is learning still. Ecumenism is another example. The Council not only *talked* differently about our Anglican, Calvinistic, Lutheran and Eastern-Orthodox brothers and sisters, precisely by calling them so, but also *thought* differently and acted differently<sup>10</sup>.

This interpretation, which seems theologically more satisfying and historically more correct than the one under a point casts doubt on John XXIII's distinction between the faith and its presentation (see *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*). Pope Francis sometimes makes a similar distinction, which therefore is not very convincing either.

c) A third interpretation talks about 'style'. As various commentators have highlighted, Vatican II adopted a style that was noticeably different from previous Councils; that style is sometimes called pastoral. Instead of issuing short theological statements that went with condemnations of positions to the contrary, the Council took its time to develop its points and present them as an invitation.

One of the pioneers of this latter perspective is the American Jesuit and Church historian John O'Malley. He has extensively argued that the Council's style shift from prescribing and condemning (as previous Councils had done) to explaining and inviting represents a sea change, a "paradigm shift". Style is not 'just' style; it contains a message. In his own words,

The style shift [...] conveyed a values shift that was also a system shift or paradigm shift. It called for new attitudes on the part of the Church and of all Catholics. The values it conveyed were anything but new in Christianity and to that extent were in continuity with tradition, but they were a break with



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the official mode in place up to that point. In its vocabulary the style promoted a change in mind-set and in the *modus operandi* of the Church as from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from fault finding to a search for common ground<sup>11</sup>.

This approach too is inspired by a pastoral concern for the faithful. As we have seen above, that concern may translate itself in an adapted pedagogy, (a) or a new way of conceiving the faith; (b) here, it translates in another mindset and – therefore – another style. That mindset has to do with the priority of God over the Church, and therefore humility and openness rather than closed certainties; with a priority of salvation over evil, and therefore hope rather than doom and inviting rather than threatening; with a priority of the people of God over the hierarchy, and therefore a sense of a shared journey rather than a command structure<sup>12</sup>.

d) It seems that Pope Francis has introduced a fourth interpretation. Leaving the intellectual, theological domain and its focus on content and/or presentation, this fourth interpretation opts instead for people and salvation. Pastoral now means: a particular interest for people and salvation. This interpretation grounds in what one might call a ‘preferential option for salvation’ and is not so much elaborated conceptually as hinted at in words and actions.<sup>13</sup> In a way that is precisely the point: it is not about theory but about practice. For Pope Francis, that is one of his fundamental principles: “realities are more important than ideas”<sup>14</sup>.

Concretely, it means that the Church should radiate pastoral closeness. Shepherds should smell after the sheep. In his long September 2013 interview “A Big Heart Open to God” that was published worldwide in Jesuit journals, Pope Francis famously promoted the Church as a field hospital



and a mother. He called for conversion to closer, more pastoral attitudes, primarily amongst ministers:

The Church's ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the Good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbor. This is pure Gospel. God is greater than sin. The structural and organizational reforms are secondary – that is, they come afterward. The first reform must be the attitude. The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people's night, into the darkness, but without getting lost. The people of God want pastors, not clergy acting like bureaucrats or government officials<sup>15</sup>.

The theme of pastoral closeness figures repeatedly in Pope Francis' teaching, for example when he challenged the Curia to free itself from its spiritual diseases, most of which consisted in a bureaucratic and self-oriented logic<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, he called the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to conceive its doctrinal mission as a pastoral mission<sup>17</sup>. Saints like Oscar Romero, with their commitment to the poor, now represent a model to be followed where in earlier times they were considered risky for their possible involvement in liberation theology. It is no coincidence that Romero was beatified and canonized during Francis' papacy.

The four distinct interpretations of pastoral are in fact related interpretations, with the later ones presupposing the former ones. Arguably, the final one is the most radical one, as it shifts the attention from faith content and Church to what these are meant to communicate, viz., God's salvation. Still, it requires the other ones. The pastoral Church that Pope Francis promotes can only realize a 'Salvation First' program – not as an abstract, theoretical salvation, but as a real,



salutary, warm, human, salvation – by adapting its style and language. One could call that the incarnation of pastoral conversion. Thus, making the Church’s communication more pastoral can only be achieved by means of ecclesial learning and by renewing ecclesial talk.

## 2. ‘Pastoral Conversion’ and the Instruction

In the Introduction, I suggested that it is not obvious to combine a pastoral concern with one that focuses on structural reforms, and I raised the question what the Congregation for the Clergy means when it speaks of “The pastoral conversion of the Parish community in the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church”. In this paragraph I will return to these considerations and argue what type of pastoral conversion the Congregation for the Clergy commits itself to, based on an analysis of the document’s argument.

The Instruction seeks to respond to contextual developments that affect the parish structures. It refers to “the considerable social and cultural changes of recent decades” (no. 1) and the “peculiar characteristic of our contemporary world, whereby increased mobility and the digital culture have expanded the confines of existence” (no. 8, cf. no. 10). This makes that the parish in its current form is outdated: “Given the above-mentioned changing realities, their generous dedication notwithstanding, the current parish model no longer adequately corresponds to the many expectations of the faithful” (no. 16). These developments are not perceived negatively but are named ‘signs of the times’ (nos. 11, 13, 14) through which the Spirit speaks to us<sup>18</sup>.

In developing its response to these developments, the Instruction makes use of two sources. Firstly, it refers to Vatican II and Pope Francis, especially in the first forty-one sections. The Instruction uses the word pastoral conversion





in its title and dedicates its first chapter to this (no. 3-5)<sup>19</sup>. It recalls Pope Francis' call to creativity and to new ways to proclaim the gospel (no. 1), to pastoral values such as closeness and mercy (no. 2), and to concern for 'souls' rather than structures (no. 3). It conceives the Church inclusively and speaks repeatedly of "the entire people of God" or "the whole people of God"<sup>20</sup>. Therefore, "[t]he whole People of God must urgently embrace the Holy Spirit's invitation to begin the process of 'renewing' the face of the Church" (no. 10); therefore, too, "[t]he subject of the missionary and evangelizing action of the Church is always the People of God as a whole" (no. 27).

Especially from no. 42 onwards, the Instruction starts turning to another source: canon law. At its presentation, the Congregation's Undersecretary, Monsignor Andrea Ripa, described the document as a "theological, pastoral and canonical resource"<sup>21</sup>. Out of 180 footnotes more than 80 refer to the Code of Canon Law. That striking number of footnote references is another indication that in responding to the developments listed above, canon law is indeed a major source<sup>22</sup>.

The tension between these two sources comes to the fore when the Instruction's concluding comment first presents canonical norms as guidelines, and then quotes Pope Francis on the creativity and motherhood:

[t]he present Document, therefore, besides underscoring the urgency of a this type of renewal, presents the canonical norms that establish the possibilities, the limits, the rights and the duties of pastors and the laity, so that the parish might rediscover itself as a fundamental place of evangelical proclamation, of the celebration of the Eucharist, a place of fraternity and charity, from which Christian witness can shine for the world. The parish, that is, "must remain a place of creativity, of relationship, of



motherhood. It is there that this inventive capacity is realized; and when a parish moves forward this way, it achieves what I call 'the parish on the move' (no. 123).

Two hermeneutical priorities determine the Instruction's actual argument. Firstly, the Congregation links pastoral conversion closely to the restructuring of parishes. Immediately after the chapter on pastoral conversion (nos. 3-5), it comments that "[t]he aforesaid missionary conversion, which naturally leads to a reform of structures, concerns the parish in particular". It dedicates a full chapter to the topic "From the conversion of people to that of structures" (nos. 34-41), after which it specifies that "[t]he pastoral conversion of the parish community, in terms of mission, takes shape and finds expression in a gradual process of a renewal of structures" (no. 42)<sup>23</sup>.

A second crucial priority is to safeguard the priest's unique role, that is to be distinguished from that of lay people. At the presentation of the Instruction, the Undersecretary hinted at this by linking the current Instruction with two earlier documents, both of which were inspired by that distinction: the "Interdicasterial Instruction *Ecclesia de Mysterio*, on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Ministry of Priests" (1997), and the "Instruction The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community" (2002) by the Congregation for the Clergy<sup>24</sup>. It is also clear in the Instruction itself. The concrete consequences of "the rediscovery of the vocation of the baptized as a disciple of Jesus Christ and a missionary of the Gospel, in light of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent Magisterium" (no. 11) remains unclear. What does not remain unclear is the priest's unicity. For example, the section on the priest opens by reserving the care of souls in its fullness to the ordained and by excluding others:



The office of Parish Priest, sometimes referred to as Pastor, involves the full care of souls. In order, therefore, for a member of the faithful to be validly appointed Parish Priest (*parochus*), he must have received the Order of Presbyter, thus excluding the possibility of conferring this office on one who lacks this Order and its related functions, even where priests are scarce (no. 66)<sup>25</sup>.

The unnecessary use of capital letters for 'Parish Priest' and 'Order of Presbyter' seems to symbolize my point: the Instruction wishes to underline the priest's distinct 'being'. So does the fact that, when discussing supplementing for priests, the Instruction underlines that different words should be used to describe their function:

in designating the tasks entrusted to deacons, consecrated men and women and the lay faithful that receive a participation in the exercise of pastoral care, it is necessary to use terminology that corresponds in a correct way to the functions that they can fulfil in conformity with their state of life. In this way, the essential difference that exists between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood is clearly maintained, and the identity of the appointment received by each person should be evident (no. 94)<sup>26</sup>.

This analysis suggests the following concerning the Instruction's argument. Essentially, the Instruction wishes to adapt parish structures to changed circumstances; one could say that it is about an *aggiornamento* of pastoral care structures. By means of the Instruction, the Congregation for the Clergy hopes to guide that reform process according to the principles of Canon Law. Although it speaks about pastoral creativity, the fact that almost half the number of footnotes refer to canon law suggests that canonical considerations have a greater weight. Moreover, the focus on the priest's unique role gives the impression that the



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shortage of priests is maybe the real issue. That would explain why the Instruction is so adamant that lay people cannot take over their role.

In light of this analysis and the earlier overview of what pastoral may mean, it is obvious that the Instruction interprets the word pastoral minimally. Pastoral conversion has to do with updating the structure of the Church, especially the parish structure. It is telling that in his presentation Monsignor Ripa used the word pastoral only used in its basic and common meaning as referencing to pastoral work in parishes, hospitals, and so on.

I wonder therefore if even the first and 'smallest' meaning of pastoral may be beyond the document. It seems that the reform of parish structures has to do with the needs of the organization rather than those of the people. In fact, their situation is only briefly discussed, in short bits and pieces, and never elaborated systematically<sup>27</sup>. The other meanings of the word pastoral are certainly beyond this Instruction. It does not try to learn from the pastoral reality; rather, by making canon law its major guideline and maintaining the distinction between priest and lay people a major concern, it shields itself from new insights or new practices. Neither does it embrace a new style that breathes dialogue, friendship, trust, ... Rather, the document's focus is on clarifying distinctions and maintaining order. Finally, neither does the Instruction promote another, more salvation-oriented ecclesial practice.

## Conclusion

So how could the Instruction deepen its commitment to pastoral conversion? It seems that the concept of conversion (that I have left out of the discussion so far) indicates how to go forward. Conversion means *metanoia*, a change of perspective, a change of mind. As Romans 12 has it: 'Be



transformed with a new mind'. Not because of liberal (or counter-cultural) ideas, but because, for a Christian, God is the ultimate reference point. As *Lumen gentium* states in its opening words: Christ is the light of the peoples, the *Lumen gentium*, and the Church is called to mirror that light. Thus, the Church is not about herself, but she is *from* Christ and *modelled after* Christ (and *towards* the Father)<sup>28</sup>. In that light, *Lumen gentium's* later statement that ecclesial structures and sacraments are not eternal but belong to this passing world (LG, no. 48) is very fitting; indeed, anything should change if salvation is better served so. Conversion means a profound reorientation on God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and what they stand for, viz., salvation. In combination with the term pastoral, it means: a profound reorientation on God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salvation based on a profound concern for and interest in the faithful. The concrete modalities of this conversion have been discussed above.

Crucially, this conversion situates itself at the level of ecclesial practice. The theological distinction between Christ and the Church from *Lumen gentium* no. 1 calls for what one might call 'virtue ecclesiology': a reflection on the Church which includes (and celebrates!) spiritual attitudes such as: listening to one another, bearing confusion without rushing to the safety of the traditional answers, accepting moments of doubt, and trying out. That is where conversion manifests its sharp edge: it relativizes the domain of doctrine and orthodoxy, canon law, structures, distinct roles, ... Only a Church that is sufficiently poor in knowing and self-esteem can receive God's richness.

Interestingly, one of the 'issue under the issues' in synodality is precisely this 'virtue ecclesiology'. Obviously, synodality has theological foundations: the Holy Spirit who guides the Church, the Church as a pilgrim people of God, the hierarchy who listens before it speaks, the 'inverted



pyramid', and so on. Yet ultimately, synodality is a 'way of proceeding', a style of being Church. That is where the real difficulty lies: it comes with a profound reconfiguration of virtues. While the Church usually promotes the old and familiar, synodality presupposes openness to what is new. While the Church usually promotes *not* speaking out, synodality presupposes a frank sharing of views. While human beings usually argue and discuss, synodality presupposes a type of conversation that is based on listening with interest; while the Church usually celebrates (orthodox) thinking, synodality presupposes interiority as the realm of truth finding and the discernment of spirits<sup>29</sup>.

Therefore, the Instruction should be more radical in its commitment to pastoral conversion. It should develop the beautiful phrase on the importance of "a significant change in mentality and an interior renewal, especially among those entrusted with the responsibility of pastoral leadership" (no. 35) into a 'pilgrim spirituality'. It should speak about spiritual freedom, detachment, poverty, and humility. These virtues are widely attested in the Church's spiritual traditions yet poorly attested in magisterial teaching and in ecclesial practice. The Roman Catholic Church's clergy is not known for their readiness to listen, their openness to newness, or their dialogue skills. Its faithful are not known for their spiritual freedom and their detachment of 'my way of doing things'.

Let me conclude with an anecdote. When I was a Jesuit novice, I came across the book 'Stretched for the Greater Glory of God'<sup>30</sup>. The book was not great, but its title summarized very well what the novitiate felt like. We had to do all sorts of new things; for example, I had to beg for food for five weeks, during a 500 miles pilgrimage in the North of England and Scotland, where people are not used to that; and indeed, I was not very much used to it myself.



The whole experience felt very much like being stretched. Pastoral conversion supposes a humble Church that is ready to be stretched for the greater glory of God. That is primarily a spiritual challenge.

### Endnotes

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- 1 The *Instruction* is available at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/07/20/200720a.html>. It was presented on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020. The English text of Undersecretary Andrea Ripa's presentation can be found at <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/2020-07/the-pastoral-conversion-of-the-parish-community-in-the-service-o.html>.
  - 2 This reflection owes to Jos MOONS, "A Primarily Pastoral Teaching Office' (John XXIII): The Creative Potential of the Principle of 'Pastorality'", in *Teaching and Tradition: On Their Dynamic Interaction*, eds. Jos Moons, Rudi te Velde, and Archibald van Wieringen (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2023), in preparation.
  - 3 Official text in *Acta Synodalia I/1*, pp. 166-175. For a critical edition and translation, see Joseph A. KOMONCHAK, "*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*: Pope John's Opening Speech to the Council", online at: <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/--john-xxiii-opening-speech.pdf>.
  - 4 Interestingly, the official Latin rendition is considerably more cautious than the original Italian version, see KOMONCHAK, "*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*".
  - 5 Developed in Jos MOONS, "'A Primarily Pastoral Teaching Office'", with references to Giuseppe ALBERIGO, "Formazione, contenuto e fortunadell 'allocuzione", *FedeTradizioneProfezia. Studi su Giovanni XXIII e sul Vaticano II* (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1984), pp. 187-222; Alberto MELLONI, "Descrizione delle redazioni dell allocuzione", *Fede Tradizione Profezia*, pp. 223-238; Alberto MELLONI, "Sinossicritica dell'allocuzione di apertura del Concilio Vaticano II", *Fede Tradizione Profezia* (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1984), pp. 239-283; and Massimo FAGGIOLI, *John XXIII: The Medicine of Mercy* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).
  - 6 For the text, see *Acta Synodalia I/1*, pp. 254-256. Cf. the in-depth study of its origin, with ample documentation, André DUVAL, "Le message au monde", in *Vatican II commence: Approches francophones*, ed., Etienne Fouilloux, pp. 105-118 (Leuven: Bibliotheek van de Faculteit Godgeleerdheid, 1993).
  - 7 Cf. full text, "The Pastoral Constitution 'De Ecclesia in Mundo Huius Temporis' is made up of two parts; yet it constitutes an organic unity. By way of explanation: the constitution is called 'pastoral' because, while resting on



doctrinal principles, it seeks to express the relation of the Church to the world and modern mankind. The result is that, on the one hand, a pastoral slant is present in the first part, and, on the other hand, a doctrinal slant is present in the second part. In the first part, the Church develops her teaching on man, on the world which is the enveloping context of man's existence, and on man's relations to his fellow men. In part two, the Church gives closer consideration to various aspects of modern life and human society; special consideration is given to those questions and problems which, in this general area, seem to have a greater urgency in our day. As a result, in part two the subject matter which is viewed in the light of doctrinal principles is made up of diverse elements. Some elements have a permanent value; others, only a transitory one. Consequently, the constitution must be interpreted according to the general norms of theological interpretation. Interpreters must bear in mind - especially in part two - the changeable circumstances which the subject matter, by its very nature, involves", drawn from the translation on vatican.va.

- <sup>8</sup> For the first three interpretation, see Michael SIEVERNICH, "Die 'Pastoralität' des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils", in *Die große Metaphern des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Ihre Bedeutung für heute*, ds., Mariano DELGADO and Michael SIEVERNICH, pp. 39-58 (Freiburg: Herder, 2013).
- <sup>9</sup> MOONS, "'A Primarily Pastoral Teaching Office'", in preparation.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. Pope PAUL VI's passionate use of these words in the homily during that prayer service with the observers at the end of the council: "Messieurs, Chers Observateurs, ou plutôt laissez-Nous vous appeler du nom qui a repris vie en ces quatre années de Concile Oecuménique: Frères, Frères et amis dans le Christ!", *Acta Synodalia IV/7*, pp. 624. The observers included not only protestant faithful but also women religious and laywomen.
- <sup>11</sup> John W.O 'MALLEY, "«The Hermeneutic of Reform»: a Historical Analysis", *Theological Studies* 73 (2012), pp. 517-546, at p. 542. Cf. his seminal work *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2008). For background, see, e.g., Catherine CLIFFORD, "Style is Substance: Origins of John W. O'Malley's Contribution to the Interpretation of Vatican II", *Theological Studies* 79 (2018), pp. 745-760.
- <sup>12</sup> For more on this, see John W. O 'MALLEY, "Did Anything Happen at Vatican II?", *Theological Studies* 67 (2006), pp. 3-33, cf. p. 29, "I will summarize in a simple litany some of the elements in the change in style of the Church indicated by the council's vocabulary: from commands to invitations, from laws to ideals, from threats to persuasion, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to conversation, from ruling to serving, from withdrawn to integrated, from vertical and top-down to horizontal, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, from static to changing, from passive acceptance to active engagement, from prescriptive to principled, from defined to open-ended, from behavior-modification to conversion of heart, from the dictates of law to the dictates of conscience, from external conformity to the joyful pursuit of holiness".
- <sup>13</sup> Obviously, this approach owes to liberation theologians. Elaborating that is beyond the current essay.
- <sup>14</sup> This is one of the four great principles Pope Francis introduced in *Evangelii Gaudium*, see nos. 231-233, cf. nos. 221-237. Cf. EG no. 232, "We have politicians - and even religious leaders - who wonder why people do not





understand and follow them, since their proposals are so clear and logical. Perhaps it is because they are stuck in the realm of pure ideas and end up reducing politics or faith to rhetoric”, and no. 233, “This principle has to do with incarnation of the word and its being put into practice”.

- <sup>15</sup> Antonio SPADARO, “A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis”, *America Magazine* (30 September, 2013), online at: <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis>.
- <sup>16</sup> See, e.g., the famous 2014 Christmass address to the Curia, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco20141222\\_curia-romana.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco20141222_curia-romana.html).
- <sup>17</sup> Thus Pope Francis in 2018, observed by Paul McPARTLAN, “‘Pastoral Conversion’: The Reform Programme of Pope Francis”, *Ecclesiology* 14 (2018), pp. 125-132, at pp. 125-126, “That Pope Francis should describe the mission of the CDF, the Vaticandicastery most associated with doctrine, as ‘pastoral’ is deeply significant. It implies that all Christian doctrine is, or should be, pastoral, and calls into question any easy distinction between the doctrinal and the pastoral” (p. 125).
- <sup>18</sup> Note the explicit rejection of the word “burden” in no. 14, cf. full text, “Beginning with a consideration of the signs of the times, it is necessary, in listening to the Spirit, to produce new signs. With the parish no longer being the primary gathering and social centre, as in former days, it is thus necessary to find new forms of accompaniment and closeness. A task of this kind ought not to be seen as a burden, but rather as a challenge to be embraced with enthusiasm”.
- <sup>19</sup> The word features in nos. 2, 3, 20, & 37 (“the pastoral conversion of structures”) and no. 2 (“the pastoral conversion of the parish community”). Cf. “the aforesaid missionary conversion” (no. 6); “Mission the guiding principle for renewal” (title chapter IV); “the conversion of hearts (no. 21); “from the conversion of people to that of structures” (title chapter VI); “the conversion of structures” and “a missionary reform of pastoral action” (no. 35).
- <sup>20</sup> See no.10, 27, 37, 38, 41, 42, and 109, 123. Cf. amongst others nos.22, 39, 56, 60, 107, and 110.
- <sup>21</sup> See <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/2020-07/the-pastoral-conversion-of-the-parish-community-in-the-service-o.html>. Cf. “the present Instruction has also sought to foster and promote, in accordance with essential canonical norms, a pastoral closeness and cooperation between different parish communities” and “this Instruction is intended to offer Bishops and their collaborators, clerics and laity, the pastoral and canonical tools to work together for the greater good of the ecclesial community”.
- <sup>22</sup> Some sections refer almost exclusively to canon law, see footnotes 49-125, 145-161 and 169-179.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. no. 20, “In view of what has been said so far, it is necessary to identify perspectives that allow for the renewal of ‘traditional’ parish structures in terms of mission”.
- <sup>24</sup> Both are available online at vatican.va. The Instruction refers to the 1997 document in footnotes 135, 137, 141, 151, 152. The 2002 document is referred to in footnotes 137, 138, 139, 140, 142, 172.



- <sup>25</sup> The text contains two footnote references, both to the Code of Canon Law.
- <sup>26</sup> The chapter is entitled “Appointments and Pastoral Ministry” (no. 94-100). For a similar concern, cf. no. 111, “The Pastoral Council is a consultative body, governed by the norms established by the diocesan Bishop, to define the criteria of its composition, the methods of election of its members, its objectives and manner of functioning. In any case, in order not to distort the nature of this Council, it is best to avoid defining it as a ‘team’ or ‘équipe’, that is to say in terms that are not suitable to express concretely the ecclesial and canonical relationship between the parish priest and the rest of the faithful”. (Here too, the Instruction writes Parish Priest with capital letters, cf. my comment in the previous footnote; here and elsewhere I have changed this for small letters.)
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. the quick references to digital culture and increased mobility in nos. 8-9 and the short reflections on brotherhood in nos. 24-25.
- <sup>28</sup> Interestingly, an earlier draft called the Church the light of the nations. That was changed “quietly”, so says Gerard Philips, who edited the text. Cf. Philips’ testimony: “La phrase initiale proclame que c’est, non l’Église mais le Christ qui est la lumière du monde: l’Église n’est qu’un reflet. J’ai tacitement changé ainsi le titre proposé par le cardinal Suenens”, Karim SCHELKENS, ed., *Carnets conciliaires de Mgr Gérard Philips, secrétaire adjoint de la Commission Doctrinale. Textes néerlandais avec traduction française et commentaires. Avec une introduction par, L. Declerck* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), p. 98. For background, see Jos MOONS, *The Holy Spirit, the Church, and Pneumatological Renewal: Mystici Corporis, Lumen Gentium and Beyond* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2022), pp. 312-313.
- <sup>29</sup> For more on these virtues, see Jos MOONS, “A Comprehensive Introduction to Synodality: Reconfiguring Ecclesiology and Ecclesial Practice”, *Annals of Theology* (The Learned Society of Catholic University of Lublin) pp. 69, 73-93, at pp. 85-90.
- <sup>30</sup> G. ASCHENBRENNER, *Stretched for the Great Glory of God: What to Expect from the Spiritual Exercises* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004).

