

BEYOND COLLEGIALITY: THE LOCAL CHURCH LEFT BEHIND BY THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

At the end of the Second Vatican Council, an anonymous person with a sense of humor summed up the work of the council in this way: “To bishops, all the power; to deacons, all the pleasure; to lay people, all the freedom; and to the priests, all the work!”¹ Forty years after the Council, it would not be fair to characterize all the conciliar work by the above stanza. The role of the bishops was less than that, but, perceiving little interest on the part of the council fathers in the priestly ministry, a frustrated priest was saying that the council was principally for the bishops and the lay people.

From the beginning, it was thought that the Second Vatican Council would present the opportunity to complete the *De Ecclesia* that the First Vatican Council had left unfinished. Because of well-known historical circumstances, that council had limited its discussion to the section of the decree on the Church that dealt with the papacy. This segment of the decree came to be a separate decree, and after it was debated and adopted, in sometimes troubled times, the council adjourned its work without officially closing and left the work to be completed at a later time.

These facts and historical circumstances had important ramifications, not only ecumenically but also in the life and thinking of the Catholic Church as well. This happened despite the corrections which Pope Pius IX’s had made to excessive interpretations of *Pastor aeternus* when, in a brief dated March 12, 1875, he sided with the position taken by the German bishops in response to a statement of Bismarck that tended to exaggerate the implications of the decree.² Because the council had voted for a Constitution on the Church that dealt only with the primacy of the roman pontiff, the delicate balance was upset between the doctrinal assertions on the authority of the pope and the statements that relate to the authority of the bishops and to the episcopal college. Many theologians and the council fathers who found themselves in the minority had foreseen precisely this result. Despite all the nuances of the text, the teaching relating to the pope’s full and supreme, ordinary and immediate power of jurisdiction over the entire Church, could seem to reduce the role of the bishops simply to that of a representative or delegate of the pope and

¹*Conciliabules* (Paris: Fayard, 1966).

²See Olivier Rousseau, “La vraie valeur de l’épiscopat dans L’Église d’après d’importants documents de 1875”, in Yves Congar and Bernard D. Dupuis (dir.), *L’Épiscopat et l’Église universelle* (Paris: Cerf, coll. “Unam Sanctam”, 39, 1962) 709-36. This is a reprint of an article published in *Irénikon* in 1956.

markedly to diminish the authority and power of the bishops, a conclusion that Bismarck did not hesitate to draw. Similarly, in spite of all the precautions taken strictly to qualify and clearly to delimit the exercise of the infallible teaching authority of the Roman pontiff, greater importance was quickly given to it in practice than that intended by the council. In short order, the Christian people ended up thinking that the pope was infallible.

Even though, then, Pope John XXIII, opted for a new and independent council rather than a resumption of the First Vatican Council, people could not help but think that the new council would have as its work to complete the work unfinished a century earlier. As O. Rousseau mentioned in the introduction of the book *Le Concile et les conciles*³ (*The Council and the Councils*), the announcement of the council caused a good number of theologians and historians to suspend their current work and to put aside their writings in progress and to busy themselves with questions that seemed to them most urgent. At the forefront of these questions were those that dealt with papal primacy and infallibility and, along with them, the question of the collegiality of the bishops. The number of published works concerning the episcopacy, papal primacy, and collegiality during these years is very large. As Y. Congar observed at the time, “some of us realized immediately, that the council afforded the opportunity to advance the cause not only of reunion, but also of ecclesiology. We were very much aware that an opportunity was being presented to us that we should exploit to the fullest, in order to accelerate the retrieval of the importance of the theme “episcopacy and *Ecclesia*,” in ecclesiology.”⁴

I. TWO EXPERIENCES OF THE COLLEGE OF THE BISHOPS AT VATICAN II

The experience of the council, however, would steer this reflection in two different directions. On the one hand, it led the bishops to become aware of their role. “Assembled, the bishops became aware of their episcopacy and of its rights; men who speak, who react, find their views echoed, form a group that has its own mass and its own cohesion.”⁵ At the council the episcopal college is there, gathered. It is ready to accomplish a single collegial act. This led immediately to the awareness of the role of the college in the governance of the entire Church, governance that for centuries had been left to the pope and to the Roman curia. Concurrently, the episcopal conferences, which originally were told they should not meet in Rome, met in order to submit names for the election of commission members, and from that moment they became an important factor in the work of the Council and of the bishops, even if, except for the pan African conference, work in common on a continental base was not frequent. At Vatican II, this experience of

³Bernard Botte et al., *Le Concile et les conciles. Contributions à la vie conciliaire de l'Église* (Chevetogne: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1960).

⁴Yves Congar, *Mon Journal du Concile* (Paris: Cerf, 2002) 4.

⁵Ibid. 10.

the bishops led them to foresee, in communion with the pope, the possibility of reversing the idea that the governance of the Church rested with the Roman Curia as had largely been the case during the preparation of the council.⁶ Truly, for a brief moment, the *orbis* (the world) invaded the *urbs* (the city).

On the other hand, Vatican II permitted the discovery of the great cultural diversity linked to the many places on the globe where the Catholic Church had taken root. This was a new experience and it marked the bishops' consciousness. Cardinal Garrone observed:

The Church today is becoming almost physically aware of its universality. We already believed in the universality of the Church; we proclaimed it in our creed. Now, however, because of many factors, we are truly *realizing* it. Distant peoples who for us were only names on a map, now often have a face and are becoming our neighbours. Once it was simply a country; now they are people we know. Suddenly, we are coming to understand what it means that Christ is king of the universe, and this universe is here, before our eyes. But, at the same time, the Church is amazed to discover how broadly his reign extends: Haiti, Goa, Katanga, Kuwait are no longer simply ideas, rather they are people for whom Christ died.⁷

The first experience of collegiality, though occurred within the framework of a universalistic ecclesiology, was in agreement with reflection seeking to balance and to complete the ecclesiology of Vatican I by affirming the authority of the episcopal college. The second experience, however, immediately oriented reflection toward the particularity of various cultural spaces, even if, here too, the local Church was not in the forefront. Nevertheless, in the persons of their bishops, suddenly the Churches appeared in all their diversity.

II. THINKING ABOUT THE COLLEGE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF A UNIVERSALISTIC ECCLESIOLOGY

It has often been said that Vatican II juxtaposed opposing ideas, meaning by that that to a doctrine or a "proposal formulated prior to the council, was added a doctrine or a proposal that expresses a complimentary aspect."⁸ In ecclesiology, this was evident principally in that to Vatican I's thesis of the primacy of the pope was juxtaposed another thesis on the supreme authority of the episcopal college, all this being mediated by the affirmation of the sacramental character of episcopal consecration which, rather than the granting of jurisdiction by the pope, endowed a man with the status of a bishop and made him a member of the college. In short,

⁶See my article "Vatican II: The First Stage of an Unfinished Process of Reversing the Centralized Government of the Catholic Church", *The Jurist* 64 (2004): 247-83.

⁷*Informations catholiques internationales* 161 (1er février 1962): 33.

⁸Hermann Josef Pottmeyer "Vers une nouvelle phase de réception de Vatican II. Vingt ans d'herméneutique du Concile, in Giuseppe Alberigo and Jean-Pierre Jossua (dir.), *La réception de Vatican II* (Paris: Cerf, 1985) 56 (English version : *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1987).

this whole discussion revolved around the relation between the episcopate (the universal college) and the primacy. Moreover, all the amendments made tended to clarify this relationship or even to reintroduce into the text the thesis of the primacy by juxtaposing it to that of collegiality. In a retrospective analysis, Philips expressed his general satisfaction with the text. But he added: “The statement concerning the bishops lost much of its quality because of the countless amendments made in order to preserve primacy. For example, in paragraph 22 on collegiality, the statement could have been a very open statement, especially in regards to the East. Now the doctrine remains the same but there is a rampart of precautions that largely damage the good impression [that it might have made].”⁹

This half-fig half-grape result did not derive only from the combative and persistent resistance of a group of well-organized and influential conciliar fathers. It also derives from the fact that the reworking of chapter III of *Lumen Gentium* which Gérard Philips, at the request of Cardinal Suenens, began in mid-October 1962, even before the conciliar discussion of *De Ecclesia*, was presented as a simple rearrangement of the preparatory schema. In fact, this project would take up many elements contained in the prior text, but would rearrange them or soften their more polemical aspects, while striving to present the bishops as successors of the college of the apostles. Later, during the first intersession, the acceptance of the Philips-schema as the basis for reworking the *De Ecclesia* would basically commit the council down that road and it would not later depart from it. The conceptual effort was essentially that of elaborating the concept of the “college,” but always in a resolutely universalistic perspective: that is, the college was presented in relation to the pope as in the same situation as the Twelve in relation to Peter.

III. THINKING ABOUT THE COLLEGE ON THE BASIS OF COOPERATION AMONG THE CHURCHES

Alongside this secondary offshoot of a universalistic ecclesiology inherited from recent centuries, Vatican II also permitted one to think of the Church starting from the local Churches. In the eyes of Karl Rahner this possibility represents one of the most innovative contributions of Vatican II.¹⁰ Others have even qualified it, too quickly no doubt, as a turning point that constituted a true “Copernican revolution.”¹¹ Indeed, if the theology of the local Church is seen as one of the great accomplishments of Vatican II, one must admit that it was only sketched there and that it would really be elaborated only after the council. It was launched in the

⁹Karim Schelkens (ed.), *Carnets conciliaires de Mgr Gérard Philips secrétaire adjoint de la Commission doctrinale* (Leuven: Maurits Sabbebibliotheek, Faculteit Godgeleerdheid, 2006) 142.

¹⁰Karl Rahner, “Das neue Bild der Kirche”, in *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. VIII (Einsiedeln, Benziger, 1967) 333.

¹¹Emmanuel Lanne, “L’Église locale et l’Église universelle : Actualité et portée du thème”, *Irénikon* 43 (1970): 490. Many other theologians use Lanne’s expression.

ecclesiology *orans*, in the first document adopted by the council, the Constitution on the Liturgy, which presented the liturgical gathering of the local Church as the highest manifestation of the Church. (SC 41) But a theology of the local Church was not at first the perspective adopted by *De Ecclesia* whose redaction was molded in the universalistic perspective of the preparatory schema that, despite all, remained the entire canvas on which people were painting. It was only with the amendments to the second draft of *Lumen gentium*, between the second and third sessions of the council, that these insights reappeared in additions to articles 23 and 26 that treat episcopal collegiality.¹² Many will also regret that in “this conciliar constitution whose entire topic is the Church, the local Church is omitted except for this paragraph” (article 26) and in several other occasional references whereas “it might legitimately have been expected that the Constitution on the Church would make reference to it *ex professo*.”¹³

Besides this first observation, a second study of the conciliar documents, considered now not as a group of independent, separate documents, but as a whole corpus¹⁴, leads us to conclude that the understanding of the Church starting from the local Church is intimately linked to a deepening of the idea of catholicity that one finds in the entire corpus and that culminates, without a doubt, in *Ad gentes*. It was to honor the new awareness of the diversity of cultures in which the Church is involved¹⁵ that the image was advanced of the local Churches in their diversity, Churches represented at the council in the person of their bishop. Although this was a more recent experience and at the time of the Council had not yet been fully elaborated theologically, still it strikingly marked the teaching of Vatican II. In an instant, not only was the perspective reversed, going from a universalistic ecclesiology to an understanding of the Church that begins from the local Churches, but an ecclesiology reduced to “hierarchology” was left behind in favor of emphasis on a concrete Church and its relationship to a definite place and culture. Finally, this breakthrough obliges one to go beyond the question of the relationship between the local and the universal and to think about the communion among the Churches and their cooperation on the regional level. This is another fruit of Vatican II, an ecclesiology that is rooted in the crucible of the conciliar experience.

¹²It is interesting to note that, according to certain observers, these additions are not foreign to the awareness that accompany the decentralization of the Church occasioned by the trip of Paul VI to the Holy Lands at this time. See Charles Moeller, “La fermentation des idées dans l’élaboration de la Constitution”, in G. Baraúna (dir.), *L’Église de Vatican II*, (Paris: Cerf, coll. “Unam Sanctam”, 51, 1966) 111-12.

¹³Emmanuel Lanne, “L’Église locale et l’Église universelle : Actualité et portée du thème”, *Irénikon* 43 (1970): 458.

¹⁴This refers to an important principle of hermeneutics of the texts of Vatican II. See Gilles Routhier, *Vatican II. Herméneutique et réception* (Montréal: Fides, 2006) 389-99.

¹⁵This awareness is relatively recent. The first encyclicals on the missions date from the XXth century. This awareness will be refined with the decolonization movement that begins in the time period after the war.

This preoccupation with the diversity of the Churches is already very evident in the first conciliar document, *Sacrosanctum concilium*. Even before any discussion of *Christus Dominus*, the decree on the pastoral office of bishops, it would mean moving from a regime of permissions or indults to one of adaptation to cultures under the authority of the episcopal conferences or, better, “of various legitimately established bodies of bishops (“*territoriales episcoporum coetus*”) competent in a given territory.” (S.C. 22 § 2, 38 and 128) Not enough attention has been given to the fact that this article 22 § 2, placed first among the “general norms” that would govern the liturgical renewal, is quite frequently referred to in the following paragraphs and thus takes on the character of a structuring general norm, indeed the most important one.¹⁶ It is at this level, moreover, rather than at the level of the active participation of all the faithful at the liturgy, that one has to place the break between *Mediator Dei* and *Sacrosanctum concilium*. The encyclical of Pius XII decreed, in article 58 that “only the Sovereign Pontiff has the right to recognize and establish all usage concerning the Divine Liturgy [...]; the right and the duty of the bishops is to see that the precepts of the holy canons on the Divine Liturgy are exactly observed.” (*AAS*, p. 544) The council’s norm contributed to the revalorization of the episcopacy and of the Churches, but in a way that was quite different from thinking of an isolated bishop, limited to the confines of his own diocese. What is proposed concerns “groups of bishops” (*episcoporum coetus*) and “territorial (*territoriales*) groups of bishops” that correspond at least to important cultural areas. As is stressed in article 40 of *Sacrosanctum concilium*, because of the difficulty that such an adaptation presents, it cannot be the concern of a single bishop, but of a *coetus episcoporum*. This awareness is also found in *Lumen Gentium*, particularly in the chapter dedicated to the ministry of the bishops, where it is stated that “this college, insofar as it is composed of many, expresses the variety and universality of the people of God.” (*LG* 22) In the college gathered in council, we see the variety of the People of God whose universality is grasped only when it is coupled with diversity, an idea that is also underscored in articles 13 and 23.

¹⁶One finds no less than 20 references to this article 22 § 2 of *Sacrosanctum concilium*, which makes it the most referenced text in the constitution. Direct reference is made in the following articles: 36, 3; 40, 1; 44; 63, b; 77; 110 and 128. Also indirect reference is made to it in articles 36, 4 and 40, 2. Finally, one is referred to articles that are in themselves a reference to article 22 § 2. This is the case in the articles 63, 101 and 113 that refer to article 36; the articles 54 and 65 that refer to article 40; 113, that refer back to article 54; 63, 101 and 113 that refer to article 63 and 113 that refers to article 101. The same setup is also found in article 25 that makes reference to article 128. Thus, one can reconstruct the nebulous semantics involved with the phrase “*territoriales episcoporum coetus legitime constitutos*” of article 22. The term “*territoriales*” which is found 15 times in the texts of Vatican II, also appears 12 times in *Sacrosanctum concilium* (22, 36, 39, 40, 63, 77, 120, 128). One finds the words “regions” essentially in the same articles (23, 25, 36, 38, 63b, 77, 110, 119, 127), “peoples” (37, 38, 77, 119, 123) and “adaptation” (38, 39, 40, 44, 62, 68, 107, 128).

IV. FURTHER REFLECTION AND WEIGHING OF THESE TWO LINES OF ECCLESIOLOGY

If one accepts that the teaching of Vatican II proceeds from these two ecclesiological perspectives, the more basic juxtaposition in this chapter III of *Lumen Gentium* is not first of all the one that sets the thesis on the full power of the primacy alongside the one that grants the same power to the college. The more basic juxtaposition is the one that inserts a certain type of universalistic ecclesiology and another which is not strictly speaking local¹⁷ but multipolar and that does justice to the diversity of cultures leading to a development on assemblies of churches “into several groups, organically united groups that . . . enjoy their own discipline, their own liturgical usage, and their own theological and spiritual heritage.” (LG 23)¹⁸ The most basic juxtaposition is perhaps the one between an ecclesiology that considers the Church in a nonhistorical fashion and one which considers it in concrete, in context. In short, contrary to what is often written, the dialectic in the framework of this chapter III on the hierarchical constitution of the Church is not simply on two levels, local and universal; it is constructed rather on three levels: the universal Church, the individual churches and the groupings of Churches. Collegial unity, furthermore, does not exist simply in the relationship between each of the bishops and the universal Church, but also in “the mutual relationships of the individual bishops with the particular churches.” (LG 23) This paragraph of *Lumen gentium* (paragraph 23) was originally entitled *relatio episcoporum ad totam Ecclesiam*—the relationship of bishops to the entire Church; the subtitle was then changed to *De relatione episcoporum ad Ecclesiam universalem*—the relationship of bishops to the universal Church; and finally it became *De relationibus episcoporum in Collegio*—the relationship among bishops in the college. It allows us to escape the primacy-episcopacy dialectic or the binary relationship between a bishop and the entire Church in order to enter upon the mutual relationships among the bishops in the college, bishops who engage in a community of effort (LG 23) within the framework of the groupings of Churches, indeed of the *communio ecclesiarum* (AG 23), an expression which appears for the first and only time at the end of the conciliar journey, in the missionary decree *Ad gentes*, which in many respects represents the most developed ecclesiology of Vatican II.

We have gone, then, from relationships between episcopacy and the primate to cooperation or to the *communio* among the Churches that integrates *both* the relationship to the primacy and the relationships among the bishops. Paragraph 23, which is further developed in chapter III of *Christus Dominus*, entitled “Coopera-

¹⁷The local or particular Church appears in chap. III (LG 23), but it does not have much significance.

¹⁸In the redaction history of the Constitution, this passage, which appears in the final version, constitutes the newest element in this article.

tion of the bishops for the common good of many Churches”, and in *Ad gentes*, poses differently the question of “collegial unity” (LG 23) or of the “collegial nature of the episcopal order” (LG 22) by integrating the relationship among the different Churches that, “by the grace of Divine Providence,” “have been constituted throughout the centuries in various groupings, united in an organic whole.” (LG 23)

The entire effort of the Twentieth century that had led us to think about the relationship between the Gospel and the Church and cultures would end up being further refined by the reflection in chapter III of *Ad gentes* that examines the exchange of gifts between the Churches at the same time that it is thinking about the relationship between the Church and cultures.¹⁹ Article 22 of *Ad gentes*, while leaning greatly upon in what is found already in *Lumen gentium* 13 about the catholicity of the Church and the legitimate diversities implied by this “catholic unity,” teaches the following:

The seed which is the word of God, watered by divine dew, sprouts from the good ground and draws from thence its moisture, which it transforms and assimilates into itself, and finally bears much fruit. In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, 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) They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary that in each major sociocultural area, theological reflection should be encouraged, so that in the light of the universal Church’s tradition, it may submit to a new scrutiny the words and deeds which God has revealed, and which have been set down in Sacred Scripture and explained by the Fathers and by the magisterium. Thus, it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith may seek for understanding, with due regard for the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples; it will be seen in what ways their customs, views on life, and social order, can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. From here the way will be opened to a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life. By this manner of acting, every appearance of syncretism and of false particularism will be excluded, and Christian life will be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture [Paul VI]. Particular traditions, together with the peculiar patrimony of each family of nations, illumined by the light of the Gospel, can then be taken up into Catholic unity. Finally, the young particular churches, adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion, saving always the primacy of Peter’s See, which presides over the entire assembly of charity.

¹⁹On the question of the relationship of the Church to cultures and the assumption of cultures in the Catholic unity, to that which is stated in *Sacrosanctum concilium* (notably in articles 37 to 40), and in *Ad gentes*, one must add the deep intuitions that are found in articles 44, 45, and 58 of *Gaudium et spes*.

And so, it is to be hoped that episcopal conferences within the limits of each major sociocultural territory will so coordinate their efforts that they may be able to pursue this proposal of adaptation with one mind and with a common plan (*AG* 22).

We find here concepts and themes that are used in other conciliar texts to refer to particular Churches (the Eastern Churches) that within a large sociocultural territory produced a theological reflection in such a way as to engender a “profound adaptation of the entire extent of the Christian life.”²⁰ Indeed, by means of such original theological reflection “the heritage handed down by the apostles was received with differences of form and manner, so that from the earliest times of the Church it was explained variously in different places, owing to diversities of genius and conditions of life.” (*UR* 14) Reading this, one is struck by the kinship of concepts and themes between what the young Churches are urged to adapt in all realms of the Christian life and what the Eastern Churches achieved in previous centuries in order to adapt the Christian life to the genius of the peoples of the sociocultural territories in which they lived and worked. Also, one cannot help making the connection because, as much in the young Churches as in the eastern Churches, “the faith is taught by an appropriate catechesis; it is celebrated in a liturgy in harmony with the genius of the people, and by suitable canonical legislation it is introduced into upright institutions and local customs” (*AG* 19).

In his authoritative commentary on this paragraph 22, Xavier Seumois, member of the *De missionibus* commission, mentions that what is meant by the phrase “to proclaim the glory of the Creator” is the need not only of liturgical adaptation in general but also of forms of popular devotion and of religious life. On the other hand, the phrase “make shine forth the grace of the Savior” means the adaptation of theology, of catechesis and preaching. Finally, the last phrase, “disposing the Christian life” refers to the whole realm of canonical discipline and legislation.²¹ Thus all the areas of Church life that are proper to the patriarchal Churches are covered, as is the case already in *Ad gentes* 19. One can conclude, then, that the acknowledgment of the legitimacy of particular Churches that enjoy their own proper traditions, as affirmed in *LG* 13 and *OE* 3, does not refer only to the past, but also to the present and the future.

Moreover, as is so clearly set forth in *Sacrosanctum concilium*, *Lumen gentium* and *Ad gentes*, such an effort at inculturation (the word we use today), if it is to remain in communion and avoid the danger of particularism, cannot be the task of local bishops taken individually, but of the grouping of bishops in episcopal conferences, or even better, as proposed in *Ad gentes*, of groupings of episcopal conferences within large sociocultural areas. This seems to be the endpoint of Vatican II’s reflection on this topic. It is by means of this specific implementation

²⁰See *LG* 23, *OE* 3, 5, 6, 12, 13 and 22; *PO* 16, *UR* 4, 14, 15, 16, 17.

²¹Xavier Seumois, “Les Églises particulières”, in Johannes Schütte (dir.), *Vatican II. L’activité missionnaire de l’Église* (Paris, Cerf, coll. “Unam Sanctam”, 67, 1967) 327.

of the “collegial character and aspect of the episcopal order”, to speak in the words of *Lumen gentium* 22, that such an inculturation of the Christian life can be realized that seed of the Gospel in the great civilizations succeed in producing original theological elaborations, distinctive liturgical customs and usages, particular forms of piety, ecclesiastical discipline and forms of Christian life that are homogeneous and in concert with these new cultural spaces. It is, therefore, the cooperation of the bishops for the good of many Churches, as is stated in chapter III of *Christus Dominus*, that must be put into practice and the collaboration of the heads of the local Churches in large sociocultural territories that has to be created.

V. BEYOND THE DUALISM OF LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL

More than a relationship to two realities (local Church and universal Church), the ecclesiology of Vatican II permits us to envision ecclesial life in accord with a threefold scheme, something that was hardly noticed at the time. We are not witnessing simply a swing of the pendulum—the passing from a universalistic ecclesiology to an ecclesiology that starts from the local Church—but we are building a tripod configuration as suggested in the three-part structure of *Christus Dominus* that foresees the relationship of a bishop to the universal Church (chapter 1), his fitting into the local Church (Chapter 2) and his cooperation to the common good of many Churches (chapter 3). Even if, from a systematic standpoint, the order of the chapters leaves something to be desired, the format of the decree at least clearly indicates the triple relationship that the bishop has with the Church: with the local Church of which he is the head, with the other Churches in the nearby area, and with the entire Church. This allows us to reorient the terms in which the recent debate about the relationship between the local Church and the universal Church has been framed. Well before Vatican II, Yves Congar had observed that ecclesiology had developed following two different lines of thought that are “irreconcilable if one of them is taken to exclude the other”; he indicated that “one of the tasks of present ecclesiology is, we believe, to reconcile these two theological developments, by giving to each line of thought its full, complete vitality, but also its true balance. Very early on, without a doubt from the second century on, the Church had a structure of ecclesial life and a canonical existence along the lines of a communion of local Churches personalized in their respective bishops, and a structure of ecclesial life and canonical existence along the lines of a single Church, of virtually universal extension, having in the Roman See a conscious center, a point of reference, in truth, to some degree already, of normative regulation.”²²

This point of Congar is precious and it is easy to see, forty years after Vatican II, how irreconcilable are the two ecclesiological lines of thought that he identified

²²Yves Congar, “De la communion des Églises à une ecclésiologie de l’Église universelle” in Yves Congar and Bernard D. Dupuis (dir.), *L’épiscopat et l’Église universelle* (Paris: Cerf, coll. “Unam Sanctam”, 39, 1962) 230.

if, on the one hand, they continue to exclude one another and, on the other hand, if one feels condemned to consider things within an equation with only two terms (local and universal) considered antithetical. If Vatican II taught us anything, it is that one must bring together the perspective that leads one to consider the Church starting from the local Church in which is realized the Catholic Church and the universalistic perspective in such a way as to hold these two perspectives together, giving each its proper weight and maintaining a fruitful balance between them. The Catholic Church cannot renounce one part of its heritage any more than it can deny a part of its history or obliterate an element of the self-understanding that it has reached. Vatican II also gave us elements for reconciling the two perspectives in a fruitful tension by starting from a local perspective that does not contradict the Church's universality; the Council proposed a third term: a universality understood as catholicity, a universality that honors the diversity of the particular Churches that enjoy their own traditions.

Congar's remark that we should not opt exclusively for one or another of the two ecclesiological perspectives in a certain manner, fits well with the reflection of Joseph Ratzinger who, in his commentary on article 22 of *Lumen gentium*, identifies "two typical concepts" of collegiality.²³ The first one, patristic in origin, places in the forefront the partial colleges of bishops, "in the local Churches themselves and in the ecclesiastical provinces. Thus, particular synods precede the ecumenical councils and they represent the 'ordinary way,' the latter being the 'extraordinary' way" (pp. 776-77). The second one, derived from "modern speculation", has chiefly in mind the full and supreme power (*plena et suprema potestas*) of the college over the universal Church and how to balance it with the full and supreme power of the pope" (p. 777); the college of bishops is here thought of as a kind of "supreme board of directors" (p. 776) of the Church. "According to the structural form that we take from our starting point," the German theologian went on, "one will link quite different concerns or problems to the idea of collegiality and one will judge the knot of the problem quite differently" (p. 776). Even though he indicates his clear preference for a patristic concept of collegiality, he observes that the "two ideas are internally complementary" (p. 777), leaving open the question: "the relief that one would give to one or the other will be, to a considerable degree, the task of interpretation; and on it will largely depend the kind of historical effect a text will have" (p. 777-78).

Evidently, both ideas are found in *Christus Dominus*. The more modern idea dominates in chapter I, while the more patristic one dominates chapter III. The latter expresses the "character and the collegial nature" of the Church by way of synods, provincial councils or plenary councils, which engage the collaborative spirit of the bishops of the same large sociocultural territory. But this idea has received less emphasis in the theological literature over the years that immediately

²³J. Ratzinger, "a la collégialité épiscopale. Développement théologique," in G. Baraúna (dir.), *L'Église de Vatican II*, 776ff.

followed Vatican II in which emphasis was placed instead on the national episcopal conferences and the Synod of Bishops. Evidently, these paths opened by Vatican II did not prove to be fruitful. At the same time, Paul VI did encourage the creation or the revitalization of groupings of episcopal conferences on a continental basis, in South America (CELAM) in Africa (SCEAM) in Asia (FABC) and in Europe (CCEE). For his part, John Paul II particularly encouraged, at the turn of the millennium, special gatherings of bishops' synods (continental gatherings) that would have as their theme encounter with Christ and evangelization. I will here simply note the appropriateness of the theme. In fact, what was principally at stake in these groupings of Churches and the spirit of cooperation among the bishops was nothing other than encounter with Christ and the announcing of the Gospel. Without being particularized in the different cultural spaces it encounters, that is, without really honoring its note of catholicity, the Church will be incapable of proclaiming the Gospel. What is at stake here is not a better balance of powers, but the witness given to the Gospel.

For the past forty years, we have been observing a certain adaptation of Christianity in these different civilizations. New ways of theological expression wish to emerge; new liturgical uses are being elaborated; original forms of the Christian life are being born; requests are being heard for particular ecclesiastical discipline. We are, nevertheless, still far from new particular Churches in the sense intended in "*Orientalium Ecclesiarum* 2 and 3 or *Lumen gentium* 13 and 23, that is to say, Churches endowed with liturgical, spiritual, theological and canonical traditions of their own.

CONCLUSION

The *Instrumentum laboris* (*IL*) for the tenth ordinary session of the Synod of Bishops on the episcopacy (2001) recalled in its introduction that, "at the beginning of the third Christian millennium, [...], we live a new moment in human history" (art. 1); it even calls this new context an "*aetas nova*," a new epoch. (art. 6) Even before looking at the exercise of the episcopal ministry, the *Instrumentum laboris* presents the traits of this *aetas nova*, this new situation in which the bishop is called to announce the Gospel and to be a witness of hope.²⁴ In this new context, the exercise of the episcopal ministry must evolve if a bishop wishes to "enter into communion with people" and put himself today in the service of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the hope of the world. (*IL*, art. 12) If the service of the Gospel demands that he have recourse to the tradition as to a treasury of wisdom, he must, nevertheless, see to it that this Gospel is "re-expressed" in the context of today's culture. This must be done without trivializing or reducing the message and without repeating archaic formulas that have often become incomprehensible to our con-

²⁴The outlines of this *aetas nova* are described in articles 15 to 31, 129 and 132.

temporaries.²⁵ At the same time, the bishop applies himself to the reading of the signs of the times (*GS* 4ff.) in order to understand in depth the major questions that our society is concerned with and to discern “the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, by all of which the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened.” (*GS* 44) In fact, “The Church is now facing new tasks in accomplishing her mission as a result of new social phenomena and cultural situations, new arenas for evangelization and new duties.” (*IL* art. 132) Today as well as in years past, the Church must find a way “to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers, and has tried to clarify it with their wisdom, too. Her purpose has been to adapt the Gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned, insofar as such was appropriate. Indeed this accommodated preaching of the revealed word ought to remain the law of all evangelization. For thus the ability to express Christ’s message in its own way is developed in each nation, and at the same time there is fostered a living exchange between the Church and the diverse cultures of people” (*Gs* 44).

How can the bishop today be a witness of the Gospel in his local Church? That is the major challenge, and everything else is secondary to that. If in fact we are being led to a new inculturation of the Gospel, even in the West, this task cannot be undertaken effectively unless it stimulates a true work in common by the bishops who have the charge of the Church in the large sociocultural territories of our world. This proposition put forth by Vatican II, without a doubt more than that of the bishops’ synod or of the national episcopal conferences, is probably today the most pertinent. However, at the same time that our world today is being globalized, tends more and more towards unity and craves a world authority that is absent, it has the need of the charisma of the primacy if these new “particular Churches”, enriched by their traditions, are to find their place in the communion. (*LG* 13 and *AG* 22) Thus, the primacy of the See of Peter that presides over the gathering of love, is not only recognized, but favored. This was highlighted in the teaching of Vatican I on the primacy when it referred to the thoughts of Gregory the Great: “My honor is the honor of the universal Church. My honor is the solid strength of my brothers. When due honor is rendered to each one, then am I honored.” The primacy has as its task, then, to guarantee the legitimate diversities and to see that they are compatible with unity, as mentioned and taught in *Lumen gentium* 13 where it speaks about a “catholic unity.”²⁶

The collegial nature and character of the episcopacy are well accepted on the theoretical level. Nevertheless, the concrete plan and the institutions that would

²⁵See article 132 of *IL* that gives an invitation to announce the Gospel by means of new words. See also *Ecclesia in America*, nos. 66 and ff. and the discourse of John Paul II in Santo Domingo (1992).

²⁶Vatican I, *Pastor Aeternus*, chap. III (Gregory the Great, *Epist. Ad Eulogium Alexandrium*, 1.8, c. 30: PL 77, 983 C).

permit an effective exercise of it are slow in coming. Could it be that today, “by the grace of Divine Providence”, diverse Churches may be constituted within various groupings, united as an organic whole, as was the case throughout the centuries for the patriarchates?²⁷ To honor the desire of Vatican II that a new vigor be given to institutions capable of supporting the cooperation of bishops for the common good of many Churches (CD 36), new steps forward will probably have to be taken. In his encyclical *Ut unum sint* (no 95), John Paul II made allusion to a “new situation” that demands that the primacy be exercised in a new way. In the same vein, one can think that this new situation also demands a new way of exercising collegiality, the two being linked, as indeed they are in the encyclical.

Studies have shown that Vatican II arrived rather easily at some crucial advances in areas where the ideas had matured before the Council opened, but that the council was much less productive and indeed experienced major difficulties when it broached new questions that had not benefited from deep exploration beforehand. This is certainly the case with regard to articulating the relationships among the local Church, the Churches of a region or of a large sociocultural territory²⁸, and the entire Church. But that is not, perhaps, the principal question. Despite all, Vatican II had the grace and insight to put forth the idea of “Catholic unity”, to think out theologically the exchanges between the Church and cultures, to go on to reestablish a real balance between the local Church, the “regional” Church, and the entire Church, without rejecting any of these ecclesiological perspectives, and to propose the notion of *communio* as a way of thinking about articulating them. Even further, Vatican II advanced some concrete proposals to move these ideas forward. If since then, certain advances have been made, as we have shown, still reservations have sometimes been greater than encouragement. To quote from Hermann Pottmeyer:

The decisive question is whether we are giving the new ecclesial self-understanding enough time and room to develop its own dynamism and shape, and thus to gain the strength it needs for creatively appropriating tradition and incorporating it into a continuity at a new level. Or, to put it differently, the decisive question is whether we are giving the Spirit of God enough freedom to lead the church along new paths. With this goes the freedom to make mistakes (though without adulterating the gospel) and to learn from them.²⁹

²⁷Paraphrase of LG 23.

²⁸We know that Vatican II often used the expression “particular Church” to designate the groupings of the Churches, a clear example is in *Orientalium ecclesiarum*, even if the expression also designates sometimes the diocese. The conceptual choice of *CIC* differs from this chapter found in *CCEO* (except from chap 177, 1). Refer to G. Nedungatt’s reflection entitled, “*Ecclesia universalis, particularis, singularis*”, *Nuntia* 2 (1976).

²⁹Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, “Vers une nouvelle phase de la réception de Vatican II. Vingt ans d’herméneutique du concile”, in Giuseppe Alberigo and Jean-Pierre Jossua (dir.), *La réception de Vatican II* (Paris: Cerf, 1985) 52.

This judgment agrees with the one expressed by Pope John Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*:

Consequently, the new century will have to see us more than ever intent on appreciating and developing the forums and structures which, in accordance with the Second Vatican Council's major directives, serve to ensure and safeguard communion. How can we forget in the first place those *specific services to communion* which are *the Petrine ministry* and, closely related to it, *episcopal collegiality*? These are realities which have their foundation and substance in Christ's own plan for the Church, but which need to be examined constantly in order to ensure that they follow their genuinely evangelical inspiration. Much has also been done since the Second Vatican Council for the reform of the Roman curia, the organization of Synods and the functioning of Episcopal Conferences. But there is certainly much more to be done, in order to realize all the potential of these instruments of communion, which are especially appropriate today in view of the need to respond promptly and effectively to the issues which the Church must face in these rapidly changing times. (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 44)

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