

DOCTRINAL SECTION

THE REFLECTING CHURCH

(The Church in the Documents of
The Second Vatican Council.)

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Introduction.

Theology is the systematic contemplation of God in the Revealed Word, Jesus Christ. It seeks to enter into the knowable spheres of God, in order that through this knowledge of faith, it may aid man to know and to belong "to the kingdom of God that has come into this world" (Lk. 11:20). Theology must remain moored to that Word made Flesh, Dead and Risen, whose visible extension is historically-realized in the structured Church. It is then the dimensions assumed by the Church as she travels through history which will give theology its direction, depth and relevance.

Because of the centrality of the concept of the Church to the whole of theology, this paper will undertake to analyze the emerging dimensions of the Church as she is presented today. The main area of study will be the dogmatic constitution "Lumen Gentium", in the light of which the other constitutions, decrees and declarations of the Second Vatican Council can be properly understood. "The Second Vatican Council was a council of the Church about the Church... reflecting on her nature."¹ This need to reflect is an urgent call and Pope Paul re-echoed the Council's desire "to set forth more precisely to the faithful and to the entire world the nature and encompassing mission of the Church" (Lumen Gentium, n.1) * when he declared in his inaugural encyclical "Ecclesiam Suam" that "the Church in this moment must reflect on herself to find strength in the knowledge of her place in the divine plan; to find greater light, new energy and fuller joy in the fulfilment of her own mission; and to determine the best means for making more immediate, more efficacious, and more beneficial her contacts with mankind to which she belongs... She has to do this in order to deepen the awareness she must have of herself, of the treasure of truth of which she is heir and custodian and of her mission to the world."²

¹ RAHNER, K. *The Church After The Council*, New York, 1966; p. 60.

² PAUL VI. "Ecclesiam Suam", *The Pope Speaks*, August 6, 1964.

*Lumen Gentium in subsequent quotes will be abbreviated to LG.

This inquiry into her nature is with a view "to renew ourselves so that we maybe found increasingly faithful to the gospel of Christ".³ The Council then sets out with a dual aim of renewal and fidelity". To achieve this goal, there was no need to forge a new idea of the Church; it was enough to recover the true idea of the Church as established by its Founder."⁴ This paper aims to present, what is believed to be the Church's major re-discovery: her nature as sign. And secondly to trace out the theological significance of this in terms of the Church's dimensions as found in the documents of the Council. "Lumen Gentium" will give us the Church's nature in the heights of the Trinity. "Gaudium et Spes" will situate the depth of her involvement in the world of man and his history. The decrees on Ecumenism, Missionary Activity and on Oriental and Non-Christian Churches will amplify her breadth; and finally some statements on her eschatological length, when the dimensions of the Church will be made fully co-extensive with the Divine Design of the Father.

The Sacramental Character of the Church.

"By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity."

—Lumen Gentium, n.l.—

The Second Vatican Council undertook the task of renewal through self-understanding. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it sought its identity and mission in the modern world. From this reflection, she emerged seemingly with a new image of herself, with a new vitality, a new outlook and a new dimension. In an age of increasing indifference to religion, the Council's declarations about the Church and her mission brought notice and interest. Not only did the Church surprise the world and the other Christian communities but she also surprise herself with all the dynamism and unsuspected resources working within her. And yet, on analysis it can be said that the Church has not uncovered anything new about herself. If anything seems new, it is the emphasis given to what she has re-discovered. "The only difference is that what was uncertain has been clarified; what was meditated on, discussed and in part controverted, now reaches serene formulation."⁵ And one formulation which is of major theological import in ecclesiology, and on which hinge many of the insights of Vatican II is the Council's re-discovered concept of the

³——— "Message to Humanity," ABBOTT, W. (ed). The Documents of Vatican II New York 1966, p. 3.

⁴DULLES, A., *The Dimensions of the Church*, Maryland 1967, p. 1.

⁵PAUL VI, "Address on Promulgation of 'Lumen Gentium' quoted FLANNERY, A., *The Church Constitution*, Dublin 1966, 1966, p. 7.

Church as "sacrament or sign". With great boldness, the Council proclaimed in her opening paragraph of the dogmatic Constitution that the Church "is a kind of sacrament or sign". The same formula first appeared in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy where it simply said: "... there came forth the wondrous sacrament which is the whole Church" (Lit. n.5).⁶ And then with greater assurance of its authenticity as a theme of the Church, the formula appeared repeatedly. "That for each and all she may be the visible sacrament of this saving reality" (LG. n.9); "... He sent His life-giving Spirit upon His disciples and through His Spirit established His Body, the Church, as the universal sacrament of salvation" (LG. n.48). Similar thought is expressed in various places in "Gaudium et Spes" Ecumenism and Oriental Churches. Therefore despite the failure to develop this thought fully, the Council has given room for further theological exploration. "Moreover, this theme links up with the authentic tradition of the Fathers. It must be understood and interpreted in this context... to give us a taste of the full riches of what is really meant by this sacramental character of the Church."⁷

An understanding of the Church as a sacrament or sign will be but an echo and enrichment of the many biblical images used to portray her. The Council made extensive use of these images. The Old Testament successively referred to her as the sheepfold, vine-yard, building of God, Temple, the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the Spouse of the Lamb. Further clarification and extension of these images came with the definitive revelation of the New Testament and the Church was referred to as the "Body of Christ", the Bride of the Lamb, a Mother, Spouse, the Community of faith, hope, and charity. (cf. LG. nn.6-7). These images are used to capture the full reality of the Church, but all these only serve to highlight her nature as a "mystery". The mystery of the Church is manifest in her very foundation..." (LG. n.5) "her life is hidden with Christ in God..." (LG. n.6). For this reason, her designation as sign is most apt. It points to her mysterious nature, but this very designation, far from 'determining' her boundaries through membership, creed and worship, as of old, broadens the Church's dimension so as to be truly opened-ended, able to embrace in various degrees of intensity, the whole of humanity. Sign also suggests her divine origin and goal, her temporal as well as her eternal values, in the same reality. And all this without prejudice to that visible and structured fulness in which she now historically subsists. "The Church is a mystery. It is a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God. It lies therefore within the nature of the Church to be always open to new and greater exploration."⁷ And explore it theology must, in order

⁶ GROOT, J., "The Church as Sacrament of the World", in *Concilium*, January 1968, p. 28.

^{*} Future reference to the Decree on the Liturgy will be indicated by *Lit.*

⁷ PAUL VI, "Opening Allocution to Second Session", *The Pope Speaks*, Sept. 27, 1963.

"to shed on all men that radiance of His which brightens the countenance of the Church" (LG. n.1). And for our guiding light in this exploration, we will depend on this re-discovered concept of the reflecting Church, namely: the Church as Sacrament or Sign.

The Father's Divine Design.

"By an utterly free and mysterious decree of His own wisdom and goodness, the eternal Father created the whole world. His plan was to dignify men with a participation of His own divine life... He planned to assemble in his holy Church all those who would believe in Christ."

—Lumen Gentium, n.2—

By such an expression of the Council situates the Church's origin and proclaims the sign-character of the Church. In the Father's intention, the Church in its initial stage, will be an assembly of believers, which, in relation to the whole of creation, stands as a sign of the saving and unifying presence of God. The initiative is from God involving Himself in man's history. The divine design encompasses all of created reality, with mankind and its history at the centre of the whole scheme. Once the sign-character of the Church is presented in this way, the Council's designation of the Church as a sacrament will be immediately understood to be broader than the more technical and exclusive liturgical meaning usually given to the 'seven sacraments'. The sacramentality of the Church "refers to a transcendental reality, invisible in itself, but manifested in ways belonging to this earth".⁸ This sacramentality is often equated with St. Paul's use of the word "mysterion". Broadly it means divine and saving intervention in human history. It is a saving presence of God, "an entering of the living and loving God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, into communion with mankind in order to exercise within mankind his power of life, love and justice and so establish his reign on earth."⁹

The Church's origin as a sacrament stems from this divine design of the Father to create the whole world. He will imbue creation with his presence, making man "the image of God", the crown of this work. "But God did not create man as a solitary. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential" (Gaudium et Spes n.12)* Therefore the whole of creation—in man—is the bearer of this saving design of the Father to intervene historically in his own creation, thereby creating a union, through presence, with it

⁸ SCHILLEBEECKX, E., "Editorial" in *Concilium*, Jan. 1968, p. 3.

⁹ GRODT, J., "The Church as Sacrament of the World" p. 28.

In this way, the whole of creation is constituted a sign of God.¹⁰ There is, however, a progressive concentration of this saving action of God on the community of man, in the course of history. And even within this community there was a further isolation of one group as a sign of the rest. First after the creation-covenant is the singling out of Man, Adam, as the image of God; Abraham, a choice among many, to father a nation, Israel; and finally the definitive adoption of a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people" (1 Pet. 2:9). And so the divine design of the Father burst forth in time in the form of a community with a history of predilection. It is by origin divine but in form earthly—namely, in the assembly of believers—in order to be present to the world, and by this presence signify the salvation in unity, for which it was chosen. This is the concept of the "mysterion", the concept of the sacramentality of the Church. It is in this gradual revelation of the divine to creation, then the choice of mankind, the narrowing down on the assembly of believers, which marks the Church as sign of unity of all created reality, and through her, the unity with God. She will articulate this presence of God to the universe and to mankind and at the same time be the voice of both the universe and mankind in acknowledging thanks and praise.

This presentation of the Church's sacramentality "may be considered the official laying to rest of the legalistic ecclesiology of the Counter-Reform... The Council reaches back beyond the twelfth century and defines the Church as "being in the nature of a sacrament in Christ."¹¹ By designating her as a sign, not only captures her sense of mystery but also does away with the closed-in attitude of a closed-in society and makes her what Michael Novak terms as "The Open Church", putting her in her proper perspective in relation with the universe and mankind. "It is distressing that the community which preaches the most intense charity towards all men often appears to divide its own members from the rest of mankind."¹² In the Father's plan, the assembly of believers is meant to represent the unity of creation; it is a unique sign in that not only does it represent all creation but it actually has begun to achieve this unity when, in a more defined, incarnate way, this Plan of the Father was undertaken by the Uncreated Word. In this mission of the word, yet a further stage of uniqueness is made manifest regarding the sign-character of the intended Church. "By her relationship with Christ... she is also an instrument of such union and unity" (LG. n.1).

¹⁰ LYONNET, S. "The Redemption of the Universe". *The Church*, New York, 1963 pp. 136-155).

* Future reference to *Gaudium et Spes* will be indicated simply by GS.

¹¹ O'NEILL, C., "The Mystery of the Church", FLANNERY, A. (ed) *Vatican II The Church Constitution*, Dublin 1966, p. 30.

¹² DULLES, A. *The Dimensions of the Church*, p. 1.

Christ and the Church.

"Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ... determining that we should become his adopted sons, through Jesus Christ... He has let us know the mystery of his purpose, the hidden plan he so kindly made in Christ... that he would bring everything together under Christ as head."

—Ephesians 1:4ff—

Since the Council is a pastoral council by intent, the concept of the Church as sign was not presented in an abstract way. She is a sign in as much as she is "a people, made one in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (LG n.4). In many ways this focus on the people as the Church is another revived concept, moving away from the too hierarchical concept insisted on by theologians of the Tridentine era. Thus Cardinal Bellarmine neatly defined the Church "as a group of men bound together... under the rule of the legitimate pastors, and especially of the one vicar on earth, the Roman Pontiff".¹³ Much of the Church's mysterious dimensions disappear when one can too readily point to who belongs to the Church and who does not. Her sign-role too becomes obscure to the point of being meaningless because of the strict division imposed. It takes on the appearance of a closed society, which is the very contradiction of God's will for it. But, inadequate though such a definition might be, it is not altogether mistaken since a definitive revelation of a structured, hierarchical Church has been made. And in it alone will the plan of the Father be fully realized, and in the words of the Council "subsist." This came about in the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son, through whose vicarious redemptive Sacrifice, this unity will be achieved. "All men are called to this union with Christ, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our journey leads us" (LG. n. 3). "Henceforth, the whole of mankind is confronted with this (Christ-Event) in order to partake in that salvation and to become itself the sacramental expression of it."¹⁴

The Father conceived this saving plan, and the Son, is the Plan conceived, for he is its perfect expression; He alone can fully express this plan, in Him alone can that plan be realized. The whole divine design is therefore crystallized in Him, He is the Prime Sacrament of all, He is actually the embodiment of all that is created; indeed all creation has its being in Him. And since if creation is for the purpose of manifesting the Father's intervention, and all creation is centered in Christ, Christ becomes the sign of that ultimate unity, not only of the Father with the rest of creation, but the unity of all creation as well. Christ in "realizing" the divine plan in himself, has become "the saving reality the one and only saving primordial sacrament... the Sacrament

¹³ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁴ GROOT. J., "The Church as Sacrament of the World", p. 29.

of God."¹⁵ "He is the image of the invisible God and in Him all things came into being. He has priority over everyone and in Him all things hold together." (LG. n. 7). The primacy of the Word in all creation, His assumption of the Father's divine plan, carries our understanding of the sacramentality of the Church further because, as the Word became incarnate, assuming a creaturely form, so has the assembly of believers taken on an historical entity. The humanity itself of Christ becomes visibly extended to this assembly when Christ has been established as Lord in the risen glory of Easter. This assembly becomes the Body of Christ. "As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also the faithful in Christ" (LG. n. 7).

The Father's divine design was efficacious, creative. And so it was carried out by the Word through his total obedience to the Father. And since the very idea of the "mysterion" was to manifest God's saving intervention in an earthly manner, Christ was constituted the redeeming Messiah in his paschal sacrifice, by which His Body and His humanity, was to respond in an obedient "Amen" both for himself and vicariously for all the created order as it is summed up in Him. It is at this stage of the unfolding of the divine design, that Christ as it were is "frozen" as Lord of all creation, and as such mankind becomes definitively riveted to him. Through Christ's paschal glory, the assembly of believers enters a more incarnate phase, at once the sign of the triumphant Lord, as well as the sign of creation's groaning till it is perfected. In the Christ-Event "the final age of the world has already come upon us. The renovation of the world has been irrevocably decreed and in this age is already anticipated in some real way" (LG.n. 48). But the actual birth of the Church, fully constituted in her sign-role, is yet to be finalized, actually realized, and extended. The union between mankind and Christ cannot be accomplished only through Christ's vicarious sacrifice. The community of mankind has to incorporate itself truly to the constituted sign-Christ. Only when it is thus incorporated will mankind cease to be simply an amorphous part of the created order and really become a witness to the saving grace at work, and be a brotherhood in Christ. For this, however, mankind needs to receive the Spirit of Christ, Who is Christ's response of love and obedience to the Father's mission. With the advent of the Spirit, the sacramental character of mankind will acquire its final earthly dimensions-centered on the Church which is now fully constituted a sign.

The Abiding Spirit in the Church.

"Because the Church is a Spirit-filled and Spirit-directed reality, she possesses the qualities that are distinctive of the Spirit of God; openness, freedom, inwardness, growth, diversity and fullness of life."¹⁶

¹⁵ SCHILLEBEECKX, E., *Christ the Sacrament*, London 1963, p. 47.

¹⁶ McNAMARA, K., "The Holy Spirit in the Church", FLANAGAN, D. (ed) *The Meaning of the Church*, Dublin 1966, p. 29.

"When the work which the Father had given the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might forever sanctify the Church, and thus all believers would have access to the Father through Christ in the one Spirit." (LG. n. 4). The Church then, while properly the Body of Christ, comes into being and is energized by the abiding presence of the given Holy Spirit. "The Church is not simply a Christological, it is also a Pneumatological reality."¹⁷ It is the spirit that gives the Church her visible structure in that He alone unites men into the Body of Christ through faith and baptism. The disciples of Christ were properly constituted as such when "Christ poured out on them the Spirit promised by the Father. From this source, the Church receives the mission to proclaim and to found among all people the kingdom of Christ" (LG. n. 5). Only with the advent of the Holy Spirit is Christ properly the mediator "sustaining here on earth His Holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity— as an organism with visible delineation through which he communicates truth and grace to all" (LG. n. 5). In a beautiful analogy, the Council portrays the Church in her visible structure as serving the Spirit of Christ, in the same way that the assumed nature of Christ's humanity is inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word. (cf. LG. n. 8).

The sign-character of the Church reaches yet another phase—and in history its final phase— when the full revelation of the Father's divine design is manifested through the humanity of the Son, Who, in achieving His risen glory, imparts to the assembly of believers (who will henceforth signify Him) the Abiding Holy Spirit, Who is in turn the full and authentic expression of the redemption of the world. "The Holy Spirit dwells in the Church... bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons ... and gives her a unity of fellowship and service" (LG. n. 4).

Finally it is through the Holy Spirit and in Him that the Church becomes that unique sign, in that now not only does it signify unity but "also is the instrument of that union and unity." Unlike other signs the Church not only points to the full reality of God's unifying saving design but it is so united to that reality, that it partakes of its creative efficacy. And in terms of salvation-history, this comes about when the "community of faith, hope and charity" are gathered together "reliving" God's saving intervention on their behalf, through the sacramental, liturgical action. The acts of Christ the Man is also that of the Uncreated Word; these historical actions of Christ are possessed also of the eternity of the Word. The liturgy then is the community's re-creating of Christ's actions and partakes of that over present efficacy coming from the action of Christ the Man, hypostatically united to the Word. In virtue of the priesthood they share with the High Priest, the community articulates to the whole world the unity it signifies and which is achieved through

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 29.

it. In this repeated articulations the Church communicates with the world. Herbert McCabe, O.P. in an interesting article develops this theme by making an analogy of the Church with language and communication. He concludes: "Now we are the Church. I mean by virtue of our participation in the sacramental order, we become ourselves the language of God in the world. We become the medium of communication between the Father and men. I mean that the Church does not exist so that its members may be in contact with the Father but so that mankind may—so that the Word may—become secular. The Father is not, you might say, interested in Christians, he is interested in people; the Church is the sacramental expression of that interest."¹⁸

And so the Father's divine design is realized in and given expression through the Church. She stands as the dual sign of: the presence of God in man's history (and their consequent union) and also the unity among men. From the beginning the Church was chosen as the primordial sign of unity: the unity of creation, the unity progressively explicitated in view of Christ, through chosen "remnants" of the community of mankind; she is the sign of the union finally effectually uniting man with God and with one another—through the Spirit of Christ. And because of her intimate relationship with Christ, she is both an accomplished sign-reality, suffused with the glory of the Risen Lord, and an accomplishing community still wending its ways to the fullness of truth and grace.

This analysis of the sign-character of the Church as founded in the mystery of the Trinity, in its eternal self-giving, is the background of Vatican II's presentation of the Church. On this sign-character hinge many of the insights of the Council, not only in her self-understanding and mission but also in the relevant principles which must activate her in her present historical situation. The council has given us its vision of a reflecting Church. A Church whose history is embedded in the mystery of the Trinity; a Church caught up in time, slowly unfolding with the rhythm of creation. The Council even suggests a Church with a mood, a mood of reflection and assessment, inspired by an abiding, and sanctifying Spirit but burdened with imperfections of a people, chosen but sinful. We see a Church with an urgent mission to be truly universal yet hesitant on how to approach elements already reflecting qualities of oneness with her. We see a respectful Church, seeing unifying values already at work outside her heretofore known boundaries. We are given an image of a Church summing herself up as a sign, a universal, all embracing sign whose new found dimensions are as extensive as the whole creation. We see a "Christ-Church" both incarnate and glorious.

¹⁸ McCABE, H., "The Church and the World". *The Meaning of the Church*. FLANAGAN, A. (ed) Dublin, 1966, p. 67.

II

In the first part of the paper we dealt with the theological significance of the Church's rediscovered concept of herself as a Sign. In the second part we will try to see how the Council uses this concept to depth herself, and thereby reflect her sign-character to herself. We will glean through the documents how the Church will address herself to the world, to other Christian communities, and to non-Christian communities.

One underlying principle of 'operation' resulting from this awareness of herself as a sign of unity, is the Church's readiness to accept and appreciate all intervention of God. Hence "Gaudium et Spes" looks at the 'signs of the times,' appreciating man and his diversified and evolving cultures, his scientific progress; social and economic as well as political movements which serve to bring about a community of brotherhood. In short, the Church expresses how she values the dignity of man, and her interest in all his secular involvement. "In the exercise of all their earthly activities, they can thereby gather their humane, domestic, professional, social and technical enterprises into one vital synthesis with religious values, under whose supreme direction all things are harmonized unto God's glory" (GS. n. 43). This readiness to stand as the unifying reality of all that exists, gives new direction to theology. Among other things, the Council appears to have reformulated her understanding of religious freedom, her concept of missionary mandate, ecumenism, education, secular involvement, her liturgy, her hierarchical makeup, her earthly dimension. She can, for example, see a more authentic meaning to her hierarchical structures, and especially in the collegiality of the episcopate, as itself an expression of her unifying sacramental nature. She sees herself eminently as standing aloft as the sign of unity in her celebration of the liturgy which she calls "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed . . . the fountain from which all her power flows" (Lit. n. 10). In the liturgy she truly is an instrument and a sign of unity. This applies specially in the liturgy of the Eucharist which is "a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace . . ." (Lit. n. 48). These and many other principles are the overflow of the Church's fresh awareness of herself as a sacrament.

The Church then is the sign of union with God, and of unity among men. She is so because she is a mystery whose very foundation is the unity of the Trinity:" The highest exemplar and source of this mystery is the unity, in the Trinity of Persons, of one God, the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit" (Ecu. n. 2). As a sign she is "like a standard lifted high for all the nations to see." (Is. 11:10). We will now turn to see how she is a standard lifted up for herself to see, for the world in which she finds herself.

and for those who have not yet heard the gospel of Christ. As she confidently undertakes to "explain to everyone how she conceives her presence and activity in the world of today" (GS. n. 2), she is posing a challenge to her own resources to be "living witnesses to him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity . . ." (LG. n. 12).

Sign unto Herself.

"The Church is in the world, and by the effect of her presence alone she communicates to it an unrest which cannot be soothed away. She is a perpetual witness to Christ who came to shake human life to its foundation, and it is a fact that she appears in the world as a "great ferment of discord."¹⁰

—Henri De Lubac—

Many have observed that the calling of the Council can only mean that the Church is in crisis. The Church is in crisis, not unto extinction but unto awakening as to her true nature. To many she has increasingly fallen into the temptation of complacency, content simply to safeguard the treasures of revelation entrusted to her, and preoccupied with keeping the undesirable incursions of the world from contaminating her. With the Council she has reawakened to her being the sign of unity. This unexpected "reawakening" is but another facet of the Church, namely that she is at the same time a "ferment of discord." This must not be understood in an alienatory sense, but rather in that continuous purification, shaking off foreign incrustations that accrue to her in her earthly pilgrimage. Through this shaking-off process she is insuring her fidelity to her sign-character. Only in this way can she claim that she adheres to her fundamental, pristine conception, pointing to the total reality to which all are destined to belong. The Council has done this when it calls the Church to self-renewal, and by it to be a witness to the world. She herself urges the world to shake off untruths, pretenses and barriers, and in this way she is acting as a "ferment of discord"; this will allow both to travel through history more ready for the final summons to unity.

Discussing the Church's witness to herself will be done by reverting to three biblical themes essential to the Church. They are martyrion, diakonia and koinonia = witness, ministry or service and fellowship. Our aim here is to show through the pages of "Lumen Gentium" how the Church wishes to project herself under these three aspects, first to herself, then as extended to the whole world.

¹⁰ DE LUBAC, H., *The Splendour of the Church*. London, 1956, p. 133.

Her Witness Role.

"Lumen Gentium" calls attention to many aspects of ecclesial witness, but always insisting that his witnessing is most effective through self-awareness and renewal. In effect the Council is throwing the weight of responsibility where it belongs: to the people of God. "This sacred synod turns its attention first on the Catholic faithful" (LG. n. 14). Too long has it been shouldered by the hierarchy, priests and religious, almost to the exclusion of the laity. Now, the Council says witness belongs to the whole Body of Christ, because each is in possession of the unifying Spirit, and each is in turn possessed by the Spirit of Unity, and therefore in each one, there is realized the concept of the Church. However, this order of grace is as yet an invisible mystery, and must be given visibility, namely through corporate witnessing-the Church. But, having human elements, and involved in human history, there are times when this witness role is at a low ebb, and the world does not feel her humanizing influence. "The Church, at once visible assembly and a spiritual community, goes forward together with humanity, and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society" (LG. n. 40). But this very leaven is "but an assemblage of men who always fall short of what God requires of them and who therefore need forgiveness."²⁰ The Council expressed this by borrowing a phrase from the classic Protestant formula "ecclesia semper reformanda" (Edu. n. 6). But this need for reform, even from sinful slips, must not be looked upon as a shame but in fact be a test of the Church's faith in the mystery of her nature. "The Church as she actually lives, suffers and in many parts rot, remains also for us a test of faith."²¹ And this must be so because such is the history of mankind since "men had fallen in Adam" (LG. n. 2). Adam's failure to ratify the professed covenant with God was the beginning of mankind's history of disunity, a disunity which will remain like a scar in him despite the healing action of Christ. Man will continually need this reminder that he is meant to be one with God and with his fellowmen, and carries with it the responsibility of conversion. In the Church and the World being witness to each other in this regard, the Body of Christ too benefits because ecclesial witness is enhanced.

For this important responsibility, the baptised need to be radicated in the Church, attentive to the stirrings of the Spirit within her and at the same time aware of the signs of the times. It is the particular apostolate of the laity to balance the interplay of his secular involvement with his religious purification. He becomes a powerful instrument, witnessing to the universal call to holiness: "Established by Christ as a fellowship of life, charity of truth, they

²⁰ DULLES, A., *Ibid.* p. 8

²¹ RAINER, H., "The Church, God's Strength in Human Weakness," in *The Church* New York 1964, p. 9.

are also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all and are sent forth into the whole world as the light of the world and salt of the earth" (LG. n. 9). Lest however, this task appear to be too great for accomplishment there is the reassurance that "The Church is strengthened by the power of God's grace promised to her by the Lord, so that in the weakness of the flesh she may not waver from perfect fidelity, but remain a bride worthy of her Lord" (LG. n. 9). Similarly in the decrees affecting bishops, priests and religious, this call to renewal appears in various guises. "The profession of the evangelical counsels, then, appears as a sign which can and ought to attract all the members of the Church to an effective and prompt fulfillment of the duties of their Christian vocation" (LG. n. 44). They are like "blazing emblems" (Rel. n. 1) forcing others to take note of this purification unto witness.

This emphasis on internal witness as the most effective way of revealing more clearly the nature and mission of the Church, offers theology a challenge. Here is a felt need affecting the reflecting Church, and theology can supply the light of development. For example the decree brings out as never before, the vast resource there is in the laity. Hence a theology on their state, their apostolate, their charism; a development of the *sensus fidelium*: "The Body of the Faithful cannot err in matters of belief" (LG. n. 12). There are ample leads for theology to help unfold the Council's insight on her witness-role.

Fellowship in the Church.

It can be truly said that the Council ushered in the age of fellowship, of community consciousness. One only need to look at her "people of God" theme, the "community of mankind" theme and the many efforts she makes to reach out to other Churches and communions, and statements of her being one with them in "joy and hope" to feel fresh direction in her growing consciousness of herself. For one thing, this sense of community moves away from the too individualistic view of redemption. Salvation comes precisely in being incorporated into the community of believers: "All men are called to belong to the new People of God" (LG. n. 13); "All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the People of God—a unity which is a harbinger of the universal peace it promotes" (LG. n. 13). Fellowship is essential to the Church because it witnesses to Christ, the head of the *koinonia*, Who is Himself the rallying point of unity. "This characteristic of universality which adorns the people of God is a gift from the Lord Himself. For this reason the Catholic Church strives energetically and constantly to bring all humanity with all its riches back to Christ its head, in the unity of His Spirit" (LG. 13).

The Church manifests this fellowship in an eminent way when she acts as one in the sacred liturgy, particularly the Eucharistic liturgy "which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life . . . strengthened anew at the Holy

Table by the Body of Christ, they manifest in a practical way that unity of God's people which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most awesome sacrament" (LG. n. 11). By her liturgy she is witnessing to herself the achieved and perfect union with God, as well as the unity among the worshippers. In this she presents herself to other Churches and communions and to the whole community of mankind, the goal to which they are going. While claiming this, the Council hastens to add that the fellowship, especially in worship as found outside the Catholic Church, is often a source of grace and union. (Theology receives another impetus for study in this matter.) These communities are "related in various ways to the People of God, and in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit" (LG. n. 15). This concept of fellowship is an offshoot of her principal rediscovery of herself as sign. And it widens her dimensions by looking at herself as walking in fellowship with the rest of the community of mankind. Instead of emphasizing the elements of division, the Church now looks at fellowship, no matter how incipient, as an omen of a unity to be aimed at. Once again, much theological study can be devoted to this emphasis on fellowship.

The Ministry of Service.

Henri De Lubac quotes Karl Barth as saying that "if the Church has no end other than service of herself, she carries upon her the stigma of death."²² This truth must have been before the Council too. "The Council focuses its attention on the world of men, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which that family lives" (GS. n. 2). She is aware of her duties "to read and interpret the signs of the times in the light of the gospel" in order that she can "respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come and about the relationship of one to another" (GS. n. 4). The Council realizes that the Church has one fundamental ministry, the service of the Word: "to bring good news to the poor and to heal the contrite of heart" (LK. 4:18). But while she is outgoing in her service, the Council rightly feels that she must define more clearly to herself the basis and goal of such service. And most importantly clearly define the scope of the service of the ministers ordained to carry out this service. And since the Will of the Lord is that the good news be spread through the apostles, the Council now turns its attention to their successors and helpers.

Chapter 3 of "Lumen Gentium" deals with hierarchical structure of the episcopate. Here in some way, theology has come to completion. Vatican I concerned itself almost exclusively with defining papal prerogatives and giving scant notice to the episcopate. Vatican II turns its focus on the bishops as

²² DE LUBAC, H., *Ibid.* p. 165.

focal points of unity in their office. "In the bishop, Our Lord . . . is present in the midst of those who believe" (LG. n. 21). The Decree traces the historical foundation of the bishop's eminence in the Church: "In order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in Him a permanent and visible foundation of unity of faith and fellowship" (LG. n. 18). He is in his person, a sign of unity. And so just as undoubtedly Vatican I was a council of the papacy, Vatican II is hailed as the Council of the episcopacy.

The doctrine of episcopal collegiality can be summed up thus: Just as, by the Lord's will, St. Peter and the other apostles constituted one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff as the successor of Peter, and the bishops as successors of the Apostles are joined together" LG. n. 22). And as a college therefore, the episcopal body is subject of supreme and full power, together with its head, the Pope, over the universal Church. But supreme power is not the main focus of the doctrine of collegiality. "The real and primary meaning of collegiality is the reality of the many in the one, the plurality of the many local churches within one Church."²³ The very institutionality of the Church becomes a sign of unity, and it serves the members of the Church to see this. "This variety of local churches with the common aspiration is particularly splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church" (LG. n. 23).

So important is the role of the bishops in the eyes of the Council that it ended the theological dispute about the nature of episcopal consecration declaring it a sacrament, and indeed "the fullness of the sacrament of orders . . . the apex of the sacred ministry" (LG. n.21). In thus presenting the role of the bishop too monolithic picture of the Church is avoided. By drawing attention on the local community ruled over by a bishop, the Council presents a more faithful image of the Church according to the will of the Lord. "In any community existing around an altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, there is manifested a symbol of charity and unity of the Mystical Body, without which there can be no salvation. In these communities, though frequently small and poor, or living far from any other, Christ is present" (LG. n. 26). Theology gains a further depth in such a presentation, as it sees the mystery of the Church in each local diocese, each local Church ruled by a bishop. In the words of Karl Rahner: "The Church alone, in contrast to all other societies, has this unique characteristic that she can appear as a microcosm of herself in any one place."²⁴ What the constitution has to say of priests and the

²³ RYAN, S. "Episcopal Consecration: The Fullness of the Sacrament of Order" in *Irish Theological Quarterly*, October, 1965, p. 296.

²⁴ CUNANE, J. "The Local Church." FLANAGAN, D. (ed), *The Meaning of the Church*. Dublin 1966. p. 74.

restored order of deacons amplifies the importance of the local church and the service and ministry of the bishop. And in so enlarging on this, the Church's service outside her own structures will become more widespread and be more truly catholic.

And so the Church renews herself through self-understanding. She looks within and works upon her elements, giving each an understanding of his individual role as witness to each other within the community of the Church. And this witness overflows and gives strength and authenticity to the witness of the community to the rest of creation. "Lumen Gentium" has opened out new horizons in this gesture of being a "ferment of discord" to herself. Through it she is enabled to situate herself in her relations with the world. Her task now is "to accord a genuine, an entirely unfeigned recognition to the real values that separated brethren and the secular world independently possess and . . . make a humble and ministerial offer of what we can give, in the hope that it will be freely accepted."²⁵

The Church as Sign to the World.

"That the earthly and the heavenly city penetrate each other is a fact accessible to faith alone. It remains a mystery of human history, which sin will keep in great disarray until the splendor of God's sons is fully revealed. Pursuing the saving purpose which is proper to her, the Church not only communicates divine life to men, but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth."

— "Gaudium et Spes, n. 40" —

"Lumen Gentium" has looked into the Church's inner self and rediscovered that the unifying principle of her nature is her sign-character. We see in the pages of the pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, how this sign-character overflows into the world as a necessary consequence, since the Church as a "community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history" (GS. n. 1). We have said above that one major result of the Church's self-understanding is her readiness to appreciate and accept realities and values which she finds in her pilgrim state. "Gaudium et Spes," is perhaps the most eloquent expression of this appreciation. It truly sets forth another dimension of the modern Church, namely the depth of her involvement in man, his world, and history and culture. The document itself disclaims that it is proposing anything new which redefines

²⁵ MACKAY, J. "Tradition and Change in the Church," FLANAGAN, D. (ed) *The Meaning of the Church*, Dublin 1966, p. 48.

her involvement in the world. It claims simply "to present teaching already accepted in the Church, relying on the Word of God and the spirit of the Gospel" (GS. n. 91). Nevertheless, there are characteristics of the document that point to the Church's new awareness of herself in her relations with the world. The whole document is called a pastoral constitution but is replete with dogmatic truths. Its tone is not that of the *Civitas*,²⁶ but as being at the service of the family of man. It addresses itself, "not only to the sons of the Church and to all who invoke the name of Christ but to the whole of humanity" (GS. n. 2) offering its service of "scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel" (GS. n. 4). It believes it gives mankind this service because "it raises anxious questioning about . . . the meaning of his individual and collective strivings and about the ultimate destiny of reality and of humanity" (GS. n. 3).

This paper set out merely to establish that whatever "new dimensions" the Church has assumed since the Council, spring from her realization of herself as the sacrament of union with God, and unity among men. For this reason it will content itself with picking out the salient features in the document that shows this. "*Gaudium et Spes*" complements the picture of the Church in realities which pertains to man in his life here below and which confronts him whether he is a believer or not."²⁷ The constitution itself describes its focus of attention "on the world of men, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which that family lives. It gazes upon the world which is the theater of man's history, and carries the marks of his energies, his tragedies, and his triumphs; that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker's love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ" (GS. n.2). By so addressing the world, the Constitution presses home its relevance to the total structure of life, and not be considered a supererogatory reality, that may or may not be seriously taken account of. The whole tone of the document implies that the Church is to be taken as a secular reality ("it is in the world's interest to acknowledge that the Church as a historical reality" (GS. n. 44) incarnate and meaningful to all the activities of man "his joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties . . . indeed nothing human fails to raise an echo in their (Christian's) hearts" (GS. n. 1). The Council is very much aware of the trend in modern secular thinking; it is equally aware of the rejection of absolute supernaturalism, traditionally associated with the Church. In this constitution, the Council has successfully instituted dialogue with this mentality

²⁶ CAMPION, D., "Introduction to '*Gaudium et Spes*'" ABBOTT, W. (ed) *The Documents of Vatican II* New York 1966 p. 185.

²⁷ DULLES, A., *Ibid.* p. 66.

when it sets out to say that there is a positive relationship between earthly realities and the sacral order. "While we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gains the whole world and lose himself, the expectation of the new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age" on this earth that kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns, it will be brought into full flower" (GS. n. 39). This is the secular dimension which the Church has assumed, a dimension so consonant with her as leaven in the world." In so doing, however, she in no way dims her sacred character but in fact it becomes more visible and is truly made sacramental.

"*Gaudium et Spes*" speaks to men in this world. Chapters 11-45 deals with man, his vocation, dignity and goal. It declares "...the pivotal point of our total presentation will be man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will" (GS. n. 3). And in the whole of its treatment on man and his activities, the document is deliberately recognizing the positive traits in him. Here one can glean the effort of the Church to reach out to man in his present milieu. "One is struck by the document's evident openness to fundamental elements in the intellectual climate of 20th century civilization, to the dimensions of human culture, opened up by advances in the historical, social and psychological sciences".²⁹ While registering awareness of all these advancements, however, the Council is not prevented from noting that these very advancements create for men many problems such as over-socialization and its consequent dehumanization, loss of identity. The Church is aware of this and sympathetic but in a most humble admission she proclaims that she has not "always at hand the solution to particular problems" (GS. n. 33). However, it goes on to assure that in what man cannot find a solution from his experiences, the Church can offer him the light of revealed truth. And this is precisely her mission and her contribution to the world today. "The Church brings to mankind light kindled from the gospel, and puts at its disposal those saving resources which the Church herself, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, receives from her Founder" (GS. n. 3). And so while the community of man is brought together by common endeavour for progress, this coming together is also for the good of the Church because her mission is "that the kingdom of God may come, and the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass" (GS. n. 45). The document speaks at great length on the activities of men and nations. But its great insight which throws light on all the Church's teachings

²⁹ CAMPION, D. *Ibid.* p. 185.

stems from her acceptance of the historical development of the world, giving its progress great positive values. The document goes so far as to say that this very same experience of the world, which helps to bring the community of mankind together, is contributory to her own mission of doing the same under the leadership of Christ. This interdependence of two autonomous societies is a healthy prospect for arriving at the fullness of truth and grace already at work, in both.

The whole slant of the document is on man as he is open to communion with God. Man is paramount because "he gathers to himself the elements of the material world. Thus they reach their crown through him and through him raise their voice in free praise of the creator" (GS. n.14). For this reason man must be guaranteed his freedom to follow this exalted call. His conscience "is the most secret core and sanctuary of his being. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths" (GS. n.16). For this reason he must enjoy liberty of conscience, the free pursuit of his human dignity and creativeness. While the document decries atheism, the Church calls for a sincere and prudent dialogue with atheists, conscious of the weighty questions they raise. (cf. GS. nn.20-21). In the Council's call for consecration of the world, as being the special apostolate of the Christian, he is directed to do so not by apartness or withdrawal, but through involvement in it, and this witness to the congruity and complementarity of the Church in the world. At the same time it cautions against indiscriminate identification because by virtue of her mission and nature "she (the Church) is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system" (GS. n.42). The most notable advance which was formulated by the Council on this matter is the recognition of the autonomy of secular values, with which she lives and from which she can profit. This however, with a view of bringing all these values to perfection. "The Church and the world coexist in polar tension. Neither can get along without the other, but each retains its own nature and principles."²⁰

Much was said on social justice, politics, economics and the proper development of cultures. All of which she undertakes to fill with her unifying dynamism, in her consciousness of herself as the sign of that unity which allows honest dialogue. "By virtue of her mission to shed on the whole world the radiance of the gospel message, and to unify under one Spirit all men of whatever nation, race or culture, the Church stands forth as a sign of that brotherliness which allows dialogue and invigorates it" (GS. n. 92). And as such, she shows herself as the one reality capable of embracing the universality of men, serving them and their diverse activities, in their progress, as well as their anxieties and longings. Like the world in regard to its history, "the Church's pilgrimage follows a tortuous route; it struggles against

²⁰ DULLES, A., *Ibid.* p. 84.

internal weaknesses and external affliction" but unlike it, she can always confidently" count upon new outpourings of the Holy Spirit."³⁰ With a vision such as this, theology embarks on a more dynamic view of the Church; she is a living, historical reality and as such is subject to human fallibility, in great need of new and ever deepening insights into her nature, presence and mission in an evolving world. In a magnificent conclusion the document reiterates the very reason she has undertaken this dialogue with the world. "By thus giving witness to the truth, we will share with others the mystery of the heavenly Father's love. As a consequence men throughout the world will be aroused to a lively hope—the gift of the Holy Spirit—that they will finally be caught up in peace and utter happiness in the fatherland radiant with the splendour of the Lord." (GS. n. 93).

The Church's Ecumenical Breadth.

"Gaudium et Spes," in reaching out for relevance in the world has taken for the spanning element—man. Man's very nature effects an interdependence between the Church and the secular complex. The total experience gained through this mutual assistance helps to give man a total personality and identity. Man is then acting out the unifying, sacramental intent given him by God. But the baptised can give an even deeper level of unit. The Council gave Christian baptism an unusually big prominence (cf. LG. nn. 11, 14, 33). It is baptism which consecrates man into the worshipping body of Christ, and baptism too is man's response to proclaiming his faith in Jesus Christ. It is the beginning of the Christian life, it is the call to the apostolate and the Church's mission, the share in the priestly, kingly and prophetic role of the Lord. And most important, the documents make baptism the rallying point for Christian unity with the Oriental Churches and in some measure some of the Western communions. "The Church recognizes that in many ways she is linked with those who being baptized, through which they are united with Christ ... In some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit" (LG. n. 15).

Pope John XIII envisaged an ecumenical council, and Vatican II fully fulfilled this inspired vision. Because the Council was drawn to that one unifying, sacramental reality of the Church, that it gave the modern Church an image in which all can find a home. And it is still ever striving to unify all, and in so doing fulfil its mission. "The church, rather than containing the totality of salvation, points towards it, and strives by its prayers and labours to actualize God's kingdom among men."³¹ Christ is the salvation of mankind, baptism in Him is the salvation of the Christian community. And since the Church is Christ's body, she must enfold all those who are baptised in Him. The ecumenical movement depends for its possibility on Christian

³⁰ DULLES, A., *Ibid.* p. 30.

³¹ DULLES, A., *Ibid.* p. 27.

baptism. Although in the past, the Catholic Church recognized the validity of baptism as administered in other Christian communions, she was too wary of accepting the consequence of such recognition. However, with ecumenism she has, I believe, dropped her reticence, and saw the many baptised. And her present mood is to highlight these common elements rather than insist on the many and great differences that exist. She still laments this division. "The divisions among Christian prevent the Church from effecting the fullness of catholicity proper to her in those of her sons who, though joined to her by baptism are yet separated from full communion with her" (Ecu. n. 4). Though many objections were made about the patronizing tone of the document, as many were amazed not only that such a document was produced, but also at the tone of humility and contrition with which the Council approached the question of the division. "Thus, in humble prayer, we beg pardon of God and of our separated brethren, just as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Ecu. n. 7). Ecumenism in the mind of the Council is not an end, but only the beginning, since very real differences make ultimate union impossible at the moment. Instead however, of making union the ultimate view of ecumenism and in so doing to ignore differences, the Council urged fidelity to the various heritage of the Churches and communions. For her own part, she sees this self-renewal as the most fruitful start from which to embark on the quest for unity. "Every renewal of the Church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity of her own calling . . . Church renewal has notable ecumenical importance" (Ecu. n. 6).

The decree on Ecumenism has enhanced the sign-character of the Church. In it the Church once more shows her widening vision of herself, able to embrace in charity and brotherhood men who follow Christ according to their imperfect lights. The "ecumenical movement means those activities and enterprises which according to various needs of the Church and opportune occasions, are started and organized for the fostering of unity among Christian" (Ecu. n. 4). These activities are stirrings of the Holy Spirit, active in the baptized to end the evil and painful consequences of disunity. In the preamble, it laments that "this discord openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature" (Ecu. n. 1). Not only is disunity such a scandal to the non Christians, but it impedes the growth and self-expression of the Church itself. "Since the Church is one, and any curtailment of its development is a restriction imposed on it as a whole, a certain impoverishment of religious life ensues even for those who are fully her members, so that the Church is simply deprived of a certain measure of growth that should be hers. To this extent her vitality is diminished and her efficacy as a sign in the eyes of the world is impaired."³²

³² McNAMARA, K., "Notes and Comments-Decree on Ecumenism," *Irish Theological Quarterly*, April 1965, p. 132.

True to the dynamic vision she has of herself as a living part of world history, the decree here does not intend simply to call for the return of the erring to the fold of truth' which she claims subsists in herself in its fullness. Rather it urges a forward movement of mutual appreciation of goals, which will come through study, and prayer. The decree urges a constant fidelity to the "common endowments that go to build up and give life to the Church. . . written word of God; the life of grace, faith, hope and charity, interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as 'visible elements,' in some cases sacraments" (Ecu. n. 3). In the study of experts the decree cautions against "words, judgments and actions which do not respond to the condition of separated brethren." It also avoided defining membership but instead speaks of "brotherhood in the Lord" and "incorporation into Christ," thus not allowing technicalities to hinder the dialogue from starting. And this however, without prejudice to the truth. All this studious effort at stressing positive elements that will contribute to mutual understanding and respect is certainly "a remarkable development—fully in line with Christian principles—in the traditional concept of brotherhood or fellowship."³³ Even in the methods suggested to achieve this unity, there is vibrant hope that this movement will be blessed. And since the Church in the divine design keeps unfolding with the world history, and is therefore in the hands of God, the council ends thus: "This synod declares its realization that the holy task of reconciling all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ transcends human energies and abilities. It therefore places its hope entirely in the prayer of Christ for the Church, in the love of the Father for us, and in the power of the Holy Spirit" (Ecu. n. 24).

There now remains for the limited aim of this paper, the tracing out of theological emphasis found in the decree which will help contribute to the Church's awareness of her sign-character. And these can be gleaned more from the practical principles of application rather than on any dogmatic advance the decree has put forward. Apart from what has already been analysed above which helped to widen our vision of the breadth of the Church, the decree points more on how to begin making this an effective communion. Progress of future ecumenism is guaranteed through mutual awareness of the advances in studies "... biblical and liturgical movements, the preaching of the word of God, and catechetics, the apostolate. . ." (Ecu. n. 6). Simply by working together, there is already shown some kind of unity. Added to this there can be prayer, mutual understanding through discussion, theological dialogue, and common service, especially in missionary areas;" these offer an exciting programme for the Catholics and their brothers in Christ. What theology cannot as yet achieve, "spiritual ecumenism of self-renewal, repentance, prayer together . . . as well as educational ecumenism of getting to know each other at

³³ *Ibid.* p. 135.

all levels. . . . and also social ecumenism of common service to mankind in the name of Christ will undoubtedly approach the unity to which their Lord is calling Christians."³⁴

More is said about real unity with the Oriental Churches. This is expressed in the esteem in which the Roman Church holds these venerable seats of Christianity. The decree urges preservation of the various rites for these too, manifest "unity in diversity." Other things set forth in the decree have in some ways been discussed in the principles of ecumenism and in the nature of the Church set out in "Lumen Gentium."

The Missionary Church and the Non-Christian Communities.

The reflecting Church has come to some 'new' understanding about herself, in her rediscovered sign-character. But all this will be fruitless if the efforts do not materialize in giving the Church her true identity as "light of all nations . . . shedding on all men that radiance of His which brightens the countenance of the whole Church." Her renewals will be unavailing if she does not go out "to proclaim the gospel to every creature" (LG. n. 1). And so we finally look at the missionary activity of the Church, especially to the non-Christian communities and see how this apostolate has profited by the Church's "new Pentecost."

The redeeming values inaugurated by Christ are recognized by the Council, to be at work in the world; for this reason there will not be that same anxiety to transform the "secular" to a sacral order. This is a new outlook, a more incarnate view of the divine design, which includes in its scope all created order. And in many ways there are vestiges of the divine in creation, since all came to be through the creative Word of God. This mentality pervades the whole pastoral Constitution, which avows that man is the focus of its attention since he is "the image of God" and in him alone can the fullness of God's redeeming presence in the world be manifested. This reverent regard for man, his culture and his aspiration finds an echo in the pages of both decrees, on Missionary Activity and on Non-Christian communities. And yet one cannot mistake the sense of urgency felt by the Church to go out and proclaim the gospel of Christ to these. But it is not for the purpose of conversion, in the old accepted sense of the word, but rather a bringing out of the "secret presence of God" (Mission, n. 9) that is there. The whole tone of the Church's mission must be that the unbaptized "be shown the real truth about their condition and their total vocation" (Mis. n. 8). The Church's efforts must not be viewed so that she will draw in, but she must go out and in so doing "undertake a new Epiphany of God's will" (Mis. n. 9).

³⁴ McDONAGH, E., "Notes and Comments-Decree on Ecumenism," *Irish Theological Quarterly*, April 1965, p. 150.

The missionary essence of the Church comes from the universal salvific will of God. This will be concretized in the visible Church but is not exhausted by it. The Church achieved this state of glorification with the glorified Lord. But this same Church, by reason of her sign-character is still in its pilgrimage, and so is operating to achieve the final glory of its own incarnate nature. It cannot therefore ignore its present state where it exists simultaneously with men who are not yet on her level of salvific awareness that has come with the Lord Jesus. The Church must continually extend its light to these men, offering and inviting them "to enter into a salvation that is the completion of their own salvation-situation"³⁵ Karl Rahner sums it up thus; "When the Christian now preaches Christianity to the non-Christian, he will no longer proceed so much from the idea of transforming the other into something which he plainly has not been heretofore, but rather he will attempt to bring him to himself."³⁶

The decree uses the biblical image of the "gentes" to further emphasize the urgency which she wants to convey with regard to the mission. It must be a mission of presence, a presence that unites and effects unity. All her activities must show herself as this sign-character of unity, able to embrace whatever is native to the people and to the geographical place. "Missionary activity therefore must consist first of all and specifically in setting up this sign among more and more people who have not yet known Christ through a Church firmly established among them"³⁷ This, rather than a preoccupation with individual conversion or mere numbers or statistics as the primary task of the mission, stems from that rediscovered theme of a dynamic People of God involved in History. And more fundamentally it stems back to that Pauline basis for mission, namely the misterion conceived in the mystery of the Trinity. "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" (Mis. n. 2). One thought to conclude this section is the Church's appreciation of the non-Christian religions: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true in these. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct . . . which often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men" (Non-Christians, n. 2).

By way of summary, Vatican II presented us with a reflecting Church, and in that same pose she is very much a living sacrament of the saving presence of God in man's history. We saw her seek to discover herself in the mysterious heights of her trinitarian foundations. So bound with her Founder, Jesus Christ, she took on an incarnate form and a hierarchical structure and

³⁵ SCHIÖNENBERG, P. "The Church and Non-Christian Religions", FLANAGAN, D. (ed) *The Meaning of the Church*, Dublin 1966 p. 107.

³⁶ RAHNER, K., *The Church after the Council*, New York, 1966, p. 64.

³⁷ HILMAN, E., "The Main Task of the Mission" in *Concilium* March, 1966, p. 4.

is sealed unto eternity by the abiding presence of the Spirit. Suffused in her divine origin and goal, she is constituted the leaven and soul of the created world, which is itself bearer of the action of God, in His total plan of unifying all created elements through man, who has been redeemed by the New Man, Jesus Christ. The vision of the Church as a "people of God" is extended to those others who have been dignified by the name of Christian through their faith and baptism. And all the baptized combine to present the Church to those who have not yet heard the gospel of Christ, as the unifying promise of God to all men. The whole vision of Vatican II regarding the dimensions of the Church is one of expansion, even when the Council is ever so conscious that fulness subsists in that community of fellowship in faith, hope, charity which historically is linked with the Catholic Church. Yet her dimensions will not be complete without mentioning her length, namely her eschatological reality: she is a pilgrim Church ever faithful to her call to holiness which comes to her in her "Amen" to the will of the Father to make all men be in fact, what they were meant to be, the family of God. With her missionary activity she is accomplishing indeed her true nature and mission as sign of union with God and unity among men.

Apart from this sacramental presentation which is surely the major unifying insight, enabling the Church to "determine" her dimensions, Vatican II gave theology fresh leads in the study of the Church. It is true that nothing new has been put forth, but new emphasis have been given on some aspects of the Church, which will need the clarification supplied by theology, as well as the living sense of faith of the faithful. Karl Rahner enumerates these areas at great lengths.³⁶ A look at these will convince one that rather than completing the study of the Church, the Council has only uncovered aspects of the Church to meet urgent needs of the moment. Much of what the Council has stated are inklings of the full reality as yet hidden in the mystery of her being. It is sufficient to say here, that there is a significant development in the area of ecclesiology, after Vatican II has presented us with some "new" images of the Church. Theology, as a service to the reflecting Church must further probe the expanded dimensions opened up by Vatican II. It will seem strange to end on a point that was not once mentioned in the whole paper, but then without Mary, the Church will be deprived of yet another 'dimension.' In a way she cannot be included in the consideration of the dimensions of the Church, no matter how expanded it may now look, because she is beyond the dimensions of the Church insofar as she is the reflection of the Church in its glory achieved fully. "In the most Holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle." (LG. n. 64).

³⁶ RAHNER, K., *Ibid.* p. 91.