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From "This is My Body" to the Church in the Twenty-first Century:

The Last Supper as the decisive moment and criterion of a renewed ecclesiology

par

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RÉSUMÉ

Certains symptômes sont les indicateurs incontestés des très graves problèmes que connaît l'Église. S'ils existent aussi dans des confessions et des religions diverses, seuls seront examinés ici ceux qui concernent l'Église catholique. Parmi les plus significatifs figurent un fort déclin dans la participation à des activités religieuses comme les célébrations eucharistiques dominicales, surtout chez les jeunes, une pénurie presque catastrophique de prêtres ordonnés, une perte de prestige et d'influence de l'enseignement dispensé par l'Église. Ces symptômes varient en intensité selon les pays, mais les statistiques indiquent qu'ils se multiplient.

Nombre de ces problèmes sont attribuables à l'extrême vélocité de changements qui surviennent partout et à l'apparente inaptitude de l'Église à s'adapter, en raison notamment de son attachement à la pensée néo-scolastique et à la tradition tridentine. Cette fidélité absolue à une tradition vieille de quatre cents ans l'empêche de se faire à un environnement en évolution rapide et radicale. Des changements appropriés s'imposent pratiquement partout dans l'Église. Or, pour que ceux-ci soient efficaces et respectueux de la nature propre de l'Église, la tradition est un guide qui ne suffit pas. S'appuyant sur les termes de l'encyclique *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, « le moment décisif où elle (l'Église) a pris forme est certainement celui où a eu lieu l'institution de l'Eucharistie, dans la chambre à l'étage », la thèse présentée suit le plus près possible l'interprétation donnée aux paroles de Jésus, *ceci est mon corps*, telles qu'elles ont été prononcées la première fois. Selon cette évidence, il est permis d'affirmer que les caractéristiques définitoires de l'Église provenant de ces mots sont *agape*, unité, service. Tel doit être le principe directeur des changements.

C'est sur une telle base que sont décrits les secteurs où les changements s'imposent ainsi que les aspects visés. Ces changements comprennent les points suivants : liturgie, sacrements, catéchèse, mystagogie, théologie, structure, gouvernance de l'Église et ses enseignements, évangélisation. Ces secteurs exigent des efforts sérieux dans la préparation des personnes touchées par ces changements et dans l'attention portée à l'exigence primordiale voulant qu'agape, unité et service soient les principes actifs et évidents régissant l'Église.

Mots clés : *agape*, amour, ecclésiologie, Eucharistie, Jésus, pain, service, théologie, tradition, unité.

ABSTRACT

Unmistakable symptoms indicate some very serious problems in the Church. While they also plague other denominations and religions, this work deals specifically with the Roman Catholic Church. The most significant symptoms include a drastic decline in participation in religious activity, such as Sunday eucharistic celebrations, especially among younger people, a near-catastrophic shortage of ordained priests, and a loss of the prestige and influence of the teaching authority of the Church. The intensity of these symptoms varies in different areas of the world, but statistical data show that they are spreading.

Many of the problems are due to the incredibly fast changes occurring in the world and the apparent inability of the Church to adapt to them, especially in its strong attachment to neo-scholastic thinking and Tridentine tradition. Exclusive reliance on a tradition developed four hundred years ago is unsuitable in a rapidly and radically changing environment. Appropriate changes are necessary in practically all areas of the life of the Church. For these to be successful and also true to the nature of the Church, tradition alone is an insufficient guide. Based on the statement of the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the "decisive moment in her [the Church] taking shape was certainly the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room," this thesis returns as closely as possible to the interpretation given to the words of Jesus, *this is my body,* when they were first uttered. On the evidence available, it can be asserted that the defining characteristics of the Church, given by these words, are *agape*, unity and service. This must be the guiding principle of changes to be implemented.

It is on this basis that the areas in which changes are needed and the aspects to be changed are described. These include liturgy, sacraments, catechesis, mystagogy, theology, the structure and governance of the Church, its teachings, and evangelisation. Within these areas serious effort must be made to properly prepare those involved in the changes and to focus on the pre-eminent requirement of making *agape*, unity and service the active and obvious principle that governs the Church.

Keywords : *agape*, bread, ecclesiology, Eucharist, Jesus, service, theology, tradition, unity

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List of Abbreviations

CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

CSL *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*

EE *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

HBD *Harper's Bible Dictionary*

JBC *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*

LTK *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*

NRSV *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*

RCIA *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*

WUD *Webster Universal Dictionary*

to

Heidi, my wife,

without whose love, forbearance and support

this work would not have been possible

to

the faculty, staff and my fellow students

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who, for the past ten years, have demonstrated

not 'reasonable accommodation',

but a warm welcome, acceptance and an eagerness to help

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INTRODUCTION

We live in historic times. As far as can be determined, there has never before been an era that has witnessed so many fundamental changes in the lives of so many people. These changes affect practically all aspects of life, are occurring at an incredibly fast rate and encompass almost all of humanity, a truly unprecedented situation. The hypothesis explored in this dissertation is a response to the challenges that this presents to the Roman Catholic Church as it moves through the twenty-first century. These brief pages of introduction are intended to situate the context, describe my hermeneutical method and its limits, and give the three steps of our trajectory.

The mission that Jesus entrusted to the Church is to proclaim the Good News to the whole world. This mandate can be successfully accomplished only if the Church is effective in the world. Effectiveness is not possible if the actor and/or action are not in harmony with those they are meant to affect. The best performance, whether artistic, humanitarian, spiritual or other, remains ineffective if it is not suitable to the understanding, comprehension and, above all, the needs of the recipients. In consequence, if the Church is to be effective in a fast-changing world, it has to adapt to those changes.

The unprecedented situation of the world presents unprecedented challenges to the Church. It is not exclusively the need for change that is the challenge, throughout its two-thousand-year history the Church has constantly changed and adapted. This is so whether we understand the term "Church" as the formal structure, the governing way or authority, the liturgy or the total community of all baptized persons. It is the sum-total of these changes that we call tradition. Tradition is not something dead, nor is it something unchanging, "carved in stone"; it is the living, growing common experience of how the faith is lived in and by the Church, again, in all the varied forms and interpretations of the meaning of "Church." The real challenge for this living tradition is to remain on the right path: it is important that in changing it remain true to the direction of the Church and faith as given by its founder at the time of foundation.

The Protestant Reformation most clearly and forcefully recognized this. Unfortunately, at the time it was not realized by any of the parties that all were aiming for the same goal of remaining faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ and, helped in great measure by external political influences, the debate lead to a split. The Second Vatican Council also recognized the need for adapting to a changing world, as well as the need for a careful evaluation of tradition. While tradition preserves the very basis of our faith, which is unchangeable, by their very nature particular traditions express and interpret these truths in ways appropriate to the age in which they grow, and those expressions and interpretations are open to judgement. Traditions that are forged in the spirit of a particular time, even though they may be appropriate when they develop, may with the passage of time become not only out-dated but outright contradictory to the original concepts. Tradition thus needs constant verification in light of the original teaching and needs to constantly evolve, so as to remain both true to the principles established by Jesus Christ and effective in a changing world.

The rate and depth of the changes the world is undergoing signals that the Church, also, has to undergo an unprecedented degree of change. Under such circumstances, tradition, which is based by definition on precedent, becomes a very insecure guide. There have been in the history of the Church occasions of revolutionary change but, by and large, they remained within an existing framework. While they needed sometimes painful adaptations (for instance, the collapse of the Roman Empire or the East-West and Protestant-Catholic splits, etc.), tradition could still be used as a guide to ensure that the new situation advanced on the right path. As far as the *total* tradition of the Church is concerned, this is still true; but now we have to be very careful which traditions we trust. One only has to consider two aspects of the changing world to grasp the complexity of the task: since Vatican II, both the population of the world and the number of Catholics worldwide have more than doubled and, by most predictions, within ten years the majority of humankind will live in urban areas. Both of these will change the life, livelihood, community and family structure, needs and resources of humanity in ways that will transform what has existed for tens of thousands of years. Very obviously a few hundred years of tradition cannot tell us how to adapt to these changes. Yet it is still important that, as Church, we adapt to the new world in order to remain effective, to remain Church.

Our hypothesis is the result of recognizing this situation and an effort to find a reliable guide for the necessary changes: *given the radical changes in the world, the Church has to change; as the institution of the Eucharist is the "decisive event" in the life of the Church, those aspects of its life that need to be adapted and the nature of the changes to be accomplished are to be defined by the meaning of this event and not by tradition*.

In at least one sense this hypothesis appears to demand the impossible; the only source we have regarding the institution of the Eucharist is the New Testament, itself the expression of traditions, albeit the earliest ones. Is there a way to break through tradition and establish what meaning was given to the foundational event, here the Last Supper, when it occurred?

Our contention is that by the method we propose to use we can get as close as possible, under the present circumstances and according to our present knowledge. We admit freely that, since, to the best of our knowledge, this method itself (at least in this field of endeavour) and especially in its application to a contemporaneous situation has never been attempted, our conclusions are open to criticism and can only hope to become a basis for further discussion. We do not attempt nor do we intend to contradict previous interpretations; this is entirely outside of the parameters of this work. Our aim is merely to suggest a basis from which fruitful discussion can be started and, possibly, ways found to develop the framework within which important and essential changes can be implemented in the Church.

The proposed method is based on an attempt to break through the limitations of a "second loop" of interpretations. Past events can only be approached through memory, even if we have experienced them personally. In reality there is no "clear" memory, i.e., one that is not coloured by a person's experiences of either before or after the event. This is why no two persons ever remember the same event in exactly the same detail. When we have not been present at an event, obviously we have to rely on somebody else's description, preferably that of an eyewitness. Every recounting of an event is an expression of memory and, thus, has been filtered through that person's personality and memory, coloured both by previous experiences and, especially, ones that happen between the event and the recounting. If the latter were strong and important, the colouring is obviously stronger. This is the "first loop," inevitable in every situation where we have to rely on somebody's recounting, even our own.

In the case of the disciples who were present at the Last Supper, the experiences following the event itself were tremendous: the arrest and execution of Jesus, who was not simply their master and friend, but the one from whom they expected the liberation of their nation and their personal futures; the resurrection of this person, whom they had seen die; the realisation that he was not a ghost but a flesh and blood living person; the ascension, when their leader, whom they believed was returned to them, left them again; the reception of the Holy Spirit, which, whatever the experience was, changed them radically. All these experiences added up and all coloured the memory of the events of the Last Supper. The latter was itself a significant event in their lives. Almost inevitably, they turned to the last meal they had with their leader to see if they could find an explanation for the incomprehensible events that followed. Thus, the "first loop" of interpretation developed.

Later authors, narrators and commentators, including authors of the New Testament, started and still start from this point. Not having been at the Last Supper, they begin with the conclusions reached by the original witnesses, among them the conviction that in some way the events at the Last Supper were a pre-figuring of later events. Further, influenced by their awareness of developments after (and since) the last major event before the original recounting (i.e., the reception of the Spirit) they build up a "second loop," now interpreting, *de facto*, not the event itself, but the narration that is built on the recounting of the eyewitnesses.

As stated before, we do not question the validity either of the method or of the conclusions. Instead, we are asking if it is possible to break through, as it were, the "second loop," and to some extent even the "first loop," to establish at least some possible interpretation that the participants may have given to the events of the Last Supper, at the time they happened. A dual approach can aid us in this endeavour. Since the Last Supper was, before all, a communal meal, we must first gather as much information as possible about the meal-customs of the time. Meal culture is strongly indicative of the thinking of a people and the strong symbolic traditions associated with communal meals can help us discover what meaning was attached to different aspects of the meal, a factor that in all likelihood influenced its interpretation at the time. Next is to seek concordances between sources. We begin with the undeniable reality that every person colours the memory of an event (or of its narration by an eyewitness) with the lens of his or her own experience. If, therefore, we can find details that – in spite of the "double loop" of the "lens" of the various eyewitnesses being interpreted

through the experiences of subsequent chroniclers – remain unchanged in disparate narrations, this would be a strong indicator of their intrinsic significance. Such details would be persistently preserved because, at the time of the event, they had such an extraordinary resonance for the participants that they not only remained unchanged in the memories of the eyewitnesses, they survived even the adapting tendency of traditions developed between the original recounting(s) and the formation of the written narratives and the necessary translations.

Looking for possible interpretations that the participants may have given to the event at the time it happened is neither hermeneutical naiveté nor referential illusion. It is a heuristic device to look for a possible "essence of Christianity" beyond the geological strata of multilevel traditions. To retrieve exactly what happened is an impossible task, but the effort itself helps us to look at the origins of the Church with new eyes.

However, before we turn to the institution narratives we shall investigate the present circumstances of the Church in order to ascertain to what degree changes are presently being implemented or are essential (chapter one). At this point we shall start with a letter Henri Boulad wrote to Pope Benedict XVI. While this approach is not standard procedure in a doctoral dissertation, both the unusual circumstances we deal with and the wide experience, recognition and authority of the author justify the choice of making this letter the starting point of our inquiry. We will then search for evidence that the points raised in the letter, as well as the nearly desperate need for change it articulates, are valid. Apart from available statistical data, we shall look at an article dealing with problems in the diocese of Montreal, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* of Pope John Paul II. The latter two documents are first reviewed from the specific angle of ascertaining whether they evidence attributes that support Boulad's contentions. This method is not aimed at evaluating either document; that would require a separate thesis. The aim is merely to find confirmation that the problems really exist before we engage in trying to find solutions. We shall then turn to the encyclical to ask whether it can indicate a reliable guide that might be used to make certain that whatever changes are necessary and/or implemented, whatever the impact a not foreseeable future will have on any aspect of the life of the Church, are executed in such a way that they preserve or, if possible, even improve on fidelity to the principles Jesus established at the foundational moment of the Church.

On the basis of what we discover we shall turn to the institution narratives and, in the light of what we know of the meal culture and religious customs of the age, attempt to find guidance in establishing the principles the Church has to follow to remain both effective in the world and the true Body of Christ (chapter two). We shall verify our conclusions by turning to John's gospel and the history of the first Christian communities to determine whether the principles we detected were recognised and practiced by the early Christians.

Using this base, the final part of the thesis will turn to the future, to postulate some ideas that appear appropriate regarding changes that may be necessary (chapter three). Given that in this radically changing environment there is no possibility of predicting what circumstances in even the near future will be, no concrete suggestion can be made at this time. All we can hope to do is indicate areas were important and sometimes radical changes are necessary, even now, and suggest some principles that can ensure that they will be both successful and loyal to the character of the Church as the Body of Christ. While practical ideas may also occasionally be suggested, the only aspect for which we maintain that our conclusions are incontrovertible is that changes are necessary and urgent.

I am well aware of the fact that this thesis is unconventional. It encompasses a wide area and necessitates recourse to several areas of theology, such as ecclesiology, exegesis, Church history, practical theology, systematic theology, etc. The consequence is that all areas are treated relatively lightly: the thesis is synthetic, rather than analytic. Because the work is essentially aimed at the future, this approach appears to be the more warranted one. The disadvantage is that the author appears to be a Jack-of-all-trades, master of none; the charge, if raised, is fully justified. The theological content of this work is essentially that aspect that is its innovation: using whatever means offered by theology (and, incidentally, also other fields such as anthropology and political science) to find the most likely meaning Jesus himself and the disciples present at the Last Supper may have given to the words *this is my body* and applying that meaning to the already developing Church of the twenty-first century. As far as I and my original *directeur de recherche*, Professor Jean-Marc Gauthier, could ascertain, this approach has never yet been attempted. Whether or not the method or the conclusions are valid will have to be determined if and when my peers debate the thesis. The most I can hope for is exactly this: that the work will, in fact, engender a debate.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH

1.1 Introduction

This chapter, in order to establish that the condition of the Church at the beginning of the third millennium is indeed grave, undertakes an analysis of three documents: a personal letter by Henri Boulad S.J. to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, portions of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*.

The first of these, a personal letter, is an unusual source in a work like this. However, written by a well-known and respected Jesuit leader and author, motivated by a "passionate love for the Church," based on wide experience and supported by undisputable data, it gives as fair an assessment of the current situation as possible. While future scholars and researchers may quarrel with some particulars of Boulad's findings (and consequently some of my conclusions), the fundamental argument of the letter, namely, that urgent action is necessary, is sufficiently grounded to deserve serious consideration. Following an analysis of the letter itself, available data will be investigated in an effort to verify the claims made by Boulad.

We shall then turn to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This nearly 700-page document was published in order to provide a fundamental and uniform basis for the teaching ministry of the Church, whether that take the form of episcopal, ministerial or catechetical instruction. It therefore gives direction regarding not only the content, but also, at least by implication, the style and language of the Roman Church's teachings about faith, morals and Christian life. My interest in the document is, above all, to determine whether it illustrates the critique of Boulad and thus to what degree, if any, it contributes to the problems the Church faces. In order to keep the discussion in focus, the analysis will be concentrated on the Catechism's structure, language and style, as well as its treatment of the moral teaching of the Church, the basis of Christian life, and particularly its presentation of the doctrine of original sin, instrumental in describing the human condition. The treatment of ecumenism, the determinant of relationships within the universal Church, will also be investigated.

We shall then look at the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, arguably the most important encyclical of Pope John Paul II. First of all, being the last encyclical published by the most popular and likely most influential pope of the turn of the second millennium, his "swan song" as it were, it is a document that may give further insights regarding the validity of Boulad's claims. We are specifically interested in the way eucharistic theory influences ecclesial theory and practice within the Church and shall investigate the encyclical from this perspective, in particular, its presentation of priesthood, unity and union, and the effect of their construal on the life of the Church. More significantly, according to the title and introductory paragraph, the encyclical deals with the very essence of the existence and life of the Church and thus may show, or at least give a hint to, the direction the Church should take in the third millennium. Its identification of the institution of the Eucharist as a "decisive moment" in the life of the Church will be explored as a possible tool in helping us to find that direction.

In the discussion of both the Catechism and the encyclical, one aspect that will get special attention is the degree to which each places reliance on tradition, and the effect of that on their treatments of the themes mentioned above.

1.2 A letter to the Pope

In July 2007 an Egyptian Jesuit wrote a letter to His Holiness Benedict XVI. While certainly not an everyday occurrence, this would not be exceptionally noteworthy but for two particulars: the author and the message. In this section I shall introduce the author, the contents of the letter and the reaction to it, and investigate whether the claims of the letter can be substantiated by other opinions and/or factual data.

1.2.1 The author, Henri Boulad

The letter was written by Henri Boulad S.J., well-known mystic, lecturer, author of numerous books translated into many languages, one time superior of Alexandrian and Egyptian Jesuits and of the Egyptian organization of the superiors of religious institutions, university professor, respectively president and vice-president of the Egyptian and international Caritas, and, even at this writing, an active and respected voice in ecclesiological and inter-religious matters. His wide interests and experience, as well as his influence, make him a person well worth listening to.

1.2.2 What the letter says

While the letter is respectful in tone, it is quite blunt in what it has to say.[1] Even before establishing his credentials, Boulad makes his topic explicit: the Church's condition is critical, urgent action is needed – in his words, it is "five minutes to midnight." The major concerns emerging from his "far from exhaustive" list of the problems facing the Church are:

* a constantly declining religious practice, particularly in Europe and Canada, complicated by a large number of Christians turning to non-Christian religions, sects, the occult, etc., because they do not find in the Roman Catholic Church what they need and want, resulting in the closing of churches;
* a dramatic decrease in vocations to the priesthood and a rise in the numbers of priests leaving the ministry, thus an increase in the age of those who remain, resulting in more and more parishes being left without local priests;
* the language of the Church, which is "out dated, anachronistic, boring, repetitious, moralizing, completely unsuited to our age," causing the injunctions of the Magisterium on important ethical and moral matters to fall on deaf ears;
* a failure to recognize the maturity of the peoples of Europe, causing the Church to lose its historical role and position in the Western world, particularly in nations that were once the most Catholic, such as France and French Canada;
* a significant decline in the dialogue with other Christian churches and other religions.

To this disturbing picture Boulad adds a stern comment: the new evangelization necessary to combat these problems will be possible only if theology and catechesis is fundamentally re-thought and reformulated. Yet, as he adds to this "damning report," there is no sign of the reform that is crucial for dealing with the situation. He characterizes the reaction of the Church as, on the one hand, minimizing the problem and finding consolation in a revitalization of the conservative side of the Church as well as in the strength of the Church in the third world; and, on the other, a rather irresponsibly blind reliance on the help of the Lord. This reliance is based on the fact that God has already helped the Church through many crises

[1] For the full French text and its English translation see Appendix. Both are used with the permission of the author.

during its first two millennia and that therefore its future survival is guaranteed, apparently without the need of human effort.

In his rebuttal, Boulad uses quite explicit language. The past, he writes, is not a buttress on which to lean or from which to gather fragments, because that will not correct the Church's current dysfunction. The "apparent vitality" of the third-world Church is misleading, sooner or later it will face the problems that the rest of the Church faces today. He blames the present crisis on the Church's failure to recognize the inevitability of a change from traditional thinking to modernism and claims that in recent years the direction indicated by Vatican II has been reversed, and that the Church is now headed back towards Trent, rather than forward towards the Vatican III he essentially proposes later.

This part of the letter ends in a series of rather sharp and critical questions, made only slightly less accusatory by the use of the first person plural. He asks how long we will hide our heads in the sand like the ostrich and refuse to look at reality, how long we will continue to try to save face, be defensive to all criticism, refuse to renew. He repeats that we are running out of time, that it is "five minutes to midnight," and, as if to underline this warning, reiterates the phrase in German, the mother tongue of the Pope.

He calls for an immediate and drastic renewal, citing the example of commercial enterprises, and by the same token insists that the Church needs to mobilize all its forces in the endeavour. His sharpest words come at the end of this segment, when he asks whether the hope that the Lord will see to it that things be righted allows attitudes of sloth, cowardice, arrogance, lack of imagination, lack of creativity, reprehensible quietism and "the like, which the Church has known in the past." Boulad then presses for what he sees as an urgently needed three-fold reform:

1. Reform of theology and catechesis: to coherently rethink and reformulate the faith in a way that is comprehensible for people today;
2. Pastoral reform of the traditional structures;
3. Spiritual reform: to revitalize the mystery and to re-conceive the sacraments in a way that gives them an existential and life-related dimension.

The way to achieve the needed reforms, Boulad suggests, is through a "general synod" of the universal Church, that is, of all Christian communities. This synod would examine all the

points mentioned and any others that might be raised "in all frankness and clarity." It would be followed by a "general assembly" (Boulad explicitly avoids the term "council") that would summarize the results of the discussions and draw the necessary conclusions.

1.2.3 Reactions to the letter

The letter was forwarded to the Vatican through the office of the papal nuncio in Cairo.[2] Among the many electronic sources dealing with Boulad that I was able to consult (admittedly only a small portion of the 67,000 available) I found no indication that there was any response to the letter from the Vatican. About two years later, the letter assumed the character of an "open letter" and was published rather widely, apparently primarily through the Internet.[3]

I have encountered no article or website that undertakes a proper critique of the letter. There are several, mostly Spanish, reports that speak of the letter at some length. These, as with the article by the Spanish journalist Domingo Oriol cited above, are more-or-less detailed introductions to the author and the letter, provide no evaluation, and are generally friendly to the person and cause of Boulad. This may be attributable to the nature of electronic media, but it may also be due to the fact that there has been no official or public reply to the letter: persons holding opposing views may simply not take the letter seriously enough to comment.

There are numerous blogs and comments on the different sites I consulted; almost without exception they evaluate Boulad's perceptions positively. Typical of these is the website of UCIP LIBAN, the Lebanese branch of the International Catholic Union of the Press, which introduces the letter with the comment (unsigned but apparently by the editor) that "such a letter initiative, in my opinion, deserves to be read and spread for the glory of God and the good of the human being – the whole human being and all humanity and so that a new Pentecost may come!"[4] While these comments do not constitute scholarly evidence, the

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[2] Domingo Oriol, "Henri Boulad, un jesuita egipcio clave, lanza un SOS en una carta al Papa," http://www.scribd.com/doc/26792805/Una-reflexion-sobre-la-iglesia-catolica (accessed February 18, 2010).

[3] Thus, for instance: in French, on the official site of the Belgian Missionaries of Africa, the websites Culture-et-foi.com and Leforumcatholique.org, and the electronic magazine *Mosaïque Pastorale* at www.paroisses-erezee.be; in German, on the Austrian *Die Kirche* site, www.wir-sind-kirche.at. In Spanish most publications dealing with, or reproducing the letter are dated 2010, such as Religión Digital.cm, xiquinin.com, and even the website of the Anglican diocese of Recife.

[4] "J'ai pense qu'une telle lettre-initiative merite d'etre lue et generalisée pour la gloire de Dieu et pour le bien de l'homme -Tout l'homme et tout homme; et afin qu'une nouvelle Pentecote arrive! [*sic*]" UCIP LIBAN website,

diversity of languages and apparent locations (indicated by Internet addresses, where shown) of the writers certainly indicate a rather wide-spread uneasiness, even an outright dissatisfaction with the condition of the Church.

1.2.4 Supporting evidence

What evidence, if any, is there to support the claims of Henri Boulad? Is the situation of the Church really as serious as he says? Is the remedy really as urgent? Given that we are speaking of the current situation, it would not be reasonable to expect the existence of an overall, world-wide, objective study evaluating either the reality of the crisis or the underlying reasons for it. For our investigation we have to be content with scattered remarks in a wide variety of sources, mainly about local problems.

Boulad specifically mentions "French Canada," presumably meaning Quebec, as one place where the problems are very obvious. In an article published six years before Boulad's letter, Georges Convert, Paris-born Roman Catholic priest, author, co-founder of *Relais* (the Taize-style "Church for young-adult Christians in Montreal"), raised several of the same concerns regarding the situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Quebec, more specifically in Montreal.[5] We shall discuss, here, that part of the article that deals with the problems; We shall have occasion to refer to the solution proposed by Convert later in this thesis.

In his article, Convert painted a picture of the local Church in the Montreal region that certainly lends credence to Boulad's assessment. He noted that only 5 to 15 percent of Catholics practised in the sense of participating in the Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist and that, especially in the heart of the city, the majority of those attending Mass were over 65 years of age. Members of the clergy were also aging and new vocations to the priesthood were not sufficient to fill the positions vacated by sick or deceased priests (4–5 new vocations a year compared to 15–20 deaths). Given the numbers as they evolved in the decade preceding the writing of the article, Convert predicted that the number of diocesan priests in the Montreal diocese would decrease from 515 in 2000 to 415 by 2010. I could not verify the accuracy of this prediction. However, the article states that in 2001 the Montreal Roman Catholic diocese

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http://ucipliban.org/arabic/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12537&Itemid=253 (accessed February 16, 2010).

[5] Georges Convert, "Une Église pour le 21ème siècle?" *L'Église canadienne* (February 2001), http://www.info-christianisme.org/index2.php?action=section&section=2 (accessed Feb. 2, 2010).

comprised about 280 parishes and missions, while the website of the diocese consulted on February 24th, 2010, mentions that there are "over 250 parishes, missions and places served by a priest (*dessertes*)," implying a considerable drop in the number of parishes. (One would assume that "places served by a priest" include hospitals, old-age homes, etc., a figure not included in the number given in Convert's article.) This interpretation is supported by a list of 50 parishes that have been "suppressed," that is, closed. While there are no dates given for when suppression occurred, from the names of the parishes it is clear that most, if not all, ceased to exist in the past decade or so.

Convert also pointed out that the absence of the communities' young people meant that in the years to come exactly that group, which should have had both the experience and the ability to introduce the changes necessary to avoid the development of a more serious situation, would be missing. This fact strongly emphasized the urgency for the implementation of remedies, for Convert just as it would for Boulad.

While Convert discusses the circumstances of the Church in a relatively small and well-defined area, available statistical data indicate that the problems are widespread and the situation deteriorating.[6] In 1985 30% of Canadians 15 years and over said that they attended religious services at least once a week, in 2005, only 21%, according to the General Social Survey of Statistics Canada.[7] During the same period, the percentage of those who had never attended a religious service in the preceding year rose from 22% to 30% of the total population, and, surprisingly, from 24% to 41% among those who claimed a religious affiliation.

The situation is even worse for the young people. Between 1984 and 2008 the number of teenagers who responded that they "don't think there is a God" or that there is "definitely no God" rose from 15% to 33%. While 21% of teens said that they still attended religious service weekly, 47% said they never, and an additional 20% that they "hardly ever," attended services.

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[6] The sources for data used in this section are: for 1985 and 2005: Colin Lindsay, "Canadians attend weekly religious services less than 20 years ago" published by Statistics Canada at http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-630-x/2008001/article/10650-eng.htm (accessed July 31, 2009); for 2001: Statistics Canada, *Census of Population -2001, Population by religion, by province and territory*, http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census01/Products/standard/themes/DataProducts.cfm?S=1&T=56&ALEVEL=2&FREE=0 (accessed July 29, 2009).

[7] In evaluating these numbers it is important to remember that Canada-wide about 40% of those who claim affiliation to Christian denominations belong to communities that do not make weekly attendance at services obligatory.

Nor is this situation exclusive to Canada, or, for that matter, to the Roman Catholic Church. A recent report by the Pew Research Center paints essentially the same picture for the United States, including the non-Catholic Christian communities which are actually in the majority.[8]

Between 1970 and 2007, thus including the term of John Paul II's papacy, the estimated number of Catholics worldwide roughly paralleled the growth in world population, going from 653.6 million to 1.147 billion, a growth of over 75%.[9] At the same time, the total number of priests actually declined by about 3%, from 419,728 to 408,024. In consequence, the number of Catholics per priest increased by 80%, from 1560 to 2800, and the number of persons without a resident priest- pastor more than doubled, from 134.7 million to 269.6 million. However, since one of the unavoidable limitations of general statistical surveys is the inevitable levelling of what is, in reality, a great unevenness in distribution of practically all the data, great care must be used in interpreting these averages. So, while in some geographical areas the situation may be better than indicated, in others it may be worse, sometimes reaching disastrous degrees. For instance, in Brazil, which houses about 8% of all Catholics, there are only 17,000 priests, or 4.2% of the world total. Thus, there, instead of the average 2,800 persons to one priest, the ratio is closer to 9,000:1.[10] Obviously, in some other areas the ratio must be much more favourable.

The figures make one thing very clear: the pastoral care of the members of the Church (at least by the ordained clergy) has suffered significantly during the years in question. The seriousness of the situation becomes evident if we consider that, for instance, to hear 2,800 confessions, assuming only five minutes per person, would occupy each priest for 29 eight-hour days without any break, obviously, even if spread out, an inhumanly conveyor-belt approach to spiritual guidance. In theory, the Church eschews such an empty ritual, yet, in practice, the Rite of Penitence, revised in 1974, is probably the least known and most generally

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[8] *Religion Among the Millennials,* Washington, DC: Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, February 2010, http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=510 (accessed March 11, 2010).

[9] The statistical data is derived from the *Catholic Data, Catholic Statistics, Catholic Research* site at http://cara.georgetown.edu/bulletin/ (accessed September 8, 2009). CARA stands for Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. The site gives the following information about the sources used: "The sources for this information include *The Official Catholic Directory* (OCD), the Vatican's *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae* (ASE), and other CARA research and databases. All data are cross checked as much as possible."

[10] "Pope to Brazilians: Priority is Vocations," *Zenit*, September 8, 2009, http://www.zenit.org (accessed September 11, 2009).

disregarded liturgy of the Church. The so-called "Rite 1," the Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents, prescribes a rite that includes preparation by both priest and penitent, a welcoming of the penitent, a reading from Scriptures, confession, the penitent's prayer, absolution, proclamation of praise and dismissal. Properly celebrated, and including the time spent in individual preparation, the rite would take at least half an hour per penitent. This would mean that, on average, if each parishioner came for confession only once a year, each priest would have to spend 1,400 hours, almost half a year (174 days) of uninterrupted eight-hour days, on this rite alone. Yet, without a doubt more people would go to individual confession if they could experience the personal care and guidance the Rite is designed to provide. This, of course, points to the other unfortunate consequence of the scarcity of priests: people who do not receive the pastoral care they need become more and more alienated from the Church.

Interestingly, in seeking reform, Convert runs into the same complacency within the Church, and uses almost the same words to describe it, as will Boulad a decade later. Under the heading "False consolations as responses" he includes the argument that the "Holy Spirit will surely save the Church … at the right moment."[11] He counters with the statement that the promise was made to the universal Church, not the one of Quebec, and mentions the example of the Church in North Africa, so strong in the early centuries, and now "just a memory." An example and warning surely applicable to the Roman Catholic Church of today.

Convert sees the root of the problem in the fact that the parishes, as they are structured at present, are not communities, but merely collectivities, groups of people brought together by their dwelling-place, essentially without anything else in common. He argues that, as a consequence of increased mobility, the traditional Quebec communities have disappeared; because parishes were based on these communities, they can no longer fulfil their role and people, who need a community for their intellectual and physical wellbeing, turn to other possibilities. While the details may vary, the problem exists worldwide, as populations mainly rural at the beginning of the twentieth century are now on the brink of becoming predominantly urban. This, in turn, supports the claim of Boulad that the Church needs a structural reform that is sensitive to the centrality of its pastoral mission.

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[11] "De fausses réponses consolantes." "L'Esprit saint saura bien sauver son Église… à son heure!"

Changes in society, added to the scarcity of priests and the consequent lack of proper continuous and appropriate spiritual leadership and care, are undoubtedly partially to blame for diminishing attendance at weekly celebrations and weakening identification with the Church, but this adverse reaction could be, to a great degree, counteracted if the message of the Church were relevant in the lives, and answered the needs, of the faithful. This leads to the next of Boulad's concerns.

1.2.5 The lessons

In his letter to Pope Benedict XVI, Henri Boulad claims that the decline in participation in the celebrations and general life of the Church, the decline in vocations to the ministerial priesthood, antiquated language, the failure to recognize the growing maturity of the faithful with a consequent loss of status and recognition for the teaching authority, and the deterioration of the ecumenical dialogue with non-Catholic and non-Christian communities are symptoms of a crisis of the Church that demands urgent action. His proposed solution consists of a triple reform: theological-catechetical, in order to make the faith comprehensible to persons of the twenty-first century; a pastorally-oriented reform of the structures of the Church; and a spiritual reform of the sacraments to give them an existential dimension.

As far as the symptoms are concerned, the article by Georges Convert confirms that both diminishing participation and a decline in vocations existed in the Montreal diocese nearly a decade before Boulad wrote his letter. Statistical data show that these problems are now widespread and serious. The Convert article does not, however, deal with the language, the recognition of maturity (except for a short remark), or the ecumenical activity of the Church, nor have I found reliable statistics or sources that would permit an evaluation of the Boulad claims in these areas. I shall therefore turn to documents that are important examples of official views, to see if they can help in corroborating or refuting Boulad's analysis.

1.3 The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*CCC*)[12]

Twenty years after the close of Vatican II an extraordinary synod of bishops asked Pope John Paul II to have a central catechism prepared.[13] This document was intended to become a source for cohesive instruction in the faith. It therefore can be regarded as a mirror of the official approach to the teaching ministry of the Roman Catholic Church and a valid indicator of whether Henri Boulad's claim, respecting the Church's use of out-dated language and theology in its presentation of the fundamental concepts of the Christian faith, is valid.

We shall examine the *CCC* from this point of view, discussing first the circumstances of its creation, including the objective it was meant to serve. We shall then turn to the reception it has received, especially in the ecumenical community, then to certain aspects of the published work in order to establish whether it justifies any of Boulad's charges. In doing so, we shall look at the language, style and interpretation of the text in general, as well as specifically in the area of morality, focusing on the concepts of original sin and virtue. These concepts were chosen because they, and the interpretation of them, are essential to understanding the essence of Christian life. The way the doctrine of original sin is presented is especially important. To a great extent it defines how the nature of the human being and the condition of humanity are viewed and, consequently, has a vital influence on both the attractiveness of the Catholic Christian teaching and the underlying ambiance of life within the Church. We shall also look at the treatment of ecumenism, a concept that is determinant in the relationships between the Roman and other Christian communities and was emphasized throughout the pontificate of John Paul II. Finally, we shall evaluate the findings.

1.3.1 Precursors of the CCC after Vatican II

In the wake of Vatican II there was a very evident need to refresh the religious knowledge of the faithful. This need was most conspicuous among Catholic adults, since the impact of the Council affected them most directly. Thus, the first attempt to replace the *Roman Catechism*, i.e., the *Catechism of Trent*, which had governed Catholic religious instruction worldwide for some four hundred years, was published in 1966 by the Dutch Bishop's Conference. The book

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[12] All references and quotations not otherwise specified are taken from *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ottawa: Publication Service, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1994); cited as *CCC*.

[13] John Paul II, "Apostolic Constitution *Fidei depositum*," *CCC*, 6.

quickly spread through the Catholic world; it was "innovative" in both its form and content, and, for this very reason, was soon at the centre of controversy. This controversy may have been the impetus for publishing the next significant Catholic attempt, a new catechism, only nine years later.

The effect of the Council was also felt in other Christian communities and in the intervening period several non-Catholic catechisms were published. In 1973, the *Neues Glaubensbuch* (New book of faith, published in the USA in 1975 as *Common Catechism*), "the first common catechism or statement of religious belief produced jointly by theologians of the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches since the Reformation of the sixteenth century," appeared.[14] In the same year, the *Katholischer Erwachsenen-katechismus, das Glaubensbekenntnis der Kirche* (Catholic Adult Catechism, the Creed of the Church) was also published in Germany.

To publish a catechism specifically for adults was "characteristic of a time in which it is important to counter the appalling decrease in basic knowledge of the Bible and the Christian faith."[15] The common characteristic of these catechisms was that they were meant primarily for catechesis; as we will see, the new official Roman catechism was meant, at least primarily, as a resource in the creation of local catechisms.

1.3.2 Compilation and publication of the CCC

1.3.2.1 The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops

The Dutch and the various other catechisms were attempts to explore, expose and explain the ideas and possibilities opened but not elaborated by the Council Fathers, who focused on pastoral and practical matters rather than doctrinal issues.[16] The controversies surrounding these attempts exposed a need for a clear and usable guide. This was the chief motivation for the request made by the majority of the participants of the extraordinary Synod of Bishops, called to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, that a new "official" catechism be compiled.

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[14] Publisher's preface to *The Common Catechism. A Book of Christian Faith* (New York: The Seabury Press, A Crossroads Book, 1975), vii.

[15] Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Catechism of the Catholic Church. An Evangelical Viewpoint," *Pro Ecclesia* 4.1 (Winter 1995): 51.

[16] Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred. A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (MO: Liguory/Triumph, 2001), 105.

In the apostolic constitution "*Fidei depositum*," proclaiming the publication of the *CCC*, John Paul II quotes from the final report of the synod:

> On that occasion the Synod Fathers stated: "Very many have expressed the desire that a catechism or compendium of all catholic [*sic*] doctrine regarding both faith and morals be composed, that it might be, as it were, a point of reference for the catechisms or compendiums that are prepared in various regions. The presentation of doctrine must be biblical and liturgical. It must be sound doctrine suited to the present life of Christians."[17]

The pope then adds, "I made this desire my own, considering it as 'fully responding to the need of the universal Church and of the particular Churches.'"[18] He continues: "[W]e offer the entire Church this 'reference text' […] for a catechesis renewed at the living sources of the faith!" He believes that it "will make a very important contribution to the work of renewing the whole life of the Church as desired and begun by the Second Vatican Council."

There are several noteworthy points in these statements and they had significant influence, apparently on the composition, certainly on the reception and evaluation of the *CCC*. The first of these is that the request is not precisely for a catechism, but for a "catechism or compendium." While the terms have meanings sufficiently loose to allow for some overlap, they are nevertheless different. "Catechism" implies catechesis or instruction, "compendium" implies a dense, concrete summary, which, while complete, is also short, factual, without much explanation, and serves mainly experts. The extraordinary synod and John Paul II, himself, seem to have blurred the distinction. Perhaps this is explained by the remarkable amplification that follows: the work is intended as "a point of reference" for publications "prepared in various regions." The implied devolution of authority certainly agrees with the spirit of Vatican II, but, in turning away from a catechism aimed at the masses of the faithful, the bishops underestimated the desire for clear, usable guidance – a point that will reappear later in this discussion.

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[17] "*Fidei depositum*," *CCC*, 6. The reference is to the "Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod," December 7, 1985: *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol. 9 II, B, a, n. 4: p. 1758, n.1797.

[18] The embedded quote is from John Paul II's closing discourse at the Synod.

1.3.2.2 Purpose and objective

The lack of clarity in defining the specific character of the work requested by the Synod may have been the consequence of differences of opinion as to what exactly was needed. Thus, for instance, Gerard S. Sloyan, priest, university professor, theologian, author, writes that the *CCC* "doubtless came into existence because of the fear that Catholics in increasing numbers did not 'know their faith.' By this is meant, 'know those things about their faith that a book of this *genre* can convey.'"[19] This appears to be a rather limited aim, and the phrasing conveys at least some superficiality. On the other hand Richard John Neuhaus, a priest with qualifications very similar to Sloyan's, states, "The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the authoritative reference or baseline for understanding Catholic faith, sacramental practice, moral doctrine, and prayer."[20]

The *CCC* itself defines its aim as "presenting an organic synthesis of the essential and fundamental contents of Catholic doctrine, as regards both faith and morals, in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the whole of the Church's tradition" (#11). This is obviously a very ambitious objective. To present an "organic synthesis" of the Church's teaching on faith and morals, even if limited to what is "essential and fundamental" is a tremendous task; to do it in the light of *both* Vatican II and the whole of tradition is mind-boggling. Most disconcerting is the mention of "the whole." Tradition is not easy to "package," it is a living, ever-changing collection of influences, opinions, facts, interpretations, views, etc. Does "the whole tradition" mean everything the Church has taught or that was taught in the name of the Church? This could fill a library, not a tome. Does it mean "tradition as it exists today"? But then, which tradition? When does an idea or interpretation become part of tradition? Are regional traditions included, or only those that are everywhere accepted? The questions are endless.

As Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J. remarks, the "*Catechism* refrains from giving its imprimatur to any particular theories and hypotheses that have not been officially endorsed by the Church."[21] This, however, is a far cry from "the whole tradition." Wolfhart Pannenberg, the

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[19] Gerard S. Sloyan, "A Theological and Pastoral Critique of *Catechism of the Catholic Church*," *Horizons* 21.1 (Spring 1994): 171.

[20] Richard John Neuhaus, "The New Catechism and Christian Unity," Symposium on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Theology Today* 53.2 (July 1996): 171.

[21] Avery Dulles, S.J., "The New Catechism: A Feast of Faith," Symposium on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Theology Today* 53.2 (July 1996): 149.

well-known Lutheran theologian who is one of the strongest advocates of Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue, says that the Synod "explicitly expressed the need for a certain uniformity in the catechetical literature."[22] If he is accurate, this suggests a strong motivation for compilers of the *Catechism* to avoid any treatment or issue that could cause controversy or even debate, once again truncating the "whole tradition." It would also make it very difficult to do the work "in the light" of Vatican II, of which one very important principle – clearly stated in connection with liturgy but, arguably, equally valid for all actions and teachings of the Church – is:

> The liturgy is made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed, but also ought to be changed with the passing of time, if they have suffered from the intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of liturgy or have become less suitable.[23]

Vatican II not only does not fix tradition, it invites, even insists on, change; discussions of inner meanings and changes to tradition inevitably involve ongoing controversy and debate.

It is also fair to ask whether such a catechism/compendium really serves the needs of the universal Church. This is questionable even if we restrict the problem to the Roman Catholic Church. As Dulles states in defence of the work:

> As a compendium of official doctrine, the *Catechism* has the limitations of its literary genre. It cannot fairly be expected to perform the function of the exegete, the historical theologian, the systematician, or the pedagogue. It leaves space for all these specializations.[24]

This almost automatically precludes its use by the vast majority of the faithful, contradicting the claim made in #12 of the *CCC*, which specifies that, while it is primarily meant for bishops, redactors of local catechisms, priests and catechists, it "will also be useful reading for all other Christians." In an article that is very complimentary, Dulles, justifies other important shortcomings of this *genre*: the quoting from the documents of councils without reference to context, a lack of differentiation regarding the importance of different teachings, and the leaving of the establishment of such factors to the conscientious reader or "the good judgment

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[22] Pannenberg, "Catechism," 51.

[23] "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), *Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Austin P. Flannery (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1975), #21. Texts of all quotation of Vatican II documents are taken from this volume, hereafter referred to as *CSL*.

[24] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 149.

of theologians." In sum, in his words, the "Catechism does not attempt to perform the task of the religious educator."[25] These characteristics seriously limit the usefulness of the *CCC*, it must be deeply studied, understood, interpreted and adapted before it can be used for valid catechesis.

The period between the end of the Council and the publication of the *CCC* was a time of rather intense debate and general interest about the reforms and innovations in the Catholic Church. The *CCC* was thus anticipated with great curiosity and, for better or worse, was, indeed still is, regarded as an indication of the attitude and way of thinking of the highest echelons of the leadership of the Church. If the official expression of the teachings of the Church appears to be unfriendly to the average person, there is a grave danger that this person will turn away from the Church itself.

Admittedly, most of these reservations about the *CCC* would lose their impact, if not their validity, if the work had avoided the term "catechism" and were instead entitled something like *Compendium of the Teachings of the Catholic Church*. It is true that in its use of the term the *CCC* follows the precedent of the *Catechism of Trent*, which it strongly resembles in both structure and approach. That work, however, was published in the sixteenth century and was intended for a highly select readership. Then, the average "person in the pew" had never even heard of, much less used, a central, "official" catechism. The Church of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is very different. Not only are there active, widely consulted secular media that report on the affairs of the Church and thus make events like the preparation of a new, post–Vatican II catechism generally known, the average faithful is also well enough educated to be able to read and use an official catechism.

1.3.2.3 The work of compiling

In the "*Fidei depositum*," John Paul II writes that the "*Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the result of very extensive collaboration; it was prepared over six years of intensive work done in a spirit of complete openness and fervent zeal." He explains that the ultimate responsibility for the compilation of the *Catechism* rested on a commission of twelve cardinals and bishops, directed by (the then) Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) and "charged with giving directives

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[25] Ibid., 150.

and overseeing the work"; the work of producing and revising the actual text was the responsibility of the editorial committee consisting of "seven diocesan Bishops."[26] The latter was chaired by Cardinal Schönborn, one-time student of Ratzinger. That the pope specified that the members of the editorial committee were diocesan bishops seems to indicate that the members of the commission, on the other hand, were not involved in active pastoral work, but were officials of the Vatican.

The editorial committee formed committees to work on various sections. Whether through an effort to meld tradition and the views expressed in Vatican II documents, or as a consequence of personal preferences, the "result in almost every section […] is a patchwork of faith statements from various theological perspectives that are not always compatible."[27] This may be the cause of what Sloyan calls "the chief shortcoming" of the *CCC*: a lack of proportion and balance.[28]

Inconsistencies in the text take various forms and have different degrees of importance. Some are structural, in the sense of giving disproportionate weight to one aspect of a moral question over another. An excellent example of this is the quite extensive treatment of the Ten Commandments and sin, in contrast to the relatively concise presentation of virtues.[29] Others are structural in the sense of an incongruity between the many references to Vatican II and the actual discussion of certain issues in the spirit of, or according to, earlier teachings that are significantly different in attitude.[30] For instance, quoting #29, which states that the human desire for God can be forgotten, overlooked, or even explicitly rejected, Pannenberg writes that this approach "is not only fundamentally pertinent, but corresponds as well to the contemporary cultural situation," he also points out, however, that the next section, concerning proofs for the existence of God, reverts to scholastic thinking without ever mentioning that these proofs have been disputed.[31]

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[26] "*Fidei depositum*," *CCC*, 8–9.

[27] Martos, *Doors*, 126.

[28] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 164.

[29] Cf. Charles E. Bouchard, O.P., "Life in Christ: The new Catechism and Christian Ethics," Symposium on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Theology Today* 53.2 (July 1996): 16.

[30] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 165.

[31] Pannenberg, "Catechism," 52.

At a less global level, there are also discrepancies concerning specific teachings, such as the statement "that the 'basic revelation' in the Old Testament consists of the declaration of God's name to Moses" (#203f) while #53 says that revelation is realized "by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other." Pannenberg concludes that "here it is impossible not to notice a glaring inconsistency in the presentation of the Catechism."[32] There are more egregious examples: The "In Brief" summaries at the end of each section are generally praised by commentators, including the relatively critical Sloyan. They usually reflect faithfully what is said in the text. Sometimes, however, they introduce significantly different ideas without comment or explanation. Such an inconsistency exists, for instance, between #85 which, quoting *Dei Verbum* 10, declares that the interpretation of the Word of God is entrusted to the "bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome," and the "In Brief" summary #100, which says it has been entrusted to "the pope and to the bishops in communion with him." According to Sloyan, "The first statement is the faith of the Catholic Church, the second is the understanding of recent bishops of Rome as to how the communion of bishops exercises its teaching office."[33] Given the shift in authority, this is no minor divergence of meaning.

The incongruities apparent in the "In Brief" sections, according to Sloyan, suggest "a heavy editorial hand."[34] This, combined with the last example cited, indicates an editorial policy that is rather authoritarian and more in harmony with the Tridentine tradition than with the direction Vatican II advocated. If the "sound doctrine" demanded by the Synod is interpreted as a predominant reliance on a rather restricted area of the tradition, a corresponding editorial policy is appropriate, especially because the "In Brief" sections serve well as a quick reference for superficial readers. However, such a policy not only contradicts the claim of "*Fidei depositum*" for the *CCC* as being open and responding to the needs of the Church, it and the resulting publication also make it difficult to discover the flexibility essential for the appropriate adaptations to which both the Apostolic Constitution and the text itself refer.

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[32] Ibid., 53.

[33] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 162.

[34] Ibid.

1.3.2.4 Publication

The pathway to publication was highly unusual, to say the least. First to appear was the French version in 1992, while the *editio tipica*, the official Latin version, was only released in 1997. This meant that for five years the bishops of the world were obliged to work with a text they had not seen in final form and they could not be sure whether, or to what extent, there would be corrections. Thus, for instance, the Canadian publication of the *CCC,* copyrighted in 1994, still bears the disclaimer "Revisions to the English translation will be incorporated into subsequent printing when the Latin Editio Tipica is released by the Vatican." While we cannot be certain of the motivation behind such an unusual process, it is not unreasonable to assume that at least one of the factors was a desire to slow down non-traditional speculations about the interpretation of the teachings of the Church.

Even if we assume that the reason for this apparently unprecedented action was an expectation that a revision of the published text might become necessary, we are left with the even more puzzling question of why a trial edition would include such a strong papal endorsement. Also, there is no mention in either the published work or in any official or semi-official document, not even a hint, that comments were invited. The *editio typica* did not contain any significant differences, other than those inevitably resulting from the process of translation. While the need for appropriate catechistic material was undoubtedly pressing, the urgency was not so great as to justify the method of proceeding.

In consequence, the most likely explanation is that there was a desire to prevent the publication of any work that might not follow the editorial policy apparent in the *CCC* or might be, in other ways, controversial. This assumption is also supported by the inclusion of the papal declaration about the validity of the material, stated in terms that are close to claiming infallibility.[35]

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[35] "I declare it to be a sure norm for teaching the faith and thus a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion" (*Fidei depositum*, *CCC*, 8). For the phrasing, cf. Richard R. Gaillardtz, "The Original Universal Magisterium: Unresolved Qusetions," *Theological Studies* 63.3 (Summer 2002), especially 449–450, 455, 459, etc.; also, Canon #749 and #750.

1.3.3 Reception

Even before the publication of the *CCC*, attention certainly was being paid to the project, not only by Catholics, but also by other Christian communities.[36] There was an atmosphere of anticipation and, in some quarters, anxious anticipation. As Dulles says:

> When the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 mandated the writing of a universal catechism, cries of outraged indignation arose from certain theologians and religious educators. They feared that the new catechism would inhibit the pace of doctrinal renewal and the accommodation of the old faith to new audiences in different parts of the world. They warned against "official centralism" and "Eurocentrism" as special dangers.[37]

A more balanced view is offered by Charles E. Bouchard, O.P.:

> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was long awaited by some and feared by others. Those who eagerly anticipated its publication hoped it would settle, once and for all, the confusion that arose in the wake of theological changes after the Second Vatican Council. Others (mostly theologians) were less enthusiastic. We feared it might prematurely foreclose theological dialogue and stifle the vitality of doctrinal development.[38]

The Apostolic Constitution introducing the Catechism takes this uneasiness into account when it repeatedly mentions renewal, responsiveness to the "questions of our age," etc., and states that it "will thus contain both the new and the old (cf. Mt 13:52), because the faith is always the same yet the source of ever new light."[39] Unfortunately the final wording, the references, quotations, and most noticeably the traditional outline borrowed from the Tridentine catechism make it appear – whether intentionally or not – that the *CCC* rests mainly on tradition. Thus "from the moment of its publication there has been no lack of Catholic theologians who have criticized it."[40]

Criticism did not come only from theologians. The *CCC*, once it was published in different languages, was an instant bestseller, beyond all expectations. The book reportedly sold 8 million copies worldwide, some 2 million in the U.S.A. alone.[41] It is thus obvious that expectations were equally great among the general public; and reactions both in the media and

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[36] Pannenberg, "Catechism," 51.

[37] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 148.

[38] Bouchard, "Life in Christ," 158.

[39] John Paul II, "*Fidei depositum*," *CCC*, 6–7.

[40] Pannenberg, "Catechism," 51.

[41] Anne Marie Mongoven, O.B., *The Prophetic Spirit Of Catechesis: How We Share the Fire in Our Hearts* (Mahwah: Paulist Press 2000), 78.

in more-or-less private conversations and pronouncements were often as critical as those of the theologians.

There were, of course, many that received the *CCC* with approval. There is a relatively clear boundary dividing the two groups and it follows, not surprisingly, the same lines as the separation between those who praise Vatican II and those who wish it had never happened.[42] In other words, generally the *CCC* pleases conservative Catholics and is criticized by progressives. Given that the younger, potentially more active members of the Church, are more likely to be progressive than conservative, the publication of the *CCC* may be perceived by them as an indication that the Church is averse to change, thus supporting Boulad's assessment.[43]

1.3.4 Language and style

A retired Episcopalian newspaper editor may seem an unusual, even an unsuitable choice as commentator for a critique of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* yet *Theology Today* invited Boyd Wright to be just that, as a contributor to the Symposium on the *CCC*. The justification for this decision is not very difficult to find. Not only is Wright an author of several critical articles, his experience, combined with the fact that he is an "outsider," in the sense of not being a member of the Catholic Church, makes him well qualified to comment on many aspects of the work. He very succinctly states his assessment of the style of *CCC*: "If one word sums up the general tone of the new *Catechism,* it is *authoritarian.* In these pages, the Church speaks with the weight of centuries and seems unswervingly sure of itself."[44] The style and language of any work are extremely important in determining its usefulness and potential audience; they are also indicative of the mindset and attitudes that stand behind it and that were at least partly instrumental in its creation. This may be one of the reasons that there is considerable debate about these aspects of the *CCC*.

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[42] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 171.

[43] Cf. our discussion of Georges Convert's article (section 1.2.5, above).

[44] Boyd Wright, "The New Catechism: I Can't Believe I Read the Whole Thing," Symposium on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Theology Today* 53.2 (July 1996): 154.

1.3.4.1 Purpose and form

Interestingly, the disjunction between purpose and form in the *CCC* is unconsciously illustrated by Wright himself, in two unconnected statements. First he writes:

> Not that there's much new in the *Catechism*. There isn't supposed to be. This is no brave theological thrust into the next millennium. It doesn't aim to inspire jaded believers. It isn't even an attempt by the Roman Catholic Church to update itself. Instead, it is a systematic compilation of what the Church believes.

Barely a page later, however, we find this: "In 1985, the Roman Catholic Church decided that after four centuries, and particularly after the momentous innovations of the Second Vatican Council, it was high time to draw up a new catechism."[45] One would assume that a new catechism drawn up to express the innovations brought about by the Council would, in fact, contain things that are new. It is the contradiction between the impetus to action and the form of the Church's response that caused the debate.

There is no doubt that in the decades following Vatican II there was a great deal of confusion in almost all areas of the life of the Church. This is certainly not surprising. The dizzying pace of the drastic changes in the world would alone have caused confusion, as it did in practically all areas of knowledge. This was, and still is, equally true in fields such as ethics and philosophy and the physical and social sciences. Vatican II was a sign that pressure was growing not only on the Catholic, but on the universal Church as well. In the case of the Catholic Church, the effect was even more pronounced. The four centuries after the Council of Trent were a period of relative stability within the Church; the observation that during this time "the only developments in sacramental theology would be refinements in peripheral matters; the central issues were settled" is largely true of other areas of the Church's life.[46] To "open the window," to use the words of John XXIII, in such a situation would inevitably cause confusion, because it required a fundamental change in a mode of thinking. It was henceforth not sufficient to argue that "we always did it this way," new ways of doing and thinking were needed. To change is, by definition, to do something differently or something new. It involves experimentation and therefore can be, and usually is, confusing and always

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[45] Ibid., 152, 153.

[46] Martos, *Doors*, 93.

subject to debate. In consequence, it is also often unsettling and even frightening. To all appearances the Fathers of Vatican II were willing to take the risk.

However, the confusion in the decades following the Council upset many people among the laity, and among the clergy and upper hierarchy as well. It is thus no surprise that Avery Dulles, Cardinal, Jesuit, professor of several universities, author of hundreds of articles and 22 books, prominent in the Catholic-Evangelical dialogue, etc., welcomed the *CCC* with these words:

> In my judgment, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is exactly what was needed to demonstrate that there is such a thing as an abiding deposit of faith, which some theologians were denying. It proves that there is continuity in Catholic teaching notwithstanding all historical developments, and that the Church's teaching can be universal notwithstanding the variety of local cultures. Properly used, the *Catechism* can greatly help to clear up the uncertainty and contestation that have been growing in the Catholic community since Vatican II.[47]

This view, however, raises questions about the purpose of the work.

In "*Fidei depositum*" John Paul II writes, "The principal task entrusted to the Council by Pope John XXIII was to guard and present better the precious deposit of Christian doctrine in order to make it more accessible to the Christian faithful and to all people of good will."[48] There are two directives in this statement: *guard* and *present better*, with each apparently having the same weight and importance. "To guard" in this case, implies, first, a stripping away of doctrinal accretions, which have, over time, obscured "the precious deposit." In other words, both "guarding" and "presenting better" demand an active rethinking: fundamental beliefs and truths of the faith must be rediscovered, re-revealed, and then presented in this renewed light, in renewed language. Yet:

> [The *Catechism*] is largely ahistorical in its description of Catholic beliefs and practices, not bothering to spell out the sometimes centuries-long dialectic that preceded the explicitation of a doctrinal or ethical matter as biblical faith.[49]

Such a method indicates that there was sufficient priority given to the guarding of tradition so as to significantly reduce the possibility of change.

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[47] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 148–149.

[48] "*Fidei depositum*," *CCC*, 5.

[49] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 165.

If the work had been intended to serve exclusively as a reference for experts, this would not necessarily be a problem. In fact, it could be a very useful foundation for working out new descriptions and interpretations of traditional doctrines. However, along with proffering it as a resource for the creation of new catechisms and compendiums, the "*Fidei depositum*" presented the *CCC* to the "Church's Pastors and the Christian faithful" and John Paul II "offered [it] to all the faithful who wish to deepen their knowledge of the unfathomable riches of salvation" and "every individual who asks us to give an account of the hope that is in us (cf. 1Pt 3:15) and who wants to know what the Catholic Church believes."[50] The eagerness with which the *CCC* was awaited and its subsequent success as a "best seller" show that individuals are indeed seeking an account of what the Catholic Church believes and that the document is likely to be used as a reference by a very wide cross-section of the faithful (including clergy). These non-experts may not have the time, inclination, or even training to do the necessary research for a proper understanding of those sections, quotations, statements, etc. that require study. And, within the dense cataloguing of beliefs and practices, they may never come to a clear appreciation of what their Church believes and how the *CCC* can be adapted to address their real spiritual needs.

Patrick D. Miller points out that "the form of a catechism, its style and level of presentation will have much to do with how it is used in the Christian communities for which it is created."[51] Since, in his opinion, the *CCC* is more suited to "an extended doctrinal statement for study and understanding as well as for defining the circle of faith" than to memorization,[52] i.e., acceptance without study, there is a danger that instead of fulfilling the avowed aim of helping present-day Christians to better understand the faith, it may cause the opposite to happen. Likely, the only solution to this problem would be a vigorous encouragement of the development of local catechisms that are geared to the needs of the local Church, something both the "*Fidei depositum*" and the text itself explicitly propose. Almost twenty years after the publication of the original French version, it still remains to be seen

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[50] "*Fidei depositum*," *CCC*, 8–9.

[51] Patrick D. Miller, "Teaching the Faith," editorial, Symposium on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Theology Today* 53.2 (July 1996): 144.

[52] Ibid.

whether the necessary authority and independence to define the most proper form and language will be granted to the local hierarchy.

1.3.4.2 Clarity

Whether one regards the *CCC* as a reference work for specialists or a resource for everyday use by all members of the Church, a clear presentation of the subject matter is a must. There is some disagreement amongst commentators as to whether this standard has been achieved, but even authors generally positive in their evaluation point out rather important flaws in this regard. Thus, for instance, Dulles, who writes that the *CCC* is "a complete and accurate compendium of Catholic teaching on faith and morals," feels obliged to include a sector on "Inevitable Limitations."[53] Of course, any reference work has limitations, even within a specific field of knowledge. This fact presents no serious problem, unless it interferes with the purpose of the work. If the purpose of a work is to present a complete and accurate compendium of the whole body of teaching of Scripture, the Tradition of the Church and of the Magisterium "faithfully and systematically,"[54] a limitation that affects a clear understanding of that teaching is very serious indeed. Understanding, in this context, must certainly take into account the way of thinking of the audience.

It may be true that the compilers of the *CCC* had "sovereign right" not to include the historical background of important decisions made by councils or popes, as Dulles claims,[55] but not if they wanted to present a faithful account of the teachings. "An acceptable hermeneutic for Christians of the year 600 or even 1450 is not within the immediate grasp of late twentieth-century believers."[56] Statements made in the past often need careful interpretation to make their meaning fully understandable in the twenty-first century. This is not a question of a conscientious or curious reader satisfying a desire to get further information about the events in connection to which statements or decisions were made. It is a matter of teaching in a manner that ensures the proper passing on of the faith of the Church.

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[53] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 149–151.

[54] "*Fidei depositum*," *CCC*, 7.

[55] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 150.

[56] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 167.

In another context, anticipating a charge that the *CCC* does not present a systematic theology, Dulles asserts that the *CCC* "limits itself to stating the settled doctrine of the Church."[57] This is problematic. While the fundamental articles of faith are beyond question, in other matters, especially subjects requiring interpretation, it is often an issue of opinion or preference. Thus, for instance, #375 refers to the story of creation, specifically the creation of humanity, as a historical event. There is no mention that modern exegesis takes into account the *genre* of the narrative and considers it a saga, in total accord with Vatican II. "This approach imposes unnecessary difficulties in the way of faith for people today," remarks Pannenberg.[58]

Working with what can only be described as out-dated methods interferes with clarity in other ways as well. In a work designed to become a reference of Christian faith, the way in which the Bible is interpreted is very important. The *CCC* relies on typological interpretation of both Testaments. This method is traditional; it was widely used in patristic and medieval literature. Its use in the *CCC*, however, may cause difficulty not only to lay people, but also "to today's bishops and other clergy or religious educators," because "almost every exegetical aid available examines biblical passages differently than in a typological way."[59]

The emphasis placed on different expressions of the official teaching of the Church appears to heavily favour tradition. There are certainly numerous footnotes referring to Vatican II, but the text itself sometimes reflects the spirit of earlier councils.[60] This may not affect the clarity of the *CCC* itself (unless one checks the footnotes carefully), but it would, in all likelihood, confuse anyone trying to follow the teachings and spirit of Vatican II.

There are not many commentaries that speak directly of the language employed in the work. Dulles mentions that the "*Catechism* attempts to present a compendium of universal Catholic teaching that adheres closely to the language of the source documents so that religious educators can know more easily what it is that must be adapted to the needs and capacities of young people or other special groups."[61] The validity of this reasoning depends, of course, again on who the intended audience is. It also assumes a relatively high

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[57] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 150.

[58] Pannenberg, "Catechism," 41.

[59] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 166.

[60] Ibid., 164.

[61] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 150.

sophistication and familiarity with the history of theology, because "checking the citations in this copiously footnoted volume reveals that the church father or council does in fact say what the text indicates but might be quite unhappy to see the use to which the statement is put."[62] It is questionable whether a reference work should be open to such criticism as well as whether the average catechist is prepared for such a task.

1.3.4.3 Tradition: guide and barrier

Presenting the tradition in the light of the teachings of Vatican II was an ambitious goal, demanding a very careful balancing act. The attempt to achieve it must have been extremely difficult and did, at times, lead to rather sharp debates in the committees preparing the *CCC*.[63] On the whole it appears that tradition won the upper hand. This may have been due to the personal views of the majority of the bishops involved in the compiling work, or simply to the fact that they were educated at a time when tradition ruled most of the institutes of higher theological learning. Unfortunately, the dependence on tradition can also present a serious problem if, as Boulad claims, it diminishes the effectiveness of the Church.

None-the-less, its attractiveness and the comfort it gives to more conservative thinker is apparent:

> If the authors put the emphasis on permanence and unity rather than on change and variety, as in fact they have, they may be pardoned. The book, as a catechism, was intended to give a serene presentation of assured teaching, not to engage in critical discussion of points that are legitimately disputed.[64]

Such an argument might be valid if we were speaking of a book concerning which the authors did, in fact, have the right, indeed the responsibility to define the aim and the character. Here, however, we are speaking of a work that, by necessity, not only expresses the teaching style and attitude of the Church, it can, and is designed to, affect the understanding of the faith of an enormous number of people.

There is no argument about the necessity of tradition, but "tradition" is not a blind concession to all that has gone before. Documents of Vatican II state that over the centuries

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[62] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 166.

[63] Cf., Wright, "I Can't Believe I Read," 155.

[64] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 149.

the tradition did, in fact, accumulate components that obscured the true nature of liturgy – and by implication, other aspects of the teachings and life of the Church – and that these components have to be discarded.[65] The Council itself, in effect, looked for guidance to a much older tradition, namely that of the fourth century or even earlier. Tradition is an essential guide in the life of the Church; on the other hand, it should not become so dominant that it forms an obstacle to progress. "'Opera Christi non deficiunt, sed proficiunt,' the works of Christ do not go backward, do not fail, but progress," quoted Pope Benedict XVI in a recent address; and he added, "This affirmation is also valid today."[66]

Is this attitude reflected in the *CCC*? In some cases, clearly, yes. Thus, for instance, the section discussing the self-sacrifice of Jesus (#606–623) "is not presented as an appeasement of the Father nor is it limited to the crucifixion," and uses the interpretation of modern exegesis, claims Pannenberg.[67] Similarly, the section on the work of the Spirit in liturgy is also praised, because it "represents the desire of the Catholic Church inspired by the Vatican Council to give more attention to this than was the case in past centuries."[68]

In other aspects, however, the reliance on tradition alone acts as a serious limitation. Thus the title for the segment Pannenberg praises is "Christ Offered Himself to His Father for Our Sins," notwithstanding the fact that the text proper bears out Pannenberg's claim, (although with the added qualification that it is not *primarily* presented as an appeasement). The discussion does present the traditional interpretation of atonement for the death of Jesus, but balances it with aspects such as obedience, love, etc. Yet, apart from the title's undeniable effect of focusing attention on the traditional interpretation, the text itself also appears to be limited by reliance on tradition, or more properly, on one particular tradition, for very little or no effort is made to explain or elucidate the other effects of the sacrifice of Jesus. These include sanctification (#606), the nature of the new covenant (#612), etc. There is also no mention of the universal priesthood of all the baptized when the institution of the Eucharist and its connection to ministerial priesthood is discussed (#611). Although it is mentioned in

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[65] *CSL* #21.

[66] Benedict XVI, *St. Bonaventure's Concept of History*, address given by Pope Benedict XVI at the general audience of March 10, 2010, http://www.zenit.org/article-28599?l=english (accessed on March 11, 2010).

[67] Pannenberg, "Catechism," 55–56.

[68] David N. Power, "The 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*," *Liturgical Ministry* 17.2 (Spring 2008): 62.

#1268 ("*Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers*," italics original) and explained in #784, there is not so much as a marginal reference to either of these in #611.

Commentators object to some of the more general aspects where tradition governs. Thus Sloyan points out that the challenges faced today are different than those of even a century ago and that this ought to be indicated when "the mode of expression of the documents of the more recent council is superior to that of Vatican I or Trent" and therefore it is a mistake that "everything that was ever said in the Catholic past, while important at the time, is treated as if it is of current value, even when in the development of Catholic theology it has fallen into disuse."[69]

This characteristic becomes more critical given the authoritarian language used. There are statements in both "*Fidei depositum*" and the body of the *CCC* that adaptations are expected, yet there is no indication that the text itself may need, or even be open to, periodic re-examination and/or reformulation. Given that, in this fast-changing world where verbal communication becomes ever more important, used language changes rapidly and that, according to Boulad, the antiquated language of the Church is one of its major problems, this is a serious shortcoming.[70] If "the catechism is not meant to be so definitive that there can be no discussion,"[71] its language should not be so intimidating as to obscure meaning.

1.3.5 Treatment of morality

A discussion of morality has obvious importance in describing the Church's relationship to the world, but especially in establishing the relationship of the "official" Church to the millions of Catholics, as it directly impacts their everyday lives and may have a strong effect on their morale. The approach of the *CCC* is therefore particularly meaningful: it can easily determine whether the teachings of the Church attract or alienate the faithful, it also signals the direction the highest authority of the Church wishes to give all forms of catechesis. And it is in regard to this topic – the moral and ethical teachings of the Magisterium – that Henri Boulad deploys

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[69] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 165–166.

[70] Cf., letter of Henri Boulad to Pope Benedict XVI; also Paul De Clerk, *L'intelligence de la liturgie* (Paris: Cerf, 2000), 21–24.

[71] Miller, "Teaching the Faith," 145.

some of his harshest words of censure. An investigation of some of the *CCC*'s teachings can stand as a test of the validity of his criticism.

Part Three of the *CCC*, appropriately titled "Life in Christ," deals with the question of Christian morality. While its 866 numbered segments, a little over a third of the total, "have been the object of especially sharp criticism in many of the first reactions to the Catechism," most of the comments I was able to consult discuss this part of the *CCC* in the context of the whole work.[72] My approach is more focused. I shall look at the general structure of Part Three with the special intent of discovering whether it demonstrates the "evangelical approach" deemed necessary by Boulad (1.3.5.1).

We shall then turn to the *CCC*'s presentation of the doctrines of original sin and virtue (1.3.5.2). These concepts have much to do with how Christianity is understood and, consequently, with whether an individual accepts the faith and how a Christian shapes his or her life. It is therefore extremely important to understand the Church's view of "original sin" and "virtue" properly, which is possible only if they are taught clearly and in a way comprehensible to the audience. How successfully the *CCC* accomplishes this teaching, both in terms of embracing the faithful and in furthering the Church's evangelical goals, will be assessed.

1.3.5.1 Choices made in building up Part Three of the *CCC*

Every editor, editorial board, committee, etc. has not only the right, but also the responsibility to decide the structure of the work to be produced. It would be an extremely rare occasion, indeed, if every reader agreed with the decisions taken. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are many critics of the structure of the *CCC* in general, and of Part Three in particular. The bulk of Part Three, 506 numbered segments of the total 866, is allocated to a discussion of the Ten Commandments. The weight given to this topic, combined with the fact that its presence is analogous to the structure of the Catechism of Trent, has very likely influenced the negative reactions mentioned above. Nor was the choice unanimous among the compilers:

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[72] The quote is from Pannenberg, "Catechism of the Catholic Church," 58. The one exception to the overall approach is Charles E. Bouchard O.P., President and Assistant Professor of Moral Theology at Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, whose article "Life in Christ" (cited above) deals specifically with the treatment Christian morality receives.

> Schönborn also tells of "a great debate" within the commission over whether the section on the Ten Commandments and their "shall nots" provides the best framework for discussing morals. Some thought Jesus' simpler twin commandments to love God and neighbor, stated as they are in the affirmative, would give a more positive tone to Christian virtues. In the end, backers of the traditional Ten Commandments, negative wording and all, won.[73]

Part Three begins, as do the other parts, with a brief introduction of seven numbered segments. The rest is divided into two sections, Section One, "Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit" and Section Two, "The Ten Commandments." The latter begins with a relatively long introduction (30 segments) and continues with the traditional division of the Decalogue: the first three commandments relating to the relationship of humans to God, the others, the traditional "second table," to the relationship between humans.

The introductory segment begins with a quotation from St. Leo the Great that focuses on the dignity of being a Christian and sharing the nature of God (#1691). The following segments continue this tone: positive, emphasizing the good in being a Christian and Christ-centred. Typical of this approach is the first sentence of #1697: "*Catechesis* has to reveal in all clarity the joy and the demands of the way of Christ." It is all the more surprising that this segment, containing a list of eight characteristics a catechesis for the newness of life in Christ should have (and thus a clear directive for catechists), fails to mention the commandment of love in Jn 13:34. Even the description of the "catechesis of charity" phrases it as "catechesis of the twofold commandment of charity set forth in the Decalogue." The *CCC* uses the term "charity" almost exclusively, a term that in modern English usage has an entirely different meaning from "love." Leaving the statement that the Decalogue contains "the twofold commandment of charity" without explanation can also be confusing. Even though the traditional division of the Decalogue (mentioned above) does allow such terminology,[74] it, at least in modern North American English, is not generally used, and can thus easily be interpreted as including Lev 19:18 in the Decalogue. Such an understanding would also make

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[73] Wright, "I Can't Believe I Read," 153.

[74] Cf., #2067: "The Ten Commandments state what is required in the love of God and love of neighbour. The first three concern love of God, and the other seven love of neighbour.

> 'As charity comprises the two commandments to which the Lord related the whole Law and the prophets … so the Ten Commandments were themselves given on two tablets. Three were written on one tablet and seven on the other.'"

A footnote gives as the source of the quote St. Augustine, Sermo 33, 2, 2: Pl 38, 208. (Pl refers to *Patrologica Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris, 1857–1866)

the *CCC* appear to disregard the only statement made by Jesus that, according to the Gospel, he himself intended as a commandment.

Throughout the *CCC*, the commandment of love quoted in Jn 13:34 suffers near invisibility. It is specifically mentioned in only two places, and nowhere is it explored or explained in detail. The first mention comes in Section One of Part Three, *Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit*. Chapter One deals with "The Dignity of the Human Person," and in Article 7 ("The Virtues") #1822 is the first segment on charity. These first segments are always used to define the virtue under discussion. This one says, "Charity is the theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God." The next segment begins with the statement, "Jesus makes charity the *new commandment*." Using biblical quotations, it then shows that Jesus manifests the Father's love by loving the disciples who then imitate the love Jesus showed by loving each other. It ends with "Whence Jesus says 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.' And again: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.'" There is very little explanation other than to say that charity (the term is changed from the Scriptural quotation) is the fruit of the Spirit and the fullness of the Law and "keeps the commandments" (#1824) and because Christ has died for us "while we were still enemies," we should love even our enemies (#1825). It then turns to the hymn of love (1Cor 13:4–7). The "In Brief" segment summarizing the article on the virtues does not mention the commandment of Jesus.

Jesus' commandment of love is mentioned once more, in Chapter Three, *God's Salvation: Law and Grace*, Article 1, "The Moral Law." Discussing The New Law or the Law of the Gospel, the introductory segment (#1965), the one defining the topic, says about the New Law, "It is the work of Christ and is expressed particularly in the Sermon on the Mount." Segment #1968 is particularly interesting, because, in describing the relationship of the old and the new Law, it appears to summarize the essence of the New Law:

> The Law of the Gospel *fulfils the commandments* of the Law. The Lord's Sermon on the Mount, far from abolishing or devaluing the moral prescriptions of the Old Law, releases their hidden potential and has new demands arise from them: it reveals the entire divine and human truth. It does not add new external precepts, but proceeds to reform the heart, the root of human acts, where man chooses between pure and impure, where faith, hope and charity are formed and with them other virtues. The Gospel thus brings the Law to its fullness through imitation of the perfection of the

> heavenly Father, through forgiveness of enemies and prayer for persecutors, in emulation of divine generosity.

But the commandment to love is only mentioned two segments further on (#1970), almost as an afterthought:

> The Law of the Gospel requires us to make a decisive choice between "the two ways" and put into practice the words of the Lord. It is summed up in the *Golden Rule*, "Whatever you wish that men do to you, do so to them; this is the Law and the Prophets."
>
> The entire Law of the Gospel is contained in the "*new commandment"* of Jesus to love one another as he has loved us.

The choice to use the Tridentine pattern of discussing morality in the framework of the Decalogue appears to be an attitude or way of thinking that has led both to the neglect of Jesus' command of love and to the relative importance given to the discussion of sin as against the discussion of virtue. One of the few complaints against the *CCC* made by Bouchard deals with this weighting, because it can easily give the impression that morality is only a matter of obedience to the law. Virtues, on the other hand, lead people to a positive view of the moral life and provide a much clearer link between morality and spirituality. It is sad indeed that the moral virtues, which provide such a rich source of moral catechesis, are treated in only a few short paragraphs (nos. 1804–1811).[75]

Part Three, probably more than any other section of the *CCC*, deserves the criticism of Sloyan: "One has far less quarrel with what is than what is not here […] its chief shortcoming is lack of proportion or balance."[76] What is said is largely true, but what is left out is essential to understanding and living Christianity, and consequently it is highly questionable whether it can be the basis of an effective, worldwide evangelization.[77]

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[75] Bouchard, "Life in Christ," 163.

[76] Sloyan "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 164.

[77] On what is said and what is left out: In at least two places no differentiation is made between the Old and the New Testaments. The first is #1822, where love of neighbour is defined in terms of Leviticus 19:18. While Jesus does mention it as the second greatest commandment, he also points out, in the Sermon, on the Mount its shortcoming. The second (#1970) is less obvious, the "golden rule." Here again Jesus refers specifically the "Law and the prophets" i.e., the Old Law. Asking that we love as he loved us goes far beyond this.

1.3.5.2 Original sin and virtue in the *CCC*

Given the limitations of my investigation, the detailed and extensive treatment of sin in the *CCC* makes a thorough analysis impossible here. I shall concentrate on the teaching on original sin, which is presented as the source of all human suffering and of sin. I shall also take a look at the treatment of virtue, because, being a "habitual and firm disposition to do the good" (#1803), it can be taken to be the ideal of Christian life.

The method used in the *CCC* is very clearly based on the traditional way of teaching about morality. The statement that "[c]atechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life" (#282) is without question true. This, however, implies that the authors of a resource meant to direct catechism have a responsibility to present faith in terms that are believable. Presenting the Genesis story as historically accurate is, at the beginning of the third millennium, not believable. Dulles defends this choice:

> In its treatment of original sin, for example, the *Catechism* repeats in substance the teaching of the Council of Trent. Although the authors were aware of a variety of contemporary reinterpretations, they did not judge that any one of them was sufficiently secure to be incorporated into an official catechism.[78]

For authors of any other work this may be their right, but not of the only official catechism published after 400 years, at least not without some clear explanation. The text of #390 begins with the statement that the "account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language." This is a solid indication that not only were the compilers aware of the need for explanation, but that, quite possibly, at least some "contemporary reinterpretations" were accepted by the Church, as Pope John Paul II's message in October 1996 to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences regarding the acceptability of the theory of evolution shows. An interpretation that was valid in the sixteenth century because, even in spite of early scientific discoveries, it still agreed with the understanding of the world of the overwhelming majority of the people was not valid or tenable at the end of the twentieth century, when this understanding and the associated ways of thinking were irreconcilably alien.

Unfortunately, in the *CCC* this is not dealt with in any way. The very sentence quoted above, implying the need for interpretation, continues with "[it] affirms a primeval event, a

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[78] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 150.

deed that took place *at the beginning of the history of man*. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents" (#390, emphasis from the original). Significantly this segment is the only one under the heading "How to read the account of the fall." It is highly questionable whether a catechesis that presents the story of Adam and Eve as a historical fact concerning the foundation of Christian life can gain many converts or regain Catholics who have turned away from the Church. Nor is it conceivable that #390 is the only comment that should or could be made on how the "figurative language" of the biblical story is to be understood and interpreted.

Segment #406 states that the teaching on the transmission of original sin, as presented, "was articulated more precisely in the fifth century, especially under the impulse of St Augustine." Yet it was exactly Augustine who warned against disregarding discoveries about the physical universe:

> It is too disgraceful and ruinous, though, and greatly to be avoided, that he [the non-Christian] should hear a Christian speaking so idiotically on these matters, and as if in accord with Christian writings, that he might say that he could scarcely keep from laughing when he saw how totally in error they are. In view of this and in keeping it in mind constantly while dealing with the book of Genesis, I have, insofar as I was able, explained in detail and set forth for consideration the meanings of obscure passages, taking care not to affirm rashly some one meaning to the prejudice of another and perhaps better explanation.[79]

This *caveat* was quite obviously ignored in compiling the *CCC*.

The problem with the traditional interpretation of original sin is not only the assumed historicity and literal interpretation of the story. Based on a literal interpretation of Rom 5:12, 18–19, the *CCC* asserts that because of one person's (Adam's) individual sin all humanity suffers (#399–409); again, doubtless a traditional teaching. Yet, a statement acceptable according to the Neo-Platonic philosophy of Augustine and his followers and the second Council of Orange in the sixth century, or to the scholastic thinking of the Fathers of Trent, is not necessarily acceptable today. This is particularly true when the only attempt to explain, in #404, merely says:

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[79] Augustine, "De Genesi ad literam*"* 1:19–20, *Sermons to the People: Advent, Christmas, New year, Epiphany*, ed. Henry William Griffen (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 2002), Chapter 19, 408.

> How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam "as one body of one man."[80] By this "unity of the whole human race" all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand.

The segment then continues by saying that because Adam (Eve is not mentioned here) received holiness and justice for mankind, the personal sin of our first parents affected human nature, depriving it of its "original holiness and justice." To make matters worse, the very next statement ties, by analogy, the universality of salvation, called Christ's justice, to the transmission of original sin. This is at best confusing, at worst it makes Adam equal in importance to Christ, hardly the most likely conclusion intended by Augustine. Ultimately, the explanation is far from satisfactory. Indicating in a footnote that the statement about the human race being in Adam "as one body of one man" comes from Aquinas does not necessarily make it either true or relevant. Simply proclaiming that something has been taught by the Church for a long time does not convince people at a time when long-held theories about life and the world are being proven wrong almost daily, even in the realm of science.

This teaching, while traditional, is problematic from other viewpoints as well, especially when presented without any indication of alternate interpretations of the figurative language mentioned in #390. The traditional teaching on original sin is not only disputed by a number of contemporary theologians,[81] it is also dubious in light of several passages from the Old Testament that explicitly reject the idea of God wanting, or even tolerating that descendants suffer for the misdeeds of their parents (e.g., Ez 18:1–20, 33:10–20, etc.). According to the *CCC* itself, even the traditional terminology labelling the cause of the human condition as "sin" is questionable:

> [O]riginal sin is called "sin" only in an analogical sense: it is sin "contracted" and not "committed" – a state and not an act. (#404)
>
> Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of personal fault in any of Adam's descendants. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been completely corrupted. (#405)

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[80] This note is from the original and reads, "St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, 4,1."

[81] Cf., István Elöd, *Katolikus Dogmatika* [Catholic Dogmatics] (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 1978), 175; Joseph Blintzler, "Erbsünde, Die Lehre der Schrift," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (*LTK*), eds. Josef Höfer and Karl Rahner (Freiburg: Herder, 1967) vol. 3, col. 967; Karl Rahner, "Monogenism," *LTK,* vol. 7, col. 562–563, etc.

Both these statements appear to indicate that "original sin" does not fit the definition of sin given in #1849–1850, where it is clearly seen as an active conscious choice.

The irony is that this whole problem could have been avoided by a simple indication and brief explanation that the term "original" may point to a historical-chronological beginning and/or an intrinsic consequence of a state of being – in this case, the state of being free, a condition essential if an individual is to have the potential to love. That conceding to temptation and the impulse to turn against the will of God, i.e., sinning, is not necessarily due to an inherited "original sin" but is a free choice, an abuse of the freedom given by God, is spelled out by the *CCC* itself in #391–392, in the discussion of the fall of the angels. This, too, is a traditional teaching and according to it the angels were *not* under the influence of any kind of angelic original sin, they fell to the temptation of the first angel who sinned, Satan.

Segment #407 states:

> The doctrine of original sin, closely connected with that of redemption by Christ, provides lucid discernment of man's situation and activity in the world. By our first parents' sin, the devil has acquired certain domination over man, even though man remains free.

The statement points out the problem of imposing traditional teaching using traditional language on modern minds. It may have been clear for people schooled in scholastic philosophy how a person can be dominated by a superior power and remain free at the same time. This is not a question of freedom necessarily meaning the lack of any restriction; but since we are speaking here of morality and choices, if a person is under domination, i.e., is controlled in making decisions, even if not totally, that person cannot be said to "be free."

Nor does the doctrine, as presented, provide a more "lucid discernment" as regards redemption. Here again, there is no question that as human beings we do need divine help to live a Christian or any other life pleasing to God. The problem lies in trying to reconcile different aspects of doctrine. When the *CCC* quotes the Roman (Tridentine) Catechism in segment #978, the situation seems clear:

> Baptism cleansed us, the forgiveness we received then was so full and complete that there remained in us absolutely nothing left to efface, neither original sin nor offences committed by our own will, nor was there left any penalty to suffer in order to expiate them […] Yet the grace of Baptism delivers no one from all the weakness of nature. On the contrary, we must still combat the movements of concupiscence that never cease leading us to evil.

The contrast here is between grace conferred in baptism and human nature, original sin has been taken out of the equation. However, the *CCC* cannot let go of it. In its anxiety to hold onto the concept, a situation is created in which Christ's actions are declared to be effective and seen to be ineffective, and our understanding suffers. Thus segment #1708 says, "By his Passion, Christ delivered us from Satan and from sin. He merited for us the new life in the Holy Spirit. His grace restores what sin damaged in us." This seems clear. Yet, if grace "restores what sin damaged in us," how can it be true that "the overwhelming misery which oppresses men and their inclination toward evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam's sin" (#403), or that "the whole human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents" (#390), to the point that humanity is able to be "united only in its perverse ambition to forge its own unity as at Babel" (#57)? We are left wondering if Christ's grace is at all effective, if baptismal grace can restore us, if we can ever be repaired of the damage of an original sin over which we had no control.

Failure to deal with these questions illustrates the very serious danger of using tradition uncritically and of citing traditional teachings without ascertaining that they do not contradict one another. Given the apparent importance of sin in the *CCC*, such a confusing presentation of the origin of human suffering (#385), death (#400), and sin (#401) is a serious fault. A reliance on the sanctity of tradition is not an excuse for ambiguity. It is a sign that the authors and/or the editors chose to disregard the fact that tradition is not something dead and unchanging, but rather an ever-changing treasure of the faith of the People of God, their faith, cultures, researches, their worlds.[82] Ignoring the present and the near past does not serve the Church, it only alienates those who have to live in this world, which illustrates the validity of Boulad's complaint.

The treatment of virtues is not free of problems either. Here too, tradition governs and becomes a barrier rather than a guide. The method of presentation is purely neo-scholastic: flat statements and definitions rather than explanation from the existential and experiential life of

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[82] "…la tradition ne se contente pas de répéter littéralement ce qui fut fait jadis: Exprimant la foi d'un peuple donné, elle tient compte des courants culturels qui le traversent selon des situations et des sensibilités nouvelles" (Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Le Partage du Pain Eucharistique Selon le Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 9); L'Église "ne doit pas concevoir la tradition comme une entité figée et pétrifiée, mais elle doit au contraire contribuer à y voir quelque chose de vécu, qui découle de la vie, qui répond au tribunal de la raison, qui fonde la vie et ouvre sur l'avenir" (Cardinal Walter Kasper, "L'Évêque, serviteur de la vérité: La responsabilité ecclésiale de la théologie," *Transversalités* 82 (2002): 94).

the Catholic person. Reasons why somebody should or would want to acquire a virtue are rarely given. Even when this question is touched upon, the desirability of practicing a virtue is given as being because it is a way of approaching God (e.g., #1814) or a method of seeking reward in the afterlife (e.g., segments dealing with hope, #1847–1821), or, most often, simply because it is something praised or prescribed in Scriptures.

The compilers of the *CCC* had another option. They could have taken a different approach, or at least deepened the teaching. The words of Jesus about those who obey his commandment of love offer more than plain joy, they promise joy that is complete (Jn 15:11). This part of the Farewell Discourse deals very specifically with life in the "here and now," and there is no indication that the promised joy will come only after death, even in his prayer for the disciples (Jn 17:13). The first Christians are described as glad, filled with joy, in Acts (2:47, 13:52, 14:17) as well as in some letters of the apostles. From even a superficial reading of the New Testament or the history of the early Church, it is quite obvious that Christians of the first centuries were not living without problems, originating from both within and without their communities, but they lived in joy. Why then would the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* not mention the joy of living a virtuous Christian life as desirable because, properly understood, it is, among other things, joyful? Evangelization based on a very selective negative-focused tradition is not likely to attract many people to the faith.

The section on virtues also suffers from inconsistencies and confusing statements, as well as lacunae. According to the scholastic and neo-scholastic method there is a clear and sharp differentiation between categories, which essentially have no influence on each other. In consequence, nearly everything can be categorized according to its "essential" qualities, i.e., those judged to be what makes a thing what it is, and discussed without reference to other subjects, even otherwise connected ones. While this is obviously an over-simplified description, it points out the inappropriateness of using this method for a late-twentieth- early twenty-first-century audience. Modern thinking tends to be ever more holistic, searching for connections and interaction between events and causes, and understands the lack of reference to such as indicating their non-existence.

Following neo-scholastic thinking, the traditional division of virtues into moral and theological categories is maintained in the *CCC*. The concept of two categories of virtues goes

back to Aristotle, who distinguished intellectual and moral virtues to explain how some outstanding figures in art and philosophy could, at the same time, live more than questionable moral lives. The listing of the moral and theological virtues, as it appears in the *CCC*, goes back to Thomas Aquinas.

Most of the problems stem from the traditional interpretation according to which moral virtues are acquired by human effort, while theological virtues are a gift of God. In the traditional interpretation, moral virtues are acquired by human effort, while theological virtues are a gift of God. (Unfortunately this principle is not explained in the *CCC*, nor is the logic behind it.) In a manner analogous to Aristotle's, the division serves relatively well as an explanation for how it is that non-Christian, non-religious, or even anti-religious persons can live very moral lives, even as they refuse any guidance or help from Christ or God. However, if given without commentary, it leaves open the question of why, therefore, faith in God or God's help is necessary at all. The missing piece is found in modern theology, as affirmed by Vatican II, which teaches that while sacraments are the normal channel of grace, God's grace, even if in a different form, is offered to all human beings. In the present context the exclusive use of the traditional interpretation can be, and in the *CCC* it is, a source of problems.

Possibly as a result of an effort to update the teaching, there are also contradictions within the discussion of moral virtues. Thus, for instance, #1804 states: "The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts, they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion and divine love." The greatest problem with this statement is that it appears to contradict Jn 15:5, "apart from me you can do nothing." The inconsistency is complicated by the fact that the following segments, discussing the moral virtues one-by-one, do mention divine help or cooperation in the acquisition or practice of these virtues (e.g., #1808). Also, there is no reference in #1804 to either #1810 or #1811 which discuss "The virtues and grace," both of which speak directly of divine help. Yet even within these segments themselves there are problems. #1810 is especially difficult to understand:

> Human virtues acquired by education, by deliberate acts and by perseverance ever-renewed in repeated efforts are purified and elevated by divine grace. With God's help, they forge character and give facility in the practice of the good. The virtuous man is happy to practice them.

This could, again, be a clear and valid statement given some, even minimal, explanation. Without explanation, it appears that the acquisition of human virtues is entirely the work of the individual. Keeping in mind the previous teaching on original sin, from where would this fallen human being, under even the partial domination of evil, get the strength, without divine help, to want to achieve a virtue? The text also gives the impression of God standing by, while the solitary human struggles with the evil inherent in human nature, and intervening only after the virtue has been acquired, a virtue that is obviously impure and in some sense base until grace purifies and elevates it: not a particularly attractive image of God, or of human virtue. Even some sort of warning to catechists to be careful in the presentation of this tenet would be helpful.

The following segment, #1811, leans somewhat more towards recognizing the role of grace: "It is not easy for man, wounded by sin, to maintain moral balance. Christ's gift of salvation offers us the grace necessary to persevere in the pursuit of the virtues." Yet even here, the phrasing does not serve to clear up the situation, because it implies that the responsibility of the human being is the acquisition of the virtues, not the acceptance of God's grace. Salvation plays almost a secondary role to perseverance, it has lost its major role as the initiative that turns a person or his/her will towards living a virtuous life.

One of the segments in "Passions and Moral Life," leading up to the discussion of virtues, suffers from a very similar problem:

> Strong feelings are not decisive for the morality or the holiness of the person […]. The upright will orders the movements of the senses it appropriates to the good and to beatitude; an evil will succumbs to disordered passions and exacerbates them. Emotions and feelings can be taken up into the *virtues* or perverted by the *vices*. (#1768)

Here the text presents human will as an almost absolute power. There is no mention of the desirability, much less the necessity, of divine intervention. There is also an utter disregard for well-established psychological research showing that influences such as upbringing, personal history, environment, etc. can have considerable impact on an individual's willpower. Defined by the neo-scholastic thinking, the *CCC* allows no middle ground; everything is categorized in terms of good and evil.

In both the traditional listing of cardinal virtues and the specific discussions of each, the concept of love, even "common" human love, is completely missing. The word itself appears only twice in the six segments dealing with cardinal virtues: in #1805, "If anyone loves righteousness" and in #1809, "To live well is nothing other than to love God." Neither of these refers to human-to-human love, according to Scripture, the sign of being a disciple of Jesus (Jn 13:35). Especially disturbing is this lack in #1807. In discussing the cardinal virtue of justice, the text mentions "what is due to God and neighbour": rights, equity, right thinking and uprightness, but no mention of love, surely a duty towards our neighbour even according to the Old Testament (Lev 19:18), but admittedly not according to the categorizing interpretation of scholasticism. Today it is hard to understand how, in discussing an issue that plays a "pivotal role" (#1805) in our "Life in Christ," that is, in Christian morality, it is possible to not even mention love. This is a direct result of scholastic teaching, which regards love, a theological virtue, as a gift of God, and justice, a moral virtue, as a duty, dependent on human will. For conscious Christians, however, it is difficult to understand, given the very clear declaration of Jesus according to which the Old Testament rule of "as yourself" is inadequate and is made complete only through love of even the enemy, i.e., a love independent of the attitude or acts of the other and focusing on the needs of the other, rather than the self.

Segments #1812 and #1813 do explain what theological virtues are. The explanation is adequate for a well-informed catechist, even though the statement that they "have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive and object" (#1812) may need some further clarification. The same segment, however, also raises a question. It begins with: "The human virtues are rooted in the theological virtues which adopt man's faculties for participation in the divine nature." The sentence appears to be a stylistic attempt to link human and theological virtues. The problem comes with the term "rooted," which logically implies not only a difference of importance, but also a dependence of origin. It is difficult to think of something being rooted in a medium, whether physical or theoretical, that does not, or not yet, exist, or is absent. If human virtue is rooted in something that has its origin in God, than it too is ultimately rooted in God, a thought that, as we have seen, is absent from the discussion of human virtues. This phrasing also raises the question of how someone who has not acquired the theological virtues could still be virtuous in the human sense. Could, for instance, a person who does not have

faith – whether because he or she never encountered Christian teaching, or even because of a refusal to believe – still be just?

Following the practice evident throughout the text, the segments dealing with the theological virtues also avoid using the word "love," using, instead, "charity." We have already mentioned this problem; here it will suffice to examine the appropriateness of choosing "charity" over "love." "Charity" is undoubtedly a translation of Latin *caritas* and etymologically its derivative, and has been traditionally used to denote love in the religious, particularly Christian, sense. Its present meaning, however, especially in North America, has changed. The Webster Universal Dictionary Unabridged International Edition (New York, Toronto: Harver, 1968) for instance, does give as the first meaning "Christian love of God" and "Love for fellow-men," but this is followed by four much more lengthy definitions that are variations on the theme of "benevolence." It is worthwhile pointing out that this edition was already thirty years old when the English translation of the *CCC* was published. The use made of the term is anachronistic and old-fashioned and can easily lead to misinterpretation, by suggesting that the text refers only to philanthropic activity, thereby again illustrating the validity of Boulad's complaint.

Interestingly, the first segment under the subtitle "Charity" does not follow the pattern. #1822 defines charity as the "theological virtue by which we love God above all things for his own sake, and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God." I have already pointed out the problem with this and the following segment: using the Old Testament commandment in the first and the one Jesus gave in the second implies a symmetry of importance. True, the commandment of Jesus does not aim to contradict the Old Testament law, but to fulfil it (Mt 5:17), indicating that his followers have an obligation to go beyond what Mosaic law demands. Thus the commandment of Jesus fulfils, i.e., completes the old law, and obeying the latter becomes insufficient. This is especially so when Jesus specifically replaces the "as yourself" with "love your enemies" in the Sermon on the Mount. Practically equating the value of the two commandments in a volume like the *CCC* is very nearly inexcusable.

The almost total and exclusive reliance on tradition is an obvious barrier to a satisfactory presentation of the moral teaching of the Church. Centuries-old expressions and argumentation make the teaching unattractive and confusing, especially when unaccompanied

by meaningful explanation. This usage assumes, among other things, that the reader/user will have sufficient training and background to be able to understand the reasoning and establish a proper context for the references and quotations, skills manifestly missing in at least the younger members of the clergy and most of the catechists.

Given all these points, without very careful and extensive adaptation the text is essentially not suitable for effective catechesis and even less for evangelization. Whether the local churches will have the financial and human resources and sufficient support and understanding on the part of the Vatican remains to be seen. As is, the approach taken in the *CCC* does indicate that Boulad's criticism regarding the moral teaching of the Church is justified.

1.3.6 Ecumenism

The publication of the English translation of the *CCC* was awaited with great interest, not only by Catholics, but also within Protestant communities.[83] This was due to the obvious desire for an open and fruitful ecumenical approach voiced by both Vatican II and Pope John Paul II. This directive was also clearly in the minds of the compilers of the Catechism.

In reflecting on the *CCC* and Christian unity, Neuhaus (who experienced life first as Lutheran pastor, then as Catholic priest) sums up the great hope:

> In the Catechism and elsewhere, this pontificate has underscored that, as the second millennium has been the millennium of Christian divisions, so we should look forward to the third millennium as the millennium of Christian unity.[84]

He immediately adds: "Orthodoxy, both upper case [the Eastern Church] and lower case [orthodox teaching], is at the heart of Catholic teaching on Christian unity." Later in the article, Neuhaus goes to great lengths to build an argument that culminates with the declaration: "It follows that to be an orthodox Catholic is to be an ecumenical Catholic" (175). There is, however, a tension. Along the way he makes the statement that "[e]cumenism is not something optional; it belongs to the very nature of the Catholic Church" but adds the caveat "[t]his is a truth too little appreciated by conservative Catholics" (174). Indeed, he finds that "[most]

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[83] Cf., James J. Buckley, "Catechism of the Catholic Church: Ecumenical Despite Itself," *Pro Ecclesia* 4.1 (Winter 1995): 59.

[84] Neuhaus, "The New Catechism" 172.

Catholics […] have not internalized this commitment to ecumenism" (176). In distinguishing between "orthodox" and "conservative" Catholics, Neuhaus, a champion of ecumenical dialogue, is trying to find a way forward. He clearly wishes to associate the orthodoxy of the editors/authors of the *CCC* with his ideal orthodoxy, vis-à-vis the issue of Christian unity.

Is he pressing the point? If, in reality, their orthodoxy is somewhat closer to the conservative position, there might be some reservation in the *CCC*'s presentation of, for instance, dialogue with Western non-Catholic Christians. One of the fundamental needs of the Catholic Church at the time of the Council of Trent was a defence against the teachings of the Protestant Reformers. Before Vatican II it was considered a mortal sin even to listen to a Protestant preacher; Vatican II reversed the position and taught that Catholics could learn from other Christians. For someone brought up and trained in the Tridentine tradition, it might have been very hard to reconcile tradition with such a teaching. If orthodoxy is equated not to an unwavering fidelity to fundamental tenets of faith but to unchanging tradition, as it appears to be in the *Catechism,* it might be near impossible to adjust to a new relationship. The replacing of old animosities with new relationships is, almost by definition, based on re-interpretations that are, or appear to be, in contradiction to principles that were important in the development of one or both views. Also, a new relationship usually demands a change in language, which could cause similar problems. Thus the difficulty lies not in the degree of orthodoxy, but in the interpretation of what orthodoxy means.

Mary C. Boys writes: "In a time when religious literacy is a concern among so many in the churches, a document such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* deserves our study. When our study reveals its flaws, however, we must record our objections."[85] While there are many responses to and comments on the teaching on ecumenism, the subject is not sufficiently concentrated in the *CCC* to distinguish separate themes within that work. I shall therefore deal only briefly with some problems or irritants identified by commentators, to give a general sense of the effect of tradition on the question of ecumenism. The question, however, goes beyond the Catholic–non-Catholic relationship, because it is also an indication of how or to what degree the leadership of the Church is approaching the possibility of internal renewal of the Church.

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[85] Mary C. Boys, "How Shall We Christians Understand Jews and Judaism? Questions about the New Catechism," Symposium on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *Theology Today* 53.2 (July 1996): 170.

1.3.6.1 Problems and irritants

James Buckley (professor of theology and dean of the faculty of Arts and Sciences at Loyola College, Baltimore, and active in the ecumenical movement) encapsulates the general complaint of, at least, Western commentators, with this observation:

> The Catechism takes seriously the different yet common history and teaching and practices of these [Latin and Eastern] churches. But […] these same things cannot be said of the Catechism's few attempts to deal with the sixteenth century divides between Christians.[86]

As I sketched above, this is undoubtedly the heritage of Trent and, to some extent, understandable. It was not, however, inevitable. There are highly respected Catholic theologians whose collaboration, if invited, could have prevented such an outcome. As it is, the text comes under rather harsh criticism. Buckley, for instance continues:

> Nothing from Vatican II's decree on Ecumenism is denied; to the contrary: the constructive ecumenical claims of Vatican II are affirmed. Nonetheless, the authors of the *Catechism* seem persuaded by little of the Catholic-Evangelical conversation since the Council. In fact, I think a case could be made that the *Catechism* offers more constructive teachings about the relationship between Israel and the church than it offers about the relationships between Catholics and Evangelicals within the Christian communion. (64)

He is not alone in his frustration. Thus, for example, Sloyan writes that the *CCC* "does nothing that would be helpful" in fostering ecumenical formation of the faithful or of ecumenical dialogue; "[n]owhere is the Orthodox or the Protestant expression of the mysteries they hold in common with Catholics provided. They are all the major ones."[87]

From amongst the many more specific concerns articulated, I offer the following examples. Boys emphasizes the consequences of sticking exclusively to tradition: the authors of the *CCC,* she writes, "manifest a reluctance to use the tools of biblical scholarship to situate the ministry of Jesus in its context of first-century Palestinian Jewish life."[88] Pannenberg protests that in #74, in the section "The Transmission of Divine Revelation," which deals with the role of tradition in the teaching of the Catholic Church and the doctrine of apostolic succession,

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[86] Buckley, "Catechism: Ecumenical Despite Itself," 63.

[87] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 166.

[88] Boys, "How Shall We Christians," 169.

> there is an irritating reference to the idea of revelation as doctrine which can be passed on, an idea the Council rendered obsolete, whereas the important thing is the proclamation of the gospel which must be kept pure in the church (*77*), and whose *object* is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.[89]

The *CCC*'s language undoubtedly could have been chosen more carefully and sensitively, but here too tradition governed.

Another delicate issue from the ecumenical point of view is the papacy. Neuhaus, opines that it "is precisely the uncompromised and uncompromisable strength of those dogmatic claims [regarding the papacy] that makes it imperative that the ministry of Peter be exercised in a way that better secures the unity of all Christians."[90] Whether one agrees that the claims (not necessarily the doctrine itself) are "uncompromisable," the doctrine is at present certainly basic to the function of the Catholic Church, thus it is important that both Catholics and other Christians understand what the Church teaches about it, all the more so because "it is not self-evident how one gets from Petrine ministry to papal primacy."[91] Of at least equal importance is how the doctrine is applied and how the power that has its basis in the doctrine is utilized. The *CCC*, unfortunately, does not offer any guidance on the subject of papal primacy that would be useful in making an ecumenical bridge.

The contrast between the repeated references to Vatican II – on the part of both the creators and the critics of the Catechism – and the *CCC*'s actual treatment of the ecumenical question is disturbing. It calls attention to an underlying, perhaps unconscious, ecumenical paralysis in the text. The authors and/or editors seem to have deemed close fidelity to tradition more important than following the spirit and even the direction clearly indicated by the decrees of the Council. Particularly damaging is that, by affirming the constructive elements of Vatican II but disregarding twenty years of effort in translating their spirit into real-life significant successes, the *CCC* appears to merely pay lip service to the Council and its authority. Ultimately, whether or not the dedication to ecumenism is sincere, the method used to discuss it causes confusion and controversy among members of the Church, suggests a serious rift at the heart of the Church, and certainly does not help the dialogue with other Christian communities.

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[89] Pannenberg, "Catechism," 53.

[90] Neuhaus, "The New Catechism," 173.

[91] Ibid.

It would take a much more thorough investigation than this work can support to determine to what degree the influence of the *CCC* contributed to the cooling of the ecumenical dialogue mentioned by Boulad. As an expression of the prevailing atmosphere within the top echelons of the Church hierarchy at the time of its compilation, it does clearly point to the dominant role accorded to tradition and the serious restraint this imposed on the Catholic side.

1.3.7 Conclusions

An investigation such as this is obviously insufficient to make an evaluation of the *CCC*, nor do I suggest that we have done so. Rather, the nature of our inquiry has led us to concentrate on some very specific aspects of the text. The intention has been to examine the Catechism from a particular viewpoint, namely, to see whether it displays evidence that Henri Boulad is justified in claiming that the Church's moral teachings are framed in an antiquated and inaccessible style, that the Church has failed to respond to the growing maturity of its members, and that the Church's attitude has led to a muting of the ecumenical dialogue.

In spite of a serious effort on the part of the editors, and probably also the authors, to produce an "organic synthesis" of Catholic doctrine (#11), the division between the tradition- and the renewal-oriented, so obvious among the wider membership of the Church, is also noticeable in the work of the authors. Thus, there are many parts of the *CCC* that show no sign of the out-dated language and teaching style that Boulad listed as one of the sources of the problems of the Church. To make a comparative analysis of the two approaches would necessitate a separate study, nor is it needed in order to illustrate whether the complaints of Boulad are valid. These latter do not pretend to be exclusive in the sense that they must be proven to be true always and everywhere in the Church and in the documents of the Church. The aspects I selected for investigation are sufficiently important for the life of the Church so that, by the nature of *CCC*, if the text exhibits some of these problems to an appreciable degree, for our purpose that suffices to justify the charges of Boulad.

The conclusions to be drawn from my investigation can be roughly grouped into three categories: first, those that concern the general stance and editorial policy of the Catechism (1.3.7.1, 1.3.7.2); second, those that follow from the discussion of specific issues and evaluate

the effects of the *CCC*'s choice and use of sources (1.3.7.3, 1.3.7.4); finally, those that follow from the discussion of ecumenism (1.3.7.5).

1.3.7.1 The *CCC* in general

An evaluation of any work, to be fair and valid, must start from the point of view of that work and its stated purpose. We ought to ask first if it accomplishes what it promises. In the case of the *CCC*, unfortunately, there appears to be a certain dichotomy of purpose. In the published version, the prologue omits mention of renewal, it also gives equal weight to the decisions of Vatican II and to tradition. Both of these are in contradiction to the apostolic constitution "*Fidei depositum*" (presenting the *CCC* to the Church), which immediately precedes the prologue. This lack of clarity may be one of the reasons that the reception of the *CCC* varied greatly. Some found more to complain about than to praise; others, who yearn for the security of clear authority to guide them, welcomed it, though mostly with some reservation similar to "if properly used."[92]

Bouchard expresses the problem well when he says that because of the existing "catechetical vacuum," which created a huge difference between the secular and religious education of Catholics, there is a great need for a usable catechism "and the new *Catechism* provides a welcome invitation to remedy this problem. Just how the *Catechism* can best be used, however, is not clear."[93] How the *CCC* will be used will depend to a very great extent on both whether the local Churches will have the human and financial resources to make the necessary adaptations urged by the text itself and whether the central authorities of the Church will recognize the authority of the appropriate episcopal bodies to control those resources. If these two conditions were to be realized, the purpose described by "*Fidei depositum*" could be fulfilled.

There is a question, however, as to whether such a situation is likely to occur in the foreseeable future. The fact that those responsible for the *CCC* appear to believe that the needs of today can be satisfied by the same model that functioned for four hundred years suggests an unquestioning trust in tradition and the authority of the Magisterium. It is true that

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[92] For the first see, for instance, Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," etc.; for the second, Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 149.

[93] Bouchard, "Life in Christ," 163.

the traditional character of catechisms is conservative, and one of their functions is exactly the preservation of tradition. Yet this approach needs to be carefully controlled.[94] This is particularly so in regard to the goal prescribed for the *CCC* by the pope, to "make a very important contribution to that work of renewing the whole life of the Church as desired and begun by the Second Vatican Council."[95]

In the *CCC* there are, in fact, numerous footnotes referring to different documents of Vatican II, but few of them are quoted in the text itself and the spirit of the Council generally has little effect on the text. Renewal cannot simply mean a repetition of what has been said or done before, even though tradition can certainly be a foundation of renewal. For it to be so, however, the light of a new understanding, of a new interpretation, is necessary, or a new emphasis of something that was hitherto missed or ignored. By largely limiting the material to traditional sources, thoughts and expressions, excepting the numerous footnote references to Vatican II documents, the *CCC* fails on this point and is an unfortunate example of the soundness of Boulad's portrayal of Church attitudes.

1.3.7.2 Editorial policy

There can be no question about the meticulous and conscientious work that went into building the structure of the *CCC*. Once the bare structure, the skeleton of the *Catechism*, as it were, was clad, however, weaknesses in the structure and in the thinking that governed its design became apparent.

As Buckley says, it "was written less for controversy and polemic than for the articulation and nurture of the faith"; or in the words of Dulles, it "was intended to give a serene presentation of assured teaching, not to engage in critical discussion of points that are legitimately disputed."[96] In practice, the result is a catechism that eliminates everything that challenges or does not adhere to the Tridentine and scholastic or neo-scholastic traditions, even interpretations and doctrines that have already been generally accepted by theologians or are more appropriate to the present worldview of all but a small portion of Christians. This

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[94] Miller, "Teaching the Faith," 144.

[95] "*Fidei depositum*," *CCC*, 6.

[96] Buckley, "Catechism: Ecumenical Despite Itself," 59; Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 149.

approach is exactly what Boulad pointed out as being harmful to the efficacy of Catholic evangelization.

The *CCC*'s policy of quoting accepted sources without making certain that they do not contradict one another also presents problems. Quite a few commentators point out such inconsistencies.[97] It is not that one would expect a tradition as rich and varied as the Church's to be consistent, nor that one would desire that richness to be eradicated. On the contrary, that "traditions" and doctrines have always been subject to controversy, that throughout its history the Church has had to and been able to change, is a resource and an example to be emulated. The problem is that the text neutralizes this history of interpretation by rarely commenting on, explaining, or even noting discrepancies. In a work intended as a guideline for catechesis, this silence can also cause serious confusion for readers and thus weaken the authority of the Magisterium.

1.3.7.3 Style and usability

The concepts of style and usability are, for all practical purposes, inseparable. Not only does style strongly affect usability, its evaluation also depends on the question "usability by whom?" The conditions for being usable and, sometimes even more important, user-friendly are much stricter for a wide audience than for a work intended for use by experts. However, the audience for the *CCC*, as identified by "*Fidei depositum*," consists of both experts and "every individual who […] wants to know what the Catholic Church believes."[98]

As illustrated above, there is an obvious distance between at least part of the intended audience and the text itself. And that part of the audience, the general public, feels a great need for a catechism, or at least a document clarifying the direction of the Church, as is aptly demonstrated by the tremendous number of copies sold. Yet, as Sloyan complains, while "[r]esources need to be user-friendly," "[t]he present theological compendium fails in that regard."[99] In this, the *CCC* lends support to Boulad's complaints about the current teaching of the Church.

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[97] E.g., Bouchard, "Life in Christ," 163; Pannenberg, "Catechism," 52, 53; Power, "The 1992 Catechism," 63; Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 162, 164, 165; Wright, "I Can't Believe I Read", 155; etc.

[98] "*Fidei depositum*," *CCC*, 9.

[99] Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 162.

Neither is it immediately useable by those in the Church hierarchy who touch most directly on the lives of the faithful. In Bouchard's words:

> The abstract, codified format of the *Catechism* does not lend itself to use as a primary evangelization tool, and it should not be used as a substitute for Scripture or more basic resources. Nor should it ever be preached from the pulpit, though it can serve as an important reference tool for preachers who address doctrinal issues through the scriptural readings.[100]

Or, in other words, it cannot be used "as is"; it needs interpretation and adaptation. In defence of the work, both "*Fidei depositum*" and the text itself emphasize this need, and appropriately so. The primary readers for whom the "compendium" was written, the experts and compilers of local catechisms, require this kind of freedom if they are to translate the *CCC* into language their flocks can understand. How successful this use of the *CCC* will be depends to a great extent on the flexibility of those in the Vatican who will do the assessment of the local adaptations. In a more fundamental sense, it also depends on whether the most profound truths of the faith can be garnered from the mother-text and on whether they are then preserved in all the local catechisms.

1.3.7.4 Choice and use of sources

Christianity is unimaginable without reference to tradition. Where the problem lies is thus not in tradition, but in the way it is used in the text. The most serious aspect of the weaknesses caused by the editorial stance is the shift in emphasis from what is and ought to be the focus of Catholic Christian catechesis: the commandment of love. By using traditional "charity" instead of "love," by equating the levitical commandment to the one given by Jesus, the Christian content and interpretation of the commandment, namely to love as Christ loved and loves us, is lost, a very serious fault indeed.

Presenting the Genesis creation narrative as a historical event and teaching about original sin in purely Tridentine language and images is not much less serious. Maintaining such out-dated forms not only gives ample ammunition to anti-Catholic and anti-religion forces, it makes Catholics, and the Church, appear ridiculous. It also promotes in Catholics the attitude that the "official" Church has fallen so far behind the times that its teachings have no relevance any more. At a deeper level, the concept that the blame for humanity's problems

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[100] Bouchard, "Life in Christ," 164.

rests on the personal sin of an individual who lived tens of thousands of years ago is extremely difficult to reconcile with the idea of a loving Father. It also negates the doctrine of humanity having been freed from sin and its consequences, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In many instances, problems caused by the exclusive reliance on tradition could have been minimized, or even entirely eliminated, if adequate explanation had been given. Dulles' argument that the lack of comment allows the user to do the research is untenable when the understanding of a particular teaching depends upon placing it in the proper context, or needs clarification.[101]

1.3.7.5 Ecumenism

The treatment of ecumenism in the *CCC* deserves special mention for two reasons. First, the Roman Catholic Church is arguably the most influential among other communities, including non-Christian ones. Second, under the impetus given by Vatican II there was probably more done by the Catholic Church in the field of ecumenical dialogue than ever before in its history. So, in 1996, Neuhaus could remark, "It is not too much to say that the Catholic Church is the center of the movement toward Christian unity in our time."[102]

The centrifugal force of this tendency had an effect on the compilers of the text, and the result is that in many respects, mostly pertinent to the Orthodox Church, the tone is in fact ecumenically sensitive. Yet, it is also significant that Buckley could validly title his article (cited above) "Catechism of the Catholic Church: Ecumenical Despite Itself," the "despite" referring mostly to attitudes towards other Western churches.[103] The dichotomy apparent here is clearly an effect of insisting on the exclusive use (and/or implied value) of a tradition regarded as unchangeable and also suggests the damage such a method can cause.

The problem is that the concept of tradition, as it is used, is itself rather restricted, deciding selections, language and interpretations solely by teachings developed by or under the influence of Trent. Trent was called primarily to fight Protestant teachings and it would be foolish to look for sympathetic statements in its documents. Relying exclusively on Tridentine

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[101] Dulles, "A Feast of Faith," 150.

[102] Neuhaus, "The New Catechism," 174.

[103] Cf. both Dulles ("A Feast of Faith," 148) and Buckley ("Catechism: Ecumenical Despite Itself," 59–67) on this dual attitude of the *CCC* to ecumenism.

and related traditions must almost automatically result in an almost complete disregard of communities that developed during and after the Reformation.

The most serious consequences follow from the fact that, given the official status of the *CCC* and the very clear endorsement of the Pope then ruling, this disregard is seen as an indication of the official opinion of the highest echelons of the hierarchy of the Church. The result is that the *CCC* becomes complicit in both diminishing the power and authority of Vatican II and slowing the ecumenical fervour of the post–Vatican II decades, thus damaging the Church. Once again, Henri Boulad's perceptions are vindicated.

1.3.7.6 Summary

The objective in examining the *CCC* was very limited. In consequence we have dealt with only a small portion of a large text, and even then only from one perspective. By no means could this treatment be called a critique, nor was it intended as such. Yet, because the themes investigated deal respectively with Christian life and the relationship between the Roman Catholic and other communities, the teachings given regarding them are exceptionally important. Our inquiry has shown that on these central issues the teachings of the *CCC* do show precisely the characteristics that Boulad asserts are among the major causes for the problems in the Catholic Church.

1.4 The encyclical of John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

The third part of this chapter functions as a transition between the presentation of the current situation, including some of the contributing factors, of the Catholic Church, and the remaining chapters of the thesis, which aim at finding a reliable guide to a better future, as well as to the actions necessary to comprehend and follow it. In order to make the bridge, the discussion will take as its subject the last encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (*EE*) "On the Eucharist and its Relationship to the Church."[104]

As the encyclical is the starting point of our inquiry, it is important that its underlying intent be properly understood. A small and select sample of articles about the *EE* written by four authors from diverse Christian communities is presented, as giving a sufficiently wide

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[104] John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 200, http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0821 (accessed on April 4, 2010).

perspective for the task, particularly with reference to Christian perceptions of the *EE*'s treatment of priesthood, sacrament and ecumenism. This is followed by an assessment of the degree to which, if any, the encyclical reflects the present situation within the Church. Since the *EE* pays particular attention to the topic, the main focus here is the treatment of the ordained priesthood. These segments end with a brief evaluation of the relationship of tradition with each of these issues.

In order to accomplish the transition from the analysis of the current life of the Church to a discussion of its future life, the final sections of this chapter will concentrate on a presentation of the Eucharist as the source of the existence of the Church. The first sentence of the *EE* proclaims: "The Church draws her life from the Eucharist." If this is true, to understand the Church, we have to understand the Eucharist; if we want to articulate an authentic path for the Church in its development, we, therefore, have to start from the point of view of the Eucharist. The discussion will move from a presentation of the logic for looking to the *EE* for guidance in progressing towards renewal of the Church, through an analysis of the Eucharist as the source of the life of the Church and the Last Supper as the ultimate guide to renewal. Some of the problems associated with looking at the Last Supper through the lens of "tradition" will then be investigated. These segments will also end with a summary of the findings.

1.4.1 The encyclical and its importance

The act of signing and publishing the encyclical on the Holy Thursday of the twenty-fifth year of John Paul II's papacy was meant to signal the special importance of the document. As the Pope himself writes, the date was chosen deliberately. While it was his custom to write on Holy Thursday of every year an encyclical "letter to all the priests of the world," on this occasion it was his "wish to involve the whole Church more fully in this Eucharistic reflection" (#7). The encyclical, as customary, is addressed to the bishops, priests, deacons, members of the religious orders and, at the end of the list, the laity, but here the Pope makes it explicit that it is addressed to the whole Church.

The encyclical is carefully constructed. The introduction gives a sketch of the major points covered and also makes clear the Pope's particular reasons for and intentions in writing the document. After speaking of the principal attributes of the Eucharist (and briefly about some

positive features of the liturgy in the documents of Vatican II and since), he turns to the "shadows." He ends the introduction by stating, "It is my hope that the present Encyclical Letter will effectively help to banish the dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice, so that the Eucharist will continue to shine forth in all its radiant mystery" (#10). Thus, while the central theme of *EE* is the Eucharist – its meaning, and particularly its pertinence regarding the ontological reality of the Church – the purpose of the presentation is the safeguarding of a specific interpretation of that reality and its expression in liturgy and customs. The encyclical's treatment of the latter can serve as good indication of whether there is validity to the claims of Boulad.

The exploration of the connection of Eucharist and Church is of a different nature and requires special attention. John Paul II reaches back to the earliest possible moment of the existence of the Church, the Last Supper, and starts his inquiry from that point. Unless one is willing to doubt the validity of his claim that this is in fact the "decisive point" in the life of the Church (#5), which this thesis certainly does not aim to do, the encyclical can be a valuable guide in indicating where to search for the principles that ought to govern the further development and life of the Church, if it is to remain faithful to its origin.

1.4.2 Reception of the encyclical in the ecumenical community

The publication of the encyclical was met by relatively few responses that dealt with it directly and the majority were by authors who were not Roman Catholic. The latter is not as surprising as it seems at first glance, given John Paul II's very explicit intention to foster *rapprochement* between the Roman and other Christian communities during his papacy.

Roman Catholic authors I was able to consult generally limit themselves to a strict presentation or popularisation of the encyclical. *The Mystery of Faith: Reflections on the Encyclical* Ecclesia De Eucharistia, a collection of essays that originated in a conference organized by the Irish Centre for Faith and Culture, is an accurate example of most such works. A review by Mary Ellen O'Donnell has an evaluation that could be applied to the work of many Catholic authors: "[T]hese writings address an impressive range of issues related to the Catholic

sacrament […]. The volume leaves little room for questions or tension and steers away from conflicts within church doctrine on the Eucharist."[105]

A significantly different approach was used by *Pro Ecclesia,* "A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology," published in the United States by the Center of Catholic and Evangelical Theology. Joseph E. Mangina, its editor, defines the aim of the journal on its website as seeking "to give contemporary expression to the one apostolic faith and its classic traditions, working for and manifesting the church's unity by research, theological construction, and free exchange of opinion."[106] *Pro Ecclesia* devoted a considerable part of an issue to "A Symposium on the Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia De Eucharistia* of Pope John Paul II," to which four authors affiliated with various Christian communities contributed. There was also at least one article by a Lutheran theologian in the previous issue. As could be expected from the orientation of the journal, each of the authors is interested and involved in ecumenism, therefore the articles deal primarily with the parts of the encyclical that have specific ecumenical importance. Also not surprising, the views differ according to the particular perspective of each author.

1.4.2.1 A Roman Catholic response

More surprising is that Susan K. Wood, Roman Catholic professor of theology at Saint John's University in Collegeville, is, of the four authors, the most critical of the *EE*, not so much of the language used, but of the content.[107] She carefully sketches the outline of the encyclical and points out positive aspects, such as the broadening of "a eucharistic theology based on the sacrifice of the cross to include the paschal experience of resurrection" and the balancing of a theology of anamnesis with eschatology (394); but she also finds a variety of points to criticize, especially "regarding apostolicity, priestly identity, and the priesthood of the faithful which

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[105] Mary Ellen O'Donnell, "The Mystery of Faith: Reflections on the Encyclical *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*," *Religious Studies Review* 33.2 (April 2007): 129, www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/118540810/ PDFSTART (accessed April 4, 2010). The volume discussed is *The Mystery of Faith: Reflections on the Encyclical* Ecclesia De Eucharistia,. eds. James McEvoy and Maurice Hogan (Dublin: Columba Press, 2005).

[106] http://www.e-ccet.org/pe.htm (accessed on May 9, 2010).

[107] Susan K. Wood, "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia.* A Roman Catholic Response," A Symposium on the Encyclical Letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia of Pope John Paul II, *Pro Ecclesia* 12.4 (Fall 2003): 394–400, http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&hid=17&sid=2927276d-c987-4ea7-8f95-3a4b69a45de1%40sessionmgr10, (accessed on April 27, 2010).

have implications for relations between the Roman Catholic Church and its ecumenical partners" (395).

Some of Wood's criticisms challenge the validity of the text itself, or of its arguments. Thus she claims that #27 uses an erroneous translation of *Lumen Gentium* #20, the original Latin of which "could mean that the episcopacy has from its beginnings been charged with the office of watching over the apostolicity of the church. It does not say that this is the only way apostolic faith is preserved" (395), as the encyclical asserts. She also points out that the episcopal office developed after the apostolic times and that implying that it is "co-terminus with the apostles" is not historically correct (396).

Wood's criticisms of the reasoning of the encyclical are mostly directed at the treatment of the ordained priesthood, particularly its role and function in the celebration of the Eucharist. Here she even challenges the correctness of the method used by John Paul II. Referring to *Lumen Gentium* (#s 20, 21, 28), Wood concludes (398–399) that "even though the eucharist is central to priestly identity, a priest cannot be adequately identified apart from his responsibilities for pastoral leadership and proclamation of the gospel," yet the priest is "largely considered apart from his relationship to an ecclesial community and apart from the priesthood of the baptized in the encyclical"; using concrete examples and quotations from the liturgy of the mass, she also challenges the validity of the statement that the priest alone presents the sacrifice of the Mass and claims that such a position contradicts *CCC* #1140 and *CSL* #48.

Wood is especially critical of the almost total neglect of the priesthood of the laity. She points out that the encyclical "only mentions the priesthood of the faithful twice [in #28 and #32]," even though, according to Vatican II, the ordained priesthood exists to engage the priesthood of the faithful in the eucharistic action. She points out that the latter is made particularly evident in three elements of the Eucharistic Prayer (399).

1.4.2.2 A Reformed response

The other strongly critical author is William Stacy Johnson, the Arthur M. Adams Associate Professor of systematic theology at Princeton Theological Seminary.[108] He represents the Reformed view, and takes pains to specify that "by 'Reformed' I refer, of course, to the theological perspective shaped by the Swiss Reformation" (414), i.e., that promoted by Zwingli. While occasionally sharper in tone, in general he has less to criticize in the encyclical than does Wood.

At the beginning of the article Johnson specifies the perspective of his critique: "The vision [the *EE*] presents is, on its own terms, inspiring; but it is a vision that remains much more narrow than the one I, as a Reformed theologian, believe the gospel demands" (415). In other words, he approaches the encyclical strictly from the Zwinglian theological view and apparently is not driven by any ecumenical impetus to compromise. This is very different from the approach used by the remaining two authors, who appear to be eager to find points on which they can agree, even if that means re-examining their own theological traditions. Not surprisingly, then, Johnson claims that "[o]ld controversies reappear in this encyclical in new ways" (415): on the positive side, he mentions the first chapter's insistence that the Mass does not add anything to Christ's sacrifice; on the negative, the reaffirmation "of the Tridentine doctrine" of the transubstantiation.[109]

Some of his criticisms clearly show an inability or unwillingness to appreciate Catholic thinking. Thus he states, "To be sure, Word and sacrament should never be dissevered (as we Reformed have sometimes wrongly done); but the sacrament is a making real of the Word, not the Word a making real of the sacrament" (415). The difference is clearly in the view of what a sacrament, and particularly the Eucharist, is. Even so, it is rather difficult to see the logic of the argument, because if the Word is, as the preceding sentence defines it, Jesus Christ, and the sacrament in any sense of the words "makes it real," then the sacrament does in fact become

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[108] William Stacy Johnson, "On the Ecclesia de Eucharistia: A Reformed Perspective," A Symposium on the Encyclical Letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia of Pope John Paul II, *Pro Ecclesia* 12.4 (Fall 2003): 414–416, http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&hid=17&sid=2927276d-c987-4ea7-8f95-3a4b69a45de1%40sessionmgr10, (accessed on April 27, 2010).

[109] His characterization of "transubstantiation as a "Tridentine doctrine" is debatable, the term was already used by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, even though it was officially approved for the use in the Roman Catholic Church by Trent.

in the same sense Jesus Christ. If this is so, it makes the opening statement of the argument meaningless or at least superfluous, because the argument is essentially a tautology, at least according to Catholic understanding of the Eucharist:

> [Reformed] theology can only view with respectful curiosity the central affirmation of this encyclical that "the church draws her life from the eucharist" (1). It would be more accurate, from a Reformed point of view, to say that the church draws her life from Jesus Christ. (415)

At the same time it is not surprising that some of the points Johnson raises are also shared by the other authors, such as the question of "strict episcopal succession." Two remarks at the end of the article deserve special attention. One is that the encyclical's "promise of more rules and regulations [regarding the liturgies] strikes one as a defensive overreaction" (416). The remark may have been elicited by the general adversity of Reformed Protestants to a central rule-making power in the Church, but even from the Roman Catholic point of view may have validity.

The other statement sums up the conclusions Johnson draws: "At the end of the day the view of the eucharist it presents is simply not catholic enough" (416). One may disagree with his reasoning – namely that the *EE*'s view of the Eucharist "fails adequately to understand that the Supper is meant to provide us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in which 'people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God'" – but the complaint itself is still substantive.

Throughout Johnson's article the term *catholic* is used specifically in its original sense of *universal*. The aim of the encyclical was not to foster the drive towards unity among Christians, otherwise one of the major ambitions of the papacy of John Paul II. However, in some elements of the encyclical that have ecumenical importance, traditional thinking, imagery and language certainly create obstacles in moving towards unity. This problem makes obvious the importance of carefully investigating the modes of expression of the Church, with a view to eliminating those factors that can cause serious problems in any area of the life of the Church, not only in the field of ecumenism.

1.4.2.3 An Orthodox response

David Wagschal, secretary for the Department of External Affairs and Interchurch Relations of the Orthodox Church in America, is much more ecumenically oriented than Johnson. The close proximity of theological understanding between the two traditions may also have helped him in understanding the Catholic view as presented by John Paul II. In his article, Wagschal makes a realistic but hopeful observation:[110]

> The Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church have ancient memories. Sadly, mutual estrangement reaches far back into these memories. Different emphases in ecclesiology, theology, and liturgy have developed over the centuries into vastly different ecclesial cultures and even schism. Today, division and separation have become the norm, and rapprochement a distant dream. Nevertheless, a thousand years after the great East-West schism, there are certain moments when we are reminded that the differences between us may not be as profound or insuperable as we sometimes think. This document, despite numerous problems and points of disagreement, may be one such moment. (401)

In the introductory part of his article, he also points out that, because ecclesiology and eucharistic theology "are arguably the ecumenical topics *par excellence*, the encyclical is an important opportunity for non-Catholic Christian communities to examine the 'ecumenical question' both from the perspective of their own relationship with the Roman Church and also in more general terms" (401).

Wagschal praises the articulation and argumentation of the encyclical, as being of a less "technical, scholastic, narrowly deductive style" than is usual in western theology, its basic assertion that the Church "is from the eucharist," and its "warmly homiletic manner" of presentation, all of which bring it closer to Orthodox thinking (401). He accentuates the document's "capacity to understand the church and its teachings as a completely integrated, interconnected whole centered in the eucharist" (402). This is, indeed, an important aspect of the encyclical, for it clearly indicates the necessity of keeping in mind this close relationship when establishing the direction of future development of any and all facets of the life of the Church.

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[110] David Wagschal, "*Ecclesia de Eucharistia:* Some Orthodox Reflections," A Symposium on the Encyclical Letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia of Pope John Paul II, *Pro Ecclesia* 12.4 (Fall 2003): 400–415, http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&hid=17&sid=2927276d-c987-4ea7-8f95-3a4b69a45de1%40sessionmgr10, (accessed on April 27, 2010).

In spite of his generally positive evaluation, Wagschal has reservations:

> Unfortunately, many areas in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* remind us of how long this journey will be, even as regards Orthodox-Roman Catholic relations. The affinity the Orthodox feel to *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* on its broadest level often does not transfer to its particulars. (403)

Apparently at least part of the problems is caused by a reversion to traditional language and logic: "In many areas of the document the patristic tone of the theology gives way to the technical, almost mechanistic language of later scholastic Roman theology" (403–404). This describes accurately the scholastic and neo-scholastic language preferred by the Tridentine tradition. Predictably, the presentation of "priestly power" is also mentioned as a negative. This may not be an entirely different criticism, for the terms mentioned – such as the "power to celebrate mass" and to "effect the consecration," or a priest being the sole "confector of the sacrament" – are very much traditional ones. Wagschal objects to these views not only as being alien to Orthodox interpretation, but also because they appear to "view the priesthood, *over and against* the community" (emphasis in original) and because they clash "with the overall tone of the document, to present the sacrament as a kind of isolated 'holy moment' that occurs under the right authorities and conditions in order to have 'saving efficacy' in a 'valid' manner (*passim*)" (404).

The historic tradition of the Church as origin of the difficulties is recognized by Wagschal:

> In most of these cases [i.e. irritants to non-Catholic Christian communities], it is not the theological intentions *per se* of these assertions that create anxiety, but the method and style of their formulation coupled with their claim to universality.[…] Almost all of these formulations are derived from the *polemics of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation,* a very specific geographically and temporally localized conflict in the Western church. (404, emphasis in original)

Yet again, we are confronted with confirmation of Henri Boulad's critique.

1.4.2.4 A Lutheran response

The most positive among the authors is George Lindbeck, well-known Lutheran theologian and historian, and, at the writing of the article, Pitkin Professor of Historical Theology Emeritus of Yale University. He approaches the encyclical partly from the perspective of the 1999 Augsburg Accord (the Lutheran–Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification), but mainly of the 1530 Augsburg Confession, a historical document "which is

authoritative for confessional Lutherans" (405–406).[111] In evaluating the encyclical from this perspective, Lindbeck appears to be guided by two principles: fairness to the document and the Roman Catholic thinking it expresses, and finding areas that have a positive effect on the Lutheran-Catholic ecumenical convergence.

Evidently aware that his viewpoint is not typical of the Protestant reaction to the encyclical, the author writes that Protestant responses "all focus on the encyclical's treatment of intercommunion and eucharistic hospitality as if these were its main topics and then express regret at its reaffirmation of the Second Vatican Council's restrictions on these practices" (406). Lindbeck makes no attempt to minimalize the problem. Referring to an anonymous news report published in the May 17, 2003 issue of *Christian Century*, he points out that even some Roman Catholic theologians opined that the restriction of intercommunion lacks proper theological basis. Progress in the ecumenical field had raised great hopes that intercommunion between Lutherans and Catholics could be achieved in the foreseeable future. Lindbeck states that the "dashing of these hopes creates grave pastoral and church-political difficulties" (406). He then quotes Ishmael Noko, the secretary general of the Lutheran World Federation, who declared that "the value of reaching doctrinal agreements can be called into question" when dialogues have "no consequences for institutional relations."

On the basis of Protestant experience, Lindbeck readily admits that premature intercommunion does present at least some of the dangers John Paul II mentions, namely that it can become an obstacle to obtaining full communion. Thus, premature intercommunions among different Protestant denominations "have arguably contributed to the cheapening of the Lord's Supper by helping to paper over the ugliness of denominational separatism" (407). However, after defending the general idea of the danger of intercommunion without complete communion, he singles out *EE* #30's fiat that Roman Catholics "must refrain from receiving communion" in the celebrations of non-Catholics so as "not […] to fail in their duty to bear clear witness to the truth," and comments: "One may ask whether the '*must* refrain' is stronger than is warranted. Are not exceptions possible in exceptional circumstances?" (406; emphasis

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[111] George Lindbeck, "Augsburg and the *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*," A Symposium on the Encyclical Letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia of Pope John Paul II, *Pro Ecclesia* 12.4 (Fall 2003): 405–414; http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&hid=17&sid=2927276d-c987-4ea7-8f95-3a4b69a45de1%40sessionmgr10, (accessed on April 27, 2010).

in original). As an example he mentions the Lutheran-Catholic study of different interpretations of the "Lord's Supper," then continues:

> [T]he remaining church-dividing disagreement over what Vatican II calls the *defectum* in non-episcopal celebrations, though taken with the utmost seriousness, was seen to be precisely that: a disagreement over a defect which did not by any means wholly destroy the reality, the *substantia,* of the sacrament. (407)

In response to fears that the *EE*'s "relative silence about the Council's eucharistic reforms" might indicate a "retreat," Lindbeck is sanguine. He suggests that the silence "implies that these reforms are simply taken for granted and, indeed, in some respects surpassed" (409). He also quotes Cardinal Kasper, to the effect that a document like the *EE* can be properly understood only "in the larger context of all other official documents and declarations" (408). Even without reference to external documents, Lindbeck finds evidence that Vatican II has been surpassed:

> Not only does the encyclical tacitly presuppose Vatican II's *rapprochement* with the Reformation, but in some respects carries it farther. It does so perhaps most notably by its fuller and clearer explanation of the meaning of "sacrifice" when applied to the Mass. (409)

Between these two points Lindbeck inserts a list of presupposed, but unmentioned in the *EE*, reforms of Vatican II. What he doesn't notice is that if the reforms he lists are read beside the Pope's description of the "shadows" and "dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice" (*EE* #10), a peculiar resonance between them emerges. One might be led to see the former as a precursor to the latter, and the latter as an exaggerated expression of the former; the *EE*'s "relative silence" regarding the reforms might then be seen as an indictment.[112]

In spite of his effort to emphasize what is positive in the encyclical, Lindbeck also finds difficulties with the text. He acknowledges that "[o]ne issue alone seems currently irresolvable, the disagreement over the *necessity* of episcopally ordained celebrants" (410, original emphasis),

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[112] Lindbeck's list: "furthering the use of the vernacular, communion in two kinds, the understanding of the mass as communal meal, the co-centrality of the liturgy of the Word in the mass … and the acknowledgment of Christ's 'real' presence in the worshipping congregation and in the Scripture read and proclaimed rather than (as suggested by medieval practice if not official doctrine) only in the one who presides and in the eucharistic species where Christ is present 'with unique intensity'" (409). The Pope's list: "In some places the practice of Eucharistic adoration has been almost completely abandoned.… At times one encounters an extremely reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. Stripped of its sacrificial meaning, it is celebrated as if it were simply a fraternal banquet. Furthermore, the necessity of the ministerial priesthood, grounded in apostolic succession, is at times obscured and the sacramental nature of the Eucharist is reduced to its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation" (*EE* #10).

but avoids discussing the problem by adding "on that the AC [Augsburg Confession] never directly pronounces and the EE simply reiterates Vatican II." A similar treatment is given to the "remedies the pope recommends" to counter the abuses of the sacrament. Lindbeck points out that they "can be read as a relapse from the Council's anti-Baroque purification of the liturgy." Thus, the article closes with the observation:

> Yet, despite the differences, we have much to learn from *Ecclesia de Eucharistia,* especially if we dig beneath its silences and refuse to be alienated by its rhetoric and its lack, in contrast to Vatican II, of sensitivity to specifically Reformation (and, to a lesser extent, Eastern Orthodox) concerns.(414)

From our point of view, it is interesting that here again, in this most sympathetic of articles, the use of Tridentine language, images and practices is seen as forming a barrier that must be overcome.

1.4.2.5 Summary

Given the very different viewpoints of the authors, it is to be expected that their reflections will also be significantly different. It is all the more meaningful when one finds consensus between them. One example of this, which at first glance may not be obvious, is that all the points that the authors had difficulty with or that they felt needed explanation – or in Lindbeck's case, defence – were in relation to parts of the encyclical where John Paul II uses Tridentine tradition or patristic tradition interpreted according to Tridentine thinking. This illustrates once more the negative effect of using that part of tradition as exclusive guide.

The second point on which the articles seem to agree is that the emphasis on the Tridentine interpretation of the exclusive power of the ordained priest causes serious difficulties in the relations between the Roman Catholic and other Christian Churches. Susan Wood, representing the Catholic view, even points out certain faults in the Pope's argumentation, indicating that the doctrine, as presented in the *EE,* is, at least in some parts, problematic within the Catholic community as well.

As to the ecumenical aspect, the reception of the *EE* is, as one would expect, varied. In the broader picture, according to both the articles themselves and the explicit statement of Lindbeck, the encyclical did cause general disappointment among the non-Catholic Christian communities. This focused primarily on what was not said, rather than the contents, i.e., there was no indication that progress in the area of intercommunion could be expected. Whether the

disappointment was, in fact, due to unreasonable expectations, rather than to the encyclical itself, is debatable and not really material here. On the other hand, as an expression of the official views of the governance of the Roman Catholic Church, it does indicate that the top leadership, even under the clearly ecumenically-oriented John Paul II, preferred to stay safely on the side of caution rather than risk any possibility of the error of going too far, too fast.

1.4.3 Presentation of ordained priesthood and its power in the encyclical

It is hard to imagine any serious discussion of the Eucharist under the *aegis* of an apostolic church (i.e., a Christian community that traces its hierarchy to the Twelve and that recognizes ordination as a sacrament) that would not include, at least to some extent, ordained priesthood. It is therefore not surprising that an encyclical dealing with the Eucharist as the source of the Church's existence does devote considerable space to the discussion of ordained priesthood and the role of the ordained priest in the celebration of the Eucharist. What, however, is not expected is the shift from the Pope's inclusive language of welcome to the laity, to his exclusive language when discussing the actual rite.

As mentioned above, in paragraph 7 John Paul II makes it clear that he is addressing this encyclical to the whole Church. The exact text makes this emphatically clear:

> From the time I began my ministry as the Successor of Peter, I have always marked Holy Thursday, the day of the Eucharist and of the priesthood, by sending a letter to all the priests of the world. This year, the twenty-fifth of my Pontificate, I wish to involve the whole Church more fully in this Eucharistic reflection, also as a way of thanking the Lord for the gift of the Eucharist and the priesthood: "Gift and Mystery".

It would be relatively easy to misinterpret this text as including the laity in the concept of priesthood, particularly in light of the teachings of Vatican II, which the Pope quotes verbatim in #28. But even if we disregard this possibility, clearly stating that the laity is part of the intended audience of a papal encyclical is a positive sign indeed. In the text as well, the faithful, i.e., the laity, are mentioned several times very positively and the importance of their participation, their partaking in the celebration and in the blessings and benefits deriving from the Eucharist, are repeatedly mentioned. All of this gives a sense that the Pope and, presumably, the hierarchy see the laity as being equal partners not merely in the Church as such, but specifically in anything related to the Eucharist and its celebration. One could say

that there is nothing new here, Vatican II established this idea when it declared that the Church is God's People.

However, when the encyclical speaks of the role of the ordained priest in the celebration of the Eucharist, the tone suddenly changes, even when referring to Vatican II and its documents. Here again, it is a case not so much of what is said as what is not mentioned. The issues that are pertinent to my inquiry – the effect of Tridentine tradition on the discussion of the relationship between priest and laity, the question of the power to celebrate and consecrate, the universal priesthood of baptism, and the scarcity of ordained priests – are analysed below.

1.4.3.1 The Tridentine tradition in discussing priesthood and laity

The subject concerning which "what" and "how it is said" causes the most difficulty is the power of ordained priests. In sharp contrast to the statements about the faithful referred to above, here, the language used is purely Tridentine.

The predilection towards Tridentine thinking is already evident in paragraph 9, which introduces the topic. In it, after saying that the Eucharist is "the most precious possession" of the Church and that this explains the Church's "lively concern" for the eucharistic mystery, John Paul II says:

> How can we not admire the doctrinal expositions of the Decrees on the Most Holy Eucharist and on the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass promulgated by the Council of Trent? For centuries those Decrees guided theology and catechesis, and they are still a dogmatic reference-point for the continual renewal and growth of God's People in faith and in love for the Eucharist. In times closer to our own, three Encyclical Letters should be mentioned: the Encyclical *Mirae Caritatis* of Leo XIII (28 May 1902), the Encyclical *Mediator Dei* of Pius XII (20 November 1947) and the Encyclical *Mysterium Fidei* of Paul VI (3 September 1965).

Then, almost as an afterthought, he adds:

> The Second Vatican Council, while not issuing a specific document on the Eucharistic mystery, considered its various aspects throughout its documents, especially the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.

The difference in tone is unmistakable. There is, at this point, no indication of the nature, importance, or, for that matter, the essential contents of the teachings of the Council, or of the fact that its decisions brought about much needed and overdue liturgical reforms. Even less

attention is drawn to the rather important detail that many of these reforms involved changes in rules and practices implemented as a consequence of Trent, and that generally through a return to much older traditions.

Paragraph 10 gives a clear statement of the objective of the encyclical and also an indication of the reason for the Eucharist having been chosen as its subject. The paragraph begins with a description of what are seen as the positive developments in the wake of Vatican II (emphasis from the original):

> The Magisterium's commitment to proclaiming the Eucharistic mystery has been matched by interior growth within the Christian community. Certainly *the liturgical reform inaugurated by the Council* has greatly contributed to a more conscious, active and fruitful participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar on the part of the faithful. In many places, *adoration of the Blessed Sacrament* is also an important daily practice and becomes an inexhaustible source of holiness. The devout participation of the faithful in the Eucharistic procession on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ is a grace from the Lord which yearly brings joy to those who take part in it.
> Other positive signs of Eucharistic faith and love might also be mentioned.

The positive language is slightly marred by making only a very general reference to post–Vatican II developments in the nature of the participation of the faithful, while specifying (and thus emphasizing) two traditional practices, adoration and the Corpus Christi procession, both traditionally dedicated not to the Eucharist as a liturgical event, but to the Blessed Sacrament, i.e., the consecrated host as an object.

Then the text takes a sudden turn and continues in an altogether different vein (emphasis from the original):

> Unfortunately, alongside these lights, *there are also shadows*. In some places the practice of Eucharistic adoration has been almost completely abandoned. In various parts of the Church abuses have occurred, leading to confusion with regard to sound faith and Catholic doctrine concerning this wonderful sacrament. At times one encounters an extremely reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. Stripped of its sacrificial meaning, it is celebrated as if it were simply a fraternal banquet. Furthermore, the necessity of the ministerial priesthood, grounded in apostolic succession, is at times obscured and the sacramental nature of the Eucharist is reduced to its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation. This has led here and there to ecumenical initiatives which, albeit well-intentioned, indulge in Eucharistic practices contrary to the discipline by which the Church expresses her faith. How can we not express profound grief at all this? The Eucharist is too great a gift to tolerate ambiguity and depreciation.

The paragraph, and the introduction, ends with: "It is my hope that the present Encyclical Letter will effectively help to banish the dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice, so that the Eucharist will continue to shine forth in all its radiant mystery."

This then is, if not the only, certainly one of the main objectives of the encyclical. What the phrasing signals is a return to the defensive thinking of Trent: the primary aim is to combat the negative, the positive is promoted as a means to achieve this primary aim. However, the situation in which the encyclical was written is not the same. Trent came into being at a time when the Protestant Reformation was very effectively tearing into the unity of Western Christianity mainly as a direct result of a deplorable lack of discipline within the Church. Now the defence appears to be against alleged mistakes in applying and developing the reforms an ecumenical Council of the Church instituted. I use the term "alleged," for it is not made clear exactly which initiatives occasioned the defensive reaction, or whether they were so widespread as to necessitate a counter action as powerful as a papal encyclical.

All through the history of the Church, the introduction of new ideas, new interpretations, theories or practices has been accompanied by experimentation and, almost inevitably, also by mistakes. There are, as well, instances of innovations that were first hotly debated and later accepted as being correct. To take only two examples from the earliest period of Christianity: Peter was clearly reluctant to accept Paul's relaxation of the purity laws, even after approval by the Jerusalem leadership (even though, apparently, not by everybody in that community, by far);[113] the idea of the canonicity of John was disputed by respected ecclesial figures for quite a long time. This is not to say that everything that is new or that is tried in the name of innovation is right, but it is important to remember that the mere fact that something is not traditional, or even that it is contrary to some part of tradition, does not make it automatically wrong. Similarly, what is traditional, what worked well in the past or under certain circumstances and environments, is not necessarily good always and everywhere.

It would take an insensitive person, indeed, to read the encyclical and not to appreciate the deep attachment of John Paul II to the rite of adoration. His personal experience of the mystery leads him to emphasize the devotion and to a desire that it be reinstituted everywhere – in a traditional form. He sees deviations from that way of celebrating the Eucharist as, for

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[113] Cf., Gal 2:11.

example, reducing it to "a fraternal banquet" or merely "a form of proclamation," and as being "dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice" (#10). However, while Vatican II very clearly states that tradition is important in liturgy, it is also adamant that certain attitudes and practices acquired over the centuries have to be changed.[114] Those charged with overseeing and controlling the developments and innovations stemming from Vatican II must keep this in mind, as well as their obligation to adapt liturgy to the specific needs of different cultures and peoples, as described in numbers 37–40 of the *CSL*. This seems to have been overlooked in the encyclical.

1.4.3.2 The power to celebrate and consecrate

The presentation of the role and function of the ordained priest in the eucharistic liturgy is made unsatisfactory by both what is said and what is omitted. As mentioned above, Susan Wood, in her article on the *EE* points out some of the major problems in the treatment of this issue. Let it suffice here to summarise the points raised: the exclusive role of the episcopacy in defending the apostolic faith; discussing the liturgical function of the priest without taking into account his pastoral and gospel proclaiming responsibilities and, in general, his relationship with the ecclesial community; excluding the priesthood of the baptized from the discussion; and portraying the role of the priest in the presentation of the eucharistic sacrifice as exclusive.

When Wood says that, in discussing these issues, John Paul II "articulates traditional Roman Catholic theology,"[115] it can be taken to mean the Tridentine-scholastic tradition, because most of these attitudes not only do not follow the trend of Vatican II's thinking, they also diverge from much of the early Christian tradition. There is absolutely no reason to suspect that Pope John Paul II intended, in any sense of the word, to contradict the teachings of Vatican II, either in this encyclical or in any other writing or pronouncement. His participation in the work of the Council as well as the references in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* itself certainly prove the opposite. Tridentine expressions, logic and approaches in discussing these matters are used to combat what he conceives to be the results of mistaken or misguided experimentation.

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[114] *CSL* #21.

[115] Wood, "A Roman Catholic Response," 399.

Unfortunately the *EE*, by describing the function of the ordained priest in Tridentine language, does give the appearance of contradicting the spirit of Vatican II. The emphasis may be intended to be on the importance of the function of the priest, but the effect is an emphasis on exclusivity and power. For instance, it is the priest who "effects the consecration" and at the Last Supper Jesus desired that his words be repeated "by all those who in the Church ministerially share in his priesthood" (#7); the community offers the sacrifice "at the hands of the consecrated minister" (#12); the community "absolutely requires the presence of an ordained priest" to celebrate the Eucharist but "is by itself incapable of providing an ordained minister" (#29); etc. These statements are, of course, doctrinally quite correct. The problem is the complete avoidance of any discussion of the assembly's role in the celebration of the Eucharist which, regrettably, also invokes an image of the passive, pre–Vatican II congregation.

By dealing exclusively with the role of the priest and defining that as power, through the use of language that was dominant pre–Vatican II, John Paul II makes it easy to interpret the encyclical as being not only against possible abuses, but also against liturgical reforms themselves. Thus, for instance, the website *Catholic Answers* presents the encyclical as being written because "today correct doctrine and practice regarding the Eucharist is threatened," including the doctrine of the sacrificial nature of the mass.[116] It states that "the uniqueness of Christ's presence in the Eucharist is subverted by emphasis on Christ's presence 'in the community.'" The contention of the unsigned article that an emphasis on the Mass as "an action of the community" has led to the subversion of the Real Presence is not only reversing history, it disregards the emphasis of Vatican II on the participation of the faithful in the sacrifice of the Eucharist.

1.4.3.3 What is missing

Two themes are missing from the encyclical, or rather, are mentioned only briefly, and then without any serious discussion: the universal priesthood of the laity and the scarcity of priests. This lacuna is all the more remarkable because the two are, or ought to be, related to the Eucharist and also to each other.

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[116] "Ecclesia de Eucharistia," Catholic Answers. No author given. http://www.catholic.com/library/cag_*ecclesia_de_eucharista.asp* (accessed April 28, 2010).

The universal priesthood, or priesthood of baptism, is only mentioned twice in the encyclical, ironically both references are used to emphasize the power of the ordained priest. The first mention is made in #28, where *Lumen Gentium* #10 is quoted, "As the Second Vatican Council teaches, 'the faithful join in the offering of the Eucharist by virtue of their royal priesthood'" and immediately followed, apparently as an explanation, by another quote from the same source, "yet it is the ordained priest who, 'acting in the person of Christ, brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people.'" The section ends with the conclusion that it is "for this reason, the Roman Missal prescribes that only the priest should recite the Eucharistic Prayer, while the people participate in faith and in silence." While not precisely misquoting *Lumen Gentium*, a subtle technique has been employed to completely subvert the intent of the original passage. The impression given is quite clearly that *Lumen Gentium* (and hence, Vatican II) emphasizes the role of the ordained priest. However, the order of the quotes has been reversed. The relevant portion of #10 actually reads:

> [T]he common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, teaches and rules the priestly people; acting in the person of Christ, he makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. But the faithful, in virtue of their royal priesthood, join in the offering of the Eucharist. They likewise exercise that priesthood in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and thanksgiving, in the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity.

Here, the "ministerial priest" is defined as one aspect of a singular "priesthood of Christ" which includes all the faithful. The passage is primarily concerned with illuminating the breadth and importance of that "royal priesthood" of the faithful. Indeed, the surrounding text and the whole setting of the paragraph within the chapter "On the People of God" makes it crystal clear that what is being stressed is the "holy priesthood" of the entire community of the baptized (#10). So, while the inference in *EE* #28 can be drawn from *Lumen Gentium* #10, by extracting the phrases he does, reversing them, and placing them within an extended defence of the "apostolicity of the Eucharist" John Paul II uses the source rather freely. In the act of invoking its authority, he counteracts the import of *Lumen Gentium*'s message by making the significance of the universal priesthood invisible.

The second mention is in #32, which deals with the "distressing and irregular situation" of communities of sufficient size to form a parish, yet not served by an ordained priest. Here the religious and lay persons who "lead their brothers and sisters in prayer exercise in a praiseworthy way the common priesthood of all the faithful based on the grace of Baptism." Praiseworthy the work of these persons may be proclaimed, but there is no further praise or support offered. Rather, the text encourages the community to pray and "mobilize all the resources needed for an adequate pastoral promotion of vocations." #33 then admonishes the prayer-leaders to "keep alive in the community a genuine 'hunger' for the Eucharist."

Sadly, no other reference is made to the scarcity of ordained priests, no hint that quite possibly other ways should or could be explored to solve the problem, besides prayer for more vocations and pastoral work to encourage young men to accept the call. The problem at the writing of the encyclical may not have been as serious and urgent as it is today, but the very mention of it shows that it was already pressing.

1.4.3.4 Summary

Through making the correction of apparent abuses one of the main objectives of the encyclical, and by reverting to Tridentine methods and language and proposing traditional practices as a solution, John Paul II overlooks and seemingly even dismisses the need for new approaches, practices and, even, formulations of theologies, in drastically changed circumstances.

One of the most significant shifts in the prevailing thinking of the second half of the twentieth century was from a predominantly analytical model, which looks at reality in terms of its discreet parts, to a more holistic approach focusing on the whole and on the relation of its parts.[117] Emphasizing the role and power of the ordained priest to the near-complete exclusion of the laity gives a very different meaning to the presentation, in the current atmosphere, than it would within a scholastic or neo-scholastic context. In the latter, it is acceptable to speak of only one side of the problem without that, in itself, being a comment on the other side or sides. Today (and equally during the past twenty or so years) the result of

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[117] Cf., for instance, Wayne M. Hall, "Thinking and Planning For the 21st Century. A Holistic Approach to Thinking and Planning," on the website of the Federation of American Scientists, http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/usfk_j2/think.htm (accessed May 20, 2010).

such treatment is the impression that the laity has little or no significant *effective* role in the celebration of the Eucharist. In addition, given the importance of the Eucharist, this can translate into a more general feeling about the overall role of the laity in the life of the Church.

There are other potential dangers related to the reversion to Tridentine formulas. One is associated with the fact that impressions tend to become fixed unless an effort is made to challenge them. It is true that the whole context of the encyclical does not support an interpretation of the document as ignoring the laity, but it is also true that to ascertain this requires conscious and careful examination of the text, a condition that is far from granted. So, unless the impression caused by the method of argument is actively counteracted, there is a risk that the idea that the laity is in some way superfluous to the inner life of the Church will prevail. Another possible unfortunate consequence is that those who are uncomfortable with reforms implemented in the spirit of Vatican II can and, as the above-mentioned examples show, do use these sections of the document without reference to the larger context and thereby attempt to slow down the process of renewal.

1.4.4 Eucharist, source of life of the Church

1.4.4.1 *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and this thesis

We maintain that continued renewal is essential not merely because it is in the spirit of Vatican II (cf., for instance *CSL* #21), but, and even more important, for the future of the Church. Yet, are conditions really such that a renewal of the Church is necessary? Often a need for renewal arises specifically because an institution has, or is presumed to have, diverged from essential principles. Another factor that may dictate a need for renewal is a change in circumstances. These can stand alone or in combination.

There is no question that the circumstances in which the Church exists, i.e., the world around it, have radically changed in practically all aspects in the last century or so. This alone might dictate a need for change in the Church. The letter of Boulad and our discussions above contribute evidence that both factors – a, at least, perceived distancing from fundamental principles and a change in circumstances – are present in the life of the Church and do affect it. The *EE*, when it speaks of "shadows," "confusion with regard to sound faith," and "dark clouds of unacceptable doctrine and practice," confirms that John Paul II was distressed by what he saw as a movement away from central truths. Leaving aside the question of how he

may have defined "renewal," partly under the influence of Vatican II and also by personal conviction John Paul II, in the encyclical, expresses an obvious awareness (all be it mostly by allusion) of a need for renewal. Many others in the Church, clergy and laity, also articulate acute concern with the state of the Church and a desire for renewal. Given all this, it is reasonable to assume that a renewal is in fact needed; there certainly are symptoms that also suggest a considerable degree of urgency.

How to proceed? To engage in the renewal of a body like the Roman Catholic Church can be satisfactory only if done in harmony with its essential character and *raison d'être*. In practice, this means that in order to find a way forward it is essential to establish what the character and *raison d'être* of the Church is. One might naturally turn to tradition for guidance. However, there are clear signs that the established Church tradition is inadequate to serve as a solitary guide. There is a sense that this too may have drifted away from essentials and that its forms and language occasionally obscure rather than enlighten. In order to recover the essence of the Church and move forward, it may be necessary to reach farther back, into origins. It might then become possible to evaluate the tradition in this light and, thus, to determine what to preserve, what to abandon and what ways, means and actions are necessary to achieve the goal of the renewed health of the Church.

Can the *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* help in finding a direction for the process of renewal? The encyclical does not speak of renewal as such. That is not the purpose of the document. However, despite the problems caused by occasional over-reliance on Tridentine tradition, in its presentation of the relationship between the Eucharist and the Church the *EE* does suggest a first step. It affirms that the foundation of the life of the Church is the Eucharist and that the essential nature and character of the Eucharist, and consequently of the Church, was established at the Last Supper. In this, the encyclical gives an indication of the direction renewal ought to take: if we can rediscover the meanings of the Eucharist and the Last Supper, we may be able to recover a sense of what is at the core of Christian faith; if we can understand those essentials in terms of our contemporary world, perhaps we can learn to engage with them; if we can do that, we will have found a possible path to renewal of the Church. Thus, an exploration of the *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the Eucharist and the Last Supper can form a valid basis for the remainder of my inquiry.

This whole argument, however, is predicated on the encyclical's equation of the Last Supper, the Eucharist and the Church. That this defining relation was recognized by the earliest Christian communities is indicated by the New Testament itself, even if not explicitly. John Paul II recalls his personal experience in the "Upper Room," which tradition says is the one where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper, and uses it to underline this connection. The expression "Upper Room" is missing from the institution narratives, but Lk. 22:12 does specify that the disciples preparing for the supper were to be shown to a "large room upstairs" (NRSV). In Greek a single word, it is traditionally translated as "upper room." The significance of the location and thus the connection between the room, the events it signifies and the Church is emphasized by Acts 1:13. Here the disciples (apostles with "certain women […] and the brothers of Jesus") gather in the upper room after the ascension of Jesus, in order to re-establish the apostolic college by electing a replacement for Judas Iscariot. Arguably this was the first step necessary in forming the Church into a functioning unit and, thus, it can be interpreted as the actual constitution of the structure of the Church. Acts 2:1 may continue the symbolism of the location, however the Greek text is not clear. The expression *epi to auto* literally means "on the same,"[118] which can be translated as "all together in one place" (NRSV), "together" (RSV), "all in one room" (Jerusalem Bible), but also may mean the "same place," implying the room mentioned in 1:13.[119] Either translation, however, makes the connection with the foundation of the Church emphatic. From our point of view, the interesting aspect of this connection is the apparent importance given to the location, i.e., the circumstances, as if they were used to recall the event and/or its meaning. A similar effect can be noted in the story of Emmaus, where the two disciples recognize Jesus at the breaking of the bread, apparently a quite common practice, yet one that had obviously gained a special meaning, which was so strong that it enabled them to recognize a figure as the living person whom they were convinced had died. This, in turn, also justifies our contention that it was necessary to investigate the circumstances in which the institution narratives are played out.

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[118] J.B. Phillips, introduction to *The R.S.V. Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Ziondervan Publishing House, 1958), viii.

[119] Cf., for instance *La Bible* (Toronto: Société Biblique Canadienne, 2000); *Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift, Die Bibel, Gesamtausgabe* (Stuttgart: Katolische Bibelanstalt Gmb, 1980; *Biblia* (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 1973); etc.

1.4.4.2 The source of life in *EE*

Throughout the encyclical, the life-giving function of both the Eucharist and the events surrounding its foundation is emphasised, to the degree that it appears to be the major point of faith that John Paul II wants to highlight. The title itself indicates this orientation, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia, The Church from the Eucharist* (given the text itself, *The Church out of the Eucharist* would probably be a more apt translation). As customary, a separate subtitle was not originally given to the document, but taken from the first words. The whole sentence reads, "The Church draws her life from the Eucharist." A clarification, a deepening of the meaning, follows: "This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates the heart of the mystery of the Church" (#1).

The vital bond between Eucharist and Church is a matter of both origins and continuing life. How, in the words of Vatican II, the Eucharist became "the source and summit of the Christian life"[120] is explained in #3: "The Church was born in the paschal mystery," and as we re-live these events at every celebration of the Eucharist, we are made anew again and again. In consequence, the paschal mystery is also the mystery of the Church (#5). This renewal is not merely an intensive remembrance, but *anamnesis*, in some way a real participation, a "becoming part of" the original event (#11) which then becomes a constant generator of the life of the Church (#12). Because life is expressed by and experienced through action, the activity of the Church, in particular the accomplishment of the mission given to the Church, i.e., evangelization, also has its source in the Eucharist and, through it, in the paschal events (#24).

These are only some examples of the connection between the Eucharist and the life of the Church mentioned in the encyclical and of the extraordinary importance accorded to this connection. Actually, there is nothing especially new about this presentation, it expresses age-old traditional teaching. Nevertheless, it does highlight one important aspect related to our inquiry. The Eucharist is so much the determinant influence on the life and functioning (i.e., action) of the Church, that we can and, as a matter of fact, ought to look for guidance through it to the foundational events, because they, in turn have a determining influence on the nature of the Church, to which every change must remain faithful.

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[120] *Lumen Gentium* #11, quoted in *EE* #1.

1.4.4.3 "Decisive moment"

In the encyclical Pope John Paul II writes: "By the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Church was born and set out upon the pathways of the world, yet a decisive moment in her taking shape was certainly the institution of the Eucharist in the Upper Room" (#5). It is a thought provoking and important statement. In speaking of the birth of the Church at Pentecost and then looking back to the institution of the Eucharist as a life-shaping event, John Paul II suggests the Last Supper as a moment of conception analogous to that of other living beings.

One of the areas where modern science at least somewhat agrees with scholastic philosophy is the idea that a being is defined by two essentially different factors. According to biology and psychology these are not soul and body, but genetics and experience. The species, gender, stature, talent, etc., etc., are determined by the DNA inherited from the two parents, and developed throughout life through physical, emotional and intellectual experiences. This is eminently so in the case of a human being, but increasing evidence shows that to a larger or lesser degree also of other species. Thus, the traits of a person are affected by the environment, but the fundamental nature is given at the moment of conception, when the genes of the mother and the father unite. The person, as such, is defined not at birth, but at conception. If the "decisive moment" of the existence of the Church was at the Last Supper, this is analogous to its conception and it is there that the essential nature of the Church should be sought.

The "decisive moment," the conception of the Church as it were, is the moment when the body of Christ is specifically given to the disciples during the bread-rite of the Last Supper. To understand the implications of that rite it is essential to try to put it in historical, religious and social context; and, if that proves difficult, to at least eliminate ahistorical interpretations. It is important to attempt both because context certainly influenced how the disciples as well as the evangelists understood the bread-rite and interpreted the reality it revealed to them; doubly important, because it is through their understanding that Jesus chose to communicate his message.

1.4.4.4 Finding the way through tradition

In spite of, or exactly because of, two thousand years of thinking, analyzing, speculation, discussion and debate about the events of the Last Supper, the task of uncovering their fundamental truths is not easy. Certainly there are terms and concepts that are generally accepted and used. There has been, however, an almost constant debate about their exact meaning and specific significance; nor is the debate over yet. The works of Vatican II give especially important guidelines in this respect.

With the first sentence of the *CSL* the bishops clearly stated the aim of the Council and thereby set the obligatory aim of the whole Church for the future:

> The sacred Council has set out to impart an ever-increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call all mankind into the Church's fold.[121]

It is important that this sentence is from a *constitution*, i.e., it has a disciplinary power close to that of a dogma.[122] Given the importance of the document, both by its nature as constitution and as the first document published by the Council, it would be rather odious to suggest that the Fathers of the Council may have been careless in phrasing the introductory sentence which, in fact, gave the program not only of the liturgical reform, but of the whole Council. This is proven by the very next sentence in the document, "*Accordingly* it sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy."[123] It is thus clear that the statement is meant to be a directive and instruction regarding the primary objective of the Council and, in consequence, of the activity and behaviour of the Church in the future.

The statement applies to this work especially in the phrase of "adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change." "Interpretations" are certainly in this category, they have changed significantly all through the history of the Church, largely in response to changes in prevalent modes of thinking and other outside influences. Here we are attempting to find as clear an indication as possible of the principles governing the future development of the Church. To complicate the task, we are looking for guidelines in an event

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[121] *CSL* #1.

[122] J. Trummer, "Konstitutionen," *LTK*, vol. 6, col. 505.

[123] *CSL* #1. Emphasis mine.

that, though it is made present to us again and again and thus appears to be familiar, historically occurred two millennia ago in a very different world. Not only this, but during the intervening time there evolved a great number of explanations as to the specific meaning of the events, which influences our comprehension. How is it possible to accomplish the objective?

Given the great variety of interpretations of the exact meaning of the events of the Last Supper – notwithstanding the wide agreement on the use of certain terms like sacrifice, salvation, etc. – according to the mandate of Vatican II the fundamental task of this endeavour will be to eliminate aspects that are "changeable," i.e., that are not part of the essence of the event. In other words, we have to search for that meaning without which the Last Supper would not have been what it is, including its ability to become the valid basis for the major interpretations that became part of the tradition of the Church.

There are innumerable studies related to the events of the Last Supper, particularly the meaning of the words over the bread. Every word, every nuance has been investigated, theorized and argued over, to a point where the mere enumeration and classification of even the most significant studies would provide material for a separate doctoral thesis. All of these, at least all the studies that I was able to consult or found references to, start from a post-Easter viewpoint.

Here we are faced with the problem of the "double loop" method of interpretation. The events that followed the Last Supper were, without doubt, traumatic for the disciples. The condemnation and death of Jesus shattered their lives; it seemed that their hopes and beliefs were utterly destroyed, and, for at least some of them, their lives as well. The gospels tell of Peter, Andrew, James and John leaving behind everything, including their livelihoods and families, to follow Jesus, and there is no doubt that others did as well. They hoped to build a new, better life with the Messiah, something considerably better than what they had left. Now everything collapsed around them and their very lives were in danger.

The resurrection and even the reception of the Holy Spirit was also a shock. True, they had witnessed Jesus resurrecting at least three people – the son of the widow at Nain, the daughter of Jairus and Lazarus – but these people had died natural deaths, thus their resurrection, while wondrous, in some ways was an extension of the cures Jesus, the miracle

worker, accomplished. Jesus, however, was executed, the Roman soldier made sure that he was truly dead. At least some of the disciples were present at the execution and death, but for all of them it was a personally experienced blow. Encountering the dead person alive and well – in spite of the wounds – must have confused them beyond everything imaginable. Then, to add to the confusion, the re-found hope, leader, miracle-maker, disappeared and left them again alone. They must have been desperately seeking to understand what they had experienced. Some cryptic statements they remembered Jesus making now appeared to make sense; in the gospel narratives, these are sometimes signalled with "the disciples did not understand it then."

The meaning of the events at the Last Supper must also have been confusing (cf., Jn 6:60, 66). It is no wonder then, that, in their search, they turned special attention to that last gathering: did anything happen, was anything said there that can help us to understand? As in every situation, the explanations they found for their experiences influenced their recollection of the events and their account of them is, in itself, an interpretation. We have to take this for granted whenever witnesses recount an event; this is the first "loop" on which every description dealing with past events is based.

The problem is exacerbated with the passage of time, given the circumstances, especially so in the case of the Last Supper. Later interpreters not only already know what happened after the Last Supper, they start from the presumption that what Jesus said and did referred to and was even meant to predict and explain the Passion and resurrection and, indeed, the continuing presence of Jesus in the world. Consequently, they investigate his words and actions practically exclusively in terms of how they predict or explain and clarify the significance and meaning of the Passion, the resurrection, and/or the future relationship of Jesus with his disciples.

These commentators (including the redactors of the Gospels) work a kind of "double loop." They look back at the events of the Last Supper, sometimes centuries or millennia later, through a lens of accumulated interpretation. They have no access to the event, the material with which they are all forced to work is its narration. This, in turn, is based on the recollection, therefore interpretation, of the eyewitnesses searching for a meaning the event might offer in relation to what was, at the time of the event, still in the future. The eyewitness account itself was formulated in the light of the experiences for which they searched an

explanation. The author of the narration added to this his own knowledge, and possibly experience, not only of the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, but also of the effect of these on the development of the community. Later researchers had this material as their only source: an account (or accounts, because there were more than one eyewitness) interpreting an experience as foretelling a second event, also already lived and known (the "first loop"), narrated by another person who has experienced the effects of the account both on himself and on the community, the "second loop," to which all subsequent commentators add their interpretations.

This is certainly a far from ideal situation, but for the present it is the only possibility any researcher has, including us. The question of the source cannot be solved at this time, but there is another aspect that needs to be kept in mind. Researchers and commentators throughout the centuries appear to have been satisfied to accept the interpretation of the meaning of the event, i.e. the Last Supper and especially the establishment of the Eucharist, as developed from the narrative during the first centuries; that is, as a predication and teaching about the Passion and resurrection and their significance. This interpretation was so fitting and so important for the life of the Church that it was not only taken to be true, but also as the only connotation worth exploring. Given that, in the references and comments contained in the works consulted, I found no indication of significantly different approaches, it seems safe to conclude that at least the vast majority of scholarly works do in fact follow this path, up to the present.[124]

For the purposes outlined above, however, this approach is insufficient. By this, we do not mean to say that either the usual method or the results obtained by applying it are invalid, nor is it the purpose of this work to debate them. What we wish to point out is that nothing in

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[124] This approach is reinforced by the strongly held beliefs of both the community and many exegetes. The following statement by Graham Stanton can certainly be applied to scholars dealing with other New Testament documents as well as the topic under investigation: "An individual scholar's understanding of the whole structure of Matthean theology will determine to a considerable extent his exegesis of particularly difficult and important passages" ("Introduction: Matthew's Gospel. A New Storm Center," *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Graham Stanton (Philadelphia/London: Fortress Press, c1983), 16). On the related issue of personal bias, Léon-Dufour says: "Readers would be naïve were they to believe that I, as a scientific worker, could eliminate all presuppositions from my reading of the Bible.… All human beings are conditioned by their environment, their previous history, and their temperament. I myself am a man and not a woman, a monotheist and not a Buddhist, a Christian and not a Jew, a Catholic and not a Protestant, a priest and not a layperson, a Jesuit and not a Dominican. Need I add more? All these facts condition my viewpoint" (*Sharing The Eucharistic Bread. The Witness Of The New Testament*, trans. Matthew Jesus O'Connel (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986) 3–4).

them excludes the possibility that the event itself had, and was at the time understood to have, other and equally important meanings or significance. We must therefore, as far as possible, go beyond the assumptions on which the method is based and search for the most likely meaning of the Last Supper events, as understood when they happened. In other words, we must try to reconstruct, as much as is possible, any aspect of the understanding of the participants that may have significance for our understanding of the "decisive moment."

The only record we have of the Last Supper is the New Testament, specifically the four institution narratives and the parallel narrative in the gospel according to John, so we have to proceed through them. As they, themselves, are based on several traditions and vary accordingly, we have to try to winnow out those aspects of the event that are most closely reported, i.e. those without interpretations attached to them that may have already coloured the original understanding. By the same reasoning, it is also very clear that the results of such an inquiry cannot hope for, much less claim, certainty. The best we can attempt is to find a reasonable and methodically valid understanding of the essential teaching of the Last Supper. If such exists, our contention is that it certainly deserves careful attention and evaluation as a basis for the renewal of the Church.

1.4.4.5 Summary

The encyclical emphasizes that the Eucharist does not repeat, but actually makes present again the whole Paschal mystery. Thus the full and conscious participation in its celebration demanded by Vatican II becomes fruitful when we participate, become part of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The ability to become part of the Paschal event at its every re-presentation also means that the effects are always made available to us as a community and as individuals: we are becoming the Body of Christ, the Church. This "becoming" is akin to becoming human. True, the individual person is created at the moment of conception when everything that is generic and genetic is determined, yet the development of the person, as such, is a life-long, ongoing process.

It is in this sense that the encyclical describes the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper as the "decisive moment" of the life of the Church. The "birth" was when the Spirit was received by the disciples, but the "conception," as it were, occurred at the moment of

giving the bread as the body, i.e., the person of Jesus, to those that participated. This was then the event that created the Church and defined its essential characteristics.

Within the encyclical, there is a significant difference of tone and method between the discussion of the importance of the Eucharist in the life of the Church and the role, function and power of the ordained priest and of the laity. The former, even though occasionally using traditional images and language, reflects to a very great extent the direction taken by Vatican II, while the latter depends entirely on Tridentine tradition and uses neo-scholastic logic. This approach weakens the impact of the whole document, not least because it appears to put the laity very much in, at best, a secondary place in the life of the Church and thereby potentially alienates more progressive-thinking Catholics. It is also the major irritant for non-Catholic Christians, who, in general, greeted the encyclical with sympathy, as indicated by most non-Catholic commentators. The consequence of this is that the ecumenical dialogue, which gained considerable energy after the Second Vatican Council and was actively encouraged by John Paul II, became more difficult.

All this lends support to Boulad's complaint regarding the out-dated language and approach of the Magisterium. Given that Vatican II, in spite of the many fundamental changes it brought about, did not establish the theological-doctrinal basis needed to properly direct and control the implementation of the reforms, this aspect of the encyclical also supports his claim that a revision of the theology and catechesis of the Church is urgently needed.

In spite of the difficulties, indeed partly by their very existence, the encyclical does give a rather clear indication of where a safe guide for the future of the Church can be found, and even of the method for finding it. Most of the difficulties noted stem from John Paul II's return to a purely Tridentine interpretation of the tradition. This indicates rather clearly that this kind of language and logic is woefully inadequate today. How then can the Church make sure that any reform implemented will still preserve the essentials of faith? By necessity this would include, among other things, eliminating those aspects of its life, including teachings, not suited to contemporary thinking. How is it possible to ascertain what to eliminate and what to keep? For an answer it is essential to get as close as possible to the "decisive moment," the very conception of the Church. We have to try and uncover the characteristics that were given to it through the very act that initiated its existence. It becomes vitally important to get

as clear an understanding as possible of this conception (in both senses of the word) because any further developments will eventually have to be measured by the criterion of whether they conform to the unadorned meaning of the moment when Jesus offered the bread to the participants at the Last Supper. In order to achieve this goal, we have to strive to get as close as possible to the understanding of the participants in the event, at the time it took place.

1.5 Summary conclusions

It would be difficult to deny that at the beginning of the twenty-first century the Church is in a state of crisis. This is especially true if we use the term in its original meaning: a time when important decisions have to be made. How close the situation is to the point where it becomes catastrophic is open to debate, nor is it important from the perspective of this study. There are, however, clear indications that important decisions have to be made in a timely manner to forestall a catastrophe, if not in the existence of the Church, certainly in its effectiveness and hence its ability to fulfil its mission.

Possibly the most visible of these indications is the sharp decline in the proportion of Catholics that participate in the day-to-day life of the Church. While the situation is far from being the same everywhere, there is sufficient data available to indicate that this is a widespread problem. Arguably, it also contributes significantly to some of the other signs of crisis, such as the decrease in vocations to the ministerial priesthood and the resulting serious shortage of ordained priests. Similarly, the lack of regular contact with the proclamation of the teachings of the Church has affected the willingness, perhaps even the capability, of Catholics to recognize the teaching ability and authority of the Magisterium, resulting in a deterioration in its effectiveness.

Both the decrease in vocations and the loss of magisterial authority have another, likely the major, source in the out-dated language and approach used by the higher levels of the hierarchy. Their pronouncements are difficult for the average person to properly understand or sound obsolete and thus irrelevant. That this tendency is indeed present in official Church documents is shown in our analysis of both the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia.*

The over-reliance on traditional language and thinking also has a detrimental effect on the ecumenical relationship with non-Catholic communities. Nor is this exclusively an external

affair, for it affects a large number of the laity. This is due partially to the significantly increased recognition of the importance of unity and understanding between Christians and, also, to the ever more numerous occasions of close and even intimate contact of Roman Catholics with people of other faiths. Some of these contacts come about through changing circumstances, such as the closing of places of worship, which forces different denominations to use the same facilities, but also from a growing number of intermarriages. Consequently, any weakening of the ecumenical efforts that were flourishing under the impetus of Vatican II also alienates people of the Roman Church.

Henri Boulad, in his letter to Pope Benedict XVI, proposed three actions as urgently needed in resolving these difficulties: a theological and catechetical reform, a reform of the structures of the Roman Catholic Church on a pastorally oriented basis and a spiritual reform of the sacraments.

The first of these reforms is made equally necessary by the fact that Vatican II essentially did not deal with theological questions and by the fundamental changes in modes of thinking in the last hundred years or so. These are not unrelated, but it is important to recognize both. Without a solid theological basis, the very spirit of the Council and practically any attempt to implement its directives are open to challenge, depending on the theological precepts a critic accepts. On the other hand, the aim of the Council was specifically to bring the Church up to the present, i.e., to adapt it to changed – and changing – circumstances and thinking. Thus, relying exclusively, or even principally, on theology developed centuries ago is insufficient; parts of the *CCC* provide ample evidence for this. Such an approach leads almost inevitably to conflict between those educated in and thinking according to the "old school" and those who accept contemporary methods and ways of thinking, almost by necessity the majority of the faithful, including members of the clergy.

The need here is not to invent a new theology but, rather, to recognize the work theologians have done in the near past and take it into account even when there is still debate about some points. The world is changing with such rapidity that the time may have come to give up waiting for clear, unequivocal statements on almost any subject. Without question, there are firm and unchangeable truths of our faith, but it is one of the most important tasks of theology to differentiate between the truth and its interpretation. In order to achieve this

reform, the hierarchy will have to be open to accepting the work of the increasing number of lay, that is, not-ordained, theologians, even though (or exactly because) they have a different perspective from that of those who are also ministerial priests or bishops.

Reforming the catechesis goes hand-in-hand with, but is different from, reform of the theology. It does require updated theology to be able to effectively fulfil its function, but also has to go beyond it. Based on a renewed theology it should be a relatively easy task to update the language of catechesis, but that will not be enough. A reworking of the principles by which it is conducted will also be necessary. The RCIA method, which emphasizes the involvement of the community, is a good guide. Catechesis cannot be effective if limited to "the classroom," even when there is only one "student" involved: it has to be supported by the involvement of the community. In consequence this aspect will also have to be emphasized and directed.

The above points to a need for a very large and effective role for the local authorities, because the language and approach has to be adapted to the needs of the immediate population. This also implies a great deal of independence. The present structure of the Church has also developed in the Tridentine tradition, even though it originated in an older model. Its character is essentially monarchic and functions largely in a directive and controlling mode, as evidenced by, among other things, the lengthy debate preceding the English translation of both the *EE* and the Canadian edition of the *Sacramentary*. Thus, the pastorally oriented structural reform advocated by Boulad is also essential if the needed changes are to be implemented.

There is a great difference between saying that these reforms are needed to assure the future efficient function of the Church and deciding how these changes are to be implemented. How can those in charge decide what is the best way, or quite possibly the only way to ensure that the reforms will result in the wellbeing of the Body of Christ and enable it to better fulfil its mission? The encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* gives a clear indication not to the answer, but to where to look for it: in the "decisive moment" of the institution of the Eucharist, the bread-rite of the Last Supper. This is the event that founded the Eucharist from which the Church constantly draws its existence as the Body of Christ and thus it is what defines the Church's very being.

In order to properly understand the nature of the Church and hence be able to establish the ground rules of the reforms, it is necessary to get as close to the original understanding of the event as possible. This does not dispute the value of later traditions, but gives a basis from which to properly evaluate them. The tradition about an event is always its interpretation and is, therefore, dependent on the prevailing frame of reference – the circumstances, culture, historical situation, predominant way of thinking, etc. – in which the interpretation is made. An event also occurs in a particular moment in history and is interpreted by eyewitness from within that context. Given our faith that the Last Supper was certainly a historical event in which God was directly involved, it is certain that what happened at that meal was formulated in such a way as to make its essential meaning understandable to the participants. While the narratives at our disposition are the fruit of later traditions, we have to search out whether – or to what degree – we can discover the original understanding of those who were present at the moment Jesus shared the bread and, with it, his body, with them.

CHAPTER TWO

"THIS IS MY BODY" – THE DECISIVE MOMENT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

2.1 Introduction

Our inquiry is aimed at finding an indicator to the path that the Church has to follow in order to resolve the present crisis while remaining true to its nature, a signpost that is as clear and as authoritative as possible. The encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* of Pope John Paul II does tell us where to look: the moment the Eucharist was instituted at the Last Supper, because this was the "decisive moment" for the future existence of the Church.

In order to properly understand the significance and specific meaning of an event one has to start from the event itself. Strictly speaking, this is not possible. Even if one is present at an event, the recollection or narration of it will be coloured by one's personal bias, history, momentary frame of mind, etc. etc. This is even more so if we were not present, because the only way to receive any kind of information about the details of an event is through the participants' reports, which will be tinted in the same way.

The effect of this is considerably greater if, between the happening and the narration, the person lives through a potentially life-changing experience. This was certainly the case for the disciples at Pentecost. From this perspective, it is immaterial whether the reception of the Spirit happened while the resurrected Jesus was still with them, as the gospel of John narrates it, or at the feast of Pentecost. New Testament narratives repeatedly mention that his followers often did not understand the significance of the teachings and/or the actions of Jesus until later, or until they received the Spirit. It would be unreasonable to think that the experience of both the resurrection and the reception of the Spirit did not strongly influence their understanding of the significance of the happenings at the Last Supper. The narratives also tell us of a consequential change in the attitude and behaviour of the disciples as a result of having received the Spirit; whatever and whenever it happened, it did have a tremendous effect on them.

Nevertheless, to get as clear an understanding as possible of the meaning of the institution of the Eucharist, it is important to approach as closely as we can the event itself, the Last Supper. The ideal would be to have been there personally. In a way, faith makes this easy: we believe that the eucharistic celebration re-presents the crucial moment and that we truly participate in it. However faith is not knowledge, nor necessarily is it understanding, for we do believe things we cannot understand. We thus have to rely on the accounts of those who did participate physically and personally, being fully aware that any conclusion we draw must remain tentative. The most we can hope for is to arrive at a conception of what is most likely to have transpired.

The problem is that we do not have any direct witness, with the possible exception of the author of the gospel according to John. We thus have to depend on indirect information that is likely not even second-hand, because it was handed down for centuries, through traditions, before it was canonised. Unfortunately, traditions, especially oral traditions, are not passed down unaltered. They too, just like the recall of the original witness, are coloured by the *persona*s of the narrators. Nor does the difficulty end there. While the New Testament was written in Greek, Jesus and the disciples in all likelihood spoke Aramaic, thus the first written narratives are translations and those, of course, went through numerous transcriptions and translations. Every text loses something in translation (or, for that matter, gains, which may even be worse). We have to look at the event through this "lens," which, like all lenses, does to some degree distort.

These, in themselves, may not be insurmountable obstacles, if we can establish with some certainty how the early communities understood the events. If there is evidence, from within the traditions used in composing the institution narratives, of a reasonable consensus regarding a particular occurrence, we may validly assume that in that aspect the traditions preserved an original understanding. It is logical, then, to examine the narratives with a view to unearthing such concordances. The aim of this method is to avoid, as much as possible, the "double loop" discussed in Chapter 1, to shed, as much as possible, the influence of a two thousand year history of tradition and interpretation.

We are not trying to find the "historical Jesus" as the term is usually understood. The person we are observing is the Jesus that walked in Galilee during the first decades of the first

century CE: Christ the Messiah, the Son of God, Person of the Trinity and thus himself God.[1] As such, belief in his existence is clearly a matter of faith; his is an image itself formed by tradition, thus we do have to rely on what tradition tells us about him. Faith tells us that he was fully God and also fully human. If he was fully human, he was, in fact, a historical being and in our inquiry we have to take into account the influence his environment and circumstances had on his actions and understanding, because this may also be an indication of the "profound meaning" of the pericopes describing the bread-rite of the Last Supper. However, his historical *persona* is secondary for us and outside the parameters of this study.

As far as the revelation contained in the New Testament is concerned, the historical person makes no difference. Scripture is the word of God and it is a firm belief of all Christians that it is true, even though various communities understand the sense of this statement quite differently. Catholics believe that, in order to properly comprehend the truth expressed in it, Scripture must be properly interpreted. This includes finding the "profound meaning"[2] or "fuller sense"[3] that may be latent in the text and is intended by God, but may not have been obvious to the human author and, therefore, is not clearly expressed in Scripture; this opens the possibility of actualizing the text. This "fuller sense" or "profound" meaning is therefore important not only because it is part of what God meant to convey, but also because it helps to make Scripture applicable to the present; it allows the word of God the flexibility to interact with the experience of humankind.[4]

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[1] Cf. Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999).

[2] *EE* #20.

[3] Cf., Peter S. Williamson, "Catholic Principles for Interpreting Scripture," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53.3 (July 2003): 327–349, based on the Pontifical Biblical Commission on *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church.*

[4] Ibid., 343. There are, however, dangers in the search for deeper meaning, which we have to take into consideration. In his article, Williamson quotes extensively from *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (*IBC*). Reconstructed, his counsel goes as follows. Because "the literal sense of scripture is […] also intended by God, as principal author (II.B.1.c)" (341) it is the "the canonical text in its final stage which is the expression of God (I.A.4.f)" (332). In consequence, "[i]nterpretation of the biblical text must be consistent with the meaning expressed by the human authors (II.B.1.g)" (334) and "[s]cholarly integrity requires that conclusions regarding the text's meaning be verified in the text" (337). A particular danger confronts Catholic exegetes "of attributing to biblical texts a meaning which they do not contain but which is the product of a later development within the tradition (*IBC*, III.c)" (337).

As far as the institution narratives are concerned, they are not exempt from this possibility of holding deeper interpretable meanings. As outlined above, at their writing, they were subject to several factors that may have influenced not their accuracy, but the relative emphasis given to certain aspects of the events. This possibility becomes a certainty if we look at the multiplicity of later interpretations. No matter how firmly they are embedded in the tradition of the Church, each is a seeking in the text for guidance appropriate to a particular time and place. It is valid, even necessary, therefore, for us to investigate, in our turn, whether there is any indication of the participants' immediate understanding of the events that may help us to determine the path the development of the Church now has to take.

In order to gain insight into both how the participants understood what happened at the Last Supper during the event itself and the circumstances that contributed to the formulation of the narratives, we have to investigate the historical-social situation in Palestine at the time of Jesus. While the whole context is operational in such a situation, it is here impossible to attempt even a sketch of such an inquiry. Fortunately, for our purposes it will be sufficient to focus on the meal itself, in reference to its cultural and social, as well as religious, aspects. We will touch on some general aspects of communal meals, contemporaneous Jewish customs, and the significance of bread and the bread-rite (section 2.2). The particularly vexed question of the Last Supper as Passover feast will then be examined (section 2.3). The debate over the apparent difficulties the differences in the details of the narratives cause about the Paschal character of the Last Supper will be explored and the significance of the question to our current inquiry assessed.

Having established the background, we will be able to turn to the institution narratives themselves, the closest information about the "decisive moment" available to us. Here (section 2.4) the first task will be to find out what, if any, part of the narrative appears to be a reasonably exact description of the historical event. This is made necessary by the fact that in antiquity historical accuracy was not an essential part of literature, especially in the case of Scripture, the main purpose of this *genre* being the preservation of the teaching on articles of faith, not the giving of a historical account. In consequence, the authors were quite at liberty to change events, to be highly selective and even to invent details that were not historically factual. A synchronic reading of the institution narratives will reveal a high concurrence between the texts regarding the bread-rite itself. We will then (section 2.5) turn to the original

question, namely, what the bread-rite, itself, communicated to the participating disciples about the nature of the message Jesus was trying to impart to them. As the "decisive moment" of the existence of the Church this will be the definition of its nature as willed by God, and hence it is this that must govern any change to be implemented in response to the present crisis.

The decisive character of the Last Supper has long been recognized by the Church, interpretations of it are among the basic arguments on which the present power-distribution of the hierarchy (here including the order of the laity) is built. Because this question is raised later in the thesis, we will look at what the narratives tell us about who was present during the meal and, specifically, during the bread-rite (section 2.6).

Then, to make certain our conclusions are valid, we will turn to John's gospel (section 2.7). The style and the content of this narrative, particularly the treatment of the Last Supper, is very different from that of the synoptics and, thus, serves well as a control for our argument. If John supports our essential contentions, this will show that they were known and accepted by at least some culturally different and geographically quite separated Christian communities of the first century. Furthermore (section 2.8), if we can also find the effect of these principles on the behaviour of later Christians, that will re-enforce the validity of our conclusions, again with the reservation that these are tentative. This part of our investigation, especially the latter, will stray from our method because it will deal with the early "second loop" tradition. This is intentional: if the results are positive, that will show not only that our conclusions are valid, but that such an understanding was present to the minds of the eyewitnesses and was also accepted by later communities as an essential component of the *kerigma.*

2.2 The historico-social and religious background of the meal

Investigating the meal-culture of first century Jewish milieu is important if we are to fully understand the events of the last meal Jesus had with his friends. Eating and, in particular, eating together was, and still is, very important in all cultures we know of.[5] One has only to think of the dinners of Christmas or Thanksgiving, the military mess, and so on. These same examples also illustrate that customs developed in connection to communal meals are very characteristic of a society itself. To anybody familiar with different cultures, it is almost

[5] Cf. Joseph Hegarty and G. Barry O'Mahony, "Gastronomy: a Phenomenon of Cultural Expressionism and an Aesthetic for Living," *International Journal of Hospitality Management* 2.1 (March 2001): 186.

tautological to say that meal- culture changes from one society to another, and this is so even when we speak of meals observed geographically or chronologically quite close to each other. How much more must they differ, then, if the meal in question is both geographically and historically far removed from the observer! It will be our task to attempt to form as clear an image as possible of at least those customs that may have a bearing on our inquiry, including the meaning and significance of specific actions.

2.2.1 Eating and eating together

Eating is obviously important for survival. The Bible on occasion uses eating as a symbol of being alive as in the case of the daughter of Jairus (Lk 8:55) or that of Jesus himself, when the disciples are afraid that he is merely a ghost after his resurrection (Lk 24:34–43).[6] Abraham's welcoming of the three men (Gen 18:1–8) shows another aspect of eating: it establishes friendship, a close and trusting relationship.

2.2.1.1 Shared meals

In the words of Jeffrey Sobal and Mary K. Nelson:

> Food is not only good to eat, it is also good to share. Shared eating satisfies a need for interaction by a union with others, where conviviality establishes and reinforces social ties […] The rituals of joint eating […] reinforce common identities [and] develop functional relationships between individuals.[7]

This potential of shared food is found in many societies. Thus in Saharan Morocco, it serves as a means of inclusion and unity: "Eating from the same plate or table allows non-relatives to mutually embody social equality and become part of the interior family circle."[8] This was clearly understood in antiquity, and appropriate rituals were developed. Because the identity of the Jewish people was at least in part determined by their relationship with God, customs arose that also emphasized this relationship in both family meals and communal meals involving people with close but non-family bonds.

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[6] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 33–35.

[7] Jeffrey Sobal and Mary K. Nelson, "Commensal Eating Patterns: a Community Study," *Appetite* 41.2 (October 2003): 181. http://www.sciencedirect.com (accessed Jan. 25, 2009).

[8] Marybeth MacPhee, "Medicine for the Heart: The Embodiment of Faith in Morocco," *Medical Anthropology* 22.1 (2003): 63.

Communal meals outside the family circle were quite common for centuries before Jesus' time. In Greek society, associations or fraternities based on religious, economic, etc. bonds, called *orgaia*, *ranoi*, or *thiasoi* would regularly meet around the table.[9] By the time of Jesus, a similar custom had spread into Jewish society as well; these groups would generally meet on the day after the Sabbath for special meals.[10] The meaning of these communal meals in the Middle East was, and still is, to signal the bond or unity of those participating in them.[11] It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the Last Supper, by its very nature, also carried the symbolism of unity.

2.2.1.2 A Jewish meal in the first century CE

We have little reliable information on the diet consumed or, for that matter, the structure of meals in Jewish families or groups around the time of Jesus. Respected Jewish archaeologist and scholar on the Second Temple period, Magen Broshi writes: "The only record we have of the daily diet in Roman Palestine is the description of a 'food basket' in the Talmudic ruling on the food ration for an estranged wife," and even this meagre source is from centuries later than our time-frame.[12] Of course, here too we can count on the influence of the Greco-Roman customs and there are many sources dealing with those. However, these sources come from a broad geographical area, an extensive time period, are often sketchy, and mainly consist of incidental remarks in texts that cover other topics. Even the style of the texts is problematic, as they are often satirical and, therefore, exaggerate certain aspects. As Blake Leyerle, professor of Notre Dame University and expert in the social and cultural history of early Christianity, comments, "Any attempt to reconstruct the exact shape of early Christian and Jewish communal meals must bear in mind [the] rich assortment of both continuity and of variables"; she also warns us that a "casual disregard for dates" is a serious "deficiency in many works" relating to meal customs in antiquity.[13] Given that we deal here with a very narrow temporal

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[9] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 19.

[10] Martos, *Doors*, 213–214.

[11] Johannes Betz, *Eucharistie in der Schrift und Patristik*, Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte IV/4a (Freiburg: Herder, 1979), 8.

[12] Magen Broshi, *Bread, Wine, Walls and Scrolls* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), 121.

[13] Blake Leyerle, "Meal Customs in the Greco-Roman World," *Passover and Easter. Origin and History to Modern Time*s, *Two Liturgical Traditions Series*, vol.5, eds. Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999 [reprinted in 2002]) 29, 45–46.

window during a turbulent time in Jewish history, we have to be very careful not to fall into this error, and especially to avoid any conclusions based solely on interpretations of isolated words or actions, whatever the source.

2.2.2 The significance and symbolism of bread and the bread-rite

We do know that the main staple of the first century Palestinian diet was bread; it contributed as much as 50% of the caloric intake of the population. This is still the situation around the Mediterranean and in other areas as well.[14] It is, then, understandable that bread would acquire an important place in the symbolism of these peoples. Anthropologist Marybeth MacPhee of the Roger Williams University in Bristol, RI writes that in present-day Saharan Morocco "sharing a round loaf of bread renders the consumers equal, in the sense of having a unified identity, and functions to symbolically protect both parties."[15]

The importance of bread in the diet of the population around the first century CE makes it not unreasonable to assume that it had an important role to play at both family and *chavurah* meals. Did this include a ritual of blessing, breaking and distributing bread at the beginning of every, or at least festive, meals? Many authors certainly believe so.[16] I could find no definitive direct witness to this custom, nor one that would contradict this likelihood. It is also significant that none of the authors of the institution narratives deems it necessary to explain the rite. On balance, I judge that we have to accept a familiarity with the bread-rite as at least a strong probability, again with the reservation that we do not know the rite's exact form.

The bread-rite, as presented in the institution narratives, consists essentially of the three actions of blessing, breaking and distributing (we will discuss the words of Jesus later in the study). Can we know whether this was generally the custom at Jewish meals and, if yes, what meaning or significance was attached to it? It is again very difficult, if not, at present, impossible to be certain, but given the indications in the available sources, and particularly the

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[14] Broshi, *Bread*, 121 and 123.

[15] MacPhee, "Medicine," 63.

[16] E.g., Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 163–164; Betz, *Eucharistie*, 11; Rudolf Pesch, *Wie Jesus das Abendmahl hielt. Der Grund der Eucharistie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1977), 10; H. Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper, A Study in the History of the Liturgy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 168; Gordon J. Bahr, "Seder and Eucharistic Words," *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature* (New York: KTAV, 1977), 487; Martos, *Doors*, 215; Johannes Petrus de Jong, "Brotbrechen," *LTK*, vol. 2, col. 706; etc.

extremely long-standing traditions in many and quite different milieus, it seems possible to make some reasonable deductions.

It is widely assumed among Christian authors that, at least on more festive occasions, the head of the table community (father of the family, or leader of the *chavurah*) thanked God and blessed the food at the beginning of the meal. This assumption is usually based on descriptions in the *Mishnah*, particularly in *Berakoth*. Léon-Dufour, for instance, not only describes the structure of a first century Jewish brotherhood meal on this basis, he also gives verbatim one of the blessings the president of the table community is supposed to have said.[17] How widespread and especially how uniform such a custom may have been, is, however, highly questionable. Thus Dr. Tzvee Zahavy professor, rabbi, widely known author, lecturer and expert on Judaism, states that "the structured system of blessings before and after the meal developed most dramatically in the late second century," although "there is no reason to doubt that special prayers were recited on the Sabbaths, Festivals, and New Year's days during Temple times." However a formal requirement for regular recitation of such prayers, including table blessings came only after 70 CE. He continues:

> Traditions ascribed to rabbis of later generations take for granted that a Jew must recite blessings before eating any foods. Surprisingly, only one early rule takes for granted that a person had to recite blessings before eating any fare at a meal […]we should not construe the references to blessings recited at a meal as evidence of an early first century practice of reciting blessings before consuming any foodstuff. The only food blessing mentioned in Berakhot ascribed to an authority who flourished before Ushan times is the blessing over wine.[18]

This statement obviously makes conclusions based on *Mishnah* questionable.

On the other hand, blessings giving glory to God for a gift received also express gratefulness, because they signal that the recipient is aware of the fact that he or she is the recipient of a favour from God. Given the emphasis the Hebrew Bible places on thanksgiving (the Psalms alone mention it 57 times), we can reasonably assume that there was a custom, at least in more observant Jewish families and *chavuroth*, of saying some form of blessing over meals, even if it may have been spontaneous rather than obligatory. The absence of rules

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[17] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 305–306.

[18] Tzvee Zahavy, *Studies in Jewish Prayer* (www.zahavy.com), 8, 13–14; (accessed December 4, 2006).

governing such a prayer also emphasizes that we should not attach importance to their timing or form.

It is also important to remember that "to bless" had a different connotation for Jews in Jesus' time than it has for Christians today. We are used to thinking of "blessing" somebody or something in terms of calling down God's blessing on that person or thing. This sense certainly exists in the Hebrew Bible, as manifested in the beautiful words of Num. 6:24–26:

> The Lord bless you and keep you,
> the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you,
> the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

There is, however, also another commonly used sense, that of blessing the Lord: "Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard" (Ps 66:8); "Sing to the Lord, bless his name"(Ps 96:2); or "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and don't forget his benefits" (Ps 103:1–2). These carry a strong component of praise and thanksgiving. This connotation is especially obvious in the meal-blessings that have come down to us through the *Mishnah*.[19] We can also find this connection in the New Testament, where *eulogein* (blessing or praising) and *eucharistein* (thanking) are used in a way that makes them appear to be equal in meaning and importance (e.g., Mk 6:41 and 8:6, Mk 14:22, 1Cor 11:24, etc.).[20]

We have seen above that sharing bread has the power to confer and confirm unity and equality. Even though the examples given deal with specific areas, this understanding is apparently widespread both in geography and history. Margaret Visser, classicist, social anthropologist and author of several books on table customs, writes:

> [B]read became […] and has remained, a deeply significant symbol, a substance honoured and sacred. We still remember that breaking bread and sharing it with friends 'means' friendship itself and also trust, pleasure and gratitude in sharing. Bread as a particular symbol, and food in general becomes, in its sharing, the actual bond which unites us.[21]

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[19] Cf., for instance, Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 305; also present-day *Haggadah* prayers.

[20] See Betz, *Eucharistie*, 26; and Alasdair I.C. Heron, *Table and Tradition. Toward an Ecumenical Understanding of the* Eucharist (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 4.

[21] Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner: The Origin, Evolution, Eccentricities and Meaning of Table Manners* (Canada: HarperCollins, 1991), 3.

The general importance of bread and the respect and the evidently nearly universal symbolism attached to it (at least in areas of the world where bread is available and is or was eaten as a main staple) make it reasonable to assume that a symbolism involving inclusion and a sense of unity was indeed attached to it at the time of the Last Supper. It is also interesting to note that the symbol is not merely the nourishing material, i.e., the bread, but is at least equally the act of sharing. The function of the bread itself is more to act as a means of achieving what the symbol signifies: it is the sharing that makes it important. Thus Johannes Betz concludes that the basic meaning of the breaking of bread at the Last Supper (i.e., the symbol) was the distribution and sharing in both the bread and the blessing that was related to it.[22] Alasdair I. C. Heron, a Protestant theologian, adds:

> Sharing in the bread […] gathered those present into a single community at the table and made the meal a shared one […] The meal itself established a bond between those who shared in it: it did not merely symbolise the bond, but actually constituted it.[23]

2.2.3 Conclusions

Proper understanding of the meal-culture in which a particular meal occurs is important. The importance of communal meals, whether or not in family (however defined or structured), is evident throughout human history. As far as can be determined, the concept of such meals either signalling or bringing about acceptance and unity is attached to communal eating everywhere. This was certainly so in the area and era in question. Unfortunately there is no reliable, clear and unequivocal evidence that would permit us to draw incontrovertible conclusions about the context of the Last Supper. Nevertheless, there is adequate information of sufficient authority to make some valid assumptions.

There is no doubt that communal meals were fairly commonplace in Palestine in the first century CE, even though neither their usual bill of fare or customary structure can be determined, given the scarcity of records and the apparently great variety of customs over both time and location. Many authors dealing with the question, including those attempting to reconstruct or explain the events of the Last Supper, rely on information contained in the *Mishnah*, especially the section *Berakoth*. The problem with using this source is that even

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[22] Betz, *Eucharistie*, 11.

[23] Heron, *Table*, 25.

though the earliest parts of the *Mishnah* were written as early as the middle of the first century, the bulk, and *Berakoth* in its entirety, was written considerably later. In addition, the text essentially deals with rites, not with the meals themselves; family and non-temple communal rituals were not regulated as to form prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Consequently the *Mishnah* provides no reasonable guide to the understanding of meals in Jesus' lifetime.

The situation regarding sharing bread is somewhat better. Providing half of the nutritional value of the first-century Jewish diet, bread was arguably the most important foodstuff. It was therefore regarded as something special and special attention was paid to its use. Given the importance of bread in the diet of the area (including the flat, pancake-like loaf still customary in many places around the Middle East), it is an obvious candidate for becoming a focus of some sort of ritual expressing the symbolism of a communal meal. The importance attached to thanking and glorifying God for the gifts he provides in Jewish religious tradition makes it likely that such a prayer or blessing over bread was fairly common at the time, even if it was not prescribed or obligatory. Breaking and sharing the pieces of a loaf of bread among those at the table is even today practiced in some areas, regardless of the prevailing religion, and is understood to symbolize acceptance and unity among the participants. It is thus reasonable to assume that both the practice and a like interpretation were rather common in Jesus' time.

2.3 The Passover meal

The Jewish Passover is an important part of any discussion of communal Jewish meals and, therefore, certainly part of the historical context of the Last Supper. The basis of Jewish identity was and remains the Exodus and the covenant and, thus, Passover is a central event of the year, with the paschal meal being, at least for the average person, the most important part of its celebration. There is, however, an ongoing debate regarding the historical accuracy of the connection between Passover and the Last Supper. While in Jewish life and thinking there was no sharp division between the religious and the secular, just as there was no separate civil or criminal law and all aspects of life were governed by the *Torah*, we have to look into this debate and its significance for our inquiry before we turn to the history and the celebration of Passover.

2.3.1 The Last Supper and the Passover

"The difference between these narratives [which describe the Last Supper] and the difficulty of their interpretation make the reconstruction of what was said, done and intended a highly conjectural affair."[24] As Alasdair I.C. Heron points out,

> Even within the New Testament, Jesus himself, the meaning of his cross, the Last Supper and Eucharist are seen and interpreted from several angles, and different theological and liturgical influences have helped to shape the accounts we possess. The evidence is fragmentary, diverse and incomplete.[25]

I shall deal with the institution narratives in detail later in this chapter; here, I want to examine the question of the nature of the last meal Jesus had with his disciples.

At first glance this setting of the problem may seem superfluous, or even gratuitous: the long-standing understanding of the Church and certainly its liturgical tradition interpret the Last Supper as a Paschal meal. However, interpretation and historicity are different things and, while each can be, at the same time, valid within its own domain, interpretation always depends on the historico-social context in which it arises. In this case it is important to ascertain, as much as possible, whether there is a difference between what the nature of the meal in fact was and how it has been interpreted, and if there is a significant difference

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[24] S.W. Sykes, "Sacrifice in the New Testament and Christian Theology," *Sacrifice*, eds. M.F.C. Bourdillon and Meyer Fortes (London: Academic Press, 1980), 71.

[25] Heron, *Table*, 54.

between the two, why that is so. If there is even a reasonable likelihood that the Last Supper was in fact *not* a Passover meal, this could have important theological and ecclesiological consequences.

2.3.1.1 Witness of the New Testament: the date

There is no doubt that the Last Supper was a Jewish meal; not only do four of the five narratives (Mt, Mk, Lk and 1Cor) mention the blessing and breaking of bread, both typical at Jewish meals, the whole setting and essence of the Jesus story assume it.[26] Similarly, it also is certain that it was a community meal, consumed by Jesus and the disciples.[27] The question is whether it was a Passover meal, as celebrated, at the time, by the Jews.

It is a well-known fact that the chronology of the Last Supper narratives in the synoptics presents problems. The synoptic dating of the Last Supper (Mt 26:17 and Mk 14:12: "On the first day of Unleavened Bread"; Lk 22:7: "The day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed") is in itself ambiguous. The first day of the festival of the Unleavened Bread would normally fall on the fifteenth day of the first month, and the Passover lamb was killed and the Paschal meal eaten on the fourteenth. This difficulty however is a minor one, because as Judah B. Segal, widely respected scholar of Middle East languages and culture explains, in "the second and first century B.C. the eves of festivals were days of special observance, tantamount themselves to festivals. This was particularly so in the case of Passover."[28] The question of dating the meal, however, points to a more serious problem.

If the Last Supper was held on the eve of the Passover, it was, in fact held on a sabbath because, according to Jewish reckoning, the day started at sundown, and thus the trial and crucifixion of Jesus would have had to happen during Passover. The execution of a criminal, or even the presence of his corpse within the precinct of the city would render the whole city unclean and thus unfit for the celebration of the festival. It might be argued that the execution

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[26] On Jewish meals and breaking bread: Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 163; Jean-Marie van Cangh, "L'évolution de la tradition de la Cène," *Lectures et Relectures de la Bible: Festschrift P.-M. Bogaert*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 144, eds. J.-M. Auwers and A. Wénin (Leuven: Leuven University, 1999), 278.

[27] I will return to the question of the meaning of *disciple*, in the context of participation at the Last Supper.

[28] J.B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover from the Earliest times to A.D. 70* (London/New York/Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1963), XVI, 245.

was carried out by Romans, not Jews, and that it would have taken place at Golgotha, which may have been outside the city limits, but this approach contradicts the described action of Jewish authorities in demanding the removal of the corpses (Jn 19:31). Also, this still leaves open the problem of the trial. The Sanhedrin could conceivably meet and even hold a trial on a sabbath, because debate in itself was not considered to be "work," but this was impossible in a case where somebody was accused of a capital crime, such as blasphemy, the charge Jesus faced. In all such cases minutes had to be taken – and that was work. Thus Segal concludes, "it is as impossible that the Sanhedrin should have tried a capital charge on the eve of the festival as on the day of the festival itself."[29]

To compound the problem, John gives a different dating to these events. In 13:1 he simply writes that the supper happened "before the festival of the Passover" and in 19:31 specifies that Jesus died on the "day of Preparation" (Paul avoids the problem by dating the Last Supper in 1Cor 11:23 with the statement, "on the night when he was betrayed"). Scholars throughout the centuries have come up with all kinds of theories to reconcile these facts and give a credible historical explanation to the synoptic dating. It is impossible here to present even the more important ones, nor is it necessary. A summary of the major arguments still being discussed today should suffice.

There are many scholars who find the whole question meaningless on the basis that the narratives clearly show the paschal character of the meal because it follows the same pattern as the *seder*.[30] The major difficulty with this type of argument is that "Jesus' last meal, even if it did occur on the eve of Passover, was not a 'seder', for there was no 'seder' in the Second Temple period."[31] Apart from this, it would also be "erroneous to assume that customs were so fixed

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Cf., for instance Léon-Dufour (*Sharing*, 164) referring to J. Jeremias having built his whole argument on this assumption; the *Haggadah* (the order of the *seder*) "supplies a very likely setting for Jesus' reinterpretation of the bread and wine with which the main course opened and closed" (Heron, *Table*, 22); Solomon Zeitlin, influential Jewish historian: "the description of the Last Supper given in the gospels is undoubtedly a record of the *seder* of the first night of the Passover" ("Passover and the Last Supper," *Passover Anthology*, ed. Philip Goodman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961)), 14; Cangh not only takes the *Berakoth* as a clear pattern for the Last Supper, he insists on the exact words of the benediction ("L'évolution," 257–264); etc.

[31] Joshua Kulp, "The Origins of the Seder And Haggadah," *Currents Of Biblical Research* 4.1 (2005), 113, at http://cbi.sagepub.com (accessed November 14, 2007).

at that time that no innovation was permitted."[32] Thus, this line of reasoning really does not bring us closer to the solution of our question: was the Last Supper a Passover meal?

There is also a theory that Jesus may have followed a different calendar from that used by the Temple. Two thousand years ago there was no fixed calendar on which everybody agreed, even in the Jewish milieu, where at least some important holy days were defined by the calendar. As far as this theory is concerned, Jean-Marie van Cangh neatly sums up the situation: either Jesus followed the solar calendar of Jubilees and Qumran (not the lunar one of the Temple), or the synoptics "made of the Last Supper a paschal meal."[33] The theory of different calendars is not new. Herbert Haag, referring to A. Jaubert, *La date de la Cène* (1957), writes that we should seriously consider this theory.[34] Yet he also points out a problem with it: if Jesus used a different calendar, he would have celebrated Passover without the sacrificial lamb, which could only be killed in the Temple according to the Temple calendar, and thus John's interpretation of Jesus as the Paschal Lamb would become problematic.

Another question raised by this theory is why the synoptics do not mention that Jesus followed a calendar other than that of the Temple. There are again theories to explain it. Thus Douglas Richardson speculates, "John's dating of the Last Supper represents the Asian not the Roman tradition, and is historically likely. If John is right, Mark uses the date symbolically and it expresses his intention."[35] This argument is taken up by Cangh, who also argues that Mark's dating of the Last Supper is symbolic and therefore does not have to be factual. He bases his view on the providentially appearing unnamed host, the symbolism of the donkey, precedents in the Hebrew Bible (1Sam 10:3–6), and expressions ("my Passover"). Léon-Dufour presents a different reasoning: in his view Mark is describing the Passover of Jesus, not the festival itself. He supports his argument with the fact that in the Markan account no detail of the Jewish Passover is mentioned.[36]

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[32] Bahr, "Seder and Eucharistic Words," 493.

[33] Cangh, "L'évolution," 270.

[34] Herbert Haag, "Passah," *LTK*, vol. 8, col. 136: "Die Hypothese, Jesus könnte nach dem Kalender v. Qumràn das P. am Dienstagabend ohne rituell geschlachtetes P. lamm gefeiert haben, ist durchaus ernst zu nehmen."

[35] Robert Douglas Richardson, "A Further Inquiry into Eucharistic Origins with Special Reference to New Testament Problems," in Lietzmann, *Mass*, 296.

[36] For Cangh see "L'évolution," 273–274; for Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 193.

Interestingly, not one of all those who describe the pericopes as based on symbolism dispute the Passover character of the Last Supper. But, is it reasonable to assume that the evangelists deliberately changed the date of the Last Supper? Here the opinions differ radically. Segal posits:

> It is more credible to maintain that the Synoptic Gospels should have changed a Last Supper which was not a Pesah [Passover] meal into a Pesah meal […] than that John should have denied to the Last Supper the qualities of the Pesah meal which would have endowed it with special sanctity.[37]

While this opinion sounds eminently acceptable, Cangh, following on Joachim Jeremias and Berthold Klappert (in *Dictionary of NT Theology*) argues that the synoptics "had no reason to add afterwards" the paschal connection, because the weekly celebrations of the Eucharist are not exactly the same as the Passover, which is celebrated yearly. He (and others) sees the different dating in John's gospel as a means of emphasizing the concept of Jesus as the Paschal Lamb, by placing the death of Jesus at exactly the same time when the paschal lambs were slaughtered in the Temple.[38] Both arguments are supported and it is difficult do decide between them.

Beyond the question of the date, there are other problems with the presentation of the Last Supper as a Paschal feast. We have already mentioned that, at least in Mark, no detail of the Passover meal is mentioned. As a matter of fact, none of the narratives mentions any of the foods or any important aspect of the Passover meal, other than the bread and the wine. Hans Lietzmann points out that no mention is made of the *midrash* on the exodus and the wandering as demanded not only in the much later *Berakoth*, but in the Bible itself; that according to the New Testament, *artos* (leavened bread) instead of *azyma* (unleavened bread) is used in all four institution narratives; and finally, that no lamb is mentioned.[39] These omissions and difficulties lead some scholars to conclude that the Last Supper could not have been a Passover meal. What is very difficult to understand is how or why the central item around which the meaning of the feast was built, namely, the lamb, could have been ignored. Thus Segal concludes that "[t]he very fact that the most important component of the Pesah meal is

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[37] Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 245.

[38] Cangh, "L'évolution," 271.

[39] Lietzmann, *Mass*, 172.

not mentioned by the Synoptic Gospels is a clear indication of the Last Supper as a Pesah meal is an artificial device."[40]

The answer to this is often that the lamb (as well as other important foods) was omitted because it had no theological significance.[41] Another argument is that the reason for the omission is that Christians at the time of the writing of the gospels held that Jesus himself was the paschal lamb.[42] These two arguments are obviously contradictory, and together they draw attention to an opportunity apparently lost to the authors of the institution narratives, which further casts doubt on the assertion that the Last Supper was a Paschal meal. There is no doubt that the tradition of regarding Jesus as the Paschal Lamb developed quite early in the Christian community, in all likelihood before the writing of the gospels (cf. 1Cor 5:7 dated between 54–57 CE), it is therefore hard to accept that the authors would not have taken advantage of the symbolic potential the consumption of the Passover lamb would offer.

2.3.1.2 Witness of the New Testament: the bread used

It seems even more difficult to explain the use of the explicit term *artos*, leavened bread, in all pericopes containing a description of the Last Supper. During the second half of the first century the majority of Christians were still Jewish, most of whom, at least until the destruction of the Temple, participated in Jewish worship and considered themselves to be Jewish. It seems unbelievable that in this atmosphere such a mistake could have been made or tolerated; and that, not once, but five times (Mk. 14:22; Mt 26:26; Lk 22:19; 1Cor 11:23, 27), based in all likelihood on several different traditions.

There is no doubt that the synoptics and Paul clearly state a strong connection between the Last Supper and Passover. As Terrence Klein of Fordham University writes, "It is still not certain whether or not the Last Supper was a Passover meal.[…] Scholarly consensus is divided on the point, but is united in viewing the meal as taking place in a Passover context."[43] Rudolph Pesch, the oft-quoted author, moves from context to content, believing that, while the actual events may differ, the elements of the meal, as narrated in the pericopes, do have a

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[40] Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 245.

[41] Thus, for instance, H. Patsch, as described in Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 88.

[42] Zeitlin, "Passover," 14.

[43] Terrence W. Klein, "Institution Narratives at the Crossroads," *Worship* 67.5 (September 1993): 410.

very strong paschal meaning; to which Haag adds the interpretation that, even if the Last Supper was not a Passover meal, according to the will of Jesus it is the Passover of the new covenant.[44]

2.3.1.3 Implications

Thus we are faced with two possibilities that still resist a clear resolution: either the Last Supper was in fact a Passover meal, but is presented in the gospels and, to a lesser extent, in 1Corinthians in such a way as to radically alter the historical feast's meaning; or it was not, but the early Christian community – or, more precisely, communities – understood it to have important paschal importance. As Betz points out, the controversy is still raging and the question is not merely one of historical accuracy, it has theological and, I maintain, ecclesiological implications.[45]

If we accept the first possibility, Jesus and the disciples did in fact celebrate a paschal meal. The most likely explanation for the difficulties in dating the event and the absence of any mention of the lamb is that, for whatever reason, it was a meal taken at an earlier date than the traditional evening of the 14th day of the first month. In this case, the participants obviously could not eat the paschal lamb, which would have yet to be slaughtered in the Temple on the fourteenth. It would then make sense that the focus, at least in the narratives, would shift to a symbol that was generally known at the time. The bread-rite is a likely candidate. Not only was it widely practiced, it also had a well-understood meaning: unity among those who shared in it.

This would leave open the possibility of presenting Jesus, himself, as the paschal lamb. This appears to be important, given that the lamb is used as a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt, the night of the last plague, and as such is focused entirely on the act of God redeeming the Hebrews. While this symbolism is also connected to God's choice of them as his people and the beginning of the covenant, it has, as yet, very little to do with human attitudes and relationships: the ball is, as it were, in God's court. Making the bread a symbol of Jesus, the "Lamb of God," changes the symbolism radically. The fundamental meaning

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[44] Pesch, *Wie Jesus,*70; Haag, "Passah," col. 136.

[45] "Problematisch, und bis zur Stunde heiss umstritten und viel verhandelt ist der Paschacharakter des letzten Mahles Jesu. Dabei geht es nicht nur um die historische Frage nach dem äusserem Verlauf, sondern auch vor allem um die theologische Frage nach dem inneren Sinn der Feier," Betz, *Eucharistie*, 8.

becomes *unity*. The most obvious, "surface" meaning is unity among those sharing the bread – the ball is in the human court. The deeper meaning is unity with Christ and, through him, with God. While similar, this is fundamentally different from the relationship established in the covenant of the Exodus, elevating humanity to a level where divine-human unity is possible, in Old Testament terms, unimaginable (even more than 2000 years later it is still difficult to accept).

Even if we assume that, in spite of all indications to the contrary, the Last Supper was indeed a regular Passover meal, this conclusion is inescapable – quite possibly even more so. In this case, there is a deliberate choice made in all four pericopes to completely disregard the lamb as the central focus of the meal and place a bread-rite using leavened bread in its place. This could be all the more significant because, even though unleavened bread was undoubtedly used during the Passover meal, there is no source indicating that any form of the bread-rite was used in connection with the feast prior to the destruction of the Temple.

If we accept that the Last Supper was, in fact, not a Passover meal, the problem is then reversed: why would the synoptics present it explicitly and emphatically as a Passover meal? To properly examine this question it is necessary to examine the Passover itself.

2.3.2 The Passover in history and in the first century

2.3.2.1 Sources

Here, however, the researcher is faced with a difficulty. "We have no information on any ancient Passover ceremony," laments Léon-Dufour, to which Segal adds, that, in spite of the importance and influence of the pre-70 CE Passover on Hebrew social and religious practice, "no full-scale study of the Hebrew Passover […] has appeared since G. Beer's introduction to his edition of the *Mishnah* tractate *Pesahim* nearly fifty years ago."[46] Segal's complaint exactly locates the problem for the researcher. The primary sources for the history of the Passover festival that pre-date 70 CE, the Bible, the Book of Jubilees, the Wisdom of Solomon, two *ostraca* and one papyrus from Elephantine, all also pre-date the time period we are interested in, by several centuries. There are only fragments of Ezekielos and the "calendar" at Qumran,

[46] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, (338); Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, vi.

Megalith Ta'anith, Philo, and Josephus dated closer to the beginning of the Christian Era.[47] This obviously is not much information on which to reconstruct a history that was not only long, but, judging from the variations in the biblical descriptions, also quite complex.[48] In addition, though the sources are scarce, there is a remarkable diversity in the ways scholars perceive and interpret them.[49]

As Tabory, Haag and others point out, one of the consequences of this situation is that for the period leading up to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE, the main source for the liturgical life, and particularly for the Passover customs, is the *Mishnah*.[50] This extremely important collection of documents is the result of an attempt by second- and third-century CE rabbis to collect and codify the oral tradition and the oral law in order to preserve, adapt, and ensure their active survival in the Diaspora. As such, it was "life saving" for Judaism and the Jewish religious and ethnic culture. Given the time and the circumstances of its creation, however, the *Mishnah*'s validity as regards the details of actual practices during the Second Temple period is, at best, uncertain.[51] Segal's opinion is clear:

> Where the Mishnah describes the [Passover] ritual of the Temple it may be employed with confidence […] Where, however, our sources deal with practices outside the Temple, and particularly the practices of the home, the greatest caution must be exercised in attributing their observance to the period before A. D. 70.[52]

The situation is made all the more difficult, because, as Zahavy describes it, the period between 200 BCE and 200 CE was a turbulent one in Jewish history, and the most formative for Jewish prayer and liturgy. Obviously the greatest changes were caused by the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE and the subsequent dispersal of the Jews, including those converted to Christianity, but the changes began earlier. Thus, for instance, rabbinism, as such, took shape after the destruction of the Temple, but the rabbis were certainly already influential during the life of Jesus, who was himself called "rabbi." The most influential of these early rabbis were Hillel (d. c 20 CE) and Shammai (50 BCE–30 CE), who were also leaders and founders of two

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[47] Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 1.

[48] John L. McKenzie, "Passover," *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, c1965), 643.

[49] Jeremiah Unterman, "Passover," *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (*HBD*), ed. Paul Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 753.

[50] Tabory, "Towards a History," 63; Haag, "Passah," col.135.

[51] Haag, "Passah," col. 135.

[52] Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 257–258.

so-called "houses," that is, groups of disciples that followed their teachings. It is noteworthy that the *Mishnah* builds some of its statements on arguments between the Houses of Hillel and Shammai, indicating that there was considerable disagreement between these two influential groups regarding Jewish religious life. Formal prayers originating in the first half of the first century CE also point to considerable diversity in religious practices.[53]

2.3.2.2 Passover in the first century CE

What, then, can we know of the Passover celebrations? Originally, Passover may have been a spring festival celebrating (and sacrificing) the first-born of the flocks, but Exodus and Deuteronomy describe the religious significance it acquired: a memorial to God's action that freed the ancestors from captivity, established the Hebrews as his own people and covenanted him to them. While at the time of the *Book of Jubilees* (2nd century BCE) the feast was still consumed in or around the Temple, this became more and more difficult as the number of participants increased and by Jesus' time the Paschal feast was no longer consumed there. As a matter of fact, the description of the feast in *Jubilees* marks the beginning of a transition that made the feast an occasion of family celebration.[54] This may have been a return to the original format, if not necessarily the original content: in the earliest sources the feast appears to be a family event with no mention of any part played by a priest.[55] One important function of the Passover, as a family feast, was to create a bond between generations.[56] "Family," by the time of Jesus, could mean the *chavurah* (or *haburah*) – a group of pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the celebrations, or friends that periodically got together for community meals.[57]

Segal warns us not to apply too readily later Jewish practice, for instance the *seder*, to the analysis of New Testament pericopes dealing with Passover.[58] This warning often seems to be

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[53] Tzvee Zahavy, *Studies in Jewish Prayer:* on Jewish prayer and liturgy, 1; on rabbinism, 2; on Hillel and Shammai, 7; on formal prayers, particularly the *Schema* and the *Amidah* ("Prayer of the Eighteen Blessings"), 13.

[54] See Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 30 and 232.

[55] Haag, "Passah," col. 135.

[56] Unterman, *Passover*, 754.

[57] Lawrence A. Hoffman, "The Passover Meal in Jewish Tradition," *Passover and Easter*, eds. Bradshaw and Hoffman, 10–11.

[58] Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 241.

forgotten or disregarded, as quite a few authors use the *seder* liturgy as a pattern in discussing the Last Supper.[59]

In spite of these difficulties, there are some pivotal points we can safely accept as historically valid and that are important for our inquiry: Passover was a celebration and remembrance of the Exodus; it was an occasion for remembering God's favour and not for atonement; the important aspect of the celebration was the meal. These are not discreet points but rather different views of the same reality. The celebration, even though it continued for seven days as the Festival of Unleavened Bread, remained focused on what happened on the evening of the "fourteenth day of the first month" (Ex. 12:2).[60] To understand the importance of this remembrance we have to keep in mind that for Jews of Jesus' time, as much as at present, the kind of remembering required here is more an *anamnesis* than a memorial:

> [T]he Passover supper, to devout Jews at least, not only commemorated the past but also made it present. It enabled them to re-enter those past events [of the Exodus] and experience vividly the meaning of their salvation. And it made the God of Israel present to them in a fuller and richer way than their ordinary awareness of God's presence. This ritual meal was, then, a complex symbol into which Jews could enter and encounter the God of their ancestors. It was a door to the sacred through which they could pass from everyday profane existence into the sacred space and time of the exodus.[61]

Proper understanding of the focus of the Jewish Passover is extremely important if we are to understand the significance of the Last Supper. There is some difference of opinion between scholars as to whether in the first century CE Pentecost was or was not the feast celebrating the giving of the Torah and thus of the formal establishment of the covenant.[62] Passover, on the other hand, was clearly a remembrance of God saving the Hebrews from Egypt, of his "love and mercy, his faithfulness not only to their ancestors, but also to them. The old history was

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[59] Cf., for instance, Richardson, "Further Inquiry," 648f., also referring to "Ligier, Jeremias and others"; Haag, "Passah," col. 136; Antal Várnagy, *Liturgika* (Abaliget: Lámpás Kiadó, 1993) 375; Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 84, 303–305, refers to Dalman, Billerbeck and Jeremias; Martos, *Doors*, 213; Rudolf Pesch, *Das Abendmahl und Jesu Todesverständniss* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1978) throughout the work; etc. To what conclusions this can lead is shown by Léon-Dufour's statement that "of course" children asked questions at the Passover supper (*Sharing*, 164); there is really no information on this.

[60] Biblical quotations, unless part of a quoted text or otherwise indicated, are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition* (*NRSV*) (Nashville: Catholic Bible Press, c1993).

[61] Martos, *Doors*, 213; see also Heron, *Table*, 20.

[62] Cf. for instance, Anton Arens, "Pfingsten," *LTK,* vol. 8, col. 421; MacKenzie, *Dictionary*, 457–458; Joseph B Tyson, "Pentecost," *HBD*, 769; etc.

the key to their own identity as God's people."[63] This was, then, much more than a memorial to a historical event: it signalled the beginning of the covenant, the commitment of God, on which all else depended.

Two things are of special importance to us. First, this celebration was "the key" to the identity of the Jewish people. True, the whole of biblical history revolves around God's continuing care for them. True, also, that even before the Exodus story begins, God has already shown his willingness to take care of those he chooses for special functions, such as Noah, Abram, and Joseph. But in all these stories God's relationship is with a single person or, at most, a single clan. Now, for the first time, he includes a whole people. This is the beginning of their story: all the rest is a continuation and, in a very real sense, a consequence of this event which is relived at the Passover.

Equally important is that at this point God makes no demand on the Hebrews, other than that they leave behind their state of slavery and take what he offers without condition. As Heron points out, the covenant is here quite obviously between two partners who are of fundamentally different status.[64] In a world were status meant near absolute power to enforce one's wishes, for one of higher status to offer a covenant without any hint that its validity depended on the lesser party fulfilling some obligation must have been quite unimaginable. (In reality, even today we find it difficult to accept the idea when the status difference is as huge as between God and creature.)

The presentation of the Last Supper in the synoptics and 1Corinthians presupposes this understanding of the Passover meal. That, and the fact that the texts link the two events, makes it evident why the Last Supper was, and remains, the "decisive moment" of the founding of the Church. The explicit connection between it and Passover in the synoptics calls attention to the belief that here the new covenant is made, the new relationship with God is established. This relationship is that which defines the Church as the People of God. This free gift of God is based entirely on the good will of God, the only condition attached to it is acceptance. If the Church is to remain true to itself, it must remain true to the essential meaning of this moment.

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[63] Heron, *Table*, 20.

[64] Heron, *Table*, 30.

2.3.2.3 The Passover meal in the first century CE

This leads us to the Paschal meal. Even in the narrative instituting the Passover, Ex. 12, the focus is on the meal. There is some uncertainty among scholars as to when the feast became regularly and generally celebrated among the Hebrews, but it seems to be certain that by the end of the exile period it was so. As mentioned above, at that time the meal was consumed in the Temple area (cf. Deut. 16:5–6), but even there, essentially in family units.[65] While we have no description of the rites followed at those meals, in light of Ex. 12:14 and 13:8 it may be taken for certain that, besides the consuming of the meat of the lamb, a feature of the feast was the recounting of the Exodus story.

Other than this, however, we have to rely on speculation. As mentioned, many exegetes of the New Testament have assumed that the *seder* is a good indication of what the Passover feast was like at the time of Jesus. Unfortunately the validity of this assumption is questionable not only because the sources generally used are of a later origin, but also because they themselves do not appear to be reliable in this regard. There is general agreement among scholars of rabbinic literature that most of the elements known from the seder as described in the *Mishnah* are missing from descriptions in Second Temple literature, including Jubilees, Josephus, Philo, the Gospels, and the sections of the *Mishnah* and the *Tosefta* which deal with the Passover as offered in the Temple.[66]

To offset this difficulty some scholars turn to the cultural environment for help, on the grounds that, given the long Roman occupation and the strong Hellenistic influence in Palestine during the Second Temple period, it is entirely justified to assume that the meal customs of the time were adopted from, or adaptations of, Greco-Roman customs.[67] It appears that this is widely taken to apply to the Passover meal as well.[68] Unfortunately, we are faced here with the same problem as before. When Gordon Bahr claims that the structure of the paschal meal can be established from that of other festive meals and that these, in turn, paralleled the contemporary Greco-Roman meals, he is talking about Jewish meals in the

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[65] Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 15; also see 2Chr 35.

[66] Kulp, "Origins," 112.

[67] Cf. Tabory, "Towards a History," 62.

[68] Rabbi George Wolf, *Lexical and Historical Contributions on the Biblical and Rabbinic Passover* (New York: n.p., 1991) iv. The book appeared without publisher; there is no indication of how reliable the scholarship is.

Tannaic period, i.e. between 70–200 CE.[69] The same is essentially true of those scholars who argue for the influence of the Greco-Roman *symposia* on the Passover meal, because they effectively are discussing the *seder*, not the pre-70 meal.[70]

It seems that this leaves us with no alternative but to say that we simply have no reliable source for determining the structure of the Passover meal in Jesus' time. This would be true even if we assumed that there was one generally accepted and practiced pattern, an assumption that itself is highly questionable. Fortunately this situation does not present a serious obstacle to our inquiry. Undoubtedly it would be helpful to be able to establish with reasonable certainty what the different segments of the meal were, how they fit together and what, if any, meaning was attributed to each of them. As it is, we have to be satisfied with the picture the New Testament presents and start from there.

2.3.2.4 Summary

The destruction of the temple in 70 CE was a traumatic event in the history of the Jewish people that changed practically all aspects of their lives. This is especially true of anything connected with their religious practices, which at the time were focused on the temple and temple rituals. It is therefore not surprising that there are only scanty and often unreliable sources regarding the Passover meal, arguably one of the, if not the, most important focuses of the Old Testament religion.

What we can deduct with reasonable certainty are some points about the essential meaning of the feast that are important for our inquiry:

1. It was an occasion of *anamnesis* of the nation-forming event of the liberation of Hebrews from Egyptian slavery; as such it emphasized gratefulness and acted as the basis of the identity of the people;
2. Because, at the moment in history that was celebrated, the new relationship was established as a gift by God without any condition attached to it, except acceptance, the festival had no atoning symbolism attached to it;

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[69] Bahr, "Seder and Eucharistic Words," 473.

[70] Thus, for instance, Hoffman, "Passover Meal," 9; Tabory, "Towards a History," 65f; etc.

3. Its essential focus was the liberation and covenant offered by God;
4. The most important part of the celebration was the meal.

Since the institution narratives assume the paschal character of the Last Supper, these aspects will be of prominent importance in our discussion of the meaning of the events at that historic moment of the Church's history.

2.3.3 Conclusions

The apparently contradictory evidence and the still raging debate make it impossible to come to a definite decision as to whether the Last Supper was, in fact, a Passover meal, or if the authors (and the traditions that served as their sources) of the synoptic gospels only presented it as such. There is even less evidence regarding whether those who partook in the meal made any such connection, then or later. It is, however, certain that the narratives draw a strong enough link between the two so that the Lord's Supper does assume a clearly Paschal character.

Passover was, and still is, the foundation of Jewish identity and arguably the most important feast in Judaic religion. It commemorates the liberation from slavery and the establishment of the nation, thus the inception of the Covenant. Its main characteristic is *anamnesis*, the re-living of the exodus and thanksgiving. The covenant, as announced by Moses, is for the first time, offered to the whole nation. Not being restricted to an individual and his descendants, it also establishes unity among them. By connecting the Last Supper to the Passover these characteristics are extended to it. This becomes even more significant either if it was historically not a Paschal celebration, or if it was and the mention of the lamb was intentionally omitted, because both alternatives would indicate a deliberate emphasis on liberation, *anamnesis*, and unity.

2.4 The institution narratives

2.4.1 Scripture and history

For the Roman Catholic who is not particularly versed in the nature of Scripture, looking for the meaning of the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper may seem a waste of time. Isn't it clear? At every eucharistic celebration we hear them recited. Even though the text surrounding the words of Jesus varies, his words are always quoted as being:

> Take this all of you and eat it: this is my body which will be given up for you.
> Take this, all of you, and drink from it: this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me.

Isn't this what is important?

This of course is true, as far as the eucharistic celebration is concerned. Unfortunately, from the perspective of theology, and especially biblical studies, soteriology and ecclesiology, the situation is not as simple as that. The text spoken at the celebrations is a liturgical text, not a quotation from the Bible. It is a composite of different narratives, to some extent even an interpretation of them. It is the result of twenty centuries of developments in tradition, faith, theology and liturgy.

What we are trying to do is to discover, as much as possible, how Jesus and the disciples who participated at the Last Supper understood and interpreted his words and actions. The record we have that is closest to the event is found in the New Testament narratives. These are not historical accounts, nor were they ever meant to be. At the era of their writing, not only were the tools of modern historical research unavailable, historical writing included, as a matter of course, oral tradition, folktales and mythology. Also, all the books of the Bible show signs that they were written, and the material included selected, with very specific purposes in mind; this almost automatically excludes any claim to total historical accuracy. The stories narrated are intended to illustrate points the narrator wants to convey. The events presented are not only carefully selected, and thus do not present comprehensive historical pictures, they may also be quite freely adapted to suit the author's purpose.[71]

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[71] Thus Marianne Meye Thompson argues that while John does use material from tradition, he gives "a creative and dramatic interpretation of the historical material" ("The Historical Jesus and the Johannine Christ," *Exploring the Gospel of John. In Honor of D. Moody Smith*, eds. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black (Louisville, Westminster:

Yet, as Edwin Daschbach says: "God's inspiration of the Bible is not concerned with slavish adherence to the exact words Jesus spoke but with faithfulness [to] what he preached."[72] This, then, means that while we may not *know* the exact words or actions of Jesus, we can understand his teachings and the significance of his actions. The words set down in the New Testament may not be word-by-word quotations of the speeches of Jesus, or his words at all; they are still faithful representations of the sense of his teachings and thus part of God's self-revelation. This circumstance, rather than being a limitation on our inquiry, opens vast potentialities. A word, expression, or action may carry tremendously more meaning than its mere lexical definition. While it is important not to distort biblical statements through twenty-first century interpretations, revelation is meant to speak throughout history: we must still find the message that is directed to us in the twenty-first century. A prime example of how this method works would be the re-interpretation of some Old Testament pericopes in light of the New Testament revelation.

The narratives as we know them today have been passed to us through several "filters." As biblical scholarship has taught us, the most significant of these is probably the early tradition, or more precisely, traditions. The four gospels themselves show evidence of various traditions, sometimes even within the same work.[73]

From our perspective, it is important to keep in mind these potentialities and limitations in using sources of information. But, if we want to get closer to the understanding of the character of the "decisive moment" that the Last Supper was in the existence of the Church, we have to investigate, as much as possible, how Jesus and the disciples understood his words and actions *on that evening*. This in no way negates the importance of interpretations attached to the words and actions by the developing tradition; as noted above, this too is part of

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John Knox Press, 1996) 33); Stephenson H. Brooks points out that Matthew's presentation of the early Christian community is very likely coloured by the prejudices of his own time and place of writing (*Matthew's Community, the Evidence of His Special Sayings Material* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1987), 115); to which Nils Alstrup Dahl adds, "Matthew is hardly interested in the historically probable" ("The Passion Narrative in Matthew," *The Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Graham Stanton, 48); etc.

[72] Edwin Daschbach, *Interpreting Scripture. A Catholic Response to Fundamentalism* (Dubuque, IA: W.C. Brown, 1985) 42. Also cf., for instance, H. Schürmann, who "is prepared to admit that we cannot attain to any certainty about what Jesus actually said" (as reported by I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdsmans, 1980, 1981), 83).

[73] Thus B.H. Streeter, T.W. Manson, and G.D. Kilpatrick proposed four different traditions for Matthew: Mark, "Q", a special written source for Matthew ("M") and the oral "Antiochene tradition"; cf. Brooks, *Matthew's Community*, 11–12.

revelation. However, tradition does not encompass the whole of revelation, nor should it contradict the event itself. Thus, if we can show that, for the participants, these words and actions may have carried meanings that are not included, or are not emphasized, in the later tradition, and thus may have lost some of their importance, there is at least a strong chance that they are also part of revelation, quite possibly intended for a later generation. Re-emphasizing these aspects may thus shed new light on the existential nature of the Church. If this is even merely a plausible possibility, it behoves us to take careful note. To find out if this is so we have to turn to the institution narratives.

2.4.2 The pericopes

There are four pericopes in the New Testament that describe the words of institution: Mt 26:26–28, Mk 14:22–24, Lk 22:17–20, 1Cor 11:23–25. There are other parts of the descriptions of the Last Supper that are of interest, and other pericopes related to the Eucharist, but for the time being I shall focus on the words of institution. John, whose description of the Last Supper is by far the longest of the four evangelists, significantly does not mention the institution; in his gospel the washing of feet takes its place. We will discuss the implications of this pericope later.

Questions regarding the person and personality of the authors of the institution narratives, their communities, and the circumstances, necessities and intentions that led to the writing of the gospels and Paul's letters are not material at this point of our inquiry. It is also sufficient to take only a brief look at the traditions that are supposed to have been the sources of the pericopes. Some scholars have posited as many as four traditions for one document. Léon-Dufour, for example, proposed two basic traditions behind the Last Supper narratives, initially identified in the *Supplément* to the *Dictionnaire de la Bible* as a "cultic tradition" and a "farewell discourse," and later added that the cultic tradition represented came from two different "milieus," both in the synoptics and in 1Corinthians, named the "Antiochene tradition" and the "Markan tradition."[74] Stephenson H. Brooks, on the other hand, finds that Matthew alone presents evidence of traditions from "at least" two Jewish-Christian groups prior to the writing of the gospel and of one active at the time of the writing (it is, however, not clear whether all

[74] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing,* 77.

these traditions were influential in the composition of the institution narrative).[75] These examples (and there are many more) demonstrate that, according to the prevailing opinion of exegetes, the undisputable differences in the narratives are due, at least in part, to the influence of different traditions existing and very much alive in the first-century Christian communities.

There are two aspects related to this fact that are important for this work. First of all, at least at the beginning, these traditions were passed on orally; this accounts for some of the differences. Orally passed stories tend to change, even though "professional" storytellers have phenomenal memories and are remarkably accurate over long periods of time. The second aspect that merits mention is the wide variety in the traditions. Again, the diversity of traditions dealing with the same topic also indicates a divergence in the communities.

On the other hand, if there are parts of the narrative that are passed on identically by different traditions, that would indicate that those (whether they be words, description of events or personalities, etc.) are recognized as having special importance. Thus, if we can find this kind of agreement in the institution narratives, we would be justified in assuming that the different communities, which gave rise to the traditions, also held those words, deeds, etc. in high esteem.[76]

2.4.3 A synchronic reading

A synchronic reading of the institution narratives is probably the easiest way to discover both the agreements and the differences among the four institution narratives. For this work, the words and actions of Jesus, as reported in the narratives, are what is important, so the following two tables focus on these, and include other words and phrases only to the extent that they affect their meaning.

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[75] Brooks, *Matthew's Community*, 120.

[76] For a treatment of the role of traditions in the development of the New Testament cf. Bart D. Ehrman, *The N.T. A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3rd ed. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

In the tables "linking" words are presented in roman font; words that are the same in all four are printed in **bold face**; those which appear in three are in *italics*; those in two are underlined; variant readings are printed in a different type face, or put between asterisks.

TABLE I: A SYNCHRONIC READING OF THE INSTITUTION NARRATIVES

Mk 14:22–25	Mt 26:26–29	Lk 22:15–20	1Cor 11:23–25
[22]…he **took a loaf of bread,** and after ***blessing it*** he **broke it**, *gave it* to them and said, 'Take, **this is my body.**' [23]Then **he took a cup,** and after ***giving thanks*** he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. [24]He said to them, 'This is my blood of **the (new) covenant** which is poured out for many. [25]Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'	[26]…Jesus **took a loaf of bread,** and after ***blessing it*** he **broke it**, *gave it* to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; **this is my body**.' [27]Then **he took a cup**, and after ***giving thanks*** he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it all of you; [28]for this is my blood of **the (new) covenant** which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. [29]I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'	[15]He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; [16]*for I tell you, I will not eat it (never eat it again) until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*' [17]Then **he took a cup** and after ***giving thanks*** he said, '*Take* this and divide it among yourselves; [18]*for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom* of God comes.' [19]Then he **took a loaf of bread**, and when he had ***given thanks***, he **broke it** and *gave it* to them, saying '**This is my body**, which is *given *for you*. Do this in remembrance of me.' [20]And he did the same with the cup...saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is **the new covenant** in my blood.'…*	[23]…the Lord Jesus… **took a loaf of bread** [24]and when he had ***given thanks***, he **broke it** and said, '**this is my body** that *is* (broken) *for you*.' [25]In the same way **he took the cup** also… saying, 'This cup is **the new covenant** in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'

… Some ancient witnesses lack this section in whole or in part (Lk 22:19b–20).

To focus on those words that are present, in the same form, in all four pericopes, Table II deletes the rest:

TABLE II: THE WORDS COMMON TO THE INSTITUTION NARRATIVES

Mk 14:22–25	Mt 26:26–29	Lk 22:15–20	1Cor 11:23–25
[22]**took a loaf of bread, *blessing it* broke it**, [said,] '**this is my body.**' [23-24]**he took a cup, *giving thanks*** [said 'This is my blood of] **the (new) covenant**'	[26]**took a loaf of bread, *blessing it* broke it**, [said,] '**this is my body**.' [27]**he took a cup**, ***giving thanks*** [saying [28]'this is my blood of] **the (new) covenant**'	[17]**he took a cup, *giving thanks*** [19]**took a loaf of bread**, ***given thanks***, **broke it** [saying] '**This is my body**' [20]['This cup is] **the new covenant** [in my blood']	[23]**took a loaf of bread** [24]***given thanks*** **broke it** [said,] '**this is my body**' [25]**he took the cup** [and said, 'This cup is] **the new covenant** [in my blood].'

As we can see, there are precious few words on which the pericopes agree. The words "blessing it" and "giving (given) thanks" are included, though in bold italics, to distinguish them from those that agree completely. The reason for this inclusion is that according to many scholars the words translated as *bless* and *give thanks*, or their derivatives, were, in New Testament times, for all practical purposes synonyms.[77] To avoid the dispute, which has little or no bearing on our present search, we may understand both words as "having prayed over."

The picture is complicated by the fact that the actions and words regarding the cup are presented quite differently in the pericopes. Luke most differs from the others: there are words attached to two cups and the words over both somewhat overlap the other pericopes. The result is that Jesus appears to have prayed over a different cup, not specifically the one he identifies as a symbol of the new covenant. In addition, the fact that some important ancient witnesses lack all or part of verses 19b–20 fuels an ongoing debate regarding whether this can be considered part of the original gospel.[78] It is also noteworthy that in both Mark and

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[77] "*Eulogein*" and "*eucharistein*"; cf. Betz, *Eucharistie*, 26; Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 42f; Heron, *Table*, 4; etc.

[78] Bradly S. Billings, "Disputed Words in the Lukan Institution Narrative (Luke 22:19b–20): A Sociological Answer to a Textual Problem," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125.3: 38; Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., "The Gospel According to Luke," *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (*JBC*) vol. II, eds. Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Raymond E. Brown (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 157; Lietzmann, *Mass*, 177; etc.

Matthew the word *new*, referring to the covenant, is a variant reading in the early manuscript witnesses.[79]

In consequence, it is not possible to arrive at any conclusion as to what the acts and words of Jesus over the cup may have meant for him and the disciples. All that seems to be certain is that there was some action on the part of Jesus, possibly accompanied by words similar to those involving the bread, and that this signalled a connection between the blood of Jesus and the covenant. Whether it was understood either by Jesus or the disciples as a new covenant is debatable. It was clearly so understood by Paul and likely by his communities, but when this understanding became generally accepted by all, or the majority, of Christian communities is outside the scope of this work. Given my goal and assumptions I must therefore regretfully exclude the words over the cup from the present inquiry and focus solely on the words over the bread.

2.4.4 Conclusions

The intention here is to find, if possible, indications of how the participants may have understood the events at the Last Supper. Because no direct witnesses are available regarding the institution of the Eucharist, we have to rely on narratives that are derived from several traditions. Our assumption is that if the wide diversity of the earliest sources and traditions results in a relatively rare measure of concurrence in the New Testament,, this would indicate a high degree of probability that something of the understanding of the direct witnesses has been preserved.

A synchronic reading of the four institution narratives does indeed expose a remarkable identity regarding the words *Jesus took a loaf of bread, blessing it broke it, [said,] "this is my body."* The expression *blessing it* is included, even though in Luke and 1Corinthians it appears as *giving thanks,* because the two are used as synonyms in the New Testament. Such a total accordance in four different pericopes is extremely rare in the whole body of Scripture, further indicating not only a common origin, but also the extraordinary importance attached to the words by both the original witnesses and the traditions that served as sources for the narratives.

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[79] Thus, for instance, Bruce Manning Metzger claims: "It is much more likely that kainh/j is a scribal addition, derived from the parallel accounts in Lk 22.20 and 1Cor 11.25, than that, being present originally, it was omitted from" no less than five important early codices. (*A textual commentary on the Greek New Testament; a companion volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (3d ed.) (London, New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 95).

The words over the cup, while there is a similar concurrence, are used quite differently in the narratives, their provenance in at least one is even disputed. There is also strong evidence that in the first centuries CE the focus was primarily on the bread; the words over the wine are therefore not included in further discussion.

2.5 The bread-rite

2.5.1 The words over the bread

> [Jesus] **took a loaf of bread**, [and] ***blessing it*** **broke it**, [***gave it to them*** and said,] "**this is my body**."

The words "gave it to them" are missing from 1Corinthians. However, the context makes it clear that Paul is not interested here in giving an account of the Last Supper;[80] as a matter of fact, in verse 23 he clearly states that his audience already knows it. It is also quite clear from what is said both before and after the institution narrative itself that, in fact, the eucharistic bread was customarily consumed in the community of Corinth, an action that only gains meaning if it was known that the bread Jesus gave to the disciples was also consumed by them, i.e., it was given to them.[81] There is therefore no reason to suspect that these words would be missing from any of the traditions that formed the basis of the institution narratives, thus they can be used here to explore the meaning of the bread-rite.

We know with reasonable certainty that the breaking and sharing of bread was a well-known custom in first-century CE Palestine, and that its meaning, or at least an important part of its meaning, was inclusion and unity. There can, therefore, be little doubt that, for any participant at the Last Supper, this significance was obvious. The same is apparently true as far as the intended audiences of the New Testament narratives are concerned, because there is no attempt to give any explanation of its meaning or any mention of the reason for its use. Yet in

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[80] Cf.: Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 84: "The conclusion is inescapable: the purpose of the account is not directly to relate an episode in the life of Jesus but rather to proclaim a foundational action"; also Andrew McGowan, "'Is There a Liturgical Text in This Gospel?': The Institution Narratives and Their Early Interpretive Communities," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118.1 (Spring 1999): 79–80, where he argues that in 1Cor Paul does not describe, but interprets the Last Supper: "If there is a sense in which Paul suggests that the Corinthians imitate Jesus, he uses the narrative primarily to teach them what it means to imitate him"; Heron, *Table*, 4, who says that Paul in 1Cor 11:23–26 describes "*the celebration of the Eucharist by the church*" (emphasis original); etc.

[81] On the consumption of the eucharistic bread in Corinth, cf., Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 222; Richardson, "Further Inquiry," 325.

the bread-rite of the Lord's Supper there was also something unusual, surprising, and more, puzzling: the words *this is my body*.

2.5.1.1 Understanding the words

Even though there is a long-standing tradition that takes for granted that the words of the institution narratives, particularly those identifying the broken bread as his body, signify that Jesus predicted and explained his death as a sacrifice. Yet it is highly unlikely that either the disciples or Jesus himself so understood his words when they were uttered. Sacrificial interpretation can only be post-pascal, i.e., of the "second loop."

An alternate hypothesis could be that faith also has to look directly at the events of the Last Supper, without denying the possibility that here Jesus acts "as a prophet explaining *his own* symbolic gesture."[82] In this sense it is quite possible that the theory proposed by Betz fits the actions and words of Jesus. In discussing the "prophetic sign," Betz argues that when a prophet (including Jesus at the Last Supper) announces "in word and action" an event that God has ordered, the prophet thereby "causes" the event to happen, and that this establishes a "sacramental bond" between the sign and the signified.[83] This, however, does not mean that this was what Jesus intended or what the disciples understood his words and actions to mean *at the time*, or that the proposed understanding or intention encompasses everything that we should understand their message to be. Prophetic power is the ability to correctly proclaim the word of God: this may cause the predicted event to happen, but the prophet still cannot see the future, even if it is his or her own future.

There is no argument here that true prophets are telling the truth – but neither can there be an argument over whether they understand this truth in the same way we do. Being human, a prophet cannot foresee the future in the sense of *knowing* what is going to happen. We may not know exactly what Isaiah intended to speak about when he composed the Servant narrative, but we can be certain that it was not the fate of the Galilean carpenter-turned-rabbi living centuries later. In the same way, even though it is very difficult to comprehend, Jesus,

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[82] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 164. Emphasis original

[83] Betz, *Eucharistie,* 9: "so dass man von einem 'sacramentalen Band' zwischen zeichen und Bezeicheneten hat sprechen können."

fully God, was equally fully human, and as such, could not foresee the future.[84] This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that he could prophesy, but we have to understand his words, in themselves, to make them valid and true.

There can be little doubt that Jesus knew he was in danger. Not only are there passages in the gospels that imply or tell us that this is so,[85] a reasonably intelligent person in his position must have been aware that the way he was acting would enrage the powers that be and of the usual consequences of such rage. Was he aware of the way this could or would happen? This is less certain, even though he apparently had connections in the Sanhedrin itself who may have warned him.[86]

What is certain is that he could not know the future in the sense we know facts, or as God knows the future as well as the past. If Jesus had been able to predict his death on the cross to the point of being able to consciously define it as a sacrifice, then he certainly would also have been able to know about the resurrection; in which case, the agony in the garden would either make no sense, be a sham, or paint a very poor picture of Jesus as a man unable to show the same attitude towards suffering as did so many martyrs. Similarly, his cry on the cross, *why have you abandoned me?* would become nothing less than a lie, for he would *know*, as no mere human person can know, that God, the Father, never abandons us, and he would *know* that God would resurrect him in three days.

On the other hand, the situation very likely had become tense enough for Jesus to conclude that a drastic action might be planned against him. If so, it makes sense that at the festive dinner, whether or not it was a Passover supper, he wanted to express his love and concern to his friends and to somehow steel them against the coming shock.

When the prophets spoke, they not only presented revelation to us, people living hundreds or thousands of years later, they also proclaimed true revelation to their own people, the essence of which, if not the details, also remains true. When Jesus spoke at the Last Supper, he communicated with the disciples around him in symbols and language that had meaning, then

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[84] Cf., Phil 2; 6–7: "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness."

[85] Mt 4:12, 12:14–16, 34, 38–42, 20:18; Lk 13:31; Jn 7:1, etc.

[86] Thus Marshall can argue that "there can be no doubt that Jesus expected a martyr's death, and it is very probable that he saw his death in this general manner" (*Last Supper*, 89).

and there, outside of the context of crucifixion and resurrection. These words also were the Word, the revelation of God, as much as those very important meanings that became understandable and discoverable only after his resurrection. It is important to try to understand what this revelation may have meant for his contemporaries, because that meaning *also* remains valid today. As it is also the decisive moment in the existence of the Church, it is of vital importance that we pay careful attention to every word, every nuance of what God reveals to us through this event.

2.5.1.2 Bread as body

The use of the Greek *sôma* for *body* has interested several scholars. While Léon-Dufour points out that it is difficult to determine which Hebrew or Aramaic word was so translated and that *sôma* itself may signify "the person in relation to the universe, or the person as destined to die," there is no disagreement on the point that the meaning is closer to "person" than to "physical entity."[87] It is therefore rather clear that, whichever Hebrew or Aramaic word was used by Jesus (assuming a careful translation), at the very latest by the time Paul wrote 1Corinthians (judged to be the oldest of the four institution narratives)[88] the words were understood to mean "this is me."[89]

In the Jewish bread ritual of the first century CE, the unity of those around the table was achieved by the act of sharing the bread. The bread, as such, was merely the means or instrument that made it possible for the sharing to bring that unity about.[90] As with other customs, this interpretation must have become ingrained, and thus understood as a matter of course, to the degree that it needed no explanation in the narratives. Jesus, by identifying with the bread, makes it the "carrier" of his person, and thus he also assumes the functions of the bread in that context;[91] he, like bread, nourishes us and also becomes the means by which the

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87 Léon-Dufour *Sharing*, 119–120; on the latter point cf., Pesch, *Wie Jesus*, 7 and *Abendmahl*, 91–92; Betz, *Eucharistie*, 23; Ossom-Batsa, *Institution*, 117.

88 Cf., Herron, *Table,* 4, 6; Sykes, *Sacrifice*, 71; Marshall, *Last Supper*, 39; Pesch, *Abendmahl*, 34.

89 It is interesting that the *La Bible, Nouvelle Traduction* (Paris/Montreal: Bayard/Médiastpaul, 2001) does in fact use "c'est moi" = "is me" both for Mark and Luke. but retains the traditional "my body" in Matthew.

90 Cf., Betz, *Eucharistie*, 11; Heron, *Table*, 25; Marshall, *Last Supper*, 84; MacPhee, "Medicine," 63; Richardson, "Further Inquiry," 325; Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 31.

91 I intentionally do not use "symbol" here, because that term has a rather wide range of meanings. By "carrier" I mean that the complete reality of the person of Jesus becomes, through the bread, accessible and perceptible (yet

unity, symbolized by the bread-rite, is achieved. Breaking and sharing the bread is what brings about the unity; the emphasis is on the sharing, not the breaking: Jesus gives himself totally to each of his disciples, not merely a "piece" of his self.

2.5.1.3 The gift

It does not require a stretch of the imagination to believe that the disciples at the Last Supper understood the words of Jesus over the bread as signifying that in some sense he was giving himself to them.[92] This would have been made quite clear by the imperative *take* and his accompanying action of handing the bread, now identified as his person, to them to eat.

Two aspects of this gesture must have been relatively evident from the first moment. The first of these is that the bread, and therefore whatever it symbolised was given *to them*. This includes the idea "for them," "for their benefit," or, given the circumstances, more properly, "for their good." Bread is nourishment and, when consumed, becomes an indistinguishable part of our bodies. This act may please the giver, but the primary beneficiary is the one to whom the bread is given. The second aspect to be mentioned is that it was manifestly freely given, without any condition, other than that it be accepted and eaten; nor was there any price attached to it, the giver did not expect any return. Gratitude might have been welcome, but even that was not compulsory (cf., Judas, whose plans were apparently known, or at least strongly suspected by Jesus).

Nevertheless, it might still have been puzzling: what does he mean by giving himself to us? Even if we assume that Jn 6:35–59 ("I am the bread of life …") is a reasonably accurate description of a discourse by Jesus (transposed from the Last Supper or made on a previous occasion), verses 66f clearly show that his disciples did not understand the symbolism. A number of them deserted Jesus and even Peter did not claim to have understood him, but only declared faith in his words. Is there a basis, then, on which the participants of the Last Supper could come to some conclusion as to the meaning of "this is my body"?

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not necessarily understandable) to others, just as a body is the "carrier" of a complete person through which others may know, contact and communicate with him or her.

[92] Cf. Heron, who argues that in the understanding of Jesus and the disciples there would be no sharp distinction between "things" and "meanings." For them "the bread and cup are means by which he offers them their share in his own person, destiny and covenant; they are the instruments of genuine exchange which he offers and extends as real" (*Table*, 55).

There is a curious trait in all four institution narratives: none gives the slightest indication of the immediate reaction of the disciples to the gesture of Jesus. Given this total, almost intentional-appearing absence of any hint, it would be pure (useless) speculation to try to formulate a decisive answer to this question. We have to turn to what the early "second loop" presents, i.e., the immediate traditions developed from the accounts of the eyewitnesses in hope of discovering evidence of "first loop" understandings.

2.5.1.4 Implications

The above does not imply that the original understanding of the event is incorrect or untrue. Jesus spoke and acted in a context that he and his disciples shared; the initial revelation is vibrantly true, in the moment, but it is incomplete. The situation is analogous to that of the Jewish understanding of biblical history as God's continuous support of the Chosen People. It is neither wrong nor false, but it does not encompass the two characteristics revealed in Jesus: God is a loving Father and his love extends beyond any limitation by nationality, race, or any criteria, except the acceptance of that love.[93] God is infinite and our capacity to understand is finite therefore, perforce, every revelation is partial. In the case of the mystery of the Last Supper it merely means that the understanding of its meaning and significance was, in all likelihood, limited to the prevailing thinking and the application of contemporary interpretations of the rite itself: Jesus broke bread and shared it with them; it, and along with it his body, was given to them freely in an act of unity; but, beyond that superficial sense, what he meant by equating his body with the bread, what he meant by giving them his body to eat, was a mystery.

So, the predominant feature of the bread-rite – unity among the participants, including the presider, or (given the pivotal role of the presider in the rite) more properly described as unity around the presider, but also including him – was clear. However, when Jesus identified the bread as his body, he introduced a totally new concept or aspect to the rite. By its very

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[93] The incompleteness of our understanding of revelation, of course, remains true and valid for all ages. We believe that God continues to reveal himself, not only because, being infinite and perfect, human understanding cannot ever fully comprehend the mystery of his being, but also because the changes in our understanding of the world make it possible (and perhaps imperative) that we understand different aspects, and certain aspects differently, of the divine existence.

newness it certainly must have captured the attention of the others around the table, even if they did not necessarily understand it completely (or, as the example of Judas shows, at all).

There are two characteristics of this action that were noticed by the disciples, as implied by the earliest traditions. The first of these is that it was a pure gift. This aspect, arguably, is and has always been present when a host shares his food with the guests (unless, of course he is an innkeeper, but that is a very different situation). However, as with so many things, because it is so self-evident it becomes invisible, except when the circumstances are extraordinary. This was certainly the case during the Last Supper. Jesus put the concept in sharp focus with his words, which must have sounded to the disciples something like "here I am, eat me" (no disrespect is meant by rephrasing the traditional words, it is done only to point out the jarring effect). In debating the meaning of the gesture, in all likelihood it must have occurred to them that Jesus had given himself without any condition and without expecting any return.

This leads directly to the second characteristic of Jesus' action: it is a gift of love, more accurately, of *agape*. The term "love" in English has many meanings; the New Testament *agape* is much more precise. *Agape* signals the attitude of putting the other person ahead of oneself, of focusing on the needs of the other rather than our own. By giving himself through the sharing of bread, Jesus, as it were, hands himself over to the disciples. How absolute this gift of himself is and how without any condition it is given is indicated by the presence of Judas Iscariot among the recipients.

These two characteristics extend, rather dramatically, the traditional interpretation of the "do this" command. The reference here to the "do this" command, which appears only in Luke and 1Corinthians, does not contradict our original intention of dealing with only those statements of the institution narratives that mirror beliefs in all source traditions. The fact that it is included in the earliest institution narrative is evidence that the *anamnesis* aspect of the Last Supper happenings was widely recognized and important in the thinking of the earliest Christian communities. A surprising number of commentators argue that the command of remembrance was meant to refer exclusively or mainly to the rite itself.[94] Yet Jesus, in his

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[94] Out of the many possible examples we cite only two: Heron says, "The point is not so much that his disciples should remember [...] but rather that they should through the celebration be forcefully reminded" (*Table,* 30); Léon-Dufour, even though he emphasizes that this remembrance is *anamnesis*, "making present," still concentrates

teachings, was adamant in emphasizing that rote behaviours are never what is important, rather, the value of actions depends on the attitudes that prompt them. When he performed one of the most vital acts of his ministry, it would be surprising, to say the least, if, by saying "do" he only meant for the disciples to repeat his act but not adopt his attitude as well. This remains particularly true in light of the reference to remembrance, that is, *anamnesis.* A much more likely interpretation is that the expression means both "do what I have just done" and "live as I am living, for the other."

2.5.2 The function of bread

We have seen that the symbolism of belonging and unity is carried by the act of sharing, with bread acting as the instrument through which this is accomplished. By proclaiming the bread to be his body, i.e., his very person, Jesus makes himself the carrier of the unity with and between the participants. As Léon-Dufour puts it, "[t]hose who receive these gifts [of bread and wine at the Last Supper] all enter into a communion of life with the one person who gives them to them."[95] This follows from the understanding of *sôma* as the whole person, not merely the physical body. Becoming "one with," i.e., united to a total person, means sharing everything, including life.

It follows from this that, if the participants are all in communion with (i.e. united to) that one person, they also must be in comm*union* with one another.[96] It seems, however, that for one reason or another this essential character of the bread-rite of Jesus' time is often, if not disregarded, minimised. Yet at the Last Supper this unity was exactly the focal point, and the

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on the rite: "The eucharistic anamnesis applies to Jesus what has been said of the Jewish Passover and requires the disciples to act as the Israelites did at their Passover feast" (*Sharing,* p. 112ff).

[95] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing*, 61.

[96] This too, of course has been widely understood, and a variety of ways were found to try to explain how this happens. So, for instance, Heron, who starts off from the assumption that the Last Supper was a Passover meal and analyses the event through its similarity to the *Haggadah* (*Table*, 22), goes on to argue that, as in the Passover meal, at the Last Supper the "bread is received as a gift from God; and Jesus himself is God's gift. By its sharing, the group is gathered into a community; and through Jesus a new community is brought into being. As the 'bread of affliction' it is a memorial of the deliverance from Egypt; and Jesus now tells his disciples to repeat what he has done for his remembrance" (28). Pesch is somewhat closer to my thesis, but simply states that the unity between the disciples and Jesus is established by Jesus giving the bread he identified as himself to them to eat ("Jesus [hat] mit dem ausgeteilten Brot Segensgemeinschaft vermittelt; gemeinsames Essen konstituiert Gemeinschaft. Gibt Jesus nun den Jüngern Brot zu essen, das er als sich selbst deutet, so vermittelt er Gemeinschaft mit sich selbst," *Wie Jesus*, 71–72).

act of sharing the bread created it, not the substance of the bread itself.[97] True, without the bread the participants could not share: the bread thus becomes the *means* by which the sharing of nourishment happens and the communion is established. In the same way it is the person of Jesus who is the means by which the sharing of nourishment happens and the unity among persons, so elusive by all other means tried by humanity, is accomplished. This is one more, rather important, reason why the decisive moment in the Church's existence was the establishment of the Eucharist.

2.5.3 Conclusions

We are attempting to reconstruct, as much as possible, the immediate understanding of the participants, including Jesus, of the events of the Last Supper. Obviously it is impossible to establish this with certainty; fortunately for our purposes it suffices if we can establish a relatively high degree of probability of what this may have been, because it will help us discover if there is a "deeper meaning" included in the narratives that may have faded or lost emphasis under layers of tradition. Finding such meaning will not, and cannot, dispute the validity of any other meaning or interpretation, it simply widens the perspective, as it were. Conversely, given the extraordinary importance of the event itself, it would be a grave fault not to take into account any meaning or interpretation that appears to be reasonable and does not contradict either Scripture or the traditional principles of our faith.

Did Jesus intend to perform a "prophetic sign" and therefore, in some sense, bring about his own suffering and death? Given what we know of his life, everything he did carried the mark of his wanting to do the will of the Father. It would make no sense to argue that at this special moment he did not, in some way, do what he conceived to be willed by the Father. His action (and the meaning we have concluded he most likely attached to it) is certainly an expression of complete self-giving *agape* and, thus, in perfect harmony with what he taught about God and God's will. This is true whether he could foresee his death, or not, and indicates that reading them as a prophetic foretelling of his death and resurrection is not the only possible interpretation of Jesus' words and actions.

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[97] Even outside the liturgy "bread became […] and has remained, a deeply significant symbol, a substance honoured and sacred. We still remember that breaking bread and sharing it with friends 'means' friendship itself and also trust, pleasure and gratitude in sharing. Bread as a particular symbol, and food in general becomes, in its sharing, the actual bond which unites us" (Visser, *Rituals*, 3).

As demonstrated, there are very few words that we can reasonably assume to be accurate translations of the words spoken by Jesus on that occasion. To these we added the "do this in remembrance of me" phrase, even though the evidence of its historicity is much weaker. However, the belief in a commandment of *anamnesis* given by Jesus at the Last Supper goes back early enough that we may accept its sense as being authentic. Later tradition focused on the liturgical side of the commandment, but it is more in line with the whole body of the New Testament teaching if it is understood, also, as "live as I do," that is, "live a life of love."

Jesus' identification of the bread with his body has a wide range of implications. The Greek word *sôma*, usually translated as *body*, has several meanings, the most fitting in this context is *person,* or *whole person*. Thus when Jesus shares the bread with his disciples, he symbolically shares his own self with them, he gives himself to them. This remains a valid conclusion even if, as is most likely, Jesus could not have known with any clarity what would happen in the immediate future. He must have been aware that he had made powerful enemies among the leadership and that therefore he was in danger of retaliation. There may have been sufficient signs to indicate that the danger was imminent. In consequence, he seeks to strengthen his closest friends, to reiterate his love and care for them. It is quite logical that he would choose a meal for the occasion and particularly the well-known custom of sharing the bread at the beginning of the meal. The symbolism usually attached to this rite, creation of unity, fits his purpose, because by creating (or strengthening) unity among the members of this group he can make sure that, whatever happens to him, they will not be left without support. By identifying with the bread, he takes the symbolism much further. He himself becomes a gift of love, given freely and without condition and, so, becomes the means by which the unity can be achieved and kept alive. By commanding that his act be re-enacted by his friends, he not only ensures the constant renewal of this unity, he directs his disciples to imitate his whole being and life.

We propose, then, that at the Last Supper those present understood a message that included concepts of unity amongst all of them (including Jesus), of self-giving love (*agape*), and of an *anamnesis* that implied living like Jesus in unity and love.

When the Church began to realize that Jesus is, in some way, united with God, the unity established by sharing his body acquired a completely new dimension. It signalled a covenant

with God, who, through the person of Jesus Christ promised an entirely new relationship with all those who believed with him, and even more extraordinary, a union with God himself. Both these factors, combined with the principle of unity among people, are extremely important in the life of the Church. In fact, it is these factors that make the Church different from any other grouping or community, thus they are what defines it. There can be no doubt that any change in the Church must be in harmony with them.

2.6 Participants at the Last Supper

One question remains to be examined: who exactly participated in the Last Supper? Several issues regarding the power structure within the Roman Catholic Church revolve around this point, because it is assumed that the words of Jesus conferred certain powers on those (and only those) who were present.[98] Beginning with the interpretation that only the apostles were present, the idea is extended, by the Church, through history, to mean that those (and only those) who fall into the line of apostolic succession can assume these powers – that is, ordained priests – and it is the Church's prerogative to confer a place in the succession. The immediate consequence of this is the creation of two classes of Christians: those with power (the ordained priesthood) and those without power (the laity). If we remember that Jesus' model was one of shepherding, leading by example and with love, the introduction of concepts of power and separation feels like a distortion of his teachings. A more insidious effect is seen

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[98] As evidence it shall suffice to refer to *EE*:

> 7. It is he [the priest] who says with the power coming to him from Christ in the Upper Room: "This is my body which will be given up for you This is the cup of my blood, poured out for you...". The priest says these words, or rather he puts his voice at the disposal of the One who spoke these words in the Upper Room and who desires that they should be repeated in every generation by all those who in the Church ministerially share in his priesthood."
>
> 21. A causal influence of the Eucharist is present at the Church's very origins. The Evangelists specify that it was the Twelve, the Apostles, who gathered with Jesus at the Last Supper (cf. Mt 26:20; Mk 14:17; Lk 22:14). This is a detail of notable importance, for the Apostles "were both the seeds of the new Israel and the beginning of the sacred hierarchy".37 By offering them his body and his blood as food, Christ mysteriously involved them in the sacrifice which would be completed later on Calvary. By analogy with the Covenant of Mount Sinai, sealed by sacrifice and the sprinkling of blood,38 the actions and words of Jesus at the Last Supper laid the foundations of the new messianic community, the People of the New Covenant.
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> 27. The Eucharist too has its foundation in the Apostles, not in the sense that it did not originate in Christ himself, but because it was entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles and has been handed down to us by them and by their successors. It is in continuity with the practice of the Apostles, in obedience to the Lord's command, that the Church has celebrated the Eucharist down the centuries.
>
> etc.

in how the logic of succession is interpreted: only the apostles were present, therefore only the priest can effectively perform the Eucharist celebration; the apostles were all men, ergo the priesthood is barred to women; the apostles were celibate, ergo priests must be celibate; etc.

The synoptics clearly state that the Twelve were there. Later commentators generally assume from this that they were the only ones present, explicitly or implicitly using the "rule of silence" (*quod non in thora non in mundo*, freely translated: *what is not in the Bible, does not exists*). It is not clear, however, that this view is completely justified and it is valid to ask if this really was an occasion exclusive to the Twelve, or if others might have been present. There are two points that allow us to question the "exclusive" interpretation.

The first is, at best, circumstantial. Both Mark (4:12) and Matthew (26:17) say it was the "disciples" who prepared the meal, and only Luke makes it Peter and John (22:8). (This is not surprising, given that Luke, both in the gospel and in Acts, tends to emphasize the role of the Twelve). John, in describing the Last Supper also speaks about disciples (though this too might be attributable to style, since he never uses the word "apostle," even though he occasionally specifies "the Twelve" (6:67, 70, 71; 20:24)). However, in the narrative of Mark/Matthew there is a clear distinction between the disciples who prepare the meal and the apostles, who come later with Jesus (Mk 14:17, Mt 26:20). Mark continues with, "when they have taken their places." This fits very neatly into the picture we get from Bahr regarding first-century CE festive meals in both Greco-Roman and Jewish culture: when the guests arrived, they were seated in an anteroom, where they were served aperitifs. When all had arrived, they washed their hands and joined the host in the room where the meal itself was served.[99]

It is easy to imagine that disciples, both male and female, would willingly act as servants for the Master by preparing and serving the food. It is, on the other hand, extremely difficult to accept that Jesus would treat his disciples, quite possibly including his mother, as servants, or worse, as slaves, especially in light of what he is quoted as saying in John 13:12–17 on the same occasion. One can question the historicity of John's text, but it is beyond doubt that it expresses the spirit of the teachings of Jesus. It is also conceivable that custom prevented those who prepared and served the meal from partaking in it (even though, if the Last Supper was, in fact, a Passover meal, usually the whole family, including servants would participate

[99] Bahr, "Seder and Eucharistic Words," 480.

(cf., Ex 9:3, Num 9:13)). In that case, it is still much more believable that Jesus would either break the custom as he did at other meals,[100] or, at the very least, invite those working to the table while he shared the bread, if for no other reason than to emphasize that they too were his disciples and therefore part of the group. Also, that at least some women and the "brothers of Jesus," were in fact regarded as belonging to the group of the Twelve is clearly indicated by Acts 1:14, "All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers."

The other point concerns the disciples on the road to Emmaus. It is at the breaking of bread that their "eyes are opened" and they recognize Jesus (Lk 24:30–31). At least Cleophas was certainly not an apostle, and one must assume that if the other were, his name would be given. If, then, they were not at the Last Supper, how could the breaking of bread have any special significance for them? Granted, Jesus probably presided at "normal" bread-rites on other occasions with his disciples, but would the familiar gestures alone have had such an effect on these two that they would recognize a living person as the one they were convinced had died just a couple of days before? We have to remember that, possibly apart from the case of Lazarus, they had never heard of a person being raised from the dead, for them it was sheer impossibility. It is quite understandable that, if anything, they would have merely thought, "That man really resembles Jesus." On the other hand, if they were present at the Last Supper, the words and actions of Jesus probably would have made a deep impression so that, when the bread-breaking was repeated, it really "opened their eyes," making it possible for them to recognize the risen Jesus. Or did the breaking of bread have some magic effect? That would relegate Jesus to the ranks of magicians and render faith in the power of sacraments mere superstition. The only believable alternative to their participation at the Last Supper is to posit that the gesture by which Jesus makes the shared bread his own body was not only used at the Last Supper but at some other gathering as well. Such a solution would open a Pandora's box of new questions, but from our point of view it would lead to the same conclusion: what happened and was said at the Last Supper is not restricted to any specific group of disciples, it is equally valid for all believers. This has rather important ecclesiological consequences, not in

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[100] Cf., for instance the scenes of the sinful woman (Lk 7:36–50) and of eating with sinners (Mk 2:15, Lk 7:34, 15:2) etc.

the least because the division of clergy/laity is often supported by an interpretation of some of these events as being exclusive to the twelve apostles and their ordained successors.

2.7 The Gospel according to John

The claims in the letter of Boulad, as well as events of the past few decades, strongly indicate that the Church is losing its way and needs to renew itself at its source. We have looked to the institution narratives for direction. While the preceding discussion does not really present anything that is outside the traditional teachings of the Church, it is possible that these particular teachings have not always received the emphasis they deserve. If we return to them, can we lean on them for guidance? This naturally raises the question of whether our deduction – that the most basic message of the institution narratives is living in unity and self-giving love – is valid.

Our aim here is different from what it was previously. We are attempting to confirm an interpretation. In the absence of any record pre-dating the crucifixion and resurrection, our conclusions were drawn on the basis of the synoptics and 1Cor. Despite the methodology of trying to uncover a "first loop" by finding common ground amongst the texts, we were, and remain, unavoidably dependant on early "second loop" recollections. The best we can do is to see if our perception mirrors that of documents from the same early "second loop" that do not form part of the institution narratives. That is, we have to look for confirmation in other early traditions. If we can find authoritative sources that come from lineages different from that of the synoptics and 1Cor, or do not necessarily present the Last Supper in terms of the bread-rite, but nonetheless do place a strong emphasis on lived unity and *agape* in the context of the Last Supper, we will have evidence of a shared interpretation.

We turn, therefore to the Farewell Address of John's gospel. John's gospel is not only very different from the synoptics, it is also arguably the most difficult to interpret and comment on. It has often been treated as a mere explanation or expansion of the synoptics, with the result that "the Johannine theological vision is often ignored, restricted, or reshaped to fit other

theological perspectives."[101] Yet, as more and more exegetes point out, John has to be interpreted (also) by itself.[102]

2.7.1 The Last Supper in John

One of the most puzzling questions concerning the New Testament documents is why there is no mention of the institution of the Eucharist in the Last Supper narrative in John's gospel. It is tempting to try to present the different interpretations and theories and to draw some sort of a conclusion from them, but this would not take us closer to the goal of finding out whether this gospel confirms our conclusion of what message the words of Jesus over the bread may have had for those who participated in the Last Supper and, consequently, for the Church today.

There is, however, one aspect of the puzzle that needs clarification. Is it possible that the community, and hence the author of John, was not familiar with the institution narrative? The text of the gospel itself indicates that this is not so. While the narrative of the Last Supper does not contain the words of institution, the so-called *Eucharistic* or *Bread Discourse* of Chapter 6 of the gospel does, even if not in the identical form we found so important in the institution narratives:

> 11Then Jesus **took the loaves,** and when he had **given thanks,** he **distributed** them […] 35**I am the bread** of life […] 48**I am the bread** of life […] 51**I am the living bread** […] and **the bread** I will give for the life of the world **is my flesh**.

While the essentials are all there (take, give thanks, give/distribute, the identification with the bread),[103] there is one important difference: "flesh" (*sarsx*) replaces the institution narratives'

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101 Gail R. O'Day, "Johannine Theology as Sectarian Theology," *What is John?" Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series #3 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 199. On the relation between John and the synoptics see, among others, D. Moody Smith, "Prolegomena to a Canonical Reading of the Fourth Gospel," *"What is John?"* ed. Segovia; James H. Charlesworth, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospel According to John," *Exploring the Gospel of John*, eds. Culpepper and Black; Thompson, "Historical Jesus"; Segal, *Hebrew Passover*; etc.

102 Cf., for instance, Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel. Its Unity and Diversity in the Light of John 6* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996); James Dunn, "Let John be John," *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*, Vorträge vom Tübiger Symposium, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 28, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck 1983), 309–339; Robert Kysar, "Coming Hermeneutical Earthquake in Johannine Interpretation," *"What is John?"* ed. Segovia, 185–189; Thompson, "Historical Jesus," 21–42.; etc.

103 Cf. Aidan Nichols, *The Holy Eucharist from the N.T. to Pope Paul II*, Oscott series #16 (Dublin: Veritas, 1991), 10–11.

"body" (*sôma*). Theories that try to explain why John uses this term abound.[104] Nevertheless, as Betz points out, it is clear from the context that, even if it is a translation of the Hebrew *basar*, it means the whole person.[105] In spite of any problem that may be caused by this term, the text shows clearly that the author and his community were familiar with the story of Jesus giving himself as bread to his followers. This remains true whether this is an indication that the "eucharistic rite has its roots in feeding of the multitude as well as the Last Supper," as Richardson argues, or because the institution story was by then so well known, and Jewish converts were so familiar with the bread-rite, that it was not necessary to repeat it in the Last Supper narrative, as Klein following Gregory Dix opines, or for any other reason.[106]

The same kind of uncertainty applies to the question of why the institution narrative is missing from the Last Supper discourse in John. Again, the reason itself does not materially affect our interest. However, since the changed focus can certainly either support our contentions or indicate the weakness of their validity, we shall turn to the pericope that replaces the institution narrative, namely the narrative of the washing of the feet.

2.7.2 The washing of the feet (Jn 13: 3–15)

In *EE* #20, John Paul II points out the importance of this pericope and its connection with the institution narrative:

> Significantly, in their account of the Last Supper, the Synoptics recount the institution of the Eucharist, while the Gospel of John relates, as a way of bringing out its profound meaning, the account of the "washing of the feet", in which Jesus appears as the teacher of communion and of service (cf. Jn 13:1–20).

Jesus, through his actions, and specifically through the explanation that he gives for them, makes "communion and service" the lesson not only of this pericope, but effectively of the Last Supper. Thus the "profound meaning" of the institution narratives is "communion and service." Consequently, it also establishes this as the, or at least, as one of the important

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[104] Thus, for instance, Heron (*Table*, 15), in agreement with Betz argues that it was to combat docetic tendencies, and sees a link with Jn 1:14, "and the Word became flesh." Betz (*Eucharistie*, 22) also sees in Jn 6:51 a reference to Jesus' death, a reference that, in his view, brings the Christological parable to a culmination. Nichols (*Holy Eucharist* 14–15), while pointing out that the expression, "eat somebody's flesh" in Semitic languages means injuring someone or doing harm to that person, concludes that in Jn. 6:48–51 "This flesh-food, blood-drink [i.e., my flesh is real food, etc.] leads to the mutual indwelling or 'abiding', *menein* of Christ and the believer." Etc.

[105] Betz, *Eucharistie*, 23.

[106] Richardson, "Further Inquiry," 299; Klein, "Institution Narratives," 414–415.

characteristics of the Church. The community that springs from the unity established through the person of Jesus, as he identifies with and gives himself in the bread, is a "communion of service"; it does not exist, except when service defines it.

At first glance that may seem to be an extreme, possibly even unwarranted, interpretation. However, 13:15 ("For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you") clearly expresses that Jesus expects his disciples to follow his example. Yet it is not in service alone that the disciples are to imitate him: it is in service and the attitude to service. In verse 34 ("A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another"), repeated in 15:9–12, makes *love* Jesus' only explicit commandment. And in the next verse John makes it clear that it is by this commandment that the community's identity is established: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love [*agape*] for one another"; to abide in Jesus self-giving love means to act with that love. In fact, there is nothing new here, nothing that does not accord with Church traditions.

Yet there are two important aspects of the pericope that, in practice, sometimes seem to receive less attention than they deserve. The first of these is the whole concept of the washing of feet. Given that first-century Jews, if they did not go barefoot, wore, at most, open sandals, the presence of animals everywhere, the climate, the condition of the soil in the area and the lack of modern sanitation, made washing feet at once a necessity and a rather unpleasant chore when done for others. Even in the case of esteemed guests the custom seems to have been to simply provide a bowl and some water for them to wash their own feet (cf. Jesus' complaint to Simon the Pharisee in Lk 7:44: "you gave me no water for my feet"). Thus the act of Jesus is even more extraordinary. In one sense it illustrates the total self-giving expressed in the sharing of the bread. However, what is emphasized here is not only a giving of self in which the giver may still retain some control or posit some condition, it is a total and unconditional gift: it focuses totally on the other. It is *agape* in action: a handing over of the self, a making one's self available to the other in order to serve the needs of the other. We often hear that the Eucharist is a gift of God, in the sense that it is freely given, there is no price attached to it. This presentation takes the idea a step further: not only is it undeserved, it is for the sake of the recipient alone. This again, then, is a defining characteristic of the Church: it must exist not for its own benefit (or for that of its own members), but to serve the world at large

This, in turn leads us to the second point. Jesus washed the feet of all who were there, including those of Judas Iscariot. It is not a coincidence that in this very pericope there is a hint of the coming betrayal (v. 18), immediately followed by the prediction of the betrayal and the identification of Judas (v. 21–30). The paradigm could not be more eloquent: service, focused on the needs of the other, ought to be rendered regardless of whether the recipient is "worthy" and whatever his or her attitude and behaviour is towards the giver.

That the obligations stemming from these principles are applicable to both the community as a whole and Jesus' followers individually is quite clear in Scripture, and particularly in the Farewell Address. Karl Rahner points out that in the

> O.T. and in the new the subject of redemption to which God's mercy is addressed is in the first place always the people, the nations, the Church a partner in the covenant (which the individual as such cannot be), and the individual shares in grace as a member of such people of the promise.[107]

Thus the relationship between Jesus and the disciples described in Jn 15:10 ("If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love"), undoubtedly part of the new covenant offered by Jesus, is offered within the framework of that community that understands the conditional. Cardinal Walter Kasper points out that the truth at the base of the identity of the individual may not be identical to that of the community, but if they are not brought to a common denominator, the conflict will lead to the exact opposite of *agape*, it will lead to violence.[108] To which Rémi Parent adds that because the faithful and their local communities are, in fact, the Church, they are also responsible for the Church.[109] Even from this admittedly meagre selection of available witnesses it becomes clear that a community cannot call itself Church, and consequently, the Church cannot claim to be *the* Church, the Body of Christ, if it does not itself live *agape*, if it is

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[107] Karl Rahner, *The Church and Sacraments,* trans. W.J. O'Hara, *Questiones Disputatae* #9 (Freiburg/Montreal: Herder/Palm Publishers, 1963), 88.

[108] "De même que pour l'identité de chaque individu, la vérité représente le fondement de l'identité et de l'unité de la société, et même de l'humanité. [...] lorsque l'individu et le groupe ne connaissent chacun que leur propre vérité, l'unité et la cohésion deviennent une question de puissance que le plus fort résout par la violence." Cardinal Walter Kasper, "L'Évêque, serviteur de la vérité: La responsabilité ecclésiale de la théologie," *Transversalités* 82: 85.

[109] "[...] toutes les personnes et toutes les communautés croyantes, parce qu'elles sont de plein droit Église, sont aussi de plein droit responsables de l'Église" (Rémi Parent, *Prêtres et évêques. Le service de la présidence ecclésiale*, Brèches Théologiques #12 (Montréal/Paris: Paulines/Cerf, 1992), 164).

not a self-giving, unconditionally loving and serving entity. It is on this that the concept of unity is built.

The gift of service, because it is a *gift,* given freely and unconditionally, does not *a priori* require gratitude, much less a "return of the favour." Jesus does not ask the disciples to wash his feet, even though as their master he could have reasonably done so. However, he explicitly tells the disciples to follow his example and wash each other's feet (Jn 13:14). His command here elucidates the "do this in memory of me" of the institution narratives. Reading John, the key of the *anamnesis,* is the word "me."[110] It is the person, the self of Jesus, that has to be "made present," become present in those who participate in the meal, who therefore have to live the life of absolute self-giving and serving others.

This is not the "price" of the gift (the command is given after he washes everybody's feet), but a consequence of accepting Jesus' gift of self. By this we mean not merely accepting the service the foot washing symbolizes, or eating the bread, for which it stands in John, but primarily accepting what this sharing means.[111] If we want to be united with Christ, if we want the new existence that sharing in the Eucharist means and brings, this is what we have to do, or rather, this is the kind of person we have to become. Sharing the Eucharist, we accept the bread that nourishes us and thereby enables us to become the body of Christ; and sharing the wine, we also share the life of Jesus, we begin to live his life. This of course also applies to the Church as the community that is called to be the Body of Christ; it has the absolute duty to live the love and the unity Jesus speaks about in the *Farewell Discourse*. The way to do so is to live the life received from Jesus through his gift of self, live like Jesus in the world, washing feet, doing what the other needs.

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[110] This is made clear by the conscious and repeated use by John of the "I am formula" (6:35, 48, 51; 8:12, 24, 58). As in Chapter 6, Jesus identifies himself with the bread given, so in the "Farewell discourse" he calls the disciples into union with himself (cf. Bruce Vawter, "The Gospel According to John," *JBC* vol. II, 437.)

[111] "The 'sharing' in Jesus of which the bread speaks needs to be taken seriously. […] Our sharing in him […] means, in Paul's terms, 'I live, yet not I but Christ within me,' (Gal. 2.20) or in John's, 'Abide in me, and I in you' (John 15.14). What Jesus was and is, he was and is not simply in himself apart from us, but precisely for us; and it is made effective as he lives in us" (Heron, *Table*, 28).

2.7.3 Unity in Jn 13–17

As we have seen, the main meaning attached to the rite of breaking bread was (and in that part of the world still is) unity. This unity is extended to all who partake in the bread. Does the Gospel of John support my contention that this is valid and even important in understanding the institution of the Eucharist?

Even though, apart from the washing of the feet and the brief incident of sending Judas out, there is no description of any action by Jesus, the narration of the Last Supper in John is the longest of the four gospels. It consists almost entirely of the words of Jesus and so thoroughly covers issues discussed elsewhere that it almost appears to be a summary of the teachings of the gospel. It is not surprising, then, that the major theme of this section is unity. As Marianne Meye Thompson points out, the theme of unity between Jesus and the Father and between Jesus and his disciples is characteristic of John.[112]

Whether this emphasis is due to an ongoing dialogue between the author (or the community) of John and the Jewish community regarding monotheism, as James Dunn claims, is irrelevant here, as is the question of whether or not Chapters 15–17 are a later addition to the gospel.[113] The fact remains that this theme, implied already in 1:1 ("the Word was with God and the Word was God"), discussed or inherent in 5:18–27, 6:56–57, 8:16, 19, 10:30, 38, and, above all, in the conscious use of the O.T. "I am" formula in 6:35, 48, 51, 8:12, 24, 58, dominates the three chapters of the *Farewell Discourse.*[114] Here, however, the gospel takes the concept a step further. While in the body of the document a very close relationship is described between Jesus and his disciples, or "those who believe in him" (cf. for instance the image of the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep), in the *Farewell Discourse* the relationship becomes a union, an identification, analogous to that existing between the Father and Jesus. The special interest of John in the unity of Jesus, both with the Father and with his disciples, comes here to full expression.[115] The three chapters are so thoroughly saturated with

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[112] Thompson, "Historical Jesus," 23.

[113] Dunn, "Let John be John," 335–336. On the dating of Jn 15–17, see Charlesworth, "The Dead Sea Scrolls," 78.

[114] On the use of the "I am" formula, cf. Vawter, "Gospel According to John," 437.

[115] On John on the unity of Jesus with the Father and disciples, cf. Thompson, "Historical Jesus," 23.

this theme (often interlaced with other themes, for instance, love) that it would be necessary to quote over half the text to provide a list.

In this respect it does not make much difference whether the emphasis on unity in John was occasioned to counteract the "centrifugal forces" of Roman persecution and Jewish antipathy as Paul N. Anderson claims, to strengthen members of the community for whom Jesus was no longer physically present, to preserve teachings of the eyewitnesses, or for any other motive.[116] The fact remains that for the author the theme was important, important enough to call the community's attention to it. Here, the voice in which Jesus speaks is also interesting, because, particularly in chapters 14–17, it resembles the classic epideictic style, "whose primary concern is the induction or bolstering of beliefs and values held among one's audience in the present."[117] This implies that the concept of unity was already present in the Johannine community and John, for whatever reason, felt a need to underline it.

The context within which John places the *Farewell Discourse* is a very strong indication that the concept of unity, at least as one of the focal points of the significance of the Last Supper, was, if anything, increasingly important for the Christian communities of the first century. Whether intended by the author of the gospel, or not, this certainly supports an interpretation of the institution narratives that sees the creation of unity at the centre of the bread-rite. In other words, it is evidence that the theme of unity between Christians and Jesus, Christians and the Father through Jesus, and, as a consequence, among Christians, was, at the very least, widespread among the early Christian communities.

2.7.4 "I am the way" (Jn 14:6)

Here again, even though in different terms, John is reinforcing the message of the institution narratives, and does so explicitly: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except through me." Jesus is the Way, i.e., he is the means through which we can reach the Father. The fact that this is only possible because of the essential unity between the Father and Jesus does not make the statement less valid or less meaningful. On the contrary,

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[116] Anderson, *Christology*, 233. On strengthening the community, see C. Clifton Black, "'The Words that You Gave to Me I Have Given to Them': The Grandeur of Johannine Rhetoric," *Exploring the Gospel of John*, eds. Culpepper and Black, 229. On preserving the teachings, see Dunn, "Let John Be John," 316.

[117] Black, "'The Words," 224.

the fact of unity is possibly emphasized by the use of the same *ego eimi* as in the "I am" formulas discussed above. God is so utterly distant from the creature that no human can possibly reach, can possibly establish any kind of contact, much less an intimate relationship with God. Only God can make it possible, and in his infinite love he does provide the means in the Incarnation, which now comes to full realization. God is not content with the incredible gesture of becoming human and thus demonstrating his love and also the high value he puts on humanness. This gesture in itself, tremendous as it is for us, does not yet make it possible for us to reach the Father. To accomplish this humanly impossible goal, God, the divine existence itself, has to become united with the human, thereby elevating the very humanity that makes us what we are to the divine level and, thus, making it possible to "come to the Father." God becomes human in order to become the way through which the human being can approach God.

The "way," however, is not the "goal." To get there we have to "walk the way" – live the gift Jesus offers us.[118] There is no mistake here. It is not a question of merely "accepting" or even "using" the gift. Jesus is not merely the way; he is at the same time both the truth and the life. Jesus is the truth in whom we have to believe (Jn 14:12). Believing *in* is not the same as believing *it,* or believing *that*. Believing *in* means, above all, trust. When we know something, in the modern, *savoir* kind of knowledge, something that is "proven," we do not need trust. I "know" that my chair will not collapse under me, because of the proven quality of the steel frame – but I do need both to believe and believe in the people who have made it, to be able to trust that they did a good job and did use the proper materials, in order for me to sit down on it.

This appears rather flippant when we talk about our faith in God or in Jesus, but it serves to illustrate that daily life is full of moments when we risk our wellbeing and often our lives on this kind of trust, most often without a moment's hesitation. Yet, are we willing, individually and as community, to do the same thing when God invites us to trust him?

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[118] "Notre rencontre avec le Christ ne résulte pas automatiquement de notre présence au rassemblement, mais notre volonté de conformer notre vie à la sienne" (Congrès Eucharistique Internationale de Lyon, *Jésus Christ, pain rompu pour un monde nouveau. Document de réflexion théologique et spirituelle pour le Congrès Eucharistique International, Lourdes, 1981* (Paris: Éditions du Centurion 1980, 29).

Any gift, to be meaningful, has to be accepted, and requires a response. This is central to the message of John and not only reinforces the lessons of the washing of the feet, it also makes it very clear that the "do this" command of the institution narratives should not be understood as relating merely to the liturgical action.[119]

2.7.5 Love in the Farewell Discourse

John uses the term *love* no less than 29 times in the *Farewell Discourse*. In 26 of these instances the word used is *agape*, or its verb derivatives. Only three times are different words used: once in 15:19, speaking of the love the world has for those who belong to it, and twice in 16:27, where the Father's love for the disciples and their love for Jesus is mentioned. The root word in both places is *philia*, denoting attraction, even an emotional tie.

Agape is used to define the disciple of Jesus in 13:35 ("by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"). It is also the motive for keeping his commandments (14:15: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," and 14:23: "those who love me will keep my word"), and keeping the commandments of Jesus is also the sign of love of him (14:21: "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me," and 14:24: "whoever does not love me does not keep my word"). It is significant that the only commandment Jesus explicitly gave as a commandment is "love one another just as I have loved you" (14:34), i.e. the selfless, total, unconditional, self-giving of *agape*. Jesus makes this the hallmark of the disciple and the pathway to the intimate relationship he offers with himself and with the Father.

The scene at the Sea of Tiberias (21:15–17) reinforces the importance of the kind of love that is demanded here. The English translation does not make this clear. In Greek, Jesus asks "Peter, do you *agapas* me," and Peter replies "Lord, you know I *philo* you." This makes it obvious why Jesus asks him three times: this is not just a teasing, or a subtle penance, Jesus tries to make Peter understand, that *philia,* that is, liking, being attracted, feeling friendship and attachments is not enough, it is not what he is talking about.

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[119] On "response" as the central message of John: "The Johannine Jesus is [...] the supreme expression of that divine love that calls human beings to respond by loving God and loving one another." (D. Moody Smith, "What Have I Learned about the Gospel of John?" *"What is John?"* ed. Segovia, 229). Anderson goes even further by arguing that in "many ways, humanity's response within the divine-human dialectic is the central theme of the entire gospel [of John] 1:1–14; 3:31–36; 4:21–24; 6:35; 7:37f.; 15:1–17; 20; 30f.) and this may be identified as the unifying theme throughout John 6 as well" (*Christology*, 105).

By making it so dominant in the very important Farewell Address of his gospel, the author does not only emphasize the *agape* of the institution narratives; the way and the contexts in which he uses the term also make it very clear what *agape* is and what it is not. It is an attitude, the consequence of a deliberate choice to accept the needs and interest of the other as being more important than one's own. John also allows us to see that the origin of human *agape* is in the infinite *agape* of the Father, which makes it possible for the human being to practice, or more properly, to live *agape*.

2.7.6 Implications

We have been using the Farewell Address as a foil against which to test our reading of the institution narratives. It is, however, not our aim to reduce the fourth gospel to some secondary role. Given the independent and specific Christological theology of John, the tremendous importance placed on the concepts of service, unity and love has to be taken at full value, and to be recognized as an essential part of the scriptural understanding of faith and hence our understanding of the nature of the Church.[120] The idea that one must live in service, unity, and love has enormous consequences in the lives of individual Christians as well as for the community that forms the Church.

It is not an exaggeration to call the gospel according to John the "gospel of love." The narrative of the washing of the feet helps us to understand that *agape*, the love with which Jesus loved and loves us, is total and unconditional self-giving in service to the needs of the other. This is what the disciple has to do in order to love as Jesus loved and, in consequence, it has to be a visible characteristic of the Church.

Is this possible for a human being and a human community? The message of the institution narratives does offer a logical solution. If we are united with the person of Jesus, then we are also united with *both* of his natures. Jesus – or more specifically Jesus Christ – the incarnate God. The human can now approach God and behave, at least to some extent, like God: he or she is now capable of *agape*.

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[120] "The establishment of the canon was the crucial hermeneutical move shaping the way the early Christian writings that make up the N.T. were to be read. Moreover, the inclusion of the Gospel of John in the Gospel canon exerted an important influence on how the other Gospels and the rest of the N.T. were read" (Smith, "Prolegomena," 175).

Accepting Jesus as the Way means to live what is essential in the life of Jesus, that is, a life of total dependence on God, love expressed in a total focusing on the other, and a willingness to serve that other. The unity with Jesus, made possible by sharing the bread that becomes his body, means more than just imitating him, important as that aspect is; it means becoming the Body of Christ, i.e., the embodiment of all that his life means, and his physical presence in and to the world. This applies as much to the whole community of Christians, the Church, as it does to the disciple, and implies a constant and conscious effort by both.

2.7.7 Conclusions

We have looked to the Farewell Address of the gospel of John in order to see if we can find confirmation, in an early "second-loop" source, for our claims regarding the character of the Church, as deduced from the institution narratives. The conclusion seems inescapable: even though in many respects very different, John's gospel not only supports, but also reinforces our conclusion that the most basic understanding of the narratives is that followers of Jesus must live an anamnesis of the principles of unity and *agape*. John takes the message farther by intensifying and concretizing it.

The narrative of the washing of the feet does not, nor apparently was it intended to replace the institution, but it does emphasize and enhance the significance of the rite. It illustrates what the giving of the bread implies. The bread shared is the means by which peace, acceptance and unity is created through the action of sharing; sharing the eucharistic bread is the way, which, if traveled, allows the believer to reach God, the source of that same peace, acceptance and unity. With the washing of feet, Jesus' gift of sharing himself through the bread is confirmed, taken from the plane of the abstract, and transformed into a sharing of himself through self-giving service. This redefines the nature of unity and *anamnesis* as an active giving of service in order to be in Jesus.

Both this narrative and the rest of the *Farewell Discourse* focus on the concept of *agape* and union with Jesus, and through him with God and with each other, with an intensity that is rather rare in the New Testament. By defining himself as the Way, Jesus again points to the only way in which salvation can be achieved: by imitating him, with his help, in total self-giving to both the Father in utter confidence – faith – and to the service of others in *agape*. This requires a constant conversion, a reorientation ever more in line with Jesus Christ himself. In

consequence this must constantly be the main topic of catechesis and mystagogy, because it involves the difficult task of constantly rising above the merely human into the realm of divine, the possibility of which was opened by the salvific presence of Jesus Christ. It also implies a need for constant renewal of the Church as community and as institution, because with the "changing times" (i.e., the context created by a changing world) the needs of both those within the Church, lay and ordained, and those without change.

The mission of the Church, given by Christ, is to bring his salvation to the world and to build the Kingdom of God for everyone. The organization and institutional structure of the Church is there in order to make it possible for its, by now, over one and half billion members to live this kind of life and to fulfill the mission of the Church. Any change in the Church must therefore follow the path established at the Last Supper, the path of unity and *agape* expressed in serving others; everything else must be in harmony with these principles.

2.8 Witness of the first century CE

In the search for the "fuller sense" or "deeper meaning" of the events of the Last Supper, or in other words, for evidence that our conclusions are tenable, it is worthwhile to look to the New Testament for first-century interpretations of the revelation contained in the institution narratives.[121] As discussed in the context of the words over the bread, there may be important aspects that lost some – or much – of their original impact through the centuries, yet remain important or regain their importance today. It is also essential to compare our understanding of the revelation from time to time with how it was interpreted in the beginning to make sure that we are still on the right path.[122]

It is considerably easier to say we need to investigate the reception of the revelation contained in the institution narratives during the first century, than to actually do it. This was a

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[121] "Scholarly integrity requires that conclusions regarding a text's meaning be able to be verified in the text" (Williamson, "Principles," 337).

[122] Ibid., 338, Williamson quotes *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* of the Biblical Commission: "In discerning the canon of Scripture, the Church was also discerning and defining her own identity. Henceforth Scripture was to function as a mirror in which the Church could continually rediscover her identity and assess, century after century, the way in which she constantly responds to the gospel and equips herself to be an apt vehicle of its transmission (cf. *Dei Verbum,* 7)."

time when Christianity was brand new, with all that this implies.[123] The ideas were very far from being clearly understood or sometimes even clearly stated even in the New Testament documents. That is why it is still possible to propose so many different, often contradictory, interpretations of the Scriptures. Yet these documents remain the best guides available to us for the earliest traditions.

The popular view of first century, so-called, "primitive" Christianity as a homogenous community where everyone thought and acted in the same way is simply historically false, as is amply evidenced by the New Testament itself. Thus Küng can say:

> That the Church is a community in freedom and fraternity does not imply any levelling down or uniformity, but on the contrary demands a polymorphous form of structure allowing diversity, mobility and flexibility. The N.T. makes this self-evident.[124]

This is a lesson worthwhile remembering, even today.

Georg Strecker, Lutheran theologian and biblical scholar, especially interested in Hellenistic influence on the New Testament, sees evidence of this diversity in Matthew: "Matthew's understanding of history […] gives evidence of the heterogeneity of the primitive Christian faith, which is represented by a complexity of different theological conceptions."[125] Olivette Genest points out that, for instance, in the narratives of the letters and Apocalypse, Jesus is sometimes active, sometimes passive, victim or victor, his death willed and not, etc.[126] The considerable number of non-canonical Christian writings from roughly the same period as the redaction of the New Testament also indicate this diversity. To add to the confusion, at the time nobody thought it necessary to make a record of how the different and often widely separated communities understood the narratives. We have to rely on secondary evidence, the

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[123] For the following statements cf., for instance, Anderson, *Christology*, 234; Hans Küng, *Why Priest?* trans. John Cumming (London: Collins, 1972), 25; Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism, Study Edition* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981) 589–595; Nathan Mitchell, *Mission and Ministry. History and Theology in the Sacrament of Order*, Message of the Sacraments 6, ed. Michael Glazier (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982), 108, 112, 133, 135, 140, 167; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 69; Eduard Schweitzer, *Matthäus und seine Gemeinde*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 71 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 1974), 141; Gerd Theissen *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity,* trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 8; etc.

[124] Küng, *Why Priest?*, 25.

[125] Georg Strecker, "The Concept of History in Matthew," *Interpretation of Matthew*, ed. Stanton, 79.

[126] Olivette Genest, *Les discours du Nouveau Testament sur la mort de Jésus. Épitres et Apocalypse* (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1995), 237.

different emphases of the documents and, as far as possible, on discerning the underlying motivations for the selections, expressions and emphases themselves. Our task is not made easier by the fact that the meaning of books of the Bible depends "not only on the original author, but all subsequent authors in the writing process."[127] Given all these difficulties and the *caveats* that are implied by them, what can we say about the reception of the institution narratives during the first century?

Without attempting to establish any hierarchy of values or importance attached to the different aspects of the teachings of Jesus and of the developing faith, we can confidently say that two concepts certainly were regarded as very important in early Christianity: *community* and *salvation*. Significantly, both of these imply a way of living.

2.8.1 Community

The concept of community, especially in translations, is expressed by different terms and circumlocutions in the Bible. *Koinonia,* fellowship*,* generally used in the Acts and probably the most familiar today, is variously used in the sense of community amongst the disciples (e.g. in Acts 2:42) and also "a very close union, a truly personal communion between the faithful and Christ" (e.g. 1Cor 1:9, 10:16).[128] Howard I. Marshall also writes that *koinonia*, as used in Acts, "could refer to the common sharing of goods which was practiced in the early church (Acts 2:44f), or it might refer to the inward bond between Christians enjoying fellowship with Christ and with each other."[129] This aspect is important, especially when we remember Jn 17:20–23, where it is made clear that this relationship is of the same order as the unity existing between the Father and the Son. At least in this sense, therefore, it signals the kind of union established by the breaking and giving of the bread.

In Jn. 17:20–23 the term *koinonia* is not used, but rather the *existing* (or *being*) *in* formula ("I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me"). The verses strongly emphasize, on the one hand, that the unity, or more properly, the ability to be united comes from the Father, and, on the other hand, that

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[127] Daschbach, *Interpreting Scripture*, 12.

[128] Léon-Dufour, *Sharing,* 209.

[129] Marshall, *Last Supper*, 127.

> the unity [Jesus] had besought for the first disciples (v. 11) must remain the characteristic of the Church. *[S]o that the world can believe that you sent me*: Unless the Church preserves the unity willed by God, it cannot perform its essential mission in the world.[130]

The above passage makes it clear that the primary mission of the Church is to be a witness not only to the love of God, but also to the fact that *agape* is a possible and viable mode of existence within community.

The message is trivialized when early Christian communities, the first experiments in trying to live Jesus' communal *agape*, are idealized as some sort of utopia, where everything was harmonious and where problems did not exist, so perfect as to be irreproducible. This image is false. There certainly were problems and dissention in the early communities (e.g. questions of circumcision, diet, Peter and Paul, etc.) and some were quite bitter (cf. 2Cor 11). These however did not cause *agape* to disappear from the life of the communities; Paul still urges the Corinthian community to help the Jerusalem church, apparently the very centre from which the "superapostles" (1Cor 11:5) came, and the help eventually sent was quite substantial. Thus the prediction of Jesus in Jn 13:35 ("by this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another") became a reality in the lives of the Christians and that love was even extended quite quickly to include those who were not of the community.[131]

2.8.2 Closeness and intimacy

John and the letters contain ample evidence that community-unity was understood – at least in some early Christian communities – to demand that the same relationship should characterize relationships within the community as that with Christ: closeness and intimacy. Of course, Scripture does not use 21st century vocabulary. Nevertheless, the images and symbols used indicate such an understanding. The intimacy between the Father and Jesus is made obvious in John: "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9), "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (14:10) and similar statements take the father-son image dangerously close to the idea of total identity. However, John also takes care to make it quite clear that Jesus and the Father are not identical. Not only does the Son not follow his own will but the will, even command,

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[130] Vawter, "Gospel According to John," 457.

[131] Konrád Szántó, *A Katolikus Egyház Története* [History of the Catholic Church], vol. I (Budapest: Ecclesia, 1983), 78; Georg Strecker, "Gottes-und Menschenliebe in Neuen Testament," *Tradition and Interpretation in the N. T. Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 62; also cf. 1Thes 4:12.

of the Father ("I do as the Father has commanded me," 14:31), he also makes it explicit: "the Father is greater than I" (14:28).

The intimacy of the relations between Jesus and the disciples is already indicated by the giving of the bread to eat, for there is no closer intimacy imaginable than ingesting the very body (signifying, as we have seen, the whole person) of another. The image here is evocative of that given by Jesus regarding marriage: "the two will become one flesh" (Mt 19:5). In the *Farewell Discourse* the same closeness is illustrated through a number of symbols: the vine and the branches (15:1–6), the relationship between friends replacing the one of master and servants (or slaves, 15:14–15), the image of a shared life (or life-principle, 14:19),[132] solicitous care for the disciple ("where I am there you may also be," 14:4) and even the same kind of love the Father has for Jesus ("as the Father loved me so I have loved you," 15:9). But not only is the love that binds Jesus to the disciples the same as the one that binds the Father and the Son, the same *relationship* also exists between them and the disciples: "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (17:21).

It may be more precise to say that God desires this kind of relationship, rather than that it exists. For, while it does exist on God's part without condition, as indicated by the love expressed in 15:9, on the human side there is a requirement: "they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me that they may become completely one" (15:22–23). This kind of unity is only achievable through *agape,* the love Jesus taught us. The "love one another as I have loved you" is not a *condition* of the unity either between humans or between human and God, it is the means through which it is established. God loves us unconditionally, but this can become the relationship here expressed as *unity* only when and if we are also willing to be unconditional lovers. First of all, this has to be an unconditional acceptance and return of the love of God; otherwise the union cannot be complete. But such unconditional love is not merely an act similar to handing over a gift, but, more importantly, depends on whether or not a person deliberately decides to be the kind of person with this attitude. Thus, acceptance of God's love

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[132] Vawter, "Gospel According to John," 453.

and entering into the promised union with him necessarily also means extending the same unconditional love to one's fellow human beings.[133]

The letters of the apostles almost without exception raise the issue of unity within the Christian community. Even if at times this was intended to rectify a situation (as is made obvious in passages like 1Cor 1:10–17 and 6:1–11), it attests to the importance the early community attached to love and unity between believers. Rom 6:5, 8:9, 15–17, 1Cor 6:17, etc. also make it evident that there was a similar belief in, and importance attached to the unity with Christ and through him, to God.

In this respect Rom 8:15–17 is especially important, for it tells us what kind of relationship is envisioned. While there is some disagreement about whether *abba* was at the time used simply as "father" or rather something like "dad,"[134] it is reasonably well established that in Jesus' time it was the common word for the male parent. Thus calling God *abba* implies a close, intimate relationship. It is debatable whether intimacy, as we understand the term today, existed in the first century CE, but Mt 18:1–6, 10, 19:13–15 and the parallel pericopes offer clear evidence that Jesus liked children and related to them in a warm, intimate way. Since in these passages he not only warns the disciples to treat the children as he does, but also tells them to be like children if they want to enter his kingdom, it is reasonable to assume that the communities understood this new relation with God to be of the same kind.

2.8.3 Salvation – living a new life

The idea of salvation was expressed in several different ways during the first Christian centuries: being made children of God; being freed from the "slavery to sin"; being reborn, receiving and living a new life. These images all imply newness, a new kind of existence, where the past does not matter and everything seems to be possible ("the one who believes in me […] will do greater works than these," Jn 14:13).

Being the children, or more specifically "sons" of God makes us his heirs; in other words, it gives us a right to everything that is God's. As the parable of the Prodigal Son shows, while

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[133] "Die vertikale und die horizontale Dimension [der Liebe] bedingen einander. Die Liebe zum Mitmenschen ist getragen von der Liebe zu Gott, und das Gebot der Liebe zu Gott realisiert sich nur dort, wo man sich in Liebe den Mitmenschen zuwendet" (Strecker, "Gottes-und Menschenliebe," 57).

[134] Cf., MacKenzie, "Abba", *Dictionary*, 1; "Abba," *HBD*, 3; M. Stenzel, "Abba," *LTK,* etc.

it may have been unusual, it was not impossible for an heir to receive the inheritance during the lifetime of his father. In practical terms this would mean that, assuming we in fact do live a life of *agape,* the full power of God, everything that is necessary for this lifestyle is at our disposal. As we have seen, living *agape*, a life of love, of putting the *other* ahead of the *me,* was understood as the necessary state for receiving what Jesus promised. Acts 2:43–47 shows us that the earliest Christian communities evidently accepted and based their practices on this assumption. That this approach was common in other Christian communities as well is implied by the fact that in 1Corinthians there was apparently no need to explain that it was wrong not to share food, i.e., to live *agape*. Given the importance attached to the words of institution, we can safely conclude that their meaning was understood to demand this lifestyle, that is, unity.

Paul repeatedly emphasizes the idea that living in Christ, i.e. salvation, makes the person free. It frees one from the Law, that is, from understanding the essence of one's proper relationship with God as merely doing prescribed actions, instead of living the right way, having the right attitude in life. This of course reflects the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus sharply criticizes those who do all that the Law demands, but all for the wrong reasons. This, then, was a new life indeed for many Jews of the first century CE. But it was a new existence for the converts from paganism as well, especially in the idea that, in spite of social or functional differences, all persons were equal, all were children of God, a dignity compared to which all earthly distinction faded into nothingness.

Living this new life also freed the loving believer from the "slavery of sin." For Christians, sin could not be committed unconsciously because the foundation of Christian living was a deliberate choice of accepting faith in Jesus Christ and consequently of a loving lifestyle, which also included a conscious decision. Thus sin could only be a deliberate refusal of this lifestyle, i.e. of the love of God and the love of the fellow human being. This in turn freed the believer from the fear of the consequences of unintentionally doing something wrong, be that consequence ritual uncleanness and the attached social exclusion or, for coverts from paganism, the ire of gods, a rather serious affair if the emperor happened to be one of them.

As 1Cor 5 and Rom 6 attest, Paul certainly was aware that conversion does not preclude the possibility of sinning; Acts 5:1–11 shows that this was generally known among Christians. Yet Paul, like Jesus, while vigorously pointing out certain attitudes and ways of acting as being

irreconcilable with Christian living, rarely talks about how to avoid sin. Both put the emphasis rather on how to live the "new life" or "the life in Christ." The message, and hence presumably the prevailing attitude in Christian circles of the time, seems to be that as long as one concentrated on living a life according to the teaching of Jesus, one did not have to worry about sin (e.g., Eph 4:17–24). This freed them from the need to be preoccupied with the fear of doing wrong and allowed them to focus on doing good.

2.8.4 Implications and conclusions

The Christian understanding of community, of the relationship with God, and of salvation in the first century CE was focused on a new way of living. What governed this living style was not merely *doing* the right thing, but the whole meaning for doing it: to live by *agape*, a concept as alien to both Roman and Jewish popular culture as it is today to ours.

Salvation was, in the first place, something that affected their lives in the here and now. Of course, there was an eschatological aspect to salvation as well – eternal life with Jesus Christ and the Father. As Strecker points out, while the early Christian community experienced eschatological salvation by experiencing God's love received in baptism, they also experienced it equally in returning the divine *agape* in their love of God and Jesus,[135] expressed in the love of their fellow human beings. The history of the expansion of the faith during the following centuries, in spite of severe persecutions, is evidence not only that this was possible but, also, that it made Christianity highly attractive.[136] That neither the need, nor the demand for such an attitude has paled during the centuries is made clear by Cardinal Dulles: "Just as the Eucharist would be incomplete if the sacrificial banquet did not lead to Holy Communion, so too the Church would be incomplete if she did not achieve among her members a communion of grace and love."[137]

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[135] Strecker, "Gottes-und Menschenliebe," 56.

[136] Cf. W.H.C. Frend, "The Winning of the Countryside," *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993), 96–97: "the causes of the popular movement [towards Christianity] can be sought primarily in the tradition of service and love towards one's neighbour for which the Christians had gained a well-deserved reputation."

[137] Avery Dulles, "Reflections on *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*," (taken from, *L'Osservatore Romano Weekly Edition in English*, 30 (July 2003), 3), at http://www.ewtn.com/library/Doctrine/euchar3.htm (accessed April 28, 2010).

2.9 Summary conclusions

The theme of this chapter was to establish, as nearly as possible, a likely understanding by the participants of the Last Supper of the words and actions of Jesus during the bread-rite, as the event unfolded. The qualifiers included in this sentence are necessary because, for obvious reasons, no certainty can be claimed for the results of such inquiry. The objective of this work was to establish how the character of the Church was defined at this "decisive moment."

The first part of our inquiry showed that at present it is impossible to determine if the Last Supper was a Passover meal or if the idea was born during the development of the "first loop" or later, but the institution narratives pointedly present it as such. Consequently, in the thinking of the earliest traditions it certainly carried the character of the Jewish Passover, *anamnesis*, i.e., remembrance indicating actual participation in the Covenant. The Covenant of the Old Testament is presented in the Hebrew Bible as a pure gift of God, given without previous condition but requiring acceptance by the human partner in the form of a definite way of living.

The second part of the inquiry was based on the five most reliable sources, namely the four institution narratives, or rather those words and actions of Jesus that are, for all practical purposes, reported in them identically, *Jesus took a loaf of bread, blessing it broke it, [said,] "this is my body,"* and the Farewell Address of John's Gospel, apparently intended to call attention to the significance of certain aspects of these events. Replacing the bread-rite with the narrative of the washing of the feet not only emphasizes those words, it intensifies and broadens them. This remains true regardless of whether this narrative records a historical event or is a *midrash*, because the purpose of its inclusion appears to be the emphasis on love and service.

These witnesses all appear to emphasize *agape* (love), unity (or union), and service as the message, or at least part of the message Jesus was understood to have expressed both with his actions and with his words. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that Christian communities in the first century, and apparently in the next few centuries as well, regarded these as the guiding principles of their lives. While it would be very interesting to discuss how the three aspects have been interpreted through the history of the Church, that would be outside the parameters of this thesis.

The strong consensus about the three aspects does imply that this, as much as it is possible to establish, was indeed what the earliest traditions accepted as the core not only of a single event but also of Christian life. In consequence it is a valid indicator that these must remain guiding principles of the life of the Church.

The implications of this are twofold. It does signal that every individual person, who intends or claims to be a follower of Jesus Christ, i.e., a Christian, must make these the basis of his or her life. This is not an easy task, and every individual must make the choice freely, and, given that the values inherent are definitely not what are generally promoted in the world, often involve a life-long struggle. Consequently a conscious, well-constructed catechesis or mystagogy is constantly required, which focuses on the values Jesus Christ emphasized in giving himself to the disciples – then and now.

On the other hand the values are also necessary basic ingredients in the life, organization, structure and activity of the Church as such, if it is to remain the Body of Christ. Because the changing world requires adaptations and appropriate changes within the Church in order to remain relevant, these changes also must be governed by the same values. In this respect it is not sufficient to maintain the "level" of compliance; like any person, this "*Sôma* (i.e., body as the person) of Christ" being human and therefore not perfect, must also strive to constantly become more and more the Christ with whom united through the rite of accepting Jesus' gift of himself.

CHAPTER 3

THE CHURCH IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

3.1 Introduction

As shown in Chapter 1, the Church is at a critical point in its evolution. Due to the fast-changing world in which it exists and has to fulfil its mandate, it faces a significant challenge: how best to adapt so that it remains both true to the Catholic Christian faith and relevant. Chapter 2 investigated the events of the Last Supper, in particular the bread-rite, the foundation of the Eucharist as well as the "decisive moment" in the life of the Church, in order to discover what fundamental characteristics were established, what the most likely understanding of the words and actions of Jesus by the participants may have been, during the event itself. We have found that, as certainly as can be determined, three concepts that were, at least, very important aspects of this understanding were *agape,* unity and service. In consequence, any development of the life of the Church must be in harmony with these concepts, in order that the Church can continue to be what Jesus intended it to be.

It thus remains to apply this lesson to the twenty-first century Church. In a fast-changing environment where nobody can predict what the necessary adaptations will be, all we can hope to do is to sketch the direction some of these changes and adaptations ought to take and present some ideas that may be helpful. Starting from the image given by the letter of Henri Boulad and the observations of others, we can establish the areas that need to be in some way changed in order that the Church remain vibrant and relevant. We will focus on these. The sequence of these discussions is not intended to signal any particular order of importance or, even less, chronological progression for this process of renewal. Even the classification or grouping of the themes is somewhat artificial because, not only are they equally important, most of them can only be accomplished in parallel with some of the other reforms.

As the liturgy is, according to Vatican II, the "summit" of all activity of the Church, we will begin with it (section 3.2), followed by a discussion of the question of sacraments (section 3.3), partly because their reception is always a liturgical action, but also because without proper understanding of the sacraments it is impossible to understand liturgy. Arguably the most important effect of the liturgy of the Eucharist is that it continuously builds the Body of

Christ. Since the other sacraments either initiate the individual into or call him or her to a particular vocation in the service of the Body, or heal the member physically or in his relationship with the Body of Christ, we will next discuss those aspects that follow from the Church being the Body of Christ (section 3.4).

Liturgy is always celebrated in community; in consequence we will turn to this topic (3.5). The Church, as community, was given the mandate to proclaim the Good News, thus evangelization will be the next point of our discussion, both as far as evangelization of the membership of the Church is concerned and as directed to the world at large (3.6). This will be followed by a discussion of those factors that make evangelization possible: theology and catechesis, or, more precisely, both catechesis and mystagogy (3.7). Finally, given that our goals for the future of the Church can only be achieved if appropriate adjustments are made in its structure and operation as an institution, we will finish with a discussion of some important and needed changes these areas (3.8). The discussions and conclusions will offer some ideas of the ways and means by which the process of renewal may be successfully accomplished.

None of this is intended to criticise existing methods or ways; the observation that they may not be appropriate now, or for the foreseeable future, does not mean that they are erroneous. It does mean that they need adjustments to remain valid. Nor do we pretend to present absolute truth. We hope merely to propose some possibilities that, given the dizzying pace of changes in the world around us, deserve to be taken into account and discussed.

3.2 Liturgy

3.2.1 What is liturgy?

It is important to remember that the term *liturgy* does not only refer to the celebration of the Eucharist, even though, as mentioned before, this is undoubtedly the liturgy *par excellence*. In the broadest interpretation it can be said that whenever the community acts in the name of Jesus Christ it performs liturgy.[1] Quite obviously, however, the term is not generally used in this sense either in official documents of the Church, or in common parlance. It is therefore more appropriate to define it as *the official and public act of worship of the Church*.[2]

Even here we have to be careful to properly understand the terms used in the definition. Liturgy is an official act of the Church because the Church acts as the Body of Christ, that is, it acts in accordance with how it was founded to be. This certainly includes the three principles of *agape,* unity and service, and signals that in every liturgical action there is a union with the whole Church. The concept of official acknowledgment is also often included, but in this work we will not necessarily respect this limitation. Throughout the history of liturgy, it has often taken a long time for a renewal of a clearly liturgical act (e.g., confirmation as a separate sacrament) to be formally acknowledged. At a time when considerable changes will and are happening, trying new liturgical acts or customs should always follow the three principles, even if, in the end, they turn out not to be popular or not to properly express the essential tenets of faith.

The liturgical act is always public, that is, open to everyone who honestly wants to be part of it and is willing to accept the meaning and significance of the act and respects the celebrating community. Liturgy is never a private act; thus private devotions are not liturgy, nor should they be presented as such.

Finally, liturgy is always worship, directed to God, whether by praising, glorifying or thanking God, or asking for God's help. Liturgy cannot be celebrated for any other reason. True, within a liturgy we may pray for a person, administer sacraments, etc., but the focus must always be on God.

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[1] Cf., *CCC*: "In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in 'the work of God'" (#1069); and, in New Testament usage it refers "also to the proclamation of the Gospel and to active charity" (#1070).

[2] Cf., Alfred Stuiber, "Liturgie," *LTK,* vol. 6, col. 1085–1097.

3.2.2 Liturgy: self-expression and guide

Liturgy plays a double role in the life of the Church: it both expresses our faith and forms it, and thus has a strong influence on just about every aspect of the life of the Church. It is of course not a new idea that liturgy expresses our faith. It can be understood and honestly practiced only if its foundation, the basic tenets of Catholic Christian faith, is accepted by the celebrating community. By the same token, and also because it is the "summit of all activity of the Church" and thus closely connected to everything the Church is or does, it is arguably the most important and most powerful instrument of mystagogy, the continuous, never-ending faith-formation (often also called, not quite properly, *catechesis*) of all members of the Church. How it is celebrated is therefore extremely important and will inevitably be a powerful factor in any change. It is thus essential that all aspects of the liturgical celebrations emphasize the three principles of *agape,* unity and service.

An obvious starting point would be the homily; however it is difficult to prescribe the tone and content of homilies and still retain their essential character of spontaneity and personal witness. Here, purposeful and determined formation, both in seminaries and ongoing after ordination, would help. The, by necessity, continuous revision of liturgical language, symbols and other aspects of celebration (for instance, postures, gestures, proclamations, etc.) may be more difficult to achieve, but may be more fruitful and even more important. This requires careful work in finding ways to clearly express what liturgy is meant to convey, including the three principles, while successfully adapting liturgy to the understanding and modes of expression of a particular assembly. The unity with the universal Church must be the fundamental principle, but it is important to understand and accept that this ideal can only be achieved if liturgy is expressed in the local language, whether that be words, music, posture, actions or symbols.

Faith is the basis of every important value in a person's life because it defines the nature of his or her existence. This remains true independently of what the faith professes. Believing in an almighty god implies a certain dependence that, subject to the image of the deity, can be a trustful intimacy or a fearful obedience, or even subjugation and slavery. If, on the other hand, a person's faith is that no such power exists, then that person is inevitably left to his or her own resources. True, a family, a group, or a society can offer support and be of help, but every person is in the same situation and, in this faith-position, everybody is ultimately responsible,

first of all, for his or her own wellbeing. While this is undoubtedly only a rough sketch of some extreme stereotypes, it serves to illustrate the importance of faith in the life of every person.

Given its fundamental role and importance, if faith is to be a "living faith," and to fulfil its function as a satisfactory guide for the direction one's life, it has to be constantly maturing, mainly through lived experiences.[3] Participation in liturgy, therefore, because it is encountering the expression of faith, is also mystagogy. The liturgy is properly celebrated if it clearly expresses the fundamental tenets of the faith and if it is an experience. It can be truly experienced only if the members of the assembly are able to become "active, conscious and full" participants, otherwise they remain mere spectators or, at best, actors of a spectacle.

3.2.3 Language and symbols

The *CSL* very clearly states that "the use of vernacular, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or in other parts of the liturgy, may frequently be of great advantage to the people" (#36.2). Vernacular is the language "commonly spoken or used by the people of a country, district, etc." or "a regional, provincial dialect as distinguished from the standard, literary language."[4] This is the kind of language the Council urged and this is what the average member of the assembly easily understands. This does not imply any lack of respect, devotion or even majesty; these aspects have to come from what is said, not how it is said. Celebrating assemblies are not homogenous and contain members who are at very different stages of their faith-journeys; all of them have to understand what is happening. An excellent example for proper liturgical language is the New Testament, most of which was written in the vernacular of the time and area.

The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for symbols. Obviously, what is symbolized is more important than the symbol. This, however, does not mean that the symbol is not important, because if it is not understood, it is meaningless and consequently not a symbol at all. Also, it has to be understandable without explanation. Again, if the symbol has to be explained, it is not understandable and thus useless. It also has to be understandable by members of the assembly at different stages of their faith-journeys and, therefore, has to be in "vernacular,"

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[3] Cf., Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, especially 32, 40–50.

[4] Henry Cecil Wyld, Erich H. Partridge eds, *Webster Universal Dictionary Unabridged International Edition, (WUD)* (New York/Toronto: Harver Publishing, 1968).

clear and common. This will also necessitate changes in usage. Catholic liturgy has to wean itself from minimalizing symbols; there is a tremendous difference in the significance indicated by marking one's forehead with a barely noticeable sign of the cross with the "catholic thumb" and using the whole palm to do the same thing. Given the importance attached to certain symbols within the liturgy and the long-standing and strong traditions attached to them, this is not an easy task, and will require patience and a particular attention to, and is demanded by, *agape*, unity and service.

Love requires that the needs of the other, here the governed rather than the governing, be the determining factor; unity, as mentioned above, can be achieved only if the common ideal is expressed in concrete terms that communicate the same thought even if they sound or look different, not when strange or even contradictory ways of expression are imposed. The mandate of the Church is to serve the world; the function of the structure, the institutional Church, is, above all, to provide the possibility and support for the laity to fulfil its function in the world. This is clearly the direction Vatican II established. The ways and means for such a revision will have to be determined by the universal magisterium, that is, the college of the bishops throughout the world. Control mechanisms (and appropriate powers) will have to be clearly defined, so as to ensure the preservation of the fundamental principles while allowing the freedom to implement necessary adaptations.

3.2.4 Participation

The desired full, active and conscious participation can be achieved only if the members of the assembly understand the liturgy. For this, all of the above are necessary, but they are not sufficient. An understanding of the importance of the participation of the assembly and a willingness to be involved are also required.

Participation that is both full and conscious presupposes two aspects: information, that is, mystagogy, and an awareness of unity. Mystagogy can and should include both the rite itself and additional formation. The language and symbolism of the celebration must include sufficient, and sufficiently clear, indication that what happens (or is meant to happen) involves every participant. For instance, it is important to be reminded that participating in the sacrifice of Jesus implies that we, also, are willing to offer ourselves to God and, thus, when we ask that God accept our sacrifice at the hands of the presider, we ask that God accept us.

The second condition is no less essential. Throughout the rite it must be evident that while there are clearly different liturgical roles for the participants, the importance of all participants is equal. This again does not, and must not, mean a loss of respect for the role of the presider, it is simply an indication that he is a member of the celebrating community, is "one of us," an expression of the essential unity created by the sacrament.

The necessary changes will have to be carefully explained, including underlying reasons and truths, if they are to be accepted and effective. If the liturgy is properly understood, participation will not be a separate aim, it will naturally follow from the rite itself. In this respect it is also important to emphasize that active participation does not necessarily mean activity, which, in fact, can even be a barrier to full participation. What all members of the assembly are called to partake in is the essential event symbolized by the liturgy: in the Eucharist, a "becoming part of" the sacrifice of Jesus, i.e., sacrificing one's self; in liturgies of the sacraments, an acceptance of what that particular act of God is meant to achieve and a willingness to cooperate with it.

Willingness to participate will also be easier to achieve if the liturgy is enjoyable. This does not mean that it has to be entertaining, but certainly that it has to be a celebration. Properly understood every liturgy is joyful, or at least can be so. This is true even for the celebration of the sacrament of penitence and for the liturgy of funerals. The title "sacrament of penitence," in itself, is a misnomer, for the sacrament is not about penitence, but about healing, forgiveness and *metanoia*, the decision to change one's life, to start anew. Asking for the sacrament is already an expression of penitence; the sacrament itself is the forgiving act of God and the granting of the grace that the *metanoia* may happen, surely a joyful occasion.

Joy is not the same as happiness. Losing a person is never a happy occasion and to a greater or lesser extent it always includes mourning. However the pain of mourning is essentially directed to oneself. If the parting makes it possible for the other to progress to something better, mourning for our loss can easily be combined with joy for the other. Christians believe that a faithful person is welcomed by God upon death, certainly a better place than our world, and thus the ritual of leave-taking, properly understood and conducted, is not a happy but is still a joyful occasion.

3.2.5 Conclusions: what is needed

The process towards a meaningful liturgical celebration of the People of God was made an official project of the Church by Vatican II. It is not something that can be achieved and accomplished with any finality, it has to be an ongoing undertaking. It is, however, important to firmly (but, again, not unchangeably) establish the conditions under which the work can successfully continue, even under the foreseeable ever-changing circumstances.

If the liturgy is to be fully understandable to over one and a half billion Catholics of very different circumstances, languages, modes of thought, cultures and backgrounds, the fundamental concept of unity has to be properly understood, clearly enunciated, proclaimed and practiced. Unity is not uniformity; given this diversity, uniformity can even be a barrier to unity. Words, expressions, gestures, symbols do have very different meanings in different languages and cultures, and sometimes no meaning at all. The importance has to shift from using the same signs, to expressing the same truth.

This, in turn, requires considerable changes both in the rules and rubrics and in the decision-making structure of the Church, a restoring of the authority of the bishops and their regional bodies so that they can make the necessary adaptations. These changes will necessarily touch some very important aspects of the liturgy and of the life of the Church and thus will have to be based on serious studies and consultation in such diverse fields as theology, liturgy (or, more properly, liturgiology),[5] anthropology, linguistics and even sociology. It is highly likely that such widely ranging fields of study will necessitate significant contributions by lay scientists and scholars.

As some of these changes will have a direct effect on everybody in the Church (and quite possibly even beyond), it will be essential that members of the clergy be properly informed and trained, not only at the end of the process, but from the very beginning. It falls to the priests in direct contact with the people to accomplish the difficult task of explaining the changes (preferably before they are implemented) and preparing the assemblies for them and, thus, they also need to be well prepared.

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[5] "Systematic study of liturgies," *WUD,* 825.

After the experience of some communities where there was no appropriate formation in connection with the reforms of Vatican II, it should not need accentuation that catechesis and mystagogy throughout this whole process is essential. The aim is to foster the proper participation of the faithful (meaning both ordained and lay persons), an aim that cannot be achieved without the full knowledge and cooperation of the individual members.

This latter point is sometimes overlooked. Such efforts are clearly directed to the benefit of the people and it is assumed that they will welcome them. However, what is obvious for the expert may be hard to understand and accept for somebody uninformed, arguably the majority of Catholics. It is therefore doubly important to inform them, not only so that they will be willing to accept the changes, but also to make them better able to become fully active members of the life of the Church.

3.3 Sacraments and sacramental preparation

Tremendous progress has been achieved since Vatican II in the celebration and the understanding of sacraments, but a great deal remains to be done. We have spoken of the celebration above; here we will focus on the preparation and understanding. This does not merely involve catechists and those preparing for the reception of different sacraments. On the one hand, the whole community is supposed to be involved, on the other, sacraments influence how Christians live and consequently have an important role in the whole life of the Church.

The primary aim of sacramental preparation is to make clear the meaning of the sacrament, in other words, what really happens in, by and through it. This has to include not only the actions of God, but also their effects and the ensuing responsibilities for the recipient, the community and the various associates of the recipient.

3.3.1 Responsibilities

Sacraments are always received voluntarily. If it is not so, there may be some *ex opere operato* effect, the sacrament itself is not complete. It is important to remember that this principle does not mean that the administration of the sacrament itself causes some automatic or magical

effect, it simply means that the effectiveness of the sacrament is independent of the holiness of the minister but still depends on the attitude of the recipient.[6]

Voluntary reception implies a willingness to accept the resulting responsibilities. Baptism, for instance, confers the status of being a child of God, a member of the Body of Christ and a share in his prophetic, royal and priestly function and dignity. These are tremendous gifts, involving tremendous responsibility. A baby is obviously incapable of making the decision to accept this responsibility. Baptism, for all practical purposes, is meaningless unless a child is brought up in a way that, in time, makes the meaning of his or her baptism clear and enables the maturing person to accept, or, for that matter, reject it. In this case the responsibility is, or rather ought to be, assumed by the parents and godparents and the whole community. This is why baptism should always be celebrated in the presence of the assembly, where it must be entirely clear that those gathered are not meant simply to applaud the newly baptised child and congratulate the parents, but, in effect, to also make a life-long commitment to taking care of him or her spiritually, as well as in any other aspect of life.

3.3.2 Preparation

It is important for those involved in sacramental preparation to keep in mind that it is not preparation for the celebration that is essential. This is particularly key in preparing children for the reception of the Eucharist or for confirmation. There is often a long and careful preparation in the catechesis of the sacrament, but then, in the last few weeks, attention is almost totally focused on the celebration. The result is that this is what "sticks" in the mind of the child. The situation is often made worse when the child is asked to assume an unusual role, such as proclaiming the readings or the universal prayer. To stand in front of the whole assembly of mainly adults and read an obviously important text is, for a 7- or 8-year old child, an awesome task. His or her whole attention will be so concentrated on doing the task well that nothing else will matter and, likely, that will be the only thing the child remembers of the whole event.

If a sacramental liturgy is properly prepared it is practically almost always possible to lead the recipient through it without more than minimal preparation – provided that the symbols,

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[6] *CCC*, #1128; Martos, *Doors,* 109; etc.

gestures and actions are clear and he or she is well prepared as to the meaning of the sacrament.

From what has been said, it should be clear that a careful preparation of sponsors (and, in the case of children, parents) is equally important. There are two central aspects to keep in mind in preparing the recipient as well as the sponsor and parents. The first is that proper preparation cannot be restricted to "classroom teaching," because it is not mere teaching (important as that is), but accompaniment that is required.[7] This also implies that the leader of catechesis, the person most responsible for assuring that it is correct and proper, must be a well trained and well prepared catechist, and that the catechesis, almost by necessity, should involve the whole community. This, in turn, in most communities, requires deliberate and ongoing formation of all the members of the community, in order to make them aware of their responsibilities.

As far as the celebrations are concerned, what was said about liturgy clearly applies here as well, because celebrating a sacrament is always a liturgy.

3.3.3 Conclusions: what is needed

Given the importance of sacraments in Catholic Christian life, sacramental reform will almost automatically be required to make any meaningful change effective. The teaching about sacraments, the catechesis and mystagogy accompanying them, and the preparations, liturgies and responsibilities connected to them will all have to be geared to the three basic principles of *agape,* unity and service.

After some four hundred years of an almost total absence of any serious development in Catholic sacramental theology, the half-century since Vatican II has produced an astounding degree of activity in the field. However, as we have seen in the discussion of the *CCC*, many of these advances are not yet part of the official views of the Church. An updating of sacramental practices according to the best advances in sacramental theology is one of the urgent needs for the resolution of the present crisis. Without a clear acceptance of the advances proposed and

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[7] Cf., Congregation For the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis,* (Ottawa: Libreria Editrice Vaticana/ Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997), especially #148, 156-162, etc.

accepted by many theologians, their work remains an academic effort that will not help the Church, as such, very much.

One of the acute problems needing resolution (but one that will hardly be solvable without a solid theological basis) is that presented by the scarcity of ordained priests. As the laity becomes gradually more informed about the faith, the need for the reception of sacraments becomes greater, yet they are often not available because of the lack of those empowered to administer them. The theological background of this problem needs a thorough investigation, so that remedies can be found and applied. In some cases that may be the acceptance of different ways of administering the sacrament, such as communal absolution, which, while theoretically possible, is nevertheless forbidden in most instances. In other cases the solution may be an extension of the power to administer the sacrament, as already is sometimes the case for baptism. There may be, if not many, at least some possibilities that until now have not been recognized; careful study and open discussion may bring unexpected results.

An obvious need is a strengthening of catechetical formation through the continuous training of catechists, again with a strong emphasis on the three principles of *agape*, unity and service. An important and essential tool, both in the formation of catechists and in catechesis itself, is the preparation and publication of local catechisms, in a way that makes it possible for competent local authorities to modify those parts of the *CCC* that are deemed to be inappropriate and to adapt the contents, language, etc. to the local needs and thinking. Similarly, and in connection with liturgical renewal, an updating of sacramental liturgies is also needed in order to keep step with both the changing world and changes within the Church. The task is difficult and arduous, but essential and urgent.

3.4 The Church as the Body of Christ

The concept that the Church is the Body of Christ and that through baptism we are all members of it was established by Paul and is, thus, part of the oldest tradition of Christianity. This fact has, from our perspective, two important implications. First, the Church cannot truly be the Church unless it is, acts and works as this Body; second, it is extremely important to properly understand and keep in mind the meaning of the expression "Body of Christ" and the characteristics flowing from it.

3.4.1 Christ and his Body

Christ is not equal to his body; he is much more than that. Thus the Church cannot claim to "be Christ" even though it is the Body of Christ, yet it is quite correct to say that Christ is the Church. But we have to be careful: even though the analogy fits, it, like any analogy, is not perfect. The Church *is* the Body of Christ, but this does not limit Christ to his Body. He certainly is not limited in his knowledge of the world to what members of the Church know and see, and there is nothing that can stop him from directly contacting any person, including one not in the Church. This is his choice, just as it is his choice that in the ordinary course of events he will be known by people only through the Church.

It may be easier to accept and understand if we say that the body is the physical presence of the person. Even though I am more than my body, as far as I know, my body is the only means by which I can be in the world, can know the world, can communicate with it and by which others can know me and communicate with me. Thus, if the Church is the Body of Christ then it is the physical presence of Christ in the world and, ordinarily, only through the Church can people get to know Christ. This places a tremendous responsibility on each member of the Church and on the Church as such.

To know a person does not mean merely to listen to or look at him or her or to read about that person. Often it is the behaviour, the attitudes, the many unspoken gestures and even some of the things the person attempts to hide that lead to real familiarity, knowledge of the person as person. The same is true of the Church, but with one important exception. "The Church" is, as it were, invisible, intangible, cannot be directly experienced. People can only know the Church through knowing its members. They will form their image and opinion of the Church according to the attitudes and behaviour they see and experience from the

members, i.e., Christians, and how Christians relate to them. Every member of the Church, regardless of his or her function or status, thus shares the responsibility mentioned above.

Jesus Christ has given himself as the Way to God, a means by which unity based on *agape* and service can become a reality among people. This also signals that these are fundamentals of his person. They also must be fundamental characteristics of his Body.

3.4.2 Members of the Body of Christ

We face here the difficulty of often-used terms. We frequently speak of the Church as the Body of Christ, but rarely specify exactly who this means. In common parlance, when we say "the Church did this," or "the Church did that," what we often mean is the hierarchy or "the Vatican," i.e., the visible government of the Roman Catholic Church. Both are important, even essential, parts of the Church, but they are not the Church, much less the Body of Christ. The problem here is not only that this usage separates the clergy from what, for lack of a better term, we call the faithful, the laity.[8] One of the unfortunate consequences of this interpretation of what *Church* means is that it frees the laity from responsibility.

Such an attitude is deadly for the Body of Christ as well as for the world, because it, in effect, sabotages the work of salvation, which is a task assigned to all members, every baptized person: to make Christ known to the world and to bring salvation to everyone. Chapter IV of *Lumen Gentium*, the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church* of Vatican II, makes one thing entirely clear: the function of lay members of the Church is equally important for the life of the Church and for its capacity to accomplish its mission as that of the ordained priesthood. The functions are different, but the calling, the vocation, as it were, for both comes from God and both are essential and equal parts of the economy of salvation and, therefore, both have to be undertaken with equal responsibility.

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[8] The difficulty with the term "faithful" is that it is used in an exclusive sense, i.e., to specify Catholics who are not ordained or do not belong to a "religious" order (the *religious* is put in quotation marks for the same reason). This, in a sense, is an insult to clergy and religious, because it implies that they are not faithful. On the other hand, it may be interpreted and presented by critics of the faith as meaning that the laity is seen as the "simple folk" who need to unquestionably believe what is preached to them by a ruling group. *Lumen Gentium* states incontrovertibly that the term "faithful" includes all members of the Church (#31).

In a recent homily, Msgr. Jacques Berthelet, Bishop of the Diocese St-Jean-Longueuil, pointed this out:

> Witnesses of a gospel of salvation, of the good news of salvation, of the good news that God is Emmanuel, who is with us and who gives us signs of his love: this is the meaning of this Holy Week, the meaning of this Chrism Mass[9] […]
>
> "The familiar passage from the prophecy of Isaiah is extended in today's reading to include these words: *you yourselves shall be named priests of the Lord, ministers of our God shall you be called*. These words are addressed to the people of God, newly returned from exile, and announce God's intention to reconstitute Israel as *a kingdom of priests, a holy nation* (Ex 19, 16). The reading from Revelation uses the same language to talk about the saving work of the risen Jesus. Having *freed us from our sins by its blood*, it says, he *has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father*. The context of each reading indicates that both are speaking of the priesthood of the people and not of the ordained priesthood."[10] […] We are consecrated by the baptismal anointing, by the water and by the Holy Spirit, and we become disciples of Jesus, we become priests, prophets and kings, we become a people consecrated in his name. This is the fundamental consecration. This is what we celebrate in this Chrism Mass […]
>
> Dear brothers and sisters we live this celebration at a time when the world is greatly troubled, when our Church is compromised, when many believers live with doubts. It is exactly at times like this that we are invited to turn to Christ and to hold fast to his Word of life.[11]

This is what the mission of the Church has been for the past two millennia and what it must be in the new one; and this is the perspective the whole Church, the whole People of God, has to work and live by.

Such a responsibility requires a considerable amount of continuous mystagogy of all members, including the clergy: the clergy, because one of its most important functions is to assure the proper formation of the laity; the laity, because formal religious instruction is less and less available in most of the world, and, also, because in a constantly changing world our understanding has to be kept updated. We are used to the thought that the way we think about and react to the world needs to change (i.e., mature) as we age and mature. Such an adaptation

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[9] "Témoins d'un évangile de salut, d'une bonne nouvelle de salut, de la bonne nouvelle que Dieu est l'Emmanuel, qu'il est avec nous et qu'il nous donne des signes de son amour. Voilà le sens de cette semaine sainte, le sens de cette messe chrismale" (homily of Bishop Jacques Berthelet, Chrism Mass, April 7, 2009; the manuscript was generously supplied by the author and is used with his permission; my translation).

[10] The embedded quote is from Vatican II Weekday Missal.

[11] "De la même manière, c'est par l'onction baptismale, par l'eau et par l'Esprit que nous sommes consacrés, que nous devenons disciples de Jésus, que tous nous devenons prêtres, prophètes et roi, que nous devenons un peuple consacré à son nom. Voilà la consécration fondamentale. Voilà ce que nous célébrons dans cette messe chrismale […] Chers frères et sœurs, nous vivons cette célébration alors que notre monde est passablement troublé, que notre Église est mise en cause, que le doute habite plusieurs croyants. C'est justement dans ces moments que nous sommes invités à tourner notre regard vers le Christ et à nous attacher à sa Parole de vie" (Berthelet, see note 9).

to a vigorously changing world is even more essential. Besides the fundamental tenets of the faith and Scripture, it is also important to focus on the triple essential characteristic of the Church and hence of Christians, *agape*, unity and service.

Mystagogy, by definition the means of deepening one's understanding of received sacraments, must also include increased awareness of the significance of the liturgy, especially of the eucharistic liturgy. By the *anamnesis* that is invoked through conscious and active participation in the Eucharist, we are united with Christ, we become the Body of the person whose whole life was a sacrifice, who lived to make us sacred. As his life was a love-gift to us, united through the Eucharist with Jesus Christ and each other our life also has to become such a gift to others. Cyprian says that participation in the Eucharist, sharing the body and blood of Christ, means to "become eucharist," to offer one's self as sacrifice, not by dying, but by living a Christian life through acts of charity and care for others,[12] that is, in the spirit of *agape* and service, in unity with Christ and with each other.

Besides mystagogy, an adjustment is also needed in the interpretation of the relationship of the different functions within the Church. The interpretation of such concepts as community, unity, leadership, government, etc. have changed drastically in the past half-century or so. Vatican II recognized the radicalness of these changes and the need for the Church to adjust to them. We will return to this topic.

3.4.3 Who is a member of the Body of Christ?

It is easy to answer this question if we understand the Body of Christ as the community of the baptized, because the answer is spelled out in the definition: everybody who is baptized becomes a member of Christ's Body. This is how #1213 of *CCC* defines the effects of baptism. When, however, we phrase the question in relation to the Roman Catholic Church, the answer is much more complicated.

Even though baptism remains the primary condition for being a Roman Catholic Christian, this in itself is not enough – at least in theory and law. Thus *CCC* #836 quotes *Lumen Gentium* 14*,* which says that every person is called "to this Catholic unity of the People

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[12] Quoted in *Jésus Christ, pain rompu pour un monde nouveau. Document de réflexion théologique et spirituelle pour le Congrès Eucharistique International de Lourdes* (Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1980, 1981), 49.

of God," the Catholic Church, and that all are called to be members. However, in the following paragraph (#837) additional conditions are listed as necessary for being "fully incorporated into the society of the Church," later also called the "visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops." To be a part of this "society," it is necessary to "accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization" and to be joined to it "by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesial government and communion." Both documents add the *caveat*: "Even though incorporated into the Church, the one who does not however persevere in charity [used usually in the sense of *agape*] is not saved. He remains indeed in the bosom of the Church but 'in body' not 'in heart.'"

The problem with this description is that neither document defines all the terms used. To what, specifically, does the expression "together with the entire organization" refer? How do these bonds function: by their existence, their reception, or, in the case of professions of faith, recitation and acceptance of what they mean, or by being willing to live one's life according to them? If the last, does this mean live every aspect of every bond at least partially, or totally? What is the bond and what is its nature regarding ecclesial government? Does it imply total submission no matter what the ecclesial authority prescribes, even if it is contrary to one's well-formed conscience or to informed knowledge of Scripture? And the list could be continued.

The *Code of Canon Law* is somewhat more helpful.[13] Canons 204 and 205 in the introductory section of Part I, *Christ's faithful*, use practically the same terms as the *Lumen Gentium* to define who belongs to the Church. The following sections, "Title I, The Rights and Obligations of All Christ's Faithful" and Title II dealing specifically with the "lay members of Christ's faithful" provide at least some clarification. The term *faithful* is used for all who "are incorporated into Christ through baptism" (Can. 204), but the laws logically are valid *as laws* only for Roman Catholics. Lay people are the non-ordained; the members of what usually are called "religious," if not ordained, are laypersons, but "their state […] does pertain to […] the life and holiness" of the clergy (Can. 207). Can. 208 very specifically states that there is "a

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[13] *The Code of Canon Law in English Translation,* prepared by The Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland in association with The Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand and The Canadian Canon Law Society (London: Collins/Publication Service of Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. 1983).

genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ's faithful." Among the obligations of the faithful we find preserving the "communion with the Church at all times," including external actions, presumably Christian behaviour (Can. 209§1); carrying out responsibilities to both the universal (Roman Catholic?) and particular Church (Can. 209§2); making a "wholehearted effort to lead a holy life" (Can. 211§1); and "the right and obligation" to "manifest to the sacred Pastors their views on matters which concern the good of the Church" (Can. 211§3).

Apart from the obligations of all faithful, among the obligations of lay persons it is emphasized that they too have an obligation "to strive so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world" (Can. 225§1) and "to permeate and perfect the temporal order of things with the spirit of the Gospel" and thus give witness to Christ (Can. 225§2). They also have the "right and duty" to acquire the necessary knowledge of Christian teaching so as to be able to live by it and be an apostle of it (Can. 229). Canons 228 and 230 specify the right to occupy offices or act in capacities according to their ability, to assist the pastors and to be liturgical ministers, all as the law allows.

While there are descriptions of the obligations following from baptism, neither these parts nor the ones dealing with baptism, or with the penalties and how and when they can be imposed, give any indication of the status of those baptized persons who for some reason not under their control – such as lack of religious upbringing, education or environment – either cease to live like Christians or never had the opportunity to try. While this may sound like an isolated or unusual case, the fact is that it describes a very large percentage of baptized persons, at least in the West. Or, what of the many Catholics who regard both the Church, i.e., the community and organization, and their church, i.e., the place where they gather and the worship they attend, as places of comfort and relaxation? This is particularly true of the younger generation in the West. However, the Christianity Jesus founded offers neither (cf., Mt 10:16–24, Lk 21:12–17, etc.). Are they, should they, remain members of the Church and be so recognized?

The concern here is not whether their baptism was a true sacrament or whether grace works in their lives, but whether or to what degree they are members of the Body of Christ and what responsibility the community has to them. The latter also raises the questions of the

degree to which, and in which cases, infant baptism is still desirable, and what degree of doubt is necessary before denying baptism to a newborn or a child regarding the parents' and/or the godparents' preparedness to raise him or her as a Christian. All these issues ought to be raised.

These are important and very difficult questions. The Church, however, must decide how to deal with them. The answers will depend in great measure on how we perceive both the function of the Body of Christ in the world and the conditions for being able to accomplish that function.

3.4.4 The function of the Body of Christ

The Body of Christ is the physical presence of the Lord and Saviour in the world; its vocation is the same as that of Jesus Christ, to bring salvation to every person and thus to build the Kingdom of God. All members of the Body of Christ are anointed to be prophets, priests and kings, and all are called to bring the Good News to the world. The conditions the realization of the three-fold principle of *agape*, unity and service demand are that every member, every cell, as it were, of the Body accept its role in the effort and that the effort not be limited to preaching.

Bringing salvation to the world is not the exclusive terrain of the clergy. It is not stretching the teachings of Vatican II to say that it is not even their primary function, which is, rather, to make the lay members of the Body capable of accomplishing their function of bringing salvation to the world. Thus the contribution of the clergy to the proper functioning of the whole Body is essential, but it is directed above all to the members. By the very nature of their vocation, they are, to a greater or lesser extent, separated from the "outside" world, while the layperson lives in the world, in the midst of it. The Pope and the few hundred people who work in the Vatican cannot save or even change the world, even with the help of half a million ordained priests; only the more than one billion Catholics can, especially with the cooperation of the hundreds of millions of other Christians.

The other essential component, if this mission is to be accomplished in the spirit of agape, unity and service, is that evangelization must not be restricted to preaching. It is clear that a proclamation of revelation is essential, but it is not necessarily the most important act, and it will almost certainly be unsuccessful if not backed up by the example of living the proclaimed truth.

If we take a look at the age of persecutions, the time when it was most difficult to be a Christian was also the time when Christianity spread most aggressively. In an age of poor and difficult communications and slow travel, while facing brutal persecution and a society with principles, beliefs and values diametrically opposed to it, in barely 300 years this new religion penetrated every level of society in the Middle East, North Africa, and good portions of Europe and Asia and attracted so great a percentage of the populations of these areas that in 380 CE it was declared the state religion of the Empire.

These people were not essentially different from us, but the majority remained faithful even, if necessary, through torture and death. If they were no different from us, what made them do it? They deeply and thoroughly believed what their faith taught; Christianity was something one lived, i.e., something that suffused every moment, every thought and every action of those who accepted it. When they became Christians, their sponsors and teachers made very sure that they knew and accepted that faith before they were admitted to baptism. Today it may sound like an oxymoron, but one of the things that made Christianity strong and attracted so many people was the difficulty involved in becoming a Christian.

Naturally there must have been something besides theology that attracted people to this oft-persecuted, scorned, despised and even hated group: it was the witness of those who lived in a Christian community, a community where everyone was equal, where everyone was accepted and where each found the kind of security that only being loved can give. This was also what enabled them to love and, when necessary, help those outside the community, even their enemies. The unity experienced there, the complete living of what they believed, also led to, and was expressed through, vibrant, joyful celebrations, according to non-Christian descriptions, even in the face of death.

Remembering these aspects of what is involved in living a Christian life is important, because we must show the world what we mean when we ask it to accept the values Jesus Christ represented, taught and offered us. In fact this is what simply being a Christian means and it requires a fundamental and radical change in the way we live. Yet, when the average person in the pew hears homilies about living Christianity or reads spiritual books that deal with it, the reaction too often is "I can't do that," or "one should not take these things literally," or "this is for saints" – as if all of us were not called to be saints.

The early Christians could do it and did do it, in spite of unbelievable difficulties. Today's world is very different, but changing to a Christian way of life may be just as difficult, if for other reasons. Yet without living his gift we cannot be his Body; without this life the Church ceases to be the Church.

3.4.5 Becoming and remaining a member of the Body of Christ

It would be outside the parameters of this study to discuss the sacrament of baptism as such, nor is it our intention to do so. The need for a liturgy that clearly and, for the average contemporary person, understandably expresses the meaning of the symbolism has already been mentioned. The question of infant baptism was also raised and we will not return to it. Here the focus will be on the person who wants to become and remain a member of the Body of Christ.

The preparation of adults for baptism is described and prescribed by the RCIA.[14] The emphasis this rite places on the involvement of the community was already mentioned in Chapter 1. The RCIA is a very carefully composed document and is arguably the best official liturgical book available. It certainly lays stress on understanding Christian living and on unity and on the importance of the example of the catechist and the sponsors. It also states that candidates should only pass from one stage to another when their spiritual readiness is at least as great as their knowledge. Thus both the rules and (in English at least) the resources are available for properly preparing a person for baptism and confirmation and the Christian life which follows. Yet problems still exist.

3.4.5.1 Preparation of catechists and sponsors

Whether the expected liturgy involves baptism of infants, children or adults, proper preparation of catechists and sponsors is essential. This is necessary even when the person in question is a well-known, practicing member of the community, or when his or her religious formation is above average. Being a sponsor or catechist implies responsibilities and may include situations that are not covered by the usual religious instruction and practice. Also, catechesis of parents and sponsors preparing for the baptism of an infant or child, or for

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[14] *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,* completely revised and enlarged, with Canadian supplement (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1987). Hereafter cited as RCIA.

accompanying an adult on the path to baptism, is essentially different than the catechesis needed by children preparing for the reception of the Eucharist and confirmation. Unfortunately, the diocese itself may not have a person with the necessary qualifications to give adequate training for the persons involved. In such a case, neighbouring dioceses must be asked for help and, ultimately, the regional or national bishops' conferences must see to it that adequate formation is provided.

This kind of formation may be especially important when using the RCIA. True, this liturgical book does give detailed information and instructions. However, even this clearly written and carefully organized book of over 300 pages needs explanation. If we take into account that the catechists working in the parishes are often volunteers and that it is not rare that even paid workers are part-timers and frequently overworked, it is hard to expect them to study and remember the details demanded by the system when the time comes to apply them.

There is also a very particular obligation placed on catechists conducting RCIA preparations: they not only have to become sufficiently close to candidates to be able to judge whether they are ready to accept all the demands of membership in the Church, catechists also have to have the courage and strength to be able, if necessary, to delay advancing a candidate, even if that means delaying baptism itself. This, of course, also means that there can be no set schedule for the RCIA program and no predetermined length for the catechesis;[15] this and the underlying reasoning must be understood from the outset, not only by the candidate, the catechist and the sponsor, but also by the pastor and the community.

All stages of the preparation for baptism of every person involved have to emphasize the three principles of the life of the Church, *agape*, unity and service.

3.4.5.2 Preparation of the community

If the community is to participate in the preparation of the candidate (or the parents) and support the sponsor, it is essential that its members also be prepared. Even in places where baptism is regularly administered during the eucharistic celebration the members of the assembly are rarely aware that initiating a person into the community automatically places responsibilities on the members. They need to be adequately informed about the task and also

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[15] Cf., "Outline for Christian Initiation of Adults," RCIA, 14.

of exactly what is expected of them. If the RCIA is followed properly, it is also important to explain the reason behind the dismissal of the candidate (and, by necessity, the sponsor or catechist) from the assembly after the Liturgy of the Word.

While the presider usually gives these kinds of explanations, depending on the nature of the assembly they may, at times, be more fruitfully given by a layperson, possibly the catechist or the adequately prepared sponsor or parent. In any case, emphasizing the example of the members of the community is important, as is illustrating that catechesis is not merely the "teaching of facts," but is a guide to life as it is lived by Christians.

In consequence the example to be given very much involves the welcome and treatment the candidate receives by everyone present and the prevailing atmosphere of the assembly. It is very hard to convince a candidate that self-giving love, unity and service are fundamentals of Christian life if he or she experiences coldness or neglect – or, for that matter, artificial and dishonest warmth – when in the presence of the supposedly Christian community into which s/he expects to be initiated.

3.4.5.3 Follow-up

There are few things that can disappoint and cool initial enthusiasm faster and more profoundly than a person being surrounded by kindness, support, interest while in need or waiting to enter a community and then experiencing that interest fade quickly and disappear. Initiation in Christian living never ends during a person's life. The need for both continued faith formation and care does not end with any part of the liturgy of the initiation, be that baptism, Eucharist or confirmation. It is easy to forget that every reception of the Eucharist is a sacrament of initiation, not only the first one. The function of the catechist, the community and the sponsor does not end with the reception of either sacrament, even though the persons responsible for a particular role may change.

This aspect of the preparation is often forgotten, even though the well-known phenomenon of first communicants or confirmed youngsters disappearing from the assemblies shortly after being feted during the liturgies is, more often than not, caused by this kind of behaviour on the part of the community as well as the organizers of the catechesis. It needs no assertion that this is in sharp contrast with all three basic principles we work with.

It is important to mention, however, that this aspect must be part of the preparation of all the actors in the catechesis and liturgy, including the recipient. All have to be prepared and willing to continue keeping in contact with the person whom they are preparing and to continue being responsible for his or her progress on the road that leads to full maturity in faith. The responsibility of the community extends beyond the person of the recipient. Support for the parents, godparents and sponsors as well as the catechist is also essential if the Church that is the community is to remain alive and active in its own part of the world as the Body of Christ. It is true that the Body exists only if it lives as the person; the person Jesus said, "I will be with you always." We are not divine and our present knowledge of what awaits us after death is limited; but at least we can promise that we will pray even then.[16]

3.4.5.4 The Body and its cells

The Body of Christ is supposed to work *in persona Christi*, not only in the name of Christ, but also in the way of Christ – always. The very fact that this ideal is nearly impossible to reach for any individual human being, no matter who, no matter his or her position or function in the Church, gives a hint to how the Church can achieve it: together. Already around the middle of the first century Paul pointed out that every part of the Body is an important contributor to the health and proper functioning of the Body (1Cor 12:19–23). Today we know that this view is true even as far as the cells of the physical body are concerned: even a few sick cells can impede its proper functioning.

The world can know Christ only through his Body, the Church. True, God can choose to reveal himself in extraordinary ways, but he also chose to do so, usually, "ordinarily," only through his Body. The effect of the presence of Jesus for some thirty years after his Incarnation clearly shows that our knowledge of God becomes much deeper, much more complete, through the example of a life lived than through the study of abstract concepts.[17]

Thus being a "member," a cell of Christ's Body is a tremendous dignity and also a tremendous responsibility, for the world will know God and Christ only through the living

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[16] On the topic of faith formation also cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis,* English edition (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997), especially section "Catechesis at the Service of Ongoing Formation in the Faith," Chapter Two, 69–77.

[17] The term "know" here is used in a sense closer to understanding, comprehension or familiarity rather than intellectual knowledge (i.e., the French "connaissance" instead of "savoir").

cells of his Body. And this understanding, this familiarity, cannot be passed on merely by words, no matter how good, correct, how much they do come from God, unless their essence is also apparent in the behaviour, attitudes and acts of the person and the community proclaiming them. This responsibility rests on every single member of the Body because the whole cannot function properly without the proper functioning of its parts.

If the Church is to be relevant in the world it has to be active in the world, and this activity has to occur in the world where the Church is. Christ wants to be present in every corner of the world; only the members of his body, both ordained and lay, can bring him everywhere. It is a harsh thing to say, but any member who does not live in such a way that he or she does in fact become the living Christ for his or her immediate world, is a sick cell in the Body. The health of every body requires that sick cells either be healed or eliminated: otherwise it cannot be as efficient as necessary and, if these cells multiply, it cannot survive.

This fact raises the very important and very difficult question of the responsibility, in this respect, of the Church, as such, and equally of all its "healthy" members. Any solution obviously must be governed by the three principles of *agape*, unity and service. Here, however, there appears to be a conflict between responsibility towards the community and responsibility towards the person in question.

Part of the solution is relatively clear: a constant and conscious effort to educate, or rather, re-educate the members of the Church. This includes members of the clergy, because their traditional training and orientation often leads them in a different direction, and without their leadership no re-education of the laity will be possible or effective. Efforts have to be directed to active members and to those "far-away." All efforts aimed at teaching have to be carefully constructed and conducted, because they must be clear and clearly understandable to each person, regardless of schooling or even intelligence, yet they must also be uncompromising about the basic principles and truth of our faith. Traditional or theological language, symbolism and approaches are obviously often inadequate for the task.

Much more difficult is the question of those baptized persons who refuse to change. It is important that we speak here of deliberate refusal. Those who are simply uninterested may just need considerable time before the example of living the faith by the active members changes their attitude. This is a matter requiring delicate judgement since the difference between the

two attitudes will not usually be easily discernible. Yet it is still crucial for the health of the Church to decide whether a baptised person who deliberately refuses the Christian values remains a member of the Church. This question is not new. It appears to have been present from the very beginning. Circumstances, customs, and interpretations are constantly changing and a clear policy will have to be established, one that is valid and as easily applicable as possible in a diverse and changing world. It would be foolish to pretend that a solution can be proposed or even discussed here; this will require serious discussion and a decision by the Church, as such. In the process, the questions raised above relating to infant baptism will in all probability also be discussed and hopefully decided.

With the disappearance of pre-baptismal catechesis, conditions for becoming a member of the Church also disappeared; in one way or the other these have to be re-established, in an updated form of course. This may result in the loss of some members of the Church, just as with any change – and this change, if implemented, will be a radical one. The pertinent question is not whether, or to what extent the numbers of Catholics would diminish, but whether those members who would leave for this reason have ever really been members of the Body of Christ, appointed and committed to bringing salvation to the world, to building the Kingdom of God, or if they have considered membership in the Body of Christ as merely some kind of religious club, or traditional socio-religious association, to which they have a right to belong without any obligations.

There is no question about whether anybody who desires to become a Christian does or does not have a right to baptism. The question is, rather, on the definition of "a Christian." Today, at least in popular thinking, it means a member of one of the Christian denominations or, among the more religion-educated people, anybody who has been baptized. In a somewhat loose application of the *ex opere operato* principle, this is also how the term is often used in official documents of the Church. But can a person who has been baptized as a baby, maybe even received communion a few times, been confirmed, married in church, but otherwise lives a pagan or atheistic life really be called Christian, i.e., Christ-follower? This is not about people whom the institutional Church has rejected or hurt, nor about those who believe but find the rituals of the Church empty and meaningless, it is about those for whom, for all practical purposes, God is non-existent or just a vague something way up in the clouds.

Answering these difficult questions will require a concerted effort by the Church. It is essential that this effort be made if the radical change necessary in the lives of Catholic Christians, so as to recapture the attractive power of the teachings of Jesus Christ, are to be achieved. Without that change, the ability of the Church to accomplish its mission of being the physical presence of the Son of God on earth is, at best, highly questionable.

3.4.6 Conclusions: what is needed

To paraphrase the oft-used statement about the judicial system, for the Church to accomplish its mission it must not only be, but must also appear to be, the living Body of Christ. While this may be easy to say, it is rather difficult to achieve: Christianity has been working to fulfil this goal ever since it came into being.

The task is not made easier by the fact that the Church is both an institution and a community. People see and judge the actions, attitudes, behaviour of both the institution and the individual members, and they judge, above all, by appearances. This may be unjust, but it is a fact of life, especially given the increasingly vocal chorus of those who, for one reason or another are endeavouring to destroy the Church or its reputation. The most serious consequence of a failure in the Church's "being seen to be" is not the possible damage a false image can cause to the institution or individual Christians, no matter how grave that may be. The real damage comes from the fact that people outside the Church (or those members with inadequate formation) will acquire a distorted, often perverted image and idea of Christ and, through this, of God. And that is a complete negation of the mission of the Church.

The phenomena of empty pews and the direction in which humanity is proceeding are decidedly not in harmony with the teachings of Jesus. Both are at, or are approaching, a critical point and important decisions have to be made. If the Church is to be the effective and positive influence being the Body of Christ implies, radical changes are necessary in the operation of the institution and in the lives of individual Christians. Almost all aspects of such changes will be successfully achieved only if the changes are carefully and thoughtfully decided upon and accompanied by effective preparation, explication and support for all members, in other words, catechesis and mystagogy. This in itself will need preparation and support.

While the situation is urgent enough that the Church cannot wait until either step is completed, the basic necessity is a strong theological basis for projected changes. As

mentioned before, Vatican II, in spite of the tremendous work and progress it achieved, did not provide such a basis for the reforms it instituted, nor has it been officially established since. This lacuna is most unfortunate because it causes insecurity and allows too much room for personal preference and interpretation. Such a situation can lead to serious mistakes, both in misguided experimentations and the equally dangerous overly restrictive attempts to curb them. The role and functions of the Body have to be investigated in light of the teachings of Jesus, the history of the Church, and, equally importantly, the changing conditions in the world. The resulting theology must be in harmony with the triple principle of *agape*, unity and service, and clear and flexible enough to be applicable in different areas and circumstances. This aim, again, is more about emphasis and language than new content.

The three principles have always been recognized in Christian theology, but at times they have been obscured as a result of a perceived need to emphasis other aspects. Such was, for instance, the insistence on sinfulness and fighting against sin. There was a time, not so long ago, when this appeared to be the major concern of Catholics. Thus, for instance, a prayer-book written for and obligatorily used by Catholic students in Hungary in the 1940s contains an evening prayer that begins:

> At the end of my daily work I present myself before you, beloved Jesus, to render an account of my stewardship. Today again You have been with me, you have showered me with signs of your love kind Lord. I give you thanks with shame and gratitude for your benevolence. Was I today worthy of your love? Holy Spirit God, come and enlighten me to see how I returned the goodness of my Lord.[18]

There follows a page-long examination of conscience, focusing exclusively on failures, no mention of even the possibility that with the help of the Lord some good may have been done. The prayer then ends with "I am painfully aware, Lord, that today I again caused you sorrow with my many sins, you who loves me so much, and sullied my immortal soul." A nearly page-long act of contrition ends the prayer. Thus, the overwhelming focus is on the sins of the person saying the prayer. Even the mentions of the goodness of God are seen mainly in the perspective of sin. Professionals, athletes, creative artists know very well how important it is to recognize and correct one's shortcomings, but, also, that they will not succeed if they concentrate on avoiding mistakes rather than on trying to do better. In the same way,

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[18] Sandor Sik and Antal Schütz, *Imádságoskönyv, Egszersmind Kalauz a Lelki Életre a Tanulóifjuság számára* [Book of prayers also spiritual guide for students] (Budapest: Szent István-Társulat, 1940), 53–55. My translation.

mystagogy and faith education must concentrate on how to do better, how to be a more loving, open, welcoming and serving person and community.

Catechesis and mystagogy, based on the developed (or, not ideally but by necessity, even the developing) theology will have to be conscious and thoroughgoing. The aim must be to reach every member of the Body, each according to his or her status and stage of development. It must also be appropriate to time and place, and therefore will necessarily be different in every country or area, every culture and language, and, in all likelihood, it will also constantly change as time goes on. The resources provided and the necessary control will have to be properly flexible to both allow and assist the development of appropriate adaptations.

It is essential that the institutional Church fully support the whole process. Here it is possibly more important than in other area that the image of serving the members of the Church in their endeavour to become more fully the Body of Christ not only is, but also appears to be, the guiding principle. This will require considerable adaptation of the language and methods of working and very likely of the rules governing the life of the Church and of their implementation. When the changes begin to take effect, one of the first signs of success will probably be that the Church will begin to operate as, and will appear to be, more of a community.

3.5 The Church as community

The events at the Last Supper, even the nature of the meal itself, clearly indicate that what Jesus established on that occasion was meant to be more than just any kind of grouping, it was meant to be a community. This is a widely recognized aspect of Christianity. It is not, however, clear just what kind of community the Church is supposed to be, or what the implications of being a Christian community are and ought to be.

3.5.1 Christianity and community

The gospels make it quite obvious that the followers of Jesus were supposed to live as community. When John shows Jesus describing the characteristic of the group of his friends, he reports that Jesus says, "By this everybody will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34); when Jesus sends out the seventy disciples, he sends them in pairs (Lk 10:1; some ancient authorities read seventy-two); the Lord's Prayer addresses God as

Our Father in heaven (Mt 6:9).[19] Various passages in the Acts and the letters of the apostles also describe the early Christians as living in community, as do non-scriptural sources of the first centuries. The three principles of *agape*, unity and service also presuppose this communal character. All of this, however, does not answer the question. What kind of community is the Church supposed to be?

3.5.2 Community or communitas?

The dictionary definition of *community* is wide enough so that the term can be validly applied to the relationship both of one billion Catholics and of a group of ten friends: each is a group of people with something in common that binds them together. Up to this point in our work this loose definition has been sufficient. Now, however, speaking of the kind of community the Body of Christ has to be in order to accomplish the task described above, a more precise description is necessary.

Anthropologists, even though they do not always agree on the exact definition, occasionally use the word *communitas* in a sense that is close to describing the kind of community required here. The word usually means either a community in which everyone is equal, which brings this group of people to a higher level of unity and enables them to share common experiences, or an intense community spirit, characterized by equality, solidarity and togetherness. This type of spirit often develops in groups that experience a situation of liminality, i.e., a border-state between two modes of existence (e.g., in puberty, during immigration, etc.).[20] The three defining characteristics of a communitas are sufficiently akin to the principles of *agape*, unity and service to suggest the term's usefulness as a guide.

The characteristics of communitas are typical of the kind of community that could – and would – help a person in the liminal situation of becoming a true member of the Body of Christ, as described above. It is not unreasonable to say that a large portion of humanity today lives in a more-or-less liminal situation. The insecurity of a constantly changing world, the often almost total absence of generally accepted traditional values and rules of behaviour, the

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[19] In the generally accepted reading, Lk 11:2 says only "Father, hallowed be, …" while some variant readings are identical to Mt.

[20] I am paraphrasing what I have gathered from various sources over several years; this is not meant to describe the precise scientific use of the term by anthropologists.

constant warnings about dangers to health, the environment, the economy, even to the existence of life on earth, all place enormous stress on Western populations, while in other parts of the world large-scale dislocations, starvation, armed conflicts, poverty, desertification, all cause the same symptoms. There is a desperate need for the kind of support that communitas offers. For the Church to promote the formation of, and to support existing, communitas communities is not only an excellent way to accomplish its mandate, such communities are desperately needed for some of its own members. By necessity these would have to be Christian communities, i.e., ones in which the members either are Christians in the sense described above, or are seriously trying to be. There has to be an essential equality between members, for anyone who felt *a priori* inferior to the others would find it very difficult to aspire to their level.

Solidarity, both felt and experienced, is also essential, because that is what ensures help when and where it is needed, help that neither requires a request nor involves intrusiveness.[21] It comes from an "I've been there" attitude and thinking that can identify with the situation, feelings and problems of the person having difficulties. This, in turn, calls for closeness, both emotional and physical. One has to be available, when and where one is needed, and to have that "sixth sense" that close acquaintance, friendship and doing things together in harmony fosters. This is what makes it possible to sense the need and provide for it – sometimes with no more than, but still important, mere physical presence. Both equality and solidarity in their best forms require *agape*; true unity entails the kind, basic and honest equality described in Canon 208 of the Church: "Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ's faithful."

It follows from the above that it is important that members of this community know each other, a factor that limits the size of the membership of the communitas. It is sometimes stated that a person cannot know, in this kind of depth, more than about a hundred people. This, obviously, is much smaller than the whole Church or even a diocese. These, too, are vitally important, they can do much, especially in providing resources to smaller groups, but they cannot replace the communitas.

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[21] While we are speaking primarily about life within the community, if it is to be a true Christian community the same solidarity will also bind it to the rest of the parish and through it the diocese and the universal Church. Acceptance and attachment, however, has to be demonstrated by both sides.

The sad fact is that in many parishes this kind of community is missing. Most parishes are much too big to function in this way, and changes in membership (new job, moving away, etc.) and the often customary periodic replacement of the parish priest[22] almost prevent them from ever approaching this level of community. The lack of the sense of a community on which the parishioner can rely is certainly one of the reasons the Church is no longer as attractive as it used to be.

The human need for community did not disappear with changes in society, but communities that satisfied the need did. Living in a village or small town, where "everybody knows everybody" provided community, and the church was part and parcel of that community. Most suburbs and big cities do not and cannot provide such a community. Even those who turn to the Church in hopes of finding one are all too often disappointed. Many parishes operate more like institutions than communities, with rules, priorities, and different levels of authority, power and status. Much of this probably existed a hundred years ago as well, but within the community of the town or village and surrounded by friends who were clearly one's equals and on whose help and support one could count, it may not have mattered. Now it does.

Forming such communitas communities under the present circumstances, within and without the Church, is not an easy or simple task. By necessity it should, and hopefully will, involve formation of leaders, participants, administrators, etc. It may need changes in the makeup of the parish, the basic unit of the Church, or a re-organization and re-thinking of its operation. It most certainly will require strong leadership and support from all levels of the hierarchy.

It will take an enormous effort and a concomitant commitment to solve this problem, but the Church badly needs these communities. The radical reorientation we propose to the understanding of what being a Christian means requires the support that only such a community can offer. We also know that during the most successful period in the life of the Church, when not only was growth phenomenal, but the members, by all accounts, lived as fully as humanly possible the ideal given by Christ, in spite of the danger of persecution, one of the great attractions that drew people to the Church was the existence of this kind of

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[22] This practice appears to take advantage of a loophole in Canon 522.

community: "Look, how they love one another." If the Church is to be effective as the Body of Christ, quite possibly re-gaining this reputation may be the best, perhaps the only, way to do so.

3.5.3 The Church as a community of "washers of the feet"

According to John, we could define the Church as the community of washers of the feet. The first thing we have to clarify is, whose feet? Who are we, the People of God to serve? The repeated "love one another" of John could be interpreted as indicating some sort of exclusivity, even if the fact that Judas was among those whose feet Jesus washed weakens that position. However, the "*agapate* your enemies" and its explanation in Mt 5:43–48 is unmistakable, as is the commission Jesus gives in all four gospels and in Acts: the mandate of the Christian community is to the whole world.

Up to Vatican II the prevailing view, at least among vast numbers of the faithful, was that the Church was there to save, or safeguard, its members: it existed to make sure that those who belonged to it would eventually "go to their reward." The responsibility of Catholics toward those who did not belong to "our" Church was to convert them, so that they too might enjoy the safety of its protection. This may never have been the official teaching of the Church, but those of my age know from experience that it was the general understanding.[23]

The mission Jesus gave to the Church was to the world. Vatican II made this very clear: those Christians who "live in the world," i.e., the laity, have to serve the world.[24] There is no question that the needs to be served do have an order of importance: salvation is paramount. But that does not mean that other needs can or may be neglected; this, in turn, was made abundantly clear by Mt 25:31–46. This parable of Judgment Day also indicates that the concept of priority of salvation should not be interpreted in a cut-and-dry, neo-scholastic way. This is

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[23] An interesting example of this interpretation can be found in George Brantl, ed., *Catholicism*, Great Religions of the World, Richard A Gard, general ed., vol. 2 (New York: Georg Braziller,1962), 145: "As an institution, the Church has three functions commissioned to her by Christ: to enlighten the minds of men by teaching, to govern them by law, and to assist in the sanctification of their souls. The sanctification of the Church in sanctifying its members is fulfilled in all those activities by which She assists in bringing to fullness the life of grace in her members. Chief among these activities is the administration of the Sacraments as outlined above." What follows is a detailing of the functions of the Church, always as exclusively related to the members. The discussion "The Mission of the Church" focuses mostly on the work of the missionaries and only the very last paragraph speaks of the responsibility of lay members, for whom a Carmelite nun is given as the example to follow.

[24] Cf. *Lumen Gentium,* Ch. IV, #31.

also emphasized in John: Jesus requires his disciples to "wash feet" as an expression of loving as he loved. The two pericopes of Matthew and John (and others) also make it clear that the Kingdom of God is not merely heaven, where we go after we die to be rewarded for the good things we did here on Earth: it is to be established right here, because this was the plan of Creation.[25]

Of course the Church does talk about our responsibility to the needy, the poor, the suffering (one only has to read the papal encyclicals or listen to the speeches of the popes) and certainly a great deal is being done both by the institutional Church and by individual Catholics in this field. However, when we compare it with other manifestations of the Church's interest, can we really say that service is the "profound and spiritual" meaning of the Church, her defining characteristic? Do we, as community and also as institution do enough? Is this as much of a priority in the life of the Church as the principle of the washing of the feet demands?

In a world that is increasingly turning not only secular, but in many instances explicitly anti-religious and in some aspects anti-Christian, it may be of special importance to remember the power of love expressed in service to others. As W.H.C. Frend, British professor of ecclesiastical history and well-known author, states, in the fourth century the popularity and attraction towards Christianity "can be sought primarily in the tradition of service and love towards one's neighbour for which the Christians had gained a well-deserved reputation."[26] The loss of many of the social service functions the Church built up through the centuries, which in many places are now taken over by the state (for instance hospitals, education, care for the elderly, the needy, etc.), is no excuse for complacency. Not only are the government-

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[25] Cf., for instance, Ambrose, *De myst.* 6:30: "For we are all anointed into the kingdom of God and into the priesthood with spiritual grace"(quoted in Burkhard Neuenheuser, *Baptism and Confirmation*, trans. John J. Hughes (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1964), 115). Edward Schroeder argues that according to the gospel of Mark, the kingdom has already arrived ("A Second Look at the Gospel of Mark—Midway in the Year of Mark," *Currents of Theology and Mission*, 33.4 (August 2006): 291). Strecker describes the change demanded for living in the Kingdom that is present as a total turnaround, a conversion from the ways of the world ("Gottes-und Menschenliebe," 58). Vatican II says that the Kingdom of God "has been begun by God himself on earth and […] must be further extended until it is bought to perfection by him" (*LG,* #10).

[26] W.H.C. Frend, "The Winning of the Countryside," *Conversion, Catechumenate, and Baptism in the Early Church*, edited with introductions by Everett Ferguson, *Studies in Early Christianity* vol. XI (New York and London: Garland. 1993) 96–97.

organized services often inadequate, there is much that can and still needs to be done, both within Western society and in the rest of the world.

Agape cannot be restricted to impersonal "acts of charity," especially not to financial contributions, important as they are. The "hymn of love" of 1Cor 13 does not even mention this kind of "charity."[27] What it describes are the signs of the attitude of true love, of *agape*. For any community, whatever its size, to be able to claim to be Church, its hallmark has to be this attitude, which has to be manifest in everything that it is and does. It is important to remember that community, or even communitas, as such, does not exist, it is created by and only exists through its members. In consequence, every member of the Christian community has to strive to live up to this ideal of *agape*. Nor can this development be regarded as a "private matter": without it the Church ceases to be the Body, the physical presence of Jesus Christ in the world, its very existence depends on it.

That such an aim requires a constant effort flows from the very fact that we are all human. It must therefore be a constant priority of all aspects of the Church's work, and especially of catechesis and mystagogy to teach, emphasize, support, and be *agape*.

3.5.4 Conclusions: what is needed

The task the Church is facing in regard to the above is not to create, or even to re-create itself or its constituent parts as community; it is community. The task is, simultaneously, considerably easier and considerably more difficult. It is to adapt to changing circumstances in such a way as to both serve the members of the community and reinforce the community's ability to perform as the Body of Christ.

One of the essential conditions for achieving this aim is adequate catechesis and mystagogy. That again implies a carefully prepared, focused and continuous effort, ideally involving every member of the Church. However, this will not be enough. Accomplishing the task will in all likelihood require some adjustment in many, if not all, areas of the Church's activity and even structure, such as questions of sharing authority, use of language, organization of dioceses and parishes, etc. To be in all respects both proper and successful,

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[27] Quotation marks are used here to separate the everyday use of the term from its use in the much wider sense of *love* in documents of the Church, e. g., the *CCC*.

such work will also need a solid theological basis, consensus, and above all strict adherence to the fundamental principles of *agape*, unity and service.

3.6 The missionary Church

The mandate of the Church is to bring salvation to the world, the principal responsibility for achieving the aim of this mandate rests on the laity. As we have already discussed, even some ecclesiologists do not always recognize this, much less the average lay person. Missionary activity has been seen as entirely consisting of missions in exotic lands, with the only responsibility of the laity being to support these through donations and prayer. Today this view is untenable, not only because it does not correspond to what Scripture says but, also, because changing attitudes towards God, religion and the Church make it abundantly clear that "proclaiming the good news to the whole creation" (Lk 16:15) "teaching them everything Jesus commanded" (Mt 28:20) is also needed right where we live and, in fact, has to begin with the members of the Christian community.

Perhaps to counteract the previous mistaken interpretation, but undoubtedly also because it better describes the task, the term now used is *evangelization*. Briefly described, *evangelization* means "to suffuse an environment with the spirit of the Gospel." That cannot be achieved by merely teaching the truths of faith, not even chiefly by it. The Gospel is a message of a new life, a new kind of existence, which is learned primarily through experience of it. Thus evangelization consists first of all in creating the conditions necessary to live that new kind of life, essentially the three principles of *agape*, unity and service, and then, in giving an example by living it. Teaching the "theory" comes afterward, when interest is aroused. Without this example and practice, the Church is not able to evangelize the world. Because Christians are human and, as such, are called to but never really reach the level of being perfect, as the heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48), evangelization of the Church itself is a constant need.

3.6.1 Evangelization within the Church

Obviously the needs of those within the Church are different from those outside of it and those who are "far-away." A very large portion of these needs can be, and ought to be, covered by catechesis and mystagogy, provided that the aim of evangelization is recognized and consciously incorporated into the process.

However, even within the Church, knowledge is not the first requirement, even though it is extremely important. The mandate of the Church is directed towards the benefit of the world and, in this respect, specifically to the evangelization of the environment in which the local church exists and its members live. Their evangelizing presence in the environment will be possible only if they experience it, learn from it, and can use it as a source of strength and support in the community of their parish. In many, if not most, cases this will require the concentrated effort, support, and leadership of the whole Church.

Depending on one's viewpoint, evangelizing the Church may sound like either a tautology or an oxymoron, it is neither. The Church itself is a human creation, notwithstanding its dignity as the Body of Christ or the tremendous help it gets from God. In consequence, the Church also needs evangelization – especially at times of major change in the world, so as to be able to adjust properly. The world is at present in a state of constant change, thus this evangelization also has to be constant.

The evangelization of the Church will not need anything very different from what has already been described: a revision of theology, constant attention to the need to adjust the structure and the division of the power of decision-making, and willingness to make the necessary changes, all in the spirit of the Gospel, especially of the three principles of *agape*, unity and service, which have to govern every move.

3.6.2 Evangelization of the environment

One of the most important aspects to remember in the planning, preparation, leading and accomplishing of the evangelization of the environment is that each step has to be appropriate to the environment. It is easy to demonstrate that environments are different in extreme cases, such as extreme poverty and riches, or for people living in the Sahara and those living in swamplands, but it is critical to remember that there are significant differences even under similar or seemingly identical circumstances. Just as much as every person is an individual being, with a unique temperament, nature, experience, etc., the environment each creates is also unique. For that matter, the persons who are expected to carry out the evangelization have also developed their own individual environments. The preparations that enable them for the task and the task itself have to take these factors into account. Evangelization cannot be rigidly planned, prescribed or controlled globally, or even regionally. The apostolic workers involved

in spreading the Good News have to have the necessary knowledge, skills, experience and freedom to be able to adapt to each environment and to their own personalities.

Of course, that does not mean that goals cannot be set; as a matter of fact, they are necessary, and it is important that in setting them the consensus of the community or communities involved be established. Proper planning does set goals, but does not micro-manage; such planning on different levels is essential if the evangelization of the world, i.e., the building of God's kingdom everywhere is to succeed.

3.6.3 Successful evangelization

In spite of the differences between evangelization within and outside the Church, and between the different environments to be evangelized, there are certain common things that not only help, but are essential to success. These are included in the proper application of the three principles.

Agape

Everything that the Church does, especially everything connected with evangelization, has to be based on self-giving, unconditional love. If this is the guiding principle, the aim will not be to change the person or even to assure his or her salvation, but to serve the best interests of the person. This will not always mean pleasing him or her, but it does mean that what is done will be done in full observation of the prescriptions of Paul's hymn of love (1Cor 13:4-8a): gently, kindly, patiently, etc. Evangelization cannot be forced; it requires that each person accept freely and voluntarily, without any pressure.

Unity

Unity can only be achieved through openness and acceptance. This does not mean any kind of "reasonable accommodation" but a genuine accepting of the other. Accommodation, whether reasonable or not, implies limits; *agape* and unity exclude them. If one wants to build a true communitas, there must be a sense of acceptance, respect and equality, possible only if one accepts a person regardless of how one feels about him or her. This does not imply that we have to approve; the two are entirely different attitudes. Accepting means recognizing the other's right to be the person he or she is and respecting this right enough not to demand a change or an adjustment to suit oneself. Openness follows from true acceptance. It means we are interested in the person and are willing to really listen and to regard his or her opinions,

thoughts, etc. as having equal value to ours. Again, this does not mean that we have to agree, but we never have the right to dismiss or belittle them. We can always have differing views, but we should not think they are better just because they are ours; at the same time we must also maintain the faith that makes this attitude possible.

Service

As noted above, the principle of a loving evangelization (any other would be a contradiction in terms) is in serving the other person – not necessarily by doing whatever the other wants, but by doing whatever he or she needs. Evangelization will not be successful, either within or without the Church, if our service is limited to "religious" or "spiritual" things; Mt 25:31–46 makes this perfectly clear.

Following these principles will not only serve to attract people. Such an evangelization of the outside environment will also create the best means of evangelization, an example of Christian living; inside the Church it will be an effective step in forming the communities that are one of the very important aspects of the future health and effectiveness of the Church.

3.6.4 Conclusions: what is needed

Evangelization, infusing the spirit of the Gospel into the whole world, is one way to describe the function of the Church as the Body of Christ. In consequence it is arguably the most important task the Church faces. Being evangelical in the above-defined sense is a prime requisite for the accomplishment of this task. This is an essential characteristic of the community, without which it cannot claim to be Church, and requires constant care, fostering and upgrading.

On the one hand, as the individual member matures in faith, the demands to live according to the teachings of Jesus do increase, and this is also true for the Body itself. As our understanding of the meaning of the New Testament teachings deepens, every aspect of the Body's existence must keep up with the newer, better, understanding. The decisions of consecutive councils of the Church are witness to this. Upgrading is, on the other hand, also necessary because the effectiveness of the effort to evangelize the environment depends not only on the proper adaptation of the ways and means used in the process, but also on the image the community projects through both its communal life and the lives, attitudes and behaviour of individual members. What is proper and effective may vary considerably

depending on time, location and circumstances. The three basic principles expressed at the Last Supper remain reliable guides for ensuring that good choices are made.

Claiming that evangelization is the most important task of the Church does not contradict the statement of Vatican II about liturgy being "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed" and that the celebration of the Eucharist "is the centre of the whole Christian life."[28] The Church is constantly being created through the Eucharist and the ultimate aim of all evangelization is to bring the whole world into the Family of God, made possible by the Son, who gave himself to all human beings for this specific purpose. Thus, while evangelization does not aim to convince everybody to come to Mass next Sunday, it is in many ways an expression of what proper participation during the celebration of the mystery means and effects.

The importance of evangelization demands a concerted effort on the part of the whole Church. Such an effort need not take away either time or energy from the liturgy and, especially not, from the task of catechesis and mystagogy, but rather should be harmonized with and built into them. Proper understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus almost automatically includes the consciousness of the effect the behaviour of each Christian has on the environment he or she lives in: evangelization. Following the teaching will form exactly the character and lifestyle that is the best way to evangelize, personal example. However, that aspect has to be a consciously accepted essential element of both liturgy and all stages of formation. This approach implies an emphasis on being the kind of person who wants to be loving, doing what is right in the eyes of God because it benefits the other – the attitude of *agape*, unity and service – rather than one preoccupied with not doing what is wrong, for fear of God's punishment.

Developing such a concerted effort of all members of the Body of Christ not only entails convincing the over one billion Catholics to accept the responsibility, it also obliges the institutional Church to make the effort possible and to consciously and actively support it. This, of course, again means the need to develop an adequate theological basis, in a form that is understandable and applicable under the varying circumstances of diverse communities, and enabling, empowering, urging and helping local Church authorities to develop proper

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[28] *CSL* #10; "General Instruction of the Roman Missal" (1970), 1, Flannery, *Documents of Vatican II*.

frameworks and methods suitable to the members and the environment. All told, it is a monumental task.

Important as certain aspects are for full and effective evangelization, such as a proper theological basis and formation, internal evangelization, etc., the condition of the Church and of the world does not permit taking the safe and comfortable path of going step-by-step. Urgency demands that action be taken (and in many instances continued and strengthened) on "all fronts." Even though this carries the danger of temporary or local failures, mistakes and errors, their effects will almost certainly be considerably less than those of delaying.

3.7 The teaching Church

As we have seen in our discussions of the implications of the above-mentioned aspects of the life of the Church, preserving the Church's relevance and effectiveness in a radically and fast changing world requires considerable catechesis and mystagogy. This, in turn, has to be adapted to the understanding of the people at the particular time and in the particular place in which it is conducted. To be adaptable to people of such diverse cultures, languages and backgrounds, whose thinking may change, if not from day to day, often within a decade, requires very special catechetical material. The formulation of such material requires an adequate and solid theological base.

3.7.1 Factors that precipitate changes in the world

In order to build such a theology and also to develop from it adequate materials for catechesis and mystagogy, it is important to understand the factors that define the changes both within the Church and around it. Nobody can with any certainty predict exactly how things will change. But knowledge of some of the factors that have precipitated the changes makes it possible to foresee the nature and the direction they may take, at least in broad outline. We have already discussed some of these, thus, here we will only summarize those that have a direct impact on the work of the Church.

Population growth

This is the most obvious indication of the tremendous change that is taking place. It has two aspects: growth that has already occurred and future growth. The unprecedented growth of the world's population during the last century caused an upheaval in almost all areas of life, from

family formation to overcrowded burial sites. Society is facing a great number of very serious problems as a result: shortages of food, water, energy, and living space, problems with garbage disposal, deforestation, pollution, etc. etc. Efforts are being made to adapt the social mechanisms that make life possible, though, according to many experts, much too slowly.

The growth continues and, thus, even if and when solutions are found to the existing problems, new ones will inevitably appear. The biggest problem is that nobody can predict with any degree of certainty either the rate of future growth or what the new problems will be. This latter is not only because we cannot predict the growth rate; the increase in the number of people occupying a finite area and using finite resources is creating an entirely new mode of existence and nobody has, or can have, any experience with it.

Immigration and urbanization

In part as a result of population growth (e.g., tension between countries and ethnic groups occasioned by shortage of land or water) and partly because of changes in production technologies, huge masses of people are moving from one place of living to another. Many of these voluntarily or forcefully/violently displaced people end up in urban areas. These shifts cause fundamental changes in lifestyles, traditional community structures, and customs, indeed, in almost every aspect of life. They also often bring increased misery to millions of already suffering people, and nearly always a loss of any sense of permanence or security.

Rise in the general level of education

This is most noticeable in the developed countries of the West, but is also true in other areas of the world. While an increase in levels of education is always to be welcomed, the nature of the current phenomenon is complex. This is not the same education of even as recently as fifty years ago. A recent study, for instance, found that no less than 48% of Canadians aged 16 years and over have a literacy rate of level 2 or lower.[29] While undoubtedly some of these people are victims of the inequality of the old education system which prevented them from advancing, this is still an indication that today's education is not necessarily based on the

[29] The study was published by the Canadian Council of Learning. The level rating is defined by the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development; there are 5 levels, of which 3 is "the minimum threshold for coping with the demands of the global knowledge-based economy." Thus a person with or below level 2 would only have the capacity "to deal with simple, clear material involving uncomplicated tasks," but would be unable to understand a bus schedule, instructions on a medication, etc. Linda Nguyen, "If You Don't Understand this Story, You're not Alone," *The Gazette* [Montreal, Quebec] 8 September 2009: A11, print.

written word. People learn not only by reading but, also, by listening to radio and looking at television, even in the poorest countries. They learn through the new oral, visual and "virtual" communications of the twenty-first century. If the content of this learning is left entirely to political speeches, paid advertising of parties and companies, films, comics, the easy-to-understand Internet blogs, sites and messages, etc., they will, in fact, gather much information, but it may be one-sided and superficial or anti-religious, though not necessarily so.

Turning away from idealism

World War II, the accompanying and subsequent discoveries of the horrible crimes committed by the ideologically based regimes on both extremes of the political spectrum, followed by some not much better experiences during more current conflicts, have left many people disenchanted with anything even vaguely connected with ideals. The media, the advertising industry and some special-interest groups have found that fostering this attitude is to their advantage and actively and successfully promote it.

Secularism

Secularism is, to a large extent, an outgrowth of this turning away from any ideal. True, it also has a rather long history in Europe, especially within the middle class, but now it has spread throughout society to the degree that countries like the USA, whose official motto is "in God we trust" and Canada, contrary to the line in its anthem that says "God keep our land glorious and free" (with the French original even more explicitly religious) declare themselves to be secular, in the sense of being detached from anything that may be judged in any way religious.

All of these create an atmosphere that is radically different from the one that dominated the West, as well as many other areas, up to the middle of the twentieth century. While any predictions about the future are, by necessity, speculative, two things can be stated with relative certainty. The first of these is that each of the above factors has contributed to the present critical situation of both the world and the Church. If the decisions to be made are to improve the situation, the factors that have contributed to the problems certainly have to be taken into account. The second follows from the first: in any effort designed and designated to help the Church adapt to the constantly changing environment, it is essential that adequate attention be paid both to the changes these factors have already caused and to the particular

changes (for better or worse) that may be caused by them. The three principles of *agape*, unity and service, of course, must remain the *sine qua non* basis of all changes in the Church.

3.7.2 Preparation for changes in the Church

Changes are necessary if the Church is to remain relevant and vibrant and in order to stop and, if possible, reverse the loss of active members. However, no matter how urgent these changes are, it is essential that the whole Church actively cooperate in their implementation. Ideally, every Christian ought to be involved, and, if properly done and successful, hopefully they will be, in the long run. This is assured by the fact that properly accomplished changes will, by necessity, follow the teachings of Jesus, the ultimate aim of all true Christians, no matter to what faith community they belong. That, however, will depend on the result of successful changes, it will not necessarily happen during the work of implementation. Consequently, the Roman Catholic Church has to forge ahead with the effort, listening and taking into account the comments and advice of sister communities, but regardless of whether they participate and cooperate. The changes have to start with Catholics.

One of the essential conditions for the full involvement of the whole Church is adequate preparation of all the faithful. This, again, includes not only the laity but also the clergy, at all levels of the hierarchy. The very significant, properly thought out and badly needed innovations decreed by Vatican II often caused confusion and even resentment, almost always because the communities were not properly informed and prepared. The reason for this was that, frequently, members of the clergy in charge of implementation were, themselves, only superficially prepared. In the circumstances this was not avoidable, but care must be taken to prevent, as much as possible, similar situations. The confusion and resentment caused by misunderstood or badly implemented changes indicate a greater or lesser degree of alienation and separation, contradicting the principle of unity. The goal of every change must be to strengthen the community in harmony with the three principles established by Jesus Christ, *agape*, unity and service, not merely to implement change at any cost. This will require time, effort and patience, even though the circumstances may be pressing.

An essential instrument of preparation of the community will be proper catechesis and mystagogy, even if other means may and, in all likelihood, will be found and used. Given their

objectives, the two are significantly different, and require different methods, thus we will discuss them separately.

3.7.3 Catechesis

Even though the term is often used to indicate all programs of faith formation, it properly refers to preparation for the reception of sacraments, especially baptism. We will discuss catechesis in this sense of sacramental preparation. Even as such, it can be a life-long process because it includes preparation for marriage, ordination and the anointing of the sick, sacraments usually received by adults.

The emphasis of catechesis should be on preparation. This may appear to be a tautology, yet it requires a conscious orientation. The concept of preparation includes, but is not equal to, information or teaching; nor are the sacraments equal to liturgy. The reception of each of the sacraments is a particular life-changing event, and each will be fully effective only if the recipient is ready and willing to accept what it entails. To be prepared for such an event is necessary for "full, conscious and active participation" not only in the liturgy, but also in the immediate and intimate action of God. God loves the human being so much that he never imposes his will, even for a person's benefit.

Catechesis must, therefore, include instruction that is clear and specific. The catechumen must understand the meaning of the sacrament, what it is meant to accomplish and why. Thus the catechist must explain the theological basis of and the background behind the sacrament, and must do so in a way that the catechumen can grasp. Catechesis must, almost always, be directed at and adjusted to a particular person. It also follows that preparing for the ceremony itself is not a primary aim of catechesis and should, in fact, not occupy much time. A properly conducted liturgy will lead a well-prepared catechist, even a child, through the rite, without problems.

This approach is especially important given the fact that information, no matter how effective and successful, is not enough. The aim of teaching in catechesis is faith formation, i.e., helping the person to reach the point in the faith-journey where he or she is ready and eager to actively participate in the event, to accept its consequences and to formulate his or her future life in accordance with what was received. As mentioned before, one of the most

difficult tasks of catechists may be to hold back persons who are not ready to receive the sacrament.

From what has been said, it is clear that catechists face an important and very difficult task. To be able to accomplish it requires strong and active support (from both the Church, as such, and the local community), proper intellectual and spiritual preparation, and adequate and proper materials, including a strong, easily understood theological basis.

Given the near-catastrophic shortage of ordained priests in many areas, catechesis is more and more a lay responsibility. However, even with the best catechists, without the knowledgeable, active and positive support of the local clergy, catechesis will not be as successful as is necessary for the health of the Church. Accordingly, priests also need adequate preparation during their initial training and, because they as well need to adjust constantly, on an ongoing basis. This, in all probability, will mean that laypersons will often teach the priest, because they are the ones who have direct experience of the situation.

As mentioned above, the active cooperation of the community is vital for the success of catechesis. In the case of children, this specifically means, first of all, the parents. But even they will not be able to accomplish their task without help:

> [W]e presume – or cross our fingers and hope – that the same cultural and religious resources that existed fifty years ago and promoted evangelization in families then exist today. This simply is unrealistic. Having been caught in the cultural changes our Catholic world has experienced, many parents – and teachers – themselves have not been sufficiently evangelized or cathechized, and are trying to raise their kids using what little residual cultural Catholicism they have gleaned from their own family and school experience. Few parishes offer resources to help them in this task.[30]

This situation obviously urgently requires a solution in the interest of the future health and effectiveness of the Body of Christ. Whatever the solution, the leadership, support and help of the institutional Church is essential, but it will be totally ineffective without the action of local churches.

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[30] Bernadette Gasslein, "Evangelization: the Foundation of Catechesis," *Celebrate!* 48.2 (March-April 2009): 4. Bernadette Gasslein is the editor of *Celebrate!*

3.7.4 Mystagogy

One of the most valuable tools for the implementation of the required changes is mystagogy. The purpose of mystagogy is to deepen our understanding of the meaning of a sacrament after having received it and to strengthen our decision to live our life in accordance with the graces received through it. Mystagogy is built on experience; successful mystagogy requires meaningful, well-conducted liturgies and proper participation. Since most aspects of living a Catholic Christian life, and the ability and the will to do so, depend to a great extent on proper understanding and acceptance of the sacraments, it is possible to discuss the conditions for good mystagogy and continued faith formation together. This also points to the great importance of mystagogy.

As mentioned above, the need for mystagogy as well as faith-formation never ends. This is also true as far as training and schooling or fulfilling a Church function are concerned. Secular professions are a good example of this. No matter how important or how occupied a professional person is, given the rate of change in every area of life, it is essential and demanded that training and knowledge be periodically updated. While the fundamental truths of faith don't change, understandings, interpretations and expressions of them do, and have to, change, presenting a constant need for renewal. This is also so in a person's faith-life. Under varying circumstances the understanding and practice of one's faith has to keep step, lest it wither or become incomprehensible to the average person, a fatal fault in the case of the leaders of the community.

One of the basic functions of both mystagogy and faith-formation is to help members of the community, particularly of the liturgical assemblies, to fully understand the meaning of liturgy and thus enable them to actively, fully and consciously participate. A similar yet different function is to help deepen the understanding of the tenets of faith. Both of these efforts have to be geared and constantly adjusted to the needs of the members. Thus, while much can be done in the course of homilies and through properly prepared and conducted liturgies, this is not enough. Even in a close-knit and stable community there will be considerable differences in background, preparedness, intelligence and interests of the members. Yet, it is essential that everyone's questions be adequately answered in ways that are fully understandable.

Question-and-answer sessions with well-prepared moderators and small discussion or study groups, also with proper leadership, are a great help. Of course, this again raises the question of who will conduct them. Already overworked priests certainly cannot shoulder the whole responsibility, providing leadership for the process may be difficult enough. However, many laypersons are increasingly prepared to do the work, if they are given sufficient help. This must include more than creating adequate venues and physical support, such efforts quite often seem to flounder on the lack of interest of ecclesial officials. Whether this is caused by a failure to recognize the urgent need for proper mystagogy and faith-formation or distrust of laity, the attitude has to disappear if the Church is to regain its status and vibrant faith-life, both of which are essential for its capacity to fulfil the mission of being the presence of Christ in the world.

Effective mystagogy and faith-formation will also depend on the availability of proper, easy-to-use materials. Theology updated both in interpretation and language is a necessary basis. Adapted and updated catechisms, suitable to each particular area and milieu are also needed. Should a particular regional or national bishops' conference not have the necessary human or financial resources, shorter, pamphlet-type publications may also satisfy the need, especially because they would be much easier to periodically update.

As we have indicated above, this whole task is very important and difficult: it can be successful only if the support of the whole Church is behind it and if the spirit of agape, unity and service guides every aspect of the effort.

3.7.5 Conclusions: what is needed

Teaching, the magisterial function of the Church, is traditionally one of its most important roles, both as directed to existing members and in its missionary efforts. Radical changes in the world, however, demand considerable adaptations in this area. These changes (e.g., in physical environments, living conditions, community structures, education, attitudes, etc.) and the unpredictability of their consequences make traditional methods, structures and languages insufficient and inappropriate.[31] Some of the areas for which proper adjustments are both essential and urgent are summarized below.

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[31] Cf., letter of Boulad, our discussion on the *CCC,* etc.

Liturgy

Because it is the source and expression of the faith, liturgy is arguably the best means of instruction and of deepening faith. As such, it must be clearly understandable and provide an experience to the participants that fosters the basic attitudes and thinking necessary for an ever deeper, more active Christian life.

The reforms of Vatican II took a great step in this direction, but they are only the first step in an ever-unfolding journey. In the intervening almost half-century since the Council, the world and the membership of the Church have continued changing at a constantly increasing rate, but during the last few decades adjustments to the liturgy have shown a tendency to counteract the reforms. This means that, more and more, the liturgy is lagging behind the people it is supposed to serve, with a consequent increase in the separation of the laity from the celebration. There is a need for a concerted effort to reinvigorate the attitude of Vatican II towards the adaptation of the language, rituals and symbols used. Because all of these are essential for active, conscious and full participation, they must be appropriate to the celebrating assembly. This implies that the most qualified to make the proper adaptations are the local ecclesial authorities; adequate power and acknowledgement, as well as aid, must be accorded to them if they are to accomplish this task.

Catechesis

Catechesis is an essential part of the missionary aspect of the teaching office of the Church. In this interpretation, it is directed mainly to those preparing to receive the sacraments, but we can also include those who, even though they have received the sacraments, have ceased to be practicing, active members of the Church.

Traditionally – at least for a number of centuries – catechesis has concentrated on imparting knowledge about the faith. Yet, as in the early Church, it is now at least equally important to introduce the catechumen to the essence of Christian living, in the sense of *agape*, unity and service. Obviously, this will not be possible without adequate information about both why this is essential and how it is achievable for a Christian. However, imparting the knowledge has to be the instrument, not the aim, of catechesis, a considerable change in the direction of many a catechetical effort.

Adequate catechesis is impossible without thoroughly and properly prepared catechists. This is particularly important in view of the fact that catechesis is mostly the responsibility of laypersons. Formation has to be continuous and must also be extended to members of the clergy. Given the workload catechists often face, it may be necessary to make such constant training compulsory. Equally essential is the availability of adequate materials, properly adapted to local circumstances.

Faith-formation

The active and successful life of the Church as the Body of Christ is impossible without effective and continuous faith-formation, including mystagogy. It has to be directed at all levels of the hierarchical Church, including all members of the clergy, regardless of their status, and all those providing the formation. All forms of faith-formation have to cover the intellectual and spiritual aspects of Christian life, all properly adapted to the personal needs of the recipients. Other than these aspects, everything mentioned above is also applicable to faith-formation.

Theology

In order for the above to be effective, the theological basis must be solid, accessible and relevant. This in turn requires a considerable update. For instance, the effectiveness of the teaching power of the Church depends not only on the content of the theology, but also on its interpretation and comprehensibility. For this to keep up with the changes in the world, there is a need for an ongoing updating of theological interpretations and their logic and language. This effort is proceeding well among scholars and in literature, but there is a significant delay in the effect of those advances on the "official" theology and teachings of the Church. This problem needs to be solved.

The solution will, in all probability, need to include an acceptance of the validity of alternative theories and interpretations. Theology is not like the natural sciences where "proof" can be demanded before a theory is accepted (and even then fundamental, generally accepted theories are successfully challenged surprisingly often). Theology can only deal with interpretation, and the validity of that depends on its logical and scriptural foundation. Today the world, including and especially *academia*, does not follow a single logic. For a theological tenet to be acceptable, what is essential is that it be in harmony with the fundamentals of faith,

essentially expressed in the Creed, and with the basic principles of Christian life, *agape*, unity and service. Applying such a judgment is certainly a very great responsibility, because errors in either direction can have serious consequences, but the faith, inherent in Catholic doctrine, that truth is stronger and will overcome error, ought to be an indication that willingness to be more open is better than the opposite.

The concept of the magisterial function of the Church

Almost all of the above mentioned desiderata require considerable local decision-making power. The present rather narrow interpretation of the concept of approval or confirmation frequently causes serious problems in this regard.[32] This policy appears to be based on the assumption that, on the one hand, the magisterial power and the grace necessary to properly practice it share the hierarchical character of the Church and, on the other, that the magisterial power of the person of the pope is automatically shared by the members of the Curia and those who work for them.

This interpretation may have been valid in the sixteenth century, when there was a need for a strong central authority and clear and unequivocal guidance. However, the situation has changed drastically, not merely as the result of changes outside the Church but, also, because bishops at the time of Trent did not necessarily have either the adequate training or the necessary freedom available to most bishops today. Under present conditions, no central power can possibly be more appropriate than the local bishops' conference in deciding on whether the message of the Gospel, or even of a document issued by the central government, is better expressed by translating *homo* as *human*, *man* or *person*, or the *adelphoi* of Rom 1:23 as *brothers* or *brothers and sisters*. What ought to be the governing principle is not the form, tradition or maintenance of some assumed dignity and majesty of "religious language" which , more often than not, serves to alienate people, but simply and only whether the work is in harmony with the basic teachings of Revelation, expressed in a form that is comprehensible to the local community of faithful. This is particularly true in view of the so-called broad interpretation

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[32] On the concept of approval or confirmation, cf., *CSL* 36.3. The problems local authorities face is illustrated by the prolonged approval process of the USA edition of the *CCC*: "The Roman curial *Congregatio Doctrinae Fidei* ("For the Teaching of the Faith") has refused to approve the idiomatic translation provided by a committee headed by Bernard Law, Cardinal Archbishop of Boston, and David Konstant, Bishop of Leeds, for undisclosed reasons. There is an irony here because Archbishop Law apparently introduced the motion toward the conclusion of the extraordinary synod of bishops in autumn 1985 that there be such a volume" (Sloyan, "Theological and Pastoral Critique," 159).

principle of canon law, according to which "favours are multiplied, burdens are restricted"; that is, any rules that *permit* have to be interpreted widely and any that *forbid* narrowly.[33] Nor is there a Holy Spirit at work in the Vatican that is different from the one at the offices of the bishops worldwide; the grace given to each person is essentially the same, even if given individually and adapted to the person's need.[34] Adaptations necessary to update the existing policy will be difficult,[35] but they are essential and they will be an important signal for a common effort to place the triple principle of *agape*, unity and service in the forefront.

3.8 The Church as institution

Any effort to implement one or more of the changes outlined above will, almost necessarily, be made more difficult, if not negated, unless there are also significant steps taken to reform the institutional Church. Vatican II opened possibilities in this area as well; unfortunately, as has been remarked previously, the pace of exploration of these possibilities has slowed significantly in the past few decades, to the point that some critics, including members of the hierarchy, feel that backward steps have been taken in certain areas. Yet the critical situation discussed in Chapter 1 will only get worse unless significant changes in the life of the Church are urgently undertaken; changes within the institutional Church are vital.

The term *institutional Church* is used in the sense of the total structure and organization of the Body of Christ, all its orders (as this term was used in the first centuries, i.e., to include everybody from the orders of catechumens and penitents to those highest up in the hierarchy), as well as the rules and customs of governance, communications and relationships within and between the orders and functions. This is obviously a wide field and it is impossible, here, to cover all its aspects, let alone undertake a detailed analysis. We will restrict the discussion to the essential features of both the institution and the needed changes.

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[33] Course by Professor John Huels, SIPL, St. Paul University, Ottawa, July 6, 1999.

[34] Cf., Thomas F. O'Meara, O.P. "Divine Grace and Human Nature as Sources for the Universal Magisterium of Bishops," *Theological Studies* 64.4 (December 2003): 683–706.

[35] Cf., for instance Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Ordinary Universal Magisterium: Unresolved Questions," *Theological Studies* 63.3 (Summer 2002): 463: "The potential for these institutions [episcopal conferences. episcopal synods, plenary and provincial councils] to facilitate a growth in shared episcopal teaching has been severely compromised by an atmosphere created by the Vatican in which synodal agendas are carefully controlled, treatment of controversial topics in letters of episcopal conferences is discouraged, and stringent litmus tests are employed for episcopal appointment. Bishops are told that they are not to voice publicly disagreements with current papal teaching."

3.8.1 Areas where changes are needed

Given that the different areas in need of change are closely interwoven, any grouping is necessarily arbitrary and somewhat inaccurate. We will speak of areas of structure, governance, function and power, and priesthood. There is a false impression that these have been fixed at least since Christianity was declared the state-religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. While it is true that from that time on there have always been recognized and recognizable structures, governance, functions associated with certain powers, and an ordained priesthood, in fact they have changed constantly, sometimes quite dramatically. On the following pages it will be useful, occasionally even necessary to highlight some changes and/or the circumstances that prompted them, nevertheless this is not the aim of this work. *We will still concentrate on attempting to identify those changes that serve the triple principle of agape, unity and service, and, thus, not only safeguard, but strengthen the ability of the Church to act as the Body of Christ.*

The following is certainly not a plan of action. It is merely intended to serve as a basis for further study and discussion, not so much indicating why an area needs change, though occasionally that will be unavoidable in the interest of clarity, as suggesting the kind of change that might produce the desired effect. At times, ideas of how some of the changes could be effected or accomplished will also be proposed.

3.8.2 Structure and organization

The organizational structure of the Church worked well in the last centuries, including the major part of the twentieth century. It developed in tandem with the evolution of the surrounding societies, in accordance with the needs of the Christian community. However, by the time Vatican II was called, certain tensions between these needs and the then existing structure had become apparent. While these tensions were serious enough to demand action, they were still mild enough so that a limited number of corrections, such as emphasis on episcopal collegiality, were assumed by the council fathers to be sufficient.

Since then, the rate of change both in and around the Church has accelerated in a way that could not have been predicted or foreseen in the 1960s. In the life of the Church, changes did not only result from the causes outlined above (such as population growth and displacement), but also from the shift in the Catholic population, which made any euro-centric thinking or organizational model untenable. The majority of the Catholic population, including thinkers,

authors, theologians, and activists, are not European. The strongest part of the Church is, more and more, on other continents, notably Africa. The societies of these local churches are different in culture, traditions, language, thinking, lifestyle and needs not only from Europe but, also, from each other. All these factors indicate that the centuries-old organizational structure must change to effectively serve their needs in the spirit of *agape*, unity and service.

3.8.2.1 Centralization

The familiar, strongly centralized structure of the Church was primarily developed during the feudal period, when the local churches badly needed support and defence against local lords and monarchs who were attempting to wrestle away the Western Christian community's decision-making power in many areas of its life.[36] The system also served well, in later centuries, when there was need to re-establish or maintain discipline.

The centralization inevitably involved a rather serious restriction, or more properly, annexation of many aspects of episcopal power. Up to the last centuries of the first millennium a bishop had almost unlimited authority within his diocese. He was the chief liturgist, the principal teacher, the chief of the community in charge of even such aspects as welfare, and in many cases the chief judge in ecclesial and legal matters. Because the protection offered by a strong central Church government was very much in the interest of local bishops, they were willing to abdicate many of these powers.

Power, in itself, no matter what kind or how strong, is never enough. It is equally important that it be applied correctly and at the right place and time. This, in turn, depends on where the power is located within the structure and the appropriateness of that location relative to outside circumstances. This requires the proper evaluation of both the structure and its purpose and of the environment. This is not a new responsibility for the Church:

> The post-conciliar task of the Church may be summarized in terms of tasks which the Church in Council set herself—greater self-understanding and consequent reform combined with greater understanding of the world and more effective service of it.[37]

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[36] For a detailed description of this and all other references to historical developments in the Church, unless otherwise indicated, cf., Janos Glaser, "Baptism and Ordination: Understanding the Priesthood of Baptism," Master's Mémoire, Université de Montréal, 2004.

[37] Enda McDonaugh, foreword to *Open to the Word, An Analysis of Lay Spirituality*, by Alfons Auer, trans. Dennis Doherty, O.S.B and Carmel Callaghan (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 7.

Yet, in 2001 Martos could write, and almost a decade later it is still true, that

> Catholics' understanding of ministry has been changing since the Second Vatican Council in response to shifts in practice and experience of ministry, these changes have not yet reached those who formulate its official teachings and speak publicly on its behalf.[38]

To some extent the resistance of the "official Church" is understandable. When the Council made it possible (or, at least, made it appear to be possible) to experiment not only with the liturgy, but also with other aspects of the life of the Body of Christ, this possibility liberated a tremendous creativity, which had been bottled up for four hundred years. Vatican II established no control mechanisms, or even suggestions, to help the various agents of the Curia cope with the eagerness of renewal evidenced worldwide. With the growth of the Church in the past century or so, the personnel in the Vatican has inevitably become a bureaucracy and, as such, not only conservative, but also, largely rule-bound. The traditional way to deal with such a problem is to resort to increased and, if necessary, more severe control. This reaction started relatively soon after the close of the Council:

> Since 1978 when Cardinal Karol Wojtyla was elected to head the Roman Catholic church and took the name Pope John Paul II, the church's top leadership has been engaged in a systematic effort to slow down the hectic pace of change that occurred in the wake of Vatican II. Rome has appointed theologically conservative bishops, it has curtailed the relative autonomy of Episcopal conferences […] it has emphasized traditions that before the council made Catholicism unique (for example, the canonization of saints, and distinctive habits for nuns), and it has issued directives returning the church to Tridentine attitudes and practices (for example, less emphasis on ecumenism and greater emphasis on papal infallibility).[39]

The situation, of course, is not hopeless:

> Even today's conservative church leaders realize that the *aggiornamento* or updating that Pope John XXIII called for could not be accomplished by a new Trent-like uniformity if Catholicism wants to remain a vibrant force in a culturally diverse and socially evolving world.[40]

It is thus important to redefine, among other aspects, the sharing of powers within the Church. The guiding principle must be the triple principle of *agape*, unity and service here as well.

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[38] Martos*, Doors,* 458.

[39] Ibid., 125.

[40] Ibid., 127.

3.8.2.2 Sharing powers

As mentioned above, historically, strong centralisation within a monarchical structure served the Church well and fit the prevailing lifestyle and thinking of the world at large and of the membership of the Church. Today it fits neither, largely because it does not, and cannot, adequately serve the needs of the people. Equally important is that in many areas of the world this type of structure did not develop to the same extent as in Europe. With the shift of the weight of the Catholic population away from Europe, the circumstances, thinking, traditions of the members of local churches also changed, in addition to the changes that occurred with the passage of time.

No person can feel a secure sense of belonging to a community that does not consider its members' needs. For this, many of the powers necessary for running any large organization must also be sensitive to quite varied local needs: the appropriate power to make necessary adaptations must belong to local functionaries. Consequently, the structure and, within it, the sharing of powers have to be reformed in a way that allows sufficient local freedom to adapt the forms themselves, in order to serve the local membership properly and adequately.

There is also an obvious need to maintain the basic unity of the Church and to provide mechanisms for making general decisions involving the whole Catholic community. Even in these cases, the power of a central agency alone is not sufficient. In order for such decisions to be efficiently enacted and beneficial in most, even if not all, areas, intimate knowledge of local situations is essential. In the past, this would have taken so long that by the time all the information was available and digested the decision (and perhaps the data itself) would probably already have been out-dated. However, with the possibilities of modern technology, it should not now be difficult to establish the means by which those who constitute the ordinary universal magisterium can exchange their views and express their will in such a way as to give adequate information and guidance to those making the necessary decisions, and even to speedily approve them before publication. Such a system would, in fact, also serve the unity of the whole Church in a way that is at present impossible, for it could provide a platform or forum for exchanging ideas, discussing problems and establishing personal contact on a continuous basis, without the need and expense of travel. It would also provide a unique

opportunity for the Pope to keep in constant contact with the bishops and keep his finger, as it were, directly on the pulse of the Church.

3.8.2.3 Dioceses

The diocese is the "local Church." As such it is really Church and has to possess the same characteristics as the universal Church. It is, however, also "local," and therefore an essentially different community than the billion-plus-member one. When Paul, in his letters, speaks about "church" he means the local Christian communities; these were small enough to gather in the largest rooms of private houses (cf. Acts 20:7–10). With the spread of Christianity the "local churches" undoubtedly grew but, at least until the mass conversions following the legalization of Christianity by Constantine, they were small enough to be real communitates. Even for a long time afterward most dioceses were probably small enough to function as communities.

Times have changed, today most dioceses are much larger, not necessarily in territory, but certainly in numbers. The increase in the number of people belonging to a given diocese nearly inevitably results in the creation of different groups within it. This goes beyond the layering of practically any community on the basis of social class or similar determinants. Those differences existed within Christian communities from the very beginning, but they could be and were overcome by the Christian spirit of *agape* and brotherhood (cf., Philem 1:15–18). The differences that are much more difficult to overcome are those that engender different needs and understandings, such as culture, tradition, background, circumstances, etc. In a relatively small population these differences tend to pale; even when differences are present, there is usually sufficient closeness and familiarity between the different groups to make adaptations relatively easy. As population and population density increase, interaction between groups and individuals decreases, after a certain point rather dramatically.

This phenomenon is often seen in today's dioceses, especially in the big urban centres which, more often than not, are covered by one diocese. The consequence of this situation is that the same, or very similar, problems evident in the centralization of power in the universal Church are also present on the diocesan level. There are several possibilities for dealing with

this situation. All of them will require careful study and the will to make the necessary adjustments; admittedly, fulfilling these requirements does not promise to be easy.[41]

One solution would be to create smaller dioceses. In some cases that may mean merely redrawing border. Sometimes, even this will occasion unwelcome changes, but they should not present overwhelming difficulties. Unfortunately this will in all likelihood work only in a small number of cases. A second step would be to increase the number of dioceses. This would present considerably more problems, not the least of which would be the need for a significantly increased number of bishops.

An alternative would be the re-institution of *chorepiscopacy*, widely used from about the second to the tenth century and, even today, in some Catholic rites, but generally not the Latin rite.[42] The definition of the chorbishop's role and power varied greatly; it could now be re-defined, as necessary, to solve at least some of the current problems. A similar solution would be the devolution of some episcopal functions and powers onto the parish priest. This alternative would ease the pressure on and workload of the bishop and make the community stronger; but it would have to include a solution for the problem of communities where there is no permanent pastor and the increased stress on priests.

Both of the latter possibilities would essentially be adaptations of the present office and function of the episcopal vicar and, in some dioceses, the practice of mandating some priests for specific episcopal functions. All of these are possible solutions, and undoubtedly it would be possible to find others; it remains important to recognize the problem and deal with it.

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[41] Because particular possibilities as well as needs vary largely from diocese to diocese, discussion of concrete means is impossible here. We are forced to make generalized comments; however the need for the local ecclesial authority to take the necessary steps is unequivocal.

[42] Relatively common in the East, less in the West, chorbishops were the heads of Christian communities in rural regions around cities, usually under the leadership and supervision of the bishop of the central city of the region. Cf., Kennan B. Osborne, *Priesthood: A History of Ordained Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 156; Raymund Linden, "Chorbishof," *LTK*, vol. 2, col.1080–1081.

3.8.2.4 Parishes

Even though the diocese is the recognized local church, in fact it is the parish where the day-to-day life of the Church is lived. Many Catholics never have any contact with the diocese and may never talk to their bishop; for them *Church* is equivalent to *our parish*. The ideal Christian community discussed above can only be formed on the level of the parish. Arguably, the parish is the most important unit of the Church since, without real community or communitas, it is extremely hard to live a full Christian life. The structure of the parish and its place in the greater structure of the Church must therefore be appropriate for the development of communitas.

As we have seen, many parishes are too large to include all members in a single communitas. Here again several possibilities exist. Unfortunately, the alternative of dividing parishes and creating smaller ones is not available unless and until a radical solution to the shortage of ordained priests is found. Other possibilities would involve the establishment of smaller groups of parishioners that would be capable of forming communitates. There are several movements that have successfully employed such groupings, for instance Cursillo, Focolare, small-church communities, Renew, etc. The relatively widespread pattern of Bible-study and faith-formation groups also provides a useful precedent.

The experience of some movements, especially that of the small-church communities and, to a lesser degree, others as well, points up the problems that can arise from such a solution. The biggest of these is that they tended to alienate or distract members from participation in the life of the parish. The complaints were often well founded, but there were contributing factors that can, and ought to be eliminated and others that can be rectified. For instance, the complaints of the members who felt alienated were that they often did not find the community in the parish that they needed and did find among the members of the movement; that their behaviour and attitudes, notwithstanding their best efforts, were not accepted and were sometimes greeted with outright hostility, even from members of the clergy; and that they missed the meaningful liturgies that were celebrated during the activities of the movement.

The fundamental condition for the successful functioning of several smaller communities within a parish is, first of all, that the parish itself be a community in which *agape*, unity and service rule. It will obviously not be the same kind of community as a communitas, but it will

still be open and welcoming to members of the communitates. The second essential condition is adequate preparation of the community. That very definitely has to include the clergy, because they not only have to be aware and accepting of the changes that will inevitably come, they will have to be the main supporters and even initiators of the formation of the smaller communities. This does not necessarily mean that they have to be the leaders, even though it might be beneficial to themselves as well as the whole idea if they were to become members of communitates. The leaders of the groups will also need careful formation and ongoing support. This support ought to include theoretical and practical training, e.g., small-group formation, leadership methods, the aim and purpose of the group, theology and liturgy, but also emotional and spiritual formation and support. This is essential both to ensure that the groups really serve the principles and the life of the parish and of the Church and because leading such a group includes quite heavy responsibilities and can be a lonely position – and also because the leader has to grow intellectually and spiritually with the group and even keep ahead of the other members.

The composition of each group will be different and these differences will be much more pronounced between groups of different areas. Thus, for this alternative to be successful, even though strong support, planning, and supplying of resources by the higher authorities of the Church (such as the dioceses, regional or national bishops' conferences and even the institutional Church) are essential, the system has to be sufficiently flexible to allow the groups to develop according to the needs of the Christians forming them. It will also be necessary that the position of the leaders be recognised and the appropriate powers, rights and privileges be accorded to the them and the members. It is of course assumed that the communitates will be founded and function according to the *agape*, unity and service principle.

3.8.2.5 Implications

If the Church is to be the community of washers of feet, which being the Body of Christ demands, it has to be first of all a true community. A community can only exist if the people who are supposed to form it want to belong to it, which, in turn, requires that their needs be satisfied. As these needs vary with circumstances, the way communities are composed and function changes with both location and the passage of time.

Throughout the history of the Church, its structure and organization have constantly developed in an effort to accommodate the changing needs of Christians. This perspective is sometimes overlooked because the changes that are most obvious are ones that have served the institutional Church and were usually occasioned by a need to keep it functioning or to help it function better. This, however, does not contradict the above statement since the Church as institution functions primarily to serve the needs of the People of God. Catholics need to keep this principle in mind and to hold the upper echelons of the hierarchy to it.

The current structure and organization of the Church served well for several centuries with relatively few and minor changes. Some important changes were implemented by and in the wake of Vatican II. Arguably, not all those recommendations, which ought to have been first steps, are fully operational yet (e.g., the demand for collegiality). Both the organizational set-up and the structure of the Church still need rather urgent revision. Today, extreme centralization causes more problems than it solves; the size of dioceses and parishes makes it impossible to adequately serve the needs of Catholics and solutions need to be found and implemented; throughout, there is a need for a greater sharing of power and authority in order to accommodate significant regional differences in population make up and needs. These changes do not merely require administrative measures, they demand a considerable transformation in official thinking and attitude. The *agape*, unity and service principle has to govern every action of every level of the Church's hierarchy, together with the recognition that the principle implies a fundamental equality of every Catholic and every Christian.

3.8.3 Governance

Every more-or-less permanent grouping of persons needs some sort of authority that assures its proper functioning. This is true for the smallest group, such as the family, for clubs and associations, countries and, since the twentieth century, even the whole world. If a formally constituted authority provides this, it is a government; no matter whether it is formal or informal, this authority expresses itself through governance. The function of governance in a community is to ensure that the purpose and aim of the community is being served through its day-to-day activity. Proper governance does not make rules; it may formulate them and it does see to their application, but the rules, in effect, derive from the aims of the community and the will and consensus of the members of the community. Therefore, proper governance of the

Church inevitably serves the Body of Christ in the spirit of the Gospel and thus of the triple principle of *agape*, unity and service.

The purpose and aim of the community of Christians, whether we call it Church or Body of Christ, is given by God and is unchanging and unchangeable. What does change is the way the purpose and aim are served and implemented, because this depends on circumstances; governance has to change accordingly, in order to fulfil its function.

3.8.3.1 Style and type

The earliest Christian communities certainly had strong individuals as their leaders, such as Peter, Paul and James, and they possessed considerable power. The style of governance was, nevertheless, communitarian (cf., Acts 1:15–26; 11:1–18; 15:1–29, etc.). The "overseer," i.e. *episcopos*, was the head of the local church appointed by the apostle (one of the Twelve, Paul, or another emissary of an established church) who founded it. For the first centuries he was the acknowledged leader of the community and governed in harmony with the elders. Up to the sixth century, the selection of the successor of the *episcopos* appointed by the apostle was, generally, through election by the people; and even afterward, when it was only the clergy and the presbyters who participated in the actual election, the agreement of the laity was required and respected.[43] At least in some places, up to the 13th century the bishop was elected locally "on his merits by the free choice of the cathedral chapter, without any external interference from king or pope."[44]

It was the successive threats of the feudal system and the near-catastrophic lack of ecclesial discipline that made a strong central government desirable and necessary. At the time, in the West, the best paradigm of this type of control was the monarchy; the Church adopted this form. As time passed the secular systems evolved more and more toward absolutism. It is not surprising that, once the Church had embraced this form of governance, not only did the governing apparatus move in the same direction, but the membership of the Church also

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[43] Cf., *Didache*, 15.1–; Patrick Granfield, "Episcopal Election in Cyprian," *Church, Ministry and Organization in the Early Church Era*, ed. Everett Ferguson, Studies in Early Christianity vol. XIII (New York and London: Garland, 1993); Mitchell, *Mission,* 171–174, 232–234; Ludvig Ott, *Das Weihesacrament. Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte*, Band 4, Sakramente, Eschatologie, Fasz 5 (Freiburg: Herder, 1969), 10; Alexandre Faivre, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church*, trans. David Smith (Mahwah: Paulist Press,1990), 124; etc.

[44] R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, The Penguin History of the Church, #2 (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), 190.

found it quite proper and natural. Both of these aspects were helped by the fact that the system served the faithful well.

By the eighteenth century problems appeared in the secular systems. People in several countries began to rebel against absolute rulers. The essential grievance in all cases was that the regimes that were based on a single and dictatorial power did not fulfil one of the key traditional functions of the ruler: to serve and secure the wellbeing of the people. That this is unacceptable, in the long run, is nothing new in history. Time and again we see examples of monarchs who, having failed in this duty, were replaced. People throughout history have risen against unjust, selfish rulers, but they usually simply replace them with someone who appears to be more promising. It was only recently that absolute monarchy, as institution and form of governance, was found to be totally inadequate. With the population increase in both numbers and diversity, this form of governance simply cannot fulfil its function. This, as recent history proves, is equally true in traditional forms of monarchies and in dictatorships. The only kind of monarchy that has survived is the constitutional one, where the monarch, if not purely a figurehead, has very limited powers and usually merely acts as an ultimate emergency control instrument, a safety valve as it were. Absolute monarchies, for all practical purposes, have disappeared from the world – except for the Roman Catholic Church.

An institution that exists in a context or environment that constantly undergoes fast and unpredictable changes obviously requires flexibility in every one of its components if it is to be able to cope with the changing situations in which it finds itself. How drastic and unexpected these changes can be is amply illustrated by the recent economic crisis, which is still far from being resolved; and its final outcome, according to the best sociological, political and economic experts, is still unclear. The same is also true of the physical environment in areas such as water, food and energy supply and world population – all of which can have tremendous impacts on the shape of the world and, in consequence, on the Church. It would be a grave mistake to maintain a rigidly hierarchical and centralizing system while trying to cope with these worldwide problems and the changes and challenges they will inevitably produce.

Changing the style of governance of the Church does not mean that discipline has to disappear or anarchy to follow. Control can be effectively exercised in important matters

without subsuming the powers and/or functions of the constituent entities, as long as the control deals with fundamental matters and principles; the execution and solution of day-to-day matters and even policies not directly involving fundamental matters must be left to those familiar with the everyday life of the people. Problems in constitutional monarchies (as well as republics) usually stem from the fact that policy makers, who are supposed to represent the people, in fact, become isolated from them.

The only monarchies that have survived are the ones that were able to adapt; so must the Church. Facing the changes requires sufficient flexibility so that the leaders of the community have the power, authority and ability to make decisions "on the spot." To do this properly, the decision-makers have to be familiar with the situation, with the everyday lives, problems, weaknesses and strengths of the people they govern; they also have to be known and respected by those people. No central government, no matter how perfect it might be, could possibly satisfy these requirements for a population of some billion and a half spread all over the world. How could a general rule satisfactorily govern an aspect of everyday life in Europe, North America, South America, Asia and Africa? How can the same symbols have the same meaning to various people living in various cultures, diverse traditions and under essentially different conditions?

It is not merely flexibility that requires the decentralization of the power structure within the Church, but also the principles of unity, equality and *agape*. Unity and equality do not mean sameness; as a matter of fact, sameness all too often destroys both. It is hard to appeal for unity when some persons or groups, for whatever reason, justifiably feel that they are neglected, treated as second-class, their needs and opinion disregarded, even if on the basis of an assumed equality.

3.8.3.2 Episcopacy

Fortunately the Church has a traditional form of governance that can fulfil all the requirements of a decentralized yet effective system and also serve the triple principle of *agape*, unity and service: the episcopacy. We already touched on the historical role of the bishops and the reasons they lost much of their previously practiced power. The time may have come to reinstate these powers.

The powers the bishop needs are those required for his function as pastor, or more properly, shepherd of the local church. A shepherd, i.e., sheep-herder does not herd the sheep in the sense of "drive," a well-trained dog can do that. A shepherd does take care of the flock and, as Jn 10:2–5 describes it, calls the sheep, who follow because they know him and trust him. The bishop has to be such a leader of the diocese, not its boss. Incidentally, the same is true of all who have any leadership function in the Church.

We have already indicated in several places that these powers have to include decision-making. That also encompasses decisions about policy and matters involving the whole Church, not merely those that are specific to the particular diocese of the bishop. Vatican II recognized the need for this and that is why collegiality was emphasized. One of the barriers to the full implementation of this concept appears to be the assumption of some Vatican officials regarding their superiority to "ordinary" bishops. This is also a question that needs to be discussed in connection with the necessary changes in the structure and governance of the Church: under what circumstances can officials of the Holy See contradict the decisions of the local episcopacy, especially those of regional and national bishops' conferences. This also invokes the rather delicate theological question of titular bishops. Do these persons, who are in fact not pastors of a flock, receive the same, or even superior, power from the Head of the Church, i.e., God, than do those who are? Is this in the true spirit of *agape*, unity and service?

Proper governance, however, requires that the concept of collegiality not be limited to bishops. The bishop has to be a shepherd of the clergy of the diocese as well as of the laity. The same arguments that show the necessity of collegiality between the bishops and the bishops and the Vatican also apply to the relationship between the bishop and his clergy. We have already mentioned the problem of the size of the dioceses; even if relatively drastic changes are implemented (if that is at all possible), there is little hope that the bishop could become as personally involved in the life of the community as would be necessary for a proper pastoral relationship. He needs the help, advice and full and enthusiastic cooperation of the clergy if the Church that is his diocese is to function properly.

3.8.3.3 Laity

Even that is not enough. Collegiality must also exist on the level of the parish. The term itself implies an approach based on equality. The pastor is not, nor should he ever be regarded as being, above those he serves; they have different functions, but are his equals in Christ. The scriptural basis of this equality, besides the institution narratives and the pericope of the gospel of John discussed above, is the often quoted 1Cor 12. This same pericope is also often quoted in support of dividing the Church not only into different groups according to their function, but also into different classes, as it were – and, for that matter, for several other viewpoints. It is impossible here to deal with the pericope or the debate around its interpretation in any detail. We are limited to presenting one possible and plausible interpretation, without necessarily disputing the validity of others.

In interpreting this pericope it is important to read it in the context of the whole letter, written in great measure to show members of the Corinthian community that no matter what their gifts, no one was better than any other member. (That this was a problem in the community is made clear in 11:22.) This being the key to the message, everything has to be understood in its light. The passage also emphasizes that every gift that is needed for the different functions within the Church comes from the same Spirit. The *charismata,* the gifts, are gifts of God and just as being a child of God surpasses all possible human distinctions, so it is with a gift given by God to an individual: it must be regarded as being much greater than anything else. Thus, no difference in the value of the gifts received can be ascribed. The gifts are given "for the common good" (v. 7), ultimately the salvation of the world.

The charismas, the gifts of the Spirit, are what empower the Church to accomplish its function, proclaiming of the Good News of Jesus Christ and building the Kingdom of God. Obviously, not every well-meaning action is inspired by the Spirit, nor is every person who claims to be, or appears to be, moved by it; the Jonestown tragedy in 1978, or, for that matter, the recent scandals swirling around the Church are sufficient proof. There must be a power available to the Body of Christ to make sure that faith and belief is not misused or abused. Wielding it, however, involves a tremendous responsibility, because it is all too easy to mistake the "common good" for one's own will or opinion, especially when that is backed up with the power and responsibility to enforce – as the behaviour of many politicians shows. Such power

must only be used in the spirit of Peter recounting the experience at Joppa: "If then God gave them the same gift he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" (Acts 11:17).

What follows from this is that every member of the Body of Christ has to feel that she or he is an equal member of the community. This will not be achievable unless there is also a possibility of participating in the important decisions. Of course, a kind of "popular democracy" in which every important decision is, or can be forced to be, put to a popular vote is impossible, even if it were desirable, which it is not. There are two areas where "popular" participation is both important and possible. The first is during the selection of the two most important functionaries in the life of the local Christian community, the parish priest and the bishop. Here again, what is needed is not an election, even though, if and when (or where) true communitates operate, this would not be impossible. The minimum, however, would be that members of the parish and/or diocesan communities be given the possibility to express their preferences and wishes. The other way participation could be accomplished relatively easily is through local synods, like the one organized not long ago in the Diocese of Montreal. In both cases it would be essential that an honest and open statement be made explaining why a proposal supported by a significant number of people could not be implemented, or why one and not another alternative was chosen. An attitude, or, especially, a statement to the effect that "you propose, I decide" will successfully and very quickly kill not only any willingness to participate in such consultations, but also the trust in the person or persons conducting, organizing or ordering them.

Full, active and conscious participation is important not only in liturgy, but also in most aspects of the life of the Church. Obviously there are limits; for instance, the Catholic population of an area has no right to intervene in the internal life of the house of a religious order within its borders, unless it has clearly violated Christian principles, for instance that of *agape*, unity and service. In that case, the appropriate ecclesial authorities must be notified and must act. But the membership of the communities do have the right and even obligation, by the same criteria mentioned in *CSL*, to participate in those aspects of the life of the Church

that directly or indirectly affect them.[45] Here again, activity must not be confused with participation. The parent who is careful to bring up the child or children in the true Christian spirit, following the teachings of Jesus, is as active a participant as is the busiest member of the Catholic Women's League or of the parish council. On the other hand, this does not mean that participation in parish or diocesan activities is not important; without them, the community cannot develop nor can it be maintained. To paraphrase the title of a popular catechesis program, faith comes first, this implies that every person, every Christian, has to fulfil his or her obligations in the order God has placed them.

Particularly important to parish life is participation in the liturgical and other ministries open to lay persons. Other than the administration of some sacraments, most ministries make this possible. Participation in these is not the same as volunteering, it is a responsibility based on particular talents, i.e., graces, in fact, a calling given by God, a vocation. It is a responsibility that, because others depend on every ministry, requires a commitment to proper and ongoing formation in order to enable the minister ("servant") to provide the best service of which he or she is capable; that is part of the vocation. From the practical point of view, such participation not only makes *agape*, unity and service more evident in the life of the parish, it can also be a tremendous asset to the clergy by freeing them from some often time consuming responsibilities and can thus alleviate to some degree the shortage of ordained priests.

3.8.3.4 Priesthood

That there is a very serious, perhaps near-catastrophic shortage of ordained priests does not require elaboration. All levels of the hierarchy are aware of the need, even if a person living in the priest-rich environment of Rome may not experience it in the same way as does a bishop struggling to provide proper pastoral care to the parishes in his charge, or the priest rushing every weekend from one church to the other to celebrate Mass. Communities are constantly urged to pray for vocations, but that alone is not sufficient. First of all, God certainly knows how many vocations are needed; it would be a grave mistake to assume that God needs any entreating to provide them. In fact, it would be much more proper to pray that persons called

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[45] *CSL* #14: "the Christian People, 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people' (1Pet 2:9, 4–5) have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism."

to be priests accept their vocation. But even that is incomplete, for undoubtedly acceptance of such a vocation also depends on other factors besides willingness.

Vocation to the priesthood (and "religious" life) is not the only one that is declining, so is the acceptance of vocation to marriage. Not only do many sacramental marriages break up, the institution of marriage itself is disappearing. In Quebec, once North America's most Catholic area, over 60% of newborns are born out of wedlock and it is estimated that "only one third of Quebecers will marry in their lifetime."[46] It is hard to imagine that many of these children, born and largely brought up in an essentially unstable environment, whose primary and most important models, their parents, for one reason or another refuse to make a life-long commitment, will find the strength to make the commitment to a vocation of priesthood, or, raised by a single parent because the other has left them, will be willing to accept the call to this very demanding life. One very important step in solving the shortage of priests ought to be a strong attention to the marital and family question from a Christian point, i.e., in the spirit of *agape*, unity and service.

A vital but far from easy task facing the Magisterium is the definition of what priesthood, and thus a priest, is. Neither Trent, nor Vatican II clearly defines priesthood, even though both speak of its various functions and dominant nature.[47] This lack has two important and rather unfortunate consequences. One is that, in spite of Vatican II's strong emphasis on general priesthood, i.e., the priesthood derived from baptism, there is no clear statement of what essentially differentiates ordained from baptismal priesthood. The other consequence is that when a person is asked to make a life-long exclusive commitment to becoming a priest, he does not, in fact, know clearly to what he is committing. The uncertainty may not be conscious, but very likely it is at least as important a factor in the large number of ordained persons leaving the priesthood as the oft-discussed question of celibacy. The two are not unrelated, for without a clear and definite definition of priesthood the problem of why the two sacraments are mutually exclusive cannot be solved.

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[46] Nicole Roy, "De Facto Union in Quebec," from the Canada Department of Justice website http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/icg-gci/dfu-udf/index.html (accessed July 7, 2010).

[47] Cf., André Duval, *Des sacrements au Concile de Trent* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 343; Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, D.C.: Sheed & Ward/Georgetown University Press,1990), 143; Melvin Michalsky, *The Relationship between the Universal Priesthood of the Baptized and the Ministerial Priesthood of the Ordained* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen University Press,1996), 65; Martos, *Doors*, 451; etc.

To find a proper definition is certainly within the domain of the universal Magisterium. Vatican II very clearly expressed that the sacramental-power based approach of Trent is insufficient. This is so not only because it does not suit modern thinking, but also because it does not extend to the pastoral role that is also essential for the wellbeing of the Church. Additionally, if a priest's only essential function lay in being the one to effect the transubstantiation of the bread and wine and in administering the sacraments of healing, priestly training could be adequately performed in a very few months, if not weeks; there would be no need for the community to maintain (i.e., employ and pay) the priest; his celibacy would be unnecessary; and important functions would be unfilled, or inadequately provided.

Once the essence of priesthood is defined, it will be much easier to decide which functions are essential and which could either be transferred or delegated to lay ministers, or eliminated. Debate and decisions of other questions, also important and even vital for the Church, depend on a uniform and well-defined view of priesthood and its functions. Such are, for instance, who can and should be ordained; is ordination always exclusive and life-long; what are the theological bases of these aspects; in light of the latter, do the related policies need revision and, if yes, what should the new policies be, should they be general or adaptable to different circumstances, etc. All of these, at present, represent an obstacle to solving the shortage of ordained priests, amongst the most critical issue in the Church today.

Such a work will inevitably be controversial; whatever the final outcome, not everybody will be satisfied. While the work has to be done under the aegis of the Magisterium, this must, on the one hand, mean the universal magisterium, on the other, given that today many theologians are not ordained persons, include as many of them as possible, selected only for their abilities and not for whether or not their views agree with those of any part of the hierarchy. No effort aimed at implementing the changes required to ensure that the Church remains effective as the Body of Christ, and to eventually increase its effectiveness, is likely to be successful without first accomplishing this task.

3.8.4 Conclusions

Changing a government is never easy; changing a style of governance can sometimes be even harder. Yet, for real changes to occur in the life of a community, the latter is the more important; changing the government without changing the philosophy of leadership cannot produce nearly all the desired results, as the recent history of post-Communist countries adequately demonstrates.

The Church is in need of such a change in governance. This is not unprecedented, the governance of the Church has undergone several fundamental changes during its history. The difference between the past and the present is that the changes in circumstances compelling such adjustments are now happening much faster than at any previous time. The changes needed within the Church cannot happen in a gradual, relatively easy and even unnoticed, natural-looking way. It may be overemphasizing the urgency to call for a revolutionary process, *reform* may be the proper term. The above discussions illustrate that this has to include practically all aspects of the life of the Body of Christ.

One circumstance that may make changing easier is that the needs and some of the methods discussed above do not require the Church to be a pioneer; it does not need to break new paths, but to keep up with the kinds of changes that have already happened or are currently in the process of happening in the world. The other side of the coin is that this makes action even more urgent: the more time that is lost, the more the Church lags behind, the more difficult it will be to achieve what is necessary.

Such an effort can only be accomplished with the whole-hearted support of the whole People of God. The way to assure such support and cooperation is proper and ongoing preparation, information and the means of adequate participation. These, in turn, will also minimalize the shock and discomfort change inevitably causes, especially in such vital areas as the relationship of the priests and the liturgy.

The specific instruments of debating, discussing, deciding and finally implementing the necessary changes will have to be determined by the universal Magisterium. This may include the need for a new ecumenical council; this, however, should not make the action impossible.

3.9 Summary conclusions

We are not, here, dealing with preparing the Church for the twenty-first century – the time for that has passed, the century is already unfolding. The letter of Henri Boulad, written some three years ago, and some of the other documents discussed indicate very clearly that even before the millennium severe problems existed in the Church. Some of these problems are not only harmful to the internal life of the People of God, but have also had a deleterious impact on the ability of the Church to accomplish its function as the Body of Christ. It is, therefore, not a question of preparation, but of a much needed effort to come to grips with those aspects that are essential to continuing as (or, in some areas, regaining the capacity to be) a world-changing force in the third millennium and accomplishing the mandate of the Church in the spirit of *agape*, unity and service.

Given that, by all indications, the radical changes that have increasingly racked the world since the late eighteenth century will not abate soon but will, in all likelihood, speed up in the foreseeable future, there is an urgency to upgrade the Church before it falls catastrophically behind. Both the problems and their corrections are so complicated that, in a document like this, no one specific program can be validly proposed. Thus, the aim has been to provide a starting point for a meaningful discussion. The situation is pressing, but the Latin saying *festina lente*, hurry slowly, is valid in this case and should be taken into consideration. The whole People of God needs to be willing to move with "all deliberate speed," quickly but carefully and not haphazardly.

The existing problems are complicated and their satisfactory solution will need practically concurrent changes in various areas of the life and functioning of the Church. This obviously makes the whole process extremely difficult. To accomplish it will need an unusual degree of determination, will, energy, cooperation and the proper attitude from everybody involved, every member of the Body of Christ. In more theological terms, it will need faith and a determined assent to listen to and follow the guidance of the Spirit and act in accordance with the principle of *agape*, unity and service. This triple principle was established by our investigation detailed in Chapter 2. It is attested by the probable interpretation the earliest witnesses, the disciples present at the Last Supper, gave to the words of Jesus when he gave them the bread to share, *this is my body*. Since, according to John Paul II, this was the decisive

moment of the existence of the Church, the meaning of this moment also defines the Church's character: everything in it must manifest *agape*, unity and service.

Accomplishing, well, any change in areas where changes are needed, such as liturgy, catechesis and mystagogy, evangelization, governance, etc., is dependent on beginning from a solid, easily understandable and adaptable theological base. The creation of such a theology is desperately needed, but satisfying each of these three conditions will require care and much work.

In order to be *solid*, this theology must be relatively compact and its interpretations acknowledged. Compactness is not the same as brevity; manifestly, background and proper presentation of arguments are essential for understanding, but non-essential parts of a debate must be eliminated, even if they are an important part of academic discourse. The logic, language and presentation, must be clear, and so must the images and ideas. Different, equally valid interpretations can and should be presented in a well-organized and "user friendly" way. Acknowledgement involves official acceptance of a theological interpretation. In an increasingly diverse Catholic population no single interpretation will be sufficient, even where it is possible. But the richness of the liturgy, tradition and reality of faith allows very different descriptions to be in complete agreement with the truth and the fundamental teachings of Scripture, without contradicting either each other or the teaching of the Church. Such differences ought to be "officially" recognized by the authority of the Church, while inclusion should not mean that one interpretation is more valid than another.

A theology is *easily understandable* if its language and logic is vernacular, i.e., common and often used: the language used in everyday communication between average persons. It is very likely that a single theological system is inadequate today, unless and until it is properly adapted regionally. Any control-apparatus of the Church must take this into account and not try to impose its own language or logic throughout the world in the name of preserving unity. Obviously this will require that local experts be involved, and even have the final say, in this kind of decision – another area that needs change.

The intertwined nature of the changes requires that their implementation involve the active support of the majority of the members of the Body of Christ on all levels. This, in turn, will be made possible only through conscious, careful and continuous catechesis and mystagogy.

Even in quiet times, this ought to be the rule rather than the exception. The rapidly and drastically changing environment of the twenty-first century requires that constant adjustment be made possible. Catechesis is functioning well in many geographical regions and in many areas of the life of the Church. What is needed is a conscious and concentrated effort to enlarge these areas and the intensity of catechesis. The areas where catechesis often falls short are post-sacramental and adult faith-formation. The available priests cannot assume responsibility for these; lay ministers have to step in. Thus increased attraction and training of persons suitable for these functions (including catechesis of children) has to be a priority.

Another area that is nearing or is already at the critical point is the scarcity of ordained priests and the scarcity of vocations. In spite of the fervent prayers of practically the whole Church, there is little sign that the situation will greatly change in the foreseeable future. Arguably, one of the major causes is one that also causes many very serious problems in the secular world: an increasing reluctance to accept responsibility, especially long-term commitments. The results are quite obvious in political life, in problems of the physical environment, in the increasing number of major fraud cases, and the list could be continued. The Church cannot solve this situation in the short term. It is certain that a clear definition of priesthood and a thorough discussion of the theological basis, and the consequences, of such regulations as celibacy and of restrictions on the possibilities of sacrament ordination are essential and urgent, but they alone will not solve the problem. While a much more efficient instrument will be the hoped-for improvement in the status of the Church in the eyes of the world when the life of the Catholic community visibly illustrates the principle of agape, unity and service given by Jesus as characteristic of his Body, that process will also take a long time.

The consequence is that there does not seem to be any fast solution to the problem of the diminishing number of priests. This means that the Church has to face the reality that the situation is not a temporary one and that alternatives must be found. Finding a solution or solutions is not only important and urgent because of the present shortage, but also because, with increased awareness among the laity of the true meaning and significance of the sacraments, there is already a noticeable increase in the demand for their reception.

These changes and the others discussed in this chapter are important, urgent and difficult. To achieve them and, thus, to assure the continued effectiveness of the presence of the Body

of Christ in the world will need a concerted effort of the whole Church. This effort will not succeed without the active commitment of the hierarchy as far as direction and help is concerned and, most important, through leadership at the front of the process. Giving an example of living up to and acting in the spirit of *agape*, unity and service is more effective than any declaration or change in rules.

The attitude demanded throughout the Church must be one of faith and trust. This implies a firm belief that God will and does help: with Christ we can do whatever his will is (cf., Jn 14:12–14, 15:7–8). Faith and trust also imply an absolute commitment to accept and to cooperate with the guidance of the Spirit, however difficult or uncomfortable it is to change long-held beliefs and customs. The trust also has to involve brothers and sisters in Christ. If the changes and the future life of the Church are to be governed by the characteristics given by Jesus at the Last Supper, our love must really be the *agape* described by Paul.

Such an attitude implies courage, even daring. The community of Catholics must be willing to accept the risk of mistakes, of errors, even of failure and abuse, just as Jesus, the Twelve, and Christians and the Christian community of the first centuries accepted them. The cooperation of other Christian communities in changing the universal Church is certainly desirable but, as the largest Christian community, the Roman Church has to lead the way and proceed regardless of who follows.

Problems are not new in the Church; according to the New Testament, they existed from the very first. The same documents also attest that the community founding apostles always demanded remedies in harmony with one or more aspects of the triple principle. This supports our contention that, like the Twelve and the communities of the first centuries the Church, we of the twenty-first century have to focus on the positive aspects of the demands of faith, to live by *agape*, unity and service. According to Jesus Christ this is the way the Church has to follow.

CONCLUSIONS

Using the term *crisis* in its original sense of a time when important choices must be made, and taking into account that this is a time of radical changes, there can be no doubt that the world is in a critical situation. Even those advocate a decision who would suggest that the best would be to continue doing things as they have been done before. Passivity, however, is not an avenue open to the Body of Christ. If the Church, the Body of Christ, is to be effective in the new world emerging from the chaos of change, it must decide how to adapt.

In retrospect, it is clear that almost a half-century ago the situation was at a relatively mild, early stage; yet the Fathers of Vatican II realized the need for adapting the Church to the changing world and, in the words of Pope John XXIII, opened the window (arguably, the door as well) making important adaptations possible. Yet that was only the first step. The conditions within which the Church exists and has to operate changed more in the forty-odd years since the calling of the Council than in the preceding century. It is debatable whether the changes in the Church kept pace or fell behind, but undoubtedly further changes are still necessary. Our aim with this work is to create a catalyst for this endeavour by presenting a principle that can ensure that the necessary changes will serve the mission of the Church as defined by Jesus Christ.

In his last encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia,* Pope John Paul II gave a clear indication of how to formulate the future life of the Church by connecting its existence inextricably to the Last Supper, specifically the institution of the Eucharist, which he defines as the *decisive moment* of the life of the Church. From this it is clear that its life, therefore also any change contemplated, must be governed by principles that were, as certainly as can be established, defined by the event as understood both by the participating disciples and by Jesus himself.

Hence our thesis, *given the radical changes in the world, the Church has to change; as the institution of the Eucharist is the "decisive event" in the life of the Church, those aspects of its life that need to be adapted as well as the way the changes are accomplished must be governed by the meaning of this event*. Neither the thesis nor the discussion is intended to criticize actions of the institutional Church or any of its officers, or to question and debate previous theories. The aim is to find an approach to solving

existing problems in a way that ensures that the Church will be fully effective in accomplishing its mandate as the Body of Christ in an unpredictable future. This is a rather unusual theological task: theological in the sense that it attempts to apply principles established in Revelation, i.e., on the basis of Scripture, unusual, because it has to deal with practical issues such as organization, governance, etc. and then project all of this into an uncertain and unpredictable future.

This task presents two challenges. If the future is unpredictable, no concrete plans can be prepared, yet the Church, in both its institutional framework and its one and a half billion members, has to be prepared to successfully adapt to the changing environment. On the other hand, the situation is unprecedented and tradition alone is not a reliable guide to how the essential character of the Church as the Body, the physical presence of Christ in the world, can be maintained and even strengthened and the effectiveness of its presence assured and in some areas even recaptured. The Church has to face these challenges; the author of this thesis had to struggle with them as well. Our search was inevitably unconventional. The first symptoms of the looming problems appeared approximately a half-century ago and, for several decades now, there have been voices that have sounded the alarm. Yet, because the situation approached the critical point only fairly recently, no systematic treatment of the problem was attempted, or at least none was found at the outset of this study. The work progressed, as it were, on uncharted territory.

It was relatively easy to establish that problems do exist within the Church. This part of our inquiry dealt with the present and, to some extent, the past. While relevant data are not abundant, what is available is clear enough: the number of those describing themselves as Roman Catholics has increased dramatically, yet participation in religious activity has diminished in some areas almost as dramatically and the number of ordained priests has also declined. The authority of the Church in the public domain has sunk to unprecedented levels in many areas. There are other symptoms as well, but for our purposes it was sufficient to find evidence that the situation is serious enough that decisive action needs to be taken.

Once we had this evidence, however, the task became more complicated. First of all, it was desirable to discover some indication of which features within the various activities and structure of the Church might be contributing to the problems or might make it more difficult

to implement the necessary changes. To find answers to these questions it was necessary to consult various fields of theology (e.g., ecclesiology, exegesis, Church history, practical theology, liturgy, etc.) and even the secular sciences and then combine the results. The consequence is that this work is essentially synthetic, not analytic. While this may not be the traditional format of a doctoral thesis, given the theme and purpose, it was unavoidable. Furthermore, the thesis deals essentially with the future; the changes that the world underwent in the last hundred years or so, and especially the ever-increasing rate of change in almost all areas of life, indicate that the future will be, in all likelihood, radically different from the past. To attempt to predict what the circumstances will be in a few decades, or to propose necessary concrete measures for accomplishing the essential adaptations to the Church in that changing world, would be pure speculation.

Our work demonstrated that at the root of some of the existing problems is a tendency to use a very restricted portion of the Church's tradition, and even that, rather selectively. While tradition is an important instrument in assuring continuity, it is, by its nature, interpretation and using it in this way is interpreting the interpretation. Interpretation, in itself, is not only natural, it is inevitable, but it can also be misleading. Interpretation always employs the language and thinking of the context in which it is made. Both of these factors can and do change with time, sometimes rather rapidly and drastically. Therefore tradition alone, especially a selective use of certain parts of tradition, is an insufficient guide in a changing environment.

To ensure that the Church is able to continue to be the Body of Christ, i.e., the physical presence of Christ in the world, through which he can be known and continue the salvific work, a solid anchor-point is necessary. The essential tenets of faith are without doubt the basis of such an anchorage and have been investigated and explained sufficiently by theology. However, faith is a journey and every person is at a different point on this journey, each may have quite different understandings of what the doctrines mean in practice, as evidenced by the very theology that explains the basic tenets. Also, much of our faith deals with mysteries and is, by definition, impossible to fully understand. Thus, to become a secure guide in the life of the Church a more concrete, practical presentation, or rather "translation" is necessary. While this is not new theology or a new theological method, theology-through-translation requires constant renewal to remain germane.

To circumvent the problems of a selective use of tradition and to renew our theological understanding, we attempted to return as closely as possible to the original understanding (or interpretation) of the "decisive moment" of the establishment of the Church and to then use this as a guide for indicating which areas ought to be changed and on what basis these changes are to be implemented. We contend that this method is what our thesis contributes to our knowledge: applying the original meaning of the words of Jesus over the bread directly to the Church in the twenty-first century.

The starting point of our inquiry is a personal letter of Henri Boulad to Pope Benedict XVI. This letter, written by a well-known, widely traveled person, who through various important ecclesial positions is well-placed to evaluate the situation of the Church, paints a rather alarming picture of the Church. Notwithstanding the qualifications of the author, confirmation of his perceptions was needed. Because the letter mentions that French-Canada, presumably Quebec, is one of the areas where the symptoms of the problems are most obvious, an article published several years before Boulad's letter was examined. The article described the situation of the diocese of Montreal, one of the important population and religious centres of Quebec. It spoke of the same symptoms, sometimes even using almost the same words as the letter. Both of these documents deal with practical issues from a fundamentally ecclesiological perspective, essentially discussing, if not the survival of the Church as such, its ability to accomplish its mission. An investigation of available statistical data then showed that the same situation does exist in wide areas of the world, even if with varying intensity. Thus we could accept Boulad's findings as valid as far as the Church at large is concerned; the information collected at this stage formed our basic assumption: changes in the Church are urgently needed if it is to remain effective in the world.

With the necessary confirmation of the validity of Boulad's presentation of the situation secured, we turned next to some of the contributing factors within the Church that Boulad also defined, such as the out-dated and ineffectual language and thinking evident in magisterial documents. The parameters of this work did not allow a thorough analysis of even one of the appropriate documents, we therefore selected two key documents and deliberately focused on searching out passages that could clearly demonstrate if the charges are valid, at least in some important instances. The two documents investigated were the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* of Pope John Paul II. The questions we raised, as a

standard by which to determine if the charges are valid, were whether the theology presented was appropriate to contemporary thinking and whether it was in harmony with the direction indicated by Vatican II. We focused, in the *CCC*, on sections dealing with moral teaching, arguably most *à propos* to Boulad's comments regarding the pronouncements of the Magisterium, and, in *EE*, on the treatment of ordained and universal priesthood, an area where the renewal tendency of Vatican II was particularly clear. These subjects are also clearly theological.

Both documents supported Boulad's contentions and also indicated that a very selective and exclusive use of mainly Tridentine tradition was at the root of the problem. While we did not do a detailed analysis of the complete documents, it became obvious that when the authors widened this interpretation of tradition, the antiquated language and approach disappeared and the spirit of Vatican II took over. This effect was strong enough for us to conclude that in this fast-changing world such a use of tradition is not sufficient and may even be a barrier to appropriate development. Because the use of two thousand years of tradition in its totality is impossible, and thus any recourse to tradition is *ipso facto* selective, any reliance on tradition alone could, at least potentially, carry the same difficulties demonstrated by the documents. The conclusion appeared to be self-evident: to find a secure guide by which proposed changes can be evaluated, we must limit the influence of tradition and traditional interpretation as much as possible, in other words, return as closely as we can to the original moments that first defined the Church. In this, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* itself gave an important indication.

The fundamental premise of the encyclical is that the Church was conceived, received its life, at the establishment of the Eucharist, specifically the handing of the bread as the body of Jesus to the disciples at the Last Supper. Since the eucharistic celebration is an *anamnesis* of the Last Supper, this source of life is present at every Mass. This, however, does not diminish the importance and authority of the original event. Through the *anamnesis* we, in some way, can truly take part in the event itself; however, we still remain twenty-first century persons and our understanding and interpretation of the happenings is conditioned by two millennia of tradition. This fact does not make the *anamnesis* untrue, yet, because it represents many layers of various conjectures, intuition, perceptions, etc., it alone cannot serve as a certain guide for the Church in a changing environment. We had to "dig deep" in our attempt to reach the

original understanding/interpretation given to the event when it happened. We thus turned to the institution narratives, more specifically to their exegesis.

Here we found that the words spoken over the bread, *this is my body,* appear in exactly the same form in all four narratives. While the words *take and eat* are missing in 1Cor, from the context it is obvious that this too was understood by the first Christian communities as part of the statement. This remarkable concordance, extremely rare in the New Testament, was sufficient evidence for us to conclude that in all likelihood these were the words used. Even this is not exact because Jesus, in all probability, did not address the disciples in Greek, the language of the available witnesses. With this proviso we could accept them as being the words spoken by Jesus at the Last Supper, at the "decisive moment" of the conception of the Church. The meaning of these words and of the actions accompanying them defines the character of the Church.

Of course, at this point we had to rely again on interpretation, but our aim was to avoid reliance on interpretations that reflected the thoughts and ideas born of awareness of the events that followed the Last Supper, what we called the "second loop." The influence of these is undeniable and also, according to Catholic faith, true because they are part of divine Revelation. However, the interpretations themselves are human, even if and when guided by the Spirit, and thus have the potential of being selective and thus obscuring some of the original meaning, which is also part of Revelation.

Traditional interpretations rely on a sense that Jesus, present in his divine nature, knew what was to come and was offering his disciples prophetic guidance. We wanted to look at the Last supper, in its moment, as a human exchange. Yet our search was not directed at discovering the "historical Jesus" or the historical disciples. The object of our research was, and is still, the Jesus of faith, the Son of God and the Messiah, an essentially theological approach. However, our faith teaches us that this person was also fully human. It is a mystery how the same person can be at the same time fully human and fully God, but this is essentially a question of *how*; we believe that it *is* so. If, therefore, he was fully human, he also had all the limitations of being human. We know that he was tempted and that he apparently occasionally lost patience and that he even made mistakes (cf., Mt 15:21–28). As a human being, he could evaluate the situation and make informed guesses, but he could not see the future, even

though he was able to prophesy. Prophecy is a gift of the Father, but nowhere is there evidence that the prophets clearly understood the full message God intended to convey through their words. Thus Jesus' words and actions at the Last Supper may very well have been prophetic, but it is highly unlikely that he consciously predicted his death and/or resurrection; it is even less likely that the disciples would have so understood him at the time. It is exactly this – what the human Jesus meant to convey to his disciples and what they understood him to mean – that we were seeking to uncover.

Available information about meal customs of the time, including the Passover feast, even if scanty, help to shed light on how the happenings may have been understood at the event itself. Whether the Last Supper was in fact a Passover meal is immaterial for us because it is clearly presented as such in the synoptics and is thus the interpretation of the earliest traditions. There is no evidence of whether this interpretation was already present at the meal itself or was born as part of the "first loop." It seems certain that the main feature of first-century Passover meals was *anamnesis* of the Covenant, as emphasized in the synoptics as well. This aspect also reinforces the profound meaning of the bread-rite, then and still, in the Middle East: the person with whom bread is shared at the table becomes a member of the family, united as closely as a blood relation. This, in itself, is a covenant between the people around the table. *Thus, even if the paschal interpretation is a later addition, by the identification of the bread with himself, Jesus makes such an extension of the meaning eminently valid.*

At communal meals the covenant is established by sharing the bread, but Jesus makes the bread an expression (or reality) of himself. This has a double theological significance. On the one hand he makes of himself an unconditional and absolute gift, a gesture of perfect *agape*, and at the same time and through the same gesture he makes himself a means by which unity is established. When Christians understood that Jesus is not merely human but also God, this gesture achieved a stupendous new significance, because it signals that those who share this Jesus-bread also become united with God. We do not "become" God any more than we "become" the bread we eat, but in some way we share in the existence of God, become divine. Here, then, two important principles are established: the Eucharist provides and demands unity both with God and with each other and provides and demands unconditional love, *agape*. These principles were established at the Last Supper; the fact that the realization of their full

importance was only achieved later does not make pursuing them different or less important; in a sense, this is exactly the process in which we are involved.

To verify our conclusions we turned to John's gospel. It replaces the bread-rite of the institution narratives with the washing of feet followed by the commandment of love and Jesus' prayer, as if to emphasize the meaning of the events of the Last Supper: *agape*, unity and service. Service is implied in the institution narratives by the action of Jesus giving himself in the bread, in John it is made explicit. We thus established the triple principle that has to govern the Church, its life and any changes contemplated. The principle is not new: it has been embedded in the teachings of the Church from the beginning. What is new is the imperative given to it by the fact that it is the decisive characteristic of the Church. In other words, any community that does not have as the basis of its existence *agape*, unity and service is not Church. This may sound harsh, but unless it can be shown that our conclusion is wrong and that this is not part of what Jesus meant when he gave the bread to the disciples with the words *this is my body*, the conclusion is unavoidable. In consequence, this has to be the ecclesiological guiding principle and the visible *leitmotif* of the life of the Church as it moves through the very uncertain future.

In the last part of our work we attempted to sketch the areas of the life of the Church that need to be changed so as to achieve this goal. This topic presented new challenges. As mentioned before, nobody can predict with any certainty how the world will change even in the near future. What is the future of the millions who are already displaced? Will they settle where they are? Will they return? If either, will it be accomplished peacefully? What will be the consequences of urbanization, of warming, of increased health services – and we could continue the list of uncertainties. These factors, and many unforeseen ones all will have an influence on everyday life and will consequently demand adequate adaptations by the Church.

Some *caveats* appear to be in order. In an increasingly global world, in spite of a strong homogenizing effect, almost indubitably variety will increase. As consciousness of local and ethnic culture strengthens and, with it, the demand that they be taken into account in every aspect of life, a monolithic system that insists not on equality but on sameness and that governs by general rules becomes inoperable. Episcopacy is, at least theoretically, the highest order in the hierarchy of the Church; in the fast-changing world, the diocesan bishop is in the

best position to make many decisions, primarily regarding the ways universal policies are to be implemented. The function of the central authority ought to be focused on policies that assure that the Church will, in all aspects, be governed and function by the triple principle established by Jesus: *agape*, unity and service. Micromanaging does not work with a membership of one and a half billion people.

This part of our inquiry dealt largely in generalities because concrete proposals cannot, at this point, be validly made, nor can specific means be established to achieve the goals. The changes, in fact, reforms, must encompass practically every aspect of the life of the Church and in consequence require the whole-hearted cooperation of every Catholic Christian. Even though Boulad does not go beyond discussing the present situation and the needs arising from it, the triple reform he suggests in his letter is also applicable from our perspective:

1) A theological and catechetical reform to rethink the faith and reformulate it in a coherent and contemporary way;

2) A pastoral reform to completely rethink the structures inherited from the past;

3) A spiritual reform to revive the mysticism and rethink the sacraments to give them an existential dimension and make them relevant to life.

Such a triple reform is needed to suffuse the whole Church with the spirit of agape, unity and service. The nearly *ad nauseam* repetition of the triple principle in our work was to emphasize that any action, even the apparently mundane, has to carry this signature. It was not possible to give detailed ideas of how this can be achieved – it is primarily a question of attitude. This is not a psychological, pedagogical or sociological but a theological statement. All aspects of the three components are fundamentally an application of the self-giving, unconditional love, the *agape* that Jesus proclaimed throughout his teaching and demonstrated so explicitly in giving his body-self (and emphasizes every time we receive communion, when he literally puts himself in our hands), in washing the feet of Judas, in his commandment to love one another and in his death. This attitude is not natural, nor is it possible without our being lifted from our natural, merely human state, to the level of the divine, through and with the resurrection and ascension. It is only possible, if, with the help of God and with the Church, we truly live the new life Jesus Christ offers. If even only a portion of the one and a half billion nominally Catholic people can be made to understand the message of *this is my body*,

together, in unity, with an attitude of *agape* and service we can and will change the world for the better.

Finally I would like to summarize these conclusions, and, as it were, this thesis. It is undoubtedly not a traditional thesis nor did I use a traditional method. After years of work, I am more than ever aware that the task I undertook was huge, and, as far as I know, unprecedented: to propose a reliable and solid guide for implementing vital and urgent changes in the Church in a constantly changing world, so that it can remain effective in an unpredictable future. Given the circumstances, tradition alone cannot serve as a guide, at least not without a valid standard by which it can be tested. This in itself presented another difficulty, because all that we know of our faith and the Church is essentially based on tradition. The question therefore arose, is it possible to circumvent tradition? Again, obviously not in any traditional way. To make certain that, whatever they were, my conclusions would be sufficient to serve as a secure guide for the Church, I also had to avoid the pitfall of those searching for the "historical Jesus": building up an image of a person about whom the only sources are interpretative traditions is necessarily pure speculation.

First, I chose to follow an inductive path, i.e., to start from the problem, not from any principle – if I could find one, it and its application would be the result of my inquiry. Next, by synthesising as many fields of knowledge, both within and outside theology, as possible, I attempted to establish the most likely interpretation the participants at the Last Supper formed during the event itself. I may be accused of playing a game and the charge may be fully justified. However this game, if it is one, helped me to get closer to the thinking – and consequently the understanding and interpretation – of the people of the time and allowed me to establish the triple-principle of *agape*, unity and service. The method was validated by the exegetical fact that the general contents of the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John, also lay particular stress on this same principle, even if in time it was obscured in the interpretations of the meaning of the Last Supper. A further test for the validity of my conclusion was to investigate whether this principle can be used as a guide for the necessary changes in the life of the Church. Given the uncertainty of the way these changes will or must be accomplished, it was not possible to verify whether applying the principle will actively help to solve the problems of the Church, but it was possible to show that it will in no way hamper renewal.

Is this theology? If theology, the "science of God," is searching for the meaning of Revelation – a contemporary interpretation of the words of and of our relationship with God – is theology, this work certainly is. Is it ecclesiology? If applying a contemporary interpretation of Revelation to the life of the Church is ecclesiology, this work certainly is. In addition, by facing the task, I have used unusual methods; in this sense my work did demonstrate that these methods can be used profitably, an advance in the field of knowledge. Will it be useful for others? This is not for me to decide.

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APPENDIX I
THE ORIGINAL LETTER OF HENRI BOULAD TO POPE BENEDICT XVI ‡

Objet : SOS POUR L'EGLISE D'AUJOURD'HUI

Très Saint Père,

J'ose m'adresser directement à vous, car mon cœur saigne de voir l'abîme dans lequel notre Église est en train de sombrer. Vous voudrez bien excuser ma franchise toute filiale, dictée à la fois par « *la liberté des enfants de Dieu* » à laquelle nous invite saint Paul, et par mon amour passionné pour l'Église. Vous voudrez bien aussi excuser le ton alarmiste de cette lettre, car je crois qu' « *il est moins cinq* » et que la situation ne saurait attendre davantage.

Permettez-moi tout d'abord de me présenter. Jésuite égypto-libanais de rite melkite, j'aurai bientôt mes 76 ans. Je suis depuis trois ans recteur du Collège des jésuites au Caire, après avoir assumé les charges suivantes : supérieur des jésuites à Alexandrie, supérieur régional des jésuites d'Egypte, professeur de théologie au Caire, directeur de Caritas-Egypte et vice-président de Caritas Internationalis pour le Moyen-Orient et l'Afrique du Nord. Je connais très bien la hiérarchie catholique d'Egypte pour avoir participé pendant plusieurs années à ses réunions, en tant que Président des Supérieurs religieux d'Instituts en Egypte. J'ai des relations très personnelles avec chacun d'eux, dont certains sont mes anciens élèves. Par ailleurs, je connais personnellement le Pape Chenouda III, que j'avais l'habitude de voir assez régulièrement.

Quant à la hiérarchie catholique d'Europe, j'ai eu l'occasion de rencontrer plusieurs fois personnellement tel ou tel de ses membres, dont le Cardinal Koenig, le Cardinal Schönborn, le Cardinal Martini, le Cardinal Daneels, l'Archevêque Kothgasser, les évêques diocésains Kapellari et Küng, les autres évêques autrichiens, ainsi que des évêques d'autres pays européens. Ces rencontres ont lieu lors de mes tournées annuelles de conférences en Europe : Autriche, Allemagne, Suisse, Hongrie, France, Belgique… Dans ces tournées, je m'adresse à des auditoires très divers, ainsi qu'aux médias (journaux, radios, télévisions…). J'en fais autant en Egypte et au Proche-Orient.

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‡ Henri Boulad, Lettre personnelle au Pape Benoît XVI (published July 8, 2009), http://forum-andre-naud.qc.ca/?p=1464 (downloaded July 22, 2009); used with the permission of the author.

J'ai visité une cinquantaine de pays dans les quatre continents et publié une trentaine d'ouvrages dans une quinzaine de langues, notamment en français, arabe, hongrois et allemand. Parmi mes treize livres dans cette langue, vous avez peut-être lu *Gottessöhne, Gottestöchter*, que vous a passé votre ami, le P. Erich Fink de Bavière.

Je ne dis pas tout cela pour me vanter, mais pour vous dire simplement que mes propos sont fondés sur une connaissance réelle de l'Église universelle et de sa situation aujourd'hui, en 2007.

J'en viens à l'objet de cette lettre, où j'essaierai d'être le plus bref, le plus clair et le plus objectif possible. Tout d'abord, un certain nombre de constats (la liste est loin d'être exhaustive) :

1. **La pratique religieuse est en déclin contant**. Les églises d'Europe et du Canada ne sont plus fréquentées que par un nombre de plus en plus réduit de personnes du 3ème âge, qui disparaîtront bientôt. Il n'y aura plus alors qu'à fermer ces églises, ou à les transformer en musées, en mosquées, en clubs ou en bibliothèques municipales – comme cela se fait déjà. Ce qui me surprend, c'est que beaucoup d'entre elles sont en train d'être entièrement rénovées et modernisées à grand frais dans l'intention d'attirer les fidèles. Mais ce n'est pas cela qui freinera l'exode.

2. **Les séminaires et noviciats se vident au même rythme, et les vocations sont en chute libre**. L'avenir est plutôt sombre et l'on se demande qui prendra la relève. De plus en plus de paroisses européennes sont actuellement assumées par des prêtres d'Asie ou d'Afrique.

3. **Beaucoup de prêtres quittent le sacerdoce et le petit nombre de ceux qui l'exercent encore** – dont l'âge est souvent au-dessus de celui de la retraite - doivent assurer le service de plusieurs paroisses, de façon expéditive et administrative. Beaucoup parmi ceux-ci, tant en Europe que dans le tiers-monde, vivent en **concubinage** au vu et su de leurs fidèles, qui souvent les approuvent, et de leur évêque, qui n'en peut mais… vu la pénurie de prêtres.

4. **Le langage de l'Église est désuet, anachronique, ennuyeux, répétitif, moralisant, totalement inadapté à notre époque**. Il ne s'agit pas du tout d'aller dans le sens du poil et de faire de la démagogie, car le message de l'Évangile doit être présenté dans toute sa crudité et son exigence. Ce qu'il faudrait plutôt, c'est de procéder à cette « nouvelle évangélisation » à laquelle nous conviait Jean-Paul II. Mais celle-ci, contrairement à ce que beaucoup pensent, ne

consiste pas du tout à répéter l'ancienne, qui ne mord plus, mais à innover, inventer un nouveau langage qui redise la foi de façon pertinente et signifiante pour l'homme d'aujourd'hui.

5. Cela ne pourra se faire que par **un renouveau en profondeur de la théologie et de la catéchèse, qui devraient être repensées et reformulées de fond en comble**. Un prêtre et religieux allemand rencontré récemment me disait que le mot « mystique » n'était pas mentionné une seule fois dans *Le nouveau catéchisme*. J'en étais estomaqué. Il faut bien constater que notre foi est très cérébrale, abstraite, dogmatique et parle très peu au cœur et au corps.

6. **Comme conséquence, un grand nombre de chrétiens se tournent vers les religions d'Asie, les sectes, le New-Age, les églises évangéliques, l'occultisme, etc**. Comment s'en étonner ? Ils vont chercher ailleurs la nourriture qu'ils ne trouvent pas chez nous, car ils ont l'impression que nous leur donnons des pierres en guise de pain. La foi chrétienne qui, autrefois, conférait un sens à la vie des gens, est pour eux aujourd'hui une énigme, la survivance d'un passé révolu.

7. **Sur le plan moral et éthique**, les injonctions du Magistère, répétées à satiété, sur le mariage, la contraception, l'avortement, l'euthanasie, l'homosexualité, le mariage des prêtres, les divorcés remariés, etc. ne touchent plus personne et n'engendrent que lassitude et indifférence. Tous ces problèmes moraux et pastoraux méritent plus que des déclarations péremptoires. Ils ont besoin d'une approche pastorale, sociologique, psychologique, humaine… dans une ligne plus évangélique.

8. **L'Église catholique, qui a été la grande éducatrice de l'Europe pendant des siècles, semble oublier que cette Europe a accédé à la maturité**. Notre Europe adulte refuse d'être traitée en mineure. Le style paternaliste d'une Église *Mater et Magistra* est définitivement périmé et ne colle plus aujourd'hui. Nos chrétiens ont appris à penser par eux-mêmes et ne sont pas prêts à avaler n'importe quoi.

9. **Les nations les plus catholiques d'autrefois – la France, « fille aînée de l'Église », ou le Canada français ultra-catholique – ont opéré un retournement à 180°** pour verser dans l'athéisme, l'anticléricalisme, l'agnosticisme, l'indifférence. Pour un certain nombre d'autres nations européennes, le processus est en cours. On constate que plus un peuple a été couvé et materné par l'Église dans le passé, plus la réaction contre elle est forte.

10. **Le dialogue avec les autres Églises et les autres religions** marque aujourd'hui un recul inquiétant. Les avancées remarquables réalisées depuis un demi-siècle semblent en ce moment compromises.

Face à ce constat plutôt accablant, la réaction de l'Église est double :

– Elle tend à minimiser la gravité de la situation et à se consoler en constatant un certain renouveau dans son aile la plus traditionnelle, ainsi que dans les pays du tiers-monde.

– Elle invoque la confiance dans le Seigneur, qui l'a soutenue pendant vingt siècles et sera bien capable de l'aider à dépasser cette nouvelle crise, comme il l'a fait pour les précédentes. N'a-t-elle pas les promesses de la vie éternelle ?…

A cela je réponds :

– Ce n'est pas en s'arc-boutant sur le passé, en en recueillant les fragments, que l'on résoudra les problèmes d'aujourd'hui et de demain.

– L'apparente vitalité des Églises du tiers-monde est trompeuse. Selon toute vraisemblance, ces nouvelles Églises passeront tôt ou tard par les mêmes crises qu'a connues la vieille chrétienté européenne.

– La Modernité est incontournable et c'est pour l'avoir oublié que l'Église est dans une telle crise aujourd'hui. Vatican II, a essayé de rattraper quatre siècles de retard, mais on a l'impression que l'Église est en train de refermer lentement les portes qui se sont ouvertes alors, et tentée de se tourner vers Trente et Vatican I, plutôt que vers Vatican III. Rappelons-nous l'injonction plusieurs fois répétée de Jean-Paul II : « *Pas d'alternative à Vatican II* ».

– Jusqu'à quand continuerons-nous à jouer à la politique de l'autruche et à enfouir notre tête dans le sable ? Jusqu'à quand refuserons-nous de regarder les choses en face ? Jusqu'à quand essaierons-nous de sauver à tout prix la façade – une façade qui ne fait illusion à personne aujourd'hui ? Jusqu'à quand continuerons-nous à nous braquer, à nous crisper contre toute critique, au lieu d'y voir une chance vers un renouveau ? Jusqu'à quand continuerons-nous à remettre aux calendes grecques une réforme qui s'impose impérativement et qu'on n'a que trop longtemps remise ?

– C'est en regardant résolument vers l'avant et non vers l'arrière, que l'Église accomplira sa mission d'être *lumière du monde, sel de la terre, levain dans la pâte*. Or, ce que nous constatons

malheureusement aujourd'hui, c'est que l'Église est à la traîne de notre époque, après avoir été la pionnière du monde pendant des siècles.

– Je répète ce que je disais au début de cette lettre : « IL EST MOINS CINQ ! » – *fünf vor zwölf* ! L'Histoire n'attend pas, surtout à notre époque, où le rythme s'emballe et s'accélère.

- Toute entreprise commerciale qui constate un déficit ou des dysfonctionnements se remet immédiatement en question, réunit des experts, tente de se reprendre, mobilise toutes ses énergies pour dépasser la crise.

- Pourquoi l'Église n'en fait-elle pas autant ? Pourquoi ne mobilise-t-elle pas toutes ses forces vives pour un radical *aggiornamento* ? Pourquoi ?

- Paresse, lâcheté, orgueil, manque d'imagination, de créativité, quiétisme coupable, dans l'espoir que le Seigneur s'arrangera et que l'Église en a connu bien d'autres dans le passé ?…

- Le Christ, dans l'évangile, nous met en garde : « *Les fils des ténèbres sont beaucoup plus habiles dans la gestion de leurs affaires que les fils de lumière*… »

ALORS, QUE FAIRE ?… L'Église d'aujourd'hui a un besoin impérieux et urgent d'une TRIPLE REFORME :

1. **Une réforme théologique et catéchétique pour repenser la foi et la reformuler de façon cohérente** pour nos contemporains. Une foi qui ne signifie plus rien, qui ne donne pas un sens à l'existence, n'est plus qu'un pur ornement, une superstructure inutile qui tombe d'elle-même. C'est le cas aujourd'hui.
2. **Une réforme pastorale pour repenser de fond en comble les structures héritées du passé**. (Voir ci-après mes suggestions dans ce domaine.)
3. **Une réforme spirituelle pour revivifier la mystique et repenser les sacrements** en vue de leur donner une dimension existentielle, de les articuler à la vie. J'aurais beaucoup à dire là-dessus.

L'Église d'aujourd'hui est trop formelle, trop formaliste. On a l'impression que l'institution étouffe le charisme et que ce qui compte finalement c'est une stabilité tout extérieure, une respectabilité de surface, une certaine façade. Ne risquons-nous pas de nous voir un jour traiter par Jésus de « sépulcres blanchis… » ?

Pour terminer, je suggère la convocation, au niveau de l'Église universelle, d'un synode général auquel participeraient tous les chrétiens – catholiques et autres – pour examiner en toute franchise et clarté les points signalés plus haut et tous ceux qui seraient proposés. Un tel synode, qui durerait trois ans, serait couronné par une assemblée générale – évitons le terme de « concile » - qui rassemblerait les résultats de cette enquête et en tirerait les conclusions.

Je termine, très Saint-Père, en vous demandant de pardonner ma franchise et mon audace et en sollicitant votre paternelle bénédiction. Permettez-moi aussi de vous dire que je vis ces jours-ci en votre compagnie, grâce à votre livre remarquable, *Jésus de Nazareth*, qui fait l'objet de ma lecture spirituelle et de ma méditation quotidienne.

Sincèrement vôtre dans le Seigneur,

P. Henri Boulad, sj

Graz, le 18 juillet 2007

APPENDIX II
TRANSLATION OF HENRI BOULAD'S LETTER TO POPE BENEDICT XVI[‡]

Re: SOS for the Church of today

Most Holy Father,

I dare to turn to you directly because my heart is bleeding as I see the abyss into which our Church is sinking. Please excuse my filial outspokenness, dictated both by the "*freedom of the children of God*" to which Saint Paul invites us and by my passionate love for the Church. Please also excuse the alarmist tone of this letter, but I do believe that it is "*five minutes to midnight*" and that the situation will not wait any longer.

First of all, permit me to introduce myself. I am an Egyptian-Lebanese Jesuit of the Melkite rite, nearing 76 years of age. For the past three years I have been rector of the Jesuit College of Cairo, after having assumed the following responsibilities: superior of the Jesuits of Alexandria, regional superior of the Jesuits of Egypt, professor of theology in Cairo, director of Caritas-Egypt and vice-president of Caritas Internationalis for the Middle-East and North Africa. As I have, over several years, participated in their meetings as the president of the Superiors of Religious Institutions of Egypt, I know the Catholic hierarchy of Egypt very well. I maintain close personal relationship with everyone, some of whom are my former students. I also personally know Pope Chenouda III, whom I am in the habit of seeing quite regularly.

As for the Catholic hierarchy of Europe, I have had many opportunities to meet some of them, such as Cardinal Koenig, Cardinal Schönborn, Cardinal Martini, Cardinal Daneels, Archbishop Kothgasser, diocesan bishops Kapellari and Küng, the Austrian bishops, as well as bishops of other European countries. These encounters occur during my annual tours of European conferences in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, France, Belgium… During these tours I address very diverse audiences as well as the media (journals, radio, television…). I do the same in Egypt and the Near-East.

I have visited some fifty countries on four continents and published some thirty works in fifteen languages, notably in French, Arabic, Hungarian and German. Among the thirteen

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‡ Translated by Janos Glaser.

books in the latter language, you may have read *Gottessöhne, Gottestöchter*, which our mutual friend P. Erich Fink of Bavaria has given to you.

I am not saying all of this to brag, but merely to demonstrate that what I am saying is based on a thorough knowledge of the universal Church and its situation today, in 2007.

I have come to the object of this letter and I will try to be as clear, as brief and as objective as possible. First of all a certain number of observations (the list is far from complete):

1. **Religious practice is constantly declining**. The churches of Europe and Canada are only attended by a lesser and lesser number of people of the older generation, who will soon disappear. There will be no alternative but to close the churches or to transform them into museums, mosques, clubs or municipal libraries, as is already being done. What surprises me is that many are in the process of being entirely renovated or modernised, at great cost, in order to attract more of the faithful. But this will not put a break on the exodus.

2. **Seminaries and novitiates are emptying at the same rate and the number of vocations is in free-fall**. The future is dark and the people are asking themselves who will bring relief. More and more European parishes are actually being taken over by priests from Asia or Africa.

3. **Many priests are leaving the priesthood and the small number left** – often already over retirement age – must provide service to several parishes in an efficient and bureaucratic manner. Many of these, both in Europe and in the Third World, openly and publicly cohabitate with women, often not only with the knowledge but also with the approval of the parishioners and the bishop, who cannot do anything, given the shortage of priests.

4. **The language of the Church is antiquated, anachronistic, boring, repetitive, moralising, and entirely inappropriate for our age**. It's not at all a question of pleasing the masses and practicing demagoguery, because the message of the Gospel must be presented in all its bluntness and exigency. Rather, what is needed is to proceed with that "new evangelisation" to which John Paul II called us. But, contrary to what many believe, this does not consist of repeating the old, which has no bite any more, but of innovating, inventing a new language that will retell the faith in a way that is pertinent and significant for the individual of today.

5. This cannot be done except through an i**n-depth renewal of theology and catechesis, which must be rethought and reformulated from top to bottom**. A priest told me recently

that the word "*mystique*" was not mentioned even once in *The New Catechism*. I was flabbergasted. It would seem that our faith is very cerebral, abstract, dogmatic and speaks very little to the heart and to the body.

6. **As a consequence, many Christians turn to Asian religions, sects, evangelical churches, occultism, etc**. Why should we be surprised? They are searching for the nourishment that they did not find with us, because they feel we are giving them stones instead of bread. Christian faith which once gave a meaning to people's lives is, today, for them, enigmatic, the remnant of bygone times.

7. **On the ethical and moral level**, the *ad nauseam* repeated injunctions of the Magisterium on marriage, contraception, abortion, homosexuality, marriage of priests, remarriage of the divorced, etc. do not reach anybody anymore and their only effect is weariness and indifference. Every one of these moral and pastoral problems deserves more than peremptory declarations. They need a pastoral, sociological, psychological, human and humane approach… along more evangelical lines.

8. **The Catholic Church, for centuries the great teacher of Europe, seems to forget that this Europe has come of age**. Our adult Europe refuses to be treated as a minor. The paternalistic style of a *Mater et Magistra* Church is definitely out-dated and does not work today. Our Christians have learned to think for themselves and are not ready to swallow just anything.

10. **The nations that once were the most Catholic – France, the "oldest daughter of the Church" or the ultra-Catholic French Canada – have performed a 180°** reversal and turned to anticlericalism, agnosticism, indifference. In a number of other European countries the same process is happening. One can see that the more a people has been cocooned and mothered by the Church in the past, the stronger the reaction against her is now.

11. **The dialogue with the other Churches and religions** shows a disturbing retreat. The significant advances that were achieved in the past half-century seem to be jeopardized.

Faced with such a damning account the Church reacts in two ways:

– By minimizing the gravity of the situation and by seeking comfort in observing a certain renewal in its most conservative wing as well as in Third World countries;

– By invoking confidence in the Lord who has supported it through twenty centuries and has plenty of power to help in this present crisis, as he has done before. Did he not promise it eternal life?…

To which I respond:

– This is nothing else but depending on the past, collecting its fragments in order to use them to solve the problems of today and tomorrow.

– The apparent vitality of the Churches in the Third World is misleading. In all likelihood these new Churches, sooner or later, will pass through the same crises as the old European Christianity.

– Modernity is inescapable and today the Church finds itself in such a crisis because it has forgotten this fact. Vatican II tried to make up for four centuries of delay, but one has the impression that the Church is slowly closing the doors that opened then and has a tendency to turn more towards Trent and Vatican I than to a Vatican III. Let us remember the several times repeated admonition of John Paul II: "*there is no alternative to Vatican II*."

– For how long will we follow the policy of the ostrich and hide our heads in the sand? For how long will we refuse to face the facts? For just how long will we try to save face at all costs – a face that is a façade that does not fool anybody today? For just how long will we continue to brace and arm ourselves against any criticism rather than recognise a chance for renewal? For how long will we continue to put off indefinitely a reform that is imperative and for which not much time remains?

– It is only by resolutely looking forward and not back that the Church will accomplish its mission of being the l*ight of the world, salt of earth and leaven of the dough*. Unfortunately, what we see is that the Church, for centuries the pioneer of the world, is now trailing behind.

– I have to repeat what I said at the beginning of this letter, "IT IS FIVE MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT!" – *fünf vor zwölf*! History does not wait, especially in our age when the rhythm races and accelerates.

– Any commercial enterprise that notices a deficit or dysfunction, immediately looks at itself, gathers its experts, attempts to pick itself up, mobilises all its resources and energies to weather the crisis.

– Why does the Church not act in this way? Why does it not gather all its vital forces for a radical *aggiornamento*? Why?

– Is it laziness, cowardice, arrogance, lack of imagination, of creativity, sinful quietism growing from the hope that the Lord will provide and that the Church has experienced other such situations in the past?…

– In the Gospel Christ warns us: "*The children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light*… ."

SO, WHAT TO DO?… Today's Church has a pressing and urgent need for a TRIPLE REFORM:

1. **A theological and catechetical reform to rethink the faith and reformulate it in a coherent** and contemporary way. A faith that has no signification, that does not give a meaning to existence, is merely an ornament, a useless superstructure that collapses by itself. This is the case today.

2. **A pastoral reform to completely rethink the structures inherited from the past**. (See my suggestions regarding this area below.)

3. **A spiritual reform to revive the mysticism and rethink the sacraments**, to give them an existential dimension and make them relevant to life. I have a lot to say about this below.

Today the Church is too formal, too formalist. One has the feeling that the institution chokes the charisma and that what ultimately matters is an exterior stability, a superficial respectability, a certain façade. Are we not risking one day being called by Jesus "whitewashed tombs…"?

Finally I suggest the calling of a general synod on the level of the universal Church in which all Christians – Catholics and others – would participate to discuss in all openness and clarity the points mentioned above and all others that may be proposed. Such a synod, which would last three years, would be crowned by a general assembly – let us avoid the term "council" – that would gather the results of this inquire and draw the conclusions.

I finish, Most Holy Father by asking you to forgive my bluntness and audacity in asking for your paternal benediction. Permit me also to say that I am living these days in your company thanks to your remarkable book, *Jesus of Nazareth*, object of my daily spiritual reading and meditation.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

P. Henri Boulad, sj

Graz, July 18 2007