

THE CHURCH: LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL

A STUDY DOCUMENT COMMISSIONED AND RECEIVED BY THE JOINT WORKING GROUP

PREFACE

One of the ways in which the Joint Working Group (JWG) of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches has attempted over the years to fulfil its purpose of fostering closer relations between the two, has been to sponsor the joint study of issues that are of great significance in the quest for Christian unity. The theme of "The Church: Local and Universal" is one of these challenging issues.

The JWG has given attention to this theme in the period since the sixth assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver, 1983. The Central Committee of the WCC asked in 1984 that this theme be studied. The JWG meeting at Riano (Rome), September-October 1985, made plans for "the Church: Local and Universal" to be an important topic for the subsequent meeting in 1987. It asked for three papers to introduce the theme with Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox perspectives, and suggested that these include some consideration of an ecclesiology of communion and also the organization of this communion at the local and universal levels, taking account of diversity within the unity of the Church and of cultures. At Bossey, April-May 1987, the JWG heard and discussed these papers which were prepared by Pierre Duprey, Gunther Gassmann and Jon Bria. As the process continued, the perspectives of other scholars were solicited for continued discussion of the theme at the 1988 meeting. Contributions came from Emmanuel Lanne, OSB, Jean Tillard, OP, Margaret O'Gara, and Patrick Granfield, OSB, who had in hand, as they wrote, the three papers mentioned above, as well as the list of questions raised at the discussion at Bossey. These contributions were discussed by the JWG in Venice, April-May 1988, which decided that a consultation on the theme should be held later in 1988. Since all of the contributions for 1988 were from Catholic sources, it asked that theologians belonging to the Orthodox and the Protestant traditions be part of this consultation.

The consultation was convened in Rome, during December, 1988, by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission on Faith & Order. Members included Nicholas Lossky, Geoffrey Wainwright, Gunther Gassmann, Emmanuel Lanne, OSB, Patrick Gran-

field, OSB and John A. Radano. The work of the group was facilitated by a draft text prepared beforehand by Patrick Granfield who made use of the papers previously prepared for the JWG meetings of 1987 and 1988. His text was the basis for discussion. The draft resulting was discussed by the JWG in St. Prix (Paris) in February 1989. It was further revised by a small committee in September 1989, reviewed by the JWG at its meeting in Rome, January-February 1990 and received there in its present form as a study document.

The Joint Working Group does not intend this study to be an exhaustive presentation on this theme. Rather it is intended to point to some factors which may help to give support and direction to the continuing ecumenical exploration of this theme. It highlights for example the necessity of both the local and the universal expressions of the church, their interdependence, the healthy tension that exists between them, and some aspects of the ecumenical convergence seen today on these notions of the Church. It also explores the ecclesiology of communion and its usefulness as a framework for discussing the relationship between the local and universal Church, not only within each Christian communion, but also in terms of the ecumenical relationship between divided Christian communions. It points to different expressions of ecclesial communion and helps us to see aspects of ecumenical convergence here as well.

This report was prepared with the conviction that the ecclesiology of communion can be a way of expressing and especially of building on the real although imperfect communion already existing between churches despite their continuing divisions.

INTRODUCTION

THE CHURCH AS LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL COMMUNION

1. The Church is the icon of the Trinity, and the Trinity is the interior principle of ecclesial communion. From the Resurrection to the Parousia, communion is willed by the Father, realized in the Son, and caused by the Spirit in and through a community. Every authentic Christian

community shares in this communion and is part of the mystery of God unfolded in Christ and the Spirit. Thus, the eschatological reality is already present, and ecclesial communion expresses the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit". At the same time the Church has an inner dynamism toward that unity that rests in the Holy Spirit. In the words of Cyprian, "The Church is a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit".¹

2. Different views of the Church as local and universal are found among the various Christian communions (cf. below §§12-24). Common perspectives on the theological understanding of the local and universal Church are therefore critically important for the restoration of Christian unity and have been frequently considered in ecumenical documents.² There is only one Church in God's plan of salvation. This One Church is present and manifested in the local churches throughout the world. It is the same unique Church of Jesus Christ, his body, which is, thus, present in every local church. It is also the same Spirit who, from the day of Pentecost, gathers together the faithful in the One Church and in the individual local churches.

3. Any ecclesiological investigation of the local and universal Church must recognize both its Christological and pneumatological dimensions which are reflected in the holy scriptures and the early creeds. The Christological dimensions of the Church are realized in and through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Thus Ignatius of Antioch could affirm that "where Jesus Christ is, there is the Church Catholic" (*To the Smyrnaens*, viii, 2) and Irenaeus that "where the Church is, there is the Spirit, and where the Spirit is, there is the Church" (*Adversus haereses* III, 24, 1). The Church is the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

4. This paper will explore in four sections the local and universal aspects of the one Church. First, the concept of the ecclesiology of communion as a theological basis and framework for the unity of the Church as universal and local;

second, the local and universal communion in ecumenical perspective; third, the ecclesial elements of communion; and, fourth, the structuring of communion.

I. THE ECCLESIOLOGY OF COMMUNION

5. More and more the concept of *koinonia*³ or communion is seen as having great value for understanding the multiplicity of local churches in the unity of the one Church. *Koinonia* refers to the source and nature of the life of the Church as Body of Christ, People of God, and Temple of the Holy Spirit. In particular, this concept allows us to hold two dimensions of the Church — its locality and universality — not as separate entities but as two integrated dimensions of one reality.

6. The theological meaning of *koinonia* is rich. Used nineteen times in the New Testament, the term *koinonia* in its primary sense means participation in the life of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. *Koinonia* is the gift of the Holy Spirit: we share in the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13,14). *Koinonia* refers to a profound, personal relationship between God and humanity (*Acts* 2,42 and *John* 1,3). The Old Testament themes of inheritance and covenant convey similar ideas.⁴ Israel is the inheritance of the Lord (*Ex* 34,9) and a covenant exists between God and His people (*Jer* 24,7). *Koinonia* rests on God's free choice to communicate himself to us: "We are called into the communion of His (God's) Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1,9). Through baptism believers are called into the fellowship of the Spirit. As a result we share in the passion and consolation of Christ (2 Cor 1,7; *Phil* 3,10); and we participate in the divine nature (2 Peter 1,4). For St Paul the sharing of possessions and the financial help for needy churches (*Koinonia* in *Rom* 15,26 and 2 Cor 9,13) are signs of our communion in the life of God.

7. Because it is the result of our union (*koinonia*) with God, the Christian community can also be called *koinonia*. The *koinonia* or bond of union between believers and God establishes a

¹ CYPRIAN, *De Orat. Dom.* 23, PL 4,553 and cited in *Lumen gentium*, 4.

² For example see *Faith and Order Paper No. 59*, report of Joint Working Group on "Catholicity and Apostolicity", 133-158 and 216-217; the individual papers of the Group can be found in *One in Christ* 6 (1970), 242-483, note especially paper by E. Lanne, "The Local Church: Its Catholicity and Apostolicity", 288-313; Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, [now the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity] "Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National, and Local Levels", *SPCU Information Service* 26 (1975), 8-31, esp. Part 2; Paul VI, Address during the 1973 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, *SPCU Information Service* 21 (1973), 3-4; World Council of Churches, *In Each Place. Towards a Fellowship of Local Churches Truly United* (Geneva: WCC, 1977); and Roman Catholic/Lutheran Joint Commission, *Facing Unity* (Lutheran World Federation, 1985).

³ *Koinonia* comes from *Koinos* \ common, the opposite of *idios* : proper, particular, private. *Koinoo* means to put together or to pool. *Koinonia*, then, refers to the action of having something in common, sharing in, participating in. It is often rendered in Latin by *communio* or *communitas*.

For studies on *koinonia* consult P.C. BORI, *Koinonia* (Brescia: Paideia, 1972); J.M. MCDERMOTT, "The Biblical Doctrine of *koinonia*", *Biblische Zeitschrift* 19 (1975), 64-77 and 219-233; H.J. SIEBEN, "Koinonia, communauté-communion", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris, 1975), col. 1743-1745; S. BROWN, "Koinonia as the Basis of New Testament Ecclesiology?", *One in Christ* 12 (1976), 157-167; and J.M.R. TILLARD, *Eglise d'Eglises. L'ecclesiologie de communion* (Paris: Cerf, 1987).

⁴ See "Heritage et alliance", in: *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique* (Paris, 1970).

new relationship among believers themselves. It is realized by participating in the life of the Triune God through Word and Sacrament. The Church is *koinonia* precisely because of the fellowship that its members have in the life of the Spirit.⁵ Our vertical relationship with

God makes possible our horizontal unity with our fellow believers.⁶ *Koinonia* is a dynamic reality that binds us together within the one Body of Christ. Our communion with the Triune God and with one another develops throughout history and will never be completely realized until we are ultimately united with God in glory. According to Irenaeus, the history of salvation is a progressive introduction of humanity into communion with God (*Adversus haereses* IV, 14,2).

8. Does communion relate only to the Church? Can it also extend to the world and operate in society? Communion refers primarily to the Church, since communion is based on participation in the life of the Trinity. The absence of

communion among churches affects the world and society, because it is a negative sign of the Gospel message of unity. But growing communion among the churches presents even now a positive sign of Christian unity and an effective way to encourage common Christian witness. Division among Christians is a scandal, but the Church's mission to announce the gospel to the world is strengthened as communion grows.

9. In a broader sense a notion of communion can also be related to the whole of humanity. All human beings are created in the image of God and are thus called into communion with God. Because it is God's plan of salvation to reconcile broken humanity and to bring it to fulfilment in the kingdom of God, there is a dynamic in history towards solidarity and constructive interdependence. The Church is called by God to serve this movement of reconciliation and to help break down barriers which prevent that renewed community among human beings willed by God. "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity" (*Lumen gentium*, 1). "The Church is bold in speaking of itself as the sign of the coming unity of mankind" (*Uppsala Assembly* of the WCC, Section I).

⁵ The *communio sanctorum* in the Creed may refer both to the "communion of the saints or holy people" and to "communion in holy things" — sharing the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. See S. Benko, *The Meaning of Sanctorum Communio. Studies in Historical Theology* (London: SCM, 1964) 3.

⁶ John Paul II has used the terms "vertical" and "horizontal". He noted that the vertical dimension of *communio* with God is primary. If it is not deeply experienced, it can weaken the possibility of the horizontal dimension reaching its full potential. Address at the Meeting of the US Bishops in Los Angeles, 16 September 1987, *Origins*, 1 October 1987, Vol. 17, No. 16, 257.

10. The notion of the ecclesiology of communion has been found helpful in various bilateral conversations. The *Final Report* of AR-CIC-I noted that *koinonia* is the term "that most aptly expresses the mystery underlying the various New Testament images of the Church".⁷ The Lutheran/Roman Catholic Commission described the Church as "a communion subsisting in a network of local churches".⁸ According to the Nairobi Report of the Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *koinonia* "includes participation in God through Christ in the Spirit by which believers become adopted children of the same Father and members of the one Body of Christ sharing in the same Spirit. And it includes deep fellowship among participants, a fellowship which is both visible and invisible, finding expression in faith and order, in prayer and sacrament, in mission and service" (§ 23).⁹ The first Report of the Catholic/Orthodox Joint Commission, issued at Munich in 1982 and entitled: "The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity", spoke of the way in which "the unfolding of the eucharistic celebration of the local church shows how the *koinonia* takes shape in the Church celebrating the eucharist". It went on to describe aspects of that *koinonia*, including that "the *koinonia* is eschatological... kerygmatic... (and) at once ministerial and pneumatological".¹⁰ ¹¹ The Reformed/ Catholic dialogue spoke of the Church indicating that "... it comes together for the purpose of adoration and prayer, to receive ever new instruction and consolation and to celebrate the presence of Christ in the sacrament; around this centre, and with the multiplicity of gifts granted by the Spirit... it lives as a *koinonia* of those who need and help each other" (*The Presence of Christ in Church and World*, 1977)."

11. Various Christian World Communions have also recognized the importance of the ecclesiology of communion. Within the Roman Catholic Church, for example, Cardinal Willebrands said that "the deepening... of an ecclesiology of communion is... perhaps the greatest possibility for tomorrow's ecumenism",¹² and the 1985 Synod of Bishops called by the Pope on the twentieth anniversary of the closing of the

⁷ *The Final Report*, in Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer eds., *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level* (New York: Paulist Press, and Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), 65.

⁸ *Facing Unity*, 9.

⁹ *Towards a Statement on the Church*. Report of the Joint Commission Between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, 1982-1986. Fourth Series. *SPCU Information Service* 62 (1986), 209.

¹⁰ *SPCU Information Service* 49 (1982), 109.

¹¹ *Growth in Agreement*, 447.

¹² "The Future of Ecumenism", *One in Christ* 11 (1975), 323.

Second Vatican Council recalled that "the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents".¹³ In its "Statement on the Self-Understanding and task of the Lutheran World Federation", the Seventh Assembly of the LWF (1984) stated that "We give witness and affirm the communion in which the Lutheran churches of the whole world are bound together".¹⁴ The ecclesiology of communion was also a major consideration of the Anglican Communion within the Lambeth Conference in 1988.

II. LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL COMMUNION IN ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE

12. Any discussion of the *koinonia* in the local and universal church must be first placed in the broader context of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, the *Una Sancta* of the early Christian Creeds.¹⁵ The *Una Sancta* in the plan of God is God's creation — an eschatological reality existing throughout history from the earliest days (*Ecclesia ab Abel*) to the return of Christ in glory. The local and universal church are historical manifestations of the *Una Sancta*, even though they should not be purely and simply identified with it. They have their unity in the *Una Sancta*. There is only one Church of God, whether it is expressed locally or universally.

1. The local Church

13. The local church is truly Church. It has everything it needs to be Church in its own situation: it confesses the apostolic faith (with special reference to belief in the Trinity and the Lordship of Jesus); it proclaims the Word of God in Scripture, baptizes its members, celebrates the Eucharist and other sacraments; it affirms and responds to the presence of the Holy Spirit and his gifts, announces and looks forward to the Kingdom, and recognizes the ministry of authority within the community. All these various features must exist together in order for there to be a local church within the communion of the Church of God. The local church is not a free-standing self-sufficient reality. As part of a network of communion, the local church maintains its reality as Church by relating to other local churches. In the words of Vatican II: "The

Church of Christ is truly present (*vere adest*) in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the New Testament" (*Lumen gentium*, 26).¹⁶

14. The local church is not an administrative or juridical sub-section or part of the universal Church. In the local church the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church is truly present and active (*Christus Dominus*, 11). The local church is the place where the Church of God becomes concretely realized. It is a gathering of believers that is seized by the Spirit of the Risen Christ and becomes *koinonia* by participating in the life of God.

15. All Christian World Communions can, in general, agree with the definition of the local church as a community of baptized believers in which the Word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive work of Christ for the world is witnessed to, and a ministry of episcopate exercised by bishops or other ministers is serving the community. Differences between World Communions are connected with the role and place of the bishop in relation to the local church.

16. For churches of the "Catholic" tradition the bishop is essential for the understanding and structure of a local church. Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are "the visible principle and foundation of unity in their own particular churches" (*Lumen gentium*, 23). According to the first Report of the Catholic/Orthodox Joint Commission (Munich, 1982), "the bishop stands at the heart of the local church as minister of the Spirit to discern the charisms, and take care that they are exercised in harmony, for the good of all, in faithfulness to the apostolic tradition (II/3). The Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission defined the local church as "the unity of local communities under one bishop" (ARCIC-1, The Final Report, p. 92). Accordingly, the Church is most fully revealed/realized when God's people are united at the eucharistic assembly with the bishop. Consequently, the local church in these traditions is primarily the diocese, but it may also refer to several dioceses.

17. For churches of the Reformation and free church traditions, which have developed a great variety of institutional structures and forms of self-understanding, the term "local church" is

¹³ Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, 1985, /I Message to the People of God and The Final Report (Washington: NCCB, 1986).

¹⁴ Eugene L. Brand, *Toward a Lutheran Communion: Pulpit and Altar Fellowship*, LWF Report, 26 (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1988), 9. This report shows that the ecclesiology of communion has long been a subject of discussion within the Lutheran World Federation.

¹⁵ See ION BRIA, ed., *Jesus Christ - The Life of the World. An Orthodox Contribution to the Vancouver Theme* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), 12-13.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the theology of the local church in Vatican II see the following: P. GRANHELD, "The Local Church as a Center of Communication and Control", *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 35 (1980), 256-263; H. LEGRAND, "La réalisation de l'Eglise en un lieu", in: *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie*, B. Laurel and F. Refouled, eds., Tome III, *Dogmatique 2* (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 143-345; and J.A. Komonchak, "The Local Realization of the Church", in *The Reception of Vatican II*, G. Alberigo et al., eds. (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1987), 77-90.

not so common and therefore also not defined by referring to the office of the bishop. For these churches it is the local Christian community (parish, congregation) for which the above definition would apply and which could, therefore, be called a local church.

18. Yet in addition to the common elements mentioned above in § 15, there are also certain convergences concerning the differences just mentioned. Within churches characterized by an "episcopal" concept of the local church, the local congregation or parish is recognized as the local expression of the diocese and the entire Church (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 42). Such communities must, however, be related to the local church, i.e. diocese, and be in communion with it.¹⁷ Reformation and Free Churches, on the other hand, which put special emphasis on the local congregation, have developed structures which serve a larger community of congregations (e.g. districts, dioceses, circuits) and have developed ministries (e.g. bishops, superintendents, regional pastors) which carry special responsibilities (together with presbyteral-synodical organs) for such larger units. In the past such larger geographical structures were seen mainly under practical aspects. In the present, however, such wider expressions of a local church are seen in a number of churches also in pastoral and ecclesiological terms: as communions of communities.

2. The Universal Church

19. The universal Church is the communion of all the local churches united in faith and worship around the world. However, the universal Church is not the sum, federation, or juxtaposition of the local churches, but all together are the same Church of God present and acting in this world. The issue here is fundamentally ecclesiological and not organizational.¹⁸ The communion of local churches gathered by and around the celebration of Word and Sacrament manifests the Church of God. The concept of the universal Church recognizes the diversity of cultural and social conditions. "While preserving unity in essentials", Christians have "a proper freedom in the various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites, and

¹⁷ A problem in some parts of the Catholic world is the decrease in the number of ordained ministers. As a consequence there are many parishes where the liturgy of the Word is becoming more common than the eucharistic liturgy. When a priest is not available, appointed lay members and religious lead the congregation in prayers and readings and distribute the eucharist. There is great concern that the practice of infrequent eucharistic liturgies could adversely affect the doctrine that the eucharist is central to the Catholic concept of the Church.

¹⁸ In the words of J.D. ZIZIOULAS: "There is one church, as there is one God. But the expression of this one church is the communion of the many local churches". See Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd 134-135.

even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth" (*Unitatis redintegratio*, 4). Catholicity enters into the very concept of church and refers not simply to geographic extension but also to the manifold variety of local churches and their participation in the one *koinonia*. Each local church contributes its unique gifts for the good of the whole Church.

20. The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church understand themselves as representing the Church universal. Reformation and Free Churches, because they had to organize themselves on the national level, often had difficulties in grasping and experiencing the universal dimension of the Church. However, through their involvement in the ecumenical movement and their experience within the Christian World Communions and the fellowship of the World Council of Churches, they have developed a stronger sense of the universal character of Christ's Church which transcends their own reality as churches organized on a national or regional level. This experience and insight find expression also in the development of Christian World Communions which, according to the WCC Assembly at Uppsala (1968), provide "some real experience of universality".¹⁹ It is the task of the ecumenical movement to lead the churches to that unity which enables them to confess and express together the universal communion of the Church of Jesus Christ.

3. The question of Priority

21. In the past, biblical scholars generally held that the term "ekklesia" was first used to designate the local church of a city or region and only later the universal Church. Contemporary biblical study, however, raises questions about the earlier view of priority. It presents evidence that suggests a more complex picture of the early Christian community than that indicated by the axiom "first particular, then universal".²⁰

22. One way of looking at the question of priority is by using an eschatological and pneumatological ecclesiology. This approach does not assign a priority exclusively to either the local or the universal Church, but suggests a simultaneity of both. Both are essential. Thus it must be said, on the one hand, that in God's general plan of salvation the universal has an absolute priority over the local. For Christ came to gather together the dispersed children of God; at Pentecost the Spirit of God was poured out upon all flesh (cf. *Acts* 2,17). God created the Church in the framework of universal

¹⁹ *The Uppsala Report 1968*, ed. Norman Goodall (Geneva: WCC, 1968), 17.

²⁰ For further discussion on this point see R.E. Brown, "The New Testament Background for the Concept of the Local Church", *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 36 (1981), 1-14, here 4.

reconciliation and unity. The Pentecostal experience and the word and grace of Christ have continual and universal relevance. The Gospel of salvation is addressed to humankind as a whole without exception. In this sense the Universal has priority and will keep it forever.

23. At the same time the Church began and came into existence at a determined place. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place" (*Acts* 2,1). From this place the Apostles began to preach the Gospel to all the Nations (cf. *Matt* 28,19). In the concrete historical situation of the foundation of the Church, the local had priority and will keep it until the second coming of Christ, because the Gospel is preached each time in a determined place; the faithful receive baptism and celebrate Eucharist in this determined place, even though it is always and necessarily in communion with all the other local churches in the world. There is no local church that is not centered on the Gospel and not in communion with all other churches.²¹

24. Since Pentecost the Church celebrates the Eucharist as the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The eucharistic celebration, therefore, embraces the Church both in its local and universal dimension. It thus affirms a mutual presence of all the churches in Christ and in the Spirit^{21 22} for the salvation of the world.

III. THE ECCLESIAL ELEMENTS OF COMMUNION

25. The ecclesial elements required for full communion within a visibly united church — the goal of the ecumenical movement — are: communion in the fullness of the apostolic faith, in sacramental life, in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry, in structures of conciliar relations and decision-making, and in common witness and service in the world. This goal is still to be achieved, and on the way to this goal it is important to note how the notion of ecclesial communion has been interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council, and the way in which it has been interpreted within the World Council of Churches.

1. Interpretations of Ecclesial Communion

26. The Second Vatican Council described two types of ecclesial communion. The *first* is full and complete ecclesial communion in which the ecclesial elements of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church are integrally present. Ac-

cordingly, the Council taught that the unique Church of Christ "subsists" in the Catholic Church, "... although many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside her visible structure" (*Lumen gentium*, 8). This leads to the *second* type which is partial and incomplete, but nonetheless real ecclesial communion. The essential elements are present in some way in other Christian churches: the written Word of God; faith in Christ and in the Trinity; Baptism; the sacraments; the life of grace; faith, hope and charity; the interior gifts of the Holy Spirit; and prayer and other spiritual benefits (*Unitatis redintegratio*, 3, 20-23, and *Lumen gentium*, 15). By their nature these elements tend toward full realization of catholic unity (*Lumen gentium*, 8, 15). Although a non-Catholic community may not have the "institutional" fullness of the ecclesial elements, this does not mean that it does not have an authentic "pneumatic" response to the presence and grace, and form a vital communion of faith, hope and charity.²³ The ecclesiology of communion offers a promising way to explain and express the incomplete but real communion that already exists between the Catholic Church and the other churches. It allows us to speak of a growing communion.

27. Vatican II, in its teaching on "subsists" and the presence of ecclesial elements outside its visible boundaries, provided sound theological basis for genuine ecumenical commitment. Although it did not resolve the problems, it nevertheless with courage and consistency laid the foundation for further progress. The ecumenical bilateral and multilateral conversations since the Council have continued to examine in detail the thorny questions connected with a common profession of faith, the sacramental life, and the role of authority.

28. Elements of communion among the churches have been discussed and clarified in the World Council of Churches in the perspective of "the unity we seek". The results of these reflections are formulated in statements of the 1961 New Delhi and 1975 Nairobi Assemblies of the WCC.

29. The New Delhi statement said: "We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible

²¹ For the New Testament communities of St. Paul, the church of the saints of Jerusalem was a reference for communion (cf. *2 Cor.* 8-9). This local church was also the test for apostolic faith (cf. *Gal.* 2,1 ff.).

²² Cf. J.D. ZIZIOULAS, *Being as Communion*, 132-133.

²³ It should be noted that the expression "full and complete communion" and "partial and incomplete communion" are not found as such in Vatican II. They are intended to correspond to "*plena communio*" (UR, 3) and "*quaedam communio, etsi non perfecta*" (UR, 3). Some authors prefer to speak of "full and perfect communion", an expression used by Paul VI. This expression assumes the possibility of "incomplete and imperfect communion". Obviously, the use of "perfect" and "imperfect" relates to wholeness or completeness and not to the moral qualities of holiness or goodness.

as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people".²⁴

30. Taking up the report of a Faith & Order consultation in Salamanca, the Nairobi Assembly stated its vision of unity in the following way: "The one Church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united. In this conciliar fellowship, each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith, and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same Church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit. As the New Delhi Assembly pointed out, they are bound together because they have received the same baptism and share in the same Eucharist; they recognize each others' members and ministries. They are in their common commitment to confess the gospel of Christ by proclamation and service to the world. To this end, each church aims at maintaining sustained and sustaining relationships with her sister churches, expressed in conciliar gatherings, whenever required for the fulfilment of their common calling".²⁵

31. The two statements from New Delhi and Nairobi refer to ecclesial elements that are generally recognized as being indispensable for any realization of visible church unity both on the local and universal level. These include: the common confession of the apostolic faith, mutual recognition of the apostolicity and catholicity of the other churches and of each others' members, sacraments and ministries; fellowship in the eucharist, in spiritual life and in mission and service in the world; and the achievement of mutual fellowship, also in conciliar meetings and decisions. Both statements emphasize local unity but this is interrelated, especially in the Nairobi statement, with the universal dimension of unity in the form of a conciliar fellowship (or, as a Faith & Order consultation in November 1988 stated: "conciliar communion of common faith and life in the ser-

vice of God's world"). The descriptions of New Delhi and Nairobi are not limited solely to the goal of visible unity. They express at the same time basic elements of the faith and life of the Church, both in its local and universal dimensions.

32. It is obvious that the essential elements of communion or unity stated in these two texts of the WCC correspond to the elements mentioned earlier in this paper. The different Christian traditions believe that these elements, in different forms, are present within their traditions and that, accordingly, full ecclesial communion exists within them. Also between member churches of the WCC different degrees of communion have developed, including, for many, eucharistic hospitality, interim eucharistic sharing, altar and pulpit fellowship understood as full communion. The question then arises as to how the communion can be described between churches which are not yet able to enter into forms of eucharistic fellowship.

33. All churches which participate actively in the ecumenical movement agree that even where eucharistic fellowship and full communion are not yet achieved between churches, nevertheless forms of communion do exist. The churches are no longer living in isolation from each other. They have developed mutual understanding and respect. They pray together and share in each other's spiritual experience and theological insights. They collaborate in addressing the needs of humanity. Through bilateral and multilateral dialogues they have achieved remarkable convergences with regard to previously divisive issues of doctrine and church order. They share, in different degrees, in the basic elements of communion. It is, therefore, possible to speak of an existing real though imperfect communion among the churches — with the understanding that the degrees and expressions of such communion may vary according to the relationships between individual churches.

34. This recognition of an already existing though imperfect communion is a significant result of ecumenical efforts and a radically new element in 20th century church history. It provides a basis for renewal, common witness and service of the churches for the sake of God's saving and reconciling activity for all humanity. And it provides a basis and encouragement for further efforts to overcome those barriers which still prevent the recognition and implementation of full communion between the churches.

2. *The Interdependence of Local and Universal in the Communion of Churches*

35. Elements of communion at the local level correspond to and interact with their expression at the universal level, because the Holy Spirit is the same

²⁴ Lukas Vischer, ed., *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement, 1927-1963* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1963), 144-145.

²⁵ Davis M. Paton, ed., *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi, 1975. The Official Report of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Nairobi, 23 November-10 December 1975* (London: SPCK, and Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Herdmans, 1976), 60.

source at both levels. Different churches, however, may have different ways of manifesting the same ecclesial elements. Ecclesial communion is lived and experienced in eucharistic communion. The eucharistic synaxis celebrates both the communion with the eternal life of the Triune God and the link with all worshipping communities, as members of the one Body of Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 10,17).

36. "The local church is wholly church, but it is not the whole Church".²⁶ This applies already in the case of existing World Communions, even though they may understand "local church" differently. It will continue to apply when full unity among Christians has been realized. The local church should never be seen in isolation but always in a dynamic relationship with other local churches. It has to express its faith in relation to other churches, and in so doing it manifests communion. The catholicity of the Church implies an interrelatedness and interdependence among local churches. Once a local church turns in on itself and seeks to function completely independently from other local churches, it distorts a primary aspect of its ecclesial character. The local church is not a free-standing, self-sufficient reality. As part of a network of communion, the local church maintains its reality as Church by relating to other local churches.²⁷

37. Mutual solicitude, support, recognition, and communication are essential qualities among local churches. Even from earliest times, the local churches felt themselves linked to one another. This *koinonia* was expressed in a variety of ways: exchange of confessions of faith; letters of communion as a kind of "ecclesiastical passport"; hospitality; reciprocal visits; mutual material help; councils; and synods.²⁸

38. Interrelatedness is now more evident among local churches of the same World Communion. The unity we seek prompts us all to find ways of restoring such *koinonia* at the local and universal levels with Christian communities, from whom we are at present divided. Ecumenism, in its local and universal expression, with its emphasis on dialogue and mutual concern, has already opened up many avenues of collaboration, spiritual and theological exchange and convergence on essential issues of faith and order.

²⁶ J.J. VON AI L.MEN, "L'Eglise locale parmi les autres Eglises locales", *Irenikon* 43 (1970), 512.

²⁷ See J. RATZINGER, "The Pastoral Implications of Episcopal Collegiality", *Concilium* (American edition), Vol. 1,45.

²⁸ See L. HERTLING, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity* (Chicago: Loyola University, 1972) and B.P. Prusak, "Hospitality Extended or Denied: *Koinonia* from Jesus to Augustine", *The Jurist* 36 (1976), 89-126.

39. At the same time, however, the growth in the *koinonia* is especially tested when, locally or universally, the churches are called upon to act together on pressing social issues. Ethical issues can become factors of division as witnessed in the on-going discussion on abortion, birth control, divorce, and homosexuality. The old slogan that "doctrine divides, service unites" is no longer axiomatic. The impact of socio-cultural challenges and the need for common responses to them is of immense importance for the future of ecumenism.

40. Each Christian World Communion has to face specific challenges regarding universality and particularity. The Protestant churches have stressed the importance of the local church, but they face the problem of concretely manifesting universality among their own churches. Participation in the World Council of Churches has heightened the experience of universality among the member churches. In the Roman Catholic Church today dialectical tension between local authority and central authority remains a critical issue.²⁹

IV. THE STRUCTURING OF COMMUNION

41. The very nature of the Church of God, the elements of ecclesial community already discussed, and the lived experience of individual Christian communities, all form the basis on which the canonical expression of communion has to be developed. Here are meant questions of polity, order, law, authority, and constitution which all refer to the structure of the Church and of communion. What has been said above about the nature of communion and its many qualities is presupposed here. The canonical dimension of communion applies to the local and universal framework of one particular tradition as well as to the already partially existing communion among different churches.

1. Canonical structures

42. Communion, as we have seen, refers, to a dynamic, spiritual, objective reality which is embodied in ecclesial structures. The gift of communion from God is not an amorphous reality but an organic unity that requires a canonical form of expression. The purpose of such canonical structuring is to ensure that the local churches (and their members), in their communion with each other, can live in harmony and fidelity to "the faith which has been once and for all entrusted to the saints" (*Jude* 3).

²⁹ On this issue see P. Granfield, *The Limits of the Papacy: Authority and Autonomy in the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

43. In the Roman Catholic Church communion with the Bishop of Rome is necessary. Vatican II referred on several occasions to "hierarchical communion".³⁰ It taught that one becomes a member of the college of bishops through sacramental ordination and hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college. At his ordination a bishop receives the office (*munus*) of sanctifying, teaching, and governing. But these tasks can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college of bishops. Furthermore, although bishops possess the threefold *munera* through their ordination, they cannot exercise them in a particular place without a specific determination, a "canonical mission" by the Pope. The college of bishops cannot act independently of the Pope, since the collegial character of the body would be inoperative without its head.

44. Despite certain differences in the life and the practice of Orthodox Churches, they believe on the basis of a common canonical tradition that episcopal ordination confers the functions of sanctifying, teaching, and ruling. They have comparable practices dealing with the designation and assignment of bishops. Moreover they agree that the bishops must be in hierarchical communion with the head of the synod. In this context, Canon 34 of the "Apostolic Canons" is an appropriate expression of the Orthodox understanding of communion.³¹

45. The Reformation and Free churches have developed their canonical structures of expressing and safeguarding communion within their churches. According to their particular heritage they employ presbyterial and synodical structures for this purpose and, in many cases, integrate into them episcopal ministries under different titles, including the office of bishop. In their respective Christian World Communions these churches have also developed canonical structures which enable consultation, cooperation, and common witness, but which do not allow for decisions which are binding for the individual member churches of that Communion. However, there is a general tendency to strengthen ways in which these communions can express their common faith, life and service on a universal level.

³⁰ *Lumen gentium* 21 and 22; *Nota praevia*, 2 and 4; and *Christus Dominus*, 5.

³¹ Canon 34: "The bishops of every region ought to know who is the first one (*protos*) among them, and to esteem him as their head, and not to do any great thing without his consent; but every one ought to manage only the affairs that belong to his own diocese and the territory subject to it. But let him (i.e., the first one) not do anything without the consent of all the other (bishops); for it is by this means that there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified through Christ in the Holy Spirit". Text in EX. Funk. *Didascalia et constitutiones apostolorum*, 1905, 572-574.

46. The ministry of the Bishop of Rome as the minister of universal unity is essential to Roman Catholicism. According to Catholic faith Peter and his successors, the Bishops of Rome, have been entrusted by God to confirm the brethren in the faith "which has been once and for all entrusted to the saints" and in the unity of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church (cf. *Lumen gentium* 25; *Christus Dominus* 2).

The Bishop of Rome is seen as the sign and guarantee of the communion of local churches with each other and with the church of Peter and Paul. His ministry is multiple: to protect both unity and legitimate diversity; to offer support and solicitude; to facilitate communication between churches; and to arbitrate differences.

47. The office of the papacy remains a controversial issue in ecumenism, but there are signs of better mutual understanding.³² On the Orthodox side the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, following a deliberation and resolution of his Synod, and convinced that it expressed the mind of the early Church, stated that the Bishop of Rome is marked out as the one who has the presidency of charity and is the first bishop in rank and honor in the whole Body of the Lord.³³ The Pope can be called *primus inter pares* (first among equals), because this apostolic see has exercised a primacy of love from earliest times.³⁴ In bilateral dialogues, Lutherans speak of the value of the "Petrine function"³⁵ and Anglicans have agreed that "a universal primacy will be needed in a reunited church and should appropriately be the primacy of the Bishop of Rome".³⁶ The Joint Roman Catholic/World Methodist Council Commission noted: "Discernment of the various factors in Scripture and history might contribute to an agreed perception of what functions the see of Rome might properly exercise in a ministry of universal unity, by what authority, and on what conditions" (§ 40).³⁷ Despite these positive statements, the problems of *divinum* (divine right), primacy of jurisdiction, infallibility and the papal teaching authority remain subjects of intense ecumenical dialogue.

³² See V. VON ARISTI, et al., *Das Papstamt: Dienst oder Hindernis für die Ökumene?* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1985).

³³ Letter of Dimitrios I to Pope Paul VI on the tenth anniversary of the lifting of the anathemas, 14 December 1975, in E.J. Stormon S.J., ed., *Towards the Healing of Schism, The Sees of Rome and Constantinople. Public Statements and Correspondence between the Holy See and the Ecumenical Patriarchate* 1958-1984 (New York/Mahwah: The Paulist Press, 1987), par. 331,279-281.

³⁴ Ignatius to the Romans I. Also, see J. Mevendorff, et al., *The Primacy of Peter in the Orthodox Church* (Leighton Buzzard: Faith Press, 1963). Also P. Duprey, "Brief Reflections on the Title 'Primus inter Pares'", *One in Christ* 10 (1974), 7-12.

³⁵ P.C. EMPIE and T.A. MURPHY, eds., *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974).

³⁶ ARCIC. *The Pinal Report*, in *Growth in Agreement*, 108

³⁷ *Towards a Statement on the Church*, SPCU Information Service 62 (1986), 211.

2. *The Shape of Future Unity*

48. If all local churches are to be united to form one *communio ecclesiarum* (communion of churches), there must be an acceptance of the basic ecclesial elements of communion: common profession of the same apostolic faith; proclamation of the Word of God; mutual recognition of the sacraments, especially baptism and eucharist; and agreement on the nature and exercise of pastoral leadership. Such agreements and recognitions are necessary for the achievement of visible unity in legitimate diversity.

49. Several models of structured Christian communion have been proposed and critically analysed within the ecumenical movement. Some of the models of comprehensive union that have been suggested include the following: organic union; corporate union; church fellowship through agreement (concord); conciliar fellowship; communion of communions; and unity in reconciled diversity.³⁸ Nevertheless, the precise shape the united church of the future should take and the forms of diversity it could embrace is an

³⁸ Briefly summarized in *Facing Unity*, 8-20, with appropriate bibliographical references.

important but still unresolved question for all Christian communities.

50. Furthermore, the different understandings of the Christian World Communions concerning the relationship between the Church local and universal clearly affect our approach toward future unity. Questions are raised if ecumenical relations develop rapidly on the local level between traditions which have not achieved full communion on the universal level. For example, what degree of communion can local churches of different traditions achieve in these cases, without breaking communion with churches of their own tradition?

51. In conclusion, it can be said that although canonical communion does not yet exist among local churches of different traditions, the churches are in communion in a profoundly spiritual way. Our churches share the common Gospel in the Christian heritage. Because ecclesial communion is a fellowship inspired by the indwelling Spirit, we can say that the barriers of our divisions do not reach to heaven. Christian unity is both a gift and a task. Christians of all communities pray for the unity of all in each place and look forward to that "one visible Church of God, truly universal and sent forth to the whole world so that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God" (*Unitatis redintegratio*, 1).