

“Empowered by the Spirit: Sketching Next Steps in Church Renewal, Lay Leadership, and the Rejection of Clericalism” Conversation Guide



This conversation guide consists of both questions for discussion and a list of resources referred to in the lecture. Facilitators may wish to make use of these other resources as a part of their presentation and discussion of the materials. In utilizing this guide, we recommend facilitators choose those questions most helpful to the purpose of their group.

View this lecture here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUJJ3Erm5hU&t=3s>

Questions for Conversation:

- Dr. Horan begins by discussing how many Catholic Christians have an “insufficient pneumatology,” including and sometimes especially those entrusted with leadership in the church. Even though we profess to believe in the Holy Spirit, Dr. Horan says many Catholics practice “Holy Spirit atheism.” Do you agree with this assessment that the Holy Spirit is often neglected in practice? Where do you think this neglect stems from?
- Dr. Horan interprets apathy in light of its Greek origin meaning “without suffering.” Apathy is a condition of fearing suffering and so refusing to be present to the suffering of others in order to protect oneself. Where do you see an apathetic attitude at work in church and society today?
- How does the combination of apathy and Holy Spirit atheism lead the church away from its true calling and contribute to failures in leadership?
- Dr. Horan outlines how a suppression of the *sensus fidelium*, the sense of the faithful guided by the Holy Spirit, leads to a unidirectional, top-down understanding of the development of doctrine and church discipline. This mistaken interpretation reinforces the idea that doctrine and discipline are only decided by the ordained and passively received by the laity. This understanding, driven by the neglect of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the *sensus fidelium*, makes many Catholics, both lay and ordained, afraid of frank conversations about the development of doctrine and church discipline. For example, Dr. Horan says we can see the fear of frank conversations around priestly

celibacy and the role of women in the church. In what other arenas do you notice a fear of frank conversations driven by the suppression of the *sensus fidelium*?

- Pre-Vatican II church teaching emphasized the church as a “perfect society,” essentially different from civil society and sufficient on its own. By examining the church’s history and reflecting on its calling, the Second Vatican Council realized that the church is always already in the world, and that, as *Gaudium et Spes* puts it, whatever afflicts the people of this age afflicts the people of God. Today those afflictions include xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and racism. Yet many today still imagine and think of the church as that separate, perfect society. How does this understanding of the church foster fear and apathy when it comes to addressing the afflictions of today?
- Dr. Horan describes the expectation and attitude that priests are superior to the rest of the People of God and should rule over them as a consequence of a larger culture of clericalism. As he says, cultures provide people with narratives that structure their societies and imaginations. What narratives support the culture of clericalism?
- Dr. Horan outlines how the Medieval and Renaissance conception of “ontological change” has misled both priests’ and lay people’s conception of Holy Orders. According to this idea, after ordination the priest’s very ontology, or being, has changed. This change tends to be interpreted as giving the priest a new power, so that he alone makes the sacraments effective through his power. However, this is a corruption of our understanding of the sacraments, where it is the power of Christ through the Spirit which brings about the grace of the sacraments, not the power of the priest himself. How do you think this misunderstanding reflects an inadequate theology of the Holy Spirit?
- How might we arrive at a better theology of priesthood through an emphasis on priesthood as relational rather than ontological? How would this relational interpretation better reflect a robust theology of the Holy Spirit?
- According to *Lumen Gentium*, the Holy Spirit sanctifies the church and leads the People of God, distributing “special graces through the faithful of every rank.” How does the teaching of that document, as well as the theology of Yves Congar discussed by Dr. Horan, help us begin to move from a juridical model of the church to an understanding of the church rooted in the Holy Spirit?
- Dr. Horan argues that much of what is needed for an authentic renewal of the church is present in the core of our teachings but has not yet been actualized, in part because we do not actually act as though we believe in the Holy Spirit. What do you think a church that embraces the Spirit would look like?

Resources:

Survivor Support

If you have been the victim of abuse in the Catholic Church, please reach out to someone.

Below are contact points that can help.

RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline	800-656-HOPE (4673) or online chat
Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests	Assistance Line: 1-877-SNAP-HEALS (877-762-7432)
Victim Assistance Coordinators	Click here to contact a victim assistance coordinator in your diocese.

- For reports and documents on the abuse crisis, educational information, and steps on how to take action, visit <http://catholiclayresponse.com/>.
- Dan Horan describes “**Holy Spirit atheism**” in his column for the National Catholic Reporter: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/faith-seeking-understanding/church-suffering-holy-spirit-atheism>
- Discussing the *sensus fidelium*, Horan quotes from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, par. 12. He also describes *Lumen Gentium* as a beginning point for a Constitution on the Holy Spirit: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html
- Orlando Espín discusses the *sensus fidelium* in his book *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism*.
- *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, explores how the Church is always already in the world, not separate from it: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html
- Reflecting a pre-Vatican II understanding of church and society, Pope Leo XIII discusses the church as a “perfect” society separate from civil society in the 1885 encyclical

Immortale Dei: http://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_01111885_immortale-dei.html

- In his **2018 letter to the People of God**, Pope Francis reflects on the harm that the sexual abuse crisis caused to victim/survivors, their families, and the whole Church. He acknowledges clericalism as a root cause of the crisis and its cover-up: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180820_lettera-popolo-didio.html
- The Association of U.S. Catholic Priests' document on **Confronting the Systemic Dysfunction of Clericalism** can be found here: <https://www.futurechurch.org/sites/default/files/Model%204%20A%20-AUSCP%20White%20Paper-Systemic%20Dysfunction%20Clericalism.pdf>
- Sociologist **George Wilson, S.J.** discusses the culture of clericalism in his book *Clericalism: The Death of Priesthood*.
- Pope Pius X refers to the laity as the “docile flock” and the Church as an “unequal society” in the 1906 encyclical **Vehementer Nos**: http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html.
- **Yves Congar's** three-volume work on the Holy Spirit is gathered together under the title *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*.
- Pope Francis discusses Baptism, through which we all enter the Church as lay people, in his **2016 letter to the president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America**: http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160319_pont-comm-america-latina.html