



WHY THE CHURCH?

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This Booklet does not address biblical or historical problems concerned with the origin or foundation of the Church, nor other moral problems connected with its reform. I have said something about these in other places. Here the concern is with *the theological status* of the Church.

I dedicate this booklet to all those for whom the institutional church is a motive for scandal and suffering. May they at least appreciate the great values the Church enshrines.

1. THE ESSENCE OF THE CHURCH: SACRAMENT OF SALVATION

“The essence of the Church is in her mission of service to the world, in her mission to save it completely and to save it in history here and now.

The Church exists to show its solidarity with the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time”

(Mgr. Romero, *Discourse in Louvain*).

According to the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (LG) of Vatican II, the Church is defined as “sacrament of salvation” (LG1,1). Sacrament means a visible sign which not only causes but makes perceptible the existence of salvation. Thus the sign of salvation is a sign of hope. Furthermore, the sacrament causes salvation precisely because it makes it visible, according to an old classical formula in Latin: “sacramenta significando causant.”

In spite of its novelty, this definition is more traditional than appears. Vatican I (on many points so opposed to II) tried to speak of the Church as “a sign raised among the nations” (DS 3014). The word sign is not all that different from sacrament which the following council would use.

The difference lies perhaps in the ingenious apologetics used according to which Vatican I only sees in the Church motives to believe in “its admirable propagation, outstanding holiness and inexhaustible fecundity.” To such an extent that these words are written, not in its Constitution on the Church, but in its Constitution on the Faith. Vatican II on the contrary is less mechanistic: the Church’s credibility comes not just from the mere fact of its existence but above all from faithfulness to its truth. We must therefore start by analyzing what it means to be a “sign of salvation”.

1.1. "To be for"

The first element in interpreting Vatican II’s definition comes from the fact that the old definition we all know of a “perfect society” is rejected.

In defining itself as a “sign”, an indication, and not as a perfect society, the Church is declaring that *the allegiance it hopes for from men comes not only from its supposedly “supernatural” character but also from what it offers them as a sign, as meaning, as “light for humanity”* (to use the expression which opens the Council Document).

In another context and some 20 years before, D. Bonhoeffer noted a similar intuition when he wrote in his letters from prison: “the Church is only the Church of Christ if it exists for the world, and not for itself”. An expression not very different from John Paul II (RH 14): “the way of the Church is man” (not the opposite!).

We should therefore conclude that the Church will only be “a sacrament of salvation” if it exists *in order to serve and make sacramentally visible the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus*. It exists to serve that Kingdom with all the content Jesus gave to that word. There should be no attempt to supplant or exhaust this “Kingdom of God” (which is the way Jesus expressed what we call salvation.).

1.2. For communion

Vatican II itself defines a little more the idea of salvation by identifying it with communion: *a sacrament of communion among men* between themselves and with God (LG 1). A people “established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth” (LG 9).

The expression communion (or also “intimate union”) refers us not only to the transcendent otherness of God but also to the here and now of our own history, so marked by the constant search for communion and fellowship among men, as also by the failures in that search, visible in the Cross.

In this light we should understand the additions made by Archbishop Romero in one of his pastoral letters or by Ignacio Ellacuria in some of his writings: the Church is “the *historical* sacrament of salvation”. Or “the body of the Church *within history*”.

It is also worth emphasising that this communion is something *reciprocal*. In these days this extremely rich concept is sometimes distorted, describing communion as accepting a uniform pattern imposed from above. But this is rather a manipulation of communion in favour of power: such a Church would not be a sacrament of communion, but rather something of the *Ancien Régime*.

To avoid misunderstanding, I should make it clear I am convinced of the need for authority in the Church and of obedience as a form of service for unity: we will speak of both later on. But *authority does not exist in the Church to substitute communion but rather to ensure that communion does not degenerate into indecision or manipulation*.

1.3. Image of the Trinitarian God: Church of the Crucified

In so far as it is a sacrament of communion, Vatican II also regards the Church as an “image of the Trinity” (LG 2-4). The Church is effectively people of God the Father, body of Christ and temple of the Spirit. And this in its totality. No authoritarian group from within can turn it into “an aristocracy of God, a substitute for Christ, an owner of the Spirit”.

In fact *the Church is an image of the Trinity because it is the Church of the Crucified*. That is to say, expression of the communion of God in history with the men and women of this incorrigible world which “kills the prophets”. Moltmann has noted with theological acuteness the link in christian faith between Trinity and Cross, pointing to the value of the catholic practice of making the sign of the cross at the precise moment of pronouncing the name of the Trinity (“in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”).

As Church of the Crucified, the whole community of believers (but especially those most responsible in it) should share in some way in this “kenosis” (or emptying out) of God, made possible by the Cross of the Son. The Cross should be a condition of the very life and sharing of the believer; and not a facile ploy to ensure that others do what those constituted in authority wish.

1.4. Visibility in the Eucharist

Finally, both the reference to the Crucified and Vatican II’s allusion to a “sacrament of communion” allow us to relate the sacramental character of the Church (“root-sacrament” in the formula of O. Semmelroth) to that “sacramental fullness” which is the Eucharist (“communion”, as commonly said).

No reflection on the nature of the Church can ignore what De Lubac says: “The Church makes the eucharist and the eucharist makes the Church”.

This means the eucharist is not a simple act of worship which has the good fortune of being agreeable to God so that, after offering it, we can already forget Him.

Many people seem to think like this and herein lies the great danger of sacrificial terminology.

No. The gospel command (“do this in memory of me”) does not refer solely to a liturgical act: for Jesus’s supper was not like this. It refers to the offering of his own body and blood (his own person and life) for the reconciliation and life of the world. So that those who only celebrate the eucharist as an obligation of worship deserve the old criticism of St Paul: “what you do is not celebrating the Lord’s Supper”.

So the eucharist exists -for want of a better way of putting it- to “turn the world into a eucharist”. And, to do this, those in the Church ultimately responsible for the eucharist have the task “of turning the Church into a eucharist” or, in other words, *ensuring that her relationships are not relationships of authority but rather of eucharist*¹. Those who speak today of an “alternative community” or a “different community” are really simply saying a eucharistic community.

In conclusion

a. The Church is not an institution for cult since it believes in a God who seeks mercy rather than sacrifices. Prayer is very important in the life of every believer: but this statement cannot be used to deny the previous one.

b. The Church is a community of members who are free (because they know they are God’s children) and merciful because, through Christ, God meets them in the needy. So it is “the

communion of Christ's Body" or, as the young Bonhoeffer instinctively wrote: "Christ existing as community".

c. Because the Church does not see herself as a "perfect civil community" but as an escatalogical community, "it has no more power in the world than Christ had when he was man" (Bartolomé de Las Casas)².

If we forget this, we will not understand what follows about the Church's mission.

2. THE WORK OF THE CHURCH: TO BRING THE GOSPEL ALIVE

“The Church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit.” (Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, 2).

For being a sacrament of salvation in history, we must add that the Church is *intrinsically missionary, evangelizing*. In the text already cited, Archbishop Romero said that the Church’s essence is in her mission. With him, other well-known Latin American bishops (E. Angelelli, Jaime Nevares...) speak of *putting in contact* (bringing near to each other) *the Gospel and reality*, the Word and life. And Vatican II explains to us what this missionary nature of the Church consists in.

2.1. The Mission

Evangelization is not the same as proselytism or propaganda. These don’t hesitate to eliminate the hearer’s freedom and are concerned more than anything else with numerical results. Coca Cola or Nike don’t evangelize, though they are all over the world.

Evangelization is an offer of salvation directed primarily to the freedom of the enquirer and respecting it. It doesn’t seek to manipulate, but to present the Gospel in a way that offers it as a possibility which remains open and meaningful. Proselytism is more concerned with the satisfaction and security of the agent. Evangelization should only be concerned with the freedom of the person in question.

The Church is missionary and evangelizing not because it only seeks to “increase its number of members”, but because it possesses the Good News essential for mankind (even though the latter ignores it): “the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ” (Rom 8,39). That is, for the same reason it is the sign of salvation.

2.2. Missionary constitution

This missionary task constitutes God’s first wish for his Church, something we can affirm with theological certainty. Before anything else God wants a missionary and evangelizing church: a recognizable and significant sign that God saves mankind, not only in some future world but affecting our present history.

The believer’s reply to this good news is what brings men and women together in a Church and sends them out to continue Christ’s mission. The Church can co-exist with a double social

image: that of an already christian society, or that of simple leaven. What it cannot accept is the loss of its sacramental meaning.

In accord with this we have to say *God has not desired arbitrary or superficial structures in his Church that could become obstacles to its mission* but has rather given it great freedom to promote this mission and facilitate communion and evangelization in the sense already explained.

The chief component of the structure left to his Church by the Risen Lord is what we call its “apostolate”, and I am not sure if we realise the importance of this expression: *the Church is formed above all to be apostolic*, to live the Gospel. Not for the desire of power or security, however much such a desire might seem sacred.

History teaches that the Church’s organisation in the first centuries was not formed according to a previous plan left by the Master but rather corresponded to actual needs and opportunities, seen in the light of the Gospel. Hence the great variety among the primitive churches which we find in the New Testament and is confirmed by historical investigation.

Nevertheless, there are not a few today who would agree with the statement of Juan Martin Velasco: one of the major modern obstacles to evangelization are the very structures of the Church itself³. And however much one may appeal to God’s will to justify such structures, if they are anti-gospel and anti-evangelization, we can legitimately doubt if they are an expression of God’s will. At least we should presume that things are more complex than suggested by a simple appeal to the will of Jesus.

2.3. To evangelize through deeds

If the first thing God wants is a Church that evangelizes, both without and within (that is, *its very presence and life add up to a proclamation*), this means that today, in the 21st century, in a plural world with a dechristianised West, *the Church is called to evangelize much more in deeds than in words*. No all who say “Lord, Lord” evangelize, but he who fulfills the will of the Father. To Vatican II’s definition of the Church as a sacrament, we can add what St Augustine says: “when the deed is added to the word, the sacrament appears.”⁴

If the Church does not evangelize in this sacramental sense (as “praxis”, so to speak), it will become what our consumer society tries to reduce it to: *something merely decorative, useful like flowers, to give colour to certain moments of a pagan life, such as weddings, funerals and so on*. In this way the Church could find an audience and even respect in our society (flowers never inconvenience); but it would be unfaithful to its mission. On the other hand, if the Church is fulfilling its mission to evangelize in the sense explained above, it will soon encounter the rejection and cross of its Founder.

Proof of this are the words of the Assembly of Latin American Bishops in Puebla that need no commentary: “As a universal sacrament of salvation, the People of God *are wholly in service to the cause of communion between human beings* and God on the one hand and among the whole human race on the other.... Every ecclesial community in Latin America should strive to serve our continent as an example of a way of living together in which freedom and solidarity are successfully combined; in which authority is exercised in the spirit of the Good Shepherd; in which a different attitude towards wealth is lived out; in which efforts are made to establish participatory forms of organisation and structure that are capable of paving the way for a more humane type of society; and, most important of all, in which it is

unmistakably clear that any merely human form of communion, devoid of radical communion with God in Jesus Christ, is incapable of sustaining itself and is fated to end up turning against humanity.” (273)

And all this is recognised and confirmed by the Church itself when, in one of its eucharistic prayers, it begs for itself to be “a haven of truth and love, of freedom, justice and peace, so that all may find in her a motive for continuing to hope”. Precisely. But how much we need to ask for this!

Without tackling here the structural reforms needed by the Church (which have been advocated throughout the second millenium and whose refusal has led to such painful divisions), we can state the following principal: *the Church of Jesus Christ should possess the maximum degree of spirituality and the indispensable minimum of organisation*. There are not a few in the Church who believe that today we have the opposite. A. Machado used to speak of “a Church that is spiritually sterile but tremendous in organisation.”⁵

By this I mean that the Church has to progress beyond the duality that seems to characterise it today: the division between clerical and lay, which some defend at all costs, to “community in service” which will oblige church ministers to pass from the sacred to service of church, self concern to concern for others, from the vertical to the collegial, as I have explained elsewhere.⁶

This reference to ministry will lead us in the next chapter to reflect on the members of the Church. But first we must look at the consequences of the Church’s missionary nature.

2.4. Good News for the poor

The treasure that makes the Church missionary is defined by the Word of God as “good news for the poor” (Is 61; Lk 4). It is here, and in hope for the sick and marginalised, That Jesus places the criterion for the authenticity and validity of his mission (Mt 11,2ff)⁷.

Evangelization must therefore be defined as *evangelization of the poor*. This does not prevent its universal character; the good news is directed to all of us to the extent that we accept placing ourselves in some way with the poor and at their side.

Thus, according to John XXIII, *the missionary church is “the church of the poor”*. It is not enough that a church more or less “of the wealthy” speaks well in favour of the poor. As the Church of Jesus Christ we still have a long way to go to appear to the world as church of the poor.

In the Middle Ages a classical expression was coined (though largely forgotten today): “our lords the poor”. If this is so, it is not enough for the Church to speak a few words in their favour. It is necessary they should have a voice (a strong one) to speak in the Church and to the Church.

2.5. The fullness of Christ

The letter to the Ephesians, explaining the “restoring of all things in Christ”, defines the Church *as that which finds its fullness in the measure that the world becomes fully subject to Christ*. (1, 23)⁸ The definition is a little complicated but very rich; it needs some explanation.

The letter gives this definition to explain how it is possible that, if it has just said “Christ is head of all”, it then says “*because of this* God has made him the head of the Church”. What is suggested here is a dynamic tension between Church and universe: the Church would come to be *the world concentrated in God’s sight* (here is the root of its character as sign or sacrament); and the world would come to be like a church in growth.

So that this explanation does not sound proselytizing two things need to be understood:

a. The letter wishes to teach that the *whole world is already subject to Christ*, possesses a seed of Christ that is its deepest truth and can be the realization, through the Resurrection, of the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus. It is the Church’s task -as service to the Kingdom- to help this seed grow to its fullness.⁹

b. To be subject to Christ is not the same as forming church or even christianising. We have already said the Church can be a model for the “conversion” of the world as well as ferment within it.

In both cases it can fulfill its mission as well as failing to fulfill it. Because, in accord with the teaching of Jesus, the world will not become subject to Christ from the simple fact of saying “Lord, Lord”, or because the Popes have temporal power, nor because there is a feast of Christ the King in the liturgy, but rather because it gives food and drink to those who have none, clothes the naked, visits the sick and prisoners...

Thus it is clear how *the fullness of the Church’s work fulfills its sacramental nature*. We can also understand why Vatican II, after defining the nature of the Church as sacrament of salvation, begins its teaching *on the work* of the Church as follows: “The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.

Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts... That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history”.

This is the same as saying the Church’s mission is to be leaven in the dough, and not fortress, or ghetto or reserve apart: and, still less, “empire”.

3. THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

All that we have said alludes and refers primarily to the community of believers or those called by God, the people of God who are the true members of the Church.

Unfortunately one of the most common hidden heresies is to reserve the name of Church to only a part of it, to a sort of sacralised power that would be the only true beneficiary of God's call and, in respect of which, the believers would be no more than the field of display and operation of this power. I must repeat this is no less than heretical, however much it may be present to many.

3.1. "Those called by God"

It is true that in the Church there is something before the coming together of the faithful. But this something before is not sacralised power through God's transcendence, *but God's call to all believers* to include them in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 1,23). Put in another way: the Church is not primarily what we call "the ecclesiastic ministry" (and only in a derived sense the so-called faithful), even though such ministry can have a higher level of responsibility and dedication. The phrase attributed to Pius IX: "Tradition it is I" is pure heresy, prescinding from whether or not the Pope uttered this phrase. And this false conception is also reflected in a classical book of the last century (the *Prelaetiones* of J. Perrone): "here we understand by Church not the totality of believers but... *the body of pastors with the Roman Pontiff*"¹⁰. Neither here nor anywhere else can that be taken as Church.

Vatican II reacted against this concept (which was still present in the preparatory document drawn up by the Roman Curia) by changing the order of chapters 2 and 3 of LG: the first chapter on the mystery of the Church was followed by the chapter dedicated to the people of God, and not by the one dedicated to the hierarchy as the previous outline had proposed.

3.2. Mystery of the People

In accord with this change of order of chapters 2 and 3 of LG, the mystery of the Church *is the mystery of the people gathered by God*, of the communion between all the members of this people where there is no longer Jew nor Greek, lord nor slave, man nor woman. If one ponders this quietly, it turns out to be highly amazing and stimulating. Obviously this people will need some services which exist for them: so that the people of God can live. But *the mystery of the Church is not the mystery of a sacralised power*, which itself will need some faithful for whom it can be exercised.

This inversion in Vatican II's outlook has not affected the mentality of many church people. But without it there would be no force in St Augustine's words which can serve as an examination of conscience for many hierarchies: "I am a christian WITH you and bishop FOR you. What I am for you terrifies me, but what I am with you consoles me"¹¹. St Augustine knew he was church *for being a christian*, not for being a bishop. One fears that today many ministers believe themselves church not for being christians, but for being priests or bishops. And so that other play on words of St Augustine about bishops, which he repeats so often and is as memorable as it is untranslatable, loses its meaning: "praessint ut prossint" (or "prodesse, non praeesse"): may they preside in order to promote. To promote, that is, the people of God, and not other interests, not even those of the Roman Curia.

When we hear it said today it would be better to avoid the conciliar definition of the Church as people of God because there is a risk of "sociological reductionism", we feel justified in considering such an argument as an attempt to defend the concept of Church I have described as heterodox. There cannot be sociological reductionism where it is claimed this people is "OF GOD". On the same lines one could say it is better to avoid the definition of the Church as "body of Christ" in order to avoid "biological reductionism", or something similar. The reductionism cannot come through using the word body, but only if one denies we are concerned in the definition with the body "of Christ", just as in the other we are concerned with the people "of God". The accusation I have just mentioned ignores completely the description of the people of God in the New Testament: "You are *God's chosen race*, his saints: he loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins..." (Col 3,12-13).

Such a people would really be an "alternative community", a contrast, and a sacrament of salvation.

3.3. We are Church

All of this discussion is not merely theoretical but has practical consequences. If we are all Church, then we are all responsible for the Church in some way. In the same way (though in another sense and for different reasons) all citizens have some responsibility for the functioning of their country. All and not only the government or parliament, though these at specific times have greater responsibility.

It is obvious that in any social body there must be some functions which assume in a more intense and dedicated manner responsibility for the whole body. This is required by the laws of human living together which God respects. But the fact these functions exist does not dispense the faithful from the responsibility which comes from the simple fact of being believers in the God of Jesus Christ. Responsibility for the good and the bad, for the building up of the people, and so that we don't live our faith in our own personal interests.

It was for this there existed in the primitive church that principle which later on passed into the realm of law: "that which affects all should be treated and approved by all". This principle does not refer only to economic or social matters. *Nothing affects christians more than God's gift of Jesus Christ in his life, death and resurrection. And this gift is the responsibility of all.*

It is good to remember in this context that Karl Barth defined theology as “ecclesiastical” and named his dogmatics as “ecclesial dogmatics”. Obviously, when he spoke in this way (Barth himself accepted the need for some authority and functions in the Church), he was not referring to a hierarchical dogmatics, or dogmatics according to the Roman Curia. He was speaking of a theology responsible for “service to the people of God”. Theology is pursued for the community of believers and not for the career or promotion of the theologian. And what I am saying of theology holds for the other tasks within the Church.

Not long ago, a group of Christians from all over the world, alarmed by the present situation of the Catholic Church and conscious that they too were partly responsible for it (though to a much smaller degree than other groups) formed a sort of world platform with the name “We are Church”. It is difficult to understand why ecclesiastical authorities universally discredited this platform which was doing no more than exercising its Christian responsibility. If specific errors had been committed, it would have been better to condemn them rather than the movement as a whole. Obviously one can fulfill a responsibility badly and unfortunately as humans we do this more than once and - when it happens - it would be good to tell us, in name of the responsibility of all. But what should not be done is simply to deny the exercise of a responsibility *that stems from the very fact of being believers, that is being Church*.

To end, this is the moment to recall that the description of the Church as people of God comes from the Hebrew *qahal* (which the Greek translates as *ekklesia*) which means an assembly already convoked to carry out its task in history¹². *Ekklesia* does not come from the Hebrew word *yahad* which means community and which the monks of Qumran used to describe themselves.

We are concerned in the Church with a community that does not flee from history but rather takes on a task within it. Hence the responsibility of all within it.

3.4. The Church of God which is in a place

The New Testament teaches that this Church, people of God, is not a sort of religious multinational, but that each particular church is the full church, *catholic*: “the church of God which is in Corinth, in Thessalonica” or in Barcelona. And this locality shares in a universal communion precisely because it is “of God”.

This point has historical and theological importance in a world of “uniform thought” and false globalization. It is worth treating it at some length.

3.4.1. Local and in full communion

A. Each local church is the **WHOLE** church (or “the catholic church”), not a **PART** (as for example Tarragona is a part of Cataluña), nor a branch (like a bank) nor an individual of a race (as Peter is of the human race). It is simply “the church of God”. Church of God which is in...Corinth (1Cor 1,2 and 2Cor 1,1), or the churches of Galacia (Gal 1,2) or the church of the Thessalonians (1 & 2 Tes 1,1), or “the church in Jerusalem” (Acts 8,1). Also in the martyrdom of Polycarp he is spoken of as “bishop of the catholic church of Smyrna”.

Each local church is therefore *the church* of God. But:

B. This older teaching of the New Testament has to be reconciled with the Letters in captivity which speak more of *the* universal church, while in the previous case *the* churches figure more. Lumen Gentium 23 affirms that “it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists”.¹³

C. To be *catholic* or “of God” each local church needs:

- to be *integral* (“holistic” in modern parlance). Because as Tertulian says: “Gods goodness is supreme and catholic” (*Adv. Marc.* 2,17).

- And it also needs to *be open* to communion with other local churches. In such a way that the so-called “universal church” becomes a communion of churches or “church of churches” in the beautiful expression of J.M.Tillard.

Integral and open. The first is closely linked to the second (which is not merely an addition): catholicity comprises a *qualitative total*, that is: a church lacks nothing of the human-divine; it is “church of God in everything that establishes the existence of a human completeness”.¹⁴ Quantitative catholicity derives from this qualitative catholicity and it is not merely a numerical aggregate. Because of this, the Church’s mission, more than a mere addition, has its root *in its possession of the whole human richness of Christ*.

D. Three important and practical consequences flow from this:

a. The Church is local. *But this being local carries the serious obligation to promote communion among all the local churches*, which requires a centre to stimulate such communion, in this case the Church of Rome.

This does not mean that another local church can impose itself or squash the distinctiveness of the local churches in the name of catholicity.

The church of Rome is not the universal church, but rather *the centre of communion* among the churches. If God’s churches are crushed by what should be their centre of communion, then we will have what St Bernard described to Pope Eugenius III: “if you reduce Christ’s body to a head with fingers, then you will change it into a monster.”

b. It can also be useful to note how *this theme is connected with the church of the poor*, as we see already in the Acts. For in each local church there enters not only all that is human but also all humans. And this is also linked (as St Justin saw in the second century) with the eucharist as communion of all.¹⁵

c. In conclusion: *all church attributes are marked with this duality of locality and catholicity* which implies an attempt to promote their collegial or synodal structure (cf LG 26). The Church was not born with a structure already given by its Founder, but rather had to search for one and for this it looked at the world around it (city, metropolis, province etc). But in structuring itself, it could not prescind from the double nature of its constitution.

3.4.2. *The local church and the eucharist*

This dialectic relationship between the local and universal church corresponds to something deeply human. The individual is truly fulfilled in the search for community: he or she becomes a person. If, on the other hand, one imprisons oneself in an individualism that seeks its identity in separation rather than communion, one ends by destroying it in human terms.

But then every community can in its turn degenerate into community-individual or become community-person, in the search to affirm itself through separation or communion with other communities. For this reason E. Mounier defined the community as a “person of persons”.

And if this dialectic of the local church is so human, one can understand it should have much to do with the eucharist. Already from the time of St Augustine it was pictured as follows: each consecrated host (or fragment) is the WHOLE body of Christ, and not a part.¹⁶ And this does not exclude the fact that all the other hosts are the same. The reduction of the eucharist to a mere act of worship makes us lose this important dimension of the Lord’s command to repeat his Last Supper.

On the other hand, the theology of the local church has nothing to do with nationalistic claims, however legitimate these might be. What we have explained is just as valid for the church of Barcelona, Calahorra or Burgos. Kasper is right to insist, replying to Ratzinger, that, in the theology of the local church, “we are not dealing with an ecclesiastical nationalism.”¹⁷

And we should add that it was precisely the emergence of various ecclesiastical nationalisms (“gallicanism” or “josephism”) that, in the course of history, weakened the importance of the theology of the local church.

J.J.Tillard has expressed well the difference between the two concepts: “none of the churches can consider its difference as the supreme value in function of which all else should be judged by her.”

That is: the differential is not composed of special features (linguistic, cultural or historical..) but by *the very fact of christianity*, as it appears in the Incarnation.

Without this opening to the other churches it is no longer “ekklesia tou Theou” (the church of God).

In this way neither are the differences barriers, nor does the suppression of the barriers eliminate the differences.

3.4.3. *The local church and the episcopate*

All these facts are basic to a theology of the episcopate. *The bishop is characterized by his bond to a local church and to the college of bishops.* Here we find the two ecclesiological features we have just described. Each bishop is representative, person in charge (“angel” as the Apocalypse says in its letters to the churches) or (in an expression dear to ancient theology and which denotes a very serious link) “husband” of a local church. *And it is precisely because of this that he is at the same time member of the episcopal communion (or “college”).*

The bond with his people is such that, in the primitive tradition, it is not the bishop who consecrates (or the eucharistic president, though there should be one) but the whole people, to which he does not impart a special power to consecrate¹⁸, but rather the communion with the churches so that there can be a true eucharist. “The church which is in...” is not merely the bishop but the whole people: “the saints and the faithful who are in Ephesus (Ef 1,1), or “God’s beloved in Rome, called to be saints” (Rom 1,7), or “all the saints in Christ Jesus, together with their presiding elders and deacons” (Phil 1,1). Because of this, *collegiality and locality are the obverse and reverse of the same reality* and not two opposed principles. St Cyprian, one of the great theologians of the local church, writes: the episcopate is one; and each bishop shares in it entirely (“*in solidum*”)¹⁹.

Hence the theological absurdity of bishops without a church (or of a no longer existing church) which is so common today. The Council of Calcedon in the 5th century already forbade this in its 6th canon. Equally odd is the case of two bishops in the same church (forbidden by the Council of Nicea in its 8th canon). Or that somebody should be a minister of the episcopal body without being a minister in a local church.

All these situations are current in our church and do much harm to the nature and theology of the episcopate. For this reason there are urgent calls to change them.

4. IS THE CHURCH AN OBJECT OF FAITH ?

The appalling Spanish (and English) translation of our creeds forces Christians to proclaim a heresy each Sunday when we affirm that “we believe in the Church”. In this chapter we have to explain that in no way is the Church an object of the virtue of faith. One can only believe in God, in the full sense of the word. But faith in God and his love is intrinsically an ecclesial faith, creative of communion and community. Thus, as is shown by the history of the various creeds and professions of faith, the Church only came into them late and not as an object of faith but in consequence of it.

4.1. Clarification of words

The word to believe, in Spanish and English, can be construed in three ways. I believe “*in somebody*” in the sense that existentially I trust in and am drawn towards that person. I believe “*that*” something or someone exists (other inhabited worlds or Father Christmas). I believe *someone*: I accept the truth of what they say.

Latin and Greek have a number of clauses and cases to distinguish these meanings that are lacking in Spanish and English. These grammatical forms show that the Church only enters into the creeds in this twofold sense:

- a. Because I believe **IN** God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I also believe (or accept) **THAT** the Church exists (the more western version).
- b. I believe that the Holy Spirit is working in the Church to lead it towards communion with the Holy (which implies) the forgiveness of sins and eternal life (the more eastern version).

Tradition offers many examples in this sense. May we be allowed at least a small selection.

4.2. Why we cannot believe **IN the Church ?**

To begin with the most authoritative witness, though not the oldest, we pass the word to St Thomas: “One can say ‘I believe **IN** the Church’ if it is understood in reference to the Holy Spirit who sanctifies the Church. But it is better to follow common usage and say simply: I believe (the existence of) the Church without the preposition “in”, as Pope St Leo says” (*2ae, I, 9, ad5*).

Long before him in the 9th century, Pascasio Radbert wrote: “We should not say ‘I believe IN the Church’ (*in ecclesiam*) but rather, suppressing the syllable “in”, we should say ‘I believe THAT the Church exists’, just as I believe eternal life exists. Otherwise it would look as if we believe in man, which is not lawful. We believe only in God and his unique Majesty” (PL 120, 1402, 1404).

Let us emphasise the reason given: to believe in the Church would be to believe in something human, and that is *idolatry*. Fausto de Rietz gave the same reason in the 5th century: “Whoever believes IN the Church believes in a man: because man was not formed for the Church but the Church for men. Therefore drop this blasphemous idea of thinking you should believe in some human creature” (PL 62,11).

This selection would be never-ending. I will close it with the Catechism of the Council of Trent which is completely clear on the point: “It is necessary to believe THAT the Church exists but not to believe IN the Church. We believe in the persons of the Trinity in such a way that we put all our faith in them. Then we change our way of speaking and say that the Church exists and not that we believe in the Church in order, with these different expressions, to distinguish God the Creator from his creatures” (Part 1, chap. 10, no. 23).

It is therefore legitimate to conclude with the magisterial summary of St Idlephouse which will introduce us to the next section: ...“the Church is not God. We believe IN God in a unique way and, *as a consequence of that faith*, we believe the Church exists” (PL 96, 127d).

4.3. To believe according to the Church

That is, to believe is to enter into contact with or incline towards the Holy Mystery which is full and total communion and implies the absence of sin and eternal life. The Church is like the “sacrament of this communion” (LG 1,1), produced by the same faith.

Thus faith is not faith in the Church, but it is necessarily *related to the Church*. We don’t believe IN the Church because it is the Church that believes and only in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, object of faith. But faith in the christian God is necessarily comunitarian: to believe in Him establishes us in a Church.

The Church, then, enters faith and the creed, not to denote *the end* but rather *the scope* and manner of faith. Because one can only believe in God who is Absolute Communion if one is also in communion. And the Church mentioned in the creed is neither the hierarchy nor what we call today the institutionalised Church (however necessary and praiseworthy both may be): the Church of the creed is the Church-communion. This is the “holy” Church. Whoever has experienced the joy and companionship involved in meeting other human beings to share in the faith of God revealed in Jesus Christ, will easily understand this intrinsically ecclesial dimension of the faith.

For this reason the Roman creeds link very well the *holy* Church and the *communion* of the saints. For in the measure that an act of faith in its structure is a “going out of oneself towards God”, this going out of self brings the believer into communion: others cannot be excluded from my faith. To *sum up*: *the Church is neither object, nor end, nor content of the faith. It is an intrinsic dimension of the faith, a manner of believing in the God who is Love*. It is not necessary to insist how this truth, in addition to being a gift, is essential for the Church.

4.4. In guise of a conclusion

In the original version, our two creeds say: “credo *in* Spiritum sanctum, sanctam ecclesiam” (without preposition) in the Roman creed. And “et *in* Spiritum Sanctum... et unam (also without preposition), sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam”, for the Nicene creed (DS 30, 150). So it is highly desirable we give back to our profession of faith its true meaning.

Or if you prefer the eastern creeds: we believe that the Holy Spirit (the giver of Life) is working *in the whole world* towards the establishment of full communion, through total pardon and eternal life. The Church is both symbol and sign of this human realization. So we claim that the Spirit *is working in the Church* to convert it into a community of faith, hope and love which anticipates its final goal.

5. THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE CHURCH

A community such as that described in the first three chapters will always be caught up in the difficult tension between charism and institution. And it will have to struggle so that its organizational elements express and give strength and life to the Spirit, instead of stifling it. “Never try to suppress the Spirit” (1 Thes 5,19) is a council already given to one of the first churches we know.

For this reason, among others, from the beginning the Church was defined as “always being in need of reform”. In an even harder way, the Holy Fathers described it as a “chaste prostitute” because the holiness of the Spirit and the sin of those who constituted it existed side by side. Those who today are saddened by some aspects of the official church should not forget that Jesus wept over Jerusalem, the religious capital of Judaism: that Jerusalem of which all used to sing “what joy when they said to me, let us go to the Lord’s house”, but did not know how to recognize the hour of God (cf Lk 19, 41).

And if the Church’s mission is messianic, its temptations will be the same as the messianism of Jesus: to change stones into bread; to tempt God or put power in his place.

5.1. Church centralism: manipulation God for one’s own advantage

Jesus was tempted to use God’s power to his own advantage, changing stones into bread and thus abandoning his solidarity with the condition of all human beings. An ecclesiastical version of this temptation is what we call church centralism: instead of being a sacrament of the Kingdom, the Church sets up as an end in itself or, to use classical biblical language, “it feeds on itself”. This temptation affects all the institutional aspects of the Church since it is an inevitable law of every human institution to end by confounding its aims with its own interests. If the Church falls into this temptation, then the ecclesiastical institution will be announcing itself rather than God and, instead of the Precursor’s mission (“that He may grow and I diminish”), it will end by confusing its own growth with the growth of God and love of the Church with love for its own authority. The criteria for appointments, canonizations and all else will no longer be service of the God’s Kingdom announced by Jesus, but service of the ecclesiastical institution even in its most dubious aspects. This temptation leads to careerism and self promotion which end by causing great damage to any community.

It is precisely because this temptation is so embedded in our human nature, that biblical sources are constantly warning against it. The prophet Ezechiel has some strong words against the religious leaders of the Jewish people: “the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves”, “you have dressed yourselves in wool, you have sacrificed the fattest sheep, but failed to feed the flock”, “you have failed to bring back strays or look for the lost”, “my flock is straying this way and that”. And he concludes: “I am going to call the shepherds to account. I

am going to take my flock back from them and I shall not allow them to feed my flock. In this way the shepherds will stop feeding themselves” (34, 2-10). St Augustine comments on this chapter from Ezechial in the two sermons already quoted in note 11.

The evangelist Matthew presents a collection of Jesus’s words, also very strong, which the exegetes agree have remained in the gospel, not in criticism of the jews “of old”, but as a warning for the ecclesiastical ministry of the christians. St Jerome agrees with this opinion when (commenting on Matthew 23) he warns that “all the vices of the pharisees have passed onto us” (PL 26, 168).

If it is possible to write this way about the primitive church, what should we be saying so many centuries later ? Perhaps the only difference is that the young church of St Jerome was capable of recognising these dangers and confessing falling into them, while the old church of our days seems no longer capable of this. For this reason it is necessary to repeat that the Church cannot

- strain out the gnat of canon law and swallow the camel of justice and mercy,
- violate God’s will by invoking the traditions of its seniors,
- clean the cup outside and leave it dirty inside,
- take the widows’ money on pretext of long prayers for them,
- lead the blind from its own blindness,
- kill inconvenient prophets then build monuments to them when they no longer molest...

The basic cure against this temptation is to rediscover and promote the gospel vision of authority against all pagan or idolatrous concepts of it. Let us examine this.

The gospel meaning of authority

Against any angelic idealism, remembering with Pascal that pretending to be angels converts us into demons, we must affirm the need for authority in the Church. Authority is needed not for reasons derived *from itself but because of our human condition*.

Any community without a minimum of authority will end in divisions or fall into the hands of hidden leaders, instinctive manipulators who hide behind big words and whom almost nobody dares resist either through human self-respect or because they never show their face. Authority is necessary because of our human condition and God, on entering our history, did not come to take advantage of us. But this is very different from an idolatrous vision of authority which considers it necessary for being a reflexion of God. Authority is not theocentric; only true love is a reflexion of God.

This is the reason why the New Testament, when speaking of authority, carefully avoids any sacralizing words (sacred power, priesthood, hierarchy, pontiffs), and deliberately uses “functional” expressions (*supervisors - bishops - servers, ancients or envoys, directors or “those who lend a hand”*). The gospel goes so far as to forbid us to call anyone “father” or “lord”, not because these expressions might have some legitimate derived sense, but so as not to lose awareness that only one is our Father and Lord, while we are all brothers. Following this way of thinking, the word “hierarchy” (or “sacred power”) only became part of church vocabulary in the 4th century as a result of the “platonizing” of christianity and through the works of a famous writer presented as if contemporary with the Apostles. I am referring to the

so-called Pseudodionisius. Personally I think the word “hierarchy” is in itself heterodox and should be avoided in Christian discussions. For, however necessary authority is, it does not belong to the Kingdom of God except for the inescapable limitation of our reality which St Paul attributes to “these present times of stress” (1Cor 7,26).

This is why Jesus remained so enormously free, though in no way individualistic, and had his major conflicts with the established authorities. He didn’t pretend to abolish authority in his community but rather convert it into a true service, as he put it in one of his oldest sayings expressed on more than one occasion: don’t you behave like worldly powers who lord it over them and yet are given the title benefactor. Among you the first should become the last and the leader the one who serves.²⁰ The Church, on the other hand, has often substituted these words for the other “religious” concept of authority, more akin to the Old Testament than to the Gospel. So the task of authority is not to impose its own way of thinking (as if the mere fact of having authority canonizes this way of thinking), but rather *to create community*, to maintain united in spite of differences and to help those for whom one is responsible to grow. When it is more pagan than gospel-based, ecclesiastical authority falls into the temptation described by that old Spanish refrain: “support it and don’t change it”, to avoid feeling that it is losing power or is badly placed.

Let me give an example. It is well known that, when Paul VI set up a commission to examine the teaching on birth control, a large majority advised the Pope on the need to change the Church’s official position on this point. Yet, through pressure from the defeated minority which persuaded the Pope that any change might undermine ecclesiastical authority for ever, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (drawn up by the leaders of the minority group) reaffirmed the traditional teaching. Could not the question have been left open without a decision? In the eyes of many, it seemed preference was given to sending millions of the faithful “to hell” rather than admit a possible self error. The result, sadly known, was the fulfillment of that phrase of Jesus which is also valid for institutions: he who only seeks to save his life will lose it, and he who accepts to lose it will regain it. Authority, wishing to save its credibility, lost it.

5.2. Privilege: using God for the benefit of his mission

Following the analogy of the temptations of Jesus already mentioned above, now it is a question of “throwing oneself down from the Temple” or “tempting God”, that is to say: taking on irresponsible risks and hoping that God will send his angels to prevent us from falling. If the previous temptation affected more those responsible for the ecclesiastical institution, this one by its very nature seems to affect more the people of God. The prophet Isaiah raised his voice against a people who “say to the seers: ‘See no visions’; to the prophets: ‘Do not prophesy the truth to us, tell us flattering things; have illusory visions’” (30, 10).

What we wrote above about the ecclesiastical responsibility *of all* also applies here. In the days surrounding Vatican II, the people of God fell to this temptation of irresponsibility many times, turning the Church into a madhouse of selfish demands in which each looked only to his own interest and not that of others. This egoistic chaos did much harm to other demands which in themselves were legitimate or convenient. And though this does not justify the present regression or “ecclesiastical winter”, we should recognise it since recognition will be the only way to prevent the error happening again.

This temptation also occurs when, on the other hand, the people of God sacrifice the gift of christian liberty in order to obtain total security, the greatest temptation of religiosity. Thus movements and institutions come into being which abdicate all use of reason, conscience and responsibility in Jesus's cause in return for specific and detailed orders which tell them exactly what they have to do and give them the peace of "knowing what we are about", at the cost of burying talents and feeling superior to those who don't follow such minutely marked paths. In the end, this temptation confuses faithfulness to God with the thousand details of "mint and dill" (Math 23,23), and, whereas Jesus announced the Kingdom of God for the poor, leads to the Church's altars being for the rich (who are those who can most benefit from this temptation). Another similar example. When the 18th century Church undertook a bold inculturation experiment in India and China, investing the talents received from the Lord, as it had done with Platonism in the 1st century, Pope Benedict XIV forbade the attempts (especially under pressure from Jansenism at that time on the right of the church), causing enormous sorrow and frustrating, perhaps for ever, the spread of christianity in the East. I have commented elsewhere how, two centuries later, Cardinal Tisserant confessed that those were "the blackest days in missionary history".

I quote these episodes now because (although it was explained to the Pope the enormous success these experiments were having), in the Bull which promulgated the definitive prohibition Benedict XIV wrote that no one should fear this prohibition would harm the missions because in the last resort "conversion is an act of Grace from God." This seems to me a good example of tempting God, hoping he will come to rescue our irresponsible behaviour of "burying the talent". This is not the Lord's reaction as expressed in the gospels...

5.3. The temptation to power as a means for evangelizing

According to the gospels, Jesus was not only tempted to use God's power for his own needs or to abuse God's strength to obtain a "sign from heaven" which would favour his mission, but also to use human power as a means to spread God's Kingdom. The Church also, seeing that it can't call on signs from heaven, will also be tempted to use power as a means for evangelization, forgetting that *worldly power might perhaps extend the Church, but cannot extend the gospel*. Throughout history, both what we call Constantinism and the later temporal power of the Popes (still active today though in a minimal and symbolic form), give clear evidence of what this temptation means.

5.3.1. Constantinism

This is the name given to the desire for temporal power at the service of the Church's work. And this in a privileged manner. The gratitude of the Church to Constantine after three centuries of persecution is understandable. But we should not forget that the emperor came to be wrongly called "the thirteenth apostle". And many centuries later St Bernard wrote to Pope Eugenius III: "You don't seem a successor to Peter but to Constantine".

And if you think this temptation has already been overcome, read what Cardinal Congar wrote in 1962: "We have not yet come out of the Constantinian era. Poor Pius IX, who understood nothing of the course of history and smothered French catholicism with his sterile attitude of opposition and conservatism... was called by God to understand the lessons of

history and free the Church from the disastrous consequences of the "Donation of Constantine" and convert it to an evangelism that would have allowed it to be less *of the world* and more *in the world*. But he did exactly the opposite. A catastrophic man, ignorant of what was both "ecclesia" and Tradition, directed the Church to be constantly *of the world* instead of being *in the world* which was what it nevertheless needed. And Pius IX continues reigning, Boniface VIII still reigns superimposed on the humble image of Simon Peter, the fisherman..." (*Mon Journal du Concile*, p. 109).

5.3.2. Charlemagne

Towards the year 800, owing to the donation of Charlemagne, the Church not only enjoyed the protection of temporal power, but herself exercised it in the so-called "pontifical states". So as not to digress, I will quote only one notable example of this political power as a way of the Church's presence in the world and which affects one of the sins for which it has most been criticized: I refer to the inquisition.

While the Popes had no political power, the Church rejected any form of inquisition or condemning heretics to death, from Priscilian (in the 4th century) to the Catharists (11th century). Pope St Leo condemned all inquisition citing the gospel parable of not uprooting the darnel. St Bernard, in spite of his intolerant disposition, also condemned it appealing to the freedom of faith which cannot be imposed by force.

When the Popes obtained political power, there began a slow process of change which, in two centuries, went from the "investigation" of heretics, the declaration of heresy as a *civil* crime of lese-majesty, the setting up their own law courts for it, the denial of defense to those accused, and even the acceptance of torture. The logic of power had triumphed over the logic of the gospel.

Compare these two stages: of a saint and a pope, separated by a thousand years of time. In the 5th century St John Chrysostom wrote: "to kill a heretic is to introduce in the world an unforgivable crime". In the 16th century Pope Leo X condemned the saying of Luther: "to burn heretics is against the will of the Holy Spirit" (DS 1843). The logic of power had defeated the gospel. And still today in the Church there are too many after tastes of this logic, both in the image of the popes as in the procedures of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which has renounced the name of inquisition but not some of the methods of its predecessor²¹. The relations of the Church with power will never be easy because it is very difficult they should be good. The Church cannot possess this power nor pretend to be protected by it. It must seek peace with it, as with all entities in the world, but knowing also to face up to it and not run away from any resulting conflict, even though this brings problems. Because power is one of the aspects most opposed to the way God revealed himself in Jesus Christ, in spite of its inevitable necessity which, for that reason, must be reduced to an indispensable minimum.

This is what would make the Church an authentic "sacrament of salvation" and what we hope from her. While, if the Church opts for power, then, when it finds itself deprived of it, it will choose to become ghetto rather than ferment.

6. THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH IN A THEOLOGICAL SETTING

What we have said, especially in the previous chapter, permits us to apply to the Church a definition of theology coined by Gustavo Gutierrez with respect to liberation theology. Theology is “a reflexion on the praxis”. We prescind here from whether there were reductionist interpretations in this definition. What it means is that *history and life are fields for theology for a christian*. And especially the history and life of faith.

Fundamentally this chapter is searching for a Theology of the Spirit. We can imagine that, if a first century christian were to be reborn today and ask for the Church, he who would have experienced all those first moments when both Luke and John spoke incessantly of the gift of the Spirit, which was going to continue and implement Jesus’s mission bringing the Church to the fullness of truth, this christian would think that, twenty centuries later, the Church would be overflowing with the Spirit. Probably his deception would be great seeing how little the western churches knew or tried to listen to “what the Spirit is saying to the churches”.

And certainly another important deficit is the Hellenic influence on christianity and theology from which only today we are beginning to escape. Hellenic and Roman influence: because the excessive legalism, inherited from Ancient Rome, has also led to a kidnapping of the Spirit at the hands of authority.

6.1. Spirit and dust

And yet, throughout its already long history, the Spirit has often carried the believing community to the fullness of its truth, as Jesus Christ promised. But also inevitably, throughout history, the dust of the centuries and of our own obscurities has been gathering on the Church. It is incomprehensible that the ecclesiastic institution does not recognize this fundamental “discernment of spirits” to reflect on its past and distinguish between what has been a gift of the Spirit and what a stain on the dust of history.

So it happens that many times, in the Church, what is no more than an effect of the patina of time is called a command of Christ. To ignore this distinction prevents that fundamental restoration (as was done to the paintings in the Sistine Chapel) which gives back to the walls of the Church their true evangelical colours with all their trinitarian polychromy, beyond the inevitable disfigurements of time.

Knowledge of the Church’s history teaches that often things once considered scandalous can be understood and even justified by the very difficulty of the times. The harm was done when those emergency or substitute measures *were no longer necessary but kept in place by authority and presented as God’s will*, thus identifying God’s will with laziness or routine.

Here we find the “we cannot” of Pius IX faced by the sin (structural even then) of the temporal power of the popes. I don’t know if Pius IX came to believe he was defending something from God and not something very much from himself when he defended the papal states (he excommunicated those with contrary opinions). If he really came to believe it, it is another example of the extent to which we humans call fool ourselves when defending our own interests, even though we may be popes. Something similar happens today in the appointing of bishops, the existence of cardinals, the head of state role of the bishop of Rome, the methods used by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, the growth of the Roman curia, or with the role of women in the Church.

This should be a source of concern for us all. The history of the Church is full of riches but also sins. Not everything in the Church is “Tradition” in the theological sense of the word, even though it may have lasted for centuries: as, for example, the inquisition or the justification of the slave trade in the 16th to 18th centuries. Theology’s task here is to carry out a necessary discernment of spirits.

Then confrontation, when it is needed, must be carried out from Church Tradition itself and not from some progressive movement. For these, though often recovering evangelical values lost by the Church, are also marked by sin and values little evangelical before which we Christians should not “be duped by progress” nor even by claims to mitigate the undeniable anticlericalism of the surrounding culture. *It is the gospel, and not just some progressive movement, that should not let the Church live in peace.*

6.2. Suggestions for today

Since a theological reading of the Church’s history is impossible here, we close this booklet with some brief bibliographical references that can help explain our present situation.

1. In my work *Memoria de Jesús; memoria del pueblo*, chapters 3 and 4. The second is dedicated to *La Sapinère*, a genuine mafia of accusations and inquisition that functioned in the Church during the pontificate of Pius X (probably with the Pope’s knowledge and financial assistance). It was about this that in the council hall the Bishop of Strasbourg pronounced some words that sound familiar to us today: “Never again!” Yet many believe, if not that particular mafia, its mentality and methods are still much more active than God would wish. The other chapter presents the Anabaptists and Thomas Müntzer and his tragic end due not only to Luther’s failure to understand but also to his own irresponsible madness over the precious evangelical treasure they carried (without any doubt) in their hands of clay. In this way the two dangers threatening the Church from different sides express themselves.

2. Cardinal Y. Congar, *Journal d’un théologien (1946-1956)*. And also: *Mon journal du Concile*. These are pages he left unpublished during his life but allowed to be published after his death. The first, written during the period of persecution and suspicion of he who would later become one of the most decisive theologians of Vatican II, show the alarming extent to which the accusations, secrets and sanctions of the Holy Office can cause suffering to a good and honest man²². The second is an example of ecclesiology from dissent, of the effort to dialogue, of not giving up before time, of not losing hope in the continuing search for cracks in the closed ecclesial institution where the Spirit might enter. For those who lived these years of preparation, of change in direction and of the accomplishment of Vatican II, it is an excellent opportunity to relive them through the eyes of someone who had major

responsability and who sometimes had to face the dilemma of struggling on in inferior conditions or resigning with some loud trumpet blast.

In spite of the sharpness of some expressions, understandable in a diary, they are two works of ecclesiology rather than two diaries. They are authentic gifts of the Spirit to today's Church which lead the reader to end by praying with the psalmist: "O that today you would listen to his voice. Harden not your hearts". Both conclude with the urgent need, adopted also by John Paul II, for a profound reform in the institution of the papacy which today (to use language similar to that of politics when speaking of a coup d'état) is victim of a "coup de curia" in which Peter has become prisoner of an apparatus directed by men of good will but lacking in vision. Cardinal Alfrink already suggested during Vatican II that the Church needed a sort of "permanent synod", composed by Peter and a group of bishops representing the universal Church which would be the true organ of government and in whose service the Roman Curia would work. The modern ease in communications makes this profoundly ecclesial suggestion ever more realistic and possible.

But these sad observations don't apply to everything in the Church. We must end recalling that, in the 20th century, the Church was enriched with an impressive multitude of witnesses, many of them authentic martyrs (among them more than six bishops), some known and many anonymous. There are names like Mgr Angelelli, Mgr Romero, Lluís Espinal, Ignacio Ellacuría and companions, Simone Weil, Madeleine Delbrêl, Dorothy Day, Etti Hillesum and thousands of others. Of them we can say what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews said in the 1st century to animate his Christians and with which we also end:

They were "confident that God has the power even to raise the dead". They "considered that the insults offered to the Anointed were something more precious than all the treasures of Egypt... Some had to bear being pilloried and flogged, or even chained up in prison... They were too good for the world... All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them... Since God had made provision for us to have something better, and they were not to reach perfection except with us... With so many witnesses in a great cloud on every side of us, we too, then, should throw off everything that hinders us, especially the sin that clings so easily, and keep running steadily in the race we have started. Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection" (Chaps 11 & 12)

NOTES

DS = Denzinger - Schönmeher
LG = *Lumen Gentium*
GS = *Gaudium et Spes*
RH = *Redemptor Hominis*
PL = *Patrología Latina*

1. Prescinding for the moment from how this ultimate responsibility is understood and whether in the New Testament eucharist and “apostolate” are connected as simply as we have put it. Many old eucharistic texts say that “the whole community consecrates” (Guerrico, PL, 185,87). And in our eucharistic prayers, the president always speaks in the plural (“we...”) or in the third person singular when narrating (“he took bread and said”).

2. *Obra indigenista*, Madrid 1985, p. 179.

3. Cf. *Increencia y evangelización*, pp. 113, 148 ss, 175.

4. *Comentario a San Juan*, 80,3.

5. For the full quotation see *Las 7 palabras de J.I.G.F.*, Madrid 1996, p. 98.

6. I refer to my notes on church ministry: *Hombres de la comunidad*, Santander 1989.

7. In Jesus’s healings, it is not so much a question of “restoring health” as reintegrating socially the sick person into the community from which they had been excluded with the excuse of impurity or unworthiness to enter the Lord’s house...

8. For the translation of this difficult phrase, I refer to *La Humanidad Nueva*; 304-305.

9. Fullness (plerôma in Greek) is a key word in the New Testament to explain the gift of God in Jesus Christ.

10. For the full quotation see *La autoridad de la verdad. Momentos oscuros del magisterio eclesiástico*, Barcelona 1996, p. 226. Also the expressive text of Y. Congar published there.

11. Sermon 340. PL 38, 1482-84, among others. Vatican II tried to pick up something of this in PO 9.

12. Not merely coming together for an act of worship: because in that case the Old Testament uses the word *edah* which the Septuagint translates in Greek as *synagogê*.

13. See also *Or. Eccl.* 2 y 4.

14. J.M. TILLARD, *La iglesia local*, Salamanca 1999, p. 61. The following quotation from Tillard is from this same work, p. 101.

15. There is a real anthology of texts on this in J.M. TILLARD, *op.cit.*, 206 & 201.

16. "he is with his body, blood, soul and divinity" as the catechism puts it: that is, there is nothing lacking in either consecrated form.

17. See the quotation in *Documents d’Esglesia*, nº 772, p. 566.

18. See the text quoted in note 1.

19. *De unitate Ecclesiae*, 5.

20. Cf. Lc 22,25-27 Mc 10,42-45; Mt 20,24-28.

21. For more details and references see *La autoridad de la verdad. Momentos oscuros del magisterio eclesiástico*, pgs. 64-70.

22. I have commented on both books in ns. 76 and 79 of *Actualidad bibliográfica de Filosofía y Teología*.