

# ECCLESIOLOGY

## General Introduction

The king of heaven and earth built  
His Church – He made his abode there  
And entered and lives in it.  
All those who want to converse  
With the Lord, should enter into it  
For He lives within it. (Lilio of Sunday)

Ecclesiology is that branch of theology, which seeks to give a scientific exposition of the faith of the Church concerning itself. Such a kind of treatise on the Church appeared late in the history of the Christian thought. It began in the West towards the end of the Middle Ages and reached the culmination at the Second Vatican Council. Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) marks a significant turning point in the history of Ecclesiology, for it is the first time that an Ecumenical Council has explicitly exposed in any detail the faith of the Church concerning itself. Such a project was on the agenda of Vatican I, but due to external circumstances the proposed schema was never debated, except for the chapters dealing with the primacy and infallibility of the pope. This underlines a significant fact: the reality of the Church was first lived for many centuries before it became a direct object of systematic theological investigation, and so Ecclesiology as a particular branch of theology appeared rather late in the history of the Church. Through the liturgy of the Church, the reality of the Church is lived and expressed. "The liturgy is thus the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church". (SC 2)

## Etymology and Meaning

The word Ecclesiology comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*. This Greek word is derived from the verb *ekkaleo*, "to summon" or "to call out." Its closest equivalent in Latin and hence in English is *convocatio*, "convocation" – "a calling together" – "an assembly." It was the official term for the citizens' assembly of the Athenian democracy. It is used in this secular sense in Acts 19:32, 39 and 41 in the account of the stirring events at Ephesus.

The English word "Church," like its equivalents in the other Germanic languages derives from the Greek adjective *kuriakos*, meaning "belonging to the Lord" – originally for *kuriakon doma* or *kuriakos domos* – meaning "the Lord's house." So its first reference would be to the building in which Christians met for worship – and perhaps that is still the first and dominant reference in ordinary English. The connection between "church" as building and "church" as community of worshippers goes a little deeper than simple metonymy. The building is spontaneously seen as a symbol of the community; and since the church community is the body of Christ, churches come to be built deliberately to represent, in a variety of ways, Christ himself.

But the NT use of the word *ekklesia* is controlled almost entirely by its employment in the OT LXX to translate, with remarkable consistency, the Hebrew *qahal*, which has the meaning of "a convoked assembly." In the strongest sense the *qahal* is the

assembly of Israel convoked by God (e.g. Deut 5:19; 23:2-9; 1 Chr 28:8, Num 16:3; 20:4; Mic 2:5). A synonymous term is *edah*, which LXX usually translates by *sunagoge*. After the exile this becomes the regular, almost technical word for the Sabbath day meeting of Jews for prayer and study of the *torah*, and secondarily for the building in which the meeting took place.

The primary reference of *ekklesia* in the NT is to the actual assembly meeting for worship (1 Cor 11:18, 14:19,35). But from this use it is immediately extended to refer to the community of the faithful in any given place, to the local community (Mt 18:17; Acts 5:11; 8:1, 3; 15:22). This is by far the most common use of the word in the NT. Much less often the word has a more general reference to the community of the faithful at large. For us “the Church,” unless otherwise qualified, is always assumed to be the universal Church. But this is unlikely to have been the assumption of the NT writers. The adjective “catholic” first appears attached to *ekklesia* in Ignatius of Antioch about 109 AD (Smyrn 8).

### History and Present State

We divide the development of the history of Ecclesiology into six stages:

1. Apostolic age and Patristic period.
2. The Scholastic period.
3. Birth of formal Ecclesiology.
4. 19<sup>th</sup> century Revival.
5. From Vatican I to Vatican II.
6. Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church.

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**1. Apostolic age and Patristic period.** No systematic treatment of the theology of the Church is available, even though some writers did compose books on the Church – St. Cyprian's *De Unitate Ecclesiae*. However, the writers of the NT and Fathers of the Church reflected deeply upon the mystery, and treated explicitly of its various aspects, especially in relation to Christological and soteriological themes. Their writings provide an inexhaustible richness of material upon which the systematic ecclesiology of today must seek to build his synthesis. It is precisely the rediscovery of the riches of the apostolic and patristic age that has revitalized Ecclesiology in our days. We can therefore speak of the Ecclesiology of the NT and the Fathers in general, as well as of particular writers, meaning by this not a formal Ecclesiology, but the particular point of view from which they contemplated the Church, and the aspects of the mystery emphasized or clarified by their writings. This Ecclesiology has certain definite characteristics: constituting a collective witness of the existence and life of the Church. It is lived before being formally expressed. It expresses itself in symbolic language rather than in abstract formulations. It emphasizes the interior mystical reality, man's divinisation in Christ. It looks upon the visible sacramental life of the Church not just as a means or condition of salvation, but the manifestation of our communion with the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

**2. The Scholastic period.** The great scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages followed in the main this tradition. They did not include a special treatise on the Church in their *Summas*. Though in their insistence on speculative theology, they tend to overlook the rich symbolism of the Scriptures and Fathers, their point of view is essentially the same. We find a special predilection for their theme of the Headship of Christ, considering the mystical body as the domain of influence of his sanctifying and salvific action.

**3. Birth of formal Ecclesiology.** When formal consideration was given to the Church in the domain of dogmatic theology, the first treatise on the Church came to be written. This was done in the context of, and in response to, definite challenges arising from historical situations. These were to determine the aspects under which the Church would be considered. Thus the first outlines of an Ecclesiology were an attempt to delineate clearly the relationship between the spiritual and temporal powers and the nature and scope of the papal prerogatives in the context of the struggle between the pope and the temporal princes (John of Paris, *De Potestate Regis et Papali*, written at the time of the conflict between Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair, 1302-3).

In the Middle Ages various movements and writers, in reaction to the many abuses in the Church and the worldliness of its prelates, began to call in question the authority and mediation of the visible Church. These movements and currents of thought found their fullest expression in the theology of Luther and the Protestant Reformation, which ended in rejecting the visible mediation of the Church, and especially its priesthood, and the authority of the hierarchy. As a consequence, Catholic theologians began to insist more on the exterior visible aspects of the Church. In the ensuing three centuries, during which the Church was faced with new threats from Jansenism, Gallicanism, and rationalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this trend continued to hold sway. It was the one incorporated into the theological manuals for use in seminaries. It reached its high watermark in 1870 at Vatican I with the solemn definitions of the primacy of jurisdiction and infallibility of the pope.

**4. 19<sup>th</sup> century Revival.** During the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a reaction was setting in against this ecclesiology with its unilateral insistence on the visible sociological nature

of the Church to the neglect of its inner life and reality. Thus a new ecclesiology was slowly formulated, which while not neglecting or denying the very real advances of the previous centuries in the Church's growing understanding of its visible structures, sought to integrate these into a more complete and vital understanding of the mystery of the Church as found in the Scriptures and the Fathers.

The first great centre of this ecclesiological revival was the theological faculty of Tübingen in Germany. Its greatest light was Johann Adam Mohler (1760-1838). His ecclesiology was characterised by its insistence on the community and the interior reality of the life of grace. This revival was furthered by the Jesuit theologians of the Gregorian University: in particular Perrone, Passaglia, Schrader, Cardinal Franzelin. Mathias Scheeben in Germany, and Cardinal Newman (1801-90) in England also exercised great influence on the development of modern ecclesiology. A proposed schema of Vatican I, largely written by Schrader, sought to incorporate the insights of this ecclesiology, and thus began by defining the Church as the mystical body of Christ. Though never debated, it met with opposition from many of the council Fathers. A revised version by Fr. Kleutgen preferred to define the Church as a visible society.

**5. From Vatican I to Vatican II.** The new trends, however, continued to exercise their influence, and between the two world wars, there was a renewed interest in the theology of the mystical body that resulted in a flood of literature on the subject. Of special importance were the works of Karl Adam, Emile Mersch, and Sebastian Tromp. Along with the advances, however, there were dangers. Especially in Germany, there was a trend towards panchristism, a form of pantheism that practically identified Christ and Christians. Pius XII's great encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (1943), while warning against these excesses, expressed a positive doctrine of the mystical body. Strongly influenced by the theology of Fr. Tromp, it sought to incorporate the patristic and scholastic insistence on the interior reality of grace with the Counter-Reformation theology of the Church as a visible hierarchical society. *The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ: it is a social body, visible and hierarchically structured. It is Christ's body, because He is its founder, head and saviour. It is called mystical to distinguish it clearly from all merely human or social bodies.*

Mystici Corporis has rightly been called the magna charta of modern ecclesiology. However, it did not give or seek to give a complete synthesis of the Church's tradition. In particular, many thought that it does not expose fully the Pauline doctrine of the body of Christ. During the next twenty years, ecclesiology continued to make many advances. It has been strongly influenced by the ecumenical movement, and by the liturgical, scriptural and patristic revival. It has put particular stress on the notion of the Church as the People of God. It has brought out in sharp relief the eschatological and sacramental aspects of the Church. Much research has been made with regard to the theology of the laity, of the episcopate, of Tradition and its relationship to the Scriptures.

**6. Vatican II's Constitution on the Church.** The Constitution is the fruit of this modern yet deeply traditional ecclesiology. Promulgated at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> session (November 21, 1964) it differs greatly in perspective and depth from the first draft drawn up by the preparatory commission and briefly debated at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the Council in 1962. This first draft was very juridical with disproportionate emphasis on the hierarchical structure of the Church. It differed very little from the normal text book

presentation. A second draft was drawn up in 1963, and this was the basis of the main debate on the Church that took place during the 2<sup>nd</sup> session in 1963. This second draft contained four chapters: 1. The Mystery of the Church; 2. The Hierarchy; 3. The People of God and the Laity; 4. Vocation of all to Holiness and the Religious. Between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> sessions two more drafts were made in the light of the debate of the 2<sup>nd</sup> session. The most important changes in these drafts were the insertion of a chapter on the *People of God* before the chapter on the hierarchy, and the addition of two chapters on the *eschatological goal of the Church* and on the *Blessed Virgin Mary*. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> session these last two chapters were debated, and the earlier chapters were voted upon. The chapter *On the call to holiness* was divided into two, a separate chapter being devoted to the *Religious*. In the final voting the Constitution was approved by 2151 'placet' against 5 'non placet'.

The textual history shows that it was by no means a matter of course from the very outset for the council to define the Church as a sacrament. The text of the preparatory commission was largely drawn up by Tromp, the main author of *Mystici Corporis*. In this preparatory text nothing is as yet said about a sacramental view of the Church. On the contrary, this draft remained completely within the bounds of traditional scholastic theology. It was subjected to devastating criticism because of its triumphalism, clericalism and legalism. A number of bishops demanded instead a view of the Church as *mysterium* or *sacramentum* (Döpfner, Lercaro, Suenens, König, Montini and others). The aim was to get away from the encrusted, narrow and one-sided elements of the traditional view held by scholastic theology. This fundamentally critical intention must be borne in mind if we want to understand properly what the council's statements really mean.

Authority or dogmatic value of the Constitution: cf. Declaration of the Doctrinal Commission. It is clear that much of what is contained in the Constitution is clearly of faith, and to this the assent of faith is required. Other things are clearly matters of Church discipline. The Fathers of Vatican II have succeeded to a remarkable degree in presenting a clear, balanced and living presentation of the doctrine of the Church. The Constitution is deeply scriptural and traditional, and it has incorporated many of the insights and advances of modern ecclesiology. It truly opens a new era in the life of the Church. However, it must not be considered as the last word on the doctrine of the Church's nature and life. It does not give or seek to give a complete synthesis of the complex reality of the Church. Like all conciliar documents, it seeks to steer a middle course between various schools of theology, and it does not wish to decide those questions that are still freely debated by theologians, and have not come to full maturity in the consciousness of the living Church. Hence, the Constitution should be looked upon as an outline of the teaching of the Church at the present stage of dogmatic development - an outline the theologian must seek to understand, develop, and complete as far as possible.

### **The Future of Ecclesiology**

No theologian has yet succeeded in presenting a fully adequate and synthetic exposition of the mystery of the Church. Many points that are still in debate or are not clear need to be studied further. Among these may be mentioned:

- \* Further research in the ecclesiology of the primitive Church, of its structure, and of the transition from the apostolic Church to the Church of the post-apostolic period (e.g. the emergence of the episcopal form of government).

- \* The exact nature of collegial authority, and its relationship to the primatial authority of the pope.
- \* The development of a theology of the local Church, vitally necessary in the dialogue with the Orthodox Churches, whose ecclesiology has always been centred on the reality of the local Church.
- \* Development of a pneumatology in the context of ecclesiology. One of the sharpest criticisms of the Constitution is that it fails to do justice to the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.
- \* The ecclesial nature of the Churches and Communities not in communion with Rome, and the related question of membership in the Church.
- \* Development of a theology of the necessity of the Church for salvation, and its relationship to the non-Christian religions. Involved here is the question of the mission of the Church to and in the world.
- \* Above all, modern ecclesiology must seek to do what Chalcedon did for Christology: express as adequately as possible the unity between the interior reality (the Church as community or communion of life in the Trinity), and the exterior reality (the Church as institution or means of grace), without confusing these two different but complementary aspects of the one mystery. This is especially urgent in the context of the dialogue with the Churches of the Reformation, whose ecclesiology denies this unity, and hence the visible mediation of the Church.
- \* In short, what is needed is a fully developed incarnational and sacramental theology of the Church that will take into account all the riches of the scriptures and the patristic period, while not neglecting the later development of the Church's growing self-awareness of its nature and mission.

**Theme 1. Church is the mystery and universal sacrament of salvation.**

Vatican II, after rejecting an initial schema on the Church in which the first chapter was entitled "The nature of the Church Militant," adopted as the title of its first chapter, "The Mystery of the Church." This change of titles is symptomatic of the whole Ecclesiology of the Council. The term mystery, applied to the Church, signifies many things. It implies that the Church is not fully intelligible to the finite mind of man, and that the reason for this lack of intelligibility is not the poverty but the richness of the Church itself. Like other supernatural mysteries, the Church is known by a kind of connaturality (as Thomas Aquinas and the classical theologians called it). We cannot fully objectify the Church because we are involved in it. We know it through a kind of intersubjectivity. Furthermore, the Church pertains to the mystery of Christ. Christ is carrying out in the Church his plan of redemption. He is dynamically at work in the Church through his Spirit.

In Eph 3:4 the Church is seen as the "mystery of Christ", because in it is realised the eternal plan of the Father. This general conception of mystery as applied to the Church was set forth by Paul VI in his opening address at the second session of the Council. He declared: "The Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies, therefore, within the very nature of the Church to be always open to new and ever greater exploration." The mysterious character of the Church has important implications for methodology. It rules out the possibility of proceeding from

clear and univocal concepts, or from definitions in the usual sense of the word. The concepts abstracted from the realities we observe in the objective world about us are not applicable, at least directly, to the mystery of man's communion with God. In some respects we shall in the end have to accept a reverent silence about the Church, or for that matter about any theological reality. Among the positive tools that have been used to illuminate the mysteries of faith we must consider, in the first place, images. Referring to the debate on the schema *De Ecclesia* at the first session of Vatican II, Gustave Weigel, a council *peritus*, observed, in the last article published before his death:

The most significant result of the debate was the profound realisation that the Church has been described, in its two thousand years, not so much by verbal definitions as in the light of images. Most of the images are, of course, strictly biblical. The theological value of the images has been stoutly affirmed by the Council. The notion that you must begin with an Aristotelian definition was simply bypassed. In its place, a biblical analysis of the significance of the images was proposed.

As Paul VI noted in the address already quoted, the Church has continually sought to further its self-understanding by meditation on the "revealing images" of Scripture. The Bible, when it seeks to illuminate the nature of the Church, speaks almost entirely through images. Paul Minear, in his book, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, lists some ninety-six such images. Even if we rule out a few of these as not being really figures of the Church, we shall agree that the NT is extremely luxuriant in its ecclesiological imagery. Any large and continuing society that depends on the loyalty and commitment of its members requires symbolism to hold it together. The biblical images of the Church as the flock of Christ, the Bride, the Temple suggest attitudes and courses of action. They intensify confidence and devotion. To be fully effective, images must be deeply rooted in the corporate experience of the faithful. The contemporary crisis of faith is in very large part a crises of images.

The word "mystery" comes from Jewish apocalyptic (Dan 2:18f), and now means the act whereby God manifests his love in the wisdom incarnate of Jesus Christ, to bring mankind to glory. It is the word of God as the fullness of revelation and it is the accomplishment of the "secret" hidden for ages in God (Col 1:16; Eph 3:3-9; 1 Cor 2:6-10). Hence the mystery implies that the saving incarnation takes effect in the Church through the preaching of the word and through the sacraments, thus leading it to the glory of heaven. The redemption of Christ calls the Church into being (Eph 2:13-16; 5:25f.; Col 1:20-22) and there achieves its fulfilment, as all mankind is assembled in the Church.

Hence ecclesiology is to be conceived in terms of the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit (LG 14; AG 2-5). The idea of the Church as sacrament takes on its full meaning within the Trinitarian perspective in which God's plan is revealed. "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament<sup>1</sup> or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind"(LG 1). Or even more explicitly, in a line of thought which stresses the place of the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit in the constitution of the Church: "Lifted up from the earth, Christ draws all men to himself (Jn 12:32); risen from the dead, he has sent his life-giving Spirit upon the disciples; through the Spirit he has established his body, which is the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation; sitting

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<sup>1</sup> The term "sacrament" is here applied to the Church by analogy with the seven sacraments properly so called, which are particular actions of Christ in and through the Church. The Church itself is a sort of "general sacrament", since as the Constitution here explains, it is a "sign and instrument" of the grace which unites men supernaturally to God and to one another.

at the right hand of the Father, he is at work in the world without ceasing, to bring men to the Church, to join them more closely to himself through her”(LG 48; see also AG 2-5; GS 45).

As the dwelling place of the Christian sacraments or the “sacrament of sacraments” (Pseudo-Dionysius), the Church is the sacrament of Jesus Christ, just as Jesus Christ himself in his humanity is the sacrament of God, according to the words of Augustine: “Non est enim aliud Dei mysterium, nisi Christus.” So to define the Church as sacrament is to see it in the context of the mystery that binds it closely to Christ and to return to the fundamental, generic meaning of the word sacrament. It is to place in the line of the economy of salvation, understanding it in terms of the sacrament par excellence, which is the humanity of Christ, and as the subject of all sacraments. The Church is thus the assembly in which, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the past becomes present in view of the eschatological future of the world. Called to “reveal to the world the mystery of the Lord” (LG 8), the Church is word and sign for the whole world (LG 17). Because its vocation is to place the world in the presence of the mystery of Christ in the Spirit, all its structures are completely subordinated to the mystery of Christ. The visible and social structure of the Church is thus only the sign and means of the action of Jesus Christ in the Spirit. As St. Thomas Aquinas used to say, what principally constitutes the Church is the Holy Spirit in men’s hearts, all the rest (hierarchy, papacy, Eucharist, sacraments) are in the service of this inner transformation (ST I-II, 106,1).

As early as 1938, Henri de Lubac summed up his conviction as follows: “If Jesus Christ could be called the sacrament of God, then for us the Church is the sacrament of Christ.”<sup>2</sup> This approach was developed in German-speaking and Dutch theology especially. The definition of the Church as a sacrament can be found in a number of drafts drawn up after the first period of the council. But the term ‘sacrament’ is preceded by an explanation of what this means: it is *signum et sacramentum*. And the text adds that the Church is *veluti sacramentum* – ‘as it were a sacrament’. In other words, according to the accustomed terminology of sacramental doctrine, the term sacrament can only be used for the Church in an improper sense.

As mystery and sacrament, the Church is always to be seen as proceeding from its source, which is the Trinity. As the bearer of the gift made to the world by God in Jesus Christ, the Church draws the principle of its universal dynamism from the Trinity. The nature of the Church is to be understood as the Church of the Triune God. The Holy Trinity is the ultimate basis and source of the Church’s existence and, as such, the Church is in the image and likeness of God. This being in the image of the blessed Trinity constitutes the mode of the Church’s existence, which, in fact, reveals her nature. Being in God, the Church reflects on earth God’s unity in Trinity. What is natural to God is given to the Church by grace.

The grace of the Trinity is the starting point for understanding the nature of the Church, and especially for her unity in multiplicity, as the Holy Spirit shares one life and one being. The three distinct and unique Persons are one in life and in nature. Similarly, the Church exhibits a parallel multiplicity of persons in unity of life and being. The difference between God and the Church is that, in the former, multiplicity in unity is the truth, whereas in the latter, this is only a participation in the truth. In patristic language the former is *ousia*, while the latter is *metousia*. The unity of the three divine Persons in

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<sup>2</sup> Catholicism, p. 291



life and being is, therefore, the prototype of the unity of the Church's persons in life and in being. As Christ Himself says in His prayer for the Church: "even as Thou O Father are in me and me in Thee, so they may be one, that the world may believe that Thou has sent me." The Church is an eikon of the Holy Trinity, a participation in the grace of God. This mystical and sacramental vision of the Church indicates that all theological thinking about the Church must be based on this communion with the mystery of the Trinity as well as on a real understanding of the history of salvation.

Now let us try to interpret the council's statements in the light of the texts themselves. If we do this, the following picture emerges.

1. The definition of the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation is one definition among others. The council uses a whole series of other descriptions in addition. The phrase 'people of God' is especially important. But there are other terms or images as well: sheepfold, flock, cultivated field, building, temple, family of God, bride of Christ and not least-body of Christ (LG 6 f.). It would therefore be wrong if we were to try to tie down post-conciliar Catholic Ecclesiology exclusively to the term sacrament. The council describes the Church rather as a mystery that cannot be exhausted by any single concept. If we are to approach the mystery of the Church, we need a multiplicity of complementary images and terms which mutually interpret and also correct one other
2. In the Vatican II texts, the definition of the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation is always embedded in a strictly Christological context. This is already brought out in article 5 of the Constitution on the Liturgy, where Jesus Christ is described as the one mediator between God and humanity, especially through the paschal mystery. 'The wondrous sacrament of the whole Church' proceeded from the side of Christ as he died on the cross. The Constitution on the Church develops this viewpoint. It begins right at the beginning of chapter one with the words: *Lumen gentium cum sit Christus* – 'since Christ is the light of humanity...' That is why it is explicitly stated that 'in Christ' the Church is "as it were" a sacrament – a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all human beings. LG 9 is more definite: Jesus Christ is 'the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace', whereas the Church is the visible sacrament of this unity. Finally, article 48 says that through his Spirit, the risen and exalted Christ has made the Church the comprehensive sacrament of salvation, and that through the Spirit he continues to be active in the Church. In these texts the Church is by no means seen as an autonomous, self-sufficient entity. The Church is the sign that points beyond itself to Jesus Christ, and it is an instrument in the hand of Jesus Christ, since he is the real author of all saving activity in the Church.
3. The definition of the Church as a universal sacrament of salvation is always put in an eschatological context. According to the council, the kingdom of God shines out in the word, work and presence of Christ. The Church represents 'the seed' and beginning of this kingdom on earth (LG 5). Indeed it is 'the kingdom of Christ already present in mystery' (3). In this way the Church is a messianic people, although it often appears as a little flock. It is 'a most sure seed of unity, hope and salvation for the whole human race' (9).

Through his act of redemption, Jesus Christ has brought about once and for all unity, peace, and reconciliation. This will become manifest at the end of time. But these things are already present in the Church in a provisional and anticipatory way, and through the Church, as a sign and instrument, they are intended to be bestowed on all human beings. So precisely because it is a sacrament of salvation, the Church must continually go beyond itself in dialogue, in communication, and in co-operation with all people of good will (GS 42, 43, 45). The eschatological context excludes any kind of ecclesiological triumphalism. The Council says explicitly that the Church has the form of a servant, in three ways. 1. It is a Church of the poor; 2. It is a Church of sinners, being 'at once holy and always in need of purification, following constantly the path of penance and renewal'. 3. It is a persecuted Church. As a servant in these three ways, the Church is the sign of Jesus Christ, who emptied himself and took upon himself the form of a servant (Phil 2:6-11).

4. By saying that in Christ the Church is *as it were* a sacrament, the council makes it clear that the classic concept of sacrament used in Catholic theology, which has been developed since the twelfth century, should not be applied to the Church. That is to say, the Church is not an eighth sacrament, in addition to the other seven. According to the sacramental concept employed since the twelfth century, the Church is a sacrament only in an improper sense. By using the term sacrament in this merely analogous sense, the council is going back to the older sacramental concept of patristic theology. At that time, *sacramentum* was the Latin word used to translate the biblical term *mysterion*. The Relatio to the Constitution on the Church expressly brings out this connection. It says that *mysterium* does not mean something unknowable or esoteric. In the sense in which it is used in Scripture, it means that transcendent, salvific divine reality which reveals itself in a visible way. If we start from this understanding of *mysterium*, it may be said that the inner nature of the Church is hidden, but that it reveals itself – even if shadows remain – in the concrete, visible *ecclesia catholica*. The term sacrament tells us that the Church is a complex reality which includes visible elements and hidden ones, what is human and what is divine. There is a mystery in the visible Church which can only be grasped in faith (LG 8). So the term sacrament is intended to help prevent both a spiritualistic view of the Church and a naturalistic and purely sociological viewpoint. What is visible about the Church is also part of its essential nature. But of course, what is visible is essential only as a sign and instrument of the true reality of the Church, which can only be grasped in faith. The council's aim is to express and interpret the truth that on the one hand the Church comes wholly from Christ, and remains permanently related to him; but on the other hand, as a sign and instrument, it is also wholly there in order to minister to men and women of the world.

This mystical and sacramental vision of the Church indicates that all theological thinking about the Church must be based on this communion with the mystery of the Trinity as well as on a real understanding of the history of salvation. As a consequence of

the communication of the Holy Spirit, the Church is thus defined by its relation to the communion between the Persons of the Trinity, the source and exemplar of ecclesial communion (LG 4).

**Theme 2**            **According to the plan of God historically realised, Church is the eschatological people of God.**

Starting from the initial self-understanding of the Church as the People of God of the “last times”, we try to situate the Church in the plan of God, and therefore in salvation history. This will enable us to understand the distinctive features of the Church as the People of God, which is both the fruit and the instrument of God’s saving action in history.

#### **A. Old Testament Background**

The central affirmation of Israel’s faith is that it is the People of God. It is a human group forming a community, a “collective personality”. But it is a unique people because it owes its existence, and whole *raison d’être* to the fact that Yahweh chose it as “his own people” (Ex 19:3f; Deut 7:5f). This notion is present from the time Israel first recognised itself as a religious and national unity, and this took place at the time of its deliverance from Egypt (Ex 6:6-8). To this was attached the idea of the Covenant through which Yahweh becomes the God of Israel, and Israel the People of God (Lev 26:9-12). The uniqueness of Israel is due exclusively to the initiative of Yahweh (notion of election); to his salvific action and his special presence among his people. From this followed the unique vocation of Israel; to be holy as Yahweh is holy, and to be the bearer and inheritor of the promises first made to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3).

From the history of the people of God there emerges the eschatological concept of the people of God, especially in the prophetic writings. After all the disloyalties of Israel, and all the judgements and punishments of Yahweh, God wishes by his pure grace and goodness to re-establish the ancient relationship in an unalterable and unbreakable manner, new and definitive (Jer 24:7; 31:31-34; 32:38f).

#### **B. Church’s consciousness of being this eschatological people**

The NT speaks often of the People or peoples of God (*laos theou*) of the Old Covenant as distinguished from the Gentile nations (*ethne*). However, it clearly affirms that the Church (*ekklesia*) of the New Covenant sealed in the blood of Christ is the true spiritual heir of Israel. It is the community of the outpoured Spirit of the messianic times, into which both Jews and Gentiles are called to enter. It is the community of Jesus Christ (Mt 16:16), through whom the prophecies are fulfilled and the new covenant is inaugurated. Those, therefore, who believe in Jesus and enter by baptism into his *ekklesia* are made sharers in all the promises made to Israel (Eph 2:11-22; Gal 3:7-2; 4:21-31; 1 Pet 2:9-10; Heb 8:6-13).

#### **C. The plan of God or “Mysterium”**

The people of God is only intelligible in the context of the Plan of God as it has been revealed to us in the course of the history of salvation. St. Paul speaks of this plan as

the Mystery, the economy of our supernatural salvation revealed to us by God in Christ. Considered in its origin, it is called the mystery of God (1 Cor 2:1; Col 2:2) or the mystery of the will of God (Eph 1:9). As realised in Christ, it is the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4; Col 4:3) and in so far as it is the object of the apostolic preaching, it is the mystery of the Gospel (Eph 6:19). It is the mystery of the wisdom and love of God (1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:5; 3:10; Rom 11:13), conceived by God before the creation of the world and hidden in God (Eph 1:4; 3:9; 1Cor 2:7; Rom 16:25). And now it is revealed in Christ and in the Church (Eph 1:9; 3:3-10; 6:19; 1 Cor 2:10; Col; 1:26; 4:3). It is the Plan of God sketched for us in nos. 2-4 of the Constitution on the Church. There we see clearly that it is the mystery of the infinite wisdom and love of the Trinity communicating to men the riches of the divine life from the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

### **The unfolding and realisation of the divine plan in and through salvation history**

#### **A. General notions of salvation history**

The plan of God is unfolded and realised in and through God's actions in history. This means that God acts in history, reveals himself in history, and inserts himself in history, conferring on it a 'religious consecration', giving it a meaning and direction. The Incarnation is the ultimate revelation of this *modus agendi* of God, which is incarnational in all its manifestations. This is the essential faith of the Christian, and is radically different from both the Greek and Hindu concepts of salvation.

This history of salvation must be clearly distinguished from both human empirical history and from the history of the cosmos. Yet it gives to both their meaning, and is intimately linked with them. It is an object of faith, but this irruption of God into time is made known to man by the signs, which God has given. In this biblical theology of history, we see that history is linear (not cyclic). It is one and coherent marked by a profound eschatological dynamism. And it is a drama, for it involves both God's free unpredictable actions in history and man's free response.

#### **Main steps of this history upto the era of the Church**

1. The Preparation: the stages that precede the coming of Christ
  - a. First phase: from creation to the covenant with Abraham – Adam – the fall – the covenant with Noah (Gen 8:21-22; 9:9-11)
  - b. Second phase: the immediate historical preparation of the messianic times
    - i. The Covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-2; 13:14-17)
    - ii. The Mosaic Covenant: creation of the People of God
      - subsequent history of the chosen people
      - the transcendence of failure: prophecy of the future
2. The fulfillment: "In the fullness of time..." (Gal 4:4) God's definitive intervention in human history, inaugurating the last times. But it is more than a mere inauguration. For in and through the mystery of Christ, God's perfect revelation and self-communication and the restoration of the universe has already taken place. The divine plan has been realized in Christ in a full and perfect way. The new and eternal covenant has been established.

## The Present Era: The Church as the final People of God

Salvation history continues. We live in an intermediate period between the first and Second Coming of Christ. This era, which is the era of the Church and the mission, is both a necessary continuation – in a sense a fulfilment – of the era of Jesus, and an intervening period prior to the complete fulfilment with the parousia and the perfect coming of the Kingdom of God. It is marked by a profound eschatological tension between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’.

- completion of the OT notion of salvation history
- witness of the NT writers; differences in viewpoint; varying degrees of emphasis on the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. In general, a definite shift in the later writings of the NT from a pre-occupation with the return of the Lord and the final consummation to an insistence on the present reality and mission of the Church in history.

### a. The Church and Israel: continuity and discontinuity

The problem: In the NT, Israel is still referred to as the People of God. It is to this people that Jesus is sent. During his lifetime, he restricts his apostolate and that of his disciples to Israel. After the Resurrection the Gospel is preached first to the Jews, and the first Christian community still continues to frequent the temple and observe the prescriptions of the law. The Gentiles are pictured as being incorporated into this unique people. On the other hand, the community of Jesus knows itself to be the People of God of the last times. There is opposition between the empirical Israel and the Church. The gentiles have been called at the same time in the blood of Christ. The Church is ‘Israel *kata pneuma*’, and the Jewish people are ‘Israel *kata sarkx*.’

Reason for the dialectic: The Church is the unique Israel in the new eschatological times. One concept insists on the new eschatological creation that is the result of the fact of Christ and the new covenant sealed in his blood. The other insists on the continuity in the history of salvation. God has not rejected his people. There exists special relationship between the Church and the people of the Old Covenant (cf. Rom 9-11).

The early Christian community, for all its links with the Jewish nation as a whole, already possessed certain peculiar forms which pointed to a distinctive development:

1. Baptism, as a sign of repentance and the purification from sin, was given with reference to the coming reign of God in the name of Jesus. From the beginning this is the initiation rite of the new fellowship (Acts 2:38, 41). This rite shows that the eschatological community is not just a vague movement or a mere fellowship, but is a community with historical forms: a Church. Baptism is already a mark of separation from the Jewish nation as a whole and it takes on even more fundamental importance when it does not have to be preceded by circumcision as a rite of initiation.
2. The communal service of prayer, as a community or in smaller groups in private houses (Acts 2:46; 12:12), was an occasion for saying the Lord’s prayer together, for interpreting sacred texts, for recalling the words of Jesus and studying his life in the light of the OT. In all this lay the seeds of later separation from Judaism; but especially and fundamentally the title given to the risen Christ: “our Lord” (*Maranatha*, 1 Cor 16:22), which indicated a new cult community with a new cult object.
3. The communal eschatological meal was celebrated, probably often in association with the simple service of prayer. As a meal which recalls the Lord before his death and

looks forward to the Lord who is shortly to come in glory, it continually recreates the community's sense of belonging to the eschatological people of God.

4. The community had its own leaders, composed at first of the twelve, the representatives of the eschatological Israel of the twelve tribes. Among them, according to synoptic, Pauline and Johannine tradition alike, Peter had the chief role to play.
5. The community was a living fellowship of love; the *koinonia* (Acts 2:42) linked together all members in a brotherly fellowship, which found expression in mutual help, shared sufferings and to a certain extent in common ownership (Acts 2:45; 4:32-36).

Although at first the eschatological community was limited to the Jewish nation, it did not remain so for long. This process of liberating itself from Judaism began by the development of a Christianity freed from Judaic laws, and after a few decades, completed by the destruction of Jerusalem and the ending of the temple cult. Indeed, there is a drastic change to the notion of the Church of the Gentiles. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy"(1 Pet 2:9-10). Here we find an accumulation of all the titles and dignities given to Israel in the OT (drawn especially from Ex 19:6; Is 43:20; Hos 2:23) applied to the Church of the Gentiles. Separation from ancient Israel seems to be completed here.

While going through the fourth-century Syrian Fathers' thought on the Church, one cannot but be struck by the predominance of the doctrine that the chosen people of God has been replaced by a new people, the Church of the Gentiles. We do not normally use the same word for God's people and for the Gentiles, but Syrians do with 'ammo' in singular and plural. The Church of the Gentiles is '*ammo d-men amme*'. Aphrahat finds prior election of the Gentiles not only in the explicit promise to Abraham, but also typified in the story of 'our father' Jacob. In Dem. IV, 'On Prayer', after a typological application of Jacob's vision of the Ladder to Christ and the Cross, Aphrahat continues:

And Jacob called that place Bethel; and Jacob set up there a pillar of stone for a testimony, and poured oil on its head. This also our father Jacob did as a mystery, foreshadowing that stones were to receive unction; for the peoples (*amme*) who have found faith in Christ are they who are anointed, as John said concerning them, from these stones God is able to raise up sons for Abraham. Thus in Jacob's prayer the mystery of the calling of the peoples was prefigured.

Ephrem has the same interpretation; the oil which Jacob poured on the stone contained the mystery of Christ hidden within it, and "again, by the stone was signified the mystery of the Church, to which were to come the vows and sacrifices of all the nations." On Jacob's blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim, crossing his hands and raising Ephraim to the first place, Ephrem falls in with Origen and others in seeing a twofold type. Jacob's crossed hands symbolize the Cross, and the reversal of Manasseh and Ephraim is a figure "of him through whom Israel the firstborn went out, like Manasseh the firstborn, while the Nations grow great like Ephraim the younger."

### b. The Church is a Pilgrim People

It is especially by understanding the notion of the Church as a Pilgrim People that we are able to grasp the present nature of the Church in this period between the Synagogue and the Kingdom, so as to understand its eschatological situation and the tensions that flow from this. This notion is developed in 1 Peter and Hebrews. In the former, the theological idea is that of the Christians as ‘wayfarers and strangers’ in this world. In the latter, the Church is considered formally as a Pilgrim People re-living the experience of the people of old in their journey through the desert toward the promised land.

There is always a danger of one-sidedness in understanding the present nature of the Church as a Pilgrim People. Protestant insistence on the ‘not yet’ leads to an inability to understand the essential difference between the Church and the Israel of old. Catholic insistence on the ‘already’ leads to a static concept of the Church, and an unrealistic view of the Church as she exists in this world. On the one hand, we must insist that the Church, precisely because she is the people of the new and eternal covenant, the Body of Christ and the community of the outpoured Spirit, will always remain essentially faithful to her Lord. On the other hand, as a people constantly in need of the mercy and forgiveness of God and called to ever greater fidelity, the Church is always called to reform and renewal.

It is pre-eminently in the Eucharistic celebration that the Church realises its nature as the Pilgrim People of the New Covenant. While calling to mind the past, what God has done for us in Christ, she experiences its effects in the present, as a pledge of the future fulfilment in the Kingdom of God.

### c. Mission and universalism of the People of God

All men are called to belong to the new People of God. This People therefore, whilst remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and to all ages in order that the design of God's will may be fulfilled: he made human nature one in the beginning and has decreed that all his children who were scattered should be finally gathered together as one (cf. John 11:52). (LG 13)

After this fundamental statement the same number develops the meaning of the Church's catholicity. This number serves as an introduction to the different ways by which men are related to the People of God, i.e. Catholics (14), other Christians (15), non-Christians (16). Finally the missionary vocation of the Church is briefly developed in number 17, which concludes: “Thus the Church prays and likewise labours so that into the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, may pass the fullness of the whole world, and that in Christ, the head of all things, all honour and glory may be rendered to the Creator, the Father of the universe.” The catholicity and mission of the Church, and the related questions of membership and the necessity of the Church for salvation, will be treated at length in later themes. Here we note briefly:

- The source of the Church's universalism is the universality of the redemption achieved in Christ (Mk 14:24; Jn 11:52), who in his body has broken down the enmity that stood as a dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, and so out of the two has created a ‘single new humanity in himself’ (Eph 2:13-16).
- Thus its unity is not based on any racial or ethnic bonds, but on faith and incorporation in Christ. And though the Jews are first to be called, God

chooses also from among the Gentiles a people to bear his name (Acts 15:14; Rom 9:25f; 1 Pet 2:10). This unity of Jews and Gentiles in the one new humanity is the aspect of the mystery that Paul insists upon (Eph 3:4f.).

- The missionary activity of the Church, commanded by Christ (Mt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), is essential to the nature of the Church as a Pilgrim People, which must continually labour to incorporate all men and all human values into Christ. It in no way denies the reality of grace and supernatural life beyond the visible boundaries of the Church.

#### d. Structure of the People of God

This is to be developed in the rest of the course. Essential dignity and equality of all the members are clearly affirmed in number 32 of the Constitution. It is also important to note that this essential equality does not destroy the distinction between hierarchy and laity, and the inequality in ministerial functions.

#### **The Church, the People of God today**

a. All the faithful belong to the people of God; there must be no clericalisation of the Church. The Church is always and in all cases the whole people of God. Everyone belongs to the chosen race, the royal priesthood, and the holy nation. All members of the people of God have been called by God, justified by Christ, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. This fundamental parity is much more important than the distinctions which exist in the people of God. If the Church is the true people of God, it is impossible to differentiate between "Church" and "laity", as though the laity were not in a very real sense "*laos*". The Church is directly or indirectly identified with the clergy, perhaps not with regard to duties, but at any rate with regard to rights and privileges. It is striking that the word "*laos*" with the meaning of people of God is so often used for the Christian community, whereas the word "*laikos*", layman, whether in the Gentile meaning of the "uneducated masses" or in the Jewish meaning of one who is neither priest or Levite, simply does not occur in the NT. The word "*laos*" in the NT indicates no distinction *within* the community as between priests and people. It indicates rather the fellowship of all in a single community. The distinction it implies is one *outside* the community, between the whole people of God and the "non-people", the "heathens".

b. Everyone belongs to the people of God *through God's call*: there must be no attempt to make the Church private and exclusive. The Church is always and everywhere dependent on the free choice and call of God, who wills the salvation of all men. Without God's free grace and love there can be no Church. God and his people do not make a covenant *together*, as equals; it is *God* who makes the covenant with his people. The covenant, like their vocation as a whole, is God's grace and free gift to his people. The essential difference and superiority of the Christian message, when compared to other oriental religions is that its aim is not the salvation of the individual alone and the freeing of the individual soul from suffering, sin and death. The essential part of the Christian message is the idea of salvation for the whole community of people, of which the individual is a member. The Church begins, not with a pious individual, but with God. The existence and the nature of the Church is determined in advance by the will of God, and unlike other human foundations where the founder retires after a time, it remains completely dependent on him.



### The term of Salvation History: The Kingdom of God

All of salvation history is dynamically ordained to the perfect consummation of God's plan. This consummation which will take place at the Parousia will bring about:

- i. The vindication of Christ's victory over sin, unbelief, and death (1 Cor 15:24-28).
- ii. The establishment of the perfect Kingdom of God (Rev 21): the heavenly Jerusalem. Then the nuptials of the bride will take place. The community on earth, which belongs in essence and destiny to heaven, joins the community of heaven, and the entire Church solemnises its nuptials with the bridegroom. "Church" and "Kingdom" become one, as do also the "cosmos" and the "Church".

It is not surprising that Paul speaks specifically of the present reign of the glorified Lord in the time between resurrection and parousia: the reign which Christ will deliver to God the Father at the end, after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies, including the last enemy, death, under his feet (1 Cor 15:24-28; Col 1:13; Eph 5:5). That will be the new fully redeemed humanity and the new world, in which God will be everything to everyone: the completed reign of God. While *ekklesia* is something essentially of the present, something finite, *basileia* is something which, although it has irrupted into the present, belongs fundamentally to the future. *Ekklesia* is a pilgrimage through the interim period of the last days, something provisional. *Basileia* is the final glory at the end of all time, something definitive. *Ekklesia* embraces sinners and righteous, *basileia* is the kingdom of the righteous, of the saints. It is not the Church but the consummated reign of God which is the goal of creation.

The message of Jesus allows for neither identification of the Church and reign of God nor dissociation between them. As an eschatological community of believers, the Church is directed towards and belongs to the coming reign of God. The eschatological community comes from the preaching of the reign of God. The reign of God is its beginning and its foundation. The Church is not the kingdom of God, but it looks towards the kingdom of God, waits for it, or rather makes a pilgrimage towards it and is its herald, proclaiming it to the world. The Church is not a preliminary stage, but an anticipatory sign of the definitive reign of God. The meaning of the Church does not reside in itself, in what it is, but in what it is moving towards. It is the reign of God which the Church hopes for, bears witness to, and proclaims. It is not the bringer or the bearer of the reign of God, but its voice, its announcer, its herald. God alone can bring his reign; the Church is devoted entirely to its service.

The mission of the Church is to proclaim that which it has heard, believed, and been commissioned to proclaim. According to this view, the Church is herald – one who receives an official message with the commission to pass it on. The basic image is that of the herald of a king who comes to proclaim a royal decree in a public square. The chief proponent of this type of ecclesiology in the twentieth century is Karl Barth, who draws abundantly on Paul, Luther and others. In his *Church Dogmatics* Barth has a long discussion on the word of God and its relationship to the Church. He warns the Church against so domesticating the Bible that it would cease to be ruled by the Bible. The word of God is not a substance immanent in the Church, but rather an event that takes place as often as God addresses his people and is believed. The Church therefore is actually constituted by the word being proclaimed and faithfully heard. The Church is the

congregation that is gathered together by the word – a word that ceaselessly summons it to repentance and reform.

Following in the footsteps of Luther, Barth distinguishes between a theology of glory and a theology of the cross. The former is found wherever the Church identifies itself with the divine and points to itself as containing what it proclaims. The correct attitude according to Barth is for the Church to point away from itself like John the Baptist pointing to the Lamb of God. It calls men to Christ by openly acknowledging its own emptiness. In the terminology of Barth, the Church is the great crater left by the impact of God's revealing word.

Barth's view that the Church is essentially a herald of Christ's Lordship and of the future Kingdom is closely paralleled in Catholic theology by Hans Küng, who began his theological career with a doctoral dissertation on Barth. In his book, *The Church*, Küng has a very characteristic section entitled, "The Eschatological Community of Salvation." He finds that the biblical term *ekklesia* means those summoned by a herald, those who have been called out (*ek-kletoi*).

*Ekklesia*, like "congregation," means both the actual *process of congregating* and the *congregated community* itself. The former should not be overlooked. An *ekklesia* is not something that is formed and founded once and for all and remains unchanged; it becomes an *ekklesia* by the fact of a repeated concrete event, people coming together and congregating, in particular congregating for the purpose of worshipping God. The concrete congregation is the actual manifestation, the representation, and indeed the realisation of the NT community.

The local Church, in this theology, is not just a section or province of the Church, as it might appear in some presentation of the institutional model, but is the Church itself as fully present in each assembly that responds to God's word.

On the credit side, this ecclesiology gives a clear sense of identity and mission to the Church – especially the local church. It is conducive to a spirituality that focuses on God's sovereignty and on man's infinite distance from him. This ecclesiology leads to obedience, humility, and readiness for repentance and reform. Finally, this theory gives rise to a very rich theology of the word. Yet there are limitations to this ecclesiological type. The Catholic point of view stresses the incarnational aspect of the Christian revelation. It is not enough to speak of the word of God, for Christianity stands or falls with the affirmation that the Word has been made flesh. Christ perpetuates not only his doctrine and his works in the Church, but shares with it his very being. Vatican II attempted to capitalise on various themes derived from the theology of the word of God, but it was not satisfied with a merely prophetic understanding of the word.

The magisterium of the Church is not over the word of God but under it, but the living magisterium is seen to be endowed with authority from Christ to interpret the word for the community. This affects the understanding of the relationship between the Scriptures and the Church.

But when Christians separated from us affirm the divine authority of the sacred Books, they think differently from us... In the Church, according to Catholic belief, an authentic teaching office plays a special role in the explanation and proclamation of the written word of God. (UR 21)

**Theme 3 Christ founded the Church on earth as a community, which he prepared by his death and resurrection and inaugurated on the day of Pentecost.**

We have seen that the disciples of Christ who regrouped in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus and received the gifts of the promised Spirit on the day of Pentecost believed themselves to be the eschatological community of salvation, the people of God of the new and eternal covenant. These believers in Jesus the Lord shared together a common life under the direction and authority of the apostles (cf. Description of the community in Acts, esp. 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:12-16). And they believed that they had been sent by Jesus with a mission to proclaim the good news of salvation to both Jews and Gentiles (cf. 1:8; 2:37-39; 15:14), who by baptism are incorporated into the community. Thus they believed that salvation history continues, that the present era is the era of the community of Jesus and its mission, which is to prepare for the coming of the perfect kingdom of God.

But does this community owe its origin to the Jesus of history or the Christ of faith? In other words, did Jesus really intend to found a community to which he would entrust a mission of continuing his saving work during an indefinite period of history that would continue after his death? Or was the emergence of the community a fact that was contrary to his intentions, or at least outside the scope of his vision? Mt. 16:18 seems to affirm clearly that Jesus did intend to found such a community. But did he actually say these words, or do they reflect the mentality of the primitive Christian community which wished to find its origin in the words of the Lord in whom it had come to believe?

Reasons for doubting:

1. The mind of Jesus was dominated by an expectation of the imminent end of this world and the advent of the eschatological Kingdom (Mt 10:23; 16:27-28). Therefore, he could not have thought about establishing a community that would continue in history. Such is the opinion of the school of consequent eschatology (Bultmann, Kummel etc.).
2. Jesus limited his teaching, as well as that of his disciples (Mt 15:24; 10:5-6) to the Jews. And it is clear from the Acts that the primitive community long hesitated to begin the mission to the Gentiles. Therefore, if Jesus did not have the intention of founding a new and universal People whose mission it would be to preach the Gospel to all the nations, then he can hardly be said to have founded the Christian Church (thus Harnack, Holtzmann etc.).

What should we say?

There are two facts:

1. In general Jesus insisted upon the nearness of the Kingdom of God. Hence, the frequent exhortations to watchfulness (Mk 13:33-37; Mt 24:36-44; Lk 12:35-40), and the urgency of making a decision for or against Jesus now.
2. In certain passages (Mk 9:1; Mt 16:28; Lk 9:27), Jesus even indicates a definite time in the near future that will witness the coming of the Son of Man or the coming of the Kingdom in power.

With regard to the predictions that give a definite time, the best explanation is that Jesus distinguishes between two comings of the Son of Man and the Kingdom. The first, which was to take place in the near future and would be as it were an anticipation and

preparation for the final consummation, is to be identified with the visitation of divine judgement upon the unfaithful people (destruction of the Holy City) and the marvellous expansion of the community among the Gentile nations in the power of the Holy Spirit. The second is the coming of the final eschatological Kingdom at a time known only to the Father (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36). This final coming cannot be accurately determined by reading the signs, and Jesus consistently refused to give any such determinations.

With regard to the general context of Jesus' preaching about the nearness of the Kingdom, Jesus makes use of the prophetic style which seeks to bring home the urgency and necessity of making a decision now. Moreover, with the coming of Jesus there is a new and decisive element present which adds to this urgency: the final times are already upon us. With Jesus, the time of fulfilment is already here; through him God's eschatological work is already in operation. In a certain sense the Kingdom is already present and only awaits its manifestation in glory. This fact sets a seal on the whole present period of salvation history, which always remains the eschatological 'hour' of decision.

### **Positive exposition of founding of the Church by Jesus**

#### **I. Mt 16:18 in the context of Jesus' messianic mission**

The meaning of the promise: "...and on this rock I will build my church"

The authenticity of the text is confirmed by both external criteria (found in all codices and ancient versions; often cited by the Fathers) and internal (the striking Semitic character indicates a Palestinian origin for the oral tradition of this logion). However, it is not clear as to when these words were spoken by Our Lord (cf. Mk 8:27-28).

#### **The Rock as understood by the Syrian Fathers**

The title of Rock (*kipho* ܕܰܦܰܠܰܐ) is a special case and the most interesting one. The word is particularly striking in the Syriac literature both because it is the precise word which Christ made a proper name (Peter), and because in the *Peshitta* the word ܕܰܦܰܠܰܐ *kipho* plays a much more dominant part than any one word for rock or stone in either the Hebrew or the Greek NT. The meaning can be summed up by saying that ܕܰܦܰܠܰܐ is a functional title given by Christ to Simon. As Christ the Chief Shepherd made Simon the chief shepherd in his place, so Christ the ܕܰܦܰܠܰܐ, foretold by prophecy and type, made Simon the ܕܰܦܰܠܰܐ in his place, and said that on that ܕܰܦܰܠܰܐ he would build his Church, and the 'bars of Sheol' ܕܰܡܰܘܰܬܰܐ ܕܰܫܰܥܰܘܰܠܰܐ would be powerless against it. In following this theme in Syrian Fathers we shall first review their presentation of Christ as the ܕܰܦܰܠܰܐ, by OT quotations and types; then how Christ made Simon the ܕܰܦܰܠܰܐ; and then the probable significance of the reading 'bars of sheol'.

#### **Christ the Rock**

Aphrahat's first *Demonstration* is about Faith, and immediately he proposes his theme under the figure of a 'house built on the crag of the firm rock' which is Christ. Aphrahat promises to prove that the prophets called Christ the ܕܰܦܰܠܰܐ. Accordingly he proposes a classic little testimony-series from both Testaments: Ps 118:22; Is 28:16; Dan

2:34-44; Zech 4:7. Then after some texts on charity, comes Zech 3:9: ‘On this *kepha* I will open seven eyes’, which, says Aphrahat, are the sevenfold Spirit of God, referred to also by Zech 4:1.

Ephrem rarely has anything like formal testimony-lists. He prefers typology or implicit allusion to *testimonia*. He develops the theme of Christ the Rock mainly by means of types. One example, shared with Aphrahat is in Jacob’s anointing of his stone (كُافَلَا) at Bethel a type of Christ ‘anointing’ believers who come from the Gentiles. In Diatessaron (EC 21,21), on Christ’s entombment, Christ is compared to Daniel and Lazarus. Against the door was placed ‘a stone against the Stone, so that a stone might guard the Stone which the builders rejected’. Then Christ is likened to the stone of Dan 2:34, and to Jacob’s stone on which he laid his head. This way of alluding implicitly to many classical texts is typical of Ephrem.

With stones (كُافَلَا) Satan tempted  
 The كُافَلَا which gave drink to the people  
 The كُافَلَا that was the Bread of Life,  
 That كُافَلَا that shattered the great image. (HVirg 14,6)

Here the ‘Bread of Life’ may be an implicit comment on the temptation: Christ was to give bread, but not by the means proposed by the tempter.

The metaphor ‘hearts of stone’ comes in to express both the Jews’ rejection of Christ the كُافَلَا, and his transformation of those hearts that accepted him. Thus in *Hfid* 84,5

The people that had a heart of stone (كُافَلَا)  
 He rejected through the كُافَلَا  
 For behold, even the كُافَلَا was obedient to words.

### Simon Kepha

That character in Jesus which is symbolised by the image of rock or stone was to be shared with men, and above all with Simon, to whom he applied كُافَلَا so that it became his new name, Peter. When Aphrahat speaks of this he clearly sees كُافَلَا as a functional title, and qualifies it with the adjective كُافَلَا firm. In a passage on how Christ rewarded faith during his life, Aphrahat says: “Also Simon who was called كُافَلَا, because of his faith was called ‘Firm Rock’ (كُافَلَا كُافَلَا)”. Only two passages in Aphrahat allude to Mt 16:18, and there are no direct quotations. In the *Demonstration* ‘On Penitence’, after David and Aaron, Simon Peter is proposed as a model of repentance. After he had denied his Lord he repented and wept many tears, and “Our Lord accepted him and made him a foundation, and called him كُافَلَا the building of the Church (كُافَلَا كُافَلَا)”. The other is a passing reference in a passage on the Transfiguration. Christ took with him “Simon Kepha, the foundation of the Church, and James and John, strong pillars of the Church”. Short as these references are, they are significant. After all

Aphrahat's insistence in *Dem.* 1 that Christ is the foundation on which is raised the house of faith, he now calls Simon Kepha both the foundation and even the building of the Church.

In general, Ephrem shows a great reserve in the use of the name **كُفَا** and when he uses it, most often the context makes clear that there is an allusion to Mt 16. The fourth *memra* 'On Holy Week' contains the most explicit passage on Peter's primacy in all the works of Ephrem.

Thee, Simon, my disciple, have I set as the foundation of holy Church  
I called thee **كُفَا** from of old that thou mightest bear all buildings.

Thou art the overseer of those who build for me the Church on earth;  
If they build anything hateful thy foundation restrains them.

Thou art the fountain-head of my teaching and thou art the head of my disciples.

By thee I will give drink to all nations; thou hast the sweetness of Life which I will give.

It is thee I have chosen to be firstborn of my teaching to be heir of my treasures.

I have given thee the Keys of my kingdom: behold, thou rulest over all my possessions.

As 'fountain-head' and as giving drink to all nations, Peter is probably compared implicitly to Moses' rock, just as in Aphrahat. The 'sweetness of life' is the Eucharist.

#### The Keys: Binding and loosing

The figure of keys **مُكَبِّرَا** (from κλεις) has a wide application in the ancient semitic world. But the use of it which concerns us stems from Mt 16:18, 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven'.<sup>3</sup> The equally widely attested figure of 'binding and loosing', which likewise refers to the exercise of moral or legal authority, occurs in the same verse and in Mt 18:18. Aphrahat refers only once to Christ's entrusting the keys to Peter (*Dem* 21). More often he uses the figure of the keys to refer to episcopal authority, but his emphasis is usually more on pastoral responsibility than on the apostolic power.

Ephrem uses the figure of the keys to stress the transmission of authority. In the homily 'On our Lord', which says Jesus received priesthood and prophethood from Simeon, we read:

Therefore the former *Steward* and the last *Treasurer* handed on the keys of priesthood and prophecy to him who had authority over the treasury of both of these. And our Lord, to show that he had received the keys from the former steward, said to Simon: *To thee will I give the keys of the gates.* But how could he give them to another unless he had received them from another? The keys, therefore, which he received from Simeon the priest, he gave to 'Simeon' the Apostle, so that even if the nation would not 'listen to' the former Simeon, the Nations should 'listen to' the other 'Simeon'.

But since John also was a treasurer, of baptism, to him also came the Lord of stewardship, to receive from him the keys of the house of absolution..

Ephrem speaks more explicitly of Christ's handing of the keys to Peter in *HVirg.* 15. The hymn is addressed first to John the Baptist, then to the 'virgin youth', the Apostle John, and then to Simon Peter:

Blessed are you also, Simon Kepha, who holds the keys which the Spirit forged.  
Great is the word and ineffable, that could bind and loose above and below!

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of Jewish and NT usage cf. J. Jeremias, art. κλεις in Kittel, TDNT III, 744-53.

For Cyrillona likewise the keys are a general symbol of authority. He expands Christ's words to Peter in John 13:8 thus:

If this is not allowed to be, you have no share with me in the throne,  
If this is not allowed to be, give me back the keys I delivered to you,  
If this is not allowed to be, even your authority will be taken from you.

#### The Bars of Sheol

It has long been known that the Syriac Diatessaron at Mt 16:18 reads not 'gates of hell' (ܡܘܨܘܘܝܐ ܕܡܘܚܐܘܝܐ ܕܗܝܘܠܐ ܨܘܠܩܝܢܝܘܢ), but 'bars...' (ܡܘܨܘܘܝܐ ܕܡܘܨܘܘܝܐ ܕܡܘܨܘܘܝܐ ܕܡܘܨܘܘܝܐ). The rest of the sentence in all known Syriac versions has the verb ܘܠܝܫܝܘܢܝܢ, which has usually been translated, just as ܘܠܝܫܝܘܢܝܢ usually is, 'shall not prevail against it' (in the Diatessaron, perhaps 'against thee'). The Syrians who used the Diatessaron were likely to see the 'bars of sheol' in Mt 16:18 as on the defensive rather than the offensive. The text could mean perfectly naturally 'the bars of sheol shall be powerless against her' i.e. 'will be unable to withstand her'. Thus we have the vision of the Church sharing in Christ's eschatological victory over death.

Just as in the desert, Yahweh through the ministry of his servant Moses had gathered together the Israelites in order to make them his holy people, a community dedicated to his worship; so Jesus expresses his intention of gathering together a community that will be peculiarly his own. This community, founded upon Peter, the rock, will endure as a stable and permanent reality until the advent of the future kingdom. This is the messianic community of God that will one day enter as the complete and perfect community of the redeemed into the kingdom of God.

It was argued that the intention of establishing a Church was first ascribed to him after the early Church had come into existence. Such an interpretation completely misunderstands the messianic and eschatological thought of Israel, in which eschatological salvation can never be dissociated from the people of God and the community of God belongs necessarily to the kingdom of God. The future achievement of salvation is to be the consummation of all God's actions through history, and this includes the choice of Israel as his people. This reality was never denied or ignored in the prophecies, and both the pattern and development of God's salvific plan demands also the ultimate existence of a community of salvation and even the fulfilment of the special community for the final period and when Israel as a whole failed, he could not abandon the thought of the eschatological community.<sup>4</sup>

In other words, not only was the pre-formation of the community not contrary to the intention of Jesus, but in the context of his messianic mission it was to be expected. For, the messianic age was to be essentially a realisation of the potentialities and destiny of the holy community. To this people, then, Jesus comes to announce the time of fulfilment. But the condition of the people's realising their vocation is the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. When the official leaders of the people reject Jesus, there follows the death of Jesus and the community. But God is faithful to his promises. Hence it is to be expected that Jesus, foreseeing his rejection by official Judaism, would set about laying the foundations of the restored community, by gathering together a remnant to

<sup>4</sup> Schnackenburg, *God's Rule and Kingdom*, pp. 216-17

whom he would give authority and that would form the nucleus of his community. He would institute a new cult to replace the old made invalid by the rejection of Jesus. This is exactly what he did. The intention of Jesus to found a Church is proved by the fact that the community of disciples stays intact even after the rejection of Jesus by the majority of the Jewish people. The recognition of their election by God, the introduction to the mystery of his suffering, and the instruction about coming persecutions, these among other things show that Jesus retained the idea of a community of salvation which gathered around him.

## II The Election, Instruction, and Mission of the Twelve

### **The election of the twelve**

Jesus, like any Jewish religious teacher gathered around himself a group of disciples. But the originality of Jesus is seen in the election, training and mission of the 12 who are to be his close collaborators, and who are to continue the mission that Jesus has come to fulfil.

- the mnemonic scheme of the 12
- the election is narrated in Mk 3:13-19 and Lk 6:12-17, and supposed as a fact in Mt 10:1-4 and Jn 6:67-70
- always referred to as *oi dodeka*, obviously symbolic of the 12 tribes; so sacrosanct that Judas must be replaced (Acts 1:15ff); so strong a tradition that Paul speaks of apparition to the 12 when they are actually only 11 (1 Cor 15:5).
- Narration of the election in Mk 3:13-15
  1. Christ's action: "And he appointed twelve"
  2. Christ's purpose: "that they might be with him", "and that he might send them forth to preach". To them he gave power to cure sickness and to cast out devils. Cf. Parallel with Christ's mission: Mk 1:38-39.

### **Instruction of the twelve**

Cf. Mk Ch. 4-14 passim

### **Mission of the twelve**

To them are entrusted the means of salvation (Word and Sacraments) with the mandate and power to administer these means of salvation to others.

- a. The intention of Jesus: Mk 3:14; Mt. 4:19; Jn 15:16
- b. The first temporary mission during Jesus' public life: Mt. 10:5ff; Mk 6: 7-13; Lk 9:1-5
- c. Definitive and permanent mission given by the risen Christ: Mt. 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:47-48; Acts 1:8; Jn 20:21

## III. The Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper

(Mt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:15-20; 1Cor 11:23-26)

The Last Supper was something very much more than a mere farewell meal of Jesus with his disciples. It is a central moment in the institution of the Church, the community of the redeemed which will one day enter into the Kingdom of heaven. Here for the last time before his passion and death Jesus calls together the twelve, who are to form the nucleus of his new community. In this sacrament he inaugurates the new and



eternal covenant in his blood, and he makes the provision for the future life of the community, the sacrificial banquet that is to be the centre and source of life of the eschatological community. The advent of God's perfect reign and kingdom are very much in Jesus' mind, the vision of table companionship in the future Kingdom (cf. Lk 22:16,18,39; Mk 14:25). Now he clearly reveals that its advent is intimately linked up with his atoning death, which affects the new and eternal covenant with his community. He applies already the fruit of the covenant and he clearly makes provision for the time to come, for the time of the building up of the community that will one day enter into the perfect Kingdom of the future.

#### IV. The Paschal Mystery of Christ and the Founding of the Church

Here we wish to bring out the significance of the paschal mystery of Christ, culminating in the sending of the Holy Spirit for the founding of the Church. We have seen that Jesus not only had the intention of founding the Church, but also that he by his words and actions laid its foundations, and gave it its essential structure. But the Church was only fully constituted after the Resurrection. The Church is something very much more than a visible community of the followers of Christ with its own proper authority and liturgical life. Church is the community of those who live by the life of Christ, whose interior bond of unity is the Holy Spirit, and whose visible structure is the efficacious sacrament in time and space of God's love for man in Christ. In other words it is not only an institution, but also a supernatural event. From this we can see the significance and importance of the Last Supper, where the Paschal Mystery of Christ was not only symbolised and pre-figured, but was sacramentally realised and made effective. Hence also the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church, for it is in and through the Eucharist that the Paschal Mystery becomes sacramentally present and effective, continually creating the Church as supernatural reality and event (LG 3,11).

To the question: when was the Church founded? Different answers can be given depending on what aspect of the mystery we wish to insist upon. – during our Lord's public life; at the Last Supper; on the Cross (many Fathers insist upon the birth of the Church '*ex latere Christi*'); at the Resurrection; on the day of Pentecost (when the glorified Christ poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit on his community, transforming it interiorly and making it his efficacious instrument in bringing to men the fruits of his Paschal Mystery. Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis* insists especially on the birth of the Church from the side of Christ without neglecting the other moments:

The Church which already conceived, came forth from the side of the second Adam in his sleep on the Cross, first showed herself before the eyes of men on the great day of Pentecost. For the divine Redeemer began the building of the mystical temple of the Church when by preaching he announced his precepts. He completed it when he hung glorified on the Cross. And he manifested and proclaimed it when he sent the Holy Spirit as Paraclete in visible form on his disciples. (n 26)

The activity of Jesus in founding the Church was completed only with the sending of the Holy Spirit. The Church exists only from the day of Pentecost. It can be seen completely only when it is viewed from the aspect both of Christ and of the Spirit. The statement that the Church was founded at Pentecost has to be understood in this way, that Jesus decided and prepared the essential elements, but in its concrete realisation it is primarily the accomplishment of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit sent by Jesus from the Father does not act like an automatic force, but rather moves men to their own decision. Thus

the concrete shaping of the Church from that Pentecost day on has been decided not only by the will of Jesus Christ but also by the decision of the men called by him. Peter's preaching was the result of the gift of the Spirit, but it corresponded also to his personal style of thought and speech. Ever since that day, the Church reveals itself as a combination of the work of God and man, a divine-human reality. It would be a misrepresentation of the gospel to identify the Spirit with the community. It would likewise contradict Scripture to exclude from the constitution of the Church the spontaneity and the historical character of human activity. There remains in the action of the Spirit human freedom with all its nuances.

### **The Syrian Tradition**

The founding of the Church on Simon Peter is well attested by the Syrian Fathers and the Syrian Liturgy. Here are a few examples from the Liturgy:

Moses is the head of the Old, Simon of the New; both resemble one another and God dwelt in them. Moses brought down the tables of the Law, Simon received the keys of the kingdom. Moses built the earthly tabernacle, Simon built the Church...(Lilio on Monday)

Simon Peter was catching fish in the sea, when his Lord called him and thus said to him: Come Simon and I will give you a catch of the Spirit and you shall draw men from death to life; and on you Simon, I will build the holy Church, and the bars of sheol shall not be able to prevail against it. (Lilio on Thursday)

Upon the rock of the household of Simon, the prince of the Apostles I am built and I am not afraid, the Church answered and said the waves and tempests beat against me but do not shake me. The accursed Nestorius fought against me, and met with his ruin. (Sapron on Saturday)

To Simon said his Lord: You are the rock of strength, on you I will base my holy Church. Into your hands I put the keys of heaven and earth that you may bind and loose according to my will. To you I trust the flock, redeemed with my precious blood. Be a good Shepherd to them, guard them from evil. (Lilio of SS. Peter and Paul)

The Syrian Fathers are delighted to make use of the imagery of the Church as the Bride of Christ. In Ephrem's poetry the imagery of the Bride of Christ features in two different contexts: first at the Baptism of Christ, where one of the roles of John the Baptist is to reveal the Bridegroom to the bride and secondly, at the entry into Jerusalem, where Ephrem portrays the Bridegroom's intended bride (Israel) as rejecting her betrothed and being replaced by a new bride – the Church of the Gentiles. The death on the Cross is the very wedding feast of the new Bride, and the blood from Christ's side is the Bridegroom's gift to his new Bride. The theme of the marriage deed being written in blood may perhaps have been suggested by Is 49:16, to which a direct allusion is made in the following:

(Oh Bride,) have faith in him who was crucified for you,  
Making out your marriage deed on the palm of his hands (Is 49:16)  
Sealing it with his own blood  
So that no one can annul it. (Lilio on Sixth Sunday after the Feast of the Cross)

**Theme 4**      **The Church is the fruit and instrument of salvation. Therefore, the Church owes to the Spirit its origin, existence and continued life, and in this sense the Church is a creation of the Spirit.**

The Church is something much more than a merely human association of like-minded individuals. It is a communion of life that has been communicated to us through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Its unity is not the result of merely human efforts, for it is “a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. (LG 4) With its insistence on the visible hierarchical structure, Catholic Ecclesiology has much to say about the institutional acts by which Jesus founded the Church. But has relatively little about the exalted Spirit-filled Lord who pours out the Spirit upon the Church on the day of Pentecost, and vivifies and guides the Church in and through the Spirit.

The Orthodox Church has reproached Catholics for this lack of a living theology of the Spirit, and one of their sharpest criticisms of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* is that it does not give sufficient place to the Holy Spirit. They say that the Catholic insistence on the Incarnation has led to a one-sided pre-occupation with the juridical structures of the Church. Although the Constitution does not neglect the role and person of the Holy Spirit (mentioned at least 20 times in the 1<sup>st</sup> two chapters alone), there is some justification in this criticism. For it does not fully succeed in inserting a developed pneumatology into its exposition of the mystery of the Church. The charismatic element in the on-going life of the Church is clearly affirmed. But obviously far greater attention is paid to the institutional structures of the Church.

In studying, therefore, the structures of the Church, we must attend first of all to this mystery of the Church’s life and unity, which is the very mystery of Christ, made present and communicated to us in the gift of the Holy Spirit. This inner nature of the Church is made known to us in the Scriptures by various images. It is by studying these images that we can come to some understanding of the mystery of the Church, especially of its relationship to Christ and the Holy Spirit.

#### **Why Images?**

The concrete way, by which God reveals to us the mystery of the Church, which surpasses human understanding and cannot be exhaustively defined. One must employ symbolic religious language to express divine supernatural realities. It has a richness of meaning and directness all its own, that can never be fully exhausted by merely abstract reasoning. Images are taken from different spheres of human life and activity. In LG 6 the order is: images taken from pastoral life, agriculture, building, domestic life. Their richness of meaning and association can only be fully understood in the light of the OT that find their fulfilment in the NT. The images supplement one another bringing out different aspects of the one mystery. For example, images from pastoral life bring into

relief the divine initiative; from agriculture describe the seed of the Church growing, a growth dependent upon Christ.

## **A BUILDING OR TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The Church is compared to a building or structure of God's design (1 Cor 3:9), laid on a firm foundation and which is being built up. Connected with this theme of building is that of the Church as God's spiritual dwelling place, his tabernacle among men, a holy temple. Into this temple the Christians are being built, as living stones, and which when completed will be the new and eternal Jerusalem (outline in LG 6). In these images connected with building, as in other biblical images, there is a question of a collective reality whose final form is reached gradually until a pre-arranged plan is brought to completion. This process is everybody's business though some have special responsibilities or functions in connection with it.

### **A. Christ the foundation and term of the building**

Christ and faith in Christ as one and the only source of grace is the foundation (1 Cor 3:11), the point from which the building starts and on which all must be built. He is the foundation stone, in whom the whole building is bonded together, and grows into a holy temple (Eph 2:21-22). This is a reference to the topmost stone in the corner between two walls, binding them together; as Christ binds together in his person the hitherto fundamentally divided groups of Jews and Gentiles. He is the living cornerstone (1 Pet 2:4) to whom the Christians are invited to draw near, so that they might be built up as living stones into a spiritual edifice.

He is also the *term of the building*, the plenitude towards which it rises and which it must eventually achieve (Eph 2:21f; 4:11-16). He is, as the author of the Apocalypse expresses it, the *alpha and the omega* (Apoc 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). He is the primary, essential and fundamental reality of the new Covenant. In a sense, he is the only reality into whom all must be incorporated in order that God's purpose may be fulfilled.

### **B. The work of up-building**

1. It is God's work. It is God's tilling ground and God's building (1 Cor 3:9-10). The same idea is expressed in Acts 20:32, and in Mt 16:18. It is Christ who builds up the Church. Thus the Church is conscious of being subject to its heavenly glorified Lord who guides and builds it up by his Spirit. Refer to Paul's whole theology of growth (1 Cor 3:6f; Col 1:6,10; and of "building up" (1 Cor 3:9-11; 14:5,12,26; 2 Cor 12:19; Eph 2:21; 4:12-16), in which God and his power take first place. Consequently all the men who are entrusted with tasks and services in the Church are simply God's instruments, servants of Christ, organs of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 4:1; 12:4-6).
2. The Christians are both the material of which it is built and also its builders.
  - a. Some have particular responsibilities and functions.

First of all, there are the apostles and prophets. Christ is the foundation, but the apostle by his preaching lays the foundation, which is faith in Christ (1 Cor 3:10f). He does this by giving apostolic witness to the fact and mystery of Christ (Eph 2:20). The NT prophets also lay the foundation by making known the meaning of the facts in the context of the realisation of God's plan.

Hence Paul links them with the apostles as the foundations of the Church (Eph 2:20; 3:5). Other ministers (Eph 4:11f) continue the work on the foundation level.

- b. But all the members are actively involved in the act of building, and are integrated into the building as living stones (Eph 4:11-16). Each has received a gift for the service of all (1 Pet 4:10). The Christians are to build up one another's faith (1 Thes 5:11; Rom 14:19; 15:2).

### **C. Nature of the building: God's spiritual dwelling place; his Temple.**

The Christian community is called the temple of God, in which the Spirit dwells. The Christians in Christ are growing into a holy temple. They are to be built, as living stones, into a spiritual temple and become a holy priesthood. Thus the image of the temple is predicated of the community as such so that it becomes the sign of God's presence, the place where men encounter God. To understand this we must trace briefly the biblical theme of the temple, the gracious initiative of God in establishing his presence among and with men.

#### **1. Theme of the Temple in the OT**

The desire for and the love of God's presence are signified in a privileged place. It is this presence which has made the people of God. If it disappears the people are dispersed. It is that which is promised for the messianic and eschatological times.

- a. The Meeting Tent and the Ark of the Covenant. Before Moses there were no sacred places. After Sinai the Ark of the Covenant becomes the pledge and symbol of God's presence (Ex 27:21; 33:7). It is inseparable from the cloud which fills the tent, and which guides the people in the desert.
- b. The Temple at Jerusalem. Solomon builds a temple worthy of God's presence. It is a centre of cult for the people (3 Kgs 5:15-8:66). It signifies that God is present among his people in a permanent way. However, prophets warn that God's presence is not bound to a building of stone or gold (Amos 5:21-24; Is 1:11-17; Jer ch 7). Without fidelity to God's will, Temple loses all its significance.
- c. Messianic and Eschatological Temple. The attention was turned to the ideal temple of the future (Ez 40-47; 43:10-12 parallel to his prophecy of a new heart and spirit: 36:23-28). Isaiah had already foretold coming of Emmanuel (7:14), and Deutero-Isaiah (ch 40-66) enlarged the dimensions of temple to the whole world. Temple will have full significance only at the end of time, when it will be a symbol of regenerated humanity.

#### **2. Theme of the Temple in the NT.**

- a. Jesus, the true Temple. While affirming his respect for the Temple, Jesus reveals that its time is finished. He announces a worship 'in spirit and truth' that has no need of a material building, and offers himself as the new Temple (Mt 12:6; Jn 2:21). With the establishment of the new covenant, the Temple loses all its meaning (Mt 27:51). Jesus is the true 'hieron', the place where men encounter God; the true 'naos', the place where God dwells. He is temple, priest and sacrifice.
- b. The Christian Community is a Temple. Both the individual Christian (1 Cor 6:19), and the community as a whole (1 Cor 3:10-17; 2 Cor 6:16-18; Eph

2:21-22; 1 Pet 2:4-6) are referred to as the temple of the living God. Christ is the true temple; but because the individual and the community are incorporated into Christ, the attributes of the Temple can also be predicated of them. By this union with Christ, the Spirit of Christ is poured out upon and fills the individual and the community (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 3:16-17). The community, therefore, is a 'spiritual dwelling', a 'spiritual temple', precisely because the Spirit of God dwells in us through our union with the Body of Christ. There is no opposition between the individual and the community. They imply and include one another. Both the personal and collective aspects are closely knit.

Just as Christ is temple, priest and sacrifice, so also we see in 1 Pet 2:5 that the Christians by reason of their incorporation into Christ are a spiritual edifice and also a 'holy priesthood'. It accomplishes its service by offering 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'. These spiritual sacrifices are co-extensive with the lives of the faithful. They are the fruits of piety and love, which the Christian is to bear in the Church and with the Church (Heb 13:15-16).

These sacrifices are called spiritual, primarily because they are the fruit of the Spirit, through whom the temple is built up, and a wholly new Christian cult is possible (Jn 4:23). Because they are the fruit of the Spirit, they imitate God's behaviour towards us and are in keeping with his nature (Eph 5:1-2). Thus 'spiritual' is not opposed to a visible liturgy or to the presence of a ministerial priesthood within the community.

### **The Holy Spirit in the Church**

#### **1. The Church, the community of the outpoured Spirit.**

According to the prophets, the messianic times would be especially characterised by a special and superabundant outpouring of God's purifying and creative Spirit that would renew Israel in the last days (Is 32:15; Ez 36:25-27; Jl 2:28-29). These prophecies find their fulfilment in the post-paschal community, as Peter testifies on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14f). It is the community of the outpoured Spirit, which Jesus exalted at God's right hand has received from the Father (Acts 2:23). And it is because of the gift of the Spirit so manifest in the life of the community, that the community becomes fully conscious of being the messianic community of the last times.

#### **2. The outpoured Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ.**

It is Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen from the dead, and who is now exalted at the right hand of the Father has received the Holy Spirit from the Father. He now pours out this Spirit on the community (Acts 2:32-33). It is he who sends the Spirit as he had promised whose coming was dependent upon Jesus' glorification. Thus the Spirit proceeds through the Lord, who has become for us 'a life-giving Spirit' (1 Cor 15:45). Indeed Paul will even say that the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17), in so far as Christ is present in the Church as effective Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit in the Church is to bring to fulfilment, to growth and fruitfulness the mystery of Christ, in the time between the ascension and the Parousia. What the Spirit accomplishes in the Church has no other

purpose than to bring to pass what Christ has accomplished for the sake of men. This identity of the work of both Christ and the Holy Spirit is ultimately the reason why in the Scriptures the same effects are attributed indifferently to Christ or the Spirit.

### 3. The Holy Spirit and the Church

The role of the Holy Spirit in the Church and his relationship to the Church is complex and multiple. But we can in general distinguish a two-fold role and relationship of the Church as fruit and instrument of salvation. It is in and through the gift and Person of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the Church as in a temple, that the community is vivified, sanctified and made one. The Spirit given to the Church by Christ is the first fruits and pledge of our redemption (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13-14).

Continuing Christ's mediation in time and space, the Church is the institution of the means of grace. It "serves Christ's vivifying Spirit towards the building up of the body (cf. Eph 4:16)" (LG 8). The Holy Spirit inspires, and guides the Church, and endows its members with his gifts so that it might always be the efficacious sacrament of Christ in and for the world. But this activity of the Spirit in and with the members of the Church in building up the Body of Christ can and must be characterised as both institutional and non-institutional (charismatic).

#### i. The Holy Spirit acts conjointly with the apostolic institution.

Before he freely laid down his life for the world, the Lord Jesus so arranged the apostolic ministry and promised to send the Holy Spirit, that both would everywhere and always be associated in bringing into effect the work of salvation (AG 4).

Thus the sending of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:7) and the sending of the Apostles (Mt 28:18) are intimately connected. They are together to bear witness to Christ (Acts 1:8; Mt 10:28; Jn 15:26-27), and so to bring to fulfilment and fruitfulness the works of Christ in the hearts of men. The apostles and those associated with them in their ministry are guided and directed by the Holy Spirit. Their authority is equated with that of the Spirit (Acts 5:3), and their decisions are likewise those of the Spirit (15:28). The consecration of ministers is jointly the work of the Holy Spirit and the apostolic body (Acts 20:28).

This presence and activity of the Spirit, who is to remain always with the apostles is the reason why the Church in her structures as instituted by Christ remains always indefectible. This means that in the decisive acts of the ministry of witnessing and in the celebration of the sacraments the intervention of the Holy Spirit is certain.

#### ii. The Holy Spirit acts freely in other ways in building up the Church. The whole Church is charismatic. The Holy Spirit directly intervenes in the life of the Church, and allots his gifts to each one according as he wills (1 Cor 12:11). Since there are different spirits and spiritual phenomena, it is essential that there should always be "the ability to distinguish between spirits" (1 Cor 12:10). Paul establishes two principal criteria for recognising the Spirit, which comes from God. The Spirit which comes from God enables a man to affirm that Jesus is the Lord. Only "in the Holy Spirit" can a man assert that "Jesus is Kyrios". The second criterion is the element service attached to the charism. The true charism is not simply a miracle; it is something in the service of the community. Charism is directly connected with the community. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). Paul also mentions less striking charisms,

such as exhortation and acts of mercy (Rom 12:8) etc. Charisms are by no means only exceptional things, they are everyday phenomena in the life of the Church. The best and greatest of the charisms is the least sensational, the most everyday of gifts: love. Without love, speaking with tongues and prophecy is nothing (1 Cor 13:1-3). This charism which is above all others, and regulates all others, is revealed in the very unsensational situations of everyday life (1 Cor 13:4-8).

A glance at the lists of charisms which Paul gives in various places (especially 1 Cor 12:28-31; Rom 12:6-8; Eph 4:11 f.) is enough to show how diversified they are. Apart from the gifts of speaking with tongues, of miraculous healing and exorcism, there are the following groups of gifts:

1. Charisms of preaching
2. Charisms of service
3. Charisms of leadership

According to Paul, every vocation is an assigning of the charism (1 Cor 7:7,17). Charism is different from a gift for music or mathematics. Charism is bestowed, assigned, distributed not on one's own behalf, but on behalf of others. It is not a natural talent, but a call to grace; a call to service. Charisms are the revelations, in concrete and individual form, of the charis, the power of God's grace, which takes hold of us, leads us to our appointed service and gives us an individual share in the reign of Christ. Our charisms are expressions of power (ἐνεργήματα), "the manifestation of the Spirit" (1 Cor 12:6f).

More than the "fruits of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), which are rather directed towards the sanctification of the individual, the charisms exist for the "edification of the Church" (1 Cor 14:12). The Christian is not to use his charism as a weapon with which he can seize power and position in the Church, but as a gift for the service of others and of the whole community. Hence the first fruit of the spirit and the greatest of the charisms is love. Charism summons us to follow the way of the cross, the way of service and love. All charisms are subject to one and the same law, the law of love. All charisms have one and the same goal, the edification of the community. But even this fundamental charismatic structure is only a temporary thing, part of the "not yet" of the eschatological period. It belongs to the "imperfect" things of this interim period and will be replaced by the fullness of perfection. "When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away" (1 Cor 13:10).

On the basis of NT understanding, we can now appreciate and understand in its complete context the text of Vatican II on the charisms:

It is not only through the sacraments and the ministrations of the Church that the Holy Spirit makes holy the People, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts according as he wills (cf. Cor. 12:11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit" (1 Cor. 12:7). Whether these charisms be very remarkable or more simple and widely diffused, they are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation since they are fitting and useful for the needs of the Church. Extraordinary gifts are not to be rashly desired, nor is it from them that the



fruits of apostolic labours are to be presumptuously expected. Those who have charge over the Church should judge the genuineness and proper use of these gifts, through their office not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good.(cf.Th.5:12and19-21). (LG12)

### **The Holy Spirit “soul” of the Church**

The expression is not scriptural. The Fathers, commenting on the scriptural passages concerning the Holy Spirit, sought to show that He gave all life and movement to the Church. The Latin Fathers especially Augustine, express this idea in the formula: the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church. The idea was taken up and developed by the scholastics and taught by the magisterium (Leo XIII, *Divinum Illud*; Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*; LG 7). Just as the soul vivifies, moves, and unifies the whole body, and is present and operative in the whole body and in each of its members, so analogously, the Holy Spirit is the indwelling principle of life, activity and unity of the Church, animating the whole body and each of its members. But note that there is only an analogy. The Holy Spirit is and remains transcendent to the Church, although active and dwelling in the Church.

**Theme 5. The theme of the Church as the Body of Christ is all-important for understanding the nature of the Church. The theme of the Mystical Body of Christ, starting from the Pauline doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ, has been richly developed in the Tradition.**

It is here above all that we are able to come to some understanding of the unfathomable mystery of the inner bond of the NT People of God with Christ; its relation to God through Christ in the Spirit. We also understand the union of its members through Christ and its striving and journeying towards Christ as its goal.

#### **I. Paul’s Theology of the Body of Christ**

The Church – people of God or body of Christ? The differences between these two conceptions are considerable. In the idea of “the people of God” temporal categories are supremely important. As the people of God, the Church is making a journey from OT election through the present towards the future. The notion of the “body of Christ” is dominated by spatial categories. But the fact that both ideas are typical of Paul’s thinking and are integrated in his writings shows that they are not necessarily contradictory. Both concepts of the Church seek to express the union of the Church with Christ and the union of its members among themselves.

##### **A. The union of the Christian with Christ.**

Justified, sanctified and saved only in union with Christ (1 Cor 1:30), the Christians are in Christ by a real objective relationship of vital union. The Christians have been called to share in the life of Christ (1 Cor 1:9 - εἰς κοινωνίαν). This union is effected by faith and baptism. The baptismal rite symbolises (Rom 6:1-11) the physical reality of our union with the body of Christ dying and rising from the dead. In order to

understand correctly this union with the body of Christ, one should take note of the semitic significance of the notion of body. While platonic dualism distinguished the body and the soul, the semitic notion of the body implies the total concrete reality of the living person. The vital character of that union underlies the use of the following words:

United with him in death

United with him in resurrection (Rom 6:5)

Crucified with him (Rom 6:6)

Raised us up with him and seated us with him (Eph 2:6)

Conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29)

If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (Rom 6:8)

From that vital union with Christ, by which all the baptised become sons of God (Gal 4:5; Rom 8:23), it follows that all distinctions of race, age, sex and social condition vanish among the baptised. Each and everyone are now “one” in Christ, and Christ is all in all (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-20; Col 3:10f.). Just as in baptism, so also in the Eucharist, the Christians are united to the body of Christ corporally (1 Cor 10:16f.). Everywhere there is only one bread, which really is the pneumatic body of Christ. The Christians, however many they be, receiving the Eucharistic body of Christ, become one body with the body of Christ.

B. The vital union of the faithful among themselves and with Christ.

Our salvation is effected by the union of the body of the Christian, really and sacramentally, with the head and risen body of Christ. From this notion of the individual union of each one of the faithful with the body of Christ, evolved the Pauline notion of the Church as the collective body of Christ. Through the vital union of each one of the faithful, the body of Christ incorporates the totality of the faithful in an organic vital way. Therefore, the Pauline notion of the collective body of Christ always connotes as foundation the vital individual union of each one of the faithful. Thus it cannot be said that this notion has been derived from the profane hellenistic metaphor of a ‘social body’, by which is signified the unity of many members of some organised society, especially the civil society. Paul makes use of that profane metaphor, but transforms it. He does not consider the Church as a collection of individual Christians, but as the organism which belongs to Christ.

The doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ was first proposed by Paul in 1 Cor 12:12-27 and Rom 12:4-8, and later developed in the captivity Epistles of Ephesians and Colossians.

1. Teaching of 1 Cor 12 and Rom 12.

The doctrine of the Body of Christ which is the Church, which was already implicit in 1 Cor 6:12-20 and 10:17, is explicitly proposed on the occasion of the question about the charisms. Since some of the faithful of the Church at Corinth had an inordinate desire for charisms, especially ‘glossolalia’, Paul explains how every grace has been given for the common good of the Church. Therefore one and the same Spirit, the source

of all these graces, distributes them to each individual at will. The fundamental reason is to be found in the fact that all the faithful make up one organism. This affirmation is illustrated by the metaphor of the human body, which is one in a plurality of members, all of which collaborate for the good of the whole body. The application of this metaphor is expressed by the extremely elliptic formula: “so it is with Christ” (12:12). This organic union of the members is founded in baptism, in which each one of the faithful through incorporation into the pneumatic Christ is vivified by one and the same spirit of Christ. It is a relation of vital and organic union of the body with the pneumatic Christ, of the members with Christ and among themselves. Christ, by reason of his glorious existence, embraces all the faithful. In other words, the Christians taken collectively have a mystical identity with the pneumatic Christ. In Rom 12:4 the same doctrine is expressed in a similar context about charisms.

## 2. Teaching of the Captivity Epistles

In Romans and 1 Corinthians the role of Christ with regard to the Church, his body was not specified. It is in the captivity epistles that the doctrine of the mystical body has a central part. The notions of Christ the Head and Pleroma are introduced in them. In these epistles the Church is explicitly called body, not as the second term of a comparison (Col 1:18,24; Eph 1:23; 5:23). The notion is an analogy as can be seen from the fact that the Apostle mixes together the notions of body and building in order to express the continuous growth or increase of the Church, and its hierarchical co-ordination which are realities of the supernatural order (Col 2:19; Eph 4:16).

### a) Christ the Head of the Body

The notion of Christ, the Head of the Body is proper to the captivity epistles. The notion of body, if taken as a metaphor, is of hellenistic origin, while that of head is semitic. Here the word ‘head’ signifies authority, the principal one, the chief, not the source of a vital influence, which is the usual meaning of the metaphor in hellenistic literature. The word is used in this sense in Col 2:10,19 and Eph 1:21f with regard to Christ as the one who has authority and dominion over the angelic powers; and similarly in Col 1:18 and Eph 1:22; 4:12; 5:23 with regard to Christ as the ruler or director of the Church. The note of “authority or domination” which is proper to the metaphor of the head is somewhat softened and happily completed by the mention of the infinite love, which Christ shows towards the body (Eph 5:25-27). Thus a union is established between the Head and the Body as intimate as that between a man and his wife. The notion implies that in this intimate union there is always presupposed a distinction between Christ and the Church as there is between husband and wife.

### b) Christ the Fullness of the Body – “*Pleroma*”

This notion is found only in Colossians and Ephesians. The Apostle makes use of a technical hellenistic term. The religious philosophy of popular stoicism considered the universe as the fullness of God, in the sense that the spirit of God pervades the material universe, communicating to all things life and existence. In a pantheistic way the divine

principle fills all things and is filled by all things. In combating this heresy that was spread at Colossae, Paul makes use of this religious vocabulary of stoicism to express the relationship of Christ to the universe and the effect of his redemptive work in the universe. However, at least for the word itself, its chief source is the OT wisdom literature. Christ is God's wisdom. Wisdom's functions and most notably her co-eternity with God and her creativity are attributed to Christ.

Christ the Son of God is the source of all creation. In him all things are created and in him they subsist (Col 1:15f). Christ the Saviour holds a primacy in all things, reconciling the whole universe to God. In him dwells the fullness of the divinity and the cosmos itself. But Christ's relation to the cosmos is different from the relation of Christ, the Head to the Church, his body. Here, there is a supernaturally vital relationship by reason of the communication of Christ's spirit. Thus if Christ as God and creator directly and immediately fills all things with life and existence, as Redeemer he fills the Church with his spirit. The Church is filled by Christ, who himself is filled by God (Eph 1:23). Therefore, in the order of redemption, Christ by incorporating the Church into himself attains through it the universe. Thus the Church in Christ attains a cosmic function even though it is not identified with the universe. It is the fullness, the *pleroma* of Christ.

### **The Mystical Body in Tradition**

Tradition has not always accepted the concept of the Mystical Body of Christ with the same meaning and the same extension. Although the Fathers of the Church sometimes speak of the Church as a "spiritual body" or "pneumatic Church" or of the "mystery" (sacramentum) of the Church, it is not until the early middle ages that the Church is spoken of as the "mystical Body of Christ". This expression was canonised by Boniface VIII in the Bull 'Unam Sanctam' (1302) and has since been used in the documents of the Magisterium.

Before designating the ecclesial body, the term 'mystical' had designated the eucharistic body of Christ, as distinguished from the body born of the Virgin Mary and from the "corpus quod est Ecclesia". This was the general usage before the Berengarian controversy (Berengarius of Tours 1000-1088) over the real presence of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist. In order to insist on the real presence, in place of the distinction between the spiritual body (Eucharist), the body of the Virgin, and the ecclesial body, there was substituted a distinction between the true body of Christ and his ecclesial body, to which one gives the name of mystical body. Idea of the Eucharist as mystical body meant that the Eucharist was truly and fully the 'mystery' or 'sacrament' of the body of Christ, relating to something beyond itself, from which it came and to which it is related. It meant to affirm that the total reality was none other than the Church as the body of Christ.

### **Teaching of the Magisterium**

#### **1. Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis***

Following the lead of early documents of the Magisterium, the encyclical sanctioned the understanding of the mystical body of Christ as it had developed in the West.

If we would define and describe this true Church of Jesus Christ – which is the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church – we shall find no expression more noble, more sublime, or more divine than the phrase which calls it ‘the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ’. This title is derived from and is, as it were, the fair flower of the repeated teaching of Sacred Scripture and the Holy Fathers.

### **Part I**

#### **A. The Church is a body**

1. One, indivisible, visible
2. Organically, hierarchically conjoined
3. Equipped with visible means of sanctification i.e. sacraments
4. Composed of determined members – not excluding sinners

#### **B. The Church is the Body of Christ**

1. The Founder. “For the Divine Redeemer began the building of the mystical temple of the Church when by his preaching he announced his precepts. He completed it when he hung glorified on the cross. And he manifested and proclaimed it when he sent the Holy Spirit as paraclete in visible form on his apostles.”
2. The Head
  - a) By reason of his singular pre-eminence and his government
  - b) By reason of the conformity between the Head and members
  - c) By reason of the fullness of his grace and his vital influence on the whole body and each of its members
3. The Sustainer. Christ sustains the Church by the communication of his Spirit
4. The Saviour

#### **C. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ**

The word ‘mystical’ is used in order that the social body of the Church may be clearly distinguished both from the physical body of Christ as well as from any other body, whether physical or moral.

1. The mystical body of Christ is made up of persons, and is ordained toward the good not only of the whole, but each one of the members, and the glory of God.
2. In the mystical body, besides the moral principle of unity, there is given another most excellent principle of unity, the Holy Spirit.
3. Relationship between the visible and invisible structure of the Church. There is no true opposition between the invisible mission of the Spirit and visible juridical mission of the apostles.

### **Part II**

#### **A. Juridical and social bonds**

The co-operation of all the members toward the same end must be externally manifest under the same visible head.

#### **B. Supernatural Bonds**

The three virtues, by which we are united among ourselves and with God in the closest manner: faith, hope, and charity.

#### **C. The Inner Mystery**

1. Christ is in us through the Holy Spirit

- 2. Church the pleroma of Christ
- D. Eucharist, symbol of unity

### Part III

- A. Errors of the ascetical life
- B. Exhortation to love the Church
- C. Epilogue: concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary

**Theme 6**      **The NT witness about the structure of the primitive community was not purely charismatic or democratic, but was hierarchical with a determined order and constitution instituted by Christ.**

All Christians are agreed that the Church must be defined in terms of ‘Word and Sacrament’. The Church is the People of God of the new covenant, whom God has gathered together. It lives from the Body and the Word of Christ. It must be defined, therefore, in terms of ‘fides and communio’. But must it also be defined in terms of office involving obedience? And if so, what is the concrete form of this office and to whom has this office been committed? To put the matter more briefly, is a definite fundamental order constitutive of the Church of Jesus Christ? A hierarchical (hieros = sacred; arche = authority) or a democratic and purely charismatic Church?

What began as protest against the unapostolic behaviour of so many bishops at the time of the Reformation, lead finally to a rejection of the apostolic office itself in the name of the purity of the Gospel. Because of the ambiguities in their teaching, their misunderstanding of the autonomy of the Word, and their unilateral insistence on the priesthood of all believers, the way was left open for the disregard and final rejection of the apostolic office. Specifically, the following difficulties must be considered:

1. Against sovereign freedom and transcendence of God. His action cannot be bound to institutional structures. No human institution can be a guarantee of purity of the Gospel or unity of the Church.
2. Mechanical and quasi-magical transmission of power through imposition of hands is foreign to the pure Gospel.
3. Uniqueness of the apostolic age precludes any idea of a real apostolic succession.

#### Catholic Response

Many Protestant difficulties are undoubtedly occasioned by a misunderstanding of the work of the Holy Spirit of continually re-creating and vivifying the Church. One-sided emphasis can lead to a one-sided denial. However, the following points need especially to be stressed:

- a) The Church is both ‘institution’ and ‘event’. We must at all costs avoid placing a false dichotomy between the ‘Church of love’ and the ‘Church of law’, between the mission of the Holy Spirit and the visible juridical mission of the apostles.
- b) The Holy Spirit remains always free and transcendent to the Church and his action is not limited to institutional structures. He can and does intervene directly in giving his gifts to whom he wills. But at the same time God is faithful to his promises. The institutional structure of the Church is of God’s design. He owes to himself to

preserve and to make efficacious the structures that he has chosen. This is in no way opposed to the divine freedom and transcendence.

- c) The apostolic succession is not an arbitrary human invention but a work of the Holy Spirit who sovereignly rules in the Church. The human imposition of hands is not the principal cause insuring the transmission of spiritual authority. The main cause rather is the Spirit of the glorified Lord. The imposition of hands is only a sacramental sign. This does not involve any sort of quasi-magical transmission of power. Such a misconception arises from a false understanding of ‘opus operatum’.
- d) The uniqueness of the apostolic age must be fully admitted. Therefore, the gift of apostleship as such was unique and untransmissible. The apostles alone were the official eyewitnesses of the risen Christ, directly commissioned by him to bear this witness, and so to found the Church. And by virtue of this special vocation they were endowed with special gifts of the Holy Spirit, e.g. prophecy and inspiration. However, integral to their apostleship was their function as office-bearers in the Church. By virtue of the mission that they had received from Christ they were appointed pastors with authority to teach, sanctify and rule his Church. Their function as pastors of the flock could, and according to the will of Christ, had to be transmitted to other men, who would succeed to this office in the ongoing life of the Church.

#### **Ecclesiastical Offices are a true Ministry or Diakonia**

The Church is a hierarchically structured community, not democratic. Thus there exists in the Church a relationship of commanding and obeying – and this by virtue of the authority given by Christ to the apostles and through them to their successors. The apostles and their successors exercise a true *potestas* (ἐξουσία). It must be seen as necessarily and essentially a ministry of service given by the Lord and to be exercised in the Lord within the context of the fraternal community guided by the Holy Spirit. With regard to this understanding of authority within the Church as a *διακονία* the following points should be noted:

- a) The great texts of the Gospel (Mk 10:41-45; Mt 20:24-28; Lk 22:24-27; Mk 9:33-36; Mt 18:1f; Jn 13:12-17) about authority and its use must not be seen as a mere moral exhortation to disinterestedness and service according to the spirit of the beatitudes. Jesus has radically transformed the nature of the authority of the Scribes and of the Aaronic priesthood.
- b) All offices and authority is essentially relative to the reality, which is the community of the redeemed, the Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. It is one among the gifts given to the Church for the building up of the Body of Christ (Eph 4:12f). the ‘new creation’ is what is primary and decisive; all else is secondary and subordinated to it, no matter how essential the structures are in the present era.
- c) Whether there be question of the stable offices in the Church or the specifically charismatic gifts, all are gifts given by the risen Lord through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, all must use them for the service of others, like good stewards (1 Pet 4:10). Exercise of authority is only one form of what each one has to do for the others in view of our common destiny, the Kingdom of God. Its function is to organise the *διακονία* of the saints (Eph 4:12).

- d) Authority is not defined as a right or property of one man over another, but first of all as a charge put on us by God – a duty or responsibility (1 Cor 9:16-18). It is a question of obedience to Christ, who calls and sends, whom he wills for a purpose.
- e) Finally, it should be recalled that all growth of the Church, is God's work. Consequently, all who are entrusted with tasks or services in the Church are simply God's instruments, servants of Christ, organs of the Holy Spirit. This means concretely that Christ in the Spirit always directly builds up his Church. He has not gone away and left his authority to his Vicar, for he always remains the Pastor, the Rock, and the Head of the Church.

### **The Hierarchical Structure of the Apostolic Community**

In the NT we must not expect to find everything clear-cut and precisely defined. It was the time of the coming-to-be of the Church, a unique and exceptional period in its history. Differences in organisation and approach are to be expected, as well as a certain fluidity and imprecision in terminology.

#### **A. The Apostles**

Who were the Apostles? Were they essentially itinerant missionaries or preachers raised up by the Holy Spirit for this work? Or were they essentially a group of men formally sent by Christ with universal authority to act in his name in founding and shepherding the community? Is the apostolate a purely charismatic gift or also a juridical institution? Does the witness of Acts and the Synoptics conflict with Paul on this point?

##### **1. The witness of Acts and the Synoptics**

###### **a) The apostolic college in Acts**

There existed a group of men called "apostles", who witness to the risen Christ before their compatriots (2:14), and before the Christian community, which is gathered around their teaching and which recognises and accepts their authority within and over the community (2:42; 4:42-45; 5:12; 6:1-6; 8:14; 15:4-6; 22f; 16:4).

###### **b) These apostles are the οἱ δώδεκα of the Synoptic tradition**

i. Luke's witness: he calls the 12 apostles five times in his Gospel. He even affirms that it is Jesus himself who gave them the name (Lk 6:13). In the Acts, he obviously thinks of the 12 as the apostles though the term 'the twelve' is rarely found. He generally restricts the name of apostles to the 12.

ii. Synoptics in general: The importance given in their narrative to the election, training and sending the twelve obviously reflects the tradition of the Church, which saw in the institution of the twelve something of great significance for the life of the community. Their election as a special group whom Christ will send on a mission is narrated in Mk 3:13-19; and Lk 6:12-17; supposed as a fact in Mt 10:1-4 and Jn 6:67-70.

###### **c) Called apostles because sent by Christ to act in his name**

The term 'apostle' is used in the context of mission (Mk 6:30; Mt 10:2; Jn 13:16). The apostle, therefore, is one who is sent by Christ with authority to act in his name to such an extent that to receive or reject the apostle is to receive or reject



Christ himself (Mt 10:40; Lk 10:16). We have to distinguish two moments in the sending of the apostles:

- i. During Jesus' earthly life (Mk 3:40; Mt 10:7)
- ii. After the Resurrection: solemn sending by the risen Christ (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:16; Jn 20:21-23; Act 1:8). In this solemn sending there is specified above all their function as witnesses to the risen Christ. By giving this witness they are to found and establish the Church.

d) Significance of the Twelve

Obviously it is a symbolic number-but not merely symbolic of the 12 tribes of Israel of the old covenant-but also with relationship to the Israel of the new covenant, over which they are appointed to rule. In Acts ch. 1 the traitor must be replaced, perhaps in the context of their eschatological function as judges (Mt 19:27-29). But this is not reserved exclusively to the final parousia, for they already exercise a judging function. This is linked with the judging function of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:7-11). The reference to the 12 in Apoc 12:1; 21:4 is hardly comprehensible unless the 12 became the directive group in the primitive community. For Luke they seem to constitute a clearly specified and closed group, to which not even Paul could be admitted (Acts 13:31-32).

2. The Witness of Paul

a) Paul, the Ambassador of Christ

The word 'apostle' has special significance for Paul, for it expresses for him the experience of his vocation. He has been called in order to be sent to preach (1 Cor 1:17). The mission is to the Gentiles, he is their apostle (Rom 11:13). By virtue of this mission he possesses true authority for building up the community (2 Cor 10:8) and he exercises this authority over the communities and demands obedience from them ((2 Cor 10:13f).

b) Paul and the apostles, his predecessors

- i. He recognises the 12 as apostles: 1 Cor 15:5f; Gal 1:17f
- ii. Dependence upon and continuity with the apostolic college: Gal 1:17f.

c) Pauline extension of the term 'apostle'

While recognising that the apostles in the fullest sense are those who have received a solemn mission from the risen Christ, and are the leaders of the Church with full authority, he also calls apostles others who work along with them and share in the missionary enterprise (Rom 16:7)

**Conclusion**

Though there is diversity in the use of the term 'apostle', the witness of the NT is consistent. An apostle is primarily an ambassador of Jesus Christ sent with authority to act in his name. And it refers above all to the apostolic college, which has been given the universal and authoritative mission of witnessing to Christ and governing the Church. They owe that authority not to the community, but to Christ himself who has sent them to act in his name.

## B. The Primacy of Peter

### 1. The Gospel witness in general

The special place of Peter in the Synoptic tradition is seen from the following:

- ❖ Mentioned 114 times
- ❖ Belongs to the most intimate circle of the apostles: Mk 5:37; 13:3; 14:33
- ❖ Represents the group and is their spokesman: Mt 8:22f; 17:24-27; Jn 6:66; 21:3
- ❖ He is the first called: Mk 1:16f; Mt 4:18f; Lk 5:11
- ❖ All the lists put Peter first and Judas last
- ❖ He is the first witness of the resurrection: Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5

Thus in general Peter is seen in the tradition as having a place apart. But this does not necessarily mean that Jesus invested him with a real primacy over the other apostles. This is seen in the 'petrine texts', which reveal why Peter did have such a prominent place in the group of the apostles.

### 2. Mathew 16:16f

The literary authenticity of the text is beyond dispute, and its historicity not questioned except by those who restrict Jesus' vision to the immediate future, the imminent coming of the Kingdom. Though the promise to Peter may not have been spoken at Caesarea Philippi, Mathew's account constitutes an indivisible literary unit composed with art. Mathew's Gospel is rightly called the 'Book of the Church'. In ch. 14-17, which prepare for the discourse about fraternal relations in the Church, Peter's pre-eminence stands out (14:28-33; 17:24-27).

- a) Peter, the Rock on which Jesus will build his Church: verse 18, seen in the context of Isaiah 28:14-19 and the theme of the remnant, shows that Jesus to whom the Father has committed all (Mt 11:27; 28:18) establishes Peter as the foundation of the new messianic community, giving him a role in the new People of God similar to that of the ancestors of Israel. This investiture is symbolised by the change of name of Simon to Peter and the play of words on the name *Kepha*. Jesus promises that the messianic people founded on Peter will be victorious in its active assault against the powers of evil. The promise is made to Peter personally, but refers to a function that Peter will play in the messianic community, and hence *per se* transferable.
- b) The Keys of the Kingdom: Just as in Is 22:22 the Lord places the keys on the shoulders of his servant Eliakim, so Jesus gives to Peter the keys of his house, the Kingdom of Heaven, and at the same time establishes him as his steward and vicar. The meaning of the image of the keys suggests a charge confided to a unique person to guard and administer the royal house. In Is 22:22 Eliakim becomes the 'Master of the Palace', which makes of him a 'vicar' of the King with full power in his absence. Peter, endowed with full power by Jesus, who has full and absolute power (Apoc 3:7), will lead the messianic People of God into the Kingdom of Heaven.
- c) Binding and Loosing: is an expression of totality, indicating the fullness of power conferred upon Peter by Jesus. It is a rabbinical expression that includes not merely an authority to teach, but a power to guide and judge.

The images complement one another. Seen in their OT context and inter-connection, they show Jesus' intention of conferring on Peter a special function in his

messianic community as its visible principle of unity and stability, a function that includes universal authority, and that can be transferred to successors. Nothing is said explicitly about successors. But given the facts that Jesus' vision was not limited to the immediate future, and that as long as the community lasts it would need someone to exercise this function in the context of its continuing victory over the powers of evil, it can be concluded that Jesus implicitly intended that others should succeed to Peter's function. It should be remembered that the community is a living one, made up of living stones, which continues to grow as long as the present period of salvation history continues.

### 3. Luke 22:31-32

There is an obvious parallel with Mt 16:16f. Note the contrast in both passages between Peter's function and his weakness. The role of Peter is put in relationship with the future of the messianic community, though here it would seem that Peter's role vis a vis the other disciples is brought out more clearly-strengthen your brethren. Peter's function is seen here especially as an exercise of faith. His faith, made firm by reason of Jesus' efficacious prayer, will support and strengthen that of the brethren.

Old Testament background: Zach 3:1-9; Amos 9:8-10

### 4. John 21:15-17

This chapter most probably added to the gospel of John by a redactor after his death is significant. This shows that in Joannine circles there was a strong tradition that singled out Peter for a special function in the Church. It makes explicit what is obvious enough from John's Gospel, namely that John recognises that Peter has a certain primacy (1:35-43; 13:22-26; 18:15-16; 20:2-10). There is a parallel between ch. 21 and Luke 5:1-11. Both are in the context of the apostolic mission. Peter is solemnly appointed shepherd of the sheep of the Lord. A threefold re-iteration of Peter's function as shepherd indicates a solemn contract (cf. Gen 23). This must be seen in the context of John 10. Jesus fulfils the prophecies that present the Messiah as the Pastor of the messianic people (Ez 34). The office of Shepherd is to rule over and lead the people of God. As is clear from the OT this office properly belongs to Yahweh. But the figure is also used of leaders, kings and judges. Israel's leaders share in the divine authority and act as God's delegates in the use of that authority. Jesus the Messiah, to whom all power has been given, appoints Peter as his vice-shepherd in the care of the messianic flock.

All the evangelists are agreed in giving Peter a special place among the disciples. Mt 16, Lk 22, and Jn 21 show that Jesus gave him a special mission that makes him the head of the community. They all put this in contrast with Peter's weakness and fall, in order to show that this mission is not due to Peter's qualifications or merits, but to the gracious and free act of God in Christ. The OT texts behind the passages refer to the biblical theme of the remnant, and the destinies of the messianic community. The mission, therefore, which Peter receives is entirely ordained to the destinies of this community over which he is placed as head. Nothing is said explicitly about successors. Yet, the texts and context suggest a positive answer. The images underlying the various texts suggest that his function is transmissible. They are personal prerogatives, but given to Peter qua officeholder in the Church. And it would seem that as long as the community lasts, there must be, according to the will of Christ, someone to exercise these functions.

## 5. Peter in the early Church

### a) The Acts of the Apostles

At least during the first formative years of the Church Peter is seen as taking the lead and as having a pre-eminent place among the other apostles. He is the spokesman for others: 1:15; 2:14; 5:1f; 5:29. He is the first to admit a gentile directly: 10:1f.

### b) Peter and Paul

Paul recognises Peter's great authority and prestige on several occasions (1 Cor 1:12; 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18). The "Antioch incident" (Gal 2:11f) is really a confirmation of Peter's special authority. That Peter was wrong in his practical course of action and needed correction is no argument against the primacy.

## 6. Peter and the Liturgy

Moses is the head of the Old Testament and Simon of the New  
Both resemble one another for God was with them  
Moses brought down the tables of the law  
Simon received the keys of the kingdom. (Night Vigil on Monday)

Peter was catching fish in the sea when the Lord called him:  
"Come, Simon, I will give you a catch of the Spirit  
You shall draw men from death to life  
And on you, Simon Peter, I will build the Holy Church  
The powers of death shall never prevail against her". (Night Vigil on Thursday)

On the rock of the house of Simon, the head of the apostles,  
I am built and I am not afraid, the Church answered and said  
The waves and tempests beat against me but do not shake me  
Because of the Lord's promise to them:  
Be assured I am with you always, to the end of the age.  
(Morning Prayer of Saturday)

You who made Simon the head of the apostles  
To hold the keys of the Kingdom, Christ God,  
And who magnifies his memory, be gracious to all.  
(Evening Prayer of the Feast of Peter and Paul)  
Blessed is he who chose you, Peter, head of the apostles,  
To proclaim his Gospel and he put in your hands  
The authority to feed the sheep in holiness.  
(Night Vigil of the Feast of Peter and Paul)

**Theme 7 For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in his Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body. For those ministers who are endowed with sacred power are servants of their brethren. (LG 18)**

The word “hierarchy” which is most extensively used for the ecclesiastical office, does not occur in NT Greek. Dionysius the Areopagite first introduced the word. But he used the word ἱεραρχία (holy reign) precisely not for the holders of office, but for the whole Church with all its ranks, which for Dionysius is in its entirety an image of the heavenly world of spirits and its ordering. All the other words in secular Greek for civil and religious authorities are consistently avoided in connection with the ministries of the Church. This is true of the basic word for hierarchy ἀρχή (ἀρχῶν), but also for τιμή αὐδ τελεωϋ.

1. ἀρχή, which always implies a primacy, whether in time or in rank means a precedence or rule. The Septuagint uses the word in secular contexts and in religious ones. The NT uses it for Jewish and Gentile authorities, and in a different sense for Christ (Col 1:16 Christ is the beginning of all things, the creative principle of the world), but never for Church ministries of any sort. Similarly the title ἀρχῶν (ruler, prince) is used for demonic powers, but never for office in the Church.
2. τιμή, which means value, price, esteem, honour, respectability, is used to describe the honour and dignity of office. It is used only once in the NT in this way, to describe the honour of the high priestly office (Heb 5:4).
3. τελεωϋ, which means end, conclusion, goal, is used to describe the total power of office. Οἱ ἐπὶ τελεῖ are those who wield power. The word does not occur in this sense in the NT at all.

All these words express a relationship of rulers and ruled. And it is precisely this which makes them unusable for the office in the Church. The word that was chosen was an unbiblical one. The particular place and function of the individual who holds office in the community was comprehensively described with a word which carried no overtones of authority, officialdom, rule, dignity or power; the word διακονία, service. Diakonia means an activity, which every Greek would recognise as being one of self-abasement: waiting at table, serving food and pouring wine. This kind of service was unthinkable for a free Greek, for whom the development of his own personality and the exercise of power were supreme things. For a Jew it was not necessarily an inferior activity; service, especially of a great master and above all when it was service for God, was something great for him. Jesus, however, gave this notion of service a radically new meaning. For him the diakonia becomes an essential characteristic of discipleship. <sup>26</sup> But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. <sup>27</sup> For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.” (Lk 22:26f).

But it is clear that Jesus is not merely concerned about service at table, nor is he simply concerned about certain acts of love, which can also be summed up in the word

diakonia (Mt 25:42-44). His fundamental concern is with living for others (Mk 9:35; 10:43-45; Mt 20:26-28). A man is a disciple of Jesus through service of his fellowmen. In contrast to all the concepts of office in existence at that time, Jesus chose and emphasized this new conception of service. Six times in the synoptic gospels we find the saying about service, quoted above from Luke with only slight variations. It is evident that what a strong impression on the disciples this particular saying must have made. It is not law or power, knowledge or dignity but service which is the basis of discipleship. The model for the disciples in their following of Christ is therefore not the secular ruler and not the learned scribe, nor even the priest who stands above his people. The only valid model is that of the man who serves at table. It is not just a question of a voluntary external self-abasement, but a total existence in a life and death of service for others, as prefigured by the service of Jesus himself and as demanded by Jesus of those who would serve him: <sup>25</sup> The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me” (Jn 12:25 f.).

The root and the goal of service is love. Service occurs out of love for others, as John indicates in the story which stands in his gospel in the place of an account of the Last Supper: the washing of the feet, which employs the imagery of waiting at table (13:1-17). In this way Jesus “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end”. This is why he rises from supper, girds himself with a towel, and washes the disciples’ feet as they lie at table. After doing this, putting on his clothes again and resuming his place once more, he speaks thus to them: “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. <sup>13</sup> “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them” (Jn 13:12-17).

Every action which helps towards the building up of the community is basically a service: <sup>10</sup> Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet 4:10 f). Service to others is not a matter of self-righteous good works. It is something that must be derived from God and directed towards God - each according to the call he has received (1 Cor 12:11 f).

There are some gifts, like those of exhorting, giving aid, the utterance of wisdom and the discernment of spirits, are more private gifts which must be employed in the service of others and practised as opportunity presents itself. There are other gifts – of apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, deacons, elders, and bishops – which are public functions within the community ordained by God and which must be exercised regularly and constantly. This second type of ministry is what constitutes the diaconal structure.

1. Bishops (literally “overseers”): The word ἐπισκοπος is entirely secular in origin. In non-Christian usage it meant an official overseer. It was used for officials of religious communities. In the Christian communities it must have designated some sort of supervisory or administrative office. These “bishops” at first existed only in the Greek communities. The word occurs only five times in the whole New Testament; once referring to Christ (1 Pet 2:25); once in Paul (Phil 1:1); once in Acts (20:28) and then at 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:7. The first evidence of the word as a ministry of the community shows that the word was used in the plural. There seems to have been a number of “bishops” in the communities without apparent distinction of rank, and it seems to be interchangeable with the title *presbyteroi* used for the same persons (cf. Acts 20:17; 28:1; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:17; Tit 1:5,7; 1 Pet 5:1-3). *Episkopos* means supervisor. It is then possible that only some of the *presbyteroi* assumed the function of supervisor. The *presbyteroi* seem to have formed a council and this ruling body may have entrusted some of its members with the specific task of supervising.

2. Presbyter πρεσβυτερος (literally “elder” *zekenim*) was the name for the man who led each Jewish community. In a more technical sense it is used to describe a person holding a position of trust and respect, perhaps even an office. The book of Numbers attributes the institution of a college of elders by Moses to an intervention of God (Num 11:16f.). In the time of Jesus the Sanhedrin was made up of priests, scribes and elders. A council of elders was ordinarily responsible for the running of each synagogue. There was thus good reason for the primitive communities to organise themselves along the same lines. Without any explanation of their origin, elders appear in Acts 11:29f as those to whom Barnabas and Saul brought the donations from the community at Antioch. In the context of the council of Jerusalem they exercise in conjunction with the apostles some kind of teaching authority.

In 1 Peter the presbyteral functions are brought together in the image of the shepherd (1 Pet 5:1-4). According to James 5:14f the elders are to be called in to anoint and to pray for the sick. It is clear from the Pastorals that the existence of presbyters has become normative. Although a list of qualifications is given (Tit 1:5f; 1 Tim 3:1f), their responsibilities are not spelled out. There is no single pattern of church structure within the NT, nor is there any common terminology to describe what does exist. It is only with St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 115) that the traditional threefold division of church office into the episcopate, the presbyterate, and the diaconate is really clear. Each of the churches of Asia Minor reflected in his letter seems to have been led by a single bishop who was supported by a council of presbyters and a number of deacons. In the course of the second century this situation became standard everywhere.

3. Deacon διακονος (literally “servant”): The earliest Christian use of the word occurs in Phil 1:1 predating the account in Acts 6:1-6 of the choice of seven “assistants” to facilitate the mission and ministry of the Twelve. The qualities of a deacon are set forth in 1 Tim 3:8-13, following a passage in which the characteristics of a good bishop are described. This juxtaposition of texts reflects the close association between the two ministries as they developed throughout the period of Christian antiquity. During the patristic age, it was understood to be a permanent, lifetime office. Deacons were entrusted with responsibilities that were charitable, liturgical and evangelical.

### **The Priesthood of all believers**

The word priest as used today is not identical in meaning with the word presbyter as it was originally used. On the contrary, the meaning of the word priest was derived from the actual Greek word for priest - ἱερευς - and from the Latin word *sacerdos*. To understand the notion of a priest we must begin with the word ἱερευς, which designates a priest in the historical religious sense, someone whose principal function is that of offering sacrifice.

The remarkable fact is that the word “priest” is not used once anywhere in the NT for someone who holds office in the Church. It is remarkable, too, that in his preaching Jesus does not use the image of the priest and the cult. His preaching, even if it is not explicitly and fundamentally critical of the cult, lies more in the tradition of prophecy. On no occasion did Jesus describe himself or his disciples as priests. The language of priesthood, the temple, and sacrifice appears in a radically transformed way in the NT. This is particularly the case in Hebrews where Jesus is described as the great high priest who once and for all entered into the heavenly temple bringing not the blood of animals but his own blood, thus achieving forgiveness and sanctification for all (Heb 9:11-14; 10:1-18). What is central to Hebrews can be found in other forms throughout the NT. Jesus is the temple, the place where God dwells (Jn 2:21). His faith and obedience, and his self-giving love constitute a sacrifice pleasing to God (Eph 5:2; 1 Cor 5:7). The words instituting the Eucharist include among their many references some that are clearly sacrificial.

Cultic language is also applied to the believing community. To be a Christian is to be in Christ. It involves living according to his Spirit. Such a life is celebrated as an authentic sacrifice, the kind of worship that God finds acceptable (Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15f). Developing a theme long associated with the covenant (Ex 19:6; Is 61:6), 1 Pet describes all believers as belonging to a “royal priesthood, a holy nation”. They are called to offer spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 2:4-10; Rev 5:10).

### **Christ, the Mediator**

The Hebrew and Aramaic of the Bible have no specific word for mediator, although the idea of mediation is of the greatest importance for OT religion. The Greek μεσιτης comes from μεσος and obviously means one who stands in the middle or in between. It is used not so much in a spatial sense as in the sense of a neutral person of trust, as arbiter in legal transactions, a guarantor who deposits a pledge. Neither the synoptic writers nor Acts and John used the expression “mediator”, although they record Jesus as fulfilling mediating functions. For the Christian community it is only the glorified Jesus who becomes in a full sense a mediator, and only the late NT writings use the expression for Christ. Paul does not apply it to Christ, and uses it only once applied to Moses (Gal 3:19f).

In the first letter to Timothy, however, the expression “mediator” is used to refer to Christ, and indicate his universal salvific will (1 Tim 2:5). The fact that it is precisely in the letter to the Hebrews that the word “mediator” is used at three important points is not surprising in the light of what has been said about Jesus Christ as the high priest. The high priest Jesus Christ stands above the Levitical priests, because he is the mediator of a



better covenant, enacted on better promises than the old (8:6). Christ replaces and surpasses the mediator of the old covenant, Moses, and brings about the new covenant, which he guarantees (7:22). This new and eternal covenant is sealed and guaranteed by the highest possible price, his own life and blood (9:15). The believer need only trust this mediator, this high priest and leader of a new and redeemed humanity, in order to come with him to the city of the living God (12:22 & 24).

Since Christ is the unique high priest and mediator between God and all men, all men who believe in him have immediate access to God through him. "Through him" (13:15) the faithful are to offer sacrifices. But the whole idea of sacrifice has undergone a radical change. No longer are sacrifices made by men from their own strength, but through the mediation of Christ. They are no longer sacrifices of atonement (nothing can be added to the atoning sacrifice of Christ), but sacrifices of thanks and praise for what Christ has perfected; not sacrifices of external gifts, but the offering of oneself. In this way sacrifice is a concrete act of witness and confession of faith, as well as a service of love: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name. <sup>16</sup> And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (Heb 13:15f). Have sacrifices of this kind anything to do with priesthood? If then all believers have, in this particular way, to make sacrifices through Christ. This means that all believers have a priestly function, of a completely new kind, through Christ the one high priest and mediator.

The idea of the priesthood of all believers is a logical conclusion to what has been said about the nature of the Church. In God's revelation to his chosen people on Sinai they were told: "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). The whole people is to be a priesthood, belonging to the God-king and sharing in his dignity: "a people holy to the Lord your God" (Dt 7:6). The prophets promise that in the time of salvation the whole of Israel will be a nation of priests: "but you shall be called the priests of the Lord, man shall speak of you as the ministers of our God" (Is 61:6; cf. 56:6f). These are the promises which the young Church saw fulfilled in reality, yet in a completely new way. Instead of the single nation of Israel, men from all the nations of the Gentiles are now called to belong to the holy and priestly people of God.

In the book of Revelation, it is clearly stated that those who have been redeemed by Christ have become sharers in the royal reign of God in the world, a priesthood for the service of God. "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, <sup>6</sup> and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen"(Rev 1:5). Christians are not subjects, but rulers together with Christ. They are not profane men, but priests through Christ (Rev 5:10; 20:6). The rapidly increasing clericalisation of the Church meant that it became more and more customary to use the word "priest" exclusively for those who held a particular office in the Church. The idea of the priesthood of all believers gradually came to be almost forgotten by the faithful and by most theologians.

#### **Vatican II and the common priesthood of the people of God**

10. Christ the Lord, high priest taken from among men (cf. Heb. 5: 1-5), made the new people "a kingdom of priests to God, his Father" (Apoc. 1:6; cf. 5:9-10). The baptised, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a

spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the perfection of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-10). Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (cf. Acts 2:42-47), should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 12:1). They should everywhere on earth bear witness to Christ and give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs. (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15).

Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the *common priesthood* of the faithful and the *ministerial or hierarchical priesthood* are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ.[2] The ministerial priest, by the sacred power that he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ he effects the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people. The faithful indeed, by virtue of their *royal priesthood*, participate in the offering of the Eucharist.[3] They exercise that priesthood, too, by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity. (LG.10)

To avoid false interpretations, it was necessary for the Council to insist at the start on the difference between the common and the special, hierarchical priesthood. Various suggestions were made to help to define the distinction. One effort took the form of an attempt to minimise the common priesthood. It was said to be an improper or initial or a “certain” priesthood, which of itself did not merit the name. This solution was not accepted. Others who acknowledged the “proper” character of this priesthood tried to define the difference with the help of the concept of “analogy”. But the real point was to determine the dissimilarity while maintaining the similarity of the common and the special priesthood. Some Fathers sought for a special term, suggesting that the common priesthood of the people of God should be called a “spiritual priesthood” to distinguish it from the official priesthood. But the quality of “spiritual” was common to both. The draft of 1963 spoke of the “universal priesthood”. This term was attacked because “universal” was said to imply that it embraced “all things”. The interpretation was not justified, but it was taken into account by the Theological Commission, which decided on the term “common priesthood”. This is shared by all the baptised and hence is not eliminated in the priest consecrated to office.

It was also suggested that the consecrated priesthood should be designated as “sacramental” or “vicarious”. But the priesthood of the faithful also has a sacramental basis, and the quality of “representative” is not the sole feature, which distinguishes the special from the general priesthood. The Constitution does not claim to have found the definitive distinction. Its concern is to make a positive statement about the priesthood of the faithful while still keeping it apart from the consecrated priesthood. Hence it contrasts the “common priesthood of the faithful” with the “priesthood of the hierarchical ministry” and affirms that “they are distinct in kind and not merely in degree”. The consecrated priesthood is not to be understood merely as intensification and heightening of the dignity and mission of the common priesthood, but represents a new type of priestly dignity and power, even though it is based on the common priesthood. But of their nature, the common and the special priesthood are ordained to each other, by virtue of their common participation in the priesthood of Christ, which however, they share in a

different way. Thus the two types of priesthood are to be defined in the light of their relationship to Christ the high priest.

**Theme 8**      **The bishops, who all together form a collegiate body, have formally succeeded to the office of the Apostles as shepherds of the Church. Hence, it pertains to the bishops to authoritatively teach, administer the sacraments, and govern the flock by virtue of the divinely instituted mission.**

The divinely instituted hierarchical structure of the apostolic Church is constitutive of the Church of all times and is to be perpetuated by means of the formal succession.

**Formal succession:**

Not merely a material succession of pastors in the Church, but those who exercise the pastoral office do this by virtue of the authoritative commission received from their predecessors.

**The Episcopal College:**

All together form a corporate body or college with a universal mission and authority, together with and under the head of the college, the successor of Peter.

At the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century we find that a “monarchical bishop” governs each local church and these are formally recognised as the successors of the apostles. At the end of the apostolic age, the local churches are presided over by a group of presbyters. Certain “roving ambassadors” of the apostles (Timothy, Titus) appear as the successors of the apostles. But the principle of succession is nowhere explicitly formulated. This situation raises the following questions:

- a) Why was the principle of apostolic succession only explicitly formulated at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century? Was it an invention of the Church of that time?
- b) How and when did the transition from the form of government of the apostolic period to that of the second century take place?

**A. The Universal Consensus of the Church from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century**

1. The Fact: By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century the monarchical episcopate was established everywhere, and they were recognised as the successors of the apostles.
2. The Witnesses:
  - a) Iranaeus: The formula *παραδοσις κατα διοδωκην* (*traditio per succession-em*) sum up his episcopal list, and constitutes the basis of his anti-gnostic position. To confound the inconsistencies of the Gnostic position, he

appeals to “the tradition which has come down to us from the apostles, guarded by successors of presbyters in the Churches” (Adversus Haereses 3,2,2). For him it is clear that the preaching, the faith, the tradition remain always in the midst of the Church; thanks to the succession.

- b) The unanimous teaching of the Fathers: It is well summed up by the saying of St. Jerome: “apud nos apostolorum locum episcopi tenent” meaning “with us the bishops hold the place of the apostles”.

This teaching of the Fathers is seen especially in their scriptural exegesis both of the OT and the NT. Commenting on Mt 10:40; 18:18 and 28:18-20, they see these texts as referring not only to the apostles, but also to their successors. Only in the light of the succession are the words of Our Lord, “I will be with you always”, fulfilled and verified.

The Patristic doctrine can be summarised by the constantly recurring theme of “traditio per successionem”. This is the articulation of three terms: tradition, time, and succession. Just as Moses perceived that in the context of a mission still unfinished and the death of the one sent, the need for a succession is imposed. So the distance between the “now” of the Church and the “then” of the apostles demands a succession as the support of a durable tradition.

St. Augustine demands the apostolic succession. Why? He gives his response in two elementary principles: 1. The apostles could not live forever, and 2. They could not abandon the Church. In other words, the Church throughout its history cannot be separated from the apostolic function. But the apostles, being mortal, could only give a limited service. Augustine supposes that Christ has reconciled the two propositions by means of the succession, which prolongs indefinitely the apostolic action. The succession assures both the prolongation of the apostolic deposit, and the apostles themselves who live on in their successors.

## B. The Period of Transition

There are few documents from this period, which extended roughly from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. But from the documents available, however, we seek to determine whether or not the principle of apostolic succession was acknowledged, and what was the structure of the Church at this time.

- a) Clement of Rome: letter to the Corinthian Church (c. 96)

The apostles were sent by Christ, who in turn had been sent by God. In each of the local churches they appointed episcopoi and diaconoi. They wanted their offices to be carried on after their death by “alii viri probati”. The local leaders were appointed by the apostles themselves or by “aliis viris eximiis”. In other words, other men were to continue the special apostolic function of giving ordination to the episcopoi of the local churches.

- b) Ignatius of Antioch: letters on the way to martyrdom in Rome (c. 107)

The theme of his letters is the unity of the Church, which is to be preserved by obedience to the local bishop, who is over the local college of presbyters, the deacons and the faithful. Hence, at the beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> century monarchical form of episcopate was established in Syria and Asia Minor. The reason for the bishop's authority is the same as that of the apostles.

c) Polycarp of Smyrna: letter to Philippians (c. 107)

In this letter, Polycarp exhorts the Philippians to be subject to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ. Nothing is said about a bishop. A bishop himself, Polycarp writes to a church founded by Paul, which around the turn of the century still retains collegiate form of government.

### Conclusions

1. At the end of the apostolic period there was the local presbyterial form of government (except in Jerusalem) under direction and authority of the itinerant apostolic successors.
2. At the beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> century, there was the monepiscopal (monarchical form of episcopate) form of government at Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus and other churches of the province of Asia. Corinth and Philippi retain collegiate form, perhaps under the immediate authority of Clement of Rome and Polycarp of Smyrna respectively.
3. At the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century, monepiscopal form was established everywhere, and these bishops were formally acknowledged as successors of the apostles.

There seems to have been two inverse and converging movements, from which resulted the double characteristic of the monepiscopos: unique head of the determined local community to which he remains attached, and possessing apostolic powers—a successor of the apostles.

- a) Within the local Church: ever greater centralisation of authority. From among the presbyteroi, the actual direction of the community was reserved to a few, and finally to one. At an early state, he would have lacked full apostolic authority, and was still directly under the authority of the “viri apostolici”, who exercised authority over a region, but had no fixed abode.
- b) From outside the local Church: the apostles confide their apostolic authority to their immediate successors. These men either confer full apostolic authority on the de facto head of a local church or settle down themselves in a local church, and in this way the local head becomes a bishop in the full sense of the term.

The early emergence of the monarchical episcopate in Ephesus and rest of Asia Minor is perhaps due to the influence of St. John, whose ‘incarnational’ theology would postulate the full establishment of the church in each place, personified in its bishops. The Pauline churches (Corinth, Philippi) under a regional apostolic successor reflect his theology of the universal Church and his own personal way of acting. He kept close supervision and authority over his churches.

## **Awareness and exercise of Collegiality in the first centuries**

There are indications that the bishops in the 1<sup>st</sup> centuries were conscious of being not so many individual successors of the apostles, but as forming altogether a corporate body or college. These indications are their awareness of their responsibility and mission toward the whole church, and of the necessity of living in communion with and co-operation with the other bishops.

1. Individual bishops took care to promote communion among themselves, and were conscious of their mutual inter-dependence and responsibility toward the whole flock of Christ.

- a) Letters of communion, which a newly consecrated bishop would send to and ask from the other bishops, and especially the bishop of Rome.
- b) Co-consecrators: ancient practice according to which a new bishop was consecrated by at least three others – sign that the new bishop was entering into a body or college represented by the Co-consecrators.
- c) Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, Clement and Polycarp manifest their ‘solicitude for all the churches’. Ignatius is aware that a local church is a crystallisation of apostolicity in the measure that its bishop is closely united with other bishops because it is the “bishops established even to the ends of the earth”, who “possess the spirit of Jesus Christ”.

2. Practice of convoking local synods

From the end of 2<sup>nd</sup> century, collegiality is institutionalised. Bishops from the same territory (Egypt, Asia, Africa, Italy) periodically come together to discuss questions of common interest, to defend the faith or to come to agreement about liturgical practices (many local synods over the paschal controversy). In the synods the bishops exercised collegially their teaching and legislative authority. However, the decisions do not seem to have had an obligatory character in so far as each bishop promulgated them in his own local church. It was from this practice that there arises finally the great ecumenical councils, beginning at Nicea in 324.

3. It seems that Tertullian was the first to use the expression ‘ordo episcoporum’ in the sense of a clearly delineated body composed of those who had the highest grade in the hierarchy, and had succeeded to the apostolic college. Cyprian, however, is the first one who formulated and developed the doctrine of collegiality. Here are some examples of his teaching: “Between the bishops of the Church there is, in effect, only one soul and one heart”. “.....there is one Church of Christ throughout the world, divided into many members, and one episcopate diffused throughout the world in an harmonious multitude of many believers”.

## **Vatican II and Collegiality of Bishops**

That divine mission, which was committed by Christ to the apostles, is destined to last until the end of the world (cf. Mt. 28:20), since the Gospel, which they were charged to hand on, is, for the Church, the principle of all its life for all time. For that very reason the apostles were careful to appoint successors in this hierarchically constituted society.

In fact, not only had they various helpers in their ministry,[4] but, in order that the mission entrusted to them might be continued after their death, they consigned, by will and testament, as it were, to their immediate collaborators the duty of completing and consolidating the work they had begun,[5] urging them to tend to the whole flock, in which the Holy Spirit had appointed them to shepherd the Church of God (cf. Acts 20:28). They accordingly designated such men and then made the ruling that likewise on their death other proven men should take over their ministry.[6] Amongst those various offices which have been exercised in the Church from the earliest times the chief place, according to the witness of tradition, is held by the function of those who, through their appointment to the dignity and responsibility of bishop, and in virtue consequently of the unbroken succession, going back to the beginning,[7] are regarded as transmitters of the apostolic line.[8] Thus, according to the testimony of St. Irenaeus, the apostolic tradition is manifested[9] and preserved[10] in the whole world by those who were made bishops by the apostles and by their successors down to our own time....The sacred synod consequently teaches that the bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church. [15] in such wise that whoever listens to them is listening to Christ and whoever despises them despises Christ and him who sent Christ (cf. Lk. 10:16).[16] (L.G 20)

This article deals with the historical continuation of the apostolic office in the institution of the episcopate and the divine right of the episcopacy in the Church. This transmission is proved very briefly by appealing to the eschatological definitiveness of the Gospel. Finally it is said that the bishops are by divine institution the successors of the apostles. This statement clearly does not intend to be an *ex cathedra* definition. It merely says that the Council “teaches” this. But it certainly implies that the episcopate is not an element of purely human and variable Church law, in the sense that the post-apostolic Church might have also given itself a non-episcopal constitution.

In order to fulfil such exalted functions, the apostles were endowed by Christ with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit coming upon them (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:4; Jn. 20:22-23), and, by the imposition of hands, (cf. 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6-7) they passed on to their auxiliaries the gift of the Spirit, which is transmitted down to our day through episcopal consecration.[18] The holy synod teaches, moreover, that the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred by episcopal consecration, that fullness, namely, which both in the liturgical tradition of the Church and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the acme of the sacred ministry.[19] Now, episcopal consecration confers, together with the office of sanctifying, the duty also of teaching and ruling, which, however, of their very nature can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college. In fact, from tradition, which is expressed especially in the liturgical rites and in the customs of both the Eastern and Western Church, it is abundantly clear that by the imposition of hands and through the words of the consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is given,[20] and a sacred character is impressed (L.G 21)

This article deals with the nature of the office of the individual bishop and of its sacramental basis. But this definition is to be read in the light of the assertion that Christ himself is present and active in the bishops who are his ministers. Their service does not replace the activity of Christ. It makes it sacramentally and historically tangible. The text deliberately avoids an expression which is often used, that episcopal consecration is the “highest degree” of priesthood. The episcopate is envisaged in itself as the full priesthood

in all regards, while the ordinary priesthood is to be explained as a limited share of the full priesthood.

Just as, in accordance with the Lord's decree, St Peter and the rest of the apostles constitute a unique apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are related with and united to one another. Indeed, the very ancient discipline whereby the bishops installed throughout the whole world lived in communion with one another and with the Roman Pontiff in a bond of unity, charity and peace;[23] likewise the holding of councils[24] in order to settle conjointly,[25] in a decision rendered balanced and equitable by the advice of many, all questions of major importance;[26] all this points clearly to the collegiate character and structure of the episcopal order, and the holding of ecumenical councils in the course of the centuries bears this out unmistakably. Indeed, pointing to it also quite clearly is the custom, dating from very early times, of summoning a number of bishops to take part in the elevation of one newly chosen to the highest sacerdotal office. One is constituted a member of the episcopal body in virtue of the sacramental consecration and by the hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college

The college or body of bishops has for all that no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head, whose primatial authority, let it be added, over all, whether pastors or faithful, remains in its integrity. For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, namely, and as pastor of the entire Church, has full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered. The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in their role as teachers and pastors, and in it the apostolic college is perpetuated. Together with their head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him, they have supreme and full authority over the universal Church;[27] but this power cannot be exercised without the agreement of the Roman Pontiff. ..The supreme authority over the whole Church, which this college possesses, is exercised in a solemn way in an ecumenical council.(22)

Here is one of the central themes of the whole Council: the College of Bishops.

- a) The text propounds a doctrine which had never been proposed so explicitly before by the extraordinary magisterium, but which does not, in effect, go beyond the traditional teaching.
- b) A number of arguments are given for the existence of the episcopal college. They are taken from the parallelism with the college of the apostles, from the doctrine and practice of the *communio*, from the synodal activity of the episcopate, from the existence of general councils, and from the liturgical practice of a bishop's being consecrated by a number of bishops.
- c) The doctrine taught in article 22
  - i. There exists a college of bishops. This is also called the body (*corpus*) of bishops or the order (*ordo*) of bishops. The meaning is the same, but the variation calls attention to the fact that "college" is not to be understood as a moral unity.
  - ii. This college continues the college of the apostles. This happens "in like manner" (*pari ratione*), because the college of bishops cannot take on the nature and charge of the college of the apostles in every respect. The role of the apostles as the eyewitnesses remains unique.
  - iii. The college exists only insofar as it takes in the Pope as its head. Without this head it ceases to be a college and disintegrates into a mere number of bishops. One may not distinguish between the bishops (as a college) and the Pope, but only between the college with the Pope as its head and the Pope alone.



iv. The college of bishops is the possessor of supreme and full authority over the whole Church. Its power is not bestowed on it by the Pope.

v. The exercise of the authority of the college must be a collegiate act. Pope's assent or confirmation is not an act which is superimposed on the act of the college from outside.

vi. It is difficult to determine the exact relationship between the Pope acting as primate and the college of bishops along with the Pope. Here the text leaves many questions open.

**Theme 9** Christ gave to his apostles an authoritative and infallible teaching office that was to remain always in the Church and to which the college of bishops succeeded.

As the "pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Tim 3:15) against whom the gates of hell will not prevail (Mt 16:18) the Church has always preserved and will always preserve uncontaminated the sacred deposit committed to her by the apostles. Hence she always remain indefectible in her belief and profession of the apostolic doctrine. This indefectibility of the Church is the result of the unfailing action of the Holy Spirit, who animates and guides the Church in each of her members. However, he animates the Church according to her organic structure as constituted by Christ and so guides and assists in a special way those who succeed to the apostles in their office as authentic teachers. It is therefore, the Catholic belief that the proximate organ of the indefectibility of the Church is her living and perennial Magisterium. Just as the primitive Church was gathered around the apostles and their teaching (Acts 2:42), so the Church of all generations remains steadfast in the teaching of the apostles by faithfully adhering to the teaching of their successors, the guardians and interpreters of the faith of the Church contained objectively in her Scriptures and Tradition (DV 10).

## I. The nature and function of the Magisterium

### A. Nature

By Magisterium we mean the perennial, authentic and infallible teaching office committed to the apostles by Christ, and now possessed and exercised by their legitimate successors, the college of bishops.

- Perennial: the teaching office entrusted to the apostles by Christ pertains to the essential institution of the Church, and so is transmitted by them to their successors.
- Authentic: endowed with the authority of Christ. The apostles and through them their successors are sent not merely to bear witness to the truth, but to teach this truth with authority in the name of Christ (Mt 10:40; Lk 10:16).

This authority given to them in virtue of their mission cannot be simply identified with the authority of the Word proclaimed (as Protestants would say). It is a properly pastoral authority to impose the Word, and so to demand obedience from those who believe. Entirely derived from Christ, whose ministers they are, and entirely relative to and in the service of the Word

which they proclaim, it has been given to them to bring about obedience to faith among all the nations (Rom 1:5).

- Infallible: immune from error. By virtue of the divine assistance promised by Christ in carrying out their office, the ministers of the Word are preserved from error in the decisive acts of witnessing and proclaiming the Gospel. Note clearly that the unique efficacious cause of this de jure infallibility (i.e. cannot err) is the divine assistance – not human effort, ingenuity or vigilance, though the ministers of the Gospel are not thereby absolved from making full use of their resources. This assistance is per se negative. However, the Holy Spirit does not merely prevent the Church from erring, but guides and leads it into all truth.

## B. Functions of the traditional Magisterium

In many respects, the ministry of the apostles was a unique and unrepeatable event in the life of the Church. They alone laid the foundation of the Church's faith and life once and for all. Their preaching was constitutive of the faith of the Church. The task of their successors is to guard and build upon this foundation and hence their teaching office is essentially relative. From this we can understand the twofold function of the continuing Magisterium.

### 1. To guard and witness to the deposit of faith

This must be considered as the primary function of the Magisterium of the successors of the apostles. If their teaching is the rule or norm of faith for the members of the Church, it is in turn ruled by the apostolic teaching. It is therefore a ministry of the Word not directly revealed to them, as was the case with the apostles, but of the Word fixed and determined forever by the ministry of the first and unique eyewitnesses.

### 2. To define and declare the meaning of the deposit

The mission of guarding the deposit and faithfully witnessing to it, implies and demands a judging function: to determine authoritatively by a solemn judgement the meaning of the deposit; to impose juridically that which is to be believed. Note well that the Magisterium in its solemn definitions does not pretend to judge the revealed Word itself. There is only question of authoritatively interpreting the Word, which of course, implies judging and condemning any interpretation of the Word contrary to its own. Thus the authoritative teachers are not above the Word of God, but its servants, bound forever to what God has revealed in Jesus Christ.

Irreformability of dogmas: that which the Church has solemnly defined (dogmas) are justly styled as irreformable. This means that what the Church has always understood and now understands, as the meaning of what she has defined remains always true, conformable to revelation and to which the irrevocable assent of faith is due. This does not mean that the dogmas of the Church are a completely adequate and exhaustive expression of the truth. The mysteries of the faith can never be fully expressed in propositional statements. Hence it is legitimate to speak of the "historical conditionability" of dogmas of the Church in that they depend upon the terminology and

state of theological development proper to a particular age. Hence they can be completed and expressed more adequately, and in this sense are capable of change.

### Note on the 'Regula Fidei'

For the Fathers of the Church, the 'regula fidei' meant that which the apostles have passed on and the Church preserves in so far as it is normative for faith: the truth which is to be believed. This is formally the faith of the living Church preserved through the succession of ministers, and materially the Scriptures and the Symbols of faith. But, from the Middle Ages on, there was a switch in emphasis from insistence on the authority of the doctrine transmitted to the authority of the one who transmits it. Thus in modern usage, one refers to the teaching authority, which interprets and declares the revelation as the 'regula fidei'. At times also the distinction is made between:

- Regula fidei proxima: the teaching here and now of the authoritative magisterium
- Regula fidei remota: the Scriptures and Tradition.

The danger in this way of speaking is to think of the teaching authority as a law unto itself, and to forget the absolute and regulative primacy of objective tradition. Instead of the magisterium being looked upon as witnessing to the apostolic doctrine contained in the Scriptures and Tradition, the Scriptures and Tradition are looked upon as witnessing to the teaching of the magisterium.

However, as the guardian and interpreter of revealed truth, not as a separate source of truth, the magisterium is "the proximate and universal norm for every theologian" (Pius XII) and indeed for every believer. The teaching of the magisterium is, however, a norm extrinsic to faith. I believe in the act of faith what God has revealed, and because of his authority. The actual teaching of the magisterium is an authoritative sign post and condition of this faith, because the Church is entrusted by Christ with the authoritative ministry of witnessing to and declaring what God has revealed.

## **II. The Magisterium of the Episcopal College**

### 1. Christ gave to his apostles an authoritative and infallible teaching office.

#### a) Authoritative

Christ the revealer of the Father, to whom all power was given in heaven and on earth, sent the apostles to proclaim the good news of salvation with authority in his name. They were not only to bear witness to the truth, but also had authority to impose this truth and demand obedience of faith. Both from the Acts (ch 15) and the Pauline epistles (Rom 1:5), it is obvious that the apostles were conscious of possessing this authoritative mission and the Church acknowledged it.

#### b) Infallible

From the fact that the apostles in the name of Christ demand obedience and acceptance of their teaching on the part of the faithful, it follows that their ministry should have been accompanied by a special divine assistance to prevent them from falling into error. This a priori argument is confirmed by Christ's promise of his own enduring assistance and of the assistance of the Holy Spirit, who would remain always with them and witness together with them. Moreover,

the apostles preaching the Gospel everywhere were conscious of this assistance, and hence of the rectitude of their teaching (Acts 5: 32; 15:28; 1 Thess 1:5; Gal 1:8; 1 Cor 2:12).

2. Which was to remain always in the Church

This is seen not only from the promise of Christ's perpetual assistance in the context of a commission to teach all nations, but also from the practice of the apostles. Thus, we see Paul confiding to Timothy and Titus the charge to authoritatively guard and teach the deposit of faith entrusted to them (1 Tim 4:11 f; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:13f.)

3. And to which the college of bishops have succeeded

From 2<sup>nd</sup> century onwards, the bishops who all together form a college are recognised as the successors of the apostles and hence as the authoritative guardians and teachers of the apostolic doctrine, whether written or handed down orally. That the bishops themselves were conscious of their responsibility and authority in guarding and expounding the faith is seen from their pastoral writings, as well as from the very early and frequent practice of convoking local synods to discuss and decide matters of faith and morals.

### **III. The Exercise of this Magisterium**

1. Ordinary

The first function of the Magisterium is to guard the deposit of faith by witnessing to it, while authoritatively teaching the faithful. This is the ordinary exercise of the magisterial office. Each bishop in his own diocese, as a successor of the apostles and member of the episcopal college, is a witness to divine and catholic truth, who teaches with authority of Christ the flock entrusted to his care. As a representative of the college, he must in the exercise of his office be mindful of his responsibility for the universal Church. Hence, he must remain in close contact with the whole episcopate, and especially with its head to whose universal jurisdiction he is always subject (LG 23).

All the bishops though dispersed throughout the world remain in communion among themselves and with the successor of Peter. Thus in their teaching they give a collective and collegial witness to the faith. This teaching is infallible when the bishops authentically teach matters of faith and morals and agree on one position as definitively to be held. Such teaching may be expressed in various ways – in creeds or catechisms universally approved by the hierarchy, in the teaching of local or regional synods, or in the liturgical practice of the whole Church.

2. Extraordinary

The bishops exercise the teaching office in an “extraordinary way when, acting as judges of the faith of the Church, they solemnly define some doctrine pertaining to faith and morals” (LG 25). It is called extraordinary, because it is exercised in extraordinary circumstances. The bishops collegially exercise this extraordinary function in ecumenical councils.

An ecumenical council is an assembly of the bishops, which so represents the entire college that its decisions are rightly considered as expressing the collegial consent of the entire episcopate. Such a council is the supreme legislative and teaching body of the Church. In the history of the Church 21 such assemblies have been accepted by the Church as ecumenical.

**Theme 10      The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of St. Peter in the primatial office, has the full and supreme, ordinary and immediate power of jurisdiction over the universal Church and all its members.**

The rivalry between the secular and the ecclesiastical powers led to acute canonical controversies about the nature of Church authority. The defence of the rights of the hierarchy, and mainly of the papacy, often resulted in presenting a one-sided view of the Church, mostly garbed in juridical language. This gave rise to an acute crisis of ecclesiastical authority – the idea of conciliarism, or the theory of the superiority of the Council over the Pope. The increasing worldliness of the hierarchy and the frequent misuse of ecclesiastical power for political and other earthly interests disfigured the Church and made it difficult to recognise in her the mystery of Christ. The crisis came to a climax with the Reformation. The historical context thus explains why ecclesiastical documents up to recent times are mostly concerned with the rejection of errors and the answer to problems related to authority.

A major theological challenge to the Petrine character of the papacy is the relationship between Peter and the subsequent bishops of Rome. Jesus did not personally appoint successors either to Peter or to the other apostles. Indeed Peter played a pre-eminent role in the apostolic community. He was one of the first apostles to be called, the first one named in the lists of the apostles, the first witness to the resurrection, and the prime spokesman for the Church in exercising a vigorous leadership role. Although Peter ministered in fellowship with other apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20), his authority within the early Christian community was uniquely superior.

The Roman episcopate increasingly took up and continued many of the functions exercised by Peter among the apostles. This development guided by the Holy Spirit was part of the design of God for his Church. In that sense the papacy is divinely willed. Several factors contributed to the Church's gradual recognition of the connection between Peter and the bishop of Rome. Rome was the burial place of Peter and Paul. It was the only Apostolic See in the West, and as the capital of the empire, it was the centre of political power and commerce. For Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110), Rome was the Church "presiding in love", and for Irenaeus (c. 180), the Church with "a more imposing foundation". The Church of Rome was accorded special recognition, and its bishops had significant influence in churches throughout the empire, often settling their doctrinal and disciplinary disputes. The prestige of the See of Rome grew when the persecutions ended and Christianity became the religion of the empire under Theodosius. By the fourth century the popes began to assert explicitly their primatial claims, and the papacy began to function openly as a universal authority.

## The Primacy of the Pope

Several ecumenical councils – Florence (1438-45) (CF 809), Lateran V (1512-17), Vatican I (1869-70), and Vatican II (1962-65) – issued strong statements on Papal Primacy. The most detailed of these is the teaching of Vatican I, which defined that Jesus directly and immediately conferred upon Peter not only a primacy of honour but also a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction (CF 821). It also affirmed that the pope does not simply have an office of inspection or direction, but rather that he has full and supreme power and ordinary and immediate jurisdiction over every church, every bishop, and every believer (CF 830). The Council asserted further that the pope's authority is truly episcopal. Its objects are faith, morals, discipline and government. And the decisions of the pope as supreme judge are subject to review by no one, not even an ecumenical council (CF 826-829). Finally, the Council defined that the pope can teach infallibly (CF 839).

### 1. *The Fact of Development*

There has been development both in the understanding and the exercise of the primacy. And in this development the concrete historical circumstances have played a considerable part. In the course of history the papacy has obviously taken different forms of expression, and hence it is necessary to distinguish clearly:

- The substantial from the accidental
- The form of exercise from the inherent power and authority (e.g. centralisation is not synonymous with or essential to the catholic understanding of the primacy).

This development is fully consonant with the nature of the Church and indeed is to be expected. And it must be clearly realised that there has been development in consciousness and progressive realisation not only of the papal primacy, but also of the Church as the people of God.

### 2. *Historical Factors in this development*

#### a) The situation of the Church before and after Constantine

i. Before: Just as the Roman Empire was like a federation of cities or provinces without a strongly centralised authority, so also the Church appears empirically as a federation of local churches, with each local church or group of churches looking after their own affairs. Instances of ecclesiastical life that went beyond the local or provincial sphere were sporadic and provisional, and hence few instances which would bring into play the universal jurisdictional authority of Rome. In this period one speaks of a "primacy of normality"

ii. After: With Constantine, and especially after the 'Edict of Milan' which established the Church in a most favourable position in the empire, the situation changed radically. So began the meddling of the emperors in the affairs of the Church. Faced with this situation the Church was forced to reflect upon its ecumenical organisation, and to elaborate its universal authority.

#### b) Historical relationship of the Roman See to different parts of the Church. The instances of papal interventions vary greatly in different parts of the Church.

- i. The Italian Zone: Special dependence on the See of Rome – Pope exercised papal, metropolitan, and special power – the latter due to the peculiar centralisation in Italy.
- ii. The Western Zone: Pope here exercised both papal and metropolitan authority. The West had been evangelised in great part from Rome – dependence of mission churches on the mother church. Rome was also the only apostolic See in the west.
- iii. The Eastern Zone: The East was not evangelised from Rome. There were many apostolic Sees. Hence, Pope would intervene only with full papal authority – and then only when the unity of faith or communion of the Church as a whole demanded such an intervention.

The Church exists in the world, and has not escaped the influence of history in its external forms and life. The Popes are neither impeccable, nor necessarily immune to the corrupting forces of power and prestige. All this follows from the present condition of the Church as a pilgrim people. A balanced and fair judgement of the Popes in history should be maintained. It is not a sign of objectivity and sincerity to stress only the darker moments in this history. There have been bad Popes; but few really bad ones. Many were saints and martyrs. There is always the task of making the papacy ever more credible; the task of reform and renewal in structures. However, it is unrealistic to think that all defects will be eradicated from the Church in this pilgrim state.

### **Conciliarism**

Vatican I's definition on Papal Primacy must be seen against the background of the struggle that had existed in the Church with varying degrees of intensity from the 11<sup>th</sup> century between the proponents of papal supremacy and those who sought to restrict the papal authority in one way or other.

- a) Conciliarism: In general Conciliarism signifies that theory of Church government which maintains that the ecumenical council is in principle above the pope. A council is here considered as an assembly of the bishops representing the entire Church, but not necessarily including the pope as its legitimate head.

The origins of this teaching are found in medieval ecclesiology and canon law, though it was only at the time of the Western Schism that conciliar thought came into prominence and won wide acceptance. There were many who, while holding that the pope was the divinely willed head of the Church, explored ways to avert possible abuses in the growing power of the papacy. Topics treated included such issues as the possibility of a pope's error in the faith, his violation of the canons of previous councils, or his persistence in notorious crime. It was generally agreed that the authority of pope and bishops acting in a general council was greater than the authority of the pope acting alone. More radical views held that bishops in council, in united agreement against a pope, had greater authority.

In its extreme form as advocated by Marsilio of Padua in his *Defensor Pacis* and later by William of Ockham in his *Dialogue*, an extreme democratic concept of the Church is taught. The pope has only executive power, is subordinate to the council, owes it obedience, and can be deposed at any time.

Conciliar teaching became a viable option in the wake of the Western Schism when there were two or more contenders to the papal chair. It was the Council of Constance (1414-18) which gave what are considered the classical formulations of conciliar thought, most especially in the decrees *Haec Sancta* and *Frequens*. The first decree called for people of every state and dignity in the Church, including the pope, to submit to a general council in an effort to uproot the current schism. The second decree looked to frequent general councils to promote the Church's reform and growth.

Conciliar thought suffered a reversal in the quarrels that marked the Council of Basle (1431). Popes of the period prohibited appeals from the Pope to a council. The Council of Florence (1438-45) in its decree for the Greeks made a strong affirmation of the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff. Pius II in 1460 explicitly condemned an appeal from a pope's sentence to a universal council.

- b) Gallicanism and Febronianism: Conciliar thought, sometimes in more radical forms, had an influence on the development of Gallicanism in France and Febronianism in Germany. Justinus Febronius maintained that the pope had only a primacy of inspection and direction rather than of jurisdiction and authority. He was merely a "primus inter pares", and subordinate to a general council.

These currents of thought were vigorously opposed by the 'ultramontanists' (defenders of the papal primacy), who were the overwhelming majority at Vatican I. It was their intention to eradicate once and for all every trace of Gallicanism and Febronianism from the Church by means of the decree '*Pastor Aeternus*'. It is this intention that explains the strong and partly one-sided insistence on the papal prerogative in the dogmatic decree.

**Essential Content of the Definition**

The pope's jurisdiction, according to *Pastor Aeternus*, is full, supreme, ordinary, immediate and truly episcopal.

- a) Full: he has the fullness of power both extensive (in all matters that pertain to the discipline and government of the Church, not just in matters that pertain to faith and morals; and over all members of the Church) and intensive. But this authority is not exclusive.
- b) Supreme: his power is subject to no other power in the Church. Hence a general council is not superior to the pope.
- c) Ordinary: the universal power of jurisdiction belongs to the pope by reason of his primatial office, and therefore not by delegation from the bishops or anyone else.
- d) Immediate: the pope is free to exercise his authority in relation to the entire Church directly without having to go through any intermediate person or body.
- e) Truly episcopal: it is another way of saying that the papal authority is 'ordinary and immediate', but was added in order to avoid the error of those who said that pope's power can be exercised only in extraordinary cases.

Lumen Gentium in no. 27 has essentially ratified and accepted these explanations given at Vatican I.



#### **Difficulties raised by the definition**

- a) The papal primacy should not be defined in isolation, but in the context of the collegiate apostolic office of the bishops.
- b) The authority of the pope appears to be absolute and without limit, as if he were the only real bishop in the Church.
- c) How can the ordinary and immediate jurisdiction of the pope over all the faithful be reconciled with the ordinary and immediate jurisdiction of each bishop in his own diocese.

**Theme 11**      **The Pope, when he defines *ex cathedra*, possesses “the infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to be endowed in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals”.**

Infallibility in its literal sense implies not only the absence of actual error, but also the fundamental inability of erring. Consequently, in the strict sense of the term, infallibility is attributable to God alone. In all other instances, infallibility must be understood as a divine gift that is operative only under restricted conditions.

Infallibility differs from both revelation and scriptural inspiration. Revelation is God’s communication of truth. Inspiration is a charism enabling biblical writers authentically to record what God has revealed. But Infallibility enables its recipients both to believe and to proclaim God’s revelation. Infallibility is that gift of the Holy Spirit that preserves the Church in its teaching as well as its members in believing, from error in regard to what is divinely revealed. This assistance is implied in Christ’s promise to send the Holy Spirit to his apostles and their successors to enable them to believe and to teach without error those truths that are necessary for salvation. Thus, acceptance of the Church’s infallibility is basically a faith-commitment that presupposes that God provides the Church with effective means both for faithfully believing and authoritatively proclaiming the authentic message of the Gospel.

#### **The Pope’s extraordinary Magisterium**

The Catholic teaching on infallibility has been given by Vatican I and Vatican II. Vatican I solemnly defined that the Pope is infallible when he solemnly teaches ‘*ex cathedra*’. This definition of Vatican I, confirmed once again at Vatican II (LG 18 & 25), has been the cause of much misunderstanding and controversy. For many it seems to erect an insuperable barrier between Catholics and all other Christians. In the fourth chapter of *Pastor Aeternus*, Vatican I describes the infallible magisterium of the Roman Pontiff as follows:

The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when he discharges his office as pastor and teacher of all Christians, and in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals that is to be held by the universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in St. Peter, exercises that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed to endow his Church (CF 839).

The Council did not teach that “the pope is infallible”, but stated that the pope exercises “that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed to endow his Church,” without explaining the nature of infallibility and without restricting the exercise of infallibility to the pope. Also, the Council did not speak of “papal infallibility,” but of the “infallible magisterium of the Roman Pontiff,” apparently in order to indicate that

infallibility is not a permanent personal attribute of the pope, but a temporary assistance divinely bestowed on him precisely in his capacity as universal pastor and authoritative teacher.

#### **Background of the definition**

The dogma of the infallibility of the Pope is a clear example of doctrinal development. The Scriptures say nothing about it directly. At most it could be deduced as being implicitly implied in Peter's role as the principle of unity and firmness in faith of the community. In the early centuries what was extolled was the *orthodoxy of the Roman Church*, whose teaching was looked upon as a norm by which one could know what was the true apostolic doctrine. Thus there grew the practice of recourse to the pope to settle doctrinal disputes, who is more and more clearly recognised as the supreme teacher and judge in matters of faith and morals. This development, however, did not occur without opposition. In reaction against the extreme papalism, there was the conciliar movement that in its extreme form completely subordinated the pope to a general council. At Vatican I itself there was a sharp contrast between the ultramontanists or papalists and the proponents of a mitigated form of conciliarism or gallicanism. The final definition clearly affirms the developed faith of the Church in the personal infallibility of the popes as an inherent element of their supreme teaching office. At the same time, this personal prerogative has very definitive and clearly defined limits.

#### **Explanation of the definition**

- a) The Roman Pontiff: The subject of an infallible magisterium is the person of the pope, not the Roman See, or only a series of popes agreeing on some matter.
- b) Speaking 'ex cathedra': This determines when the pope is infallible. This technical expression is equivalent to the extraordinary magisterium. Therefore, when the pope:
  - i. Acting in his office of shepherd and teacher of all Christians – therefore, not as a private person, or merely as the bishop of the Church of Rome.
  - ii. Solemnly defines by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority. So, as supreme judge in matters of faith and morals, he definitely issues a solemn judgement or definitive sentence.
  - iii. Doctrine concerning faith and morals to be held by the universal Church.
- c) Is infallible: immune from error in the same way that the whole episcopate is when it defines doctrine.
- d) By virtue of the divine assistance, promised to him in Blessed Peter. This clearly indicates that the efficacious cause of the rectitude of such a definition is God alone, not the ingenuity or intelligence of the pope.

Therefore, such definitions are irreformable "ex sese non autem ex consensu ecclesiae". This formula was added at the last moment in order to make perfectly clear that the infallibility did not in any way depend upon the subsequent juridical consent of the bishops or the Church at large. However, from an ecclesiological viewpoint, infallibility in teaching must always be accompanied by infallibility in believing.

The teaching of Vatican I on infallibility was amplified by Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* (no. 26). After noting that bishops “individually do not enjoy the privilege of infallibility,” the Council taught that bishops can exercise infallibility in two ways: first, “when, even though dispersed throughout the world but preserving for all that amongst themselves and with Peter's successor the bond of communion, in their authoritative teaching concerning matters of faith and morals, they are in agreement that a particular teaching is to be held definitively and absolutely”; and secondly, “when, assembled in an ecumenical council, they are, for the universal Church, teachers of and judges in matters of faith and morals, whose decisions must be adhered to with the loyal and obedient assent of faith”.

Vatican II partially clarified the question of subject matter by stating that infallibility is “co-extensive with the deposit of revelation, which must be religiously guarded and loyally and courageously expounded.” The Council also underlined the moral responsibility of the pope and the bishops, when defining matters of revelation, to “apply themselves with zeal to the work of enquiring by every suitable means into this revelation and of giving expression to its contents.”

#### **The Pope's Ordinary Magisterium**

The ordinary exercise of the Pope is called universal because of his position as supreme pastor. Hence it is to be “reverently acknowledged” by the whole Church, and his pronouncements are to be “sincerely adhered to according to his declared mind and will.”(LG 25). The Pope exercises his ordinary teaching function:

1. Through his own personal acts when he teaches as supreme pastor. The solemnity of these teachings varies according to the type of document in which this teaching is expressed: apostolic constitutions, encyclical letters, *motu proprio*, apostolic letters, allocutions, instructions etc.
2. Through the Roman Congregations: These congregations can be compared to the offices or ministers of a modern state, and as such are the administrative organs which serve the Pope in his government of the universal Church. To them the Pope delegates his jurisdictional authority. Hence, their decrees and decisions within the scope of their delegated authority are juridically binding. However, in order that the teaching emanating from one or other of the congregations be considered as authentic, it must have the approbation of the Pope. This can be given in two ways:
  - a) In *forma communi*: this is a general approbation that signifies the Pope's general tacit assent and his permission to promulgate the decree. The decree thus approved remains that of the Congregation concerned. Obviously such an approbation does not give the decree great doctrinal value.
  - b) In *forma specifica*: such approbation renders the act of the congregation an act of the Pope himself, and is given only after close examination and study of the document concerned.

#### **Object of the Magisterium**

The object of the authentic and infallible teaching office must be determined clearly. This object is generally described in the documents of the Church as doctrine

about faith and morals. This technical expression embraces whatever concerns necessarily the truth of the religious relationship of men with God in Christ – whatever pertains to the promotion of the Christian religion and the eternal salvation of souls. But the question must be asked: does this include truths not formally revealed? In other words, is the competence of the Magisterium to teach authoritatively and infallibly restricted to the deposit of faith or does it extend to other matters also?

It is necessary to distinguish between:

- a) Primary object: the deposit of revelation, i.e. whatever has been revealed by God either explicitly or implicitly – promulgated by the apostles and preserved by the Church in her Scriptures and living tradition.
- b) Secondary object: the truths connected with the deposit of faith, i.e. truths not revealed in themselves, but so intimately connected with the revelation that their profession and even definition by the Magisterium or the condemnation of errors which contradict them is necessary for the integral conservation and proclamation of the deposit of faith.

With regard to this twofold object it is:

1. Defined doctrine that the object of the authoritative and infallible Magisterium is the deposit of faith.
2. A theologically certain conclusion taught by the Church that the Magisterium can also teach authoritatively and infallibly truths connected with the revelation but not formally revealed.

#### **Explanation of the secondary object**

##### 1. Development of reflection on secondary object

The question of the secondary object was first explicitly posed at the time when the followers of Jansenius sought to evade the condemnation by Innocent X in 1653 of five propositions taken from Jansenius' book, by affirming that the doctrine condemned was heretical, but that Jansenius had never taught them in his book. Alexander VII answered this by declaring and defining that the condemned propositions had been taken from the book, and in the sense intended by the author, and demanded an internal assent under oath to this fact. From that time on, the Church reflected more on the nature of the teaching office as a reality in history competent to teach authoritatively and infallibly whatever is intimately connected with the preservation and exposition of the deposit of revelation.

##### 2. Reason for affirming Magisterium's competence

The Church does not guard inviolate and faithfully expose the deposit of faith in a vacuum. The Word must be made a living reality for the men of every generation. It must be defended against every sort of error and its relevance and meaning must be affirmed in concrete situations. And all this must be done by succeeding generations of living teachers. But the Magisterium could not carry out efficaciously this ever-actual mission in history unless it lay within its competence to teach authoritatively and infallibly whatever truths or facts are connected with the faithful preservation and exposition of the deposit of revelation.

##### 3. Practical extent of the secondary object

No exhaustive or authoritative list of practical examples of the secondary object has been drawn up. It is generally agreed that the following fall within the competence of the magisterium:

- a) Dogmatic facts
  - i. In general sense: historical fact not revealed but intimately linked up with the preservation and exposition of the deposit of faith e.g. that a council is ecumenical
  - ii. In technical sense: the orthodoxy or falsehood of some writing
- b) Theologically certain conclusions from the revelation e.g. the necessity of jurisdiction to absolve validly
- c) 'Preambula fidei': truths naturally knowable whose acceptance is necessary for the rational acceptance of some doctrine as revealed truth
- d) Other examples: solemn canonisation, solemn approbation of religious orders.

**Theme 12      The local Church makes present and is the microcosm of the universal Church. Therefore the Church is a communion of Churches.**

We have seen that the ecclesiology whose central point of reference is the Petrine office and which insists very much on the juridical structures of the Church is that of the Church as one visible society gathered under the authority of one supreme pastor. This ecclesiology, though perfectly valid and true, does not always take sufficiently into account certain vital aspects of the nature and structures of the Church.

- With its insistence on the Church as one universal society, it has little to say about the specific nature of the local Church, which is often looked upon as a mere part of administrative organ of the one universal Church.
- With its insistence on the role of the primacy, it tends to consider almost exclusively the vertical relationship between the pope and each bishop, and hence overlooks the horizontal relationships that exist between the bishops themselves.
- With its insistence on the unity of the whole body, it tends to confuse unity with uniformity and to obscure the essential catholicity of the Church.

These aspects, however, are brought sharply into relief when we view the Church from the perspective of the local community and from this perspective view the total Church as a communion of local Churches. Although this is not the perspective from which LG primarily views the Church, it as well as the other documents of Vatican II, do insist upon the reality and mission of the local Church, and take into account the nature of the Church as a communion of Churches. This is especially true in connection with what the Council had to say about the role of the bishops and the collegial nature of authority. The theology of the local Church is not opposed to the theology of the universal Church. They are both valid and complement one another.

#### A. The Local Church: manifestation and realisation of the mystery of the Church

1. A unique reality: In the NT the local congregations are called 'Churches'. In fact the term 'Church' seems to have been predicated first of the local congregations and only later does it take on an ecumenical meaning referring to the universal body of believers. In the Fathers and later tradition 'Church' refers more often to the universal community, though the NT usage of a double predication continues. This double predication is unique and strange (as strange as calling Trivandrum the Republic of India). This usage underlies a fact: there is a unique relationship, not found between other societies and their parts, between the local Church and the universal Church. And this unique relationship forbids us from considering the local community as merely a part or administrative division of the universal society. "The Church alone, in fact, in contrast to all other societies has this unique characteristic that she can appear as a microcosm of herself in any one place." (Rahner)
2. The local Church as the eucharistic community: The Church is one complex reality composed of a divine and human element (LG 8) – visible assembly and spiritual community, the communion of those who share together the very life of the Father in Christ through the Spirit manifested and realised in and through the visible communion of the means of grace. But this mystery of the Church is perfectly made present, manifested and actualised in the celebration of the Eucharist, the "fount and summit of the entire Christian life" (LG 11). The mystery of the Church is made present and manifest in the fullest way in its many aspects:
  - i. As the congregation of God's people: just as God's people of Israel were most fully his people, when they gathered together to commemorate the day of the covenant, so the Church is most fully itself, when it is gathered to celebrate the Eucharist.
  - ii. As the community of worship, which Christ has gathered together to worship the Father in spirit and truth.
  - iii. As the community of believers: here we find God's people gathered together to listen to the public proclamation of the word by Christ's authorised representative, and responding by its profession of faith.
  - iv. As the body of Christ: through Eucharist we are made one with Christ and one with each other in the fellowship of the one Spirit. The Church which celebrates the Eucharist is itself built up by the Eucharist and finds in the Eucharist its perfect manifestation as the body of Christ.
3. The local community gathered around a bishop: The celebration of the Eucharist in which Christ's word is proclaimed and his paschal mystery is actualised is essentially dependent upon the ministry of a bishop, who alone possesses the fullness of the ministerial priesthood of Christ that has come down to us through the apostolic succession. He is the "visible principle and foundation of unity" (LG 23) of the local community. Therefore, we can say with St. Cyprian, that a fully constituted local Church is "a people united to its bishop". There we find the Church of Christ fully present where we find Christ present and operative not only invisibly in his paschal mystery, but visibly

in his authoritative representative. Around the bishop we find his presbyterium or priestly college (LG 28).

## **B. The relationship of the local Churches among themselves**

### **1. The local Church does not stand alone**

Just as a bishop is only fully and efficaciously a bishop of the one Church of Christ when he lives in communion with the other members of the episcopal college, so also and consequently each local church fully manifests and makes present the Church of Christ when it remains in full communion of faith and life with the other local Churches, which all together form the one Church of Christ. Thus the local Church can never be considered as a self-contained isolated entity. It is the Church of Christ in this place only to the degree that it shares in and makes present the plenitude of the faith and life of the hierarchically structured unity of the communities of Christ.

Therefore, the eucharistic communion effects and manifests not only the union of the faithful with their bishop in the local Church, but also the union of the Churches among themselves, so that “the Church consists in the communion of the whole world” (Augustine). Although the Church only exists concretely in local communities, it cannot be simply identified with them. And the sociological reality of the Church as a universal society does not find its fullness in each local Church. Nor does the fact that the eucharistic mystery is fully realised in each local Church preclude the relationship of dependence and subordination between the various Churches.

### **2. The Church of Rome: centre of the communion of Churches**

Within the communion of Churches, the Church of Rome as the See of Peter’s successor “presides over in charity” (Ignatius of Antioch). It is the Church with which all Churches must agree because of her special pre-eminence (Irenaeus). Thus within the communion of Churches, one Church exercises a special function as the focal point and efficacious centre of unity in faith and life – a function that implies a universal power and authority of jurisdiction. The concrete relationships, however, between local Churches and Rome need not be, nor should be, always and everywhere the same. They are often determined by historical and other factors.

### **3. Relationships between groups of local Churches**

All the local Churches are related to one another as sister Churches. Hence, there exist multiple relationships between the Churches whereby they share spiritual treasures, apostolic labourers and temporal resources. These relationships exist on the regional, national and supra-national levels. Today especially they find concrete expression in episcopal conferences. Among these relationships special note must be taken of those that exist between several local Churches that together constitute a “particular Church” in the meaning elaborated in the Decree on the Eastern Churches (nos. 4f).

## Summary Conclusion

This theology of the Church as a communion of Churches has been well summarised by Fr. T. Stransky (One in Christ, 1966, p 13).

Local Churches are not administrative units of a huge superorganization, but living cells, each of which contains the whole living mystery of the one Body of Christ. Each community can rightly be called Ecclesia (cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1). Through the bishop and his priest preaching the Gospel, celebrating the Eucharist and guiding the apostolic witnessing of the people, the whole of Christ's action as prophet, priest and king becomes effective in the local community.

Each Church makes present the whole and undivided Church, which carries on its own life in each. Above all, it is by celebrating the Eucharist (which includes the breaking of the Word) that the particular Church most perfectly makes present the Church in all her fullness and expresses most deeply the unity of the particular community and the unity of the whole Church.

But the structure of the individual community remains incomplete and closed if the bishop stands alone and does not live in communion with the other bishops of different Churches, with and under the bishop of Rome. The Church of Christ, then, is not a federation of ecclesiastical provinces but a communion of local Churches, through which the entire Body of the universal Church and each particular Church achieve their growth in perfect harmony, each being open to the needs of others and sharing its own goods with others. The unity of the Church is thus based on the principle of 'catholicity', the communion of all Churches among themselves, and 'apostolicity', i.e. the episcopal principle.

**Theme 13      The Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. (LG 14)**

The necessity of the pilgrim Church for salvation, i.e. the necessity of entering the visible Church, is affirmed as the basic principle. It is not put forward as a solemn definition of faith. Still, the appeal to Scripture and Tradition shows that the Constitution on the Church teaches with full authority the necessity of the Church for salvation. The truth is, therefore, part of the deposit of the Catholic faith. The nature of this necessity is not exactly stated, whether it is necessary because it is the one means to the end (*necessitas medii*) or because it is prescribed (*necessitas precepti*). Instead of this, some reasons are given for it, in part Christological, in part derived from the obligation of all men to believe and be baptised.

Christ as the one mediator remains the real way to salvation. The Church, as his body, is the place where his presence is accessible to us. In this sense the pilgrim Church is a necessary means (*de necessitate medii*), though whether absolutely or conditionally is not stated. The closer the Church is united to Christ, the better it partakes of the unique and indispensable quality of his mediatorship. The obligation to believe and to be baptised which Christ imposed is equivalent to an obligation to belong to the Church, since baptism has as an essential function the task of being constitutive of the Church. However, the necessity of the Church is not stated so absolutely that inculpable ignorance of the Church and of its role in salvation at once implies exclusion from salvation. The possibilities of salvation where one does not fully belong to the Church are propounded in Articles 15 and 16.



### *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*

1. Origin of the expression: In the context of the dispute about the validity of baptism administered by heretics, St. Cyprian contended that such a baptism was invalid. Cyprian justified his position on the basis that: "It is only the Spouse of Christ, the Catholic Church, that can give birth spiritually to children of God... In order to have God for Father one must have the Church for mother." And later on: "*Salus extra Ecclesiam non est*". Irenaeus expressed the same idea in this way: "No one can have a share in the Spirit if he does not come to the Church."

2. Teaching of the Magisterium: This has been the traditional teaching of the Church, based on the explicit teaching of Jesus about the necessity of faith and baptism. Pius IX strongly reaffirmed it in combating indifferentism, but at the same time applied to the axiom the principle of error in good faith and hence the possibility of salvation for those who live in invincible ignorance of the Church. Letter of the Holy Office to Cardinal Cushing clarified the Church's position in the context of the error of Fr. Feeney (see the full text given separately). According to the letter:

- a) The necessity of entering into the Church is not an intrinsic necessity in order to be saved (as is supernatural faith), but by reason of the divine positive institution (relative necessity of means).
- b) Therefore, it is not always required that a man be incorporated actually into the Church, but it is necessary that at least he be united to her by desire.
- c) This *votum ecclesiae* can be either explicit (catechumens) or implicit (non-Christian-contained in his intention of surrendering to God in faith). But in order to be efficacious this *votum* must be animated by supernatural faith informed with charity.

*Lumen Gentium*, while clearly affirming the traditional faith with regard to the necessity of the Church, assumes the distinctions made by the Letter of the Holy Office.

- Negatively: Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter or remain in it. (LG 14)
- Positively: Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience--those too many achieve eternal salvation. Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who, without any fault of theirs, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. (LG 16)

### 3. Conclusion

- a) It excludes both indifferentism and the extreme position of Feeney
- b) Its positive meaning can be expressed in two propositions:
  - i. The Church alone is the institution created and sent by God to bring to men the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

ii. In order to carry out its mission the Church has received from its Founder and Lord all that is necessary to bring about the salvation of the whole of humanity.

#### **This Church subsists in the Catholic Church**

Since the Church is such an all-embracing organ of salvation, it can only be one Church, which is also holy, catholic and apostolic. This Church is the deposit of the whole of salvation, of revealed truth and of sanctification in all the fullness constituted by Christ. But one could still ask: where is this Church? The answer to this question is given clearly, but in a way which is ecumenically of supreme importance.

This is the sole Church of Christ which in the Creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Saviour, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care (Jn. 21:17), commissioning him and the other apostles to extend and rule it (cf. Matt. 28:18, etc.), and which he raised up for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). This Church, constituted and organised as a society in the present world, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him. (LG 8)

There are two points here:

1. The true and unique Church of Christ exists as a concrete fact of history. As such, it must be recognisable and definable in spite of all the character of mystery which is attached to it.
2. The concrete form of existence of this Church founded by Christ is the Catholic Church.
  - a) It is no longer said that it "is" the "Roman" Church. This means that the Roman Church, as a local Church, is only part of the whole Church, though its bishop is head of all the bishops of the Catholic Church. The Pope is designated as "successor of Peter". This was done at the urging of the Oriental bishops, and was intended to give full expression to Catholicity by describing it as a fullness in which the sum total and unity of the local Churches are displayed.
  - b) No absolute, exclusive judgement of identity is uttered, such as, that the Church of Christ "is" the Catholic Church. This does not create obscurity about the recognition of the Church of Christ. It merely takes into account the concrete reality that "outside its structure many elements of sanctification and truth are to be found." Thus "ecclesiality" does not simply coincide with the Catholic Church.

#### **The ecclesial reality of various Christian communities**

What was required for full membership in the visible community was not fully and distinctly envisioned. However, only in the fellowship of the visible community could one partake of the invisible fellowship of *caritas*. Heretics, therefore, who had separated themselves from the visible community had separated themselves from the grace of the Holy Spirit, and therefore were not members of the Body of Christ. The possibility of heretics being in good faith was hardly envisioned. What about sinners who

remain within the visible community? Their status is an anomaly. Since St. Augustine, and after him St. Thomas, consider the Church primarily from its inner aspect as the spiritual kingdom of grace, sinners are regarded as only ‘apparent’ (Augustine) or ‘equivocally’ (Thomas) members of the community of Christ. Yet, pastorally they are considered as sick or deformed members of the body of Christ, who can be cured.

In the context of the Reformation, membership is considered almost exclusively in relationship to the Church as a visible society. Only Catholics (whether in the state of grace or sinners) are members. Those in the state of grace outside the visible society were said to belong to the soul of the Church or to belong to the Church *in voto*.

Three points had to be reconciled:

- the real necessity of the Church for salvation
- the existence of inculpable ignorance with regard to the Church and
- the real possibility of salvation outside the Church.

The first attempt took the form of the doctrine of the *votum ecclesiae*. Its origin is to be sought in patristic affirmations on the so-called baptism of desire and of the baptism of blood. But more precise questions were posed with regard to this *votum*. Must it be a *votum explicitum*, an act of the will expressly formulated? Or is a *votum implicitum* enough, an act of the will which is included in a certain attitude? If the latter, further distinctions are possible. Must the *votum implicitum* contain the express desire of using all the means of salvation demanded by God, or is a more general attitude of love of God or obedience to him sufficient?

Thus, before Vatican II, the doctrine of the *votum ecclesiae* formed the bridge between reality – the fact that most men are outside the Church – and the traditional doctrine of the universal salvific will of God and the necessity of the Church for salvation. The Church is the way of salvation for all, either through real membership of it or through the conscious or unconscious desire of the Church.

## The Doctrine of Vatican II

The teaching of Vatican II developed in different stages. The differences between the final text and the preliminary stages may be summarised as follows. When speaking of belonging to the Church, the final text avoids the expression “members” which had been used by *Mystici Corporis* and the text of 1962. It speaks instead of *incorporari*, of being incorporated for Catholics, or of *conjunctum esse*, of being linked for non-Catholics, who are elsewhere termed *fratres seiuncti*, separated brethren (in other documents). The Council’s teaching with regard to the different ways men ‘belong or are related’ to the Church is as follows:

- a) Catholics in the state of grace are fully incorporated into the society of the Church. This follows from the very nature of baptism (UR 22), as the beginning of the Christian life ordained toward full participation in the life of the Church. Catholic sinners though incorporated into the Church remain in her in body only not in heart (LG 14). By using the expression ‘fully incorporated’, the implication seems to be that there are degrees of incorporation. This is confirmed by the fact that the Council Fathers rejected an earlier version which read: “in the true and absolute sense of the term, only those are incorporated...”

- b) Non-Catholic Christians, according to LG 15, are linked (*conjunctam*) with the Church in many ways. The Decree on Ecumenism expresses this relationship in terms of ‘communion’. “For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptised are in real communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect.” (UR 3)
- c) Non-Christians are said to be related (*ordinantur*) in various ways to the People of God. The text goes on to speak of the Jews, Muslims, other believers in God, and finally those who have not come to an explicit knowledge of God but strive to live a good life with the help of divine grace.(LG 16)

Outside the visible structure of the Catholic Church, there exist genuine, visible, and significant elements of the sign instituted by Christ. These elements are called ‘vestiges’ of the Church. By a ‘vestige’ we mean a social means of grace which pertains to the visible structure of the Church as instituted by Christ, but existing outside the fully constituted and unified structure. These elements are efficacious signs of the grace of Christ in the Holy Spirit (LG 15; UR 3 and 13-23). These elements do not hang in the air, nor are they possessed by isolated individuals. They exist in concrete communities which are built up and structured by these elements of the sign instituted by Christ. Therefore, by virtue of these elements and the manifest fruit of the life of Christ in the Spirit which they both manifest and effect, these communities must be acknowledged as Christian communities. Thus, it is within and through these communities that the body of Christ is built up. “It follows that the separated Churches and Communities as such, though we believe them to be deficient in some respects, have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church” (UR 3).

By virtue of these elements, these communities are in real, though imperfect communion with the Catholic Church. In LG 8, it is affirmed that these elements of sanctification and truth "are properly gifts belonging to Christ's Church and, as such, urge towards Catholic unity", and in UR 3, that “all of these, which come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ”. This implies that, these elements are necessarily and intrinsically related to, and derive their efficacy from the Catholic Church. The Council also speaks of these communities as “Churches and Ecclesial Communities”. The Orthodox communities are always referred to as Churches, whereas the communities that have arisen as a result of the Reformation are referred to generally as ecclesial communities.

### **Ecumenism**

The goal of ecumenism is the restoration of unity among all Christians in “one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth into the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved to the glory of God.” (UR 1) Specifically it is the restoration of full and perfect communion between the Catholic Church and the other Christian Churches and Ecclesial communities. We do not speak of the ‘return’ of these Churches to the Catholic fold and this for two reasons:

- i. The present members of these Churches never separated themselves from the Catholic Church, so it seems anomalous to speak of their return.
- ii. More importantly, the image of these Churches returning to the Catholic fold usually presents the picture of their coming to the Catholic Church, while she herself remains the same. However, the Catholic Church, while retaining her essential structures, must also change. It can only be within a renewed and reformed Catholic Church that widespread reunion can take place.

We would describe the meaning of ecumenism for the Christian Churches as a mutual conversion to and search for the fullness of the mystery of Christ. Thus the practice of ecumenism involves a twofold action, one that looks inward and the other outward.

- i. Inward: Self-renewal and reform – conversion of heart (UR 6 & 7). The first and primary task of the Catholic Church with regard to ecumenism is the inner renewal and reform of the Church.
- ii. Outward: Initiatives and activities that promote Christian unity – prayer and dialogue.





