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From the Editor's Desk

I tell you the truth, it is better for you that I go.
For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you.
But if I go, I will send him to you (Jn 16:7).

This and several surrounding verses, omitted from the Gospel reading for Pentecost Sunday, help set the context in which we, like the Johannine community, find ourselves after the resurrection of Jesus. The verses remind us of our hope as we make our pilgrim way in time and space. The church's post-Easter phase is all about transitions, a phase that continues unabated to the end of time. We are promised the Comforter, the One who strengthens us for the journey. Indeed, Jesus tells us that his death (in John seen as his return to the Father)—excruciating as it was for him and devastating for his disciples—is actually better for us. It signals the coming of his Spirit who will “guide [us] to all truth.” John concludes his Gospel, in fact, by telling us that this guidance will bring us into the fullness of Jesus' revelation—a guidance needed because if everything Jesus had done “were written down, . . . the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (21:25, RSV). He and his revelation are the storehouse from which, under the guidance of his Spirit, the good scribe in Matthew “brings out from his treasure what is new and what is old” (Mt 13:51–52).

This issue of *Theological Studies* begins the journal's year-long commemorative reflection on the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. Church councils are privileged moments when the church gathers to assess its condition, usually to clarify and regulate its teaching, typically by issuing approved texts to declare the *sensus ecclesiae* on disputed questions and to provide pastoral guidance in changing circumstances. As the church's very first council was marked by the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), so all subsequent councils are held with the conviction that the same Holy Spirit descends upon and educates the church gathered in council.

While we Christians believe that such gatherings are privileged moments of divine guidance, we also believe, in accord with Jesus' testimony, that even outside those privileged moments the Spirit guides our drawing from the conciliar treasury both what is old and what is new. In other words, in postconciliar periods the church lives out of its treasury, both its most recent accumulations as well as its entire storehouse of Scripture and magisterial teaching. This realization is a great comfort—“I will not leave you orphaned” (Jn 15:18).

For 50 years now the church has been drawing on the riches of Vatican II together with all previously accumulated riches. In commemorating this jubilee, however, *Theological Studies* will consider primarily what has been drawn most deliberately from Vatican II's storehouse. I would, however, express a cautionary note about this “drawing from.” Clearly, the most important store consists of the approved constitutions, decrees, and declarations. But a multitude of other documents written and preserved during the council offers an amazingly rich adjunct of materials to help us interpret the approved texts. After all, if Sacred Scripture is not self-explanatory, neither are conciliar documents.

Studying the store of complementary documents to throw light on the conciliar texts is a strategy that the church dare not neglect lest it fall into presumption. The Holy Spirit will be present to guide qualified scholars in this latter strategy, just as she was in authoring the conciliar texts themselves. This is where the church's

theologians most significantly carry out their mission within and for the church and the world. Not that they speak magisterially in the official way that the papal and episcopal magisterium does. But they do speak with analogous authority, just as the council's *periti* did in developing the documents that the council eventually approved.

Interpretations of conciliar texts, expressed in publications, lectures, and homilies, become part of what is added to the ecclesial storehouse as the church journeys on in time. Eventually, under the Spirit's guidance, another council will be called so that the church may again draw on its cache of conciliar and complementary texts to take stock of its status.

After Vatican II, such a process is likely to require considerably more time than for previous councils, as technological advances enabled a store of documents far exceeding that for any previous council. In his 2005 Christmas address to his curia, Pope Benedict marked the 40th anniversary of Vatican II's closure by reflecting on the question, "What has been the result of the council?" He identified two hermeneutics of the council, one of "discontinuity and rupture" and one of "reform." An ongoing dispute over "the true spirit of the council" and its "deepest intention" has ensued.

We all desire to read the documents in the "true spirit of the council." But this begs the question how we will do so. Benedict wisely observed that to interpret according to the council's "true spirit," one must have a "vital relationship with" whatever truth one is attempting to express. If it is a truth of faith, one must be living this faith. Benedict quoted John XXIII's speech opening the council that the context of a living faith-doctrine "should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and . . . literary forms of modern thought." In the case of Vatican II, this injunction requires careful historical reconstruction of the conciliar processes, such as authoring the documents. That in turn requires again studying not only the approved texts but also the complementary documents archived during and after the council.

A further word of caution: In a sobering article entitled "Quanto concilio ancora da studiare" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, May 1, 2012), Piero Doria, the Vatican archivist charged with reorganizing the vast store of Vatican II papers, gives some of the history of these papers, many of which are "still unexplored" but "have a great value for understanding both the spirit of the council and the correct hermeneutic of the documents." Doria also notes that during and after the council many papers were misplaced or went missing; some have been recovered, but others are still missing, most importantly the register of protocol of the theological commission *De doctrina fidei et morum*. He makes it clear that reconstructing the workings of the council so as better to understand what happened there and what the conciliar texts mean will be a long-term process.

The commemorative articles published in this issue of *Theological Studies* and in future issues will give us a good sense of what we can know of the council to this point in time. While scholarly conclusions will always be more or less tentative, and while studying the great store of conciliar texts and complementary papers will be demanding, we can be confident that the articles will participate in the Holy Spirit's effort to lead us into all truth. So we pray.

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