

True and False Reform in the Church

Yves Congar, O.P.

TRUE AND FALSE
REFORM IN
THE CHURCH

Translated and
with an Introduction by
Paul Philibert, O.P.



A Michael Glazier Book

LITURGICAL PRESS
Collegeville, Minnesota

www.litpress.org

A Michael Glazier Book published by Liturgical Press

Cover design by David Manahan, OSB. Photo courtesy of PhotoSpin.com.

A translation of *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Église*, revised edition. © 1968 by Les Éditions du Cerf (Paris).

© 2011 by Order of Saint Benedict, Collegeville, Minnesota. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, microfilm, microfiche, mechanical recording, photocopying, translation, or by any other means, known or yet unknown, for any purpose except brief quotations in reviews, without the previous written permission of Liturgical Press, Saint John's Abbey, PO Box 7500, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321-7500. Printed in the United States of America.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Congar, Yves, 1904–1995.

[Vrai et fausse réforme dans l'Église. English]

True and false reform in the church / Yves Congar ; translated and with an introduction by Paul Philibert. — Rev. ed.

p. cm.

“A Michael Glazier book.”

Includes indexes.

ISBN 978-0-8146-5693-8 — ISBN 978-0-8146-8009-4 (e-book)

1. Church renewal—Catholic Church. I. Title.

BX1746.C6313 2011

262'.02—dc22

2010031330

Contents

Translator's Introduction	xi
Preface to the Second Edition (1967)	1
Foreword	9
The Methodology of This Study	11
The Plan of the Book	15
Introduction (1950)	19
I. The Church Is Constantly Reforming Itself	19
II. Contemporary Self-Criticism and Reformism (Especially in France)	22
III. The Church Today: How Did Self-Criticism Become Suspect?	29
IV. Four Traits of Contemporary Self-Criticism	36
V. The Reasons for Today's Self-Criticism: A Passion for Authenticity	40
VI. Applying These Insights: The Need to Adapt or Revise	45

PART ONE

Why and How Does the Church Reform Itself?

1 THE CHURCH'S HOLINESS AND OUR FAILURES	55
I. <i>The Point of View of Antiquity and That of the Present with Respect to the Problem of Evil in the Church</i>	55

II. <i>The Teachings of the Bible, the Fathers, and the Magisterium</i>	62
Holy Scripture	63
The Fathers: Their Theology Is Essentially “Symbolic”	69
The Teaching of the Magisterium and of Theologians	76
III. <i>Principles for a Solution:</i>	
<i>Several Meanings of the Word “Church”</i>	82
God Alone Is Infallible	82
Two Aspects of the Church: Institution and Community	84
Four Meanings of the Word “Church”	88
Additional Remarks on This Theme	90
IV. <i>Application of These Principles:</i>	
<i>Holiness and Failure in Light of the Different Meanings of Church</i>	92
In Its Formal Principles (Given by God) the Church Is Infallible	92
As a People Made Up of Human Beings, the Church Is Fallible	95
The Church as the Ensemble of Churchmen or Hierarchical Persons	101
The Concrete Church, Synthesizing the Preceding Elements	111
<i>Excursus: Evil in the Church in the View of Several Contemporary Theologians</i>	114
2 WHY AND IN WHAT WAY DO THE PEOPLE OF GOD NEED TO BE REFORMED?	117
I. God’s Plan and How God’s People Should Respond to It: Situating the Problem of Reform	117
II. The Need for Reform in Light of the Temptation to “Pharisaism”	135
III. The Need for Reform in Light of the Temptation To Become a “Synagogue”	147
3 PROPHETS AND REFORMERS	169
Prophets: Their Role and Their Character	172
Prophecy in the Church	176
1. Specially Insightful Knowledge about the Things of God	178
2. A Knowledge or Mission Related to Executing God’s Plan	183
3. Predicting the Future: “Natural Analogs of Prophecy”	185

The Reform Spirit and Prophecy	187
The Situation of Prophecy within the Church	188
The Perils of Prophetic Activity	189
Why St. Augustine Was a Source of Encouragement for Reformers	191
Schematic Table Summarizing These Points	194

PART TWO

Conditions for Authentic Reform Without Schism

The Problem	199
The Possibility of Deviations in Any Reform Movement	199
The Ambivalence of “Seeds”	203
Möhler’s Distinction: <i>Gegensatz</i> (Contrast) and <i>Widerspruch</i> (Contradiction)	205
Two Types of One-Sidedness	208
First Condition: The Primacy of Charity and of Pastoral Concerns	215
The Prophetic Initiative Should Not Develop into a System	215
Successful Reforms Were Motivated by Pastoral Concern	218
Reforms That Tried to Create a System Turned Out Badly	224
Second Condition: Remain in Communion with the Whole Church	229
The Whole Truth Is Grasped Only in Communion with the Whole Church	229
This Communion Makes the Difference between Catholic and Schismatic	232
<i>Sentire cum Ecclesia</i>	236
The Center and the Periphery	237
Need for Support from the Base	242
Need for Approval from the Central Powers of the Church	244
“Pneumatological” and “Prophetic” Functioning of the Hierarchy	248
Application of These Principles to Religious Orders (Troeltsch)	249
Being Connected to the Community	254
Communion Justifies the Possibility for a Breakthrough	256
The Responsibility of the Center to Listen to the Periphery	261

Third Condition: Having Patience with Delays 265

- The Nature of Patience and Its Role 266
- The Boastful Spirit of the Reformers 269
- The Link between Impatience and an Intellectual and Dialectical Point of View 274
- Blocked by the Church, the Impatient Reformer Appears to Be Persecuted 276
- The Church Is Against Ultimatums and the *Via Facti* 277
- The Church's *Via Facti* vs. the Wrong and Revolutionary *Via Facti* 280
- The Tension that Results for the Faithful Reformer 283
- Responsibility of Church Leaders Not to Be Too Patient 284

Fourth Condition: Genuine Renewal through a Return to the Principle of Tradition (Not through the Forced Introduction of Some "Novelty") 291

- Two Kinds of Adaptation: As Development and as Innovation 291
- Adaptation as Development Comes About through Ressourcement 293
- The Church Needs to Live in Contact with Its Deepest Tradition 304

PART THREE

The Reformation and Protestantism [omitted in this translation]

CONCLUSION

Perspectives on the Attitude to Take toward Concrete Reform Initiatives

A) About the Élan and Spirit of Reform in General 309

- 1) For or Against the Idea of Reform 309
- 2) Among Reformers, the Distinction between the Faithful and the Revolutionaries 321
 - Medieval Apostolic and Evangelical Movements 322
 - Sixteenth-Century Reforms 323
 - Lamennais and Lacordaire 329

- B) Considering Contemporary Reform (Text from 1950) 335
- 1) Three Motives for Optimism about Contemporary Reforms
(in France) 335
 - 2) The Problem of a Divided Spirit among Catholics 337

AFTERWORD (July 1968) 341

APPENDIXES

Appendix I: Collective Responsibility 349

Appendix II: Two Types of Fidelity 365

Appendix III: His Holiness Paul VI Speaks about the Reform of the
Church (From the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, August 6,
1964) 372

Index of Names 374

Index of Subjects 376

Translator's Introduction

You are about to explore one of the transformative masterpieces of twentieth-century theology. Cardinal Avery Dulles once called Congar's *True and False Reform in the Church* "a great work [that lays] down principles for authentic Catholic reform."¹ Many others have pointed out its importance: Gabriel Flynn calls it "arguably Congar's most important and original contribution to Christian theology,"² while Jean-Pierre Jossua has said in several places that this is Congar's most personal and most powerful book.³ It is also a book that is, in my view, more potent today than at the time of its original publication in 1950, when it was badly misunderstood. Not long after its publication, the Holy Office forbade its reprinting or translation into other languages; yet less than twenty years later most of its insights had found their way into the major documents of Vatican II. Congar himself once remarked, "If there is a theology of Congar, that is where it is to be found."⁴ Following Vatican II, Congar released a second and revised edition of *True and False Reform* in 1968. It is that edition that has been translated here.

It is clear that Archbishop Angelo Roncalli (later to become Pope John XXIII) discovered and read *True and False Reform* during his years as papal nuncio in France. He asked in response to reading it, "A reform of the church: is such a thing really possible?" A decade later, he presided

¹ Avery Cardinal Dulles, "Preface," in Gabriel Flynn, ed., *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church* (Louvain, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005), p. 28.

² Flynn, op. cit., p. 9.

³ Jean-Pierre Jossua, *Le Père Congar: La Théologie au service du peuple de Dieu* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1967), 30–31; also, Flynn, op. cit., p. 133, n. 113.

⁴ Yves Congar, "Letter from Father Yves Congar, O.P.," trans. R. J. Zawilla, *Theology Digest* 32 (1985): p. 215; cited in Flynn, op. cit., p. 101.

over the opening of the Second Vatican Council which he had convened. In his opening address at the council, he described its goals in terms highly evocative of Congar's description of authentic reform. Pope John called the council not to reform heresy, not to denounce errors, but to update the church's capacity to explain itself to the world and to revitalize ecclesial life at the periphery and to open the doors to ecumenical conversation. For us today, this book fills in the blanks of what we have been missing in receiving the council and its call to "true reform."

Congar's own life, however, is an incredible witness to the very principles that he lays down in this book. In 1954, in part because of Vatican reaction to this book, he was sent into exile from his home, his books, his colleagues, and his friends in Paris. He suffered genuine anguish because of the interruption of his intense theological work and because of the injury to his freedom and his reputation. Eventually, however, Congar was vindicated by Pope John. He was one of the first theologians to be appointed by the pope to the council's preparatory theological commission.

It remains to future historians to trace the exact influence of Congar's *True and False Reform* upon John in advancing the idea of a council. But it is already clear, as Avery Dulles put it, that "Congar's ecumenical ecclesiology permeates the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, and the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*."⁵ Despite repeated suffering from Vatican measures against him, Congar always considered the church's well-being the important issue in his life. In one of the last interviews he gave, Congar remarked: "While for a time I was suspect and criticized in Rome, in the same way I became recognized as an important theologian who during the Council was active as an expert in five commissions and was subsequently for fifteen years a member of the International Theological Commission."⁶ Much later, Pope John Paul II created him a cardinal some months before his death, in recognition of his contributions to the council.

What did not become integrated into the council's documents, however, is precisely what is found in this book. Its message is sorely needed for a church divided not only over the value of the council for the present and the future but also over the meaning of the church. As you will

⁵ Flynn, op. cit., 28.

⁶ From Frano Prcela, O.P., "Pioneer of Church Renewal: Yves Congar (1904-1995)," trans. Thomas O'Meara, *Wort und Antwort* 36:3 (1995), pp. 130-133.

discover, Congar was at pains to clarify the equally necessary roles of the *center* (hierarchical leadership) and the *periphery* (local churches with their prophets, their people, and their pastoral geniuses). He draws upon an astonishing array of historical examples not only to clarify his meaning but also to demonstrate how the church dealt with specific challenges in the past. Church leaders will find here what Avery Dulles calls "the dialectic between structure and life in the church"; pastors will find a penetrating challenge to understand their ecclesial mission as essentially prophetic; and laity yearning for a church more in tune with their own experiences as Christians in the world will find both encouragement and light for their roles. Ecumenists will receive important direction from a theologian who believed that the catholicity of the church needs to be enriched by the cultural and theological genius of Greeks and Russians, Scandinavians and British, indeed, all the rich diversity of the various peoples of the earth.

It is remarkable, then, to discover that the vision, the theological principles, and the arguments for effective catholicity and unity that suffuse Congar's writing from half a century ago ring so true to the cultural and pastoral situation of today. In many ways, despite changed circumstances, the restlessness of the early twenty-first century Roman Catholic Church mirrors the ferment that Congar described in the church's yearning for renewal following the Second World War in Europe. A great many ordinary Catholics feel that they are not understood or being listened to, priests are facing the problem of a gap between parish life and the spiritual hungers of an increasingly disaffected laity, bishops are facing painful administrative choices in the light of a shortage of ordained pastors, and the Catholic Church as a whole is sliding further away from the innovative and creative elements of the scientific, cultural, and artistic evolution of a globally mediated world.

Maintenance or mission—nostalgia or *aggiornamento*? This question immediately becomes ideologically charged today with the competitive ambitions of traditionalists and progressives. In just such a world, Congar's book is an apology, among other things, for daring to believe in God's promise: "See, I am making all things new" (Rev 21:5). Many Catholics who want to remain Catholic are waiting for just such a deep and authoritative theological analysis of their church in a state of cultural transformation.

In 1950 when Congar wrote the first edition of this book, as now, the tension between the Roman Curia and the renewal initiatives of the prophetic voices in the church was not only palpable but painful. Congar

paints the picture of this tension in careful detail. His analysis of the complementary roles of the “center” and the “periphery” contributes lucid insight into what we are experiencing today. Further, his clear defense of the role of the center, the apostolic authority of the Holy See and its responsibility to govern the church for the sake of the church’s unity, is fulsome and articulate. This principle was evidently important to him.

However, Congar likewise describes the periphery as having an equally important complementary function of bringing the church’s preaching and witness into every culture, adjusting the life and practices of the church to the human dynamics of linguistically, culturally, and historically diverse nations and devising initiatives to bridge the gap between what is familiar and what is urgently needed.

In the service of this understanding of the church, Congar describes what he calls two levels or kinds of “fidelity.” While apostolicity means for him that the church will never depart from the deposit of faith that it received from Christ and the apostles, it also means that the apostolic witness simply must come alive in new cultures and that the church is obliged to explain itself in the languages and sensibilities of those cultures. The church will never abandon or distort the divine gift of revealed truth, but in order to express it in a new age the church must be conversant with and articulate in the habits and perspectives of that newness. To cling to formulas that have become outdated and dry for the sake of preserving the past is a kind of fidelity, perhaps. But Congar calls this “flat” or superficial fidelity. It is incapable of entering realistically into dialogue with the very areas of culture that the church has the duty to evangelize.

A full and genuine fidelity requires both a thorough grounding in the sources of the faith and their changing expression through history as well as the courage to address the same faith in terms that can be not only understood but also embraced by our contemporaries. This sort of fidelity requires commitment and resourcefulness. It makes demands upon believers and is far more difficult for the individual to live than a passive acquiescence to what is familiar in the religious world. Here, as so often elsewhere, Congar articulates experiences familiar to us that are elusive to describe, and by naming them he provides a critical analysis that can break through the impasse of hardened ideological opposition.

One of the richest contributions of *True and False Reform* is its profile of the prophetic principle in the church and of those called to be prophets to their age. Prophets are usually found on the periphery and have the

burden of challenging the complacency of the center. At the heart of his understanding of prophecy is his conviction that God's word has the power to address the present world. He personally understood the radical nature of the prophet's gift of himself/herself to the demands of that message and the graced instinct that informs it. More than once he was personally crushed by its demands. Yet he is also demanding in insisting that prophets are never dispensed from holding the unity of the church as the Body of Christ and its concrete social communion at the very center of their field of vision. His profile of the traits of genuine prophets, contrasted with other voices that proved not to be authentic, offers both encouragement and critical guidance for those who struggle today to find a way to make themselves heard for the sake of a living church.

I need to explain why the third part of this work has not been included here. Congar himself noted (as you will see in his "Preface to the Second Edition") that in 1967, burdened by bad health and by incessant demands for his collaboration in international conferences and symposia on the council, he was unable to redo his long essay on Protestantism. While the first two parts of *True and False Reform* remain pertinent and necessary, the third part required considerable revision, both because of the extraordinary changes brought about by the documents of the council and because of new books on ecumenism and the work of the bilateral ecumenical commissions. Congar himself noted that, in the light of those influences, he would have written a much more positive assessment of Protestantism than he had done in 1950. An additional reason for not including the third part has to do with the realities of publishing. This already large book would be even larger (and more expensive) with part 3. With the publisher's advice, I decided the best solution is this abridged edition of the work, presenting what is most valid and important for our present pastoral situation.

I am indebted to the members of the Congar Study Group of the Catholic Theological Society of America for inviting me to undertake this translation. They had already attempted a translation of parts of the book, and I have profited from partial drafts of various sections of the book done by Catherine Clifford, Susan Brown, and Joseph Mueller, as well as from the encouragement of other members of the group, especially Mark Ginter. I owe an immense debt of gratitude to Myriam Frebet who, as a native French speaker and someone familiar with the currents in French Catholicism in the post-World War II period, was able to advise me and correct my errors in translation. Her contribution to this project has been inestimable.

With the consent of the editors at Liturgical Press, I have decided to maintain Congar's format for his huge scholarly apparatus. Obviously, the immense richness of this text depends upon the thousands of references to be found in the notes. I have translated into English the majority of Latin and German citations, both in the text and in the notes. I hope this heavy scholarly resource, which will be of genuine value to scholars, will not put off general readers, who should find in the text tremendously rewarding insights for their practical Christian life.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Collegeville Institute at Saint John's University in Minnesota for a year as resident scholar at the institute (2008–2009), where the major portion of this translation work was done. I equally owe gratitude to my provincial, Very Rev. Martin J. Gleeson, O.P., and to my Dominican confreres for giving me the time and freedom to undertake such a time-consuming project. In addition, I wish to thank Liturgical Press, especially Hans Christoffersen, editorial director, for his encouragement in bringing this work to press and Mary Stommes, managing editor, for her careful and invaluable assistance in preparing the manuscript for publication. If this translation helps reinsert Congar's wise and courageous witness into the stream of current Catholic thought and theology, the effort will have been worthwhile.

Paul Philibert, O.P.

Preface to the Second Edition (1967)

This is a second “revised and corrected” edition of a book first published in November 1950. In many ways the first book is dated, not only because of the scholarly resources which it used but also because of the ecclesial and theological climate it evoked and, in a deeper sense, because of the way its concerns were raised. In all these respects the current situation (1967) is not that of the years between 1947 and 1950. With regard to scholarly references, the difficulties are not too serious; they can always be brought up-to-date, and I have tried my best to do that. Differences still remain, however, with respect to the climate within the church today and in the way the central question has been posed.

Between 1947, when the book was first written, and 1950 the church—especially in France—sought to respond pastorally to the actual situation in which it found itself. But some initiatives worried Rome. Pius XII, a great pope, was not fundamentally opposed to change, but he wanted strict control over any change and even wanted all initiatives for change to be his alone. Further, although he put in motion certain reforms within the Catholic Church (e.g., in exegesis and liturgy), he was much more reserved about areas in which Catholics might find themselves in contact with non-Catholics. Finally, with regard to theology, he not only was anxious to retain strict control but also was upset about certain methods that theological research was employing. His encyclical *Humani Generis* is dated August 12, 1950.

I may be wrong, but it seems to me that in 1947–1950 I was doing my theological and pastoral research within the framework and on the basis of traditional church practice. Of course, I wanted to *adapt* my work to the new situations brought to light by pastoral research and experience.

2 True and False Reform in the Church

But I never questioned the church or its authority. The basic issue was that of adaptations in the apostolate, and the papacy willingly acknowledged the soundness of this principle.¹

For me, the distinction adopted by Emmanuel Mounier (and, in substance, also by Jacques Maritain) between "Christianity" and the "Christian world" provided an effective intellectual framework within which these hopes for renewal could be acknowledged and dealt with. It was a question of liberating the Gospel from more or less outmoded sociological, pastoral, and liturgical forms so as to give it the best possible chance of success in a world calling for new forms, new expressions, and new structures.

In a few short weeks John XXIII created a new climate in the church, and then came the council.² This most significant breakthrough came from on high. All of a sudden, forces for renewal which had scarcely had room to breathe found ways to be expressed. The cautious suggestions for reform mentioned in my text of 1950³ have been surpassed by far. What is happening right now, insofar as it is positive, is certainly in line with what I had intended, yet it goes a great deal further, well beyond what one could have hoped for in 1950. Liturgical reform is still in full swing, parish and pastoral councils (with lay participation) are being formed, and there is a restoration of what one could call the conciliar life of the church (the Synod of Bishops, episcopal conferences, diocesan synods, etc.). Further, research in the area of religious studies is being

¹ Note, for example, these statements of Pius XII, characteristic of a program of adaptation: "The mystical Body of Christ, following the example of the physical members which comprise it, does not live and act in the abstract, outside the constantly changing conditions of time and place. It is not, and can never be, separated from the world which surrounds it. It is always of its century; it goes forward with it day by day, hour by hour, continually adapting its ways of doing things and its attitudes to those of the society in the midst of which it must act" (Pius XII, "Speech at the Anagni Seminary," April 29, 1949, in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi* XI, p. 50; and R. Rouquette in *Études*, April 1951, p. 68).

² I had wondered if John XXIII had ever read *Vraie et fausse réforme*. I got the answer one day from a missionary who willingly told me the following story: In 1952, while he was visiting Archbishop Roncalli at the nunciature in Paris, he found him in the midst of reading this book, in the margins of which he had been writing in pencil (this copy still exists somewhere, no doubt). Archbishop Roncalli said to his visitor, "A reform of the church, is such a thing possible?"

³ I had intentionally refrained from proposing or even suggesting a concrete program of reforms so as to remain on the level of a theological study (rooted in history) about the nature and conditions of a genuine reform *within* the church.

officially encouraged, as well as research about and the first steps toward a new program for the formation of the clergy, etc. On the whole, despite some unfortunate exceptions, theologians now enjoy the freedom that they need for their research and writing. But more than anything, two great changes already characterize the climate within the church and will continue to do so more and more: an ecclesiology based on the "People of God" and ecumenism.

But I have not yet finished pointing out the consequences of the ecclesiological initiatives of Vatican II. The council transcended a purely "hierarchy-centered" ecclesiology and it denounced legalism (without, of course, proposing ignorance of law!). It gave primacy to an ontology of grace rooted in the sacraments, and primacy as well to baptism with respect to all other roles in the church as a society of persons. The council adopted an apostolic, rather than a primarily ritual, understanding of the priesthood, giving full value to the place of the Word and to catechesis; and it recognized charisms and the variety of ministries in the church, etc.

As for ecumenism, it has become or is on the way to becoming a dimension that touches the church's entire life, even its internal concerns.⁴ This change of perspective will entail reinterpretation, opening and broadening out our thinking to a degree that we cannot at present measure. But this link between ecumenism and the spirit of renewal, which I perceived and emphasized from the beginning, is equally apparent now from the other side; renewal is not only required by ecumenism as a sort of prelude, but renewal is also nourished by ecumenism.

Just as the ecclesial climate is new today, so also is our way of posing questions. We now proceed more by addition and deepening than by substituting new data for traditional sources. Our questions are still questions about adaptation, but they have become more radical, not only because they are more difficult, more rigorous, and more urgent, but also because they are posed today in a way that touches the very roots of the church and its faith.

Although we functioned in 1947–1950 on the basis of and within the framework of a solid Catholic structure, today we are intellectually and culturally torn out of a Catholic framework, perhaps even out of a religious framework, and thrown into a world which, by its vitality and its

⁴ The address of his holiness Paul VI, at the opening of the Synod of Bishops, September 29, 1967, is particularly significant in this regard.

innovation, imposes *its* problems upon us. The study of the history of ecclesiological doctrines which I pursued for thirteen or fourteen years made me realize that one's sense of the church depends, in a decisive way, upon one's sense of the world and of the relationship one sees between church and world.

Here we have the problematic relation between the "two powers" and their characteristic confrontation, which has in large part determined the prevailing concept of "church" as authority and power. The temporal power had to become fully "lay," and the church had to acknowledge that lay character fully for the church to be able to understand itself and define itself purely as "church." Thank heavens, the Catholic Church didn't define itself until Vatican II, after all the often violent confrontations between it and temporal society had been more or less put to rest. Furthermore, in defining itself, the church benefited from a retrieval of rich biblical sources as they reemerged formally and frankly for the first time since the Middle Ages. In the end, the church has adopted a new way of understanding the temporal order in keeping with the real situation of the world.⁵

There is no longer really a question of "two powers." Certain questions are still posed in those terms, but they are decidedly of little and perhaps narrow concern when one considers what "the temporal" represents today for the consciousness of Christians. At issue now is the question of how to grasp the world and its history in their full dimensions, their full significance, with all their dynamism and all their problems. Temporality has to do with the determination of Christians to exercise their responsibilities in building up the world with a view toward the kingdom of God.

You don't need to go as far as inferring that an interest in the world represents a betrayal of the faith (as did Maritain in *The Peasant of the Garonne*) in order to recognize that our period in history can be characterized by a genuine discovery of the world by Christians. This discovery is accompanied by a shock of awareness, grasped often only in general terms, that Christians have new responsibilities for the world. In making

⁵ On this point, see G. Martelet, "L'Eglise et le temporel: Vers une nouvelle conception," in *L'Eglise de Vatican II*, published under the direction of G. Barauna (*Unam Sanctam* 51b), 1966; also Y. M.-J. Congar, "Eglise et monde dans la perspective de Vatican II," in *L'Eglise dans le monde de ce temps* (*Unam Sanctam* 65b), 1967. See also the lecture by B. Lambert, given on June 7, 1967, at the Exposition in Montreal (*Doc. Catholique*, 1967, col. 1401-1455).

such a transition, what pertains to the world may feel as though it has an importance, an immediacy and a relevance that outweigh the claims of the faith and the affairs of the church. While wanting to remain faithful Christians, we nonetheless find that the world, not the church, sets the agenda. The world poses challenging questions with respect to the faith's claims and goals.

These questions are those that were fundamentally brought up already in the eighteenth century, but they arise today among a greater number of persons and with more intense feeling. For all practical purposes the facts of science, of technology, and of a purely rational and humanistic social organization remove the God-question from the horizon for whole segments of the population today, without any need for discussion. Everywhere we find ourselves tempted not only to leave behind claims that feel too objective and naive but also to give up the ground of ontological claims about religious truths and spiritual realities in order to lead everything back to the one question of the meaning and fulfillment of humanity.

From that perspective it is no longer simply a matter of adapting Catholicism and the church to a modern society born outside the cultural influence of Catholicism. We also need to rethink and reformulate what we mean by Christian reality, in response to the claim that now nothing else exists but a world where human beings are the center and master of everything. Today's problems are radical in a different way. The difference between the situation of 1947–1950 and that of 1967–1968 is expressed rather well by the difference between the titles given by the journal *Esprit* to its August–September 1946 issue (*Monde chrétien, Monde moderne—Christian World, Modern World*) and its October 1967 issue (*Nouveau Monde et Parole de Dieu—The New World and God's Word*). The issues raised, even by Christians, go a lot further than previously, and so more is required to provide answers.

These issues require that the council's *aggiornamento* not stop with adaptations inside the church but go further to insist on the church's complete return to the Gospel, and to its finding a new way of being, of speaking, and of commitment *which correspond to the Gospel's wholehearted service to the world*. The *pastoral* aspect of *aggiornamento* has to go that far. Today that is what must be done to reach people, because they are no longer waiting in some neutral, empty space where the clerical church can find them. Rather, they are involved full time and energetically in the activities of this world. We have to meet them there in the name of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes people imprudently call everything into question without sufficient background and without submitting their ideas to critical reflection or taking stock of the implications and consequences. I would not describe the current situation with the same optimism that I had used to describe the reformist thrust of the immediate postwar period. This is not because I have become pessimistic but because certain approaches and even certain situations today are troubling. I am still confident about the final outcome but also conscious that for some, on certain points, we are now in a critical moment. I would have to rewrite certain parts of the book differently today to take all this into account.



So, then, why this new edition? Is it still worth reading?

If I didn't think that it was still useful, I wouldn't have republished it. In that case, this book would have had value only as testimony to the past. But for me it represents something more, despite its limitations and its imperfections. First of all, it expresses a certain mentality, a way of approaching the reality of the church. Furthermore, it is an attempt to study that reality *theologically* in one of the dimensions of its *history* or of its real *life*. This requires a method, which I will have to explain, that integrates history and theological reflection. Finally, this book concerns an area of *theology*: that is why, to the extent that this theological method succeeds, it achieves something of permanent value. The dynamics governing reform in the church and the conditions for a reform without schism uncovered here seem to me to deal with the question at a "formal" enough level to remain applicable at the present time, even though it is different from the less difficult situation of 1947–1950.

Nevertheless, some updating and some corrections were required. I have not been able to alter things to the point of writing a new book. That would have been necessary if I wanted to deal with the new post-conciliar situation as such. Sadly, that was a practical impossibility for me. I have only been able to amplify certain suggestions that I made in the 1950 text, to nuance certain expressions, and to correct things that might be misunderstood. However, even the censors from the years 1950–1954 acknowledged that a statement from one section that might have displeased them was completed, balanced, explained, or rectified three or four lines later. I removed the 18 pages of appendix 3, "The

Mindset of the Right and Integral Catholicism." This constitutes on my part neither a change of heart nor a retraction; it is just a fraternal gesture inspired by my desire to contribute to the peace and mutual understanding among the Catholics of France, something much to be desired.

I have felt the greatest hesitation about the third part of the book.* On the one hand, I think that any theological examination of the conditions for authentic reform needs to be adequately treated. Further, on the basis of substantial documentation, I offer considerations which still have value in my view. Yet from another perspective, many things in those 180 pages no longer satisfy me because they correspond neither to the level of dialogue reached today by the ecumenical movement nor to the ecclesiological awareness of postconciliar Catholicism.

While my portrayal of Protestant positions is not false, it is incomplete. It is not sufficiently sympathetic. Some statements are contrasted at the level of opposition between confessional statements, while these signify in Protestantism a positive content much richer than just words.⁶ There is even a hint of polemic in the third part. Polemic, however, if it is accurate, loyal, and irenic, can be a form of dialogue. That is how these pages are meant to be read: they articulate genuine questions that have to be put to the Protestant Reformation. I have, nevertheless, nuanced here several stereotypical expressions. Nowadays ecumenical work, and thus Protestant thought to the extent that it has profited from ecumenism, would permit the addition of some further, more positive comments to my presentation. For example, I would speak more positively about the meaning of the church, about the role of the ecclesial community in the reading of the Bible, about Karl Barth's current views, etc. But, in fact, I was unable to rewrite all that . . .

Likewise today I would present somewhat differently certain Catholic views opposed to those of Protestantism, not so as to reject those which I had held before but in order to expand upon and nuance certain points. The ecclesiology that is implicit in this third part is not sufficiently expressive of *Lumen Gentium's* teaching on the People of God, a people gifted in its entirety with spiritual charisms. In this way too my book shows the years that have passed since the date of its first publication.

Nonetheless, with these present revisions, I think that this new edition will still be useful. People have often requested its reprinting since the

* As noted in the translator's introduction, the third part is omitted from this translation.

⁶ One example would be what I say about the Word of God in Protestantism.

8 *True and False Reform in the Church*

first edition was sold out! That is my justification for this present edition, which has received due approval from competent authorities, for which I am genuinely grateful.

Y. C.
Strasbourg
Christmas 1967

Foreword

Theologians have only studied the *structure* of the church, so to speak, not its actual *life*. Naturally, the church has a structure deriving from its constitutive elements, but with this structure it *lives*, and the faithful within it live in unity. The church is not just a framework, however, not just a mechanism or an institution; it is a communion. Within it there is a unity which no removal of parts can destroy; the constitutive elements of the church themselves assure us of that. However, there is also the unity made up of living persons. This unity calls their attitudes into question, and its effectiveness can be made or broken by those attitudes. This is the reality of communion. For this reason we can't really know the church unless, over and above the institution and its structure, we study the nature of this communion, its conditions, its implications, and the ways in which it can be injured.

In such a study the investigation of actual instances of reform is necessary because, as we shall see, reform represents an ongoing feature in the life of the church as well as a critical moment for the Catholic communion. I am considering reform here from the perspective of the theologian, the ecclesialogist. Don't look in this book for a reform *program* but only for a study of the place of the phenomenon of reform in the life of the church, of the factors which eventually make reform necessary, and of the conditions under which reform can develop without undermining Catholic communion. Theologians could only give up studying the reality of "reforms" if they were first to abandon investigating the life of the church theologically.

In fact, Catholic theology has devoted little study to the life of the church. It would be easy to show the reasons for that historically. Chapter 2 of my *Lay People in the Church* offers a sketch of the reasons. Further, schism

and heresy have been defined only in terms of the elements of unity or of orthodoxy which they lack, that is, from the point of view of the accepted orthodoxy (the *quo*, as scholasticism might put it). We have scarcely sought to characterize them in themselves, by means of their contents, their origins, their variants, or by means of their attitude (the *quod*, one would say, using scholastic terminology). In general, Catholic theology has given little consideration to Christian realities *as experienced by religious subjects*. It has considered the church as an institution with an objective existence—and it certainly is that. But theology has given little consideration to the church as an assembly of faithful people and a community with a life that springs from their activity.

Once again, while theology has considered the church according to its unchangeable essence, it has given little consideration to it as something existing in time. Neither the social interaction of religious subjects nor the conditions of their temporal existence has held much interest for theologians, who have left these topics either to canonists or to spiritual writers, to apologists or to historians. Among theologians of stature who have addressed this particular domain, one is hard pressed to think of anyone but Möhler¹ and Newman, two great minds who were precisely the ones to introduce into theology a consideration both of the religious subject and of historical development. However, the development of my work will show, I think, that the classical theology of the great masters, including first of all St. Thomas Aquinas to whom I owe the foundations of my own thinking, is far from useless for this present interest.

It is indispensable to have such guides, for the area is quite difficult. This is not only because the direction has not been clearly laid out but also because there are so many obstacles along the way. It is always tricky to develop a theology about life. The pitfalls are twofold. The first, which need not be fatal, is due to the fact that it has to deal with cases that are “individual instances,” with which, as such, the science of theology would not normally be concerned. In this case, we can grasp some sufficiently representative facts and consider them rather “formally,” so as to discover invariables of behavior which might have value as practical norms. The second pitfall, however, could be more perilous. It concerns not only the methodology but also the objects of this kind of theology. In fact, a lot of attempts to create a theology about life have been disappointing. The church itself, by which I mean primarily the teaching church, has felt this dissatisfaction and has expressed it fairly clearly.

¹ The titles of great books are often significant. Möhler did not write a treatise on the “unity of the church” but an essay on “unity *in* the church.”

The two great minds which I mentioned above, although truly Catholic and worthy of our serious attention, both raised many questions. Some critics went so far as to label them “forerunners of Modernism.” Even though the injustice of such an insinuation is clear, the fact that the allegation could be made says something significant.

Modernism, by breaking out of the framework of Catholicism, made clear the danger of any reflection on life that is not based upon a pre-existing, well-established theology treating the church’s structure. Furthermore, in the case of Modernism, there was something quite different than a mere weakness in theological foundations; there was a perversion, a genuine breaking down of foundations. This at least shows us the direction from which dangers could come. I have indeed learned from that example and will attempt to ground my theology of communion upon a theology of unity, and my study of the character of “reforms” upon a solidly framed ecclesiology. This dogmatic base will, I hope, give balance to the present study in yet another respect.

Putting forward a theology of the *life* of the church, that is, of the church in so far as it is also made up of human beings, risks so focusing upon the church in its human framework, according to the relativity and contingency of its historical dimensions, that its reality as a supernatural mystery might seem diminished. But in fact this mystery must shine through everywhere within what is human, so that the eternal and divine structure of the church can be felt as everywhere present. I hope my treatment has not failed to emphasize this conviction about the importance of mystery.

The Methodology of This Study

These remarks about the object and the character of my work make clear the kind of methodology needed here. A classical theological method would suffice for a study of the church in its structural aspects and simply as an institution, taking a two-step approach involving as full an awareness as possible of the “revealed facts,” and as rich and as rigorous as possible an elaboration of those “facts.” However, in order to study the church according to its life as a communion, the insights of history as well as those of experience must be integrated along with insights from doctrinal sources.

My work remains theological, but its object, taken from the *life* of the church, makes it necessary to add to the bare theology of the church a consideration of present and historical facts which are also *loci* for theology—*sources* for theological reflection. The classical theology of the

church will still be in evidence, although I cannot be asked to say or to defend everything, since that would require the compilation of a whole formal treatise. Nor can I be asked to say or to defend everything in detail about the *facts* to which I refer. I can only choose among them the ones that are most significant and provide documentation that allows a judgment to be made about whether my claims are proven and my interpretation correct.

By employing such a method in theology, there is sometimes a risk of giving the impression that the perspective is too personal: interesting, perhaps, but reflecting the ideas of only one person. However, all theological work represents an element of personal elaboration, unless it has lost contact with personal reflection and become a mere rubric, something akin to the liturgical calendar or the regulations at the post office. But here the link between theological doctrine and the experiences of the church's life is being made through the reflective operations of one person. It is impossible to achieve the same degree or the same kind of objectivity here as in a thesis of classical theology about the Trinity or about Christology. Furthermore, what is involved here is only an *essay*: a genre less dogmatically complete but perhaps fully as necessary as the classic treatises. This is why I employ the first person rather often. This is fitting for ideas that have a solid basis but are the product of an inquiring mind rather than the doctrine of a church or of a school in possession of the truth.

Reassurance about my objectivity will be found, on the one hand, in the quality of the ecclesiology on the basis of which the work is done (and of this, theologians will be the judges) and, on the other hand, in the quality of the historical documentation (and judgment about this falls naturally to historians). At the risk of weighing down the book and having it appear a bit pedantic, I have included a rather large number of footnotes so as to show that my work can claim, as a sort of reassurance, the support of a great number of thinkers as well as the support of the shared experience and agreement I have found in many places. This is a way of remedying the shortcomings of a highly personal thought experiment.

Perhaps others will be dissatisfied with this study because of its subject matter. With the exception of part 3, this book was written in 1946, in that atmosphere of pastoral renewal which the introduction calls to mind. I have wondered myself about the appropriateness of treating such a topic. Might there be a risk, in doing so, of encouraging excesses in the movement of reform, of supporting a kind of discontent or lack of confidence in the church, in its structures or in its hierarchy?

It strikes me, however, that my solidly based conclusions are anything but disloyal. I think that theologians, without going beyond the realm of their competence, need to enlighten priests and faithful on this point as well as on others, that it quite reasonably pertains to theologians to study a fact which is as constant in the life of the church as is the fact of "reform," just as it pertains to historians or sociologists to study the fact of "revolution" in the history of societies.²

Sometimes people are frightened by the word "reform" because, unfortunately, history has associated this term with revolutions as such. A sort of curse seems to hang over the word. Admittedly the term is a bit vague and can designate equally well either the simple determination to go back to following one's principles (in this sense, we ought to reform ourselves daily) or the great upheavals that destroy more than they create. We are well aware that there are *inauthentic* reforms. But, all things considered, reform refers only to what is normal and even ordinary. I will make good on this claim when I give a precise explanation of exactly what is involved.

Further, if the question is a delicate one, can't we treat it with delicacy, with seriousness and respect, coherent with a view of the church which is constructive and traditional? Since the question is certainly a real one, can we afford to leave it to those who would treat it superficially and without nuance, in order to avoid bringing up what some may consider an inopportune topic? Is it not better to enlighten those who are concerned about it, to indicate the appropriate constraints, to show them that the church is even greater, more beautiful, and more worthy of their trust and their love when it undertakes its own renewal than when it is imagined to reside in an illusory and artificial heaven of immutability and perfection? "The truth must be told," wrote St. Augustine, "especially when a problem makes it more urgent to tell the truth. Those who can understand, do so. By refraining from telling the truth for fear of harming those who cannot understand, not only do we obscure the truth, but we deliver into error those who might grasp the truth and who could avoid error in that way . . ."³

² This is what Paul Perrier, for example, tried to do in his "Révolution," part of a *Grammaire de l'Histoire*.

³ "Dicatur ergo verum, maxime ubi aliqua questio ut dicatur impellit; et capiant qui possunt; ne forte cum tacetur propter eos qui capere non possunt, non solum veritate fraudentur, verum etiam falsitate capiantur, qui verum capere, quo caveatur falsitas, prouident . . ." (*De dono perseverantiae*, ch. XVI, n. 40 [PL 45:1017]).

However, we want to keep our distance here from whatever is unhelpful or dangerous. We want to avoid causing or creating bad will. It is best to avoid, even when tempted, a journalistic or media-focused tone. This is why I wanted, first of all, to give a scholarly tone to this study, so that by its literary genre it would belong to the science of theology, not to the popular media. Next, after it was written, I submitted my text to several censors, among whom were a prelate and a bishop. I hereby thank them for the comments which they were kind enough to offer; I took advantage of them. On one important point I modified my language on the basis of their observations, thus correcting, over and above the words, a category of my thought. I published four pieces from the first version,⁴ attracting in this way either new critical comments or encouragements, both of which were equally profitable. Finally, I imposed on myself a delay of three years, at the end of which I reviewed the entire text of 1946. I completed it and brought it up to date with works which had not appeared at the time of the initial writing.⁵ Most of the time my amplified and reworked reflections, the richer documentation, and later critical exchanges have confirmed my initial positions. Criticism is not always negative; it plays a necessary testing role, as much by confirming as by invalidating positions called into question. It must always be exercised, and exercised freely.

After having been submitted to the judgment of friendly critics, then put to the test of a complete revision, this book is now available for the consideration of all those who want to read it. But above all, and in the spirit of its second part, it is submitted to the judgment of the holy church. I am confident the church will understand that this is not a book of negative criticism but of love and trust—above all, of total love for and absolute trust in the truth. Truth, which each friar preacher has been called to serve with all his might, truth alone can captivate the mind, while at the same time saturating and stimulating it.

⁴ "Péché et sainteté dans l'Église," in *La Vie intellectuelle*, November 1947, 6–40 ; "Conditions d'un vrai renouvellement," in *Je bâtirai mon Église = Jeunesse de l'Église* 8 (1948): 151–164 — "Pourquoi le peuple de Dieu doit-il sans cesse se réformer?" in *Irénikon* (1948): 365–394 — "Culpabilité et responsabilité collectives," in *La Vie intellectuelle*, March–April 1950.

⁵ In June and July of 1948, I published the *Esprit* article on *Christianisme et Monde moderne*, etc., before the work of Ida Görres and Papini, *Essor ou déclin de l'Église*, appeared.

The truth can only be served, here as elsewhere, by absolute and total sincerity. By absolute sincerity, I mean without any tinge of subtlety, hidden agendas, or timidity; by total sincerity, I mean honoring the full extent of the truth, according to all its aspects, and thus arriving—not by some artificial addition of “prudence” but by facing facts—at a respect for all that needs to be respected. This spirit of respect for the truth is proud and humble at the same time, a respect which belongs to those who stand up for themselves, yet who are aware of their dependency as servants of the truth. They submit themselves to the accepted order, since order is only another name for the truth.

That is why there is nothing said by *implication* in this book, but only what is loyal, what can be held loyally and understood by any upright and informed person. Cleverness of thought and of style only deceive those who are not worthy of the simple truth, because they are not looking for it in an unconditional manner. By contrast, a completely confident forthrightness is the only attitude conceivable among the children of God who have been given the liberty of Christ (Gal 4:31) and who celebrate forever a passover of sincerity and truth (1 Cor 5:8).

The Plan of the Book

The plan of my book is simple. Between an introduction describing the actual reforms we find in progress today and a conclusion, there are two main parts (to which I decided to add a third*): (1) Why and in what sense does the church unceasingly reform itself? (2) Under what conditions can a reform be authentic and be carried out without schism? (3) The Reformation and Protestantism. I eventually added the appendices to deal with some further developments that seemed to be required, in order to deal in depth with one or another problem raised in the book.

I had not anticipated the third part in the 1946 version. Several of the questions which are treated there were, however, touched upon briefly, particularly in part 2 under the First Condition. But could one treat the theological problem of “reform” without raising the question of the Protestant Reformation, and could one raise that question without being obliged to treat it in a sufficiently thorough manner? I soon found myself involved in substantial new work, begun in my thinking a long time ago. No doubt the present book has thus become notably more weighty.

* Omitted in this translation.

However, the subject required that this topic be addressed, and many points touched upon in the preceding chapters can be found better explained and substantiated in part 3. The laity, or even priests, who have no particular interest either in Protestantism or in certain technical theological questions can just skim over this third part and proceed directly from part 2 to the conclusion. The detailed analytical tables will assist them in finding their way around.



May the present work, with all its imperfections, serve the church which is itself the servant of the Lord—although it is also something more as well, since, in truth, it bears the names of Spouse and of Body of Christ. I dedicate this work to my brothers in the priesthood, as a testimony to my ardent and affectionate sympathy for them and to a sincere feeling of profound fraternity in the service of Christ and of his Body. Had he been still living, I would have dedicated this book to his Eminence, Cardinal Suhard—had he deigned to accept it.

Fr. Yves M.-J. Congar
Le Saulchoir

COMMENTS ABOUT VOCABULARY: Especially in the third part of this book [not included in this translation], the words *reform* and *reformation* are used, sometimes with, sometimes without an initial capital. Capitals are used when it is a question of the historical fact of the Protestant reforms of the seventeenth century, except when the adjective “Protestant” is added (“the Protestant reformers”). This is a bit like the way one simply says “the Revolution” to designate the revolution of 1789. This way of employing terms clearly does not prejudice our judgment, which is rather well explained and substantiated in the third part.

Also in the third part, “word of God” is written sometimes with, sometimes without capitals. It will be seen that this way of doing things is required by an appreciation of the ambiguity of that concept which can refer either to an act of God or to an ecclesial reality (biblical text and preaching).

Sometimes the word “reformism” is used. This is admittedly not very elegant, and it risks suggesting the idea of a systematic exaggeration in the direction of “reforms.” I understand by it a tendency toward reform, and not so much the movement itself toward reform or the ensemble of activities which reform entails as what precedes these things and provides their context. Reformism thus understood is therefore ambivalent; it could be simply an openness to problems and a desire for improvement or a taste for stirring things up, for criticism, and for novelty. The word, as I have made use of it, does not necessarily imply that latter kind of excess.

Introduction (1950)

I. The Church Is Constantly Reforming Itself

The church has always tried to reform itself. At least since the end of the classical period, when the first great councils, the writings of the Fathers, and the development of a fixed liturgy more or less defined the church's nature, its history has been marked by periods of reform. This fact has struck all the historians, both Catholic and Protestant, who have studied the papacy and the church.¹ Sometimes the reform movement

¹ Here are some examples: J. Haller, *Papsttum und Kirchenreform* . . . (Berlin, 1903), p. 11: "The need for church reform . . . extended over many centuries, and is perhaps as old as the church itself . . ."

F. Mourret, writing in *Apologétique* (Paris, 1937), p. 693: "It is a fact that the church has never ceased to work at reforming itself. All of its saints were, in their own way, reformers. To limit myself to those whose reform activity was evident: St. Benedict called his contemporaries, who were too lax or too attached to external concerns, back to a spirit of prayer; St. Bruno awakened a spirit of recollection for a century that was too restless; the life of St. Francis of Assisi was a preaching of disinterestedness addressed to religious who had lost their primitive fervor; and the life of St. Vincent de Paul, in the midst of a century filled with egoism and worldliness, was a lesson in charity and self-sacrifice.

"Similarly, each council (maybe we could say each papal encyclical) was a work of reform. There were nineteen general or ecumenical councils, convoked to remedy abuses in the universal church, and an incalculable number of national, provincial and diocesan councils. All had as their purpose to reform abuses that had crept into dogma, morality and discipline. In reality, the Catholic Church is in a perpetual state of reform, that is, a perpetual state of trying to restore beliefs and morals to their original purity."

J. Lortz, *Die Reformation als religiöses Anliegen heute* (Trier, 1948), p. 212: "Reform within the church is a never-ending theme of the history of the church." Also, J. Guiraud,

has been the result of religious orders correcting their own failings or returning to a more exact expression of their original inspiration, often with an energy that reinvigorated Christendom as well (cf. St. Benedict of Aniane, Cluny, St. Bernard).² At other times the popes undertook a general reform of abuses or addressed moments of crisis (Gregory VII, Innocent III). In lending their energies to reform movements, the popes likewise took the occasion to extend and strengthen papal authority. Sometimes an evangelical spirit, an apostolic “yeast,” developed, touching people’s hearts, as was the case throughout the twelfth century, finding expression in the mendicant orders of St. Dominic and St. Francis. At other times it was church councils which addressed themselves to needed reforms.

Gregory VII used annual councils in Rome as a tool in his program of reform. As Hauck has noted, with the Lateran Council of 1215, a new type of council comes on the scene.³ These new councils are councils for Christendom which for four centuries will be concerned with church reform. As Msgr. Durand, the bishop of Mende, makes explicit at the Council of Vienne, this is reform “in the head and in the members.” After the failure to bring about serious reform in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, followed by the shock of the Protestant Reformation (which

Histoire partielle, histoire vraie, 14th ed. (Paris, 1912), vol. II, ch. 13, pp. 288f. Msgr. Keppler, *Ueber wahre und falsche Reform*, 1903, p. 24 (trans. in French by C. Bègue, *Vraie et fausse réforme: Discours de S. G. Msgr. Keppler . . . , 1 Dec. 1902* [Fribourg en Suisse, 1903], p. 24).

² Until their decline at the end of the 18th century, then their restoration in the 19th, reform was a persistent activity of all the religious orders. *Reformatio* is assigned by Jean of Limoges (mid-13th century) as a regular activity of an abbot with respect to his monks, without the word meaning exclusively a purely interior or moral reform (J. Leclercq, “Un opuscule inédit de Jean de Limoges sur l’exemption,” *Analecta S. Ord. Cisterc.*, III [1947], pp. 147–154). Jacques de Vitry, an author from the beginning of the 13th century, gave church reform as a characteristic of the Western church by contrast with the Eastern church: “*Singulis autem diebus status occidentalis ecclesiae reformabatur in melius, et illuminabantur per verbum Domini, qui sederant in tenebris et in umbra mortis*” (*Historia occidentalis*, ch. 11 [Douai, 1597], p. 294).

³ A. Hauck, “Die Rezeption und Umbildung der allgemeinen Synode im Mittelalter,” in *Histor. Vierteljahrschrift* X (1907), pp. 465–482. *Reformatio* was indicated as one of the objectives of the councils in almost all of the bulls convoking them. At the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries, priests prayed during the sermon that God would come and reform his church: cf. ritual books of Chartres and Autun, cited by P.-M. Gy, *La Maison-Dieu* 30 (1952), p. 131. The link between councils and reform has been brought up often. It is there already in the 5th century. Documentation on this point is so abundant that it could fill up a whole chapter.

covered up the significant Catholic reform initiatives at the beginning of the sixteenth century), the Council of Trent finally achieved a long-awaited reform of the church (at least a partial one). Everybody knows what followed that. (With Vatican II, we are living through a new moment of church reform flowing from that council's initiative and its spirit.)

These are only a few instances in the long history of reforms. I could never completely enumerate the countless partial reforms, reformist texts, or the historical studies dedicated to reform movements in the church.⁴ Nonetheless, I can still allude to the many different activities which, without being called reformist, nonetheless actually represented a movement toward reform in the life of the church.

In effect, every active movement within the church represents a movement beyond what went before it and takes its force from a new inquiry into the sources and the enduring energies of the church's life. In that way, every active movement has a certain quality of reform. This is as true of the contemporary period as of any other, perhaps even truer today. That is why I wrote in 1937:

The church is constantly reforming itself; it can really live only by doing so, and the intensity of its effort to reform itself measures at any given moment the health of its muscle tone (*tonus vital*). Don't be fooled: Pius X's initiative, which found its formula in his motto *Instaurare omnia in Christo* (Renew all things in Christ), an initiative diminished somewhat by the war, but not extinguished, is a true movement of reform. It led to a whole series of subsequent initiatives: the liturgical movement, the missionary initiative begun by Benedict XV and developed under the encouragement of Pius XI, the reform movement brought about by Catholic Action, the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the bishops, and most particularly to the superb realization of Catholic Action expressed by Young Christian Workers. It led as well to the internal renewal of contemporary Catholic theology through a more serious contact of theologians with the sources, a less total ignorance of the Oriental tradition, a more

⁴ I had begun a bibliography on this topic for my own use, but I quickly got submerged in it and gave up finishing it. E. Brown, *Fasciculus rerum expendendarum et fugiendarum. Sive tomus secundus Scriptorum veterum . . . qui Ecclesiae Romanae errores et abusus detegunt et damnant necessitatemque Reformationis urgent* (London, 1690), has published here a number of reformist writings (in the 1st volume, especially the texts of the period of the councils of Constance and of Basel; in the 2nd volume, pp. 794–800, see the list of authors who wrote in favor of reform in the Catholic Church, given in alphabetical order with a brief indication of their works and their dates).

living contemplation of the mysteries, a deliberate turning away from the narrow perspectives of the popular theology of the Counter-Reformation. This became as well a movement of reform producing a quiet assurance about the value of theological work both as interpretation of and a response to the world, signifying a return to intellectual initiatives and to a freedom of thought to which Catholics give evidence in history, philosophy, sociology, culture, and the arts (think, for example, of the work of Maritain) . . .⁵

II. Contemporary Self-Criticism and Reformism (Especially in France)

This interpretation of the chain of reform initiatives, which I wrote back in 1937, took on new meaning and even some urgency quite suddenly toward the end of the Second World War (1939–1945) and in the immediate postwar period. This new situation, which had matured only gradually, became suddenly apparent. After a period of time when free expression in the church had not been possible, a complex of ideas and feelings came to expression with both freedom and solidarity. I will analyze the causes of this explosion of reform initiatives later. For the moment, I want to make note here of some of its characteristic manifestations.

Almost all these initiatives date from 1946, in the form of literary manifestations. As such, they are easier to grasp and to acknowledge than some others, but it would be a mistake to believe that the spirit of reform was limited only to these manifestations or that these following initiatives were the most decisive examples. Some of the writings that I will make note of here produced a certain notoriety within their different contexts but did not play a significant role in the life of Catholicism, whereas others were more significant. All of them, however, are indications of a state or spirit of reform.

The first ones to speak up were perhaps the most eager but not necessarily the most reflective. The book of Aloys Masson, attractive because of his passion for evangelization, was nonetheless rather superficial.⁶ He blamed the church for getting involved in politics, but at the same time he wanted the church to be involved in a way other than the one it had chosen. Beginning with an article by M. Dupouey, followed by another by Emmanuel Mounier, *Esprit* opened up an inquiry that we will examine

⁵ *Chrétiens désunis* (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1937), pp. 339–340.

⁶ Aloys Masson, *Pour une Eglise* (Geneva, 1945).

further on.⁷ Dupouey was critical of the externals of the church, its sociological condition, its excessive “prudence,” and the advanced age of its leaders as well as the mediocrity and the impotence to which Christians seemed to resign themselves within the church. This outburst was immature and much influenced by the experience of the moment, where Communists presented themselves as the leaders for the immediate future. Certainly during those years more than one sincere young Christian asked himself if it might not be a good idea to introduce a bit of Marxist virus into the church so as to avoid the complete dissipation of the church’s evangelizing yeast.⁸ The dimension of illusion evident in such an idea only points out the tragedy of how deeply the problem was felt.

Mounier was more serious. He had a talent for linking captivating anecdotes with somewhat dubious formulas. He expressed the problem of the faith in the context of an anguished Christianity in such a way that he focused upon, not Christianity itself, but the “Christian world.” He himself represented the interests of a group more specifically committed to Christian life and Christian theology than the journal *Esprit*. With this group, called the Youth of the Church (*Jeunesse de l’Eglise*), he felt great sympathy and solidarity.

This group came together and made itself known in Lyons beginning in 1942. It had two goals that were linked together: first, to emphasize the importance of Christian community in the church and, second, to investigate how Christians and the church can collaborate with the new social order that was in the process of being formed. In that way, the group “Youth of the Church” placed itself simultaneously on the course of breaking away from the past as well as of renewing its serious commitment—the predicament of a large number of generous Christians who found themselves faced with new and difficult problems. The publications of “Youth of the Church” found an audience because of the loyalty with which they undertook a difficult examination of conscience for Christians faced with the need to both break out and yet renew commitment all at once.

We are getting close to discussing problems that are properly ecclesial ones. In 1946 both laity and clergy spoke up. They didn’t speak exactly

⁷ M. Dupouey, “L’Eglise va-t-elle émigrer?” *Esprit* (May 1946), pp. 703–716; followed by E. Mounier, “L’agonie du christianisme?” pp. 717–730.

⁸ See several texts like that collected by L. Barjon, “Quand les chrétiens s’accusent,” *Esprit* (May 1946), pp. 214–220.

the same language nor in exactly the same tone, but there was a deep and impressive harmony joining their complaints and their voices. The voice of the laity had a tone of complaint. They complained about the preaching they heard,⁹ the liturgies they attended, the place given to the proletariat (their place) in the church,¹⁰ and the outdated, inept, ineffective, and purely “bourgeois” style of so many of the forms in which parish ministry was being exercised. I won’t go into more detail here, since later on I will give actual examples of the reformist initiatives of the decisive years 1945–1947.

The exposé of *Esprit* on “The Modern World and the Christian World,” which appeared in the August–September 1946 issue, contained several contributions that were both interesting and moving. There were some articles that seemed to see only the weaknesses of the church. However, the essential function of self-criticism is assuredly not praise and flattery. On the whole, as I will point out further along, this critique was healthy and was linked to positive results. The articles made clear that the pastoral activities of the church no longer had much meaning for the majority of people, especially the more radical and dynamic among them. You might say that this is because people are more easily inclined to be carnal than spiritual; but it was also because people, both priests and lay faithful, received the things of Christ in forms inherited from an honorable but culturally obsolete past, in acts and formulas that were scarcely more than rituals, lacking the power to invite others to life or to express their life.

⁹ About *Témoignages sur la spiritualité moderne* by Dr. Jouvenroux (Paris, 1946), P. d’Ouinco wrote: “A suggestive and irritating booklet.” I find it more suggestive than irritating—it’s talking about real problems. See this same author’s “Lettre d’un Catéchumène,” *La Vie Intellectuelle* (Jan. 1948), pp. 32–36.

The question of religious education is at present intensely focused upon the use of the catechism. Cf. an article signed C.H., “Will my child lose his faith in the catechism?” in *Témoignage chrétien* (Nov. 12, 1948), and also several articles by Abbé Rétif, who has just published a book on the question (cf. below, 1st part, ch. 3, n. 34). Pius XII echoed this disquiet in his address to the International Catechetical Congress of Oct. 14, 1950 (*Doc. Catholique*, 1950, col. 1413–1414). This question of the catechism is a most serious issue, since the great majority of children still learn about the church through it. It is amazing that, given the seriousness of the question, the majority of the faithful are hardly interested. But we have heard the heartfelt cry of Canon J. Colomb, *Plaie ouverte au flanc de l’Eglise* (Paris, 1954). Since then the catechetical renewal has become one of the liveliest chapters in the renewal of the church. It is currently in full swing.

¹⁰ This was the theme of “Lettre d’un Communautaire à son curé,” published by M. M. Barbu in *Communauté* (1 and 15 July 1946).

The clergy will never speak completely in the same voice as the laity. That's the way it ought to be. Not that the clergy are vowed to expressing themselves only in a sacral, conventional, hollow, or unreal jargon, which is not the way any truly thinking person expresses what he really feels. But their consciousness of the responsibilities of the priesthood imposes upon the clergy a certain measure, a reserve, a concern not to wound anyone, and a need to take account of everything and everyone—all concerns that the laity don't feel quite the same way. It is not possible for a pastor of souls to be as radical as a layman in his options and in his criticism.

Nonetheless, a self-conscious critique has been very much alive in the last ten years among the clergy, and on the whole it touches upon the same complaints as those of the laity. I pointed out already in a summary way what those are, but I will give more detail about the exact sense of what they mean later on. The congress of the *Union des Oeuvres* at Easter 1946 in Besançon, on the theme "Parish: Christendom as Community and Mission," was the occasion to express and to examine collectively the pastoral dimensions of these problems. In the atmosphere of joy, enthusiasm, and fraternity created by this congress, the French clergy took on the role of apostolic deputies of the local churches. Further, the many bishops present did better than create an impossible night of the fourth of August [an abandonment of invested privileges, as in 1789 during the French Revolution]: they opened their ears to the demands being made, taking an active part in a collective examination of conscience and in a search for something better. One of them said to the chronicler of *Etudes*, "It feels like we are at the beginning of a great revolution."¹¹ This attitude of welcome and active attention, without which a reform spirit would have risked becoming either sterile or producing harmful results, resulted a year later in the startling publication of the historic letter of Cardinal Suhard, "*Essor ou déclin de l'Eglise—Rise or Fall of the Church.*"

In those unusually fruitful years, there was not a conference, a retreat, or a conversation between priests and seminarians that did not take up in one way or another the same questions that were on the mind of every minister of the Gospel seeking to achieve a real and efficacious pastoral ministry, namely, a real, less artificial preaching; catechetics more apt to prepare Christians for real life; less routine and mechanical liturgy, one

¹¹ Cf. the chronicle of P. R. Rouquette in *Etudes* (May 1946), p. 257.

which really expresses the living worship of the community; forms of parish life that are less legalistic, more dynamic, truer to the real needs of the people, etc.

A spirit of reform in the liturgy was not something new. We could even say that the first of all modern reform movements is the liturgical movement and doubtless this is not by sheer chance.¹² If an organized liturgical movement was slow to take shape in France, nonetheless from its beginnings the French Center for Liturgical Ministry (Centre de Pastorale Liturgique—1943) not only was interested in a more communal and more intelligent celebration of liturgical rites but was also linked to the movement of retrieving the theological sources—the Bible and the Fathers—and to the renewal of preaching and catechetics. Indeed, it was tied in to the renewal of all forms of parish pastoral life, which are the objectives of apostolic renewal today. You can easily find indications of these pastoral hopes in the publications of the liturgical movement and in the chronicles of Père Doncoeur.¹³

More than all the other points noted above, the liturgy raises questions for the supreme authority in the church, doubtless because it is so tightly linked to questions of doctrine and to the structure of the church itself. We are not surprised, then, to see the Holy See intervene and itself take the initiative for liturgical reforms. Clearly, certain instances of liturgical renewal have come from Roman initiatives. The new translation of the Psalter (1945) was introduced in Rome as an act of “reform.” You can see that as a first step in a reform which will include the reform of the Breviary in both its texts and its structure, and which will include sooner or later a reform of the celebration of certain sacramental rites, perhaps even a vernacular translation of the first part of the Mass. From here on, this liturgical reform is a movement on its way to further development.

Different proposals for the reform of the Breviary have been put forward by those in the hierarchy or by specialists in the liturgy.¹⁴ A docu-

¹² G. Söhngen, “Der theologische Sinn der liturgischen Erneuerung,” *Catholica*, V (1936), pp. 147–171, has convincingly laid out the reform aspect of the liturgical movement. He even thinks that a Catholic reformation, as opposed to the Protestant Reformation, is characterized first of all by a reform in worship. [This idea received a striking confirmation when Vatican II began its work with liturgical reform, undertaken through its beautiful constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.]

¹³ See, in particular, “Etapas décisives de l’effort liturgique contemporain,” *Etudes* (Nov. 1948), pp. 200–210.

¹⁴ Cardinal J.-B. Nasalli Rocca di Cornegliano, *De Breviario Romano et Calendario ejusdem Breviarii reformando* (Pro manuscript, 1946, 3rd edition)—French trans. in *Paroisse et liturgie* XXIX (1947), pp. 30–42. See the bibliography on this question in

ment like the Holy See's constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis* demonstrates a desire for historical and liturgical authenticity, which is the very soul of a spirit of reform in such matters. In his encyclical *Mediator Dei*, the Holy Father made a distinction between the divine and the human elements of the liturgy, and showed how the human elements, characterized by a certain relativity, must undergo modifications according to the needs of the times.

There would be many other examples of reforms to mention, if I were to try to be complete. But let me point out, at least, one area of considerable importance, namely, institutes of religious life (especially of women). There we find also a search for adaptation and authenticity expressed in a variety of areas of practical application.¹⁵

Nonetheless, how could this presentation of the present spirit of reform, limited here to certain examples cited in print and outlined in a dry documentary and bibliographical fashion, give to someone who has not experienced it a feeling of the reality? I want to evoke the immense goodwill, mixed with a certain anxiety, which for years now has led to an exercise of self-criticism of a new kind in the church (particularly in France), with an eye to revising, adapting, and purifying everything that could limit or impede the work of the Gospel. It will be better to give an account of the character, the causes, and the practical applications of this spirit of reform. But first I should note that similar problems and currents exist also in other countries. Unfortunately, here I need to limit myself to written examples, which are not always either the most important or the most significant.

The book of Papini that appeared in 1946 brought up fundamentally similar questions.¹⁶ At first glance, he leaves the impression of superficial

Les Questions liturg. et paroiss. XXX (1949), pp. 23–24. Also add A. Bugnini, "Per una riforma liturgica generale," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 63 (1949), pp. 406–430. For the liturgical reforms of Pius XII, see *Ephem. Theol. Lovanienses* (1955), p. 311.

¹⁵ You can find descriptions of these initiatives in *La Vie Spirituelle* and the *Supplément*: cf. in particular *Le Supplément* of May 1948 on adaptations for feminine religious life. Observe also that the Congress of Religious in Rome, Nov. 1950, unfolded under the banner of reform; its title was "*Statuum perfectionis presentibus temporibus atque adjunctis accomodata renovatio*," a title reused (as to its substance, at least) by the decree of Vatican II *Perfectae Caritatis*. See also the addresses of Cardinal Piazza in opening the congress, that of Pius XII (Dec. 8, 1950), and that of Cardinal Micara (Nov. 12, 1950), all to be found in *Doc. Catholique*, 1950, col. 1699, 1676–1677, and 1698.

¹⁶ G. Papini, *Lettere agli uomini del Papa Celestino Sesto* (Florence, 1946)—French trans.: *Lettres aux hommes du pape Célestin VI*, trans. J. Bertrond (Paris, 1948).

gossip about a serious problem, but he does express with literary talent what a lot of the faithful think without always saying enough about it.

Germany, a country noted for spawning serious critical ideas, is the source of the clearest examples of a reformist spirit outside of France. Writings of this kind have been so numerous there that an outside observer, H. Hermelink, was able to compile a list of titles of no less than fifty bibliographical entries.¹⁷ He clearly went beyond the area in which I'm interested, finding in general publications evidence of a spirit of openness, and mixing with the self-criticism coming from the faithful other texts that are often equivocal or even unacceptable, coming from the Catholic Reform Movement (*Reformkatholizismus*) and published previously by G. Mensching and H. Mulert. On the other hand, Hermelink left out some writings that are interesting for our concern here.¹⁸ Further, publishing in 1940, he obviously did not have access to the postwar publications.

Among those, the most important is doubtless the "Letter on the Church" of Ida Görres.¹⁹ This article was certainly anything but scandalous: it explained why, "despite everything," a Catholic loves the church with a love linked to profound religious attachment. This text, however, gave expression to a feeling which had been growing for a long time and which, as in France, expressed the feeling of disproportion between what one hopes for from the church, namely, the Gospel, and what one finds in the concrete experience of approaching the church. Other examples might be given similar to her article. However, these suffice for the moment. Perhaps I should mention a more recent article, published in Austria, "Christian Honesty": a statement pleading for freedom of discussion in the church and for honesty in this exchange.²⁰

¹⁷ "Innerkirchliche Reformbewegungen im deutschen Katholizismus," *Theologische Rundschau*, new series 12 (1940), pp. 189–235.

¹⁸ For example: P. Simon, *Das Menschliche in der Kirche Christi* (Freiburg im Br., 1936)—French trans.: *L'humain dans l'Eglise du Christ* (Mulhouse, 1950); H. Wirtz, *Ein Laie sucht den Priester* (Frankfurt, 1940); and in Switzerland, P. Winder and F. von Streng, *Laienwünsche-Priesterwünsche (Priesterwünsche an die Akademiker, Laienwünsche an die Priester)* (Lucerne, 1937). It would be easy to expand the bibliography on these topics.

¹⁹ "Briefe über die Kirche," in *Frankfurter Hefte* (Nov. 1946), pp. 715–733. A partial translation in French: "Malgré cela, je reste catholique," *La Vie Intellectuelle* (Feb. 1947), pp. 26–35. Görres also published *Die leibhaftige Kirche: Gespräch unter Laien*. H. J. Schultz edited two volumes collecting contributions from various authors: *Kritik an der Kirche and Frömmigkeit in einer weltlichen Welt* (Stuttgart, 1959). And others . . .

²⁰ F. Jantsch, "Christliche Anständigkeit," *Gloria Dei* 3 (1948–1949), pp. 1–6—partial French trans.: "Pour la libre discussion dans l'Eglise," *La Vie Intellectuelle* (Feb. 1949),

III. The Church Today: How Did Self-Criticism Become Suspect?

This kind of self-criticism is something rather new in the church these days; at least it has not been going on for a very long time. The Middle Ages had a freedom in such matters that the modern period has not known. St. Bernard's ability to speak frankly to the pope might have been explained by his particular circumstances if we did not also have similar texts by St. Colomba, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Bridget, and others . . . The reformist treatises published by bishops, monks, and theologians articulated criticisms straightforwardly, such that E. Brown has been able to edit a number of them as polemical material against the Roman Catholic Church (see above, note 4).

On the tympanum of our cathedrals, as in the paintings of Fra Angelico, you can find monks, bishops, and even popes being ushered into hell by grimacing devils; Dante put his contemporaries, Pope Nicholas III, Pope Boniface VIII, and Pope Clement V, in his *Inferno*. True, he had ideological and political motives for doing so, but the critique remains unsubtle. Such facts are sufficiently numerous and well enough known that I don't have to insist.

However, in that sociologically "healthier" period, a freely expressed critique of individual persons was nonetheless expressed with respect for the ecclesial institution and its functions. Those times did not have any more "morality" than ours perhaps, but they did seem to have a greater "code of honor," a healthy and solid public spirit, to use the helpful distinction made by M. G. Thibon following Prudhon. It would be a problem if criticizing persons undermined respect for their administrative function and for the institution itself. However, historians of the church, and particularly historians treating the origins of the Reformation, have shed light on this question.²¹ It is a fact that the church has long maintained the point of view, perfectly healthy in itself, that the criticism of persons and of things within the church does not entail either loathing or loss of faith. As L. M. Febvre has pointed out with respect to

pp. 126–131. In addition, there are many writings that have appeared since, laying claim to freedom of speech and opinion in the church: K. Rahner and E. B. Roegele in *Wort und Wahrheit* (Jan. 1953), pp. 5–10; *Doc. Catholique* (1954), col. 799–803; E. Guerrero in *Razon y Fe* (1960), pp. 45–64, and (1961), pp. 365–382, etc. The idea is mirrored in John XXIII's address to the press of June 6, 1962, and in Vatican II (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 37; *Ad Gentes*, no. 28; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 37).

²¹ See in particular Denifle-Weiss, *Luther und das Luthertum*, vol. 2 (Mainz, 1909), pp. 60f., 65f.

Rabelais, it is an anachronism to attribute to people living before the modern period attitudes uncharacteristic of their own time.

Since those days the Reformation has come on the scene, as well as revolutionary liberals, the spirit of the Enlightenment philosophers, Voltaire, rationalism and its modern progeny, Marxist atheism, Nazism, and similar expressions as well . . . As an undercurrent of its radical doctrinal attack upon the church, the Reformation developed a widespread critique of things Catholic, from monastic life to the priesthood and, above all, the papacy. This was a merciless critique which lacked scrupulous concern for the truth. Some of these themes, sadly, are still strong within Protestant consciousness and create complexes which constitute the most serious psychological obstacle to mutual understanding. Modern rationalism's attack upon all positive religion and, practically speaking, upon the Catholic Church has also expressed itself in a relentless critique of persons and things inside the church. It has mercilessly exploited all the scandals and all the frauds that we should have ourselves renounced long ago and, to tell the truth, should never have tolerated. The sarcasm of Voltaire did as much to fashion contemporary unbelief as the philosophy of Spinoza . . .

Surrounding all of that there is a great characteristic tendency in the modern world to move from an objective to a subjective world, from a world of order, hierarchy, and tradition to a world of personal consciousness and individual thought. Those who lived in the Middle Ages and those who lived in the *Ancien Régime*—Péguy claims in his *L'Argent* that it's the same thing—those who had a "code of honor" according to Thibon's meaning, lived with respect for classes, hierarchical functions, authority, and superiors. The leader, the priest, and the religious were respected then by reason of their capacity as leaders, priests, or religious, and by reason of their function, their state in life. Instead of urging respect for persons because of the dignity of their rank or their function, the modern world tends to respect functions only if the persons who exercise them have credibility because of their individual qualities. So today people do not respect a leader simply because he is a priest or religious but only to the degree that he is personally good and helpful. To the degree that this tendency toward a completely individualistic "sincerity" has won out, the common good (*esprit public*) has become shipwrecked. Morality has remained an issue, but not very brilliant; "honor" is on a downhill slide.

With respect to criticizing the weaknesses and faults of the church, all of this brought about new conditions and a new context. On the one

hand, being critical, which formerly one could do freely, in good conscience, “in-house,” without diminishing respect for the essentials, became a terrible weapon and the source of attacks that can no longer be controlled or even faced with the candor of previous times. A spirit of loyalty for the church, which did not impede criticism in the past, now demands that one be careful not to create an occasion to betray the church or to give comfort to the enemy. Even when a Catholic, informed by a sufficient historical perspective, might be inclined to utter the same criticisms that an unbeliever would, he or she is held back by the fear that their word might be distorted and used against the church.

The church has seen what a sincere self-critical statement can do to help its unscrupulous adversaries. At the time of the Reformation, there were already people in the church who thought that it was not fitting to aid Protestant polemics by publicly disavowing the faults of the popes or of other churchmen. Contarini replied that the best way to blunt the attacks of the Protestants was to reform the Curia. With other reformers who had the same tendency as he (Sadolet, Pole, Carafa, and a good number of other prelates), he wrote a memorandum which he gave to Paul III (1537). However, this memorandum, given by one indiscreet person to other indiscreet persons, was printed and disseminated. Luther made use of it to attack Rome, thus seeming to justify those who held for silence about problems in the church and spoiling for quite a long time any possibility of exercising ecclesial self-criticism.²²

²² Luther, *Ratschlag eines Ausschusses etlicher Kardinäle: Papst Paulo III auf seinem Befehl geschrieben und überantwortet, mit Luthers Vorrede* (edit. Weimar), pp. 191–308; cf. text on pp. 284f. For a treatment of this episode, see L. Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste*, vol. 5, pp. 126f.; and H. Grisar, *Luthers Kampfbilder*, fasc. 3 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1923), pp. 57f.

Luther even used the beautiful and humble text of Hadrian VI giving instructions to Chierigati, the nuncio at Nuremberg (cf. Pastor, vol. 4, 2nd part, pp. 93f.). He used it again, with a certain discretion, in his *Vermahnung an die Geistlichen* of 1540 (Weimar, XXX, 2, p. 354); but he ridiculed it in his *Vorrede, Nachwort und Marginalglossen zu Legatio Adriani* of 1538 (Weimar, L, pp. 355–363). Luther even edited and glossed the bull by which Paul IV adjourned the council (Weimar, L, pp. 92f.).

Because the Curia feared another use of such well-intentioned documents, access to the papers of the Council of Trent (originally intended for public inspection by Pius IV) was forbidden by Pius V, who limited publication only to the decrees of the council: cf. H. Jedin, *Das Konzil von Trient: Ein Ueberblick über die Erforschung seiner Geschichte* (Rome, 1948). Here is another symptom of this state of affairs: after the Council of Trent, the episcopal authority had a watercolor painted of the church of Santa Maria di Spelonca (Arquata), “*cum sint in inferno depicti Papa, Cardinales et*

Erasmus paid attention; in 1522 he wrote to Pope Hadrian VI, a Dutchman like himself, that if he had spoken somewhat freely, it was the tranquility of those times that allowed him to do so.²³ However, in 1526 he complained that all that had been spoiled by the Protestant quarrel, and that papal authority had become stronger and weighed more heavily on the church since Luther (and Erasmus himself) had claimed the right to express themselves freely.²⁴

Following this tragic period when everything was called into question, criticized, and disparaged, the Catholic hierarchy viewed Catholics joining in criticism of the faults and weaknesses of the church with pain and displeasure. St. Thomas Aquinas had claimed certain criteria in the law (based on apocryphal sources) that required stricter guarantees for any testimony or accusation against a minister of the Roman Church, citing this consideration: "Condemning one of these ministers would bring prejudice against the dignity and the authority of the Church in the opinion of others, constituting so grave an inconvenience that the Church might tolerate the evil actions of a single minister, unless the fault he performs is so public and so evident that grave scandal would result."²⁵

Evidently these considerations still inspire the attitude of pastors responsible for the life of the church. In their view too much attention to failures in the church risks destroying more than building up the church. This is not the moment, they think, to add our voice to the voices of those who bitterly attack the church.²⁶ Moreover, the hierarchy itself has been very sparing in any statements that risk discrediting sacred authority by condemning or disavowing faults (see below, page 76). The system of powerful central authority which has prevailed in the church since the sixteenth century has, in its way, tended to interpret every critique as

religiosi, quae res vero sapit Lutheranismum—with a pope, cardinals and religious, who delighted in Lutheranism, shown in hell." Cf. G. Fabiani, "Sinodi e Visite pastorali ad Ascoli dopo il concilio di Trento," *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia* 6 (1952), pp. 264–280; p. 280, n. 80.

²³ Cf. A. Renaudet, *Etudes érasmienne* (Paris, 1939), p. 203.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 261, 284, n. 4. Erasmus couldn't forgive Luther for having abused the true cause of the Gospel by his use of violence: *ibid.*, p. 352.

²⁵ *Summa Theologiae*, 2a-2ae, q. 70, a. 2, ad 3. See Stephen Kuttner, "Cardinalis: The History of a Canonical Concept," *Traditio* (1945), pp. 190–192, 202–214, for a treatment of this *Constitutum Sylvestri* (Mirbt, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums*, no. 193) and of the group of apocryphal documents that constitute the "Symmachian Apocryphals."

²⁶ Similar to the position of Protestants in *Positions protestantes* (Paris, 1946), p. 15.

arising from a spirit of opposition and even from a dubious orthodoxy.²⁷ A simplistic apologetics has often thought that it was necessary to defend *everything*. This attitude has defended the sanctity and the perfection of the church using ideas that are not always correct and which can only be maintained, if the truth be told, by refusing to see things as they actually are.

Self-criticism is nonetheless still necessary. Every spiritual organization that is really alive must encourage genuine critique. A school of thought that ignores this rule would condemn itself to nothing more than mere survival. Ida Görres correctly observes that the impossibility of speaking critically under Nazism was a cause of its weakness. Further, the pressures of life are such that they will eventually become expressed despite everything. They will find expression but, unfortunately, that does not substitute for what should have happened in a well-ordered world.

The terrible attacks that the church has undergone in the modern period are, in part, a response to a regime of conformity that was too mistrustful of any new thinking—thinking in tension not with the great Catholic tradition so much as in tension with the received ideas of a narrow milieu that had lost touch with the currents of living thought. Papini correctly noted: “The stone with which we strike ourselves on the breast is one that our accusers won’t be able to throw at us.” There is an element of necessary criticism which, far from being opposed to the church, has to exist as a requisite element of the church’s life.

How can Christians live out the absolute sincerity that the Gospel imposes on them if they aren’t able, within the limits of respect for what needs to be respected, to speak about what is most precious to them, the community of the church? St. Thomas More alluded to this in explaining his own freedom of expression: “Do we need to keep a respectful silence even in the face of abuse? Must we call every criticism of the evils brought about by human malice a novelty, an absurdity, or an impertinence? Let’s stop calling ourselves Christians, if we have to keep still about what Christ taught us. Almost all the precepts of Jesus condemn present behavior more than all of my criticisms.”²⁸

²⁷ The history of the First Vatican Council provides a perfect example of this. Any criticism, and even the simple discussion of certain points, was resented by Pius IX and his circle as an outrage to the dignity of the Holy See. See, for example, *Le Concile du Vatican d’après des documents inédits* (Paris, 1919), pp. 196f., 239–240, 244–245, 296–299.

²⁸ Cited in E. Dermenghem, “Erasmus et Thomas More contre Machiavel,” *Le Roseau d’Or—Chroniques 2* (Paris, 1926), p. 235.

We need to note, however, that even though they use the same words, saying materially almost exactly the same thing, there are two kinds of criticism that are very different. One is evil or destructive; the other, good and constructive, that is, edifying in the true sense of the word. The church does not like someone who risks destroying more than building up, even using good form. A number of attitudes expressed by the hierarchy that are above all pastoral in perspective can be explained by this concern.²⁹

We may be impressed by the forceful statements of violent figures who appear on the scene of history. Their power, even brutality, might appear appealing. But once such persons have turned everything upside down, they disappear from the stage of history, leaving to others, who are meeker and less glorious, the job of putting things back together again . . . The church operates with greater seriousness and weighs its words carefully because it takes its responsibilities more seriously. The church is guided not just by the light of an experience of the present moment or of one single aspect of reality but by the light of its experience of centuries and of the whole spectrum of life.

There are two distinct types of criticism, just as there are two very different ways of using punishment in education. You can punish out of anger, carried away by impatience and even by a feeling of resentment or getting even. But you can also punish out of love so as to help others to arrive at their real good. Similarly, you can criticize without love or respect in a spirit of disparagement and hatred; but you can also criticize out of love, with seriousness and respect. The church can accept criticism of the latter kind. Abbé Godin and Abbé Daniel made that kind of critique in their book *Is France a Mission Land?—France, pays de mission?* Clearly there is always some risk involved. Others can use our words to disparage the church in a completely different spirit from what we intended. As we saw, this is what Luther did. I know some secular anti-Catholics who literally devoured the book of Godin and Daniel in order to find

²⁹ In this respect we might consider the following rule, formulated at the 8th Ecumenical Council, as the expression of the attitude of the Catholic Church: "Si synodus universalis fuerit congregata, et facta fuerit etiam de sancta Romanorum Ecclesia quamvis ambiguitas et controversia, oportet venerabiliter et cum convenienti reverentia de proposita s[uj]scitari et solutionem accipere, aut proficere, aut profectum facere, non tamen audacter sententiam dicere contra summos senioris Romae pontifices." 11th rule and 13th canon: cf. Mansi, XVI, 174 and 406, cited by Hefele-Leclerq, *Histoire des Conciles*, vol. 1, A, p. 74.

ammunition to express their antagonism against the church. Anyone who is candid and loyal, using only the light of truthfulness, is vulnerable in this way. Blessed is the weakness of the one whose defense is Truth itself!

In one of his addresses Pius XII said this: "We know that our words and our intentions risk being falsely interpreted and distorted for the sake of political propaganda. But the possibility for such erroneous or mean-spirited misinterpretations cannot make us stop speaking up."³⁰ Pius XII further said this as well, coming closer to the point that interests me here:

The free expression of one's opinion is the prerogative of every human society where people, responsible for their personal and social conduct, are intimately committed to the community to which they belong. . . . In the eyes of Christians, repressing the expression of opinion or forcing it into silence is an attack upon the natural rights of persons, a violation of the world order that God has established. . . . We want to add another word concerning public opinion inside the church itself (naturally with respect to matters open to discussion). This may astonish those who don't really know the church or who only think they know it. The church is a living body, and it would lack an element of its life if the free expression of opinion was lacking—a lack for which both pastors and faithful would be blamed.³¹

Citing the letters of Pope Celestine VI, treated by Papini (and representing the German reform movement referred to above), P. A. Koch recently wondered about the conditions which would assure that criticism within the church could be good and fruitful.³² He settled upon the following points that one could easily expand upon: love of the church; genuine and frank courage, which would inspire straightforward criticism in the manner of St. Paul disagreeing with St. Peter at Antioch face-to-face (Gal 2) instead of covert detractions; justice and exactitude: refusing loose generalizations, avoiding careless or unilateral judgments; prudence and humility.

³⁰ Allocution to the Sacred College, Christmas 1946 (*Doc. Catholique*, Jan. 5, 1947, col. 3).

³¹ Address to the international congress of the Catholic Press in Rome, published in the French edition of *Osservatore Romano*, Feb. 18, 1950, and reprinted in *Doc. Catholique*, Mar. 12, 1950, cols. 322 and 327.

³² "Kritik an die Kirche," *Stimmen der Zeit* (Dec. 1947), pp. 169–184.

Koch adds that, in response, the church ought to show itself open to criticism and to offer to those who are critical a calm response, shorn of the sort of agitation that excites suspicion. Koch also notes (p. 183) that the impossibility of any criticism was one of the fatal weaknesses of the Nazi regime. Finally, the church should acknowledge justified criticism in a spirit of realism.

IV. Four Traits of Contemporary Self-Criticism

The examples of criticisms of the church made by Christians given here ought to be classified as good critiques. I don't mean that everything said in them is perfect. Human frailty exists in each one of us along with spiritual integrity—the two tendencies are sometimes mixed or even alternated. Sometimes one clearly prevails over the other. In the writings of those like Mensching or H. Mulert, the bad tendency is so great that it spoils the element of truth in what they say.³³ By contrast, in the celebrated examination of conscience of Cardinal Manning (which I translated in *Masses ouvrières*, March 1951, pp. 20–44) and in the book of Godin and Daniel, the criticism is completely pure. Between these two types, there is a whole range of pluses and minuses, judged differently according to who it is who makes the judgment.

In France, however, there is a sort of consensus about what makes for a loving and respectful self-criticism. This self-criticism has had both blunt and subtle voices. Nonetheless, there is a certain homogeneity, a kind of generalized approach that is represented in this criticism. That is why I am going to try to point out the causes and the points of interest of the present movement of critique or reform, after describing it in some detail.

1. Catholic self-criticism is frank, sometimes even harsh. It does not arise from a lack of confidence or from a lack of love for the church but, on the contrary, from a deep attachment and from a desire to be able to trust, despite the disappointment of someone who loves and who expects a great deal from the church. If certain proposals for reform have given some people the impression of being revolutionary, it should be recog-

³³ *Der Katholizismus: Sein Stirb und Werde*, ed. G. Mensching (Leipzig, 1937); *Der Katholizismus der Zukunft: Aufbau und kritische Abwehr*, ed. H. Mulert (Leipzig, 1940). These two publications were put on the Index by the decrees of Jan. 22, 1938, and of May 7–16, 1941, respectively.

nized that these revolutionaries act in a spirit of fidelity to the church. Péguy gave us the model of this kind of fidelity and offered the justification for wanting to reform the church he loved.

These feelings are sometimes so strong that they produce an *outcry*, but at the root of such vehemence there is neither revolt nor bitterness. Rather, there is a very deep attachment, encouraged by the rediscovery of the church in the spirit of the 1930s. It is a fact, perhaps unexpected but nonetheless real, that the self-criticism of the years 1945–1950 have no relationship to Modernism, no link to this or that pamphlet coming from the Modernist revolt or from *Action française*.

This self-criticism would not have been possible without this kind of openness and energy or without the victory over Modernism. As always, of course, pressing problems have continued to prompt new research, some of which is troubling the Roman authorities (cf. the encyclical *Humani Generis* of Aug. 12, 1950). I wonder if there is actually anything more than a common historical context that links the research of specialists and the reform movement under analysis here. If anyone comes up with some coincidence between a current problem and some question that was raised by Modernism, with some defense of a previously condemned proposal (or one called into question at least), the matter can be problematic—even fatal. For example, proposals for liturgical renewal risked being compared to the articles of Pistoia that were censured in 1794.³⁴ There exists a kind of “raw material” for reform movements, just like there is “raw material” for political life. There can be various combinations of these elements, but the political spirit is very different from the spirit of true reform.

A crisis or an uneasiness lies at the root of present-day reform, but it is not a crisis of loyalty. I really mean “at the root,” because it is not out of the question that the crisis, which I will soon analyze in detail, might have become a crisis of loyalty for one or another protagonist if their deeply felt, sincere, and worthy demands had not been listened to at all. It cannot be denied that certain critics have experienced—do now experience—a feeling of uneasiness, a malaise. They have felt that their pure, necessary, justified demands have been insufficiently taken into consideration or even treated with a prejudice of suspicion. They have felt that

³⁴ R. Pilkington, “La Liturgia nel sinodo Ricciano di Pistoia (1786),” *Ephemer. Liturg.* 43 (1929), pp. 410–424. Pilkington correctly notes that the proposals for liturgical reform of Pistoia were not condemned as “haeretica, falsa,” but only censured as “temeraria et probato mori injuriosa.”

their leaders don't recognize the urgency of problems as seriously as they do and that, despite the exhausting effort they devote to their proposals, they are in danger of failing, either because their urgency is recognized too late or because, in the end, the principle is called into question.

They think that too often considerations of "tradition"—meaning official support for received ways of acting or speaking—practically smother considerations about the most authentic sorts of improvements or the most urgent pastoral adaptations . . . Sometimes, listening to complaints about this sort of thing concerning matters I took seriously, I have reflected on those first years of the sixteenth century, when so many people felt that the situation of the church was extremely serious, that matters could be resolved if only people did the right thing, but that time was running out and unfortunately the hierarchy didn't seem to appreciate the urgency. The key difference—much to our advantage—is that the church today possesses a purity of spirit, resources, and pastors as well as a commitment to its apostolic mission that the beginning of the sixteenth century lacked. Vatican II has clearly proven that.

2. A second trait of contemporary self-criticism in the church is the serious nature of its foundations. Not only does it draw upon a real awareness of the apostolic situation of the church (as I will show) but it has antecedents or intellectual precedents of unquestionable importance. There would not be the present wave of reform without a clear and correct judgment about apostolic needs. Neither would this reform have come about (or, at least, not with the same quality) without the theological and liturgical renewal, whose first initiatives came from Leo XIII and St. Pius X.

This wave of reform, likewise, arises from a renewal of the very meaning of the church—above all within the last quarter century. The liturgical movement, with its spirit of reform, would not have become what it is without being preceded and then nurtured by the scientific research of its scholars. It never stops finding support in serious research. Likewise, the present movement, which is essentially apostolic or pastoral, owes much to a renewal of ideas about the church, and it never stops making reference to ecclesiology—for which pastoral life is the natural prolongation or application.

3. Among considerations about reform, there is one that represents a third characteristic trait. It is a fact, in the currents under discussion, that the role of the laity is considerable. Many of the writings referred to

above are the works of laypeople. This fact points to a new awareness by the laity that they are the church and that they have a responsibility, in a certain sense, to create the church. They discuss questions about the church because they feel responsible for the church.

How could we fail to recognize in this new situation the influence of Catholic Action and of the appeal of the Holy Father for the laity to do their part, under the direction of the hierarchy, in the church's apostolic mission to the world? Catholic Action was the great preparation of the movement under consideration. This will become even clearer further on.

Until now, priests and, above all, laypeople were simply expected to reform themselves. (A pastor would not have allowed a mere parishioner to tell him off—and he was right.) The bishop hears the advice of his priests, but at the diocesan synod the bishop alone remains the final arbiter and the only legislator. This way of doing things is part of the structure of the church, which is hierarchical. Nonetheless, a study of the history of the church indicates that its genius created in the past structures for communal or collegial decisions. In my *Lay People in the Church* I give examples. The *Pontifical*, in the introduction to the ordination of priests, remarks that the captain and the passengers are all in the same boat; they ought to have the same idea about a question that calls them both to understand the common life. Although the church is structured hierarchically, it leads its life in the ranks of the faithful as well. All the faithful are responsible for the whole body of the church in some way, especially when circumstances become critical. This justifies the fact that today neither priests nor laity can excuse themselves from paying attention to the problems of the church.

4. Among the conditions that can further seriousness and depth in ecclesial self-criticism, I must mention the practice of return to the sources—what we call today *ressourcement*.³⁵ Later we will see how an

³⁵ The word *ressourcement* comes from Péguy, and its first use can be dated precisely. In the *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* (Mar. 1, 1904) he had the idea but not yet the word: see the text in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 12, pp. 186–192. However, in *Argent* (con't.), the 9th notebook in the 14th series (Apr. 22, 1913—*Oeuvr. compl.*, vol. 14, p. 218), he wrote: "Nothing is as anxiously [*sic*] beautiful as the sight of a people who lift themselves up again through an interior movement, a return to the sources (*ressourcement*) of their ancient pride, by means of a new release of the instincts of their race."

For Péguy this meant going back to the sources of life—to a new release of energies. Péguy envisaged "an invincible Christendom renewing itself from the ground up"

examination of sources or principles of church life is demanded by the nature of the present reform movement. We will see it as one of the conditions—the fourth in my list—by which reform can come about without schism. *Ressourcement* is thus extremely important.

“The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). The prophet speaks of a punishment, a withdrawal of God’s Word. Today we are living out this text as a kind of blessing, because God has sent us, along with a hunger for his Word, an abundance of nourishment.

This is not the place to go into detail about the renewal of studies in the Bible, the Fathers, and the liturgy, which represent a kind of underground foundation that feeds the felt need to return to the sources. Once again, as we will see better further along, contemporary ecclesial self-criticism or the spirit of reform is accompanied by a return to the sources of theological and pastoral thinking within the living rivers of a Catholic tradition rediscovered in its deepest expressions.

V. The Reasons for Today’s Self-Criticism: A Passion for Authenticity

Among the general causes for the reformist self-criticism of today, some are linked to current attitudes and others are more specific.

As for current attitudes, I necessarily point to a taste for sincerity. Here is an extremely rich personal quality that might have certain superficial (even faulty) manifestations but some profound ones as well. To mis-

(*Clio*, p. 170). The word *ressourcement* has been used (and I use it here) to express the idea of a return or going back to the sources. In this sense, the expression is old and even classic. Erasmus spoke of “*ex fontibus praedicare Christum*”; Lacordaire in 1828 wrote to Lorain: “Strength is found at the sources, and I want to go there to see . . .”; St. Pius X proclaimed the need to “*redire ad fontes*—go back to the sources”; M. Blondel spoke of the necessity of going back to the great authors themselves, who are often betrayed by formulas considered “traditional” but that are really recent (Testin, *La semaine sociale de Bordeaux*, Paris, 1910, pp. 67–68). Pius XII, in *Humani Generis* (Aug. 12, 1950), after opposing a return to sources which might neglect the living teaching of the magisterium, goes on to say, “Theologians ceaselessly ought to go back to the sources of divine revelation . . . By studying the sources, the sacred sciences keep growing fresher, while speculation that neglects to go all the way back to the study of the deposit of revealed faith becomes sterile, as experience shows us” (AAS 42 [1950], p. 568).

understand this is to misunderstand one of the fundamental characteristics of contemporary people (and the kind of humanity that they have to bring to Christ). The superficial or faulty aspect of modern sincerity is a tendency to attack whatever presents itself as sacred and to rob it of its halo. It can even seem that attacking the sacred gives someone the status of an adult, and sometimes in the view of the young, all authority and all conventions are a priori suspect of betrayal or corruption.

By contrast, heretics seem to have a kind of prestige, identifying them as superior persons.³⁶ To be avant-garde or nonconformist becomes a value in itself. But as Emmanuel Mounier has rightly noted,³⁷ there is a conformism and a professional pride in the attitude of the avant-garde, to the effect that the attitude of the Young Turk eventually destroys itself. Here as elsewhere, only the truth is really liberating. Being at the forefront doesn't make any sense or have any value in itself. The only thing that really counts is to be true. That is the solid foundation and the best part of this taste for sincerity.

Our age certainly goes further than others in demanding truth in actions and attitudes. Clearly, previous generations did not have difficulty in adopting the habits and customs that tradition had laid down before their time and without their assent, although our contemporaries do feel that reluctance. Let me make note of a few superficial and inoffensive examples . . . It was evident that priests in the postwar period of 1945 had personal ideas about how to celebrate the Mass (within certain objective limitations), concerning what to say out loud, for example.³⁸ They didn't do this lightly but out of concern for being faithful to the meaning of things. We also saw priests introduce individual adaptations in their clerical dress. Though a humble detail, this is not insignificant. If someone feels a personal reaction he is not going to fall in completely

³⁶ Today, "the word heresy no longer means that one is wrong, but rather that one has a perceptive and courageous heart. By contrast, the term orthodoxy takes on a pejorative meaning" (Chesterton, cited by G. Marcel, *Du refus à l'invocation*, p. 238).

³⁷ *Témoignage chrétien* (Feb. 25, 1949); cf. *Feu la Chrétienté* (Paris, 1950), pp. 122f., 233f.

³⁸ For example: To say out loud the final doxology of the Canon of the Mass—"Per ipsum . . ."—gives to the *Amen* of the faithful the sense of solemnity that it had at the time of St. Justin; gives meaning back to the gesture of offering at the Offertory, etc.

Note from 1968 edition: All that had been written in 1950. Clearly we have gone far beyond those suggestions and new initiatives have surpassed those of 18 years ago . . .

with all the impersonal details of the rubrics; because objective truth, *the rights of which are not called into question here*, does not say everything about the authenticity of the gesture *of some particular person*.

What we find here is a present-day taste for authentic gestures, and one of the effects of this tendency is one of the great themes of the modern world—the discovery of the subject. This is not a complete “discovery,” of course, because only those who don’t know St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas would imagine that they had been inattentive to the person as “subject.” This point also has to be connected to one I made before, namely, that the church does not build itself up only from on high but also from below. Of course, in a real sense, the church exists antecedently to the faithful and is not created by them. But from another point of view, it is indeed also created by the faithful; the church only achieves its full living reality from human activity. So as I will show, that is precisely the area where the church needs reform activity, where the point of view of the subject comes into play, inspired by the taste for sincerity and by reasonable and worthwhile demands for reform.

We can admit, by the way, that the events of recent years have played their part in the growth of reform tendencies. The war and its consequences have been a tragic lesson for those paying attention. A great number of priests and active laity became more or less deeply involved in the resistance, all of them engaged in at least material disobedience. There is a qualitative difference between someone who has never disobeyed—never broken a rule—and those who felt they had to break through a wall holding them back from what was officially forbidden. When people have once broken the law, they have entered another world. We know that the domain of the good does not end on the frontiers of what is considered legal (materially speaking) but that it extends (and sometimes even begins) beyond those frontiers.

It is possible that the special and specific conditions caused by the war played some small role—I believe that this is the case. Wars speed up historical change. All kinds of traditional considerations that would not have been called into question so soon were suddenly questioned or denounced. During a war, many things count for so little; people are brought to hang on to only the essentials in lots of cases. Many instances of authority that made sense during a time of peace collapse during wartime; and when they collapse, they reveal where true values lie. In wartime there is an intermingling of people, a raising of questions, and an exchange of ideas that bring about more change in two years than in a half century of peace. In sum, with a shakeup of everything, whatever

is precarious falls down more quickly. People are looking for true values and for the most effective structures.

In 1945, added to all that, people, a certain number at least, felt the attraction or the weight of a prerevolutionary situation and became aware of the call to structural reforms that the Catholic hierarchy itself proposed for society. So why not within the church too? the laity came to say.

Only concrete or specific causes were really decisive. In France everything came down to the realistic evaluation of the true apostolic or pastoral situation of the church. This evaluation took into account two stages. From 1925 to 1940, within the context of Catholic Action, this period was the springtime of a new spirit, and it introduced the practice of a new method of pastoral inquiry. From their “guys” and their “gals,” priests heard questions that came from the pastoral environment (the milieu); they came into deeper contact with the objections, the problems, the readings, the distractions, the real state of the pastoral environment from which their formation, their clerical dignity, and their cultural functions had set them apart. This created a strong impetus.

Think of the circles of Young Christian Workers’ study groups, the gatherings of Eagle Scouts (*Routiers*). Despite being disrupted by the mobilization of 1939, the war, captivity, exodus, the problem of surviving, the resistance, and the rest, it became apparent to me that the consciousness and the situation of the masses were far different than I would have believed. I remember the summary account made by priests right after Easter 1940; I remember the experience of the captivity—and I remember this testimony expressed in 1944 by a marvelous young Christian worker militant taken by the Gestapo from his work as a Christian in Berlin: “I thought I knew the masses. In fact, I didn’t know them at all. The situation is far more serious than we ever imagined.”

Is France a Mission Land? (the book of Godin and Daniel) appeared in 1943. The event of its publication is well known—it belongs to history. Once again, by insisting on the simple truth, someone pronounced words that others needed to hear. Only after his death was Abbé Godin’s book fully accepted in the church. The man and his work were truly providential and prophetic. We have been guided by his message ever since: the apostolic and missionary face of the church has been strengthened and even transformed. Very quickly, Godin’s work led to a new awareness of the situation of the world and to a new rapport between the church and the world. Here, in a few lines, is the situation:

The world is settling into religious indifference. The proportion of Christians may be reassuring (?) in some areas, but it is negligible in others. In proletarian circles which have taken on the character of a sociological milieu, a practicing faith is practically nonexistent. By way of example, here are two samples of what's going on. One comes from an observer inside the milieu of the proletariat: "We continue practicing the received traditions, without wondering if it wouldn't be more useful today to know if all this energy and all this time produce pastoral success, and if a fundamental change would not perhaps be indispensable."³⁹ And, by contrast, here is what someone says from outside the church: "Without a program of readjustment, of which it appears incapable, the Catholic Church seems to be on the way to collapse. As of now, it has the support of only a small fraction of society that might call itself Christian."⁴⁰

In order to undertake the evangelization of a world which is becoming pagan or was never Christian, the church always carries within itself the deposit of faith, the sacraments, the seal and the assistance of the Holy Spirit. (We should note, however, that the pagan world of antiquity was religious, whereas the present-day world seeks to extinguish every religious need.) Many things in the church, however, are not actually sensitive to the work of evangelization. Certain forms of worship, the inappropriate use of excessively analytic and abstract formulas for catechesis, the bourgeois structure and weak community links of parish life (at least in the majority of France), the clerical attitude of the priests, and practices and expectations that belong to an idea of "Christendom" that is for practical purposes anachronistic make the assimilation of new members coming from a new and different world effectively impossible. The accumulation of venerable old pieces of furniture in its cultural baggage creates an impossibility for the church to make sense "to the barbarians," according to the famous ironic remark of Ozanam.

Even a good number of the faithful think that there are lots of things to adapt in the church: simplify its liturgy, attune its preaching to the real needs of people, reconsider and enliven the institutional forms of our pastoral organizations. As for the crisis of priestly vocations, one reason seems to be the feeling among young people sometimes that many

³⁹ P. Schulte, *Le prêtre d'aujourd'hui*, 2nd ed. (Mulhouse, 1941), p. 279.

⁴⁰ R. Kanters, *Essai sur l'avenir de la religion* (Paris, 1946), p. 42. This book, although one-sided in its criticism and not constructive in spirit, could still help serious readers to reflect on the pastoral situation.

present forms of ministry are poorly adapted to the conditions for ministry today, to say nothing of their attraction to the evangelical ideal in its absolute purity. Vocations are more abundant for a dedicated life that is frankly missionary or contemplative. Further, vocations seem to succeed in the line of an apostolate or a religious life in the world under conditions which require a continual re-creation of an evangelical life and which permit direct, Christian, sincere contact with people and their needs and anxieties.

So the distinction proposed by Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier some time ago between “Christianity” and the “Christian world” today means something more than a mere literary formula for those aware of the true pastoral problems of today. The Christian world is a necessity, a true appreciation of reality which simply must be translated into social experience. There is a link between reformist self-criticism and a certain “revolutionary” attitude (that is both healthy and normal). There is a revolutionary attitude that arises from the recognition that we need to change the shape of the “world,” to judge that certain forms are outdated and to choose to substitute others. But, as you see, these ideas of the “outdated” or of “change” do not bear upon Christianity in itself or upon its dogmas and its hierarchical structure. What is called into question, frankly, are certain forms, practices, or habits of historical Catholicism—more exactly, of Catholics, of a certain Catholic world, and of certain historical-social realities of Catholicism.

VI. Applying These Insights: The Need to Adapt or Revise

So we have begun seriously to describe precisely the present dynamics of reform. Two of them give an orientation to all the others, namely, the wish for authentic self-expression and the need to adapt or revise some of our ways of acting.

The wish for authentic self-expression means just what it sounds like. This has always been a requirement of genuine Christian character, but it is now an irrepressible need in the light of modern sincerity—especially with respect to worship, which is our relation to God.

People want an altar that is really an altar, not a flower stand or a pedestal for statues. They want a Paschal Vigil or a Pentecost Vigil that is really a vigil, not a ceremony expeditiously celebrated in the morning to get it out of the way. People want a Mass that is genuinely the praise and the self-offering of a community united in faith, not just a ritual that goes its own way page after page as people, who may or may not follow

the Mass, watch.⁴¹ Here's the point: too many things have become "rituals" for us, that is, "things" that exist in themselves, ready-made. We are preoccupied to carry out the ceremony, meet the conditions for validity, but without being concerned whether these rituals are the actions of real living persons.

As Abbé Michonneau has well observed, people don't live by rites, and our parishes fail to attract people because "our Christianity looks like a ritualism that doesn't change anything in the lives of those who practice it."⁴² In our beautiful and holy Catholic liturgy, as it is too often celebrated, there are many things that have lost their original meaning and have become a mere ritual vestige of an action that, at its origin, did express a genuine initiative of some person or some community.

Today there is a compelling call for true gestures carried out in such a way as to really be the gestures of living persons and to really express what they are meant to express. (We need to direct and guide this tendency, but who, in the name of the Lord, would dare to suppress it?) Look at this example: When the faithful of Abbé D., gathered for Mass in a worker's apartment at M., arrived at the *Confiteor*, they stopped and said to one of the participants, "You got into an argument and a fight with so and so. Go ask him for forgiveness." The person in question left the group to go ask for forgiveness, while the little assembly waited for him to return before continuing with the Mass. Everyone will recognize that this way of celebrating the Eucharist would be impossible in other circumstances. But who could fail to see the *truth* of the gesture. You could only object to it by misunderstanding the Gospel itself, as it is here applied both in spirit and according to the letter (Matt 5:23).

What I have said here about ritual gestures is likewise true in the area of doctrine, taking differences into account. Although doctrine is not

⁴¹ Cf. text of J. Rivière writing to Alain Fournier at Easter, 1907: "The Mass this morning—terribly deformed, lacking grandeur or feeling—disgusted me. Everything was ugly, and I felt that no one understood anything" (*Correspondance*, III, p. 93).

The meaning of the present liturgical movement is expressed very well by P. Doncoeur in his "Chroniques" in *Etudes*; cf. in particular, "Étapes décisives de l'effort liturgique contemporain," *Etudes* (Nov. 1948), pp. 200–210. — On one particular point (the authenticity of *things* used in the liturgy), see also A.-M. Roguet, "Plaidoyer pour la vérité des choses," *La Maison-Dieu* 20 (1949), pp. 117–126. Finally, let us note that the two motives for reform that my analysis of 1950 highlighted are exactly those invoked by Pius XII in favor of liturgical reform. (Cf. as to the Paschal Vigil, F. Antonelli, *Osservatore Romano* (Mar. 4, 1951) — see *Doc. Catholique*, 1951, col. 341–342; and in Vatican II, the Constit. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 21, 62, 88.

⁴² *Paroisse, Communauté missionnaire* (Paris, 1946), p. 258.

abstract or irrelevant in itself, it is less than it should be with respect to its impact on our lives, with respect to the way we ought to present it to others so that it doesn't just remain a truth *in itself*, but a truth with living roots in the minds of real persons, able to enrich them in the way they actually live. Further, with respect to the way the church becomes a sociological reality, all these forms are like the visible surface of the church through which people see and touch it. But they are always in danger of existing in themselves like rituals, cut off from the living heart of the Gospel and so representing merely a sociological crust without the capacity to transmit the sap that makes the Christian vine live.

What is actually at stake in this consideration is the truth about the very reality of being Christian—the truth about the religious relation of the human person with God. So it is completely different from a matter of taste or from an itch to call into question received customs. In this way, you can see that we are dealing with a reform of religion, not just a reformist attitude with respect to ecclesiastical matters. Christianity, when it is true to itself, requires a relentless obligation to pay attention to religious reform.

The taste for authentic gestures is also a taste for the authenticity of Christian reality. Christianity has lived for a long time. It is overloaded with all kinds of contributions from the history it has passed through and affected by all kinds of human circumstances. It's not that we condemn things that we should rather try to understand and explain historically. But the real point is this: there are things which come from history that it would be foolish to try to absolutize by making them identical with Christianity. Human and historical forms, developed throughout history, are linked to Christianity without pertaining to its essential reality.⁴³

Once again, in one way or another, I come back to the distinction between "Christianity" and the "Christian world," between the church and the Catholic milieu. Granted, we shouldn't spurn any of the historical elements of our ecclesial life, but we cannot reproach our epoch for its hunger to rediscover, as far as possible, pure evangelical attitudes and the authenticity of Christian teaching—and this in all domains. In

⁴³ E. Mounier, "L'agonie du Christianisme," *Esprit* (May 1946), p. 724: "Just as in decorating our churches we should not add anything, but rather greatly reduce gold and plaster ornaments; so also in order to break through the wall of misunderstandings which suffocate the Christian message, we should not invent some new kind of magic, but rather rediscover Christianity itself, allowing the word of God to express its penetrating purity."

the area of thought, people want to taste the flavor of Christian teachings in their specificity and their purity (*ressourcement*) rather than a philosophical or apologetic syncretism.

Today's spontaneous current of reform has to be understood in this sense. However, this penchant (which is that of a whole generation) has unquestionably been reinforced by the situation of believers in the contemporary world. Modern rationalism has developed in a terrible way what I might call the critique of sublime motives. It accuses everything that has a reputation for nobility and disinterestedness of having secret, egotistic, or sensual motivations. In carrying out this merciless critique, rationalism makes use of formidable techniques. Marxism proposes to find within the great ideas of justice, religion, family, Fatherland, or property the mask for selfish personal or collective interests, and to discover a cynical hypocrisy in everything we hold sublime, including—in the first place—religion.

Psychoanalysis invites this generation to discover sexual motives underneath all our noble ideals, including (and in the first place) mysticism. Believers, who already possess the taste for the sincerity and authenticity that belongs to their age, have been driven further to seek absolute purity of intention in all their behaviors. They know that people cannot any longer put things over on them and so, in order to show religion in a worthy way to their contemporaries, religion must be seriously critiqued and stripped of everything in it that is in conflict with human interests of class or politics.

This kind of criticism has to be far reaching, because things are so closely linked together that you can't call one point into question without raising many others. For a world willing to accept the Gospel only when it is presented by a church of irreproachable purity, it is no longer possible to support dubious routines, comfortably installed in the bed that the "centuries of faith" has made for the church. To use the expression of Père Beirnaert, we need "a Christianity that makes an impact."⁴⁴ For him there is only one honest means of making such an impact (but it is efficacious): to be truly oneself, drawing as purely as possible upon the original spirit of the church.

One of the fruits of the merciless criticism that Christians have undergone is the discovery of the interconnection between spiritual things and

⁴⁴ L. Beirnaert, "Pour un christianisme de choc," *Construire* (3rd series), 1941, pp. 5–22. There are valuable ideas of the same sort in M. de la Bedoyère, *Le christianisme sur la place publique*—Christianity in the Market Place (Brussels, 1947).

the material world. Having learned this, they have undertaken for themselves a form of self-criticism. We are now suspicious of the link between an apostolic-evangelical fervor and the external conditions of life. You can discover this truth through theological reflection based on the study of history. Think of the work where Père Chenu has shown how evangelical reform could only have succeeded in Christendom if the structures of society themselves were called into question by a new return to the Gospel as its source.⁴⁵ You can find the same truth by looking at spiritual experience in the history of the church. An evangelical thought world or an evangelical heart presupposes evangelization right in the midst of the human situation. The history of the church and the history of the saints show us that these things are linked, and that it is truly difficult to think in an evangelical way when one carries the weight of triumphalism, prestige, certainty, and power. This leads us to understand that there is a strong link, indeed a passage, that leads from the wish for truth to the authenticity of Christian gestures—going all the way to the revision (reform) of certain forms of concrete ecclesial existence (see below, and chap. 2, first part).

This was, you recall, the immediate conclusion of the evaluation of the apostolic situation in France. I won't go back over the analysis I made above. Let's just remember the experience of many of the faithful who are among the most fervent Catholics: they realize that they won't find the Gospel outside the church, and they don't want to leave the church. Nonetheless, they judge that with respect to their own lives, as well as to the effectiveness of apostolic outreach, certain forms of concrete pastoral action are inadequate for these times because they hide or disguise the Gospel rather than express it.

A young woman doing religious missionary work in the world recently said, "In the name of the pagan environments in which we find ourselves living, we want our religious living to give people a simpler image of Christ that is easier for them to decipher."⁴⁶ This is an often-repeated fact. For many people today the external forms of the church have become a barrier that screens out not only the Gospel and God but also the mystery of the church itself.

⁴⁵ "Réformes de structure en chrétienté," *Economie et Humanisme* (1946), pp. 85–98, reprinted in the collection *Inspiration religieuse et structures temporelles* (Paris, 1948), pp. 261–281.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Le Supplément de la Vie Spirituelle* (May 1948), p. 116.

Many would receive the faith fairly easily if it were offered to them in the form that it receives from its sources (the Bible and early tradition). But they have trouble recognizing the Gospel beneath the historical baggage that hides its living reality and that seems foreign to it.⁴⁷ Because of this, it is often from outside or in a roundabout way that we discover the functional values of the Gospel in the church itself.⁴⁸ In the same way, we discover new forms of faith expression and worship; they are re-discovered—reinvented—by going back to the sources and remaining rooted in them. These are facts, and we can only misunderstand their meaning if we bypass one of the clearest directions given by the Holy Spirit to the present time.

From another perspective, when we have understood better the mystery of the church, we can be more understanding and clearer about the outdated structures and the delays that we mentioned earlier. This leads us to appreciate more fully the church's transcendence. The call for needed adaptations takes on a new urgency, an urgency motivated by fervent faith and an impatience for apostolic outreach.

I have already noted that many of our contemporaries are returning to a Christianity rooted in its sources. They stumble over the difficulties that the church poses for them, but they know that outside of this church, both historically and dogmatically, they cannot find the Gospel. What turns them off is not Christianity but the Christian world which contains so many non-Christian elements within its structures, inspired by a paternalistic quest for influence—even power, a bourgeois attachment to money, etc.⁴⁹ If only we could remake the human face of the church and help it appear more like the church of Christ!

⁴⁷ Cf. J. Guitton, *Difficultés de croire* (Paris, 1948), pp. 12f.

⁴⁸ Some references on this point: E. Mounier in *Esprit* (Aug.–Sept. 1946), pp. 214–215; J. Guitton, “Les sources de l’incroyance intellectuelle dans la France contemporaine,” *Lumen Vitae* 2 (1947), p. 614, note; M.-I. Montuclard, “L’Eglise et les valeurs,” *Jeunesse de l’Eglise*, cahier 5, p. 41; J. Folliet, in *Présence de l’Eglise: Les chrétiens au Carrefour* (Lyon, 1949), pp. 72f. (these are really remarkable pages); P. Duployé in *Cahiers Sainte-Jeanne* (July 1949), p. 203.

⁴⁹ These complaints, already clear for a thinker like Proudhon, have become commonplace today. See, e.g., the compilation of texts collected in *Jeunesse de l’Eglise*, cahier 8 (“Je bâtirai mon Eglise,” May 1948). Cf. M.-I. Montuclard, *Rebâtir le temple: Deuxième lettre aux impatients*, p. 948: The author examines the difference between Christianity and the Christian environment—the structures and the face that history has imposed on the church. He sees in them one of the causes for de-Christianization.

Finally, certain changes in ecclesial life and “structures” appear to be needed.⁵⁰ By this I mean changes in the style of catechesis and preaching, therefore also in the formation of the clergy, in the external forms of worship, in the public face of parishes, and in the way in which the church presents itself publicly (sometimes scandalous, outdated pomposity). All this needs to be done in the light of and under the inspiration of a return to the sources: the Bible, ancient Christianity, the spirit of the liturgy, and major documents of the magisterium.

These observations, which will teach most of our readers nothing new, need to be made more precise by articulating how their spirit is expressed in the current reform of structures.

In the majority of reforms that the church has known, it was a question essentially of reasserting established rules that were fixed in decrees or canons. Some reforms, however, were accomplished or at least advocated in the name of a return to sources higher than church canons, canons whose holiness was not in question but that needed to be transcended by the stimulus for reform.

Such was the case with the evangelical or apostolic movement that ran throughout the whole of the twelfth century; it became expressed finally in the work of St. Francis and St. Dominic. At the beginning of the sixteenth century this was the case of the reform vision of John Colet,

⁵⁰ Those who use this rather vague expression, “structures,” don’t always bother to define what they mean. However, there seems to be a consensus about the following: (i) The question is not about the [essential] structure of the church (dogma, sacraments, hierarchy). No one is calling this essential structure into question. Rather, using my distinction between structure and life, the need for [structural] change has to do with issues about life. (ii) However, within the essential structure of the church, the church’s life borrows forms, some of which are adaptable, while others have a certain stability. For example, the eloquence of some preacher is an ephemeral expression of doctrine, but the way the catechism is written, or the style and organizational structure of parishes, or even the manner of celebrating High Mass—these are more stable forms of ecclesial life. Such things do not belong to the essential structure of the church. They are historically introduced as expressions of its life, and so they have only a relative value. They are what we mean when we speak in the plural about “ecclesial structures.”

I see a sort of verification of my definition in J. Folliet’s article “Qu’est-ce qu’une réforme de structure,” in *Chronique sociale de France* (1946), pp. 23–42. For Folliet, a social structure is “the permanent and organized element of a social reality, in the measure that this reality appears to be humanly constructed and submitted to the human will.” Cf. J. Caryl and V. Portier, *La mission des laïcs dans l’Eglise* (Lyon, 1949), p. 54: “A structure is a social reality that is organized through human intervention . . .”

Lefèvre d'Étaples, Cardinal Ximenes, Erasmus, and others of less importance who have been studied by M. A. Renaudet. This is also the case without any doubt with respect to the current spirit of reform. It's not a question of reforming abuses—there are hardly any to reform. It is rather a question of renewing structures. That's a bigger job than simply re-insisting upon canonical practices.⁵¹ It demands going much further back, all the way to the sources. What is in question is not just tracing an inappropriate form back to its original source but inventing new forms that go beyond the given patterns of action, based on the deep tradition of an always living church under the stewardship of the magisterium.

We've had the tendency, when challenged by reform initiatives, to say, "Reform yourselves, reform your own life, and everything will be okay." It is above all those who represent God who need to hear this! In 1900–1905, for example, A.-M. Weiss took this message to heart in the face of the German reform movement, of which the *Reform-Katholizismus* represented the outside extreme.⁵² That was a moment when great anxiety upset the church from the inside, even calling its very principles into question; while, on the contrary, society enjoyed at least an apparent calm. The present reform spirit benefits from serious preparations, one of which surely was the strengthening of the doctrinal tradition of the church in its response to Modernism.⁵³ However, the state of the world and of people's hearts, plus the very nature of the conditions required for evangelization in the modern world, are extremely serious questions touching upon what one might call the structures or the forms of expression of the church. It is not outside or against the tradition of the church that the movement wants to find a solution, but in the very depths of the tradition itself.

These are the areas of application, the traits, and the status of the current reform movement at present.

⁵¹ More important, [this reform spirit] goes beyond being a mere reinforcement of prohibitions or censures. As E. Mounier has written: "You can refute, condemn or wipe out an error or a heresy. But you can't refute a dramatic situation; and Christianity, while peaceful on the surface, is confronted today with the most challenging drama that it has ever encountered" ("*L'agonie du christianisme*," *Esprit* [May 1946], p. 730).

⁵² See below: 1st part, ch. 2, n. 81.

⁵³ Cf. J. Guitton, *art. cit.* in *Lumen Vitae*, p. 626: "There is a huge difference between the intellectual generosity of 1947 and the ambiguity of Modernism in 1907. [In Modernism,] protestations of fidelity disguised profound disbelief. Now, the inverse is the case, and sometimes excessive statements becloud a full fidelity. The examination of the church's 'faults' or of its 'delays' are accompanied by a feeling for the concrete reality of the church and of its mysterious nature that is more alive than ever before."

PART ONE



Why and How Does the Church Reform Itself?

Chapter 1



The Church's Holiness and Our Failures

I. The Point of View of Antiquity and That of the Present with Respect to the Problem of Evil in the Church

People do not look at the problem of evil in the church today exactly as the Fathers did. If the church of the Fathers is the same church as our own, nonetheless, their way of thinking about it was different from ours. These differences need to be explained with reference to the history of doctrines about the church. From my point of view, the perspective of the Fathers can be characterized by the following traits:

1. The patristic tradition had a very mystical idea of the church. It saw the church as above all a descent to earth of heavenly realities, a movement of humanity and of the world into the "spiritual" quality of the kingdom of God and the body of Christ. These are realities whose true condition is heavenly. So the church appeared in this way as a mystery of holiness, a body brought to life by the *Pneuma* or Spirit of God. The church was therefore a body, a visible body constituted by sacraments celebrated by the hierarchical priesthood.

The characteristic proper to patristic ecclesiology that is at once both attractive and perplexing for us is this: the church is seen as fundamentally mystical, as a divine reality. At the same time patristic ecclesiology does not neatly distinguish the external and social aspect of the church from the interior and mystical aspect. What we call "internal forum" and "external forum" were not really distinguished.

We can find a great number of examples of this, touching different areas. For example, there was not always a clear distinction, such as we would make today, between a spiritual person and one having competence and power. Further, sin, even when completely personal, had the aspect of separating the person not only from God but also from the church. Therefore reconciliation had to be public. From this we can see that, to the degree that communion with God and with the church were blended into the same perspective, the problem of the status of sinners became an important ecclesiological problem. The problem of evil in the church was seen first of all as the problem of sin.

2. Even after the end of the patristic age, the ancient world was characterized by the predominance of an objective perspective and, correlatively, by a rather weak feeling for the importance of the subject. By contrast, the modern world is characterized down to its roots by the discovery of the point of view of the subject. In antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and still under the Ancien Régime, the spiritual point of view is that of the time before 1793.¹ It pertains to an objective world, a world which was perhaps not morally so much better than our own but which had “codes of honor” that controlled respect for groups, tradition, hierarchical functions, and the authority of classes and superior states of life.

I already spoke above about the idea of “modern sincerity.” That idea is linked to the discovery of the subject and to an immense interest in subjectivity. While in the ancient world the way in which someone did something or discovered something was hardly worthy of mention, since the essential was the thing itself, in the modern world, the way in which things are done is what interests us. St. Thomas or Albert the Great might have written, in the spirit of Aristotle: “It matters little by whom and how something has been said; what counts, is to know if it is true or false”; whereas modern people might say: “It doesn’t matter much if something is true or false; what is important is the manner, the tone, the

¹ I say 1793 and not 1789 in order to point to an important event, namely, the execution of King Louis XVI, rather than the seizing of the Bastille. I think that there is something deeply important in the use in sociology of the psychoanalytic idea of the murder of the father. That applies in this case to the murder of the king, which symbolizes the elimination of all authority, including (most of all) God’s authority. Cf. J. Lacroix, “Paternité et Démocratie,” *Esprit* (May 1947), pp. 748–755. Even before the psychoanalysts and the sociologists, the supporters of the monarchy understood this. See, for example, H. Delassus, *Le problème de l’heure présente* (Paris, 1906), vol. I, pp. 12f.

process followed, that is to say, to know by whom and how it has been done.”

This modern attitude easily falls into subjectivism, into a sort of mystique of sincerity which is not justifiable, because it can lead to genuine crimes against humanity. But today's climate is constituted by these realities. You can understand then how our contemporaries raise questions about ecclesiastical ministry that hardly interested the ancients at all. They were not concerned about questions treating the condition of the faithful as religious subjects or about the relation between ministers and the faithful.

3. There is another difference to note. In ancient times the church impressed the faithful as the most excellent of realities. By comparison with the pagan world, its excellence was stunning. Under the regime of Christendom, which was a symbiosis of faith and the temporal order under the guidance of the church, all real social good and human progress harmonized perfectly with the church, existing only in and through the church. For this reason, the question of evil in the church was seen then only from the viewpoint and within the context of the church, so seen exclusively in terms of sin.

In the modern secularized world, things are different. The secular world operates outside the influence of the church, even sometimes in opposition to the church. It is a human world that is not exclusively material, but also spiritual, moral, and sometimes even religious in its own way. It can even happen that this human spiritual world aspires to guarantee people the fulfillment of their destiny by excluding the church. In any case, moral and spiritual values have developed outside the church. Humanity has taken its own path, made its own discoveries, conquered new frontiers and new forms of existence. Humanity has discovered new ideas, found new methods for doing things—all without the church—even when in fact it was building upon values originally derived from Christianity. Humanity has even had its heroes, its holy laypersons, and all of this has simply increased the new demands and the new objections with respect to Christians.² This situation is a matter of importance. The problem of evil in the church has widened and is now framed in completely new terms.

In antiquity, the world was stable and the ideal was to continue a tradition. The church was required to be faithful to itself and it hardly

² See M. de la Bédoyère, *Le christianisme sur la place publique* (Brussels, 1947).

felt any need to pursue new human initiatives.³ By contrast, we have entered a world of perpetual change, marked by an evolution of events that the world interprets as progress.⁴ We have acquired a sense of history that is something other than, and more than, simply knowledge of past events; there is a feeling of progress in the world, of development in human affairs. No longer is the church the framework for the whole of social life; no longer does the church carry the world within itself like a pregnant mother. From now on the world stands before the church as an adult reality, ready to call the church to account. It no longer suffices for the church to verify its fidelity to its own tradition. The church now must face up to questions and criticisms with respect to its relationship to the world, to social values, to progress, and to social developments.

Because of all that, our contemporaries think about the problem of evil in the church in a way that is different from previous ages and in broader terms. Previous ages considered evil essentially in terms of sin and thought about it in theological terms where, in such terms, it sometimes led to serious practical difficulties. But they did not let it bother them too much, in fact. Their confidence in the stability of sacred realities kept them from worrying too deeply about human behavior.

In a sense, our contemporaries are more easily scandalized by personal failings. A bad priest now discredits the church much more than would have been the case in previous times. People often fall away from religious practice because of some fault of an individual representative of the church. Furthermore, today the idea of good order is more demanding than it was before. We said above that modern "sincerity," especially in France, can fixate upon almost any issue, but still with sincerity and depth. Those who live their commitment honestly and completely are met with respect. But those who appear to be superficial or insincere are judged severely, especially if their actions are characterized by pretensions to grandeur or prestige. A great number of churchmen are blamed for not genuinely believing in the so-called sublime realities by which they live at the expense of the credulous faithful. People are turned off by anything that strikes them as pure ritual traditionalism without real personal investment. Clearly, a part of the scandal that the church excites is aggravated by considerations of this kind. (The analysis given here is for the sake of understanding these things, without attempting to judge them.)

³ In this respect, as in several others, perhaps the modern world began at the shift from the 12th to the 13th century.

⁴ Cf. Paul Hazard, *La crise de la conscience européenne*, vol. 3 (Paris, 1935).

Above all, however, our contemporaries are now familiar with a new field for scandal, namely, the posture of the church with respect to the historical progress in which the world is caught up. People are more scandalized today by the church's lack of understanding, its narrowness, and by its slowness to act, than by the sins and faults of its individual members. (Once again, my point here is to analyze the facts, not to judge them.)

"Becoming" means opening the mind to new dimensions of reality; failing or refusing to do that constitutes a new kind of moral category—a historical fault—a sin against the truth that reality has this dimension of becoming. Further, this is a collective failure, a historical-social failure of responsibility. (I return to this topic at the end of this work in a special appendix.)

It is not necessary to refer to Marxism here. These ideas are so much in the intellectual atmosphere today that you find them everywhere. Nonetheless, of course, in this intellectual climate, Marxist ideas do play a role.

Influenced by these ideas, our point of view for evaluating human acts has changed. The thing that counts now is *results*, while the *intention* (interior and subjective right judgment) has become secondary.⁵ In a recent study undertaken by *La Vie Spirituelle* on holiness, one of the outcomes was to highlight an idea of holiness widely accepted, especially by the laity, that is in some ways troubling: the saint is someone useful to his or her neighbor and who succeeds in helping out others in human misfortune.⁶ Those qualities have sign value, of course, and do create a sort of atmosphere.

Once again, people complain of the church's slowness to adapt and to "understand," its narrowness and its excessive rigidity in considering the "subject" (that discovery of the modern world which allows the contributions of persons, their discovery of new forms, new values, and new possibilities to come into play).

You can add this as well: the criticism of the church becomes livelier to the degree that specifically ecclesiastical elements grow in dimension. The church of the Fathers, which lasted in the West until the eleventh century for the purposes of the present discussion, was regarded above

⁵ See the rather telling article of J. Dumazedier, "Libération par le Marxisme," *Jeunesse de l'Église*, cahier 7, pp. 37–63.

⁶ The results were published in *La Vie Spirituelle* (Feb. 1946). I oversimplify here. There were a lot of very good and very evangelical elements in the responses to the questionnaire.

all as a heavenly reality, participating in the heavenly mysteries, as St. Cyprian put it.⁷ It was regarded above all according to its mystical aspect. So true was this, that the Fathers and the first scholastics thought they had treated the church sufficiently by discussing Christ, the sacraments, and the communion of the faithful. They did not develop an ecclesiology properly so called or, if you will, a theory about the ecclesial apparatus in itself.

After the eleventh century, and especially after the end of the thirteenth century, a reflection upon the church itself and especially its powers took on considerable scope and continued growing down to the sixteenth century, and then with renewed energy even down to our time. Is this simply a simultaneous development, or was there a relation of cause and effect? It seems to me that the criticisms of the church, as well as the need for reform, are concomitant with the growth of ecclesiastical structures or of what I just called the ecclesial “apparatus.”^{7a}

Here is another fact that confirms rather well what was just observed. The great Christian communions outside the Catholic Church have been largely spared from the criticisms that have fallen upon the Catholic Church. The Protestants glory in the fact that the countries where the Reformation flourished have not experienced the anticlericalism that thrives in Catholic countries. They say that this is because clericalism has been rampant in Catholic lands.⁸ There is some truth in this.

People criticize a church more severely when it vaunts the claims of its powers—some would say its pretensions. One day I will show how this is the basis for the well-known “anti-Roman complex,” which began to lessen significantly only in non-Catholic countries. What gives such an edge to the question of the church’s faults are its “pretensions.” The accusations that people make against the church would not be so serious if they were made against some other institution. They are troubling, however, when the church as a society and as an institutional apparatus claims for itself the quality of holiness, the prerogative of infallibility, and calls people to obey, to have confidence in its actions, and to revere it.⁹

⁷ Cyprian, *De unitate Ecclesiae catholicae*, 6: “sacramentis caelestibus cohaerentium.”

^{7a} G. B. Ladner has shown that until the 11th century, the verb “reform” was applied to the Christian faithful who needed to be “re-formed” to the image of Christ; the theme is applied to the church itself beginning in the 11th century (*The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action* [Cambridge, MA, 1956]).

⁸ See, for example, F. Hoffet, *L’impérialisme protestant* (Paris, 1948).

⁹ Dom Vonier understood this, and he opened his meditation in *L’Esprit et L’Epouse* (*Unam Sanctam* 16 [Paris: Cerf, 1947]) with this theme.

From that perspective, you can understand some of the present-day attitudes with respect to the failures that people see in the church: its sins, limitations, and historical mistakes.

I have just expressed, then, for all practical purposes the themes of the Protestants and of a good number of secular critics, perhaps especially those who still find the church interesting despite everything. Their scandal is increased by the fact that this same church, that makes such exalted claims for itself, fails to recognize its mistakes, refuses to acknowledge its failures, and to be humble. In truth, this idea feeds itself on a theology of the church that is Protestant and that allows Protestants to denounce what they called "the faults of the churches" with a sort of religious delight. In the third part of this work I will attempt to identify the theological positions that underlie this attitude.*

This question of the "failures of the churches" and, in particular, their "historical faults" that brought about the sad divisions of the Christian people is a question of the highest importance for the ecumenical movement. A humble confession of faults appears to be a condition for a dialogue between the Christian communions.¹⁰ In fact, Catholics *do* recognize the "historical failures" that they committed in the great tragedies of the "Eastern Schism" and the Reformation. We will see later on that this avowal of failure does not date only from the present moment. However, this awareness is nonetheless clearer in our day because of our more exact knowledge of history and because of the grace of the Holy Spirit moving so many hearts toward the work of unity that the Spirit is preparing.

But on this point, as on others touching ecumenical dialogue, it quickly becomes clear that the least formula, if it is not going to be meaningless, will have ramifications for the whole spectrum of dogma and particularly the whole spectrum of ecclesiology. The same words do not always mean the same thing, because each side interprets them within its own frame of reference. So it is necessary to make very precise what we mean by the expression "faults of the churches" and to identify the *idea* of the church that is implicit for each side, hidden beneath the affirmations that it makes.

Catholics have become more sensitive to the weaknesses of their church. Confronted with attacks against their church, Catholics want to

* As noted above, part 3 is not included in this translation.

¹⁰ Otto Urbach (a Catholic) has written something along these lines in *Zum Gespräch zwischen die Konfessionen* (Munich, 1939), p. 49. Cf. Möhler, cited below, n. 61.

be on irrefragable ground; they don't want to have to defend the indefensible. They, like others, belong to their century and carry within themselves its taste for sincerity, further heightened by its concern for historical objectivity. Further, they have learned the lessons of history. They think that serious self-criticism done in a timely fashion would have effectively stripped adversaries of their strongest weapons. They want to separate the eternal and living essence of Catholicism from all the baggage that the church has accumulated through the centuries—the waste, the excesses, and the dead skin, so to speak. They want this all the more because they have acquired a renewed and expanded awareness of their Christian responsibility, of the urgency for a perfectly pure apostolic witness, a witness that is not vulnerable to attack in the midst of a re-paganized world (re-paganized, some would say, “because of our failures”).

Further, we have seen in recent years a growing number of “examinations of conscience” that lack, in truth, the full seriousness of persons genuinely struck by the solemn nature of penitence. In the introduction, I made reference to the principal literary examples of the self-criticism of the years 1945–1946. Let me note, in ending this section, how relevant all that is to my present purpose. Authentic gestures, adaptation of forms—these were the two principal themes of this reformist self-critique. A lack of genuineness in commitments, slowness to respond, and narrowness of spirit with respect to what historical development requires or demands: these are the areas where modern people are particularly sensitive concerning the weaknesses of the church. We will return to these two points again in order to demonstrate that in theology they are precisely the themes to which a reform spirit is linked. At the moment, however, it is important to affirm theologically that it is possible to address the faults or defects of the church and, above all, to make clear their theological dimensions. To do that, I first of all take up an exploration of the church's tradition.

II. The Teachings of the Bible, the Fathers, and the Magisterium

As to the teaching of the Bible and the Fathers, I can only claim to provide here a summary sketch. Each of these topics would require research and development going well beyond the limits of the present treatment. I will make do with furnishing some direction that hopefully touches upon the essential elements of the question.

1. Holy Scripture

A) *The People of God under the Old Law*: A fact of great significance, which Protestant writers especially have underlined, is that Israel is a sinful people, incessantly falling into infidelity, repeatedly destined for punishment, even death, because of their faithlessness. But they are also ceaselessly forgiven and lifted up again by the grace of God. From the beginning, Adam had been a sinner, condemned and forgiven. In the desert, then under Joshua and the Judges (i.e., during the whole time when Israel left Egypt, walked toward its inheritance, and finally entered into possession of the Promised Land), Israel never stopped falling, never stopped being condemned and chastised for its infidelity, never stopped crying out to God, who sent help to Israel and saved it. Here are a people incessantly destined for death and then saved from death. This people, in the framework of its history, proclaim the central mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The themes of punishment joined to mercy, of judgment from which a small number escape, and finally of the remnant—these are the themes of the history of Israel.

Sometimes the fidelity of God's people can be found only in one single heart. At the moment of the golden calf, it was the heart of Moses; at the time of the discouraging story of scouts sent into the Promised Land while the people murmured against God, it was the hearts of Caleb and Joshua (Num 13–14). Confronted by the prophets of Baal, under Ahab and Jezebel, it was the heart of Elijah (1 Kgs 18–19), who was at the end of his strength and courage.

The leaders of the people—kings and priests—are themselves sinners. Only the word and the fidelity of God do not fail. Sometimes God seizes upon a man and makes him a prophet, someone to speak for God, who speaks a word *from God* and thus becomes, in the midst of a faithless people, a sort of link to God. Israel really continues to exist only through these interventions from God.

B) *Under the New and Definitive Law*: The kingdom of God that Jesus came to announce will embrace nothing but the pure and the purified,¹¹ nothing that is not robed in a wedding garment. However, the church only represents the earthly phase of the kingdom, a period of proclamation, of preparation, and of germination (the “firstfruits”). The parables of the kingdom that are applied to this preparatory phase show us the

¹¹ 1 Cor 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Rev 22:15; etc.

church including both good and bad fish,¹² both weeds and wheat,¹³ both well-dressed guests and others without a wedding garment . . .¹⁴

I don't have to belabor this theme of the *Ecclesia mixta* (a church with mixed elements) that is so abundantly evoked by the Fathers, especially by St. Augustine. The church in its earthly phase is a community of sinners and not just of saints. Sin can indeed separate a person from Christ and also in some way from the church. But sin does not take away one's membership in the church—a fact that presupposes the distinction, already made in passing and treated again further on, between the frame or structure of the church and the church's life.

No member of the church completely escapes from sin—with the exception, as we shall see, of the Mother of God. Even the apostles were sinners. It is remarkable that in all the episodes where Jesus promises or gives to Peter what we cannot avoid calling his primacy, we find a sign of the personal weaknesses of Simon Peter.¹⁵ Clearly, Peter seems to have become another person after Pentecost. In a general way, the apostles appear to us as charismatic personalities habitually moved by the Spirit of God. But limitations and weaknesses remain in them (cf. Gal 2:11f., etc.). Even more clearly, evil continues to exist in the community of believers. Let me try to elucidate this fact. What general indications can we find about this matter in the apostolic letters?

First of all, there are evidently numerous allusions to personal sins along with exhortations to lead a pure life. Some sins imply a social disorder requiring exclusion from ecclesial communion (1 Cor 5). Next, there is mention of more or less serious abuses leading to the formation of cliques (1 Cor 1:10f.; 11:18f.; cf. Jude 12f.), jealousies, and disputes (1 Cor 3:3). Here again the most serious cases may lead to exclusion (Titus 3:10). Third, the gravest of sins is false teaching or false practices. Almost all the epistles make reference to this problem. Sometimes it is a case of the Judaizers (Gal; cf. Phil 3:2), sometimes the case of a pseudo-philosophy or of a syncretistic gnosis (Eph; Col 2:8; etc.), sometimes pointless observances (Col 2:16-23).

But above all, the apostles, to the degree they move along in their career and reflect on what will occur when they have left the scene, find

¹² Matt 13:47.

¹³ Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17.

¹⁴ Matt 22:10-11.

¹⁵ Matt 16:17-19, 22-23; Luke 22:32, 34; John 21:15-17, evidently linked to Peter's threefold denial; cf. Mark 14:37.

themselves warning of an "increase of the perils." It is not only in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 1:3-4; 6:2b f.; 2 Tim 2:14; 4:1-8; Titus 3:9-11) or in the non-Pauline letters (2 Pet 2:1f.; 1 John 2:18f.; 4:1-6; 2 John 7; Jude 17f.; Rev) that we find such warnings. They are likewise found in the captivity epistles (Eph 4), in Paul's great letters (Rom 16:17-18), and even in Acts.

Nothing is more significant in this respect than St. Paul's exhortation to the elders at Miletus (Acts 20:28-31) at the moment when he was leaving them for Jerusalem, aware that he was facing troubles from which he might not come out alive. Here is a form of direct witness from Luke (this text is part of the "*Wir-Stücke*"—the *we* passages), and the impressive cross-references with many Pauline texts guarantees its authenticity. We find here an expression of the great preoccupation of the apostles about the churches. They were led to imagine the moment when they would no longer be present, and they address the threat of false doctrine and divisions.

One fact seems really remarkable to me and has great meaning for ecclesiology. Faced with these risks of doctrinal error, St. Paul appeals to the apostolicity of doctrine, that is to say, to the tradition, the received teaching (Rom 16:17-18), to the apostolicity of ministry, since ministers exist precisely to avoid succumbing to the winds of false teaching (Eph 4). Timothy and Titus, the *episcopoi* of Miletus, by the authority and the grace of the laying on of hands, have the pastoral charge to watch over the purity of doctrine. Paul counts on those who exercise the charge of *episcopè* [overseer] to assure the purity of his churches when he will no longer be around. In this respect, the witness of Clement of Rome (XLIV) on apostolic succession in the *episcopè* is fully in accord with the accounts of the Scriptures. He describes, after the fact, precisely what the Acts and the Pastoral Epistles express as their ecclesial vision and their intention.

In the letters to the churches in chapter 2 of the Book of Revelation, the "Angel" of each church probably designates both the community and the pastor who, charged with the *episcopè*, watch over the communion of faith and love in which the congregation (*Ecclesia*) must live.¹⁶

¹⁶ According to W.-H. Brownlee, "The Priestly Character of the Church in the Apocalypse," *New Testament Studies* 5 (1959), pp. 224–225: the angel of the church is at one and the same time the bishop and the community itself. On the idea of the angel of the church interpreted as designating the bishop who incarnates, personifies, and symbolizes the unity of the community, cf. commentaries on the text, and also J. Colson, "Aux origènes de l'épiscopat," *La Vie Spirituelle, Supplement* (Aug. 1949), pp. 149f.

These letters are made up of both praise and encouragements as well as reproaches. Only the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia are not reproached.

Against the other churches, these complaints are lodged: to have abandoned their first love and their original fervor (Ephesus), to keep in their midst people attached to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans or those too indulgent about eating food sacrificed to idols or practicing fornication (Pergamum), to allow a false prophetess to seduce the faithful (Thyatira), to be a bit lax (Sardis), to be lukewarm and proud of their riches (Laodicea).

All those things represent weaknesses affecting the behavior of the members of the community and eventually their pastors. The community is collectively responsible for those who make it up, both faithful and leaders. In sum, what is criticized or praised (with the promise of fitting recompense) is both the personal and the collective behavior of the members of the churches. When these members behave more or less well, the churches are affected in their way of living.

However, it seems here, as in the pastoral letters, that there is a fundamental reality of the church that is not compromised by the disorderly behavior of its members.¹⁷ The sinner who defiles himself does not turn the church into a sinful church. Fundamentally, to the degree that people sin, they place themselves outside the church. If their sin concerns the domain of the Christian life, sinners become less alive, but they still remain within the framework of the church's saving grace. If their sin has to do with constituent elements of the church as an institution, then sinners withdraw from the framework of the church, which however is not itself harmed by the sinner's error.

In speaking of heretics who deny some aspect of the mystery of the incarnation (cf. John 5:22; 4:2-3; 2 John 7), St. John writes: "They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us" (1 John 2:18-19). Before the

¹⁷ Consider this interesting note by Cl. Chevasse, *The Bride of Christ* (London, 1940), p. 95: In the Old Testament, in Hosea and Ezekiel, the same woman is both unworthy and graced, both unfaithful and capable of conversion. In Revelation, there are two women—the courtesan who is hopelessly fallen, and the pure, holy and eternally young spouse. Of course, this refers to the heavenly Jerusalem; but John and the entire tradition of antiquity conceive of the church on earth as a beginning of the church in heaven.

troublemakers were expelled from the church, they had been in its midst as a sort of trial and temptation, something necessary to allow for the discernment of true believers and thus, in a certain way, necessary for the purity of the faithful people (1 Cor 11:19).

Second Thessalonians 2:3f. is a troubling text which the Reformers frequently applied polemically against the papacy¹⁸: "Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God."¹⁹

Can we draw from this text the idea that the mystery of iniquity exists within the temple, that is to say, within the church? (The true temple according to the New Testament is the Body of Christ, that is, the church.)²⁰ This appears exegetically debatable. The "lawless one" [or "man of sin"] is a Semitic expression like "son of perdition" and likewise an apocalyptic figure drawn from the Book of Daniel,²¹ where it refers to Antiochus Epiphanius, the type of the enemy of God, who went so far as to violate God's temple. The Lord makes allusion to this in his eschatological discourses (Mark 13:14; Matt 24:15). St. Paul only uses the classic terms of the Jewish tradition to designate the Antichrist. Even in this perspective, it can be said that evil comes from outside, not from within the church. Antiochus Epiphanius made war on the saints . . . There is then, in the text of St. Paul, mention of the Antichrist-type, of which Antiochus Epiphanius had been a figure, having gone so far as to profane the temple. There is not, however, an affirmation about the fact that the mystery of iniquity might be found within the church itself, a spiritual temple under messianic rule.

¹⁸ Luther, for example, in *Wider Hans Wurst* (1541), cited by Münchmeyer, *Das Dogma von der sichtbaren . . .*, p. 29; *Von der Wiedertaufe* (1528) and *Commentary on Galatians* (1535), cited *ibid.*, p. 30; *Ad libros . . . Catharini . . . Responsio* (1521) [Weimar, VII: 742]. See also H. Grisar and Fr. Heege, *Luther-Studien: Luthers Kampfbilder* (Freiburg, 1921). For Calvin, for example, cf. *L'Épître à Sadolet* (ed. Je sers, p. 71).

¹⁹ Cf. 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1.

²⁰ The view of H.-M. Feret, "Le temple du Dieu vivant," in *Prêtre et apôtre* (Dec. 15, 1947), col. 182–183.

²¹ Cf. Dan 7; 9:27; and especially 11:31, 36–37.

I think that the apostolic church presents itself, from the point of view of the fidelity and the evil that can reside within it in continuity with Israel, in one way, and in very different circumstances, in another way.

In the old dispensation, the relationship between Israel and God was that of a covenant.²² God would abandon Israel when Israel turned away from him. We see these formulas again and again: “If you observe my law . . . I will be for you your God . . .” There is nothing like this in the New Testament touching upon the church. Rather, there are firm and unconditional promises: “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). “I am with you until the end of time” (Matt 28:20; cf. John 16:33). “The Father will give you another Paraclete to be with you always” (John 14:16). “He will teach you all things; he will guide you into the truth” (John 14:26; 16:13). “As my Father has sent me, so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21, 23), etc.

Under the old dispensation, Christ was yet to come and the Spirit only appeared in transitory ways. This old regime is essentially *prophetic*. The new and definitive dispensation, after which there will be no other that can be more perfect, is characterized by the fact that Christ has come. The fully sufficient cause for communion with God has been introduced into the world, given to the world in a definitive way. It is no longer only a question of announcing this communion, of serving it from afar, but of applying it and serving it as fully present and active.

Parallel to the entry of God’s son into the world by his incarnation there is the entry of the Holy Spirit by his mission (Pentecost). The Holy Spirit also is truly *given*—as “firstfruits” in a manner still imperfect but nonetheless real. The terms in which the New Testament describes the relation of the Holy Spirit to the church are borrowed not so much from the metaphor of “breath,” that is, of a passing inspiration, but rather from that of indwelling, from the fact of “filling up” the church.²³ The governance of the church is no longer *prophetic* but *apostolic*.

The church is the continuation of Israel—it is the new and genuine Israel, the true people of God. But this quality of being the people of God

²² I believe that the word *diatèkè*, usually translated as “arrangement” [*disposition* in French] as the most suitable meaning, signifies “covenant” more particularly in the Old Testament, and “testament” more particularly in the New Testament. This is what Erasmus thought also.

²³ H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, pp. 328–389. These same considerations are further developed in my part 3 [not included in this translation].

which sufficed to define Israel adequately does not suffice to define the church. The church is not only the people of God that has finally received and recognized its Messiah. It has also received from on high a new dispensation or covenant with the substance of the Word and the substance of the living bread. The status of the church is not the same as that of the ancient Israel because the final realities, those after which there will be no more, are present and active within her. The church, like Israel, subsists by the fidelity of God with respect to his purpose of pouring out his grace. However, throughout the time of Israel, this purpose *was on the way toward* its realization; in the church, however, *it has come to completion* through an apostolic ministry that applies and, in some way, distributes what was accomplished in Jesus Christ in one single stroke. The church is the reality of a mysterious happening that has come to its plenitude: it is the Body of Christ, the Spouse of Christ. We can easily see that, by the fact that it is "people of God," it is composed of fallible members. However, in its reality as Body and Spouse of Christ, as living temple of the Holy Spirit, it receives the capacity to be "the pillar and bulwark of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15).

Basically, the theological tradition resolves the question of evil in the church (and my treatment goes in the same direction) by placing it entirely in this line of thinking. I am about to lay out the ideas.

2. *The Fathers: Their Theology Is Essentially "Symbolic"*

On this point, the patristic tradition, as more generally ecclesiology itself, is expressed according to two modes or two plans of analysis. We need to consider both of them if we want to grasp patristic thinking fully. There is first a mode of explanations based upon biblical figures and then, second, a mode of propositions elaborated on the basis of the life of the church.

Two great symbols are employed: first, that of the moon and, second, that of women chosen from a life of impurity and then introduced into the order of holiness.

The theme of the moon has been studied by Hugo Rahner.²⁴ Leaving aside other complexities, it will suffice here to show the application of

²⁴ "Mysterium lunae": Ein Beitrag zur Kirchentheologie der Väterzeit," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 63 (1939), pp. 311–349, 428–442; 64 (1940), pp. 61–80, 121–131, reprinted in *Symbole der Kirche: Die Ekklesiologie der Väter* (Salzburg, 1964). *Idem*, *Greichische Mythen in christlicher Deutung* (Zurich, 1945), pp. 139, 200f.

this theme to our topic. This speculation, at once strange and fascinating, has its point of departure in biblical texts like those where the sun is shown going forth like a spouse from its nuptial couch (Ps 19:5); where the sun and the moon are placed in relationship one with the other as in this text: "*Orietur justitia, donec auferatur luna*—May righteousness flourish . . . until the moon is no more" (Ps 72:7); or even this text: "*Per diem sol non uret te, neque luna per noctem*—The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night" (Ps 121:6), etc.

The Fathers liked to underline the fact that the moon symbolizes by its periodic changes the mutability characteristic of the historic condition of the church, showing alternating weakness and renewal. They also developed the following theme: the star of life is the sun, but during the night, when it is hidden, it lends its brightness to the moon. When the sun appears and rises in the sky, the moon decreases even to the point of disappearing and becoming lost in the light of the sun. Likewise, the moon, by the submission that it offers in its nuptial encounter with the sun, becomes the mother of things living on the earth, and it brings forth during the night the life-giving dew. In the same way, the church—by dying for Christ in the self-giving submission that it offers everyday visibly on earth in the obscurity of its union with Christ—receives the power to communicate the spiritual life, to become the source of the baptismal waters, and the channel of the dew of grace. And this, *donec auferatur luna*—until the moon is no more. There is a daily and constant self-giving of the church, which will become total at the end of time, when the church will bring forth its fruit through the resurrection of the flesh.

For our purposes, the interesting idea here is that the church receives all of its brightness from the sun, Christ, its Spouse. By itself, the church is obscure: it has a twofold aspect, one shining and pure because illuminated by Christ, and the other obscurity. As Augustine says, either it includes both the spiritual and the carnal or, without power or beauty of its own, it owes all of its power to the Sun—who is Christ.²⁵ St. Augustine is attached to the idea that the church, like the individual soul, is ugly and sinful in itself. At the point at which it confesses its sins, it begins to become beautiful through the action of the one who is himself true Beauty.²⁶ In this way, the church finds the source of its beauty in feeling

²⁵ *Ennarrationes in Psalmis*, n. 3 (PL 36:132).

²⁶ *Ennar. in Ps. 103, Sermo 1*, n. 4 (PL 37:1338). Let me cite this text that is so characteristic of Augustine, where the word "reformer" is found (which pleases the Protestants): "*Vis ei placere? Non potes quamdiu deformis es. Quis facies ut pulchra*

and confessing its need to be purified.²⁷ Each of the faithful and the church itself can say, "I am holy," because they receive their holiness from their Head, of whose body they are members. All their beauty and all their holiness come to them through the grace of this Head.²⁸

If we understand the theme of the moon in this way, we can see how close it is to the theme of the women caught in impurity and purified. In both cases the themes have a spousal quality which goes to the very heart of our topic.

The Bible gives us a number of examples of women living in impurity who are chosen and purified after being called. The story of these women has been given an ecclesiological interpretation by Origen, who founds a whole tradition of typological exegesis of this kind.^{28a}

There is Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho, who took in and saved the scouts of Israel and merited, because of that, to be saved herself from the anathema and then to be justified.²⁹ She is a figure of the church that, like her, has been drawn out of paganism and idolatrous impurity. Or there is the case of the daughter of the Philistines, also idolatrous and likewise *meretrix*—a harlot, whom Samson took for his spouse.³⁰ There is Thamar, whose story is so strange for our way of thinking.³¹ There is the "spouse of fornication," whom Hosea is ordered by God to take as his wife.³² Finally, there is Mary Magdalene, the very type of the sinful woman, who is chosen, loved, and pardoned, and who becomes the most

sis? Prius tibi displiceat deformitas tua, et tunc ab illo ipso cui vis placere pulchra, mereberis pulchritudinem. Ipse enim *reformator* tuus qui fuit *formator* tuus" (The same One is your *Reformer* who once formed you).

²⁷ *Ennar. in Ps.* 69, n. 6 (PL 36:871).

²⁸ *Ennar. in Ps.* 85, n. 4 (PL 37:1084); *Sermo* 138, n. 6 (PL 38:766). Cf. also Origen, *Homily 2 on the Song of Songs* (PG 13:50): "Apart from the bridegroom, the spouse is not beautiful; she becomes beautiful when she is united to the Word of God, when she is very near to the Word"; cf. Theodoret, *On the Song of Songs* (PG 81:133, 177, 201), cited in *La Vie Spirituelle* (May 1949), p. 538.

^{28a} Cf. H. Urs von Balthasar, *Geist und Feuer: Eine Sammlung von Origenes Texten* (Salzburg, 1938), p. 221: "Hure und Heilige." See likewise H. de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Eglise*, pp. 82f.

²⁹ Josh 2; cf. Heb 11:32; Jas 2:25. Jean Daniélou, "Rahab, figure de l'Eglise," *Irénikon* 22 (1949), pp. 26–45. See especially the texts of Origen (p. 33) and of Gregory of Elvirus (pp. 41–42). To the texts cited by Daniélou, you should add *Opus imperf. in Mat.*, hom. 1 and hom. 49 (PG 56: 618 and 909).

³⁰ Judg 14. Cf. St. Augustine, I, n. 2 (PL 38:1640).

³¹ Gen 38. Cf. *Opus imperf. in Mat.*, homily 1 (PG 56:614).

³² Cf. St. Jerome, on Hosea, ch. 1 (PL 25:823); Jerome collects different examples of harlots from the Bible and connects them to the church.

faithful of souls. She is a figure of the church, says St. Ambrose,³³ for the church has been able to take Mary Magdalene as a symbol for herself—for Mary has the outward likeness of a sinful woman, as Christ took upon himself the outward likeness of a sinful man.³⁴

Finally, the idea that comes to light through these symbols, and to which St. Augustine often returns, is only one aspect of the theology of the church as Spouse of Christ. This church, which arises out of Israel which was so often unfaithful, or which comes from idolatrous Gentiles given over to so many impurities—this church Jesus Christ chose for his spouse even while it was still a prostitute. He loved it and mercifully took it to himself while it was still impure. But it is now purified by faith and baptism—the theme here touches the text of Ephesians 5:26—it is made his spouse, a virginal spouse, and now, it has become virginal by faith.³⁵ What we draw out of these symbols, then, is the idea that the church has been chosen in its sinfulness, but in making Jesus Christ its spouse, it has been purified and is now virginal in its faith.

There are also texts using literal and no longer symbolic expressions that help us to clarify these ideas. There are first of all texts that point out the effect of sin. For Hermas, the Spirit who lives within the faithful is saddened by their sins, sins which can even bring about their losing

³³ *In Lucam*, 6, n. 13f. (PL 15:1671f.). Cf. Severus of Antioch: M. Brière, “Les Homiliae cathedrales de Sévère d’Antioche,” *Patrologie orient.*, IV, 80, and XXVI, 367.

³⁴ Ambrose, op. cit., n. 21, col. 1674. This same idea is taken up by Paulinus of Nola, Letter 23, n. 33 (PL 61:278). One cannot argue from this text, as does Damasus Winzen (“Büssende Kirche,” *Catholica* [1932], p. 127), that Ambrose accused the church of being sinful.

³⁵ Here are some characteristic texts: “Meretricem [Christus] invenit [Ecclesiam] virginem fecit. Quia meretrix fuit, non debet negare, ne obliviscatur misericordiam liberantis. Quomodo non erat meretrix quando post idola et daemonia fornicabitur? Fornicatio cordis in omnibus fuit, in paucis carnis, in omnibus cordis. Et venit, et virginem fecit: ecclesiam virginem fecit. In fide virgo est. . . .” (*Tractatus I de Symbolo in Tractatus et sermones inediti*, ed. G. Morin [Munich, 1917], p. 6); cf. also Sermo 213, n. 7 (PL 38:1063); Sermo 364, n. 2 (38:1640); cf. *Ennar. in Ps. 44*, n. 26 (PL 36:510), and Cl. Chevasse, *The Bride of Christ*, pp. 149–150. Cf. Philo of Karpasia, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, cited by Welsersheimb in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* (1948), pp. 38–39; St. John Chrysostom, *Quales ducendae uxores*, III, 2 (PG 51:227–228); in *Mat. Hom. 3, 4* (PG 57:35): Christ assumed the church (human nature) as impure and prostituted, “quemadmodum hi fornicarias duxere mulieres [examples given from the Old Testament], ita Deus naturam fornicatam copulavit sibi: id quod olim prophetae circa synagogam factum esse dixerunt. Sed illa quidem conjugii suo ingrata fuit, Ecclesia vero a patrii malis semel liberata, in sponsi amplexu permansit.” Same theme in *De capto Eutropio* (PG 52:402). We can only regret that these themes that are fundamental for the Fathers no longer play any role in the modern theology of the church.

the Spirit's presence. But the Spirit remains forever in the church, which remains forever holy because of this.^{35a} And then, St. Ambrose: If the church is made up of good and evil persons, it has sinners within it, yet it remains itself holy and immaculate;³⁶ the sin does not affect the church in itself, but only in us.³⁷ However, because its members are sinners, the church weeps tears of penitence.³⁸ It does not claim to be without weakness, but it confesses its wounds and desires to be healed; the church says of itself, as did the woman of the Gospel: "If only I can touch his garment, I shall be healed," and the church prays along with Jeremiah, "Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed . . ." ³⁹

Basically the line of thinking used by the Fathers is the following: the church itself is holy, but her members are sinful. However, we can apply to the soul what is true of the church, and to the church what is true of the soul. The church is spouse, the soul is spouse; the soul needs to be forgiven, the church needs to be forgiven.

This last point, touched upon by St. Ambrose, will be used often by St. Augustine. The church, like Peter (who is a symbol of the church), is both strong and weak,⁴⁰ following the Lord during his passion but then denying him. Augustine freely insists on this point: Like the individual soul, the church, called out of sin, ceases to be ugly and sinful at the point at which it confesses its iniquity: "The moment that you confess [your sin], you begin to become beautiful through him who is Beauty itself."⁴¹ The earthly church, says St. Augustine, is only holy and beautiful by the

^{35a} See *Mand.* V, 1, 2, 3; X, 2, 1, 3; 3, 1, 2.

³⁶ As to "holy": In *Hexaemeron*, III, 2, 3, and 5 (cited by Battifol, *Le catholicisme de saint Augustin*, p. 122, from whom I borrow several of the following texts of St. Ambrose). "Ex maculatis immaculata," see *In Lucam*, I, 17 (Battifol, p. 122).

³⁷ "Non in se, sed in nobis vulneratur Ecclesia. Caveamus igitur ne lapsus noster vulnus Ecclesiae fiat" (*De virginitate*, 48 [Battifol, p. 123]).

³⁸ "Ecclesia et aquam habet, et lacrimas habet, aquam baptismatis, lacrimas poenitentiae" (Battifol, p. 122).

³⁹ *De Poenitentia*, bk. I, ch. 7, n. 31 (PL 16:476); cf. ch. 15, n. 81, col. 490, where Ambrose says that the whole church bears the "onus of sinner," showing penitence by its tears, its prayer and its grief. This whole treatise, directed against Novatian and the party of pastoral severity, claims that the church is a church of sinners and that the sacraments are given for the use of sinners, etc.

⁴⁰ *Sermo* 295, n. 3 (PL 38:1350), but this text has the character of referring to biblical figures and symbolic applications.

⁴¹ *Ennar. in Ps. 103, Sermo* 1, n. 4 (PL 37:1338). Because the church has first confessed its need for healing, it can now affirm its holiness: *Ennar. in Ps. 69*, n. 6 (PL 36:871); cf. St. Hilary, *Tract. in Ps. 125*, "ubi peccati confessio est, ibi et justificatio a Deo est" (PL 9:690); St. Ambrose, *In Ps. 118, Sermo* 18.

beauty and the holiness that come to it from its Head, by grace (see n. 28 above); it only lives and subsists through the pardon it receives from God.⁴² For if the church is holy in itself, because of its members it has reason to say each day, “Forgive us our trespasses.”⁴³ By confessing its sins, it is purified from them, and in saying this prayer incessantly the church becomes *sine macula et ruga*—without stain or wrinkle.⁴⁴

This process of purification, as well as the full incorporation of human beings into their Head and the perfect wedding of the church to its spouse, will only come about at the end of earthly existence. Like the full justification of each one of us,⁴⁵ the complete purity of the church is eschatological.⁴⁶ This is a theme on which St. Bernard insists, by bringing Augustine’s ideas together with Origen’s typology from the Song of Songs and applying it to each individual faithful and to the church. The church is not yet arrived at the condition in which it will no longer know either spot or wrinkle. It will only have that condition when, with the final resurrection, it finally becomes fully spiritual.^{46a}

This condition, however, is not uniquely eschatological. For someone like St. Ambrose or St. Augustine, the *sine macula et ruga* is a quality which is constantly being realized by the action of penance and the sacraments, where the Holy Spirit is operating. The prayers of the ancient sacramentaries ask for a progressive realization of this purification as far as this is possible upon earth.⁴⁷ But both for the liturgy and for the

⁴² *Enchir.*, 64 (PL 40:262), “per hanc [remissionem] stat Ecclesia quae in terris est, per hanc non perit quod perierat et inventum est” (*Luc.*, XV, 24).

⁴³ “Ubi cumque autem in libris commemoravi Ecclesiam non habentem maculam aut rugam, non sic accipiendum est quasi jam sit, sed quae praeparatur ut sit, quando apparebit etiam gloriosa. Nunc enim propter quasdam ignorantias et infirmitates membrorum suorum habet unde quotidie dicat: Dimitte nos debita nostra . . .” (*Retract.*, bk. 2, ch. 18 [PL 32:637–638] and bk. 1, ch. 7, n. 5 [col. 593]). Cf. also *De continentia*, n. 25 (PL 40:366); *In Evang. Joan.*, tract. 57 and 124, n. 5 (PL 35:1796 and 1973); *Sermo 181*, n. 7 (38:982). Cf. St. Bernard, *Sermo 3*, in *Festo omnium Sanctorum*, n. 2 (PL 183:469); St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 8, art. 3, ad 2; etc.

⁴⁴ *Sermo 181*, n. 7 (PL 38:982). Here we find the idea of the forgiveness of sins by praying the Our Father.

⁴⁵ Cf., e.g., *Sermo 144*, n. 6 (PL 38:790).

⁴⁶ Refer to the texts cited in n. 43 above.

^{46a} Cf. *In Dom. Ia post Oct. Epiph. Sermo 1*, 3; 2, 2 (PL 183:155D–156A, and 159); *In omn. Sanct.*, 3, 2 (469); *De diversis Serm.* 33, 8 (182:994); *In Cant.*, 25 and 38, 5 (183:900 and 977); *Epist.* 113, 2 and 126, 6 (182:257 and 275C).

⁴⁷ Cf. *Missale Bergomense* (Solemnes edition, 1900, p. 50); *Libellus orationum gothicohispanus* (*Thomasii opera*, ed. Blanchini, pp. 27, 62, 81); Mozarabic Liturgy, *Liber ordinum* (ed. Férotin, pp. 268, 286); *Liber sacrament.* (ed. Férotin, p. 944). See texts cited

Fathers, as for Scripture itself, the perfect realization of the purity and sanctity of the church comes only in heaven.

Some critical clarifications, which have a properly ecclesiological value, came about in the West following the Donatist crisis. We know that the Donatists insisted that the holiness and efficacy of the means of grace depended upon the personal purity of the ministers. Optatus of Miletus is the first to show how the sacraments are holy in themselves, not because of those who celebrate them,⁴⁸ and that the holiness of the church comes from the sacraments and is not limited by the condition of persons.⁴⁹ But it is above all St. Augustine who was the providential teacher here. He elaborated an ecclesiology in which the acts of the Christian minister had a sort of objective and stable consistency, independent of the dignity and personal sanctity of the minister. The church is made up of sinners and of just persons, and sinners are found even among its sacred ministers. This fact has been announced to us by the Lord himself, so we shouldn't be scandalized. But the sacraments retain their value, even when they are administered by unworthy ministers. "The baptism of Christ, consecrated with the very words of the Gospel, is holy even when performed by the most vile adulterers, for the intrinsic sanctity of baptism cannot fail and the power of God acts within it. . . ." ⁵⁰ "When Peter baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes; when Judas baptizes, it is Christ who baptizes. . . ." ⁵¹

Even when these technical clarifications, introduced by St. Augustine, are not known to the other Fathers, they still follow this teaching, in particular, St. John Chrysostom, according to whom bad priests take nothing away from the holiness of the priesthood.⁵² In this way the tradition of

in G. Manz, *Ausdrucksformen der lateinischen Liturgiesprache bis ins 11 Jahr.* (Beuron, 1941), p. 285.

⁴⁸ Optatus, *De schism. Donatist.*, bk. V, ch. 4 (PL 11:1053).

⁴⁹ Ibid., bk. 2, ch. 1, col. 941: "Ecclesia una est, cujus sanctitas de sacramentis colligitur, non de superbia personarum ponderatur. . . ."

⁵⁰ *De bapt. contra Donat.*, bk. 3, n. 15 (PL 43:144).

⁵¹ *In Joan.*, tract. V, n. 18 (PL 35:1423); tract. VI, n. 7, col. 1428; *De bapt. contra Donat.*, bk. 3, n. 10; bk. 4, n. 4; bk. 5, n. 19; *Contra Crescent.*, IV, 20, etc. Cf. *Sermo de ordinatione episcopi*, n. 11 (ed. G. Morin, *S. Aurelii Augustini Tract. sive Sermones inediti* [Munich, 1917], p. 154): "Why are they separated from us, they who are our brothers? Let them tell us why. Were the bishops evil? But they were seated on their legitimate throne; they governed in the name of Christ. . . ."

⁵² *De sacerdotio*, III, 10 (PG 48:646-647); *In Tit.* (62:672); cf.: "When you see an unworthy priest, don't attack the priesthood. You shouldn't blame the thing, but rather

the church has become fixed with precision from this classical period on. A galaxy of saints and geniuses (whom we do not call “Fathers” in vain) providentially define the principles on which the church had lived and must continue to live. From that source we have drawn an idea of the church already included in the notions of the church as house and temple of God, as spouse and body of Christ, which are fundamentally biblical ideas—the idea of an objective holiness *of the ecclesial institution itself*, independent of the holiness of the persons who live within it. The error of the Donatists had consisted precisely in seeing sanctity as only personal. But in response, the Catholic doctors showed that there is an incorruptible sanctity which comes to the church from its faith,⁵³ from the sacraments,⁵⁴ and from the hierarchical powers of the priesthood (see n. 52). We come back once again (and not for the last time) to the distinction between the structure of the church and its life.

3. *The Teaching of the Magisterium and of Theologians*

Declarations by the hierarchy concerning the faults of the church are rather rare. What I said earlier about the situation created by criticisms of the church in the modern period explains in part why. However, there are a certain number of statements about this where a rather precise position was taken that has not varied. In a word, occasionally the church can clearly admit the faults of persons, even in the hierarchy, but it refuses to impute defects to the church as such.

In the sixteenth century the explosion of Luther’s protests punctured an abscess of discontent which had been ripening for a long time. Compelled to admit the urgent necessity of a serious reform in the church, official declarations about reform from the highest sources multiplied.

the one who uses badly something in itself beautiful. For if Judas was a traitor, that calls for the condemnation not of the apostles but of Judas’ own life. It is not a grievance against the priesthood, but a sin on his own conscience . . .” (*Vidi Dominum*, hom. IV, nn. 4 and 5 [PG 56:126]), cited by C. Journet, *L’Eglise du Verbe incarné*, vol. I, p. 125, a passage that cites other texts of Chrysostom and Augustine. Cf. A. Moulard, *S. Jean Chrysostome* (Paris, 1949), p. 119; cf. St. Leo, *Epist.* 105, 3 (PL 54:1000).

⁵³ In addition to the texts of Augustine just cited, see St. Leo, *Epist.* 80, ch. 1 (PL 54:913).

⁵⁴ Optatus, *De schism. Donat.*, bk. 2, ch. 1 (PL 11:941); see n. 49 above. St. Augustine, *De bapt.*, VII, 9, 13 (PL 43:162–163).

Hadrian VI,⁵⁵ a reforming pope too soon removed from the superhuman task that he had courageously undertaken, wrote as follows to Chieregati, his envoy to the Diet of Ratisbon:

You should say that we freely recognize that God has permitted this persecution of the church because of people's sins, and particularly because of the sins of priests and prelates . . . Holy Scripture teaches us throughout [the Bible] that the faults of the people have their source in the faults of the clergy. That is why the Lord, when he desired to purify the ills of the city of Jerusalem, went first to the Temple . . . We know that for years many abominations have been committed even by the Holy See—abusing holy things, breaking commandments, in such a way that everything became scandalous . . . All of us, prelates and ecclesiastics, we have become turned away from the path of justice.⁵⁶

Some years later, at the Council of Trent that was convoked to strengthen the church in its faith and to reform its life, the highest prelates—Cardinal Pole at the very beginning of the council and Cardinal Lorraine at the end—solemnly proclaimed a *mea culpa*—"through our fault." If the salt loses its savor, Cardinal Pole reminded the council, it is good for nothing but to be trodden underfoot—and he added this profound thought: "If we do not recognize that, then it is vain for us to go into the Council, vain to invoke the Holy Spirit, who enters the soul of people first of all 'to convict the world in regard to sin and righteousness and condemnation' (Jn 18:8). To the degree that the Spirit has not accused us to ourselves, we are still unable to say that the Spirit has come inside us; and he will not come inside us, if we refuse to pay attention to our sins."

Cardinal Lorraine, for his part, told the council: "You have the right to ask us the cause of such a tempest. Brother bishops, whom shall we accuse? . . . It is because of us that this tempest was born, my Fathers . . . 'Let the judgment begin with the household of God' (1 Pet 4:17); 'Let those who carry the vessels of the Lord purify themselves' (Is 52:11)."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Hadrian VI, *Instructiones au nonce Chieregati* (1522), cited in L. Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste*, vol. 4, 2, pp. 93f. (French trans., vol. 9, pp. 103f.). On Luther's usage of this humble and beautiful text, see my introduction, n. 22.

⁵⁶ Admonition to the legates to the second session of the Council of Trent (Jan. 7, 1546), in *Concilii Tridentini Actorum*, vol. 4, first part (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1914), pp. 550–551.

⁵⁷ Speech given Nov. 23, 1562, in *Conc. Trid. Act.*, vol. 9 (Freiburg, 1924), pp. 163–164.

In 1537 a commission of cardinals and bishops, addressing a memorandum to Paul III on the reform of the church—particularly *in capite* (in its leadership)—likewise proclaimed in terms taken from Scripture: “It is by us that the name of Christ has been blasphemed among the nations.”⁵⁸

With great frankness some of the highest churchmen (Cardinal Pole and Cardinal Lorraine both came close to being elected pope) recognized their responsibility and their faults as churchmen and as leaders of the people of God. But nowhere did they talk about the corruption of the church itself. The tradition of St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine continued here: priests are poor humans and sometimes at fault, but the priesthood itself is holy.

Following this same line, Bossuet explained that the church may always be exempt from error but not always free of vice.⁵⁹ Cardinal de Noailles replied to Zinzendorf in 1721: “You attribute to this church, which is the spouse of Jesus Christ and is always pure and holy in itself, the failures of its ministers. The church laments these faults, it punishes them, but the church itself is not guilty of them . . . Condemn as much as you want the bad conduct of the bishops, the cardinals, and even the pope when their actions do not correspond to the holiness of their role. But respect the church, which gave them holy rules and which itself is guided by the Spirit of holiness and truth . . .”⁶⁰ It was this same tradition that Möhler continued, that theologian of great value whose remarkable sense of the church so many times moderated certain excessive tendencies. He wrote:

We have to acknowledge meeting bishops and priests who trample underfoot their most sacred duties and who have let the heavenly fire become extinguished at their hands. Several have even quenched the smoldering reed by their misrule. Catholics don’t have to dread confessing such things, in fact they have never dreaded it. How can we deny the deep decadence of the priesthood, when the very exist-

⁵⁸ *Consilium delectorum cardinalium et aliorum praelatorum de emendenda Ecclesia*, 1537. Text found in Mirbt, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums*, n. 427, and see Pastor, *Gesch. der Päpste*, vol. 5, pp. 117f.—another text that Luther mocked (cf. n. 22 in the introduction here).

⁵⁹ Cf., e.g., *Instruction pastorale sur les Promesses de l’Eglise*, art. 7.

⁶⁰ Text found in A. Salomon, *La Catholicité du monde chrétien d’après la correspondance inédite du comte Louis de Zinzendorf avec le cardinal de Noailles et les évêques appellants, 1719–1728* (Paris, 1929), pp. 21–22.

tence of Protestantism is undeniable proof of it? . . . So, Protestants, learn to measure the magnitude of the abuses for which you blame us by the magnitude of your own mistakes. Here is the ground on which the two churches will one day meet and shake hands. In the felt awareness of our common failure, we ought to cry out to one another: "We have all failed. Only the church cannot fail. We have all sinned. But the Church alone is pure and without spot."⁶¹

Official statements of this sort have become weaker and less striking in the contemporary period, perhaps, at least until Vatican II. Still they used the same ideas: people, even churchmen, are subject to all kinds of weakness; but the church, divinely instituted and assisted, is itself without fault. Listen to Leo XIII: "The church historian will underline the divine origin of the church more clearly by hiding nothing about the trials that the faults of its children and sometimes even of its ministers have imposed upon this spouse of Christ."⁶²

Listen to Pius XI, speaking particularly about the faults for which our separated brethren can blame us and because of which, perhaps, they try to justify their secession. With respect to the Reformation, the pope spoke of "the deadly decadence, the dissoluteness and the corruption of the human milieu that, here below, is mixed in with the divine element—the negligence, the laziness of the friends of goodness, the miserable audacity of the wicked, the bad example from on high and the willing imitation by the people, the return to paganism in public and private behavior that unleashed in the 16th century the terrible tempest in Europe of the Reformation, which would snatch so many people from the heart of Europe . . ." ⁶³ And with regard to the Orthodox, Pius XI said: "The separated Orthodox need in this respect to abandon their old prejudices so as to seek to know the true life of the Church, not to impute to the Roman Church the faults of private persons, faults that the Church condemns and which it will bring itself to correct. The Latins, for their part . . ." ⁶⁴

⁶¹ *Symbolique*, no. 37 (trans. Lachat, vol. 2, pp. 33–34).

⁶² Letter to the bishops and clergy of France, Sept. 8, 1899 (*Acta Leonis XIII*, Desclée, vol. 7, p. 295). Cf. a similar but more timid statement in Benedict XV, Encyclical *In praeclara*, Apr. 30, 1921, on the occasion of the centenary of Dante (AAS 13 [1921], p. 214).

⁶³ Homily for Pentecost 1922 (AAS, 1922), p. 345.

⁶⁴ Encyclical, *Ecclesiam Dei*, Nov. 12, 1923 (AAS, 1923), p. 580.

Using a declaration of more general application, Pius XI went on: "The divine mission of the church, which is carried out by humans and has to be carried out by human persons, can become painfully overshadowed by an all too human humanity that, at times, sprouts and comes back again and again, like the weeds within the wheat of the kingdom of God."⁶⁵

Finally, the firm ecclesiological teaching of Pius XII contributes clarifications in which the tradition of the Fathers can be found: "We find in the church a need to denounce human weakness. This comes from the tendency toward evil from which each of its members suffers, even the highest. But the church itself is holy in its sacraments, in its faith, in its laws, and in the spiritual gifts by which it ceaselessly engenders saints . . ."⁶⁶

The preoccupation with ecumenism has evidently favored, just as it has called for, an avowal of the faults within the drama of Christian divisions. Let me mention in this respect the collective letter of the bishops of Holland on the occasion of the Conference of Amsterdam of July 31, 1948.^{66a} But it is the Second Vatican Council that gives us the most authentic teaching. Its Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, shows the church coming forth from God, but committed to human history as it moves laboriously to its culmination:

Christ [was] . . . "holy, innocent and undefiled" (see Hb 7:26) [and] knew nothing of sin (see 2 Cor 5:21), but came only to expiate the sins of the people (see Hb 2:17) . . . The church, however, clasping sinners to its bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal." (LG 8)^{66b}

[The church] enters into human history . . . Advancing through trials and tribulations, the church is strengthened by God's grace,

⁶⁵ Encyclical, *Mit brennender Sorge*, Mar. 14, 1937 (AAS, 1943).

⁶⁶ Encyclical, *Mystici corporis*, June 29, 1943 (AAS, 1943), p. 225 (ed. Bonne Presse in French). Cf. the discourse of Pius XII (then Cardinal Pacelli) at the Eucharistic Congress of Budapest, May 25, 1938 (*Doc. Cathol.*, 1938, col. 717).

^{66a} See *La Vie intellectuelle* (Nov. 1948), p. 44, and the first edition of this work, pp. 623–624.

^{66b} Cf. LG 48: "For the church on earth is endowed already with a sanctity that is true though imperfect. However, until the arrival of the new heavens and the new earth in which justice dwells (see 2 Pet 3:13) the pilgrim church, in its sacraments and institutions, which belong to this present age, carries the mark of the world which will pass . . ."

promised to it by the Lord so that it may not waver, through the weakness of the flesh, from perfect fidelity, but remains the worthy bride of the Lord, ceaselessly renewing itself through the action of the Holy Spirit until, through the cross, it may arrive at that light which knows no setting. (LG 9)

By the power of the Holy Spirit the church is the faithful spouse of the Lord and will never fail to be a sign of salvation in the world; but it is by no means unaware that down through the centuries there have been among its members, both clerical and lay, some who are disloyal to the Spirit of God. Today as well, the church is not blind to the discrepancy between the message it proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted. Whatever is history's judgment on these shortcomings, we cannot ignore them and we must combat them assiduously, lest they hinder the spread of the gospel. (GS 43)^{66c}

"The church" does not content itself only in exhorting its members to purify and renew themselves.^{66d} The church applies the same obligation to itself, not only in words^{66e} but also in actions. The Second Vatican Council was a reform council, both by its own actions as well as by the initiatives which it unleashed in the entire body of the church, even at the highest levels.

There is then, with respect to our problem, a position that can be considered traditional: the position of the Fathers of the Church, of the magisterium, or of the pastors in charge. It is the tradition which, in one way or another, we find in the writings of recent theologians. Each one has nuances proper to his or her theological orientation and according to the perspective taken in their works, but they have all repeated in some way the distinction between the weaknesses of Christians and the purity of the church itself. This is expressed more historically and

^{66c} Cf. the Decree on Ecumenism, UR 4: "As a result, the radiance of the church's face shines less brightly in the eyes of our separated sisters and brothers and of the world at large, and the growth of God's kingdom is retarded. All Catholics must therefore aim at Christian perfection . . . that . . . the church . . . may daily be more purified and renewed." As to admission of historical failings, cf. *ibid.*, UR 3; GS 36 (Galileo!); Declaration on Religious Freedom, DH 12.

^{66d} LG 15 and see preceding note.

^{66e} Decree on Ecumenism, UR 6: "Christ summons the church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continual reformation of which she always has need, insofar as she is a human institution here on earth."

psychologically in the work of Newman, more apologetically in that of P. Pinard; it is precise and theological in the work of Charles Journet. But it is always the same position which is basically held and expressed: the church is not without sinners in its midst, and thus there is evil within it, but the church itself remains without sin (see excursus below, p. 114).

Let me add that, with the exception of Newman, the problem of evil is thought about only in terms of sin, not in terms of delays, lack of comprehension of the culture, or narrowness, which are the principal objections raised by our contemporaries. But as we will see, the principles for explaining evil in the church are the same for the two positions. By the way, the breadth of the word *peccatum* (sin) in ancient and medieval Latin embraced both of these positions.⁶⁷

We need to try to understand an expression according to its meaning in the Catholic tradition. For, in the terms that we have summarized here, we find a solution, but one that needs to be explained in order to be real, authentic, and useful. Otherwise it can seem simplistic, glib, and too cheap. Nothing puts off a contemporary thinker more than a simplistic apologetic explanation. Let's put aside apologetics, then, as a subsidiary consideration, and stay on the level of a theology of the church. There we will try to shed some light on the question.

III. Principles for a Solution: Several Meanings of the Word "Church"

God Alone Is Infallible

One principle dominates the whole question of the fallible character of the church. I borrow the formula for it from St. Thomas Aquinas. In asking whether angels can sin, the Common Doctor answers:

The angel and any other spiritual creature can sin, if we consider them according to their own nature. If any creature has the privilege of being sinless, it draws this quality not from its own natural condition, but from grace. Here is the reason why: to sin is to deviate from the rectitude that an act should have. This definition of "sin" applies to the natural order as well as to art or to morality. However, to be

⁶⁷ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Comm. in Phys.*, bk. 2, ch. 8, lect. 14 (Aristotle, 199a:33); and the *Summa Theol.*, Ia IIae, q. 21, a. 2, for examples of how in both profane and classical diction *peccata naturae*, *peccata artis*, and *peccatum* meant defect or failure. Cf. n. 68 below.

incapable of deviating from rectitude, there is only one act whose directive power would be the very energy of the agent who performs it. In cutting a piece [of something], if the rule for the operation is the craftsman's hand, then the result will always be correct. But if someone has to follow a model—a pattern determined elsewhere—then the cut is sometimes correct, sometimes not. Now only the divine will is the rule of its own acts, having nothing above it to give it order in guiding it towards its goal. By contrast, the will of any creature only finds rectitude in its acts to the degree that it is regulated by the divine will, from which it receives its ultimate goal. This is a bit like the will of an inferior who should regulate his (or her) will according to the will of the superior—the soldier, for example, with respect to his chief. That is why sin as such is impossible only in the divine will . . .”⁶⁸

So metaphysics shows us how God alone is infallible. All created reality, on the other hand, can fail to achieve what it ought to be or to do. If the church is holy and infallible in itself, that is only insofar as it is *from God*; it is so according to the aspect that it comes *from God*, and to the degree that it is *of God*.

This simple metaphysical analysis coheres remarkably with the fundamental affirmation of the Bible on the topic of holiness. In the Scriptures, especially in the Old Testament, what comes from God and belongs to God is holy, and thus it is withdrawn from the condition of common things.⁶⁹ In the New Testament, under the regime of the Messiah who has come, the dimension of transcendence will be made complete in a dimension of immanence, due to the gift and communication of the Holy Spirit (the *Spirit* is himself communication: 2 Cor 13:13). The holiness of the church and of its faithful always derives from what there is within them that comes *from God*. This holiness consists in a state of greater interiority. There is a real communication of God's holiness to the church and to the faithful.

In fact, the ancient church was aware of itself as an organism of spiritual life communicated from on high.⁷⁰ Whatever the date was when the

⁶⁸ *Summa Theol.*, Ia, q. 63, art. 1, c. For the meaning of “sin” in this text, look at n. 67 just above.

⁶⁹ P. Delehaye, *Sanctus: Essai sur le culte des saints dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1927), pp. 1–57.

⁷⁰ F. Kattenbusch, “Der Quellort der Kirchenidee,” in *Festgabe Adolf Harnack* (Tubingen, 1921), pp. 143–172.

church gave itself the predicate of “holy,” this is the first title by which it characterized itself.⁷¹ It truly is the holy church. The title of this chapter is not misleading.

But this holy church is also the church of our limitations and our failures. We see in a general way how that can be. The church, to the degree that it is *from God*, is holy, whereas to the degree that it is from us, it is subject to our limitations and our failures. This, in substance, is what the tradition said. The difficulty is to see how the same church can be at one and the same time holy and sinful, to distinguish exactly what is from God and what is from us, to see clearly what we mean when we speak about “the church itself.” Either the church is sinful, as the Protestants and sometimes the Fathers chose to say,^{71a} or the church is without sin, as Catholic theologians and frequently the Fathers as well preferred to say. Basically, the opposition (and the misunderstanding, if there is one) comes from imprecise language, doesn’t it? The same word, church, has several meanings, and it will help us to distinguish between them. To a colleague of the Chamber who interrupted one of his presentations by ironically saying *Distinguo . . .*, Bishop d’Hulst answered: *To distinguish*—that is still the only way that we have found to avoid confusion . . .

Two Aspects of the Church: Institution and Community

The distinction between two aspects of the church—the church as institution and the church as community—is important and helpful for this question (and for others as well).^{71b}

The church is made up of believers, and the most common definition of it found in the patristic tradition and theology is *congregatio fidelium*. However, it is *from* the church that we receive the faith. The church is made up of the baptized, and in this definition “faithful” means “baptized.” Yet the church gives us baptism: “Go therefore and make disciples

⁷¹ Cf. F. Kattenbusch, *Das Apostolische Symbol* (Leipzig, 1894 and 1900); H.B. Swete, *The Holy Catholic Church* (London, 1915), pp. 24f.; P. Nautin, *Je crois à l’Esprit-Saint dans la sainte Eglise pour la Résurrection de la chair (Unam Sanctam 17, Paris, 1947).*

^{71a} So in the Carolingian period, Alcuin to Charlemagne in June 799 (*Monumenta Germ. Hist. Epist.*, IV, 288, 14); or Charlemagne to Angilbert (PL 88:909B).

^{71b} I have used and explained this distinction (which shouldn’t be thought of as a dichotomy) in my *Lay People in the Church*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1959), revised edition with addenda published in 1965: see ch. 6, esp. pp. 278f. See how H. de Lubac treats this in distinguishing between *Ecclesia congregans* and *Ecclesia congregata: Méditation sur l’Eglise*, p. 78. These are clearly different aspects of the same reality.

of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20; cf. Mark 16:15-16). There is a sense then in which the church is made up of its members, and another in which the church makes its members and is anterior to them. The sense by which the church is a community made up by its members is more accessible to us because it corresponds to our experience. It is the other aspect above all that needs explaining. We should pay careful attention to it. The church is in this way anterior to its state as a community in two ways.

a) In the first way, by reason of the incarnation, the church exists *in Christ* before its foundation *by Christ*. This existence of the church in Christ is twofold: first, in God's plan, by the election and predestination that God makes of men and women by means of grace to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29-30); second, at the moment when the incarnation takes place. At that point, effectively, according to the whole patristic tradition interpreting Scripture, the Son of God espoused human nature and became truly united to it. From then on, in a way that is not easy to explain but that is truly real, he contains human nature within himself in its entirety. This is why the messianic acts by which he returns to his Father through death, the tomb, the resurrection, and the ascension—his "journey to his Father"—are truly done for our sake and, in a certain way, are already done by us. An abundance of Pauline texts comes to mind for this point.

Looking at this twofold existence of the church in Christ, we might speak of a reality of the church *as mystery*, anterior to its reality as *congregatio (collectio) fidelium*.

b) The church anticipates itself in yet another way, namely, *as institution*. This signifies the reality of the church by which it *precedes* its own members not only in Christ but also in its own existence in this world, according to which it engenders the faithful and, as the spouse of Jesus Christ, becomes our mother. How can that be?

It precedes us by faith, by the sacraments of the faith, and by the exercise of the apostolic authority received from Christ (cf. Matt 28:19). Before existing as a community of the faithful, the church exists as an institution. That is, it exists first as that ensemble of means by which Christ willed to animate and unite the faithful. These means, which build and structure the church, are: the deposit of faith (and principally the revelation of the Holy Trinity); the sacraments of the faith, instituted by Jesus

Christ, as the means for being united to the mystery of his passage to the Father; and, finally, the ministries or apostolic powers. These are the elements, we discover, that can generate and form communities to be the church—as we see in Acts⁷² and in, for example, Tertullian.⁷³ This is a constant tradition which modern ecclesiology has maintained, even as it contributes certain clarifications.⁷⁴

In another sense that is very real, we can say that Jesus did not found the church, for, as people of God and community, the church existed already in Israel. What Jesus did that was decisive was to institute the people of God as a new covenant. How did he do that? He did so by introducing the church, through his very person, into the heavenly world (church as mystery), by revealing to it the true faith (in the Holy Trinity), and by instituting the sacraments of the new covenant in his blood, establishing the apostolic powers (derived from his own) according to the threefold function of prophecy (or magisterium—corresponding to the true faith), priesthood (corresponding to the sacraments), and royal authority.

Jesus gave efficacy to all of that as a new covenant in his blood through his death. When he had done all of that, the church had its structure, its skeleton. Something like the dry bones brought back together in the prophecy of Ezekiel, the church now only has to wait for the living force, the breath of life, that the Spirit of Pentecost will give to it. Then it will engender peoples by the Word and the apostolic sacraments: *quae virgo est sacramentis mater est populis*—virginal in its sacraments, the [church] is the mother of the peoples.⁷⁵ Chaste in its faith and its sacramental life, the church engenders and becomes a people; it becomes the people of God according to the new covenant in the faith of Christ, the sacraments of Christ, and the ministry of Christ.

The church exists according to a second aspect, that of a community that creates the members that compose it. It is in this particular sense

⁷² “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

⁷³ In places where he lists the elements that the local communities ought to receive from the apostolic churches “*ut Ecclesiae fiant*” (*Praescr.* 20, 5; 36).

⁷⁴ Two examples: first, the classic analysis of the elements of ecclesiastical communion through communion with the faith, the sacraments, and a unique community life. Second, the text of the encyclical *Mystici corporis* (see n. 66).

⁷⁵ St. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, bk. 1, ch. 6, n. 31 (PL 16:197). There is a widespread patristic (especially liturgical) usage of the word *populus, populi* which refers in this context to the material increase of the church within humanity through baptism.

that Pius XII said, speaking of the laity: "They above all ought to have an always clearer awareness not only that they *belong* to the church, but that they *are* the church, that is, the community of the faithful on earth led by their common head, the Pope, and by the bishops in communion with him. They are the church . . ." ⁷⁶

We can note that according to these two ways in which the church exists (as mystery and as institution) before being a community of the faithful, its existence has something both very real and also something virtual at the same time. Predestination, the espousal of human nature, the inclusion of human beings within Christ, on the one hand; the deposit of the faith, the sacraments, and the apostolic powers, on the other hand—what could be more real? However, all of that still needs to be made actual precisely by way of bearing fruit in the community of the faithful. Finally, when all of that is accomplished and brought to its fullness, the church will be the *true* temple, the *true* spouse, and the integral Body of Christ—the *whole* Christ.

With respect to this reality of the work of God bearing fruit in the lives of human persons, everything else is only a *sacrament*, in the patristic sense of the word so happily highlighted by Henri de Lubac in his *Corpus Mysticum*. Eschatologically, when everything shall have come to pass—predestination, the mystery of espousal and of the faith, and the sacraments—there will be nothing other than *church-communion*. To see only this aspect of interiority and communion, as many extreme Augustinians have done throughout history, is to practice a kind of *theology of glory* . . . For the church to recognize itself as first an *institution* is to acknowledge its true state as an earthly church as well as its role as the *servant* of the Lord, of whom she is destined to be eternally the *spouse*.

In the light of this first distinction between the church as a community made up by the faithful and the church as a mystery and institution that precedes its members and brings them to birth, we can distinguish several senses of the word "church." It's not a matter of dividing the church into several parts. It is the same church that is the people of God destined to a historical existence and that is also a divine institution as the universal sacrament of salvation. The point is to distinguish different aspects in this unique and complex reality. These distinctions permit us to speak of the church in different ways, attributing different qualities to her and referring them to the church with the proper analytical discernment.

⁷⁶ Allocution of Feb. 20, 1946; cf. *Documentation Catholique*, 1946, col. 176.

Four Meanings of the Word “Church”

1. We can understand the church as the elements of the institution itself, that is, those things that correspond to the new covenant given by Christ to the people of God. In this way, the church refers to the saving grace acquired in Christ and destined to be communicated to people; the deposit of faith; the sacraments; and the apostolic powers of priesthood, magisterium, and governance, derived from Christ’s own powers. On the whole, Vatican I spoke of the church in this sense at the beginning of its constitution *Pastor aeternus*,⁷⁷ comparing it to the house of the living God, that is, to a place established by God where the faithful can be united by the bonds of a common faith and a common charity.

The Middle Ages said the same thing on the basis of patristic texts: *Ecclesia constituitur per fidem et fidei sacramenta* (the church is constituted through faith and the sacraments of faith).⁷⁸ In this way, the church is considered in its formal and constitutive principles which come from God and are God’s gifts. We might speak of an *Ecclesia de Trinitate* (a church coming from the Trinity) in the way in which I wrote about it in *Chrétiens désunis*.

2. Using the same point of reference, we might speak next of an *Ecclesia ex hominibus*—a church made up of human beings. In this way, the meaning of church would be the people, adhering by faith to the salvation that flows from Jesus Christ and adhering to the means of salvation instituted by him, who fill up the house of God and form the community of the faithful. *Congregatio fidelium* is the most common formula for the church in the Fathers and the theological tradition.⁷⁹ In this way, we designate as church no longer the formal principles coming from God but the material principle representing the people—no longer the institution but the people or community who form its membership. In this sense, *we* are the church.

This is the meaning of *ecclesia* (church) principally⁸⁰ used in Holy Scripture and which signifies in an exact way the congregation or the convoked assembly. This doesn’t mean that the biblical idea of church

⁷⁷ Denzinger, n. 1821.

⁷⁸ For St. Thomas, see my *Esquisses du mystère de l’Eglise*, pp. 35 and 85.

⁷⁹ Cf. my *Esquisses*, p. 69; and also A. Darquennes, *De Juridische Structuur van de Kerk volgens Sint Thomas van Aquino* (Louvain, 1949).

⁸⁰ I say “principally” because the meaning of the word *ecclesia* has sometimes evolved beyond its original sense under the pressure of the reality that it points to, as e.g., in Acts 8:1; 1 Cor 15:9, where it signifies, in addition to its immediate meaning, something stable, much like an institution.

should be sought only in a semantic analysis of the word *ecclesia* and in the passages where that word is found. We have already pointed out that the idea of church is fully present in 1 Peter, where, however, the word *ecclesia* is not found even once.

3. The people who make up the church don't all take the same part or play the same role. Yet they are all the faithful and they have all received faith, grace, and salvation. But among them there are those who are not only the faithful, but who are also bearers to some degree of one or the other of those energies (powers) instituted by God that in their entirety constitute the church in the first sense of the word and represent the church's formal principles. In this third sense, the word "church" designates the hierarchy, that group of the faithful who have been called and ordained so as to exercise hierarchical functions. We talk about the church very frequently in this sense. This is the meaning when someone says, with respect to a point of doctrine or discipline: "The church has not yet decided about this matter . . ." ⁸¹

Note also that this third sense cannot be understood without referring to the powers of priesthood or magisterium. However, what is referred to are not the powers *in themselves*, but rather certain members of the church, insofar as they bear and exercise these powers. By reason of this, they merit in a special way the title *churchmen*. This third sense comes about through a conjunction of the first and second meanings: a churchman is a person who does the acts of the church itself, "hierarchical acts," which he performs *in persona Ecclesiae*—in the name of the church. On the other hand, such a person is never completely identified with the church itself. Even when persons perform in the name of the church, they remain themselves—and that can be seen in what they do.

4. Finally, we can designate the church in a fourth and final sense, not by referring to its pure formal principles alone (that come from God as a gift), nor by referring to the humanity that sociologically makes up the people of God, but rather by the conjunction of the two—uniting the divine formal principle with the human material principle. In this sense, the church is the divine-human reality that is born of this union.

⁸¹ For example: "They obey what the church commands. They say 'church' here like they would say 'the government'—as if they were not part of it themselves" (Monsignor Chevrot, "Pour une prédication évangélique," *Congrès des Oeuvres de Bordeaux*, 1947, p. 74). In my *Lay People in the Church*, op. cit., p. 48 and notes, I have given numerous examples of this reduction of the word "church" to mean exclusively the hierarchy.

Here the word “church” takes on its full meaning and designates synthetically the concrete church in its totality. It is a church made up of human persons, but according to the degree that these persons have received Christ and accepted to live by a new principle of being, of organization and action. This is the Body of Christ. This is humanity, insofar as it exists by a new existence in Christ within the church, thanks to the energies and to the realities instituted by him for that purpose. As I showed already in *Chrétien désunis*, the *Ecclesia de Trinitate* and the *Ecclesia ex hominibus* join together and become one in the *Ecclesia in Christo*, the Church of the Word Incarnate, the Body of Christ. This meaning includes all the other meanings and synthesizes them. This is the meaning when we say simply “the church,” or “the treatise on the church,” etc.^{81a}

Additional Remarks on This Theme

Before applying and reaping the fruit of these distinctions, let me make two remarks in which I will highlight a certain benefit for ecclesiology from the preceding exposé.

1. I have already briefly⁸² expressed the characteristic norm for the action of God and of the church, which I called the dialectic between what is *given* and what is *done* with it. The church is the result of the synergy of a gratuitous divine gift that is pure in itself and a human activity that is characterized by human freedom, limitations, and natural fallibility. This fact determines two types of holiness for the church, well known to theologians and to those who do apologetics. There is the *objective sanctity* in the church that comes from God’s gifts, and it gives the church its life and its structure. And there is the *holiness of the members*, the touching, precarious but magnificent fruit of the cooperation of human freedom with God’s gifts. This is a fruit that God desires to reap and enjoy after having sown it and brought it to maturity.

The *communion of saints* is in the area of the *sancta* (holy things)—the objective gifts of God. There is also the *communion of saints* at the level

^{81a} G. J. Adriaansen, “Ik geloof in de heilige Kerk” in *Bijdragen* 11 (1950), pp. 51–75. Adriaansen thinks that we have placed the formal and the material principle of the church too close one to the other: he prefers the way *Mystici corporis* compares them to the two natures in the hypostatic union. For my part, I see no fundamental difficulty with either formulation.

⁸² *Chrétien désunis*, 1937, p. 86, n. 2, pp. 119, 130; *Esquisses*, pp. 26, 30, etc. (text from 1937).

of the *sancti*—living saints whom the church does not hesitate to celebrate, along with the mysteries and the sacraments of the Savior, for they are the members of Christ.⁸³

But while it is clear that the gifts of God and the *sancta* are pure, being the source of sanctification for the rest, the *sancti* are mixed up with impurity, needing always to be redeemed and sanctified. (The Virgin Mary alone represents a special case, for she is something other and more than merely the first among the saints. In God's plan, she is found on the side of the Cause of salvation himself [Christ], introducing him into the world by her title of Mother of the Savior. That is why Mary is also the "eschatological icon of the church," as Louis Bouyer called her and as the conciliar constitution *Lumen Gentium* 8 presents her.)

2. The great scholastic theologians, commenting on the Creed, raised a problem concerning the wording of the ninth article: *Credo . . . in sanctam ecclesiam*. How, they ask, can the Creed speak not only of believing *that there is a church* but also of believing *in the church*, when the movement of faith in (*credere in*) can only have God as its object—and also, how can one call the church "holy"?

Calvin, who knew the traditional nuances of the two expressions, preferred to say: "I believe the holy church," rather than, "I believe in the holy church."⁸⁴ The Catholic doctors replied by linking the article on the church to the article on the Holy Spirit and giving it this meaning: "I believe in the Holy Spirit sanctifying and uniting the church."⁸⁵ Rediscovering the trinitarian meaning and structure of the Creed, they showed how everything spoken of at the end of the *Credo* ought to be attributed to the Holy Spirit as his proper effects.⁸⁶ The Holy Spirit is the agent of every return to God.

Here is how St. Albert the Great expressed it:

Considering that the Holy Spirit is given and sent in order to sanctify creatures, and that this holiness, even if it fails sometimes in individual persons, never fails in the church—we can say "*sanctam ecclesiam*." Since every article of the faith is founded upon divine and eternal truth (for the creature is useless and does not possess an

⁸³ For this question, cf. Swete, *The Holy Catholic Church*, op. cit., pp. 259f.

⁸⁴ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ch. 4 (vol. 2, p. 120).

⁸⁵ Cf. *Chrétien désunis*, p. 69, and especially St. Thomas, *In Sent.*, III, d. 25, q. 1, art. 2, ad 5; *Summa Theol.* IIaIIae, q. 1, art. 9, ad 5.

⁸⁶ St. Thomas, *Compendium theol.*, 147.

enduring truth), the present article should be brought back to the personal action of the Holy Spirit, that is, to "I believe in the Holy Spirit"; not only in the Spirit himself, as the preceding article says, but: "I believe in the Holy Spirit as to his proper action, which is to sanctify the church through his own holiness that he pours out in the sacraments, through the virtues and the gifts, and finally through the miracles and graces *gratis datae* (freely given)" . . . that the Holy Spirit gives in order to manifest the holiness of the church.⁸⁷

There is no better way to link the holiness of the church to God and to the divine action attributed to the Holy Spirit. By that fact, the root of the holiness of the church is shown to be hidden in God with Christ and the Holy Spirit. There is a visible holiness, seen in the works that demonstrate a sort of proof of holiness. But the essential holiness of the church, deeper than the works of its members, characterizes its very existence. That holiness can only be affirmed by faith in the Holy Spirit, whose proper activity this is. We see something of the holiness of the church in the *sancti* as well as in the *sancta* (the divine gifts) by way of the effects that they produce. But as to the radical and deep holiness of the church as mystery, as institution, and even as people of God, the church believes in that by believing in the Holy Spirit who sanctifies it. Further, even historically, *Holy Spirit* and *Holy Church* appear to be linked in the Creed.⁸⁸

In general, then, such is the classic theology of the meanings of the word "church."

IV. Application of These Principles: Holiness and Failure in Light of the Different Meanings of Church

In Its Formal Principles (Given by God) the Church Is Infallible

In the first sense, *church* is the institution coming from God, representing the totality of principles established by Jesus Christ to make humanity his body. To repeat, these principles are essentially the faith (the revealed doctrine) and the sacraments of the faith, then the apostolic powers derived from the sovereign energies of Christ as king, priest, and prophet (related to the faith and the sacraments). Further, there are

⁸⁷ *De sacrificio missae*, II, ch. 9, art. 9 (Borgnet, 38, 64–65).

⁸⁸ Cf. P. Nautin, *op. cit.*, *supra*, especially p. 61.

the "charisms," the gifts of grace, and finally the gracious plan of God conceived in divine wisdom and made manifest in the divine word.

We are dealing here, then, with gifts and promises from God that, flowing from God, participate in divine infallibility. Of course, these gifts are given to human beings and sometimes, as is the case with the doctrine communicated by the prophets and apostles, the gifts have been made through the mediation of other human beings.

But here I am not considering the *personal* reception or *personal* use that persons make of these gifts. Rather, I am looking at the gifts in themselves, such as they are in coming forth from the hand of God and as they exist by his goodness. In this respect, even if gifts are given or communicated through the mediation of a human being, the infallibility of God remains in place with respect to his gifts, because the human intermediary has a purely instrumental role here. The instrumental cause, says the philosopher [Aristotle], is the paradoxical means that allows a result greater than what pertains to the power of the agent. The agent is the cause of something which it does not itself have according to its own power, because the energy at work comes from on high. This is what happens to creatures if God extends his goodness to the point of using them to produce his own divine work.

Considered in this way according to its constituent principles (not only such as they exist *in God*, but as they are *given* and exist *within the church* as its formal principles), the church is impeccable, infallible, and virginal, with the impeccability and the virginity of God himself and of Jesus Christ. The faith of the church cannot deviate, and its sacraments, insofar as Christ is in them, are saving and effective (the meaning of the expression *ex opere operato*). Likewise, with respect to these things in themselves, there is no question of limitation, aging, or being out of touch. I hold, then, that with respect to its essential principles, the church is incapable of failure and has no need to reform itself.

However, that need for reform arises with respect to the use or the abuse that humans may make of its principles, as we will see further on. In this way we define precisely where a wrong turn, an insufficiency, and so a need for reform can happen in the church. This cannot be on the level of constitutive principles themselves, that is, with respect to doctrine or the sacraments or the powers relative to them. For these things are the part that God plays in the church—God laying the foundation, in a certain way. Human beings can turn aside from them or be inadequate to exercise them properly, but the principles themselves are incorruptible, not only in God, but also *in the church* to whom God has

given them. These things are irreformable. This is where the Protestants take leave of the Catholic tradition (still held also by the Orientals). In the third part [not included in this translation], I will show how and why.

In this first sense, then, the church is seen as flowing forth from God, taking its identity from God, and united to God as to its principle. The church is truly a spouse, and this is what Dom Vonier describes in his book *L'Esprit et l'Epouse*. The church is united to Christ and, by reason of this indissoluble union, it is pure. God alone cannot sin. God alone is infallible simply in being himself, in needing to follow no other rule than himself. For only the One who is everything that he is and cannot be otherwise has no rule outside himself. The church is free of failures and mistakes only to the degree that it is joined and united to God, insofar as it is his spouse, even to the point of becoming one flesh with Jesus Christ.

I cannot here elaborate a whole theology of the church according to the theme of spouse. However, this idea is central for the present problem, and we will come back to it at every step of our analysis. But following what has just been said, we can, in passing, make note of an idea which is important for the problem of the status of a reform in the church (and to which I will return later in the third part).

Möhler strongly insisted⁸⁹ that the church is not founded upon a text or upon a letter exterior to itself, even if that should be the letter of the Holy Scriptures; but the church is founded through a gift of the Holy Spirit as a living reality which has its law within itself. In this way the church follows an interior and living law, which includes the Scriptures, through the Spirit who lives within it. The church is given its own norm, then, from within and does not have to submit to any exterior law formulated in a text. — Such an idea is acceptable only on the condition of seeing the church in its aspect of spouse united to the Holy Spirit and to Christ. The church's quality of *holiness* follows precisely its quality as spouse, and follows the same conditions just noted.

In this sense by which we first consider the church, it is holy, with an objective sanctity that it cannot lose (because of the gift and the promise of God). This holiness does not depend upon persons in the church but depends upon its formal, constitutive principles. As House of God, the church is holy independently of those who live within it. It is holy in its

⁸⁹ Cf. above all *L'Unité dans l'Eglise*, nos. 7, 8, 14, 63, and 68 and appendix 3. Cf. below p. 216.

faith, in its sacraments, and in the apostolic powers derived from the powers of Christ relative to the faith and the sacraments. It is objectively holy and cannot lose this holiness, inherent in the gifts that it receives from God.

This does not mean any inappropriate glorification of the ecclesiastical institution. On the contrary, this is the way in which the sovereignty of God's action within the church is expressed. "*Hoc ad excellentiam Christi pertinet*" (this belongs to the excellence of Christ), as St. Thomas put it.⁹⁰ So there exists in the church an order of holiness and of worship that flows from the priesthood of Jesus Christ and that has its own proper consistency, going beyond the fickleness of persons and independent of the precarious and changeable dispositions of human beings. There is a principle and a criterion of truth that exists in the episcopal charism, and in a singular way in the charism of the Holy See. So there exists in the church a holiness and a truth that are in a way institutional and that precede and dominate the personal life of the church's members. This is the church's grandeur and its "juridical" role, *de facto* and *de jure*, in order to render its institutions stable and independent of fluctuations due to time and culture.

As a People Made Up of Human Beings, the Church Is Fallible

In the second sense of the word "church," it means the Christian people, the assembly of the faithful. The church is made up of its members. Here we are taking account not of God's gifts considered in themselves in all their purity, insofar as they flow forth from God and have been given to the church and remain in the church through the action of God. Rather, we are looking here at the use that human beings make of these gifts—humans with all their freedom, their weakness, their instability, and their essential fallibility. This is the doorway through which sin and various other weaknesses penetrate into the church. This is the "material cause" of the church, the human beings who make up the people of God who are vulnerable to these weaknesses,.

It will be good to look separately at sins properly so-called, on the one hand, and at historical faults brought about through narrow-mindedness and slowness to respond, on the other hand (about which we have already spoken and which we will treat again in an appendix).

⁹⁰ *Summa Theol.*, III, q. 82, art. 5, c.

a) *The area of sins properly so-called.* “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). We are all sinners. However, it is not useless to make a distinction here.

Looking at the faithful individually, they are all, at one moment or another and in one way or another, sinners. Looking at the community that they form, this community as such is holy, for the Holy Spirit who was given to the church at Pentecost has never left it and will never leave it. St. Thomas says that the faith of the church is always “formed” by charity.⁹¹ Some people in the church sin in all kinds of ways, and individually taken, all the members are fallible. They are all, with the exception of the holy Virgin, effectively sinners. The Virgin Mary is an exceptional member of the church (and also an image of the whole church). But the community itself is holy, and it cannot separate or turn itself away from God (not only with respect to its constitutive principles but also with respect to at least some part of its members at any given moment).

On the one hand, there is an election that affects the people as a whole and that cannot defect at the group level, even despite failures of one or another member.⁹² On the other hand, there are God’s formal promises concerning the fidelity and indefectibility of his church (cf. Luke 22:31-32; Matt 16:18, 28:20, etc.). That is why the more we are inserted in the communion of the church, the more deeply we are established in holiness and truth.

While the community as such is always united to the Holy Spirit, and therefore always holy, always spouse, individual souls may or may not be united to God. The gifts by which the Lord constitutes his church are twofold. There are gifts of service—gifts of ministry—and we can use them well or poorly, exercise them well or badly. And there is the gift of life itself—life in Christ—interior justification and the fruits of the Holy Spirit within us; and we can receive or refuse them, honor or betray them. This question of the use of the gifts of ministry and of fidelity to the gifts of life is one where human liberty plays its role. This is where by human fallibility we can thwart God’s gifts. We are able to walk according to the Spirit or according to the flesh (Gal 5:24-25).

⁹¹ *In Sent.*, III, dist. 25, q. 1, art. 2, ad 4; IV, dist. 6, q. 1, art. 3, q. 2, ad 3; *Summa Theol.* IIaIIae, q. 1, art. 9, sed c. and ad 3; q. 2, art. 6, ad 3.

⁹² This is true not only for Israel in the Old Testament but also for the Israel of the New Testament: cf. Eph 1:4 (as to the “us” in the text, see the commentary of Armitage Robinson on v. 4; cf. Col 1:12-14). For the “Twelve,” see John 6:70 and its use of the word “Twelve.”

The expression of St. Paul, the "body of sin" (Rom 6:6), has sometimes been applied to the church—an expression equivalent to "the body of the flesh" (Col 2:11). It is not that bodiliness as such is evil, either for the faithful for whom the body can be an instrument of justice (Rom 6:12-13; 12:1, etc.) or for the church for whom bodiliness is the church's exterior form and a sensory element necessary and good in itself.⁹³ It is not the church, then, even as community, that sins; it is individual human beings who are tempted and who sin. Through them and in them (who belong to the church), the church knows temptation and sin; through them and in them, the church is spotted by diverse stains.

Every evening at Compline (in the Latin Rite), the church has us read St. Peter's warning: "Keep alert: Like a roaring lion, your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith . . .," and the text goes on to say, "For you know that your brothers and sisters in the entire world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering" (1 Pet 5:8-10). The people of God are a people tempted, and the years that Israel lived in the desert between Egypt and the Promised Land we are now reliving in the present time, between this earthly world and the kingdom. These are essentially years of temptation. Thus there is often sin, and then penitence.

The church in the collectivity of human beings which compose it, both individuals and hierarchical persons, is subject to temptation, to sin, and to the call to repentance. This is why St. Ambrose, whose views we have already examined, says that the church sheds tears of penitence, but it never ceases to beg God to heal its wounds, and it approaches Christ with the sentiments of the woman who said, "If only I can touch his garment, I will be healed . . ." This is why St. Augustine, returning to what he had written, says, "Wherever in my books I spoke of the church having neither spot nor wrinkle (Eph 5:27), it is necessary to understand this not as if the church were already like this, but in the sense that she is preparing herself to be, on the day when she will appear in her glory. At present, by reason of the ignorance and infirmity of her members, she has reason to say every day, 'Forgive us our debts.'" It is also in this sense that a dignitary of the Roman Church remarked, "The Church recites the *Confiteor* . . .," and the encyclical *Mystici Corporis*

⁹³ This is clear in the vocabulary of the New Testament, which makes a distinction between *σάρκιος* (*carneus*, meaning fleshly) and *σαρκικός* (*carnalis*, meaning carnal); cf. Westcott, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 186–187 (with respect to Heb 7:16). Of course the body of the church can become "carnal" here or there.

applies to the church the petition of the Our Father, "Forgive us our trespasses . . ." ⁹⁴

We are not dealing here with a temporary situation or with a period of decadence. Others have quite correctly pointed out the imaginary quality of an image of the primitive church—even of the apostolic church—that is too beautiful.⁹⁵ That church also had its flaws, as the New Testament gives us enough evidence to see. The heroic church, the church of the martyrs, was itself sometimes also a weak church, rich in sinners and renegades. The persecutions of Decian and Domitian tragically brought the church to understand this and forced it to think theologically about the fact of the failure of the members of the body of Christ.⁹⁶

However, the error that holds that the church could only be composed of the just and the predestined periodically reappeared in Montanism, the Schism of Novatian, Donatism, and later the Cathars, Wyclif, John Hus, and the Anabaptists (this last group vigorously refuted by Calvin himself).⁹⁷ In their different ways, each of these groups deviated from the Catholic tradition in misunderstanding an essential trait of the mystery of the church.⁹⁸ For the presence of sinners in the church is not something accidental, a peripheral phenomenon; it represents something structural. The whole idea of the church is involved here.

If the church is only a completely spiritual communion with God, then one has to leave the church because of sin (even interior sin) to the degree that one commits it. Sinning, in effect, would destroy communion with God in Christ. But the church, at the same time that it is communion with Christ, is also the means of this communion—the means of procuring it through the proclamation of the faith and baptism, the means of nourishing and bringing it to perfection through everything which en-

⁹⁴ AAS, 1943, p. 225. For St. Augustine on this point, cf. *supra*, n. 43.

⁹⁵ D. Franes, *Radicalisme in de eerste eeuwen der Kerk* (Bois-le-Duc, 1936); H. Pinard de la Boullaye, *Carême de 1937*, 6th conference (pp. 248f.), cites 1 Cor 3:3; 5:1-6; 1 Tim 1:18-20; Jude 4; Rev 3:15-17, etc.; P. Simon, *Das Menschliche in der Kirche Christi* (Freiburg-im-Breisgau, 1936), ch. 3 on the "human" in the apostolic church.

⁹⁶ Cf. G. Bardy, *La théologie de l'Église de saint Irénée au Concile de Nicée, Unam Sanctam* 14 (Paris, 1947), pp. 167-191.

⁹⁷ *Institutes*, vol. 2, pp. 148f. Rather than undertake a discussion of principles, Calvin looked in the OT and NT for examples of sinners who still belonged to the people of God.

⁹⁸ Cf. Franes, *op. cit.*; K. Rahner, "Kirche der Sünder," *Stimmen der Zeit* (June 1947), pp. 163-177 (and as a booklet from Herder, Vienna). Rahner clearly shows how the church is a church of sinners. Cf. n. 39 above, on the *De Poenitentia* of St. Ambrose.

lightens the faithful—the means of pastoral help and of grace, the means of repairing the Christian life through the exercise of the power of the keys . . . Sinners belong to this church that is their means of grace as long as their sin does not bear expressly upon this ecclesial affiliation (heresy, schism, apostasy) or does not lead to excommunication. While the impure and sinners have no part with Christ, the church here below is like a net full of fish of all sorts, good and bad, like a field where weeds are mixed with wheat; both Cain and Abel can belong to it.

The church's proper work is precisely to ceaselessly purify sinners from their sin. The church is itself the place and the instrument for the application of Christ's redemption. This redemption is accomplished as far as Christ is concerned, but it is brought about in us only through an implementation repeatedly pursued again and again—"*Opus redemptionis exercetur*" (the work of redemption will be carried out), as the liturgy says. "The mystical body, the holy mystical body, is a body where redemption is both accomplished and not accomplished; where then sin is always present and active. Each generation which arises gives new expression to sin in some way, thus giving sin new life. The mystical body is the place where sins must be cast out, the place where trials arise—the place where redemption is at work . . ." ⁹⁹

The liturgy, which is so revealing to those who pay attention to its profound meaning, helps us to understand the nature of the church's mission when it assigns the pericope about Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) as the Gospel for the Mass of the Dedication of a Church. Zacchaeus is a sinner (or has that reputation). But when Jesus comes under his roof, he acknowledges that he is a sinner, and he rectifies the injustices that he has committed. With Jesus, salvation entered his house; the publican, excluded from the people of God, has become a son of Abraham as well: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and save what was lost." This sheds great light on the work of the church: to help humanity to pass from the "world" into the people of God (making Jesus present and active) and to pass from sin to justice, from perdition to salvation. The church according to its first meaning (as institution of salvation) incessantly brings holiness into the church in the second sense of the word (as the community of the faithful and the people of God).

So we see where sin is situated in the church. The church is neither the principle nor the subject of sin—it is rather the members who are the

⁹⁹ Emile Mersch, *La théologie du Corps mystique*, vol. 1 (Paris-Brussels, 1944), p. 366.

principle of sin, the human beings who make up the church. From this point of view, the traditional response to the problem of evil in the church appears correct and satisfying: the weaknesses are not the action of the church itself but of its members. We can see why Dom Vonier preferred to speak of the faults of the “people of God,” not of the church.¹⁰⁰

In *L'Esprit et l'Epouse* he had considered the church as the spouse of God, that is, as completely holy—whether seeing it in its powers and its sacramental and liturgical activity or whether according to its value as a quasi-personalized community. In *Le Peuple de Dieu* he looked at the church according to the second sense that we have distinguished here, that is, in its concrete historical life, at once personal (in individuals) and social. Dom Vonier succeeded better in speaking of the Church-Spouse than in speaking of the people of God. But his distinction accords with mine, and he contributes a poetic feeling that the ideas of *formal cause* and *material cause* don't convey to the same degree.

b) *The area of social-historical mistakes.* These are the mistakes that particularly bother our contemporaries. Even though this is a decisive question, I can only give a rapid overview here. Since this topic relates to the chief concern of reform, I will study it closely in the following chapter.

In any given society people share a whole world of received ideas and attitudes pertaining to their social grouping. These are things that have explanations and sometimes historical justification. But people scarcely ever call them into question because they make up the very milieu they are immersed in and live in. They do not represent the church as such, but rather the forms of Christian thought and existence; however, they are inherited from concrete historical situations and become fixed into received ideas and habits.

Sociological reality that is religious at its root and human in its manifestations is inevitably shaped by human beings when they become the people of God in history. We see this above all when we realize that the habits, the attitudes, and the “mentality” of this people are shaped less by the deep structures of the church than by concrete sociological structures. In brief, people are shaped by a “Christian world” that has its good sides, certainly, but also its limitations, its stolid resistance to cultural innovations, and its rigidity and narrow attitudes.

We should note, by contrast to what happens with sins properly so called, that here the more one moves toward the collective, the greater

¹⁰⁰ See especially *Le peuple de Dieu* (Lyon, 1943), pp. 122–123.

is the danger of corruption. Although the church constructs itself most fully through a spiritual communion in faith and the sacraments of the faith, it more or less betrays itself and hides its genuine features beneath the forms of the "Christian world" elaborated throughout history.

In our time, in a country like ours, the corruption of the Christian world does not so much compromise the church as hide it. The proof is that in countless cases, the rediscovery of the true mystery of the church comes not from official organisms of the Catholic milieu but from little groups that return to the Tradition by rediscovering the liturgy and theology through their own practice (see above, intro., pp. 45f.). It would not be hard to show how throughout history, but especially in our time, the church reappears and shines forth more clearly when the conventional (but inauthentic) facades of the Christian world fall apart. I can even say that the church only begins to be purely and fully itself when it is pushed out of certain positions that it held within a "Christian world" (which is sometimes almost the same thing as the "world" as such).

I know that some people, especially Protestants, consider this distinction between church and Christian world to be gratuitous and mere wordplay. That follows from the tendency of Protestant thought that misunderstands the distinction between the church as institution and as mystery so as to see in the church only the congregation or the people made up by the faithful. I examine the texts and the outcomes of this position in the third part [omitted in this translation]. However, at the point that Protestants rediscover this aspect (as is happening at this time), they return to positions rather similar to ours.

The Church as the Ensemble of Churchmen or Hierarchical Persons

In this third meaning of church, the church means hierarchical figures. It is easy enough to admit that there are members of the church who sin and who fail. But there are also faults and defects of hierarchical figures—churchmen—who not as individuals but precisely as hierarchical personages are at fault in the very exercise of their ecclesiastical functions. Are not such faults and defects, then, the faults and defects of the church?

Yes, in the third sense of the word "church," we should say so. We have to stop and recognize that many faults that give scandal and give the impression of being failures of the church itself are fundamentally situated in this area.

A preliminary answer comes to us from dogma and theology on the level of principles and of what *can* be a priori. There is a domain of action

where the hierarchy (that ensemble of men who have received the ministries derived from Christ and the apostles) is sinful and fallible. When it is a question of acts of the *priesthood*, it is a matter for the most part of sacramental actions that pertain to that objective order of holiness, independent of human persons, that we have already discussed.

But the celebration of the sacraments is also (and first of all) a prayer, a ceremony that bears witness to faith and invites us to pray. In this respect, the personal holiness and unworthiness of the minister are dispositions of capital importance. Pastorally they either nourish or destroy Christendom.¹⁰¹ The sacraments in themselves, the Eucharist in itself, insofar as they come from Christ, are completely holy, pure, and perfect. But, with respect to their celebration by priests, they become the worship of a particular community . . . We well know how miserable their celebration can sometimes be. It is also clear that the liturgical or ritual forms, instituted at a given moment and in a given cultural context, can present limitations and more or less serious handicaps.

It is enough to think of the inevitable problem of Latin, of the failure to adapt our liturgy for the good of mission lands, of the demands made by the present liturgical movement, for example, in order to see that the existing priestly ministry of the church is imperfect. Further, isn't this just what the encyclical *Mediator Dei* (November 20, 1947) recognized? This great text clearly distinguishes between the divine and the human elements of the liturgy, and it recognizes, on the human side, possibilities for development as well as for abuses. This lays the groundwork precisely for the exercise of an activity of reform (cf. *Mediator Dei* 50).

From the point of view of the magisterium, there is a guarantee of infallibility under certain precise conditions, whether for the whole church in its unanimity with respect to what it professes to believe, or for the episcopacy dispersed throughout the world but teaching as doctors of the faith in a unanimous way, or for the episcopacy legitimately assembled in council and defining the faith, or finally for the pope "when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, acting as the universal pastor and teacher and drawing upon his supreme apostolic authority when he defines what must be held by the whole Church as a doctrine concerning faith or morals."¹⁰² This infallibility is not the fruit of an *inspiration* but simply

¹⁰¹ Blanc de Saint-Bonnet wrote: "A holy clergy make for virtuous people, a virtuous clergy make the people honest, a bad clergy make the people ungodly" (cited by Leon Bloy in *Celle qui pleure*, p. 91). The same idea is expressed in a less literary way in St. Gregory and throughout the Middle Ages.

¹⁰² First Vatican Council, Denzinger, no. 1839.

of an *assistance*—a guarantee bearing upon the final expression of the work. But this work itself, as it unfolds, follows normal human pathways, again with God's help. The history of conciliar definitions is often a very human history. The work of the persons involved remains influenced by their own limitations, even in the final product, the definition of dogma. God's guarantee to spare the church of error is nonetheless marked by circumstances, and the resulting human statement is not beyond improvement.

Besides the question of infallibility, a charism that is needed in order to assure the first of the formal principles of the church, there is the habitual governance of the Holy Spirit over the church. But this governance does not rule out particular failings, nor does it always supply for the limitations or the ignorance of churchmen, even those placed in the highest roles. Even if it is certain that the church as such will never teach error, nonetheless the part left in the church to the activity of human beings means that the church will not necessarily always, at each moment and in each circumstance, enjoy the best manner of teaching or the greatest plenitude of teaching.

In a way that was unanimous and formal, the Middle Ages admitted the possibility of a heretical pope with respect to his private person. The treatises on theological criteriology (*De locis*, etc.) are likewise unanimous in admitting that isolated bishops, the Fathers of the Church, and theologians, not only as isolated persons but in groups (theological schools), at certain times can be mistaken in their teaching. Examples of each one of these cases would be easy enough to cite. There would be examples as well of the slowness to respond or of the accidents that can be found in the development of doctrines. There are in the history of Christian doctrines examples of obscurantism; there are cases of slowness of response, even detours in the development of ideas. On several points (for example, in the area of social doctrine), the development of theological truth is conditioned by the state of the world. In summary, the cooperation of human beings plays its role in many ways, bringing with it, outside of those determined cases where it benefits from a formal guarantee from God, possibilities of bad results and failure.

If we consider that the magisterium includes the whole area of pastoral preaching, we suspect that churchmen may be judged lacking in the exercise of one of the hierarchical acts that is most essential. Think about the failure of preaching in the past, sometimes even in the present; think about how the altogether analytical and scholastic approach of modern catechisms represents a narrowing and mediocrity of adaptation . . . If preaching and catechesis are precisely the object of the major

concerns for reform at present, it is because they have been shaped by ideas received from the past and are not what they ought to be for the present.

In essence this is a question of the function of the ruling power of the church. This too is the object of a general assistance of the Holy Spirit (who governs the church). I can even admit (with the Swiss theologian Charles Journet) the idea of a practical infallibility of the church in the order of prudence, analogous to its dogmatic infallibility, but also *limited* (as that is, of course). That does not prevent, however, that in this area certain hazards are at play with respect to human cooperation with the work of God. There are hazards above all in this area, I would say, since it is even further away from the formal magisterium and from the sacramental order where human instrumental causality is in interplay with divine assurance and infallibility. Government in the church is a power received from God but, operating by juridical practice such that the church fully exercises it through itself and *positis ponendis* (taking all necessary distinctions into account), exercises it as a political authority would exercise its own power of government.¹⁰³

Père Emile Mersch writes the following:

Wherever humans act as humans, in everything that Christians do—even the best, in all that ecclesiastical leaders do, even the most dignified, human weakness and human malice and the trace of human sins inevitably betrays itself—and does so often. The saints themselves do not totally escape from these bad moments except at the moment of their full spiritual maturity when they're dying. Grace, as we ought to believe, should preserve the pastors of the church and even more their most important actions, but it does not suppress their failures—that would be to suppress their humanity. There is then, even there, beyond authentic faults, the interference of selfish viewpoints and worldly calculation even in the perspective of the most apostolic persons; there are prejudices and unconscious ignorance, vanity that renders people inattentive, touchiness that nourishes unacknowledged grudges, prideful stubbornness which insists upon respect for the role they play, impotence to have and to keep a genuinely right intention in the spirit of true humble abnegation, etc. . . .¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ See my "Ordre et Juridiction dans l'Eglise," in *Irénikon* (1933), pp. 22–31, 97–110, 243–252, 401–408 (reprinted in *Sainte Eglise*, Paris, 1963).

¹⁰⁴ *La théologie du Corps mystique*, vol. 1, p. 368.

This last idea of Père Mersch ought to receive our attention. One of the temptations of churchmen is certainly to identify in their own minds what they do concretely with the sacred function in itself. Yet these men who exercise the most sacred authority can be lacking in information or intelligence.¹⁰⁵ They can spoil occasions, alienate people, provoke irreparable damage by their narrowness or their lack of understanding. People agree in thinking that Cardinal Humbert acted brutally in the matter of the Patriarch Michael Cerularius, who himself bears terrible responsibility. St. Clement-Marie Hofbauer said that he had tried in vain to make the Curia understand the true cause of the Reformation, and he considered Rome responsible for the state of affairs in Germany and in Austria.¹⁰⁶ What might we say of the religious history of Bohemia in the fifteenth century?

Churchmen can also lack character. St. Peter agreed dogmatically with St. Paul about the question of Christians coming from paganism (Gal 2:11f.), but he took an equivocal attitude (and it is not impossible that he lacked character). Such is the case, later on, of Pope Liberius signing the formula of Sirmium and of Pope Honorius misunderstanding what Monothelism meant and consequently showing himself indulgent toward it, the case of Pope Paschal II when the emperor Henry V extorted from him a renunciation of his rights of investiture, and of Pope Pius VII signing the Concordat of Fontainebleau . . .¹⁰⁷

If after examining dogma and theology, we now look at history, we discover an unequivocal answer. Churchmen, charged with hierarchical powers and responsibilities, failed over and over not only in their personal lives, but also in the exercise of their administration. They failed to the degree that they were not pure instruments of the action of God (as

¹⁰⁵ At various moments in history, we meet up with a veritable hatred for priests, going so far as to inspire their murder. I have collected several examples of this, both between 1500–1530 and between 1820–1850.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. J. Hofer, *Der hl. Klemens Maria Hofbauer: Ein Lebensbild* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1921), pp. 276 and 383–384. After quoting the famous letter in which Perthes describes his interview with the saint on the religious meaning of the Reformation, Hofer cites the following letter of E. Veith from Apr. 21, 1863: "*Nicht ohne Grund hat Hofbauer, der ein wirklicher Heiliger war, fast täglich wiederholt, Rom sei an allen Uebel schuld*—Not without reason did Hofbauer, a genuine saint, repeat almost daily, Rome is guilty for all these evils . . ." (ibid., p. 384, note).

¹⁰⁷ I borrow these four examples from F. Mourret, *Le Concile du Vatican d'après des documents inédits* (Paris, 1919), pp. 314–315.

in the celebration of the sacraments or the charism of infallibility linked to their function), that is, to the degree that they expressed themselves.

The church itself, through the voice of its most important pastors, has several times admitted this. I cited above some texts from the period of the Reformation which are clear in this respect. "All this evil has come from us," said Hadrian VI; likewise Contarini, Carafa, Pole, and Sadolet, addressing Paul III, the legates opening the Council of Trent, and Cardinal de Lorraine at the end of his life's work. To that we could add other texts of Sadolet, statements of Pope Pius V, St. Vincent De Paul,¹⁰⁸ Bossuet, and lots of others. There is no point in going into detail about the faults of so many popes, bishops, priests, and religious. This history is rather well known and the church has suffered abuse because of it. Rather, let's see if we can understand a bit the meaning of all these facts.

In the preface which he wrote for the 1877 third edition of his *Via Media*,¹⁰⁹ Newman, wanting to address the criticisms that he had formulated against Catholicism as an Anglican, took up this problem. He showed how from the moment that the principles of the church in its three prerogatives of power (priesthood, magisterium, and government) are concretely exercised in history, they are necessarily mixed up with circumstances and cease being concretely or historically pure. They interfere and react one with another and end up limiting themselves. An *idea* is able to be pure, but *life* takes place in the world where one cannot escape being mixed up in some kind of compromise or blemish.¹¹⁰

In this perspective sketched out by Newman, I discovered some light on the subject in his idea of historical conditioning. From the moment that the priesthood, the magisterium itself, but above all the power of government are concretely exercised in history, they are touched by the conditioning of historical situations. They take concrete forms which are limited, and in part determined, by the conditioning that the state of ideas and morals, politics, and even economics imposes. They take on modalities which do not pertain to them essentially, but which phenom-

¹⁰⁸ "The church has no worse enemies than its priests"; "It's because of priests that heretics have prevailed and that vice has overcome and ignorance pitched its throne among the poor . . ." (St. Vincent de Paul, quoted by J. Delarue, *L'Idéal missionnaire du prêtre d'après saint Vincent de Paul* [Paris, 1947], p. 283).

¹⁰⁹ Pp. 36–94. There is a French translation of these pages in J. H. Cardinal Newman, *Pensées sur l'Eglise (Unam Sanctam 30* [Paris, 1956]), pp. 306–343.

¹¹⁰ Cf. H. Pinard de la Boullaye, *Carême 1937*, p. 269. This idea makes me think of the Legend of St. Nicholas and of Cassian that Soloviev tells at the beginning of his *La Russie et l'Eglise universelle*.

enologically or historically enter into their concrete exercise. The priesthood becomes linked to all sorts of cultural forms, to devotions where human piety enters strongly in; the magisterium, at least in its minor expressions, is linked to a specific level of information¹¹¹ and means of expression. As to governance, it is much more associated historically with particular forms of authority, and it includes, even in an area as holy and pure as that of the missions, for example, delays, limitations, and narrowness . . .

Within extremely complex circumstances, drawing from a large historical canvas, the bishops and above all the popes took on secular titles in the context of feudalism after Constantine, the fall of the Roman Empire, and the Carolingian Empire. The structure of Christendom has made of the church and of the secular city one single society, the "Christian Republic," in which prelates and popes have exercised powers deriving from another competence than that of their strictly spiritual jurisdiction: rights of overlords, arbiters, moderators of Christendom, judges of the Christian princes, etc. Pius IX expressed this clearly when speaking of the deposition of kings: "This right has been exercised by the popes in extreme circumstances, but it has nothing to do with pontifical infallibility. Its source was not infallibility but pontifical authority. That authority, according to the public law then in force and with the consent of the Christian nations, recognized that the pope was the supreme judge of Christendom, and his authority extended to the right to judge, even in temporal matters, the princes and the states. Of course the present situation is completely different."¹¹²

Pius XII made a similar application of the distinction between the pure substance of papal power and its historical application, where all sorts of elements become involved. In question was the organism in the church that defends the body against heresy and which has taken, at certain times, the form of the Inquisition. "Without doubt," said Pius XII, "through the centuries the tribunal charged with the defense of the faith took on forms and undertook methods not demanded by the nature

¹¹¹ This explains some cases (rare, indeed) like that of Pope Honorius approving Monothelitism. In the case of the condemnation of Galileo, a lack of knowledge was joined to an excessive claim of authority with respect to an area where the church has no competence.

¹¹² Speech of July 20, 1871, to a delegation of the *Accademia di Religione cattolica* (cf. *La Civiltà Cathol.*, series 8, vol. 3, 1871, p. 485), quoted by J. Lecler, in *L'Eglise et la souveraineté de l'Etat* (Paris, 1946), p. 87.

of things, but which can only be explained in the light of the historical circumstances of the time. It would be false however to try to create an argument against the legitimacy of the tribunal itself."¹¹³ So one of the things which nourishes the bulk of complaints and accusations against the church, according to historical analysis, is the way it carried out its mission.

During the centuries in which the West was developing, the popes and many prelates added the exercise of essentially secular powers to their sacred functions. More than once, they used their secular power for the benefit of the church, whether in favor of their spiritual jurisdiction (above all) or for temporal interests. Inevitably, it happened that they abused their power, treated secular questions with methods drawn from another order—methods of authority and tradition that work in theology but do not belong in the realms of science or politics. Or, on the contrary, it happened that they sometimes treated spiritual questions with methods borrowed from the temporal order, using physical compulsion, for example. Inevitably, again, they sometimes succumbed to the temptation of power, and the “secular lord” in them sometimes overshadowed their responsibility as pastors of souls. Again, when the profane world became secularized, it violently rejected the guidance of churchmen and nurtured a kind of resentment against them which often turned into revolt.

Reflecting on this, we perceive that a good part of the failures that people blame on the church fall under the perspective of what we noted quickly above: acts of simony, nepotism, abuse of power, violent constraint, use of spiritual arms for temporal ends—the Galileo affair, etc. . . . These are essentially consequences of the fact that the spiritual power linked itself to secular practices and, even more deeply, the fact that in a world subjected to the church, the spiritual power naturally took on a spirit of jurisdiction. But these are practices whose explanation needs to be researched and at least contextualized by history. We’re talking about facts that have to be seen historically, that have a date in time; and it would be not only unjust but stupid to judge them according to our ideas in the present. History is the great mistress of justice and truth. She permits us to distinguish things and to give them a concrete context. History provides us with criteria according to which we can judge with justice and objectivity the human role in the exercise of the powers of the church.

¹¹³ Speech of Oct. 6, 1946, to the members of the Tribunal of the Rota (*Doc. Cath.*, Oct. 27, 1946, col. 1187).

Churchmen, yes—but laity too. To the degree that they have had an influence, shaped the opinions of Catholics, or exercised leadership, what we said about bishops and their government applies to laity also. In their own way, they have affected the collective behavior of Catholics and so, amazingly, they have shaped the attitudes of the church as a concrete reality and as a historical phenomenon. Think of Montalembert or Veuillot, of the Catholics of the Second Republic or of the Second Empire, against whom H. Guillemin has made a pitiless indictment.¹¹⁴ Think of what Pius XI says, in *Quadragesimo Anno*, about Catholic employers who are unresponsive to papal directives: “These people are the reason why the church, without in any way meriting it, can seem to be, and can be accused of, taking sides with the wealthy and to lack sympathy for the needs and the suffering of those who are deprived of their share of well-being in this life . . .”

From a historian’s perspective, the concrete means chosen by spiritual authorities make an impression. The behaviors of the Catholic population are given voice by their leaders. Historians don’t look at the church in the first sense given above, the one that derives its meaning from the faith. Rather, they look at the church in terms of the concrete shape of the “Christian world,” since they can only grasp it as a concrete sociological grouping, directed by a hierarchy operating under specific circumstances in which contingent means become fused with their structural power.

Further, the church, seen in its human incarnations, may appear to be an impressive reality but not too much different from others. The scandal comes precisely from the contrast between these concrete experiences of the church, on the one hand, and the church’s claims to a supernatural sanctity, on the other, without distinguishing between the two contexts so as to see the facts about its holiness and its failures.

Often scandal also comes from the fact that, despite all these imperfections in the church’s history, we find in the church a sort of intransigence bordering on pride. But in the light of what we have seen, the church’s intransigence can be understood, as well as its failings. Even though, when it is a question of human beings, any kind of failure is possible, still the church needs to safeguard the purity of whatever is even remotely linked to the formal principles of the church (first sense).

Once again, Newman can really help us here. We saw how he explained that the church, in carrying out its sacred ministries in the framework

¹¹⁴ “Les catholiques français et la IIe République,” *Esprit* (Dec. 1945), pp. 875–898; *Histoire des catholiques français au XIXe siècle—1815–1905* (Geneva-Paris-Montreal, 1947)—a “history” that is both fragmentary and biased.

of human history, was led to allow itself to adopt concrete expressions that were somehow unworthy. In this same perspective, he came to distinguish between two conditions of Catholicism (or of Anglicanism).¹¹⁵ First there was the level of principles, for example, the formal dogmas of the church, and then there was the level of religion lived spontaneously and concretized in the passage of human history—namely, the common doctrine expressed in popular beliefs and practices, deriving from controversies and historical circumstances. In sum, this is the difference between Catholicism (or Anglicanism) *at rest*, and Catholicism *in action*.

In changing the frame of reference a bit, we might call this today the difference between “Christianity” and the “Christian world.” Newman went on to add that the objections and the oppositions of Anglicans and Protestants to Catholicism were in general due more to Catholicism “in action” than to Catholicism and its principles “at rest.” Newman thought that Anglican opposition to Catholicism was situated less at the level of principles than at the level of concrete historical and popular religious expression. Their opposition didn’t concern Catholicism in itself, but rather what Newman called, along with his colleagues, “Romanism.” Anglicans’ opposition arose less from authentic Anglicanism than from their tendency to fall into Protestantism (using the Anglican vocabulary here). Their opposition focused more on a *mentality* than on doctrine. Further, according to Newman, they often erred in attacking a political or popular expression in the name of pure principles, attacking “Romanism” in the name of Anglicanism—simply put, attacking exaggerations or deformities in the name of pure theoretical principles.

Later on we will see that Soloviev blamed Khomiakov for making a comparison between a concrete Catholicism and an ideal, abstract, and unreal Orthodoxy.¹¹⁶ Alas, this is the constant tendency of any polemic; and isn’t there a certain element of polemics in any apologetics? Even further on, Péguy, after making his famous distinction between the *mystical* and the *political* (which resembles Newman’s opposition just noted), remarks that often authors are unjust in comparing not mystical doctrines among themselves or political doctrines among themselves, but rather comparing a mystical doctrine with a political doctrine or a political

¹¹⁵ Cf. the introduction to his *Via Media* (n. 109 above) and the first volume of this work, reproducing *The Prophetic Office of the Church* (from 1837); also his *Apologia* (French trans. by Michelin-Delimosges: Paris, 1939), pp. 112f., 141, and 232f.

¹¹⁶ Cf. D. Stremoukhoff, *Vladimir Soloviev et son oeuvre messianique* (Paris, 1935), p. 203.

doctrine with a mystical doctrine.¹¹⁷ Still, staying close to Newman's meaning, Péguy adds that the "mystical doctrines are less opposed to one another than political doctrines among themselves—and in a different way. You don't have to attribute to mysticisms the evil of dissensions, wars, or political bad feeling. Nor is there among them the restless resentment of the political order" (p. 82).

It is easy to see how such ideas contribute to clarify both our problem here as well as any ecumenical program. From the point of view of an irenic effort to create mutual understanding, we can see the big part that false contradictions arising from prejudice, the clash of different mentalities, and a historical legacy of quarrels and resentments play in the divisions among Christians. From the point of view of our problem [concerning evil in the church], we can see an application and confirmation of the basic distinction between the weakness of churchmen and the purity of the church in itself, that is, between the kind of discredit that ecclesial realities undergo when they are employed by human agents and the same activities viewed according to their essence and their principles.

The Concrete Church, Synthesizing the Preceding Elements

Finally, we need to reunite the elements that we have distinguished during this analysis. If a purely profane history sees the church as a sociological reality composed of men and women linked to concrete means of expression and committed to conditioned circumstances of time and place, the faithful cannot be satisfied to simply juxtapose with this completely exterior perspective an affirmation of transcendence. Let me say it again: I have only distinguished the different aspects of one, single church that are reunited in the church's concrete reality. Yes, there is only *one* church.

The very church that a strict historian sees as a human society (second and third senses) possesses, as the faithful know, truly divine internal principles (first sense). They know it is the very church whose mystery consists precisely in this fusion of the divine and human that is so difficult for us to perceive. As the encyclical *Mystici Corporis* (June 29, 1943) solemnly recalled, there is only one church and thus only one adequate meaning of the word—the one that reunites the three aspects we have just distinguished.

¹¹⁷ *Notre Jeunesse (Oeuvres compl., ed. NRF), p. 62.*

The church is the human community to which the divine energies communicated by Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son, are entrusted, and in which they become active so as to bring human beings together in communion with the life of the Father. Or in other words: the church is human beings gathered up into the bosom of the Father by the action within them of the energies of Jesus Christ made present in their midst through his Spirit, his sacraments, and his Word, whose ministry has been confided to the corps of the apostles. Or finally: the church is the communion of men and women in whom the Spirit and the energies of Jesus Christ are active and at work. The corps of the apostles has received the ministry of this spiritual work and thus they have within them the animating power of Jesus Christ, the second Adam.

We can see how, if we take the church in its *concrete but adequate* sense, this church is both holy and full of sinfulness, both indefectible and fallible, both perfect and still subject to many historical imperfections. In the church, what comes from Christ is holy and without defect, but what comes from the exercise of human freedom is subject to mistakes. However, both the one and the other truly pertain to this concrete body which, if we take it for what it really is, is the church.

In this concrete body there is a divine part and a human part. The divine part is truly interior to the church and constitutes the array of its formal principles. But the human part, with its inherent weakness, is also a reality inside the church. So the church in its internal principles is without either weakness or sin, but the human matter that enters into its concrete structure is fallible, and that brings sin into the church—without, however, dishonoring the church itself. St. Ambrose spoke this way: “*Immaculata ex maculatis*—the Immaculate is made up of the sinful.” For the sins and limitations of persons who are in the church remain the sins and limitations of these individuals, even if they exercise hierarchical functions and if they sin even as they exercise these functions.

All the same, there is a sense in which these faults are the faults of everyone, and so they are the faults of the body, since “we are all members of one another.” Deeper than the solidarity of example and of social practice, there is an organic solidarity in virtue of which every sin sullies the whole church because it sullies the body.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, every expression of goodness also affects the whole body as well. Evil and especially good coexist so closely in the church at this point that the one

¹¹⁸ See the texts of Augustine, Tertullian, Origen (*In Jesu Nave*, hom. 5, n. 6), etc.; in H. de Lubac, *Catholicisme* (1st ed.), p. 45, n. 3; (4th ed.), p. 51, n. 1.

always compensates for the other to some degree. There is a social or, more exactly, an ecclesial aspect of penance, which formerly was clearly expressed in public penance; this is still a reality and it is observed in the text of the *Confiteor* and its recitation at the start of the celebration of the Eucharist. As St. Ephrem said, "The whole church is the church of penitents and the whole church is the church of those who were perishing."¹¹⁹

Solidarity plays out in a way that is both truly collective but also truly personal in this area of historical faults and group behavior. Each person affects all the others to some degree and contributes in constituting, maintaining, or transforming a situation where human weaknesses affect all the members of the group. It was inevitable that along with the awareness of an order of historical or social failures, the question of collective responsibility would be raised. This question can also be addressed to the people of God (something that I will look at further in an appendix).

It was understandable to have recourse to the idea of the body and to the notion of the incarnation in order to think through this union of the divine and the human. I myself said that the *Ecclesia de Trinitate*, pure and simple, and the *Ecclesia ex hominibus*, fallible as it is, meet in *Christo*. From that fact we justify the presence in the church of an element of light and an element of weakness. This is a bit like what is the case in Christ: there was weakness in him but it stopped at the threshold of sin. Without going so far as to develop a notion of *kenosis* so dear to some Protestant theologies,¹²⁰ theologians have often applied to the church the idea that it replicates the conditions of Christ's life,¹²¹ but in the church as in Christ the divine is present as incarnated, in the condition of humility, in the

¹¹⁹ Cited by V. Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient*, p. 177.

¹²⁰ A christological theory arose out of Lutheran dogmatic theology that, drawing from Phil 2:7, claimed that Christ was stripped of his divine attributes. To see this applied to the church, see W. R. Carson, "The Kenosis of the Church," in *Reunion Essays* (London, 1903), pp. 157–172. The whole tone here is both bold and timid, childish and ill at ease, like the atmosphere of the Modernist period.

¹²¹ For example, Msgr. Benson, *Le Christ dans l'Église* (Paris, 1920); Mersch, *Théologie du Corps mystique*. Elsewhere I will point out the criticisms to be made of too organic and biological an interpretation of the analogy of the body. In some treatments the activities of the church-as-body of Christ are presented too much as being the activities of Christ himself. See my contribution to vol. 3 of *Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (451/1951), published by the theological faculty of St. George in Frankfurt and reprinted in *Sainte Église* (Paris, 1963), pp. 70–104.

form of a slave.¹²² In this perspective we are brought to recognize a kind of essential and general weakness of the church and to situate this weakness in the earthly and created element as such, in the visible forms in which the divine principle is realized and becomes manifest.¹²³

This point of view is altogether correct. It easily opens out upon an eschatological perspective (explicitly so in Karl Adam); that is, it leads to a perspective closely related to the final and glorious accomplishment of God's work. This is somewhat similar to some Protestant viewpoints and thus risks being attracted to the separation in that Protestant perspective between the divine and the created, the spiritual and the sensible . . . and thus risks also to identify the *body* with the *flesh* and to confuse what St. Paul called "the body of sin" with bodiliness as such. That evidently would be an error and would make it very difficult to think correctly about ecclesial reality.

Excursus: Evil in the Church in the View of Several Contemporary Theologians

It will be interesting here to see the way in which some theologians who have studied the problem raised in this chapter have proposed to resolve it. This is a way for me to confirm or complete my own approach. First, the study done by M. Villain and J. de Bacchiocchi (*La vocation de l'Eglise*, Paris, 1953) and H. de Lubac (*Méditation sur l'Eglise*, Paris, 1953, pp. 78f.) are similar in their views to mine.

Père Pinard de la Boullaye twice touched on this question in his conferences at Notre Dame. He first of all took up the argument, still useful, of the Catholic apologetic about the weaknesses of the popes: these weaknesses are personal, so that the properly hierarchical or dogmatic action of these popes is beyond reproach.¹²⁴ Next he showed that the church is made up of humans who are subject to human weakness, and

¹²² P. Simon, *Das Menschliche in der Kirche Christi*; K. Adam, "Le mystère de l'Eglise: du scandale à la foi triomphante," in *L'Eglise est une: Hommage à Moehler* (Paris, 1939), pp. 33–52; Fr. P. Sladek, "Göttliches und Menschliches in der Kirche: Ein Beitrag zur Frage aus der Sicht des Grenzlandes," in *Theolog. Quartalschrift* (1941), pp. 175–190 (*kenosis* is mentioned on p. 183). I only became aware before the 2nd ed. of the recent article by Karl Adam, "Das Problem des Geschichtlichen in Leben der Kirche," in *Theolog. Quartalschrift* (1948), pp. 275–300, pages that show the presence in the life of the church of both a human, historical principle and of a transcendent principle, drawing from well-chosen historical examples.

¹²³ You can find this idea in Adam and Simon (op. cit., pp. 48f.).

¹²⁴ *Conférences de Notre-Dame*, 1931, 5th conference, p. 216.

that it has always been such. The church can't live on earth without soiling the hem of its vestments a bit. Nonetheless the church has enduring promises to convey so that, instead of doubting the church, we should rather humbly mistrust ourselves.¹²⁵ There is nothing here that doesn't accord with my own exposé.

At the time of violent Nazi attacks against the church, J. Bernhart made a distinction between the divine and the human in the church by distinguishing between *Wesen* and *Geschichte*¹²⁶—an approach that resembles a lot my distinction between *structure* and *life*.

We have already seen how Dom Vonier, in distinguishing between the church itself (that is, its principles received from God) and the people of God, practically expresses what is essential in my distinctions. Cardinal Journet formulates these in precise concepts: the church does not lack sinners, but it is itself without sin. We are pure in everything that links us in reality to the church. The degree of evil that we shelter measures the degree of disfigurement that we introduce by our participation in the church.¹²⁷

I came close to saying this myself in returning to the question in 1961.^{127a} However, I introduced a third term between the "sinless" church as such and our sins, namely, the pitiful things, the more or less seriously harmful things, that happen to the church itself and to the exercise of its ministry. There are "pitiful things," things that need to be corrected, that are clearly linked to the actual sins of members of the church.

Karl Rahner took up this question with characteristic energy and frankness.^{127b} We can't just talk about a kind of completely ideal Platonic church untouched by the actions of its members. If its members are sinners, then we need to speak of the church of sinners. However, this does not injure the church's holiness, for the church has the power within itself to purify its members from their sins and to sanctify them. The church ceaselessly goes about doing just that. It is the "holy church of sinners."

¹²⁵ Conferences for 1937 (*Jésus vivant dans l'Eglise*), 6th conference: "L'Eglise idéale et l'Eglise réelle," pp. 247f.

¹²⁶ "Göttliches et Menschliches in der Kirche," in *Die Kirche in der Zeitwende*, ed. E. Kleineidam and O. Kuss (Paderborn, 1935), pp. 238–268.

¹²⁷ Journet, *L'Eglise du Verbe incarné*, vol. I: *La hiérarchie apostolique* (Paris, 1941), pp. xiii–xiv, 124f., 314, etc.; vol. II: *Sa structure interne et son unité catholique* (Paris, 1952), pp. 489, 904; *Théologie de l'Eglise* (1958), pp. 236, 244.

^{127a} "Comment l'Eglise sainte doit se renouveler sans cesse," *Irénikon* 34 (1961), pp. 322–345, reprinted in *Sainte Eglise (Unam Sanctam* 41 [Paris, 1963]), pp. 131–154.

^{127b} "Die Kirche der Sünder," *Stimmen der Zeit* 140 (1947), pp. 163–177.

In a brief article Abbé Couturier proposes three levels that he calls the sacral, the ecclesial, and the ecclesiastical.¹²⁸ The sacral corresponds exactly to my first sense of the word “church.” The ecclesiastical belongs to the human context that I have analyzed under the second and third senses. Between the two, Couturier posits an *ecclesial* level that represents, if I understand him, the bodiliness of the sacral, “the human container, which is thus perfectible, but guided by the Spirit.” For example, “the scriptural texts which could have been different and whose interpretation is constantly in progress, the texts of the rites and of the Missal, whose adaptation ought to be modeled on the psychological structure of human persons that is itself variable in time and space, dogmatic texts that are indefinitely perfectible, and the secondary social structure of the church—a structure expressive of the church’s immutable sacred architecture” (p. 65). In summary, it is a question of the sensible forms assumed by the divine principles of the church. These are institutions with a human form that derives sometimes from God, sometimes from the church guided by the Holy Spirit.

The *ecclesiastical* is a concrete implementation by the members of the church, both hierarchy and faithful. Summing up, Couturier writes: “The church is infinitely holy and unchangeable because it is *sacral*; it is holy and perfectible because it is *ecclesial*; and it is terribly sinful and in need of sanctification because it is *ecclesiastical*. In speaking of the church as such, then, we can say—we ought to say—that it is holy, changeable, and sinful” (p. 67).

Couturier’s categories are interesting. They grasp well the bodiliness of the church itself: the earthly form of the church, on the one hand, and the area of sin, on the other hand. In my categories, however, these things are found between the first and the third meaning of the church. Scripture belongs to the first sense; the “secondary social structure of the church” belongs to the third. That third sense is the area where failure can exist, but where the Holy Spirit is ceaselessly at work and in a way that is increasingly powerful and effective to the degree that we draw closer to the constitutive principles of the church as the instrument of our salvation.

¹²⁸ “Chaque chrétien est responsable de l’Eglise,” *L’Amitié* (Jan., 1947), pp. 57–69. These distinctions are taken from Damasus Winzen, “L’Eglise mystère,” *Oecumenica* (1934).