

## Introduction to

*Synode Extra ordinaire: Célébration de Vatican II* (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1986) 9-32

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On January 25, 1985 Pope John Paul II startled the Catholic world by convoking an Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council. The Pope's announcement led the Catholic Church to undertake a serious effort to interpret and evaluate both the Council itself and the remarkable impact it has had on the Church in the last twenty years.<sup>1</sup>

The Synod unfolded in three major stages. The first was inaugurated on April 1st, when Archbishop Jozef Tomko, General Secretary of the Synod, sent to all those who had a right to take part in the Synod a request that they institute a consultation studying how the Council has been and still needs to be applied.

The second stage began with the opening session of the Synod, which was inaugurated by the Initial Report delivered by the official Relator of the Synod, Cardinal Danneels. This report summarized the responses from the Churches and proposed an orientation for the Synod's work. During the first week of the Synod, the members made many oral and a few written interventions. This stage concluded on Friday when Cardinal Danneels gave his Second Report which summarized the week's discussion and outlined some questions that needed further consideration.

The third stage then began as the members of the Synod met in small language-groups to consider the topics which Cardinal Danneels had proposed. After these groups reported the results of their conversations to the general assembly, the latter part of the second week was principally devoted to the preparation of a "Message to the People of God" and of a "Final Report" to synthesize the Synod's conclusions.

The essential documentation of the Synod of 1985, then, is the following: (1) the questions sent out to the Churches; (2) the responses of the Churches to the questionnaire; (3) an Initial Report, summarizing their responses; (4) the oral and written interventions given during the first week of the Synod; (5) a Second Report, summarizing the Synodal interventions; (6) the reports of the discussions in the language-groups; (7) the Final Report; (8) the Message to the People of God.

Of these, until now, only the initial questionnaire, the Final Report and the Message to the People of God have been available in full. This volume now adds to these a full translation of the Initial and Second Reports and of the reports of the language-groups, a selection of the reports from the Churches and of the oral and written interventions, and a number of complementary documents. Although it is far from complete, this volume thus provides far more documentation

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<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger's famous interview with Vittorio Messori [add bibliographical data for French edition], somewhat understandably but no less unfortunately, was interpreted as providing the "hidden agenda" for the convocation of the Synod. The book clearly affected a number of the responses and interventions at the Synod itself, and it is still being used as a yardstick by which to measure what the Synod did and did not do.

than has yet been available on the Synod and thus makes possible a much fuller understanding of the issues that were at stake, of the development of the debate, of the meaning and intentions of the Final Report, and of the ecclesial and theological significance of the Synod.

Of the new documentation here made available, special attention should perhaps be drawn to the responses from the local Churches. The great majority of these responses have not been previously known. In mid-summer, the bishops of England and Wales released to the press the report which they had made to Rome, and they were followed shortly after by the bishops of the United States and of Holland. But early in October, the Vatican Secretariate of State sent a letter asking Episcopal Conferences not to publish their replies to the Secretariate's questionnaire. Several conferences which were at the point of releasing their reports then withdrew them.

It is not possible here to summarize the responses from the Churches. They differ greatly in length, detail, literary genre, and in the fashion in which the Secretariate's questions are addressed and answered. We publish here only 15 of the 95 responses submitted, but even these provide a unique testimony to the impact the Council has had on the life of the Churches and make one even more eager to see the rest of them published. Their contents are with some success summarized in the Initial Report, which, however, also had to omit most of the interesting detail. Furthermore, as we shall see, some very important elements in the Churches' responses are presupposed but not well represented in the Final Report. A full understanding of the Synod, then, cannot ignore the reports of the Churches, the preparation of which may justly be said to have marked the beginning of the Synod.

This Introduction cannot offer a detailed description of all of the documentation provided, much less a full analysis and interpretation of the Synod's development. What is possible and may be helpful is to make some remarks on the Final Report, reading it in the light of the four general questions sent out to the Churches, and noting where possible the relationship between its conclusions and earlier stages of the debate. In this way it may be possible both to uncover some of the chief theological and ecclesiological issues and to demonstrate the value of the extensive documentation this volume now makes available.

### The Framework of the Discussion

In his announcement of the Extraordinary Synod, Pope John Paul II assigned it three purposes: to revive the conciliar experience of ecclesial communion, to exchange and study experiences and information on the implementation of the Council, and to foster further study and application of the Council. To carry out the Pope's intentions, the Consilium of the Synod decided in March to put some order and system into the process by proposing that the study of the vast achievements of the Council, both in its texts and in its impact on the Church, concentrate on its most important documents, the four Constitutions on the Church, on Divine Revelation, on the Liturgy, and on the Church in the Modern World. This was not to exclude, however, reference to other conciliar documents or to questions having particular importance in

the local Churches.<sup>2</sup> Concentrating on these four themes, Archbishop Tomko's letter asked the Churches to report what had been done to implement the Council, what benefits had accrued to the Churches from it, what errors or abuses there had been in understanding and implementing the Council, and what difficulties, new or old, stand in the way of further implementation and how these might be addressed.

In Cardinal Danneels's Initial Report, this focusing of attention yielded a title containing the theme which the Synod would pursue until the end: "The Church, under the Word of God, Celebrating the Mysteries of Christ for the World's Salvation."<sup>3</sup> This phrase was used to structure all three of the main Reports, a decision which probably greatly simplified the synthetic work of Cardinal Danneels and of Walter Kasper, the Special Secretary, who, in preparing the three Reports, had to work under extremely difficult circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

In the course of the Synod, another trilogy of purposes appeared, first stated in Cardinal Danneels' Second Report, which described the purpose for which the Synod had been called as "celebrating, verifying and promoting the Second Vatican Council." This trilogy does not exactly correspond to that of the Pope; it does not include the effort to revive the experience of ecclesial communion, and it introduces the somewhat odd notion of a Synod's "verifying" an Ecumenical Council.<sup>5</sup>

Lastly, the Synod's Final Report somewhat alters the earlier frameworks. It is divided into two sections, of unequal length. The first discusses "the central topic of this Synod: the celebration, verification and promotion of Vatican II," while the second discusses particular topics: the Mystery of the Church, the sources by which the Church lives, the Church as communion, and the mission of the Church in the world. Looking for the way in which the Final Report addresses the Secretariate's four questions, one finds that the first three of them are

<sup>2</sup> Archbishop Tomko's letter to the Churches made brief reference to the distinction common at the Council between the Church *ad intra* and the Church *ad extra*, but this did not play a great role in the Synodal debates, although one could argue that beneath many of the debates lies the question of the relationship between the nature and the mission of the Church.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase was presented in the Initial Report as indicating the "principal structure or building-plan according to which the documents of the Council were composed. For it was the Council's intention to renew the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) by drawing on its sources in the Word of God (*Dei Verbum*) and in the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and for the sake of the world's salvation (*Gaudium et Spes*). The interpretative key of a new and deeper reading ('*relecture*') of the Council and the central topic of this Synod, as has been suggested, is: "The Church, under the Word of God, celebrating the mysteries of Christ for the world's salvation." See also the paper by Walter Kasper, Special Secretary to the Synod, printed in the appendix. Here and elsewhere, this paper is a valuable document for understanding the structure and emphases especially of the Initial Report.

<sup>4</sup> The Initial Report had to be prepared before all the responses from the Churches had arrived; the Second Report had to be prepared while the first week's debate was still going on; and the Final Report was composed during a hectic final week.

<sup>5</sup> The Final Report says: "Unanimously and joyfully, we also verify that the Council is a legitimate and valid expression and interpretation of the deposit of faith as it is found in Sacred Scripture and in the living tradition of the Church." This is an odd statement, first on the grounds of the old principle *Maior a minore non benedicitur*, and for the reason expressed in a comment, eventually ignored, made in the French language-group: "Adherence to the Council should be expressed in such a way that readers are not surprised by the need to say it."

discussed in the first section, while the fourth question--how to promote the Council--already begins in the first section and is the principal concern of the whole second section.

### The Four Questions

The first two questions which the Secretariate asked of the Churches were: What has been done to make the Council known, received and implemented? What benefits have come to your Churches from the Council?

The Churches' responses to the first question often told in some detail the many and great efforts they had made to make the Council known and to put its reforms into effect, efforts which were also occasionally summarized in some of the interventions during the first week of the Synod. Cardinal Danneels' Initial Report devoted a few brief sentences to the immense work of publication, translation, interpretation and implementation of the conciliar documents and on the "great renewal in the whole life of the Church" which this had brought about. "Because of this reception, that is, the internal acceptance and practical implementation of the Council and its documents, we bear witness to the presence and effective power of the Holy Spirit." The Final Report makes no reference to the efforts at communication, reception and implementation, but it does contain a brief summary:

The great majority of the faithful received the Second Vatican Council with zeal; a few, here and there, showed resistance to it. There is no doubt, therefore, that the Council was embraced with heartfelt adherence because the Holy Spirit was prompting his Church to do so. Moreover, even outside the Catholic Church, many people paid careful attention to the Second Vatican Council.

As for the Churches' answers to the second question, Cardinal Danneels' Initial Report went to some length to describe the fruits of the Council which almost all the reports had mentioned. He was then able to conclude:

All these things are only a brief summary of the principal themes. But they show that we should be grateful to the Spirit of God for his providence and for the gifts he has given us in these twenty years. In many ways we have acknowledged that Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, is still present to us today through the Holy Spirit. We must not, therefore, lose hope or expect all kinds of evil, but rather be grateful, joyful, hopeful, which will bring us a new and greater dedication of our energies. We must state, then, that the Church today is alive and flourishing and demonstrating its vitality in our own age.

This conclusion was also echoed in many of the interventions at the Synod.

Unfortunately, the answers to the second general question are very poorly represented in the Final Report. There are only these two sentences:

We have unanimously *celebrated* the Second Vatican Council as a grace of God and a gift of the Holy Spirit, from which have come forth many spiritual fruits for the

universal Church and the particular Churches, as well as for the men of our time. Unanimously and joyfully, we also *verify* that the Council is a legitimate and valid expression and interpretation of the deposit of faith as it is found in Sacred Scripture and in the living tradition of the Church.

Two short paragraphs of the Final Report, therefore, are devoted to the first two general questions and to the two purposes of "celebrating" and "verifying" the Council. Having said this, the Report hastens on to discuss the "shadows" and "difficulties" in the process of receiving the Council, and these occupy most of the rest of the document. As a result, the Final Report is very unbalanced and does not correctly represent the reports of the Churches submitted before the Synod nor most of the speeches delivered during it.

The easiest explanation of this imbalance lies, first, in the dynamics of the Synod and, second, in the circumstances of the redaction of the Final Report. At the end of the first week, Cardinal Danneels gave his Second Report, summarizing the previous week's work and offering suggestions to guide the work of the language-groups. The Cardinal's general synthesis did note the unanimous celebration of the Council as a gift of God, but his emphasis, somewhat understandably, fell on what yet remained to be done, both at the Synod and in the daily life of the Church. Because of that focus, he explained three times, he did not repeat in this Second Report the descriptions of the positive results of the Council which he had made in the Initial Report.

This concentration on present problems and on how to meet them largely determined the agenda for the language-group meetings of the second week of the Synod. A number of observers have pointed out how much more negative in tone and direction the summaries of the work of these groups were than the summaries of the initial reports and of the Synodal interventions. There are probably many reasons for this, but one surely is that these groups were meant to concentrate on present difficulties and on future solutions. It was easy, with that agenda, to take for granted or to forget all that had already been "celebrated" and "verified."

Finally, it is clear that the Final Report was written in close dependence on the Second Report and on the summaries of the work of the language-groups. Whole sections of it are taken *verbatim* from one or another of these sources. This makes the Final Report much more a summary of the last week's work than of the first week's and of the reports received from the Churches. Unfortunately, the secrecy under which those reports and Cardinal Danneels' Initial Report were kept shrouded have until now prevented a balanced assessment of all that the Synod members had to say about the effect of the Council. They were far more balanced in their assessments than the Final Report would lead one to think.

This explanation again points up the necessity of consulting the Initial Report and especially the responses of the Churches on which it depends. The Final Report, along with the Synod "Message," may represent the only document on which the Synod voted, but without the earlier documentation, the Synod's "celebration" and "verification" of the Council simply hang in the air.

The third general question had asked about errors and abuses in the reception of the

Council. The Final Report speaks of "deficiencies and difficulties" and attributes them in part "to an incomplete understanding and application of the Council, in part to other causes. However, in no way can it be affirmed that everything that took place after the Council was also caused by the Council." A brief attempt is then made to uncover the external and internal causes of these difficulties: external: the Church's lack of material means and personnel, the use of force against the Church, the influence of a technological and materialistic ideology and of hostile mass-media, the work of the devil; internal: partial, selective and superficial readings of the Council, hesitance in implementing its true doctrine, over-emphasis on institutional problems and reforms, a lack of discernment with regard to a secularized world.<sup>6</sup>

All of these difficulties and all of these attempts to explain their source are mentioned in the pre-Synodal reports of the Churches and in some interventions during the first week. But there are some emphases both in the responses and in the interventions which do not appear in the Final Report, which also makes no room for two important arguments which Cardinal Danneels' Initial Report had found in the responses from the Churches:

Several reports state that the above-mentioned questions must be interpreted in historical perspective. In the Church's past, disagreements, indeed confusion, have often immediately followed the celebration of Councils. Before all the faithful peacefully received Councils, there was a long struggle and many phenomena occurred that are not much different from what we are experiencing now: there was little foresight, and sometimes confusion and damage. Looking at the history of the Church, then, we can have more confidence, patience and hope in our own circumstances. Taught by the Church's historical experience, we should not be overly dejected at the present state of affairs and the sadness we experience.

The reports mention another topic for reflection: until the last Council, an attitude of defensiveness and alienation often prevailed with regard to secular questions. For that reason, many questions accumulated for a long time and now suddenly rush upon the Church like a flood or avalanche. The Council did not create these questions. Indeed it is highly likely that if the Church had not confronted these questions in and after the Council, a very powerful "earthquake", as it were, could hardly have been avoided.

Besides these historical perspectives, the Final Report also ignores the many references in several pre-Synodal responses to the speed and magnitude of social, political and cultural changes in the years since the Council, changes which they did not think represent only dangers to the Church. Both the pre-Synodal reports and the Initial Report, therefore, differ both in tone and in critical quality from the consistently negative evaluation which the Final Report gives to secular developments since the Council<sup>7</sup> and from its therefore somewhat moralizing

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<sup>6</sup> Almost all of the description of difficulties and of the analysis of its causes is taken, sometimes *verbatim*, from the report of the German language-group.

<sup>7</sup> After a very rapid acceptance of secularization as "the legitimate autonomy of temporal matters," the Final Report concentrates on the danger of "secularism." Later, after declaring "the great importance and great relevance" of *Gaudium et Spes*, it notes "that the signs of our time are in part different from those of the time of the Council,

interpretation of internal Church developments.

Lastly, in the Final Report, an important statement of the Initial Report is missing. It concerns the way in which post-conciliar difficulties should be addressed:

All this forces questions, that is, doubts, difficulties and very serious duties, on the conscience of bishops and urgently demands answers and remedies. But many bishops in their reports rightly state that these evils cannot be corrected solely by disciplinary and administrative means. Failings after Vatican II cannot be combatted by the means used before the Council. It is rightly stated that solutions have to be found patiently, perseveringly, with trust in God's Spirit and through fraternal conversation.

The critique of pre-conciliar means of dealing with problems and the implied fear that they may be resurrected today are not mentioned in the Final Report, except insofar as it does refrain from disciplinary recommendations and strongly urges spiritual reform as the essential means of correction.<sup>8</sup>

### Principles for Interpreting the Council

The remainder of the Final Report is devoted to responding to the questions about what might be done to correct the errors and to meet old and new difficulties in the way of an accurate understanding and effective implementation of the Council. This suggestion is prefaced by what might be called certain "hermeneutical principles" for a reading of the Council:

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with increased problems and anxieties. Today, in fact, everywhere in the world we witness an increase in hunger, oppression, injustice and war, sufferings, terror and other forms of violence of every sort. This requires a new and more profound theological reflection in order to interpret these signs in the light of the Gospel." All the new signs of the times are negative, as if there is no longer any "joy and hope" in the world for the Church to share. (The modern Western world comes in for particularly severe comments.) Later, certain "truly human values" are accepted and defended: "the dignity of the human person, basic human rights, peace, freedom from oppression, poverty and injustice," but even these are said to need "purification," before they can be elevated to the level of "integral salvation." There is no indication anywhere in the Final Report that the Church has anything to learn from the world.

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps this is the place to note the curious attempts to re-define *aggiornamento*. The Final Report discusses it in the context of an emphasis on the Cross, which it apparently believes has been neglected recently. "From this paschal perspective, which affirms the unity of the cross and resurrection, the true and false meaning of so-called '*aggiornamento*' is discerned. It is not mere easy accommodation, which would lead to the secularization of the Church. Nor is it an unmoveable closing in upon itself of the community of the faithful. It is, rather, missionary openness for the integral salvation of the world. Through it, all truly human values are not only accepted but vigorously defended: the dignity of the human person, basic human rights, peace, freedom from oppression, misery and injustice. But integral salvation is only obtained if these human realities, often deformed by sin, are purified and further raised by grace to familiarity with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit."

A few things are odd about this description. First, no recorded discussion before or during the Synod suggests it as a definition of *aggiornamento*. Second, it appears in the discussion of the Church in the modern world, where it functions as part of the one-way description of the need for the Church to "purify" values honored by the world. Thirdly, it has completely lost the connotations it had in Pope John's use of it, which included the need for the Church to criticize and reform itself in the light of modern challenges. Of course, this latter emphasis is in considerable tension with the earlier statement that "the Church is one and the same throughout all the Councils."

The theological interpretation of the Council's doctrine must attend to all the documents, in themselves and in their close inter-relationship, so that it is possible accurately to present the integral meaning of the Council's often very complex affirmations. Special attention should be paid to the four major Constitutions of the Council, which are the keys for interpreting the other Decrees and Declarations. The pastoral character of the documents should not be separated from their doctrinal force, nor is it legitimate to separate the spirit and the letter of the Council. Moreover, the Council must be understood in continuity with the great Tradition of the Church, while at the same time from the Council's teaching we must receive light for the Church today and for the men of our time. The Church is one and the same in all the Councils.

This exhortation is consistent throughout the Synodal documents and appears, as stated, to represent a genuine consensus. But a number of qualifications and explications found in the Initial Report's corresponding section are omitted,<sup>9</sup> as are other comments, made in the pre-synodal reports or in hall, on the unfinished character and imperfect nature of some of the Council's statements and on the impossibility of using the Council to address problems which it never envisaged.<sup>10</sup>

With these as the interpretative principles, the Final Report then turns to four particular areas on which it offers statements and suggestions for a fuller reception of the Council. Since it will not be possible to discuss all of these, attention will be focused on some of the chief ecclesiological issues treated in the first and third sections.

## Ecclesiological Issues

### *The Notion of the Church*

Two concepts of the Church dominate the Final Report: "Mystery" and "Communion." The first is presented as an antidote to the growing phenomenon of secularism, defined as "an autonomistic vision of man and the world" which by neglecting or even denying the dimension of mystery reduces the integral view of man and leads to "a new idolatry, to the slavery of ideologies, to life in narrow and often oppressive structures." To the visible signs of a return to the sacred, however, the Synod offers an emphasis on "the dimension of the 'divine' or of mystery," the mystery of God in Christ and in the Holy Spirit and the mystery of the Church herself.

The mystery of the Church is stated in the following paragraph:

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<sup>9</sup> The Initial Report had acknowledged that the very interpretation of the Council is often disputed, that all the conciliar statements do not have the same weight, and that both legalistic interpretations and enthusiastic appeals to the spirit of the Council must be avoided; and it had made special mention of patristic Christological and Trinitarian confessions, along with Trent and Vatican I.

<sup>10</sup> See the pre-synodal reports from Brazil, Canada and the United States, as well as the oral intervention of Msgr. Delhaye.

The whole importance of the Church derives from her connection with Christ. The Council described the Church in different ways: as the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the family of God. These descriptions of the Church complement one another and must be understood in the light of the mystery of Christ or of the Church in Christ. We may not replace a false, one-sided, merely hierarchical view of the Church with a new and also one-sided sociological concept of the Church. Jesus Christ is ever present to the Church and lives within her as the Risen One. From the Church's connection with Christ the eschatological character of the Church is clearly understood (see LG, ch. VII). In this way, the pilgrim Church on earth is the messianic people (see LG 9) which already anticipates in itself the new creation. Yet she remains a Church with sinners in her midst, holy and always in need of purification, which, amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God, proceeds towards the future kingdom (see LG 8). In this sense, both the mystery of the cross and the mystery of the resurrection are always present in the Church.

This dimension of mystery leads immediately into a reminder of the Council's teaching on the universal call to holiness, which requires the Church "to serve and foster a sense of repentance, prayer, adoration, sacrifice, self-giving, charity and justice," to plead for more saints, and to devote itself to holiness in religious communities, in apostolic movements, and among the laity, to give greater attention to popular devotions, and to remember the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It is hard for anyone to disagree that divine mystery lies at the heart of the Church's life or that it must display itself in the holiness of its members. But, as stated, this evocation of mystery has certain features which deserve reflection. First of all, it appears to represent an astounding denigration of the notion of the Church as People of God. This is the only place in the Final Report where that notion occurs,<sup>11</sup> and here it appears simply as one among many descriptions. It would be impossible to tell from the Final Report that "the People of God" had been the title of a whole chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, that it had served as one of the architectonic themes of the Council's ecclesiology, and that it had been introduced precisely as an articulation of the very mystery of the Church in the time between Ascension and Parousia.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In two places, the Final Report does refer to the Church as a "messianic people" (LG 9), but with very little effort to unfold the great richness of this paragraph.

<sup>12</sup> At the Council, the Doctrinal Commission said that "the presentation 'on the People of God' concerns *the very mystery of the Church*, considered in itself. This material, whose biblical importance is clear and an exposition of which many of the Fathers and the faithful are looking forward to eagerly, cannot be separated from the basic statement of the intimate nature and purpose of the Church." It added that "the first chapter, 'On the Mystery of the Church,' discusses the Church in its total fullness from the beginning of creation in the plan of God to its heavenly consummation. Chapter II then discusses the same mystery insofar as during the "in-between time," between the Ascension of the Lord and his glorious Parousia, it moves towards its blessed goal" (See *Constitutionis Dogmaticae Lumen Gentium Synopsis Historica*}, ed. G. Alberigo and F. Magistretti [Bologna: Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, 1975], p. 441). The Synod may be assuming that "People of God" has been misrepresented by being separated from "mystery," but the answer to this problem should not be the neglect of a notion the Council promoted so strongly, particularly in a document that elsewhere warns against partial and selective readings of the Council!

How is it to be explained that the Final Report seems to consider it necessary to downplay "People of God" in order to emphasize "Mystery"? The problem appears to go back to the Initial Report, which only mentions the term in its section on negative phenomena of the post-conciliar period:

Several reports mention that the conciliar teaching on the Church has sometimes been received superficially and incompletely. For example: the notion of the People of God, with which the Council described the Church, has been separated from its context in the history of salvation and from its coherence with other images and notions of the Church, such as Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. Thus "ideological" and false ideas are sometimes introduced into the notion of "people." Moreover, the mystery of the Church and its sacramental condition are often neglected. The Church as an institution and the Church as mystery are sometimes separated or indeed opposed to one another; similarly, the Church as communion is opposed to the Church as institution, the popular Church to the hierarchical Church.

From the responses so far available, it is clear that many of the problems here indicated exist in some of the Churches, as indeed was occasionally noted in the synodal interventions. But in its section on the positive fruits of the Council, the Initial Report fails to mention the fact that many of these responses also regard the notion of the Church as People of God not only as one of the most important conciliar themes but also as one which has had a great effect and resonance in their Churches. There is little indication that they think it ought to be downplayed; to the contrary, some of the responses give it great prominence. Similarly, to judge from the summaries of the interventions in the hall, People of God is mentioned as often and as warmly as any of the other images or notions of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

A final word should be said about another statement in the paragraph of the Final Report on the mystery of the Church: that "we may not replace a false, one-sided and merely hierarchical view of the Church with a new and also one-sided sociological concept of the Church." This particular way of presenting the problem does not appear to have been used before the Final Report, so that it is difficult to know exactly what it intends. There are, however, two earlier statements that may explain it. The first occurs in the Second Report: "Without this dimension of mystery, the Church would lose all significance for men, indeed it would lose its own identity and would be reduced to the level of other social institutions. It would have nothing to say, nothing to be." The second occurs in the report of the German language-group, which refers to "the tendency to want to make the Church *ourselves*, rather than to receive it from God. From the correct statement, 'We *are* the Church,' it is often mistakenly concluded, 'We *make* the Church.'"<sup>14</sup>

If these earlier statements underlie the remark of the Final Report, one can understand

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<sup>13</sup> See the reports from Brazil, England and Wales, and the United States. Cardinal Lorscheider devoted a written intervention to the theme, introducing it with the statement, "The Church as People of God is the key-idea of *Lumen gentium*."

<sup>14</sup> This criticism is developed at some length in the third chapter of *The Ratzinger Report*.

why it was said. The distinctiveness of the Church lies precisely in the mystery of Christ celebrated and realized in it; and in this sense, it is true that we "receive" the Church from God. But it is also clear that in many respects the Church is very much like other social bodies and even that there are senses in which we do ourselves build up the Church. Both of these features require a hierarchical and/or sociological approach to the Church, and without noting these there is a great danger, unacknowledged in the Final Report, of an equally incorrect and one-sided ecclesiology of mystery. On this point, the Council's presentation in LG 8 was far more balanced.<sup>15</sup>

The other ecclesiological notion particularly stressed by the Final Report is that of "communion," which is indeed described as "the central and fundamental idea in the Council's documents." After briefly noting the profound biblical and traditional roots of this idea, the Final Report attempts to explain its meaning and what it may contribute to contemporary reflection on the Church.

What does the complex word "communion" mean? Fundamentally, it concerns communion with God through Christ and in the Holy Spirit. This communion is achieved through the Word of God and the sacraments. Baptism is the door of the Church and the foundation of its communion. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life (see LG 11). The communion of the eucharistic Body of Christ signifies and effects, that is, builds up the intimate communion of all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (see 1 Cor 10:16).

For this reason, the ecclesiology of communion cannot be reduced to purely organizational questions or to questions simply about power. Nevertheless, the ecclesiology of communion is the foundation of Church order and especially of a correct relationship between unity and pluriformity in the Church.<sup>16</sup>

At the Synod, "communion" was one of the most frequently used terms for the Church, and it was proposed by speakers of the most diverse backgrounds, interests and opinions. And, of course, it was a key term at Vatican II where it represented the principal ecclesiology opposed to a purely or mainly juridical approach.<sup>17</sup> The Final Report's description of the roots of ecclesial communion is also a fine statement of the Trinitarian, Christological and sacramental grounds of communion.

If there was common agreement on the value of the term "communion," the Final Report's

<sup>15</sup> Just before the Synod met, the International Theological Commission published a small book, *L'unique Eglise du Christ* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1985), on select aspects of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. "People of God" appears in the titles of two of the chapters, and there is a third on "L'Eglise comme 'mystere' et 'sujet historique.'" The Synod does not appear to have made use of these discussions

<sup>16</sup> Earlier the Final Report said, that "the Church is the sacrament, that is, the sign and instrument of communion with God and also of communion and reconciliation of men with one another."

<sup>17</sup> See the very careful work of Antonio Acerbi, *Due ecclesiologie: Ecclesiologia giuridica ed ecclesiologia di comunione nella "Lumen Gentium"* (Bologna: Ed. Dehoniane, 1975). It would be interesting to compare the uses to which the word "communion" was used at the Council and at the Synod.

next paragraph discreetly hints at some of the differences about the implications of the notion that were already perceptible in the reports of the Churches and in the synodal interventions. On the one hand, it says, an ecclesiology of communion should not be reduced to questions of power and organization. This sentence repeats an idea already stated in the Second Report: "It was rightly stated in the hall that people today would not understand it if all that was discussed in this Synod was the distribution of powers in the Church."<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, the Final Report immediately adds, communion is the basis of Church order and of the relationship between unity and pluriformity in the Church. This sentence reflects a theme prominent in some of the pre-synodal responses (see especially the report from England and Wales); it was often urged in the first week's debate and was strongly repeated in two of the language-groups (English A and Spanish A). Here the concern was what the Spanish group called the "horizontal dimension" of communion and its implications for participation and co-responsibility. To this second set of concerns the rest of the discussion of communion is devoted.

In taking up these issues, the Final Report addressed serious questions raised in the pre-synodal responses of the Churches and by many speakers in the synod hall. The Initial Report had first mentioned them as part of its description of "negative phenomena" in the post-conciliar Church:

What the Council taught about the Church as communion is sometimes neither understood nor put into practice; indeed many responses indicate that in the Church there is partly a lack of confidence, partly a real distrust, which cannot be removed unless we work patiently at dialogue. Not unimportant controversies still exist, repeated quite often in many responses, on the relationship between the universal Church and the particular Churches, on the understanding of collegiality with and under the Roman Pontiff and on improving its practical implications, and on the status of episcopal conferences. In many reports it is stated that much is still desired for greater participation and co-responsibility, for greater communication, and especially for improvements in the practical and informative exchanges between the particular Churches and Episcopal Conferences and the Roman Curia.<sup>19</sup>

This short paragraph summarizes complaints about relationships with Roman authority which are expressed with considerable passion and in specific detail in several of the

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<sup>18</sup> This appears to refer to Cardinal Ratzinger, who in his synodal intervention, is reported to have said, "The distribution of powers cannot be the central theme of the Synod." A week earlier, at the Consistory of Cardinals, the same Cardinal had exhorted his colleagues not to give the impression "that we, like the disciples in the cenacle, are only discussing which of us is the greater and this at the very time when the members of Christ are suffering and asking us for the bread of life."

<sup>19</sup> The Initial Report returned to the theme later: "From the responses of Episcopal Conferences, it also appears that this reality of communion is not yet fully understood nor put into practice. In particular, the relationship between the universal Church and the particular Churches, as well as the status of Episcopal Conferences, needs finer theological analysis and fuller practical implementation. Moreover, in many responses, the strong desire is urged for a greater exchange of information and communication and for greater collaboration."

pre-synodal reports. In his Second Report, Cardinal Danneels again took note of the criticisms and recommended that the language-groups study communion in terms of the applicability of the principle of subsidiarity, the relationship between unity and pluriformity, the problem of inculturation, the understanding and practice of collegiality, and the role of episcopal Conferences.

Already here, however, one wonders whether the challenge is not already being muted. Cardinal Danneels not only states the problem, but already orients the discussion:

On the one hand, there are practical questions about daily relationships with the Holy see and Roman dicasteries, for which many desire a greater collegial spirit. On the other hand, there are theological questions which have not yet been sufficiently clarified. For this reason, I will make only a few observations.

Collegiality is a sacramentally grounded reality, and therefore the collegial spirit is broader than a merely juridical exercise of collegiality. Since it is a sacramental reality, a theology of collegiality cannot be reduced to a mere debate about consultative or deliberative power. This should be kept in mind in discussions about improving the Synod of Bishops.

Here the appeal to collegial spirit and its sacramental basis has the effect of relativizing the significance of debates about structure in the Church, when it could as justly be argued that the questions arise precisely because the sacramental and collegial foundations require more appropriate structures and relationships.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Concrete Realization of Communion*

The various issues in which the horizontal dimension of communion is discussed in the Final Report will now be briefly reviewed.

1. *Unity and Diversity*. This was a major preoccupation in the reports from the Churches and in the Initial Report. The latter builds on the Council's statement, which it describes as "one of the most important statements in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," that "the one and universal Church exists in and out of the particular Churches (see LG 23):" "This is the basis for legitimate pluralism within the unity of the Church (see International Theological Commission, 1972). In this structure of communion, the Church is a likeness and representation, an image, as it were, of the trinitarian communion of Father and Son and Holy Spirit (see LG 4; UR 2)."<sup>21</sup>

But the Final Report takes over from the Second Report a redefinition of the very terms

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<sup>20</sup> The Second Report's brief reference to questions about improving the Synod of Bishops is the last one to appear. This question, which was raised in a number of the pre-synodal responses and synodal interventions, is not mentioned in the Final Report. It is addressed, however, by Pope John Paul II in his concluding address to the Synod.

<sup>21</sup> The Initial Report refers to the document of the International Theological Commission, *Quinze thèses sur l'unité de la foi et le pluralisme théologique* (Paris: C.L.D., 1978). This text and others had been cited in a defense of pluralism by the Scandinavian bishops in their pre-synodal report.

of the discussion:

Here we have the true theological principle of variety and pluriformity in unity; but this pluriformity must be distinguished from mere pluralism. Since pluriformity is true richness and implies fullness, it is true catholicity; but a pluralism of mainly opposed positions leads to dissolution and destruction and to a loss of identity.

The reasons for this redefinition of the terms of the discussion are nowhere discussed; this semantic change, introduced in the Second Report, does not seem to have been requested by any speaker at the Synod.

2. *Inculturation.* A reading of the responses from the Churches will indicate how often reference was made to this theme and not only by Churches in "the Third World." It received a rather brief notice in the Initial Report: "It is reported that the process of 'inculturation' has begun, and an effort is being made to overcome the division between the Gospel and human culture, which is without doubt one of the most serious dramas of our age." Inculturation was also often mentioned in the synod hall as a major challenge for the Church to confront. The Second Report treated it as part of the question of unity and pluriformity and offered a description that was taken over by the Final Report:

Here we also have the theological principle for the problem of inculturation. Since the Church is a communion which joins diversity and unity, by its presence throughout the world it takes up whatever positive elements it finds in each culture. Yet inculturation is different from mere external adaptation, since it means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity and by rooting Christianity in the various human cultures.

In the Final Report, inculturation is given stronger support than in the earlier reports; but it still appears as something which will affect the cultures more than the Church itself. Perhaps this is why the discussion was moved from the section on Church as communion to the one on the Church's mission in the world. There is no reference to the often-voiced request of the local Churches for greater freedom in meeting the challenge of inculturation.

3. *The Eastern Churches.* After having been almost totally ignored in the two earlier Reports, the Eastern Churches in communion with Rome are given a separate paragraph. The first two sentences simply paraphrase statements of the Council, while the last one takes note of these Churches' "testimony through the death and blood of their martyrs for Christ and his Church."

Unfortunately, none of the reports from the Eastern Churches sent before the Synod is now available; but, if one may judge from the comments which their bishops made in the Synod hall, they have some very serious complaints to make to the rest of the Church, about relations with Rome and other western Churches and about the Code of Oriental Canon Law now being

prepared. None of these is adequately represented in the Final Report.<sup>22</sup>

4. *Collegiality*. This section of the Final Report contents itself with a description of the sacramental foundation of collegiality, a distinction between collegial spirit (*affectus*) and collegial activity in the strict sense, and an insistence that the issue be posed correctly, not as a distinction between the Roman Pontiff and the bishops taken collectively, but between the Roman Pontiff by himself and the Roman Pontiff along with the bishops, a description borrowed from the famous *Nota praevia explicativa*. These remarks are followed by descriptions of collegiality in a broad sense:

From this first collegiality, understood in the strict sense, one must distinguish the different partial realizations which are truly a sign and instrument of collegial spirit: the Synod of Bishops, Episcopal Conferences, the Roman Curia, *ad limina* visits, etc. All of these realizations cannot be deduced directly from the theological principle of collegiality; they are, rather, governed by ecclesiastical law. Still these and other forms, such as the pastoral journeys of the Supreme Pontiff, are a very important service to the whole college of bishops along with the Pope, as also for the individual bishops, whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to govern the Church of God (see Acts 20:28).

What is interesting here is not only the very selective references to the Council's discussion of collegiality, the effort theologically and ecclesially to deflate the various expressions of collegial spirit,<sup>23</sup> and the curious mixture of things considered to exemplify collegiality, but the total absence of any reference to the many problems raised in the responses of the Churches, in the Initial Report, in the synodal interventions, and in the Second Report, about the practical implementation of collegiality. Here is the clearest indication that, in the Final Report, invocations of "communion" and "collegial spirit" have triumphed over serious and frank admission of structural difficulties in the Church today.<sup>24</sup>

5. *Episcopal Conferences*. Much ink was spilled before and during the Synod over the status of Episcopal Conferences in the Church. Given the attention they attracted beforehand, the rather thin statements of the Final Report bear all the marks of a compromise. Episcopal Conferences are described as concrete implementations of collegial spirit, as pastorally useful, indeed necessary today, and as instruments through which "the bishops of the same nation or

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<sup>22</sup> One of the suggestions the Synod makes is "that the Eastern-rite codification be completed as quickly as possible;" but it seems that the Eastern bishops were asking for more than mere speed.

<sup>23</sup> At least the Final Report does not include the controversial paragraph of the book published by the International Theological Commission, which maintained that collegiality could be applied to institutions such as Episcopal Conferences "only in an analogous, theologically improper sense" (see *L'unique Eglise du Christ*, p. 38).

<sup>24</sup> It is somewhat ironic that the famous *Nota praevia* warned against considering communion "as some vague *spirit* [*affectus*]" and described it as "an *organic reality* which at once requires a juridical form and is animated by charity." At the Synod, *affectus collegialis* was used to cover a multitude of sins.

territory exercise their pastoral role conjointly."<sup>25</sup> Finally, the Conferences are asked to keep in mind "both the good of the Church, or the service of unity, and the inalienable responsibility of each bishop towards the universal Church and to his own particular Church."

Episcopal Conferences are also the topics of one of the concrete suggestions made at the end of this section of the Final Report:

Since the Episcopal Conferences are so useful, indeed necessary, in the Church's pastoral work today, it is hoped that their theological status might be studied and especially that the question of their doctrinal authority might be more clearly and deeply explained, keeping in mind what is said in the Council's Decree, *Christus Dominus*, no. 38, and in the Code of Canon Law, cc. 447 and 753.

Those who feared that the Synod would make a clear statement seriously qualifying the authority of Episcopal Conferences can regard this as a "victory" of sorts. But it is not clear who will make the desired study of these questions.

6. *Participation and Co-responsibility*. Here the Final Report begins with a clear and strong statement: "Because the Church is a communion, there must be participation and co-responsibility at all of her levels," a claim which it then illustrates at all levels except the highest.

No such section can be found in the Second Report, but a need for it was clearly indicated in the Initial Report:

The Church's structure as a communion would certainly be diminished if it were reduced only to hierarchical communion with the episcopal college and with the task of universal unity, that is, with the Petrine ministry. For in the Church communion between bishops and presbyters, between bishops and theologians, between priests and laypeople, between men and women, between the poor and the rich, must be put into practice more and more and made to conform to a more perfect rule.

It is good that the Final Report returns to this emphasis,<sup>26</sup> even though its statements do not go much beyond the hortatory.

7. *Subsidiarity*. At the end of its discussion of communion, the Final Report suddenly

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<sup>25</sup> In his Second Report, while recommending Episcopal Conferences for discussion in the language-groups, Cardinal Danneels drew special attention to these two texts in *Christus Dominus* and the Code of Canon Law. At the Consistory of Cardinals just before the Synod, Cardinal Hamer referred to the same texts in support of his argument that "the Episcopal Conference is situated in the lines of the local collaboration of several particular Churches; it is not a reduced form of episcopal collegiality." This is also the argument of Henri de Lubac in *Les Eglises particulières dans l'Eglise universelle* (Paris: Aubier, 1972), to whom Cardinal Hamer also refers.

<sup>26</sup> This section seems to depend heavily on the reports of English language-group A and Spanish language-group A.

mentions an issue it had not discussed before: "It is recommended that a study be made to determine whether the principle of subsidiarity in use in human society can be applied in the Church and to what degree and in what sense such an application can and should be made."

The principle of subsidiarity was raised at several earlier points in the synodal discussions. A number of the responses from the Churches mention it explicitly, in each case (at least in those we have available) always positively and with a desire to see it put into greater effect. The term is not mentioned a single time, however, in the Initial Report. During the first week's debate, it was raised again at least four times, and it was perhaps this that accounts for its appearance in the Second Report, which also appears, however, already to imply an answer to the question of its applicability within the Church:

Taken in a broad sense, communion is a fundamental anthropological reality. For man has been created by God as a social being, and the men of our day, often living in anonymous structures, experience a great desire for true communion. For this human community, or, speaking more strictly, for this human community or society, the principle of subsidiarity, among others, applies. The question is whether this principle also applies in the Church insofar as it is a human reality. For ecclesial communion, understood in the strict and theological sense, is sacramentally based. Communion in the Eucharistic Body of Christ symbolizes and effects, that is, builds up communion in the Body of Christ which is the Church (see 1 Cor 10:16f). An ecclesiology of communion, therefore, is a Eucharistic ecclesiology; but the Eucharist, according to St. Augustine, is a sign of unity and a bond of charity. It is in this Eucharistic theology that one chiefly finds the principle of the Church's life of communion.

These comments do not reflect the expressed desire that the subsidiarity-principle be applied more fully, but rather asks whether it is applicable at all, a question which, from the evidence now available, had not been asked before at the Synod. And it appears also to offer an argument against its applicability, or at least against its applicability to the Church understood sacramentally rather than simply as "a human reality," in itself a questionable distinction.

Subsidiarity was also discussed in the language-groups. None of their reports questioned *whether* the principle applies in the Church, although the Latin group cautioned at some length against certain false interpretations of it. Several of the groups did ask for continued study of *how* it might apply.

The question arises, then, why the question of the very applicability of the principle of subsidiarity within the Church was raised in the Final Report. The answer may lie in an intervention which Cardinal Jerome Hamer made at the Consistory of Cardinals which was held immediately before the Synod. There he questioned the pertinence and need of the principle of subsidiarity for the life of the Church. Echoes of his position were heard at the final press conference at the Synod when Archbishop Schotte stated flatly that "subsidiarity is not a theological principle," a view which has recently been repeated by Cardinal Krol.

## Conclusion

These remarks have focused on two central ecclesiological questions at the Synod: the fundamental notion of the Church and the concrete realization of ecclesial communion. For the first the Final Report chose to emphasize the dimension of "mystery" realized in "communion." No one will regret it if the mystery of Christ's redemptive work, word and grace is central both to the life of the Church and in ecclesiology. But it is difficult to see why it should be thought necessary to emphasize it at the price of a neglect of other dimensions, equally necessary to the life of the Church on its pilgrimage and equally emphasized in the ecclesiology of the Council.

Similarly, with regard to communion: the vertical dimension of this profound ecclesial reality is inescapably bound up with its horizontal dimension. Where the latter is not considered to be an implication of the former or where these implications are not boldly addressed, people are likely to think either that the true dimensions of the communion of all in God, in Christ and in the Spirit are not really appreciated or that the appeal to "communion" conceals other agendas.

When the Synod is taken as a whole--including the responses of the Churches, the interventions in the hall, the language-group discussions, and the Final Report--it can be seen as an occasion on which the Catholic Church engaged in a serious and healthy self-examination about its fidelity not only to the Council but, beyond the Council, to the Gospel of Christ. If there are reasons for questioning whether the Final Report by itself adequately represents this view of the Synod, at least with this volume members of the Church will be better equipped to understand the basic issues at stake at the Synod and to take part in a discussion which certainly did not come to an end with the close of the Synod.

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