The Ecclesiology of Vatican II. Between continuity and renewal.  
(Part One)

Many things have been written and said about the ecclesiology of *Lumen gentium*. In the conscience of many some keywords have remained: the idea of the people of God, the collegiality of the Bishops, followed by the re-evaluation of the Bishop’s ministry towards the primacy of the Pope, the importance of the local Churches towards the universal Church, openness towards ecumenism dialogue with other religions. Finally, the matter of the specific state of the catholic Church, that it is expressed according to the formula that the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic, mentioned in the Creed, and exists in the Catholic Church.

A review of the texts of the Council has recognized different phases in the years following the Council. It can be said that the first period dominated above all the subject of the collegiality, strongly linked to the concept of the people of God. It has been seen in the first place in the linguistic political use in a general sense of the word "people", in the field of the liberation theology. With the use of the Marxist word the people were put in opposition to the dominant classes and more in general, even more widely, in the sense of the sovereignty of the people, that has finally been also applied to the Church. Very slowly, however, new problems came to the surface along with new discoveries and a perhaps more profound reading of the texts.

1. The Church seen in the perspective of God

It is necessary to remember that the Second Vatican Council more than an ecclesiological council was first and above all a theological Council. It spoke before all of God, that He is the God of everything, who saves everything and is accessible to all. The texts of the Council talk about different subjects, but in the first place, among the Council fathers there was a great desire to speak above all of God, of His very intimate relationship with the world, with the men who live in the world, of their commitments/obligations, and of the their vocations/calling, etc. Proper to the interior of this discourse is the written discourse on the Church. It does not come separately but in a very tightly seen link with God and with the human person. The Council texts present it like a given help from God to men in their lives and in the their journey on this earth. Paul VI expressed very well the deepest feelings of the Council fathers in his speech on September 29, 1963, at beginning of the second session of Vatican II.

In our opinion – the Pontiff said – this renewal should begin from the knowledge of the relationship that the Church is bound to Christ. As we have said, the Church wants to research its image in Christ. If after this search it will have noted some shadow, some defect in its complexion, in its wedding
garment, what should it do spontaneously and courageously? As it is obvious, this search will not have any other purpose that to renew itself, to correct itself, to restore itself to that conformity of its divine model, whose principal duty is to emulate. Let us remember words of Christ, that he pronounced in the priestly prayer, when threatened by the last torments and death: "And I consecrate myself for them, so that they may also be consecrated in truth" (John 17: 19). The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council - this is our opinion - should apply and follow the same instruction life of that Christ wanted. Only then, when the inner work of sanctification will have been completed, will the Church be able to show its face to the whole world, saying these words: Who sees me, sees the Christ, as the divine Redeemer had said of himself: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14: 9).

Underneath this appearance the Ecumenical Council is to consider itself like a new spring, that awakens in its bosom the Church energies and immense possibility almost latent in its spirits. It is in fact a resolution of the Council, as it clearly appears, that a lot of the inner richness of the Church that the norms which regulate its canonical institutions and ritual forms return to their primitive vitality. This universal Council’s aim is to make the Church emphasize its charming perfection and sanctity that only the imitation of Jesus Christ and the mystical union with him by means of the Holy Spirit can confer on it (n. 5, 2-5).

The intention of the Council, in harmony with the words of Paul VI, was to introduce and to subordinate the discourse of the Church to the discourse of God, to propose an ecclesiology in the proper theological sense. This conciliar intention results not only in a clear manner from the general reading of the theological content of the texts of the Council but in particular manner from the date of the promulgation of the respective texts. The first conciliar text, promulgated December 4 1963, is the text dedicated to the liturgy – the Constitution on the sacred liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. The fact that this is placed in the beginning means that it had from the beginning pragmatic motives. The texts says:

This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times 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 the whole of mankind into the household of the Church. The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy. (n. 1).

There are not however purely pragmatic motives to decide on the place of the text on the liturgy. Number 2 of the document explains:

For the liturgy, "through which the work of our redemption is accomplished," most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church. It is of the essence of the Church that she be both human and divine, visible and yet invisibly equipped, eager to act and yet intent on contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it; and she is all these things in such wise that in her the human is directed and subordinated to the divine, the visible likewise to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, which we seek.
In the architecture of the Council such an arrangement of the document seems to then have quite a precise sense and wants to say that at the beginning of every discourse on the Church is adoration. And therefore God. After the conciliar text on the liturgy follows the dogmatic Constitution on the Church \textit{Lumen gentium}, promulgated November 21, 1964, intimately connected to it. This would like to say that "the Church lets itself be guided by prayer, from the mission to glorify God. The ecclesiology has to do for its nature with the liturgy" (J. Ratzinger). It follows then the third conciliar constitution is the dogmatic Constitution on divine revelation \textit{Dei Verbum}, of November 18, 1965. It speaks of the Word of God spoke, strong and potent, that convenes the Church. It brings the Church to reflect on the presence of God in its story and renews it in every age.

Hearing the word of God with reverence and proclaiming it with faith, the sacred synod takes its direction from these words of St. John: "We announce to you the eternal life which dwelt with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you may have fellowship with us and our common fellowship be with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:2-3). (N. 1)

The last and fourth one is the pastoral Constitution on the Church in the contemporary world \textit{Gaudium et spes} (7 December 1965). This one shows how the glorification of God is proposed in an active life, like light received from God that should be carried from the Church in the world, to form the person human who lives in the image of God and for His glorification. The above-mentioned text says:

Hence this Second Vatican Council, having probed more profoundly into the mystery of the Church, now addresses itself without hesitation, not only to the sons of the Church and to all who invoke the name of Christ, but to the whole of humanity. For the council yearns to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today (n. 2).

This seems to be the profound intention of the Council fathers that perhaps was not always received well by everyone. These wanted to say that the Church grows from the inside to the outside and not vice versa. Its first and largest commitment is that of being in communion with God. This communion is built on a life of prayer, in the sacramental life, in a straight faith, in hope and in the works of charity. Strong in this relationship with God, the Church can then turn to the world proclaiming the Risen One.

2. \textit{The Church like "People of God"}

The topic of the Church as "People of God" is a supporting topic of the Council which dedicated whole second chapter Constitution \textit{Lumen gentium} to it. This topic has had considerable development in theology before the Council. The idea of the Church as the Body
of Christ, promoted by Pope Pius XII in the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943, rendered "little clarity regarding the relationship between visible and invisible elements, between rights and grace, between order and life"\(^1\). The theologians proposed a new concept, well rooted in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, which is that of "People of God". Who proposed it advised that it is a more spacious and theologically rich concept with respect to the concept of Pius XII. It gives better relief to the fundamental equality of all of the Baptized as one people, allows to articulate more harmonically the historical and dynamic dimension of the Church, and that is to say the historicity of the Church, the continuity between Israel and the Church, its eschatological tension towards the Kingdom. "In the same time the concept of the "people of God" – as J. Ratzinger recalls – also underlines the cultural dimension, the communion that should exist inside and also the communion with those who do not belong to it directly. This people has a mission to fulfill for all people who are already mysteriously oriented towards it. This people is unique and together diverse. To speak of the Church as the people of God permits one to see it diversely in its articulation and dimensions, recognizing also the possibility of errors in this journey as well as purely the possibility of a constant renewal and reform".

The concept referring to the Church as the "People of God" gives occasion to spacious debates on the structures of the Church. There was who talked about the need to democratize the Church, according to the image of European society, or to render her closer to a "popular democracy", as proposed by Marxism or communism, then in a clearly political perspective. However, the theological reflection, based on the biblical and patristic texts, continued beyond these debates. This has helped contemplate the Church in a vertical rather than horizontal viewpoint. The exegetic analysis showed that the concept "people of God" is a biblical concept and expresses the strong one "relationship" with God. In it, the connection with God is fundamental, or rather indispensable. Furthermore, the expression "people of God" is not opposed to the hierarchy of the Church because it sees it as an important element for a full life of the "people of God", the institution which facilitates the full communion of the faithful with God. The image of the Church as "people of God" highlights besides that it does not exist for itself, but what it should always be, an instrument of God. The effort of who is responsible in the structures of the Church should be one who can assure the presence of God in its life, making it an instrument that is always better to bring men towards him to prepare for the moment in which “God will be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

This mission of the Church, enlightened by the light of Christ, like its people, clearly results from the first number of *Lumen gentium*.

Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature,(cfr. Mc 16:15) to bring the light of Christ to all men, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race, it desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission. This it intends to do following faithfully the teaching of previous councils. The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical and cultural ties, might also attain fuller unity in Christ. (n. 1).

The Cristocentric dimension is, next to the geocentric one, the second strong image of the Council. The Church cannot and should not concentrate attention on itself, but on Jesus Christ, because he alone is the light of all peoples (cf. Lc 1-2; John 1,1-18; 9).

3. The Church as community

*Communion* is another image of the Church rich in its contents and elaborated by the Council fathers. Even if it is not a dominant image in the texts of the Council, it has had considerable development in the in the Post Council period.

What does communion mean? The term communion was to indicate the various relationships that unite at various levels Christians among themselves, and indicated besides that the same Church, involving various aspects such as sacramental communion, the communion of services, the structured communion for the mediation of the Bishops etc.

Facing the different interpretations of the concept of communion, when wanting to put the horizontal aspect in the first place, the communion with the faithful places it as the first thing and the most important, to the loss of the hierarchical structure, many theologians underlined that the deeper dimension of the concept of communion is in the communion with God. This is realized first of all in the sacrament of baptism and in the Eucharistic celebration. Here because the Eucharist makes the Church and the Church makes the Eucharist. The sacramental celebration of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ risen in glory, gives realization (gives the strength) and realizes in fact, that unity that we were created for by the eternal Father: with Him, the Highest Good, and in Him among us. This is what the words of *LG* say regarding the foundation of communion in the Church of Christ. Thanks to Him, and for being the Son of the Father and the giver of the Holy Spirit, in the blood and water, symbols of his life that it is given to us sacramentally, then it is possible to enter in the circle trinitarian Love and, therefore, there it is possible to get such Love to love us, as He loved us (Cf. John 15: 12). Without this "open door" – according to the Fathers: the side of Christ; according to John: the person of Christ, door of the sheep (Cf. John 10: 9) – that
introduces us to the ocean of God’s Love, there would not have been in fact a communion among us!

The foundation of communion is Christ and by means of him, the Trinity, the Mystery of a loving Communion. The explanatory note of the third chapter of LG says: "Communion" is a concept held in great honor in the ancient Church (and also today, specially in the East). For it is not to be understood as a vague “affective” certainty but an "organic reality" that asks for juridical forms and together is enlivened by the charity². It regards, in fact, a profound dimension of the Church and explains it in its various components. We find the biblical foundations of this concept above all in Saint Paul, who frequently in his letters to the different Churches, addresses this argument.

He explains how the Christians are: “called to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1, 9), in fact: "for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3, 28), in him baptized and clothed with him. The Eucharist, says Saint Paul, is: "a communion with the blood of Christ […], communion with the Body of Christ" (1 Cor 10, 16) and it is from such a communion that the possibility of communion among us is achieved. Communion with Christ, then, is in the Trinity: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with all of you" (2 Cor 13, 13). The gift of the "communion of the Holy Spirit" in Christ, renders dynamic the Christians in the construction of his Body because he gives them Charity, a bond of communion. Paul returns to this topic of Charity frequently and teaches his audience how to live it among themselves and allow it to animate the individuals and the community in the dimension of being "one".

Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with the mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality (Rom 12, 9-13).

Here is a distinguished description of Charity, what it produces and how it is the creator of koinonia!

It is significant that the well-known one "Hymn of charity" of Saint Paul, be properly placed in the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians where he discusses some charisms given to the individuals in the Church for its well-being and that are always lived out in Charity, which is the charism of the charisms. Without this it will not be possible to be exercise a "common usefulness". Charity and charisms, therefore, belong to the same reality and both are necessary to build the Church, as a full and beautiful communion. As we can see, these two dimensions of the Christian

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life, are always at the center of the different movements that are born in the Church, proper to the recovery of these fundamental truth of the Christian life.

Also Saint Peter discusses the topic of communion (Cf. *Pt* 4, 13; 5, 1), also in *Acts* at different moments: 1, 14; 2, 42-46; 4, 24-32; 5, 12, and the Johnine tradition: *John* 10, 1-18; 15, 1-10. 12-17. This is to highlight some testamentary hints that show how deep are the biblical roots of the concept of communion, a fundamental concept in the vision of the Church.

Numerous then are the Fathers of the Church who treat this topic, very alive in the primitive Church, in the phase of the persecutions, in which the unity between its members was the strength, subsequently, as the Church went on structuring itself and the experience of communion was seen as a great necessity to grow harmonically.

The well-known the letters of Saint Ignatius of Antiochi (Second Century) frequently touch this argument. He insists above all on the strength of the sacramental celebration in order of the ecclesial Communion: "Commit yourselves to gather more often for the Eucharistic celebration and to praise the Lord […] when you gather, in fact, the forces of Satan collapse and his scourges dissolve themselves in this unity, that teaches you the faith". He also highlights, how the unity of the celebration is a figure and accomplishment of that life: "Study to participate in one Eucharist, one in fact is the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, one is the chalice that unites us in his blood, one is the altar, as one is the bishop with his presbyters and the deacons, servants like myself. If you operate this way, then operate according to God". Those who also treat this argument are Ireneus, Clement the Roman, and Augustine.

Facing a certain reduction to the concept of "communion" it is verified in the years after 1985, how the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith found it opportune to prepare a Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church On Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion, published June 28, 1992. The Vatican document returned to the fact that the ecclesial communion is of invisible and visible character, embraces the hierarchy as well as the lives of, the insertion into the life of Christ and at the same time the intimate communion with brothers in the faith. Here are some parts of the text:

_Ecclesial communion is at the same time both invisible and visible._ As an invisible reality, it is the communion of each human being with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit, and with the others who are fellow sharers in the divine nature, in the passion of Christ, in the same faith, in the same spirit. In the Church on earth, there is an intimate relationship between this invisible communion and the visible communion in the teaching of the Apostles, in the sacraments and in the hierarchical order. By means of these divine gifts,

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1 Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philippians*, 2.
2 *Ibidem*.
which are very visible realities, Christ carries out in different ways in history his prophetical, priestly and kingly function for the salvation of mankind. This link between the invisible and visible elements of ecclesial communion constitutes the Church as the Sacrament of salvation.

From this sacramentality it follows that the Church is not a reality closed in on herself; rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavour, for she is sent to the world to announce and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her: to gather together all people and all things into Christ; so as to be for all an "inseparable sacrament of unity" (n. 4).

The Vatican document teaches as well that the universal Church holds the precedence on the particular Church, which follows afterwards, like a secondary and dependent reality from the first one, which lives thanks to the first one. Here is what the document also says:

The Church of Christ, which we profess in the Creed to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, is the universal Church, that is, the worldwide community of the disciples of the Lord, which is present and active amid the particular characteristics and the diversity of persons, groups, times and places. Among these manifold particular expressions of the saving presence of the one Church of Christ, there are to be found, from the times of the Apostles on, those entities which are in themselves Churches, because, although they are particular, the universal Church becomes present in them with all its essential elements. They are therefore constituted "after the model of the universal Church", and each of them is "a portion of the People of God entrusted to a bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of his clergy" (n. 7).

The text of the Congregation also teaches that the universal Church in its mystery is essentially a reality, that ontologically and temporally precedes single particular Churches.

Indeed, according to the Fathers, ontologically, the Church-mystery, the Church that is one and unique, precedes creation, and gives birth to the particular Churches as her daughters. She expresses herself in them; she is the mother and not the product of the particular Churches. Furthermore, the Church is manifested, temporally, on the day of Pentecost in the community of the one hundred and twenty gathered around Mary and the twelve Apostles, the representatives of the one unique Church and the founders-to-be of the local Churches, who have a mission directed to the world: from the first the Church speaks all languages (n. 9).

The document took up again a rabbinical theology, that had conceived as pre-existing the Tora and Israel, as observed by J. Ratzinger: "The creation would have been conceived, because in it was a space for the will of God; this will however had a need for a people, who lived for the will of God and became the light of the world". The Fathers of the Church were convinced of the intimate identity between Church and Israel and because of this did not see the Church as something casual drawn at the last minute, but recognized in this meeting of the peoples under the will of God the internal theology of creation. Beginning with Christology this image is expanded and deepened:
From the moment of the Incarnation story comes explained as the story of love between God and man.

Even the Council advised a such solution. *Lumen gentium* does not consider the Church as a reality closed in on itself, but sees it as departing from Christ: "Christ is the light of nations – proclaimed the Constitution – and this sacred council, assembled with the Holy Spirit, ardently wants that the light of Christ, reflects on the face of the Church, illuminating all men. ..". The Council document makes reference to the theological reflection of the Fathers that saw in the Church the moon, that does not have its own light, but returns to the light of the sun, who is Christ. This allowed the Fathers to highlight the fact that the ecclesiology should always remain in a close connection as well as a close tight dependence on the Christology and deeply bound to it. The *Lumen gentium* puts on guard every straight discourse on the Church and make reference to the Son, without omitting talk about the Father, including the Holy Spirit. In this way, the Christological vision of the Church is stretched necessarily in a trinitarian ecclesiology (cf. *LG* n. 2-4). Nor does it result that the straight discourse on the Church always requires a discourse on God. This trinitarian approach offers the key for the right reading of the entire text of *Lumen gentium*. Only from this perspective we learn what is the Church: one, holy, catholic. Only departing from the concrete historical accomplishment and in it, can we say what the expression "universal Church" means.

This relationship between the universal Church and the local Church, the precedence from one to another in view of communion, is well explained from the text of *Lumen gentium*.

"The conciliar text – observed Card. J. Ratzinger - passes from Baptism to the Eucharist, in which Christ gives his body and thus makes us his body. This body is one, and so again for every local Church the Eucharist is the place of incorporation into the one Christ, the becoming-one of all communicants in the universal *communio*, which unites heaven and earth, the living and the dead, past, present and future, and opens up into eternity. The Eucharist is not born from the local Church and does not end in her. It continuously shows that Christ comes to us from outside, through our closed doors; the Church comes to us continuously from outside, from the total, unique body of Christ and leads us into it. This *extra nos* of the sacrament is also revealed in the ministry of the Bishop and of the priest: the truth that the Eucharist needs the sacrament of priestly service is founded precisely in the fact that the community cannot give itself the Eucharist; it must receive it from the Lord through the mediation of the one Church. Apostolic succession, which constitutes the priestly ministry, implies at the same time the synchronic aspect and diachronic aspects of the concept of Church: belonging to the whole history of the faith from the Apostles and being in communion with all who let themselves be gathered by the Lord in his body. The Constitution on the Church has notably treated the episcopal ministry in chapter three, and explained its meaning starting with the fundamental concept of the *collegium*. This concept, which only marginally appears in tradition, serves to illustrate the interior unity of the episcopal ministry. The bishop is not a bishop as an individual, but by belonging to a body, a college, which in turn represents the historical continuity of the *collegium Apostolorum*. In this sense, the episcopal ministry derives from the one Church and leads into it. Precisely here it becomes evident that there is no opposition between the local Church and the universal Church. The Bishop represents the one Church in the local Church, and builds up the one Church while he builds up the local Church and awakens her particular gifts for the benefit
of the whole body. The ministry of the Successor of Peter is a particular form of episcopal ministry connected in a special way with responsibility for the unity of the whole Church. But Peter's ministry and responsibility would not even be able to exist had the universal Church not existed first. In fact he would have been moving in a void and representing an absurd claim. Without a doubt the right relationship between episcopate and primacy must be continuously rediscovered, even through hard work and suffering. However, this quest is only correctly formulated when it is seen in relation to the primacy of the Church's specific mission and, in every age, when it is oriented to and subordinated to it: that is, to the duty to bring God to men and men to God. The Church's goal is the Gospel, around which everything else must revolve.”

4. The guided Church from the Holy Spirit

The pneumatological vision/dimension of the Church is also present in the texts of the Council. It can be said that it springs forth from Church inserted in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which also reflects itself in the earthly mystery of the Church. And now, following the geocentric and cristocentric dimensions of the Church, is necessary to highlight its pneumatological dimension. I would like to begin from the speech of Pope Paul VI on November 29, 1972, which explains very well the importance of such a dimension. The Pontiff said the following at that Wednesday audience.

We have asked ourselves many times what are greatest needs of the Church? From the mediated wisdom of the Council we have deepened the knowledge and the conscience of this human phenomenon, polarized in Jesus Christ, defining People of God, his mystical Body of Christ, with him together and articulated (Cf. Eph. 4, 16), destined to make out of humanity a society of brothers, appearing bright to orient man, as a sign and instrument, to their religious destiny (Lumen Gentium, 1). All of us from the experience of the modern world, a wonderful giant of science and power, but blind and neutral to what matters more, love and life; we, foresee and designate ourselves in the centuries of the past and open ourselves to the new century more clearly, more direct, more pressing the santifying and missionary vocation of the Church, and that we feel her pledge to collaborate in overcoming the social gap, almost a staircase, but not an obstacle, that still separates and opposes men among us because of the different and often times unjust fruition of the earthly kingdom. While all are invited, more of them are poor. To the enjoyment of the kingdom of Heaven which need do we feel first and foremost to address for this our beloved and blessed Church?

We should say, almost anxious and praying, because it is its mystery and its life, you all know it: the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, animator and sanctifier of the Church, its divine breath, the wind of its sails, its unifying principle, its inner source of light and strength, its support and comforter, its source of charisms and songs, its peace and joy, its pledge and prelude of a blessed and eternal life (Cf. Lumen Gentium, 5).

The Church is in need of an everlasting Pentecost; it is in need of fire in the heart, of words on the lips, of prophecy in its vision. The Church needs to be a temple of the Holy Spirit (Cf. 1 Cor. 3, 16-17; 6, 19; 2 Cor. 6, 16), that is to say a total cleanliness of inner life needs to be felt inside of her, in the
mute emptiness of us modern men, all extroverts for the charm of the exterior life, seductive, charming, corrupt with flatteries of false happiness, by feeling, we mean rising above her personal intimacy, almost like a plant, a poem, a prayer, a hymn, a voice praying of the Spirit, as Saint Paul teaches he prays and asks us and for us "with ineffable moans", and he interprets the discourse that we alone do not know how to reach God (Cf. Rom. 8, 26-27).

The Church needs to anxiously regain, the flavor and certainty of its truth (Cf. Io. 16, 13), and to listen with inviolable silence and docile availability, the voice, or rather the conversing speaker in the contemplative absorption of the Spirit; which teaches "every truth" (Ibid.); and then the Church needs to feel for all of its human faculty the wave of love, of that love that is called charity, and that in fact, spreads in our own hearts " through the holy Spirit that has been given to us (Rom. 5, 5); and therefore, penetrated by faith, the Church needs to experience a new stimulus of activism, an expression in these works of charity (Cf. Gal. 5, 6), rather its pressure, its zeal, its urgency (2 Cor. 5, 14), its witness, its apostolate.

Men who are alive, you young people, and you lives that are consecrated, you brothers in the priesthood, are you listening to us? This is what the Church needs. It needs the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in us, in each of us, and in all of us together, in us the Church.

Why has the inner fullness weakened in many of these spirits, that simply say they are in the Church? Why have the ranks of the militant faithful in the name and under the guidance of the Church become so lazy and reduced? Why have so may become apostles of the dissent, of laicization and of secularization, almost thinking to give a freer course to the expressions of the Spirit? Or sometimes having more faith in the spirit of this world that in that of Christ? And still: why have some slackened, or rather denounced like annoying chains, the ties of ecclesial obedience and jealous adherence to a communion with the ministry of the Church, for the pretext of to living according to the Spirit, released in the form and from the actual norms of the canonical institutions, of whom the visible body of the Church pilgrim, historical and human, even if mystical, have to be united? Perhaps the recourse to the Holy Spirit and to its charisms has been a pretext, perhaps not too sincere, to live or to believe to live the Christian religion in an authentic manner, while such a pretext is served, lives according to the actual spirit, the actual free examination, the actual arbitrary and often times ephemeral interpretation?

Oh! if perhaps the true Spirit was in front of us, we certainly would not be the ones to extinguish it! (Thess. 5, 19) We very well know that "the Spirit blows where it wills" (Io. 3, 8); and we know that the Church, is demanding of its true faithful for its established observances and often times she finds herself cautious and distrustful towards the possible spiritual illusions who show singular phenomenons, she wants to be extremely respectful of the supernatural experiences given to some souls, or of the phenomenal facts, that sometimes God miraculously honors to introduce in the plot of natural events.

However, we want to once again give a worthy look at the authority of the tradition, expressed as noted by Saint Augustine, who reminds us that "a Christian has nothing more to fear than to separate himself from the body of Christ. If in fact he separates himself from the body of Christ, he is no longer a
member of Him, and if he is no longer a member of Him, he is not fed by his Spirit (In Ev. Io. 27, 6; PL 35, 1618) "he does not live by the Spirit of Christ, if not the body of Christ" (Ibid. 26, 13). Because humble and faithful adherence to the Church not only does not deprive us of the Holy Spirit, but rather places us in a better and under a certain appearance in the indispensable condition to enjoy personally and collectively of its living circulation. That which each of us can put into practice. First with an invocation. We should have as a "first devotion" one to the Holy Spirit (and one to the Madonna who carries us as she carries us to Christ!). Secondly, with the cult of the state of grace, one knows. And thirdly with a life totally penetrated and to the service of Charity, that is none than the effusion of the Holy Spirit. Right here: of Him, above all, the Church is in need of today!

Say therefore and always all to Him: come!"5

The Council and still more of the period that followed it have already discovered the great presence and action of the Holy Spirit inside the Church. The Spirit was given without measure to the Church of Christ and is present in every Christian community, including the smallest one. He it is found present in equal measure in the apostolic Church as well as in the particular Church; in the Church of yesterday as in the Church of today. In this continuous and operating presence Holy Spirit one writes the image of the Church as a movement of salvation. That form, the extension of the movement of God in history, that it is refracted in the story, in different movements, of which everyone brings in himself something like a breath with which God revives the a human from the mud such as Adam- Eve. The Church of Christ, then, is the great movement of men who reach out towards. By means of men follows the paschal journey of the Church: man, writes John Paul II, is the way of the Church.

The Holy Spirit gives witness to himself and to history with the intention of always new inspiring new movements, in whose origins new hope is always found, generated in the same action of the creation and salvation of man. Without this hope which eternally renews itself, the story would only be an assigned drama and we its actors. This is the drama of alienation, immobility of activists, and the drama of movements without a Movement. The last 30 to 40 years have known the birth of many different movements signaling the so-called "spring of the Church". It is difficult to list them in this context. I would only like to say some things regarding the constituting elements of a movement, that desires to be ecclesial, and its criteria.

It says that there are four the constituting elements to an ecclesial movement: the foundational charism, the person of the founder, the community dimension, a particular rapport with the Bishop of Rome.

1. An ecclesial movement is born from a particular charism that the Holy Spirit gives to a concrete person for the well-being of the Church6: "A charism that consists in a new and

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5 Paul VI, General Audience, Wednesday, November 29, 1972.
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original way of understanding and living the Gospel, that answers to a necessity in the Church, to better develop its mission in the world of its time". The charism should therefore be exercised as a service. Because of this every charism, and all things pertaining to its genuineness and exercise should submit itself to the judgment of the authority that approves the statutes that it expresses. Given for the well-being of the Church, the charisma can have a universal character; that is to say that it can attract persons of every type, make its attraction not only sound good to the laity, but also to religious and priests, without that, in order to enjoy the grace linked to the charism, the different vocations should renounce their proper choices of life in the Church;

2. The foundational charism comes from the Holy Spirit to a particular person (the founder or the foundress) who has the task of interpreting it and translating it into an organic reality, that unites those who fell attracted to that charism and desire to live it concretely. It is also the task of the founder/foundress to indicate the goals to reach and the spiritual means to reach them and at the same time, to give an organizational structure to the movement, exercising a form of spiritual paternity/maternity towards its members;

3. In the ecclesial movements, the charism has a particular uniting strength, which moves some members to form either a life of community or to make an experience (permanent or transitional) of community life for the purpose of living the charism better, that in its deep essence, is a life of communion with Christ and with the brothers in a spirit of Evangelical fraternity. For this, in almost all of the ecclesial movements develop forms of community life, that distinguish themselves from religious communities and the consecrated life by the fact that the communities of the movement are made up of men and women, married people and people profess the evangelical counsels, laity and priests;

4. Finally, the fourth constituting element of the ecclesial movements is the particular bond that they have with the Pope and with the petrine ministry proper to them. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger observed: "In the Church there should always be services and missions that are not purely local in nature, but are functional to the mandate that invests the comprehensive ecclesial reality and propagation of the Gospel. The Pope is in need of these services, and these are in need of him, and in the reciprocity of these two species of mission, the symphony of the ecclesial life is complete[…] The Papacy did not create the movements, but it has been their essential support in the structure of the Church, its essential pillar. In this, the deepest sense and

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7 Ibid, p. 528.
8 Cfr. Lumen gentium, n. 12, John Paul II, Christifideles Iaici, n. 24; Codex Iuris Canonici, c. 299, § 1; 314; 322, § 2.
the true essence of the petrine ministry becomes visible like never before: this should keep the
dynamism of the mission alive ad extra ed ad intra⁹.

Beyond the constituting elements of an ecclesial movement there is also the criteria of the ecclesiality of the movements of which John Paul II speaks about in the post-synodal papal exhortation Christifideles laici (December 30, 1988) in n. 30. They are: 1. The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness, as it is manifested "in the fruits of grace which the spirit produces in the faithful" and in a growth towards the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity. In this sense whatever association of the lay faithful there might be, it is always called to be more of an instrument leading to holiness in the Church, through fostering and promoting "a more intimate unity between the everyday life of its members and their faith". 2. The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith, embracing and proclaiming the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity, in obedience to the Church's Magisterium, as the Church interprets it. For this reason every association of the lay faithful must be a forum where the faith is proclaimed as well as taught in its total content. 3. The witness to a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship to the Pope, in total adherence to the belief that he is the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal Church, and with the local Bishop, "the visible principle and foundation of unity" in the particular Church, and in "mutual esteem for all forms of the Church's apostolate". The communion with Pope and Bishop must be expressed in loyal readiness to embrace the doctrinal teachings and pastoral initiatives of both Pope and Bishop. Moreover, Church communion demands both an acknowledgment of a legitimate plurality of forms in the associations of the lay faithful in the Church and at the same time, a willingness to cooperate in working together. 4. Conformity to and participation in the Church's apostolic goals, that is, "the evangelization and sanctification of humanity and the Christian formation of people's conscience, so as to enable them to infuse the spirit of the gospel into the various communities and spheres of life". From this perspective, every one of the group forms of the lay faithful is asked to have a missionary zeal which will increase their effectiveness as participants in a re-evangelization. 5. A commitment to a presence in human society, which in light of the Church's social doctrine, places it at the service of the total dignity of the person. Therefore, associations of the lay faithful must become fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more just and loving within society. The fundamental criteria mentioned at this time find their verification in the actual fruits that various group forms show in their organizational life and the works they perform, such as:

"the renewed appreciation for prayer, contemplation, liturgical and sacramental life, the reawakening of vocations to Christian marriage, the ministerial priesthood and the consecrated life; a readiness to participate in programs and Church activities at the local, national and international levels; a commitment to catechesis and a capacity for teaching and forming Christians; a desire to be present as Christians in various settings of social life and the creation and awakening of charitable, cultural and spiritual works; the spirit of detachment and evangelical poverty leading to a greater generosity in charity towards all; conversion to the Christian life or the return to Church communion of those baptized members who have fallen away from the faith (Christifideles laici, n. 30)

5. Marian Dimension of the Church

Speaking about the Christological dimension and of pneumatological dimension of the Church recalls directly the presence of Mary in the Body of Christ, closely united to Him, of whom she is

the true Mother and will be for all eternity, and also united to the Spirit in a unique manner: "full of grace" (Cf. Lk, 1, 28). The Church exists because it becomes God’s dwelling place in the world and so it is "sanctified". All of this is synthesized in last chapter of the Constitution on the Church that talks about the Blessed Virgin Mary in the mystery of Christ and Church. From one side, the insertion of mariology in ecclesiology, which the Council undertook, could appear rather by chance, but from another side, more interiorly, this decision corresponds perfectly to the orientation of the unity of the Constitution. A straight image of the Church, an image that was truly wanted by the Council, can be included only when it is included this relationship between the Mother of God and the Church. The Council’s desire was to say that the Church comes anticipated in Mary, in Her is the personification and vice versa, Mary does not exist outside the Church, in closed and isolated world, in a space for herself, but all of her significance, her richness, her profound mystery is revealed properly in the Church.

The Church comes urgently to exercise its identity of Mother: to welcome, to nourish, to make to grow, to carry to maturity. In these attitudes she finds again particularly in Mary her full accomplishment having occurred already and the help to exercise the actual maternity in a really pure and full manner: " in her apostolic work also, justly looks to her, who, conceived of the Holy Spirit, brought forth Christ, who was born of the Virgin that through the Church He may be born and may increase in the hearts of the faithful also. The Virgin in her own life lived an example of that maternal love, by which it behooves that all should be animated who cooperate in the apostolic mission of the Church for the regeneration of men" (LG n. 65).

We can say that the marian profile of the Church, its marian characterization is fundamental to comprehend her as Christ wanted, since no one more than her is what Christ wanted his brothers to be. Besides being a Mother, she is the one that formed in her bosom the physical body of the Lord, and she also shared high intimacy of thoughts, heart beats, and every movement of his being.

So when the Council says that Mary is really the one who more closely participated in the sole mediation of Christ, hinting at the full involvement of Mary’s humanity, now assumed into Heaven, in redemption, that is to say in the regeneration of the brothers of Christ (Cf. LG nn. 60-63). In other words, she is involved in the formation of the members of the Body of the Lord in a very particular manner. Here because, different theologians have risked the assertion that the marian beginning precedes that of the petrine in the Church of Christ, in the sense that is closer to the salvific mediation of the only begotten Son, it is also that same Peter who depends on Mary, as times as the Servant of God John Paul II wanted to affirm unequivocally.

The so-called "marian profile" of the Church is so essential in the understanding of the mystery of communion that the Church embodies. The Holy Father Benedict XVI spoke about
it in a very rich manner in a text that was released a short time after his election, titled: *Maria Chiesa Nascente* (Edizioni San Paolo, 1998). In a particular manner the text reflects on some elements of mariology in connection with ecclesiology. The essentially feminine and maternal character of the Church, as has been understood through the centuries and experienced by everyone (one can only think about the sacramental economy), emerges particularly when we put ourselves facing the mystery than Mary takes care of Him and mediates with her presence: "masculine setting sociological activistism of *populus Dei* the fact is countered that the Church – "ecclesia" – is feminine. [...] The Church is more than "people", more than a structure and of an activity: in it lives the mystery of the maternity and love that makes such maternity possible. Only if that exists is it possible to have a devotion to the Church, love for the Church“10.

The feminine and maternal presence of the Holy Virgin helps the Church in fact to include herself in all of the human notations that Christ wanted to give, escaping the risk of simply becoming a functional organization: "A purely structural eccelsiology does necessarily degenerate to the Church to a program of action. Only thanks to the marian element comes the fully restored emotional sphere of the faith and as well as the achieved human conformity to the reality of the Logos incarnate"11.

The presence of Holy Mary helps and supports all of God’s people, from the hierarchy to those simply baptized, to keep a balance in their reality all supernatural (Sons of God) and, simultaneously all human = Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.

The Mother of the Son of God, be it because she is the one in which and for whom God became man in a total sense, except sin, this is because she was a woman, that is to say particularly qualified, body and soul, to the generation of life in all of its dimensions to her care and development and one for whom all men and women of today can find a just balance in understanding their biological dimension, which should be in harmony with the intellectual and spiritual which precedes all.

The Holy Virgin, in fact, in her human and spiritual fullness is proposed like a growth factor towards the fullness also in this fundamental dimension of the human creature: the connection. The trinitarian origin of the person, in fact, has inscribed itself in the deep radical need of a relationship and relationship that is pure, that is to say free and marked the gift of full life. When these dimension find space to develop, the person grows and matures towards the fullness, that is to say towards happiness. Mother and teacher of relationships, she leads the whole Church to recognize the value of the human person, because of Christ, even if unwittingly

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at times, is the necessity to establish relationships fully human, that is to say that hold account of everything required of the other and welcomes it, understanding the particularities that distinguish it. This is also very much necessary and above all, in the Church of today, particularly for those with the responsibility of government, who run more the risk of ‘flattening oneself’ in the solely functional and pragmatic dimension.

6. The universal vocation to holiness and the overcoming of the clergy-laity contrast

If one wants to strictly understand the orientation of the conciliar ecclesiology, one cannot omit chapters 4-7 of the Constitution, in which talks about the laity, of the universal vocation to holiness, of religious and the eschatological orientation of the Church. The Council fathers put into the center of these chapters again the reflection the intrinsic purpose of the Church. They tell us once again what is more essential to its existence, that is to say the holiness, the conformity to God. The Church exists, to become the dwelling place of God in the world and to be the house of “holiness”

The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and everyone of His disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consumator of this holiness of life: "Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5,48) … Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society (LG, n. 40).

The Church is a community of brothers and sisters, in which all of the inequalities belonging to a people, to a social class, to a sex, are considered to be overcome, at least at the side of God who calls to the same perfection, to the same holiness, lived in different contexts however. The foundation of this unity is baptism giving rise to a new attitude of fraternity. Vatican II uses the terms brothers and fraternity for the most part in reference to this ecclesial fraternity, sign and source of human fraternity. The task and the mission of the Church is then to build or restore this equality, in conformity with the teachings of the New Testament: "You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers" (Mt 23.8) and "For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt 12,50).

Such a setting carries with it the overcoming of an ecclesiology that is inspired rather to the hierarchical models borrowed from the cultural realities and civilians of the feudal society or absolutists, where the Church had to often justify the net separation between laymen on one side, and clergymen or religious on the other.

Often times (almost always) the vision of the Church depended from the vision of society. The democratic climate of today’s society has also influenced in some manner the point of view
and presence of the Church. It speaks today of a humanity that is fully adult age that already began before Vatican II and carried the esteem of the laity. Its task is no more than that of being a sole contributor of hierarchical apostleship, however a more autonomous and specific task comes assigned him that springs from baptism and becomes strengthened in confirmation.

Vatican II perceived that it invited the laity to a more live and profitable participation in the holy liturgy (SC 14; 48), to a more direct reading of the Bible (DV 25) and above all gave back to the laity, in Lumen gentium, their full dignity as members of the people of God. The dogmatic Constitution on the Church plainly affirms that "a secular character is particular and specific to the laity" (LG 31; EV 17363). The laity are opposite the clergy, to whom is reserved the ministerial offices, and to the religious, who profess to follow in "spirit of the Beatitudes". The task of the laity is then "to seek the kingdom of God treating the temporal things and ordering them according to God" and therefore they should “contribute, from the inside in the form of fermenting the sanctification of the world".

Conclusion

I would like to conclude my reflection on the theology of the Church starting from the documents of the Second Council Vatican, with the text of Saint Ambrose, also used by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the present pontiff Benedict XVI:

"So therefore be strong and grounded in your heart! ... What it means to be, the apostle has taught it, Moss wrote: "The place, on which you stand, is holy ground". No is, if not the one who is strong in the faith... and still another word is written: "You however be strong with me". You be strong with me, if you stand in the Church. The Church is the holy ground, on which we should be... It is therefore strong to be in the Church. It is strong there, where I want to appear to you, there I stay close to you. Where the Church is, there is the strong place of your heart. In the Church the foundations of your soul lean. In fact in the Church I have appeared to you like a burning bush. The bush is you, I am the fire. Fire in the bush I am in your flesh. Fire I am, to illuminate you; to burn the thorns of your sins, to give you the favor of my grace".
The Ecclesiology of Vatican II: between continuity and renewal  
(Part Two)

Notes on the practical journey of the Church in these last forty years

It is very difficult to describe the journey of the Church after the Council. It has been long and varied. A main line was – until Benedict XVI – to draw the Church closer to the problems of persons, bring her closer to the faithful. More pastoral, more active in the elaboration of the Christian culture, open to many, sensitive to the dialogue with non-believers. Less dogmatic and more pastoral, missionary. It was the Church committed to building a civilization of love. But things now are changing.

1. What significance did the synods have in mind for the life and mission of the Church?

The theological state of the synods of the Church is to explain. The present pontiff – Benedict XVI – has an ecclesiology that is very centralized with the Vatican as *caput mundi*. The unity of the Churches seems to precede its universality. Instead the sense of the synods is concretized properly in the universality of the Church. This means that the churches scattered throughout the world also have something to say about the riches of the church of Jesus Christ. The local churches are not alone users (receiving) of what Rome says but contribute actively to the development of catholic doctrine.

The Holy Father Benedict XVI seems to defend the idea of the "small flock", that is to say to retain it, even if the Church loses a lot of its faithful, there will be at the end a Church of elite, formed by "true" Catholics.

The present synods (general and continental) have allowed to the Church to breathe the cultural and universal air, to speak with the voice of many people, to be present where the faithful are.

2. What are the proposals and the requests that the Church does in the face of religious life?

Paragraph 43 of *Lumen gentium* recalls attention to three points: a.) the fundamental principle of the divine origin of the evangelical councils; b.) the reality of the varied forms of life of religious life in the Church; c.) the description of the religious state.

According to the *Constitution* the essential figure of the church could be incomplete, and in voluntary case of omission also false, if it is not held in account of the religious state, a concrete element of in the living body of the church. *Religious life expresses the same essence of the church.*
43. The evangelical counsels of chastity dedicated to God, poverty and obedience are based upon the words and examples of the Lord. They were further commanded by the apostles and Fathers of the Church, as well as by the doctors and pastors of souls. The counsels are a divine gift, which the Church received from its Lord and which it always safeguards with the help of His grace. Church authority has the duty, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, of interpreting these evangelical counsels, of regulating their practice and finally to build on them stable forms of living. Thus it has come about, that, as if on a tree which has grown in the field of the Lord, various forms of solidarity and community life, as well as various religious families have branched out in a marvelous and multiple way from this divinely given seed. Such a multiple and miraculous growth augments both the progress of the members of these various religious families themselves and the welfare of the entire Body of Christ. These religious families give their members the support of a more firm stability in their way of life and a proven doctrine of acquiring perfection. They further offer their members the support of fraternal association in the militia of Christ and of liberty strengthened by obedience. Thus these religious are able to tranquilly fulfill and faithfully observe their religious profession and so spiritually rejoicing make progress on the road of charity. From the point of view of the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious state of life is not an intermediate state between the clerical and lay states. But, rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both these states of life so that they might enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and thus each in one's own way, may be of some advantage to the salvific mission of the Church.

Paragraph 44 outlines the nature and the value of religious consecration. It emphasizes:

a.) a theocentric aspect;

b.) an ecclesial aspect;

c.) the value of signs.

- The Council gives importance to the ecclesiality of religious life;

- The priority of the contemplative dimension in the life of the church (see n. 40 Ad gentes):

"Religious institutes of the contemplative and of the active life have so far played, and still do play, the main role in the evangelization of the world. This sacred synod gladly acknowledges their merits and thanks God for all that they have expended for the glory of God and the service of souls while exhorting them to go on untiringly in the work which they have begun, since they know that the virtue of charity, which by reason of their vocation they are bound to practice with greater perfection, obliges and impels them to a truly catholic spirit and work.

Institutes of the contemplative life, by their prayers, sufferings, and works of penance have a very great importance in the conversion of souls, because it is God who sends workers into His harvest when He is asked to do so (cf. Mt. 9:38) God who opens the minds of non - Christians to hear the Gospel (cf. Acts 16:14), and God who fructifies the word of salvation in their hearts (Ad gentes, n. 40)."
- the active life should be guided by the contemplative life. This pastoral norm, reaffirmed by Saint Thomas Aquinas, comes reconfirmed by the Council. The ecclesiality of religious life includes:

a) Be it those “soli Deo vacant"

B) Be it those who take care of the apostolic charitable works,

c) Be it those who give advice in the spiritual life, those who guide the faithful.

The religious state is a prophetic sign not alone, but also eschatological. And this goes understood not only as an anticipation of the future of the church, that is to show what the future life will be, but as attention to today which should be recovered in the fullness of its meaning.

In every way, besides how much has been said above, it can be said that the Council has not reflected enough on religious life. Its juridical side is barely elaborated.

To understand and fully value the attention of the Church to religious life it is necessary to take into consideration the development of reflection on the consecrated life that the Church increased after the Second Vatican Council, with the varied published documents from the Congregation for the Institutes of consecrated life and the Society of Apostolic Life, the signs and development of the Synod on the consecrated life and the successive Post Synodal Exhortation Vita Consacrata, and the direct or indirect urgencies present in the pontifical documents published on the horseback of the third Christian millennium. And this, nevertheless, is still a field of immense and complex research that asks for a specific and profound study.