

THIRD PLENARY ASSEMBLY: WORKSHOP DISCUSSION GUIDE**THE DIOCESE AND PARISH
AS COMMUNITIES OF FAITH****INTRODUCTION**

It is not yet twenty years since the end of the Second Vatican Council and already the fires of enthusiasm for aggiornamento that were lit then and swept through the Church in hope-generating blazes seem to be flickering and dying out now. In some quarters of the Church strong reactions have long gotten entrenched – even to the extent of putting the blame on the Council for the many crises and problems that have been plaguing the Church over the past decade and a half. Empty churches, depleted seminaries, moribund religious houses, marrying priests, “wild” liturgies, dissent on sexual morality, questioning of authority – these are among the many evils blamed on the liberalizing tendencies let loose by the Council. These problems are undoubtedly linked with the Council and they have had a weakening effect on the Church.

But *what* Church?

The question is by no means a cynical one. It is asked here in all seriousness. For if these problems are sapping the life of the Church in some parts of the world, in other parts, in other places, the initiatives launched and encouraged by Vatican II are, on the contrary, moving the Church from strength to strength. There are problems too, certainly, where these initiatives are being taken, but they are problems that come from a burgeoning, not an ebbing, life.

From this wide – possibly biased – view of the effects of the Council, three sociological facts can be noted offhand:

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1) When the problems — or, perhaps, it is better to say, the impulses of Vatican II — are regarded as enervating and hindering in some places, in others as enlivening and injecting a new spirit into the Church, the difference could well stem from a difference of outlooks: There is a dying and a rising in any process of renewal and change — necessarily. Could it be that in some places there is too much concern, even obsession, with the dying, not enough regard for the nurturing of the life that is trying to burst forth? Or, worse, could it be that the new life is being stifled and aborted?

2) The second fact is more prosaic but by no means less significant: Where an institution is more established, there one will find greater resistance to change, and more polarizations, more conflicts can be expected. Are the problems noted here limited only to such established Churches or are they common to all?

3) The third fact is that, whatever problems there are in any community, they can oftentimes be made to be catalysts for the greater life, not the deterioration, of the community; but this depends on how the community handles them, and the proper handling will in turn depend very much on the leadership exercised in the community.

The above observations and questions are not exactly what this workshop is all about. But since our subject has to do with diocesan and parish structures — institutions, that is — the fruitfulness of our discussion of it will hinge much on how deeply we want to go into the question suggested by the three facts: questions of how we look on life processes within the Church; questions of the part we want to play in how those same processes are institutionalized and structured within the Church; and, finally, questions of how Church leadership channels and leads those processes. For convenience, then, we will consider our *outlooks* on dioceses and parishes as communities of faith, the *structures* that are implicit in the notion of community of faith, and the *leadership* forms that are required by these communities.

The rationale for the division is quite easily stated: Our interest is in the diocese and parish as communities of faith. As communities, they necessarily have what sociologists call a “social structure,” the set of permanent relationships that exist between members of any human group that make up a community. Hence the need to look into the structuring of dioceses and parishes. The structures of a community, however, the relationships that compose those structures, do not run by themselves. There are rules governing them. These could be written or unwritten, and in this workshop we will be looking into these rules, not the written ones so much (canon law and its prescriptions or diocesan regulations promulgated by bishops) as the unwritten ones, those that correspond to what anthropologists call the

“cultural values, world views, norms and goals,” etc., of any people. And finally, since for the running of any community, there is need of authority, we must look into the leadership and patterns of leadership that must obtain in the communities of faith that we want to see developed in the Churches of Asia. It is hoped that with these three we will be able to come up with a holistic perspective on and approach to the reforming renewal that was the intent of Pope John XXIII when he convoked Vatican II.

I. OUTLOOKS

The two position papers of this Plenary Assembly are concerned with the theology of the Church as a community of faith and with the Asian contexts in which that theology is immersed. The first looks to the kind of ecclesiology that must underlie our discussions, more specifically, the theology of the Church as Communion. The second looks to the pastoral demands welling up from such a conception of Church as it is contextualized in Asian conditions. The double perspective on the kind of Church we should work to develop and on the Asian context of our theology and pastoral should serve as our own perspective too, our own starting point, and nothing more need be added. But perhaps the theological and pastoral points of view of the two papers could be enriched further from a sociological perspective. This perspective is subsumed by the position papers, but it will do no harm to make it even more explicit for the further insights it may afford us. Three points particularly deserve our attention: vision-formation, operative values and the attitudes or stances to be taken.

1. Vision-Formation

In any Church, any community of faith, the people have a vision — a mental model, that is — of what the Church community should be. It is often implicit, unexpressed. But for all its implicitness, the way they practice their faith will be shaped by this vision. This is a sociological phenomenon that social scientists have known for long: people of any and every cultural tradition have an idea of what their *ideal* culture is, the ideal way in which a member of their culture should act. They have, in other words, a *world view* that sums up in a more or less coherent way their outlook on the supernatural, on nature, on man. From this, it follows, they also have an idea of what their ideal society should be, a model of how their society functions and should function. Their knowledge, however, of these models, both of their culture and of their society, is often unreflected on, unexamined, uncriticized. And it is rare for the ordinary citizen to be able to give an adequate explanation of the whys and wherefores of his cultural behavior. He just knows that he must act and behave thus and so because so it is expected of him.

In situations of rapid change — as is the post-Vatican II period in the Church — old ways are superseded by new, bringing in its wake tremendous problems of role-definitions and self-definitions. People in this situation go through severe and wrenching doubts about their self-identity. And with good reason: A people's identity precisely as a people is most intimately bound up with their cultural traditions, and when these are lost or forgotten, there is a corresponding loss of a sense of direction to which many social ills are traceable. Thus it is that in many places in the Third World today the need for an analysis of culture and its processes, of a deeper and more reflex knowledge and understanding of culture, is being felt and, more importantly, met. The need is highlighted most sharply in situations of violent change when ideological considerations easily become the reintegrating forces in society and take over the functions that cultural values ordinarily fill.

If this kind of analysis is necessary — and it must be done by the people for themselves, not by experts alone for them — it is also necessary for a community of faith: They must act always from and according to the vision that is at the core of their Gospel faith; they must look into that vision, see what it entails for themselves precisely as a community of faith; they must analyze themselves as Church in its light. Self-analysis sounds too faddish, and it is like asking a whole community to put itself, as it were, on a psychiatrist's couch for psychoanalysis. But all it means is for people to be constantly aware of themselves as members of a community of faith, understand what their faith vision is, how it works in themselves and in their communities, whether it is strengthened or weakened by their cultural upbringing. In a word, they must have a clear idea of what it is to be Church in the cultural context of which they are part.

Several things happen when analysis of this sort is done:

1) The first step is taken in making the process of inculturation of the faith a more conscious and reflective process — a process which should be of great concern to this Plenary Assembly since inculturation is its principal sub-theme.

2) The reflection on the Gospel vision of community and the sharpening of a people's understanding of it, especially when cast against sheerly cultural or ideological visions, will make them reflect on their faith — *do theology*, in other words. If the indigenizing of theology is a legitimate concern, this is where and how it begins.

3) A vision of the Church, what it is or should be, what its mission and task are, will be clarified for and by the community in an ongoing and

ever-applicable way. This knowledge and self-understanding from both faith and culture, the process by which they are arrived at, continued and deepened — these cannot be stressed enough. For they have much to do with bringing about the life that must animate and permeate whatever structures will be set up, with developing the ideas that will be the nucleus of growth for those same structures.

2. Values

The cultural vision of any people of their society and community is best seen and expressed in the complex of values that are distinctive of themselves as a people. These values, in their distinctiveness, define their cultural self-identity. When faith is made to enter into a cultural vision, allowed to suffuse it, sublimate it, we have happening a crucial phase of the inculturative process.

Here we have to ask what is it that the faith does to a cultural vision when we say it *enters, suffuses, sublimates* it. There are a number of things that it “does,” but since we are talking in terms of values, we will put it in these terms: There are *faith-values* too, springing directly from the Gospel, that must be worked into the matrix of a culture by a people in order for them to be *also* communities of faith. These faith-values may or may not be equated to or coextensive with the cultural values of a people (most often they are — or at least can be found in germ in the latter, especially in their *ideal* manifestation). In any case, it is part of the process of analysis discussed in the preceding section on vision-formation to see whether or not they do. The task of the community does not end with the analysis but must go on to make the living and lived synthesis between faith-values and cultural-values which is demanded by inculturation.

What are some of the more important faith-values that must be characteristic of a Christian people? *Communion* itself, to start with the most obvious, is such a value. It is one that flows from the very nature of a faith-community. And if it is to be central to our thinking and acting, we will have to make much too of a whole set of other values that are inextricably linked with it.

Being-for-others is one such value — and quintessentially Gospel. It is the mandate of charity that Christ made the hallmark of discipleship. “By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13, 35). If this ideal became the distinguishing trait of the Churches of Asia, of every Christian in Asia, would we ever talk of a Church in crisis, a stagnating Church, fossilized structures and the like? The question is probably tendentious and simplistic, but even so, the image we project as Church in Asia is one in which this mark is not too prominent.

From being men and women for others, we get a related value: *sharing*. A Christian must be ready to share with others of himself, his resources, his faith. Again, one cannot help wondering whether, if Christians had been more sharing in the way Christ himself shared, we would be faced today with the two ideological monstrosities that are currently causing much harm to people not only in Asia but all over the world – capitalism and communism in their people-devouring forms. The question, like the one on for-otherness, seems too simple-minded. But the fact is a sharing outlook has much to do with the righting of the economic and political imperialisms of these two dominant ideological systems.

Being-for-others and sharing in their turn imply strongly that people must be ready to do their part to bring about real communion. *Participation* itself thus becomes a necessary value. It is a key one in Vatican II documents and is in fact a chief cause of the general ferment within the Church since the Council as its ramifying consequences are worked out in the life of the Church. Whatever excesses may have been committed in the name of participation in recent years, we cannot get away from the fact that there has to be more, rather than less, participation in the life and action of the Church by every member of the faith community. A Vatican II Church is practically synonymous with a participative Church.

The ultimate value will have to be *human dignity* or, in faith terms, our filiation in the one Father of us all. No one will quarrel with the fact that it is a fundamental value. But for some reason its practical implications for the life of the Church have not been followed through as thoroughly and as explicitly as they should. And strangely – or, not so strangely, rather – the more we emphasize communion, the more we also have to stress the dignity of the sons and daughters of God. The stress will have much to do with how a Church community will face up to problems – widespread and endemic in Asia – of human rights, justice, poverty, other touchy social and political issues.

The above by no means exhaust the faith values that must move a Church that seeks to be communion. There are others, linked to these in logical *and* theological necessity, and these too must be looked into. The above are sufficient, however, as starters.

3. Attitudes

If we talk of the values of faith, we must also talk of the attitudes of faith demanded by those values. We select for discussion only two – in view of our stress on communion and community and the insights they raise in their wake: the twin attitudes of *learning* and *trust*.

In a very true sense, we have become over-obsessed with verbal orthodoxy, the purity of our linguistic expression of the faith. It is a necessary and legitimate preoccupation. But if we as Church are entrusted with the "deposit of faith" and we must be faithful to it, our handing on of this deposit is conditioned inevitably by the language and culture we operate in, and the Church, the institutional Church more particularly, has always to be open to the possibility of learning a richer expression of the faith from the people — and from the Spirit who moves in them. From the perspective of inculturation, the dialogue that takes place between faith and culture is in truth a learning process, not just a teaching one, for both preacher and listener.

Correlative to learning and founded on the fact of the Spirit's breathing and living in the whole community of faith is the attitude of trust. There can be no communion without trust — trust of the Spirit, yes, but also trust of the people themselves among whom He moves. We will probably vehemently deny it, but in practice we have acted as though lay people, for instance, will go astray as a matter of course without the ever present and watchful guidance of the hierarchical Church. Our distrust of the laity is in effect a distrust of the Spirit. For if we truly trusted Him, we would also trust the people whom He inspires.

The last observation flies in the face of the reality: People do go wrong without the guidance of the magisterium. But if this is true, it may well be because the structures of a Church that is communion are simply not there — or at least not sufficiently present to make it reality. So we have to go into the problematic posed by the question of structures.

II. STRUCTURES OF COMMUNION

Cultural values and social structures are mutually dependent on and supportive of each other, and any serious student of "social engineering" worth his salt will never lose sight of this first principle in social change. Altering social structures without paying attention to cultural values and vice versa will simply not work. It can be done, true, but only at the price of tremendous social upheavals, untold and unnecessary human suffering. If we apply this principle to the Church as an institution and community, we will have to do two things:

- 1) Strive to bring about the outlooks we have been speaking of in the previous section — a massive effort at re-educating ourselves to aspects of the Church and our faith which we probably did not take too seriously before or whose implications we did not fully appreciate.

2) Seek to create structures that will embody the outlooks we see are required by communion, structures that will be themselves, in practically sacramental fashion, effect what they signify. It may be good then to give consideration here to structures of forming visions, values and attitudes of communion — to keep the parallel with our earlier discussion on outlooks.

1. Structures for Vision-Formation

If, as was said above, our working model of the Church has everything to do with the actual kind of Church we have; and if we want to define Church principally in terms of communion; then we simply have to begin casting about for Church structures that will realize our vision in actuality or at least help make it a possibility, continue to support and enhance that possibility. Very simply put, it means we have to think in terms of *structures of discernment* — the institutionalizing of such means, procedures, relationships, roles and functions as will enable the people, ordinary rank-and-file believers, to meet, reflect, pray together, help one another in a truly communal and far-reaching effort at self-education. These structures, to give them another name, will be *forums* for the formation of *public opinion* within the Church — sheer necessities in any human community as community.

We already have such structures, sanctioned and blessed by the Official Church: pastoral councils and conferences of all kinds from the parish to the universal Church levels. These are — or should be — primarily forums for the building up of public opinion in the Church. If they have not operated as such, it is because of certain canonical questions that keep being asked about their functioning, the niggling one, especially, about whether they are deliberative or merely consultative bodies. These questions when answered legalistically, distract from what should be their fundamental nature and task.

The use of the terms “forums” and “public opinion” are probably, in turn, distracting to most Church people brought up in the old forms of Catholicism and hence should not be used here either. But the words do not matter too much, the ideas do. And the idea behind the use of the word “forum” is not that of a public market of any and all thinking, no consideration being given to how wild or preposterous it may be — or how “offensive to pious ears.” We are talking of *ecclesia* in its aboriginal meaning, a gathering of the people of God to whom faith is crucial and is the paramount and sole motive in their coming together to worship, reflect, discern and act together as men and women of faith. And by “public opinion” is meant the consensus of a community, born of an active and reflective faith, on how they as a people of faith should think and act in conformity with that same

faith vis-à-vis their life problems and concerns. It is hence in essence no different from what theologians call the *sensus fidei fidelium* except that here we are interested in its *conscious* formation and explicitation by the people themselves.

A development that is completely in line with the kind of structures we have in mind here and that is already far advanced in many areas of the Church in Asia is the growth of Basic Christian Communities. Where they are allowed the freedom they need to operate in the forming of their own vision of what Church is, they fast evolve into real and vibrant ecclesial communities. What happens at the base communities should also happen at all other levels in the Church all the way up to the top.

2. Structures for Value-Formation

The values already discussed as requisite for a Church as communion have to be fostered not only by talking about them, reflecting on them, praying over them, but by living them as well. Opportunities for their exercise and strengthening must thus be provided and set up. In the concrete, this means opportunities for every baptized member of the community to participate as much as possible in the life of the Church, in its works, in the day-to-day decisions made for that life and work. The structures of modern democratic states with all their paraphernalia for representative government, the exercise of the responsibility of those governing towards the governed, the guarantee of rights and freedoms and the like to citizens — these are not what we are talking of here, at least not principally and directly. The Church is not a state, should not be, and if its renewal includes some overhauling in its internal mechanism, it is not going to be by merely streamlining bureaucratic procedures in the Church to make it a more efficient political machine for governing and control. This may be a desirable thing — to administrators. But what we are talking of here goes much deeper: our concern is the invention of ways and means of assuring the greater participative action of people of faith that is proper to the Church *as* Church.

It is an exercise of creative imagination that must be given to the whole Church, not just to clerics, canon lawyers, theologians, Church bureaucrats. What concrete forms these structures will take in any given Church in Asia will depend pretty much on a people's particular genius for socially organizing themselves. That genius must be respected. But whatever forms they take, they must be such as nurture and promote the values and outlooks of communion. The raising of the problem of structures for value-formation and its bringing to the people for solution is already by itself a significant change in Church structuring, at least as we have it now, and small as it may seem, it is a change that like any first step, if pursued in the direction it leads to, cannot but result in the creating of a genuinely participative Church.

3. Structures for Attitude-Formation

Attitudes, like values, are probably better caught than taught. And hence very much depends on the attitudes that are projected and communicated by the leadership in the Church vis-à-vis the very values we say are required of a modern Church. But how does one pass on in a lived and living way the idea that every believer, by the mere fact of baptism, enjoys the dignity of sonship in the Father and this dignity gives him the right and the duty to fully participate in the community of faith in regard to its life and work, its mission and growth, its worship and preaching? There is no substitute for the living of the idea in all its implications, not only on the part of accepted leaders in the Church but also by every believer. The problem is how to create structures in the Church that will support and transmit the idea if those structures are absent.

The problem is no different from those we have been dealing with when we addressed ourselves to the questions of structures for vision-formation and value-formation. We are not talking of three different structures but of one, and it does come down to building up real communities of faith at all levels of the Church: discerning and praying, sharing and acting, participative and faith-centered. In any ecclesial community graced with these qualities, or at least striving to be graced with them, people will necessarily create and form structures of thinking, valuing and doing that cannot but bring about the communion we seek. Specifics of the kind of structure to aim for or even the way of going about setting them up — these can be talked about only in a most general way. But if one looks for a formula, there is only one: Give the problem to the people and let them act on it; and let the official Church encourage the responsibility of the people in meeting the problem. The very act of doing so will help generate the attitudes and the structures to form them.

Earlier in our discussion of structures for vision-formation, we alluded briefly to the canonical issue about whether the various kinds of pastoral councils and conferences now extant in the post-Vatican II Church are deliberative or consultative bodies, and we noted how the issue distracts from what should be their fundamental task, namely, discernment and all that it entails. We did not meet that particular issue head-on. But after all that has already been said about structures of communion, perhaps this observation will help: If we accept discernment as basic to these bodies, and, more importantly, if these bodies are truly vehicles of discernment in all their actuations, the canonical question becomes secondary to the concern for the *life* of the community. The operative word after all is "pastoral." For it does not connote simply a concern for power over the flock of Christ, its guidance, its control and guarding lest it stray, but even more vitally,

concern — and an overriding one — for feeding, nurturing, inspiring its full life in Christ. In this thoroughly pastoral perspective, the community will know, practically instinctively, the limits of its competence, what it can do or cannot do for its own life. In its constant discerning as a community, it will be guided — always — by the law of Christ. But for this pastoral perspective to flourish, a pastoral leadership is imperative.

III. LEADERSHIP FOR COMMUNION

If communion is going to be a reality in the Churches of Asia, the idea cannot really catch unless it is brought down to the level of the ordinary believers, the men and women in the pews, that is. Their traditional role so far has oftentimes been confined only to receiving, to learning, to listening from the anointed leaders of the Church. In very practical terms, then, this means we will have to go beyond this traditional role and let lay men and women assume heretofore unaccustomed leadership roles and responsibilities in keeping with their character as laity. And this must be done where it matters most for them: in the communities where they attempt to live their Christian lives. But for this new kind of leadership to come into play, the old has to take a hand. It will be this double leadership within the Church — lay and hierarchical — that we will be attending to here.

1. Lay Leadership

This is the age of lay people in the Church. And the sense we give this statement is rather simple. We are not talking of political power and its exercise in the Church, although this is often how the idea is taken, but of responsibility, *shared* responsibility, for the life of the Church.

True enough, the notion of power is not excluded by the notion of responsibility. But by the same token, it does not exhaust it. It may be well for us, therefore, to confine our definition of leadership in the Church to this kind of responsibility and ask rather how it is to be exercised.

Right off we could say in very general terms that the *how* of leadership will be dictated by such attributes of leadership as are in keeping with the idea of communion. The vision, the values and attitudes, which we have spent time on above and which we see must be those of the entire community, must to an even more intense degree belong to the leaders in the community. And to be practical about it, this means setting up imaginative training programs for lay leaders that will help them to function well as catalyzers for the bringing about of a Church that is communion.

We could come up with a shopping list of qualities and attributes of lay leaders in the Church we want to see emerge. The exercise may well be of profit. Here we will only stress one that may or may not summarize everything that can be said about lay leadership in the Church. But it is a quality that stems directly, it seems, from the nature of Church as communion. The term that describes best the quality we look for is *evoking* leadership — as contrasted with *directing*. As the word indicates, we understand by an evoking leader one who will be able to listen and learn, trust and inspire. In the sharing that goes on in the discerning community, he must be able to evoke sharing not only in ideas but in acts also, in responsibilities, initiatives, etc. He must be able to evoke ideas, articulate them, throw them back to the community for practical decision and action.

It we make much of the distinction between evoking and directing leadership. It is for the reason that the latter kind is what we are most familiar with: Our people look to their priests and bishops — and where lay leaders are coming more to the fore, to them — to tell them what to do, to think for them, to decide for them. The net result is that lay people in the Church are often afraid to think, much less to act, for themselves without their leaders' "say-so" and blessing. We know this is a caricature, but it is a caricature that has become the only reality in many parts of the Church despite our lip-service to freedom, responsibility, dignity, and the like. This does not mean that the two kinds of leadership are incompatible with each other. Not so. At times the leader has to take action on his own, direct people, that is, when it is clearly his responsibility as leader to do so. The least we can say is that the directing kind of leadership must not be the sole manner of exercising authority in the Church.

2. Clerical Leadership

In most Churches of Asia, there is no other kind of leadership in the Church except clerical, and the model of leadership is priestly and hierarchical. Thus the phenomenon, widely noted, that when lay people start to exercise more formal leadership roles within the Church, they tend to be clericalized laymen. But more and more, where lay leadership programs are quite developed, a model of lay leadership is evolving that is distinctively lay. If this new model is a desideratum, we cannot emphasize enough the place and importance of clerical action and support in its formation and functioning simply because up to now the responsibility for leadership has been all theirs. But this very fact calls for a new model of hierarchical leadership too. But what?

Again, we could engage in the exercise of drawing up a list of desirable qualities we would like to see in bishops and priests of the communion type. This is best left to the workshop to do if it is judged there is profit in the exercise. But if what was said above about *evoking* and *directing* styles of leadership is at all valid, it should be applicable too to clerical leadership in the parishes, dioceses, the universal Church for that matter. For too long, leadership in the Church has been defined in terms of power, control, decision-making, prerogatives, privileges — not so much in terms of service, dialogue, sharing, coresponsibility. But however it is defined, it still comes down to the same basic reality — authority and its exercise. If this is true, the problem becomes one of style of leadership more than anything else, and we have to develop the style that is more attuned with the definition of Church as communion, and gives life and meaning to that definition.

CONCLUSION

A criticism we could make about the approach of this workshop paper is that we have not really addressed ourselves directly to the diocese and parish as ecclesial structures except in a most general way. This has been done quite deliberately. One reason is that if we are truly Church, what can be said about the universal Church can also be said about the local Church, down to its smallest manifestation and vice versa. Another is that at any level of the Church, it is the spirit that matters most, and where the spirit of communion prevails and real efforts are expended to make it permeate the whole body of the Church, the particular line of development followed in any given Church would be different from that of another, but the general principles would be the same. Hence our concentration has been on these principles of development with regard to outlooks, structures and leadership. They are applicable to BCC, parishes, dioceses, national Churches — even the Roman Curia?

A second criticism of the approach we have taken could well be the semblance, possibly even the fact, of some kind of “vicious circle” in our reasoning. It starts with the necessity of outlooks of communion, then goes on to structures and leadership styles for communion, all of which have really only one focus: the creation of a more participative Church. But for its creation, the people in communities of faith should participate, and for them to do so, they must have the outlooks, structures, leaders for participation! The apparent circular reasoning merely serves to point up one important fact: We are concerned here with a *whole* — the Church and the community, values and structures, leaders and followers, etc. — and in this whole, the interdependence of parts among themselves, of parts and the whole, is such that a holistic approach — an acceptance therefore of their mutual causality — is the only one to take.

This holistic approach is but one more aspect of the perspective we assumed for this discussion. As was pointed out in the beginning, it was going to be mainly but not exclusively sociological. It may be time now to say something about that non-exclusive part by reiterating something which, though alluded to often before, does not come directly under empirical sociological analysis. Reference here is to the role of the Holy Spirit in the restructuring of the Church and our faith in His working. The subject is one that should be taken up by the more professedly theological workshops in this Plenary Assembly, but we can say something about it too even from our limited perspective.

If we make much of the Spirit, it is because communion is not merely a sociological reality but a theological one as well. The theological reality is in this that it is the Spirit that brings about communion. We readily accept this truth but, it seems, not its practical implications. For if the Spirit were really accepted as breathing and moving in the whole body of the Church, there should be more attention than has heretofore been paid to the *sensus fidei fidelium*. The Spirit speaks through the laity too, not just through the hierarchy. Hence, if there has been any bias in this paper, it is for creating such human structures within the Church as are within our capabilities to create in order for the voice of the Spirit to be heard speaking through the non-hierarchical parts of the Church. Lest this bias be misunderstood, let it be said clearly that by this special emphasis we are not trying to put up a false dichotomization, least of all, opposition between Spirit-in-the-laity and Spirit-in-the-hierarchy. The Spirit moves in both, is shared by both. All we ask is that the structures be provided for listening to Him through either portion of the Church, not just through one.

This brings us to our second concern — our faith in the Spirit. The attempt on our part to create viable structures of communion is at base a strong act of faith in the Spirit. For it bespeaks a readiness to listen to Him through whatever channels He speaks. If everything we have been discussing so far seems to be nothing but an unsubtle attempt at “democratizing” the Church — a stated aim in some parts of the world — it should be evident at once that the emphasis on the Spirit is precisely the opposite of any facile and false conceptualization of the Church as a democratic social organization, if only for the fact that the Spirit of God does not operate by majority rule — much less regardless of whether that majority is right or wrong! But this requires a strong faith that the Spirit will not go wrong, even when He speaks and moves through fallible, manipulable human beings like us.

One last observation germane to the one just made: The Church is already communion, at least germinally, even in its most “institutional” form. It is not as if we are talking about a completely new creation. The practical

consequences of this statement are simply that no matter how hidebound, pre-Vatican II, conservative, authoritarian, reactionary, etc., a Church may be, it contains within itself the life-principles of communion, and all that remains to be done is to activate those same life-principles. The Church in its human aspects still works like any human institution: It carries within itself the seeds of its own transformation, and the transformation will not take place unless the seeds are made to germinate and grow. The part of the Spirit in that transformation is assured – not the part of us human members of the Church. It is for this reason we can say that the new structures we wish to see rising forth from the old are simply *enabling* structures, i.e., structures that will enable us to act – and act ever united to the Spirit.

That enabling unity is, when all is said and done, what communion is all about. And it is this kind of unity that we must make real in the parish, the diocese, the whole Church.

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...the Church is not a mere institution, but a living organism, which grows and develops in the world. It is not a static entity, but a dynamic one, which is constantly in contact with the world and its problems. The Church is not a closed society, but an open one, which is always ready to receive the world into its arms. It is not a power, but a service, which is always ready to sacrifice itself for the world. The Church is not a religion, but a faith, which is always ready to live and die for the world. The Church is not a church, but a community, which is always ready to share its life with the world. The Church is not a building, but a people, which is always ready to go out into the world and proclaim the Gospel. The Church is not a tradition, but a mission, which is always ready to bring the Good News to every man, woman and child. The Church is not a hierarchy, but a communion, which is always ready to stand together in the face of the world. The Church is not a church, but a church, which is always ready to be a church for the world.

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