

# THE CHURCH, THE CHURCHES, AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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**T**HE UNITY of the Church is a clear datum of Christian faith, recognized by the creeds and by the Scriptures. According to the New Testament there is and can be only one body of Christ, one bride, one flock, one new Temple, one new Israel, one new People of God. All these images connote unity; it would be out of the question for Christ to have several bodies, several brides, or for there to be several new Temples or new Israels. Jesus, moreover, prayed that there might be one flock and one shepherd (Jn 10:16) and that all His disciples might be one as He and the Father are one (Jn 17:21). Paul gloried in the fact that we Christians, since we know only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Eph 4:5), are all members of one another (Rom 12:5). So closely are we united, he declared, that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor freeman, male nor female (Gal 3:28). All national and racial differences, all distinctions of sex, age, and social class, pale to insignificance in the light of our transcendent unity in Christ. For the Church to be divided, Paul implies, is as impossible as for Christ to be divided (cf. 1 Cor 1:13).

The unity of the body of Christ, of course, leaves room for a multiplicity of local congregations that may, in accordance with New Testament usage, be called "churches," but it excludes a plurality of rival and conflicting denominations that reject one another's doctrines, ministries, or sacraments. Almost since the beginnings, however, this dividedness has been the actual condition of Christianity. What is in theory abnormal has become in practice normal, and this anomaly calls for theological explanation. All major Christian traditions have had to grapple with the dilemma posed by the theological necessity of oneness and the factual givenness of division.

The present paper aims to explore the resources at hand in contemporary Roman Catholic theology for handling this dilemma. After a typological survey of some theories that have been current in modern ecumenical theology, this essay will focus particularly on the positions taken by Vatican II, especially in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*) and in the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*). Our reflection on Vatican II in the light of modern ecumenical speculation will, it is hoped, provide some indications of the directions presently open to Roman Catholic theology.

## FIVE TYPES OF SOLUTION

In the ecumenical theology of the last hundred years some five types of solution, each having various subtypes, have been proposed. I shall here designate the five solutions respectively as substantialist, dualist, actualist, eschatologist, and secularist. All these solutions are worthy of consideration, because they take seriously both the necessary unity of the Church of Christ and the actual dividedness of bodies that lay claim to the Christian name. To assess the strengths and weaknesses of the solutions, we shall have to consider the ecclesiological images on which they respectively rely.

*Substantialist Approaches*

The substantialist solution may be treated first, since it has been, at least until very recently, the most familiar to Roman Catholics.<sup>1</sup> It views the Church as a patrimony bequeathed by the apostles to their successors. The Church exists wherever the essentials of this patrimony, in the order of doctrine, sacraments, and ministry, survive. The main elements of the theory are succinctly outlined by Gustave Thils in the first edition of his history of the ecumenical movement, published in 1955.

Catholic theology is unanimous in defining the Church, in the face of the separated Christians, in the following manner. Christ founded a Church. This Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. It is, under a certain aspect, a visible and historical communion. As Christ has given it the assurance of His assistance, this historical and visible communion is indefectible: it has existed substantially—in its essential constitutive elements—from its foundation until the present and it will continue to exist until the end of the world. This Church is visibly hierarchical; it is directed by the episcopate and the sovereign pontiff. Consequently, it is not possible to give theological meaning to discussions or movements which would have as their goal to “construct” or to “reconstruct” the *Una Sancta*. . . .<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As R. G. Collingwood points out, substantialism is a legacy of Greco-Roman antiquity. By substantialism he means a system constructed on the basis of a metaphysics according to which only what is unchanging is knowable and fully real. For Livy, Collingwood points out, “Rome is a substance, changeless and eternal. . . hence the origin of Rome, as he describes it, was a kind of miraculous leap into existence of the complete city as it existed at a later date. . . . Rome is described as ‘the eternal city.’ Why is Rome so called? Because people still think of Rome, as Livy thought of her: substantialistically, non-historically” (*The Idea of History* [Oxford, 1946] pp. 42–43). Ecclesiological substantialism is simply an application to the Church of the kind of thinking that Livy applied to Rome. On the effects of substantialist thinking in recent ecclesiology, see John W. O’Malley, “Reform, Historical Consciousness, and Vatican II’s *Aggiornamento*,” *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 32 (1971): 573–601, esp. 590–91.

<sup>2</sup> G. Thils, *Histoire doctrinale du mouvement œcuménique* (Louvain, 1955) p. 170.

In the same work Canon Thils finds fault with the majority of the members of the World Council of Churches for defending "a concept of the Church according to which the true Church of Christ does not exist *quoad substantiam* in a determinate historical community."<sup>3</sup>

The substantialist position admits of two subtypes, both of which have flourished within Roman Catholicism. It may be asserted in an *exclusivist* form, in which case the fact that the true Church is identical with one denomination (Roman Catholicism) is taken to imply that all other "Churches" are counterfeits or pseudo churches. They may be given the title "Churches" only in a descriptive or sociological sense, since they are external to the one true Church. This exclusivist form of the substantialist position was characteristic of Roman Catholicism, especially in its more polemical phases, until about the middle of the present century. Exclusivism is particularly prominent in the ecclesiological pronouncements of the Holy See from the middle of the nineteenth century until about 1950, when *Humani generis*, with a reference to *Mystici corporis*, affirmed that "The Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same thing."<sup>4</sup>

The other subtype of the substantialist position I call *inclusivist*. It asserts that although the Church of Christ exists fully or perfectly in one communion alone, it is found imperfectly or by participation in others, inasmuch as they too possess certain gifts or endowments that belong by right to the one true Church. This nuanced position derives from the doctrine of *vestigia ecclesiae*, which has been traced back as far as John Calvin.<sup>5</sup> After being revived in the twentieth-century ecumenical movement, this doctrine was taken into Roman Catholic theology by Yves Congar and others. Since about 1950, however, it has been customary to speak not so much of "vestiges" of the Church as of "elements," "gifts," "endowments," etc.—expressions which seem more irenic and positive.<sup>6</sup> As we shall see, the idea that there are "elements" of the true Church outside of Roman Catholicism has given rise to theories that other Christian communions may be "imperfect

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173; cf. p. 133.

<sup>4</sup> *Humani generis*, no. 44 (Denzinger-Bannwart, *Enchiridion symbolorum* [30th ed.; Freiburg, 1955] no. 2319), referring to *Mystici corporis* (ed. Sebastian Tromp; 3rd ed.; Rome, 1958) no. 13. In the America Press edition (3rd ed.; New York, 1957), which we shall follow in quoting *Mystici corporis*, the number is 17. In future references to *Mystici corporis* we shall indicate both sets of numbers thus: 13=17.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4 (1559 ed.), chap. 2, nos. 11–12.

<sup>6</sup> For an account of the modern discussion of "vestiges" and "elements" of the Church, see Thils, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–47, and the revised edition of the same work (Louvain, 1963) pp. 247–59. See also James O. McGovern, *The Church in the Churches* (Washington, D.C., 1968) pp. 84–98.

realizations" of the Church of Christ or even, in an analogous sense, "Churches."

Before leaving the substantialist position, it may be worth mentioning a variant on this, which flourished especially in Anglo-Catholicism in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Edward B. Pusey and others maintained that the Catholic Church exists in historical actuality as a tree having three branches: the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox, and the Anglican. These three branches, according to this theory, are all realizations of the one true Church, since they have preserved the apostolic deposit of faith, sacraments, and ministry. Their mutual differences are consequently regarded as unessential. This "branch theory" was rejected by Pius IX. In an 1864 letter to the English bishops, the Holy Office asserted that there is no other Catholic Church than that built upon Peter.<sup>8</sup> Since the Vatican I definitions of papal primacy and infallibility by Vatican I in 1870 and the condemnation of Anglican orders by Leo XIII in 1896, the branch theory has become difficult to maintain, but the idea that the Church consists of certain specifiable fundamentals found in more than one communion continues to appear in documents such as the Lambeth Appeal of 1920.

The substantialist approach to the ecumenical problem, while acceptable to many Anglicans and Orthodox as well as Roman Catholics, has been widely rejected by Protestant theologians, who generally prefer other categories of thought. In an extended book review of the first edition of Thils's work, Roger Mehl mounts an exceptionally powerful critique.<sup>9</sup> The substantialist ecclesiology, he believes, results in the hypostatization of the Church as a quasi-divine reality that has its security and strength in itself rather than in the Lord who judges and forgives it. Further, he charges, the Church in this theory comes to be viewed as existing for its own sake, to the detriment of its mission of service toward the world. Since the Church is treated as already complete within history, the eschatological dimension of hope is obscured. Ecumenism is harmed, because a Church which regards itself as containing the full substance of the Christian reality cannot hope to gain anything significant by association with others; it can find in the others only vestiges of its own truth and sanctity. When a Church that regards itself as a quasi-divine entity becomes a power in the

<sup>7</sup> An exposition and critique of the branch theory are given by Yves Congar in *Divided Christendom* (London, 1939) chap. 5, pp. 145-97. For further literature see A. H. Amadio, "Branch Theory of the Church," *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 2 (New York, 1967) 352.

<sup>8</sup> Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum* (32nd ed., Freiburg: Herder, 1963), no. 2888. In future references this work will be cited *DS*.

<sup>9</sup> R. Mehl, "Ecclesia quoad substantiam," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 36 (1956) 317-28.

world, the result is especially menacing. For all these reasons Mehl concludes that the substantialist mode of thought is "particularly sterile in ecclesiological and ecumenical reflection. God's relationship with his people cannot be expressed except in a living dialectic. The modern analyses of existentialist and communitarian personalism seem to us to be far more propitious instruments for theological research."<sup>10</sup>

Influenced both by Protestant criticisms and by recent advances in Catholic theology, some contemporary Roman Catholic ecclesiologists have become dissatisfied with the substantialist model. Hans Küng, for instance, holds that no one empirical Church can properly identify itself with the Church of Christ. "Is this one Church," he asks, "being fair to itself if it overlooks the fact that in some respects it is not the ecclesia but merely a *vestigium ecclesiae*, and that what is only a vestige in its own case may be fully realized in the case of other churches? To overestimate oneself in this way is surely a sign of pharisaical self-conceit, self-righteousness and impenitence."<sup>11</sup>

#### *Dualist Approaches*

The second type of solution, which I call "dualist," is influenced, at least remotely, by Hellenistic Platonism. It resolves the paradox of unity and division by distinguishing between an invisible, noumenal, or spiritual sphere, in which unity is to be found, and a visible, phenomenal, or empirical sphere, in which we experience division. There are some statements in the early Reformers that point in this direction. Calvin, in particular, has been interpreted as holding that the true Church is invisible and that the visible Church is merely an *externum subsidium fidei*.<sup>12</sup> Many liberal Protestant theologians, influenced by Kant, held that the true Church, as an inner moral unity of minds and wills, is invisible. Membership in this one, invisible Church they considered essential for salvation. The visible, institutional Church was seen by them as an external expression and support of the Church that is within the hearts of believers.

The Platonistic and Kantian dichotomy of the visible vs. the invisible has been losing ground in the twentieth century. Modern personalism, however, has tended to generate a new dichotomy of community vs. institution. Emil Brunner, while he repudiates other dualisms, falls into this dichotomy when he affirms:

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>11</sup> H. Küng, *The Church* (New York, 1968) p. 282. Küng in this passage repudiates also the "branch theory" of the Church.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4, chap. 1, nos. 1-7. Cf. E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of the Church (Dogmatics 3)* (Philadelphia, 1962) pp. 19-22.

The New Testament Ecclesia, the fellowship of Jesus Christ, is a pure communion of persons and has nothing of the character of an institution about it: it is therefore misleading to identify any single one of the historically developed churches, which are all marked by an institutional character, with the true Christian communion.<sup>13</sup>

Somewhat in the same vein, Paul Tillich makes a sharp distinction between the "Spiritual Community," which he holds to be one and undivided, and the "churches," which he sees as mutually disunited organizations. He refuses even to use the term "Church" (with a capital "C") to designate the Spiritual Community, which he takes to be hidden and invisible, though it does not exist as an entity beside the visible churches.<sup>14</sup>

In the thought of Emil Brunner and Paul Tillich, therefore, Christians are one in Jesus Christ in that they belong to a single *koinōnia*, a "pneumatic" fellowship of persons, as opposed to an organization having officers, laws, and external institutions. In this, as in the Platonistic dualism, it is possible to hold that the organizational divisions of the institutional Church are compatible with the abiding unity of the Church as a communion.

Ecclesiological dualism, at least in its Platonistic form, has found a generally unfavorable reception in the modern ecumenical movement. For instance, the Third World Conference on Faith and Order, at Lund in 1952, stated in its Report to the Churches: "We are agreed that there are not two Churches, one visible and the other invisible, but one Church which must find visible expression on earth."<sup>15</sup> The New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961 issued a classic statement on the imperative to pray and labor for that full visible unity which Christ wills for His Church on earth here and now. One may wonder, however, whether a form of Kantian dualism does not underlie the repeated statements in World Council literature that the aim of the ecumenical movement is to manifest, rather than to bring about, the oneness of Christ's Church.

The Roman magisterium, for its part, has repeatedly rejected dualistic solutions to the ecumenical problem. For example, Pius XII, in his Encyclical *Mystici corporis*, while recognizing the distinction between the social structure of the Christian community and the spiritual gifts coming from God,<sup>16</sup> rejected any separation between these two aspects:

<sup>13</sup> E. Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London, 1952) p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 3 (Chicago, 1963) pp. 162-72.

<sup>15</sup> Oliver S. Tomkins (ed.), *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order* (London, 1953) pp. 33-34.

<sup>16</sup> *Mystici corporis*, no. 61=77.

From what we have thus far written and explained, Venerable Brothers, it is clear, We think, how grievously they err who arbitrarily picture the Church as something hidden and invisible, as they also do who look upon it as a mere human institution with a certain disciplinary code and external ritual, but lacking power to communicate supernatural life.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of a Church of love (*Liebeskirche*) in contradistinction to a juridical Church (*Rechtsskirche*), according to this Encyclical, is a pernicious fallacy.<sup>18</sup> The invisible mission of the Holy Spirit and the visible commission of the apostles and their successors reinforce each other; both are given within one and the same Church.<sup>19</sup> Hence Pius XII, like Leo XIII, emphatically rejects the opinion that the true Church is invisible, intangible, or merely "pneumatological," and that consequently the various Christian communities, though differing in their profession of faith, are united by a bond that eludes the senses.<sup>20</sup>

Contemporary Catholic ecclesiology has not retracted this critique. Hans Küng, for instance, points out that it would be an evasion to split up the real Church Platonically into a visible empirical Church and an invisible ideal one. "We cannot minimize our divisions by superficial spiritualistic-dualistic solutions; we shall make them all the harder to overcome if we do not see how deep they go, if we allow unity to melt away into the invisible."<sup>21</sup>

#### *Actualist Solutions*

The third group of solutions to the ecumenical dilemma may be called "actualist." Karl Barth, especially in his early work, was a leading representative of this view. At the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Barth presented a powerful paper in which he maintained that the Church is a "living congregation which consists in the *event* by which it is *gathered* together."<sup>22</sup> In the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics* he wrote: "Even the Church is not constantly, continuously the Church of Jesus Christ, but such she is in the event of the Word of God being spoken to her and believed by her."<sup>23</sup> Applied to the problem of Christian divisions, this doctrine allows for the possibility that

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 62=78.

<sup>18</sup> "For this reason We deplore and condemn the pernicious error of those who conjure up from their fancies an imaginary Church—a kind of society that finds its origin and growth in charity—to which they somewhat contemptuously oppose another, which they call juridical" (*ibid.*, no. 63=79).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 63=79.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 14=18 (quoting *Satis cognitum*, DS 3300).

<sup>21</sup> Küng, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

<sup>22</sup> *The Universal Church in God's Design* (=Vol. 1 of *Man's Disorder and God's Design*; New York, 1949), quotation from p. 69 (italics in original).

<sup>23</sup> *Church Dogmatics* 1/1 (Edinburgh, 1936) p. 299.

true preaching may occur in an institution whose official doctrines are distorted. This Barth was willing to admit even in the case of Roman Catholicism. "In so far as even there [in the Roman Church] *evangelium pure docetur et sacramenta recte administrantur* we can and must certainly believe in the Church even within the *false Church*."<sup>24</sup> In the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, where Barth nuances this actualistic view by insisting on the necessity of ecclesiastical organization, he still finds the key to Christian reunion in the Church's openness to the actuality of Jesus Christ. If Christ's real presence were really allowed to become event instead of being simply cherished, he says, the problem of the separate existence of individual churches would be reopened far more radically than by the reciprocal confrontation of friendly or hostile "sister-Churches."<sup>25</sup>

Actualism, then, solves the dilemma of the Church and the Churches by holding that the true Church is not simply identical with any existing denomination, but that it comes into existence, momentarily and transiently, when the Holy Spirit actively transforms the local gathered community through word and sacrament.

Among the many critics of the actualist position, we may mention Lesslie Newbigin, the Bishop of the Church of South India. In his work *The Household of God*, he protests that, if we subscribe to Barth's view that the Church is exclusively event, the Church becomes a series of totally disconnected happenings. This is contrary to the biblical view, which regards the Church as a divine-human fellowship realized in a real visible community existing continuously in world history.<sup>26</sup> The personal relationship between God and man, according to Newbigin, is not to be played off against the institution. In a passage that tells against the position of Brunner as well as that of Barth he observes:

Is it not significant that the deepest, most fruitful, and most satisfying personal relationships are those in which the impersonal factors are at their maximum, in which the personal is most indissolubly connected with physical, biological and economic factors—namely in marriage and the family? And must we not assert that the attempt to isolate the personal, and to set it over against the legal and institutional, does violence to its nature? Must one not say that the attempt, in the conditions of human nature, to have a personal relation divorced from its proper impersonal context is futile? It is surely congruous with the whole nature of man that Christ, in giving us Himself, has given us a Church which is His body on earth and therefore marked by visible limits and a continuing structure, so that fellowship with Him should be by incorporation in it.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Credo* (London, 1936) p. 197 (italics in original).

<sup>25</sup> *Church Dogmatics* 4/1 (Edinburgh, 1956) p. 682.

<sup>26</sup> *The Household of God* (New York, 1954) pp. 47-58.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

*Eschatologist Approaches*

The fourth manner of solving the problem before us may be called the "eschatologist." The true Church, according to this view, exists in hope and in promise rather than in actual realization within history. No existing community or combination of communities can claim to be, even momentarily, the Church of Christ, though such communities may well be places where the Church is *coming to be* insofar as they are being continually converted to the gospel of Christ. Edmund Schlink, in the first paragraph of his celebrated address at the Lund Faith and Order Conference of 1952, gave classic expression to this point of view:

The Church is on her way between the first and second Advent of Christ. She is on her pilgrimage towards her Master who is coming again. She does not know what may yet happen to her on this pilgrimage. Yet she is certain that at the end of it stands the Master, Lord of the world, and the conqueror of every adversary. Then He will gather together all who are His, from all nations, from all lands, and from all ages, and with them He will celebrate the great Supper of the Lord. Then, after all the struggle and the strife, there will be *one* flock and *one* Shepherd.<sup>28</sup>

While Schlink's portrayal of the pilgrim Church is marked by a certain pessimism about the earthly form of the Church, his eschatological emphasis has remained a strong feature of many of the World Council documents, notably those of the Evanston Assembly of 1954. The New Delhi Conference of 1961, in its Report on Witness, explicitly connected the pilgrim status of the Church with the necessity of ongoing reformation:

A reappraisal of the patterns of church organization and institutions inherited by the younger churches must be attempted, so that outdated forms which belonged to an era that is rapidly passing away may be replaced by strong and relevant ways of evangelism. This is only one illustration, but an important one, of how the Church may become the Pilgrim Church, which goes forth boldly as Abraham did into the unknown future, not afraid to leave behind the securities of its conventional structure, glad to dwell in the tent of perpetual adaptation, looking to the city whose builder and maker is God.<sup>29</sup>

From a Roman Catholic point of view, Thomas Sartory, in a book written before Vatican II, took issue with Schlink's view as being "too evidently an escape into eschatology," a "flight into the unworldliness of

<sup>28</sup> Text in Oliver S. Tomkins (ed.), *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order* (n. 15 above) p. 151.

<sup>29</sup> W. A. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (New York, 1962) p. 90.

the Protestant faith."<sup>30</sup> "Pure eschatology," he writes, "misunderstands the conditions of the new order of salvation, and Protestantism seems to prefer taking its stand on this Old Testament prophetism."<sup>31</sup> Hans Küng takes a similar position. Far from solving the ecumenical problem, he argues, premature recourse to the consolations of eschatology can have the effect of actually perpetuating the present divisions among Christians by removing the motivation to struggle against them.<sup>32</sup>

Somewhat in the same vein, the Orthodox in their Declaration concerning Faith and Order at the Evanston Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1954) found fault with the eschatologism of the majority report. They objected:

The "perfect unity" of Christians must not be interpreted exclusively as a realization at the Second Coming of Christ. We must acknowledge that even at the present age the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church continues to breathe in the world, guiding all Christians to unity. The unity of the Church must not be understood only eschatologically, but as a present reality which is to receive its consummation in the Last Day.<sup>33</sup>

### *Secular Approaches*

The fifth approach is that of practical ecumenism. Underlying this ecumenism is an ecclesiology oriented toward action in the world. As Bonhoeffer put it, the Church is her true self only when she exists for others. "The Church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving."<sup>34</sup> In line with this approach some have held that the mutual separation of Christians in their confessional statements and sacramental worship is not ultimately decisive, that the Church is most fully realized when Christians act together, even across denominational lines, in service toward their fellow men. The best way to promote unity, according to many adherents of this school, is for Christians to work in solidarity, as though they were in fact members of a single believing community. As they grow together through collaborative efforts, the barriers of suspicion and misunderstanding will melt away. Such was the premise of Archbishop Nathan Söderblom's Life and Work Movement, according to some of its leading interpreters. The secular ecumenism of the 1960's in many of its manifestations has been similarly oriented.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Sartory, *The Oecumenical Movement and the Unity of the Church* (Westminster, Md., 1963) p. 60. The German original of this work was published in 1955.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>32</sup> Küng, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

<sup>33</sup> W. A. Visser 't Hooft (ed.), *The Evanston Report: The Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1954* (New York, 1955) p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (new ed., New York, 1967) p. 204.

Prior to Vatican Council II, Catholic commentators tended to pass a rather severe judgment on the secular irenicism of the Life and Work Movement. Not untypical is the stance of Yves Congar, expressed in 1937:

It would hardly be possible to find a more radical opposition to the teaching of the Catholic Church: it is, in fact, a completely topsy-turvy use of words. Religion is for us that which is based on unity of belief; religions are the multitudinous sects. For Life and Work on the contrary, religion "in spirit and in truth" consists in the moral attitude common to all the sects and underlying the variety of their creeds.<sup>35</sup>

This outright condemnation, as Congar himself now recognizes,<sup>36</sup> was too harsh, but it is worth quoting to illustrate some of the fears that still hover about the secular forms of ecumenism. Such ecumenism is often accused of emphasizing the horizontal or human dimension at the expense of the vertical or the divine, and of subordinating the truths of dogma to the practicalities of ethics and politics.<sup>37</sup>

These five approaches do not exhaust all the possibilities, but they are representative of some of the most significant attempts to solve the dilemma of the Church and the Churches. In each case the solution is connected with a definite ecclesiological stance. They imply five distinct types of ecclesiology, all of them worthy of serious consideration. The first ecclesiology looks at the Church primarily in terms of its societal or institutional endowments; the second adverts rather to the interior or mystical aspects of men's communion with God and with one another; the third attaches chief importance to the actual experience of God's loving forgiveness in the existential life of the congregation; the fourth accentuates the provisional and promissory character of everything given in the present life; and the fifth views the Church primarily as a healing or transforming agent in the world. We do not wish to choose between these ecclesiologies, for all of them incorporate valid insights. Any adequate solution to the ecumenical problem, we suggest, will have to respect what is sound in each of the five approaches, and to reconcile these sound elements in some harmonious

<sup>35</sup> Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom* (n. 7 above) p. 120.

<sup>36</sup> Yves Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians* (Westminster, Md., 1966) pp. 24-25.

<sup>37</sup> Thus Eugene Carson Blake, in the General Secretary's Report at the Louvain meeting of the Commission of Faith and Order, August 1971, felt constrained to observe: "At Uppsala, at Canterbury, and at Addis Ababa there have been voices reflecting a widespread fear among the constituency of the member churches of the Council alleging that in recent years it has set a new course away from traditional and essential interest in faith in God and the unity of the Church towards an over pre-occupation with ethical action programmes in the world." Text in *Ecumenical Review* 24, no. 1 (Jan. 1972) 26.

synthesis. It will also have to eliminate from any one theory whatever is irreconcilable with the valid elements in other theories.

With this introduction we may now turn to Vatican Council II, as the fullest and most recent statement of the official stance of the Catholic Church regarding both ecclesiology and ecumenism. We shall have to ask ourselves how the Council positions itself with reference to the five approaches already outlined.

#### VATICAN COUNCIL II

##### *The Substantialist Perspective: Exclusive and Inclusive Forms*

The original schema of the Constitution on the Church, drawn up by the Preparatory Commission in 1962, was rather unecumenical in tone. In line with *Mystici corporis* and *Humani generis* it denied any separation between the Church as a society and the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>38</sup> Further, it asserted that both the Church of Christ<sup>39</sup> and the Mystical Body<sup>40</sup> are identical with the Roman Catholic Church. If these assertions had been retained, Vatican II would have accepted the substantialist position in a generally exclusivist form.

Many bishops and theologians, however, keenly aware of the mentality of the present age, wished to avoid harsh formulations that would inhibit dialogue with the modern world. In particular, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, under the leadership of Cardinal Bea, pressed for revisions that would show greater respect for the Christian reality of other bodies not in union with Rome. The basic stance of Vatican II, therefore, was changed from exclusivist to inclusivist substantialism.

Vatican II does endorse a substantialist view, as appears from numerous texts. For example, *Lumen gentium*, in a revision of the schema already quoted, affirms that the unique Church of Christ, "constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church which is governed by the successor of Peter, and by the bishops in union with that successor."<sup>41</sup> The term "subsistit," substituted in 1964 for the term "est" in earlier drafts, has

<sup>38</sup> "The Church as society (*Ecclesia societas*) and the Mystical Body of Christ are not two things (*haud binae res sunt*), but only one, having a divine and a human aspect" (no. 6 of schema *De ecclesia* composed by the Preparatory Commission, dated Nov. 10, 1962).

<sup>39</sup> "Haec igitur Ecclesia, vere omnium Mater et Magistra, in hoc mundo ut societas constituta et ordinata, est Ecclesia Catholica, a Romano Pontifice et Episcopis in eius communione directa" (*ibid.*, no. 7).

<sup>40</sup> "Ecclesia Catholica Romana est Mysticum Christi Corpus" (title of no. 7).

<sup>41</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 8; in W. A. Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York, 1966) p. 23.

given rise to much discussion. In scholastic philosophy, subsistence is understood to be the mode of existence proper to a substance. A substance "subsists" in the sense that it "exists in itself," i.e., with a certain autonomy, independence, or self-sufficiency. Quite possibly the intention here is to depict the Church of Christ as a kind of substance. But more probably the term "subsist" is here taken in a less technical sense, as meaning the continued existence of anything, whatever it be, in integral form. The meaning, then, would be that the Church founded by Christ as a visible institution (*societas*) survives in Roman Catholicism in such a way that it lacks nothing essential to its constitution.<sup>42</sup>

Many other statements about the Catholic Church in the documents of Vatican II reinforce this "substantialist" position. *Unitatis redintegratio*, for instance, declares that the unity of the one and only Church "dwells (*subsistit*) in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose."<sup>43</sup> Earlier in the same Decree we read: "It is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of salvation can be obtained."<sup>44</sup> On several occasions the Council affirms, in some modified sense, the principle "extra ecclesiam nulla salus." For instance, *Lumen gentium*, art. 14, makes the strong assertion: "Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by God through Jesus Christ, would refuse to enter her or to remain in her could not be saved."<sup>45</sup> Similar statements are made in the Decree on the Missions<sup>46</sup> and in the Declaration on Religious Freedom.<sup>47</sup>

Many of these statements, taken in themselves, might be understood in an exclusivist sense, agreeing with the more polemical pronouncements of the Roman magisterium in the previous century. But throughout the documents of Vatican II runs an irenic inclusivism corresponding to the ideas developed by Catholic ecumenical leaders in the previous two decades. The substitution of the term "subsistit" for "est" in *Lumen gentium*, art. 8, is, from this point of view, highly significant. It implies that, notwithstanding the teaching of *Mystici corporis* and *Humani generis* that the Church of Christ is coextensive with the visibly organized Roman Catholic communion, Vatican II looks upon the Church of Christ as transcending Roman Catholicism. In his ex-

<sup>42</sup> Vatican II refrained from using the term "Roman Catholic," but when it spoke of the "Catholic Church" it regularly meant what in the ecumenical movement is known as the Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>43</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 4; Abbott ed., p. 348.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 3, p. 346.

<sup>45</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 14, pp. 32-33.

<sup>46</sup> *Ad gentes*, no. 7, p. 593.

<sup>47</sup> *Dignitatis humanae*, no. 1, p. 677.

planation on the Council floor, the *relator* gave as the reason for the change of wording: "so that the expression may harmonize better with the affirmation [in this same paragraph] concerning the ecclesial elements that are present elsewhere."

In numerous passages Vatican II acknowledged the presence of authentic Christian elements in the other Christian communities. In references to these elements, the term *vestigia ecclesiae*, with its pejorative connotations, is avoided. These elements are viewed as gifts or endowments of Christ and, thanks to the active presence of the Holy Spirit, as vital and life-giving. *Lumen gentium* calls them "elements of sanctification and of truth."<sup>48</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio* asserts that "some, even very many, of the most significant endowments which go together to build up and give life to the Church herself can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church."<sup>49</sup>

In two passages the Council specifies some of these elements.<sup>50</sup> They are divided into visible and invisible. Among the visible elements are Scripture as norm of belief and action, baptism, and, in the case of many separated Christian bodies, other sacraments, not excluding the episcopate and the Eucharist. Among the invisible elements are the life of grace, faith in Jesus Christ, faith in the triune God, Christian hope and charity, and the interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, who is acknowledged as being present with His sanctifying power and as strengthening these Christians, at times, even to the point of martyrdom.

The enumeration of these elements inevitably gives rise to the question to what extent these separated Christian bodies have a truly ecclesial character. These elements, as declared in *Unitatis redintegratio*, "go together to build up and give life to the Church herself";<sup>51</sup> in other words, they are by their very nature constitutive of the Church as a vital entity. The Decree goes on to draw the conclusion that these communities "have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation."<sup>52</sup> The preaching and sacramental ministry that takes place in them "can truly engender a life of grace and can rightly be described as capable of providing access to the community of salvation."<sup>53</sup> The separate communities that avail themselves of these instruments share at least something of the nature and functions of the Church of Christ.

This brings us to a more difficult question. Can Christian communi-

<sup>48</sup> *Lumen genitum*, no. 8, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 3, p. 345.

<sup>50</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 15, pp. 33-34; *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 3, pp. 345-46.

<sup>51</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 3, p. 345.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

ties not in union with Rome be called, in the proper sense of the word, "Churches"? The exclusivist substantialist theory would assert: Christ founded only one Church; this Church subsists truly in Roman Catholicism; hence no other community can be called Church. This, however, would be an oversimplification. The problem of the churchly character of the separated Christian communities is more fruitfully approached from another angle. Supported by a multitude of biblical and patristic precedents, the Council accepted the idea of the local church as having a certain primacy over the universal Church, and on this ground admitted the usage of the term "church" in the plural. *Lumen gentium*, for instance, declared that the "Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament."<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere *Lumen gentium* declares: "In and from such individual churches there comes into being the one and only Catholic Church."<sup>55</sup> Later in the same article the Mystical Body of Christ is described as "the body of the churches."

The term "local church," generally speaking, refers to the parish or diocese. This analogy is not particularly helpful when we are asking about the ecclesial status of bodies such as the Orthodox, the Lutheran, or the Anglican Church. But Vatican II also gave a certain theological status to the regional Church.

By divine Providence it has come about that the various churches established in diverse places by the apostles and their successors have in the course of time coalesced into several groups, organically united, which, preserving the unity of faith and the unique divine constitution of the universal Church, enjoy their own discipline, their own liturgical usage, and their own theological and spiritual heritage. Some of these churches, notably the ancient patriarchal churches, as parent-stocks of the faith, so to speak, have begotten others as daughter churches.<sup>56</sup>

Relying on the analogy of the ancient patriarchal Churches, the Council does not hesitate to designate the separated communities of the East by the title "Churches." In so doing Vatican II makes no innovation. It follows what some theologians regard as a venerable practice of the Holy See.<sup>57</sup> The Decree on Ecumenism, in articles 14–18, gives an

<sup>54</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 26, p. 50.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 23, p. 44.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 23, p. 46.

<sup>57</sup> See the evidence assembled by Yves Congar in two studies: *Chrétiens désunis* (Paris, 1937: 2nd [unchanged] ed., 1964) Appendix 6, pp. 381–82 (incompletely translated in the English version *Divided Christendom* [n. 7 above] pp. 294–95); "Note on the Words 'Confession,' 'Church,' and 'Communion,'" in *Dialogue between Christians*, pp. 184–213, esp. pp. 200–202.

ample theological justification for the application of the name "Church" to the separated Christian communities of the East. So far as these Churches are concerned, what is lacking is not the intrinsic ecclesial character of the communities themselves, but rather the relationship of full communion between them and the Petrine See.

More delicate is the question what title is to be given to the Christian bodies separate from Rome which have come to exist in the West since the Reformation. In the Decree on Ecumenism they are referred to by the rather cumbersome expression "the Churches and ecclesial Communities which were separated from the Apostolic See of Rome during the very serious crisis that began in the West at the end of the Middle Ages, or during later times."<sup>58</sup> The bodies here referred to are not only the Protestant Churches deriving from the sixteenth-century Reformation but also some of earlier origin, such as the Waldensians, and some of later origin, such as the Old Catholics. They are collectively referred to as "Churches and ecclesial communities" without any clarification as to which of these two terms is applicable to which bodies.

There is no reason in principle why a "Church" could not be defined as any community of faith and worship, called into being by God's word addressed to mankind in Jesus Christ. In that case there would be no occasion for distinguishing between Churches and ecclesial communities. But the Council preferred to adhere to the "substantialism" of many theologians, who insist that to qualify as a "Church" in the full theological sense of the term, a community must be apostolic in its faith, sacraments, and ministry. More specifically, it must subscribe to the orthodox faith as defined in the councils of the first five centuries; it must administer the seven sacraments recognized in both the East and West during the Middle Ages; and it must possess an apostolic ministry transmitted through an unbroken series of episcopal ordinations. That the Decree was influenced by this view of the Church seems to be apparent from the fact that the title "ecclesial communities" (not "Churches") is given to those bodies in the West which "especially because of the lack of the sacrament of orders . . . have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the Eucharistic mystery."<sup>59</sup>

Some of the Council fathers would have wished even the Protestant communities to be called "Churches" in the theological sense of the term; but the Council did not see fit to state that all such communities were Churches, both because some of them have been judged to lack the requisites of orthodoxy, the full number of sacraments, or valid

<sup>58</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 19, p. 361.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 22, p. 364.

ministry in the apostolic succession and also because some such groups, such as the Society of Friends, do not refer to themselves as Churches. Cardinal König accordingly suggested the neologism "ecclesial communities"—a term which indicates the genuine churchly character of these groups without going so far as to call them "Churches." In using the expression "ecclesiae et communitates," "the Council made it clear that among the separated communities of the West there are those which should be regarded as Churches, but left open, or referred to theologians, the question which communities were intended by this in concrete terms."<sup>60</sup> Some conservative bishops and theologians would no doubt wish to restrict the designation "Churches" to groups such as the Old Catholics; others might wish to extend it to the Church of England and to some, at least, of the mainline Protestant Churches. As Robert E. Hunt has well said, "It was not within the scope of *De Oecumenismo* to write a systematic appraisal of every known Protestant body."<sup>61</sup>

The bilateral conversations on the world and national levels which have been carried on since the Council have tended to show that Catholic theologians, on the basis of a more flexible view of apostolic succession, are taking a more positive attitude than previously toward the ministries and sacraments of Anglicans and Protestants. This development makes it dangerous to assume that, even from a substantialist perspective, such communities may not be called "Churches" in the proper sense of the word. Although the Catholic Church has not yet found it possible to accord full recognition to the priesthood and Eucharist of these communities, the eventual granting of such recognition is not out of the question.<sup>62</sup>

In this connection it is of interest that Paul VI, several times since he became pope, has used the expressions "Church of England" and "Anglican Church."<sup>63</sup> While this may be simply a gesture of courtesy,

<sup>60</sup> Johannes Feiner, "Commentary on the Decree on Ecumenism," in H. Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II 2* (New York, 1968) 77-78.

<sup>61</sup> "The Separated Christian Churches and Communities in the Mystery of Salvation," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 21 (1966) 25. For an argument that Vatican II intended to apply the concept "Church" to Protestant bodies, see Kilian McDonnell, "The Concept of 'Church' in the Documents of Vatican II as Applied to Protestant Denominations," *Worship* 44 (1970) 332-49.

<sup>62</sup> See, for example, the consensus document "Eucharist and Ministry: A Lutheran-Roman Catholic Statement," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 31 (1970) 712-34, esp. pp. 732-33.

<sup>63</sup> G. Thils, *L'Eglise et les églises* (Bruges, 1967) p. 67, gives references to three statements of Paul VI as quoted in *L'Osservatore romano*. More recently, at the canonization of the Forty English Martyrs, on Oct. 25, 1970, Paul VI declared: "There will be no seeking to lessen legitimate prestige and the worthy patrimony of piety and usage proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman Catholic Church—this humble 'Servant of the

it is quite likely, granted the extreme circumspection with which Paul VI usually chooses his words, that he intended the theological implication of these terms.

Having discussed the deficiencies of non-Catholic Christian bodies as understood by the fathers at Vatican II, we may now turn to the other side of the coin: the perfections claimed for Roman Catholicism. The Council asserts not that the Catholic Church is in every respect perfect, but that it possesses all the essential structures which pertain to the constitution of the Church of Christ. In making this claim, the Council assumes, or implies, that the papal-episcopal form of government, the distinctive trait of Roman Catholicism, is of divine institution.

The divine institution of the papacy and episcopate is indeed a cardinal tenet of Vatican Councils I and II. Vatican I explicitly asserted that Jesus Christ conferred the primacy not on Peter alone but on all Peter's successors till the end of time.<sup>64</sup> Vatican II made the same claim for the episcopate as a college. In maintaining this, *Lumen gentium* showed an awareness of the difficulty of constructing a direct argument from the New Testament, which does not indicate that the universal episcopate has a collegial status. The Council therefore used an indirect argument.<sup>65</sup> After stating first that Christ established the college of the apostles under the headship of Peter as fully authoritative in the Church, *Lumen gentium* argues that Christ intended the mission he entrusted to the apostles to endure for all future generations. From these premises the conclusion is drawn that there must always be in the Church a body of officials succeeding to the apostles. This body exists today as the episcopal college under the headship of the pope. Just as the papal office is permanent, as affirmed by Vatican I, so also is that of the bishops, among whom the pope holds primacy. The Council documents do not discuss the speculative questions whether officials other than bishops might also be successors to the apostles, or whether Christ might have made provision for an eventual change in the form of government in His Church. The assumption seems to be that the episcopal office, like the Petrine office, is destined to endure forever.

If it be granted that the papal-episcopal form of government is and

servants of God'—is able to embrace her ever beloved sister in the one authentic communion of the family of Christ." This special deference toward Anglicanism may be a reflection of the view of Vatican II that "Among those [Western separated Communions] in which some Catholic traditions and institutions continue to exist, the Anglican Communion occupies a special place" (*Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 13, p. 356).

<sup>64</sup> DS 3056-58.

<sup>65</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 20, pp. 39-40.

must always remain an essential feature of the Church of Christ, there is a sense in which one may say that the Catholic Church is institutionally more perfect than others. Other Churches possess some of the divinely given means of salvation (Scripture, sacraments, ministry); the Catholic Church possesses all these and more. To the extent that the Council accepts, fundamentally, a substantialist ecclesiology, it seems to imply that other Christian communities are inferior or even that they merely participate in the plenitude present in Roman Catholicism. Some critics have objected that such is, in fact, the teaching of Vatican II.<sup>66</sup>

The Council, however, did not go so far. While claiming a certain institutional superiority for Roman Catholicism, it did not reduce the value of other Churches to their resemblance to the Roman Catholic Church. Deliberately seeking to avoid a "triumphalist" posture, the Council conceded that Roman Catholicism is in many respects a deficient and perfectible realization of the Church of Christ, and that the other Christian communities have their own distinctive values. They have their own proper contribution to make to a reunited Christianity. In recognizing the shortcomings of the Catholic Church and the possibility of authentic Christian developments in other communions, the Council relied upon approaches other than the substantialist. It drew from insights that have arisen from the dualist, actualist, eschatologist, and secular points of view. To these aspects of the Council's ecclesiology we therefore turn our attention.

### *Dualist Perspectives*

In the preceding discussion of the elements of the Church, we took note of the fact that according to Vatican II some of these are visible, others invisible. On the visible side one may list the threefold deposit of doctrine, sacraments, and ministry. Among the invisible elements one may reckon the life of grace, the Christian virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If this distinction holds for the Christian endowments found in the other communions, we might suspect that it would apply likewise to the constitutive elements of the Catholic Church itself. In that case we should have to recognize a certain duality of the spiritual and the corporeal within the Church.

In traditional Catholic ecclesiology this duality has long been recognized. Encyclicals such as *Satis cognitum* and *Mystici corporis* affirm that the Church includes both visible hierarchical elements and in-

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., E. Schlink, *After the Council* (Philadelphia, 1968) p. 118; also the views of Lukas Vischer in *Ecumenist* 4 (1966) 38; and Jean Bosc as cited by M. Villain in "The Debate on the Decree on Ecumenism," *Concilium* 14 (Glen Rock, N.J., 1966) p. 128.

visible spiritual gifts. These documents, however, emphasize the inseparability of the two sets of endowments. According to *Mystici corporis*, the Holy Spirit "refuses to dwell with sanctifying grace in members that are wholly severed (*omnino abscissa*) from the Body."<sup>67</sup> The invisible mission of the Holy Spirit and the juridical commission of the rulers and teachers in the Church complete and reinforce each other.<sup>68</sup> Thus there is a perfect equation between the Roman Catholic Church as visibly organized society and the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>69</sup> Although a given individual may be more intensely united with the Church in one respect than in the other, still the Church under its two aspects is seen as having the same extension.

As we have already noted, the preconiliar schema *De ecclesia* would have reaffirmed the coextensiveness of the Church as a society (*ecclesia societas*) and the Mystical Body of Christ. The Council fathers, however, were not satisfied with this identification. At the first session Cardinal Liénart complained that the schema did not do justice to the mystical dimension of the Church, but reduced it too much to the juridical.<sup>70</sup> At the second session Cardinal Lercaro made a similar point:

The Church as society and as the mystical body of Christ expresses two distinct aspects, which fully and perfectly coincide as far as the essential order and constitutive norm given by Christ, the Founder, are concerned. But these two aspects can never be the same in the existential and historical order. In that order, these two aspects do not always enjoy the same fullness of extension; in fact, conflicts arise between them, and will continue to arise until the very end of human history. Then and only then will the identity and equality of the Church and the mystical body be consummated and made manifest.<sup>71</sup>

As a result of this and other interventions to the same effect, the text was modified to read:

But the society furnished with hierarchical agencies and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things. Rather they form one interlocked reality (*unam realitatem complexam*) which comprises a divine and a human element.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Mystici corporis*, no. 55 = 69.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 63 = 79.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 13 = 17. The same point is made with added insistence in *Humani generis* (Paulist Press ed.; New York, 1950) no. 44.

<sup>70</sup> Liénart's speech is summarized in *La documentation catholique*, Jan. 6, 1963, col. 39.

<sup>71</sup> Text in *Ecumenist* 2 (1964) 90.

<sup>72</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 8, p. 22 (I have slightly modified the translation in the Abbott edition).

By thus guardedly opening up the distinction between the two aspects of the Church—the human-societal and the divine-mystical—Vatican II notably modified the “substantialist” ecclesiology found in the texts thus far considered. It made approaches toward, if it did not actually endorse, the dualist point of view mentioned earlier in this paper. Regarded as Mystical Body or as a fellowship of life and grace, the Church of Christ does not precisely coincide with the Catholic Church considered as a hierarchical society. There is a real though imperfect fellowship among all Christians who share in baptism, faith, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, even though they are not members of the same hierarchically organized society. On the other hand, there is only a deficient fellowship among members of the same hierarchically organized society unless they are also fellow sharers in the grace of the Holy Spirit. From this point of view, the mutual bonds may be closer between two grace-filled Christians of different denominations than between two members of the same ecclesiastical denomination if the latter two are not both living in the grace of Christ.

Of the two dimensions of fellowship, the spiritual and the societal, the former is the more important. *Mystici corporis* explicitly declared that the social structure of the Christian community is “something inferior when compared to the spiritual gifts which give it beauty and life . . .”<sup>73</sup> According to *Lumen gentium*, the societal organization serves as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, who makes use of it in order to build up the body of Christ.<sup>74</sup> Thus we must qualify somewhat the statement made above that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church and nowhere else. For the reasons given in the previous section of this paper, it may be true to say that the Catholic Church alone preserves all the essential institutional elements. But since the Church is, more importantly, a community of grace, one cannot take it for granted that the Church under this latter aspect is necessarily realized better in Roman Catholicism than elsewhere. Roman Catholics who lack the Spirit of Christ are only imperfectly incorporated in the Church of Christ.<sup>75</sup> Conversely, non-Catholics who do live by the Holy Spirit are in a very crucial way part of the Church.<sup>76</sup> If they excel in faith, hope, and charity, they cannot be regarded as strangers to the Church of Christ even if the community in which they worship may lack some sacramental or other institutional element which the Church of Christ, by right, should have. They are in a real, though imperfect,

<sup>73</sup> *Mystici corporis*, no. 61–77.

<sup>74</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 8, p. 22, with reference to *Satis cognitum*.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 14, p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 15, pp. 33–34.

communion with Roman Catholics.<sup>77</sup> Hence we may say with Gregory Baum: “*concretely and actually* the Church of Christ may be realized less, equally, or more in a Church separated from Rome than in a Church in communion with Rome.”<sup>78</sup>

Some authors have sought to illuminate this distinction between the Church as visible society and as community of grace by building on the idea of the Church as sacrament. In the opening paragraph of *Lumen gentium* and in several other texts the Council endorsed the view, widespread in recent Catholic theology, that the Church is the universal sacrament of the redemptive grace of Christ.<sup>79</sup> As a visible institution it tangibly represents this grace. As Mystical Body it lives by the grace that it sacramentally represents.

In sacramental theology it is common to distinguish between the *sacramentum tantum* (the visible rite) and the *res sacramenti* (the life of grace normally gained by a well-disposed recipient of the sacrament). According to Scholasticism, as far back as the Middle Ages, the *res sacramenti* is not given to every recipient of the *sacramentum tantum*, nor is the physical reception of the sacrament unconditionally necessary for the reception of the grace.

These distinctions can also be applied to the Church. In accordance with the Roman Catholic understanding of institutional completeness, there is a sense in which it may be said that the Church as *sacramentum tantum* is fully present in Roman Catholicism, although in actual practice Catholics are always obliged “to purify and renew themselves so that the sign of Christ can shine more brightly on the face of the Church.”<sup>80</sup> In other Christian Churches something of the sacramental sign is always present, but this presence will be, in the Roman Catholic view, an imperfect one. Thus they are, as institutions, imperfect realizations of the sacrament of the Church.<sup>81</sup> But if we now shift our attention to the *res sacramenti*, the special privileges of Roman Catholicism are not so obvious. The life of grace will not automatically be more vigorous in a Catholic community than in some other Church.

<sup>77</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 2, p. 345.

<sup>78</sup> “The Ecclesial Reality of Other Churches,” *Concilium* 4 (Glen Rock, N.J., 1965) 82.

<sup>79</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 1, p. 15; no. 9, p. 26; no. 48, p. 79; *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 26, p. 147. Cf. DS 3869–70.

<sup>80</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 15, p. 34; *Gaudium et spes*, no. 43, p. 245.

<sup>81</sup> This view is not a peculiarly Roman Catholic one. George A. Lindbeck, writing as a Lutheran, has defended the thesis that “a Catholic Church, such as the Roman, has an ecclesiological character that makes it in important respects a fuller manifestation of the Church than are Protestant Churches” (“A Protestant View of the Ecclesiological Status of the Roman Catholic Church,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 [1964] 243).

For this assertion many reasons may be assigned: the deficiencies of Roman Catholicism in its actual historical realizations, the presence of many visible elements of Christianity outside the Catholic community, the freedom of the Holy Spirit, who is not bound to any particular means of grace, and the unpredictable variations in the responses of individuals and groups to the graces they receive. Since Vatican II recognizes these variables, its ecclesiology is not so Rome-centered as might at first appear.

### *Actualist Perspectives*

When there is question of the Church as a community of faith and love, the spotlight shifts from the universal and permanent ingredients of the Church to those which are local and actual. The Church, considered as a congregation, is most perfectly realized in the here-and-now of the local community assembled at a definite moment of history. Granted that the Church is indeed a universal society having definite legally-founded structures and offices, it is much more than this. As Rahner has written:

It cannot be denied that when the Church acts, that is, teaches, confesses the faith, prays, celebrates the Sacrifice of Christ, etc., she reaches a higher degree of actuality than she does by her mere continuing existence. She is a visible society; as really visible she must continually realize her historical, spatio-temporal tangibility through the actions of man. She must become "event" over and over again.<sup>82</sup>

The whole enduring constitution of the Church is ordered toward its becoming an actual event in concrete tangibility. This occurs most conspicuously when men are gathered in the name of Christ and together experience His gracious presence. In the communal celebration of Christ's redemptive act, the total essence of the Church is expressed and realized for a particular portion of God's people. The whole Church, as Rahner says, is completely realized in the local Church.<sup>83</sup>

Earlier in this paper reference was made to the doctrine of Vatican II that the local Church is not simply a component part of the total Church but a concrete realization of the Church's total essence. *Lumen gentium* develops its theology of the local Church in close connection with the idea that the unity of the people of God is symbolized and intensified when the Church actualizes itself in word and sacrament.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> *The Church and the Sacraments* (in the collection *Inquiries* [New York, 1964]) p. 316.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321. See also the speech of Bishop Edward Schick, "Importance of the Local Church," in H. Küng *et al.* (eds.), *Council Speeches of Vatican II* (Glen Rock, N.J., 1964) pp. 35-38.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Lumen gentium*, nos. 3, 11, and 26; pp. 16, 28, 50.

The Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, reflects the same dynamic ecclesiology. In a special sense, this Constitution teaches, the Church realizes itself through the twofold ministry of word and sacrament. "For in the liturgy God speaks to His people and Christ is still proclaiming His gospel."<sup>85</sup> "Day by day the liturgy builds up those within the Church into the Lord's holy temple, into a spiritual dwelling for God (cf. Eph 2:21-22)—an enterprise which will continue until Christ's full stature is achieved."<sup>86</sup>

It would be a mistake, of course, to divorce institution from event, or to imagine that they necessarily work against each other. The response to God's gracious word in Christ normally rests upon a certain institutional basis, for the Holy Spirit makes use of visible signs in order to bring the grace-event to pass. The more integrally and purely the objective elements of the Church are present, the more effectively the actual realization of Christian community may be expected to occur. The event of grace, conversely, tends to renew and revitalize the objective signs of grace. Word and sacrament are signs by which the inner life of the Church is expressed and humanly appropriated.

Some Protestant theologians have no doubt tended to view the Church in excessively actualist and existentialist categories, thus neglecting what makes for apostolicity, continuity, universality, order, and sacramental visibility. In this respect Newbigin's criticisms, previously set forth, are entirely sound. In the biblical view, as Heribert Mühlen remarks, the Church is never a purely spiritual event, but an event visibly linked with the incarnate life of the Son of God.<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, as Mühlen also observes, Catholic ecclesiology in the past has concentrated too narrowly on the Church as institution; it has tended to view the Church primarily in objectivist, prepersonal categories, thus overlooking the dynamic role of the Holy Spirit. If due recognition is accorded to the spiritual and personal dimensions, there is greater possibility of doing justice to the ecclesial character of communities that, in the eyes of Roman Catholic theology, are doctrinally or institutionally deficient.

When the other Christian communities are appraised solely in terms of the institutional elements that they preserve in common with Roman Catholicism, little justice can be done to the distinctive character of these communities and to all that has been "wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren."<sup>88</sup> The Christian

<sup>85</sup> *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 33, p. 149.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 2, p. 138.

<sup>87</sup> H. Mühlen, *Una mystica Persona* (3rd ed.; Paderborn, 1968) p. 512.

<sup>88</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 4, p. 349.

elements, moreover, fail to appear in that mutual connectedness which makes them constitutive of Churches or ecclesial communities. As Bishop Pangrazio remarked at the second session, with reference to a preliminary draft of the Decree on Ecumenism:

It is a good thing to list all those elements of the Church which by God's grace have been preserved in these communities and continue to produce saving effects. But to express my honest opinion, it seems to me that such a catalogue is too "quantitative," if I may use the expression. It seems that these elements have simply been piled together. I believe that a bond is needed to unite these separate elements.<sup>90</sup>

The constitutive bond of inner cohesion in the other Churches, as well as in Catholicism, is none other than the Holy Spirit, who by His saving presence integrates the elements into a living totality. If the Church by its very nature is *ekklēsia*, that is, a gathering of men in response to God's call in Christ, the essential precondition for any such community is the Spirit of truth and love. "Where the Church is, there too is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church and every grace."<sup>90</sup>

The unifying role of the Holy Spirit is of major importance for the proper understanding of ecumenism. If the various empirical Churches are assessed in terms of their institutional elements alone, or in terms of purely human factors, they might be regarded as strangers having little to do with each other. The union of Churches might then be conceived along the lines of a merger among business corporations that coalesce for purely pragmatic reasons. In fact, however, the "separated" Christian Churches are inherently bound to one another because each of them is constituted as a living community of faith and charity by the indwelling of the same Spirit who is at work in all the others. As Mühlen shows at some length, the Holy Spirit is today one person in many Churches.<sup>91</sup> The Churches are one in their underlying reality (*existential*) even though in their historically tangible expressions (*existentiell*) they are mutually divided. The uncreated Spirit of Christ, who makes each of them a vital reality in the order of grace, by His personal and dynamic presence makes them all realizations, more or less perfect, of one and the same theandric reality.

By its renewed emphasis on the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit in the local community, Vatican II has made it possible for Catholics to take a much more positive attitude toward the ecclesial character

<sup>90</sup> Küng *et al.*, *Council Speeches* (n. 83 above) p. 190.

<sup>90</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3, 24, 1 (PG 7, 966).

<sup>91</sup> H. Mühlen, *op. cit.*, pp. 494-550.

of assemblies that lack certain elements that may be viewed, in substantialist perspectives, as permanent gifts of Christ to His Church. The Church is no longer defined exclusively or even primarily as a worldwide society of men united under the authority of the pope and the bishops in communion with him. The institutional elements are seen as intrinsically ordered toward the event in which Christ is dynamically present through the Holy Spirit. The constitutive features of the Church as society are not devalued, though they are in a sense relativized. They are seen as operative and functional rather than as ends in themselves. The more perfect the institution, the more intensely the event of grace may be expected to occur; but where the communal event occurs in spite of institutional deficiencies, we must recognize that, in an important sense, the Church of Christ is truly present. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20).

### *Eschatologist Perspectives*

We have seen some reasons why Vatican II tempered its "substantialism" with ideas derived from the dualist and actualist approaches to the ecumenical problem. We may now turn to the eschatologist point of view. As we have observed, the substantialist approach tends to focus on the Church as a given, as a permanent deposit inserted into history by Christ, and consequently underplays the developmental aspects. This weakness, scarcely noticed in the static outlook of the rationalist era, has become increasingly apparent since the break-through of historical consciousness into Western civilization in the nineteenth century. Vatican II, especially in its Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*), adverted to this change of mentality and its inevitable ramifications affecting man's religious life:

Today the human race is passing through a new stage of its history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective, and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence we can already speak of a true social and cultural transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well.<sup>92</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the Roman magisterium, on guard against immanentistic evolutionism of the Modernists, insisted strongly on the conservative role of the Church—on its function to safeguard the deposit of faith and sacraments. Church unity, consequently, was understood

<sup>92</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, no. 4, p. 202; cf. no. 54, p. 260.

as the return of the other Christians to the one true fold, and an acceptance by them of the full doctrinal and institutional heritage preserved in Roman Catholicism. This was, in effect, the substantialist solution.

Vatican II, breaking sharply with the approach of *Satis cognitum* and *Mortalium animos*, shied away from asserting that Christian unity should take the form of a return to the past, or a surrender by the other Christians to Roman Catholic claims.<sup>93</sup> Rather it envisaged Church unity as progress on the part of all the Churches, including Roman Catholicism, toward a future to which God is leading His people. Ecumenical activity, says the Council, while it must be "loyal to the truth we have received from the apostles and the Fathers and in harmony with the faith which the Catholic Church has always professed," must at the same time point forward "toward that fullness of unity with which the Lord wants His body to be endowed in the course of time."<sup>94</sup>

This future-oriented ecumenism will remain mere verbalism unless the underlying ecclesiology is understood and accepted. The Church, according to this view, does not exist as a finished product. "As the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her."<sup>95</sup> Its foundations have been laid, but the building is still incomplete. According to the text from Ephesians that we have already seen cited in the Constitution on the Liturgy, the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Himself being the cornerstone."<sup>96</sup> In Him "the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place for God in the Spirit" (Eph 2:20-22). Christians, in other words, are the living stones of a temple that is still under construction (cf. 1 Pt 2:4-5; 1 Cor 3:16-17).

Shifting from the metaphor of the Temple to that of the People of God, we may rephrase the same thought in other terms. Echoing the language of Augustine, *Lumen gentium* does so eloquently:

The Church, "like a pilgrim in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God," announcing the cross and death of the Lord until He comes (cf. 1 Cor 11:26). By the power of the risen Lord, she is given strength to overcome patiently and lovingly the afflictions and hardships which assail her from within and without, and to show

<sup>93</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, in its title and in many sentences of the text, speaks of the "restoration" of unity, but the unity hoped for is not viewed as a mere replica of that which obtained in the primitive Church. Vatican II consistently avoids speaking of Roman Catholicism as the "true fold" to which the "straying sheep" must return.

<sup>94</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 24, p. 365.

<sup>95</sup> *Dei verbum*, no. 8, p. 116.

<sup>96</sup> *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 2, p. 138; cf. n. 86 above.

forth in the world the mystery of the Lord in a faithful though shadowed way, until at last it will be revealed in total splendor.<sup>97</sup>

This developmental vision of the Church comes through strongly in chapter 7 of *Lumen gentium*, entitled "The Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church and Her Union with the Heavenly Church." Here it is clearly asserted that the Church "will attain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven."<sup>98</sup> In line with this view, *Unitatis redintegratio* can combine a "substantialist" with a "processive" understanding of the unity of the Church. "This unity, we believe, dwells (*subsistit*) in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time."<sup>99</sup>

Alluding to the statement of *Unitatis redintegratio* that the Church is still "tending towards that fullness with which our Lord wants His body to be endowed in the course of time,"<sup>100</sup> Mühlen correctly infers that the Catholic Church no longer understands itself as the static center of a perfect institutional uniformity, around which the other Churches would be grouped (those having "more" elements being closest to the center), but rather it now sees itself "together with the separated Churches as still on the way to the active realization and manifestation of that incomprehensible concreteness of the historical existence of the Spirit of Christ which will be made visible only in the total course of history."<sup>101</sup>

By frankly recognizing the pilgrim state of the Church, the Council disavowed the tendency to make the Catholic Church, in any of its concrete historical realizations, the standard by which the ecclesiastical reality of all other Churches is to be measured. The Church is recognized as being reformable, and therefore always subject to judgment in the light of the gospel.

Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth. Therefore, if the influence of events or of the times has led to deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline, or even in the formulation of doctrine (which must be carefully distinguished from the deposit itself of faith), these should be appropriately rectified at the proper moment.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>97</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 8, p. 24.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 48, p. 78.

<sup>99</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 4, p. 348.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 24, p. 365.

<sup>101</sup> *Una mystica Persona*, pp. 543-44.

<sup>102</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 6, p. 350.

As indicated by the preceding quotation, the Church is reformable in two dimensions: the moral or personal dimension and the institutional or public dimension. As regards the former, Vatican II went beyond all previous official Church teaching in acknowledging the sinfulness of the Church in its members. In a speech at the second session, Bishop Stefan László of Eisenstadt, Austria, explicitly linked this with the fact that the people of God is on pilgrimage toward its eschatological goal. "If we speak of the pilgrim Church in the biblical sense . . . we say the Church is on pilgrimage because in all its difficulties and miseries this people is not without fault, not without sin."<sup>103</sup>

Since the Reformation there has been in Catholic thinking a fear that to admit sinfulness in the Church, except by way of exception, might weaken the apologetical argument based on the note of sanctity. Protestant theology has had some reason to protest that Catholicism, proceeding too much from the idea of the Church as an abstract institution, falls into a *theologia gloriae*. With its distinction between the Church as society and the Church as a community of grace, Vatican II felt free to assert, in *Lumen gentium*, that there are sinners in the Church (*in sinu ecclesiae*), who belong to it *corpore* but not *corde*.<sup>104</sup> Because of the ambiguous relationship of sinners to the Church—they are in a certain respect *outside* it—Vatican II spoke guardedly of the sinfulness of the Church as such. From his own point of view, Karl Rahner finds that the Council did not treat of this question "with the explicit clarity, intensity, and detail which one could perhaps have expected."<sup>105</sup> Yet it is clear that the Council did suggest that the Church is corporately sinful. "The Church, embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal."<sup>106</sup> Of each and every member of the Church, including the hierarchy, it may be said: "If we say we have not sinned, we make Him [Jesus] a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 Jn 1:10). According to *Unitatis redintegratio*, this holds good for sins against unity. "Thus, in humble prayer, we beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive those who trespass against us."<sup>107</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Text in Küng *et al.*, *Council Speeches*, p. 44.

<sup>104</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 14, p. 33.

<sup>105</sup> K. Rahner, "The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II," *Theological Investigations* 6 (Baltimore, 1966) 279.

<sup>106</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 8, p. 24.

<sup>107</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 7, p. 351.

Does the reformability of the Church imply the possibility that its institutions may be distorted and contrary to the gospel? Gregory Baum, in the article already referred to, might seem to be denying this possibility. "According to the Constitution [*Lumen gentium*]," he writes, "the Catholic Church is the institutionally perfect realization of the Church of Christ on earth."<sup>108</sup>

But if we take seriously the idea that the Church is still under construction, we can hardly be content to say that the Church, in its present condition, is institutionally perfect. The irreformability of the Church must be carefully restricted to the elements that are of divine institution. Of very few elements in the structure of the Church can this be certainly affirmed. Even if it be granted that the councils have not erred in holding that papacy and episcopate are permanent gifts of God to His Church, it should be evident that the concrete realizations and theological interpretations of these institutions are historically conditioned. The papal and episcopal offices have taken on different forms in the primitive Church, the patristic period, the Middle Ages, and more recent times. These developments, insofar as they are influenced by passing sociocultural conditions, may be presumed to be reversible. Hence there is very wide scope for reform in the way in which papacy and episcopate are conceived and implemented.

The line between reformable and irreformable institutions, like that between reformable and irreformable doctrines, is itself subject to constant re-evaluation. Vatican II deliberately refrained from affirming that the distinction of orders, as between episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate, is of divine origin,<sup>109</sup> even though the First Vatican Council, had it accepted Kleutgen's schema, would have affirmed that the superiority of bishops over priests is of divine right (*iure divino*).<sup>110</sup> Perhaps certain other structures, today understood as divinely ordained, may eventually be regarded as of ecclesiastical institution, and consequently as mutable. Or the very idea of divine institution may be reinterpreted to include an element of reversibility. Have we not too casually assumed that whatever God institutes He institutes for all time? Why could He not institute something that is

<sup>108</sup> Baum, *art. cit.*, p. 71; cf. p. 82. On p. 72 Baum slightly qualifies this assertion.

<sup>109</sup> *Lumen gentium*, no. 28, p. 53.

<sup>110</sup> B. Dupuy, "Is There a Dogmatic Distinction between the Function of Priests and the Function of Bishops?" *Concilium* 34 (Glen Rock, N.J., 1968) pp. 74-86. Dupuy accepts the opinion of A. Duval that Trent did not intend to give dogmatic status to the distinctions between bishops, priests, and ministers, although *DS* 966 has often been read as though it meant to affirm this.

intended to last for a given period only?<sup>111</sup> If a given structure ceases to be functional, may we not properly infer that it was not intended by God to abide forever? Perhaps there are some immutable structures, but for the modern mind this has to be proved rather than presumed.

*Gaudium et spes*, in its discussion of the contemporary mentality, called attention to the fact that men of our day can no longer accept an uncritical and magical view of the origins of social institutions.<sup>112</sup> In its treatment of the secular order, this Constitution insisted strongly on the necessity of transforming political and social institutions so as to promote the freedom and dignity of persons, and the participation of the largest possible number, with genuine freedom, in public affairs.<sup>113</sup> Because of its subject matter, *Gaudium et spes* did not deal *ex professo* with the reformation of Church structures, but in a very significant passage it did declare that the "visible and social structure" of the Church "can and ought to be enriched by human social life. . . . The reason is not that the constitution given her by Christ is defective, but so that she may . . . adjust it more successfully to our times."<sup>114</sup>

In view of the institutional reformability of the Church, we cannot accept without qualification the idea that the Church in Roman Catholicism exists in institutionally perfect form, whereas its realizations in other communions are institutionally defective. From some points of view, the institutions of Church government may have evolved more felicitously in other communions, which have been particularly vigilant to eliminate any superannuated ecclesiastical divine rightism. Thus the Catholic Church, in its program for Christian unity, does not have to demand that other religious groups accept all the developments that have historically occurred within Roman Catholicism, or even all the legitimate developments, but only those that can be shown to be irreversible. Catholic ecumenists may sympathetically study, and hope to profit from, the forms of worship and government that other Christian bodies have found conducive to Christian life and worship.

Of all the new thrusts of Vatican II, its acceptance of an eschatologically oriented view of the Church is perhaps the most pregnant of ecumenical consequences. As Walter Kasper has observed, it makes

<sup>111</sup> Some recent authors on the subject have contested Rahner's apparent opinion that developments coming about by divine ordination are always irreversible. See E. Schillebeeckx, "The Catholic Understanding of Office in the Church," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES* 30 (1969) 569.

<sup>112</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, no. 7, p. 205.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 31, p. 229.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 44, p. 246.

no great difference, theologically, whether you call the separated communities Churches or not.

Far more important is a fundamentally new theological overview of the relationship between the Church and the Churches, a view that no longer treats this relationship purely statically and juridically, but dynamically and in the perspectives of salvation history. The unity and catholicity of the Church are always and in every case still *in fieri*; they will always remain a task. The solution cannot lie either in mutual absorption or in simple integration of individual ecclesiastical communities, but only in the constant conversion of all—i.e., in the readiness to let the event of unity, already anticipated in grace and sign, occur ever and again in obedience to the one gospel as the final norm in and over the Church.<sup>115</sup>

### *Secular Perspectives*

In spite of the negative judgments previously pronounced by Catholic theologians on the Life and Work Movement, as mentioned earlier in this paper, Vatican II took a generally favorable stance toward the involvement of the Church in the sociopolitical order. The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, more than any other document of the Council, stressed that the Church must not pursue its own particular interests in isolation from the rest of mankind. On the contrary, the Church is here seen to be essentially related to the world; she “goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s family.”<sup>116</sup> The Church is said to be possessed of “a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law.”<sup>117</sup> In passages such as these the Council accepted to some extent the model of the Church as servant and healer of the total human society.

*Unitatis redintegratio* seizes upon the ecumenical implications of this ecclesiology. In an eloquent paragraph it calls upon Christians to work together in the name of Christ “to relieve the afflictions of our times, such as famine and natural disasters, illiteracy and poverty, lack of housing, and the unequal distribution of wealth.”<sup>118</sup> Such co-operation among Christians, says the Decree, “vividly expresses the bond which already unites them, and it sets in clearer relief the features of

<sup>115</sup> W. Kasper, “Der ekklesiologische Charakter der nichtkatholischen Kirchen,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 145 (1965) 62.

<sup>116</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, no. 40, p. 239.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 42, p. 241.

<sup>118</sup> *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 12, p. 355.

Christ the Servant.”<sup>119</sup> It leads to better mutual understanding and esteem, and in this way it paves the path for closer union among separated Christian groups.

Reinforcing these recommendations, the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church calls for collaboration among Christians in social and technical as well as cultural and religious projects. “Let them work together especially for the sake of Christ, their common Lord. Let His Name be the bond that unites them!”<sup>120</sup>

On Gaudete Sunday, December 1966, Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, issued a pastoral letter, “The Servant Church,” in which he reaffirmed and extended some of the ecclesiological insights of Vatican II. Building on the theme of Jesus as the Suffering Servant, Cardinal Cushing argued that, just as Jesus fulfilled His role by being “the man for others,” so the Church is called upon to be “the community for others.” “The gospel calls upon us to heal and to reconcile, to serve and to bear witness—here-and-now, in this world.”<sup>121</sup>

In many postconciliar theologies, both Protestant and Catholic, this Christian secularity is closely connected with eschatological hope. The promised kingdom of God is viewed as social in character; it is described as a kingdom of justice, freedom, peace, and fraternal love. Sincere commitment to these values, it is pointed out, drives Christians to protest against social evils such as discrimination, oppression, tyranny, and violence. Sustained by its eschatological hope, the Church has the mission and the motivation to labor confidently and perseveringly for the values of the messianic age. Freed from undue attachment to earthly security and rewards, the Christian can generously dedicate himself to this unending struggle. Fortified against the illusions of earthly utopianism, he can be soberly critical of every social order conceived or established within the limits of history. To the extent that Christians of different confessions share these fundamental convictions and concerns, they are drawn together into a community of faith and action that transcends their confessional barriers and paves the way for richer unity in faith and worship.

This growing unity through social action is not merely a theoretical conclusion from abstract premises. In the brief span of years since Vatican II it has been amply verified in experience. On the international level, the Roman Catholic Church and the member Churches of the

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 354.

<sup>120</sup> *Ad gentes*, no. 15, p. 603.

<sup>121</sup> Cardinal Cushing's pastoral letter was published in Boston by the Daughters of St. Paul, 1966. Its significance is discussed by Robert L. Richard, S.J., in *Secularization Theology* (New York, 1967) pp. 176-82, and by Richard P. McBrien in *Do We Need the Church?* (New York, 1969) pp. 75 and 216.

World Council of Churches have collaborated successfully in the exploratory Committee on Society, Development and Peace (SODEPAX). At meetings such as the Beirut Conference of April 21-27, 1968, this Committee has drawn up firm and realistic proposals for ecumenical action on behalf of the deprived peoples of the world. The resolutions of the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches (July 4-20, 1968) resoundingly approved this international and secular trend of recent ecumenism.

Within the United States some of the most vigorous streams of ecumenical activity since 1966 have flowed from common commitments to objectives such as civil rights, fair housing, and peace. Robert McAfee Brown, a prominent spokesman for this type of ecumenism, observes that many Protestants and Catholics, when they march or demonstrate together for secular goals, "sometimes feel closer to one another than they do to the uninvolved members of their respective communities back home. . . . If Martin Luther started a revolution in the sixteenth century that drove Catholics and Protestants apart, Martin Luther King, Jr., started a revolution in the twentieth century that is drawing them back together again."<sup>122</sup>

Lewis S. Mudge, in a recent study of radical developments in ecumenism, gives a number of instances in which the world, "seen as an arena in which new manifestations of humanity are bursting forth and striving with the old political and ideological powers," becomes the common ground upon which Christians are drawn together. The presence of Christ, he says, is found "at the point where Christians, under the compulsion of the gospel, find that they can become creatively involved in the world's struggles, and hence have a presence to celebrate." "The presence of Christ in the secular environment is a presence 'in, with and under' outward structures and events. It is detected not by dispassionate analysis but by personal involvement, which, with the recognition of the brother, can become eucharistic."<sup>123</sup>

Secular ecumenism is certainly not a substitute for ecumenism in the more traditional spheres of doctrine, worship, and polity. Christianity has always been, and remains, far more than a social-welfare agency or an evanescent experience of togetherness. Bernard Lonergan's reflections go far beyond any superficial cult of momentary sentiments. The Church, he points out, is not simply a body of doctrine to be believed. It is a community in which the gospel is lived and practiced;

<sup>122</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, *The Ecumenical Revolution* (rev. ed.; Garden City, 1969) pp. 407-8.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis S. Mudge, *The Crumbling Walls* (Philadelphia, 1970) pp. 88-89. Similar ideas have been expressed by Rosemary Ruether in her *The Church against Itself* (New York, 1967) chap. 8, and in her *The Radical Kingdom* (New York, 1970) pp. 158-67.

it is, in other words, a constitutive and effective, as well as a cognitive, community. "It is constitutive inasmuch as it crystallizes the hidden inner gift of love into overt Christian fellowship. It is effective inasmuch as it directs Christian service to human society to bring about the kingdom of God."<sup>124</sup>

The division between Churches, Lonergan goes on to say, resides mainly in the cognitive meaning of the Christian message. The constitutive and effective meanings are matters on which most Christians very largely agree. Ecumenically, then, it becomes important to express the kinds of agreement that do exist. This may appropriately be done "in collaboration in fulfilling the redemptive and constructive roles of the Christian church in human society."<sup>125</sup>

The successes of secular ecumenism in the past few years call attention to a dimension of the gospel that has been unduly neglected in recent centuries, as the Churches have retreated into a kind of metaphysical wilderness. By renewed dedication to the total welfare of the human family, here as well as hereafter, the Churches may be able to find both a new solidarity and a new sense of relevance, and in this way reverse the process of fragmentation and decay that has been going on in recent centuries.

By way of a concluding summary, one may say that Vatican II made great strides toward opening up Roman Catholic ecclesiology to ideas that had originated in other traditions and were previously deemed incompatible with Catholic orthodoxy. Without abandoning the "substantialism" characteristic of previous Roman pronouncements, the Council modified this substantialism in two important respects. First, it interpreted this doctrine inclusively, rather than exclusively, so as to allow that other Christian communities authentically participate in the reality of the Church of Christ. Secondly, it in many ways relativized the supremacy claimed for the Roman Catholic realization of the Christian Church. For one thing, it restricted this claim of supremacy to the institutional aspect, thus leaving open the possibility that the Church as an interpersonal community, or as a mystical sharing in the divine life, may be realized more strikingly outside the boundaries of Roman Catholicism than within them. Further, Vatican II held that the Church as a universal and abiding institution exists to foster Christian life and conduct on the personal and local level. The realization of the Church as a community of faith, worship, and service may, at least in theory, be better achieved in certain non-Catholic communities than in Roman Catholic dioceses and parishes.

<sup>124</sup> B. F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York, 1972) p. 362.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 368.

To this it may be added that, in the perspectives of Vatican II, the institutional perfection of Roman Catholicism is by no means absolute. All historical realizations of the Church are seen to be provisional and reformable with reference to the ultimate eschatological goal. While adhering to the position that there are essential and permanent structures of divine origin, the Council acknowledged the need for institutional as well as personal reform within the Catholic community. Thus the general thrust of Vatican II was to stress the solidarity between Roman Catholicism and other Christian bodies, both in faith and in service toward the total human family, and to speak less confidently of the supposedly singular privileges of the Roman Catholic Church.

Since the Council, ecumenically oriented theologians have tended to amplify the Council's concessions to nonsubstantialist positions rather than to insist on the substantialist elements that undoubtedly remain in the Council documents. Under the probing of scholarly research, Catholics are increasingly aware of the difficulty of clearly distinguishing between the substantial and the accidental of the Church. They tend to subordinate the institutional features to the mission of the Church, and to hold that a heavy burden of proof rests upon anyone who wishes to show that a given structure is immutable. Accenting the common bonds between all committed believers, many younger Christians question the importance of the distinctive features of any particular denomination. All of this puts strong pressures on academic and official theology to insist less on confessional differences and to enlarge the area of common Christian sharing.

The present fluid situation presents both an opportunity and a danger. The opportunity is that of overcoming the excessive rigidity and objectivism of the post-Tridentine period. The danger is that, by straining to make every possible concession, Catholicism might fail to make its full distinctive contribution to the Christianity of the future. This contribution, I submit, is not simply the ecclesiological substantialism of the recent past, but rather the sense that the Church is too great a mystery to be contained under any one model or conceptual scheme. Catholicism, at its best, is capable of drawing on many irreducibly distinct ecclesiological schemes and of maintaining them in dynamic equilibrium. Conceived in this way, Catholicism is not insuperably opposed to either Orthodox or Protestant Christianity. Roman Catholicism may prove capable of enriching these other Christian streams as well as of profiting from what they have to offer. The more the Roman Catholic Church is able to participate in this mutual exchange of riches, the more it may be expected to progress, in fellowship with other Christians, to the fulness Christ wills for His Church.