

## SEMINAR ON THE LOCAL CHURCH

### THE MEANING AND NATURE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

An inquiry into the meaning, nature and function of the local church enables the theologian to raise penetrating and profound questions concerning the meaning, nature and function of the Church as such. Yet one must note at once with a kind of wonderment that traditional Roman Catholic ecclesiology hardly touched on the question in the modern era preceding Ecumenical Council Vatican II.

Just to take one example, the famous Jesuit ecclesologist, Joachim Salaverri, in his "De Ecclesia Christi," *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, co-authored with Michael Nicolau, S.J.,<sup>1</sup> wrote a rather long *articulus* (pp. 601-21) on the bishops as successors of the apostles, but no theology of the local church at all. His silence on the question is interesting and revelatory.

Michael Schmaus, the great lover of the Church, on the other hand, has devoted two of his five-volume *Dogma* series to the Church: Volume Four: *The Church*, and Volume Five: *The Church as Sacrament*. Though one finds an entire chapter in volume four, "The One Church and the Many Churches" (pp. 88-104), dealing, at least indirectly, with the subject matter, the fact must be underscored that even here one finds more a treatment of the ecclesiality of the separated churches than a theology of the local church as such. This very fact seems to indicate that the question of the theology of the local church has two dimensions thereto: an ecumenical meaning of the term applicable to the different Christian communities, and the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of the term applicable within the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> These two dimensions are neither completely separable nor totally identifiable, but have to be studied together in order to gain deeper insights into the nature and function of the local church. I propose, therefore, that we study, first, the emergence of the problem in Roman Catholic theology during and after Vatican II as well as in the history of Christianity. The role of the laity in the life of the local church and the local church as an important center of communication and control will be important segments of this dimension. The second part of our study will center on the ecumenical aspect of the theology of the local church by closely scrutinizing developments in Protestant and Orthodox theologies as important contributions to the basic theological understanding of the meaning, nature and function of the local church.

<sup>1</sup>Madrid, 1962.

<sup>2</sup>One finds the combination of the two in Orthodox Churches.

## I. CATHOLIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH IN THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II AND IN POST-VATICAN II THEOLOGY

Although the Council makes it clear that "among all the nations of the earth there is but one people of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of heavenly and not an earthly nature,"<sup>3</sup> this one people of God is made up of "local churches"<sup>4</sup> and "particular churches"<sup>5</sup> that could be considered as "portions" or individual peoples of the one People of God. Therefore, "within the Church particular Churches hold a rightful place. These Churches retain their own traditions without in any way lessening the primacy of the Chair of Peter."<sup>6</sup> And, the document goes on to state, "in and from such individual churches there comes into being the one and only Catholic Church."<sup>7</sup>

What are, then, these "local" and "particular" churches?—This question already implies a further twofold question: How does the Council actually describe or define these "local" and "particular" churches? And, why does the Council use the two terms "local" and "particular" in the way it does? Let us deal with these two questions step by step!

### *Basic Texts of Vatican II*

#### (1) *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)*, No. 41 states:

The bishop is to be considered the high priest of his flock. In a certain sense it is from him that the faithful who are under his care derive and maintain their life in Christ.

Therefore all should hold in very high esteem the liturgical life of the diocese which centers around the bishop, especially in his cathedral church. Let them be persuaded that the Church reveals herself most clearly when a full complement of God's holy people, united in prayer and in common liturgical service (especially the Eucharist), exercise a thorough and active participation at the very altar where the bishop presides in the company of his priests and other assistants.<sup>8</sup>

There are four elements clearly present in this text connoting something important about the meaning, nature and function of the local church.

(a) A local church has something to do with a group of people gathered for and "united in" prayer and common liturgical service. The celebration of the Eucharist is especially singled out though it does not

<sup>3</sup>LG, No. 13; Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, No. 23, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, No. 13, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, No. 23, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup>Abbott, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

necessarily take place at each gathering. The reference thereto is in parentheses.

(b) The united gathering is not a reference to a mere physical presence. It requires a "thorough and active participation" in prayer and in a common liturgical service.

(c) This prayerful gathering takes place around the altar, where the bishop presides over the celebration in the company of priests and other assistants.

(d) The Apostolic See is never referred to in the above text, as Emmanuel Lanne very aptly remarks.<sup>9</sup> To quote him: "From the theological viewpoint it [Rome] is never mentioned as being the centre of communion in the liturgical action. Everything seems to depend upon the local community's celebration with the bishop as the principal manifestation of the Church. When the constitution deals with the role of the See of Rome, it is always in the practical context of promoting and regulating liturgical reform (as in Nos. 22, 44, 45, 63, etc.). One might even add that Rome's role is there presented as being of the order of law, of jurisdiction, and never of the order of a theology of apostolicity and catholicity."<sup>10</sup>

(2) *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen gentium), No. 26*

This Constitution, being a profound dogmatic statement on the nature of the Church, completes the vision of the local church present in germinal form in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. The following deeply theological text characterizes rather clearly the relationship of the local or particular church and the universal Church.

A bishop, marked with the fullness of the sacrament of orders, is "the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood," especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered, and by which the Church constantly lives and grows. This 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. For in their own locality these are the new people called by God, in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness (cf. 1 Th 1:5). In them the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's Supper is celebrated, "that by the flesh and blood of the Lord's body the whole brotherhood may be joined together."

In any community existing around the altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, there is manifested a symbol of the charity and "unity of the Mystical Body, without which there can be no salvation." In these communities, though frequently small and poor, or living far from any other, Christ is present. By virtue of Him the one, holy catholic, and apostolic Church gathers together.<sup>11</sup>

By adding the theological dimension to the liturgical reflection present in the previous text, this citation delineates the following new elements in the understanding of the meaning, nature and function of the local or particular church.

<sup>9</sup>"The Local Church: Its Catholicity and Apostolicity," *One in Christ* 6 (1970), 298.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Abbott, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

(a) The local community is not just *any* gathering of interested people. It has to be a legitimate local congregation of the faithful. Though the term "legitimate" may be and actually is a source of confusion, the fact that the text sets the New Testament churches as the exemplar of a legitimate local congregation, indicates clearly that one has to return to biblical times in order to discover the true nature of a Christian community as the legitimate gathering of the faithful.

(b) In addition to the celebration of the Eucharist, the preaching of the Word of God is mentioned explicitly as constitutive of the very nature of the local church. One may, therefore, conjecture that these two elements are so essential to the local church that jointly or even separately, they would represent a powerful enough force to gel the local community into a sacramental gathering of the people of God. Though this understanding of the local church is helpful even to the Catholic concept of the local church, it is incomparably more important to those non-Catholic Christian communities, where the celebration of the Word of God seems to play an overwhelming and overarching role in the gatherings of the faithful.

(c) Though the ministry of the bishop is singled out in the text as also constitutive of the meaning, nature and function of the local or particular church, his actual presiding over celebrations is nowhere explicitly mentioned. The fact that he either offers the Eucharist or causes it to be offered seems to take care of his role.

(d) The local or particular Churches are a symbol of the charity and unity of the Mystical Body, operating in the Holy Spirit and revealing the fullness of the same Body. In this capacity, they are the here and now gatherings of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, its concrete sacramental actualization and manifestation, and the authentic bearers and primary disclosers of the *notae* of the Church.

(e) The interesting reference to communities, frequently small and poor, or living far from any other, seems to fit better a parish Eucharistic gathering than the larger diocesan community. Yet its mention in such a basic text on the local or particular church indicates either a great desire of the Council fathers for a better and more vital integrating of the parishes into the life of the diocesan local church, or their intention to create city-dioceses as local churches in which the working relationship of bishop and faithful would be a better expression of the New Testament churches.

(3) *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegratio), No. 15*

"Hence, through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches the Church of God is built up and grows in stature."<sup>12</sup> Though this statement is made in the context of the Orthodox churches, and as such connotes more a regional than a diocesan concept of the local or particular church, it goes without saying that its applicability to Catholic churches is also self-evident. For it deals with the process

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358.

of sanctification which always takes place and is realized within every local church.<sup>13</sup> The phrase, the Church of God "is built up and grows in stature" appears as full of meaning and significance. For as Lanne remarks, the text does not speak here only of the mere manifestation of the (universal) Church of God, its subsistence (*vere inest*) and activity in the local or particular church, but of the universal Church's real edification and growth in and through the local churches. And it is noteworthy and even paradoxical to some extent to note that the statement is made a propos of the Orthodox Churches that are not even in canonical union with the Roman Church. How much more significant is then the statement when it is read in reference to the local churches within the Roman Catholic Church! It points out the fact that the universal Church's actual growth in sanctification cannot even be talked about without first admitting to the primacy of the entire process on the level of the concrete, existential local churches.

(4) *Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church (Christus Dominus), No. 11*

A diocese is that portion of God's people which is entrusted to a bishop to be shepherded by him with the cooperation of the presbytery. Adhering thus to its pastor and gathered together by him in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, this portion constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and operative.<sup>14</sup>

Two comments are due here concerning this important conciliar text. First, it has to be noted that the term "particular church" is introduced here in reference to the diocese. This question of proper terminology will be dealt with below.

The second point is much harder to take. It implies that the diocese is a portion of God's people, the universal Church. The usage of this term is certainly not in harmony with the theological texts studied so far in other documents of the Council. But it is at least understandable, provided that the reader bears in mind its canonical connotation signifying the fact that the text deals more with episcopal jurisdiction than with the theological understanding of the diocese. And, as Lanne remarks, canonical definition was "the intention of the decree and its drafters."<sup>15</sup>

*Theological Opinions Generated by the Conciliar Texts*

After Vatican II, great interest has developed in the theology of the local church. For the sake of a concise presentation, some interesting conclusions of four theologians will be introduced here, for all the four

<sup>13</sup> Particularly, if one reads this short text in the light of No. 41 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 26 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, and No. 11 of the Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church.

<sup>14</sup> Abbott, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

have drawn practically on the texts presented in this paper. They are: Emmanuel Lanne,<sup>16</sup> J. Pintard,<sup>17</sup> Henri de Lubac,<sup>18</sup> and René Beupère.<sup>19</sup>

While Beupère simply concludes that "the local church is the gathering of believers in Christ around a bishop who is their guide and leader and from whom they receive the Word and the Sacrament,"<sup>20</sup> Lanne's conclusion is much more colorful and significant, though it had been made about seven years ahead of Beupère's writing. He sets new perspectives for Catholic ecclesiology by stressing the point that Vatican II's new ecclesiological vision is "centered on the local or particular Church as a manifestation of the Church, as the place where the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is present and active, and where it lives, builds itself up and increases."<sup>21</sup> All these terms are important, for jointly they indicate that the universal Church is not only present and active in the function and operation of the local church; it also lives and subsists in the local churches. As a matter of fact, Lanne even claims that, in Vatican II, the local church seems to have become "very much the center of reference of the Church's life and manifestation as catholic and apostolic."<sup>22</sup>

To prove his point further, Lanne considers other possible local communities and asks the question whether they, too, can, "in themselves and theologically" manifest the catholic and apostolic Church in their gatherings. And while he readily recognizes *some* representation of the universal Church on the part of entities smaller than the diocese—parishes, families, professional or sociological communities, etc.—as indicated by some texts of Vatican II, he refuses to recognize such a content in communities *above* the local, diocesan level. "For the doctrine of collegiality and the entities in which it is expressed (synods, patriarchates, episcopal conferences and even the ecumenical council) do not appear *in themselves and theologically* to manifest the catholic and apostolic Church any more than does the local community in its eucharistic celebration."<sup>23</sup>

Lanne draws this conclusion on the ground that the texts of Vatican II offer no statement at all to the contrary. All these communities, be they smaller or larger than the diocese, reveal the universal Church only "in relation to the local or particular, hierarchically constituted, Church." Then he sums up his theological insights into the texts of Vatican II in the following pregnant statement:

<sup>16</sup>"The Local Church: Its Catholicity and Apostolicity," *One in Christ* 6 (1970), 288-314.

<sup>17</sup>"L'Église locale comme lieu de divinisation," *Esprit et Vie* 81 (1971), 385-94.

<sup>18</sup>Henri De Lubac, *Les églises particulières dans l'Église universelle* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1971).

<sup>19</sup>"The term 'local church' in the Ecumenical Context," in *In Each Place: Towards a Fellowship of Local Churches Truly United* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977).

<sup>20</sup>*In Each Place*, p. 40.

<sup>21</sup>*One in Christ*, p. 312.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 313.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 312.

The latter [the diocese], then, seems to be the centre of ecclesiological reference, especially in the proclamation of the Word and in the celebration of the sacraments; it is in virtue of it, in short, that the Church manifests itself as catholic and apostolic. This aspect of Vatican II's ecclesiology does not seem to us to have been sufficiently noticed hitherto, for it is something so new for us. Of course, the texts must not be made to say more than they actually contain; but there does seem to be a consensus on the fundamental points, which gives us the right to speak of a really new perspective.<sup>24</sup>

This sacramental consideration is carried even further by J. Pinard, who calls the local church a "lieu de divinisation."<sup>25</sup> Commenting on the famous No. 26 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, he asks whether the Church can really be present *in* a place, *in* the midst of a gathered community. This is a question similar to that of St. Thomas raised in reference to the presence of Christ's body in the Eucharist. And the answer also seems to be borrowed from St. Thomas, namely, that as Christ's body is present wherever is found its sign, the consecrated bread and wine, the Church is present wherever there is found "a legitimate local congregation of the faithful." The Church is found around the diverse altars not as in diverse places, but "*sicut in sacramento*."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the local church is not only a sign of the universal Church, it is also the sacrament of the unique church ("mais comme un sacrament de l'unique Église"). As a sign, it makes us think of what it signifies, as a sacrament, it also makes present the Church that it signifies.

Though Henri de Lubac's views on the meaning, nature and function of the local or particular church will be examined shortly in connection with the proper terminology to be used, it will suffice here to consider another dimension of the local community by stressing the community's involvement in the world. After asserting clearly that fidelity to the Lord must be maintained at all cost, de Lubac warns those of us who want to learn more about the local or particular churches, not to be satisfied with abstract notions and not to yearn for the tranquillity of past times. A Faulhaber of Munich, a Von Gallen of Munster, an Ignatius of Antioch, a Cyprian of Carthage or an Augustine of Hippo did not take refuge in the tranquillity of their cathedrals. Each of them, in his own milieu, preached or wrote to their contemporaries according to the demands of their times and also in fidelity to the primary truths and to the historical facts of Christianity. This duty falls on the local or particular church, especially on its bishop, even today. To neglect faithfulness to either would inflict infidelity on the local or particular church.<sup>27</sup>

We may now conclude from the preceding reflections and text analyses that though the Vatican II documents cast different shades of meaning of the local community, the most fundamental and traditionally outstanding meaning of the local or particular church refers to the diocese. It is the diocese that, in Roman Catholic theology, can properly

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Esprit et Vie*, p. 386.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>27</sup> De Lubac, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.

be called local or particular church. However, some ambiguity in the terminology itself requires a further inquiry and distinction.

## II. LOCAL OR PARTICULAR CHURCH?

An attentive reader of the documents of Vatican II is puzzled by the fact that the reality called diocese is not referred to by the Council Fathers in a consistent pattern. Most often it is called "particular church," though there are instances where the term "local church" connotes exactly the same reality in the conciliar texts.

Henri de Lubac has dealt with this problem in his book *Les églises particulières dans l'Église universelle*.<sup>28</sup> Some of his thoughts deserve consideration here, because they seem to deepen the meaning of the theological reality under investigation, and because he claims that, regardless of the long history of the problem (which actually goes back to St. Ignatius of Antioch) and the unsettled status of the question in Vatican II, more theological precision is needed today to enhance further ecclesiological developments.

After a rather thorough analysis of the two terms as they are found both in the history of the Church and the documents of Vatican II, De Lubac claims that the proper terminology intended for the diocese by Vatican II is "particular church." He readily admits that a survey of twentieth-century theologians and Vatican II commentators shows that they are far from being unanimous, for some of them favor "particular" while others show a preference for "local," and still others use both as if they were synonymous. In turning to the documents themselves, De Lubac finds there a tendency toward using the two terms to signify two different realities:<sup>29</sup> the diocese as a particular church and other churches that are properly local churches.

Of the two, the particular church is the more fundamental unit, because it is a theological reality which mirrors the relationship of the one Church and the many churches. In this regard, De Lubac echoes Lanne's theological understanding of the diocese, referred to above. And De Lubac states unequivocally that "the particular church as such is not determined either by topography or by any other factor that pertains to the natural or human order. It is determined by 'the mystery of the faith.'" We can say in one word that its criterion is essentially of the theological order.<sup>30</sup>

If one is tempted to object to such a strong statement concerning the nature of particular churches, one must bear in mind that De Lubac does not deny the many other factors that characterize the solidarity of those who form the particular community. He only claims that the faith factor has repercussions on all other factors and enjoys a tremendous priority over them.

<sup>28</sup>(Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1971).

<sup>29</sup>Cf. pp. 29-42 and Nos. 23 and 27 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church; Nos. 11 and 23 of the Decree on the Bishops' Office in the Church; No. 20 of the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity; and No. 14 of the Decree on Ecumenism.

<sup>30</sup>De Lubac, *op. cit.*, p. 44.



The situation is different with the churches properly called "local" by the Council. Though the theological reality is also important in their formation, factors of the socio-cultural order play the major role in their structure and orientation. The Council speaks in this regard of theological investigations to be stirred up "in each major socio-cultural area" for appropriating certain elements of the philosophy and wisdom of these people.<sup>31</sup>

This basic difference between particular and local churches is also indicated, at least in the abstract, by a twofold movement operating between them and the universal Church. A particular church is always, by its very nature, universalist and centripetal in its orientation, being not only an administrative unit but also the here-and-now actualization of the universal Church. To stress this point, De Lubac remarks, some of the Council Fathers over-reacted, in their zeal for theological clarity, to the term "diocese," and wanted to ban it from ecclesiastical language for the simple reason that in its origin it was a political concept, borrowed from the ancient "dioceses" of the Roman Empire. Evidently, they wanted to give expression to that mutual interiority which exists between each particular church and the universal Church, characteristic of the Pauline churches in the New Testament and witnessed to by both St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, De Lubac perceives in virtue of this mutual interiority a radical correlation between particular churches and the universal Church. The former are not just, quantitatively speaking, parts of the latter; they are, in virtue of their own existence, the Church itself. And, *vice versa*, the universal Church is not just the federation of particular churches; it is the one People of God, blessed with organic and mystic unity "not because it is composed of numerous particular churches, but because each particular community is nothing else, on its own, but a particular form of the presence of this *unique* People of God."<sup>33</sup> This mutuality and radical correlation is adequately symbolized by the bishop of the particular community, who, as the link between the particular and the universal community and the representation of the interior mutuality, is at the same time the representative of both, claiming temporal priority to neither of the two representations.

The local churches, on the other hand, while certainly operating as universalist and centripetal forces in virtue of the particular churches they are composed of, also represent some centrifugal forces due to the socio-cultural elements present in their structure. It is exactly these socio-cultural elements that differentiate one local church from another and give each its character and genius. These centrifugal forces can, however, be turned into a positive asset for the universal Church, enabling it to absorb whatever is valuable in the great cultures of humanity and to eliminate uniformity as detrimental to both the creative spirit of the people and the proper understanding of history. As No. 22 of the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity states it so eloquently,

<sup>31</sup> Cf. No. 22 of the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity; Abbott, p. 612.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. De Lubac, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

Thus, in imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young Churches . . . take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Ps 2:8). From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator. . . .

Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek for understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these people. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. . . .

Particular traditions, together with the individual patrimony of each family of nations, can be illumined by the light of the gospel, and then be taken up into Catholic unity.<sup>34</sup>

To round out this notion of the local church, it should be noted that in Reformation theology this concept has been given a slightly different dimension in the idea of "a fellowship of local churches." Though a separate paper has been prepared on this issue, anticipating a few ideas here will help us to pinpoint the exact meaning of 'local' in regard to the Church.

Leslie Newbigin, recognizing that "local" refers to the "place" where the Church is, goes beyond the mere physical dimension of the adjective, and claims that the Church's place is "in the fabric of human society." Instead of just situating the Church "on the surface of the globe," one has to understand it as "the Church for that place, and the meaning of the preposition 'for' is determined christologically; that is to say, it is determined by what Jesus Christ has done, is doing and will do with and for the world as its author, redeemer and consummator."

If it is not determined Christologically, two opposite dangers might affect its life. Either the Church does not speak to the people of its "place" by using the language, worship and style of another "place," or it "may be so conformed to the 'place' that it simply echoes and confirms the interests of its members and does not communicate to them the sovereign judgment and mercy of God."<sup>35</sup> Then, he draws the following conclusion:

Thus on the one hand, the local Church is not truly the Church if it merely confirms for the people of that place what they already are. The Lord whom it worships and confesses is Lord of all, and therefore its life must embody a catholicity which calls in question the lifestyle of that place. This means . . . that each local congregation must be knit by bonds of mutual recognition and mutual responsibility with the Church in all places and all ages. And, on the other hand, these bonds must not be so interpreted that—in the name of catholicity—the life-style of another place or time is imposed upon the local congregation as a condition of recognition. True catholicity will not deny but will confirm a proper particularity in the life-style of each local Church.<sup>36</sup>

### CONCLUSION

From the many possible conclusions just a few should be presented here to lead the reader to still deeper understanding and reflection.

<sup>34</sup> Abbott, *op. cit.*, pp. 612-13.

<sup>35</sup> *In Each Place*, pp. 17 and 20.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

(1) One can hardly expect at this time of history that the proposed change in terminology will be universally accepted or even looked upon favorably. Yet the advisability of such a change is evident. "Particular church" and "local church" should not be used interchangeably since they do not connote exactly the same ecclesial realities. Furthermore, the term "particular church" is as ancient as theological reflection in Roman Catholic and Orthodox context. It also distinguishes clearly the traditional diocesan churches as theological realities from the historically established local churches as well as from the local churches of the ecumenical movement.

But even if there is no change in terminology, the theological content of the diocese as a particular church must be borne in mind by all those who deal therewith either theologically or administratively. Only in this way can new consciousness be created in regard to the theological content of particular churches.

But at this age of ours, when ecumenical consciousness is gaining more and more ground, one has to realize, as Yves Congar did many years ago, that actually the very concept of the unity of the Church depends greatly on the right perception of the nature of particular churches. Stressing from the very beginning the importance of the local or particular churches, Eastern theologians have understood unity as resting on the Church as a communion of churches, viz., envisaging the local or particular churches first, then positing all the exigencies required by their communion. The Western concept of unity, at the same time, has posited the universal reality first, then explained the particular churches, in an analytic way, as parts of the whole.

Both these concepts have merits and demerits. Their very presence in contemporary theology indicates that unity amid diversity, or, in Lanne's terminology, the "pluralism-unity dialectic,"<sup>37</sup> is a given, it is here to be dealt with by both church officials and theologians as part of God's providence.<sup>38</sup>

(2) If particular churches are gatherings of believers in Christ around their bishops from whom they receive the Word and the sacraments, particularly, the Eucharist, initiatives for enjoyable liturgical celebrations, for some forms of variety according to customs, traditions and cultural developments should primarily come from the particular and local churches. Their bishops should see to it that their churches are for their particular places; that their churches, in virtue of their catholicity, embrace and sanctify whatever is compatible from their culture with revelation and gives expression to the creative originality of their peoples. At the same time, it is also the bishops' duty to see to it that neither their particular churches nor their smaller communities ever lose sight of their main reason of existence, viz., to live and act as the Church of the Lord, to bear the burden of all the churches, to live in peace with

<sup>37</sup> "Pluralism and Unity: The Possibility of a Variety of Typologies Within the Same Ecclesial Allegiance," *One in Christ* 6 (1970), 451.

<sup>38</sup> Yves Congar, *After Nine Hundred Years* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1959), pp. 13, 81-82, 86.

them, to maintain their centripetal orientation, and to ban parochialism from their ranks.

(3) This new yet ancient ecclesiological orientation implies at least three priorities for the bishops of the particular churches. First, it requires that the bishop's role and function in the particular church entrusted to his care be essentially pastoral, not administrative; that he know his priests and faithful; that he be in touch with them and give direction to their lives; that he be visible, available and accessible to them; that he teach and serve his people and, by being the link between his particular church and the universal Church, he studiously cultivate, promote and deepen the radical correlation that delineates the correct relationship between his church and the Church as such. Mediating is his role. While he cannot build a kingdom for himself in his diocese, he cannot be a mere emissary of the pope, either. Both these dimensions of his theological and sacramental calling are to be fulfilled as equally important, and only in so doing does he really respond to his calling.

To accomplish this, it is possible, even desirable that some present mammoth particular churches be broken up into manageable smaller ones; that priests be entrusted with pastoral rather than clerical duties; that lay resources be further tapped for valuable services to the particular churches.

Second, the time has, perhaps, come when the return to an ancient custom of the Church is preferable. Should not once again the merely administrative duties of particular churches—and even of parishes—be entrusted to permanent deacons or competent, properly trained lay persons? These latter could certainly be at least as successful as bishops and pastors presently are, due to their special training and managerial skills. In this way, the preaching of the Word of God and the sacramental life of the Church would be given absolute primacy in pastoral life and such an orientation would also, hopefully, revitalize the gospel in the life of the contemporary Christian.

Finally, let us speak the unspeakable! In view of the fact that only particular churches are in themselves and theologically the manifestation and actualization of the universal Church, it follows that regardless of the historical development of the cardinalate and the structural apparatus of the Vatican, no office or honor should be considered higher than that of the bishops of actual particular churches. Consequently, decisions affecting the life of all particular churches, particularly, the election of the pope should be their duty and privilege.

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