

**TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH**

by

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**Preface**

The invitation to submit a paper on the local Church to serve as a focus of discussions for theological advisers to the Asian Bishops' Conferences has given me an opportunity to bring together some thoughts which have either been published in separate essays or remained till now hypotheses entertained in my mind. For this I am very grateful to the organizers of the colloquium.

I begin with a methodological chapter for two reasons. First, I am convinced that method in ecclesiology remains a much neglected topic, not least because ecclesiology has often had to play an ideological role. Second, the wide neglect of the local Church in pre-Vatican II ecclesiology and the remarkable interest in the topic since the Council both need an explanation which can also at the same time justify the later development.

A shorter second chapter offers an exposition of what Vatican II had to say about the local Church, material which is perhaps well enough known for it not to be necessary to go into it at great length.

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The first annual colloquium of the FABC Theological Advisory Committee took place in Hong Kong, 4-14 April, 1986. The focus of the discussions of the members, nominated by their episcopal conferences, was: "Current Trends in Catholic Ecclesiology." The Rev. Joseph A. Komonchak, invited participant and professor in the Department of Religion, Catholic University, Washington, D.C., presented this study as one of several position papers for the meeting.

The third chapter uses the initial remarks on method to offer a theological interpretation of the Council's teaching in an exposition of the genesis of the Church, that is, how the Church comes to be in those local communities in and out of which the one and catholic Church exists.

The final chapter briefly addresses an issue which the concentration on the local Church inevitably raises: how the many local Churches constitute that communion of communions which we call the universal Church.

Since Fr. Amaladoss has contributed papers dealing more specifically with the question of inculturation, I have confined my remarks on this subject only to what has been necessary for my own argument.

I have written this as a theologian for theologians; and I look forward to a discussion which will enable us all, myself first of all, to benefit from each other's experience, knowledge and wisdom.

## CHAPTER I METHOD FOR A THEOLOGY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Before engaging the question of the local Church, I wish to discuss some methodological issues which are crucial both for ecclesiology in general and for a theology of the local Church in particular. I will propose a methodology which recommends itself, among other reasons, because it requires ecclesiological reflection to begin with and to center upon the local Church.<sup>1</sup>

### A Central Problem in Ecclesiology

One of the chief ecclesiological questions is prompted by the following passage of *Lumen Gentium* 8:

The one Mediator, Christ, established and ever sustains here on earth his holy Church, the community of faith, hope, and love, as a visible organization through which he communicates truth and grace to all. But the society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical Body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly gifts, are not to be thought of as two realities, but form a single complex reality which is constituted by a divine and a human element.

The Council here makes a statement which is denied only by those who imagine the true Church to be an invisible community whose members are known only to God, a view which has never had much support in the Catholic tradition and has been largely discarded by Protestants as well. But, apart from the brief analogy to the Incarnation which follows, the Council does not offer any theological explanation of how one is to understand how two such remarkably different sets of descriptions can refer to the single reality called "the Church." I do not wish to defend the Council's position here, apart from indicating my conviction that it reflects well, if in different language, the biblical and traditional understanding of the Church.

During this century we have seen a series of remarkable developments in ecclesiology, which some have interpreted as a succession of governing "models." But neither the once-dominant model of the Church as a *societas perfecta* or any of the models that have since sought to displace it (e.g., Mystical Body, People of God, sacrament, communion, herald, servant, etc.) have adequately engaged the problem posed by the Council's restatement of the Church's central self-understanding.

Classical ecclesiology concentrated on the legitimation and articulation of authority in the Church. It did so in language borrowed from modern legal theory, presenting the Church as a *societas perfecta*, independent and sovereign in its own sphere, a sacred replica of the modern self-assertive State. The Church was a *societas inaequalium*, the articulation of whose power distinguished some as teachers, rulers and sanctifiers from others who are taught, ruled and sanctified. Most of the pages of a typical pre-conciliar textbook in ecclesiology were devoted to defending these theses. Questions about the specific character of this society were either treated very briefly (at least long enough to identify the Mystical Body with the Roman Catholic Church) or left for other theological disciplines to discuss.

This ecclesiology should not be faulted for exploring the articulation of power in the Church, for this is a necessary dimension of any social reality and already says something about the inner character of that reality. It was at fault on other grounds: (1) because it nearly restricted ecclesiology to this one question; (2) because it ignored other human dimensions of the Church, including some which in fact provide the communal framework presupposed by differentiations on the basis of authority; and (3) because its Procrustean identification of the spiritual reality

of the Church with the Roman Catholic Church was achieved simply by biblical or dogmatic argument and not by an effort to understand how the spiritual and the institutional dimensions coincide in the one social body of the Church. (One might argue that Charles Journet's effort to construct an integral ecclesiology on the basis of Aristotle's four causes was one such effort, but there is fairly general agreement that these categories are an inadequate framework for the historical reality of the Church.)

What, then, of the models which have attempted to dethrone the classical ecclesiology of the *societas perfecta*? Here I will speak generally. Most of these are distinguished by an effort to recover and to bring to the center of ecclesiology the distinctive spiritual, sacramental, liturgical, communal dimensions of the Church. The first chapter of *Lumen Gentium* may be said to represent the vindication of a number of such efforts in the four decades before the Council. So we speak of the Church as the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit, as *koinonia*, communion, fellowship, etc. Few of these descriptions, when articulated in full ecclesiologies, deny the human, societal dimensions of the Church, but it is not unfair to say that these are secondary in importance to the divine, spiritual and invisible dimensions which make the Church an absolutely unique social phenomenon.

It was, of course, a great gain to recover these often neglected dimensions of the Church. But many people have experienced difficulty in communicating these descriptions to the ordinary people who constitute the Church. The language is often foreign to their experience, because it is either biblical or abstractly theological (e.g., "sacrament," a familiar term, which becomes less and less familiar as efforts are made to explain its meaning and its implications). And often these newer ecclesiologies also appeared as simply required by the Bible or the tradition. They were asserted to be true, but not a great deal of effort was made to show how the remarkable biblical, traditional or theological language was true of the very human groups which gathered as the Church of Christ.

### **Two Forms of Reductionism**

As different as were the classical ecclesiology and the new efforts at a theology of the Church, they agreed on one point: in their suspicion at introducing modern social science into ecclesiology. At its origins, classical ecclesiology was not hesitant in applying what passed for social theory to the Church, whether in the borrowings from Aristotle's political theory in the Middle Ages or in the imitation of modern juristic thought in the last two centuries. But in both cases, the borrowing was for the sake of

self-defence and a vindication of the *libertas Ecclesiae* in the context of fairly sophisticated secular theories. It served only to illumine certain dimensions of the Church — principally the necessity and distribution of power —; and, once this was accomplished, an appeal was immediately made to the *de iure divino* character of its structures and to the Church's unique origins, character and goals to argue the irrelevance of comparisons with other social bodies.

If the newer ecclesiologies did not hesitate to speak of a certain "sociological reductionism" in classical ecclesiology's near exclusive attention to questions of authority, they ran the danger of falling into the opposite danger of "theological reductionism." By this phrase James Gustafson means "the exclusive use of biblical and doctrinal language in the interpretation of the Church" on "the explicit or tacit assumption that the Church is so absolutely unique in character that it can be understood only in its own private language."<sup>2</sup> The introduction of sociological categories not simply into discussions of the pastoral activity of the Church but also into ecclesiology itself is often met with as much opposition here as in the classical ecclesiologists. A short murmur of general approval is often followed by lengthy warnings against the danger of sociological levelling.

An illustration of this tendency is given in the critique of Leonardo Boff issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Boff applied to the Church Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of culture on the analogy of the accumulation of capital in economics. He went on to speak of a monopolization of the religious "goods" of the Church — word and sacrament — by the clergy.<sup>3</sup> I do not wish to defend Boff's use of the analogy here, except to point out that neither he nor Bourdieu claim that this analysis or analogy exhausts the reality of the Church. But listen to the response of the Congregation:

The reality of the sacraments and of the word of God may not be impoverished by reducing it to the "production and consumption" pattern, thus reducing the communion of faith to a mere sociological phenomenon. The sacraments are not "symbolic material," their administration is not production, their reception is not consumption. The sacraments are gifts of God, no one "produces" them, all receive the grace of God in them, which are the signs of eternal love. All that lies beyond any production, beyond all human doing and fabrication ... But interpreting the reality of the sacraments, of the hierarchy, of the word, and of the whole life of the Church in terms of production and consumption, of monopoly, expropriation, conflict with the hegemonic bloc, rupture and the occa-

...sion for an asymmetrical method of production is equivalent to subverting the religious reality, and that, far from contributing to the solution of real problems, leads rather to the destruction of the authentic meaning of the sacraments and of the word of faith.<sup>4</sup>

This response comes very close to pure "theological reductionism." If it is a mistake to reduce the sacraments to the economic model, it is equally a mistake to think that the model has no applicability at all. At least it is a serious mistake to think that the sacraments are simply gifts of God, pure signs of grace, "beyond all human doing and fabrication." These are views which are regularly contradicted in other areas of theology, and indeed by the same Congregation's other recent statements on the minister of the Eucharist. Fear of one type of reductionism has led it into another, equally unsatisfactory, example of it.

### **An Example from the History of Theology**

Let me briefly refer for illustration's sake to a parallel development in the theology of grace. Bernard Lonergan has argued that St. Thomas' theology of grace and justification represents an articulation in Aristotle's metaphysical categories of St. Augustine's profoundly psychological description of conversion.<sup>5</sup> Aquinas' theory represents an impoverishment in language, no doubt, but it also immensely clarifies some key issues which Augustine's more fluid and evocative language had left unclear for centuries, and it did so by drawing attention to "created grace" or, better, to the created effect in persons of the uncreated self-gift of God.

In the hands of men intellectually and spiritually less profound than St. Thomas, this attention to the "metaphysics of grace" often resulted in a series of increasingly arcane disputes which gradually lost nearly all spiritual relevance. In our own century, a quite understandable reaction led to what seemed like a rediscovery of the primacy of "uncreated grace," the utterly free mercy and elevating love of God. There was a broad movement back to the earlier biblical and traditional language, with occasionally a dismissal of the pertinence of much reflection on "created grace."

But now, it appears, there has been a return of interest in created grace, not in metaphysical terms, but in terms of its psychological reality. Karl Rahner and Piet Fransen both wrote profoundly on the experience of grace. Longergan argued that what medieval theory meant by the infused habit of sanctifying grace is identical with what his analysis of intentionality discovers as an underlying, conscious but not known, state of "being in love without qualification."<sup>6</sup>

Without defending these particular recent theories of an experience of grace, one may note that they appear to indicate that the theology of grace could not be content with either the metaphysical speculations of the classic theology or the simple recovery of the biblical and traditional language. There had again to be the effort to relate the splendid assertions with the human beings loved by God and so to recover, now in the language of conscious intentionality, what St. Augustine had experienced and described rhetorically and St. Thomas had experienced and explained metaphysically.

### **The Example Applied to Ecclesiology**

This illustration already suggests the methodological shift I believe to be necessary in ecclesiology: to turn attention to the Church as a human community. This does not mean denying the recovered spiritual and transcendent dimensions of the Church; but it argues that if the splendid biblical and traditional reality is true, it is true of quite concrete bodies of men and women. As an adequate theology of grace must speak of the created effect of uncreated grace and do so, in Aquinas' terms, as an entitative habit or, in modern terms, as a transformation of subjectivity, so an adequate theology of the Church must speak of it as the human community or transformed intersubjectivity which results from the word of Christ and the grace of the Spirit.

This is the essential thesis of James Gustafson's book, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community*. Gustafson was acute enough to know what objections would be posed to him.

Does the assumption of continuity between the Church and other forms of human community make a social analysis of the Church irrelevant to theology? By focusing on the Church as an historical community does one necessarily reduce it to an entity different from what the theologians talk about? The answer to these questions depends upon what one takes as his data for theological reflection about the Church. If the primary or exclusive datum of Christian theology is the Bible, and the theologian's task is an exegesis and exposition of texts, the present essay is not a theological document. If, however, the task of theology with reference to the Church is to come to some understanding of a social reality known to human experience, this essay is theological, or at least has implications for theology.<sup>7</sup>

Before Gustafson, the basis for his thesis had been well stated by another American Protestant theologian, Claude Welch:

The church may be fully dependent on God's act, but it is not simply God acting. It is a people believing, worshipping, obeying, witnessing. Thus we can and must make fast at the outset our understanding of the church as a body of community of human beings, albeit existing in response to the activity of God. In this sense, the ontology of the church means in the first instance the humanly subjective pole of the relationship.<sup>8</sup>

And recently an Italian theologian, Severino Dianich, has argued for a similar position in terms which also make it clear how significant this shift is for a theology of the local Church:

Another problem is that of method in ecclesiology. Until now it is an ecclesiology of the objective component which has been constructed, that is, an identification and deep exploration of the conditions for the Church's authenticity, the components of its essential outline — a formal ecclesiology. It knew all that was needed for a Church to be authentic, but not what the Church is.

In such an ecclesiology, of course, it is the form of the universal Church that counts and the question had to be asked, almost as if there were some doubt about it, whether the particular Church was legitimate. If the response was affirmative, a search was made for the structural and sacramental forms able to legitimize the particular Church, almost as if the very fact in itself had no theological relevance. But instead, an ecclesiology which desires to escape the danger of formalism and to remain attentive to the concrete and the subjective places at the center, before all else, the originating event which makes the Church: the fact, that is, that there exist two or three persons, come together in the name of Jesus, who believe and communicate in the faith. Thus, before the forms that guarantee authenticity and before whatever is necessary for its legitimation, there is the fact of faith or, better, the fact of the communication of the faith which constitutes an occurrence of the Church. It is the subjects, persons of flesh and bone, in their free choice to believe in Christ and to confess him, who are first of all, at least in germ, the Church. On this first principle of the Church the questions are to be grafted and the formulas measured for understanding the premises and conclusions, conditions and forms, structures and generalizations through which the germ is capable of developing all its virtual powers. It is, then, the Church as event, encounter of persons, particular community which is the first and the obvious element in ecclesiology, while its structuration in universal form is the derived element. In its turn, of course, this legitimates the particular, but always as logically derived, and not vice-versa.<sup>9</sup>



Dianich's critique of "formal" ecclesiology applies as well to the more spiritual, supernatural ecclesiologies as to the classical, institutionally oriented theology of the Church. All these approaches fall into abstraction as long as attention is not also paid to the concrete realization of these principles in particular communities of real men and women. The Church is not an *Ecclesia de Trinitate* except as an *Ecclesia ex hominibus*, and the whole task of ecclesiology is to put these two dimensions together. In Dianich's terms, the task is to combine in an integrated fashion the objective and the subjective elements of the Church.

Note that Dianich's use of the term "event" or "occurrence" of the Church is not the same as the more familiar counterposing of "event" and "institution." More often than not, this contrast adopts a sociologically insupportable notion of "institution." Secondly, it often makes the Church appear too episodic, neglecting precisely the degree to which communities rely upon tradition and custom, institution and role precisely for their most "event-ful" characteristics. Thirdly, the "event" of the Church is often described as if it were something which God alone mysteriously brings about. It thus neglects the degree to which the Church, as any human social body (including "institutions," by the way) is made to be, is brought about, is achieved, by human beings. The Church is an achievement, brought about simultaneously and inseparably by both God and man. It is an occurrence within human intersubjectivity, the effect of the encounter between God's free subjectivity and the free subjectivity of the men and women who receive and appropriate his word and grace.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Self-Realization of the Church**

As Dianich argues in his book, *La Chiesa mistero di comunione*, the originating, genetic event of the Church is presented paradigmatically at the beginning of the First Epistle of John: "What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you and we together may share in a common life, that life which we share with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3). One human being speaks to others for the sake of a fellowship which is also fellowship with God himself in Christ. While this is an extremely fruitful way of approaching the occurrence of the Church, Dianich's suggestion can be rendered even more persuasive if it is based upon an explication of the human intersubjectivity by which the Church is made to come to be, and for this I believe it useful to turn for assistance to the social sciences. This is why Gustafson's book pursues a method which moves from the common to the unique, from what the Church shares with other human communities to what distinguishes it from all

others. It is methodologically similar to the use which St. Thomas made of Aristotle for a metaphysics of the transformation which grace brings about in the Christian.

Here I suggest a starting-point in reflection on the difference between human societies and natural realities, and I borrow a programmatic statement from Anthony Giddens:

The difference between society and nature is that nature is not man-made, is not produced by man. Human beings, of course, transform nature, and such transformation is both the condition of social existence and a driving force of cultural development. But nature is not a human production; society is. While not made by any single person, society is created and recreated afresh, if not *ex nihilo*, by the participants in every social encounter. *The production of society* is a skilled performance, sustained and "made to happen" by human beings. It is indeed only made possible because every (competent) member of society is a practical social theorist; in sustaining any sort of encounter he draws upon his knowledge and theories, normally in an unforced and routine way, and the use of these practical resources is precisely the condition of the production of the encounter at all.<sup>11</sup>

Giddens is here referring to what Bernard Lonergan calls "the world constituted by meaning."<sup>12</sup> Some illustrations first: think of the difference between an arrowhead and a mere piece of flint, between a wink and a facial tic, between a city and a beehive. Physically and chemically, the arrowhead is not distinct from another piece of flint; but an arrowhead is much more than mere flint — human hands have worked on it and meant something by it. To confuse a facial tic with a wink is to invite social embarrassment; the latter means something, the former does not. Bees do not gather because they choose to; cities are constructed by free subjects.

Social encounters, social bodies, societies are made to be, to happen, by their participants, which is why, perhaps a little confusingly, Giddens calls them "practical social theorists." He is referring here to the fact that anyone involved in a social relationship knows what behavior is expected of him and what is expected of the other, knows that the other knows what is expected of himself and of the other, and knows that each knows that the other knows. This shared knowledge, expectation and willingness is the social relationship. It resides in, consists in that mutual knowledge and willingness. The "ontology" of a society, in other words, is precisely the intersubjectivity of its participants.

To study the genesis of a society, or what Giddens calls its production and re-production, its creation and re-creation, is to study the emergence of the shared knowledge, expectations and willingness of its participants. I believe that the text of 1 John which Dianich uses is in fact talking about just such a reciprocal social relation. The event or occurrence of the Church in his sense is precisely an example of the genesis of a shared world of knowledge, expectation and willingness.

We are not accustomed to speak of *communio* in such terms, but I do not think them inappropriate. The word has concrete reference, to an event that occurs within the intersubjectivity of the "two or three" gathered together in Christ's name. It has depths, of course, that escape reflective grasp, both because depth-experiences between persons always escape such reflection, but especially because it is an intersubjective experience whose depth is God himself. But this does not mean that even this depth-experience in God is unconscious, and its concrete reality can be usefully explored by examining how human communities, or at least those of a certain type, are generated and sustained. For this, I have found it useful to apply Lonergan's heuristics of community.

For him, community is an achievement of common meaning and value. It is a potential achievement when a group of people share a common field of experience, when they have something to think and talk about together. Without this, community is not possible, for otherwise the people cannot know what they are talking about. But by itself, community of experience — at least in Lonergan's technical meaning of the term — is not sufficient for full community of meaning and value. The group needs also to think and talk about their experience and to reach some measure of common understanding and agreement: Yes, this is what the experience means, and, No, that is not what it means. But groups of people do not form effective communities if they only think, talk, and agree; they must also act in common, and to do that they must be committed to common values and to common goals. The achievement of meaning and value — the production of community — is the result of common experiences, common understandings, common judgements, and common commitments.<sup>13</sup>

As heuristic, this scheme, of course, is purely formal. It yields sets of questions that one may ask about various groups which are or might be considered communities. If the Church is to be considered a community, it is not illegitimate to ask those questions of it. One would ask, then, what is the common experience that provides the potential for the self-realization of the Church, what are the common understandings and

judgments that give form and act to the potentiality for community given in the experience, what are the commitments and decisions, values and goals, that render the community effectively present and active. If these may be identified, then one has at least one possible way of understanding how the Church is a human community, and, on the basis of that understanding, of asking what it means and how it can be that this community of meaning and value, this human community, is the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit. Without this or some other, similar, effort, I do not think the question can even be posed as to the relation between the divine and the human dimensions of the Church; for without it, one term of the relationship is absent.

The Church is the social and historical effect of the self-gift of God in word and grace. This effect exists as a human community insofar as a group of people undergo the experience of God's gift of himself in the Spirit and are brought to understand their transformed personal and intersubjective experience in the light of Jesus Christ. As wide as we may hope in faith that the gift of the Spirit is, only the Christian Church takes form as the Body of Christ, for only these men and women are given, through the word of Christ, to know whose Spirit it is that has taken possession of their lives and drawn them together to himself. The knowledge of self, world, and God that is given in Christ bears fruit in an effective life lived in the memory of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, in the hope of his return and of the triumph of the Reign of God which he announced, and in the fellowship and loving activity that continues his service to God and to the world.

Precisely in what characterizes and distinguishes the Church among human communities, the Church is also the historical subject of its own self-realization. The Church stands always on this side of the God-creature distinction. The Church is not God; it is not Jesus Christ; it is not the Holy Spirit. And if it is the People of God, the Body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit, it is all these as a human reality, that is, because certain events occur within the intersubjective consciousness of a group of men and women. Faith is a free human act, though one impossible without divine grace; created grace is, metaphysically, a qualification of the soul and, psychologically, a transformation of intentionality, in whose every moment God is at work; the love of God which is the Holy Spirit is so powerful that it can make even us freely love; hope rests upon God's promise and power, but it takes the form of quite human acts of confidence and courage. The Church comes to be because the members of the Church, under God's grace, believe, hope and love. If there were to cease to be a group of men and women who believe, hope and love in and be-

cause of Christ, the Church would cease to be. What we could not do without God's self-gift, we can do in his Spirit and in Christ; we must do it, for God does not do it in our place. His grace is the transcendent principle by which we are ourselves, together, made to be the historical principle, co-producers, if you will, of the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

I have here only outlined the main lines of the process by which the Church is realized as the human community which results from Christ's word and the Spirit's grace. These need to be filled in by attention to the sets of experiences and feelings, images and symbols, insights and concepts, judgements and statements, decisions and actions, relationships and roles, institutions and ministries by which the Church is constituted as a distinct community in the world. Other heuristic schemes can also be useful, for example, Josiah Royce's analysis of communities of interpretation constituted and distinguished by their common memories and common hopes, or Maurice Halbwach's fascinating discussions of "collective memory."

This long methodological note has been necessary, I believe, in order to face the challenge posed by the Catholic insistence that the Church is a single and complex reality. I believe an approach such as the one I have sketched is the only way adequately to deal with the ecclesiological challenge posed by that assertion. It is, further, as Dianich has noted, a point in favor of this methodological approach that it focuses ecclesiology on the local Churches, in and out of which, as *Lumen Gentium* says, the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church comes to be.

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1. For this proposal I have drawn from articles already published: "Christ's Church in Today's World: Medellin, Puebla, and the United States," *The Living Light*, 17 (1980), 108-20; "Ecclesiology and Social Theory: A Methodological Essay," *The Thomist*, 45 (1981), 262-83; "History and Social Theory in Ecclesiology," *Loneragan Workshop*, 2 (1981), 1-53; "Loneragan and the Tasks of Ecclesiology," *Creativity and Method: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1981), pp. 265-73; "The Church Universal as the Communion of Local Churches," in *Where Does the Church Stand?* (Concilium 146; New York: Seabury, 1981), pp. 44-50; "Ministry and the Local Church," *CTSA Proceedings*, 36 (1981), 56-82; "Clergy, Laity and the Church's Mission in the World," *The Jurist*, 41 (1981), 422-47; "The Church and Religious Education in the 1980's," *The Living Light*, 19 (1982), 200-210; "Church and Ministry," *The Jurist*, 43 (1983), 273-88.

2. James Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 101. See also p. 105: "A doctrinal reductionism refuses to take seriously the human elements in the Church's life, or if it acknowledges them it does not explore or explicate them except in doctrinal language. The definition of the Church may focus on what is considered to be the essence of the Church; this may be defined in such a way as to exclude the social functions and structures that the Church shares with all societies ... the reader occasionally has difficulty in knowing whether some theologians are referring to anything historical and social in character in their treatises on the Church ... Many theologians ignore part of their task in ecclesiology, i.e., to make theologically intelligible the human forms and processes that can be understood and interpreted from a social perspective."
3. Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power, Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), pp. 110-115 (The English translation of this book often cannot be trusted).
4. Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei, *Documenta inde a Concilio Vaticano Secundo Expleto Edita (1966-1985)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1985), pp. 291-92.
5. Bernard J.F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971).
6. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 120-24.
7. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, pp. 5-6.
8. Claude Welch, *The Reality of the Church* (New York: Scribners, 1958), p. 48. See also Langdon Gilkey, "Theological Epilogue: Language and the Church," in *How the Church Can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 128-46.
9. Severino Dianich, "Soggettività e Chiesa," in Associazione Teologica Italiana, *Teologia e progetto-uomo in Italia* (Assisi: Cittadella, 1980), pp. 105-28, at pp. 115-16. Dianich defended his methodological option in "Ecclesologia ed ecclesiogenesi," *Rassegna di Teologia*, 21 (1980), 415-18. These essays give some of the foundations for his three books: *La Chiesa mistero di comunione* (Torino: Marietti, 1975); *Teologia del ministero ordinato. Una interpretazione ecclesiologicala* (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1984); and *Chiesa in missione. Per una ecclesiologicala dinamica* (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1985).
10. "To understand the mission and the Church one must always keep in mind that originating element that we find present in the very principle from which mission and Church take their rise: it is a matter of an encounter between the liberating freedom of the Spirit and the liberated freedom of man" (Dianich, *Chiesa in missione*, p. 77).
11. Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), pp. 15-16.
12. See this term in the index to *Method in Theology*.
13. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 79.

## CHAPTER II VATICAN II ON THE LOCAL CHURCH

### The Question of Terminology

Vatican II was not consistent in its use of the term "local" and "particular" Church. "Particular Church" appears more often and usually designates a diocese, although it is also used to refer to groupings of Churches into "rites" (OE 2-4). "Local Church" is used of dioceses (AG 19, 27) and of patriarchal Churches (LG 23); but "local congregations" gathered for the Eucharist are also said to be "Churches" (LG 26, 28). In one passage, "particular" and "local" are both used, without distinction, to refer to dioceses in Eastern rites (UR 14).

The revised Code of Canon Law uses "particular Church" to refer to a diocese, and, I believe, never uses the term "local Church" at all. Theologians disagree over the appropriate language, and while there is, as they sometimes acknowledge, a certain arbitrariness in their choice, it often also reflects certain important theological options. Henri de Lubac, for example, chooses "particular Church" to refer to "the church presided over by a bishop," while reserving "local Church" to refer to sociocultural groupings. But de Lubac also claims that "only the church we are here calling particular belongs to the fundamental structure of the universal Church (the latter being realized only in the former); but the local church, with her singular traits, is nonetheless something useful, or even indispensable *ad bonum Ecclesiae*."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, Hervé Legrand gives a vigorous argument against what he calls the Code's "theological neologism," on the grounds that "particular" and "universal" are lexicographical contraries, which can lead particular Churches to think that universality is an extrinsic reality and cause the universal Church to embark on a false universality. He himself, therefore, prefers to use the term "local Church" everywhere, qualifying it where necessary by adjectives such as "diocesan" or "parochial," and his choice reflects his interpretation of the Council's teaching, which assigns greater theological significance to sociocultural particularity than does de Lubac's.<sup>4</sup>

I am persuaded by Legrand's argument on this point. I will generally use the term "local Church," hoping that the context will make it clear whether I am referring to small eucharistic communities, dioceses, or larger groupings of Churches.

## **The Council on the Local Church**

Two major theological assertions seem to govern the Council's statements about the local Church: first: that in its distinctive and constitutive principles, the Church is realized in local Churches; and, second, that it is in the distinctive social and cultural conditions of local Churches that the Church's catholicity is concretely realized. I will spell out these two central statements in the sections that follow, providing for each the appropriate conciliar texts.

### **The Spiritual Principles of the Church**

The principal conciliar texts on this subject are the following:

The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful. The individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal Church; and it is in these and out of these that the one and unique Catholic Church comes to exist (LG 23).

A diocese is a portion of the People of God which has been entrusted to the pastoral care of a bishop with the cooperation of a presbyterate, so that, adhering to their pastor and by him gathered in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, they might constitute a particular Church in which is truly present and active the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ (CD 11).

This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, adhering to their pastors, are themselves called "Churches" in the New Testament. For in their locations, these are the new People of God called by God in the Holy Spirit and in full conviction (see 1 Th 1:5). In them believers are gathered by the preaching of Christ's Gospel and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated ... In every altar community, under the bishop's sacred ministry, is manifested the symbol of that love and "unity of the Mystical Body without which there can be no salvation." In these communities, although often small and poor or living in the diaspora, Christ is present, by whose power the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is gathered together (LG 26).<sup>5</sup>

These passages offer a theological vision of the Church's self-constitution, of the spiritual principles that give it distinctive life. These



principles are the call of God, the grace of the Holy Spirit, the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, the apostolic ministry, the celebration of the Eucharist, and the fellowship of love. These are the vital principles through which there comes to be in the world the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ. But this Church is not only made manifest and visible in dioceses and in infra-diocesan congregations; it is *represented* there, in the strong sense of the word. It is precisely the one and universal Church that is gathering together in such Churches, that is present and active in them, that is built up and grows in them, that comes to be in and out of them.

As a number of commentators have pointed out, this vision represents something of a Copernican revolution in ecclesiology.<sup>6</sup> The Church is not universal in the manner of a transnational corporation which from a central office establishes identical branches all over the world. Nor is the local Church “a section of a vaster administrative body, one part fitted to other parts in order to form a larger whole, each of these parts remaining exterior to the others, in the way the French provinces, for example, are fitted to each other in order to form, grouped or not into more important divisions, the administrative body of the State.”<sup>7</sup> The universal, catholic Church arises, if you will, from below, because in the every local Church the full reality of what is called “the Church” is realized: that is, the communion of believers in the holy things won for us by Christ. The Church universal comes to be out of the mutual reception and communion of local Churches. The Church universal *is* the communion of local Churches.

On the other hand, the Council also says that the local Churches are “formed after the model of the universal Church” (LG 23). Legrand warns against interpreting this Platonically:

In fact the Church which is constituted out of the local Churches (which results from their communion) is identical to the Church which is realized in the local Churches. On this ground, the local Churches have to be in the image of the universal Church, not as the reproduction of an “ideal” Church, but by agreement with and reception of that which constitutes the communion of the Churches.<sup>8</sup>

Another way of looking at the statement is to see it as careful to preserve the truth which requires two sets of statements about the relation between local and universal Church. Here is how de Lubac expresses them:

Since there is a mutual interiority or inclusion, there is a radical correlation, so that it is not enough to say that the particular churches have to be inserted into the universal Church: they are so by their very existence. The universal Church is therefore not one of a “federative” unity — as if particular churches were at first able to establish themselves, each one separately, and then were free to join together; she is the Spouse of Christ. Her unity is “organic and mystical.” The People of God are a single people, “not because they are composed of numerous particular churches, but because each particular community is for its part only a form in which this *one* people of God occurs.”

Just as the universal Church does not result, in a second “moment,” from an addition of particular churches or from their federation, neither could these churches be considered the result of the division of a universal Church alleged to be anterior to them. They all proceed from a prior, particular, concrete church, that of Jerusalem; they came from her, “as it were, by cutting and planting.” A universal Church, prior to or alleged to exist in herself, apart from all the particular churches, is only *un etre de raison*.<sup>9</sup>

I will return to this question later, particularly in the discussion of the communion of local Churches.

### **The Concrete Catholicity of the Church**

If the Church is one because of the common principles described above, it is catholic because they are only realized in particular times and places. The universality of the Church does not principally consist in its geographical extension throughout the world. In *Lumen Gentium*, catholicity refers to the Church’s effort to foster, purify, confirm, elevate and take up what is good in the abilities, resources and customs of the peoples among whom it arises. Catholicity is a theological principle:

The character of universality which adorns the People of God is the gift of the Lord himself, by which the catholic Church effectively and constantly seeks to recapitulate the whole of humanity with all its goods under the Headship of Christ, in the unity of his Spirit. In virtue of this catholicity, the several parts bring their own gifts to one another and to the whole Church, so that the whole and its several parts grow by the mutual sharing of all and by a common effort towards the fullness of unity (LG 13).

As particular churches thus legitimately develop their own traditions (LG 13), so also by divine providence they have gathered into organic groupings, such as the patriarchates, which “enjoy their own discipline, liturgical usages, and theological and spiritual patrimonies.” This *Ecclesiarum localium in unum conspirans varietas* vividly demonstrates the catholicity of an undivided Church (LG 23).

The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church can be read as a description of this concrete catholicizing of the Church.<sup>10</sup> The Church is to “speak, understand and lovingly embrace all languages and so to overcome the dispersion of Babel” (AG 4). The Church and Christ “transcend distinctions of race and nationality and so cannot be considered strangers to anyone or to any place” (AG 8). The Church must imitate Christ who “by his incarnation bound himself to the particular social and cultural conditions of those among whom he lived” (AG 10). It must seek to become “a congregation of believers endowed with the cultural riches of its people,” living for God and Christ “according to the honorable customs of its people’s life” (AG 15).

The churches must, therefore, undertake a discernment within their cultures and societies. “From the customs and traditions, wisdom and teaching, arts and sciences of their peoples, they borrow whatever can contribute to the Creator’s glory, the manifestation of the Savior’s grace, and the right ordering of the Christian life” (AG 22). In each great sociocultural region, this will require a new theological enterprise, “in which, in the light of the tradition of the universal Church, the deeds and words revealed by God, contained in the Scriptures and explained by the Fathers of the Church and by the magisterium, are submitted to a new investigation.” Faith will thus pursue understanding by “taking account of the philosophy and wisdom of the people,” whose customs, understanding of life, and social order are in turn to be evaluated in the light of revelation. By these means a more profound adaptation of the whole sphere of Christian life will be possible:

Avoiding all syncretism and ethnocentrism, the Christian life will be adapted to the genius and character of every culture, and particular traditions, along with the distinctive gifts of every family of nations, will be illumined by the Gospel and taken up into the catholic unity. Thus, new particular Churches, with their own traditions, will take their place in the communion of the Church (AG 22).

In such descriptions, the Council proposes a vision of catholicity that parallels what it praises in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the

Modern World as “a more universal form of human culture, which the better promotes and expresses the unity of the human race the more it respects the peculiarities of different cultures” (GS 54). As humanity itself, the Church is a concrete universal, *una Ecclesia circumdata varietate*, not one in spite of, but precisely *in* the variety of the local churches.

Two major themes thus control the Church's teaching on the local Churches. They are, on the one hand, *Churches*, the People of God and assembly of believers, gathered by word, Eucharist and Spirit, each one of them all that is meant by the word “Church.” On the other hand, they are *local Churches*, communities in which the Church of Christ takes on flesh and bones in concrete men and women, of different times and places, in distinct cultures, societies and politics, each of them differently and distinctively all that is meant by the word “Church.”

1. Hervé Legrand gives the full statistics: “The Church, as such, is called ‘catholic Church’ 45 times, ‘universal [*universalis*] Church 25 times, and ‘whole [*universa*] Church’ 23 times. Of the eight uses of *ecclesia localis*, four refer to the diocese, a fifth to the diocese in its cultural context, two to a grouping of dioceses, and one, uniquely in the texts of Vatican II, to the parish. the 24 uses of *ecclesia particularis* are equally heterogenous: twelve refer to a diocese, but twelve others to a Church in its cultural environment, of which five refer to Catholic Churches in non-Latin rites” (“La réalisation de l’Église en un lieu,” in *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie*, ed. B. Lauret and F. Refoulé; tome III: dogmatique 2 (Paris: du Cerf, 1983), pp. 143-345, at p. 146).
2. Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), pp. 171-90, at p. 189-90.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
4. Legrand, “La réalisation de l’Église en un lieu,” pp. 157-59, and pp. 151-55.
5. See also UR 2, 15; SC 42; LG 28, for other texts pertinent to the theme.
6. See E. Lanne, “L’Église locale et l’Église universelle: Actualité et portée du theme,” *Irénikon* 43 (1970), 481-511, at p. 490; L. Bouyer, *L’Église de Dieu: Corps du Christ et Temple de l’Esprit* (Paris: du Cerf, 1970), pp. 333-43; H. Legrand, “The Revaluation of Local Churches: Some Theological Implications,” in *The Unifying Role of the Bishop*, ed. E. Schillebeeckx (Concilium 71; New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 53-64.
7. de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, pp. 199-200.
8. Legrand, “La réalisation de l’Église en un lieu,” p. 152.
9. de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, pp. 203, 207-208.
10. See H. Legrand, “Inverser Babel, mission de l’Église: La vocation des églises particulières au sein de la mission universelle,” *Spiritus*, 11 (1970), 323-46.

### CHAPTER III THE GENESIS OF THE CHURCH

In this chapter an effort will be made to apply elements of the method outlined in the first chapter to an understanding of the Council's teaching on the local Church which was summarized in Chapter II. The focus will be on the genesis of the Church in the local Churches.

By the genesis of the Church is meant, not principally the historical origins of the Church out of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (although this has paradigmatic and not merely historical value), but rather what the Venerable Bede referred to metaphorically when he said that "everyday the Church gives birth to the Church."<sup>1</sup> As is true of other social realities, the existence of the Church is a precarious achievement, for it counts for its continued existence on successive generations appropriating and reproducing the insights and decisions, meanings and values which previous generations had shared and which had generated and constituted the social world they left behind.

The paradigmatic case is the emergence of the Christian Church. The Church had its origins in the human response to the divine initiative announced and given in Jesus Christ. A group of people once heard Jesus of Nazareth preach and saw him act, and tentatively and not very faithfully they began to follow after him, hoping that "he was the one who would liberate Israel" (Lk 24:21). Jesus drew a certain group of them into an especially close relationship with him and assigned them tasks which they agreed to carry out. After his execution, they became convinced that God had vindicated Jesus, his message and his mission; and they came together again, now out of the conviction that by his resurrection God had not only made him Lord and Christ but had brought about the promised new covenant, something new, the fulfilment of Israel's desire but also a community in which the distinction between Jew and Greek had been overcome. And this group of disciples, which soon called itself "the Church," began to tell others of Jesus Christ and to invite them into the fellowship of faith, hope and love which God had brought about in them. And throughout its long history, the Church has been produced and reproduced by successive generations of men and women becoming convinced that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself; and all the gestures and rites, communities and institutions, ministries and activities have arisen out of and center upon that founding conviction.

I hope it is clear that none of this is meant to deny or to downplay the divine initiative. It was God who was in Jesus Christ, in the words he

spoke, in the deeds he performed, in the community he gathered; and it was God's grace that enabled certain men and women to recognize God's hand and his very self in Christ, to become convinced that he had been raised in the power of God's Spirit, and to come together in a new community. But the Church did not then and does not now come together solely out of the divine initiative; it required then and requires now the free human response of faith, hope and love which that initiative enables. And the Church is achieved today, as community and as institution, because the members of the Church, by God's grace, today continue to produce the human acts of meaning and value — faith, hope and love — that then constituted those first generations of men and women as a distinctive social body in the world.

Dianich expresses well how this historically generative moment must be kept at the center of all ecclesiology:

The identification of the primordial fact that triggers that distinctive historical process that we call the Church is rather simple, since it is difficult to maintain that there is anything on the historical level that precedes the communication of the faith. For the Church, indeed, everything begins when one person communicates to another the "good news" that Jesus has been raised and is the Lord and when this communication is received and shared. But above all it is interesting to note that this fact has quite specific characteristics and potentialities. It immediately marks the Church as a phenomenon of interpersonal relationships, involving in the highest degree the subjectivity of its protagonists. At the same time, the event does not take place in history in some isolated and unforeseen manner, without historical antecedents and consequences, but rather as always and necessarily a portion of the tradition which links all successive events of the Church to the originating witness borne by the Apostles to the Risen Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, in the faith-awareness of the protagonists, the event is lived as the fruit of a free choice of faith and as the moment in which, by the power of the Spirit, is born the new Christian subjectivity, freed from sin and from the slavery of the law, in the emergence of the new man and the new creation ...

Finally, if, on the one hand, the Church cannot realize itself as if it were only beginning today, as if it did not have its whole history behind it, it must, on the other hand, recognize that the free character of the act of faith makes the Church a reality which at every moment is generated anew, because the act of faith of believers,

which constitutes the Church, is at every moment the fruit of the encounter between the Spirit's freedom and man's freedom. If the Tradition (and the strong complex of structures which support it) gives the Church the appearance of an historical entity endowed with very great stability, in reality the Church is, from a sociological viewpoint, a very fragile human aggregation, whose confidence in the future trusts completely in the grace of the Spirit. This is clear as soon as one considers that the Church exists solely because of the free act of faith of believers, so that if ever they were to cease to give their free assent to the message of faith, the Church would immediately come to nought.<sup>2</sup>

For a closer examination of the subject, I wish to distinguish two moments in the daily genesis of the Church: (1) one generation's communication of Christian meaning and value and (2) the reception and appropriation of that meaning and value as the principles of a new generation's common life. The first may be said to be the *objective* and the second the *subjective* principle of the Church's genesis. If the objective element is neglected, there will be the danger of reducing the Church to a vague community of friendship, warm feelings, or social solidarity. If the subjective element is neglected, the analysis will remain abstract, for the objective element is only a potential principle of a common life and becomes a real, effective principle only when subjectively appropriated in and by quite concrete groups of men and women in quite concrete circumstances.

### **The Objective Principle of the Genesis of the Church**

First, then, one generation communicates to another its Christian meanings and values. These are borne or carried by a variety of "objective representations."<sup>3</sup> These include the Scriptures and the monuments of the Tradition, the apostolic ministry, institutions and roles, customs and habits, images and language, stories and legends, exemplary individual and communal lives. All these are so many ways in which previous generations of Christians have objectified the interpretation and evaluation of human life which they have drawn from and centered upon Jesus Christ. They express and embody a generation's Christian response to the basic questions of human existence in the world. Embodiments of the meaning and value which directed the lives of a previous generation, they provide for the succeeding generation a heritage by which it may locate itself in the world, in history and before God. Through their stories and myths, gestures and rites, language and symbols, institutions, roles and

examples, the generation before us offers us a God to believe in, a world to inhabit, a goal for which to hope, and selves to become; and in ways that we never fully appreciate, it shapes and moulds at the most intimate depths our vision of what it means to be a human being, of who God is, of what the world is and can become.

In describing this moment in the genesis of the Church as "objective," I am referring to its status as a given, as standing over-and-against a new generation of potential believers, as an historical realization and challenge, there before the new generation as one among many life-worlds they may choose to inhabit in our pluralistic world. *Fides ex auditu*, Paul said: we come to believe because of something we have heard, something which was there before us, which was real for someone before us, which they have communicated to us, which places us before a free choice, a choice whose consequence is whether there shall be a Church in our own generation.

But this objectivity is the objectification of the previous generation's subjectivity. What is communicated to us is what they have received and appropriated; the world we are invited to enter is the world they have constructed. We are asked to believe what they have believed, to love what they have loved, to hope for what they hope for. We are asked to recreate the world they have created, to continue in the world the social body that carries on the word of Christ and embodies in its fellowship and in its service the grace of the Spirit. The genesis of the Church every day, in every generation, is the challenge posed to a new generation's exercise of its own historic self-responsibility by a previous generation's exercise of its.<sup>4</sup> The particular problems posed by the encounter of these two historic subjectivities we will consider later; but first we need to look at the second moment in the Church's genesis.

### **The Subjective Principle of the Genesis of the Church**

In the objective carriers of Christian meaning and value is posed the challenge to a new generation. And the Church arises again and again only because that challenge is met in the reception and appropriation of that meaning and value by the new generation. Paul Tillich once said, "Man cannot receive answers to questions he never has asked." The interpretation of a message and its appropriation as an authority for one's life presupposes that one is asking certain kinds of questions, questions he has brought with him or which have been evoked in him by the message itself. That Christianity has always believed itself to have a relevance to every generation means that there are questions which every generation



must pose to which Christianity offers itself as a response. But to say this is not to require us to attempt to delineate those questions in a form so abstract as to be applicable to any generation in any culture at any time. Humanity is not an abstract but a concrete universal, and if there are universal questions, it is not only because there is a universal human nature, nor even because there are "anthropological constants," but because every generation, before whatever challenges it may face, asks questions about meaning and value, about what the world is, who God is, and what sorts of selves we may be.

And because the subjective appropriation of Christian meaning and value is always mediated through the existential and historic questions of the new generation, the genesis of the Church is always first and foremost the genesis of a local Church. The reception and appropriation of Christian meaning and value is always a *concrete* hermeneutical achievement. There is no universal Church in the sense of a Church believing in some abstract way in a merely formal faith. 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 received as a response to concrete threats to authentic human meaning. The Church's hope overcomes quite concrete experiences of the demonic power of evil in persons and structures. 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 alienation. The Church universal 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. The Church is not catholic in spite of the differences in circumstance and in hermeneutical focus among the local Churches, but precisely in and through them.

For these reasons it is not legitimate to make the social and cultural differences among the Churches a secondary theological principle of the Church's life. For it is only in societies and cultures that the questions arise to which the objective Christian meanings and values are addressed. The social and cultural conditions are the interpretative matrices of a Christianity made concrete. It is only an abstract Church, joining together abstracted individuals, that could be considered to have been adequately described without reference to the social and cultural conditions in which individuals and communities ask about the meaning and value of their lives.

These are also the reasons why it is impossible to separate the "nature" and the "mission" of the Church, as if there were first a moment in

which the Church becomes what it is and a second in which it looks around at the world to see what it might bring to it. Again Dianich puts the point well:

Finally, that *historical starting-point* which gives form and furnishes a tool for understanding to anyone who wishes to understand the nature of the Church reveals its last potentiality, leading us to see that, in the end, the Church's nature essentially consists in its historical mission. In fact, the Church is not an hypostasis subsisting in some meta-historical empyrean, nor can it be thought to be a pure effect, removed from its cause, an entity separate from the event which constitutes it from the beginning, from the communication-communion of faith, nor as an institution which can by itself provide for itself as if the mission of communication-communion were not what in every instant gives meaning and direction to its existence ... And all this does not lead to an ecclesiocentric vision of the mission and of history, if enough attention is given to the fact that, through the profound involvement of subjectivity in the event, history itself profoundly determines the event and to the fact that, in this way, the preaching of Christ to the world is not presented exclusively as a divine command to believe in him, but also as a human proposal, with enormous consequences, about a history to be undertaken together.<sup>5</sup>

In discussions about the Church's "mission to the world," "world" is not primarily the physical cosmos or even "the theater of human history." The "world" *is* human history; it is the historic human self-project: not only what human beings have made together but what they *are* together. Individuals become individuals within that world; it makes them what they are and they make it what it is. Individual self-realization occurs within the general and particular political, social and cultural self-realizations of the world; the world realizes itself through the individual self-realizations. To paraphrase Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann: the world is a human product, and individuals are products of the world.<sup>6</sup>

To relate "the Church" and "the world," then, is to relate the Christian self-project and the collective human self-project. As an individual's faith is a particular instance of the project of human existence, so the self-realization of the Church is an instance of the self-realization of the world. It is a moment in the world's self-realization. If the Church is distinct from "the world," it is because in the Church the self-realization of individuals and groups centers around Jesus Christ. The individual and collective self-project of humanity is for them interpreted and resolved in Christ.

But this is not a private moment, nor an act of withdrawal from "the world." It occurs in the world, and as a moment in the world's self-realization. The world is not what lies outside the Church; it includes the Church and without the Church, the world would be something different from what it is. Christian believing, hoping and loving are free human acts, determining what the world should and shall be. If this is the case, then there is not some first moment in which the Church becomes the Church and a second moment in which the Church considers its relation to the world. Church means "assembly" (*ek-klesia*), and the fact that there has been an assembly of human beings because of Jesus Christ, in his name, and for his sake, has altered the world already and poses a challenge for the present generation which is reponsible for what the world shall be in the future.<sup>7</sup>

### The Genesis of the Church from the Two Principles

It is in terms of this challenge to the Church to become an historically effective mediation of Christian meaning and value into the historic self-project of mankind that the two moments I have distinguished above come together in the concrete genesis of the local Church. The intersection of the two moments is illustrated in Gustavo Gutierrez' book, *A Theology of Liberation*, where we find two questions being asked. The first has a familiar form: "What is the meaning of the struggle against an unjust society and the creation of a new man in the light of the Gospel?"<sup>8</sup> People find themselves involved in an historic project and willingly submit it to the judgement of the Gospel. It is a familiar question, because we are accustomed to asking about the significance of a great variety of things in the light of the Gospel. Here the Gospel has the hermeneutical priority.

But Gutierrez has already asked another question, much less familiar in its form: "What is the meaning of the faith in a life committed to the struggle against injustice and alienation?"<sup>9</sup> Now it is the Gospel which is brought to the struggle for illumination, and this is an unfamiliar question, so unfamiliar that many people reject it out of hand because here the hermeneutical priority appears to be given to the historic project itself. It reflects Gutierrez' statement that theology is critical reflection on praxis, that is, that practical commitment goes first and theological theory is second.

But it is crucial that Gutierrez asks *both* questions, and it would be something other than Christian theology were he to omit either one. The first question asks the Gospel to illumine the commitment, while the second expects the commitment to illuminate the Gospel. The first

question concentrates on what I have called the "objective moment" in the genesis of the Church — a reference to the already given, normative Christian meanings and values. The second articulates the "subjective moment," the process by which the objective representations of Christianity are illumined by the questions brought to it out of a practical commitment. The objection commonly brought against this second question arises often from a failure to note that all questions to a text, including the Bible, arise from the practical commitment which generates the questions a reader brings to a text.

The problem often appears to be that Gutierrez' question reflects a different question from the ones most classical theologians bring to the Gospel. But when, for example, North Atlantic theologians approach the Scriptures, do they not bring personal and communal commitments and the corresponding questions? Could they not spell out their questions in some such form as this: "What is the meaning of the faith in a life committed to the struggle for individual authenticity?" And does not this question itself presuppose a whole set of social and cultural conditions which are not only taken for granted but often universalized as the only ones appropriate? But once one makes the "political turn" and starts asking why it is that individual authenticity is so common and so difficult a task in late twentieth-century middle-class society, then it becomes apparent that a question like in form to Gutierrez' second has always provided the *Vorverständnis* for a reading of the Scriptures, and that the only difference between the two questions lies in the identification of the real threat to the genuinely *humanum*.

If only the first question is asked (or adverted to), then Christianity is presented in purely formal fashion and the true concreteness of the genesis of the Church is overlooked. If only the second question is asked, then the Gospel loses its character as a divinely given and in that sense "objective" word which is not ours to dispose of as we see fit, and we are in danger of a merely ideological interpretation of the Gospel and of a reduction of the Church to the scale of a simple legitimation of social, political or cultural decisions we are unwilling to question. But if both questions are asked, then we are approaching an instance of the concrete self-realization of an authentic Church, whose genesis both illumines and is illumined by the historic self-project of which it is itself now a dimension. The human decisions that make the Church to be from day to day, from generation to generation, in any society or culture, are, thus, inescapably, decisions which also make the world to be what the world shall be.

Schillebeeckx has a few lines in which he illustrates what is really at

stake in the claim to concrete Catholicity:

... Christianity only stays alive and real if each successive period, from out of its relationship to Jesus Christ, declares anew for Jesus of Nazareth. Then it is impossible to determine "first" the essence of the Christian faith in order subsequently — "in the second instance", as it were — to interpret it as accommodated to our own time. Anyone who, with the Christian churches, affirms the universal significance of belief in Jesus must have the humility loyally to shoulder, along with that, the difficulties accruing to it — or else must surrender the claim to universality. Only these two possibilities are genuine and consistent. To accept the universality while at the same time denying the hermeneutical problem — thereby positing one exclusive definition, *ne varietur*, of essential Christianity — is neither an accessible road nor an authentic possibility; it is to disregard and evacuate of all substance the true universality of the Christian faith.<sup>10</sup>

In other words and in terms of our discussion, an insistence solely on the "objective moment" in the Church's genesis is itself a surrender of the claim of Christianity to be of universal redemptive significance, either by being content with a purely abstract Christianity or by identifying its redemptive role with one particular instance, however venerable or legitimate it may be. But that universal redemptive role is only taken in its full seriousness and difficulty if both dimensions of the hermeneutical genesis of the Church are taken into account.

Another quotation from Dianich draws us back to the local Church. He is speaking about the concrete *traditio* of the Church, which, according to *Dei Verbum*, "makes progress in the Church under the assistance of the Holy Spirit." He gives special attention to the *perceptio ... tam rerum quam verborum traditorum*, that is, to the subjective appropriation of what has been handed on.

The subject who perceives is in a certain sense the creator of the tradition insofar as he is the protagonist and author of its developmental dynamism. But, as he is not a pure and empty recipient, so in no way is he an absolute original principle of it. His is a perception of a given (*res et verba*) which precedes him and has a quite determinate origin. At the same time his perception will occur in the forms and with the instruments which he has at hand, or, better, by which he lives, insofar as, in its turn, his subjectivity bears

all his past with it. The great problem of the relationship between the Church and history here has its original and simplest location: the subjectivity of the believer is the first channel of communication, the first space, in which history and Church are intertwined and live together. It can be asked whether it even makes sense to ask how the Church must come down into history. In fact, so posed, the problem does not exist, unless one is working with an ecclesiology for which the believing subject is irrelevant or in which the believing subject is conceived outside the space and time of human history.

But the problem does show its true basis if stated in the following terms: what does it mean for the Church that its journey of faith is determined by the subjectivity of believers and that each of them is, for his part, a portion of the progress towards the complete truth and gives a basis and new flavor to the journey of tradition with the many and specific determinations which comprise his history and the history of his milieu and constitute his personality? Examples are easy to find in history: think what it meant for the development of the faith-tradition for Jews and then Greeks and then barbarians and then modern men to enter the Church. And think also of what it will mean for the Church for black Africa to believe and for people in the future to come to Christ from an atheistic and secularized culture.

Thus, the first problem in the relationship between Church and history is not a problem about what to do, about responsibilities or about the demands and the conditions which control the activity of the Church in the complex evolution of human history and its contribution to the main lines of human progress. The first problem is that of the self-awareness of the Church as an interweaving of many subjectivities, each of which bears with him his own history and the history of the human group in which he was formed and lives. This is the problem of inculturation, of the local, popular, national, culturally determined character of each particular Church. It becomes clear, further, that placing subjectivity at the center of ecclesiology not only does not reduce the collective and historical dimension of the Church but rather accentuates it. If the Church in fact is first of all a faith-encounter of flesh and blood people, its primary basis lies in an indissoluble interweaving of faith and history.<sup>11</sup>

Dianich's comments again force attention upon the event of the Church, here upon the occurrence of *traditio*. This is not simply *tradita*, the "realities and words" which one generation hands on to another for its

comfort and judgement. On the one hand, those words and realities are things spoken and things done by Christians as they faced their historic challenge; and, on the other, they are not transmitted until they are received, and the active *perceptio* does not take place except as a constitutive element of the new generation's assumption of its own self-responsibility. And if the transmitted Christian meanings and values are to shape the new historic moment, it is also true that they will inevitably be shaped by the social and cultural matrix in which they are received and by the challenge it represents and the resources it possesses.<sup>12</sup>

The International Theological Commission recently addressed this issue by attempting to relate "The Church as 'Mystery' and as 'Historical Subject.'" It located the distinctiveness of the Church in its Spirit-inspired remembrance and expectation of Jesus Christ and in its mission to proclaim that memory and hope to all people. But "with this memory, this hope and this mission it is not a matter of a reality which is to be placed upon or added to an existence or activities already being lived." The Church's activity is "the confrontation of a human activity in all its forms with Christian hope, or, to keep to our vocabulary, with the demands of the memory and hope of Jesus Christ." And the Commission then appealed to an old Scholastic adage:

The new People of God is not, then, characterized by a way of existence or a mission which would be substituted for an existence and for human projects already present. The memory and hope of Jesus Christ must rather convert or transform from within the way of existence and the human projects already being lived in a group of people. One might say that the memory and hope of Jesus Christ by which the new People of God lives are as it were the "*formal*" element (in the Scholastic sense of the term) which must structure the concrete existence of men. The latter, which is as it were the "*matter*" (again in the Scholastic sense), free and responsible, of course, receives such or such a determination in order to constitute a way of life "*according to the Holy Spirit*." These ways of life do not exist *a priori* and cannot be determined in advance; they display a great diversity and are thus always unforeseeable even if they can be related to the constant action of the one Holy Spirit. On the other hand, what these different ways of life have in common and as a constant is that they express "in the ordinary conditions of family and social life in which (human) existence is interwoven" (see LG 31) the demands and the joys of the Gospel of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

This analogy is helpful as long as, as the Commission makes clear, it

is recognized that the "matter" here is the already engaged historical self-project of a society or culture and that the "form" is not fully determinable or definable without reference to that exercise of self-responsibility. Once again the Church comes to be in an encounter between the liberating freedom of God himself in Christ and the Spirit and the liberated historical freedom of an earlier generation, on the one hand, and the freedom of a new generation in the process of assuming its own self-responsibility in history.

The Commission's description of the "mysterious exchange" which evangelization and inculturation represents simply applies this view: "On the one hand, the Gospel reveals to each culture and liberates within it the final truth of the value it carries; on the other hand, each culture expresses the Gospel in an original way and manifests its new aspects."<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter has tried to bring together in a heuristic description of the concrete genesis of the local Church the two primary emphases of Vatican II's discussion of the local Church: the realization in local Churches of the distinctive and constitutive principles of the Church and, in particular, the concrete catholicizing of the Church in the hermeneutical process by which local Churches come to be. This effort has required a concrete ecclesiology, that is, a refusal to remain simply on the level of theological generalization or abstraction. To think concretely about the generative and constitutive principles of the Church — the call of God, word of Christ and grace of the Spirit — is to turn one's attention to those concrete situations and those concrete actions and processes by which concrete men and women daily construct the Church. And this is always the genesis of the one and catholic Church in and out of the many local Churches.

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1. "Nam et Ecclesia cotidie gignit Ecclesiam" (PL 93, 166d), quoted in Henri de Lubac, *The Splendour of the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1963), p. 65 and p. 269, n. 102.
  2. Dianich, "Ecclesiologia ed ecclesiogenesi," pp. 417-18.
  3. I borrow the term from the following sentences in Gustafson's *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, p. 43: "The community of Christians maintains its social identity and inner unity through the internalization of meanings represented objectively in certain documents, symbols, and rites. The continuity of the Church has a double reference: on the one hand to the representations of Christ in documents and symbols, and on the other hand to the internalization of the meaning of Christ by members of the community. The meanings that become subjective, internal, and focal for persons are carried objectively, and thus potentially as meanings, in the Bible, the creeds, the symbols and rites of the Church." I have added to this list persons and institutions.



4. To some degree, what is described here as "the objective moment" in the genesis of the Church refers to the aspect of the Church as "Mother" or as the *ecclesia congregans* in distinction from the *ecclesia congregata* or "children of the Church," two dimensions discussed in spiritual and theological terms by de Lubac in *The Splendor of the Church*, pp. 51-73.
5. Dianich, "Soggettività e Chiesa," p. 118.
6. Their articulation of the social dialectic runs: "Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product." See *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City: Anchor, 1967), p. 61.
7. "There certainly are some meanings of "world" which have no ecclesiological relevance. If by world we mean the created cosmos, it is simply obvious that the Church exists and lives in the world until the new heavens and new earth are here. If instead by world we mean, negatively, the unholy and stubborn refusal, at the heart's depths, of obedience to God, it is just as obvious that the Church has nothing in common with this anti-Gospel of existence. But it will determine the Church's self-awareness if we mean by "world" a complex human reality which historically is not the Church and is clearly distinguished from the Church either because it has not been reached by its message or institutions or because it is not yet completely ready to be integrated into its structure. So understood, the world is simply the other pole before which the Church identifies itself, the daily place of its existence, the principal source of its historic responsibility, the term of a constant confrontation in the complex and exciting perspective of its journey towards the Kingdom. The Church is not itself without the world. Or at least, without the world the Church would not be the pilgrim Church, but a pure meteorite of the Kingdom, fallen upon the earth, incapable of sharing 'the joy and hope', the pain and grief of the men of our age'" (Dianich, *Chiesa in missione*, p. 9). This whole book is a very intelligent argument for the inseparability of Church and mission, ecclesiology and missiology.
8. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973), p. 149.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
10. E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Seabury, 1979), p. 575.
11. Dianich, "Soggettività e Chiesa," pp. 123-24.
12. Thus the generative process of tradition is, from both sides, an encounter with history. "It is not possible to construct a theology of mission by appealing for a hermeneutical principle to a Church-subject to which precise historical dimensions are not attributed. The Church as the subject of the historical mission will necessarily be, therefore, a Church which is always determined by its mission and by the historical situation of which it is a part. In every moment of its existence the Church subsists in virtue of its fundamental missionary act: if at some moment there were to be no proclamation of Jesus, no communication of faith between one man and another, that very moment the Church would cease to exist as an historical subject. It is, therefore, always determined by the protagonists of that communication of faith whose very dynamism sustains it in existence. The subject who proclaims and the subject who welcomes the proclamation are the poles within which flows a vital fluid which gives consistency at once to the

*missio* and to the *ecclesia*. Thus these cannot but determine the Church with their concrete subjectivity and, therefore, with their own history. The welcoming subject, because it is to him, in his concrete situation, and not to some anonymous addressee, that the proclamation is brought and, therefore, it is in view of him that it has been specifically formulated. The proclaiming subject, because he is not simply a material vehicle of the Word, but a believing voice which states it from the depth of his experience of faith and of his existence, decisively marked by the Lord whom he believes and proclaims" (Dianich, *Chiesa in missione*, pp. 172-73).

13. Commission théologique internationale, *L'unique Église du Christ* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1985), pp. 24-25.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

#### CHAPTER IV THE COMMUNION OF LOCAL CHURCHES

The third chapter explored the genesis of the Church in the communication and reception of constitutive Christian meaning and value, an event which always occurs only on a local level. But this concentration on the places and processes in which the Church comes to be cannot ignore the other dimension of the issue, the universality or catholicity of the Church. This is a question which the Council itself forces on us by saying, on the one hand, that the local Church is formed on the model of the universal Church and, on the other, that the latter arises in and out of the local Churches. The first statement assigns a priority to the universal Church, the second locates it in the local Churches. I offer here some initial and tentative reflections on these statements which are difficult to reconcile not only theoretically but also and especially practically.

First of all, there is an inadequate distinction between the two terms. If, as we shall see, the local Church is not a Church if it is not Catholic, neither is there a Church Catholic except in the local Churches. This must be kept in mind because of a recurrent temptation to speak of the universal Church as if it is a reality independent of the local Churches, standing over and against them as an entity in its own right. At times this tendency identifies the universal Church with the local Church of Rome, so that relations between local and universal Church are often, subconsciously, discussed as the relationship between "periphery" and "center," that is, between local Churches and Roman authority, as if the Church in Rome were not itself a local Church but rather, in some unique way, were itself the "universal Church" while all other Churches are merely "local."

Second, the universal Church is something that must be made to

come to be in each generation. In other words, it does not already exist in some guaranteed fashion before the local Churches come to be: it is in *and out of* the local Churches that it exists: the latter, therefore, have some priority over it, bring it to be, at least in the sense that they are the places in which and constitute the processes through which the Church Catholic comes to be. As the existence of the local Church, so also the existence of the universal Church is a precarious achievement, by no means guaranteed in advance but brought about as a dimension of the Church that comes to be always locally.

On the other hand, that the Church must be catholic is a conviction that precedes and determines the genesis of the local Church. This can be grounded theologically in the universal mission Christ gave to the Church, in the paradigmatic value of the Pentecost-experience in which it is already a universal Church which gathered locally in Jerusalem, and in the Church's belief that Christ's word and grace have universal anthropological relevance. A community not so based is something other than the Christian Church. That there is in Christ neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian or Scythian, must not only determine the internal life of every local Church but must set the terms also of its relations with every other local Church. In this sense, there is a priority of universality to particularity, of catholicity to locality, in the sense, that is, that there is no Church which does not gather around a Gospel of universal significance and which is not in communion with the other Churches.

Third, the difficult task of reconciling particularity and universality, locality and catholicity, or rather, of achieving a Catholic Church in a local society or culture, involves tensions which it will always be tempting to avoid by choosing one without the other. The unity that is indistinguishable from universionality can be identified with uniformity, the imposition of a single model, already achieved elsewhere, on new attempts to realize the Church. This is what is criticized in what is sometimes called the "Euro-centric" vision. On the other hand, catholicity can be so identified with concreteness that a similar temptation may be embraced by "new" Churches so intent on their own self-realization that they lose sight of the inner requirement of communion with the other Churches, the limits of their own realization of the Church, the danger of ethnocentrism, and the risk of reducing Christianity to its local manifestation. This is the temptation to schism, and it is only historical accuracy to note, with Legrand, that "the map of the successive schisms which have rent the unity of the Christian Church ... constantly and almost perfectly coincides with that of the great cultural areas."<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, as with the genesis of the local Church, so also the self-realization

zation of the universal Church in and out of the self-realizations of the local Churches requires attention to the concrete principles of the Church's catholicity. Sociologists would tell us that, just as you cannot speak of a local community without being able to identify the meanings and values, the symbols, the activities, the institutions which give form and act to the potential for community which exists in the common experience of a group of people, so you cannot speak of a communion among communities unless you can identify what it is that shapes and actualizes the diversity of communities as a single communion. At least briefly, then, we must speak about the principles for the realization of the communion of local Churches in the Church Catholic.

### **The Principles of Catholic Communion**

At the risk of repetition, it is important to keep in mind that the principles here outlined are not later, secondary, derivative principles of the self-realization of the local Church. They are intrinsic to its self-realization, or else it is something other than the Church that is coming to be in a society or culture. A local Church does not first come to be in itself and only later consider its responsibilities for universal communion.

The first of these principles of communion is the common dependence of all Churches on the same generative and constitutive Christian meanings and values. These are, as we saw earlier, the call of God, the word of Christ and the grace of the Spirit. The Church *ex hominibus*, with all the particularities and diversities of the human, is always the *Ecclesia de Trinitate*, the creation of the one God and Father of Jesus Christ. It is "the assembly of God which is in Christ Jesus" that assembles in Corinth and in Thessalonica, in New York and in Paris, in Manila and in Bangkok.

Second, those Christian meanings and values are carried by the same "objective representations." This term refers to the Scriptures, the transmitted *regula fidei*, the central forms of worship, and the apostolic ministry. This might be considered the "Christological" principle, for all of these center upon the One by reference to whom the *communicatio Spiritus Sancti* takes shape and acts as the Body of the Christ. If these are taken away, there is no substance, no shape to distinguish the Church from a generalized religious body. As necessary as it will be to recognize the cultural particularities within which all of these carriers of the meaning and values of Christ, it is part of the central belief in the Incarnation to recognize that all bodies claiming to be the Church must pass by way of Christ and the Apostles. Difficult as it is to apply and as simplistic as it

may perhaps be, the distinction between the "substance" of the sacraments and their "accidents" here has a methodologically paradigmatic value for all the other carriers as well.

Third, the apostolic ministry referred to above as one of the constitutive carriers of the Church's meaning and value turns attention to the institutional mediation of the communion among the Churches. This ministry, centered in the bishop, carries forward the role of the Apostles, a role which is at once one and diverse. The popular historical image of the Twelve, difficult as it is sustain critically, also has paradigmatic value: a single body of disciples, united in their discipleship behind the one Lord, disperses into all the nations, leaving yet not leaving one another, to become founders of Churches. The bishops are the heirs of that ministry: they are those in whom their communities have recognized the charisms of faith and leadership they require, those whom leaders of other Churches have acknowledged to share the apostolic faith, those whom the community has received from the laying-on of hands and the prayer of all, those around whom the community gathers for worship and for service. But if, through the confirmation and the ordination of other heads of local Churches, the bishops mediate the Church Catholic to the local Church, they also mediate the local Church to the Church Catholic. In their origin, both communal and sacramental, bishops bear in themselves the two dimensions of the Church: its particularity and its universality, its locality and its catholicity. The communion of bishops, their collegiality, is a crucial principle of the communion of Churches. A bishop is not a head of a local Church before he is a member of the college of bishops, nor a member of the college before being a head of a local Church.

Perhaps this is the place to draw attention to Legrand's argument for the theological significance of the territorial criterion by which the Church has always structured itself. He sees it as a reflection of the catholicity of the local Church:

If this Church were to be organized on some other principle than territory, would it not appear to be a club whose members would be decided by race, language, social class or any other common characteristic? It would then contradict its own self-designation, which means "convocation." The local Church would surrender to the challenge of Babel if it were content to reproduce within itself, by sacralizing them, the human divisions, cultural, social and political, when its nature is to face them with the Gospel which gathers a people from all tribes, languages and nations.

On the other hand, this challenge can be taken up, on the level of values, by giving renewed vigor to the guiding image of the Church as an antitype to Babel and, on the level of institutions, by the activity of an episcopal ministry which, while promoting the construction of the Church in the diversity of cultural areas — each must hear the Good News in its own language — would become the servant of a communication and of a concrete catholicity because it has to be realized in a territorial space. Thus conceived — but without making it the first or last principle of pastoral action — territoriality is at once a sign and guarantee of catholicity.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, there is the apostolic ministry of the Bishop of the local Church of Rome. There are now, as a result of centuries of historical development, many ways in which this bishop's ministry of unity has taken on institutional form, some of which obscure the theological basis on which his ministry rests or at least are certainly not the only or the best way in which it might be exercised.

Still, for Catholics, the Church of Rome and its bishop have unique responsibilities as the center of ecclesial communion. This is the Church which "presides in love," presides over the communion of Churches, communion with which is a touchstone of ecclesial authenticity. The requirements of unity in faith and in life which every local Church acknowledges within itself have their counterparts in the unity of faith and life with this Church which is a necessary condition if the communion of Churches is to be more than an empty word or a velleity. As in the local Church, the other principles of communion are institutionally and sacramentally mediated through the apostolic ministry of the bishop, so the apostolic ministry of the Bishop of Rome institutionally and sacramentally mediates the other principles of the communion of the Churches. If there is no need for the institutional mediation of local communion, there is none for the institutional mediation of universal communion. But if communion, both locally and universally, requires institutional mediation, then the ministry of the Bishop of Rome has an irreplaceable role.

At the moment the Church is going through a somewhat troubled period as an effort is made to reflect structurally a regained sense of concretely Catholic communion after centuries of uniformity and Roman centralization. Legrand has correctly noted, that "the communion among the Churches remains a mere homiletic theme if it is not translated effectively, that is, into structures."<sup>31</sup> The Council, itself a unique institutional expression of that communion, concretized its view of Catholic communion by strengthening the role of episcopal conferences, by calling for

greater collaboration and contact across Churches and conferences, and by promoting the institution of the Synod of Bishops. The controversies which now attend all three of these developments in many ways recall the controversies at the Council itself over the relationship between papal primacy and episcopal collegiality. Developments since the Council have revealed that this issue is primarily the question of finding appropriate institutions for the practical articulation of the inescapable demands of both unity and concrete catholicity.

### **Dialogue and the Communion of Churches**

It is only natural that, after centuries during which a Euro-centric model of the Church was taken for granted as a universalizable realization of the Church and centralization around Rome was regarded as intrinsic to it, the emphases today should widely fall on the freedom and responsibility of local Churches for their own self-realization. It is also only natural that this task will not be undertaken or carried through without even more tension and conflict than would almost inevitably accompany serious efforts to localize the Church. In any age that task would be difficult and likely to lead to misunderstandings and to be accompanied by mistakes; but the centuries-old inertia of a Christianity already achieved in the forms of the European Churches is reflected at once in the difficulties some have in imagining another form in which the Church could come to be and in the difficulties others have in claiming their self-responsibility without denying the requirements of catholic communion.

In this situation, I wish briefly to take up a clue furnished by Pope John Paul II. In *Catechesi tradendae*, the Pope refers to the problem of inculturation in the following terms:

... the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the biblical world or, more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived), nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down through the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, were one to strip away all the cultural embodiments in which, both in the Scriptures and in later Christian history, the Gospel was incarnated, there would be nothing left. There is no transcultural Gospel in the sense of a culturally disembodied Christianity. It does not

arise from a new cultural soil, but from the word of Jesus Christ brought alive by the Holy Spirit. Today cultures regularly confront one another, and Christian evangelization is the effort to introduce into the dialogue of cultures an encounter with the culture created by Jesus Christ and the apostolic mission he entrusted to his disciples.

Pope John Paul II has accurately identified a problem which James Gustafson had intelligently stated twenty-five years ago:

The meaning of Jesus Christ, as the one who gives unity to the whole Church, is always related to particular persons, communities and cultures. The common center finds special expressions in relation to the lived experience of particular persons or the values of particular cultures. The Church's history is the story of its effort to preserve the common locus of identity while finding those particular expressions of its significance that are appropriate to special times and places. The Church always has a problem of consistency. It must relate Jesus Christ to persons and a society dominated in one place by Hinduism, in another by secular democracy, in another by primitive religion. The problem is one suggested earlier: To what extent are particular expressions so closely identified with the meaning of Jesus Christ that he is lost in the absence of these words, concepts, and images? Christians are socially divided by their solutions to this problem. The problem may be stated more radically: To what extent is the very meaning of Jesus Christ so bound to the history and culture in which he appeared that it cannot be universalized without universalizing elements of that culture and history? How can the culturally conditioned expressions of meaning from one time and place be the vehicles for appropriation of the same meaning in another time and place without distorting the meaning itself?<sup>5</sup>

The more seriously the Churches assume responsibility for their local self-realizations, the more a dialogue of Churches will become an inner requirement of a genuinely Catholic communion and the more such a dialogue will in some respects also take on the character of a dialogue of cultures. This may appear a strange way of looking at the issue, given the fact that the communion in Christian faith, hope and love might be thought to make such dialogue unnecessary or superfluous. But the effort to inculturate the Gospel in the social and cultural matrices of local Churches does cause problems in mutual understanding for which a uniform, Euro-centric Church is ill prepared.

The problems can arise on two levels. There is the problem of



West and those of the East. Until the eleventh century, the Churches of the two areas and traditions lived in ecclesial communion, however difficult or troubled it may sometimes have been. There is a good deal of historical experience that might be studied there, both for a proper understanding of Catholic diversity and for uncovering the sorts of disagreements and tensions which, if left unattended, can lead to schism.

The other example is the simple fact that the Church of today believes itself to be in communion with the Church of all previous centuries. A certain way of looking at the history of the Church can lead one to see only the points of communion between the Churches of different ages. But anyone who looks closely at the concrete life of the Church over these twentieth century in almost any place on earth. St. Thomas explained Jerusalem in the first century, that of Rome in the fifth century, that of Spain in the ninth, that of Paris in the thirteenth, that of Munich in the sixteenth, that of Vienna in the eighteenth, that of Bavaria in the nineteenth not only differ among themselves but differ all also from the Church in the twentieth century in almost any place on earth. St. Thomas explained the catholicity of the Church to mean not only its geographical but also its temporal universality; and if one gives its full concreteness to that temporality, one recognizes in that claim a rich source on which we might draw today in dealing with differences which now do not so much divide generations or historical epochs as Christians and cultures of the same generation. Catholicity across time in fact has been catholicity across cultures, and this may help us today to dialogue across the many cultures of the same day.

Such dialogue will require, as suggested above, skills the Church has not recently felt itself to need. Not least of them perhaps is the ability to make use of the contribution which such social sciences as sociology and cultural anthropology can offer. To some degree this suggestion returns to a major point argued in the first chapter, one which Bernard Lonergan stated precisely in the context of a conception of the Church as a process of self-constitution: to assume that responsibility, the Church "will have to recognize that theology is not the full science of man, that theology illuminates only certain aspects of human reality, that the Church can become a fully conscious process of self-constitution only when theology unites itself with all other relevant branches of human studies."<sup>6</sup>

This observation deserves special notice when there are signs of a new return to the old "theological reductionism," the belief, that is, that the Church is so transcendent and mysterious at its core that its internal

dialogue between various local Churches around the world. The more concretely the Church becomes genuinely local Churches with immediate reference to the economic, social, political and cultural circumstances and challenges, the more difficult it may be for local Churches to understand one another, the more decisions made in one area may challenge other Churches, the more likely it may be for Churches to wonder if their communion with one another is not threatened. Such Churches need to learn the skills of dialogue within their common Christian commitment, able to make distinctions which a uniform approach to the Church's self-realization does not require and not only to tolerate but to appreciate differences which the localization of the Church demands.

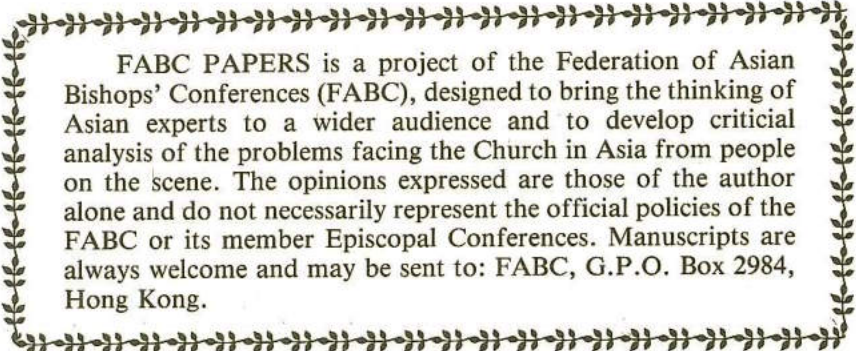
This leads also to one of the dimensions of the second level on which the problem arises: that between a local Church and Rome's ministry of catholic unity. For one of the roles which the Bishop of Rome must play is precisely that of guaranteeing that the concrete catholicizing of the Church not lead to a dissolution of Catholic unity, whether by alienation from the Church of Rome or by the alienation of local Churches from one another. An illustration of this was provided by Rome's actions in bringing together representatives of the hierarchies of the United States, France and Germany when they were all reflecting on the question of nuclear war. This, I think, resulted in conclusions acceptable to all while not preventing the hierarchies from addressing the issue in the terms they believed their several circumstances to require. The dialogue promoted by Rome, in other words, led to the relaxation of tensions and, it seems, to the improvement of each hierarchy's statements.

The issues of relations with Rome are far more complex and varied, of course, and it is difficult to generalize. It is not unfair or mistaken to say that Rome is trying to do what it ought to do — attend to the requirements of unity — and the Churches are trying to do what only they can do — attend to the requirements of concrete catholicity. As long as each acknowledges the responsibility of the other, a first condition of dialogue is fulfilled. But no one should expect that the tensions and disagreements will not be with us for a very long time or that they will easily be resolved.

As I suggested above, we do not have much experience in the required dialogue and are only beginning to work out some of the ecclesiological and anthropological theories needed to help the practical resolutions. It is in many ways a new experiment for the Catholic Church. But perhaps there are two historical examples to which we could look for some help in understanding what differences are compatible with Catholic unity. The first is the communion between the Churches of the

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and external relationships can be adequately dealt with in exclusively theological language and on exclusively theological principles. This is a view which what one might call the Thomistic tradition has always resisted and which the Augustinian tradition has always been tempted to promote. Vatican II, I believe, was in this respect far more Thomistic than Augustinian, but there is today a real temptation to return to a dualistic vision of the Church which would accentuate to the point of absolutizing the distinctiveness of the Church from all other social bodies and the distinctiveness of theology from all other human disciplines. Dialogue will only be truly possible if we acknowledge from the beginning that we can and need to learn from others perhaps as much as we have to teach them.

1. Legrand, "La réalisation de l'Église en un lieu," p. 157. de Lubac agrees; see *The Motherhood of the Church*, p. 225.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 173-74.
3. Legrand, "La réalisation de l'Église en un lieu," p. 318.
4. Pope John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*, 53.
5. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, p. 84.
6. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. 364.

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