

Moving Forward in the Spirit Towards a Renewed Catholicity

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The Present Challenge – The Crisis of Faith

The signs of times seem to be that we are the last generation to live in a culture formed and marked by the Christian faith. Having closed its mind to Christianity, the European culture is itself imploding, as the Christian faith was the common basis. The parallel collapse of faith and culture forces us to ask what the future will be like.

Already in the late sixties Joseph Ratzinger was acutely aware of this collapse in the making. In a booklet from 1970 called *Faith and Future (Glaube und Zukunft)* the future pope predicted that a coming crisis of faith will hit like a storm and tear down the church as we know it. The survival process will be painful and the small communities of those who come out of the difficulties, will have to restart from the beginning. Thus, a simple and more spiritual church will make bigger demands on the individual members.

If this analysis is true, our task is to keep the faith alive here and now and build bridgeheads into the future. The present predicament requires that we all have to ask what we as Christians must do to keep the faith intact among us. In short, what is then the vision which must be sustained, when we as brethren in the faith endeavour to construct together an adequate ecumenical structure?

The Real Danger

Relevant as Ratzinger's analysis is, we must nevertheless bear in mind that we are not the first to fear the future. To take one example, St. Basil the Great in the fourth century wrote: *"A darkness full of gloom and misery has descended on the churches... The terror of universal destruction already hangs over us, yet they (i.e. the faithful with the church leaders) continue to enjoy their rivalries, ignoring the sense of danger"* (*On the Holy Spirit*, 77).

The church survived the crisis of his time, but it is important to note that St. Basil pointed to the internal state of the churches as the real danger in that challenging situation. We recognize a similar situation in our own predicament. Now, as then, party spirit and pride undermine a unified response to the external challenge. The present "darkness full of gloom" must be met in two ways, first by a reconciliation between the churches and second by the renewal of the individual.

It is a matter of fact that the revival of Christian fellowship is the precondition of the revival of the individual. In my opinion, the external and the internal changes are jointly manifested in the institutional collapse – the loss of a Christian community is expressed in a modern variety of gnosticism, as St. Irenaeus of Lyons diagnosed in the middle of the second century, when he wrote: *"among them there is neither a congregation nor a set of doctrines"* (Adv haer III 4,2). The imperative we are confronted with is therefore to rediscover and re-establish among us catholicity as the basis for Christian unity.

The Ecumenical Imperative

When Jesus prayed for his disciples *"that they may all be one... that the world may believe"* (John 17:21), he gave an ecumenical imperative. In order to bear fruit, unity among Christians is required (15:4f). The question is how we are to fulfil his prayer. In well meant ecumenism there is a danger of "indifferentism" – the wilful neglect of real issues – but inversely, there is also the parallel danger in denominational "integralism" – arrogance on behalf of one's own all-consuming tradition.

The Challenge to the Disciples From "the Christians"

Fortunately, we have in the New Testament an example of how the Early Church approached and solved internal division, in the so-called Council of Jerusalem in the year 49. The conflict was caused by St. Paul's mission to the Gentiles which had led to a radical new category of disciples called "Christians", as they were not circumcised Jews (Acts 11:26). The dispute was solved by the intervention of St. Peter who inferred that since the Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit, purifying their hearts by faith, they should not be put under a yoke (Acts 15:8-10). The Decree from the Council accordingly stated that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit to lay upon the baptised Gentiles only "the necessary things", namely *"to abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality"* (Acts 15:28, cf. Rev 2:14).

In short, the Gentiles are obliged to stay away from acts and things which will make them unclean in the eyes of the Jewish disciples but if they adhere to the mentioned prescriptions, they are welcome to worship with their Jewish brethren in the faith. Manifested in the presence of the Spirit, the unity between the Jewish and Gentile believers was expressed in common worship.

The Church of the Gentiles

In his New Testament letters, St. Paul uses his authority as the apostle to the Gentiles to instruct new Christian communities, which he calls "churches". As a matter of fact, the word "church" is closely connected with St. Paul and the people around him (1 Thess 2:14, 2

Thess 1:4, Gal 3:13, Acts 9:31, 20:28). However, his choice of the word is not arbitrary. In the Septuagint, the Greek noun *ekklesia* is used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*, meaning the people of Israel entering into the covenant with Yahweh at Sinai (Deut 5:22, 9:10). Clearly this means that the church is to be understood as the eschatological Israel (cf. Rev 21:12f). It is important to note that the Greek word is also used unassimilated in Latin – *ecclesia*.

The first time we find *ecclesia* in the New Testament is in Acts 9:31 where we read: "*Then the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, she increased in numbers*" (cf. *Orthodox Study Bible*, 1993). It is important to note that here the same word *church* is used to denote the Christian community both universally and locally. When the local churches scattered throughout Judea, Galilee or Samaria come together it is everywhere the same church which is manifested at the different locations.

Institutional and Charismatic Standards

Moreover, St. Luke insists that the different assemblies constituting "the church", are all edified by a double basis of support – living in the fear of the Lord and being comforted by the Holy Spirit. The fear of the Lord expresses the institutional aspect of church life and the strengthening of the Spirit manifests the dynamic side.

In the following chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, this duality is shown in the story of the baptism of the Gentiles. Confronted with a radical new situation, St. Peter meets the challenge by referring to the commanding authority of the risen Lord and while he speaks, we are told, the Holy Spirit falls also on the Gentiles thereby legitimating their baptism (10:39-45, cf. 11:15-18f). The account continues with the spread of the Church from Jerusalem to Antioch and from there, led by the Spirit, to Cyprus (12:24 - 13:1-5).

Thus, the narratives in Acts (6:1-14:27) picture the Church as being led forward by God by responding to external and internal challenges.

The Life of the Church as a "Happening"

Interestingly, in the mentioned quotation from the Acts 9:31, St. Luke expresses this dynamism paradoxically by using the two verbs "build" and "move" in the passive to show how the Church is formed. The fear of the Lord gives the institutional stability which makes possible that the Church is being built up as a house (*oikodomouméne*) while the comfort of the Spirit draws her in the right direction (*poreuoméne*). The Latin translation describes this interconnected process with the word-pair *aedificabur ambulans*. The meaning is that, by

honouring Christ, the Church is built up and moved ahead by the Spirit. Perhaps we can sum this up by saying that the church is a "construction site" based on two weight-carrying pillars – the fear of the Lord and the support of the Holy Spirit – holding the activities together in their rightful place. There is a dynamic balance as the Church, shaped in her respect for Christ and animated by the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, is moved forward.

Christian Pilgrimage

When St. Paul describes the meaning of being Church to the Corinthians he roots the Church in the Old Testament idea of the people of the Covenant and reminds the faithful that they too are pilgrims: *"We walk by faith, not by sight"*. In this world we are away from the Lord. Still, the Apostle insists, *"we have confidence because God has given us the Spirit as guarantee"* (2 Cor 5:7,5 – cf. *Orthodox Study Bible*, 1993, close to the Greek text). To "be on the way" is simply a paraphrase for belonging to the Church (Acts 9:2, 18:25, 19:9,23, 22:4, 24:14,22).

This understanding of the Church as a pilgrim people delineates ecclesial life both internally as externally. The Christian brotherhood inspires mutual respect and love among those who are on the way. On the other hand, their specific lifestyle sets them apart from those outside the community (1 Cor 5:6, cf. 1 Thess 4:12, 1 Tim 3:7). There is a demarcation line between the church and the world, as St. Paul admonishes the faithful: *"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time"* (Col 4:5). Christians are pilgrims – alien citizens (*paroikoi*) – sojourning in a foreign land, to quote St. Peter (1 Pet 2:1).

The Marks of the Church

The faithful constitute themselves as Church by coming together to celebrate Eucharist, we are told in St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:19f). St. Paul explains the constituting meaning of the Eucharist by stating: *"The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread"* (1 Cor 10:16f).

The Greek word for body *soma* can be used to signify both the human body and human society, the family. St. Paul uses this duality to explain the meaning of the Eucharistic bread, thus bringing together here and now the sacrificial body of Christ on the cross with the church as his social body. In short, the eucharistic celebration is community building as the church meets at a given location, unfolding a given ritual with authoritative status (1 Cor 11:23ff).

Baptism and the Unity of the Charisms

In the following chapter St. Paul exemplifies the social character of the Church by also pointing to the sacramental unity given in baptism: *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many"* (1 Cor 12:11-14). In his argumentation, St. Paul lets the Eucharist, baptism and the manifold charisms come together in the unity of the ecclesial body.

Unity in the Faith

The narrative in Acts 9:31, showing how the Church is moved forward by her respect for Christ and the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, is reflected in St. Paul's instruction for the Corinthians: *"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Cor 12:3). The confession of Jesus as the Lord is probably a quotation taken from the catechetical teaching prior to baptism. *"For us"*, he reminds the Corinthians, *"there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist"* (1 Cor 8:6). Thus, the baptised are expected to bind themselves to the professed faith of the Church (cf. Rom 10:9).

Moreover, as the apostle to the Gentiles, it is St. Paul who insists that it is his duty to teach the faith despite opposition within (1 Cor 3:1ff), for the local church has no doctrinal autonomy; hence, he corrects the Corinthians: *"Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached? If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord"* (1 Cor 14:16f).

In his absence the Apostle upholds his authority by sending his delegate Timothy *"who will remind you of my rules in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church"* (1 Cor 4:17). As his faithful son in the Lord, St. Paul concludes his instructions recommending Timothy, as *"he does the work of the Lord, as I also do"* (16:10). Acting in St. Paul's place, Timothy had been installed by the laying of hands and thereby he received the charism for his work in the Apostle's stead. Moreover, St. Paul instructs Timothy to ordain his co-workers in the same manner (2 Tim 1:6, 1 Tim 4:22).

Catholicity Locally and Universally

Clearly, St. Paul requires the Church to be united in the same identity *"everywhere, in every [local] church"*, but he does not therefore use the expression "Catholic Church". This belongs to the next generation.

The first time we meet the word in writing is in the so-called *Martyrdom of Polycarp*. According to St. Irenaeus, Polycarp who, as a young man, had known St. John and others who had seen the Lord, is identified in the text as the "Bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna" (XVI,2). Moreover, in the narrative we are told that Polycarp before his death blessed the Lord as "*the Shepherd of the Catholic Church throughout the world*" (XVIII,1;XIX,2). Furthermore, the inscription to the text is addressed to "*the strangers and sojourners (paraoikia) of the Holy Catholic Church in every place*". In the use of the expression "Catholic Church" both as local and universal communion, we recognise the Pauline understanding of the local church as "*the place in which the whole Catholic Church dwells*" (Zizioulas, 2001, p. 125).

Catholicity as a Qualitative Attribute

Likewise, St. Ignatius of Antioch, a contemporary of Polycarp, uses in his *Letter to the Smyrnaens* (VIII) the word *catholic* to denote the general standards required for the spiritual life in the local church. *Katolikos* (*kath+holos*) means in secular Greek what is according to the rule - whole, full and complete - and Ignatius emphasises that the liturgical proclamation of the Gospel requires correct procedures: "*Wherever the Bishop appears, let the congregation be present; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.*"

The unity required in the Catholic Church entails liturgical consequences: "*Let that be considered a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints. Whatever he approves, this is also pleasing to God, that everything which you do may be secure and valid*" (Smyrnaens, VIII). For validity, the Martyr Bishop uses the Greek word *bebaios*, a juridical term meaning what is "sure", "trustworthy" (cf. Rom 4:16, 2 Cor 1:7).

In a word, the idea of the Catholic Church is from the beginning connected with "validity" as qualification for true church life. This includes also Church orders: "*Without these (the diaconate, presbyters and the bishop) the name of Church is not given*" (Ignatius to the Trallians II:1). Clearly, the word *catholic* is here a qualitative attribute requiring that things are done as they ought to be.

Church in the Making

We started these reflections by asking: What kind of social structure does it take to keep the faith alive? My intention above has been to present the Pauline understanding of the Church as a template. The church is shaped as a dynamic interplay between institutional and charismatic "pillars". As St. Luke presents the Early Church she exists in the unity of being and doing – *aedificabur ambulans in timorem Domini et sancti Spiritus consolationem replebatur*.

The next question is then: How can the insight that "the church is always in the making" lead us forward in our present predicament? Our immediate challenge is, starting with ourselves, to make the Church, in the Spirit, present to Christ's Lordship.

The Internal Challenge

Above, we distinguished between the threat from outside and the threat from inside. For now, we can do little to counter the external danger, except by setting a line in the sand between secular society and the Church. In fact, such a demarcation line is very challenging to draw, but will in given situations and in specific issues serve to protect the Church from imploding. The internal challenge of gnosticism – a situation where "there is neither a congregation nor a set of doctrine" requires a solidarity fittingly called "ecumenism in the trenches" – a church in the making based upon the fear of the Lord and the strengthening of the Holy Spirit.

The Need for a New Commonality

The present collapse of the Christendom model – the temptation to define church life in bureaucratic and juridical terms – necessitates that we must lay a sure foundation in order to pass on our spiritual gifts to future generations.

This is a challenge to us across the denominational lines. To search for ecumenical catholicity as a basis for commonality must be an exercise that transcends what has been called "academic ecumenicism". A liturgical approach would be more constructive, since the Eucharistic celebration, according to St. Paul, manifests the Church as a social reality here and now (1 Cor 11:18). Perhaps we can find the basis for a new commonality in the light of the Council in Jerusalem by asking: What are "the necessary things" for common worship?

Unity in Diversity

If liturgical doing and making is the essential constituent of the Church, it might also be helpful to look at the practice of the Undivided Church in the late part of the first millennium. At that time, without causing schism, doctrinal unity was expressed across a variety of liturgies – Syrian, Alexandrine, Byzantine, Roman, and their many derivatives. Thus, liturgical uniformity is not among "the necessary things" (Acts 15:28). The dividing line is the "deep" structure at the base – that the Eucharist is offered to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

Baptism admits to the Eucharist. Consequently, the point of departure in our search for commonality should be the assent to the trinitarian faith as expressed in the baptismal commitment. The Nicene confession probably originates in catechetical formulas to which St. Paul refers in the letters to the churches in Rome and Corinth (Rom 10:8-13, 1 Cor 8:6).

The normative status of the confession is particularly clear in the Corinthian version which is written in plural form and is rooted in the Old Testament morning prayer (Deut 6:4 – God/ Lord/ one). Moreover, the Nicene Creed remains the ecumenically accepted summary of the Gospel narrative.

Ecclesial Affinity

When the basic doctrinal issues are clarified, the door is open for a clarification of the sacramental relationship between the Eucharistic communities in more detail. The premise must be that the local Church is the place in which the whole Catholic Church dwells. The Pauline criterion would be that we maintain the same basic patterns of ecclesial life – "everywhere, in each church". Moreover, as Apostolic delegate, it is the Bishop's task to safeguard this unity in the Faith (1 Cor 4:17, 16:10).

Agreeing on this, we should then begin to look for "affinity" with other ecclesial bodies – starting with those churches which seem closest to us. As each denomination carries the burden of her own particular history, we need also to free ourselves from the yoke of unnecessary things lingering in our customary mind-set. Still, the question of "valid orders" cannot be avoided. A constructive starting point could be to discuss in general terms the role of charisms in the Church and more specific the laying of hands in the transmission of them.

Apostolicae Curae

The question of Anglican orders is a particularly difficult problem:

The Roman rejection of Anglican orders in *Apostolicae curae* was not based on faulty succession lines but upon the lack of form in the Edwardian ordination liturgy which did not have the *Traditio instrumentarum*. The difficulty with this argumentation was recognized by Pius XII in 1947 as it would also lead to the rejection of Orthodox orders. Furthermore, it entails that the Roman Catholic Church herself did not have valid orders before the Middle Ages! Nevertheless, the Roman rejection, although illogical, remains unchanged and cannot be theologically challenged as it is in the end a "political" statement.

Therefore, if the Union of Scranton were to formally accept Anglican orders, this will certainly have a negative effect on any future relationship with Rome. An additional problem is the innovation of Lady Bishops, and now that the orders of the Church of England are to be "fused" with Methodist ordination, Anglican orders in general will be seriously compromised. This means that Anglican orders must be clarified in an ecumenical perspective.

A Concluding Proposition

Consequently, we must ask: How are we to gain this ecumenical Catholicity? For non-papal Western Christians, the Old Catholic option as represented by the Union of Scranton offers itself as the relevant answer. The PNCC orders are recognized by Rome and the

Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches. In addition there is the theological document agreed with the same Orthodox Churches, called *The Road to Unity*.

Thus, the gifts of the Old Catholic position are: valid orders, the doctrine of the Undivided Church, and conciliar ecclesiology. In this way, the dual standards of St. Paul and St. Irenaeus are met – we have both "a congregation and a set of doctrines"!

THE ROAD TO UNITY

Summary of Relevant Points

Summing up the two century-long contact between the Old Catholic Churches and Orthodoxy, the so-called *The Road to Unity* is the fruit of the dialogue which took place between the Old Catholic Churches and the Chalcedonian Orthodox patriarchates from 1973 to 1987. The consensus document, structured under seven headlines marked with Roman numerals, was originally published in Greek and German but has later been translated into English and other languages. In the following, the concern is primarily to present the ecumenical consequences stated or implied in the document. However, we will begin with a brief presentation of the basic ecclesiological position as starting point for reflection.

The Church as Catholic

Summary of sections III/1, 3; III/2,5,9

In Section III, the Church is depicted as a pilgrim people of God living in the expectation of the coming Lord. Thus, the Church is rooted in the history of salvation and prefigured in Israel. As a visible community on earth fighting the good fight of the Lord, the Church is animated by the Holy Spirit uniting all members in one body with Christ as its head.

Moreover, in this body all the local Churches are united to one another as a conciliar structure founded in the episcopate. By a pastoral ministry structurally linked with the Apostles, the unity of faith is expressed in abiding dogmatic and ethical principles and an ordered worship. In this way, the church is called Catholic in the inner qualitative sense of the word because, although scattered over the earth, she is always and everywhere the same. The local churches recognise in one another the same reality and they affirm their essential identity, above all by the unity of faith, liturgical life and basic principles of canonical order. Consequently, the local Churches must devotedly maintain the essential unity given to them, and constantly struggle against the forces of sin and division.

The Eucharistic Communion

Summary of section V/4; 1,5,9

The Eucharistic service is the focal point of the entire life of the Church. In this sacrament Christ is present offering himself in a bloodless way and shares himself in a real representation of his bloody sacrifice on the cross offered once and for all. The Lord himself is the priest officiating at each Eucharist. Receiving his body and blood, the faithful are united with Christ and through him with each other. Joined together as one body, the whole Eucharistic community – clergy and people – has an organic part in the performance of the Eucharistic celebration. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17).

The Ecumenical Imperative

Summary of section IV/1,4,5

This true Church, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, has existed without any discontinuity wherever the faith, worship and order of the ancient Undivided Church are preserved unimpaired.

Nevertheless, the question of the Church's boundaries can also be seen in a larger light. Wherever the Trinity is proclaimed and the incarnation is acknowledged, the Unity of the Church as the Body of Christ is understood in a wider sense. All who believe in Christ are called to seek lovingly, sincerely and patiently to enter into dialogue with one another and pray unceasingly for the restoration of the unity in faith and full fellowship so that the Lord may lead all to attain the fullness of unity.

The Ecumenical Approach

Summary of section VII/2,4,7,8

If it is, indeed, the Church as the Body of Christ which performs the Eucharistic celebration and all who partake become one body in Christ, this entails that the ecumenical dialogue must aim at Eucharistic fellowship as expression of fellowship in the faith of the one Church. However, this fellowship does not signify uniformity in liturgical order and practise, but rather points to the fact that in each of the participating Churches, a historically legitimated development of the faith of the ancient and undivided Church is preserved.

However, in order to establish fellowship it is necessary to check carefully not only whether we are close enough but also whether the differences are so significant that separation must continue to exist. This fellowship does not require the subjection of one Church with its tradition to the other Church, for this would contradict the reality of the fellowship. The Churches united in full communion will fulfil their responsibilities not isolated from each other, but on principle together.