

RESPONSE TO PROFESSOR TAVARD—I

To have heard from George Tavard his insightful assessment of some of today's ecclesiological trends and his suggestions about what constitutes an ecclesiology which is "Catholic" has been, as expected, a rewarding experience. For two decades now, especially from 1954 to 1974, Tavard has enriched Catholic theology by summarizing past views but most of all by shaping future trends, all the while serving for younger theologians as a paradigm because of his assiduous, productive dedication. In his CTSA paper he has effectively caught the mood of chapter 1 of *Lumen gentium*, namely that ecclesiology's focal point is "de ecclesiae mysterio." He invites us to reflect on the Church with that same awe that Paul experienced on the road to Damascus, when, according to Acts 9:4ff., he perceived a mysterious identity between Christ and his Church, a relationship expressed in other places as that between God and the *templum Dei*. We are grateful for Tavard's warning us again about the dangers of narcissistic ecclesiocentrism. His stress on the divine initiative opts for a pneumatic emphasis that would make our ecclesiology more apophatic and thus more acceptable to the Orthodox Church and more sensitive perhaps to charismatic renewal in the Church. His approach helps overcome pessimism that occurs when the Church is falsely described in quasi-political terms (as, for example, in René Laurentin's recent *Réorientations de l'Église après le troisième synode*).¹ Tavard often is criticizing what I would call "confessionology" rather than the best of ecclesiology and in doing so he touches interestingly upon several critical issues against which Henri de Lubac warned in his now famous address at St. Louis University, May 29, 1969, on "The Church in Today's Crisis."²

In his historical section Tavard has shown how different models have shaped the *tractatus de ecclesia*, once Christian communions had reached a level of formal consciousness on the Church as a distinct entity of revelation. His reference to James of Viterbo and Juan

¹(Paris: Seuil, 1972).

²Revised text in French in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 91 (1969), 580-96. Original English text in *Theology Digest* 17 (1969), 312-25.

Torquemada could have been expanded to reflect the views also of John of Paris, Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockam (as recently suggested by John Ryan in the *Ecumenist*).³ Using the same method, one could reach behind the fourteenth century into the earlier centuries before formal treatises on the Church were written, but where still reflection on the Church was present. Here we are not thinking so much of the five helpful models that Avery Dulles has recently suggested as operative today in the Christian churches,⁴ but of five historical models from church history.⁵ In the patristic period a predominant model is that of the Church as *mysterium* (a model closely allied to Tavad's sympathies). After the Constantinian turning point, the Church appeared partly as *imperium* into the early medieval period. Other models dominated reflection on the Church, such as in the sixteenth century in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Church was the *institutio salvifica reformanda*; throughout much of the nineteenth century the model emerging is that of Church as *societas fidelium*. Perhaps in our own day the most useful model (although one not totally safe from the hazards mentioned) is that of Church as *sacramentum seu signum missionis*. Even though some of these living models are not developed in formal treatises of ecclesiology, our stock-taking of ecclesiology needs to remember them.

Tavad stressed with reason that from the viewpoint of faith the history of the Church cannot be simply a "chronique scandaleuse."⁶ Rather it is an unfolding of the *pleroma* at work in the Church through the power of the risen Lord. If I understand correctly the second section of his paper, he answers the question "Is there a Catholic ecclesiology?" affirmatively and points to five characteristics: (1) ecclesiology for a Catholic theologian is a superfluous branch of theology which ideally serves only an ancillary function of encouraging reflection on

³"Who Guards the City?" *The Ecumenist* 12 (1974), 21-7.

⁴*Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974).

⁵On this development cf. Heinrich Fries, "Wandel des Kirchenbilds und dogmengeschichtliche Entfaltung," in *Mysterium Salutis*, ed. by J. Feiner and M. Löhrer, Band IV/1, *Das Heilsgeschehen in der Gemeinde* (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1972), pp. 223-85.

⁶Karl Rahner, "The Church of Sinners," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 267.

the central aspect of revelation, the mystery of God's self-communication in Christ; (2) Catholic ecclesiology finds its justification not in orthopractical critique of government or polity but rather in the articulation of orthodox trinitarian belief; (3) Catholic ecclesiology is eschatological in that it is a reflection on the vertical relationship of the people of God in its direct rapport with the *eschaton* already present in its midst; (4) Catholic ecclesiology is characterized by a "descending" approach stressing the transcendent activity of Christ over against the "ascending" response of the community. (Here Tavad objects to the description of the Church as *ecclesia justa et peccatrix*.) (5) Catholic ecclesiology finally is catholic in that it reflects not only on the cosmos itself but is an ecumenical reflection on the meaning of other Christian communities and other religions especially Judaism and Islam.

GENERAL REACTIONS

While appreciative of the suggestive dimensions of his paper, I am led to ask whether in the end Tavad has answered the question whether there exists a specifically Catholic ecclesiology. As I read his description, I am led to conclude that what he describes are the broad lines of a healthy ecclesiology, traits which should appear within any of the major Church confessions, Lutheran, Orthodox, Anglican or Free Church. Indeed there are frequent points of contact between his suggestions and various ecclesiological statements published by the World Council of Churches. To describe a healthy ecclesiology is useful but ultimately it leaves the other question about Catholic ecclesiology unanswered ("Catholic," I say, granting its applicability to Orthodox and Anglican ecclesiology where the Church views almost coincide with our own).

To answer the more specific question a Catholic would want, I think, to add three distinctively Catholic dimensions: (a) Catholic ecclesiology is characterized by a dialectical balancing between Church understood as *local* congregation and Church as *world-wide* international community. Only from this perspective can we understand the importance given in Catholic theology to such issues as bishops' pastoral office and the symbolic place of the Petrine ministry. Such an ecclesiology will want to stress the need for local churches sharing with one

another, especially through their bishops, in *koinonia*. (b) Catholic ecclesiology is markedly *sacramental* in the sense that it turns to its worship and liturgical piety for understanding what indeed is the nature of the Church and in giving that action more formal expression.⁷ (c) Finally, Catholic ecclesiology is marked by a concern for the permanent charismatic structure of the Church, so that self-understanding grows out of understanding continuing charisms: prayerfulness, Christian parenthood, virginity, evangelical simplicity of life-style, leadership roles and other charisms. The fact that these three characteristics (except for the understanding of the Petrine ministry) are present in Anglican and Orthodox thought only confirms what Vatican II said about the special relationship of Constantinople and Canterbury to Rome in regards to belief and polity.

Having stated these three characteristics of Catholic ecclesiology, we would like to go back now over some specific issues in Tavad's paper and show where we would place other accents or would interpret data somewhat differently even within the context of a healthy ecclesiology in general.

SPECIFIC REACTIONS

Reservations that I feel toward Tavad's description of the state of ecclesiology are clustered about three concepts: *Heilsgeschichte*, *pleroma* and mission.

A. *Heilsgeschichte*. Tavad asserts straightforwardly, "with the older tradition" he says, that "*Heilsgeschichte* as such ended with the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord." "The events of our times are not *heilsgeschichtlich*." If by that he means that one must resist the temptation of assigning to present or future events the same status one would give to the *ephaphax* events of Christ's life, death and resurrection, then the point is well taken. Or, if by his critique of *Heilsgeschichte*, he registers a demurrer about the pretentious claim to be able to identify salvation-historical significance in ambiguous happenings of the now, then I agree. (After all, reading the "signs of the times" as a

⁷On this aspect, cf. Gustave Martelet, "De la sacramentalité propre à l'Eglise," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 95 (1973), 25-42.

Christian is not like reading the morning newspaper.) But using the concept of *Heilsgeschichte* does not necessarily imply claiming to know the meaning of history, nor recognizing an imagined logical plan in the chaos of historical events. My reservation with Tavad's distance from the technica of "salvation history" finds support I feel in the recent instructive book prepared at Tübingen under the direction of Jürgen Moltmann by Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, *Heilsgeschichte zwischen Ideologie und Prophetie (Profiles and Critique of Heilsgeschichte Theories in the Ecumenical Movement from 1948 to 1968)*,⁸ which traces the development of the concept from its initial popularization by the German Protestant J. C. von Hofmann (1810-77) to its use in official documents of the World Council of Churches and Vatican II, and in theologians such as William Temple, Leonard Hodgson and Oscar Cullmann. Müller-Fahrenholz argues that the apocalyptic-wisdom structure of salvation-history theology does not need to justify itself by means of organic or evolutionary theories (theories which as Tavad hints, correctly I think, are latent in *Gaudium et spes*) but can be justified in the context of a doxological confession relating to God's action in history. Thus I would be hesitant to reject the notion of an ongoing *heilsgeschichtlich* dimension, because it provides a convenient way to indicate that God's salvific act begun in time is brought to completion within the historic processes of human activity. And I would venture to say that a *heilsgeschichtlich* approach is the most patient method of explaining the action of the Spirit in the Church today. Christian liturgy, a *memoria passionis et resurrectionis*, also underscores the belief in Christ's Spirit operating now, provided only that his grace is not limited by human obtuseness.

B. *Pleroma*. Secondly, in relation to Tavad's use of *pleroma* (Christ's and ours) I have some misgivings. His presentation of the *pleroma* within the Church seems to me not to allow sufficiently for the ongoing growth dimension of the Church.⁹ The Church appears in his

⁸(Freiburg-Vienna: Herder, 1974), esp. pp. 221-33.

⁹On *pleroma* see P. Benoit, "Corps, tête et plérôme dans les Epîtres de la Captivité," *Revue Biblique* 63 (1956), 5-44; also in *Exégèse et Théologie*, vol. 2, pp. 107-53. Also R. Schnackenburg, "Church and Parousia," in *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*, ed. by H. Vorgrimler (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), pp. 91-134.

description as too fixed. Thus I find ambiguous his statement that "The Church is God's *pleroma* in indefectible fidelity to the uncreated *Pleroma* of the Word." For even within the perspective of Ephesians and Colossians, one would have to say that the cosmic dimensions of the Church are not yet achieved and that individual Christians "complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24). His presentation could perhaps have placed more emphasis on that fact that "we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4:15, cf. Eph 3:19). The riches of divinity conferred on Christ for the Church can flow into the Church only to the extent that they are accepted in faith and love by the disciples. As Heribert Mühlen has shown, this *pleroma* is the body of Christ seeped through with the Holy in so far as the Body grows through Christ and builds itself up in love, i.e., precisely through the Spirit at work within it.¹⁰ The developmental nature of the Church seems to be what the Epistle to the Hebrews says about the Church as the pilgrim people of God who has not yet entered into its "rest" (Heb 4:8ff.) but seeking "the city which is to come" (Heb 13:14), a point expressed in *Lumen gentium* (No. 5) where it is stated that the Church "slowly grows (*paulatim increscit*)."¹¹ Tavad's description of the Church might be complemented along the lines of what Leonardo Boff described in his *Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung*, where Boff writes that the Church is not only a mystery, but also the history in which its mystery is developed. In other words, one needs to affirm, as Boff suggests, that Church is both *mysterium sacramenti* (with reference to the mysterious, the divine, the unfathomable) and *sacramentum mysterii* (with consequent stress on the visible, the tangible, the historical).¹¹ The Church, fruit of salvation, is not only a function of Christ, but as a means of salvation is also a function for the

¹⁰H. Mühlen, *Una Mystica Persona*, 2nd rev. ed. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1967), p. 161 (no.6.40); French translation, *L'Esprit dans l'Eglise*, vol. 1 (of two vols.) (Paris: Cerf, 1969), p. 225. For a digest of the main theses of this book, see the article by S. J. Kilian, "The Holy Spirit in Christ and Christians," *American Benedictine Review* 20 (1969), 99-121. See also on this, Cl. Dagens, "L'Esprit Saint et l'Eglise," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 96 (1974), 225-45.

¹¹*Die Kirche als Sakrament im Horizont der Welterfahrung. Versuch einer Legitimation und einer strukturfunktionalistischen Grundlegung der Kirche im Anschluss an das II. Vatikanische Konzil* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1972), pp. 67ff.

world, and needs to manifest by its own epiphany how it is that means of salvation.

C. *Mission*. This leads to our last point by raising a question about the concept of mission contained in this address. Precisely because it bears a mission to assist believer and unbeliever to be open toward divine grace, the Church needs to be sensitive to the possibility that indeed it may not appear what it is in fact. Whereas Tavad speaks disapprovingly of what he sees behind *Gaudium et spes*, a "fear that it may be possible for the Church to live outside of the world, for orthodoxy to be dysfunctional," I would say that this is no blind fear but the recognition of a sober fact, and that this justifiable fear lies at the root for concern about orthopraxis, even "orthostructure." In this regard, Karl Rahner writes about this double dimension of the Church:

For the Church is at least in part the means of salvation precisely in so far as she is the believing and confessing community, constituted by the predetermining power of God's grace, of those who glory in the triumphant grace of God's divinising and forgiving self-communication to mankind and who with missionary zeal as "God's co-workers" in the service of grace move men precisely through this confession of faith to accept divine grace.¹²

It would be unfortunate if verbal infelicities in Gutiérrez's book or the often frenetic tone of liberation theology were to distract us from the correctness of what it says about the Church's need to signify in its internal structures the very salvation which it announces. Because of its role as witness and because of its mission, the Church needs therefore to pioneer in justice, peace and liberation; it must be concerned for reforms of structures, international economic structures, demographic structures, social structures. Orthodoxy may be a dead letter in the same sense that one may be *corpore* a member of the Church without being *corde* in the Church (*Lumen gentium*, No. 14). For this reason I do not share Tavad's hesitancy about descriptions of the Church as *simul justa et peccatrix*. The long tradition of confessing the Church as *casta-meretrix*, foreshadowed in the Old Testament, touched upon in

¹²K. Rahner, "The Church and the Parousia of Christ," *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), p. 305.

the New Testament, but especially obvious in patristic writings, as H. U. von Balthasar¹³ among others has shown, retains special pertinence.

To be sure, George Tavad's second thoughts about some of contemporary Catholic ecclesiology touches a resonant chord which echoes notes sounded by Ratzinger and von Balthasar, namely that ecclesiologists often talk so much about structural reform that they fail to articulate the basic Christian hierarchy of belief in God as creator, sanctifier and illuminator within the Church. In a friendly caveat occasioned by a recent book on ecclesiology, Avery Dulles has written that one must never lose sight of the mystery of the Church behind any call for structural remakings.¹⁴ In all of this, we agree. But we cannot separate the continuity that the risen Lord guarantees by his Spirit from the continuity that we lend to the Church in history, through Word, Ministry and Sacrament. By concentrating on one aspect alone, we may be preaching the Church as something literally incredible because we have failed to ask whether our present gestures and structures mirror its interior nature.

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¹³*Sponsa Verbi*, Band II (Einsiedeln: Benzinger, 1961), pp. 203-305.

¹⁴A. Dulles, review of R. McBrien, *The Remaking of the Church*, in *America* 129 (November 10, 1973), 358ff.