

*Apparent Victory, Actual Defeat? Vatican II Ecclesiology of the Episcopacy and the Catholic Sexual Abuse Crisis*¹

1. Vatican II: Theological and Institutional Reforms

The magisterial nature of the Second Vatican Council has been subject to debates, especially by those who attempt to reduce the pastorality of the teaching of Vatican II to a merely “pastoral” council in the sense of non-theological and non-doctrinal, of a lesser magisterial authority compared to previous councils. Misguided as this attempt is, there is little doubt on the fact not only that Vatican II has a doctrinal content, but also that it was a *reform council*. In the words of John O’Malley: “Vatican II thus falls under the rubric of a reform council [...] What is peculiar to Vatican II, however, is the scope given to updating and the admission of it as a broad principle rather than rare exception”.²

This peculiarity of Vatican II was not very evident during the preparation of the council led by the Roman Curia between 1960 and 1962, but it became clear with the opening speech of the council by John XXIII on October 11, 1962, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*. Spiritual renewal, theological aggiornamento, and institutional reform were closely linked in the mind of the participants at Vatican II, which in this respect was much closer to the comprehensive approach of Trent to the agenda *de doctrina* and *de reformatione* than to Vatican I.³ Like Trent, Vatican II was about *both* theological reform *and* institutional reform. This was consistent with the idea of a

¹ This paper was accepted and delivered, in an abbreviated form, at the session of the “Vatican II Studies Unit” at the annual conference of the American Academy of Religion (San Diego, 23-26 November 2019).

² John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 300.

³ See John W. O’Malley, *Vatican I. The Council and the Making of the Ultramontane Church* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).

council in John XXIII, who had done serious historical work on the reception of the council of Trent and interpreted Vatican II in the same tradition of Trent, as a council for a change of epoch, a “new order of things” as he said in *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*.⁴

Now, at sixty years from the beginning of the preparation of the council, we must look at Vatican II with fresh eyes: far from the dangers of ritualism of the celebrations of anniversaries, and in the midst of a papacy like Francis’ that is unmistakably a time of new impulse to the reception and application of the council’s teaching and intention. But it is also necessary to re-examine the teaching and the effects of Vatican II in light of the sex abuse crisis in the global Catholic Church. What does the abuse crisis tell us when we look at the major ecclesiological and institutional reform of Vatican II, one of them being about the role of the bishops? This paper will try to re-assess critically some aspects of the ecclesiology of the episcopacy of Vatican II not from a theological-systematic, but from the perspective of the history of Church institutions and structures, in order to raise some questions about possible links between the ecclesiology of the episcopacy and the systemic ecclesial failure of the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church.

2. *Episcopacy and Liturgical Reform: Ecclesiological Ressourcement*

The first subject discussed at Vatican II in the first and second session (1962 and 1963), the liturgy, was an example of interconnected discourses on reform. The liturgical debate set in motion far-reaching institutional consequences of theological debates, both at the central level and in the local churches. The history of the conciliar debate on liturgical reform speaks clearly about the need for a *de-centralization* of liturgical legislation in favor of the local churches (diocesan) and of national bishops’ conferences.⁵ Many of the bishops and theologians active in the first and second sessions of Vatican II had the clear awareness that the liturgy debate was the first step toward the formulation of an ecclesiology with profound institutional consequences.

In the meetings of the liturgical preparatory commission of April 1961 the issue of the

⁴ See Max Vodola, “I met Charles Borromeo ... and he brought me to Vatican II”, *Pacifica*, 26(2) 2013, 171–183; Jared Wicks, “Tridentine Motivations of Pope John XXIII before and during Vatican II”, *Theological Studies*, 75(4) 2014, 847–862.

⁵ See Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform. Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Collegeville MN, Liturgical Press 2012 (Italian translation 2013, German translation 2015).

adaptation of the liturgy was already connected to a deep understanding of the renewed, and at the same time ancient, structure of the Catholic Church with the bishops (and not Rome) at the center of the regulating mechanism. The underlining ecclesiological reframing of the liturgical debate in the first and second session was the first step of the rebalancing of the focus on the papacy of Vatican I with an *ecclesiology of the episcopacy* which was not just theologically grounded in the tradition beginning with the early centuries, but also with far-reaching institutional consequences.⁶ The ecclesiology of the liturgical constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* embodies the rediscovery of the ecclesiology of the monarchic episcopate of the early Church: at Vatican II, ecclesiological *ressourcement* proceeds from the model of the fathers of the Church, and to a lesser degree according to the early modern, Tridentine model of bishop.⁷

But the Eucharistic and Patristic ecclesiology *Sacrosanctum Concilium* – the first real accomplishment of Vatican II and the first reform that started already *concilio durante* - was only the beginning of the conciliar reflection on the Church itself and on the ecclesiology of the episcopate. The choice to “start with liturgy” marked the beginning and arguably also the peak of the *ressourcement* at Vatican II. Soon after the completion of the liturgy debate (and after the death of John XXIII), Vatican II became more and more taken up with the very complex effort of institutional modernization of the Catholic Church – an effort not always exempt from the influence of a bureaucratic and technocratic mentality.

3. *Episcopacy and Papacy: Collegiality at the Universal Level*

The connection between liturgical reform and ecclesiological renewal became apparent during the first debate on the liturgy at Vatican II in October 1962, when fierce opposition arose from the ones who opposed the proposal of giving to episcopal conferences “rights” in the process of adaptation and implementation of the liturgical reform. This example is telling of the relationship between *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Lumen Gentium*: the ecclesiological development that

⁶ See Mathijs Lamberigts, “The Liturgy Debate,” in *History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, English version ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. 2 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 107–166; Giuseppe Dossetti, *Per una “chiesa eucaristica”. Rilettura della portata dottrinale della Costituzione liturgica del Vaticano II. Lezioni del 1965*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Giuseppe Ruggieri (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002).

⁷ See Daniele Gianotti, *I Padri della Chiesa al Concilio Vaticano II. La teologia patristica nella “Lumen Gentium”* (Bologna: EDB, 2010).

lead to the institution of episcopal conferences originated from the liturgical debate and the plan for the liturgical life of the Church after Vatican II. That is why it is possible to see the importance of the ecclesiology of the liturgical reform on the basis of the gap between the accomplished and coherent ecclesiology of the liturgical constitution and the *ecclesiologies* of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* and of the decrees *Christus Dominus*, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.⁸

If *Sacrosanctum Concilium* views the hierarchy of the Church more in terms of local churches and of communion of and within local churches (the diocesan churches with their presbyterium, and the bishops' conferences), the constitution *Lumen Gentium*, debated and approved between 1963 and 1964, can be seen as a push back in re-establishing the pre-eminence of the universal level: in chapter III episcopal collegiality is a function of the universal collegium of bishops, and not of the communion between local churches.⁹ This had important consequences on the issue of Church reform at Vatican II. The first consequence was the creation of a new balance between papal power and episcopacy by elevating the episcopacy and episcopal collegiality to the universal level in a moment of unforeseen and unexpected centralization of the governance of the Church: the decentralization was limited to some issues and subject to reversal in the post-Vatican II period (for example, the liturgy).

The second consequence is to focus on a functional and jurisdictional relationship between the papacy and the episcopacy: if the issue of reform of the episcopacy at Trent is in terms of obligation for bishops to resign in their dioceses and of the system of benefices, at Vatican II the focus is on a repartition of faculties between the pope and the bishops – with the exclusion of other in Church. It was a repartition that gave more authority and power to the bishops, without taking away anything from a papacy that was expanding since Vatican I and kept expanding after Vatican II. This is a necessary expansion of the framework of reference when we try to

⁸ About this issue, see Hervé Marie Legrand, “Lo sviluppo di chiese soggetto: un’istanza del Vaticano II. Fondamenti teologici e riflessioni,” in *L’ecclesiologia del Vaticano II: dinamismi e prospettive*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo (Bologna: EDB, 1981), 129–163; Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Significance of Vatican II for Ecclesiology,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology*, ed. Peter Phan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 69–91.

⁹ See Hervé Legrand, “Communio Ecclesiae, Communio Ecclesiarum, Collegium Episcoporum,” in *For a Missionary Reform of the Church. The Civiltà Cattolica Seminar*, eds. Antonio Spadaro, SJ, and Carlos Maria Galli. Foreword by Massimo Faggioli (New York/Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 2017), pp. 159-195.

understand the institutional and structural dimension of the Church today: Roman Catholicism lives today in the theological paradigm of Trent, Vatican I, and Vatican II, and not just of the post-Vatican II, post-1960s period; Vatican I has not been completely superseded by its successor.

At Vatican II there was a repartition between papacy and episcopacy that aimed at a more efficient episcopal ministry from an administrative-bureaucratic point of view (retirement age, more control on the clergy and on the religious orders in the diocese, coordination with other bishops in one same region and nation). This meant also an episcopacy less limited by other ecclesiastical powers in the diocese (especially the religious orders in *Perfectae Caritatis* and of the laity)¹⁰. In some sense, the ecclesiology of the episcopacy at Vatican II operated a small-scale reproduction, at the diocesan level, of what had happened to the papacy in the previous century, beginning with Vatican I, in terms of ab-solution (at least symbolically) from constraints both at the ecclesiastical and social-political level.¹¹ The new ecclesiological and institutional balance between papacy and episcopacy at Vatican II was also a repartition that met the reluctance of the bishops to share with the presbyterium and the laity some of the power acquired or regained by the episcopacy for the governance of the local churches.

Yves Congar captured immediately, during the council, the value of the papacy giving back to the episcopacy some rights taken away and given to Rome in the recent centuries: “In the end, a list was read this morning of the faculties that the Pope grants to bishops: ‘*concedimus*’ [we grant], ‘*impertimur*’ [we impart]. Whereas, in reality, all he is doing is to give back – and not graciously! – a part of what had been stolen from them over the centuries!!!”¹² At the same time, Congar’s major contribution to the preparation of the ecclesiological debate on the episcopacy at Vatican II must be re-read in the present context of the failure of episcopal leadership in dealing

¹⁰ See Alberto Melloni, “The Beginning of the Second Period: The Great Debate on the Church”, and Joseph Famerée, “Bishops and Dioceses and the Communications Media (November 5-25, 1963)”, in *History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, English version ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. 3 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), pp. 1-108 and 117-175.

¹¹ See Massimo Faggioli, “Quelques thèmes de réflexion sur le modèle d’évêque post-conciliaire”, *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 1 (2002), pp. 78-102.

¹² Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council*. Transl. Mary Jihn Ronayne OP, Mary Cecily Boulding OP, ed. Denis Minns OP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), entry of 3 December 1963, p. 465.

with the ecclesial crisis both at the local and at the universal level.¹³

4. *The Bishops' Synod of Paul VI: An Instrument of Papal Primacy*

The first official meeting in the Vatican focused on the sex abuse crisis took place in February 2019, with representatives of all bishops' conferences, of religious orders, and the top officials on the Roman Curia called by pope Francis to participate in an event that resembled an assembly of the Bishops' Synod. As a matter of fact, no Bishops' Synod was ever called to discuss the sex abuse crisis. This is important to not because the Bishops' Synod, created by Paul VI on September 15, 1965 with the motu proprio *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, was one of the most important institutional innovations of Vatican II.

The new Bishops' Synod was the manirestation of the rise of central power through defense of papal prerogatives in addition to new powers for an episcopacy more closely linked to the universal level through episcopal collegiality. The Bishops' Synod was welcome by most council fathers as a positive step towards a more concrete realization of episcopal collegiality, but the way it was built revealed its function as extension of papal power. Moreover, the timing of the motu proprio (not just its publication, but also its preparation in the Roman Curia far from the eyes of the council between the late 1964 and the summer of 1965) was clearly in order to preempt Vatican II from creating a different kind of new ecclesiastical institution of episcopal collegiality.¹⁴

The *synodus episcoporum* of Paul VI was an institutional innovation, which had no real precedent in the tradition of the Church of Rome, except some vague references to the “synodos endemousa” in the Eastern tradition and the “concistorial model” of governance in support of the petrine ministry, before the “concistorial model” was substituted by the modern Roman Curia of the early modern period (especially since the reform of Sixtus V in 1588). Paul VI's decision to

¹³ Especially *L'ecclésiologie au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Cerf, 1960 in the series “Unam Sanctam” edited by Congar) and *L'episcopat et l'Église universelle*, eds. Yves Congar and Bernard Dominique Dupuy (Paris, Cerf 1962).

¹⁴ See Gilles Routhier, “Finishing the Work. The Trying Experience of the Fourth Period”, in *History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, English version ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. 5 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), pp. 55-61; Antonino Indelicato, *Il sinodo dei vescovi. La collegialità sospesa (1965-1985)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008).

create the Bishops' Synod was in its own way a papal reception of a conciliar debate, as it originated from the conciliar debate. The Bishops' Synod turned out to be – especially during Francis' pontificate - a turning point from multi-century centralizing tendencies and the Roman practice of church government. But other passages in the text on the new Bishops' Synod remained undebated by the conciliar fathers and hidden to the conciliar fathers. The decree on the pastoral ministry of the bishops, *Christus Dominus*, approved a few weeks after *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, had to “cover the crown” in front of the *fait accompli* and was designed to give conciliar legitimacy to an act of papal magisterium that was a reception as much as a rejection of some requests coming from the council.

The history of the Bishops' Synods – at least until the election of Francis – shows that the new institution was more a function of papal primacy than of episcopal collegiality. The Synod created by Paul VI in 1965 was not an expression of the Church's synodality and not an institution of the Church's synodality. Because of both the structure given to it by Paul VI in 1965 and the ecclesiology of the collegiality of Vatican II, the Bishops' Synod is still a form of the exercise of papal primacy extended to include forms of episcopal collegiality. The development of the Bishops' Synods under pope Francis could change that, but is still *in fieri*: it remains to be seen, for example, if the Bishops' Synod will remain a “Synod of Bishops” and if it will be an expression of episcopal *collegiality* as a particular case of the exercise of papal primacy, or if the Bishops' Synod will become an instrument of ecclesial *synodality*.

5. *The Roman Curia and the Bishops' Conferences: Collegiality, not Synodality*

In these new forms of relationship between papal primacy and episcopacy, the issues of the central government of the Church, the Roman Curia, and the bishops' appointments were left completely *untouched* by the final documents of Vatican II, except some vague wishes. This inability of Vatican II to tackle the issue of the central government of the Church must be seen in contrast to the fact that the issue was addressed numerous times in the debates in the aula and in the commissions. The number, structure, and function of the Curia dicasteries, the role of papal diplomacy and of the Secretariat of State were intentionally withdrawn from the portfolio of the

issues to be debated by the council and were left for the papacy to decide after the council.¹⁵ That was one of the main reasons that made the Catholic Church more centralized in the post-Vatican II period compared to the pre-Vatican II period – despite Vatican II and because of the lack of connection between Vatican II’s ecclesiological turn and a still largely unaccomplished reform of the Church as an institution.¹⁶ In many ways the 1967 reform of the Roman Curia by Paul VI was still a pre-Vatican II reform: paradoxically it realized the dream of Pius XII (under whom the young monsignor Montini served in the Roman Curia) of a more centralized system in a *papalist and episcopalist* Catholic Church.¹⁷

This centralization of the government of the Catholic Church was counterbalanced only for the first decade after the end of Vatican II by a stronger authority of the national and continental bishops’ conferences, largely thanks to the need to develop the institutional side of the liturgical reform decided by the council.¹⁸ But it was a trend that was soon reversed after the election of John Paul II to the papacy: the ecclesiological policy of the pontificate was visible with a few key decisions revealing an hermeneutics of Vatican II skeptical of decentralization and of the dialectics between the local and universal dimension of the Church, especially with the new *Code of Canon Law* (1983), the Extraordinary Synod of the Bishops at twenty years from the conclusion of Vatican II (1985), the apostolic constitution of reform of the Roman Curia *Pastor Bonus* (1988), and the motu proprio *Apostolos Suos* the theological and juridical nature of episcopal conferences (1998).¹⁹ The post-Vatican application of the theology of the episcopacy to the structures of church governance by bishops construed a relationship between the bishops and the Roman Curia, and between the bishops and the bishops’ conferences, that reinforced the individual bishops’ authority at the expense of the collegial dimension.

¹⁵ On this, see Massimo Faggioli, *Il vescovo e il concilio. Modello episcopale e aggiornamento al Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005), pp. 299-304; *Vatican II: The Complete History of Vatican II*, ed. Alberto Melloni (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 2015), pp. 232-235.

¹⁶ See Hervé-Marie Legrand, “Du gouvernement de l’Église depuis Vatican II,” in *Lumière et Vie*, 288 (oct.-dec. 2010), pp. 47-56.

¹⁷ See Massimo Faggioli, “The Roman Curia at and after Vatican II: Legal-Rational or Theological Reform?,” *Theological Studies* 2015 76(3), pp. 550-571.

¹⁸ See Heribert Schmitz, “Tendenzen nachkonziliarer Gesetzgebung. Sichtung und Wertung,” *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht*, 146 (1977), pp. 381-419.

¹⁹ See James Provost, “*Pastor Bonus*. Reflections on the Reorganization of the Roman Curia,” *The Jurist* 48 (1988), pp. 499-535; Gianfranco Ghirlanda, “Il M.P. *Apostolos suos* sulle conferenze dei vescovi,” *Periodica de re canonica*, 88 (1999), pp. 609-657.

The post-Vatican II period during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI can be seen also as a time of struggle between papacy and episcopate, in a clash of hermeneutics about the meaning of the ecclesiology of the episcopate of Vatican II. Some visible changes took place since the election of pope Francis. The previous focus on the limits set to the implementation of episcopal collegiality has now been replaced by the focus on synodality: at the central level with the interpretation of the Bishops' Synod by pope Francis. At the local level the effort to open the Church to the synodal model sees a key role of the national bishops' conferences: for example, the "synodal path" opened by the Catholic Church in Germany in January 2020 and the Plenary Council celebrated in Australia between 2020 and 2021.

6. *Episcopalism and "Parishization" of the Church*

A similar trend in the episcopalism of Catholic ecclesiology at Vatican II and afterwards can be seen in the way the council treated the role of the religious orders. Vatican II's "universal call to holiness" for the laity must be seen in the context of the strengthening the power of the bishops by a "constitutionalization" of collegiality which left the religious orders in a difficult situation. The council's ecclesiology largely ignored the specific role of the religious orders, also because of the focus on the need to rebalance the ecclesiological emphasis of Vatican I on the papacy. The functionalist ecclesiology of Vatican II (especially in *Lumen Gentium*) excluded (or tried to exclude) prophecy in the Church, and also of the religious orders and especially female influence in the Church.²⁰ At the same time, the specific social role of the religious orders was increasingly taken away by the secularization of social services in the modern administrative state – in an incongruous alliance between conciliar theology and the modern state.²¹

The choice of Vatican II to call the parish "the cell" or building block of the local church (decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10) – an innovation from the previous magisterial language - reflected the choice to create a *trait d'union* between the local church, identified with the

²⁰ See Stephen R. Schloesser, "'Dancing on the Edge of the Volcano'. Biopolitics and What Happened after Vatican II," in *From Vatican II to Pope Francis. Charting a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul Crowley, S.J. (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2014) 3-26, esp. 19-20.

²¹ On this issue see also Walter Kasper, *Mercy. The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life* (New York – Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 2014) 185-205.

dioceses, and the living components of the body of the local church.²² Vatican II pursued a strengthening of papal power and of episcopal power, while in the local churches continued the “parishization” of the Church at the expense not only of the religious orders, but also of other forms and spaces of Christian life (such as the confraternities). The council’s option for a new balance between the old territorial model of church governance together with openings towards the *ad extra*, the personal criterion (the opening of Vatican II for personal parish and personal dioceses), and the supra-parochial and supra-diocesan types of ministry given the new conditions and opportunities of mobility of the faithful did not really change the trend towards a new empowerment of the episcopate and the papacy. This new empowerment of the episcopate tempered only by a modicum of bureaucratic functionalization, especially with the introduction of the mandatory resignation at a certain age limit for all residential bishops.²³

This vision of a Catholic Church of the future under the control of the bishops was modified not only by secularization, but also by one of the most significant phenomena of the post-Vatican II Church: the rise of new ecclesial movements. This phenomenon on the one hand reflected the crisis of the Tridentine parish-diocesan model and of the role of the religious orders; on the other hand, the need for these movements to receive formal and symbolical recognition from Rome meant a strengthening of papal power – in the context of the theological culture of these new movements that do not see themselves as movements of “Church reform” in the sense of institutional and theological reform, but rather of “ecclesial renewal”.²⁴

7. *Episcopalism and Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church*

We are seeing the effects of the “weaponization” of the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church – especially in those Catholic Church polarized by at least three decades of so-called “culture wars”. On a superficial and popular level, there is the attempt to use the crisis either for an

²² See Giampietro Ziviani, *Una Chiesa di popolo. La parrocchia nel Vaticano II* (Bologna: EDB, 2011), esp. 216-219.

²³ See Massimo Faggioli, “Introduzione”, in *Commentario ai documenti del Vaticano II*. Vol. 4: *Christus Dominus, Optatam Totius, Presbyterorum Ordinis*, eds. Serena Noceti and Roberto Repole (Bologna: EDB, 2017), pp. 13-40.

²⁴ See Massimo Faggioli, *Sorting Out Catholicism: Brief History of the New Ecclesial Movements* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

argument against the tradition of clerical celibacy or, on the other side of the ideological spectrum, in the attempt to scapegoat homosexuality – despite the fact that serious scholarship denies the direct, causal connection between the phenomenon of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church and celibacy or homosexuality. It is perceptible also, at the level of the institutional and ecclesiastical discourse, the attempt to create a connection between the reforms of Vatican II and the sexual abuse crisis in the Church. It must be said clearly that the sexual abuse crisis should not be used to make an argument for the reversal of Vatican II: not only because there is no question that the future of Catholic ecclesiology must be built following the footsteps of Vatican II, but also because it is well known that the phenomenon of sexual abuse did not begin in the 1960s, and that the phenomenon of sexual abuse in the Church takes place also in Catholic communities where the reception of Vatican II was not synchronical with the social and cultural upheaval of the sixties like in Western Europe and North America.

However, the sexual abuse crisis is one of the signs of our times and we must look at it to cast a light on the situation of the Church and also on ecclesiology, and in particular on the ecclesiology of episcopacy and on the institutional expressions of that ecclesiology at all levels - local, central, and national-continental.

Also as a response to the incomplete ecclesiology of Vatican I and its declarations on papal primacy and infallibility, the ecclesiology of Vatican II emphasized the authority of the bishops both in communion with the pope (“episcopal collegiality”) and monarchically in their own diocese. This theological development happened also at the expense of the power, in local dioceses, of the priests, of the religious orders, and also of the laity.

The sex abuse crisis cast a light on the consequences of this heterogenesis of the theology of the episcopacy. That theology was supposed to avoid the dangers of an “imperial” papacy in the Catholic Church and managed to do it with a doctrine on episcopal collegiality that represented a decisive step forward in the realization of a Church as it is described in *Lumen Gentium*. At the same time, it failed to create at the local level a theological culture and institutional structures able to translate episcopal collegiality into a collegiality between the bishops and its presbyterium and the entire people of God.

The sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church is a Catholic crisis, and not just a “clergy sex abuse crisis”: it is a crisis not just of the episcopate, but also of the theology of the episcopacy. This casts a new light on the theology of Vatican II in the context of the history of

episcopalism and of the last two and half centuries of Catholic ecclesiology.²⁵ This is a more fundamental issue than the need to review the meaning of ecclesiastical nomenclature in light of abuse crisis (e.g. bishops, archbishops, metropolitans, etc.). This is so not only because the crisis has fueled the calls for new inquisitorial systems and a new centralization of the Church in Rome as the tribunal; and not only because the different approaches to the crisis have created an unprecedented (in modern times) rift between the papacy and a national episcopate (as seen in the USA in the summer of 2018, and, in different terms, in Chile earlier in 2018), but because the abuse crisis puts into question the overarching narrative about the development of Church's hierarchical structures over the last few centuries about papacy and episcopacy.

The episcopalism of the major institutional reforms of Vatican II (episcopal collegiality; the Bishops' Synod; national bishops' conferences; new relations between the ordinary, his presbyterium, and religious orders in the diocese) refers to Trent and Vatican I as well as to the ecclesiology of Vatican II. The push for synodality and against clericalism has been very visible from pope Francis, but it still has to be converted into new ecclesiastical institutions for the governance of the Catholic Church.²⁶ The crisis of Vatican II episcopalism also calls into question of the institutions and the contents in the formation of priests in diocesan seminaries²⁷. The abuse crisis interacts not only with the discussion of ordained ministry in the Church (*virii probati*, clerical celibacy, women deacons) and on the ministry of women, but it also questions

²⁵ See Shaun Blanshard, "The Ghost of Pistoia: Evocations of 'Auctorem Fidei' in the Debate over Episcopal Collegiality at Vatican II," *Theological Studies*, 79/1 (2018): 60-85; Id., *The Synod of Pistoia and Vatican II: Jansenism and the Struggle for Catholic Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁶ For example, see Francis, *Letter to the People of God* (August 20, 2018) http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didido.html; Francis, *Address to the Roman Curia* (December 21, 2018) http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2018/december/documents/papa-francesco_20181221_curia-romana.html; Francis, *Letter to the Bishops of the United States of America*, January 1, 2019 <http://uscgb.org/about/leadership/holy-see/francis/upload/francis-lettera-washington-traduzione-inglese-20190103.pdf>.

²⁷ About this, see the document produced by the seminar sponsored by Boston College between September 2016 and the summer of 2018, with a set of proposals on the formation of future priests: "To Serve the People of God: Renewing the Conversation on Priesthood and Ministry", *Origins*, vol. 48 n. 31, December 27, 2018, pp. 484-493. See also Sandra Yocum, "The Priest and Catholic Culture as Symbolic System of Purity", in *Clergy Sexual Abuse: Social Science Perspectives*, eds. Claire M. Renzetti and Sandra Yocum (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2013) pp. 90-117.

the Trent-to-Vatican II assumption of a certain territoriality of the Catholic Church based on the diocesan and parish structure inherited by the early Church from the Roman Empire. The territoriality of the diocesan presbyterium was one of the roots of a misplaced sense of solidarity between priests and their bishop in the cover-up of crimes; territoriality was also a misused “asset” in the pattern of transfer of abusive priests to another parish or another diocese instead of their removal from ministry.

But there is also a political and institutional side of the episcopalism of Vatican II. The growth in the relevance of the episcopate in the Catholic Church was part of a kind of “reparations” that the institutional Catholic Church (the Holy See and the bishops) received in terms of political recognition from the secular state during the 20th century, after the turbulent period of relations between Church and State in the “long nineteenth century” beginning with the French revolution and ending with the two world wars. These “reparations” were in terms of symbolical recognition (the bishop as the sole interlocutors of the secular state on behalf and in the name of the Church), but not only (the meaning of the age of concordats for the growth of the role of the episcopates).

The solution of the “Roman question” between 1870 (fall of the Papal States) and 1929 (Lateran Treaties) gave the papacy an institutional and political stability vis-à-vis the nation state and international political order that extended its benefits also to the episcopate thanks to the unique and growing hierarchical dependence of the bishops from the pope. In this sense, one of the problems in the governance of the Catholic Church today is that the episcopalism of Vatican II not just followed, but also imitated the papalism of Vatican II: a new focus on episcopal authority that reflected more the context of the growing papal power following *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican I than a really new balance of power in the Church consistent with the ecclesiology of the people of God and of *communio*.

8. *Conclusions*

The abuse crisis pushes the Church to take a new look at great ecclesiological achievements of Vatican II such as the collegiality and sacramentality of the episcopacy. More generally, the failure of episcopal leadership in dealing with the crisis cannot be separated from a certain

episcopalism of Vatican II: an emphasis on the rights of bishops in order to limit the power of the papacy, but in the end also in order to limit most other systems of “checks and balances” in the constitution of the Catholic Church.

A reform of the governance of the Catholic Church must go back to the text and the spirit of Vatican II, but also be aware of the shortcomings of the ecclesiology of Vatican II and of its unintended consequences. The sexual abuse crisis and the financial scandals in the Catholic Church are questioning some paradigms in ecclesiology and in the ecclesiology of Church reform. A paradigm of Church reform now in crisis is *the episcopalist paradigm*. This is not only an issue of the institutional culture of Church structures dealing with abuse crisis (e.g. the Roman Curia and the papacy, the national bishops’ conferences, the religious orders)²⁸, but also and more fundamentally a question about the theology of the episcopacy and the role of the episcopate in the government of the Church.

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Abstract

The sex abuse crisis in the Catholic Church is not just a crisis of governance, but also a crisis in the theological model of Church governance. The Second Vatican Council represents a key moment in the development of a peculiar kind of episcopalism. The reforms of Vatican II and of the post-Vatican II period about the liturgical reform, the episcopal conferences, the Roman Curia and the Bishops’ Synod – they have all enhanced the role of the episcopacy together with the papacy. The abuse crisis pushes the whole Church to take a new look at great ecclesiological achievements of Vatican II such as the collegiality and sacramentality of the episcopacy, but also at the unintended consequences of those achievements. One of the paradigms of Church reform now in crisis is *the episcopalist paradigm*, and it’s necessary to consider this in light of the

²⁸ See Marie Keenan, “The Organizational and Institutional Culture of the Catholic Church”, in *Child Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 24-53.

present call for a synodal Church.