

□ CHAPTER ONE □

*Vatican II:  
The Church's Self-Understanding*

GEORGIA MASTERS KEIGHTLEY

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL was very much a council about the Church. Its documents make a comprehensive statement about ecclesial life, examining it both in terms of its internal operations as well as its complex of external relations. The purpose of this intense self-scrutiny was eminently practical. The Council knew that if the Church were to advance its mission on behalf of the gospel, it had, at last, to take the modern world seriously. Above all, the Council knew that ecclesial life and practice must be renewed if the Church were to creatively engage the difficult new challenges increasingly presented it.

This essay will examine the understanding of the Church that emerged from the conciliar reflections and deliberations. It will consider five themes integral to the Council's renewed vision. Thus this essay will look briefly at: 1) the nature of the Church as *communio*; 2) the Church as simultaneously local and universal; 3) Church mission; 4) Church ministry; and 5) the *christifideles* who constitute the Church.

But at the same time, such a review must take into account the extent to which, some thirty years later, the conciliar view has become that of the entire Church. According to the theological notion of "reception," conciliar teaching is but a beginning; such must also be accepted and appropriated (i.e., received) by the

entire community of believers. In short, this teaching must become part of the fabric of the Church's everyday existence.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, the process by which conciliar decisions are incorporated into Christian life and practice proves to be a gradual one. In respect to Vatican II, theologian Hermann J. Pottmeyer aptly describes the process as "a *movement* in the course of which the Church elaborated a new interpretation of itself";<sup>2</sup> in his view, full reception of Vatican II is even yet incomplete.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, he would argue it is not inappropriate at this point to take stock: How has conciliar teaching on the Church's self-understanding shaped the Catholic community's life today? On what points has the Council's teaching been implemented, experienced setbacks or even been rejected? What yet needs to be done to align Catholic life with the Council's visions and hopes, both now and for the future?

Certainly some elements of conciliar teaching have already become commonplace. For example, this is very much evident in the fact that I, a lay theologian and a woman, am writing this essay on the Church. This would not be the case if the Council Fathers had not urged that the study of theology become the province of laity as well as of clergy.<sup>4</sup> The point is that in some instances, reception of the Council has so thoroughly occurred that it already conditions any analysis of it.

Implementation of Council teaching will determine assessment of it in other ways. For instance, in encouraging theologians to find new sets of categories for communicating the faith and in inviting the contribution of a lay perspective on theology, the council moved away from a narrow, monolithic view of Catholic reality to a much richer, inclusive one.<sup>5</sup> This originated in the Council's acknowledgement of the cultural and social diversity present in the local churches. This pluralism decrees that the Council's effect will not have been uniform throughout the Church. It also suggests that inherent to my view of the Council will be the standpoint of the lay church as well as my particular context, that of U.S. church life.

To reiterate, my project here will be to examine five themes related to the Church's self-understanding implicated in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. I will consider the extent

to which Council teaching has influenced the Church's life and practice to date. On this basis I will then proceed to suggest what yet remains to be done if the Council's vision is to finally become a reality. And, given the fact of the council's partial implementation, my analysis will both reflect as well as speak to my location in the Church as a lay theologian and as a member of the U.S. Catholic community.

### The Nature of the Church as *Communio*

The critical impulse that can be seen at work during and after the Council was aroused because the official self-understanding of the Church which right up to the Council had been formed by a counter-reformational and neo-scholastic theology, had become questionable. It had become increasingly alien to the real life of human beings and no longer met the needs of an effective pastoral practice.<sup>6</sup>

In its search for a new self-definition, one that could better represent the aspect of grace and the charisms present to the social body missing from juridical interpretations that had prevailed formerly, Vatican II looked to early Christian experience. Thus *Lumen Gentium* (LG) resorted to an array of biblical images to explicate the divine mystery at the heart of the Church. While "People of God" may appear to have been the council's preferred description, theologians have concluded subsequently that the fundamental ecclesiological category of the council documents is actually that of *communio*.<sup>7</sup> According to one commentator, the notion of the Church as *communio* was struggling to be born in the text of *Lumen Gentium*; such is the thrust of the biblical images themselves. Yet this richer, deeper understanding of the Church could emerge only "after and as a result of Vatican II."<sup>8</sup>

The Extraordinary Synod of 1985 was convoked for the express purpose of evaluating the Second Vatican Council's impact across the Church. The Synod's Final Report concluded: "The ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of

the Council's documents."<sup>9</sup> Synod members cited the trinitarian origin of Church communion, noting that "the unfolding missions of the Son and the Spirit in salvation history," because "they are specifically constituting, sending and gathering missions, calling together and making one people" become the Church's own and are its very purpose for being.<sup>10</sup>

What then is *communio*? The term "koinonia" (Greek) / "communio" (Latin) is an ancient one, and unlike the images found in *Lumen Gentium* that merely describe the Church, this word "says what the Church actually is."<sup>11</sup> *Koinonia* is a central New Testament term. It has as referents both God's grace and the human response to it. Primarily, it is used to express the understanding early Christians had of themselves as constituting an entirely new form of human community, a society whose very principle of unity and identity was the felt presence of God's own self.<sup>12</sup> This shared experience of union with God through Christ in the Spirit was not only the basis for the union between believer and believer and source of the local Church's common life, it was also recognized to be the bond that linked the local Church to Christian communities everywhere, past as well as present. Finally, it was out of this *communio* experience that particular forms of ministerial and missionary activity eventually took shape.

Ironically, one reason the image "People of God" lost favor with many bishops and theologians after the Council was that, in the same way as the juridical definitions it sought to replace, it too seemed unable to give adequate expression to the Church's sacral, charismatic dimension.<sup>13</sup> While initially this metaphor enjoyed great popularity because it returned the laity to the center of the Church once again, "People of God" came to be construed in a narrowly political, even ideological way. Such readings re-introduced division within the Body of Christ, especially that between people and hierarchy;<sup>14</sup> they also tended to reduce the notion of a people united by grace and Spirit to that of a people bound by no more than a common social agenda.

Unfortunately, what was lost here was the Council's positive hermeneutical move to acknowledge lay equality. It did this by acknowledging that true equality is a matter of the Spirit's gifts and charisms that are abundant throughout the Church and

present to the entire People of God, to laity no less than to clergy and religious. Beyond this, the Council wished to indicate that ecclesial communion must be achieved through a variety of structures, including those associated with the laity's own lived experience of being Catholic and not just through formal ones associated with the hierarchical institution.

Certainly any reduction of the graced community to the status of a merely human one is incongruent with *Lumen Gentium*; here the Church's divine and human elements are understood to comprise an inseparable, irreducible, interlocking reality.<sup>15</sup> As such, neither element should take ascendance over the other; nor can one be permitted to flourish at the expense of the other.

As an ecclesiological category, *communio* then has an advantage in that it presents a conceptual framework capable of maintaining the divine and human in this creative tension.<sup>16</sup> This becomes especially relevant in light of the 1985 Synod's claim that trinitarian *communio* has substantial implications for the development of ecclesial forms. The Final Report states: "The ecclesiology of communion is also the foundation for order in the church."<sup>17</sup> It then proceeds to identify five relations mediated by the internal dynamism of trinitarian life; these five organizational patterns are unity/pluriformity, participation and co-responsibility, collegiality, subsidiarity, and inculturation.<sup>18</sup> Each is recognized to be a mode of ecclesial self-expression that arises out of "that common participation in the triune life, common faith, common baptism, common eucharist."<sup>19</sup>

But to say that the Church's internal dynamic requires visible structure if it is to manifest a vital historical presence is also to admit that some sort of social patterning is integral to communion. This then directs attention to the quality of the Church's institutional life and raises questions about the dialectic that occurs between divine *communio* and structure.

For example, the Synod suggests that analysis of institutional forms, their capacity to facilitate Church mission, is a way to determining the presence or absence of *communio* in the local church. But what then are the particular criteria for measuring this achievement? And, are there additional criteria for specifying what structural forms are best suited to realizing communion? Furthermore, the

Synod position implies that while structure itself may be inseparable from *communio*, concrete historical forms are not inseparable and thus are changeable, especially if they fail in their ability to build communion. In truth, many of the difficult post-synodal debates about such issues as the teaching authority of bishops' conferences, the freedom of local churches to adapt their institutions to meet the pastoral needs of mission, and the full integration of women into Church life are, at bottom, an effort to work out the ramifications of both conciliar and synodal teaching on the proper relation of communion's divine and human realities.

But clearly, by making this direct correlation between *communio* and Church order, the Synod reiterated Vatican II's assertion that the Church's institutional life must not be underestimated. As both the means for carrying human response to mystery as well as for carrying mystery's graced overture to humanity, ecclesial life is something to be taken seriously, attended to, even nurtured. And so, because dysfunctional structures are instrumental to the breakdown of *communio*, a constant attention to and evaluation of institutional order must be an ongoing theological and pastoral priority.

A last question posed by the Synod's Final Report is this: Are there then social patterns, structures other than those five the Synod identified, that are also indispensable to achieving Church communion? For as the report notes, *communio*'s ultimate destiny is the world, and yet the means by which *communio* comes to be mediated here is not really studied by either Council or Synod. But the fact that some concrete means is always necessary to constituting Church communion suggests that some type of social form is also essential to realizing communion in the midst of the world's own structures.

The relation between communion and structure becomes clearer upon examining the Council's teaching on the local church.

### The Local Church

One of the most striking statements Vatican II made about the Church was its assertion that "the one and universal Church is

realized in and through the variety of local churches."<sup>20</sup> By so saying, it insisted that "the Church is not simply an abstract but a *concrete* universal"; in this way the Council emphasized that the universal Church's existence is directly tied to *communio's* actualization in a diversity of local cultures and historical circumstances.<sup>21</sup> Whereas for the past, ecclesial reality was believed to cohere primarily in the institutionalized hierarchical and administrative order, now the Church is conceived in terms of its coming-to-be in the different milieus of contemporary experience, places where the Church must not only take up existence but areas for which and within which it must define and direct its mission.

By this means, the Council suggests that the local church is the normative historical form of ecclesial reality.<sup>22</sup> Certainly, careful study of the constitution of young churches helps to make clear what the practical achievement of *communio* entails.<sup>23</sup> For example, inculturation, i.e., the integration of Christian meanings and values into the culture of a specific people, requires such things as the creation of: 1) a style of worship and liturgical practice expressive of the local culture in its choice of language, ritual, and symbol; 2) grass roots churches whose institutional forms are shaped in response to the social and cultural exigencies of the people; 3) new forms of ministry to address the pastoral needs of individual societies; 4) a Christian moral vision based on the critical synthesis of the ethical values of church and cultural tradition; 5) vital dialogue between faith and culture at a variety of levels, geared to shaping a social life that is both more human and humane; and 6) the articulation of new contextual theologies expressive of the local church's own apprehension and evaluation of its project on behalf of trinitarian *communio*.

Postconciliar experience and continuing reflection on the nature and character of the local church confirm that *communio* is a genuine historical achievement. And while *communio* may begin with divine initiative, it also depends on the response to grace and Spirit on the human side. *Communio* as something to be built is an eminently social cultural project. On the other hand, precisely because it takes human effort, something inevitably conditioned by sin, *communio's* realization will neither be immediate nor easy.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, the example of the young churches reveals that building the Church may not be left to clergy and religious alone. On the contrary, laity prove indispensable to bringing the Christian community into being, *ad intra* as well as *ad extra*. For example, laity constitute the Church *ad intra* in their work as liturgical ministers, religious educators and pastoral counselors. But at the same time, and as recent Church documents repeatedly insist, by virtue of baptism laity have been commissioned to the Church's *ad extra* mission. By their individual and collective efforts, they must mediate the ecclesial experience of *communio* within/to the patterns, interactions, exchanges of the everyday. Per the Council's vision, laity work from within the world "in the manner of leaven."<sup>25</sup>

On this point, hierarchy of the young churches attending the 1987 Synod on the Laity expressed great concern. While the bishops rejoiced at having secured a Catholic presence in their diverse cultures, they nonetheless recognized that the Church's establishment there was as yet incomplete. That is, they were aware that the local church must have a visible public effect by way of a radical Christian witness directed to, in, and for the everyday.

The bishops saw that most laity had yet to understand that their vocation was to be more than just a community of worship, that as members of Christ's Body they had to replicate in their own particular situations the graced life of the Spirit. More to the point, the bishops were very much aware that for the local church to fail in this was also a failure of mission — as well as a failure of *communio*.

To repeat, what this experience of the young churches demonstrates is that inculturating a church involves more than just securing a community's presence and/or its relative autonomy. Rather, and even as it is putting down roots, the Christian community must ever be about the work of communicating the gospel to others, testifying to God's redemptive love by both word and credible deed.

But then, this matter of Church mission was another aspect of Church life that the Council saw compelling need to address.

## Church Mission

Because the terms “church” and “mission” are reciprocal and condition one another, in articulating a new definition of the Church, the Second Vatican Council was obliged to restate its beliefs about the nature and purpose of the Church’s mission as well.

As was true for *communio*, all of the conciliar documents bear on the issue of mission in some way. The most important contributions, however, are to be found in *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), and *Ad Gentes* (AG).<sup>26</sup>

The Council’s key assertion is that mission is simply not something the Church does. Rather, mission is what the Church *is* and it is thus because ecclesial reality originates and participates in the very missions of the Son and the Spirit:

The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature. For it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she takes her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father. (AG 2)

And according to *Lumen Gentium*, the divine missions and their historical extension, the Church, make possible both a sharing in the divine life and the creation of one people.

By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity. (LG 1)

On this basis, the Council went on to say that as participants in Christ’s three-fold office of priest, prophet, and king, all of the baptized share responsibility for the Church’s mission of evangelization.

Just as the complex meaning of *communio* took time to unfold, so too it has taken time for a renewed understanding of

Church mission, one planted in the soil of *communio*, to develop. For example, recognition that mission and communion implicate each other is presumed by the Council documents. But what was mostly implicit becomes explicit in the documents of the 1985 Synod; here the connection is made that mission involves the mediation of communion.<sup>27</sup> But an even fuller statement yet can be found in *Christifideles Laici* (CL), the papal statement on the 1987 Synod on the Laity. Here a direct correlation between communion and mission is clearly articulated:

Communion and mission are profoundly connected with each other, they interpenetrate and mutually imply each other, to the point that communion represents both the source and fruit of mission: Communion gives rise to mission, and mission is accomplished in communion. (CL 32)

But with this identification, the question arises: Just as communion needs structure to become historically viable, is this also true for its correlate, mission? In other words, if structural form is needed to constitute the Church as an *ad intra* communion, isn't structure also necessary to constituting the Church in its *ad extra* mission? This then places in focus the five structuring relations the 1985 Synod identified with *communio*: Are these also intrinsic to or in some way associated with Church mission? Or, is it also possible that there are other structures necessary to *communio* but that go unidentified? To get at this, it is helpful to look at the 1990 papal document on mission, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), as well as at points made about the laity in *Christifideles Laici*.

Acknowledging the need to be more precise when describing the object of Church mission today, *Redemptoris Missio* sets out some "specific parameters" concerning the mission *ad gentes*. In considering the proclamation of the gospel to people and contexts where Christ is not known, *Redemptoris Missio* notes that while "missionary activity has normally been defined in terms of specific territories," today evangelization must also address "new worlds and new social phenomena" as well as individual "cultural

sectors," which it deems to be "the modern equivalents of the Areopagus."<sup>28</sup>

On the one hand, the document is quite specific about the formal ecclesial structures that are necessary to carrying out this mission of evangelization. Thus *Redemptoris Missio* calls for the establishment of local churches, "ecclesial basic communities," missionary institutes, for episcopal conferences and families to assist this work. In addition, the document cites the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples as having overall responsibility for coordinating mission. Indeed, the document confirms the necessity of a structured approach to this endeavor by saying that

since the church is also a communion which is visible and organic, her mission requires an external and ordered union between the various responsibilities and functions involved, in such a way that all the members "may in harmony spend their energies for the building up of the Church."<sup>29</sup>

Certain passages of *Redemptoris Missio* indicate that the structuring relations of *communio* are very much a factor here. For example, the responsibility for mission is said to be a collegial one, one shared by all the bishops.<sup>30</sup> The establishment of new churches involves the effort to inculturate the gospel in such a way that the Church can become an intelligible sign in and for this context of God's salvation in Christ;<sup>31</sup> bishops' and people's discernment of a culture's authentic appropriation of the gospel suggests an autonomy for local churches associated with the principle of subsidiarity.<sup>32</sup> Finally, acknowledgement of the laity's role as agents of mission reflects the principle of participation and co-responsibility.

On the other hand, when it comes to talking about structure for those aspects of Church mission which *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) identified as "the evangelization of culture," i.e., the "strata of humanity . . . mankind's criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life,"<sup>33</sup> *Redemptoris Missio* becomes much less clear.

While cities, youth culture, poverty, the mass media are definite cultural sectors needing to be addressed, the text is rather vague about what a formal gospel response might actually be. Here there is a tendency simply to describe these challenges rather than to outline definite strategies of approach. A likely reason for this ambiguity has to do with the fact that, since the Council, primary responsibility for the *ad extra* mission tends to be attributed to the laity. Thus it is in texts pertaining to their particular ecclesial role that further development of this matter must be sought.

The 1987 Synod's subject was "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World 20 Years After the Second Vatican Council," and the document *Christifideles Laici*, issued in December 1988, presents a papal summary of the Synod's conclusions. Reiterating much of what the Second Vatican Council had said, the text again highlights the laity's "secular" character which originates in God's call to realize the Church, to mediate *communio* in all the different areas of contemporary human experience.<sup>34</sup> The primary structure for supporting this effort is the local church community, the parish.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, lay mission is also dependent on other social forms: the family, such lay groups and associations as confraternities, third orders, sodalities, movements and other groups formed to respond to today's cultural and communal needs. *Christifideles Laici* underscores the importance of these organized efforts by asserting that Church communion "finds its specific expression in the lay faithful's working together in groups"; and following Vatican II, the document additionally states that "the group apostolate" represents "a sign of communion and of unity of the church of Christ."<sup>36</sup>

But here too, while the 1987 Synod agrees that Church order is requisite to facilitating lay mission, nevertheless there is a lack of specificity as to exactly what these structures might actually do. While the document enumerates the kinds of structures needed to support lay effort, it does not really address the types of programmatic action that structure serves as a framework for. What this might involve will be dealt with more fully in the next two sections.

One interesting development in *Christifideles Laici* concerns the “criteria of ecclesiality” that set the parameters for lay activity. While the 1985 Synod identifies communion structures in terms of collegiality, subsidiarity, inculturation, and so on — and which are reprised in *Redemptoris Missio* — the criteria offered by *Christifideles Laici* involve “obedience to the church’s magisterium, as the church interprets it,” “witness to a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship to the pope, in total adherence to the belief that he is the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal church,” union with one’s bishops, “conformity to and participation in the church’s apostolic goals.”<sup>37</sup>

But the question is, are these relational patterns also part of the mediation of *communio*? They are not mentioned by either the 1985 Synod or *Redemptoris Missio*; furthermore, these “criteria” appear to contradict the spirit of participation, collaboration, and collegiality originally advocated by the Final Report. Is it to be concluded then that there are two different sets of mediating structures, two different modes of ecclesial self-expression, one for lay mission and another for hierarchical mission? If so, how do the two relate to each other in a formal ecclesiology of communion?

Clarification of the nature of the relationships existing between mission, *communio* and structure is to be had by examining the Council’s rethinking of Church ministry.

### Ministry

Perhaps Vatican II’s best received and best implemented teachings to date have been those pertaining to the liturgy. The Council’s call for full and active participation of all the Church’s members has become the reality in many places. At the same time, the opening of Church ministry to laity has resulted in the institution of myriad forms of service to meet the growing — and diverse — pastoral needs of local churches. Indeed, this fundamental restructuring of Church ministry has created two difficult questions for theology today: What precisely is the essential difference (noted in *Lumen Gentium*) that distinguishes the ordained and the non-ordained ministries? And, is everything that the ordinary baptized do rightly named “ministry” or is ministry

a term to be used 'only in designating activities done within the Church?

Prior to Vatican II, ministry and mission appeared to be two distinct realities; generally speaking, clergy's responsibility was Church ministry while laity's, under the aegis of Catholic Action, had become the mission to the world. Vatican II, however, retrieved the concept of the baptismal priesthood and restored to the Church the notion of the fundamental unity and equality of all believers. But in doing so, it opened the way to confusion over the distribution of ecclesial tasks. In showing that Church ministry has its origins in baptism rather than orders, the Council emphasized that lay and clergy alike have responsibility for both mission and ministry. And in thus weakening the boundaries between clergy and lay, the Council demanded a new approach to the traditional "church/world" distinction. Thus the Council appeared to say that instead of laity functioning as a bridge between church and world (as it was conceived in the past), laity and clergy are now to act together as the church in the world, sharing responsibility for both.

According to David Power, when Paul VI officially opened Church ministry to laity with the issuance of the *motu proprio Ministeria Quaedam*, the pontiff wished to make clear that service in the Church and service in the world are intimately related, that they are even extensions of one another.<sup>38</sup> For example, the text indicates that the one who reads in the assembly has a responsibility for making God's word known to those outside. Similarly, catechesis is not simply a work done within the Church; as the pontiff later explained in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the catechist must be able to read the signs of the times in order to impact her/his surroundings in a Christian way and "to reach those who are remote from [the church]."<sup>39</sup>

That this effort to strengthen the links between Church ministry and mission ultimately had little effect is heard in the plaint of the *Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern* issued five short years after *Ministeria Quaedam*. Here a group of U.S. Catholics voiced dismay that ministry within the Church, rather than the service to the world that is properly theirs, has become the U.S. laity's major preoccupation.<sup>40</sup> That this is true for the rest

of the Church was later confirmed in *Christifideles Laici*; here it is noted that laity have been tempted to be “so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world.”<sup>41</sup> This statement indicates that despite Paul VI’s effort, the dichotomization of ministry and mission has once again become the norm.

On the other hand, this neglect of the world is quite understandable when one examines the way in which the Church’s ministries have developed in the U.S. context. For example, review of the study *New Parish Ministers* conducted by the National Pastoral Life Center shows that while an important emphasis has been placed on religious education, the liturgical ministries, and creating ministries to address special group needs (elderly, youth, families), there has been very little development of ministry initiatives and supporting structures to enable lay evangelization of “new worlds and social phenomena,” the “cultural sectors” called for by *Redemptoris Missio*.<sup>42</sup>

In identifying the specific activities of lay and religious ministers, *New Parish Ministers* shows, for example, only 0.5% of the sample serve as Evangelization Ministers; only 2.5% serve as Social Ministry Directors.<sup>43</sup> And while the largest category of ministers, General Pastoral Ministers, is involved in social service and evangelization outreach, they do this as part of their many other parish responsibilities.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the time and resources given over to formation of Catholic laity for their worldly obligations have been quite minimal. On the other hand, the ministry study does suggest that given the way parish energies and church resources are directed, most laity are indirectly prepared for ministering in the church.

While both the Council and *Christifideles Laici* emphasize that the local church, the parish is the place where lay mission originates, in most instances, little has been done in this area to develop or promote an active lay leadership which could set its own agenda *ad extra*. But neither is there much opportunity for such to be exercised. While participation on parish and diocesan councils is a place where laity could have an effective voice in setting mission agendas, the U.S. Church’s record here is quite

mixed.<sup>45</sup> Not all parishes have councils, some are purely appointive bodies, while others are elected and fully representative of parish membership. In some parishes, lay members have no voice; in most other situations, the lay voice is purely consultative and advisory; only in a few instances are laity actually involved in decision-making and encouraged to take responsibility for the parish.

A very small percent of laity have access to diocesan or national Church offices and of these laity, many are professional Church workers. What is lacking are regular opportunities and formal structures promoting honest dialogue and genuine collaboration between laity and hierarchy; such would permit laity to have a vital role in pastoral planning and to help make decisions about the use and allocation of Church resources.

Nor are most parishes places where a Catholic response to the challenges of job and profession can be fashioned, the social questions of the day discussed, a Catholic conscience on the issues formed. In the past, a significant conduit for lay activity was the many parish/diocesan/national organizations that provided formal contexts for both discussion and apostolic endeavor. Today many of these organizations, because they have not adapted to changed times and to the needs and circumstances of a new generation of Catholics, involve only minimal numbers of older laity or have simply become defunct. But as *The Chicago Declaration* observes, the need for innovative lay groups, the need for places for fostering lay initiative and for developing programs to meet a panoply of social issues continues. Interest in promoting such, however, seems hardly a priority for either bishops or their staffs. And, without support of clergy, most lay efforts of and by themselves do not usually succeed.

On the other hand, the inherent bond between ecclesial ministry and Church mission becomes strikingly evident in the activity of clergy and religious. Indeed, since the Council the Church's mission to the world has been taken up more and more by members of the United States hierarchy, both as individuals and as a group. Bishops, priests, religious men and women have been the ones to develop Catholic positions on social issues, to formulate public policy, to do the work of political advocacy. The

evidence shows that what these groups do in a ministerial capacity tends to be replicated in some form of beneficial service for the world.

Laity, unfortunately, have not been taught to view mission in this way, as a corollary to their in-church effort. But neither do they have access to the kinds of formal networks of service that clergy and religious do. Much more troublesome is the fact that the Council hedged on giving laity the same kind of freedom to act publicly as church as it gave to clergy and religious. While official teaching recognizes that laity are called to mission by virtue of their baptism, the "criteria of ecclesiality" cited above strongly suggests that the official Church still tends to regard lay mission as a delegated one.

This discussion raises a fundamental question about the need to shape a ministry for the future that is consistent with an ecclesiology of communion. What would a ministry look like that took as its starting point Church mission? Would there be a continuing need to keep clerical and lay tasks distinct? Or, would the result be an understanding of ministry that presumes its tasks ought to be approached on the basis of the Church's mission of evangelization rather than on the status of the person undertaking them? But this then would implicitly require collaborative, co-responsible action by lay and clergy; furthermore, it presupposes the need and right of local churches to act autonomously in accord with the principle of subsidiarity, another of the relational patterns identified with *communio* by the 1985 Synod.

To better understand the lay experience and the possibility of a solution to the unfortunate bifurcation of mission and ministry, it is instructive to review the Council's teaching on the subject of the laity.

### Laity

If Vatican II marks the Church's rediscovery of itself as a human society generated by Word and Spirit, then one practical consequence of this had to be its rediscovery of the laity. Thus, *Lumen Gentium* affirms that by baptism, laity are fully constituted *christifideles*, that as such, they participate in Christ's three-fold

mission of priest, prophet, and king. It asserts that laity too, no less than clergy or religious, are called to a life of holiness.

In the intervening years, *communio's* practical achievement has been evidenced by such things as active lay participation in the liturgy, the recognition of lay ministers and ministries, laity's service on pastoral and diocesan councils, their service as Church professionals and administrators. Yet in taking stock of the laity's progress, bishops attending the 1987 Synod on the Laity noted that their advance had been uneven and that a significant part of the laity, Catholic women, have yet to be fully integrated into ecclesial life.

While women's issues are presumed to be a concern of First World churches only, the 1987 Synod showed that, to the contrary, bishops of the young churches, heavily dependent upon the pastoral work women do in the base communities, were eager to find additional ways for recognizing in some institutional way women's spiritual gifts and energies.<sup>46</sup> For their part, First World bishops argued a role for women on consultative and decision-making bodies, that women's voices be heard in the articulation of Church positions, the preparation of Church documents. Some bishops even requested that study be made about opening the diaconate to women. Yet despite such suggestions, the Synod did little to change things for Catholic women. In the U.S. the only discernible move towards admitting women to the fullness of communion has been intermittent attempts at dialogue between representatives of women and the bishops. But to date, this has had little tangible or meaningful result.

On the other hand, the 1987 Synod was quite prepared to give women a major role in the Church's *ad extra* mission, the work of evangelizing culture. *Christifideles Laici* states that:

the human problems of today's world, already cited in the second part of the council's constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which remain unresolved and not at all affected by the passage of time, must witness the presence and commitment of women with their irreplaceable and customary contributions. (CL 51)

Not only this, but the document also goes on to make this striking attribution:

Women have the task of assuring the moral dimension of culture, the dimension, namely, of a culture worthy of the person, of an individual yet social life. (CL 51)

But by the positions regarding women that it adopts, the official Church encourages the continuing dichotomization of ministry and mission, certainly as far as lay people are concerned. And by limiting women's participation *intra* Church, the hierarchy not only misses the opportunity to enrich and deepen Church *communio*, it also impedes the natural movement of *communio* into mission. And as has been suggested, while formal structure is just as crucial to mission as it is to ministry, there is little official interest in building networks for lay Catholic action. Furthermore, there is little understanding that laity themselves, their lives constitute a part of the ecclesial reality through which communion can and must freely flow. As the Venerable Bede once proposed, "every day the church gives birth to the church"; and while this seems evident when the community gathers around the table for eucharist, the truth is that the Church is also born daily in the inchoate structures of lay activity in the areas of family, economic, political and social life. Little recognized and hardly appreciated or studied, this has been an historic and significant means by which the Church becomes an incarnate presence to and for each generation.

Given the Council's strong identification of the Church with its mission, there is pressing need to give fresh attention to its teaching on this point, and in particular to *Gaudium et Spes*. This document not only recapitulated the Council's teaching on mission but in doing so, laid out a scheme for lay Catholic activity. For instance, review of *Gaudium et Spes* makes clear that it is principally in the circumstances of everyday life that the Christian missionary exigence is met. This document suggests that to be lay is already to be on mission given that one's life situation of family, work, public affairs—all that constitutes the lay person's every

day, i.e., the individuals, the ideas, values, concepts, feelings and frameworks of society and culture are precisely those entities that must be referred to Christ and infused with the spirit of *communio*.

What needs to be fostered in Catholic laity is an appreciation of the fact that they themselves, their lives are the realizations of the Church in the world and to help them approach this with a ministerial attitude of service, a perspective that brings to the Church the needs of the world and finds itself irresistibly drawn to meet them.

This ministerial attitude must be rooted in an authentic lay spirituality. While this remains yet to be articulated, conciliar teaching suggests that it will have the following characteristics. First of all, this spirituality will be inherently ecclesial, rooted as it is in baptism and the parish eucharistic celebration of *communio*. Having this sacramental origin, lay spirituality will also be christocentric in that Jesus' life and teaching provide the basic pattern for living *communio* in the world. It will also be incarnational in that laity, aware of the Spirit's presence to created reality, will be instrumental in freeing its transforming power. But this will also be an incarnational spirituality insofar as its prayer forms, spiritual practices, meanings and values will be enfolded in the diverse cultures in which laity find themselves and in which their catholicity expresses itself.

Finally, this spirituality will be one that is collaborative and communitarian. To be a member of the laity is to be in communion; the term itself is without meaning in any other context besides the Church. But more than this, lay spirituality is communitarian in that it presumes that we are inherently social beings, in need of each other, affirmation, and forgiveness. To this end, this lay spirituality will help shape lives that witness to a new way of being human; it will also give evidence of a new style of common life, inviting and gathering all to union with Christ.

But at the same time, a contemporary lay spirituality, rising out of *communio* and the trinitarian missions as it does, is invariably drawn to mission. As such it must seek out both formal and informal social networks to enable the spread of *communio* beyond the Church. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* suggests that there are three distinct moments associated with the contemporary task of

evangelizing culture. First, ways must be found to increase and build on those types of service that provide hands-on acts of charity to the poor, the homeless. But since this solution to human need is but temporary, laity, by means of their education and expertise, must go on to do the sort of social analysis and critique needed to create transformational strategies that result in just social structures capable of protecting human well-being.

Laity must also be about changing the attitudes, the biases implicit to all social systems; thus lay Catholics must be influential in shaping a moral ecology for a global society, an approach to life which views even society's weakest, poorest member to be something of inestimable value.

### Conclusion

What conclusions may be drawn from this review of Vatican II and reception of its renewed vision for the Church?

If Vatican II described the Church as being the sign and instrument of God's saving love, it has since become evident that *communio* is the best term for referring to this mystery of divine favor at the heart of the Church. And, in that *communio* is destined for the world, the Christian task is to be the historical mediator of this experience of God through Christ in the Spirit. While the fullness of communion remains an eschatological achievement and is only partially realizable in time, nevertheless communion requires no little human effort. To have real credible effect, it must be expressed in the exigencies of human social life. As has been seen, *communio* is originally received in and through the relations that give rise to the Church's interior life. But it can and must be expressed in the culturally patterned interactions that comprise everyday existence.

The challenge that has always confronted the Church is to make this experience of God the world's own. Yet as the Catholic community approaches a new millennium, it must find innovative ways for acting as well as new energy; new commitment for its mission on behalf of the gospel. This cannot happen, however, if the Church's institutions do not become more responsive to the needs of the contemporary world.

This study has emphasized the critical importance of attending to the quality of the Church's institutional life; not only must dysfunctional structures that block communion be dealt with; a way must be found to allow the Church's charismatic element to be a major impetus, spurring the renovation and/or reform of Church order.

Furthermore, this study has suggested that ministry and mission, while extensions of one another, are two distinct moments of the Church's constitution. As such, each involves a different set of performative actions to achieve their ends. Since the Council, considerable attention has been given to reorganizing ministry. Much less has been done in respect to mission. As a first thing, mission's task must be conceived in a way appropriate for today, the future. For this, *Gaudium et Spes's* teaching about mission must be re-visited as must the Council's teaching about the laity, the baptismal priesthood.

There also needs to be serious study and reflection on the questions generated by the Council, especially those given extended development in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Redemptoris Missio*. As they show, the work of mission presents challenging new questions: What precisely does it mean to evangelize culture? And how are the different aspects of mission to be conceptualized so that this effort can be addressed, both strategically and programmatically?

As far as laity are concerned, they are primary agents of Church mission; it is imperative that at last they be brought into full communion (women will be the litmus test for this) and that the ambiguities of conciliar teaching that continue to thwart lay freedom and ability to act constructively as Church be resolved. More important, across the Church there is need to acknowledge the central role laity play in constituting the Church every day by means of their lived witness. For this reason, it is essential to begin to educate laity to this truth, to help them foster a proper spirituality in which their Christian vocation can be firmly rooted. Finally, the Church's pastors must work with laity to create the supporting structures necessary to inculcating the gospel in the diverse areas of experience.

The challenge of empowering and preparing lay Catholics to

assume their proper responsibility for Church and world is a theological and pastoral urgency. This will require the articulation of a new spirituality, new forms of Church order, and new commitment — and laity themselves have much to contribute here. But in the final analysis, this is not an option. The Church's future, as well as the gospel's, depends on it.

### Notes

1. See Patrick Granfield, *The Limits of the Papacy* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 147-52.

2. Hermann J. Pottmeyer, "The Reception of Vatican II," in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 30.

3. Pottmeyer, "The Reception of Vatican II," 43.

4. *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, 29, 32.

5. *The Church in the Modern World*, 62.

6. Pottmeyer, "The Reception of Vatican II," 31.

7. Kilian McDonnell, "Vatican II (1962-64), Puebla (1979), Synod (1985)," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 25: 426.

8. Peter Hebblethwaite, *Synod Extraordinary* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986), 121.

9. "Final Report," *Origins* 15 (December 19, 1985): 448

10. McDonnell, "Vatican II," 402.

11. McDonnell, "Vatican II," 121.

12. John Knox, *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), 50-51, 55-62.

13. Joseph Komonchak, "The Theological Debate," in *Synod 1985: An Evaluation*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and James Provost, 55.

14. Avery Dulles, *The Reshaping of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 189-90.

15. *LG* 8.

16. McDonnell, "Vatican II," 414.

17. "Final Report," II C1.

18. "Final Report," II C.

19. McDonnell, "Vatican II," 404.

20. Joseph Komonchak, "The Local Realization of the Church" in *Reception of Vatican II*, 77.

21. Komonchak, "The Local Realization of the Church," 77.

22. There continues to be debate about whether the local church is the diocese or the particular, national church. See Patrick Granfield, "The Local Church as a Center of Communication and Control," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 35 (1985):256-58. From a lay point of view and experience, the Church is the parish; it is this Church, the local eucharistic community, with which one has almost exclusive contact.

23. According to Jan Grootaers, the "young churches" designates those of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The term originated in the ecumenical movement.

24. Grootaers, 176.

25. *LG* 31.

26. Lucien Richard, O.M.I., "Vatican II and the Mission of the Church: A Contemporary Agenda" in *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda*, ed. Lucien Richard, O.M.I., Daniel T. Harrington, S.J., and John W. O'Malley, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 58.

27. "Message to the People of God," III; "Final Report," IID, 1.

28. *RM* 37a,b,c.

29. *RM* 75.

30. *RM* 61-64.

31. *RM* 52.

32. *RM* 54.

33. *EN* 19.

34. *CL* 15.

35. *CL* 26.

36. *CL* 29.

37. *CL* 30.

38. David M. Power, *Gifts That Differ: Lay Ministries Established and Unestablished* (New York: Pueblo, 1980), 8-9.

39. *EN* 73.

40. "The Chicago Declaration of Christian Concern" in *Challenge to the Laity*, ed. Russell Barta (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1980), 21.

41. *CL* 2.

42. Philip J. Murnion, with David DeLambo, Rosmary Dilli, S.S.N.D., and Harry A. Fagan, *New Parish Ministers: Laity and Religious on Parish Staffs* (New York: National Pastoral Life Center, 1992).

43. Murnion, *New Parish Ministers*, 44.

44. Murnion, *New Parish Ministers*, 48.

45. See chapter 5 of William D'Antonio, James Davidson, Dean Hoge, and Ruth Wallace, *American Catholic Laity in a Changing Church* (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1989).

46. Grootaers, 126.