



PROGRESSIO

JACQUES TRUBLET S.J.

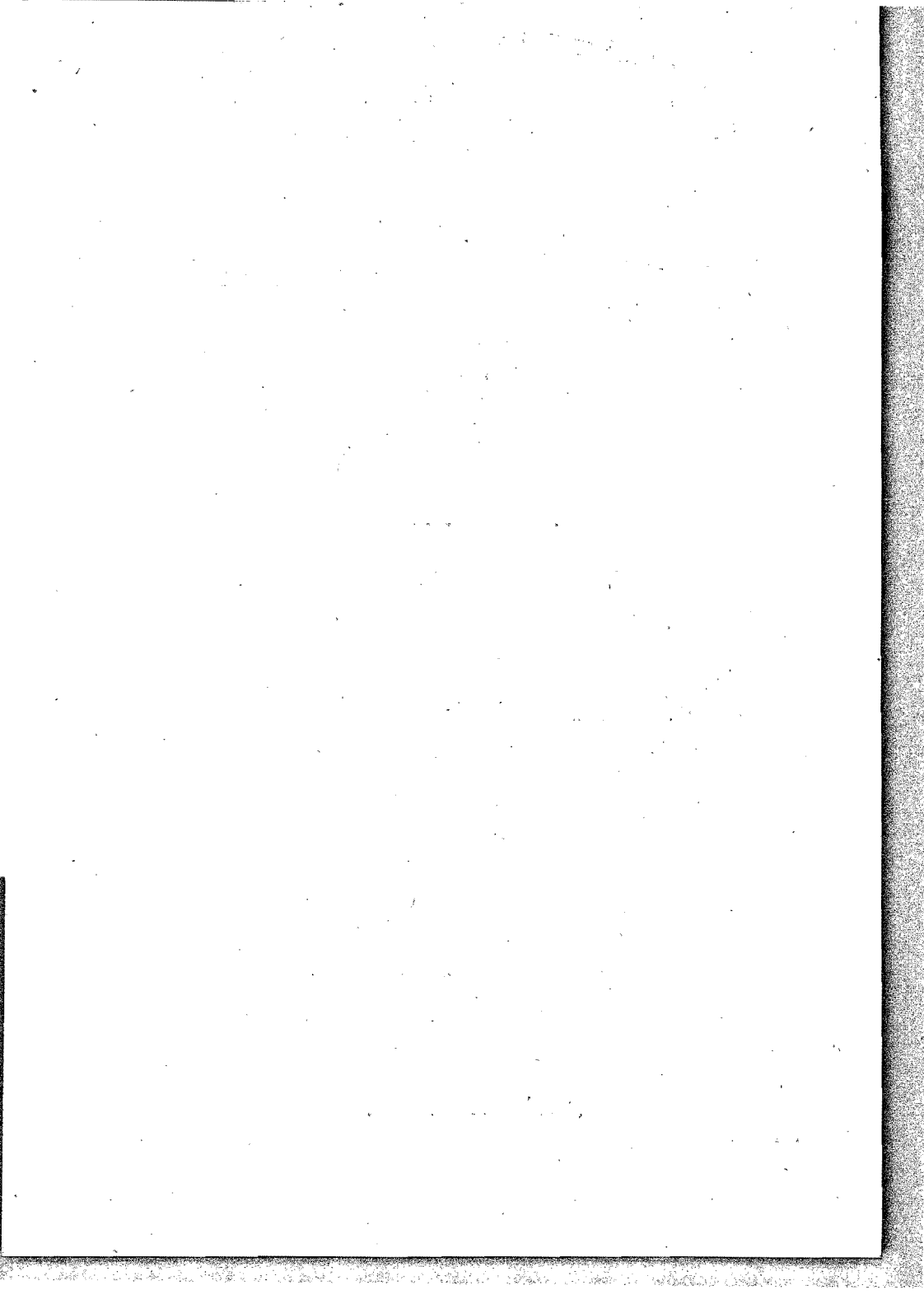
Foreword by
Cardinal C. M. Martini

HUMAN COMMUNITY OR CHURCH OF GOD?

The structure of the Church according
to the New Testament

SUPPLEMENT N. 25-26 - June 1985

PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD FEDERATION OF CHRISTIAN LIFE
COMMUNITIES * C.P. 6139 * Borgo S. Spirito 5 * 00195 ROME
ITALY * ENGLISH-SPANISH-FRENCH EDITIONS. EDITOR: José GSELL

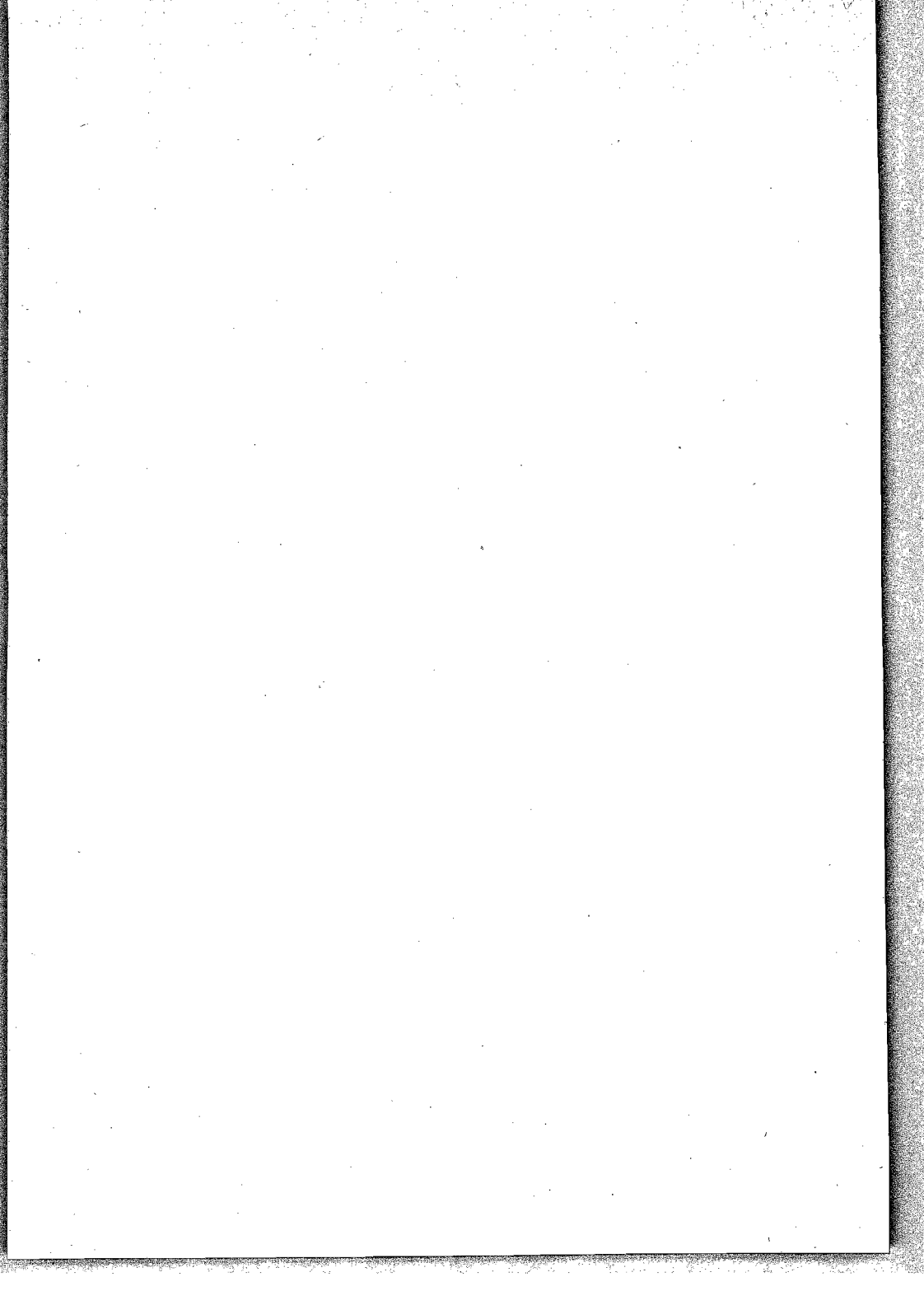


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The structure of the Church according to the New Testament



FOREWORD

This essay of Fr. Jacques Trublet proposes, to Christian Life Communities and to all Christian communities (and there are many) which are questioning themselves about their existence, their nature and their mission, a new look at the primitive Church and at the New Testament which attests to and documents the Church's life, its faith, and the structure which it gradually took on. Christian experience and reflection, drawn by an authentic faith instinct, always return for essential verification to this Church of their origins. The journey is not a repetitious and boring return-to-origins which turns out to be fruitless; it is an ever necessary seeking after a genuine and inspiring font of belief, and of the personal and communitarian existence belief makes possible.

One who reads Fr. Trublet's essay easily comes to an awareness that the primitive Church is not, in fact, something which can be taken as already familiar, something to be discounted. The common observations about it single out a few particulars, not always well chosen, from a panorama which is, by contrast, immensely rich, complex and intriguing.

Welcome, then, is any help which specialists give toward a real understanding of this Church! And especially welcome is an essay like this one which, by allowing many New Testament texts to speak for themselves, leads the reader to a firsthand knowledge of the witness and perspective such texts give.

What a rich array of beginnings and developments the varied witness of the New Testament writings offers the reader! The three major sections of this study treat three important aspects of the life and structure of the Church: relationships outside the community, within the community, and between communities.

This structure of the essay evidences the primacy given to mission, to the experience of communion, to the urgency of communication--all very current themes for the Church and for every kind of community it comprises.

The explanation unfolds gradually. It is not geared to scholars but to disciples of all kinds. It is geared above all to whole communities, and particularly to those persons in communities who are more responsible for, or at least more concerned about, their ongoing life. It doesn't intend to--it cannot--explain everything; one could have wished, for example, a development of the theme of Eucharist in the second section. Still, the reader is started on the road and given the possibility of putting questions to himself. And ultimately the questions which a meeting with the Church of the New Testament raises in the "simple" reader are the same ones which the learned find provocative. They are fundamental questions about faith and about the Church today as it seeks to find its way.

The vital experience of Vatican II and its aftermath called many to active responsibility in the Church and underlined the need of enlightenment for the ever-new task of discerning the signs of the Spirit. For this task a return to the New Testament is necessary if we are not to reverse ourselves, not to turn in on ourselves or lose our way. But we must also return fearlessly from the New Testament to our own experience to discern, with the help of the same Spirit which suggested the way then, the Church's way today.

Asserting by way of conclusion that "the New Testament Church gives us food for thought!", Fr. Trublet explicitly invites us to the task of discernment. Listen patiently, think responsibly: this is the approach his essay recommends. It is one of perennial validity. It asks of the reader the effort of listening patiently to the testimony of the New Testament and, in order to do this, of forgetting for the moment one's own urgent questions so as to be able to assume an attitude of honest receptivity. It then spurs one to creativity and originality, and

suggests as appropriate ways to this the three avenues of relationships outside the community, within the community, and between communities.

Finally, at the center of this attention to the biblical word and of this task of creative reinterpretation, we find the figure of Jesus. His centrality is significant. It is Jesus that, from the outset, the voice of the apostolic Church echoes, talks about, proclaims. It is Jesus that, in its lived experience, the Church follows, imitates, manifests. Today as then, Christian communities have no wish to measure themselves against themselves, or to exist for their own sakes, but for Him. Fr. Trublet's essay can help them to do precisely this.

Carlo Maria Cardinal Martini

Father Jacques Trublet S.J. is professor of Sacred Scripture at the Centre Sèvres in Paris. Born in 1937, he made his biblical studies at Cambridge and at l'Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem. His principal specialization was the study of the Old Testament, in particular of the psalms. We are happy to offer to the Christian Life Communities this example of his valuable work.

One part of this study has been published in the Cahiers d'Actualité Religieuse et Sociale whose Directors have graciously allowed us to reproduce it.

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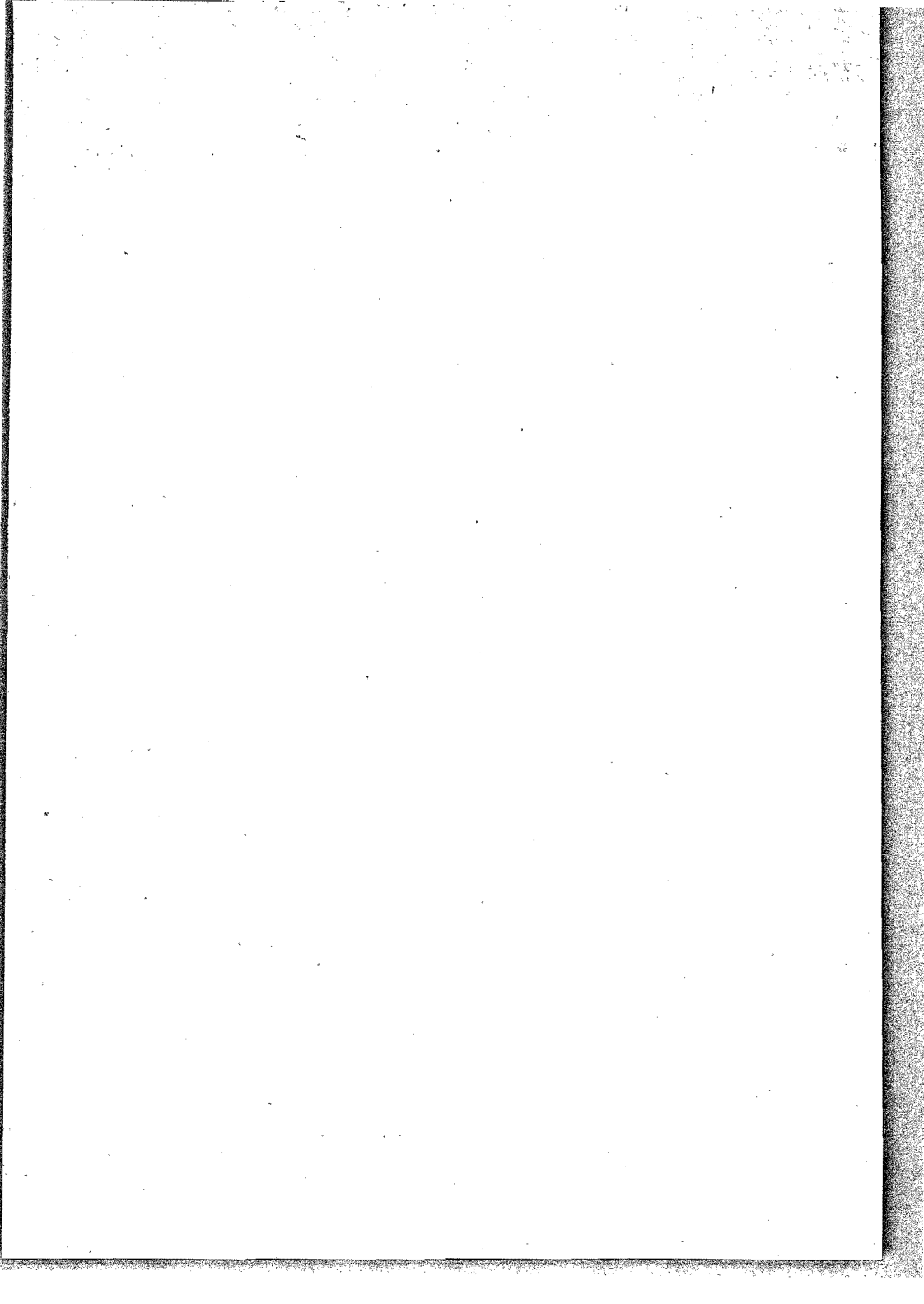
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INTRODUCTION



HUMAN COMMUNITY OR CHURCH OF GOD ?

INTRODUCTION

* Present State of the Question

For several years, the traditional parishes have been breaking up, everywhere, into small groups of different kinds. "The people, as far as we can gather, are coming together more effectively in this way, and that responds to the new needs of the People of God". As a matter of fact, there is often only a vague resemblance between a team for some special form of catholic action and a prayer group. But do all these human groups deserve the name of the Church of Christ, as Paul could affirm of "the Church which was at Corinth" (1 Cor 1,2)? That is a question that we would like to clarify. To be more precise, we would pose the question in the following terms: what is it that distinguishes the true Church of Christ from an ordinary human community?

* The method of approach

To find the elements for a reply, we are going to investigate the New Testament (NT), but, first of all, two remarks about our method.

* On the one hand, we will note that the NT does not present a collection of uniform documents, neither in form (gospel, letter or hymn), nor in content (the emphasis changes from one book to another). These texts reflect back on different communities which did not have the same preoccupations. That is why since the central subject of the Acts of the Apostles is the spread of the Church after Pentecost, the other authors of the NT only speak incidentally and indirectly of their community.

* On the other hand, we will not be looking, in the NT, for all the ecclesial structures that we are familiar with and which are the result of a long history. The NT constitutes only one stage in the life of the Church; essential, certainly, but it represents only one stage in the development of the Body of Christ—the 'embryo' phase.

✠ The two-fold 'dimension' of the Church

Every human community that would aim at being an actual realisation of the Church of Christ must fulfill certain objective conditions that are to be found throughout the NT. In effect, we can identify the ecclesial reality by reference to two 'dimensions' (space and time) which intersect and 'locate' such a reality.

* On the one hand - in terms of the 'dimension' of space - there are all the relationships, internal or external, which make up the Church at a given moment: the relations with non-believers, the relations with other communities and the relationships among members of the same community.

* On the other hand - in terms of the 'dimension' of time - there are certain historic moments that stand out in the life of the community and the life of the community can be seen as passing from one to another.

This two-fold expression of the ecclesial reality (the community's relationships and its historical framework) is echoed in the language and life of the groups, and influences what is said and done on the level of 'Church'. One or other particular aspect will be more important at a given moment, but all these elements must function together and, if possible, with the same intensity.

THE COMMUNITARIAN RELATIONSHIPS

At each moment, the life of the Church is manifested through three types of relationships:

1. On the level OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY

The community does not live turned in on itself; it exists for the world...

* on account of its message, it goes to announce to "those outside" the good news that it carries in its very being, while adapting itself to its audience; compare, for example, what it says to the Jews (Acts 2,14-40), to the

Greeks (Acts 17,22-31), to the Romans (Acts 10,34-43), and on a larger-scale, we can verify this hypothesis if we reflect that Mark addresses himself to the Romans, Matthew to the Jews and Luke to the Greeks.

* On account of its mission it goes to encounter those who do not share its faith - first to the Jews, then to the pagans (Acts 13,13-52).

All these activities have an effect on the life of the community. Either the people who listen turn towards Christ and enter into the community of believers through baptism

"Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the apostles, 'What must we do, brothers?' 'You must repent,' Peter answered 'and everyone of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise that was made is for you and your children, and for all those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God will call to himself.' He spoke to them for a long time using many arguments, and he urged them, 'Save yourselves from this perverse generation'. They were convinced by his arguments; and they accepted what he said and were baptized. That very day about three thousand were added to their number." (Acts 2,37-41)

or else, they terminate the dialogue politely, as at Athens *"At this mention of rising from the dead, some of them burst out laughing; others said: 'We would like to hear you talk about this again.'" (Acts 17,32),*

or quite violently, as with the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7,54-60); or the arrest of Paul

"He then gave orders to the centurion that Paul should be kept under arrest but free from restriction, and that none of his own people should be prevented from seeing to his needs." (Acts 24,23);

or persecutions of every kind

"We had, as you know, been given rough treatment and been grossly insulted at Philippi, and it was our God who gave us the courage to proclaim his Good News to you in the face of great opposition." (1 Th 2,21);

"When the chief shepherd appears, you will be given the crown of unfading glory." (1 P 5,4);

"I know the trials you have had, and how poor you are - though you are rich- and the slanderous accusations that have been made by the people who profess to be Jews but are really members of the synagogue of Satan." (Rv 2,9).

2. on the level WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

At the same time, the christian community must deepen its understanding of its faith and nourish its spiritual life.

* In view of the need *"always (to have) your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope you have"* (1 P 3,15), or to reply to the questions that the believers ask about certain points: Christ (Hebrews, chs.1-5), life after death (1 Cor 15,12-58), or other subjects, we see the birth of catechesis and the interpretation of Scripture. While Luke, in the episode of Emmaus, sets out the principles for a christian reading of the OT, Matthew authenticates the mission of Jesus through drawing arguments from the Jewish writings. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews explains the work of Christ through recourse to the book of Leviticus. However, not everything was exactly simple for erroneous documents tried to find their way into the assemblies and it was necessary to refute them and protect oneself against them (1 Peter 2; 2 Cor 11).

* To be authentic, the faith must become incarnated in the institutions and in concrete daily living. If love and the sharing of goods must be the rule for the relationships between brothers [(Phm 16); (Rm 12); *"If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing which would make me completely happy. There must be no competition among you, no conceit; but everybody is to be self-effacing. Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead. In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus."* (Ph 2,1-5)], it is also important to set up leaders in the groups (1 Tm 3,1-13) who are essentially at the service of

all, in the interest of unity. Sometimes it was necessary to intervene, to rectify different kinds of abuses (1 Cor 5; 6,1-11; Gal 1,6-10; James 2,1-13).

* All that only makes sense if rooted in and fed by public worship and prayer. Taking up Jewish prayers

"So, my dear brothers, what conclusion is to be drawn? At all your meetings, let everyone be ready with a psalm or a sermon or a revelation, or ready to use his gift of tongues or to give an interpretation; but it must always be for the common good." (1 Cor 14,26),

the members come together regularly to praise God. Here and there we see texts composed by the communities

"His state was divine, yet He did not cling to His equality with God but emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave, and become as men are; and being as all men are, He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. But God raised Him high and gave Him the name which is above all other names so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Ph 2,6-11).

The sacramental life becomes progressively structured, with special attention given to the eucharist (1 Cor 11 and the gospel accounts of the Last Supper; John 6), and baptism (1 Peter; Mt 28,19-20).

3. on the level of relationships BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

We come now to the third communitarian dimension of the Church, an important one that is often neglected today - the inter-relation between the different cells.

* Beyond their social or ethnic differences, and in spite of geographic distances; the first communities succeeded in maintaining the unity of the body. What mutual concessions that supposes, how many passionate exchanges must have taken place! The conflict at Antioch and the Assembly of Jerusalem which put an end to it (Acts 15,1-35) remained for a long time a sort of model in the history of christianity. The indefatigable courage of Paul was an important

factor in this inter-communion, as he always included a visit to Jerusalem in his missions, to explain his decisions to and receive confirmation from the mother Church.

* This unity in the faith showed itself also in a concrete way through the equitable division of material goods. The rich community comes to the aid of the one in difficulties. It is not a question of "giving alms", but of practising economic equality and solidarity. Among brothers, sharing resources is another way of declaring that they live the same faith. According to Paul, the churches of Macedonia were very good examples in this regard (2Cor 8-9).

THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CHURCH

Though the relationships we have been describing are very important, for all that they are not sufficient to found the Church. Other factors must contribute to building up the framework. For, even if a human group fulfills the conditions we have been describing, it is still not yet similar to the Church of Christ. A community is only entitled to this name if it recognises that its origin, its future and its existence lie beyond its own powers.

1. The ORIGIN of the Church (its relations to the past)

The Church shows that it is not responsible for its own origin - that its origin lies beyond its present membership - by virtue of two complementary points: reference to Christ and its reading of the Scriptures.

* Though the presentation of Christ may vary according to the different authors - a Rabbi for Matthew, Lord for Luke, the Word in John and Priest in Hebrews - all converge on this central affirmation that Christ, after his death, moves to a completely new life and that it is through this Easter event that the Church is born.

* But how are we to situate this event in the history of mankind? What language can we borrow to communicate such an event? The primitive Church has resolved this question through situating itself simultaneously in continuity and

in discontinuity with the OT. The Easter event prolongs and brings to term the history of the chosen people. Christ truly accomplished everything that had been announced by the law and the prophets

"Then He told them, 'This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the prophets and in the Psalms, has to be fulfilled'" (Lk 24,44),

and the Church recognises itself as the holy people of God or the new chosen race:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people at all and now you are the People of God; once you were outside the mercy and now you have been given mercy." (1 P 2,9-10).

2. The FUTURE of the Church (its eschatological dimension)

The ecclesial community does not, then, owe its origin to itself, but to Christ who has raised it up. Its ending equally is not in its own hands. In effect, its finality aims to establish the "reign of God" which coincides with the second coming of Christ. The Kingdom is not the Church, but the Church is for the Kingdom. The NT gives us some information about the moment when the end will come and about the time which separates us from that moment.

With regard to the time which separates us from that moment, the NT says two things that are slightly contradictory:

* On the one hand it tells us that nothing more is to be expected as everything has been given *"once and for all"* (Heb 7,27) in Christ. That is why the apostles, after Pentecost, proclaim that the end of time has come and that people are living in the last days (Acts 2,17).

* From another point of view, we are told that all the power of the resurrection of Christ has not yet been released in time. In effect, while suffering or evil inhabit the earth, we must struggle to get rid of it, be on our watch (Mk 13,33-37), and continue to labour (2 Th 3,1-15),

in spite of adversity and in the certainty that the victory has already been won (Jn 16,25-33).

We find several particulars, of two types, on when the end will come:

* On the one hand, the date must remain unknown to everyone [*"But as for that day and hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, no one but the Father only"* (Mt 24,36)]. That is why we must be vigilant so as not to be surprised (1 Th 5,1-11) and discern the authentic signs which announce the end (Mark 13).

* But together with that, we can point to a presentation which anticipates the final scene. Matthew makes use of an allegory (Mt 25) while the others have recourse to an apocalyptic style (1 Th 4,13-18). In both cases, we should not look for the exact description of how things will be, but rather at an abundance of symbols which try to tell us something of what follows when history is ended.

In other words, each day we live out the return of the Lord Jesus and while He is coming we build up our world, knowing that the final meaning of this world is yet to come.

3. The present EXISTENCE of the Church (or the gift of the Spirit)

How can the community live harmoniously all these historical tensions (to be linked to the past and to be an eschatological sign), or contemporary tensions (to live unity in diversity)? The Church, because it has received the gift of the Spirit, can live all these contradictions.

* To root the Church in its origins, the function of the Spirit is to recall and to confirm the work of Christ [*"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you."* (Jn 14,26)]. He is present at the birth of the Church

"When Pentecost day came round, they had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something

appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.

Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled, each one bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language. They were amazed and astonished. 'Surely' they said 'all these men speaking are Galileans? How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya round Cyrene; as well as visitors from Rome - Jews and proselytes alike - Cretans and Arabs; we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God.' Everyone was amazed and unable to explain it; they asked one another what it all meant. Some, however, laughed it off. 'They have been drinking too much new wine' they said " (Acts 2,1-13)

as He had been at work in the conception of Christ

"'The Holy Spirit will come upon you' the angel answered 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God...' " (Lk 1,35).

Living in the Church, He helps it discover the inexhaustible newness of the Gospel.

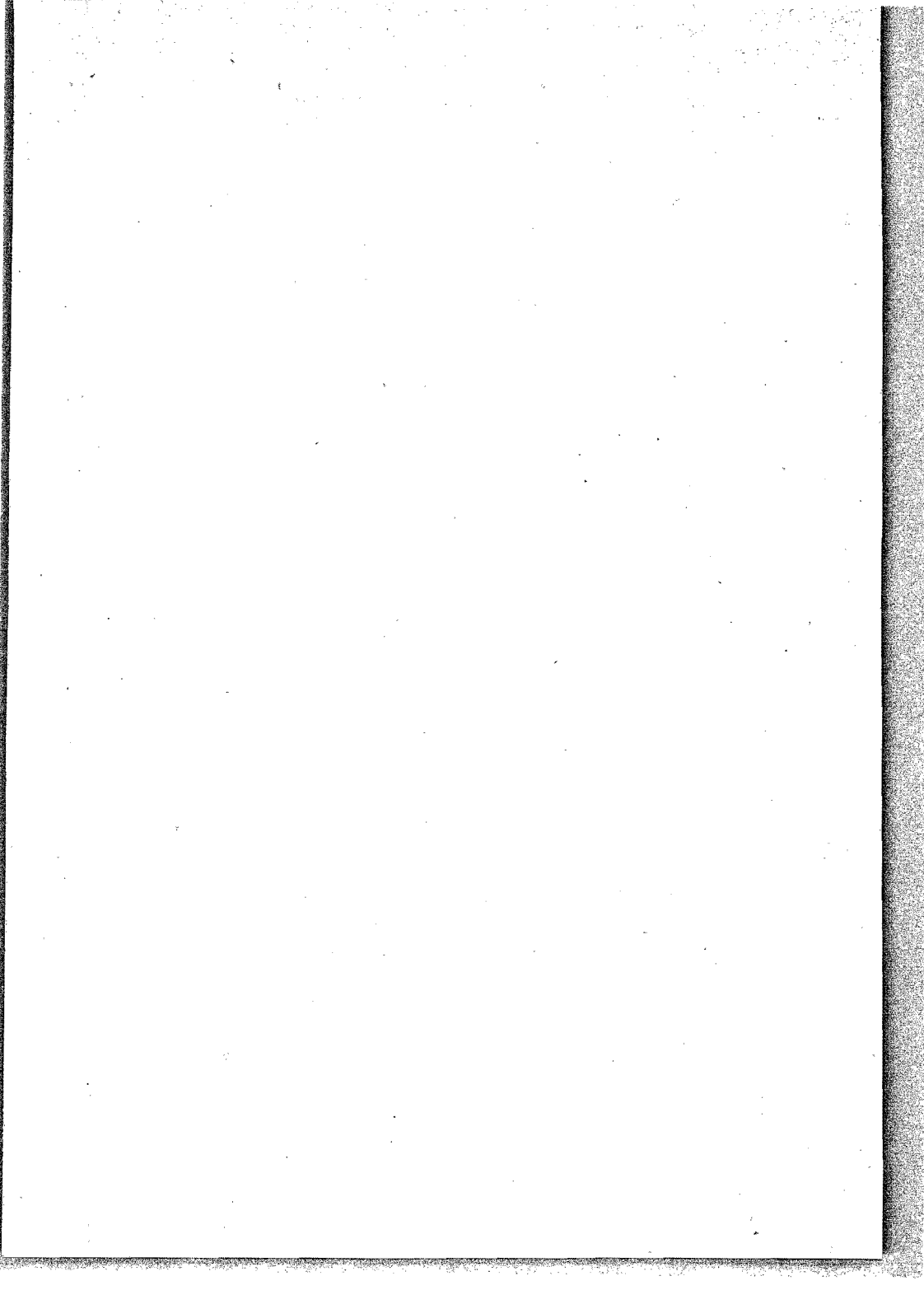
* To accompany the Church throughout its earthly pilgrimage, the Holy Spirit sanctifies it through giving it all the gifts which it may need to bring to fulfillment all the tasks entrusted to it. It is He who dispenses charisms to each person and brings about unity amid great diversity, but for the building up of the whole body (1 Cor 12-14).

We have given a very broad outline of the Church in the NT without in any way suggesting that this is exhaustive. The structure we have proposed, even though it is schematic, can easily be discovered in all the communities which were recognised as the Church of Jesus Christ

through space and time. But lest this presentation remain a bare skeleton, we invite the reader to go back to the texts we have cited. The chapters which follow fill out, in greater detail, this initial outline.

I

**IMMERSED IN THE WHOLE WORLD
RELATIONS OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY**



IMMERSED IN THE WHOLE WORLD RELATIONS OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The PLACE of the Church, the TIME of the Church (space and time)

The existence of the Church implies a place where a triple relationship is experienced (outside the community, within the community and between communities) and where the time when the Church began, its future and its present existence come together. An examination of one or other aspect (i.e. space or time) should never lead us to forget that these two always go together, even though, for the sake of clarity, we may treat them in sequence. The structure (i.e. this two-fold dimension of the Church) we proposed in the preceding chapter should always be borne in mind throughout this work.

The LOWEST DEGREE of presence to the world

It is not by accident that we have adopted the following sequence - "outside", "within", "between". Actually, even if, from a certain point of view, the relationship to the world can seem to come second, it is always presupposed in the texts of the NT. Prior to any declaration, any specific action, the Church remains present to humanity. Following the example of Christ, who became man among men, the Church must become incarnated in humanity. This is the question that we plan to deal with first, putting aside till later the study of the mission of the Church, or of the reactions of non-believers towards her.

1. INCARNATION OF THE CHURCH

If the Church carries on the work of Christ in the history of mankind, it is only in the midst of the world,

and its time, that she realises such a presence. Her relation with those who do not share her faith can take different forms, depending on circumstances or the kind of milieu in which she comes to birth. Without becoming too 'cut and dried', we may group what we find in the NT around four types of situations. (These four "behaviour-patterns" always flow from the fact that the Church is in time.)

A. FOUR TYPES OF SITUATIONS...

* Dispersion

* While the people of Qumran took refuge in the desert of Judah to practise there the Law, sheltered from all contamination, and the pious Jews avoided as much as possible contact with non-Jews

"The Samaritan woman said to him, 'What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?' - Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans" (Jn 4,9);

"They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium. It was morning. They did not go into the Praetorium themselves or they would be defiled and unable to eat the passover" (Jn 18,28);

"The centurion replied, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured" (Mt 8,8);

"The Jews criticised Peter and said, 'So you have been visiting the uncircumcised and eating with them, have you?' (Acts, 11,3),

the community founded by Christ, like its Master

"He entered Jericho and was going through the town when a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. He was anxious to see what kind of man Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him: 'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I must stay at your house today.' And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully. They all complained when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house' they said. But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the

Lord, 'Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount.' And Jesus said to him, 'To-day salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek out and save what was lost' (Lk 19,1-10),

completely does away with any discrimination between classes of people, or races. The Gospel of John insists on this sort of presence to the world:

"I am not asking you to remove them from the world" (Jn 17,15); they must "remain in the world", even if their Lord is "to stay no longer in the world" (Jn 17,11).

* This relationship to the world took some time to come to the fore in the community of Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, one gets the distinct impression that at the beginning, just after the departure of Christ, the believers liked to come to-gether among themselves

"...and when they reached the city they went to the upper room where they were staying;..." (Acts 1,13), or to live in a closed circle

"These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.

The many miracles and signs worked through the apostles made a deep impression on everyone.

The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed.

They went as a body to the Temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved "

(Acts 2, 42-47).

This was a necessary stage to confirm the faith of the disciples, but as a result of different influences - internal or external - they resumed their former activities (John 21), or were dispersed. Persecution, especially, put an end to this tendency and so began, for the new people of God, the Exodus towards the promised land or the Exile

away from their own homeland

"That day a bitter persecution started against the church in Jerusalem, and everyone except the apostles fled to the country districts of Judaea and Samaria. There were some devout people, however, who buried Stephen and made great mourning for him. Saul then worked for the total destruction of the Church; he went from house to house arresting both men and women and sending them to prison. Those who had escaped went from place to place preaching the Good News " (Acts 8,1-4).

* Participation

Refusing to turn in on themselves, the members of the community begin to mix with non-believers at every level of the secular world, and to live normally their human responsibilities

* With regard to life in society, christianity shows itself quite open. We come across some remarks on this subject concerning law suits, but on the whole we are led to believe that christians lived in the midst of the world like everyone else. For example, can a christian accept the invitation to dine with a pagan? No problem. But if, by chance, some food is served up that comes from pagan sacrifices, then the christian should abstain from it (1 Cor 10,27-33). Apart from several cases like this, the NT only offers advice which comes down to simple common sense: behave justly, appropriately, graciously and "taste fully" [*"Be tactful with those who are not christians and be sure you make the best use of your time with them " (Col 4,5)*].

Plutarch, some years later, used the same language: *"Behaving graciously towards one another, they add a certain taste to life through the way they speak, which carries a definite flavour, like salt."* (Moralia 514 f) Apart from these general suggestions, there is the recommendation "to live in peace with everybody"

"Do all you can to live at peace with everyone " (Rm 12,18);

and to show "an exemplary conduct":

"Always behave honourably among pagans so that they can see your good works for themselves and, when the day of reckoning comes, give thanks to God for the things which now make them denounce you as criminals." (1 P 2,12).

Finally, unless a person leaves the world, he/she will inevitably come across people who are less than desirable:

"When I wrote in my letter to you not to associate with people living immoral lives, I was not meaning to include all the people in the world who are sexually immoral, any more than I meant to include all usurers and swindlers or idol-worshippers. To do that, you would have to withdraw from the world altogether." (1 Cor 5,9-10).

* In economic or professional matters, there is no question of creating circles just for christians. Paul invites the Corinthians to be like everyone else in buying what is sold at the market, wherever it may come from [*"Do not hesitate to eat anything that is sold in butchers' shops" (1 Cor 10,25)*]. To take work seriously becomes a form of witness for the people of Salonika [*"so that you are seen to be respectable by those outside the Church, though you do not have to depend on them." (1 Th 4,12)*]. If someone of high rank receives baptism, that is no reason for resigning from his office. We have no reason to believe that the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10-11), or Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus [*"The proconsul, who had watched every thing, became a believer, being astonished by what he had learnt about the Lord." (Acts 13,12)*], had to abandon their office as incompatible with their faith.

* On the civic or political level, the faithful are invited to be submissive to magistrates in the exercise of their office [*"Remind them that it is their duty to be obedient to the officials and representatives of the government..." (1 Pt 3,1)*]. In contrast with the Zealots who are in favour of revolting, christians seem to accept the established order. However, an important corrective is added to this loyalty towards public authority: civil or political authority deserves obedience only if it effectively promotes the common good and if it represses evil. If these conditions are not respected, the believer is no longer bound by his/her contract. From this general principle flows

the lawfulness of taxation or the honour due to the Emperor (1 P 2,13-17). Romans 13,1-7 is to be interpreted in this sense

"You must all obey the governing authorities. Since all government comes from God, the civil authorities were appointed by God, and so anyone who resists authority is rebelling against God's decision, and such an act is bound to be punished. Good behaviour is not afraid of magistrates; only criminals have anything to fear. If you want to live without being afraid of authority, you must live honestly and authority may even honour you. The state is there to serve God for your benefit. If you break the law, however, you may well have fear: the bearing of the sword has its significance. The authorities are there to serve God: they carry out God's revenge by punishing wrongdoers. You must obey, therefore, not only because you are afraid of being punished, but also for conscience' sake. This is also the reason why you must pay taxes, since all government officials are God's officials. They serve God by collecting taxes. Pay every government official what he has a right to ask - whether it be direct tax or indirect, fear or honour".

Now, if we date the Epistle to the Romans during the years 55-56, we realise that the supreme power at Rome was in the hands of Nero (54-66).

* Even in the religious sphere, the first christians continue to have regular contact with their fellow Jews, whether through going to the Temple

"...and they were continually in the Temple praising God" (Lk 24,53);

"Once, when Peter and John were going up to the Temple for the prayers at the ninth hour,..." (Acts 3,1);

"So the next day Paul took the men along and was purified with them, and he visited the Temple to give notice of the time when the period of purification would be over and the offering would have to be presented on behalf of each of them." (Acts 21,26)

or their synagogues

"The others carried on from Perga till they reached Antioch in Pisidia. Here they went to synagogue on the sabbath and took their seats" (Acts 13,14),

or through keeping up a certain number of observances of Levitical origin. They needed time to free themselves from Judaism and find their own identity.

* As far as family life is concerned, there is no longer any segregation. A believer can continue, or not, to live with a non-believer, but in the case of conflict, the faith must come first

"The rest is from me and not from the Lord. If a brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she is content to live with him, he must not send her away; and if a woman has an unbeliever for her husband, and he is content to live with her, she must not leave him. This is because the unbelieving husband is made one with the saints through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made one with the saints through her husband. If this were not so, your children would be unclean, whereas in fact they are holy. However, if the unbelieving partner does not consent, they may separate; in these circumstances, the brother or sister is not tied; God has called you to a life of peace. If you are a wife, it may be your part to save your husband, for all you know; if a husband, for all you know, it may be your part to save your wife "
(1 Cor 7, 12-16).

The liberalism of the Church is quite striking by comparison with the decisions of Nehemiah (Ne 13) or with the regulations then current in Judaism.

* Distinction

Though contact with pagans takes place daily, in every area of life, nevertheless the christian should not allow himself/herself to be "absorbed" by pagans, or lose his/her identity. The Church is present to the world, but the two realities should not become confused. The NT reaffirms this distinction a number of times, and in different ways.

* This is the sense of numerous expressions which form contrasting couplets. Here we present the most characteristic ones:

- those who are "outside" versus (= distinguished from or "versus") those who are "inside"

(Mk 4, 11; 1 Th 4, 12; 1 Tm 3, 7; Col 4, 5)

"Be tactful with those who are not Christians..."

- those who are "far away" versus those who are "close"
(Acts 2,39; Ep 2,17; Ep 2,13)
"...you that used to be so far apart from us have been brought very close..."
- those who are "of the world" versus those who are "not of the world"
(Jn 17,14-16) *"They do not belong to the world..."*
- those who are "from below" versus those who are "from above"
(Jn 8,23) *"You are from below; I am from above."*
- those who are "from here" versus those who are "from elsewhere" (Heb 13,14)
- those who are "of the present time" versus those who are "of the time to come" (Rm 12,2)
- those who are "not believing" versus those who "believe"
(Acts 15,5; 18,27; 19,18; 21,20-25)
"They gave glory to God when they heard this. 'But you see, brother,' they said 'how thousands of Jews have now become believers, all of them staunch upholders of the Law, and they have heard that you instruct all Jews living among the pagans to break away from Moses, authorising them not to circumcise their children or to follow the customary practices. What is to be done? Inevitably there will be a meeting of the whole body, since they are bound to hear that you have come. So do as we suggest. We have four men here who are under a vow; take these men along and be purified with them and pay all the expenses connected with the shaving of their heads. This will let everyone know there is no truth in the reports they have heard about you and that you still regularly observe the Law. The pagans who have become believers, as we wrote when we told them our decisions, must abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from fornication.'"

* This distinction does not carry strong, negative overtones. All these expressions deal with affirming the christian identity. That is no reason for the believer to think of himself/herself as superior to others, but rather the meaning this identity gives to his/her life or activity distinguishes him/her from others. As for the

behaviour of the non-baptised - that calls for no judgment from the Church; it is God's affair

"It is not my business to pass judgment on those outside. Of those who are inside, you can surely be the judges. But of those outside, God is the judge." (1 Cor 5,12-13)

who can always reveal himself to them as he chooses (Rm 1-4). So the disciple of Jesus must acknowledge that there are paths, and ways of acting, other than his own. It stands out clearly from the NT that the rest of the world is not made up of potential christians, but of people with whom I must share a common humanity for this is the only place where God reveals Himself and where the incarnation of the Church takes place

"Remind them that it is their duty to be obedient to the officials and representatives of the government; to be ready to do good at every opportunity; not to go slandering other people or picking quarrels, but to be courteous and always polite to all kinds of people " (1 Pt 3,1-2)

* Opposition

How far should the christian go in his/her contact with non-believers? Where should one draw the line at collaborating with them? While the world remains under the sign of the Kingdom yet-to-be achieved, the Church can only make herself active and present in the world. But when the times show themselves to be in conflict with the Gospel, the believer must choose his/her ground and stand apart-which sometimes will appear as a lack of solidarity:

- * The communities of the NT have been led to stand apart
- either when the faith has been menaced by idolatry (1 P 4,1-6; 1 Cor 10,14-22), or magic (Acts 19,18-19; 1 Cor 8,7).
- or when the customs are in contradiction with the purity of the Gospel message (1 P 2,11-12).
- or when there is a confusion between Mammon, Caesar and God (Mt 22,15-22; Lk 16,9-11).
- or when the Law smothers the Gospel. The whole point of Galatians is to deal with this matter.
- In all these cases, the christians are invited "not to unite yourselves with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6,14-16).

* The need to stand apart appears quite clearly in a number of contrasting couplets, where the contrast expresses not difference, but antagonism. For example:

- Light versus darkness (1 Jn 1,5-10; Ep 5,7-11; Jn 3,19-21..)
- Spirit versus the world, earth, flesh (Jn 15,18-19; 16,33; 1 Jn 2,16...)
- New world versus the old world (2 Cor 5,17).

* But in the concrete reality, things are not quite so clear-cut. Everything is all mixed up: situations are complicated and one must learn to discern what comes from God and what comes from the Bad Spirit. So there is "a wisdom coming from God" which confronts "the wisdom belonging to this passing age" [*"But still we have a wisdom to offer those who have reached maturity: not a philosophy of our age, it is true, still less of the masters of our age, which are coming to an end"* (1 Cor 2,6)].

"Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do," (Rm 12,2)

B. ...LIVED OUT IN TERMS OF THE "TIME DIMENSION" OF THE CHURCH

All the situations we have just been discussing are always experienced in terms of the "time dimension" of the Church. To finish off this discussion, we would like to have a look at some instances which show the connection between the two "dimensions" of the Church - space and time. The reader is encouraged to discover other examples!

■ with regard to the PAST

* Taking up, in its turn, the important stages of the history of the people of God in their encounter with the world, the New Israel comes to know an Exodus in the midst of the peoples of the world

"Yahweh will scatter you among the peoples, and only a small number of you will remain among the nations where Yahweh will have driven you" (Dt 4,27),

or an Exile far from their own homeland

"I have scattered them among the peoples but from far away they will remember me (they will teach their sons, and these will return)" (Zc 10,9).

* Jesus, through his incarnation, has desired to live in the heart of the world and to be with people who are rejected or sinners. He also learnt to recognise what belongs to Caesar, and what belongs to God

"...give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God" (Lk 20,25).

His last wish was to gather together a community which He would send to the four corners of the world

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..." (Mt 28,19),

but He died to maintain its unity in spite of its dispersion

"...but to gather together in unity the scattered children of God" (Jn 11,52).

At the cost of His life He affirmed that His Kingdom was not of this world

"Mine is not a kingdom of this world..." (Jn 18,36).

But henceforth, the victory was to be His

"I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave: I have conquered the world" (Jn 16,33).

with regard to the FUTURE

The time of dispersion occurs when the disciple, while becoming one with the people around him, nevertheless witnesses to a reality beyond the present.

* The life of the believer is lived as a tension, as a refusal to settle down until he/she reaches the promised land. He/she is a stranger, a traveller who is not "at home" while the Kingdom has not yet arrived

"I urge you, my dear people, while you are visitors and pilgrims, to keep yourselves free from selfish passions that attack the soul" (1 P 2,11).

* But this journeying must be active and not just negative in relation to this world. A test like Hebrews 13,14:

"For there is no eternal city for us in this life but we look for one in the life to come" indicates very well the continuity between the two cities. Though present to the world, the believer is not content to be a mere reflection of its reality, but through all that he/she is and does, tries to incarnate in this world the image of the world to come. When this world comes to birth, all the nations will be gathered together ["And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet to gather his chosen from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Mt 24,31)], and the Kingdom will have triumphed over Babylon (Rv 13,18).

✠ in the PRESENT

Sent to the community by Christ, the Spirit of God helps it find or invent, in every situation, what is appropriate to do.

* Between this Spirit and the world there exists a radical incompatibility, and "the world cannot receive Him" (Jn 14,17). It is He who enables the believer to know what is from God and what is not (1 Cor 2,11-16): "a man gifted with the Spirit (he in whom the Spirit speaks) can judge the worth of everything, but is not himself subject to judgment by his fellow-man." We can see this light in operation from the first days of the Church - an abundance of justice and spontaneity on every occasion (cf. Acts 8,26-29; 16,7; 20,22).

* As a source not only of light but also strength, He gives the Church the courage to confront the world when this latter proves to be against the Gospel. He frees from all constraints, including that of the Law. He has already triumphed over the world, but the members of the christian community are invited to finish off what Christ has begun.

"It is not every spirit, my dear people, that you can trust; test them, to see if they come from God, there are many false prophets, now, in the world. You can tell the spirits that come from God by this: every spirit which acknowledges that Jesus the Christ has come in the flesh is from God; but any spirit which will not say this of Jesus, is not from God, but is the spirit of Antichrist, whose coming you were warned about. Well,

now he is here, in the world. Children, you have already overcome these false prophets, because you are from God and you have in you one who is greater than anyone in this world; as for them, they are of the world, and so they speak the language of the world and the world listens to them. But we are children of God, and those who are not of God refuse to listen to us. This is how we can tell the spirit of truth from the spirit of falsehood." (1 Jn 4,1-6).

It is through the power of the Spirit that the Church can incarnate the promise it carries within herself - that the world become the place where the Kingdom is 'located'.

2. THE "CHRISTIAN ENTERPRISE", AND HOW IT MANIFESTS ITSELF

- How does the primitive Church open herself to the whole world?
- The biblical record of a painful process of withdrawal, constantly to be repeated.

Though completely a citizen of the world and actively involved in what goes on there, the believer also belongs to a group that has come together for a specific undertaking. Even though this two-fold belonging was not always easy to live out, the NT leads us to understand that, in spite of real difficulties, the first christians knew how to adapt themselves to circumstances while preserving their faith. But their relations with the world began to change and grew complicated for the believers were not content to be merely a silent and discreet presence: they took the risk of telling non-believers about the vision which inspired them and suggested to them that they, too, take up this vision. This decision had many consequences. It had repercussions on the relations between the Church and the world, and brought about numerous upsets at the very heart of the community. It was necessary to adapt to this new state of things and re-think a number of options. How were this openness to the "outside" and the life with-

in the community to fit together? How to meet with non-believers and respect their culture? How to speak to them? There were many questions like this which haunted the new-born Church and which concern us today.

A. THE NECESSARY, AND GRADUAL GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

✦ Coming together as a prelude to being sent

In the presentation of the early Church, the texts of the NT, especially the Book of the Acts, portray a scenario which they repeat several times. In the first phase of the life of the communities, the main concern remains the life 'inside'. Then, suddenly, in a second phase, the whole horizon of concerns changes and what comes to the fore are the meeting and dialogue with those 'outside'. This is how Luke proceeds with his book: we see the life of the community between Easter and Pentecost [the brethren come together, they pray, Matthias is chosen (Acts 1,12-26)]. Then, on the day of Pentecost, the apostles appear in public and there proclaim their faith. This demonstration results in the entry of three thousand people into the community [*"They were convinced by his arguments, and they accepted what he said and were baptised. That very day about three thousand were added."*(Acts 2,41)]. Once more, the internal questions of organisation and structure come to the fore (Acts 2,42-47), but once again, in the temple, members of the community are led into a dialogue with non-believers (Acts 3-4), before becoming absorbed in the internal affairs of the Church (Acts 4,23-5,11). Such alternating ('inside'/'outside') will repeat itself. This movement, which is presented in the Acts rather rapidly and not systematically, reflects a situation that continues for several years, as the other books of the NT testify.

Actually, between the Resurrection of Christ (approximately the year 30) and about the year 45, the early community was mainly concerned with its internal structure. Then, after this date - which coincides with the beginning of Paul's journeys - the principal objective becomes the encounter with the world. The communities then

organise themselves - with the apostle, as head of the functions of the Church - in terms of evangelisation (cf. 1 Cor 12,28, and Acts 14,4-14). It is during this period that Paul founds the Churches of Asia Minor, Greece and Italy. But, very quickly, the communities need help to resolve problems which confront them, and this is the theme of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians in 51, and his letters to the Galatians and Corinthians in 56. Much later, the letters to Titus and Timothy will be mainly concerned with directions for the organisation of the communities. So, as we see, a period of coming together (to look at internal questions) is followed by a phase of opening up to the world - growth involves the need to set up structures.

In this way, the Church becomes aware progressively that its own 'finality' - the reason why it exists - does not lie in its own hands, but that it has been sent to the world to announce there the good news of Christ

"But they will not ask his help unless they believe in him, and they will not believe in him unless they have heard of him, and they will not hear of him unless they get a preacher, and they will never have a preacher unless one is sent, but as scripture says: The footsteps of those who bring good news is a welcome sound" (Rm 10, 14-15).

The change which resulted from this was the first great change.

■ The people to whom the first christians were sent:
a transition from the Jews to the pagans

But a second significant change was called for, at the same time, and without doubt this provoked considerable repercussions. As a matter of fact, in its encounter with the world, the Church had been rather selective: she thought she should either evangelise the Jews first before worrying about the rest of the world, or reserve her message exclusively for the Jews. There is abundant evidence for this fact in the NT, but some observations should suffice to prove the point.

The christian message begins at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, not only because that is where the apostles were living

"Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed them in a loud voice: 'Men of Judaea, and all you who live in Jerusalem, make no mistake about this, but listen carefully to what I say...'" (Acts 2,14),

but because - *"We had to proclaim the word of God to you first" (Acts 13,46)*. The first seven chapters of Acts take place in Jerusalem. Then, in 8,5, we see Philip, one of the seven deacons, "who went to a Samaritan town and proclaimed the Christ to them", and soon afterwards made contact with the eunuch of Candace (Acts 8,26-40). Peter himself, after considerable hesitation, approaches Cornelius, a pagan, and "while Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners... all were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the pagans too..." (Acts 10,44-45). At Antioch it is almost by accident that the Greeks hear Christ spoken of [*"Some of them, however, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch where they started preaching to the Greeks, proclaiming the Good News of the Lord Jesus to them as well" (Acts 11,20)*]. Though with Paul there is a movement out of Palestine (Acts 13 to 28), nevertheless the customary order is kept to. In each city that the "apostle of the Gentiles" goes to, his first contact is with the Jewish emigrants - at Antioch in Pisidia [*"The others carried on from Perga till they reached Antioch in Pisidia..." (Acts 13,14)*], at Iconium [*"At Iconium, they went to the Jewish synagogue, as they had at Antioch, and they spoke so effectively that a great many Jews and Greeks became believers." (Acts 14,1)*], at Lystra (Acts 16,1), at Philippi (Acts 16,13), at Salonika (Acts 17,1-2), at Beroe (Acts 17,10), at Corinth (Acts 18,1-4), at Ephesus (Acts 19,8) and even at Rome (Acts 28,17) - before turning to the pagans.

This 'opening out' goes hand in hand with a relative specialisation in the work of evangelisation - some will look after the Jews while others will go to the pagans [*"On the contrary, they recognised that I had been commissioned to preach the Good News to the uncircumcised just as Peter had been commissioned to preach it to the circumcised" (Ga 2,7)*]. The first sector falls to Peter and the second to Paul. Paul likes to refer to his ministry that he received from "God who had specially chosen me while I

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was still in my mother's womb... so that I might preach the Good News about (His Son) to the pagans" (Ga 1,15-16; Rm 1,5-6), "...to make them acceptable as an offering made by the Holy Spirit"(Rm 15,15-16) and so that "...salvation may reach the ends of the earth"(Acts 13,47). This division of the apostolate was to allow room for respecting the diversity of cultures and the birth of several models of Churches.

How can we explain an attitude which, at the beginning, was so minimally universal? Several reasons can be offered. In the first place, God bound Himself to Israel by an unbreakable alliance and, whatever they do

"They are adopted as sons, they were given the glory and the covenants; the Law and the ritual were drawn up for them, and the promises were made to them... and from their flesh and blood came Christ" (Rm 9,4-5) [1].

That is why it is only in the face of their oppositions and insults (Acts 18,6), their hardened unbelief and their attacks (Acts 19,10) that Paul turns towards the pagans - "...this salvation of God has been sent to the pagans; they will listen to it"(Acts 28,28). This is the last word of Paul in the Book of the Acts. It is only then after the refusal of the Jews that Paul dedicates himself to the pagans. But at the same time, retribution is overtaking the Jews (1 Th 2,16). In spite of their refusal, or because of it, the Jews are the foundation which carry the whole building -they are the root which supports the other branches (Rm 11,17-19) - "...their fall has saved the pagans... Since their rejection meant the reconciliation of the world, do you know what their admission will mean?" (Rm 11,11-15). In this perspective, the pagans owe their salvation to the Jews

"Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, who form the Israel of God" (Ga 6,16);

"Look at the other Israel, the race, where those who eat the sacrifices are in communion with the altar"

(1 Cor 10,18)

and participate by their faith in the privileges of the

[1] Cf. Rm 3,9; 9,14; 10,12; 1 Cor 1,22 ff; 10,33; 12,13; Ga 3,28.

children of Abraham

"...In this way Abraham became the ancestor of all uncircumcised believers, so that they too might be considered righteous " (Rm 4,11);

"Scripture foresaw that God was going to use faith to justify the pagans, and proclaimed the Good News long ago when Abraham was told: In you all the pagans will be blessed " (Ga 3,8).

From now on, God has reconciled these two peoples in Christ

"And it is in him that we were claimed as God's own, chosen from the beginning, under the predetermined plan of the one who guides all things as he decides by his own will; chosen to be, for his greater glory, the people who would put their hopes in Christ before he came.

Now you too, in him, have heard the message of the truth and the good news of your salvation, and have believed it; and you too have been stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit of the Promise, the pledge of our inheritance which brings freedom for those whom God has taken for his own, to make his glory praised " (Ep 1,11-14);

"This was to create one single New Man in himself out of the two of them and by restoring peace through the cross, to unite them both in a single Body..." (Ep 2,15)

and the true Israel is the one which recognises Christ.

✱ The missioning of the Christians and the passage of time

Jesus confined himself to Israel during His earthly life

"...Go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel " (Mt 10,6);

"He said in reply, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel '" (Mt 15,24),

no doubt due to the prerogatives of the Jews, but also as a consequence of the Incarnation. His message is universal and He clearly affirms that the Queen of Sheba (Mt 12,42), the people of Tyre and Sidon (Mt 11,22) and even the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt 10,15) will be able to share in the salvation He has come to bring. Once He has risen and transcended the limitations of the Incarnation, He invites His followers to "make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28,19).

* Between the resurrection of Christ and the end of time, the Church must carry out this order of the Lord. As long as the world has not received the message, the end of time has not yet been achieved

"...Thus, all the way along, from Jerusalem to Illyricum, I have preached Christ's Good News to the utmost of my capacity " (Rm 15,19);

"So when I have done this and officially handed over what has been raised, I shall set out for Spain and visit you on the way " (Rm 15,28);

"There is a hidden reason for all this, brothers, of which I do not want you to be ignorant, in case you think you know more than you do. One section of Israel has become blind, but this will last only until the whole pagan world has entered, and then after this the rest of Israel will be saved as well " (Rm 11,25).

* The Holy Spirit brings together the movement 'outside' and the development 'inside' the community. In this world He creates a state of expectancy for God and the word, He guides towards Christ, He leads to the truth (Jn 14,17) and brings about reconciliation (2 Cor 5,18-20; Ep 1,10). Within the community He calls to mission

"One day while they were offering worship to the Lord and keeping a fast, the Holy Spirit said, 'I want Barnabas and Saul set apart for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13,2)

and even more than that it is the Spirit who breaks the Church out of its insularity and 'forces' her to recognise that the pagans are also called to salvation (cf. the episode of Cornelius, Acts 10, and the affair at Antioch, Acts 11,19-26). It is due to Him that the mission becomes universal.

To show itself to the world, the Church experienced many crises and had to accept a number of changes. For the Body of Christ to grow, some breaks have to be made - the communities have to set aside a feeling of cosiness, which runs the risk of turning the members in on themselves, and move outside [*"But they will not ask his help unless they believe in him, and they will not believe in him unless they have heard of him, and they will not hear of him unless they get a preacher, and they will never*

have a preacher unless one is sent,..."(Rm 10,14)]. As long as the world does not know Christ, Christians cannot rest on their laurels. But it is not enough just for individuals to meet with the world; the first Christians give us an example of collaboration that overcomes small-mindedness (1 Cor 3 and Ph 1,15-18).

"It is true that some of them are doing it just out of rivalry and competition, but the rest preach Christ with the right intention, out of nothing but love, as they know that this is my invariable way of defending the gospel. The others, who proclaim Christ for jealous or selfish motives, do not mind if they make my chains heavier to bear. But does it matter? Whether from dishonest motives or in sincerity, Christ is proclaimed; and that makes me happy..."

B. THE WORD OF FAITH BREAKS ON THE SCENE

Being sent on mission to the 'outside' has to be able to 'take flesh' in a word which expresses its meaning and origin. In these circumstances, what language has the NT used?

The Acts of the Apostles has preserved for us some outlines of the discourse addressed to non-believers [2]. All these texts are expressed in an identical structure that is easy to discover. It has four main characteristics which still remain the norm for all dialogue with unbelief.

a) A discourse which implies a witness

These discourses have the form of a proclamation [3]:

[2] The list of these discourses is as follows: Acts 2,14-40; 3,12-26; 4,9-12; 5,29-32; 7,2-53; 10,34-43; 13,16-41; 14,15-17; 17,22-31.

[3] The verb "to proclaim" in Greek is *kerysso* which gives us the 'English' word "Kerygma", the name that the exegetes give to this proclamation of the faith to non-believers in the NT. The phrase "Good News" in Greek appears in English as "Gospel".

good news or an event is announced. The apostles do not give a theoretical exposition of some truths to be believed but present themselves as guaranteeing an event which they have witnessed. The proclamation of the faith is above all to give a witness.

Herein lies the importance of the formula - "Of which all of us are witnesses"(Acts 2,32). The apostles imply their role of witnesses in what they say without obscuring the reality they refer to. With the Areopagus, Paul is not content to give an informative presentation about christianity: after his introduction which gives us a good picture of his audience who are in search of wisdom or truth, he does not go on to say, 'I will teach you this knowledge that you are looking for', but rather, 'I have come to announce to you precisely what you venerate without knowing it'. In effect, the message that he proposes is radically different from some teaching about God; it is not the demonstration of a philosopher but the oracle of a prophet, of someone who has witnessed what he is talking about.

b) The connection with an event and a question

The point of departure of all these proclamations of the faith is either an event that the listeners have just experienced or a philosophic question that the people are asking. This reference to the event is not simply an elaboration of the event itself. In these discourses, the word spoken is to give meaning to what, up until the present, has remained insignificant or has been susceptible of different interpretations.

And so the whole history of Israel is reassumed in this way - Christ is the meaning of this whole movement. The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is but a consequence of the resurrection (Acts 2,14), the healing of the lame man is but a manifestation of this cosmic event (Acts 3,1-10). Likewise, the state of the Apostles is interpreted as a state of drunkenness, but Peter proposes another meaning. It is the same with the question that the Greeks are wondering about - the statue to the unknown god is a part of their culture, their research. That is the starting point for showing that the question itself finds meaning in the event of Easter.

c) Adapting to the audience

The christians do not speak in the same way to everyone - they take account of the cultural background of their listeners. With the Jews, they begin with Scriptures, showing either that Christ has fulfilled them or that they remain meaningless without reference to Christ. With the Greeks there is a different approach.

In his discourse to the Areopagus, Paul sets out to develop two themes. Though the first, "God does not live in temples made by men" (Acts 17,24-25) is well attested in the Bible, the second, "God does not need anything" (Acts 17,26-27) is not at all semitic, even if it is found in the Greek Old Testament (2Mac 14,35). On the other hand, we know that it is a classical theme of Greek literature. And so Euripides, in his play about Hercules, has one of his heroes say (1345 and ff.) - "For God, in as much as he is really God, does not need anything. That is the disastrous way the poets talk!" Paul tries to enter into the thought of his listeners, so that he can go as far as possible with them. Hearing him take up their religious theme, the Athenians understood without any difficulty that he wanted to speak to them of God. Through putting their status in a favourable light, Paul succeeded in capturing their attention for a moment while disconcerting them as little as possible. The proclamation of the faith presupposes that the christian enters into the cultural and religious world of those whom he/she is addressing.

d) Two-fold fidelity to people and to God

How far can one go in adapting the message? The question will inevitably arise for the christian who wants to manifest and speak about his/her faith - to whom must I be faithful? Respect for the people whom I am addressing does not imply that I modify to their taste a word which is not my own. Without doubt, the moment may come when we will no longer be able to continue our way together; and out of respect for the message and out of respect for the people who are listening to me, we must go our separate ways. At Athens, Paul would doubtless have been more successful if, instead of speaking of the resurrection from the dead, he had spoken of immortality. Was it necessary

for Peter to remind the Jews of their sins? In these two encounters with the world, there was no question of altering the message or of ensnaring the listeners. Perhaps it is through these two signs that we recognise the authentic witnesses of the Word and of people.

3. THE REACTION OF THE NON-BELIEVERS

- ✱ The proclamation of the Gospel provokes conflicts with the world: is this a special sign of the authenticity of the Church?

The rapid growth of the Church in the aftermath of Pentecost should not obscure the other side of the reality - a growing violence against the christians, coming from the Jews and the Romans. While the Book of the Acts retraces the main stages of this painful journey, the other texts of the NT give us a glimpse, beyond their silence, of a climate of ill-treatment and here and there suggest the reason behind it.

A. THE STAGES OF A PAINFUL JOURNEY

We will follow step by step the record of the Acts, complementing it with observations from Jewish and Latin historians, in particular Flavius Josephus - author of a History of the Jews and contemporaneous with the NT - and Tacitus for the end of our period. Rather conveniently, but also somewhat arbitrarily, we can distinguish four successive waves in the attacks which the first christians suffered.

- ✱ At the beginning, a religious conflict

Towards the year 34 the first anti-christian wave broke. The successes of the new sect disquieted the Jewish religious authorities - the priests, the Levites and the Sadducees who constituted the priestly aristocracy then in

power. This explains the dispute that took place in the Temple after the healing of the cripple and during the exchange which followed. *"While they were still talking to the people the priests came up to them, accompanied by the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees. They were extremely annoyed at their teaching the people the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. They arrested them, but as it was already late, they held them till the next day"* (Acts 4, 1-3). From this we learn that the Sadducees were the authority in charge and the reason for the disagreement was on the level of doctrine. As a matter of fact, the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Lk 20,27; Mk 12,18). As for the Temple official - the number two in the religious hierarchy - in charge of maintaining respect for the rites and good order in the sanctuary, he had at his disposal a special police force which doubtless he made use of in the circumstances. As it is a religious offense, those in charge are brought before the Sanhedrin who want to know in whose name they perform their signs. Getting their answer, they threaten the disciples and forbid them to act in the name of Jesus (Acts 4). Everything takes place within the bounds of law.

Some time later, in the Temple again, the same thing occurs, but there is such a crowd around the Apostles that they are arrested discreetly. Imprisoned, they are miraculously delivered. The Sanhedrin is very much affected by it all and opinions are divided. Gamaliel, a Pharisee, proposes a solution which has already proved itself - if the activity of these men is purely human, it will eventually come to nothing; but if it comes from God, one can not take the risk of opposing God. In both cases it is better to let time pass (Acts 5,17-42). The intervention of Gamaliel shows clearly that the question remains on the religious level. Other sources lead us to think that the first christians continued to come to the Temple and to respect the observances of the Law.

The intervention of Stephen will mark a turning-point and provoke the break with Judaism. In his discourse, Stephen violently attacks the Temple and the sacrifices. This is nothing new. But, though the prophets had condemned

the cult when perverted, they had never questioned the institution[4]. If, following the prophets[5], the spiritual cult[6] was fostered among the Jewish émigré communities (the Diaspora), nevertheless the existence of the cult practised at Jerusalem was never challenged. Even at Qumran we do not find a criticism quite so radical - in that case people abstained from the cult because it was soiled and did not express "the offering of the lips". Stephen represents a radical tendency, perhaps a group of christians who thought in this way and who, according to the present state of research, came from baptist sects. Whatever the case may be, the conflict breaks out in an hellenistic circle

"But then certain people came forward to debate with Stephen, some from Cyrene and Alexandria who were members of the synagogue called the Synagogue of Freedmen, and others from Cilicia and Asia. They found they could not get the better of him because of his wisdom, and because it was the Spirit that prompted what he said. So they procured some men to say, 'We heard him using blasphemous language against Moses and against God'"

(Acts 6,9-11)

and the affair is brought before the Sanhedrin who pronounce a sentence of death against him and execute him outside the city, according to the prescriptions of Deuteronomy (17,1-7). This episode reveals that the expansion of christianity had touched extremist circles. The conflict still remains on the religious level, but a legal procedure is no longer respected for the Jews did not have the right to put anybody to death. We are in about the years 36-37.

[4] Hosea 3,4; Is 6; Jer 33,11; Mic 3,12; Jer 26,1.

[5] Amos 4,4; 5,4; 5,21-27; 9,1; Hosea 6,6; 14,3; Is 1,10-17; 29,13; Mic 6,6-8; Jer 6,20; 7,1-15 and 20-23; 11,15.

[6] In his treatise on Sacrifices, Philon of Alexandria, roughly contemporary with the NT writes: "The sacrifices represent the offering of the soul which, in every aspect, ought to offer itself as a holocaust to God" (139).

* Political persecution breaks out

Immediately after there was a new surge of violence of a clearly political nature. When Herod Agrippa I came to power in the year 37, as he had been the friend of the Roman Emperors Caligula (37-41) and Claudius (41-54), he found himself entrusted with the whole administration of Palestine [Josephus, *Histoire juive* (HJ) 18,6.7; 19,5]. More or less imposed by Rome, he wanted to gain the sympathy of the population and win favour with the Pharisees who were the dominant party. A man without scruples, sometimes he participated in the ceremonial cult, sometimes he ignored the levitical laws, striking coins which carried his image or putting on obscene and bloody spectacles (HJ 19,7). This was the political background for the arrest of James, the brother of John. Luke gives a faithful account as he writes - "*It was about this time that King Herod started persecuting certain members of the Church. He beheaded James the brother of John, and when he saw that this pleased the Jews he decided to arrest Peter as well...*" (Acts 12,1-3). This is the one whom Tradition calls James the Greater. The motif for his death is basically political - to please the Jews. We can guess what the situation of the Church was: James and Peter were seen by those outside as the leaders of the Church, and a victim of its own success, the new-born christianity managed to make itself unpopular in the eyes of an important party of the Jews. On the other hand, Luke's account closes with a significant phrase - "*The Word of God continued to spread and to gain followers*" (Acts 12,24). Herod Agrippa died in 44.

* Struggle for influence

The next phase is marked by a certain rivalry in the area of influence. This stands out clearly from the voyages of Paul. He, as we have seen, initially sought contact with the émigré Jews, but almost every time, things did not work out well. At Antioch in Pisidia, in 50-52, "*But the Jews worked upon some of the devout women of the upper classes and the leading men of the city and persuaded them to turn against Paul and Barnabas and expel them from their territory*" (Acts 13,50). At Philippi they are

accused of spreading doctrines that conflict with the edicts of Rome. They are arrested and whipped, illegally, for they were Roman citizens. They are set free but ordered to leave the city (Acts 16,11-40). At Salonika, the detractors of Paul and Silas also use a political argument to draw down on them the ire of the Roman authorities - "... They have broken every one of Caesar's edicts by claiming that there is another emperor, Jesus" (Acts 17,5-7). At Ephesus, Paul almost gets himself lynched, but fortunately for him he has a friend or sympathiser among the local authorities who shows that he has not blasphemed against their goddess - a sure sign that the whole thing was engineered: "...most of them did not even know why they had been summoned" (Acts 19,32). At Jerusalem, during Pentecost of the year 58, some Jews from Asia, seeing Paul in the Temple, accuse him of having sinned against the Jewish people, the law, and of having introduced pagans into the Temple (Acts 21,27-36). He escapes his attackers, thanks to the tribune, who has him brought before the Sanhedrin. This meeting was presided over by Ananias "who maintained his position by means of corruption" (HJ 20,9). He orders Paul to be struck in the face, and Paul answers him - "God will surely strike you, you whitewashed wall! How can you sit there to judge me according to the Law, and then break the Law by ordering a man to strike me?" (Acts 23,3). Paul had noticed some Sadducees and Pharisees at the meeting and so, to extricate himself from the situation, he introduced a matter that was a point of division between the two groups - the resurrection from the dead; and in this way he was able to retire from the scene (Acts 23). Finally at Caesarea, in the presence of the Roman authorities, the Jews have recourse to the religious argument spiced with politics. His accusers are not able to prove their claims and Paul vigorously protests his innocence ["Paul's defence was this, 'I have committed no offence whatever against either Jewish law, or the Temple, or Caesar.'" (Acts 25,8)]. He refuses to fall into the trap they lay for him that he should be judged at Jerusalem by the Jews ["But Paul replied, 'I am standing before the tribunal of Caesar and this is where I should be tried. I have done the Jews no wrong, as you very well know...'" (Acts 25,10)] and later demands to be sent to Rome, as was

his right. Paul confided to the Corinthians all the dangers that had marked his life: he mentions, among other ill-treatment he suffered, that he had received - "Five times the 39 lashes from the Jews"(2 Cor 11,24).

* Hostages of a despotic power

The last wave of persecution which falls on the communities is not reported by Luke in the Acts, but by non-christian authors. The reasons for the persecution are mixed. In the year 62, the high priest Annas, son of the one who had had Jesus condemned, and who belonged to the party of the Sadducees, profited from the death of Festus to get rid of all those who did not agree with his politics. He had James, the brother of the Lord, arrested, and some other christians. These are handed over to the tribunals and accused of transgressing the law. They are condemned and stoned (HJ 20,8). This action appears quite arbitrary when we consider the firmness with which James had defended the Jewish institutions in the conflict in which he was in opposition to Paul (Acts 15). As we can see, the first christians become a nuisance and at the same time they serve as a scape-goat in situations that the political leaders have to deal with. The same situation occurs, on a grand scale, with the persecutions of Nero. He sets the city on fire so he can rebuild it and, to calm the anger of the people, accuses the christians of being responsible for the crime (Tacitus, Annales, 15,44). According to Tertullian, one edict of Nero was to forbid a person to be a christian under pain of death (Aux Nations, 1,7). This edict served as a reason to fall back on in the persecutions conducted by the Emperors who succeeded Nero.

So, during the first century, the christians suffered all sorts of ill-treatment though there were moments of respite. In this sort of climate the authors of the NT set about their works.

B. MEANING OF THE PERSECUTION

The most likely milieu in which some particular gestures or words in the NT are recorded is a context of persecution. An example will help us see that this statement is well-founded. A certain number of the manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark stop at 16,8, with the fear and silence of the women at the tomb. The question was often asked why this Gospel finished on a note that was less than comforting, and as a result of this question, some manuscripts thought it a good idea to add a finale that is a summary drawn from the other Gospels. Now, let us imagine the conditions under which the community of Mark is actually living - Rome towards the end of the first century under Nero or one of his successors. These people believe in the resurrection of Christ but it is not very obvious in these terrible days that they are living, in fear and silence; like the women on the morning of Easter, they are profoundly upset, even crushed. Another way to verify our earlier statement is to make a record of all the themes which refer to this situation: to hate/be hated, oppress/be oppressed, pursue/be pursued, suffering, sadness... These very numerous references which appear from a reading of the text, or a concordance, reveal in a surprising way just how much this reality is present to the mind of the authors of the NT. Rather than give a long discourse, we prefer to mention simply the two main lines that we have picked up.

a) On the one hand, the persecution is very much bound up with the growth of the Church. And so Luke, after giving an account of judgment and imprisonment, notes on a number of occasions - "The word of God spread everywhere in that region" (Acts 13,49; 12,24). It is also thanks to persecution that the Church opens itself to mission and becomes dispersed: "*Those who had escaped during the persecution that happened because of Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch,...*" (Acts 11,19). This same idea is found in different words where there is reference to purification in view of mission: "(Persecution) is a sign of the judgment of God; its goal is to make you worthy of the kingdom of God for which you suf-

fer". *"We had, as you know, been given rough treatment... it was God who decided we were fit to be entrusted with the Good News."* (1 Th 2,2-4) It is a test for our faith and the authenticity of our actions (cf. James 1,3.12).

b) On the other hand, persecution is experienced by virtue of the "time" that is proper to the Church. Christ had warned His disciples that they would be "hated because of His name" (Mt 10,22; 24,9.10). And just as Christ had "to suffer to enter into His glory" (Lk 24,26), the Church must also "follow the Lamb" (Rv 14,4) and pass through the torments of the passion - arrest, imprisonment, court-decisions more or less regular, false witnesses...; and she must even, like the crucified, have the courage to pray for her tormentors [*"But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"* (Mt 5,44)]. It is Christ who relives His passion through her - *"...I am Jesus, and you are persecuting me"* (Acts 9,5).

If the past gives meaning to the suffering one undergoes, so also does the future. Persecution is the sign that the end is near (2 Th 1), or that the 'last times' have already begun [*"The time has come for the judgment to begin at the household of God; and if what we know now is only the beginning, what will it be when it comes down to those who refuse to believe God's Good News?"* (1 P 4,17)] This perspective of the end of history gives the believers the strength to face difficulties, for the roles will be reversed - *"God will very rightly repay with injury those who are injuring you, and reward you, who are suffering now, with the same peace as He will give us..."* (2 Th 1,6-7). As for those who suffer persecution - *"When the chief shepherd appears, you will be given the crown of unfading glory"* (1 P 5,4) [7].

The Holy Spirit helps Christians live out their present situation; He enables them to transform sadness into joy - *"...the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit."* (Acts 13,52), and *"...and it was with joy of the*

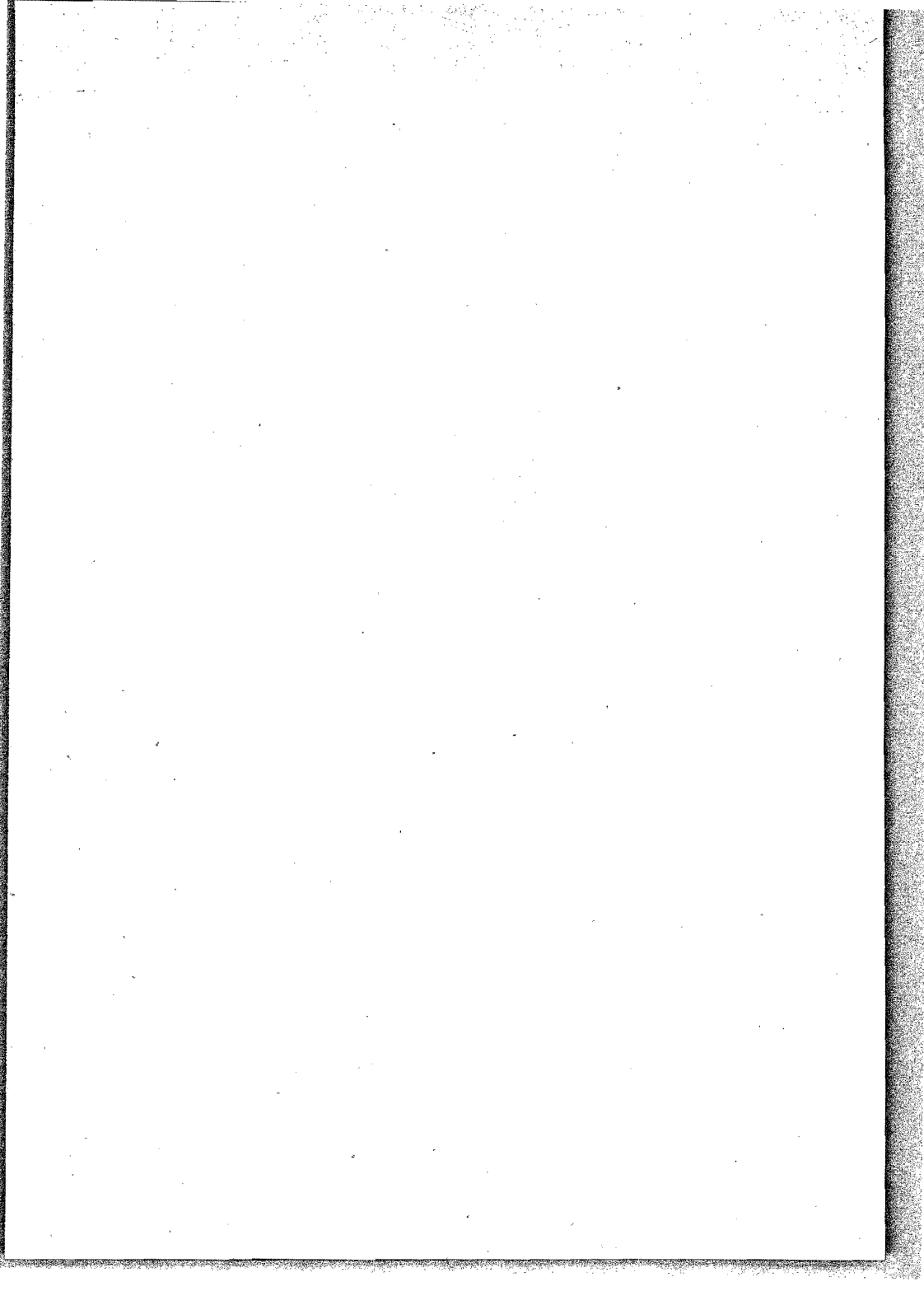
[7] Persecution is one of the major themes of the Book of Revelation.

Holy Spirit that you took to the gospel, in spite of the great opposition all around you" (1 Th 1,6).

Let us end with a passage where all these themes are mixed up together:

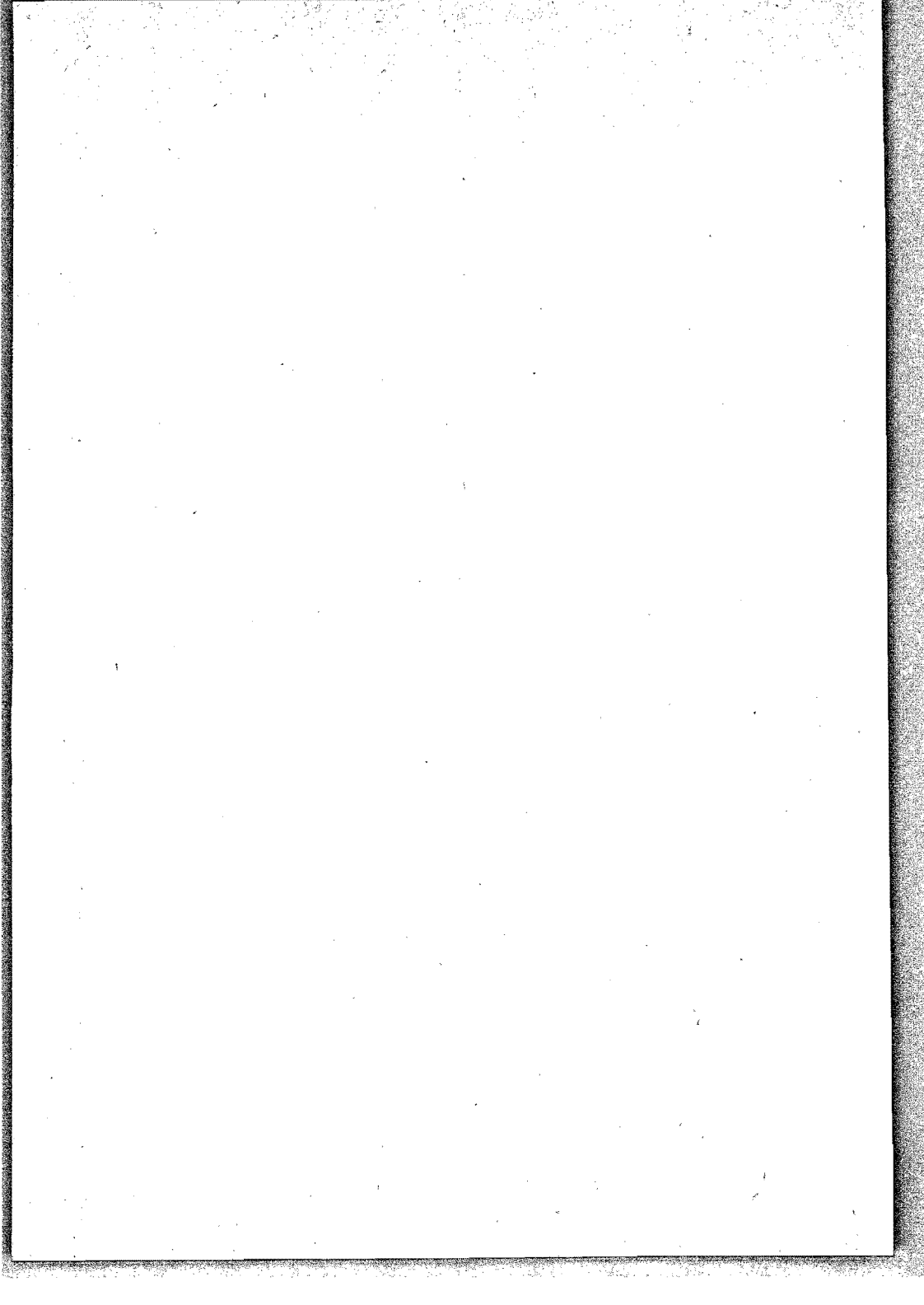
"If you can have some share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad, because you will enjoy a much greater gladness when his glory is revealed. It is a blessing for you when they insult you for bearing the name of Christ, because it means that you have the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God resting on you" (1 P 4,13-14).

In spite of the profound significance which is bound up with persecution, this latter should never be sought for in itself. On the contrary, whenever it is possible, one should flee from it and defend oneself vigorously and skillfully before one's judges. But at the same time, one can wonder about the authenticity of a Church which never knows persecution.



II

**GATHERED TOGETHER IN THE FAITH
RELATIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY**



GATHERED TOGETHER IN THE FAITH RELATIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

The expansion of christianity brought about profound changes within the communities and raised some questions for them that were difficult to answer - what were the conditions for a person to be accepted for baptism? how was one to reply to the queries of the new converts? what style of celebration was called for? how was the coherence of the group to be maintained and how was the community to be structured to foster its unity and fervour? Luke presents a serene and optimistic picture of these new beginnings; he regroups the specific activities of the communities around 4 headings:

"These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers." (Acts 2,42)

This verse gives the essentials as far as the life of the communities is concerned: the believers come together in the faith to deepen what they know and what they are living, they try to put into practice the mystery that gathers them together and they express their faith in cult or prayer. In this present chapter, we will concentrate on what focusses around the theme of understanding the faith and catechesis.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH

A. THE SITUATION OF CATECHESIS AND ITS RELATION WITH PROCLAIMING THE FAITH

When the believers address themselves to the world to speak of their faith, they go right to the essential and give out the heart of the message that inspires them. This can be summarised in a few phrases:

"Christ died for us but He is risen - we are witnesses of this. This event ushers in the 'new times' which are also the 'last times' and gives birth to a new people of God which is the Church".

This exposition is usually concluded by an appeal to conversion, that is, by an appeal to recognise "the truth" of this proclamation.

In the beginning, if the listener agreed with what was proposed, it was sufficient for him/her to ask for baptism, and this was conferred without any delay. This emerges from the brief summaries which follow the discourses we find in the Acts - on the day of Pentecost, three thousand people join the community (Acts 2,37-41). Cornelius and all his household are likewise introduced into the Church without having to wait (Acts 10,34-48). When Philip meets with the Eunuch, he agrees to baptise him after a relatively brief explanation (Acts 8,26-40). Certainly these people were searching, and well disposed, but one cannot help being surprised at such rapid procedures.

This practice must not have lasted very long, and more guarantees were asked of the candidates to avoid disappointment (Cf. Acts 5,1-11). From the end of the second century an institution was born which continues up to the present day - the catechumenate. Rather than give baptism to people immediately after they accepted the message, and replied to questions, the rite of baptism was deferred and a whole process of education in the faith took place - the pre-baptismal catechesis.

It would be pointless to try to find traces of this type of catechesis in the NT. As a matter of fact, it remains impossible to separate clearly between what belongs to the proclamation of the faith and what to catechesis. Without forcing the texts, we can discover two complementary approaches which in time become separated. First of all there is the proclamation of the faith (the kerygma) - telling an audience who are non-believers about the message of the Gospel. Catechesis, on the other hand, presupposes that one's audience is moving towards the faith

and wants to understand what they have some knowledge about. They expect the community to reply to their questions and their sole request is to enter into the tradition of this community. This second step is easily seen in several texts, especially in Acts 8,26-40. A simple comparison with the discourse of Peter shows significant differences:

Acts 2

public character of the initiative;
the public were not expecting anything
the point of departure:
a happening which really poses a question
the happening finds its meaning in the resurrection of Christ
Jesus fulfills the Scriptures
After a question, baptism is proposed
conversion and baptism eventuate
it is a proclamation of the faith in a discourse which the listeners follow.

Acts 8

private character of the process of instruction;
the eunuch wants to know something
the point of departure:
the problem in the text
the Scriptures are fulfilled in Christ whose resurrection is their central point
This particular Scripture passage is fulfilled in Jesus
Baptism is explicitly asked for
baptism eventuates
we have a succession of questions and replies.

The simple comparison of these two texts is quite revealing for our understanding of the two approaches which underlie them. The proclamation of the faith is a declaration, catechesis is an instruction—a program of education. Luke has put this across extremely well by using the image of a journey — the progress of the chariot is the sign of the whole process of interior transformation which takes

place. There is the same scenario in the account of Emmaus. These two scenes suggest how people may be guided and helped in their understanding of the faith - a true catechesis.

B. THE FUNCTION OF CATECHESIS

The first function of the proclamation of the faith consists in giving out the essential of the christian message. The prime function of catechesis will be to recall this message and to develop it. In the proclamation of the message, there is no moving into secondary explanations nor into details concerning Jesus of Nazareth. See, for example, what we learn from Peter's discourse (Acts 2) about the life of Jesus. Likewise, with regard to the resurrection of Christ, the accounts in the Acts all pass over, in silence, the empty tomb and are extremely discreet about the appearances of Christ. The catechesis of the Epistles or the Gospels completes this basic teaching through proceeding in three ways:

- through spelling out the content of the claim - "Christ has risen, He has appeared"; an account follows of the apparitions of Jesus
- through drawing out the consequences of the resurrection
- through replying to the questions that the listeners pose.

Let us refer just to one typical example - 1 Cor 15. In this chapter, Paul proceeds in three stages: he recalls the common faith and the difficulty of his audience, he then shows the connection which exists between the resurrection of Christ and ours, and, finally, he inserts a question dealing with how the resurrection takes place. We would suggest our readers go through all of chapter 15, and discover there these three parts: a) the reminder of the common faith (verses 3-4); b) the examination of the doubt of the Corinthians (verses 12-19) followed by Paul's argumentation with the help of the theme of the two Adams (verses 20-28); the response to the "how" of the resurrection of the dead, using the comparison with the seed (verses 35-56).

While Philip started from a problem in the text of Isaiah and enlightened his listener by referring to the resurrection, Paul starts from the faith of the Corinthians in the resurrection and a question they pose. In both cases, the catechesis tries to shed light, to bring together what, at first sight, seem unconnected.

C. THE GOSPELS AS CATECHESIS

The Gospels are also marked by a catechesis for they were put to writing in milieux where a whole host of questions were bubbling around. The presentation of the gestures and the sayings which the editors still remembered were coloured by this state of affairs and consequently it is pointless and impossible to want to find behind the text the detailed account of a particular gesture or the word by word composition of a particular saying. The accounts we have are the meeting-point where the faith of the community and the memory it keeps of Jesus come together and fuse. What we propose to do here is to show the influence of the questions that the community was facing on the transmission of the text, both in the discourses and the narratives.

* In the discourses, what happens is that a question is formulated on which Jesus has made a pronouncement. This kind of dialogue between a person asking a question and Jesus is the most elementary form of a process of instruction - we may recall the Dialogues of Plato or our own catechesis of 25 years ago. To give some examples of what we are thinking about:

- "What must I do to possess eternal life?" (Mt 19,16)
- "What is the greatest commandment of the Law?" (Mt 22,34)
- "Why do the Scribes say that Elias must come first?" (Mt 17,10).

Moreover, the question varies from one Gospel to another. So:

- "Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife?" (Mk 10,2).
- "Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?" (Mt 19,3).

These formulas are basically aimed at introducing the response that Jesus gives to them. But it can also happen that the response is somewhat modified as is the case with the last two verses cited.

The influence of catechesis also makes its presence felt in the use of certain stylistic procedures - a series of sentences very well phrased, some phrases that are linked together through one word that is repeated several times (cf. Lk 16,9-15).

✱ The Gospel narratives follow this rule. A comparison of the calming of the storm in Matthew (8,23-27) and in Mark (4,36-41) allows us to grasp quite vividly the editorial work of the authors. Matthew has worked over the text in three ways - he places it in a new setting, his own account is constructed differently from Mark and Luke, and he suppresses a certain number of details.

a) A new setting

The literary 'unit' where this narration is inserted goes from 4,23 to 9,35. Matthew has included in this passage of Scripture a certain number of miracles that Mark and Luke place in another framework. This series of miracles is introduced and concluded with the same phrase - *"He went round the whole of Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people"*.

Through this arrangement of the material, Matthew puts together what concerns the miracles of Jesus, to show us His complete power over the forces of evil as indicated by the verse we have just quoted.

The immediate context projects a slightly different meaning onto the text. Twice people speak of following Jesus, being with Him, and Jesus' response is quite clear (8,19-22). Matthew is the only one to place these two sentences here. Then he links, without any transition:

"...He got into the boat followed by His disciples" (8,23). Mark seems to indicate that it was rather the dis-

ciples who led Jesus into the boat (Mk 4,36). Given the way that this is linked (in Matthew) with what precedes the calming of the storm, does it not become a vivid illustration of the concrete way in which the disciple is invited to follow Jesus, that is, to embark with Him in the midst of uncertainty and dangers?

b) The rearrangement of the material

In Mark and in Luke, Jesus begins by calming the sea before rebuking the disciples; in Matthew, we find the inverse order. The immediate context poses the question - on what conditions can one follow Jesus? Matthew gives the reply in the narrative of the miracle. In the heart of the storm, He invites these "timid believers" to develop their faith in Him because it still had no proper roots. We may also be somewhat surprised that these are the people who are full of admiration at the end of the narrative. Perhaps this is a way of inviting those who stop short at the 'miraculous' aspect of things to pass beyond this attitude. In this narrative, Matthew tells us in a simple and imaginative way what it is to believe in Jesus.

c) The suppression of certain details

Mark reports, in detail, and in a vivid and lively way, the violence of the storm: "...the waves began to spill over the boat... Jesus was in the back of the boat, sleeping with His head on a pillow... Jesus said to the waves...". Matthew has suppressed these details to retain only the essential - with Jesus there is nothing to fear. Mark wishes rather to show the power of Jesus. Finally, Matthew has transformed the cry of the disciples into a confession of faith. Not "Master" or "Teacher" as in Luke or Mark, but, "Lord, save us". Catechesis leads the disciple to adore before receiving baptism.

D. THE FORMS OF CATECHESIS

Is there any possibility of reconstituting the forms which catechesis took in the NT? Research has succeeded in detecting two types of catechesis in the texts, each

one showing common traits and characteristic points. Unfortunately these two models have not come down to us as separate and distinct so that the distinction made between them, though helpful, is hypothetical.

a) The oldest model

This first type of catechesis reflects quite well the situation described in Acts 15,20-29:

"...we send them a letter telling them merely to abstain from anything polluted by idols, from fornication, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has always had his preachers in every town, and is read aloud in the synagogues every sabbath.

Then the apostles and elders decided to choose delegates to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; the whole church concurred with this. They chose Judas known as Barsabbas and Silas, both leading men in the brotherhood, and gave them this letter to take with them:

'The apostles and elders, your brothers, send greetings to the brothers of pagan birth in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. We hear that some of our members have disturbed you with their demands and have unsettled your minds. They acted without any authority from us, and so we have decided unanimously to elect delegates and to send them to you with Barnabas and Paul, men we highly respect who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly we are sending you Judas and Silas, who will confirm by word of mouth what we have written in this letter. It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from fornication. Avoid these, and you will do what is right. Farewell.'"

It can be characterised by two expressions that are to be found in several places - the catechumens are invited to abstain from impure things according to the norms of Leviticus (cf. Lv 17²-26), and to grow in holiness (cf. 1 Th 4, 3-12; 5,4-8,22; 1 Peter 1,14-21; 2,4-10; Ep 4,17-19; Tt 2, 12-14; Rm 13,8-10). Now, in these passages the distinction between 'outside'/'inside' proves very significant.

The counsels for 'purity' reflect an eschatological climate where one is invited to live as a child of light, that is, not to compromise oneself with what brings defilement, and to render to God a "sacrificial" worship modelled on the sacrifices of the Old Alliance. All these elements together clearly reflect a milieu marked by Judaism and constitute a genuine adaptation of the ancient levitical code for Jews who have accepted faith in Jesus Christ.

b) The more recent model

Some years later, a new type of catechesis came to be worked out, and developed, but not independently - it was superimposed on the first model. However, we can detach its themes quite clearly and we can get the feeling that one has 'changed gears'. The key expressions of this second model are the following - the catechumen is requested to reject, actively, things which are objectively bad, such as sin and evil desires, and to 'put on' justice and to practise virtues which have a social influence - on the family, life in society (1 Th 5,8; Rm 13,11-14; 1 P 3,3-12; Ep 4,20-24; 4,32-5,1; 5,21-6). In this second type of catechesis appear the lists of vices or virtues that we find in the NT. The distinction between the 'outside' and the 'inside' is stressed less and the sense of worship has changed - it has become more spiritual and so more free (1 Th 5,19-21; Ep 5,15-20). The eschatological expectation has taken on the appearance of a combat (Ep 6,10-20). This second model was born and developed in a pagan milieu.

As in proclaiming the faith, we see that the word of the believers is adapted to the different publics. There are no models ready-made, once and for all, which can be used in any kind of milieu. The NT shows us adjustments being made according to the new needs that made themselves felt. However, in the two models we have seen, the triple references to the faith, worship (cult) and action of the believers are inseparately linked. These three pillars of the christian catechesis always go together and they will remain the norm for any understanding of the faith. Of course, they can be replaced, as in the third and fourth centuries, by three different approaches - a dogmatic catechesis, a sacramental catechesis and a moral catechesis;

or as in the catechisms of 25 years ago - truths to be believed, sacraments to be received and virtues to be practised. But to separate or to neglect one of these themes always leads to the destruction of catechesis as it is proposed in the NT.

2. THE LITURGICAL LIFE

A. A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN VOCABULARY

The vocabulary of worship (cult) is very commonly employed in the NT, but its use is very rigorous. It serves to designate pagan ceremonies

"...they have given up divine truth for a lie and have worshipped and served creatures instead of the creator, who is blessed for ever" (Rm 1,25); or

"The priests of Zeus-outside-the-Gate, proposing that all the people should offer sacrifice with them, brought garlanded oxen to the gates" (Acts 14,13)

and the religious practices of the Jews. Mention is made of Anna's participation in the liturgical life of the Temple

"She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer" (Lk 2,37)

and the service that Zechariah carried out

"Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were surprised that he stayed in the sanctuary so long" (Lk 1,21).

It is also recorded that Paul, on returning from a voyage, went to the Temple to present an offering

"After several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to make offerings..." (Acts 24,17).

When there is talk of sacrifices, that almost always refers to those of the OT

"Every high priest has been taken out of mankind and is appointed to act for men in their relations with God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins..." (Heb 5,1);

"To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice " (Mk 12,33).

It is the same with the word 'priest' which designates either the sacred ministers of the people of Israel

"Mind you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence of your recovery " (Mk 1,44);

"...how he went into the house of God when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the loaves of offering which only the priests are allowed to eat..." (Mk 2,26);

"...When he saw them he said, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests '" (Lk 17,14);

"While they were still talking to the people the priests came up to them, accompanied by the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees " (Acts 4,1);

"It could be said that Levi himself, who receives tithes, actually paid them, in the person of Abraham, because he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek came to meet him.

Now if perfection had been reached through the levitical priesthood because the Law given to the nation rests on it, why was it still necessary for a new priesthood to arise, one of the same order as Melchizedek not counted as being of the same order as Aaron?" (Heb 7,9-11),

or those of the pagans

"The priests of Zeus-outside-the-Gate, proposing that all the people should offer sacrifice with them, brought garlanded oxen to the gates " (Acts 14,13).

Outside of these uses, the liturgical vocabulary never designates, in the NT, a particular person or a particular act, but always Christ or the whole community.

3. THE THREE-FOLD ORIENTATION OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP (CULT)

Worship is rooted in Jesus Christ, the only priest, the unique victim and the new temple of God

Christ is the only person in the NT on whom is conferred

the title of "priest"

"For it was about him that the prophecy was made: You are a priest of the order of Melchizedek, and for ever" (Heb 7,17)

or "mediator"

"He brings a new covenant, as the mediator, only so that the people who were called to an eternal inheritance may actually receive what was promised: his death took place to cancel the sins that infringed the earlier covenant" (Heb 9,15).

And yet He did not come from the sole priestly tribe - the tribe of Levi - but from the tribe of Judah which is the royal tribe

"Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, Tamar being their mother, Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram was the father of Amminadab,..." (Mt 1,3).

So He does not hold His priesthood from men, but it is a gratuitous gift from God

"No one takes this honour on himself, but each one is called by God, as Aaron was. Nor did Christ give himself the glory of becoming high priest, but he had it from the one who said to him: You are my son, today I have become your father..." (Heb 5,4-5).

In virtue of this fact, His is a new priesthood and an absolutely fresh beginning in the completely new relations with God. This is the reason why He is associated with Melchizedek who appears and then disappears. Although in Israel, one was a priest by birth, Christ becomes so through His death

"...one who would not need to offer sacrifices every day, as the other high priests do for their own sins and then for those of the people, because he has done this once and for all by offering himself" (Heb 7,27);

"...so Christ, too, offers himself only once to take the faults of many on himself..." (Heb 9,28).

But there is an even more significant difference with regard to the priesthood of the OT - Christ's mediation between man and God is really efficacious

"We have seen that he has been given a ministry of a far higher order, and to the same degree it is a better covenant of which he is the mediator, founded on better promises" (Heb 8,6);

"He brings a new covenant, as the mediator, only so that the people who were called to an eternal inheritance may actually receive what was promised; his death took place to cancel the sins that infringed the earlier covenant " (Heb 9,15);

"...and to Jesus, the mediator who brings a new covenant and a blood for purification which pleads more insistently than Abel's " (Heb 12,24)

for it truly purifies us of our sins

"He is the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature, sustaining the universe by his powerful command; and now he has destroyed the defilement of sin..." (Heb 1,3);

"It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God's religion, able to atone for human sins " (Heb 2,17).

On the other hand, this priesthood cannot be handed on

"...but this one, because he remains for ever, can never lose his priesthood." (Heb 7,24).

* The service of the Temple each day required its quota of victims. For the people this was a way for them to offer themselves to God, by means of an animal. Christ is both priest and victim

"...one who would not need to offer sacrifices every day, as the other high priests do for their own sins and then for those of the people, because he has done this once and for all by offering himself " (Heb 7,27);

"...and this is what he said, on coming into the world: You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me. You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sin; then I said, just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book, 'God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will.'

Notice that he says first: You did not want what the law lays down as the things to be offered, that is: the sacrifices, the oblations, the holocausts and the sacrifices for sin, and you took no pleasure in them; and then he says: Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. He is abolishing the first sort to replace it with the second " (Heb 10,5-9)

for it is in His own blood that the new alliance is sealed
"*Drink all of you from this,*" he said *"for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins..."* (Mt 26,28);
"*In the same way he took the cup after supper, and said, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me'*" (1 Cor 11,25).

The death of Christ is reread in terms of being a "real liturgy"

"We have seen that he has been given a ministry of a far higher order, and to the same degree it is a better covenant of which he is the mediator, founded on better promises" (Heb 8,6)

or a "real offering"

"...and follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God" (Ep 5,2).

Christ gives His life - like the Servant (Is 53) - because this is a gift from the Father. But, again, there is a noticeable difference in comparison with the sacrifices of the old law - Christ is a perfect and holy victim

"To suit us, the ideal high priest would have to be holy, innocent and uncontaminated, beyond the influence of sinners, and raised up above the heavens..." (Heb 7,26)
who accomplishes once and for all what these sacrifices only prefigured

"...and he has entered the sanctuary once and for all, taking with him not the blood of goats and bull calves, but his own blood, having won an eternal redemption for us" (Heb 9,12);

"And this will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ."
(Heb 10,10).

John understood this when he saw that Jesus did not have His legs broken on the cross (Jn 19,34-37; Ex 12,46).

* The work of Christ marks the end of the institution of the Temple. Had not Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple

"We heard him say, 'I am going to destroy this Temple made by human hands, and in three days build another, not made by human hands'" (Mk 14,58),

and had He not suggested to the Samaritan woman that it would soon be possible to adore God anywhere in Spirit and in truth

"Jesus said: 'Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem'" (Jn 4,21)?

That happens on the day of Christ's death and is signified through the veil of the Temple being rent

"At that the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom..." (Mt 27,51);

"Here we have an anchor for our soul, as sure as it is firm, and reaching right through beyond the veil..." (Heb 6,19);

"...by a new way which he has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his body" (Heb 10,20).

The new Temple is henceforth the Body of Christ

"Jesus answered, 'Destroy this sanctuary, and in three days I will raise it up'" (Jn 2,19)

and God no longer lives in a building made by human hands (Acts 6,13-14; 7,47-48; Heb 8-10).

* Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the christian community can celebrate God authentically

* Whether we are in the Spirit (1 Cor 6,11.17)

"These are the sort of people some of you were once, but now you have been washed clean, and sanctified, and justified through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the Spirit of our God"

"But anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him"

or whether He lives in us, it is through His mediation that we have access to genuine worship (cult)

"Jesus said: 'Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour will come - in fact it is here already - when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father wants.'" (Jn 4,21-23).

As Christ is henceforth the only priest, the unique sacrifice and the new Temple, the Spirit grafts us onto Him - "He makes us sharers in Christ"(Rm 8,9) and "sons in the Son"(Ga 4,6), and "He comes to help us..."(Rm 8,26).

Thanks to Him we can discover where we belong and our relation to the Father, and He can cry in us - "Abba! Father!" (Rm 8,15) or help us discern that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12,3), in other words, that Jesus is not simply a man among men. It is He who brings about the unity of the Body of Christ which is the Church, and His gifts are to be found at work there(1 Cor 12). There are many gifts, but it is the same Spirit (1 Cor 12,13).

* It is He who dwells in our bodies and in the community, making them the place where the new holiness is to be found. On two occasions, Paul reminds us that "we are the temple of God, dwelt in by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 3,16) and "the house of God" (1 Tm 3,15). With Christ and in the Spirit, the place where God is to be met is no longer a particular place in the world, but the body of the person who glorifies God

"Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God" (1 Cor 6,19).

✠ In the new covenant, the celebration makes present the liturgy "from above" and anticipates that of the world to come

Hope is always a dimension of every celebration; without doubt, this is the aspect we miss out on most in our assemblies. The dimension of hope, in celebration, is clearly expressed in the NT under two different but complementary forms.

* Expressed in terms of space, there is a contrast made between the liturgy "from above" and the liturgy "from below" -that of heaven and that of earth. On the one hand, we are insistently invited to contemplate the heavenly liturgy (Rv 4-5), and on the other hand, to model ours on it, especially giving it a universal character. For

if the heavenly worship (cult) reunites men of every nation, race, people and language

"After that I saw a huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language; they were standing in front of the throne and in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palms in their hands. They shouted aloud, 'Victory to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels who were standing in a circle round the throne, surrounding the elders and the four animals, prostrated themselves before the throne, and touched the ground with their foreheads, worshipping God with these words, 'Amen. Praise and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and strength to our God for ever and ever. Amen '" (Rv 7,9-12),

the earthly one should also move in the direction of transcending all particularities. And so it is for everybody to "understand" - each in his/her own tongue - the wonders of God

"...and we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God " (Acts 2,11),

so that "every tongue may confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Ph 2,11). This completely does away with any spirit of partisanship

"...and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus " (Ga 3,28).

* The assembly which comes together to celebrate its Lord considers itself as the assembly characterised by "the last times". Through the enlightenment which baptism brings a person is introduced into the world to come

"Remember all the sufferings that you had to meet after you received the light, in earlier days..." (Heb 10,32);

"...and appreciated the good message of God and the powers of the world to come..." (Heb 6,5),

And by celebrating the Lord's Supper

"The point is, when you hold these meetings, it is not the Lord's Supper that you are eating..." (1 Cor 11,20)

re/she anticipates "the feast of the Lamb" (Rv 19,7-9).

The christian has the surety that it is in the course of a meal of this kind that "the Son of Man will come to eat

with His own" (cf. Rv 3,20-21). But, alas! reality shows all too clearly that one is not yet completely under the sign of the last times, and so one is led to desire ardently the presence (parousia) of the Lord:

"The Spirit and the Spouse (i.e. the Church) say to the Lord - Come!"

(Rv 22,17; cf. Rv 6,10; 10,7; 11,17-18; 12,10-12; 15,3-4; 19,7-9; 20,3-4).

The two images (of space and time) are put side by side in Matthew's version of the Our Father, in the Ecumenical Translation of the Bible. This translation brings out very clearly the meaning that lies there - "May your kingdom come; may your will be accomplished on earth in the image of heaven"(Mt 6,10).

C. MOVING BEYOND THE DISTINCTION SACRED/PROFANE

The distinctions pure/impure, sacred/profane, priest/laity conveyed by the OT come to lose their relevance in the worship (cult) of the new covenant. Apart from Christ, no one can possess priestly power in the sense of the OT.

* In effect, it is the whole community - in its members - who form a holy priesthood (1 P 2,5-10) or "a kingdom of priests" (Rv 1,6). All of us, through sharing in Christ and the Spirit, are involved in this priestly movement[8].

* Henceforth sacrifices become useless. It is our own person that we have to offer to God:

"Think of God's mercy, my brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly

[8] In this perspective, the title of priest, or priestly ministry, that Tradition will use can only be analogous. This does not exclude, as we shall see, that certain members of the community preside over prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist.

pleasing to God " (Rm 12,1) [9]

Consequently, the whole of daily existence takes on a 'sacred' value and is carried out like a liturgical service. The area reserved to God is not some particular action but all that He has given to men and women to live out. We will limit ourselves to giving some of the more significant examples. Paul does not hesitate to speak of "the proclamation of the Gospel" in cultic and priestly terms

"He has appointed me as a priest of Jesus Christ, and I am to carry out my priestly duty by bringing the Good News from God to the pagans, and so make them acceptable as an offering, made holy by the Holy Spirit" (Rm 15,16)
- "...my life's blood is to be poured out like an offering on the sacrifice that your faith offers to God"(Ph 2,17). All one's time should be consecrated to God - "Pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances", Paul recommends to the Thessalonians (1 Th 5,16-22). Everything that can be a part of our life takes on a new meaning, even the most ordinary actions - "Whether you eat or whether you drink, whatever you do, do all for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10,31). Everything is linked up - prayer, concrete action and reflection - "Pray... and keep yourselves in the love of God as you wait for Our Lord Jesus Christ in His mercy..." (Jude 20-21). This aspect of things was already evident in the work of catechesis.

D. NEVERTHELESS RITES ARE NECESSARY...

Under pain of sinking into ideology or pure intellectualism, the expression of faith cannot reduce itself to a mere quest of the intelligence or lose itself in concrete

[9] This is a rather free translation from the Greek, to indicate that Christ has abolished the observance of the old Law and that the situation of the christian - 'the christian condition' - qualifies one's relations with God (Ep 2,11-22).

living. The person or the community - by means of gestures or particular words - have to be able to signify in a complete way, with the body, words, feelings, their relation to God. Though, in the new covenant, every action has become holy (sanctified), it nevertheless remains necessary to have recourse to signs to show forth, with greater intensity, what one is living at each moment. We will consider four of the more central points.

✱ Where does the community come together to celebrate?

For a number of years, the christians frequented the Temple of Jerusalem

"They went as a body to the Temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread..." (Acts 2,46).

Paul himself goes there on returning from his journeys (Acts 21; 22,17). In the other cities, they participated in the services of the synagogue to celebrate the Sabbath. Outside of these places, the christians celebrated or prayed in their homes

"They went as a body to the Temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread..." (Acts 2,46);

"They preached every day both in the Temple and in private houses, and their proclamation of the Good News of Christ Jesus was never interrupted " (Acts 5,42),

but in the one place, together. And so we are told of the houses of Priscilla and Aquila

"... Aquila and Prisca, with the church that meets at their house, send you their warmest wishes, in the Lord " (1 Cor 16,19);

"My greetings to Prisca and Aquila... also to the church that meets at their house " (Rm 16,3-5),

or of Nympha at Laodicea

"Please give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church which meets in her house " (Col 4,15).

Doubtless, it was only much later that the first christians looked for places of worship apart from Judaism.

❖ When do the meetings take place?

In this area, likewise, the Jewish prescriptions remained in force for quite some time. Here and there one notes that the daily time-table of Jewish prayers was the rule for a person's devotion - Peter goes up on the terrace at the sixth hour

"Next day, while they were still on their journey and had only a short distance to go before reaching Jaffa, Peter went to the housetop at about the sixth hour to pray " (Acts 10,9)

and Paul observed the feasts of the Passover

"...Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed; let us celebrate the feast, then, by getting rid of all the old yeast of evil and wickedness, having only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5,7-8)

or of Pentecost

"Paul had decided to pass wide of Ephesus so as to avoid spending time in Asia, since he was anxious to be in Jerusalem, if possible, for the day of Pentecost " (Acts 20,16);

"In any case I shall be staying at Ephesus until Pentecost because a big and important door has opened for my work and there is a great deal of opposition " (1 Cor 16,8).

The Sabbath was to be questioned only much later and replaced by the first day of the week, named - for quite a long time - after "the Day of the Lord"

"...it was the Lord's day and the Spirit possessed me.." (Rv 1,10),

but taken very early as the day commemorating the resurrection of Christ (Mt 28,1; Mk 16,2; Lk 24,1; Jn 20,1.9).

❖ What form do these meetings take? Acts 2,42 is a key text in this matter:

"These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers."

It is more than probable that the structure of the meeting was modelled on the synagogue service, with some

modification here and there - one began with a recitation from Deuteronomy 6,4 and 11,13-21 and Numbers 15,37-41 [10].

Then came a series of blessings -eighteen- of praise or requests. This was followed by the reading of a passage of the Pentateuch [11] and of another text from the Bible, left to the choice of the celebrant or the reader (Lk 4, 17-21).

Very soon, Paul's letters came to be considered as part of the Scriptures

"He always writes like this when he deals with this sort of subject, and this makes some points in his letter hard to understand; these are the points that uneducated and unbalanced people distort, in the same way as they distort the rest of scripture - a fatal thing for them to do " (2P 3,16).

The Gospels were read and composed within this context. As in our eucharistic liturgy, what followed next was a commentary on the text or an instruction (cf. Lk 4,17-21; Acts 13,15-41). It is in this type of assembly that we should situate the ritual meals soon called "the breaking of bread" (Lk 24,35; Acts 2,41-42) or "the Lord's Supper" (1 Cor 11,20) [12].

★ **What did people say in their prayers or during the celebration?** Spontaneous prayer was strongly recommended *"Pray all the time, asking for what you need, praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion " (Ep 6,18).*

[10] This prayer was called Shéma, from the first word of Deuteronomy 6,4 - "Listen".

[11] The first 5 books of the Bible, also called the Law.

[12] Within the limitations of this work, it is not possible to give the significance and the structure of the Eucharist. However, it is not one rite among others; it is the centre of the whole christian life; St. Irenaeus speaks of "the cup which sums up everything".

For spontaneous prayer, cf. 1 Cor 14,26; Ep 5,18-20; Col 3,16-17; Rm 15,5-6; Acts 16,25; James 5,13, where the word "psalm" probably does not refer to one of the psalms of the OT.

There is a good example of improvised prayer in Acts 4,24-30

"When they heard it they lifted up their voice to God all together. 'Master,' they prayed 'it is you who made heaven and earth and sea, and everything in them; you it is who said through the Holy Spirit and speaking through our ancestor David, your servant:

*Why this arrogance among the nations,
these futile plots among the peoples?*

*Kings on earth setting out to war,
princes making an alliance,*

against the Lord and against his Anointed.

This is what has come true: in this very city Herod and Pontius Pilate made an alliance with the pagan nations and the peoples of Israel, against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed, but only to bring about the very thing that you in your strength and your wisdom had predetermined should happen. And now, Lord, take note of their threats and help your servants to proclaim your message with all boldness, by stretching out your hand to heal and to work miracles and marvels through the name of your holy servant Jesus "

where biblical quotations and phrases coined by the apostles are mixed up together. Even the prayers attributed to the Lord have undergone some changes according to the preoccupations of the authors. For example, compare the Our Father in Luke (11,1-4) and Matthew (6,9-13), or the accounts of the last supper of Jesus (Mt 26; Mk 14; Lk 22; 1 Cor 11,23-26).

The NT has preserved some of these compositions that can be divided into different groups:

- Canticles (psalms), also called hymns [13] that we repeat in our liturgies. Some are in honour of God, like the

[13] 1 Cor 14,26; Ep 5,19; Jm 5,13; Col 3,16; Ep 5,19.

Magnificat; others celebrate the mysteries of Christ - His pre-existence, His incarnation or His glorification. For example, 2 Tm 2,11-18; Ph 2,6-11; John 1. Still others are related to the baptism of the believer - 1 Peter 1,3-5; 3,18-22; 2,22-25; 5,5-9.

- **Doxologies** (a formula which begins with "Glory to..."), most often addressed to the Father, sometimes to Christ. There are some twenty of these - e.g. Rv 5,13-14:
"Then I heard all the living things in creation - everything that lives in the air, and on the ground, and under the ground, and in the sea, crying, 'To the One who is sitting on the throne and to the Lamb, be all praise, honour, glory and power, for ever and ever'. And the four animals said, 'Amen'; and the elders prostrated themselves to worship."
- **Blessings** (a formula beginning with "Blessed be...") in honour of the Father and the Son - e.g. 2 Cor 1,3-4[14]:
"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, a gentle Father and the God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our sorrows, so that we can offer others, in their sorrows, the consolation that we have received from God ourselves."
- **Invocations** - cf. 1 Cor 16,22; Rv 20,20; 1 Th 3,11; 2 Th 2,16.
- **Acts of thanksgiving** to the Father or to Christ - e.g. 1 Tm 1,12:
"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, and who judged me faithful enough to call me into his service..."

We may notice that the majority of these prayers are addressed to God and that Christ is included most often as mediator - "I thank my God through Jesus Christ" (Rm 1,8). This is quite in conformity with the role given to Christ in the design of God: Later on prayer directly addressed to the Lord Jesus will develop.

[14] Cf. Lk 1,68ff; 1 Peter 1,3-4; 2 Cor 11,31; Rm 1,25; 9,5; Ep 1,3-14.

3. THE PLACE OF PERSONS - AND THEIR ROLE - IN THE COMMUNITIES

Now that we have seen the activities characteristic of the life of the Church (proclaiming the faith, catechesis and liturgical life), we turn to the persons who were responsible for them. It is not so much their competence which claims our attention but rather their mutual relationships and positions within the communities. It should be noted, right at the beginning, that the NT was familiar with neither the institutional dimension nor the charismatic dimension as 'pure states', but rather with an harmonious mixture of both of these, according to the different stages of its development.

A. DIFFERENT EXPRESSIONS (OF THE CHURCH) IN SPACE AND TIME

The different ways in which the Church was structured correspond to the three important changes it had to cope with.

a) The period of coming together after Easter (between 30 and 45, at Jerusalem)

* Initially composed of Jews coming from Palestine and speaking Aramean - Hebrews, as they were called - the community gathered in converts, almost immediately, who had doubtless known and followed Jesus. They formed a group around The Twelve^[15]. This number recalls the twelve tribes of Israel and has to be maintained during all this period, even after the defection of Judas (Acts 1,15-26). Present at the last meal of Jesus (Mk 14,17-20), they have accompanied Him from the baptism of John to be witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 1,21-22). Their essential role is to give a collective witness of this event; this is

[15] We must distinguish: The Twelve, Apostles and Disciples. The oldest term is "The Twelve". It is only much later that "The Twelve" and "The Apostles" are joined together in the Gospels. Cf. Mt 10,2, Mk 6,30 and Lk 6,13.

the meaning of the appearance to the Eleven. To this function which cannot be passed on, other tasks are added - teaching, presiding over the prayers and the breaking of bread

"These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2,42),

and managing the goods of the community (Acts 4,34-35 and 36-37; 5,2)

"None of their members was ever in want, as all those who owned land or houses would sell them, and bring the money from them, to present it to the apostles; it was then distributed to any members who might be in need."

* With the arrival of the new converts, the group proceeds to lose its homogeneity, particularly on account of the Jews who came from the diaspora or lived in Jerusalem; these Jews spoke Greek and were consequently known as Hellenists (Acts 2). Conflict broke out concerning the division of goods

"About this time, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked." (Acts 6,1).

What to do? To split the community into two parties would have been irreconcilable with the unity of the Church. What was needed was to find a structure which would maintain the unity while respecting the differences and the role of the Twelve. The latter, then, kept a place apart. The sub-group of the Hellenists was given a special service to look after them - the Seven [16]. The other group, of the Hebrews, was taken in charge by the Hebrews themselves, among whom can be placed James, the brother of the Lord.

* However, the differences were due not only to a question of language but also to religious options that were quite contrary. Stephen, for example, represents the tendency to break with Judaism. James, the brother of the

[16] This number refers, perhaps, to the 7 members who exercised authority in the communities of the diaspora.

Lord, is the leader of a group who do not think it is necessary to break with the Jewish institutions.

b) The period of people being sent off (between 45 and 65, -from Antioch)

Towards 45, persecution dispersed the community of Jerusalem, a certain number of whom took refuge in Antioch. It is from there that the Church spread to Asia, Greece and Italy. Through cross-checking documents with one another in different ways, we can identify two types of communities:

* The most common model seems to be the one that doubtless served at Antioch. We can distinguish there two kinds of functions: in order of priority comes the person who is sent (the apostle), whose role consists in "announcing the Gospel", in founding the Churches (1 Cor 3,6-8), not in giving baptism (1 Cor 1,17). Once his task is completed, he can move on and entrust the 'follow-up' to one of his collaborators - Apollos, for example [*"I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God made things grow"* (1 Cor 3,6; cf. 2 Cor 11,25-26)]. The other functions are for the internal service of the communities. The prophet plays an important role in the liturgical assemblies - "he gives help, encouragement and comfort" (1 Cor 14,3-5); he has also the responsibility for looking after the preaching and expounding of Scripture on particular occasions

"In the Church, God has given the first place to apostles, the second to prophets, the third to teachers; after them, miracles, and after them the gift of healing; helpers, good leaders, those with many languages" (1 Cor 12,28);

"...Surely I should pray not only with the spirit but with the mind as well? Any uninitiated person will never be able to say Amen to your thanksgiving, if you only bless God with the spirit, for he will have no idea what you are saying. However well you make your thanksgiving, the other gets no benefit from it" (1 Cor 14,15-17).

There are also teachers who are able to give solid instruction, at some depth, as was the case with Apollos (Acts 13,1-3; 1 Cor 12,28-29)

"In the church at Antioch the following were prophets

and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the tetrach, and Saul. One day while they were offering worship to the Lord and keeping a fast, the Holy Spirit said, 'I want Barnabas and Saul set apart for the work to which I have called them'. So it was that after fasting and prayer they laid their hands on them and sent them off."

Finally, there are other persons whose role is difficult to describe - a deaconess at Cenchreae

"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae..." (Rm 16,1),

administrators ('presidents')

"If your gift is prophecy, then use it as your faith suggests; if administration, then use it for administration; if teaching, then use it for teaching" (Rm 12,7),

guides

"In the Church, God has given the first place to apostles, the second to prophets, the third to teachers; after them, miracles, and after them the gift of healing; helpers, good leaders, those with many languages." (1 Cor 12,28)

pastors

"And to some, his gift was that they should be apostles; to some, prophets; to some, evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers..." (Ep 4,11).

* A second model is in use at Jerusalem

"When they had finished it was James who spoke. 'My brothers,' he said 'listen to me. Simeon has described how God first arranged to enlist a people for his name out of the pagans. This is entirely in harmony with the words of the prophets, since the Scripture say...' (Acts 15,13ff)

and at Ephesus:

"From Miletus he sent for the elders of the church of Ephesus" (Acts 20,17).

At the head of the Church is placed a college of Elders who watch over the orthodoxy of doctrine and the equitable distribution of goods (Acts 11,29-30; Gal 2,10; Acts 15,13-29)

"The disciples decided to send relief, each to contribute

what he could afford, to the brothers living in Judaea. They did this and delivered their contribution to the elders in the care of Barnabas and Saul";

"The only thing they (James, Cephas and John) insisted on was that we should remember to help the poor, as indeed I was anxious to do."

They are named, not chosen by lot, and they take up their responsibility after the imposition of hands

"In each of the churches they appointed elders, and with prayer and fasting they commended them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe"(Acts 14,23).

c) The period of settling down (between 65 and 100)

* The initial enthusiasm of the new communities (Heb 6,10; 10,32-34) risked becoming somewhat jaded(Heb 5,11;10,25; 12,3) unless some structures were set up to help everyone become integrated into the community and remain within its unity. In certain Churches, like at Corinth, an excessive 'liberty' reigned in the community, as things were tolerated which were incompatible with the spirit of the Gospel - drunken parties during the Lord's Supper(1 Cor 11,17-34), the misconduct of one of the members who was living with his mother-in-law(1 Cor 5,1ff), law-suits between brothers (1 Cor 6,1-11). Paul has to intervene vigorously. Elsewhere, individualism has reasserted itself and each one went his/her way, refusing to obey those charged with responsibility; and so the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes to them - "Obey your leaders and follow their orders. They watch over your souls..." (Heb 13,17). In other places, the elders had perhaps overstepped their authority, and so they are gently cautioned:

"Now I have something to tell your elders: I am an elder myself, and a witness to the sufferings of Christ, and with you I have a share in the glory that is to be revealed. Be the shepherds of the flock of God that is entrusted to you: watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly, because God wants it; not for sordid money, but because you are eager to do it. Never be a dictator over any group that is put in your charge, but be an example that the whole flock can follow."(1 P 5,1-3; cf. Acts 20,28-31).

* The Pastoral Epistles [17] are full of advice on the government and instruction of communities.

■ Timothy had the responsibility for setting up the organisation of the Churches in the region of Ephesus and Titus for the island of Crete (cf. Titus 1,5). Ordained by the college of Elders (1 Tm 4,14), their essential role was to teach, especially since doctrine began to be contaminated by all kinds of heresies (Titus 2,1; cf. 1 Tm 4,16; 1 Tm 1,10; 2 Tm 4,3; Titus 1,9; 2,1):

"Before God and before Christ Jesus who is to be judge of the living and the dead, I put this duty to you, in the name of his Appearing and of his kingdom: proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience - but do all with patience and with the intention of teaching. The time is sure to come when, far from being content with sound teaching, people will be avid for the latest novelty and collect themselves a whole series of teachers according to their own tastes; and then, instead of listening to the truth, they will turn to myths. Be careful always to choose the right course; be brave under trials; make the preaching of the Good News your life's work, in the thoroughgoing service." (2 Tm 4,1-5)

In spite of their young age, they must make themselves respected (Titus 2,15; 1 Tm 4,12; 5,1-2; 2 Tm 2,22) and be in command (1 Tm 1,3; 4,11; 5,7; 6,13-17). Their authority is to be exercised in different areas - the organisation of the liturgy (1 Tm 2,1-15), and help for widows, for example (1 Tm 5,3-16). They should also appoint those who are responsible in the local communities (1 Tm 5,22; Titus 1,5), and keep an eye on order (within the community) (1 Tm 5,19; Titus 3,10).

■ The local Churches do not all have the same type of organisation - in some we see a college of Elders or overseers, in others servants.

[17] So called in the 19th century because they are considered as addressed to pastors: Titus or Timothy.

* The group of elders (presbyters), is also called overseers [18]. To take on this responsibility, a person must be suited for government. The best way to take this into account is to see how the candidate has carried out his family responsibilities (1 Tm 3,2-7; Titus 1,6-8). All this would lead us to believe that relationships within the community were modelled on the family and not on civil society.

He must also be capable of teaching [*That is why the president must have an impeccable character. He must not have been married more than once, and he must be temperate, discreet and courteous, hospitable and a good teacher...* (1 Tm 3,2)], of encouraging people in sound doctrine and of dealing with opponents.

* As for the people who are called servants [19] - we only meet these in the Church at Ephesus. The qualities required are very much the same, though slightly differently nuanced, as for the elders. Women may fulfill this role [*In the same way, women must be respectable, not gossips but sober and quite reliable.* (1 Tm 3,11)], but apart from that, not much more is known. In the Churches with a Greek background, do they correspond to the elders in the Jewish communities? Or are they the subordinates of the elders? We can only guess.

[18] In Greek, the word for "elder" is "presbyter", from which comes the word "priest". But it is only several centuries later that this will acquire the priestly overtones that we have spoken of in connection with the liturgy and Christ, the one Priest. In Greek, the word for "overseer" is "episcopos", from which comes the word "bishop"; but it is not used in the same way here as it is used later for Ignatius of Antioch. This second usage becomes more current and the first becomes blurred. Cf. replacing the word "superior" by the word "responsible".

[19] Here the Greek word "diaconos" gives us the word "deacon". A similar development took place here as in the preceding note.

So, for their structures, the communities drew their inspiration from the family or civil models of their ethnic background. Creativity, adaptability and the smooth running of essential 'services' seem to have guided their choice.

B. BUT THE SAME BASIC STRUCTURE

Each community had, then, every latitude to invent the social model which corresponded best to its particular situation. But, apart from differences of content, of emphasis or of titles, three important functions are always found going together; these functions still structure the life of the Church today, and their meaning is to be looked for in the historical framework of the Church.

a) An explanation of these three functions

* The priestly function exists in all the communities; as we have been able to show, it is not the monopoly of any one member, but belongs to the whole community.

* The function of government is exercised by some individuals, but never along the lines of a military or civil hierarchy. The NT will speak of an envoy, a shepherd, a guide, a steward, or an ambassador. All these titles have the common element of referring to someone else. But the term most frequently used is the word "servant" [20]:

"After all, what is Apollos and what is Paul? They are servants who brought the faith to you..." (1 Cor 3,5)

"People must think of us as Christ's servants, stewards entrusted with the mysteries of God..." (1 Cor 4,1).

Paul will even go so far as to say that he has made himself the slave of all (1 Cor 9,19). This is the advice we find attributed to Paul - 'Be a good servant' (1 Tm 4,6).

[20] From this comes the name "ministers" which is usually given to those in charge; etymologically, it means "servants".

* The third function is in terms of a more effective spreading of the word, both outside and inside the community. What remains primary is the presence to the world, and not internal problems. What determines the organisation of the communities is the proclamation of the Gospel, and not vice-versa. When material questions tend to take on too much importance, the Twelve react

"So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food...' (Acts 6,2),

and for Paul, likewise, what is of prime importance is - "to preach the Good News" (1 Cor 1,17).

Now, in its basic structure, the Church is always stretched between two poles - authority and dependence. Everywhere we find teachers and those being taught, those governing and those being governed; Peter is very often among the Twelve when he speaks

"Then Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed them in a loud voice..." (Acts 2,14),

or when the Twelve call the assembly to take an important decision

"So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them..." (Acts 6,2).

In spite of notable differences between texts, there is no getting round this double polarity. No one has a monopoly on authority, no one is only a subordinate, but everyone shares in the power (Rv 2,26-28; Acts 6,1-6,15) and all are servants (Heb 6,10; 13,16; Rv 2,19; 1 P 4,10-11). This 'circulation' of roles is part of the structure of the community; it is the sign that the community is not speaking to itself and does not come together for itself.

b) The theological significance of this structure

How are we to explain this constant relationship (between authority and dependence) that we have just described? All the communities live in the same Spirit and the same hope because they take Christ as their model.

■ The Church genuinely wishes to reproduce and incarnate the image of its founder until the end of time. Now,

Christ lived out, perfectly, this double relationship. During the whole of His life, He refers everything He does, as well as His teaching, to the Father:

"...my aim is to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (Jn 5,30)

"...My teaching is not from myself; it comes from the one who sent me" (Jn 7,16).

At the end of His earthly existence, He could truly say - "I...have finished the work you gave me to do" (Jn 17,4). With His disciples, Jesus is placed sometimes in a position of authority - as He teaches them - sometimes in a position of serving (Mk 10,42-44), or even in the position of a slave when He washes their feet (Jn, 13). The members of the Church should try to have this sort of attitude:

"If our life in Christ means anything to you...be united in your convictions and in your love... That is the one thing that would make me completely happy... In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus: His state was divine... but He emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave" (Ph 2,1-11).

With regard to how to conduct oneself, the author of the Pastoral Letters also refers to the example of Christ.

"Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is very deep indeed: He was made visible in the flesh, attested by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed to the pagans, believed in by the world,taken up in glory" (1 Tm 3,16);
"Remember the Good News that I carry, 'Jesus Christ risen from the dead, sprung from the race of David...'"
(2 Tm 2,8),

and Paul recalls that all authority comes from Christ (Ep 4,10-15).

■ The Holy Spirit enables people to assume the responsibilities entrusted to them. Every community service expresses a gift of the Holy Spirit

"That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you. God's gift was not a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power, and love, and self-control" (2 Tm 1,6-7);

"You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the body of elders laid

their hands on you; do not let it lie unused " (1 Tm 4, 14)

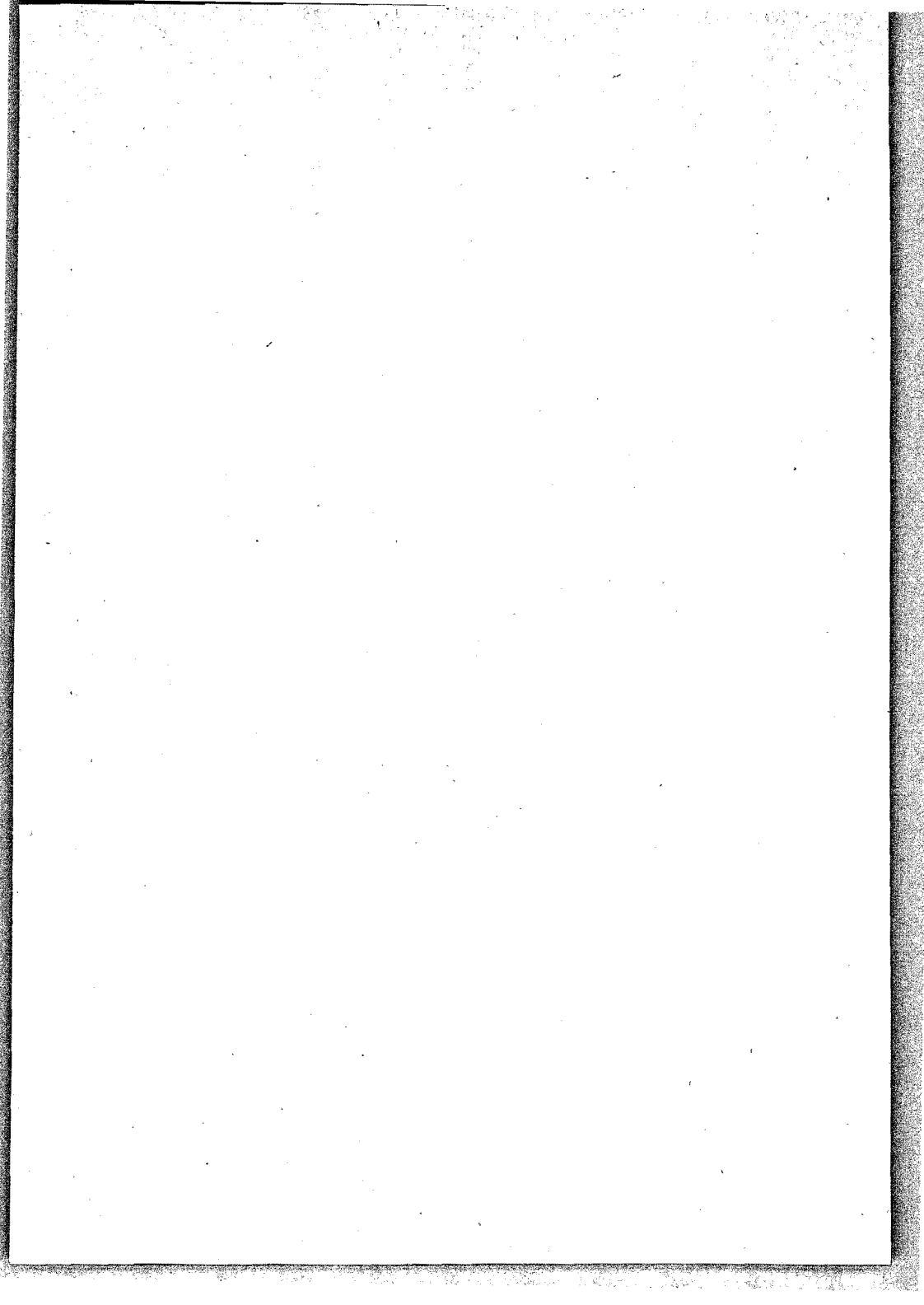
which allows for diversity in charisms and yet unity in love (1 Cor 12-13). Through the power of the Spirit, the Church can guard intact what has been entrusted to her

"You have been trusted to look after something precious; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us " (2 Tm 1,14)

and recall effectively what the Lord has done or said

"...but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you " (Jn 14,26).

■ But the meaning of this structure appears only in the light of the last times. He who has given birth to the Church - "will see that it is finished when the day of Christ Jesus comes" (Ph 1,6). That day will be a day of judgment when the person who has fulfilled his/her charge well - "...will be given the crown of unfading glory" (1 P 5,4), or will be punished. One must be vigilant and develop his/her gifts for it is on this that one will be judged (Mt 25). During this time of waiting, the community must be kept without stain (1 Tm 6,14) and people should not pass judgment before the Lord comes (1 Cor 4,5). However, one group within the community has the special mission of bearing witness to the new age - those who have voluntarily opted for celibacy. It falls to these to show forth the reality of the world to come - for the sake of the Kingdom, they already anticipate this new age (Mt 22) inaugurated in Christ and they give a glimpse of the depth and richness of the interpersonal relationships that are promised (1 Cor 7).

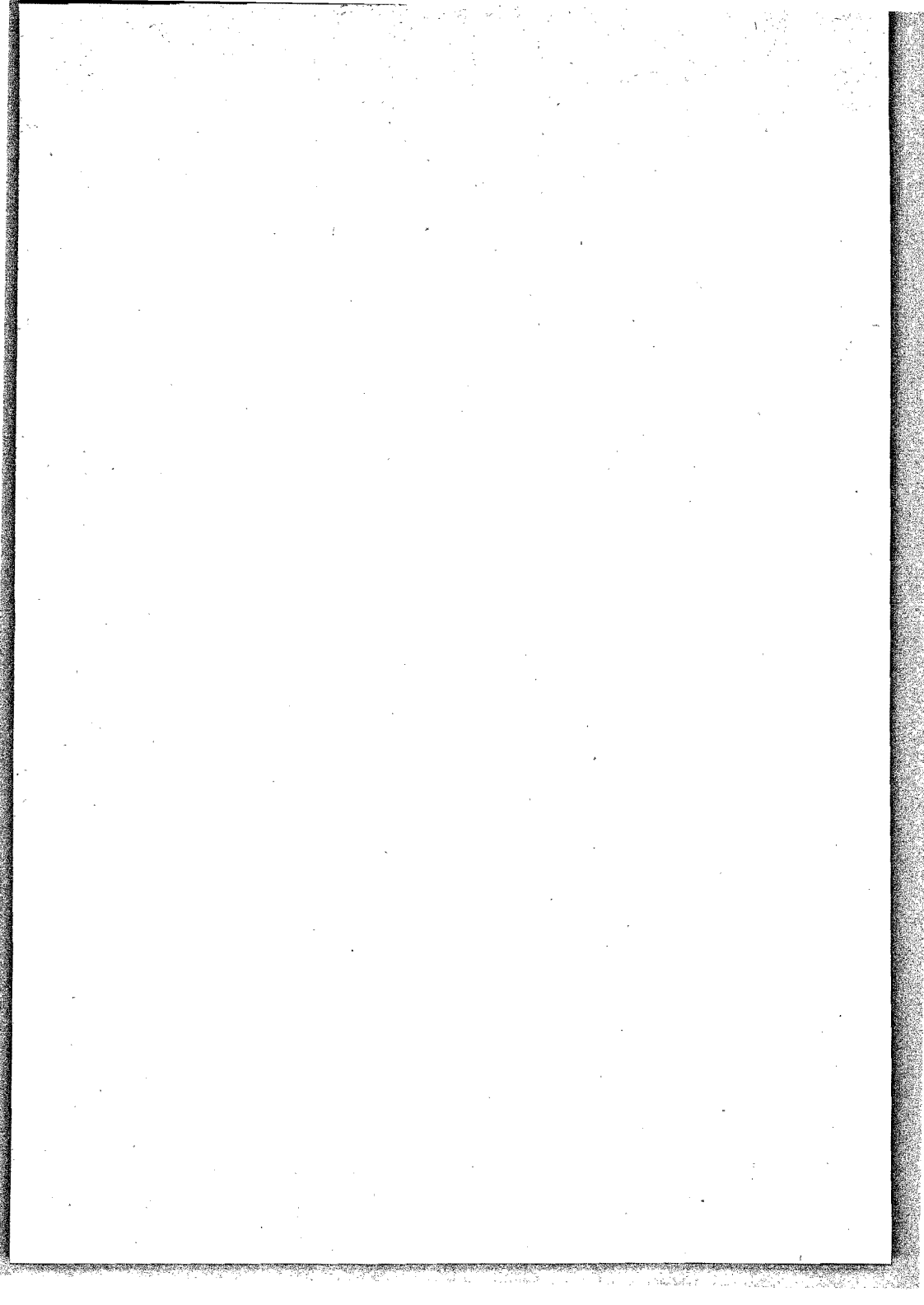


III

THE ONE BODY OF CHRIST

AMIDST THE DIVERSITY OF THE CHURCHES

THE RELATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES



**THE ONE BODY OF CHRIST
AMIDST THE DIVERSITY OF THE CHURCHES
THE RELATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES**

The Church is present to this world to bring about the Kingdom of God, and so it enters into dialogue, and conflict, with it. But very quickly numerous believers, coming from very different backgrounds, join the original small group. Each one of these communities organises itself in its own way and emphasises one or other aspect of the Gospel which corresponds more with its own identity and particular situation. But would not this way of proceeding run the risk of a fragmentation, both from the point of view of christianity and of the communities? Would not the Gospel itself be broken up and watered down, to the point of being no longer recognisable from one place to another? St. Paul will recall that "Christ cannot be divided" and "that there is only one Gospel". On the level of principle, agreement was reached without too much difficulty; what remained to be done was to find the means for this unity without falling into uniformity.

To achieve this, the authors of the NT elaborated a theology of unity, which allowed each community not to renounce completely its own culture, and to integrate basic realities that were compatible with the Gospel. However, this development had to find ways of expressing itself in practices that effectively reflected this theology of unity. In this way, the relations between communities became one of the factors that helped build up and structure the Churches of the NT.

**1. THE MULTIPLICITY AND DIVERSITY
OF THE CHURCHES OR OF COMMUNITIES**

Primitive christianity shows a great deal of variety in its sensitivities, and its theologies, that we too easily tone down. The differences are not irreconcilable - as we shall see - but one could not bring them together

into a unity, which would not do justice to this pluralism. Besides, this Church with a hundred faces shows the impossibility of grasping the features of the Risen One or simply of the Jesus of history.

The different communities of the NT are supported, in part, by the cultural milieu in which they are born and so they depend on the way in which they relate to this environment. In a schematic way, we can classify the communities of the NT into two main groups:

A. THE JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

✠ At Jerusalem - according to the Acts of the Apostles - we see a community, with conservative tendencies, trying to reconcile the demands of faith in Christ with the directives of the Law.

Ⓔ In Asia Minor, according to the letters of Paul, we learn of the existence of a judaeo-christian community singularly free from submission to the Law and contaminated with pagan elements. As a matter of fact, in the Letter to the Colossians, Paul takes issue with a group who seem to mix the ritual prescriptions of judaism (circumcision, feasts - new moon, sabbaths) with 'gnostic' speculations about the evolution of the cosmos, to the extent of invalidating the salvific work of Christ.

During the missions of Paul, the Churches founded by him and coming from a pagan background had been dispensed from rituals and the Jewish Law. At least, that is what we may infer from Galatians 2,1-10. This would be about the year 56.

Some ten years later, when Luke composes the Acts (towards 80), we will have a new version of the facts which distinctly moderates the concessions granted at the time of Paul and which Paul himself would not have accepted as being open to review, as we may gather from his attitude in Gal 2,11-21. The text of the Acts (ch. 15) presupposes a certain regression in comparison with the Galatians. The

discussion on the integration of the pagans, which had occurred at Antioch, concludes with a compromise, since the christians with a pagan background are exempted from the observance of the Law, but with a three-fold restriction - they are to abstain from food which has been offered in sacrifice, from animals that have been strangled and from impurity (?) (Acts 15,29). What had been previously conceded by the authorities (Paul, James and Peter) was doubtless no longer ratified by the rank and file, who considered that the Law was being taken too lightly.

In Palestine we can also locate the existence of a third tendency of judaео-christian origin. It is possible to identify this tendency through building up a collection made up of the sayings of Jesus (Logia), which are common to the texts of Luke and Matthew. The community which is discernible behind this collection is a group of judaео-christians, prior to the fall of Jerusalem in 70, who, as a result of the set-back of their mission to the Jews (Luke 11,49-51; Matthew 23,34-36), withdrew among themselves to await the imminent end of the world and the return of Christ (Lk 17,22-35). All these texts are dominated by an attitude of expectation and isolation, based on pardoning offenses and loving one's enemies (Lk 6,27-36; Mt 5,38-48). According to a tradition recorded by the fathers of the Church, when the Jews rose up against the power of the Romans, this community refused to collaborate with them and took refuge in Pella in Transjordan. But when Bar Kokheba triggered off his revolt against Rome in 135, their refusal to collaborate with the rebels provoked their extermination and they disappeared from the scene of history.

As this three-fold description shows, we can see a certain amount of disintegration at the heart of the communities that came from judaism. It seems to me that the fragmentation was even more acute if we believe the constant appeals for unity coming from one side and the other. And so the letters of John (1 Jn 2,19) or the conflict between the Jews who spoke Greek (the Hellenists) and the Jews who spoke a semitic language (the Hebrews) in the Acts (Acts 6) lead us to understand that, as in

every human gathering, the forces of disintegration and partisan ideas always threatened to fragment the group and set up divisions at the heart of each community, and between the different communities.

B. THE PAGAN-CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

(i.e. coming from a pagan background)

It seemed that everything was in favour of christianity being established in a Jewish milieu, while there were enormous obstacles against its catching on in a pagan milieu.

Moreover, if "Christ is a scandal for the Jews, He is also folly for the pagans"(1 Cor 1,23). A religion with neither temple, nor priesthood, nor rites, christianity proclaimed its faith in a God who inhabits a dwelling not made by men and situated in the heavens

"For we know that when the tent that we live in on earth is folded up, there is a house built by God for us, an everlasting home not made by human hands, in the heavens " (2 Cor 5,1).

However, some factors contributed to a rapid inculturation of christianity in the Greek world. Paganism was somewhat running down and some basic realities were simply waiting to be taken up. Added to this was the exceptional status that the Jews enjoyed in the Roman Empire and which the Christians were able to avail themselves of for some time.

All these communities with a pagan background are hardly known to us and Paul wrote to them only about some points of liturgy. Everything else has slipped into oblivion and our documentation is full of gaps.

A somewhat analogous situation can help us interpret correctly the meaning and extent of Paul's letters. Imagine a religious community that is known only through the exchange of correspondence between itself and its superior

general, and that the Rule of this congregation has been lost. What we would find in the letters would be questions and replies about matters that the Rule did not foresee - dispensations from certain obligations or a particular way of living out this or that observance. We would doubtless suspect a number of deviations in relation to what should be done. Such information would lay no claim to inform us about the life of the community. Something of its spirit would come through in these exchanges, but on the side, as it were, and in a very fragmentary way in comparison with the whole reality these exchanges do not mention. This principle of interpretation should qualify the way we read the Pauline letters so that we do not read them from a false standpoint.

So it is by no means easy to describe each one of the Pauline communities for the reason we have just indicated, and besides, the limitations of this work do not permit us to enter into details. Let it suffice for us simply to indicate - on some precise points - some trends, rather than divergences, between these communities.

One problem recurs in a significant way, namely that of spelling out faith in Christ and rejecting or accepting other values. Or, in other words, discerning between what is compatible and tenable with christianity, whether it is a question of the Law, of speculations which are more or less gnostic in nature or of certain ways of behaving current in the pagan world.

Faced with this recurrent question, Paul reacts in the same spirit while taking into account the particular situation of his correspondents.

* When the question is put to him concerning food consecrated to idols, he reacts differently to the Christians of Rome and the Christians of Corinth. With the first group, he seems more tolerant and more liberal - "...the one who eats, does so in honour of the Lord... the man who abstains does that too in honour of the Lord..."(Rm 14,6). With the Corinthians, he is more directive and indicates only one solution (1 Cor 8 and 10).

* The same question is raised at Corinth with regard to the value of charismatic phenomenon. Some members of the community were attributing too great an importance to them. Consequently Paul gives a reply which puts these extraordinary gifts in context. On the one hand, the faith should be able to be communicated and what is intelligible is certainly to be preferred over what is not intelligible. On the other hand, the community is built up first and foremost through love rather than by these extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit (1Cor 12-14). Besides, this overemphasis on exceptional gifts had ended up in undermining certain aspects of belief in Christ. An undisciplined speculation about the glorified Christ tended to gloss over His death on the cross [1 Cor 12,3; *"The language of the cross may be illogical to those who are not on the way to salvation, but those of us who are on the way see it as God's power to save"* (1 Cor 1,18); 1 Cor 2,2]. And there was the further problem that more prominence was given to the person who announced the good news or baptised than to Christ Himself, to such an extent that some people reached the stage of invoking Paul or Apollos, forgetting that in reality it is a question of belonging to Christ (1 Cor 1,12).

* Though we could multiply these examples, perhaps it is enough to indicate some pointers. The communities whose outlines we can see behind the Letter to the Ephesians and the Letter to the Colossians were interested in speculations about the evolution of the cosmos and were not overly successful in integrating these speculations with their faith in Christ, or at least they settled for watering down the work of Christ in favour of intermediary powers. The community of christians at Salonika, on the other hand, were under the impression that the resurrection was an invitation for them to separate themselves completely from the realities of this world, which left them in a state of unreal and 'other-worldly' expectation.

All these examples, chosen at random from the letters of Paul and too briefly dealt with here, are nevertheless sufficient to show the complexity and variety to be found in the communities of the NT.

The mission to the pagans involved some necessary adjustments and changes, but for all that, these did not cut christianity off from all the historical roots it carried from judaism. Paul, in his effort to establish a christianity adapted to each culture and consequently marked by different systems of ideas, was constantly calling these communities back to essentials as they were always in danger of 'flirting' with positions incompatible with the work of Christ.

P. UNITY IN HARMONY AND LOVE

This diversity among the communities - taken as a whole - that we have just described, should not be minimized nor explained away too readily. If the NT, and Paul in particular, insist so much on the unity of the Churches, it is because this was threatened, or at least, was not to be taken for granted in the sense that it would look after itself. The fact that the NT managed to establish this unity remains a mystery for us and shows us one of the special places where the Holy Spirit left His mark.

This unity is to be found on two levels which complement each other - one level has to do with the statements which repeat the need for unity among the Churches, and the other with the means to be used to achieve this. These two levels are really two different aspects of the one reality - one is more 'theoretical' ('ideological') and the other is more 'practical'. Let us look at these two aspects, in turn.

A. THE WAY OF SPEAKING ABOUT UNITY

[Unity - yes; unification - no

Unity does not automatically happen - that is obvious. The NT was quite ingenious in proposing a concept of unity which was founded on respect for differences. This option led to rejecting certain forms of unity which tended to versimplify.

* Rejection of a unity reduced to the lowest common denominator

Might we not suppose that the unity of the Church is the sum of all the communities who invoke the name of Christ? The modern version of this model would be an association of churches based on the right to be different and on an agreement about some points considered essential. One would end up with a federation, like the United States or the United Nations. This system, as congenial as it may appear, does not do justice to what the first communities were looking for. As a matter of fact, each community claimed - while keeping the marks of its own historical background - to present itself to the world as the one spouse of Christ. Really, what is the Church? if not a totality of communities which make the whole Church really present at a particular time and place. In addition, to achieve this end, the Churches of the NT took on a structure adapted to their situation. The analogy with the Body gives a good indication of the direction in which they were moving. Each cell remains unique and irreplaceable and the body is not a pile of cells and members, but an organisation of these.

* Refusal to centralise

Would not insisting on this point too much run the risk of actually leading to the sort of centralising system that could be taken to be implicitly denying that there were any differences? or might it not lead to some sort of hierarchical system where some communities would presume to tell others what to do? Certain communities more or less claimed to have authority and wanted to impose on others their own way of being christians, but such an attitude came to nothing (cf. Acts 15). However, the 'mother' communities, in the person of the Apostles, always kept a certain right of 'inspection' in relation to the new communities.

❑ Unity in communion or harmony

Rejecting the solutions we have just suggested, the NT proposes a vision of the unity of the Church where each

particular community is accepted in its uniqueness, to the extent that it maintains the characteristics of the Church of Christ.

The very word which designates the totality of the communities and each one of them - the word ECCLESIA - is applied on these two levels. As Father Jerome Hamer has so well observed [21] - "The word 'Church' designates the People of God in its totality and the manifestation of this People in a particular place". As a matter of fact, the same term is applied whether to the gathering in a house (where the Eucharist can be celebrated) or to the local community. Only the context can give us the actual meaning. And so in this one passage which follows, the same word refers to two realities: "*My greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked death to save my life: I am not the only one to owe them a debt of gratitude, all the Churches among the pagans do so as well. My greetings also to the Church that meets at their house*" (Rm 16,3-5).

The fact that the same term can be used in two different contexts indicates that it is a question of the same reality in both cases, but each time approached on a different level or scale. The NT insists on the fact that the Church of Christ is one, and that each Church is the Church of Christ - "At Corinth (1 Cor 1,2), in Galatia (Gal 1,2), at Thessalonica (1 Th 1,1)". Paul challenges all these communities, enjoining them to live in unity and harmony. These appeals can refer to the particular Churches and the totality of the Churches. The foundation of unity remains the faith in the same God, the same Christ, the same Spirit, received in the one baptism. "*There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all...*" (Ep 4,4-6).

[21] J. Hamer, L'Eglise est une communion, Unam Sanctam n.40, Cerf 1962, p.37 ff.

In other places, Paul comes through more strongly and pours out his feelings - *"If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. That is the one thing which would make me completely happy. There must be no competition among you..."* (Ph 2,1-3). These injunctions refer to the unity at the heart of the communities but they can just as well be applied to the unity of the communities among themselves. For Paul, the unity of the Church is rooted in the one faith and the one body of Christ, and the one Gospel (Gal 1,7). For John, on the other hand, unity finds its model and its foundation in the unity of the Father and the Son (cf. Jn 15-16). Clement of Rome, some years later, will challenge the Church of Corinth, using the same arguments as Paul: "Why are there quarrels among you, angry outbursts, divisions, strife? Have we not the same God, the same Christ, the same Spirit of grace poured out on us, the same calling in Christ? Why do you tear apart and cut up the members of Christ? How can anyone rise up against his own body? How could you be so foolish as to forget that we are members of one another" (46,5-7). We hear an echo of - *"...so all of us, in union with Christ, form one body, and as parts of it, we belong to each other"* (Rm 12,5).

B. FROM A WAY OF SPEAKING TO PRACTICE

The appeals for unity - as beautiful as they may be - remain a dead letter if they do not lead to some action. The communities of the NT had understood well this necessary connection between theory and practice, and they were extremely creative in expressing their theology in the most concrete terms. Their efforts in this direction were mainly concerned with three points:

1. the exercise of a ministry between the communities
2. an exchange of letters
3. sharing resources and hospitality.

* Ministry between communities

The founder and the mother Church of a community had - in its regard - a certain right to keep an eye on things and to confirm, or not, what was going on. The very rhythm of the Acts of the Apostles is marked by this note. Let us take the example of Samaria. The miracles of Philip result in many people accepting the Gospel (Acts 8,5-13). The news of this arrives among the apostles who have remained in Jerusalem, and these immediately send off Peter and John [*"When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them..."* (Acts 8,14)]. Philip had announced the good news, and Peter and James, leaders from the Jerusalem Community confirm the community that has just been born and confer on them the Holy Spirit (Acts 8,15-17). In chapter 10, the same process is repeated at Cesarea with Peter, who reports to Jerusalem what he had been led to experience through contact with the pagans. And again the same thing occurs at Antioch where Barnabas is sent

"The church in Jerusalem heard about this and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. There he could see for himself that God had given grace, and this pleased him, and he urged them all to remain faithful to the Lord with heartfelt devotion; for he was a good man, filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. And a large number of people were won over to the Lord." (Acts 11,22-24)

The founder or the founding community send missionaries and as soon as the first proclamation of the good news has been taken up, he or the community dispatch leaders of the highest level to authenticate and confirm the work just begun. It could be said that Paul received this ministry of founding and "verifying". He spent his time in planting the gospel, in organising the community and in continuing on his way. But when the mother community is too far away and cannot send its leaders to authenticate the christianity of the new communities, then it is Paul himself who sets out to go to Jerusalem, to give a detailed account of everything he has done and the reactions that he has aroused. The apostle of the nations refuses to play a solitary role and gives up founding more communities, to gain the approval of those who have given him his mandate. This was

the price for the unity of the Church. The mother Church must be in agreement with and confirm what Paul has done thousands of kilometres away. To achieve unity, a report, and agreement with the report, are important. For example, immediately after the mission to Antioch that we have just mentioned, a conflict breaks out over the necessity for circumcision - "*...and it was arranged that Paul and Barnabas and others of the Church should go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the apostles and elders*" (Acts 15,2).

All the voyages of Paul pass through Jerusalem or Antioch. That is where he sets out from, and that is where he returns. People are sent from there and that is where they return to give an account of the mission entrusted to them.

In Acts 14,27, at the time of the first journey - "On their arrival they assembled the Church (so it is they who took the initiative in calling the people together) and gave an account of all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the pagans". So Paul gives an exhaustive account ("all") of his mission and he emphasises his way of proceeding; in other words, he explains the options which have guided his ministry, in particular - and the text which follows apprises us of this - the refusal to impose the practices of the Jewish Law on the pagans.

The return from the second voyage (Acts 18,21) is less explicit on the meaning of his arrival, but again, on the occasion of his third mission, Paul is led to justify himself - "*The next day Paul went with us (to Jerusalem) to visit James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he gave a detailed account of all that God had done among the pagans through his ministry*" (Acts 21, 18-19).

These latter texts throw a light on mission that is slightly different from what we have described in the first part (pp.15 ff). To be complete, the proclamation of the gospel must be embodied in a presentation, not just any sort of a presentation, but a presentation that is the fruit of an authentic community discernment. For this to

be genuine, it is important to enter into details because (by contrast) it is easy to agree on essentials. But Paul's opening his heart to those who have sent him demands, from their side, openness to the Spirit. And if they give too much weight to their own particular concerns or to their Jewish background, the apostle can close up and refuse to listen to them (Gal 2).

* The phenomenon of the Letter (Epistle)

* The mere facts

Of the 27 writings of the NT, 20 belong to the literary form of a letter, not to mention the exchange of letters recorded in the Acts (Acts 15,23-29; 23,26-30), or in the Book of Revelation (1-3). We must recognise that we are dealing with a kind of correspondence that has little in common with that of its time, but whose guiding principle remains a long-distance exchange between someone who sends a message, and the person, or persons, to whom it is sent. And when it is a question of John, of Paul or of Peter, these letters lay claim to a certain authority over those to whom they are sent.

* The function of the Letter

The role which fell to the apostle did not allow him to stay on for any length of time with the Churches that he founded. He had to set up new communities in other places or go back to Palestine. One of the characteristics of the apostle is to absent himself, to be far off at a time when his presence is necessary. Certainly he took care, before leaving, to set up a minimum of structures and to delegate his authority to co-workers, but he remained the ultimate appeal for certain decisions. And so it is by means of letters that he can exercise his authority. Let this word not frighten us! One may refer back to our chapter on organisation and the role of individuals (p.73) to have an idea of the true meaning of this word. We shall try to state it clearly here.

In each one of his letters, Paul recalls his title of "apostle of Christ". That highlights, right from the begin

ning, the relationship that he wants to establish with the people to whom he is writing. If he imposes on himself the need to be authenticated by others, it is his right to demand an account of what has happened within the group he has gathered together. The replies that he gives to the problems posed have much in common, in many respects, with the writings of the prophets. In effect, his role is to recall the initial demand of faith in Christ in this or that particular situation. Far from imposing his own way of seeing things, the apostle sends the community back to its commitment to Christ and draws consequences from this decision.

This prophetic role of the apostle doubtless explains the variety of Paul's approaches in his letters. According to the subject he wants to defend or according to the morale of the communities, he handles his argument with intransigence, or subtlety, he advises, he encourages, he blames or he congratulates. It is especially in the letters to Timothy or to Titus that we find the best description of Paul himself. In the advice that he lavishes on these two pastors, he describes the role of the true apostle that he wishes to be. Even if these three letters are not from Paul himself, many of their traits are quite close to Paul's way of thinking. The attitude of Paul draws its inspiration from what the NT understands by fraternal correction. The letter of Clement of Rome contains exhortations of this kind, but there the prophetic role is vested not in an apostle, but in a community: "Accept our advice...", "You will be a source of joy and happiness for us if you obey the recommendations that we have given you through the Holy Spirit". The text leads us to understand that "fraternal correction between communities" was a practice that was current towards the end of the first century. And, as a matter of fact, Clement adds - "Let us accept corrections which no one, my dear friends, should become indignant about. The reprimand that we mutually address to one another is good and very useful" (58,2; 63,2; 9; 10).

* The practice of the agape

Two numbers of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius (230-231) summarise perfectly what the communities of the

NT put into practice to an exceptional degree - "...love ought to manifest itself in deeds rather than words" and "...love consists in a mutual sharing of goods". The link between communities finds a concrete and preferential expression through the service of hospitality and the sharing of resources.

a) Hospitality for travellers

In the suburb of Corinth - near the western port - the community of Cenchreae had set up a service of hospitality to receive Christians who landed at the port. In Romans 16,1-2, Paul mentions the zeal of Phoebe, a lady who was very much involved in this service: "*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae. Give her, in union with the Lord, a welcome worthy of saints, and help her with anything she needs: she has looked after a great many people, myself included.*" Whatever way we understand these words, they indicate that Phoebe had used her wealth and social position to meet the needs of people passing through, whether through giving them financial help, whether through intervening on their behalf with the local authorities.

We learn that Paul was given a warm welcome when he landed in Italy (Acts 28,14 and ff), and that he could count on the connivance of Christians to escape danger at Damascus (Acts 9,25), at Lystra (Acts 14,20), at Thessalonica (Acts 17,10), and at Berea (Acts 17,14). From his side, John was welcomed at Patmos when he was banished (Rv 1,9).

The letters of John indicate that hospitality did not automatically take on. Gaius had remained faithful in welcoming missionaries as they passed through, although a certain Diotrephes took exception to this. And so the author of the third letter of John wrote - "So if I come, I shall tell everyone how he has behaved... he not only refuses to welcome our brothers, but prevents the other people...from doing it" (verses 9-10).

b) Sending help to communities in distress

A number of communities came to the aid of the community at Jerusalem which experienced extreme destitution.

(1) What happened to money that was collected

* The starting point was Antioch

"While they were there some prophets came down to Antioch from Jerusalem, and one of them whose name was Agabus, seized by the Spirit, stood up and predicted that a famine would spread over the whole empire. This in fact happened before the reign of Claudius came to an end. The disciples decided to send relief, each to contribute what he could afford, to the brothers living in Judaea. They did this and delivered their contributions to the elders in the care of Barnabas and Saul." (Acts 11, 27-30). The mention of Claudius allows us to date this famine between 46 and 48. The historian Josephus (Antiquités Juives 20, 97-98) also refers to this. What is to be noted is that each one gives according to his resources and that two trustworthy men are deputed to deliver the result of the collection.

* An effective organisation is set up to meet the needs of people

Paul devotes part of his energy and his sense of organisation to set up an effective service of mutual aid throughout Asia Minor and Europe for the benefit of Jerusalem. He prescribes strict regulations - *"Now about the collection made for the saints: you (in Macedonia) are to do as I told the Churches in Galatia to do. Every Sunday (that is, the day which recalls the Lord's resurrection and when the Eucharist is celebrated) each one of you must put aside what he can afford, so that collections need not be made after I have come. When I am with you, I will send your offering to Jerusalem by the hand of whatever men you give letters of reference to; if it seems worth while for me to go too, they can travel with me"* (1 Cor 16, 1-4). Paul does not want to get too much involved with these matters both to avoid being overloaded with work and especially to avoid being suspected of benefitting from this money or of having been careless about it, in the case of some of it being stolen (2 Cor 8, 16-22).

The Churches of Macedonia were outstanding in their generosity and Paul mentions this on several occasions - *"...throughout great trials by suffering, their constant cheerfulness and their intense poverty have overflowed in*

a wealth of generosity. I can swear that they gave not only as much as they could afford but far more... begging and begging us for the favour of sharing in this service to the saints" (2 Cor 8,1-6). They did this to such an extent that their "zeal has been a spur to many more" (2 Cor 9,1-5). Paul also benefitted from their generosity (2 Cor 11,7-9; Ph 4,10-18).

This movement of mutual aid between the Churches continued beyond the NT. It would be the turn of the Romans to help the Corinthians beset by poverty. Here is what Denis, Bishop of Corinth, writes to his benefactors: "Actually, from the very beginning, it has been your practice to help out all your brothers in different ways and to send aid to numerous churches in each city; you alleviate the destitution of the needy, you support the brothers who are in the mines through the resources you are sending right from the start. Romans, you are keeping up the traditional practice of the Romans"(Eusebius H.E. IV, 23,10).

(2) The meaning of such generosity

Let no one be deceived in this matter! Such fervent generosity is not based on philanthropy, but on the very heart of christianity: agape. As a matter of fact, the money given over, which circulates between community and community, takes on the dignity of being a sign.

* A sign that the communities have an **active exchange** among themselves. The Church of Jerusalem has "given the faith" to the Churches founded by Paul and these, in return, give back to the Mother Church "a little love". The exchange witnesses both to the fact that the communities really stand together and especially that the circulation of resources is not just one way traffic. For this to happen, all the foundations should give something back to the first benefactors. A certain identity in the faith requires a certain **equality** in charity. Paul also encourages the Churches to give by saying - "This does not mean that to give relief to others you ought to make things difficult for yourselves: it is a question of balancing" (2 Cor 8, 13). This principle is drawn from metaphors and arguments that are somewhat shaky, for if we follow the logic of the case Paul presents, it seems that people could enrich others out of their own poverty.

* A sign that the community centres around agape. Paul is quite ingenious in actually getting the funds collected but without being absolutely sure that the money will reach its destination. He had no assurance that the community at Jerusalem would accept such generosity (Rm 15,31). But the very fact of wanting to do something for it gave meaning to the gesture. On several occasions Paul takes up this point - "You always have the most of everything - of faith, of eloquence, of understanding... so we expect you to put the most into this work of mercy too... I am just testing the genuineness of your love"(2 Cor 8,6-15), or again - "So, then, in front of all the churches, give them a proof of your love"(2 Cor 8,24).

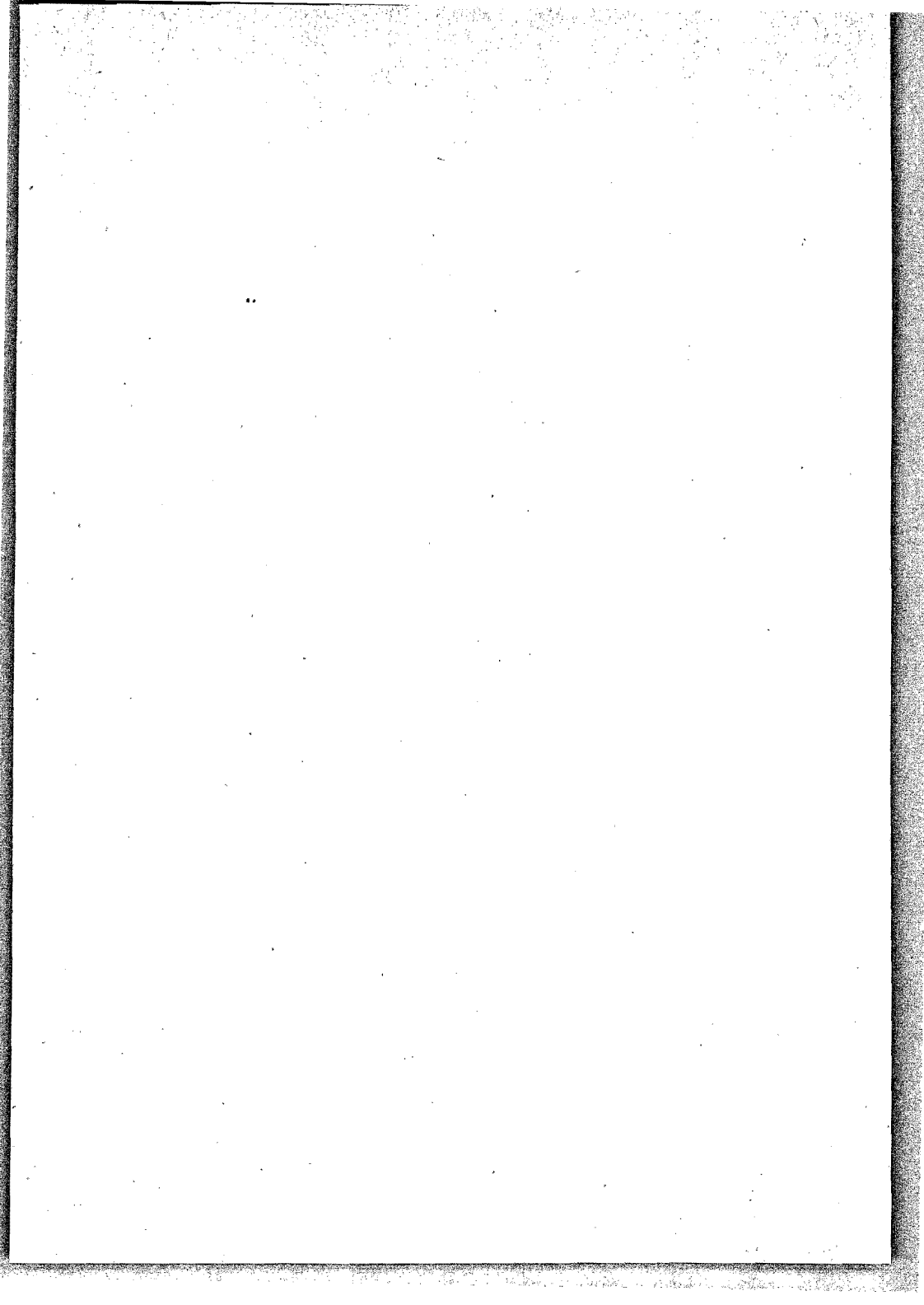
From being a sign, the agape actually becomes a proof as far as other communities are concerned. It was by no means simply a matter of raising sums of money.

* A definitive sign that the community which had been founded was well and truly the Church of God. If the Community knows how to practise agape, that is because it is dwelt in by the Holy Spirit who confers on it His supreme gift. Now if the Holy Spirit acts effectively on a group, the authenticity of its belonging to Christ cannot be doubted. And so this community deserves to be numbered among the Churches of Christ, carrying the same title as the Church of Jerusalem.

Has it really been necessary to make this detour in order to reach our conclusion in the form of a syllogism? The judaeo-christian communities, as we have seen, had conceded people being dispensed from the practice of the Law, reserving the right, some years later, to reverse their decision. This dispensation, in the long run, weighed quite heavily on the Churches of the Gentiles. How could they give certain proof that they had not deviated from their initial foundation? How could they be identified and authenticated? Paul's insistence on collecting funds is worth reflecting on, and we may well wonder if he did not see in this act an effective way of removing all suspicion from the Churches he had founded. The money shared was more effective than confessions of faith. After all, was there not here an echo of the Master - "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"(Mt 6,21)?

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION:

**THE CHURCHES OF THE NT
PROVIDE FOOD FOR THOUGHT!**



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THE CHURCHES OF THE NT PROVIDE FOOD FOR THOUGHT!

Perhaps the ground we have covered may seem somewhat stark to some readers, whether because it has involved a great deal of documentation, or whether because there has been no reference to the Church of today. We have taken the risk of proceeding in this way because it seems to us that an authentic comparison only takes place from the perspective of mutual knowledge. The further we go in becoming acquainted with these communities, the more we will find our own roots and the more they will reveal to us our own true identity.

To others, our study may appear superficial and incomplete. We are very conscious of not saying, by any means, all that has to be said on this question, and that the line we have taken has not allowed us, for example, to treat in any detail what we are accustomed to call the mystery of the Church, or to take up the various metaphors that are applied to the Church (People, vine, temple, spouse). Our study has been limited to dealing with the functioning and the appearance of this spiritual reality. We have not described the particular characteristics of this or that Church, such as they are presented to us through each work of the NT. Our analysis has deliberately concentrated on outlines and structures as we have tried to uncover, from all the texts, a structure of the Church that was the norm, or rule. Whether we have actually succeeded in doing this - that is for our readers to say!

At the end of this study, may we be permitted to present three statements:

1. The attention we have given to the Churches of the NT invites us to encounter Jesus in a new way.
2. We will only be really the Church for our time and place if we experience both a continuity and a break with the Churches of the NT.
3. Each one of the elements of the structure we have proposed only has value in relation to the others, and therefore we must re-think how these balance out in our community.

1. MEETING JESUS IN A NEW WAY OR IN THE CHURCH

There is a certain nostalgia which leads us to want to know more about and to discover Him whom we have never laid eyes on. But this quest is in vain and impossible for the face of Him whom we seek is always beyond our grasp and only allows itself to be seen in the manifold images that the witnesses of His life and death have left us. If we think of His face as a white light, then what we see through all the texts of the NT is not this white light but a whole spectrum of component colours.

A. MEETING JESUS ACCORDING TO THE GOSPELS

What can we say about this person or that person whom we love? The more we discover about someone, the more the horizon of their personality recedes from us, stopping us from getting any closer, and revealing the lack of depth of our knowledge. The Other is inaccessible, never allowing himself to be unveiled; he reacts strongly if I try to force him into a pigeon-hole. However, I cannot do without representations or images - as fleeting and as vague as they may be. They become for me the meeting-point or the milieu in which the meeting takes place, like water which bears me up when I swim though I seem to be pushing it away from myself. The other lets himself be known only through the multiplicity of images which surround him.

We do not have at our disposal a self-portrait of Jesus or His autobiography through which to know Him. We have to rely on this manifold image that the authors of the NT build up and which each one has sketched according to his own understanding and taking into account the questions of his readers. Each one of them gives us only one aspect of Jesus and to read only one of these authors always runs the risk of encasing Jesus in a hard and fixed image. The approach of Matthew is geared more to listening: Jesus speaks very much in the First Gospel. The presentation of Mark is more pictorial - even graphic; he frequently retains striking, even shocking details. For Luke, the

life of Jesus is portrayed within a drama which all leads up to Him. His presentation is more "comprehensive" - he gives interpretations. As for John, he automatically leads us to a spiritual reading of the life of Jesus and introduces us to contemplation.

We could continue to show the special features of each author in their way of encountering Jesus. We could also try to outline the personality of this man and establish that the witnesses agree on essentials [22], while knowing it is pointless to wish to reduce the distance which separates them. The portrait of a person can never be reduced to adding one point of view on top of another; it is something much more than that. To want to foist a full and definitive image on the Other is effectively to close off every avenue that gives access to his mystery. And nevertheless, the attempt to do this is almost as old as the life of the Church. It was not long before christians tried to synthesise the different and unconnected parts of each Gospel, to reduce them to a single text that later was called: The Four Gospels rolled into one*. Certainly a tempting and beguiling venture - but only a crumb to satisfy our hunger to possess Jesus.

Are we doomed to keep going round in circles, unable to break out of this impasse? Have we come to a blind alley? In actual fact, the reason for these divergences in the interpretation of the life and message of Jesus is to be looked for in the way each one of us lives out his/her christianity. As we live out quite different, even contradictory, realities, we could fall into the illusion of restoring the depth of our unity through constantly returning to some mythical fixed point of our history, be it Jesus of Nazareth (the historical Jesus). However, the diverse representations of Jesus witness, in fact, not to some immobile and fixed image behind them but to the way

[22] Cf. A.M.Hunter, "Un Seigneur, une Eglise, un Salut", ed. Delachaux et Niestlé, 1950, pp.43-57.

* Translator's note: this does not quite capture the elegance of the original French.

we undertake to live out and make the Gospel a living reality. The place where we meet Jesus is not some fixed point but has to be constantly changing and is only to be found in the complex and undefined network of changes involved in our searching and groping. Where our differences and our fumbblings cross - there we find Jesus. From this point of view it would be necessary to go through the whole of the NT to bring out the points of convergence and divergence between the communities. What we would like to do here is to show how Luke deals with this question in the Acts of the Apostles.

B. MEETING JESUS ACCORDING TO THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The conclusion that we come to at this stage of our analysis is that language reflects how people live, and that what is said about Jesus almost invariably refers back to what people want to live or to what they are actually living out together. If we accept this proposition, then the Acts of the Apostles hold great interest for us. In effect, this book takes us from community to community and mentions both the language (i.e. way of talking) and the experience of a certain number of them. Even though the Gospels come out of real, live communities, they are simply concerned to report testimony about Jesus and the snippets they give us about their existence only provide us with the vaguest of silhouettes. Of course one can try to pierce the secret and discover the community talking and acting behind the text, but that sort of work is highly conjectural.

The Acts, on the other hand, contain both a certain language about Jesus and the life of those who pass this on. It has to be said that these two types of writing do not take up quite the same question. For the Gospels, the question can be formulated like this - who was Jesus and what was His message? For the Acts, the question would rather be - now that Jesus has left this earth, where and how do we meet Him? The Letters of Paul and the Acts of Luke do not resolve this problem in quite the same way. We will keep to the work of Luke. From the very beginning, we can already foresee the response which is set out

according to three different moments or occasions - Jesus is present in the language (i.e. the way people talk about Him), in the blessings and misfortunes of the communities, in the 'being-together' of the believers. This is what we would propose to outline in this section.

■ The language (way people talk) about Jesus

In the Acts, with just a few exceptions, Jesus no longer speaks, but people often speak about Him and in His name. The communities have things to pass on about His person and His message. We can find there traces of the outlines of sermons, homilies and catechesis [23]. Based on this material, it is relatively easy to reconstruct, with a high degree of accuracy, the sort of language used by these first christians. This work of reconstruction has already been the object of numerous works and it has led to the following propositions:

1. Jesus is portrayed within the context of a whole history which has begun long before He appeared on the scene. His coming has been prepared long in advance and His ultimate precursor is John the Baptist [*"You must have heard about the recent happenings in Judaea; about Jesus of Nazareth and how he began in Galilee; after John had been preaching baptism "(Acts 10,37)]*. This is the design of God.
2. Jesus is attached to the line of David and He fulfills the promise which were made to him(David) [*"To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour..."(Acts 13,23)]*. These promises culminate in the fact that He will never see corruption (Acts 2,25-31.34; 13,34-37). This conviction is expressed through the title of Christ so often given to Jesus.

[23] For example: Acts 2,14-39; 3,13-26; 4,10-12; 5,30-32; chapter 7; 8,26-40...

3. Jesus was accredited by God in the face of the people through signs and prodigies [*"Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say: Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you, as you all know" (Acts 2,22)*], proof that God was with Him and that He had received the gift of the Spirit (Acts 10, 38).

4. Jesus was put to death by men but raised up by God and exalted at His right hand [*"Now raised to the heights by God's right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit" (Acts 2,33); Acts 5,31*]. It was necessary for Him to pass through the first stage to achieve the second (Acts 17,3; 26,23). His glorification, however, will only be accomplished at the end of time (Acts 3,20; 10,42). But from now on Jesus is the Lord (Acts 2,36; 7,59; 9,14). [24].

In all this teaching, the way of talking is not simply to convey information; rather, the language used is clothed with symbols and types which, in particular, liken Jesus to certain characters of the OT. We will limit ourselves to some examples to illustrate our point: just as Joseph was sold by his brothers, and thanks to that was able to save them, so also Jesus... (Acts 7,9.13.14.18). Jesus is the prophet like Moses who was due to return (cf. Dt 18,15) - His signs and wonders are witness to this. Like the Servant of whom Isaiah speaks (Is 53 → Acts 8), Jesus, delivered over to torments and death for others, saves us [*"By his own right hand God has now raised him up to be leader and saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him to Israel."* (Acts 5,31)]. Hence the importance of the title "Just" which is attributed to Him (Acts 3,14; 7,52; 22,14). On the other hand (and for reasons that it would be too long to go into here), we note the absence of the titles, "Son of Man" or "Son of

[24] Cf. C.H.Dodd, "La prédication apostolique et ses développements", ed. du Cerf, 1975.

God". Doubtless these words were unintelligible in a Greek milieu?

On this first level, encountering Jesus still takes place in the same way which we have described for the Gospels. We are still on the level of talking, with all the limitations that implies.

* Life according to Jesus

Luke proposes to us to leave, without any reservation, the unreal world to model our life on that of Christ. The word, lest it be a lie or an abstraction, must come to grips with the basic realities of life and death. The christian life does not consist in simply producing a language, a way of talking, but must find concrete expression in the ordinary experience of daily life, in a 'practice', in action [in Greek, Acts (of the Apostles) equals Praxis → practice]. The ideal will henceforth consist in living what Christ has lived. The Acts appear as setting out the different aspects of the life of Jesus as realised in the life of this or that person. We will limit ourselves to giving some indications of this.

Jesus performed miracles; it is possible for the community to do the same because it lives in the power of the Risen One. Peter and John enable a paralytic to walk again (Acts 3,1-11). Peter and Paul each restore a dead person to life (Acts 9,36-42; 20,7-12). We should compare the miracles of the Acts with those of Jesus in the Gospel. It is clear that the vocabulary and the form of the account are quite similar. In some cases, of course, the text in the Acts is inspired by a text from the Gospel. Jesus calmed the tempest and saved his disciples from drowning; Paul saves 276 people from shipwreck (Acts 27, 13-44). In other cases, only the fact is mentioned without giving any details (cf. Stephen, Acts 6,8).

We also note the importance given by Luke to scenes before a tribunal or judge. There is no doubt that this reflects real events, but his insistence reminds us of the trial of Jesus (Acts 26; 8,1-3). It is in persecution that people follow the Master more closely.

This imitation of Christ finds its fulfillment in the death of the disciple. It is truly there that His message is re-enacted in all its fullness. The most characteristic example of this remains the martyrdom of Stephen. As in the case of Jesus, people fail to trap him in his discourse and so it is necessary to bribe false witnesses who also accuse him of blasphemy. The crowd is stirred up and he is brought before the Sanhedrin where he is accused of violating the prohibitions of the Law and blaspheming against the Temple. Some years after Jesus, Stephen relives His passion. He reminds the Israelites of their infidelities and how they ill-treated the prophets. His end comes about like that of Jesus: he is executed outside the holy city, he pardons his executioners and commends his spirit into the hands of God (Acts 6,8-8,1). It is in confronting life and death that we witness to Christ and not only in talking well about Him. The fifth Gospel is written in our blood...

* Jesus shows Himself

Even though the NT is full of invitations to imitate and follow Jesus and to model our life on His (cf. "Love one another as I have loved you..."), this reiteration of the past nevertheless runs the risk of tying us to past events that are over and done with, so that all we have to do is to reproduce them one after the other. Luke complements memory with creative imagination which can adapt itself to the changing patterns of history. The past is forever closed and inaccessible - not only the man Jesus but the whole environment that went with Him. So we must give up the idea of belonging to his time, to run the risk of living our own. It is a matter, after all, of the question we posed at the beginning - where and how do we meet Jesus today? It was a number of years before this awareness took shape. We shall try to retrace some of the stages that marked this journey.

With His death and glorification, Jesus no longer belongs to this earth. In a few verses, Luke recounts how the earthly hopes of the disciples were dashed by Jesus

and how they represented this break from Him. The Ascension - like the Resurrection - points to the moment of separation. Jesus is no longer visible or accessible as He was, so another way must be discovered. It is for a very good reason that Luke has placed this account at the head of his book. So they are invited to go to meet Him somewhere else and in a different way.

If the Jesus of history no longer belongs to our world in the way that His contemporaries were able to meet Him, in what way, henceforth, does the Christ of faith - the Risen One - make Himself effectively present to us today: that is, with the power of His Resurrection? In effect, Christ is not present to us today in the way our dead are present to our minds; His presence is not just a memory, rather, it is a transforming presence.

In a nuanced way, the authors of the NT affirm that there is both a discontinuity and a continuity between Jesus and the Church. For his part, Luke is more sensitive to the second aspect and he understands this as the work of the Spirit. This is the meaning he gives to Pentecost. For just as the Spirit came upon Mary to bring about Jesus' birth, so He was poured out on the community of disciples to make it into the community of the risen Jesus and to envelop it with His power. Pentecost is to the Twelve what the Annunciation was for Mary. The Spirit is at work in the Church so that she may continue the work of Christ in the history of mankind.

This continuity can be expressed in terms of identity. Such is the case when Paul, on the road to Damascus, asks the question - "Who are you, Lord?" and hears the reply - "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9,5). The formula is very strong and it has to be modified with other affirmations which also speak, though in a different way, of the bond which unites Christ to the Church, such as the metaphors of the body or of the bride in the Letters of Paul.

This continuity is only possible, however, by means of certain analogies, and it is not always experienced in the same way nor with the same intensity. In the Acts, Luke orients us in several directions which we find combined in

the account of the Disciples of Emmaus (Lk 24,13-31). It is the Word which brings about presence or action. The Church is the bearer of the Word. Christ took flesh, the Church takes the word.[25] The other who walks with me - the word exchanged - re-actualises the presence of Christ. In the Acts there is a lot of travelling and people speak a great deal together. One of the most typical accounts remains the encounter between Philip and the eunuch.

Another factor ties in with the preceding ones - the Scriptures are henceforth the privileged place for meeting the Risen One. In the Acts, the OT is re-read in the light of what Jesus has experienced in His death and resurrection. It is through the Scriptures that the mystery of His person and His mission are unveiled. In almost all the discourses of the Acts or the catecheses, explicit reference is made to the Scriptures for unravelling the meaning of the events that have just been experienced (cf. the discourses and also - Acts 8,26-40).

Without setting aside what we have said previously, we can also say that miracles are an effect of the Resurrection. In saying - "in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!"(Acts 3,6)- Peter wishes to signify that they also - in the Resurrection of Jesus - have acquired the power to heal which was manifested in Jesus. In conclusion, we can point out another special place where Jesus is encountered - the shared meals. In the Acts, the meals hold an important place, whether it is a question of the breaking of bread, which designates the Eucharist, or meals taken in common (Acts 2,46 or Acts 10). We may also take note of the prayer assemblies, baptisms...

This rapid sketch leads us, then, to the following conclusion. For Luke, Jesus makes Himself seen and grasped today only through the Church which becomes, by the work of the Spirit, the place of His presence-to-the-world for those who have not encountered Him before and after Easter.

[25] There is a good presentation of this question in Cahiers Evangile no.21 - "Une lecture des Actes des Apôtres", pp.57-58.

But, on the other hand, Luke insists on the intrinsic link between what the Church says and does. The Church is not only the place where people speak about Jesus, but also the place where, in life as in death, the authenticity of this language, which is a constant invitation to follow Jesus and to be one with Him, is verified.

2. IN DISCONTINUITY AND CONTINUITY WITH THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

For believers, re-reading the NT is never a question of poring over old and obscure writings but of returning - through the text - to the place of their childhood. This return, or this detour, is both necessary and possible, but on two conditions - we see ourselves in continuity and in discontinuity with our past.

A. THE EXPERIENCE OF CONTINUITY or looking at the Churches today as mirrored in the Churches of the NT

"The basis for the Bible's capacity to speak to people in every age is the conviction of the organic - almost biological - unity between the people of God of the Old and the New Testament, in time and place... The individual and the community of a given age feel vitally concerned by what has happened to the people of the past. This is a part of their own destiny. In virtue of this unity, the word of God addressed to people at a given time, living in a particular situation, is, in itself, valid for every generation." [26]

[26] F. Dreyfus, "L'actualisation à l'intérieur de la Bible", *Revue Biblique*, April 1976, p.200.

These propositions apply equally - and even more so - to the Church. To construct the Church today without any reference to the Church of the NT would be like chopping a tree off from its roots. From this point, we leave the area of proofs to enter into the experience of a community of believers. Up until now we have been concerned with an historical and theological reconstruction. This research has little or no interest for us if it does not lead us to what we are actually experiencing.

Through what we have done, we now have some sort of a mirror in which we should look at ourselves. The mirror is of no particular interest in itself; rather, the interest lies in the image of ourselves that it reflects back. To stay on the level of a scientific and distant reading of the NT would mean to be more concerned with the mirror than the image it gives us. In other words, to expect the exegete to give an unequivocal and definitive response, or to speculate on the fact that, after all, his work is highly conjectural, would be to abdicate our responsibilities. The NT poses a question and it is to us - today - that this question is addressed.[27]

To take up this first point in a practical way, we would suggest to the reader to go back over the first chapter, asking himself/herself whether it is not obvious in their community, that of the 6 elements mentioned, one or other is overemphasised, or one or other is simply absent. For example, is my community really convinced that it is gathered together through the initiative of God? How does that show itself, concretely? What place is there for mission or for celebrating?...

It is up to the reader to find other questions. The NT challenges us and invites us to restore, perhaps to give, more place to one or other aspect of the ecclesial life.

[27] S.Kierkegaard develops this idea at length in a sermon entitled, "Le miroir de la parole", published in a collection entitled: *Pour un examen de conscience*, translated and edited by P.H.Tisseau, pp.17-75.

B. THE EXPERIENCE OF DISCONTINUITY (BREAK) or to 'make' (i.e. to be) the Church in a different way.

We will never be the church of the NT[28]. To re-read the NT is of necessity to reinterpret it in terms of what we are, and of the present situation. To make again the Church today is to take into account the changes of our time... To play again a fugue of Bach is always to put something of ourselves into it! Of course, one cannot play it simply any old way, but considerable liberty is allowed to the person "interpreting" it who, while respecting the intention of the author, recreates something that has not been heard before.

If it were necessary to build again today the Church of the NT, we would have great difficulty in choosing both the place and the period. Should we opt for a more charismatic, Corinthian style, or something more structured, like Antioch - the Church of Matthew? To imitate the Churches of the past is a gamble and to force ourselves to take it up is to betray their spirit. We have to be Christians of our age - our task is to announce the Gospel to men and women of today and to reply to the questions posed by believers today. In brief, a new way of announcing or understanding the faith must, of necessity, be found which takes into account the culture and the milieu in which we want to incarnate the Church.

The authors of the NT would doubtless have recognised with difficulty the image of Christ in the declaration of the Council of Nicea: "The Son is of the same substance as the Father", but this proposition was certainly more faithful to their thought than the texts of Arius - the opponent of the Council - who wanted to keep to the letter of Scripture. The mystery of the Church, no more than the mystery of Christ, is not exhausted by what the NT has to say about it. In this sense, we can say that the Second Vatican Council, in its constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, is

[28] M. de Certeau tackles this question in his book, *L'étranger ou l'union dans la différence*. Ed. by Desclée De Brouwer (1969), pp.160-164.

more faithful to the NT than those who want - like certain sects - to remain purely and simply with what the NT has to say. Conditions external to the Church necessarily modify the way its structure materialises at this or that period of its history.

For this reflection to take concrete shape in our way of living as Church, we might perhaps question ourselves on the following points:

1. When we were children, our catechism included a chapter dealing with the Church. It would be worthwhile to re-read it and to compare it with what Vatican II was able to say about the same reality. We may say straight away that our catechism insists more on authority and Vatican II on responsibility. Where, in the NT, are the bases for these two positions?
2. Has the ecclesial community to which I belong really come to grips with the world around it? Does it provide its members with the means necessary to have a renewed understanding of the faith which corresponds to the culture and mentality of each person? Finally, do I think of my community as a service-station or as a place where I assume my responsibility according to my expertise and my personal gifts? As a leader of the community, is what I do a slightly veiled way of exercising power or the occasion for authentically serving my brothers and sisters?

3. A CRITICAL LOOK AT OUR COMMUNITIES

Before closing with this "NT Revisited", let us take -at our own risk- a critical look at our own communities.

A. COMMUNITIES WITH A STRONG EMPHASIS ON RELATIONS OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY

Certain parts of the Church pay special attention to mission and relations with non-believers. In groups like

this, the whole life of the Church is focussed on spreading the Gospel. The group regularly questions itself whether the proclamation of the Gospel is gaining or losing ground.

These communities display a great variety of features and take different forms: they can be a mission in pagan lands where christianity has not yet succeeded in establishing autonomous churches, or a christian community in an unbelieving milieu, or a catholic action group.

Re-reading what we have written in the first part of this work would doubtless invite these communities to change their standpoint or make some adjustments in how they go about things. Some burning questions might well come up - what christianity are we offering? Is it accommodated too much to the inclinations of those to whom it is offered, and watered down? Does the way the faith is proposed really take into account the culture of those to whom it is addressed? Why does the proclamation of the faith have so little effect - neither conversions nor persecutions? Does the community take time to celebrate what it announces? Does it renew itself in its theology? The readers may be interested in refining these questions.

B. COMMUNITIES WITH A STRONG EMPHASIS ON RELATIONS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

In this category we include groups which give a very great importance to catechesis, to the liturgy or to the organisation of the community. The classic, but not exclusive example remains the parish, though certain charismatic renewal group would recognise themselves here.

These communities, where people often have the feeling it is good to be alive through shared prayer and a beautiful liturgy, can ask themselves the following questions: have we forgotten that very many of those around us, where we work or in our towns and villages, do not know the face of Christ? Do we develop an 'in-language' for theology and catechetics, which adds consolation to our spiritual comfort, forgetting that Auschwitz did happen and that half of the world is hungry and has nothing to eat?

C. THE FORGOTTEN DIMENSION - THE RELATION BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

The link between communities is not taken care of very well, even if they are connected at the level of the hierarchy. The absence of communication, at the base, between communities is regrettable - not so much on the territorial level as on the level of different milieus, parishes... In some places people do not reach the stage of talking to one another, in other places they are completely ignorant of one another. Where is the sharing of resources between the Churches of the rich countries and those of the developing countries?

Where do we see the trouble Paul went to, to explain what he had done? Where do we find all this correspondence through letters, from one Church to another, that the first centuries has preserved for us? All these lacks are a grave threat for the health or the building up of the Body of Christ which is the Church. Nothing is more harmful to its growth than to allow some communities to believe that they are autonomous, that they are self-sufficient or that they have nothing to expect from others. To be Church today, it seems to me, is to move beyond tensions or confrontations, in the desire to keep intact the seamless robe of the Bride of Christ.