

CHRISTIAN MORALITY AS A MIRROR IMAGE OF THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH

The introductory section of the Constitution on the Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council has a telling sentence on the relationship between the Christian life and the mystery of the Church: "the Liturgy contributes in the fullest way to the result that the faithful express in their lives and make known to others the mystery of Christ and the true nature of the Church" (Proem. Const. de Sacra Liturgia. n.2).

This sentence, which is, so to speak, a curtain-raiser of a council that embodies the mystery of the Church is a clear pointer to the lines of development of Catholic moral theology in the post-conciliar epoch. Ecclesiology as the understanding the Church has of herself should and actually will be reflected in the concept of the Christian life. The more consciously this happens, the more fruitful will be the impact of the Council on the lives of the faithful and also on scientific moral theology, which in the last analysis must be an instrument for right living.

This paper is an attempt to sketch the general lines of Ecclesiology that emerge from the process of the Council to date. At the same time it will, parallel with this, present the basic structure of Christian morality.

I. THE ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH SEEN THROUGH THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

In his message for Pentecost 1960 the Pope of the Council spoke of his hope for a new Pentecost, and forecast the preoccupation of the Council itself with Ecclesiology, emphasizing that the Church's understanding of herself is entirely in relation to Christ, from whom she takes her origin and to whom she is ordained. It follows that this self-understanding is, root and branch, pastoral: it is directed to the blending of truth and charity in the Christian life.

After briefly noting that the Council seeks in the first place to achieve a deep understanding of doctrinal sources, John XXIII continues:

The main purpose of the earthly life of each redeemed individual, the great purpose that must be served by the efforts of every community, family, nation, the whole world and in a completely singular way by those of holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, the purpose for which the Council is to assemble is the *triumph of Jesus Christ*. If Christ, *in Whom we perform the truth in charity*, grows in us, we are on the way of true progress. The stirring words of the Apostle to the Ephesians, so profoundly mysterious, should be written over the door of the Ecumenical Council: "He (Christ) is the head, and on him the whole body depends. Bonded and knit together by every constituent joint, the whole frame grows through the due activity of every part, and builds itself up in love" (Ephes. 4,15 ss.). It is not difficult from the various phrases that make up this Pauline text to uncover the illuminating concepts that give us the beautiful and lustrous picture of the Catholic Church in the Ecumenical Council. Truth and charity, Christ the supreme head of the Mystical Body (Discorsi, messaggi, colloqui del S. Padre Giovanni XXIII, vol. 11, p. 396 ss.).

Ecclesiology is essentially Christo-centric. Only from Christ can the Church receive her mission, only in relation to Him, contemplating the mystery which is Christ and His mission, can she know herself. She cannot seek her own triumph except in seeking the victory of the love of Christ. She must live the mystery of Christ in self-annihilation, in fulfillment of her mission, in the service of love, in the praise of the Holy Trinity.

Christ gives the Church her mission with the same love with which He has been sent from the Father. By this love for man the Church must bring home the world to God, making it as it were tangible and visible in the person of Christ. Thus she must proclaim Him, and through and with Him the love of the heavenly Father: not merely in categories of thought, but with the radiance of love in truth, by her witness, her unity, her readiness to serve.

The Council strikes this note in its first message to the world.

"Faith, hope, and the love of Christ compel us to serve our brethren, and in this way to follow the example of Christ, who 'came not to be served, but to serve'" (Mtt. 20, 28). Hence the Church's birth certificate is no title to domination, but a vocation to serve. "He laid down his life for us. And in our turn we are bound to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3, 16).

Application to Moral Theology

If we are to have an ecclesiological self-consciousness that is unambiguously Christo-centric, it must be translated into terms of daily life, into our celebration of the Liturgy, into the discharge of our teaching office, into the structure of the Church's law and administration. In particular, this interconnection and mutual action is most evident in what concerns the relationship between the Church's understanding of herself and moral theology. One does not have to assume the mantle of the prophet to forecast that the deeper Christo-centric Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council will have an influence on scientific moral theology and the proclamation of the Church's moral message, that it will be impossible for it not to leave a permanent impression.

How then to present the basic structure of a Christo-centric moral theology that at the same time manifests the true nature of the Church?

(a) *Christ—"The Law and the Covenant."* Christ is the Law and in fact the most intimately vital law of the Church herself and of individual Christians.

This is no flight of any fanciful muse of modern times, but the age-old theology of the Church, supported by Holy Scripture and the Fathers, who call Christ the "Law and the Covenant." This idea has a central place admitting of no ambiguity in the theology of *Justin*. "Our hope is neither in Moses nor in the Law. Now everything is different. I mean there will be but one definitive law and one covenant surpassing all others, that God enjoins on all that wish to share His inheritance. . . . Christ has been given to us as an eternal and final law and covenant. Without Him there is neither law nor prescript nor commandment. . . . From what He did and

from the miracles He worked can everybody know that He is the new Law and the new Covenant" (Justin, *Dial.* 11, p. 6, Sp. 487-499). The Law of Moses and the Testament give way to "the Blood of the Redeemer, in which our faith finds its value. Another Covenant and another Law have gone out from Sion, Jesus Christ. . . . Let us then walk in the light of the Lord" (*Dial.* 24, p. 6, Sp. 528). "Christ the Son of God, Who was born of a Virgin according to the Will of the Father, from the line of Abraham of the stock of Juda, of the family of David, has been preached to the whole world as the eternal law, the new covenant" (cap. 43, p. 6, Sp. 568. Cf. cap. 51, p. 6, 599; cap. 65, p. 6, Sp. 625; cap. 122, p. 6, Sp. 760).

Irenaeus, like Justin, applies the Scriptural text "He has given a law in Israel" (Ps. 77,5) expressly to the person of Christ (*Contra Haer.*, lib. 111, cap. 16,3, p. 7, Sp. 923), and likewise the words of the prophet Isaias (2,3) "The law shall go out from Sion and the Word of God from Jerusalem" (*Contra Haer.*, lib. IV, cap. 34,4, p. 7, Sp. 1085 ss).

Clement of Alexandria says the same almost in the same words: "The Law of the Lord is without reproach. It brings souls to their true home. The Saviour is Himself called *Law* and *Word* (*nómos kai lógos*) for example in the kerygmatic preaching of Peter and already before that by the prophet Isaias: "The Law shall go out from Sion and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Ecl. 57, p. 9, Sp. 728). In the *Stromata* Clement speaks of the divine resemblance in the soul of the true initiate which is subject to the royal sway of faith in Christ, "Who is truly the Law, the Commandment and the eternal Word" (*Stromata*, lib. VII, cap. 3, p. 9, Sp. 421). "The great tree that shelters mountain and valley, in fact the whole earth, is the Law of God which has been delivered to the whole world. This Law is the Son of God, Who will be preached to the utmost confines of the earth" (Hermas, *Similitudo VIII*, 3,2, p. 2, Sp. 974).

These few citations from the writings of some of the most ancient and highly esteemed Fathers of the Church are enough to show how Christo-centric and personal in relation to Christ himself was considered the moral message of the early Church, completely faithful to the message of Christ himself. In this message He him-

self occupied the central place as the source of life, the way of salvation, the life-dispensing Truth. All this preserves faithfully the teaching of St. Paul who synthesizes all in the *lex Christi* (Gal. 6, 2), which is in reality nothing else than the love of Christ dwelling in us and pressing us so that we live in Christ as in the very law of our life (ennomos Xristu 1 Cor 9,21). We are the property of Christ; trusting faithfully in His name, His strength and grace, and thus driven on and led by His Spirit we discover that law of our Christian being that truly frees us.

This is precisely the line followed by John XXIII in the text he wished to see over the doors of the Council: "If Christ, in Whom we perform the truth in charity grows in us, we are on the way of true progress." This growth of Christ in us is always inseparable from the growth in charity of the Church herself, from her fullness of being in the love of Christ, "Who receives the entire fullness of God" (Eph. 1,23; cf. 4, 13).

Christ is the Covenant. Just as the law of the Old Testament was proclaimed as nothing more or less than the law of the Covenant, so is that of the New Testament to be regarded as the law of the New Covenant. However, before it extends to all men through the operation of the Holy Spirit, it finds its essential form in Christ himself. He is the New Testament in the most comprehensive way possible, ontologically and existentially. In the Word of the Father made man divinity and humanity meet in the hypostatic union. We can go so far as to call it "the hypostatic covenant," an expression that brings home its innermost form, strength and indissolubility.

The incorporation of all the redeemed and of the elect in the Mystical Body of Christ and the "growth of Christ in us" is the working out of the Covenant brought into being by Christ in person.

The same truth can be expressed in the fundamental Scriptural categories of "Word and Answer," which are to be understood completely and exclusively Christo-centrally and theocentrically, and hence completely and exclusively in terms of individual and corporate salvation.

(b) *Christ, Word and Answer.* Christ is the final and perfect Covenant. He is the Word in Whom the Father expresses himself

fully even from eternity, the Word in Whom He announces his entire love for men, that is to say, in the mystery of redemption, the Incarnation, Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. Christ himself with all his actions, words, graces, commandments, sufferings, is God's Word delivered to us. He is not a Word that lingers and dies, not a Word that remains ineffective, but the *Word* that abides forever. What is proper to the Christian moral law irradiates as a light from Him alone. Separated from Him everything is mute and dead, or at the most a word only of sound, which, if heeded, makes those who hear it inquire for the one who calls or speaks, finally for the meaning of his message. This holds of the natural moral law. This exists because all that exists through the Word. "Without Him nothing is made" (John 1,3). Only in the Word of God made man, only in Christ Jesus, does creation express its ultimate finality, and hence only in Him does the natural moral law itself find its full realization (cf. Col. 1,16: "All things are made through Him and for Him. . . . And He is the Head of His Body").

Only Christ imparts to creation the power to give the definitive answer. He himself is the answer of redeemed mankind. In Him do all things hold together (Col. 1,17); so in Him all things are united to render unto the heavenly Father the final answer of love and adoration in the clarity of the beatific vision.

Christ understood himself and His life as this answer, and this is clear from both the morning and evening prayer of that same life. He sees His human nature and its assumption in the hypostatic union as a gift from the Father, and so He expresses the meaning and purpose of His life: "Behold I come to do Thy will" (Heb. 10,7). His total oblation is His answer: "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit" (Lk. 43,46), and it is an answer given in the name of all mankind.

The purpose of the history of salvation and of the Christian life is that man should understand himself with all that belongs to him as called in Christ and that he surrender himself entirely. In that is no mere arbitrary or self-imposed decision of man himself, but it is demanded by the dynamism arising from man's creation

and renewal in the Word of God. Man comes to the understanding of himself, his nature, his destiny and his ultimate potentialities only in the measure in which he sets himself to hear and answer Christ.

Thus is man set free from the mortal disease of independence. Only in Christ and as one with Him does man come to the proper understanding of himself, to be truly himself.

(c) *The United Answer to the Rallying Call.* The Church is the true "kahal," called from the nothingness of the non-being of the people of God into its reality. As the Body of Christ it is the rallying call (ekklesia and kalein have the same etymology: call). It lives in Christ Who is God's Word to men and all creation. It delivers His Word to all, but that Word is made credible in the measure in which the Church is faithful to her call with an answer that breathes and is love itself.

It is easy to see that Catholic morality is by way of a dialogue, personal and at the same time endowed with social consciousness, a morality that seeks the salvation of the human community because it is Christo-centric and ecclesial. In this way only can it "express the mystery of Christ and the true nature of the Church in terms of living and in this way only can it reveal things to others."

These different aspects and characteristics, it is important to realize, don't merely lie side by side in an unconnected way, but are centered in Christ Who imparts to them an organic unity.

(d) "*Christ in us.*" Included in the mystery of the Church is the truth that her relation to Christ is not in any way a mere external one. She is the Body of Christ. Christ lives in her, quickening her through His Holy Spirit.

This obtains too with the life of each member of the faithful, who while he adheres to Christ only externally and is subject to Him with a merely external obedience has in no way arrived at what is proper to the New Law. The mystery of the Christian life consists in the truth expressed more than 160 times by S. Paul that Christ lives *in us* and that we live *in Christ*. The Christian life is the community of life in Christ, a community of life that before all else bears witness to the solidarity of all the members of the

Church according to the economy of salvation, which makes them zealous for the salvation of the souls of all men.

Looking at things from this essential aspect, certain important fundamental directions of Catholic moral theology become evident.

A man may find himself confronted with the challenge of a special grace or he may on account of his particular natural and supernatural gifts be able to help someone who is in need. If, however, he evades the call or inspiration of the moment because it does not arise from the general law expressed according to the letter, he does more than deprive himself of special merit. What is far more to be regretted is his refusal of Christ Who wishes to further the growth of His Body. His attitude, if it is one that is fundamental to his way of thought, is a rejection of the law of life in Christ Jesus to shelter behind the mere letter of the law.

A man who does not live in grace or who consciously postpones his conversion, does not live in the law of Christ, even when he in spite of his unbelief can point to certain works demanded by the law. If the love of Christ does not abide and work in us, nothing is, in the last analysis, of any avail. This indwelling of Christ in us is evident especially in a freedom from what is merely anthropocentric, in breaking away from an ego-centric concern for personal perfection, in a life directed by the "new commandment" of love of our neighbour.

II. PRIME IMPORTANCE OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF HERSELF

Love is not just a commandment that is annexed to the already existing structure and constitution of the Church, for the Church is herself "mystery of love." She has been conceived out of the open wound in the Heart of Jesus. As the chosen bride of Christ she lives a life that has the creative force of His love and grace. Her vital principle is the Holy Spirit sent upon her by Christ as the sign and pledge of His endless love as her Redeemer. Through the Holy Spirit the Church is assumed into that love of Christ that delivers Him back to the Father and offers Himself for all men. The Church proclaims the mystery of Christ by living according to her true

nature, giving love from the fullness of love received; so that her ultimate mission is to manifest the love of Christ, to show how He has made available for us the vivid, life-giving experience of faith that God is love.

Thus the commandment of love does not attach itself to the outer, juridical structure of the Church, for the reality is exactly the contrary. Christ founded a visible Church, with a definite constitution, with definite officials and definite offices, to give visible shape to the truth that she is His beloved Spouse who should synthesize everything in the answer of love. Whatever in the course of history has been added by the Church herself to her essential constitution, the manner in which she has implemented this constitution in her life, is subordinate to the demands and claims of her interior mission of love. Privileges, official forms, customs, laws, organization, human traditions, all these things are in the Church; but they have only that value which comes to them from their aptitude to proclaim the love of God in the witness of her life.

The spirit of the II Vatican Council under the headship of Pope John is clearly to overhaul everything in the light of this fundamental principle. Anything that hinders rather than helps the fulfillment of the great task of rendering credible to the men of our time, whatever their culture and social status, the message of the primacy of love must, for that reason, be sacrificed or altered. Any innovations must be tested by the same sound principle, and painstakingly developed.

The Church of the Word Incarnate is conscious that in this world, in this state of pilgrimage, she has need of a juridical structure, of organization, of money and so many other tangible but transitory things. They must, however, never be values in themselves. Rather must they be all the time indicated as necessary for the proclamation of the message of salvation of God's love, and for the opening of the way of salvation.

It is by no means of the least importance to accentuate what needs to be accentuated. Because the body must mirror the spirit, too great emphasis on material things obscures and diminishes almost to the vanishing point the things of the spirit. Hence the

juridical aspects, things like management and other means, in themselves of this world, can push themselves into prominence and so absorb attention that they do not proclaim the spirit of love, but hide it and to a degree betray it.

Application to Moral Theology.

One acquainted with the history of moral theology will at once appreciate how clearly there has been a change of perspective on this point. The concept of the Church of the II Vatican Council, corresponding as it does with Holy Scripture and living tradition, must be reflected in the formation of our priests in moral theology so that it might be continued in the preaching of Christian morality and take shape in the entire life of the Church.

(a) *A Problem of Synthesis.* Not only Ecclesiology but the entire field of moral theology must be presented in a synthesis at whose centre is Christ with his love, his personal gift of love, his commandment of love. It will not do to lay down in a particular treatise or maybe to say incidentally in others that love of God and of our neighbour is "the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13,10). Everywhere it must be made evident that all Christian virtues are the means and expression of the love of God and our neighbour. To be scientific and apt at the same time to form good pastors and good Christians, moral theology must be as much permeated with the mystery of love, with the primacy of love as are the writings of the Beloved Disciple or of the Apostles of the Gentiles.

It is quite impossible to present the Christian life as though it were a life dominated by the commandments given on Sinai, and then to introduce the commandment of love of God and our neighbour. Sometimes we have travelled far from the law of Sinai which was already an expression of a Covenant, a manifestation of love.

Neither is it possible, as many catechisms try to do, to treat the commandment of fraternal charity as a subdivision of the fifth commandment. If one wishes to follow the plan of the commandments, he must be careful to expound them as the expression of the love of God and of our neighbour.

It is equally out of court to treat the sacraments as indicating

a field of obligation adjacent to that of the commandments, for they are gifts and works of Christ and His love, meaningful signs of salvation, challenges for us to grow in Christ. In systematic moral theology the sacraments must occupy a place that demonstrates that, given the primacy of charity, there are no three different fields of moral obligations, but that rather the love of God in Jesus Christ pervades everything. This love is basically not an obligation but a gift, a gift that in the most pressing way possible compels acceptance.

(b) *A Problem of Balance.* When one concentrates on casuistry on a juridical plane without the guiding light of love, it is of little help to preface it or add a postscript to the effect that love is the primal consideration and moulds the entire Christian life. If, for example, the prohibition to eat meat on Friday is emphasized merely in its material content without reference to its significance for Christian mortification and through this its significance for the love and worship of God, and if this emphasis on the letter of the law prevails over that given to the daily opportunities to love our neighbour, one who follows such a course, as before him the one who expounds it, will regard love of our neighbour as merely one of a series of obligations that include that of Friday abstinence and so many others.

We have only to think of the stock accusations: "I eat meat on Friday; I did servile work on Sunday" to see the results of this misplacing of accent. The large army of the scrupulous with their fixations on minute points of law, on rubrics, on taboo-like questions concerning validity, so that they are oblivious to the good news of God's love, represent the innumerable Christians for whom an amazing shift of emphasis has concealed the true nature of the Church.

If the Church of the II Vatican Council considers it necessary to simplify the Church's laws and to enliven everything with a sense of the primacy of charity, it does not mean there will be any loss of reverence for law or of the spirit of obedience. But these things will be effective in Christian living on condition that moral theology and the preaching of the moral law follow the direction forecast by the Council. No person of insight will deny that there is still much to be done precisely here.

III. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In his closing words of blessing to the community—to the “Church”—of Corinth the Apostle of the Gentiles alludes in a Christo-centric context to the primacy of love along with the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. “The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (2 Cor. 13,14). Only in living faith in the Holy Spirit and in loving obedience to him can the Church give testimony in her life to the mystery of Christ, and through the primacy of love bring men to the belief that the Son of God made man has endowed her with the very power of love with which he has been sent by the heavenly Father.

The image of the Church of the II Vatican Council bears the impress of the words of Pius XII: “As Christ is the head of the Church so is the Holy Spirit her soul” (*Mystici Corporis*, AAS 10, 1943, 220). The Holy Spirit does not merely abide in the Church as in his dwelling place; he operates in her that she might become the fullness of the Body of Christ. Only through his grace are the faithful a holy fellowship in Jesus Christ. “You are no longer aliens in a foreign land, but fellow-citizens with God’s people, members of God’s household. You are built upon the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the foundation-stone. In him the whole building is bonded together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you too are being built with the rest into a dwelling for God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2, 19-22).

The II Vatican Council will deal a death blow to any idea of the Church that would make her primarily consist in an external organization divided into officials and subjects.—Of course, in the Church authority and obedience must continue to be held in honor, but it must be honor of a higher, spiritual kind.—The definitive view of the Church is the theological one: in her entirety, in her office-bearers, in her states of life, she is the working of the Holy Spirit, as classically expressed in the epistle to the Ephesians (ch. 4) and that to the Corinthians (ch. 12). Every order, rank, function is at the service of the building up of the Body of Christ in a mysterious unity, which is ultimately the grace of the Holy Spirit. The truth

of faith that gifts of grace are "the work of one and the same Spirit, distributing them separately to each individual at will" (1 Cor. 12,11) the Spirit in Whom "we were all brought into one Body by baptism" (1 Cor. 12,13), is the most compelling motive for each Christian to fulfill his proper vocation in unity, in fidelity, in readiness to serve the Mystical Body: "One Body, One Spirit, as there is also one hope held out in God's call to you" (Eph. 4,4).

The modern world, especially in the totalitarian regimes, puts all its hopes in penal institutions, endeavouring to reduce all to a dead level of uniformity, but the Church knows her own differing facets, fruit of the Spirit who builds her to unity in her multiple forms and variety. Thus the universal episcopate under the successor of Peter and with him sees the rich and multiple variety of the renewed Liturgy, the endeavour to achieve a pastoral that is at the one time unified and varified, and the originality of the lay apostolate.

In faith and in trust in the Holy Spirit, who is the bond of unity and peace, the Church overcomes temptations, that are unnatural to her, to look for the bond of unity in such things as the *vinculum iuridicum*, imposed uniformity, latinization, a centralization irreconcilable with the principle of subsidiarity. Joy in belief and joyous obedience in faith are fruits of the Holy Spirit, so that the Church is able to achieve a greater harmony of unity in variety and variety in unity according to their prevalence. Not to risk this variety in unity betrays a sinister lack of faith in the mystery of the Holy Spirit, which is witnessed by the entire structure of the Church.

Application to Christian Moral Theology

The glad tidings of Gospel morality must be given in such a way as to be a true witnessing to the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit," not only in sermons and catechetical instructions, to which corresponds its being pieced into life, but also in its scientific exposition. It must be made clear that the law of Christ is a law of true freedom while it is a law of solidarity: that the laws of the Church spring from the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus and call for an understanding and fulfillment that is spiritual; that the love and

fellowship of the Holy Spirit must display themselves in a responsible acceptance of the individual gifts of God and in ordaining them to the spiritual building up of the community.

(a) *True Freedom in the Holy Spirit.* In the same context the Apostle of the Gentiles speaks of the "law of the Spirit" freeing us from the law of sin, and of the "freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8,21). We are bound by absolute and child-like obedience to the workings of the Holy Spirit: "They who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God" (Rom. 8,14).

Catholic moral theology must not endeavour to diminish the tension or, to put it better, the "contrast in harmony" between solidarity and the spirit of initiative to the detriment of one or the other. The virtue of *epikeia* must be given once again its traditional place in relation to the observance of a positive law. If we remove the concept of *epikeia* from the narrow region of individualistic and self-centered thinking, we can do this without danger. *Epikēia* is a virtue in a law-giver and superior who is unwilling to insist on trifles, and who will not and cannot suppress spontaneity and the spirit of initiative for the common good. It is a virtue that the ecclesiastical law-giver and superior should show in an outstanding way. Where he lacks a virtue so necessary even for a purely earthly community, he betrays his role as a witness for the Church in her capacity as a rich community of fellowship in the Holy Spirit, as a community of confirmed and courageous Christians. No less guilty of a betrayal is the subject for whom *epikeia* means nothing more than an appeal to his own comfort and egotism, that shows he is not a man led by the Spirit.

The emphasis on individual salvation of the last century sought as a compensation in endowing the law with an inflexibility so stringent that sometimes a purely positive law obtained an absolute character even when confronted with the claims of the law inscribed by God in the spirit and the heart and with those of the call of the hour—the *kairós*. Such a development has its own logic: he who is absorbed with the problem of individual salvation has no good use for freedom or *epikeia*. Where, however, the spirit of Christian freedom and joyous responsibility is not stifled by legal trivialities

and distrust, the entire Christian life is founded on the "law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus." That means courageous freedom and a total emancipation from self-seeking—the true freedom of the "fellowship in the Holy Spirit."

For the Church's positive laws to be animated by obedience we must not seek to ground them in metaphysics. Rather must we put in stronger relief the difference between positive laws and the valid demands of man's metaphysical essence. The Church's positive laws are truly "spiritual"—i.e., in the spirit and for the law of the spirit—in so far as they express a sensitivity to the "signs of the time." Evidently they cannot contradict the nature of man, but that is not enough. They must be faithful to the workings of God in history of salvation, they must seize the opportunities of the time.

In a time when there is a powerful breakthrough in the course of history, the Church's legislation must be venturesome. Without foolhardiness or impudence, she must use the human means offered by divine providence to understand the signs of the time. Not only is she the community of the Holy Spirit with a humble, loving sensitivity to the spirit of the times: she is also the Church of the Word Incarnate, which dares not leave unused any human means for the salvation of souls. Moral theology will not degenerate into a sort of *spiritualism* by a prudent and courageous use of psychology and sociology for her proper purposes.

(b) *Ecclesial and at the Same Time Existential*. The moral theology of John Michael Sailer, John Baptist Hirscher, and Magnua Jocham was displaced after the middle of the last century in Germany by that type of manual which at first blush seemed more ecclesiastical than the works of these three great innovators of a spiritually conceived moral teaching. Today it is only too clear that the ecclesiastical character of the canonical type of moral manual was far too external and narrow. Morality was almost entirely reduced to the categories of legal obedience.

The profounder ecclesiology already powerfully proclaimed in the Encyclical—*Mystici Corporis*—and which was to reach its culminating point in the II Vatican Council goes back to Sailer, Hirscher, and Jocham, and beyond them. Christian morality is

ecclesial in the sense that it is totally ordained to the mystery of salvation which is the Church.

Reacting against collectivism our times have been shocked into proclaiming the uniqueness of each individual. They are vocal in their claim for the existential. It is easy for this spirit of today to degenerate into individualism, but it is by no means inevitable. The decisive factor is that each individual must reveal and make use of his innate qualities for the sake of enriching the community. The sense of belonging to a community—the *ecclesial*—should express itself in obedience to the common laws, but also in the region of individual or existential ethics. The Holy Spirit who endows each with His gifts does so that everyone with all he is and has might contribute to the building up of life of the Mystical Body.

A most important problem for moral theology and moral pedagogy is how to blend into an organic and profound unity the diverse categories of *community* and *individual*. In the pastoral field the same problem recurs in trying to achieve a synthesis between the common apostolate and the spontaneous consent given by an individual to the chances, providentially offered him, of serving the Kingdom of God. Such a desired synthesis emerges from the correct view of the Christian life as "fellowship in the Holy Spirit."

IV. THE CHURCH OF THE WORD INCARNATE

Emphasis on a "pneumatic" Ecclesiology in no way implies a tendency to a spiritualism concerned only with the salvation of an invisible soul or relegating it to a separate department. In the opening address of Pope John the II Vatican Council proclaimed the Church of the Word Incarnate. She is a Church that takes seriously the spiritual nature of man, that listens to the spirit of the times, with the purpose of strengthening and purifying everything pregnant with vital possibilities. Already Pius XI and Pius XII have brought a new enthusiasm to the vision of the Church and her task—the mystery of the Incarnation not just as a past salvific event, but as something present, the Church's endeavours to preach the event of human salvation, not only in so many propositions, but by piecing the Gospel into the world of today, in all its cultural

and social structures (cf. B. Haring, Tradition und Anpassung im Lichte des Geheimnisses der Inkarnation, in: *Kirche und Überlieferung* (Festschrift für Rupert Geiselmann) Freiburg 1960, p. 253-262).

Application to Moral Theology.

Of moral theology it can be said of course that it has always come to grips with reality. A prudence dealing with the real and concrete has always been taught, and there has always been the concern to make moral goodness a reality. However the question remains whether there was a real feeling or understanding of the fundamental mystery of salvation.

(a) *The Shape of Prudence in the Context of the Historical Reality of Salvation.* Natural or philosophical ethics which has been hastily baptized conceives prudence mainly as something concerning the self-perfection of the individual. What seems to get the first importance is human planning. When we conceive prudence from the viewpoint of the Church as the mystery of salvation we see it at once as theocentric, as pieced into the history of salvation and as concerned with salvation in the communal or social sense. The prudential judgment must be applied to the kairos, which God, the Lord of the history of salvation, has prepared for the purpose of piecing the resources of the new age into the substance of history. Once more it is a question of seeing existential categories in continuity with history. Thus existential ethics becomes something no longer arbitrary, abruptly breaking away from the stream of things, but something that seizes opportunities often slight in themselves, but offering a chance that will not recur to be built into the general scheme of the history of salvation.

(b) *Presence of the Church in Every Sphere.* The presence of the official Church in medieval and modern politics or in the ecclesiastical state as a political force, sometimes mixed up in hurly burly of politics, has produced no good fruits. Today she would be present everywhere in life, but as a leaven, as the salt that shows its virtue by being dissolved or the light that illuminates by being consumed. In all her activity the Church fulfills the challenging call that comes from the Incarnation of the Divine Word, Who

"emptied Himself" (Phil. 2,7). The splendour of the Paschal Mystery does not even begin to shine amongst Christians if their work is not a witness to the Mystery of the Incarnation.

Contemporary moral theology must continue to work out the promising theses of a "Theology of Earthly Realities" (cf. G. Thils, *Theologie der irdischen Dinge*, Salzburg, 1955; *Theologie et realite sociale*, Tournai, 1952): in a way though that will testify to the mystery of the Incarnation better than the *Devotio Moderna* and its successors. (cf. Thils, *Transcendance et Incarnation: deux psychologies spirituelles*, Louvain, 1950).

(c) *The Natural Law Within the Law of Christ*. Catholics today are prepared to collaborate in a far-reaching way with all men of good will. Since that is so, the "natural moral law" understood as the sum of those moral norms necessarily engrafted in man's being and, in their fundamental principles at least, knowable to human reason, has a role of the highest importance. There is here a bridge. If Christians in their task of collaboration are not to lose their grip of this, their original inheritance, it is incumbent on moral theology to work strenuously at the task of showing the integration of this natural law into the law of Christ. But in this there should not be even the least appearance of a collapse in the natural law, which must itself be contemplated as essentially Christo-centric. "The whole universe has been created through Him and for Him. And He exists before everything, and all things are held together in Him" (Col. 1,16 ss.).

The incredible notion that the moral teaching of the New Testament adds nothing to the contents of the natural law keeps on coming up in the heads of many (even of Catholic theologians): all it does is to add a new motive. Radically this is a worse error than that of Pelagius, who verbally said the same thing. However, he had another concept of nature, which he conceived historically, and as ordained to Christ from the very beginning. Hence for him the unique character of the New Law was obscured, but not the Christo-centric character of the Christian morals as a whole.

If what is new in Christian morality is merely the motive, so that it is attached to the morality of the natural law without any

content proper to itself, everything is dominated by the merely natural. What is "supernatural" in such morality is a poor and foreign kind of reality, another story unreally added to the merely natural building of Christian morals. Such a position is, of course, based on that legal concept of moral theology that considers moral doctrine a matter of assigning certain limits, so that a moral imperative does not result from the being of things but from set formulations. For New Testament morality the decisive evaluating point is that of "being in Christ," which betokens a new fulness of being over and above what is in the concept of pure nature, a mighty fulness of being that embraces the whole man; for the whole man, by the power of grace, is in Christ Jesus. This essential and personal view of the matter corresponds to a further characteristic of Christian morality, which is not to be understood from the standpoint of the morality of set limits, but decisively from those commandments that show the goal toward which we have to strive continuously. These latter, however, have a new fulness through our *being in Christ*. In the New Commandment what is truly new is the *norm and the motive*: "As I have loved you" (John 15,12).

V. THE CHURCH IN HER FINAL AND INTERMEDIATE STATE

The Church of the fulness of time must proclaim to the world in the joy of salvation: "The time has come; the kingdom of God is upon you" (Mk. 1,15). In her life with the grace that teaches her to make use of the *kairós*, the hour of the present, she must give testimony that she is entirely and utterly ordained "to the happy fulfillment of our hopes when the splendour of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus will appear" (Tit. 2,13). By detachment from all transient forms and lust for worldly prestige must she give testimony that "the whole frame of this world is passing away" (1 Cor. 7,31). She professes her faith in the ever present resources of the Kingdom of God in her patient work and ever renewed attempts to christianize the world, but also her hope for "the new Heaven and the new earth" which will become a reality only with the return of the Lord.

The Church of the fulness of time realizes her union with the

Church of the heavenly Jerusalem, with which she blends her hymn of praise. This fact however must be a warning against any kind of "triumphalism," for she is attuned as the Church of pilgrimage, as the Church of the in-between state of the time of penance. This aspect of the Church's image is of great significance for the dialogue with separated Christians.

Consequences for Moral Theology.

The entire Christian life must express and testify to this essentially eschatological direction of the Church, and thus express and bear witness to the Mystery of Christ. In this we have the necessary prerequisites to overcome effectively the laicization of Christianity, materialism, and the break away of a false existentialism.

(a) *The Law of Continuous Conversion.* The Christian life is immersed in the fruitful tension between what has already been effected and what is not yet. The Christian is not satisfied with himself even in the "new creation." What today is called "triumphalism" is of a kind with Pharisaism, with the attitude that regards neither the reality before us nor what God has assigned us. Both ways, we get a smug self-satisfaction.

The Christian life demands both magnanimity and humility: it is a joyous assent to the full law of Christ, and at the same time a submission to the judgment, which is not a source of depression for anyone who strives humbly and with magnanimity.

(b) *Commandments Concerning the Goal and Those Defining Limits.* The commandment "be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" is one that corresponds to our sanctification in the unre-served following of Christ. We can, at least in an incipient way, do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven, because the love of God is poured forth in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. But still on earth we always have to pray for God to help us to do His will in this way. The commandment to love God and our neighbour fully is one which expresses the fulness of salvation at the end of time: but by the same token the precepts that are concerned with defining limits are those proper to the "not yet", proper to the time in-between.

The true image of the Church and a deeper understanding of the Church of the end of time can and should be worked out in the correct placing of accent on these types of commandments in their relative importance, those that concern the goal and those concerned with a universal and immediate fulfillment (those defining limits).

VI. THE CHURCH OF THE HIGH PRIEST

The Constitution on the Liturgy and that concerned with the mystery of the Church are inevitably centered round the mystery of the priesthood of Christ. From this does the Church derive her life and in it is she ordained to the glorification of God in a way that is free from all false glorification of self. The Mystery of Redemption is one that takes place in the Mystery of Faith, the Holy Eucharist, and the other sacraments, and also in the life of the faithful. Through Redemption man is delivered from a barren self-centeredness to glorify God. As the family of God, the community of salvation, as a worshipping and believing community through her faith, her common hope, her love in Christ Jesus, the Church should direct everything to glorifying God.

Application to Moral Theology

Our times are threatened with laicism and a philosophy of life concerned only with this world. Hence moral theology and all the Church's preaching must with undeviating consistency make it clear to man that his highest end is to honour God, to recover the sense of adoration and immerse himself therein. Only then will he understand once again what sin really is.

(a) *The Sacramental Structure of the Entire Christian Life.* Admitting that "the Liturgy contributes in the fullest possible way to the end that the faithful express in their lives and make known to others the mystery of Christ and the nature of the Church," it follows at once that it must have a central place in moral theology. It does not do to introduce the sacraments and the eucharistic sacrifice as betokening a new region of obligations added to the commandments, and as indicating so many subsidiary helps to fulfilling duties that can be understood without reference to them. In

every treatise, the sacraments must have an explicit place.

(b) *The Sacraments as Signs of the Church*. The sacramental economy was drastically distorted by the recent fashion of considering the sacraments only as "means of grace" or "means of salvation" and hardly anything else. They are personal encounters with Christ Who speaks to us and Whom we answer, Who gives Himself and to Whom we surrender.¹ They are the expression of the indissoluble communion in the order of salvation between Christ and the Church. Above all, the sacraments are acts of worship, in which God glorifies His own saving Justice, His Mercy. Through them Christ sanctifies man, raising them to the level of His own priestly activity.

The sacramental life is an actual event of salvation, ordained to that final act in the history of the World, when Christ delivers all things to the Father, "that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15,28).

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¹ For a development of this point, see my book *Gabe und Auftrag der Sakraments*, Salzburg, 1962.