

**THE CHURCH AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH
SOME POINTS FOR REFLECTION AT
THE THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLY**

by

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This position paper has been prepared for the Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), held at Lux Mundi Seminary, in Sampran, Thailand, near Bangkok, 20th-27th October, 1982. The theme of the Plenary Assembly is: "The Church — a Community of Faith in Asia."

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I. Introduction

1. Previous “common statements” of the FABC: the first plenary assembly in Taipei (1974) and the second plenary assembly in Calcutta (1978) dealt with evangelization and prayer, respectively. The 1970 statement of the Asian Bishops’ Meeting (Manila, during Pope Paul VI’s visit) and the Colloquium on Ministries in the Church in Asia (Hong Kong 1977) took up the role of the Church in Asia in the context of the development of peoples (*Populorum progressio*) and the present and future of ministries in the Catholic Church in Asia. The International Congress on Mission (Manila, 2-7 December, 1979) focused on missionary presence and action in Asia. The third plenary assembly of the FABC in Bangkok, October, 1982, will be the first one explicitly to address itself to the theme of *COMMUNITY* — the Church as community, as community *OF FAITH*, as community of faith *IN ASIA*.

If we were trying to collocate these various themes in a theological schema, one might say (in rough approximation) that Manila 1970 and

Taipei 1974 addressed themselves to the Church's task in the world: *mission* and *diakonia*, the "societal" dimension; that Calcutta 1978 focused on prayer and interiority (and also inculturation): the "intrapersonal" dimension. And now Bangkok 1982 will deal primarily with the "communitarian, interpersonal" aspects of the Church's structure, being, life and action.

2. For the sake of narrowing our theme, we might begin by saying that the choice of "model": — the Church as community of faith in Asia today represents a *choice* among various images and models. *Not* that other images and models are set aside.

For example: the Church as institutional, hierarchical society (linked up more explicitly with the juridical/canonical "perfect society" paradigm); or the Church as Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit (the "mystical communion" model); or even the Church as pilgrim People of God within the world and within "secular history", etc.

— But the choice of model *does* place accents on certain characteristics, dimensions, factors/elements within the Church's structure, being, life, actin/passion, mission and endterm. These we consider preferentially, without entirely sidetracking other aspects. We "distinguish to unite" — in later, more comprehensive consideration.

II. Part One: The "Community Paradigm"

3. Let us consider the ecclesiological "community paradigm" first of all.

3.1. It does not seem necessary to go into an elaborate exposition of the term *community* in either its daily use, or its philosophical or theological understandings. A few selected points will suffice.

3.2. The "community-model." The perfect "society-model" of late 19th-century and early 20th-century schoolbook ecclesiology was characterized by its predominantly canonical/juridical accents: "the church-model of canon lawyers" of the time. The "society-model" was reductionist with regard to the "Kingdom of God" theme in the Scriptures: *visible Church = perfect society = the Kingdom (plus minusve)*. This paradigm tended to place authority (efficient cause) and individual salvation (final cause) as the primordial ecclesial elements, to the neglect of other, more fundamental ecclesial dimensions (e.g., anthropological, communal).

4.1. The Church as *community*. Here we can only enumerate rather summarily the operative elements of this paradigm. Prescinding from the incorporation of the “society-model” elements into this model (*media* “institutionalia” *salutis*: the Scriptures, the sacramental signs, the ministries and authority, the visible structures of the institution), we can distinguish two “levels”:

4.2. “Level One”: the *interpersonal*, and in this sense the “anthropological side.” The Church as matrix of human interpersonal relationships; not merely functional ones. The Church is a *coming-together of human persons* — summoned by the Gospel, assembled by the Spirit (cf. below) — in mutual relationships of knowing, understanding, communication, sharing, concern, caring, serving, etc.

4.3. “Level Two”: in which level one is (and must be) rooted, the deeper “graced, mystical side.” The Church’s *communion* substratum, so to speak, *ecclesia ut communio in Christo*. The Church *de vita Trinitatis*: sharing in and “realizing within the body of the faithful” the inner life of the Father, Son and Spirit.

The development and reaching-out of this *koinonia*, in increasingly wider circles: both within the Church (*ad intra*) and beyond it, in the larger human community (*ad extra*), through the action of the Spirit, overcoming divisions among men, destroying the structures of selfish interest and injustice, creating spaces of compassion, forgiveness, justice, brotherhood . . .

4.4. A lapidary formulation text: “Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, that we have seen with our own eyes; that we have watched and touched with our hands, the Word who is life . . . What we have seen and heard we are telling you, so that you too *may be in communion with us*, as we are *in communion with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ*” (1 John, 1 ff.). This community begins with the experience (both personal and within community) of Jesus (and of his Spirit), and grows in widening circles through communion and communication, through the ministry of Word (Gospel) and Sacrament, *koinonia, marturia, diakonia* . . . The community (in ever-widening circles) reaches out toward “the larger world” and developing history for the initial “realization” of the Kingdom of God.

5. From the paradigm of Church as community, communication, communion, derive certain immediate consequences, which we will merely enumerate here, without much exposition:

— a certain primary attention to *the local community*, (the primary attention in many New Testament texts, to be sure) with its very concrete, down-to-earth exchanges of ecclesial life: the community as primary locus of the presence of Christ, of the action of the Spirit and the brotherhood and oneness of all in the Father, and of the “actualization” of this communion/presence and communion/action in the daily life of the community of the faithful.

6.1. A central element in the reality of Christian *communio* is the Eucharist and the local eucharistic assembly. “The Church makes the Eucharist, and the Eucharist makes the Church.” The *reality* (at least incipient) of the Christian community, responding to the summons of the Word, assembles to celebrate the Eucharist. There the Word of the Gospel is proclaimed to call forth unity in and of faith, and under the signs of bread and wine Christ’s body and blood are shared so that in him and through him the community is made, truly, *Church*, one in his Spirit, one in his love. The love of Christ, crucified and risen, works within the community to truly make it “Church” *in fact*, by opening each to his all-embracing self-gift, breaking down by his love the walls of division within each heart and within the community, creating spaces and channels of forgiveness and oneness.

6.2. *Within the community*: — the sharing of gifts and the sharing of responsibilities (collegiality and coresponsibility):

Sharing of gifts: everyone has his/her gifts, both from nature and from grace (in both cases from God), talents *and* charisms, which in measure denote tasks and vocations in life, and a place and service within the Body of Christ;

6.3. *sharing of responsibilities*: the ministries, rooted in the charisms, are participations in the life and service of the Church, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*: no one (even the bishop!) has a monopoly of ministry, responsibility, etc., in the community, although the pastoral office demands the tasks of animation, leadership, direction from its holders;

6.4. and thus the necessity of diverse gifts, tasks, ministries, and the working-together and coordination of these diverse community-realities within the community (the Spirit is not a Spirit of anarchy and confusion).

7. The role of “*process*,” of development and growth as a community: the “growth and/or decline” of the community on its way to “realization” as a community of the Gospel (cf. below, discipleship and mission); this is a process placed within a given time in history, and thus within a very concrete context of people and situations; the role of communitarian *discernment* “*in the Spirit*” within this process.

These are some consequences of the notion of community, and its underlying *communion, koinonia*.

(EXCURSUS)

The Church: Communio and Community

The latest (supplement) volume of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* — correctly, we believe, — tells us that “the primary model of the Church for Pope John Paul II’s understanding of the community of faith is that of the Church as *communio*.” — Perhaps these (direct) quotations will indicate some of the key elements which enter into this “understanding of the community of faith”:

(a) “Communion in the New Testament implies that Christians partake in Christ by receiving his Spirit and that they enter at the same time a fellowship with each other in sharing different gifts. . . . Paul’s reference to sharing in the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist at the Lord’s Supper came to be regarded as the special moment in the Church’s celebration of its unity. The distinctive Pauline motif in his use of communion is not principally our living in common, but our common sanctifying bond in Christ. . . . Sharing one’s possessions through financial support, sometimes referred to as *koinonia* (2 Cor 9:13; Rom 15:26; Heb 13:16), is an outward expression of participating in the gift of the Spirit” (Fahey, 13).

(b) Over the Christian centuries the notion of communion was more and more extended to the *horizontal* (communion between those who share in the common life of the Spirit of Christ) and in *institutional* aspects (relationships of mutual recognition, acceptance, communication, between various local churches, regarding baptism, penitential reconciliation, eucharistic hospitality. Ultimately (according to the historian Ludwig von Hertling) it came to mean “the bond that united the bishops and the faithful, the bishops among themselves, and the faithful among themselves, a bond that was both effected and at the same time made manifest by eucharistic communion.” (Hertling, 16) “In the Church after the New Testament period, communion was expressed in such ways as in regular collaboration of bishops at synods and at the installation of new bishops in neighboring churches, in mutual consultation about disciplinary and doctrinal issues, and in sharing eucharistic fellowship with visiting Christians in neighboring churches” (Fahey, 15).

(c) “. . . Communion from the viewpoint of the *New Testament* refers to the vertical relationship between believer and redeeming Lord. *Present theological usage* more commonly employs the term to describe the horizontal or ecclesiological implications of the Church’s charismatic structure, shared responsibility, and collective accountability” (Fahey, 17).

(d) *Communio* or *koinonia* in contemporary Catholic ecclesiological usage covers a very broad spectrum of senses: rooted in the intra-Trinitarian *circumincession* or *perichoresis* (communion within God), it includes also communion between God and human beings who share in the life of the Spirit, in a privileged manner within the community that is the Church.

It covers the bond of oneness and communication which "unites bishops and the faithful, bishops among themselves, and the faithful among themselves." Communion in the same sacraments (baptism, for instance) "realizes" and makes manifest this *koinonia*; the eucharist and the oneness in Christ which it effects ("may we one bread, one body be/in this blessed sacrament of unity") is both source and fullness of this unity. There is also interecclesial communion among churches united with one another in the *catholica*.

Churches united with one another and with the Roman See, touchstone and center of this *catholica unitas*, share with one another in so many ecclesial realities (intercommunication, cooperation within and across episcopal conferences, e.g., in theological reflection, liturgical developments, international meetings and synods, and the like). Today, in the ecumenical movement, there is talk too of interecclesial communion between *divided* churches.

(e) Finally, some theologians speak of the extension — the reaching out — of Gospel and the power of the Spirit "outside the Church" to "realize" progressively the Lordship of Christ as the realization, too, of *koinonia*: the fulfillment within history of the work of redemption through the power of the Gospel and its values, and the power of the Spirit working — in and through the Church and the Gospel — to bring about unity in truth, justice, brotherhood and peace within mankind.

Admittedly, these diverse uses of the notion of *koinonia* in contemporary theological writing widen it almost beyond any specific meaning. Perhaps more properly for our purposes its meaning should be kept within the boundaries of the local churches in unity and communication with each other and with the Roman See which presides over the *koinonia* in charity.

III. Part Two: Community of Faith

8. Secondly, we turn our attention to the second segment of the title: community of FAITH, to draw out its implications (those, i.e., not explicitly covered in the preceding paragraphs).

To speak of the Church as community of faith is to insist on the (local) church as a "place" of the receiving and "realizing" of the Word: the community is summoned by the Word of God in Christ; it is assembled by the proclaiming of that Word: the Gospel is a word spoken from person to person, from personal faith to personal faith, and ultimately, from Christ in and through his Spirit, to the believer. This dialogue of the Gospel is at the root of the Christian community. The "receiving of the Gospel" by individuals and by the community as a communication, interpersonally realized and accepted, is at the very core

of the meaning and reality of the community of faith. The community shares the “common story” which is the “story of Jesus” in which its meaning, and the meaning of all the personal lives which are gathered in this community, is offered. The individual lives, and the community’s life is thus an interiorizing (conviction) and an expressing, a living out (responsibility) of the story of Jesus.

Community: Discipleship

9. Hence a community of faith *must be*, necessarily (by intrinsic logic) a community of discipleship (and of course, of friendship), as well as a community of mission — perhaps better, a community in mission.

Discipleship (drawn mainly from the New Testament understanding of discipleship). We would be tempted to develop here a whole theology of discipleship, were it not for the limitations of this paper. The following indications will have to suffice for now.

9.1. Discipleship begins with the call or summons of the Lord himself spoken in and through the Spirit, spoken in and through the proclamation of the Gospel. — The Gospel accounts of the calling of the disciples make it abundantly clear that “the initiative ... is all on the side of Jesus. The disciples are called by him without preparation or merit” (D. Senior). The call to discipleship is always “an unmerited gift”: Faith is a grace. And response to this gift is also a grace. The gift of discipleship, the response of discipleship, and growth in discipleship are all gifts from the gratuitous initiative of God.

9.2. Discipleship is the following of Jesus, a following after Jesus, a personal relationship with Jesus. “The disciples have almost no life of their own apart from their relationship with Jesus.” “There is little, if anything, of Jesus’ life that is not shared with the disciples; they are his constant companions” (D. Senior).

9.3. Discipleship thus means an acceptance of the “story of Jesus”; of the meanings and values he embodied in his life and teaching; the interiorizing of these as norm and pattern, inspiration and energy of one’s own and the community’s being, life and action.

Discipleship means *growing* continually in Jesus and in his Spirit. This growing (cf. above) is a *process*; it takes time; it means *praxis*, the praxis of discipleship”; it means learning to discern decisions and deeds in the Spirit — within the community.

9.4. Discipleship means “learning the way of the Cross” as the law of the life of discipleship, as the core of the message of the Gospel, as the “story” which one must traverse if one will mature in the discipleship, if one is to grow in authenticity of Christian love and the service of the brethren.

9.5. “To be a disciple is to be part of a new community, a new polity, which is formed on Jesus’ obedience on the cross. The constitutions of the new polity are the Gospels. The Gospels are not just the depiction of a man, but they are manuals for the training necessary to be part of the new community. To be a disciple means to share Christ’s story, to participate in the reality of God’s rule. . . .

“Christians learn the power of this rule by loving as God has loved through Jesus’ life. . . . It is through such love that Christians learn that they are to serve as he served. Such service is not an end in itself, but reflects the Kingdom into which Christians have been drawn. This means that Christians insist on service which may appear ineffective to the world. For the service that Christians are called upon to provide (has) as its aim . . . to demonstrate that Jesus has made possible a new world, a new social order” (Hauerwas, 49).

10. This discipleship means following Jesus along the way of the cross because it shares

— in his, and his Father’s, preference for the poor and the little ones of the world (Luke);

— in his journey “through the dark side of the world” (John);

— and in the totality of his self-gift in love (e.g., as in the lives of the saints, throughout Christian history and in our time — Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Archbishop Oscar Romero, Rutilio Grande, Maximilian Kolbe).

Community, Discipleship and Mission

11. (especially in the New Testament) Discipleship, according to the Gospels, effects ongoing conversion and transformation. Contact with Jesus, being with him, learning his attitudes and values, growing in him, changes a person and begins in and around him/her the presence of the Kingdom of God.

11.1. To describe his own mission, Jesus cited the passage from Isaiah: “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” The

Kingdom Jesus proclaimed would be the realization (“already but not yet”) of all this: a new order in humanity, men and women at one with God in fidelity of heart, the human community a community of freedom and justice, of brotherhood and peace.

11.2. Jesus empowers his disciples for a participation in his mission. He sends the Twelve to take part of his own task, his own redemptive mission: to proclaim the Gospel and to be the pillars of God’s definitive rule over mankind. They are to be his witnesses to the Church which was to come. Hence mission is “a constitutive part” of their experience and their discipleship; their discipleship was discipleship in and for mission.

11.3. Their mission would entail the following of *his*: the proclamation of the Kingdom to all peoples (in the name authority and power of the Risen Lord, Mt 28:16-20) and God’s saving work in the whole world. It would announce good news to the poor and to “people of no account” in the world — God’s own preference for them, his vindication of them and their cause. Their mission would meet opposition, persecution, encounter with hostile powers. It would go through the struggle with the powers of darkness and “the world” which was in conflict with God; it would pass through the pattern of death and new life — after the pattern of Jesus.

IV. Part Three: The Community of Faith — Its Self-Realization

12. The Church community “constituting itself” in the world.

We have dealt with some aspects (as somewhat *disiecta membra*, unfortunately!) of the Church as community of faith = community of discipleship and mission. Here we must add a few lines on the constitution of the (local) church as community, the “realization” (= self-realization) of the local church *as Church*. Some few affirmations will have to suffice: (Cf. J. Komonchak).

12.1. (a) All members of the Church, including — and in a true way, *especially* — the laity, have the right and responsibility to participate in the building-up of the Church in the world. (b) For the Church is the *historical subject* of its own “self-realization,” under the Word of God, and in the power of the guiding Spirit. And the first instance of this “building up of the Church in the world” is the local church within its own concrete context in history.

12.2. (c) The Church as a community (= the local church, as first instance) is “the effect in the world of God’s self-gift and self-

communication in Christ and in the Spirit.” The Church comes to its true “realization” as the presence and action in the world of the Father’s saving grace in Christ and through the Spirit; as a *human community* (graced, redeemed, called together in Christ) which “realizes” itself more and more through the life and activity of its members in community, discipleship and mission. This “self-realization,” “self-constitution” in Christ’s grace, under the leading of Christ’s Spirit takes place through the actualization of common experience; through the achievement of common understandings, common meanings and values; through coming-together in common discernment, common commitments and common activity.

12.3. (d) As we have said the primary *locus* for all this is (in the first instance) the local church. Community, discipleship and mission become *real* and *realize* the Church in the first instance in the local community. Thus the “creation of community” cannot abstract from the social and cultural conditions in which discipleship and mission are to be lived out. The “universal” in the Church is *mediated* by the concrete, the local, the here-and-now, as the local communities struggle to grow into their “*being Church*” in their world (cultural, social, political, economic and religious contexts).

13. Thus the local community “constitutes itself as Church” (“under the Gospel, by the power of the Spirit”) here and now through its discipleship and mission as concretely realized by *this* group of faithful people in their concrete situation(s) of time and history, place and culture. Here is rooted the task of inculturation, localization, contextualization. Discipleship and mission are not abstractions, but the living out of Christian faith (by faithful people in community) in very concrete situations — cultural, economic, social, political. E.g., the theology which will be operative in *this* community will arise from the wrestling of the Christian mind — relating Christian experience and meaning to the world in the midst of which this community is trying, struggling, to give reality and concrete shape to its own discipleship and mission.

14. “(The human acts by which its members realize the Church) are always posited by concrete men and women, living in cultural, social and political milieux, and drawn together in recognizable communities. The Church universal does not come to be because of some abstract or merely formal faith, hope and love. It is not the Word of God in general that gathers the Church in faith, but the Word as preached in specific interpretative contexts and as a response to concrete threats to authentic human and Christian meaning. The Church does not celebrate the Eucharist in general; it celebrates it in quite concrete human groups, and the communion effected in and through such a Eucharist overcomes quite concrete experiences of the

demonic power of evil in persons and social structures. The universal Church arises insofar as the several communities of faith, hope and love recognize and receive one another as redeemed for God by a common Savior and in a common Spirit" (J. Komonchak, 69-70).

15. Articulating the Community "From Below":

The Christian community builds itself up — more accurately, the Holy Spirit builds up the Church — both "from below" and "from above." The "larger Church" — the Church as one, one in the entire world, is "realized" in and through the concreteness of local communities: dioceses (in our present canonical structures *the "complete" local church* under its bishops); parishes . . .

15.1. Today, however, the "articulation" of the Church "from below" is seen most concretely (in most —?— places) in communities smaller than the parish and not organized "from above" (as parishes are), but in "smaller communities" and/or "basic ecclesial communities" where the principle of "meaningful interpersonal relationships" and of the "experience of community and *koinonia*" is primary in intent and actualization, — towards the maturation of faith.

15.2. There are the catechumenal and neocatechumenal communities, prayer groups and/or "charismatic" communities, several-family groups, work-and-profession communities (especially in more developed countries), and other "informal groupings/communities."

15.3. *The* most remarkable phenomenon in this area is of course the proliferation of genuine ecclesial base or grassroots communities all over the world, especially in Latin America, and some countries in Africa and Asia, as well as in the West. Fr. Yves Congar has somewhere remarked that they are the single most significant ecclesial "event" of our times. They certainly embody, for the Church, one of the great "signs of the times."

15.4. These communities arise "from below," in the sense that they are "at the grassroots," among simple (mostly materially poor) people, "little people" without power or voice in the larger society, often "victims" in many ways. They make up "the Church of the poor" in most countries where they exist and grow rapidly. These communities are often the context where the poor are enabled to come to an understanding of their human and Christian vocation as persons, as families, as communities, and thus are also enabled through conscientizing education, Scripture study, prayer, community work and action (praxis) — to become more and more *subjects* of their own lives and history, as free human beings, as sons and daughters of God.

There is more, infinitely more, that can and should be said about the “grassroots ecclesial communities.” But we cannot take much more space here, and these indications will have to suffice.

16. That these communities be true ecclesial communities, certain “conditions” would be looked for (*the six e’s*):

(a) that it be *the Gospel*, not any other elements, as, e.g., political ideology, merely social linkages, etc., which summons them to come together (*Évangile*);

(b) that their intent is truly to build up the *Church (Église)* and its life of faith, hope and love; to *participate* in a common life, ministry and action as people who want to “be, live and act together as Church”; not to establish some trade union or political organization or some other such objective;

(c) that they are in communion with the *bishop* and his episcopal office (*episkope, évêque*), and *not* set up against him and his pastorate in the local church;

(d) that this community is truly open to the *Spirit (Esprit-saint)*, and seeks truly to do the Spirit’s bidding, through every way that they may find his guidance and direction in discernment, decision, action;

(e) that their common life and Christian endeavors centre about the *Eucharist (eucharistie)* as the sacramental/symbolic focus of that life;

(f) finally, that they seek, in whatever ways are truly possible for them, to bring the Word and the service of the Gospel to the surrounding society (*évangélisation, mission.*)

17. Articulating the Community “From Above”: this is a misnomer: rather we should speak of articulation *towards* the “above” elements, i.e., the reaching out of the local community towards bonds of communion that are increasingly wider and more universal.

Very summarily: the local ministries and the community’s subgroups create linkages with other communities (e.g., family groups, catechists, etc.);

— pastors and leaders of the grassroots communities with their counterparts in other like communities;

— priests within the bonds of the presbyterium with their bishop;

— bishops with other bishops in episcopal conferences, regional, national, continental . . . international (synods of bishops, worldwide councils, etc.);

— episcopal collegiality with and under the leadership of the Bishop of Rome.

18.1. It might be noted that the structures of collegiality and communion tend (inevitably) to be more impersonal and functional when one enters into progressively more and more universal circles of communion.

18.2. “Community” in its “psychological, interpersonal, anthropological” sense is realized more really, more tangibly, more experientially the “lower down” one goes to the smaller groupings, the grassroots level. Here “community” is more meaningfully applied.

18.3. There is (once again) a necessary, inevitable tension between the centripetal and centrifugal movements in the life of the Church, between “systole” and “diastole” of the Church’s life-circulation. These two poles are both necessary, and necessarily in tension; the tension ought to be challenging and creative for the life and growth of the Church.

19. There is in this simultaneity and mutual relationship of “community from below” and “universal Church (from above)” an evident and insuperable law, which we must be aware of. The richer the very concreteness of community life is the more tangible its “love-climate,” the weaker is its capacity to express the “worldwideness” of the Church; the more this worldwideness is affirmed, the more we lose the concrete experience of the intimate common life of mutual knowledge, love, and common activity. Thus it is unavoidable that, as the Church assumes and extends the functions proper to its “catholic structure” the less one can expect the warmth of interpersonal relationships . . . and the characteristics of Church as society assume stronger and clearer shape, while those of the Church as community recede. With the more universal aspects go an increasing accent on the juridical, the institutional, a certain anonymity and bureaucratization becomes more evident. Thus the Church as concrete local community and the Church as a worldwide organization become two distinct poles of an insuperable dialectic, which would seem to belong to the nature of the Church itself. A vigilant ecclesial sense will guard against the dangers — *either* of the community degenerating into a sect, closing up within its own limited experience, tending to become more subjective and arbitrary in its perspectives, *or* of the higher-level instances of the universal church stifling the freedom and spontaneity, the creativity and singularity of the smaller community, through the legalism, bureaucratism, the secularism of worldwide political strategies and policies. We are faced here with a fruitful dialectic which it would be tragic and harmful to suppress by eliminating one or other pole of vital tension (Dianich, 168).

V. Conclusion

20. What we have done in the previous pages is merely to provide a "check list" of themes and topics that can be explored when one studies "the Church as a community of faith" in contemporary theology.

The foregoing paragraphs thus give only a kind of outline for an article on "the Church as community of faith" in a theological encyclopedia. There is a score of particular themes, among the topics indicated above, which can be developed more fully, about which more concrete and particular questions can be raised and discussed.

21. Two themes especially seem to me worth exploring together:

(a) what the realization (more and more conscious in our experience) should mean: that the Church is the *active subject* of its own "self-realization as Church" (under the Gospel, under the Spirit, *surely*), and that this "self-realization" is the work of all those in the ecclesial community, including the laity, in communion and participation ... what this realization should mean to us, for the constructing of our local Church as community of faith;

and (b) what this "self-realization as Church" means very concretely in the here-and-now situations in the midst of which our local Asian churches are trying to live out more and more faithfully their local "discipleship and mission" ... and the working out in fact of this process, in relation to the articulation of the local Church "toward the greater Church" (in its universal dimensions) = relationships between the local Churches and the communion of Churches throughout the *catholica*, whose center and touchstone of unity is the Roman See.

22. It is hard, before FABC III actually convenes, to know what the bishops would really want to focus on, what aspects of this very broad theme, what questions, what problems, etc. These pages give something of a panoramic view. It is up to the participating bishops to take from this check list what *they* would really want to reflect on and discuss.

(Final note: in this draft of this paper, appropriately entitled "SOME POINTS" I have omitted the *footnotes*. They are rather numerous, and will be supplied in the final text of the paper, when — after necessary revisions — it is published in definitive form.)