

THE PARISH COMMUNITY: THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS ARISING FROM ATTEMPTS TO IMPLEMENT VATICAN II

I. A TIME OF CONVERGENCE

We meet at a time of extraordinary vitality of the Church in the United States. Some specific qualities of this vitality are worth noting at the outset.

First, this is a time of great freedom for theological and pastoral initiative in the Church. Theologians and pastoral ministers have an almost unparalleled opportunity to explore new approaches to understanding and conducting the life and mission of the Church. The few incidents of what appear to be unreasonable constraints are matters of concern but they are the more notable and newsworthy because they are rather exceptional.

Secondly, the situation of the Church in this country allows us to be open to the broadest variety of human concerns, the most profound questions of individual and social life, the wisdom that can be discovered in any source. This openness can also be found in new forms of cooperation among lay people and priests, women and men, theologians and bishops, movements and institutional structures, and among churches, as well as with secular groups pursuing various courses of human development.

Besides this freedom and openness, there remains among Catholics and the rest of the American people considerable concern for matters of belief and morality. Poll after poll reports the retention of faith and persistence in prayer.

Fourthly, there is in the Church a great flourishing of ministry, both of ways in which the mission of the Church is being exercised and in the number of Catholics who acknowledge their responsibility for this mission.

Fifthly, this is a time of unusual wholeness or convergence of diverse aspects of the Church. There are many expressions of this. On the one hand, we are simultaneously trying to broaden participation in the Church and attempting to take a more prophetic stance toward the world. This is not an easy combination to accomplish since prophets do not normally consult and committees are not normally risky. But we are struggling to accomplish the two.

Furthermore, there is greater effort to cooperate among various disciplines, and also to integrate various techniques into a fuller church life. A few examples of the latter may be useful.

After decades of development in the use of historico-critical methods for understanding the meaning of the Scriptures, there is growing interest in incorporating the use of these techniques into confronting the Word of God as a dialog of faith.¹ After a period of adopting techniques from psychology for pastoral counselling, there is renewed effort to relate these techniques to the language and processes of the Church.

In social ministry, one of the most important developments has been the adoption of organizing techniques from the labor movement so that people could acquire enough power to address the powerful forces affecting their lives. Now, there are widespread and explicit attempts to integrate community organizing efforts into the whole life of faith and parish.²

In most organizations, there are alternating periods of innovation and consolidation. A period of innovation, experimentation, and proliferation of new forms is followed by one of trying to achieve better integration of these developments. We seem to be moving into such a period, one in which new developments will be less marginal to the full life of the Church.

Freedom, openness, faith, flourishing of ministry, and convergence appear to be some of the qualities of current church vitality.

II. CHALLENGES

At the same time, of course, there are profound challenges to the Church. These signs of vitality I have listed are not uniformly accepted and, however normal, are not normative in the institutional life of the Church. They do not represent a coherent consensus that can serve as a basis for common and confident Catholic identity. We seem to have moved from a highly prescriptive approach to the Church to a kind of *laissez-faire* approach in which pluralism remains, in the terms of Raimundo Panikkar, simply a tolerance of plurality. There is need for both better defined norms and encouragement of the many expressions of these norms, expressions which complement and challenge one another.

Secondly, and in relation to what I have mentioned, there remains an institutional crisis in the Church. At one level, the crisis is one of alienation from the teaching, offices, and community of the Church. At another level, the crisis is the failure of the church

¹Cf. Sandra Schneiders, "Biblical Studies: Academic and Pastoral Project," unpublished paper, 1980.

²Cf. Harry C. Boyte, *The Backyard Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), which describes the widespread efforts to relate community organizing to the spiritual roots and religious communities of the organized.

structures to embrace the broad range of experiences and expressions of faith. Catholics simply feel more independent and often regret that they do not find support for their experience of God or for the various ways they are trying to be responsible Christians in the world.

Thirdly, questions about the place of women in the Church challenge the integrity and unity of the Church. The reasons presented for exclusion from ordination and the consequent exclusion from many decision-making forums in the Church, do not appear plausible to many and, given the general condition of institutional authority in our time, resort to this basis for a position has diminishing acceptance.

Fourthly, church discipline has suffered great erosion even among active members of the Church.

Fifthly, we are just beginning to appreciate how much the upward movement of U.S. Catholics into the economic mainstream has affected our readiness as a Church to give priority to the poor, to work against racism, and to give Hispanic and other groups their rightful place in the life and leadership of the Church.

Finally, we must admit that pastoral practice often remains seriously negligent in terms of the quality of preaching and liturgy, in respect for parishioners, and in all its all too prevalent clericalism. These are but a few of the challenges facing the Church. Other challenges of youth alienation, family breakdown, consumerism, alliance with the righteous right, decline in numbers of active Catholics, priests and sisters, and polarization around issues such as abortion, ERA, busing and capital punishment, could also be cited. But none of these takes away from the fact that we are experiencing unusual vitality.

III. VATICAN II BECOMES OUR COUNCIL

We do appear to stand at the transition point following Vatican II. As a way of describing this transition, I would like to recall a major work on pastoral life in the Church. This will also bring us closer to the central point of this paper—the challenges to theology posed by current parish experience.

Thirty-five years ago, Abbé Michonneau published the book whose English title was *Revolution in a City Parish*.³ This book by a pastor created a controversy because he described France, the "eldest daughter of the Church," as mission country. Pointing to extensive disaffiliation from the Church, to the kind of secularization of public life that had made the Church insignificant to a major

³ Abbé G. Michonneau, *Revolution in a City Parish* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1948).

part of the French Catholic population, the Abbé urged a new approach to parish life that would lead beyond the relatively small worshipping population to those who had little or no continuing contact with Church or life of faith. He proposed an intense effort at evangelization that would reach out both to individuals and to the collective culture that determined the fashion of thinking, acting and indeed, being. This mission of evangelization had to become the responsibility of all Catholics and the parish had to become more explicitly and evidently a real community of faith, of belonging and of mission.

Abbé Michonneau proposed a number of steps for this recasting of the life of the parish. These steps were:

1. The development of a truly living and apostolic liturgy; worship that truly engaged people's expression of faith and grounded a sense of apostolate.
2. A general missionary apostolate in which the priests would focus more on what he called direct apostolate, rather than the indirect apostolate of many social, educational and recreational activities. This direct apostolate entailed spending more time with people in their homes discussing basic matters of belief and recruiting people not for the service of the Church but the service of Christ.
3. Attention to families and districts, or sub-communities of the parish, as loci of religious development; what we would call today "small groups."
4. Much more care in the celebration of the sacraments so that they would truly be celebrations of individual and ecclesial faith.
5. Divorcing the ministry of the parish from concern for money.
6. Stripping away the clerical culture especially in terms of the language and forms of faith which were alien to the people.
7. Equipping modern apostles and fostering priestly spirituality characterized by reflection, obedience, detachment, humility and flexibility.
8. Team work, among the priests and with parishioners that would be the occasion for self-criticism, discussion and prayer.

The Abbé's observations are remarkably relevant to pastoral ministry in the United States today. Much of what he wrote will be echoed in my later comments about the main theologico-pastoral issues we face. I suggest that, when he wrote this book, we had not yet experienced the kind of secularization and alienation he faced in France. In fact, that is not precisely our experience today because the history and culture of France remain quite different from our own history and culture. Yet, his remarks are more relevant to our pastoral experience today than they once were.

It could further be argued that it was the kind of pastoral situation faced by Michonneau that lay behind much of Vatican II. While there are reflections of the world Church in the documents of Vatican II and the document on religious liberty was specifically influenced by the United States Catholic experience, much of the core of Vatican II may disproportionately relate to the European

Catholic experience and particularly that of France and Germany. The practices and reforms introduced by Vatican II provided for our church in the United States further ways to express the life of a relatively robust church. They were embellishments of our existing vitality and they gave us resources for dealing with the kind of culture shock that was to follow the Council.

But now we are experiencing some of the same patterns of social and church life that had been experienced in France. While there remain considerable belief and concern about faith and while the Church has evidence of great vitality, nonetheless, we are experiencing disaffection from faith and church and the separation of private church life from public social life that is the main feature of secularization. To this extent, we may say that Vatican II, in its foundation, is becoming more fully our Council as well. For now we are confronted with the questions and principles of the Council and not simply with the practices resulting from its principles. If there is one major conclusion of my work in moving around the country it is that we need seriously to examine how much we are truly committed to the principles of Vatican II.

Do we really accept a new understanding of the sacred and secular that reaches beyond the forms and structures of the Church? Are the clergy really committed to the priesthood of the baptized and the equality of lay people in the Church? Do we really believe in a collegial style as an expression of collegiality or have we adopted various councils as a kind of organizational finesse in the Church? Further questions of this order could be asked. I think it is now the basic ecclesiology of Vatican II that confronts us as we grow weary and dissatisfied with so many superficial expressions of this ecclesiology.

The challenge of a truly evangelizing mission that must engage the whole Church, working together with a spirit of teamwork, so well phrased by Abbé Michonneau and seeded throughout the council documents, is now our challenge. Facing this challenge will require addressing in theory and practice the theological questions implicit in the challenge. As sociologist David Martin has written, if we do not face these theological questions, we are tempted to validate our life and ministry as Church in either fundamentalist or secularist terms, both of which are ultimately self-defeating.⁴ We either resort to a kind of pietist faith that cannot

⁴Cf. David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Harper, 1979), throughout and especially Chap. VII, "Crisis Among the Professional Guardians of the Sacred," pp. 278-305. See also by the same author, *The Dilemmas of Contemporary Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), and "General Tendencies and Historical Filters," in *Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion* (New York: Mouton, 1979), pp. 1-16.

sustain critical reflection or we appeal to the secular usefulness of the Church that dodges the questions of faith. We turn to healing ministries or resignation rather than develop a theology of suffering or a pastoral practice of working against unsafe health conditions. Or we prove the value of our schools and hospitals and social action in terms of federal guidelines and professional criteria.

In this context, then, of both vitality and challenge within the Church, as well as of a new situation of faith and Church in society, let me turn to some of the theological questions most raised by current parish experience.

IV. CHALLENGES TO THEOLOGY FROM PASTORAL PRACTICE

I should like to identify five areas of theological problems. These are: (1) expressing the mysteries of faith; (2) the nature of the church community; (3) person and role in the Church; (4) shared responsibility; (5) the relationship between Church and society. Obviously these are enormous questions and in fact they may not equally be seen as problematic areas for theologians themselves. Furthermore, theologians may judge that there are more fundamental questions, as may be evidenced by the considerable attention being given to Christology. Nonetheless, while acknowledging that there are many other questions, I can confidently say that these matters pose difficulties for parishioners and parish ministers. The problem they face is the absence of at best an accessible or familiar theology that would provide surer ground for church life and pastoral practice. Let me discuss each of these. In each instance, I will try to crystallize the issue in an example, indicate some broader evidence, offer some sociological reflection, and suggest some of the components of the issue. Then I will try, however inadequately, to pose some questions for theology.⁵

(1) Expressing the Mysteries of Faith

In a conversation with a hospital chaplain, I asked if part of the attractiveness to clergy of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's material on death and dying was that it provided a way of dealing with death and dying without having to speak of the religious meaning of death. The chaplain's response was vigorously affirmative and he went on to lament the tendency in some pastoral care of the sick to exploit the captive situation of the hospitalized by making them

⁵I wish to thank for their reflection on these matters Rev. John Doherty, Rev. Frank Kelly, Sr. Ann Lovett, Mr. Peter Steinfels, Rev. Leo Mahon, Mrs. Kathleen Murnion, Rev. Brian Joyce, Rev. Harry Byrne, Rev. William Bausch and Rev. Timothy Collins.

unwilling objects of the minister's need to explore the emotions connected with serious illness and impending death.

This tendency may in part result from difficulties pastoral ministers experience in being able to find adequate theological expression for reflecting on the meaning of death in the wake of erosion of earlier notions of sin and judgment and of a cosmology of heaven-purgatory-limbo and hell. Lack of confidence in being able to articulate faith about something as central as death may not only tempt the minister to resort to psychological categories (or, in other situations, fundamentalist expressions) but may also make it difficult to speak of the Christian meaning of life, with its limitations and tragedies, its apparent unfairness and frustrations.

Such lack of confidence was measured earlier in a study of New York priests completed ten years ago, where close to half the priests indicated some doubt about the plausibility of the doctrine they were preaching and the rites they were performing.⁶ The difficulty is very directly one of being able to speak about the mysteries of faith and Church, the mysteries of grace and sin, of the sacraments and the sacramentality of the Church. It is evidenced in the research findings that indicate that large numbers of Catholics who distance themselves from the sacraments, whether the Eucharist or the Sacrament of Reconciliation, question the meaning of or need for the sacraments.⁷

A relatively new pastoral experience that has been reported to me further underscores this point. A number of pastors have mentioned to me the still infrequent but increasing incidence of situations where parents who had been strictly faithful to Sunday Mass and who had strenuously opposed the decisions of late-teenage children to stop going to Mass, then begin to imitate their children and stop participating regularly in the Eucharist themselves. This seems especially to occur where the parents admire their children whom they see otherwise pursuing decent and honorable lives. The withdrawal of such young people from the sacraments may raise questions to the parents about the meaning of the sacraments in their own lives.

But if difficulty regarding the mystery of the sacraments is evidenced in withdrawal from them, it may also be evident in the exaggerated emphasis on making the sacraments more evidently expressive of some immediately experienced feelings of fellowship and sentiments of affection.

We have come from a period in which there was a tendency to consider as sacred what was carefully separated from the secular

⁶This study has remained unpublished and uncirculated.

⁷This was very much the findings of private studies conducted by the Archdiocese of Chicago and New York, again unpublished studies.

or at least to make the sacred so separate.⁸ Sanctuaries, sacramental materials, clergy and religious were set apart from ordinary life and familiar contact. We have instead moved in a direction that suggests a closer connection between the sacred and the holy, trying to find the sacred not so much in objects, events and persons that are isolated from the rest of human experience, as in the manner in which we relate our faith to human experience. Without the props that suggested mystery or contact with what is most sacred, we are left to achieve much more personal expression of the element of the sacred in church life and all of human life. The actions, objects and persons intended to symbolize the sacred must be found in a more explicit and communicable context of faith, a faith that can be expressed in theological terms.

The first area I would propose for consideration, therefore, is that of the basic mysteries of the Church. Included are such matters as the relationship between human life and the life of God, grace and sin, the effective and expressive meaning of the sacraments, the meaning of death and of all the limitations of life. Obviously, these are primarily religious questions. Put in the form of questions, we may point to the following:

- (a) How do we understand our belief about the relationship between individual human lives and the life of God?
- (b) What is the meaning of the sacraments and specifically, what is the relationship between the authenticity of the celebration, that is the celebration as truly an expression of lived faith, and the validity of the sacraments?
- (c) How do the sacraments relate to the other means of God's encounter with persons?

(2) *The Nature of the Church Community*

Recently, I had occasion to meet three law students from other countries who were participating in a program on international law. Two were from Mexico and one from France. After some conversation, I said to them: "You must all be Catholic." The first, one of the Mexican students, replied: "What's the difference between being Catholic and being Christian?" The second, the student from Paris, answered "Yes," but with a tone that suggested that he could see no particular significance in this. The third student also answered "Yes" and went on to express his concern about the relation between his faith and his forthcoming practice of law. I suspect that these three responses exemplify three of the major categories of Catholics today.

⁸Cf. Philip J. Murnion, "The Parish as a Source of Community and Identity," in Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, ed., *The Parish in Community and Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 101-18.

A second incident. There is a small group of Catholic professionals meeting in New York, people who are concerned about the relationship between their identity as Catholics and both their own professional work and their views about social policy. These people from a variety of occupations and professions report great difficulty in integrating their Catholicism and their professional work. But they also point out that for them to indicate among their colleagues that they are Catholic elicits immediate stereotyping as people who must be docile to an institutional authority concerning whose teachings they, as lay people, have little or no input.

Obviously, we are experiencing difficulty about the meaning of being Catholic, about the nature of the church community. Andrew Greeley has documented extensively the growing independence of Catholics who make up their own mind about doctrine and morality and who question the importance of teaching authority and liturgy.⁹ Father Greeley has also limned the profile of the communal Catholic, one who retains a Catholic identity that is culturally rooted but individually defined.¹⁰ Another important expression of this lack of automatic connection between Catholic identity and church life is to be found among Hispanic Catholics whose history, especially among Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, has fostered a Catholic life more family and community-based than church-based.

In one respect, the question here is the specifically modern question of the relationship between individual and community.¹¹ Commitment to any community is more voluntary, both the fact and the extent of such commitment. A Church increasingly assimilated into American culture, is increasingly confronted with the relation between the individual Catholic and the church community. We have moved from a situation of many ethno-social supports for church community life to one in which these supports have been eroded.

This relationship is, of course, made more difficult by the institutional character of the community, sharing all the difficulties today of institutional commitment and loyalty. The institutional structures are both inevitable and inadequate to the requirements of church community.

⁹Cf. Andrew M. Greeley, *The Church in Crisis* (Chicago: Thomas More, 1979) and *Catholic Schools in a Declining Church* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1976).

¹⁰Andrew M. Greeley, *The Communal Catholic* (New York: Seabury, 1976).

¹¹The question of the relationship between the individual and the community is, of course, one that has been a concern for every community, every society. It is a question of particular moment to current community and social life because of the broadening legitimation of the individual as autonomous, especially in the moral sphere.

At another level the question is one of individual conscience and church authority or interiority and the public character of being Catholic. Again, this is a perennial tension but it has become more acute given so many encouragements to the moral autonomy of the individual that have accompanied increasing corporate power over individuals, and the consequent separation of public and private life.

Finally, if community commitment is perceived to be more voluntary, what is the nature of the relationships of the members to each other? These relationships lack the traditional assumptions that went with ethnicity, family, and common minority status. They appear, therefore, more negotiable.

The elements or expressions of this challenge in pastoral experience are many. First, there is the extent to which people feel respect for their own experiences, ways of expressing faith and judgments of conscience in the Church. Lay people often complain of a lack of such respect.

Secondly, there is a question of membership in the Church and admission to the sacraments. The spread of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and, in very different ways, the growth of the Charismatic Renewal and of other movements, suggests that membership is a matter of adult conversion and commitment.¹² Further, in a study of baptismal practice in one diocese,¹³ almost half the priests indicated that they saw baptism as primarily an introduction to the Christian community of their individual parish. These and many other developments, including multiplying conditions for the reception of the sacraments, appear to underscore a more voluntary and perhaps more "elite" notion of the church community.

Thirdly, Catholics experience greater doubt about their special obligation to fellow Catholics and indeed to fellow parishioners because their relationship seems more voluntary, if not accidental, and negotiable.

Fourthly, there are increased questions about the relationship between the parish and the diocese, which is the major link to the universal church community. Surely, the diocese and parish are connected through assignment of personnel and financial inter-

¹²The question of membership in the Church will undoubtedly become an increasingly significant one. Changes in the notion of membership appear to be largely in the hands of pastoral ministers and especially of religious educators. There is great need for more dialog between theologians and pastoral ministers on this matter. Karl Rahner's description of the Church as essentially a church "in diaspora" also suggests emphasis on membership based on adult commitment.

¹³*Cf.* Office of Pastoral Research, Archdiocese of New York, "Baptismal Preparation in the Archdiocese," unpublished study, 1977.

dependence, but relationships of shared mission and ecclesiology are often less clear.

Ambiguity about the meaning of the church community has surely increased with both assimilation of individual Catholics into mainstream America and involvement of parish ministers in ecumenical and social action coalitions that relate to broader constituencies and coalitions. So also the increased secularization of Catholic health, education and welfare institutions blurs the meaning of church community. Whatever all the sources of the difficulty, there are many theological questions. Let me cite a few.

- (a) What is the relationship between individual conscience and church teaching?
- (b) What is the relation between individual and cultural expressions of faith and Church and the pastoral life of the Church?
- (c) What is the nature of the Church as community?
- (d) What are to be the norms regarding church membership and participation in the sacraments? What do they imply regarding both faith and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church?
- (e) Beyond the rather romantic notion of community that so often is present in the Church, what is the real meaning of the parish community?
- (f) What is the relationship between parish and diocese and what does this require of each?
- (g) What is the significance of small or "independent" communities?

(3) *Person and Role in the Church*

Recently, a priest who had served on the personnel board for his diocese described the results of the consultation procedure the diocese used to learn the interests of parishioners regarding the appointment of a new pastor. Given a list of qualities the new pastor might be expected to have, the parishioners were asked to rank them in order of importance. The list included such qualities as prayerfulness, organizational ability, preaching ability, and the like. Regularly, the two qualities given highest priority were "warmth" and a "sense of humor."

A few years ago, Father Joseph Komonchak assembled a group of permanent deacons to discuss, among other things, why they had sought the diaconate. Their answer was that they had already been actively trying to exercise responsibility for the mission of Christ and the Church and saw the diaconate as a way of relating these efforts more clearly to the Church.

These two experiences reflect two of the concerns about the relationship between person and role in the Church. On the one hand, the personhood of the one who occupies a formal role in the Church is being given much importance by parishioners and ministers alike. On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly necessary to articulate the place of the lay person in the life and ministry of the Church. Is it necessary to become clerical or religious to enjoy true responsibility in the life of the Church?

Growing use of the term "lay ministry" and its popular application to any effort to exercise responsibility for extending the message and mission of Christ has replaced "priesthood of the laity" which had replaced "apostolate of the laity" as an expression for the responsibility of the lay person in the Church. This usage may be lamented and the Doctrine Committee of the NCCB has urged restricting the term ministry to those formally designated by orders and commissioning to ministry. But difficulty about the term reflects both present restrictions on formal roles, such as orders, and lack of agreed clarity on the place of the lay person in the decision-making and ministry in the parish and at other levels of the Church. And it is especially those parish priests who are most open to lay participation that most search for a clearer and a more practical theology of laity and priesthood in the Church.

Clearly the institutionalizing of roles in the Church is connected with ecclesiology, but also with changing conditions of church life. When the members of the Church are more educated and independent and when the mission of the Church is described as more dialogical with society, older understandings of roles become inadequate. But neither will simple assertions of the shared priesthood of baptism be adequate for addressing the practical life of the Church, the varying levels of commitment and formation, the proliferation of sites of ministry, or the changing character of the ordained priesthood.

Some components of the question, then, are:

- (a) the very notion of personhood that is articulated and exemplified in the Church;
- (b) the real status of the lay person in the Church;
- (c) the nature of ministries in and of the Church;
- (d) the role of women in the Church;
- (e) the role of the priest.

Put into the form of some questions seeking theological clarification, we may ask:

- (a) What is our theology of the human person, human relationships, and of the relationships between personhood and formal role in the Church?

- (b) Can we articulate a practical theology of the laity in the Church?
- (c) Can we develop a positive theology of the relationship between gender and role in the Church?
- (d) Do we need a new theology of priesthood that better combines charisma and office, person and role, sacredness and holiness?

(4) Shared Responsibility in the Church

I had occasion recently to attend a meeting of an ordinary and the highest level consultative body of clergy in the diocese. Reflecting on the experience of the day, it occurred to me that I had taken this body more seriously than had the participants. Some members of the group freely absented themselves and most evidenced little investment in the group's discussions. It became clear to me that this collegial forum which, however restricted to clergy, formally represented the most important expression of collegiality in the diocese, in fact had little significance as a group. While the relationship between each member and the ordinary was important, the group as group was of minor significance.

This experience prevails in the Church. While we have had great proliferation of councils, boards, commissions and committees, the significance of these groups for collectively giving direction to the life of the Church remains at least questionable. The NCCB Parish Project has found in a survey of effective parishes that common to them are careful efforts at shared responsibility among the members of the staff and with parishioners. And there is growing incidence of parish assemblies or conventions in which all parishioners can participate in setting priorities for the ministry of the parish. Yet, in such parishes, there is considerable groping for understanding the relationship between pastor and staff or staff and parishioners, and in situations where there is much less commitment to shared responsibility, there seems to be little challenge from the diocesan church.

The growth of participatory process in the Church, while rooted in Vatican II, is also part of a development that occurred in all of society in the late sixties. Almost every institution, challenged by its constituents about the extent to which it was serving the needs of the constituents, developed some form of constituent participation. Thus we have community planning boards, hospital boards, school boards, university senates, and the like. All appear to be suffering the same lack of clarity about their relationship to the executive officers of their respective institutions, a condition exacerbated by both the simultaneous growth of the bureaucracies in these institutions and the very multiplication of such councils.

In the parish this issue is experienced as a question about the relationship between priest and parishioners, pastor and other staff, staff and council. It is also experienced in terms of the relationship between parish and small groups or parish and movements. It is further experienced as a lack of consistency in the Church. For while parishes are urged to foster sharing of responsibility among lay people, religious and clergy, at the diocesan level typically such sharing is restricted at best to bishops and priests, and at the level of the universal Church to pope and bishops or pope and curia.

Some questions needing attention, therefore, are:

- (a) What is to be the nature and practice of shared responsibility in the parish?
- (b) How does parochial shared responsibility relate to the bishop and diocese?
- (c) What is to be the decision-making process in the Church and how does it allow for both prophecy and participation?
- (d) What are appropriate methods for asking pastoral questions that will make more likely the combination of faithfulness to tradition and pertinence to the people?

(5) *Church and Society*

My final point has to do with the relationship between Church and society or the matter of the relationship between individual and ministerial religion and public order. A few instances first.

One of the most effective community organizers in the country, Ernie Cortez, has discussed with me his efforts at connecting the organizing effort with the full life of the parishes involved. This effort is part of a prevailing trend to integrate organizing efforts with the family and church communities of the people being organized. His efforts have led him in search of theological materials that might be useful for parishioners trying to reflect on the meaning, methods, and purposes of their community action. But he has been unable to find satisfactory material and he finds parish priests reluctant to serve as resource persons to such reflection because they similarly feel inadequately prepared for this kind of reflection.

To take another example, there is serious division among parishioners between those who support public efforts to curb private immorality and public efforts to determine economic and racial justice. Obviously, the matter of abortion falls between these two positions because of the special nature of the question of human life and because of the matter of public funding.

The parish is faced with a multitude of questions regarding its relation to social policy. Parishes remain the most important support for community organizing efforts around the country and the

Campaign for Human Development is the single most important private source of funding for local social justice efforts. Similarly, Catholics surely constitute the most important source of opposition to legalized and publicly funded abortion.

Articulation of the relation between Church and society has been a major force in the sociological distinctions made among forms of religion; especially the classical church-sect typology which, however much undergoing constant questioning and refinement, remains significant in describing the relationship between faith and social life, Church and society.

The parish experiences this question in many ways. The tension concerns teaching and, especially, preaching. This is a tension concerning the degree of specificity appropriate to preaching. A second is the question of whether the Church is to be prophetic, that is simply standing for certain principles or morality, or political, that is participating in the necessarily compromising efforts to further public morality and social justice. A third challenge concerns how to relate private efforts at sharing money and sources to the involuntary sharing that occurs through tax moneys and government regulations and services. A fourth problem is the integration of social ministry into the full life of the parish, liturgical, educational, and programmatic.

Numerous theological questions arise, therefore, among which may be included the following:

- (a) What is the nature of the relationship between Church and society in a pluralist society?
- (b) What are the foundational principles of our social teaching and how do these apply to our society?
- (c) Is there a specifically Catholic theological contribution to the formulation of principles for a just social order?
- (d) How do we handle the cultural and economic pluralism in the Church?
- (e) Are there resources and methods useful for pastoral reflection on social life, whether one's work, one's community, or larger social forces? Is there a theology of work, of corporate life, of public responsibility?
- (f) What is the function of preaching and teaching regarding questions of justice? And how much should pastoral ministry participate in the compromising efforts of political action?

Obviously, there are many more such questions.

V. CONCLUSION

It has struck me in preparing this paper how much the conditions of Church and theology parallel the condition of other struc-

tures and disciplines. This is not surprising, of course, but it is also illuminating. Every institution is struggling to accommodate to growing demands for individual expression and self-determination as well as to the importance of communities for individual and social life. Similarly, there are interesting parallels between theology, art, history, philosophy and psychology at present. As one author puts it:

Nowadays "meaning" and "meaningfulness" cover not merely [the] phenomenon [of making cognitive or cognitive-moral sense] but also such aspects of life as the attributes of social relationships [e.g., to have a meaningful relationship]; personal attributes such as "sense of purpose," "predictability," and so on. . . . What, in fact, are now called problems of meaning would more adequately be expressed as problems of being. . . ."¹⁴

As one particularly suggestive parallel, I would like to note some qualities of art, because art as entailing both meaning and performance relates so closely to pastoral life.

Robert Hughes, in his survey of modern art, *The Shock of the New*,¹⁵ points out that, after a rapid succession of styles, it has become clear that art is inherently pluralist in form. Styles do not so much replace one another as become additional expressions. Yet, there must be some criteria for the art, criteria that avoid, on the one hand, attempts to impose uniformity of expression and, on the other, pretenses to art that are purely examples of inevitably private, self-indulgence. Furthermore, art must resist the tendency arising from commercialization to establish the value of art in terms of its usefulness as an investment. He further notes that in the seventies it became more apparent that art would not be very significant as a force for social change because it became more evident that art cannot claim to be the prerational expression of the future.

In this context, Hughes describes a revival of realism and quotes one artist's view: "To paint from life at this point demands both the transgression and the inclusion of doubt."¹⁶ It involves the transgression of doubt because any effort to depict life is a "shot at certainty"; inclusion of doubt, because the central paradox of realism is that representation cannot be fully accomplished.¹⁷

Finally, Hughes argues, in discussing developments in abstract art:

¹⁴Roland Robertson, *Meaning and Change* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), p. 85.

¹⁵Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New* (New York: Alfred M. Knopf, 1981), especially the final chapter.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 404.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 404.

The ultimate business of painting is not to pretend things are whole when they are not, but to create a sense of wholeness which can be seen in opposition to the world's chaos; only by setting this dialectic in full view can painting rise above the complacency of "ordered" stereotypes and the meaningless bulk of the familiar.¹⁸

Pastoral ministry, indeed the life of the Christian, is, and must increasingly be seen to be a work of art. Its meaning and expression are inevitably pluralist. Its challenge is to achieve an integration, in belief and performance, of one's life. Yet, there must be some criteria for this effort, and the effort requires resources for its inspiration and its technique. It is for this that parishioners and parish ministers look to the aid of theologians. They must be able both to transgress and live with doubt. They need ways of understanding the message of Jesus in terms that give meaning to their experience and ways of understanding the life of the Church that ground authenticity and effectiveness in their efforts.

Perhaps then, practically, this is a time when theologians can offer not one new model for Church, but a set of qualities.¹⁹ It may be possible to move beyond the necessarily technical language of theology, to the language of ordinary Christian life. It may be a time for a new spirituality of action and relationships and in fact renewed emphasis on a spirituality that accents creativity rather than redemption. Could not also there be a new journal of pastoral theology in which theologians communicate with pastoral ministry more effectively?

These and many more aids are needed for the Catholic today and the pastoral minister to be what artist Agnes Martin proposes as an ideal for her fellow artists: "We are in the midst of reality, responding with joy."²⁰

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¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

¹⁹ Specifically, it seems to me that Avery Dulles' work, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), has served a most valuable ecclesiological-sociological function in clarifying some varieties of assumptions about the Church that are operative in pastoral practice. While I appreciate his most recent unpublished paper proposing a new "model" or "image," a "community of disciples," as a source of greater unity, this will not dispel the variety that prevails. It seems more useful at present to articulate necessary qualities for the Church that must be met irrespective of the configuration of the Church.

²⁰ Agnes Martin, "We Are in the Midst of Reality Responding With Joy," in *Agnes Martin: Paintings and Drawings 1957-1975*, Catalogue (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1977), pp. 17-39.