

The Gift of the Church

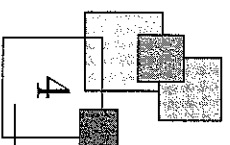
A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of
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The Significance of Vatican Council II for Ecclesiology

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Ecclesiology, "talk about the Church," is usually considered to be a reflective discipline that makes the Church the object of inquiry and discourse. But there is another sense that can be given to the term "Church-talk," namely, the type of talk that makes the Church come to be in actuality. Thus, there is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the part of a preacher, and there is the "Amen" of faith, the fundamental genesis of the Church described in 1 John 1:1-4. Then there is the "we-language" which expresses the communion established among believers and between them and God, and there are the terms they use in speaking to and about one another, terms like brothers and sisters, father and children, etc. There also are the words they use of themselves: "*ekklesia*" (assembly), "*koinonia*" (communion, fellowship), "*congregatio fidelium*" (gathering of believers), "household of faith," etc. Finally, there are the terms which they use to describe the origin, nature, and purpose of their community: "People of God," "body of Christ," "temple of the Spirit," "Bride of Christ," etc. All of this "Church-talk" expresses and mediates a community-consciousness in the everyday world, that is, a sense of what brings Christians together and makes them one, distinguishes them from other human groups, describes their relations with God and with one another, and orients them in the world. This first level of "Church-talk" might be called an implicit, lived ecclesiology, the living reality and sense of being the Church that is the subject on which the discipline of ecclesiology reflects critically and systematically.

A history of ecclesiology, then, cannot be solely a history of the reflective discipline, valuable as this is. It must also be a history of the first-level consciousness of the Church, of how Christians have understood and articulated their common lives and realized their mission in the successive worlds and in face of the historical challenges these posed. The life of the Church, its self-realization, is, therefore, a primary datum for the historian of ecclesiology.

All this is also true of the Second Vatican Council and of its significance for ecclesiology. The council is, of course, immensely important for what it said, for the sixteen documents it produced, all of which, Karl Rahner said, have to do with the Church.¹ But the council was also an event in the history of the Church, unusual in two senses: first, simply because ecumenical councils are relatively rare events, and, second, because the council represents a watershed event in the modern history of the Church. We will, therefore, have to consider the council under both respects, as a historic moment in the Church's self-constitution and as an expression of the Church's reflective self-consciousness.²

Preconciliar Catholicism and Its Ecclesiology

In his opening address to the council,³ Pope John XXIII had a paragraph that is useful for interpreting the historic significance of the council. He said that in his daily ministry he often had to listen to people "who see only ruin and calamity in the present conditions of human society. They keep repeating that our times, if compared to past centuries, have been getting worse." On such people, who, he said, have not learned much from history and idealize the past, the pope added his judgment: "We believe We must quite disagree with these prophets of doom who are always forecasting disaster, as if the end of the world were at hand." The pope invited the bishops instead to consider that human society might be "entering a new order of things" and to have confidence in "the mysterious plans of divine Providence which through the passage of time and the efforts of men, and often beyond their expectation, are achieving their purpose and wisely dis-

¹ Karl Rahner, "The New Image of the Church," *Theological Investigations*, vol. X (New York: Herder and Herder, 1973) 3.

² For the dialectic of experience, event, and documents at Vatican II, see Maria Teresa Fattori and Alberto Melloni, eds., *L'evento e le decisioni: Studi sulle dinamiche del Concilio Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997); John W. O'Malley, *Tradition and Transition: Historical Perspectives on Vatican II* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989).

³ The official Latin text may be found in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962) 786-95; a reconstruction of the textual history and variants of the speech is offered in Giuseppe Alberigo and Alberto Melloni, "L'allocuzione Gaudet Mater Ecclesia di Giovanni XXIII (11 ottobre 1962)," *Fede tradizione profetia: Studi su Giovanni XXIII e sul Vaticano II* (Brescia: Paidera, 1984) 187-283; an English translation is available in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966) 710-9.

ing of all things, even contrary human events, for the good of the Church."

Pope John was here critical of an attitude that has been described as "Catholic catastrophism," the view that the development that led to distinctive features of modernity was one long apostasy of Western society and culture from the ideal once achieved in medieval Christendom. The repudiation of Christ's reign, it was thought, had begun with the Reformation's destruction of the religious unity of the West, had then been spread into the realm of intellectual culture by the Enlightenment, and then through a series of revolutions had subtracted from the control and even the influence of Christ and his Church the realms of economics, politics, and culture. From the time of the French Revolution until the eve of Vatican II, this negative judgment, which at times, as the pope noticed, was even expressed apocalyptically, dominated official assessments of modernity given by popes and bishops.

This attitude not only determined the general interpretation of the modern world, but also provided the basic ideological justification for the construction of modern Roman Catholicism in the face of an apostate world. In its articulation of the ancient faith this distinctively modern form of Catholicism stressed the dogmas that stood in greatest contrast to the errors and heresies of modernity—original sin, the atonement, and the right of Christ to rule over society and culture. It encouraged devotions that would provide a popular reinforcement of this faith—the Immaculate Conception, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the kingship of Christ. On the level of everyday social organization, it encouraged the multiplication of distinctively Catholic associations and movements to solidify a sense of identity among Catholics, to immunize them from contamination by the world, and to mobilize and energize them to restore the world to Christ. On a larger level, it promoted uniformity in the Church and an increasing centralization of authority in Rome by means of an exaltation of the person and role of the pope whose high-point was the definitions of papal primacy and infallibility at the First Vatican Council. The result was a distinctive Catholic sub-society whose ideology and organization reinforced one another.⁴

This new social form of Catholicism was justified by the ecclesiology that prevailed between the two Vatican Councils. It concentrated on the societal nature of the Church, that is, that Christ had established a visible institution of salvation with structures of juridical authority concentrated on the pope. A demonstration was offered that this was the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church founded by Christ and,

⁴ See Joseph A. Komonchak, "Modernity and the Construction of Roman Catholicism," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 18 (1997) 353-85.

according to his promise, still existing in the world and identifiable in the Roman Catholic Church. The only true members of this Church were those who were joined by the externally verifiable criteria of profession of the faith, sacramental participation, and subordination to rightful authority. The whole approach was institutional: the identification of the "one true Church," the distribution of authority, and the duties of submission to the hierarchy. The purpose of such treatises on the Church was to legitimize the solidly organized and ideologically self-confident institution that now lived in an apostate world.⁵

This vision of the Church and its effective expression in the life of the Catholic Church dominated in Roman circles right down to the eve of the council. When Pope John entrusted to a theological commission the preparation of texts for the Vatican Council II, it was natural for the commission to believe its purpose was to prepare documents that would simply repeat and reinforce the attitudes and strategies typical of modern Roman Catholicism, particularly as they had been articulated by the modern popes. Assuming that its role was primarily the defense of the faith against modern errors, the Theological Commission composed a set of documents that drew in large part upon the chief doctrinal interventions of the previous century and a half: the Syllabus of Errors (1864), Vatican I (1870), the condemnation of Modernism (1907), and the encyclicals of Pope Pius XII, particularly *Humani generis* (1950), so recently critical of what was disparaged as the "new theology."⁶

The Drama of the Council and the Need for a Renewed Ecclesiology

Among these official texts was one on the Church, which consisted of eleven chapters.⁷ The first two established the institutional character of the Church and the visible criteria for membership. The next two

⁵For a good description of ecclesiology at the beginning of Vatican II, see Yves Congar, "Situation ecclésiologique au moment de 'Ecclesiam suam' et passage à une Église dans l'itinéraire des hommes," *Le Concile de Vatican II: Son Église, Peuple de Dieu et Corps du Christ* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984) 7-32; Joseph A. Komonchak, "Concepts of Communion, Past and Present," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 16 (1995) 321-40.

⁶See Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Struggle for the Council during the Preparation of Vatican II (1960-1962)," *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995) 227-96.

⁷The text may be found in *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Oecumenici Concilii Vaticani II*, vol. 1:4 (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1971) 12-91.

were devoted to the episcopate and, although they were expected to balance the papally focused texts of Vatican I, they at every point reinforced papal prerogatives. A chapter on the laity reflected recent theological developments and the increasing role assigned to "Catholic Action." After a chapter on the religious life, largely devoted to vindicating their juridical place in the Church, two chapters addressed what was described as the crisis of authority in the Church. A chapter on Church and state repeated the modern "thesis" of the special favor that must be assigned to the Catholic Church. A chapter on the Church's missionary activity concentrated on the Church's right to evangelize. A final chapter on ecumenism concentrated on individuals and on their "return" to Mother Church and set out restrictive rules for common worship.

Three months before the council opened, the first set of texts for discussion (not including the draft on the Church, which was not yet finished) were sent out to the bishops. A number of bishops and their theological consultants began to express fears that the doctrinal texts would fall far short of the three purposes Pope John had assigned to the council: spiritual renewal, pastoral updating, and ecumenical unity. Several important cardinals registered these complaints strongly to the pope. It is likely that he was replying to these concerns when in his opening address he said that the council was not called simply in order to repeat what was already known but rather to preserve and to promote the Church's heritage faith in a pastorally effective way so as to meet the demands of the day. The council would refrain from condemnations and seek to correct error by "the medicine of mercy," that is, by a positive presentation of the faith. In a typically tactful way, Pope John was outlining a conciliar agenda quite different from the one reflected in the prepared texts and in effect authorizing the bishops, should they agree, to choose another direction for their work.

The bishops accepted the challenge. They overwhelmingly approved a draft-text on the liturgy which called for significant reforms over which local and regional episcopal bodies would have important responsibility. They were so critical of the doctrinal text On the Sources of Revelation that they were asked to vote on whether to retain it as the base text. Sixty-one percent of the bishops voted against the text, which Pope John then ordered withdrawn from the floor and remanded to a mixed commission for revision. These two votes revealed that the conciliar assembly shared the pope's vision and desired to produce texts that would authorize a serious review of the Church's pastoral activity and would state the faith in a language and with emphases quite different from those that had characterized the magisterial teaching of the previous century.

Meanwhile, the official text on the Church had been finished and distributed to the bishops. While the assembly was debating the other texts, efforts had already begun to prepare an alternate text. By the time Cardinal Ottaviani, head of the preparatory theological commission and now of the conciliar doctrinal commission, introduced the official text, the drama of the first session of the council had already been played out, and the few days of debate devoted to this document had an anticlimactic air; Ottaviani, and everyone else, knew that the text on the Church would also have to be significantly altered.⁸

The whole council, but particularly its first session, was the Church-in-act, and on the existential and historic level, important events were underway. On the structural level, there was a changing of the guard: those who had been at the margins during the preparation of the council were now replacing as leaders of the council those who had controlled the preparation. Bishops who had been expected obediently to follow the until-now normal direction of the central Roman authorities were now acting collegially and with a new sense of their own responsibility. And they had made it clear that what they wished to do and to say was often dramatically different in style, method, language, and substance from the mental attitudes, pastoral strategies, and creedal emphases that had marked modern Roman Catholicism. This ecclesiology-in-act displayed in the experiences and decisions of Vatican II required a corresponding ecclesiology-in-theory.⁹

The conciliar process and the texts it produced were made possible by a series of theological and pastoral developments that had made their way, not without difficulty and opposition, in the decades before the council.¹⁰ On the level of theological scholarship, we might point here to the biblical renewal which, after having been nearly smothered by the anti-Modernist reaction, had been re-animating by Pius XII's encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943), to the recovery of the deep and rich Catholic tradition in the ages of the Fathers and the great medieval

⁸ See Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Initial Debate about the Church," *Vatican II commence . . . Approches francophones*, ed. Etienne Fouilloux (Leuven: Bibliothek van de Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, 1993) 329-52; Alberto Melloni, "Ecclesiologie al Concilio Vaticano II (autunno 1962-estate 1963)," *Les commissions conciliaires à Vatican II*, ed. M. Lambertini et al. (Leuven: Bibliothek van de Faculteit Godgeleerdheid, 1996) 91-179.

⁹ For the drama of the first session of the council see Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1998), especially, for the debate about the Church, 281-357.

¹⁰ See Stanislas Jaki, *Les tendances nouvelles de l'ecclésiologie* (Rome: Herder, 1957); Avery Dulles, "A Half-Century of Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 50 (1989) 419-42.

theologians, and to the reconstruction of the Church's liturgical tradition. On the level of the Church's life, we might invoke the liturgical renewal, the ecumenical movement, and the rethinking of the Church's relationship to the modern world reflected in Catholic action movements that inspired a theology of lay people, in efforts to elaborate theologies of history and of terrestrial realities, and in long-resisted attempts to reconceive and reform relations between Church and state. As might be expected, there was a dialectical relationship between what was happening on the level of Church life and what was being thought out on the level of scholarship and reflective theology.

In the course of these developments, fuller notions of the Church began to be elaborated and to demand a place in ecclesiology alongside the dominant institutional emphases. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the recovery of the notion of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, endorsed and elaborated in the encyclical *Mystici corporis* (1943). The two decades before the council witnessed the emergence of the notion of the pilgrim People of God and the spread of the idea of the Church as sacrament. The relationship between Eucharist and Church, the subject of important historical studies, was also a major theme in liturgical theology. Ecumenically inspired investigations drew attention to the relations between Word and sacrament and between Scripture and tradition, to the problems of authority, and to the eschatological dimensions of the Church. The place and role of lay people was studied in terms both of their participation in the inner life of the Church and as bearers of the Church's mission in the world.

It was the small place of these notions in the official draft on the Church prepared for Vatican II that led to the general disappointment with the text. The redactional history that resulted in *Lumen gentium* and the other major ecclesiological texts of the council is largely the story of the effort to integrate the recent developments into a statement of the Church's awareness of itself.¹¹

The final texts of Vatican II differ in genre, purpose, and doctrinal authority; they were elaborated over four years, during which the mind of the council itself developed; on many important subjects the council decided not to try to settle legitimately disputed theological questions but simply to set forth the elements that must be kept together, perhaps even in tension, and in the stating of these the council, as was centuries-old conciliar practice, worked by compromise and

¹¹ The best history of *Lumen gentium* remains Antonio Acerbi, *Die ecclesiologie: Ecclesiologia giuridica ed ecclesiologia di comunione nella "Lumen Gentium"* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 1975).

conciliation toward the greatest consensus possible. For all these reasons one should not expect to find a definitive and systematic treatise on the Church in the conciliar documents. An ecumenical council is not a theological seminar.

In the following analysis, I will identify major areas in the council's ecclesiology and explain their significance with regard to (1) developments beyond preconciliar emphases and (2) fruitfulness in the post-conciliar period.

Basic Theological Notions of the Church

Some interpreters claim that there is no single ecclesiology in the council but only a variety of images or models of the Church. The council does, no doubt, employ many images; in fact, it devotes one paragraph to several biblical images and another to the development of the Pauline notion of the body of Christ (LG 6-7). On a more reflective level, the first chapter of *Lumen gentium* is devoted to the Church as mystery, and here the notions of "Church as sacrament" and as *communio* in the divine life are introduced; the second chapter discusses the Church as the People of God, and with the third the text turns to differences among the members of the Church, beginning with the hierarchy. This variety has led some people to speak of several distinct conciliar ecclesiologies and others to identify a single underlying notion that would capture the essence of Vatican II's view of the Church, some opting for "People of God," others for "*communio*," and so forth.

The reason for the variety of images is to be found in the council's choice of a more biblical, patristic, and liturgical language. Images, precisely because of their concreteness, cannot be integrated as such. Integration can take place on the level of reflection or theory, but this too the council did not seek to achieve, being content with descriptive exposition rather than synthetic explanation. Notions such as "mystery," "communio," "sacrament," "body of Christ," "People of God," "temple of the Spirit," and so forth were introduced as a theme seemed to require. The council sought to set out the elements of the Church's life but it left it to theologians to construct a synthesis of them. These elements are many, but the council's ecclesiology includes them all and is, therefore, single in intention.

More unfortunate is the claim sometimes made, implicitly or explicitly, that one must choose among the conciliar notions. Thus one sometimes hears the suggestion that "People of God" and "body of Christ" are incompatible. Initial enthusiasm for "People of God," criticized as overly sociological or "democratic," has yielded lately to "commu-

ion" as the key conciliar idea, better able to set out the Church's dimensions of mystery. To make such choices is to betray the council's intentions and teaching. In explaining the structure of *Lumen gentium*, the doctrinal commission explained that with chapter two, "The People of God," the council was continuing the exposition of "The Mystery of the Church" begun in chapter one; only whereas the first chapter had discussed that mystery in the divine plan from creation to consummation, the second chapter would take up the same mystery in the time between ascension and parousia, that is, in history. A single mystery was being unfolded, first in its transcendent and then in its historical dimensions, and the commission had broken the material up into two chapters simply because a single chapter would be too long.¹²

Rather than thinking that a distinct ecclesiology flows from each of the major notions, this comment invites us to explore which dimensions of the one Church each concept expresses. A particularly important observation on this point is given in LG 8, where the council sets out the constitutive elements of the Church that a theological vision must integrate. It is at once a community of faith, hope, and love and a visible structure, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ, a visible group and a spiritual community, existing on earth and endowed with heavenly gifts. These notions, which could be put in parallel columns, do not describe two distinct things but "a single complex reality composed of a divine and a human element." As in christology the systematic task is set by the attribution of both the divine and the human to "one and the same Jesus Christ," so ecclesiology attempts to understand the presence of both elements in the Church. To sacrifice or to ignore one or the other is to eliminate the mystery. Particular notions more fully than others illuminate one or another of the constitutive elements, but an integral ecclesiology must include them all.

Where Is the Church?

The council provides an answer to this question on three levels, all of which advance in significant ways beyond the common preconciliar ecclesiology. The easiest way to answer the question is to identify its members, who belong to the Church. The preparatory text on the Church, echoing a long tradition from Robert Bellarmine to Pius XII's *Mystici corporis*, had defined "true" members as those joined by the bonds of the external profession of the faith, the reception of the sacraments, and

¹² *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. 3:1 (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1973) 209-10.

submission to authority, particularly that of the pope. Since only Roman Catholics fulfilled all these criteria, it was possible for this draft, in answer to a second level of the question, simply to identify the Church of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church.

In the course of the conciliar discussions, however, it became clear that this was too simple an answer. Merely external criteria, which may suffice for some apologetical purposes, leave out of consideration the inner elements that constitute and animate the Church. Things are more complex when genuine faith, hope, and love, and the Spirit's grace that makes them possible, are taken into account. For, on the one hand, these gifts can be found outside the Catholic Church; on the other hand, they are not enjoyed by all Catholics. In addition, important constitutive features of the Church, such as the Holy Scriptures, the central creed, the sacraments, the apostolic ministry, are found in greater or less degree among non-Catholic churches and communities. The living body of Christ, then, cannot simply be identified with the Catholic Church.

On the first level of our question, then, a more flexible language had to be found than that of membership. The council chose instead to speak of degrees of communion with the Church. It began with full incorporation into the society of the Church which is enjoyed, it said,

[b]y those who, possessing the Holy Spirit, accept its entire organization and all the means of salvation established in it and within its visible structure are joined to Christ, who rules it through the Supreme Pontiff and the Bishops, by the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical governance, and communion (LG 14).

According to these last criteria, only Catholics can enjoy this full incorporation, but according to the first and most important of them, the life of the Spirit, not all Catholics are fully incorporated.

Lesser degrees of communion are then described in the following paragraph, which speaks of non-Catholic Christians, who enjoy a genuine but imperfect communion based upon an impressive set of elements found among them: the Scriptures, faith in God and Christ, union with Christ through baptism, other sacraments, the episcopate, the Eucharist, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, communion in prayer and spiritual blessings, a true union in the Holy Spirit, and martyrdom (LG 15). When the council considered non-Catholic Christian churches and communities in the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), it made the even stronger statement that

some, even very many, of the most important elements or goods by which, taken together, the Church is built up and given life can exist

outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God, the life of grace, faith, hope, and charity and other inner gifts of the Holy Spirit, and visible elements.

In addition, the text went on, "more than a few of the sacred actions of the Christian religion are carried out among our separated brethren," actions that "can really generate the life of grace and must be said to be able to provide entrance into the communion of salvation" (UR 3).

These powerful and generous statements explain why, on the second level of our question, the council could not be content with a simple identification of the Church with the Catholic Church. Instead, making a significant change in the verb employed, the council said: "This Church [of Christ], established and organized as a society in this world, *subsists* in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and by bishops in communion with him, even though many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside its visible structure" (LG 8). The doctrinal commission explained that it had replaced the verb "is" (used in earlier drafts) with the term "subsists in," not because of a deep philosophical concept of "subsistence," but simply because the latter was a more appropriate phrase, given the council's affirmations, in the texts cited above, of the existence of ecclesial elements in other Christian communities.¹³ A unique claim is being made, of course, of the Catholic Church, one that is explained in *Unitatis redintegratio* 3, where the council says that "it is only in the Catholic Church of Christ, the common help to salvation, that can be found all the fullness of the means of salvation." The council's claim, the concrete meaning of the "subsists in" formula, is that the means of salvation Christ wishes his Church to have—the Scriptures, the creed, the sacraments, the ministries—are found in their totality only in the Catholic Church. The claim remains a strong one and defines the object of ecumenical dialogue ever since the council as Catholics and other Christians discuss their differences over these various means of salvation and in particular whether they are all willed by Christ.

There remains a third level at which the question "Where is the Church?" can be asked. It concerns the relationship between the one

¹³ "Subsists in" is used here so that the phrase may better correspond to the statement that elements of the Church are present elsewhere: "Acta Synodalia, vol. 3:1, 177. The non-technical character of "subsists in" is revealed by the synonyms used in the doctrinal commission's explanation of the term: "adesse" (is present) "invenitur" (is found). For the interpretation of the phrase, see Johannes Willibrand, "Vatican II's Ecclesiology of Communion," *Origins* 17 (1987) 27-33; Francis A. Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988) 23-33.

universal Church and the many local or particular churches. For many centuries ecclesiology had developed in a universalistic perspective, perhaps above all because it devoted so much attention to the universal authority of the pope and because of the worldwide missionary expansion of the Church from Europe which not infrequently took the Western shape of the Church to be normative. The result, both in theory and in practice, was a highly centralized and uniform vision of the Church.

Three developments before the council began to qualify some of the assumptions of this view. The first was increased respect for the diverse cultures to which missionary efforts were directed, along with efforts by the popes to promote an indigenous clergy so that as missionary lands achieved political independence the Church would not be considered a foreign body. Second, conversations with the Orthodox East yielded a new appreciation of the diversity of spiritual, liturgical, and theological traditions within the one Church. Third, both theological scholarship on the relation between the Church and the Eucharist and liturgical emphasis on the role of the eucharistic assembly discovered points of contact with the eucharistic ecclesiologies of the East.

All of these movements concentrated attention on local realizations of the Church both in the form of the individual worshiping assembly and in distinct broad traditions of Church life. The conciliar texts reflected these developments and provided the basis for one of the most remarkable features of postconciliar ecclesiology: the new emphasis placed upon the local church.¹⁴ Once again, one may not expect to find in the texts of Vatican II a full and coherent theology of the local Church, as is clear already from the inconsistency of its vocabulary. The council referred to both "local" and "particular" churches, but the referent of these terms (diocese, rite, patriarchal church, local congregation) varies from text to text.

A first dimension of the local churches is liturgical. The council stated that "the chief manifestation of the Church occurs in the full and active participation of the whole holy People of God in the same liturgical celebrations, particularly in the same Eucharist, in common prayer, at the same altar at which the bishop, surrounded by his presbyterate and ministers, presides." Local eucharists, as in parishes, "rep-

¹⁴See Jean-Marie Tillard, *Église d'Églises: L'ecclésiologie de communion* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987); Jean-Marie Tillard, *L'Église locale: Ecclésiologie de communion et catholicité* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1995); Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Local Church and the Church Catholic: The Contemporary Theological Problematic," *The Jurist* 52 (1992) 416-45; Patrick Granfield, "The Priority-Debate: Universal or Local Church," *Ecclesia Tertii Millenniumi Adveniens: Omaggio al P. Angel Anton* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1997) 152-61.

resent the visible Church established throughout the world" (SC 41-42). That this manifestation or representation is to be taken in a strong sense is indicated in LG 26:

This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local assemblies of the faithful, which, linked with their pastors, are themselves called Churches in the New Testament. For in their localities, these assemblies are the new People called by God in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness (see 1 Th 1:5). In them the faithful are gathered by the preaching of Christ's Gospel and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated "so that the whole fellowship is joined together through the flesh and blood of the Lord's body." In every altar-community, under the bishop's sacred ministry, is made manifest the symbol of that charity and "unity of the mystical body without which there can be no salvation." In these communities, although they be often small and poor and scattered, Christ is present by whose power the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is brought together.

In these texts the particular, necessarily local, eucharistic assembly is described as an event of the one and catholic Church, whose whole mystery, generated out of the word of God and the sacrament, is realized there.

A similar focus is revealed in the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops (*Christus Dominus*), which offers a definition of the diocese that sees it as more than a merely administrative subdivision of a worldwide organization:

A diocese is a portion of the People of God which is entrusted for shepherding to a bishop in cooperation with the presbyterate so that, united to their pastor and gathered by him into one flock in the Holy Spirit, they may constitute a particular Church in which is truly present and at work the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ (CD 11).

That here, once again, the whole mystery of the Church is realized in the diocese is made clear in the very important statement found in *Lumen gentium*:

The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity both of the bishops and of the multitude of the faithful. Individual bishops are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches, which are formed in the image of the universal Church and in and out of which the one and unique catholic Church exists (LG 23).

Two important statements are made here, in apparent tension with one another. On the one hand, the individual churches are said to be

"formed in the image of the universal Church;" on the other, this latter is said to exist "in and out of" the individual churches. From the first statement it is clear that the individual local churches are not something distinct from the universal Church but represent it, realize it, bear its image in the sense that what makes the one Church the Church makes them churches. From the second statement it is clear that the universal Church is not something distinct from the individual churches but exists only in them and out of them. As Henri de Lubac said, apart from the individual local churches, the universal Church is only an *ens rationis*, an abstraction.¹⁵ Taken together, the two statements represent one of the most important ecclesiological teachings of Vatican II, and a good deal of postconciliar reflection has been devoted to exploring it and its implications.

When this new orientation is taken seriously, attention focuses on the concrete circumstances in which the one Church comes to be and to act in and out of the many local churches. These are briefly alluded to in a number of paragraphs of the conciliar texts, particularly in its Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (*Ad gentes*), where the challenge of the Church's becoming genuinely at home in the various cultures of the world is described.¹⁶ Such passages have inspired the considerable literature on inculturation and on local theologues that has been published in the decades since the council.

Such passages require that the catholicity of the Church be given concrete meaning. Once again the council led the way:

This mark of universality which adorns the People of God is the gift of the Lord himself by which the Catholic Church effectively and constantly strives to recapitulate all of humanity with all its gifts under the headship of Christ and in the unity of his Spirit. In virtue of this catholicity, the individual parts bring their own gifts to the other parts and to the whole Church so that the whole and the individual parts grow through the mutual communication among all and their common desire for fullness in unity (LG 13).

Catholicity here appears as "fullness in unity," the fullness reflecting the many gifts given to the individual churches, the unity expressing and realizing the divine plan to bring scattered humanity back into unity under Christ and in his Spirit. This deep notion of catholicity is reflected later on in the same text when the council at once praises the diversity of discipline, liturgical usages, and theological and spiritual

patrimonies found in varied "matrices of faith" such as the ancient patriarchates, and insists that "this variety of local Churches, together aspiring to unity [*ecclesiarum localium in unum conspirans varietas*], more clearly demonstrates the catholicity of the undivided Church" (LG 23).

The Common Responsibility

The first draft on the Church, after initial chapters on the nature of the Church and on membership, had turned at once to its hierarchical structure. Before a revised draft was submitted to the second session of the council, it had been decided to place a chapter on the People of God before it entered upon differentiations within the Church. The doctrinal commission explained that this chapter focused on the whole body of believers, clergy, religious, and laity, to whom all that it said in its continued meditation on the mystery applied. If this explanation can prevent an understanding of the term "People of God" that applies it solely to the laity, it remains that this placement draws attention to another of the main contributions of Vatican II's ecclesiology, that the building up of the Church and the fulfillment of its mission in the world is the work of the whole body of believers. Historically, of course, this meant a rehabilitation of the laity, much neglected in typical preconciliar textbooks, which, as Yves Congar often commented, tended to turn ecclesiology into "hierarchyology," treatises on the hierarchy.

Among the developments that led the council to this expanded vision was, first, the liturgical movement whose efforts Vatican II endorsed when it set down a primary intent of its Constitution on the Liturgy:

Mother Church greatly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations that is demanded by the nature of the liturgy itself and for which the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people God has purchased" (1 Pt 2:9; see 2:4-5), have a right and duty in virtue of their baptism (SC 14).

This was an important recognition that it is the whole community of faith that is the subject or agent of worship, so that the laity are not to be conceived as merely passive recipients or observers of liturgical actions performed by the clergy.

This particular application to the liturgy rests upon a more general statement:

The chosen People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5); there is a common dignity as members deriving from their

¹⁵ Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982) 207-8.

¹⁶ See especially AG 4, 8, 15, 22.

rebirth in Christ, a common grace that makes them children [of God], one salvation, one hope and undivided charity. There is, therefore, no inequality in Christ and in the Church on the basis of nationality, social condition or sex, because "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free-man, male nor female. For you are all *one* in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28; see Col 3:11).

If all in Church do not walk along the same path, all are called to holiness and have received an equal faith in the righteousness of God (see 2 Pt 1:1). Although by Christ's will some are established as teachers, dispensers of the mysteries and pastors for others, still there is among all an equality in dignity and in the activity common to all the faithful with regard to the building up of the Body of Christ (LG 32).¹⁷

Within the Church this grounds the set of fundamental rights and duties of all Christians which have since been enshrined in the Code of Canon Law.¹⁸ But these rights and duties do not mark only the inner life of the Church. The laity also have an apostolate, defined as "participation in the saving mission of the Church," and to it, the council says, they "are commissioned by the Lord himself through baptism and confirmation" (LG 33). To this sacramental call the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam actuositatem*) adds a charismatic basis:

From the reception of these charisms, even the simplest ones, arises the right and duty of any believer to exercise them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and for the building up of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit "who breathes where he will" (Jn 3:8) and at

¹⁷ See also AA 2.

As in the structure of a living body no member is merely passive but shares both in the life and the activity of the body, so in the Body of Christ, which is the Church, the whole body "makes bodily growth when each part is working properly" (Dph 4:16). Indeed, such is the connection and linkage of members in this body that a member which does not work according to its ability toward the growth of the body must be said to be useless to the Church and to itself. In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a unity of mission.

¹⁸ See *Codex Iuris Canonici*, canons 208–23. The only right mentioned in the conciliar documents that is not included here is the one stated in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam actuositatem*) 3: "From the reception of these charisms, however simple they may be, there arises for every believer the right and duty to exercise them." This may be the place to recall what Pope John Paul II said in the apostolic constitution, *Sacrae disciplinae leges*, with which he promulgated the new code. After noting that the code is an effort to translate Vatican II's ecclesiology into canonical language, he said: "If, however, it is impossible to translate perfectly into canonical language the conciliar image of the Church, nevertheless the Code must always be referred to this image as the primary pattern whose outline the Code ought to express insofar as it can be by its very nature."

the same time in communion with his brethren in Christ, especially with his pastors (AA 3).

These vindications of the co-responsibility of all members of the Church have had their effect in the opening of new opportunities for lay people in the liturgy, in catechesis, and in the governance of the Church. While this is certainly a welcome realization of the council's intentions, the focus of the conciliar texts on the laity lies rather on their role in the world. This is clear in the very effort of the council, in LG 31, to provide a typical description of the layperson that would go beyond the banal sociological definition of them as all those who are not clergy or religious. Their basic Christian dignity is described when the council calls them Christians

who, as incorporated into Christ by their baptism, constituted as the People of God, and made sharers in their own way in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ, have their own role to play in the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.

But what is distinctive about the laity is their "secular character," that is, that they live their Christian lives and undertake their Christian responsibilities in the world as, typically, married and employed in secular occupations.

It is here that they are called by God to exercise their own role, led by the spirit of the Gospel, working from within, like a leaven, for the sanctification of the world, and thus, especially by the witness of their lives, faith, hope, and love, they reveal Christ to others.

The council here places the distinctive and irreplaceable role of the laity in their daily efforts to redeem society, culture, and history. It is, in turn, precisely as those engaged in this activity in the world that they also have a right and duty to bring their experience and the wisdom gained in it as their necessary contribution to the inner life of the Church.

This effort to validate and encourage the participation of all in the life and work of the Church at all levels was reflected in the council's call for co-responsibility and for the establishment of structures to enable it. Thus, on the parish level, the council called for structures, such as parish councils, through which the laity could exercise their right, and even their duty, to make known their views on matters concerning the good of the Church (LG 37). Similarly, on the diocesan level, it endorsed senates or councils of priests and pastoral councils composed of priests, religious, and laity (CD 27). Finally, with regard to the governance of the whole Church, the council sought to restore a greater sense

of the collegial character of the episcopate, that is, of the common responsibility for the whole Church of the whole body of bishops, carried out both by the faithful fulfillment of their responsibilities in their individual dioceses and by such forms of collective responsibility as episcopal conferences and the Synod of Bishops.

Once again, these emphases on participation and co-responsibility reflect the council's renewed interest in the local churches in which the mystery of the Church is realized. It does not see the Church as a vast multinational religious corporation with central headquarters in Rome, branch offices in major cities, and retail shops in parishes. The gathering of the People of God into communion in the mystery of God takes place locally as the word of God is preached and faith is generated, as the power of the Spirit renews hope, as the love of God creates love for God in return and love of the brethren, as this new people, so defined and so constituted, realizes an at least partial transformation of the world in which it arises. Within this process there are different responsibilities, variously grounded in the sacraments (baptism, confirmation, orders) and in special gifts or charisms; but all make the Church come to be and all help it to make a difference in the world. The Church that comes from the Holy Trinity (*Ecclesia de Trinitate*) is the Church that arises from among human beings (*Ecclesia ex hominibus*); the one Church whose constitutive principles make up the universal form of the churches is the Church that arises in and out of the many local churches.

Primacy and Collegiality

Circumstances prevented the Vatican Council I, after its definition of the jurisdictional primacy and of the infallible exercise of the teaching office of the pope, from moving on to a discussion of the role of bishops. From the beginning it was expected that Vatican II would attempt to provide this necessary complement. The difficulty of this task, which made the history of the third chapter of *Lumen gentium* one of the most controversial in the whole course of Vatican II, lay, first, in the need fully to respect the teaching of Vatican I and, second, in the fact that between the two councils the papal role and an accompanying mystique of the papacy had grown to such an extent that the impression could be gained that the whole Church was personified in the pope and that its governance was a Roman monopoly.

The teaching of Vatican II, in LG 3, begins with the clear statement that its teaching on the episcopate will be set out as a continuation of the teaching of Vatican I on the governance and teaching authority of the pope, which it again proposes for belief (LG 18). Paragraphs follow on Christ's gathering of the apostles and on the continuation of their

ministry in their successors, the bishops. The important statement is then made that the three offices of the bishop (teaching, governing, and sanctifying) are radically communicated by episcopal ordination, an effort to overcome the dichotomy suggested by the common preconiliar teaching that only the third of these was communicated by the sacrament of orders while the first two were the result of papal delegation. The necessary unity with the pope this theory wished to defend was instead stated by the council in terms of "hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college" (LG 21). The three episcopal offices are later described at some length (LG 25–27).

The college of bishops embodies and makes still present the college of apostles represented by the Twelve. The council used a nontechnical and rather elastic notion of this "college." That the successors of the apostles constitute a "stable body" was proved by history, as in the ancient forms of communion among the bishops and with the pope, the holding of regional and general councils, the emergence of patriarchates, and, more recently, the establishment of conferences of bishops (LG 22–23). The delicate task the council faced was that of defining the authority of the episcopal college in such a way as not to infringe upon the primatial role of the pope. Rather than offering a speculative resolution of the difficulty, the council was content to set out the terms that any such theory must take into account (LG 23–24). On the one hand, the pope has "full, supreme, and universal power over the Church, which he may always freely exercise." On the other hand, "the order of bishops, . . . in union with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head, is also the subject of full and supreme power over the whole Church, a power which can only be exercised with the consent of the Roman Pontiff." During and after the council, theologians and canonists have debated how to reconcile and synthesize these two statements, which the council was content simply to state as the terms of the debate. These theoretical debates have been matched on more practical levels by discussions and even controversies about the relative authority of the pope, individual bishops, and regional forms of collegiality, such as episcopal conferences. As the council itself did not settle the theoretical debates then, so also its teachings, by themselves, do not provide answers to the practical controversies since. The chief challenge, then as now, is to reconcile the demands of unity and the requirements of diversity.

During the council, Joseph Ratzinger acutely distinguished two ways of approaching the question.¹⁹ The one that came to dominate in

¹⁹Joseph Ratzinger, "Die bischöfliche Kollegialität nach der Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils," *Das neue Volk Gottes: Einführung zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1970) 184–7.

the modern era is universalistic and conceives the governance of the Church on the model of a central administration, monarchical under papalism, more corporate under one modern view of collegiality. The other view, typical of patristic ecclesiology, focuses on the realization of the full mystery of the one Church as a communion of the many local churches, and so derives the theology of the ministries of unity in the Church from a theology of communion rather than vice versa. Both views were represented in the debates on primacy and episcopacy and in the final texts of the council, and they continue to be defended today.²⁰

The Church and the World

The council did not entitle its pastoral constitution *The Church in the World*, but *The Church in the Modern World*. With this effort, the council sought to provide general principles and guidelines for the task that Pope John XXIII had challenged it to undertake: to take a new look at the world in which the Church now lived, to offer an evaluation of its strengths and needs, to examine the appropriateness to this world of its pastoral attitudes, strategies, and institutions, to reform what was no longer appropriate, and to be willing at once to learn from the world even as it sought to teach it. The result was *Gaudium et spes*, the text in which, more than any other, the council agreed to follow the Pope in his rejection of "the prophets of doom."

The document begins with an expression of the Church's solidarity with "the joys and hopes and the sorrows and anxieties of people today" and then sets out upon an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the social and cultural transformations underway. The Church is now living in a more dynamic world, marked by the effort to increase human control over nature and "to establish a political, social and economic order that will be of ever greater service to people and will help individuals and groups to affirm and cultivate their own dignity" (GS 6-9). It is within this movement of conscious effort to transform and to direct human history that *Gaudium et spes* sets out the Christian understanding of the human person, the human community,

²⁰See also Hervé Legrand, "Collégialité des évêques et communion des Églises dans la réception de Vatican II," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 75 (1991) 545-67; for an example of the practical debates, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Roman Working Paper on Episcopal Conferences," *Episcopal Conferences: Historical, Canonical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Thomas J. Reese (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1989) 177-204.

and human history in order then to discuss the Church's task in the modern world (chs. 1-4). While sociologically informed, the approach has as its theological basis a christological anthropology nicely summed up in the statement that "it is only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word that the mystery of the human being is truly made clear" (GS 22). The intent throughout is to correct mistaken modern tendencies, found among both believers and unbelievers, to counterpose the sovereignty of the Creator and the self-responsibility of individuals and groups, what might be called their created autonomy. The classic Christian doctrine of freedom, sin, and redemption is here extended beyond the individual to include the collective human self-project.

There are at least two respects in which the method and the content of *Gaudium et spes* are significant for ecclesiology. The first is on the level of ecclesiology as lived, the basic attitudes and strategies that define the Church's activity in the world. Following Pope John's lead, the council largely refrained from the suspicious, negative, and defensive posture that had marked the Catholic subculture before; instead, it adopted a method of dialogue reflecting its judgment that the Spirit of God is not absent from modern developments (see GS 26) and enabling it to describe in paragraph 44 what the Church can learn from the world. While generally positive and hopeful, the presentation is not, as some would later complain, "naïvely optimistic"; it does not refrain from often quite critical remarks on imbalances and failures in the modern world and on the mistaken views of God and of humans that frequently lie behind them. But its response was a positive and confident statement of what the Church has to offer both through its message about Christ and through its own life of faith, hope, and love.

A particularly controversial example of the change in theory and practice that the council adopted is found in its teaching on religious freedom. As late as the mid-1950s, indeed even in the official schema on the Church prepared for the council, the ideal relation between Church and state was presented as one in which the Catholic Church is established as the official state religion, the state supports it financially and juridically, and the state may use its coercive power to prevent or to restrict the public activities of other religious bodies. The most that could be allowed would be "toleration" of mistaken religions in order to preserve public peace. Efforts to revise this theory and the corresponding practice were consistently resisted.

In its Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis humanae*), the council dethroned the preconiliar ideal. It asserted the right to religious freedom both of individuals and of religious bodies on the basis of the dignity of the human person, the freedom of the act of faith, and the juridical incompetence of the state in religious matters. While it did

not utterly reject the possibility of a confessional state, thus would have to allow other religions something more than mere "toleration," namely, genuine religious freedom and an equal share in the state's support. The freedom of the Church would be guaranteed in general constitutional and statutory guarantees of religious freedom. Paul VI put it well at the end of the council when in his remarks to leaders of governments he replied to his own question: "What does the Church ask of you? It asks only for freedom, the freedom to believe and to preach its faith, the freedom to live and to bring its message of life to people."²¹ With this teaching, as some remarked at the time, the Church was leaving "the age of Constantine."

On the level of reflective ecclesiology, the method and teaching of *Gaudium et spes* are significant because they require that a theology of the Church include, and not simply as an afterthought, a consideration of the Church in the world. Certainly, an ecclesiology will have to consider the formal constituents of what *Lumen gentium* called "the image of the universal Church," that is, the generative principles, divine and human, that make the Church the distinctive reality that it is. But just as individuals become Christians in the concrete circumstances and under the concrete conditions that define and distinguish their particular lives, so the Church is never generated except in particular places, at particular times, and in face of particular historical challenges. The Church never comes to be except in the world, which means, of course, that the churches never come to be except in their particular worlds. In the concrete genesis of the Church in the churches, the world does not appear at some second moment and, as it were, "out there," as the object of redemptive concern. The genesis of the Church is a moment in, a dimension of, the genesis of the world. Its very existence is supposed to make the world different.

It would be a mistake, then, to imagine a tension, much less a dichotomy, between the texts of the council that, to use a not entirely happy distinction made at the time, speak of the *Ecclesia ad intra* and those that speak of the *Ecclesia ad extra*, to contrast a theological to a sociological or historical approach to the Church, or to divide the theological notions of the Church up between these two pretended oppositions. It is true, of course, that some notions direct attention more clearly than others to one or another of these dimensions, but it is a single dynamic historical agent that these dimensions constitute and these notions describe. The People of God that is the sacrament of Christ's redemptive presence in the world is the same Church that is

communion in the mystery of God, and the communion with God and among human beings that constitutes the Church's distinctive reality and that it celebrates in its central worship is what the pilgrim people are to bring to the world by proclaiming it in word and embodying it in life and service. The Church that the world needs is the Church that is most distinctively itself, and what distinguishes the Church is what most directly and immediately relates it to the world of human history. The mystery of the Church is realized in the history of the world.

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²¹ See *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) 10-11; Abbott, *Documents of Vatican II*, 729-30.

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