DYNAMICS OF CHANGE IN THE CHURCH'S SELF-UNDERSTANDING

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THIS ARTICLE is a methodological attempt to explain changes in self-understanding within the Church. Its basic claim is that such changes can be clarified, at least in part, by recourse to two dynamic processes that characterize human development as a whole. These two processes derive from humanity's fundamental historicity. They are (1) the process by which there emerges an ontic pluralism of values and groupings and (2) the process by which the human capacity to classify becomes more discriminating.

To clarify the methodological principles, I shall attempt to apply them in some length to a concrete instance of change in the Church's teaching about itself: the shift from the pre-Vatican II view that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church and others are false churches to the postconciliar notion that the one true Church's elements are distributed in varying degrees throughout a number of bodies that call themselves churches.

The article divides into three sections. The first sets forth a typical problem of change in the Church's teaching: the above-mentioned doctrine about the true and the false churches. The second section sets forth the two dynamic processes that facilitate an explanation of changes in Church teaching. The third section applies the dynamics of the second section to the problem set forth in the first.

SHIFT IN THE CHURCH'S SELF-UNDERSTANDING

In the theology of the textbooks used up until Vatican II, a section on the Roman Catholic Church as the true Church invariably had an honorable place.[1] Such teaching showed that certain marks belonged to the true Church; these marks were found in their integral perfection only in the Roman Catholic Church; hence it, and it alone, was the true Church.[2] Nor was such teaching confined to theology textbooks. It was sanctioned by the supreme teaching authority of the Roman Catholic

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[1] Cf. A. Tanquerey, *Synopsis theologiae dogmaticae* 1 (26th ed.; Paris: Desclée, 1949) 388–557. Michaele Nicolau and Joachim Salaverri, *Theologia fundamentalis* (2nd ed.; Vol. 1 of *Sacrae theologiae summa*; Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1952) 872–932.

[2] For a history of the use of the marks of the Church in apologetics and theology, see Yves Congar, *L'Eglise une, sainte, catholique, et apostolique* (Paris: Cerf, 1970).

Church[3] and it was found in catechisms and popular expositions of doctrine used everywhere.[4]

With the advent of Vatican II, however, the teaching on the Roman Catholic Church as the one true Church has practically disappeared. In searching through bibliographies of a few recent years, I could not find a single article on the subject by a theologian of substance. Instead, a new teaching, based largely on article 8 of *Lumen gentium*[5] but also on the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), is now found everywhere.

This new teaching of *Lumen gentium* 8 may be summarized as follows. There is but one true Church of Christ which is vivified by his Spirit and through which he communicates grace and truth to all. Christ ceaselessly sustains that Church as a community of faith, hope, and charity bodied forth in a visible structure. "This Church ... *subsists* in the Catholic Church ... governed by the successor of Peter ..., although many *elements of sanctification and truth* can be found outside its visible structure." Because these elements *"properly belong ... to the Church of Christ,* (they) possess an inner dynamism toward Catholic unity."[6]

The words I have italicized point to two related elements of newness in the Church's self-understanding. First, it is not said, as it was said in an earlier 1963 draft of the document, that the Catholic Church "is" the true Church; rather, the true Church is said to "subsist" in the Catholic Church. According to Philips, "subsists" indicates that in the Catholic

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[3] *DS* 802, 870, 3303.

[4] See the classic *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests,* tr. John McHugh and Charles Callan (New York: Wagner, 1934) 101–9.

[5] "This is the unique Church of Christ which in the Creed we avow as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. After his resurrection our Savior handed it over to Peter to be shepherded (Jn 21:17), commissioning him and the other apostles to propagate and govern it (cf. Mt 28:18 ff.). He erected it for all ages as 'the pillar and mainstay of the truth' (1 Tim 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, *subsists* [italics mine] in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in union with that successor, although many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside of its visible structure. These elements, however, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, possess an inner dynamism toward Catholic unity."

[6] In the summary and comments that follow, I am greatly indebted to Aloys Grillmeier in "The Mystery of the Church," an explanation of chap. 1 of *Lumen gentium* appearing in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 1 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967) 149–51. For further commentary on this section of *Lumen gentium,* see Gregory Baum, *De ecclesia: The Constitution on the Church of Vatican Council II* (Glen Rock, N. J.: Paulist, 1964) 18–24; Kevin McNamara, ed., *Vatican II, The Constitution on the Church: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1968) 99–102; G. Philips, *L'Eglise et son mystère au Deuxième Concile du Vatican: Histoire, texte et commentaire de la constitution Lumen gentium* 1 (Paris: Desclée, 1967) 114–19.

Church is found the true Church in all its plenitude and power.[7] However, no absolute and total identity of the true Church and the Catholic Church is made. Secondly, an explanation (1) for the use of "subsists" and (2) for the refusal to totally identify the true Church and the Catholic Church is given. It is admitted that there are genuine ecclesial elements of sanctification and truth outside the Catholic Church. In fact, it is the existence of these elements in other churches that propels them toward Catholic unity.

The common teaching of the past identified the Roman Catholic Church with the true Church, and it denied the existence of saving ecclesial elements in other churches. (If other Christians were saved, it was *in spite of* their membership in false churches.) It is obvious, therefore, that there has been a considerable shift in teaching. How is this to be explained? Are we to say that the old teaching was erroneous and the error has been corrected? A number of Catholic theologians feel uneasy with this type of answer; it is too black and white, too destructive of continuity in the Church's self-understanding. Shall we appeal to some notion of reinterpretation of the doctrine such as Avery Dulles does in the context of several models of the Church?[8] A difficulty here stems from the fact that reinterpretation can have many meanings. To reinterpret may mean (1) to repeat the old understanding in new language, or (2) to derive new implications from a combination of old understandings, or (3) to make new applications of old principles and then to thematize new knowledge resulting from those applications, or (4) to proclaim a new interpretation that includes the elements contained in the old but goes beyond the old by accounting for further elements and/or differentiating in a more nuanced way the elements explained by the older teaching, or (5) to state a new interpretation that, at least partially, contradicts the old.

I do not believe that it is wise or fruitful to resort too quickly to error and partial discontinuity as means of explaining shifts in the Church's teaching. Nor do I believe that such a procedure is necessary in this case.[9] I think it is possible to account for the shift in the teaching on the

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[7] Philips, *L'Église et son mystère* 119.

[8] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1974) 115–50.

[9] I am not claiming that all shifts in the Church's teaching are simply matters of apparent discontinuity. It appears to me to be historically obvious that we have made mistakes and have had to correct them. I am claiming that in this case we can meet the malaise brought about by apparent discontinuity in teaching by showing that the shift is the product of certain processes that are at the heart of genuine development in continuity. I recognize, further, that there is always the danger that one will resort to explanations such as the one I will give in a desperate effort to show that the past was not mistaken. However, there is also a present danger of falling into the posture of "honest self-disclosure," so that one is overanxious to attribute error to the past. I see no way to avoid both of these two extremes but the way of eternal vigilance and mutual criticism.

true Church in a way that preserves continuity and self-identity in an honest way. Reinterpretation need not impugn the past. It can fulfill it.

SOME GENERAL EXPLANATORY NOTIONS

Rather than appeal to a specifically ecclesiastical notion of reinterpretation, I would like to move the discussion further back to some factors necessitating reinterpretation in all fields. These factors flow from humanity's fundamental historicity.

Notion of Historicity

That human beings are historical in nature no one denies today. But what is the nature of historicity?[9a] Here I wish to indicate only three of the factors constituting human historicity, because each pertains to the problem before us.

1) *To be historical is to be relatable.* This means that a human being is, beyond all other creatures that we know, in a relationship with his or her environment that leads to changes in both. The sights one sees, the sounds one hears, the ideas current in one's milieu, the quality of the personal community within which one dwells—all these call forth reactions and responses that modify the individual and the communities to which she or he pertains. In turn, people and societies shape and change their environment, utilize its resources, bring forth its potentials, destroy its possibilities. To a certain extent, all beings change their environments and are in turn changed by them. Yet no being is so involved with change as the human animal.

As a consequence of this fundamental relatability of persons to their environments, individuals and groups of people tend to differ. Different environments call forth different developments in men and women, and in turn lead to different modifications in the environment. Even if there were no other factors involved, persons would be different simply from

[9a] The nature of historicity revolves around the question of freedom. For determinists, man's historicity derives solely from already existing created causes. Individual persons and individual societies are unique only because they are conditioned by unique inner constitutions and their successive responses to unique sets of environmental circumstances. A typical example of such a deterministic view may be found in Edward H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961) 113-43. For other examples see Patrick Gardiner, ed., *Theories of History* (New York: Free Press, 1959). The view I espouse in the text accepts the conditioning by already existing factors, but it sees man's historicity as also deriving from his possession of freedom. The formulation of this view is my own; however, it has been profoundly influenced by the notion of freedom exemplified by Yves Simon in *Freedom of Choice* (New York: Fordham University, 1969). Quite helpful has been Karl Rahner, *Hominisation: The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965).

the fact that they have grown up in different settings. An Einstein placed in a primitive setting would be a primitive genius at best, not the scientific light of the twentieth century.[10]

2) *To be historical is to be characterized by individual and societal accumulation.* By accumulation I mean the carry-over of the effects of past changes and developments into the present. This means that each individual and each society incorporates in some way in the present that which has been developed in the past. The possessions a man has acquired, the ideas he has thought, the emotions he has felt condition what he now is and does. The habitual mores of a society, the government that has ruled it, the ideals that have shaped it in the past—all continue in some way, if only by reaction, to influence its present.[11]

Now to a certain extent all this is true of lesser living things. A dog is shaped to some extent by its past, and so is a tree. One might even claim that a pack of animals and a forest of trees considered as a group have also been shaped by their pasts. However, human accumulation is far more profound and all-pervasive than that of any other creature. To some extent this is true because individuals and societies of persons grasp more deeply and vividly than other living beings what has occurred to them in their personal pasts.[12] However, humanity's exceptional accumulation power stems basically from the fact that the sequence of persons and societies manifests a sustained growth. A dog starts basically where its sire started. The sire may have made advances in its days; it may have learned a few tricks from its environment; but the pup begins where the sire began. On the whole, there is little accumulation over the history of the canine species.

Not so with human beings. Each generation more or less stands not just on its own past but on the total past of its predecessors. Hence there has been an accumulated science in which the present researcher learns from, builds upon, and then goes beyond the past and its knowledge. Moreover, just as the human race has accumulated sequentially in the intellectual realm, so too it has grown in the personal realm. The sensitivities of persons to human values and the capacities for destroying

[10] For a convenient history of theories of culture with emphasis on the effect environment has upon cultural differences, see Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Crowell, 1968).

[11] Perhaps the most comprehensive modern philosophical analysis of the relatability of man (and also of other beings) to the total environment is that of Alfred North Whitehead; see his *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1969) 100–51.

[12] Whitehead takes this up in his system when he treats "presentational immediacy." In turn, presentational immediacy makes possible the symbolic nature of man, a key factor in man's growth in his environment. See Whitehead's *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (New York: Putnam, 1959).

or repressing such values have grown with time.[13] In brief, humanity is traditional, not just instinctual.

3) *To be historical is to be creatively self-transcending.* It is the human creative self-transcending capacity that accounts for the fact that persons differ from other living beings in their relationships to their environment and in their sustained growth. Each person and each society is capable—in small or great measure depending on circumstances—of going beyond the situation bequeathed to it. This creative capacity has to do, therefore, with the emergence of novelty, to use a Whiteheadian phrase.[14]

This creative self-transcending capacity has many facets. First, men and women have the capacity to understand, to grasp the unities and interconnections in their own experiences within their world. They can go beyond the merely given to group together elements of their experiences under a unifying aspect. They can, in effect, overtake themselves and thus go beyond themselves. Secondly, they can envision potentialities and possibilities in themselves and in their environment. They can dream dreams and see visions of what might be. They are not limited to rearrangements of the past but can, within limits, create a new future in their minds. Thirdly, they can choose among the various alternatives envisioned. They cannot go down all possible roads, but they can decide upon one or a few. Fourthly, they can generate new and unexpected

[13] I am not advocating a view of unlimited progress. Theories such as those of Turgot and Condorcet have by now been discredited. Man obviously has had ups and downs; better eras have succeeded worse ones. What I am claiming is that, apart from catastrophes that destroy the hard-won gains of the past, man tends to complexify as an individual and societal being. The knowledge of one age is passed on to the next. With that knowledge tends to go a corresponding change in how men act and affect their environments. In the long run, the accumulation of knowledge leads to a complexification of environments, which in turn complexify experience. Only when the artifacts and the memory of the past are destroyed by a great war or some other cataclysmic event does the process of complexification reverse itself. Such destructive events effectively rupture the chain of tradition that is the life line of the process of human complexification. However, complexification is not synonymous with progress. Often such complexification leads to disintegration, personal confusion, waste, pollution, and a thousand other unfortunate results. The evident increase in the amount of knowledge, in the pluralism of values, and in the capacity to effect change has undoubtedly led to an increase in the number of good things man can do. Just as surely, it has also increased the number of things that can and often do go wrong.

[14] Whitehead, *Process and Reality* 25–26. In *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1967) 207, Whitehead asserts that the "essence of life is the teleological introduction of novelty, with some conformation of objectives. Thus novelty of circumstance is met with novelty of functioning adapted to steadiness of purpose." Whitehead saw novelty everywhere but especially in higher organisms. He made creativity an ultimate notion, "the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact" (*Process and Reality* 25).

experiences by their choices of novelty. Men and women never fully grasp themselves, never fully know what will happen to themselves and their environments when they act. Even in the implementation of decisions made without reflection, they can move into a newness, often a destructive newness. The example of the use of DDT is still before us.[15] Fifthly, persons can learn more about reality from their new experiences. New experiences provide new data, and new data constitutes a matrix for new understanding. Scientific experiments merely exploit in a systematic manner the capacity of human beings to advance in learning by varying experience. Sixthly, persons can symbolically express who they are in such a way that they project forward and communicate not only what they have been but also what they are creatively coming to be. Animals can use instinctive and recurring expressions that point to the same meaning over long periods. However, because men and women change in new and creative ways, in their expressivity they must project forward new meanings. Hence they use symbols—expressions that declare and suggest, reveal and conceal. Their societal language, which to some extent is an ever-growing repository of sedimented universal meaning, both denotes and connotes. Further, language is not just an entree to the meanings of the past; it is also a catalyst for meanings that will be in their future. And so we have a growing recognition that hermeneutics is not simply the recovery of the meaning intended by those who wrote the texts or composed the artistic productions; it is also the grasp of the deeper reality that gave birth to the text or work of art; finally, it is the herald of meaning that is coming to be in the present.

What this third point means, therefore, is that human persons are *not* historical because they are related to their environments and because they are conditioned by their pasts. Animals are related to their environments and are conditioned by their pasts, but they are not historical. These two factors are necessary for historicity, but they are not sufficient. The human race is historical and is delivered from an endless repetitive cycle precisely because it possesses to a marked degree the factor of creative self-transcendence. Further, this historicity becomes more apparent to the degree that men and women are freed from the necessity of applying their energy to a struggle for survival and are able to apply it to creative efforts. Thus there is a sense in which it can be said that some primitives, at least over fairly long periods of time, were *concretely* prehistorical. The historicity of such primitives was only potential; it was not actualized; for these human beings were so engaged in the struggle for survival and maintenance of a repetitive life cycle that the

[15] It is now known that this widely-used pesticide has harmful environmental side effects; see *Science News* 107 (March 1, 1975) 136.

creative factor which makes for genuine historical development was largely attenuated.[16]

Effects of Historicity

Two effects of historicity bear in a special way upon the problem of the shift in the teaching on the one true Church. They are (1) the gradual emergence of ontic pluralism[17] and (2) the increasing necessity and capacity of persons to be self-reflective and to be able to make explicit distinctions.

1) *Because of humanity's historicity, the emergence of ontic pluralism in the various areas of human concern is to be expected with the passage of time.* By a condition of ontic pluralism I mean one in which different groups of people develop different sets of potentials. Thus, biologists have developed the human capacity to understand life, and physicists have developed the capacity to understand matter. They are pluralistic groups within a larger community of scientific interest. Similarly, artists have developed the capacity to express the human spirit through oils and canvas, whereas sculptors have developed the capacity to express themselves in stone. The point is that all human beings have many potentials, that a group can be identified by the potentials it has developed, and that when several groups develop different sets of potentials we have the condition of ontic pluralism; for in such an eventuality we have persons who differ in the actualities developed in their very beings.

The claim here is that in all significant fields of human potential ontic pluralism becomes inevitable with the passage of time because of the creative self-transcendence implied in man's historicity. This follows upon two factors. On the one hand, the accumulated effect of the human exercise of the power of self-transcendence means that persons become richer and more complex in the very constituency of their beings. Because

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[16] I use the word "ontically" to refer to actualized potentials in man. To have a feeling, to conjure up the image of a person, to understand an experience, or to make a decision *is* to actualize a human potential and thus to be changed "ontically," that is, in one's very being. To be "ontically" historical is thus to actualize significantly man's creative capacity. It would seem that man has always exercised this creative capacity to some extent. However, early man exercised it so slightly and hence changed so slowly that we can justifiably say that he was ontically prehistorical.

[17] On the subject of pluralism, see Karl Rahner, "Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Church's Profession of Faith," *Concilium* (British ed.) 6, no. 5 (June 1969) 49–58; Gérard Philips, "A propos du pluralisme en théologie," *ETL* 46 (1970) 149–69; William Thompson, "Rahner's Theology of Pluralism," *Ecumenist* 11 (Jan.-Feb. 1973) 17–22; Andrew Greeley, "Notes on a Theology of Pluralism," *Christian Century* 91 (1974) 696–700; Raymond Devettere, "Progress and Pluralism in Theology," *TS* 35 (1974) 441–66; Bernard Lonergan, *Doctrinal Pluralism* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1971); David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury, 1975).

of a sequence of creative advances, the race develops. Feelings, emotions, attitudes, understandings, and free choices become more complex and variegated. What was once only a bare potential becomes actual. Nor may we accurately describe this state of affairs by saying that human beings remain essentially the same although they change in accidental subjective qualities. More precisely we should say that the race's quality of creative self-transcendence (which is the condition of possibility of understanding and freedom), considered as an *abstract* quality, does remain over the ages. However, because of the exercise of this quality over long periods humanity does undergo genuine changes in its *concrete* realization. Since human beings are constituted by such things as feeling, emotion, understanding, and freedom, any developments in these areas constitute development in the concrete beings of men and women. And this is an ontic development of essential human qualities.

On the other hand, despite the collective advance in the realization of human potentials, human beings remain finite and limited. No single individual or group of individuals can incorporate all the increased realizations brought into existence by humanity's creative advance. As a result, even within the confines of a specific civilization and culture, a pluralistic development of values occurs. Some persons develop one set of values, others develop different sets; for no person or group can develop all the values achieved by the race in advanced stages. Persons become, as it were, increasingly specialized as persons. Intellectual specialization is the most obvious example of this.[18] However, a corresponding specialization of feelings, attitudes, and emotions also occurs because of the interrelatedness of the various aspects of human beings. Hence cultures and subcultures become common. Each person and each group represents, more or less, a different limited selection of the many values available for actualization. As the number of these values increases because of the accumulated creative advance, the variety of actual concrete personal realizations increases. This is ontic pluralism, a pluralism of difference not just in ideas but in the total experiential make-up of persons.

2) *Because of its historicity, humanity experiences an increasing necessity and capacity to be self-reflective and to make explicit distinctions.* First, the creative advance in values makes self-reflection an

[18] If one looks for a symbolic event that signaled the onset of intellectual pluralism or specialization, one might see it in the publication of the third edition of the *Encylopedia Britannica* in 1788. Earlier editions had been put together by one or two men. By 1788 the field of human knowledge had so expanded that no one man could master it all. Hence, with the edition of 1788, the *Britannica* began to call upon specialists. I am indebted for this bit of information to Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 174.

increasing necessity, and that necessity forces the development of this reflective capacity. The necessity to be self-reflective increases as change accelerates and ontic pluralism emerges. In such conditions the individual no longer attains self-identity by the ceaseless repetition of the same behavior pattern, for behavior patterns are in constant flux. To meet the need for self-identity, a person must find a thread, an intelligibility, that will give continuing meaning to an empirically changing sequence of operations. However, such a thread can be found only by reflection upon one's life and activities in the world. And so men and women are driven to a closer examination of their words and deeds. They begin to analyze their reasons for acting; they become aware of hidden motivations, implicit goals, and hidden agendas. Steadily, by the practice of self-reflection, they become more self-reflective persons.

Moreover, this self-reflection is not confined to the individual and his lifetime. Men and women are social beings and their identity is societal as well as individual. The group, too, needs to acquire an identity over change. As further values emerge, the nature of the tradition by which the group lives must change. A tradition that consists in the repetition of certain concrete acts no longer suffices, because the environment has changed and demands new activities. There is need for a dynamic tradition that enables the group to maintain a fundamental identity as it changes and develops. However, such an identity can be attained only by examining the societal self and its development over time in the hope of discovering some unifying thread. And so persons begin to study not just the acts of the past but the motives and causes that produced them. The chronicle gives way to "scissors and paste history" (Collingwood's phrase), and this in turn gives way to a history increasingly more aware of its presuppositions. In the end, the curiosity about the past, the advance in living standards which permits the employment of many to investigate that past, the emergence of sociology as a science, the increase of the rate of change to the point that significant societal alteration is noticed within one lifetime—these and many other factors have enabled the human race to realize on a large scale that it is historically conditioned,[19] that history is not cyclical, that mankind changes in new and unexpected ways, and that the future will be different from the present

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[19] For the story of the emergence in human consciousness of the fact that man is historical, see Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) esp. 125-40. This work treats of the way man came to realize that both nature and human society have evolved. For a more specific treatment at greater length of the emergence of historical consciousness with regard to human society, see R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University, 1956) 1-204. For an account of the thought of the great forerunner of the historical understanding of man, see Richard Manson, *The Theory of Knowledge of Giambattista Vico* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1969).

as the present has been different from the past. Effectively, then, human beings have become more self-reflective and more aware of themselves both as individuals and as members of society.

Secondly, with the passage of time, humanity's historicity promotes both the necessity and the capacity of individuals and of the race as a whole to make ever more subtle distinctions. Early human beings dealt with a few concrete realities and understood them in terms of their own concrete experiences. There was little tendency to use their abstractive powers, because experiences were limited and could be classified under relatively few categories. Because situations tended to remain constant, morality was simple and consisted largely of rules of thumb demanded of all and accepted without question. There was no need for theoretical expositions and for schools which encouraged abstraction, because each person learned all that he or she would need to know within the context of life experience. However, the passage of time and the changes brought about by a sustained creative advance have altered this state of affairs. Increasingly, men and women have become more differentiated in their consciousness; they have become more aware of the complexity of things, not only because reality itself is more complex but also because they have become more sensitive to the elements that go to make up that reality. Moreover, this greater capacity to distinguish has tended to become more widespread. Whereas only a handful of human beings in the recent past were conscious of the complexities of the operations of their personal lives and the developments of their societies, in the present large numbers are so aware. Thus, within the Church itself—at least in Europe and the Americas—the simple acceptance of pat answers which characterized the Catholic of the 1950's has given way to a recognition that reality is not so susceptible of pre-established solutions. For better or worse, many have become more discriminating.[20]

This increasing need and capacity to discriminate is the reflective and conscious aspect of the tendency of individuals and societies to pass through stages of development. Such developmental stages have been enumerated from many points of view,[21] but it is not my purpose to

[20] A case can be made that the great dividing line among men at present is the recognition or nonrecognition of the complexity of existence. As Andrew Greeley put it in his *Priests in the United States: Reflections on a Survey* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972) 11, "I have long since discovered that the important political and social distinctions are not between men who are liberals and conservatives but between men who think the world is simple and those who know it is not."

[21] See Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1936); Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Crowell, 1968) esp. 142-249, 634-87; Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 55-83; Kenneth Boulding, "Ecology and Environment," *Transaction* 7 (1970) 38-44; W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969); Percy S. Cohen, *Modern Social Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 1968) esp. 174-235;

review them. Here I indicate one way of describing the stages of development of the capacity to discriminate. This development in discriminatory capacity I shall term "the movement from category to continuum." The claim I make is that there is a recurring dynamic in human development that leads persons to move from the recognition of one or a few categories under which reality is classified towards a recognition that reality is much more of the nature of a progressive continuum. I make no claim that this movement totally explains the increasing human ability to discriminate; it purports to highlight only one significant aspect of that movement. Further, I shall not attempt to verify this movement from category to continuum beyond indicating a number of examples drawn from various fields of experience commonly shared.[21a]

Jerome Bruner, *The Relevance of Education* (New York: Norton, 1971) esp. 3–67; P. G. Richmond, *An Introduction to Piaget* (New York: Basic Books, 1971) esp. 7–60; Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954); Frank Goble, *The Third Force* (New York: Pocket Books, 1971) 37–53; Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (2nd ed.; New York: Norton, 1963) 247–74; Lawrence Kohlberg, "Education for Justice: A Modern Statement of the Platonic View," in *Moral Education*, introduction by Nancy and Theodore Sizer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1970) 56–83, esp. 70–83; Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (2 vols.; St. Louis: Herder, 1948, 1949); Donald W. Sherburne, ed., *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1966) 36–71; John S. Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972) 27–65, 135–56; Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (revised and abridged in one volume; London: Oxford University, 1972); Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven: Yale University, 1953); Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970); Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding* 1 (Princeton: Princeton University, 1972); Bernard Lonergan, *Insight* (London: Longmans, Green, 1958) 115–39, 431–87; Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 85–99, 295–320; Peter Chirico, "Religious Experience and Development of Dogma," *American Benedictine Review* 23 (1972) 56–84. I am indebted to these and to other readings that have opened my mind to the processes of development. However, I cannot assign any specific references for my own ideas, because it is the cumulative effect of these and other readings that has led to these ideas.

   [21a] There is no direct proof possible for this postulate regarding the movement from category to continuum. This is an explanatory postulate which attempts to summarize a recurring dynamism of the human mind. It has not been uttered by theologians, hence it cannot be found explicitly in past theological documents. Further, to my knowledge, it has not been articulated at this degree of generality by psychologists or sociologists or students of cognitional theory. Its justification is its ability to clarify and explain a great variety of observable data, just as the proof for any general scientific theory rests on its power to explain what has been observed. In the present instance, furthermore, the postulate is one about the processes common to human minds. Its justification or proof can come from many examples of the working of the human mind known to all. Hence the examples I adduce. However, since it is a postulate about the working of any mind, it should also be capable of verification in the specific experience of each reader. I have found that verification over and over again in my own experience and in the experience of friends. The reader is asked, therefore, to seek for the existence or nonexistence of that verification in his or her own life.

For the sake of simplicity I shall postulate four stages in the progression from category to continuum. In reality, each stage tends to shade off into the next, so that the very progression is an example of a continuum rather than a series of categories. These four stages are (*a*) the stage of a few categories; (*b*) the stage of a multiplicity of categories; (*c*) the stage of a hierarchy of categories; (*d*) the continuum stage.[21b]

a) *The stage of a few categories.* There is a drive toward unity in each person. When confronted with a battery of experiences, he or she tries to reduce them to order by placing them into a few categories based on aspects abstracted from the experiences. The use of these categories and the related symbolization facilitates thinking and communication. The basic tendency is (1) to categorize realities that are significant for the people who do the categorizing and (2) to categorize these realities under some quality or qualities that these people find operationally useful. Thus, boxing fans have developed classifications for fighters that are based on weight, for weight is the quality according to which opponents can be most equitably matched.

b) *The stage of a multiplicity of categories.* With the passage of time, individuals become more aware of further distinctions in the realities they have categorized, and they increase these categories to manifest these distinctions. Hence the Arab has made extensive use of the camel in the course of history. The result is that today Arabic has terms for camels of every size, age, shape, color, odor, state of health, and degree of strength.[22] Similarly, Eskimo languages have a great number of words to describe the different kinds of snow. Finally, it appears that each culture follows a pattern of development in color categories from a primitive stage of two colors (black and white) to an advanced stage of eleven colors.[23]

c) *The stage of a hierarchy of categories.* Eventually the proliferation of categories compels hierarchical categorization. The very drive toward unifying data that promotes initial categorization is at work here. Once the number of categories goes beyond a certain point, the race must

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[21b] I am aware that these four stages are points on a continuum and that many more stages or points could have been indicated. However, it seems to me that these four are adequate for the limited purposes of this article.

[22] Otto Klineberg, *Social Psychology* (rev. ed.; New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1954) 50.

[23] Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Color Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California, 1970). Berlin and Kay collected data on the way color is classified from twenty languages of various linguistic origins. They discovered that the expansion of color categories follows (with only minor variations) the same fixed sequence of evolutionary stages in all cultures and languages from an initial stage of black and white to a seventh stage of black, white, red, green, yellow, blue, brown, purple, pink, orange, and gray. Eventually these two researchers extended their study to one hundred languages and further confirmed their results.

unify the categories by a higher generalization.[24] Thus, there are group-ings of shades under a few basic colors; the square, the rectangle, and the rhombus appear as specific variations under the category of regular four-sided geometrical figures; historians move from describing the his-tory of individual countries and civilizations towards hierarchical gener-alizations about all civilizations.[25]

d) The stage of a continuum. Even the development of a hierarchy of categories proves to be inadequate. Eventually persons reach the capacity to recognize that reality is not so easily placed in watertight compartments. Rather, the case seems to be that much of what we classify under discrete headings actually represents aspects that fall along a continuum in which one part shades off into the next. Thus, one begins to see that there is not some limited number of colors but that there is a color spectrum within which a virtually unlimited number of colors can be placed. Thus, too, one begins to recognize that the categories of Esau and Jacob, of the just person and the sinner, of the sheep and the goats, are too facile as a description of concrete men. One sees that there is a whole range of mixtures of goodness and badness, that totally good and totally bad people are ideal constructs, and that the persons we know fall upon some section of the continuum that runs from totally good to totally bad. Further, one can see that the neat distinction between real and notional knowledge is not so neat after all. *All* under-standing is based on experience; it falls along a spectrum of possibilities. Toward one end, the experience is quite thin and the concept grasped in understanding is based on a minimal actualization of the person's capac-ities. At the other end of the spectrum, the experiences in which the concept is found are many and deep; they represent a substantial actual-ization of the powers of the person. Finally, one can even begin to grasp principles that explain *how* discrete realities are generated from a contin-uum-like matrix. A classic example stems from the study of the cone in mathematics. In early geometry it was assumed that the point, the circle, the ellipse, the parabola, the hyperbola, and the angle were unrelated. In later times it was shown that all these figures can be derived from an ordinary cone that is cut at varying angles by a plane. If one cuts the tip of the cone, one has a point. If one lowers the plane from the tip but parallel to the base, one finds that the cut generates a circle. If one tilts the plane slightly from being parallel to the base, one discovers that the

[24] Jerome Bruner says: "Perhaps the most pervasive feature of human intellect is its limited capacity at any moment for dealing with information. There is a rule that states that we have seven slots, plus or minus two, through which the external world can find translation into experience" (*The Relevance of Education* [New York: Norton, 1971] 4).

[25] Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University, 1972); this is Toynbee's summary and rethinking of his classic study. See also Eric Voegelin, *Order and History* (4 vols.; Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1956–74).

cut is an ellipse. By similar shifts one can derive the other figures. It thus became evident late in the history of mathematics that these figures were aspects of a continuum generated by slices of a cone.[26]

In summary, two prominent effects of human historicity have been underlined. First, ontic pluralism in personal realization becomes ever more widespread. Secondly, human beings find a need and a capacity to be more self-reflective and, as a result, they tend to make ever more subtle distinctions. One dynamic that describes the advance in the capacity to discriminate is the progression from category to continuum.

APPLICATION TO QUESTION OF ONE TRUE CHURCH

To illustrate the use of these two dynamic effects of human historicity, I shall attempt to explain the shift in the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church about itself by employing them. As I indicated in the first section, it was once commonly taught that only the Roman Catholic Church was the true Church and that other churches were false churches. Now it is being taught that the true Church subsists in the Catholic Church and yet has elements which appear in other ecclesial groups. There is no doubt that a shift has occurred. The question is whether that shift is basically a reversal of the past or represents a normal type of development. The position I am advancing is that the shift can largely be explained as stemming from the operation of the dynamic processes set forth in the preceding section. The first dynamic, the emergence of ontic pluralism, largely explains the change in ecclesial reality which necessitates the shift in teaching. The second dynamic, the growth in both self-reflectiveness and the capacity to make distinctions, explains why the Church was able to make that teaching shift.

Emergence of Ontic Pluralism

The central reality of Christianity is the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. The acceptance of that reality in such a way that it permeates the thoughts, actions, attitudes, and feelings of individuals and groups constitutes the Christian faith life and ultimately the Church as the community of faith.

The reality of Jesus Christ now risen from the dead is at once the foundation of the demand that there be but one Church and the stimulus that makes for ontic pluralism among Christians. On the one hand, Christ risen is the source of the Church's oneness. There is but one Lord and one faith in that Lord. That faith is based on the total acceptance of the one Lord. Church comes into being among all those who are united in their faith in the risen Christ. The oneness in the object of faith which characterizes Christians demands the oneness of

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[26] Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California, 1971) 173–87.

the Church; for the Church is the sacrament, the symbol, the expression of faith.

On the other hand, the acceptance of the risen Christ stimulates ontic pluralism in the Church. By his resurrection Christ is universal Lord. He touches every person and every aspect of the universe. Acceptance of him as Lord involves the whole of persons and all their development. However, persons are always unique, even if there are aspects that they share with others. This means that the concrete faith of individuals always has a unique element over and above the common element shared with other Christians. Accordingly, from the beginning there was an ontic pluralism of faith based on the ontic pluralism of individuals. However, ontic pluralism did not militate against the oneness of the Church, because the individual faith-response was never made an identifying mark of the Church. The early Church was content to affirm the generic acceptance of the risen Lord as sufficient; and this made for one Church.

With the passage of time, humanity's creative advance and living-out of the implications of faith in the Lord in the manifold contexts of life led to complex developments of faith existence not only in individuals but also in small groups. Soon there emerged classes of Christians who stressed and developed different facets of the faith in the Resurrection. A gradated clergy, virgins, and monks appeared alongside the laity. Such groups, while professing and living out the common faith, also professed and lived out implications derived from the Resurrection that did not characterize the faith life of other Christians. Thus there appeared in addition to the ontic pluralism of individual faith that had existed from the beginning an ontic pluralism of classes within the Church.[27] However, this kind of pluralism did not break the unity of the Church, because, on the one hand, the Christian faith values of each group were recognized as authentically Christian by all, and, on the other hand, the Church did not impose the values achieved by one class as obligatory on all.[28]

Eventually the spur toward ontic pluralism promoted by the all-embracing nature of the Resurrection faith and humanity's creative advance led to the emergence of larger social groupings possessed of different developments of Christian values. Thus there appeared an Eastern and a Western Church. The difference in these two churches was not fundamentally a difference of cultic forms, of polity, or of articulated theology.

[27] For an amplification of these notions of the development of faith values, see my "Religious Experience and Development of Dogma" (n. 21 above).

[28] It can be argued that one of the causes of divisions of the Church was precisely the tendency on the part of specialized groups to impose the faith values they had developed as obligatory on all Christians. Thus, prophecy and celibacy are Christian values; that they must be achieved by all is another story. To impose them on all is to invite Church division, as Montanism did.

Such differences existed, of course, but they sprang ultimately from the underlying development of faith existence and faith values that characterized Orthodox people and those ruled by Rome.[28a] Moreover, this kind of larger ontic pluralism was ultimately further evidenced by divisions into subgroups in both East and West. Hence there appeared the various Orthodox Churches in the East and the plurality of Protestant Churches alongside Rome in the West.

Thus the acceptance of the one risen Lord in the total context of life led eventually to two aspects that proved to be in tension with one another. The one Lord as the common object of faith demanded one Church as the community of all those who accepted him. At the same time, that acceptance in the whole context of a developing progression of historical situations led to a pluralism of faith realizations and a consequent pluralism of expressions in ritual, in polity, and in theology that made the achievement of a single visible world-wide Church increasingly more difficult.

Of course, the above account is a simplification. It is a model which stresses one set of factors in an exceedingly complex concrete history. It is not intended to deny that there were many other factors contributing to the actual existence of the many communities called Christian churches. Without doubt, ecclesiastical politics, the pressures applied by secular rulers, sinful motivations, sheer ignorance stubbornly clung to, and a host of other factors also led to the regrettable separation of Christian churches that has persisted to the present day. The point here is that alongside factors of dubious value, there are also factors that legitimately and inevitably lead to a pluralism in faith realization and expression. When these legitimate and inevitable factors become significantly operative at the level of national and larger cultural groupings, they constitute the emergence of a genuine pluralism in the Church. They also demand that the consciousness of Christians be so heightened that the existence, necessity, and legitimacy of this pluralism be recognized. Otherwise the one Church becomes a group of divided churches.

Shift in Church's Self-Understanding

We have been speaking of a shift in the reality of the Church, of the emergence of ontic pluralism. However, the problem we set ourselves

[28a] As examples of differences between Orthodoxy and the West in lived faith values, one might cite the following. First, Orthodoxy has stressed the influence of the Holy Spirit, whereas the West has tended to stress the continuing Incarnation. Secondly, Orthodoxy has developed the sacramental aspects of the Church, whereas the West has amplified the Church's juridical side. Thirdly, Orthodoxy has highlighted the role of the bishop, whereas the West has developed its consciousness of the role of the pope. These differences, on the whole, are not contradictory. They represent to a large extent different areas of development. Further clarification of these and other differences are beyond the scope of this article.

was that of a shift in the Church's self-understanding and teaching about itself. Accordingly, we now turn to an account of that shift in understanding by (1) employing the cognitive dynamic of progression from category to continuum and by (2) showing the dependence of this dynamic upon the prior dynamic of the emergence of ontic pluralism.

1) *De facto, the Church's self-understanding seems to have followed the progression from category to continuum.* In the early centuries the Church was quite capable of recognizing a pluralism of expression but not a pluralism of personal faith realization and understanding. Accordingly, there could be only one true community of belief; all other communities had to be false communities. For Origen and Tertullian, for Cyprian and Augustine, there could be but one true Church; other bodies were false churches, nonchurches. Only two categories were operative, although the recognition of the validity of a baptism administered outside the true Church was the beginning of an implicit recognition of the inadequacy of this two-category division of ecclesial reality.

In time the number of categories became expanded. For the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodoxy could not be dismissed simply as a false church or a nonchurch. It fell somewhere in between; it was separated from the See of Peter; it was in schism; but it was a church or, rather, a communion of churches. Hence, Vatican II was only summing up a long-held distinction when it referred to the special position accorded to the Eastern Churches by the Roman Church.[29]

In the post-Reformation period, the Catholic counteroffensive tended to view the Protestant communities as false or nonchurches. However, it was slowly recognized that these communities contained elements of the true Church such as the Scriptures and the sacrament of baptism. It was these elements that provided the basis upon which Vatican II could call these groups "churches and ecclesial communities . . . separated from the apostolic see of Rome."[30] Further, Roman Catholic theologians have commonly recognized differences in communities stemming from the reform movements of the sixteenth century. For example, the Lutheran Churches and the Church of England were generally regarded as far closer to the Roman notion of church than the Baptist Churches. Hence the first three stages of the progression from category to continuum have been exemplified: first, that of a few categories: true and false churches; then, that of a multiplicity of categories: the Roman Church, schismatic Orthodox Churches, separated Churches and ecclesial communities; finally, that of a hierarchy of categories: the various degrees of the Churches of the Reform.

I believe that we are now entering the stage of explicit recognition that a continuum of reality exists. In accordance with this notion, the Church at any given historical moment realizes only some of the elements

[29] Decree on Ecumenism, nos. 14–18.   [30] Ibid., no. 19.

of the eschatological Church, and it realizes any given element in varying degrees of perfection and intensity. It is possible, almost inevitable, that different external bodies will possess varying elements of the ultimately one eschatological Church in varying degrees of perfection. The one Church of the *eschaton* is thus visibly manifested in different groupings that possess different sets of the aspects that all pertain to the Church grown to full stature. The doctrine of *Lumen gentium* sketched out in the initial pages of this article is, in terms of the categories I am using, the Roman Catholic Church's official recognition of this continuum nature of the one Church's visible manifestation.

2) *That the recognition of the pluralistic situation evidenced in the progression from category to continuum came long after the ontic realization of this situation is normal to human dynamics and the Roman Catholic theological tradition.* On the one hand, human understanding normally follows upon human experience, that is, it comes *after* the realization of some underlying human potential. Human understanding is the thematization and explicitation of aspects of one's underlying experiential continuum; it is a reflection on that continuum which in its turn further differentiates that continuum. Because it is dependent upon elements in that continuum, it can come only *after* those elements have emerged. Further, the more abstract and the more universal are the aspects understood, the longer it usually takes to grasp them. It took longer to grasp the law of universal gravitation than it took to grasp the law of falling bodies on earth. It took longer to grasp the generic laws of human development than to grasp the pattern of development in a single culture. It simply takes longer to grasp a generic pattern that is present in many different types of experiences. One has to have lived through experiences sufficiently large that the generic pattern emerges to consciousness. Hence it is not surprising that it took the Church so long to recognize the highly general reality of pluralism and its development.

On the other hand, the theological tradition has recognized that explicit faith understanding always comes after the relevant faith life and experience. This is the meaning of the axiom that "theology is faith seeking understanding." The statements in which theologians, including the official theologians of the papal and episcopal magisterium, express the faith are dependent upon the prior existence of that experienced faith. Hence the solemn proclamations of dogmas have as one of their conditions that they represent the universal faith of the Church.[31] They must,

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[31] Vatican I denied that as a condition of infallibility the pope had to receive the subsequent approval of the Church. However, the Council did say that the pope could be infallible only with regard to what was a reality of the Church's universal faith. On the historical side of this question, see Gustave Thils, *L'Infaillibilité pontificale* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1969). For a theological-philosophical analysis, see my *Infallibility: The Crossroads of Doctrine* (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews and McMeel, 1977).

therefore, be embedded in the actual faith existence of the members of the Church universal. Thus both human experience and theological tradition necessitate that faith existence precede faith understanding. And so ontic pluralism expectedly precedes the cognitive grasp of its existence and meaning.

3) *The conditions of the present promote the understanding of the pluralistic situation in the Church.* Aspects of a person's experience are explicitly recognized when situations highlight these aspects by contrast. Hence one notices the special family practices in one's own home after having spent time in the home of a friend whose family has different practices. Many such contrasting experiences have contributed to our recognition of the pluralistic reality. Rapid changes in society within the compass of one's own lifetime make one aware of different stages in the lives of a community. Frequent transportation makes one aware of the legitimate differences within different communities in an existential manner. The increase of knowledge workers[32] and the widespread diffusion of historical learning make one more aware of significant changes in secular and religious life over the centuries. Television enables people of one culture to get in contact with many others. In countless ways significant differences are made to confront one another, so that the pluralism of reality is forced upon the consciousness of us all. One cannot help recognizing the existence of pluralism; and the existence of so many knowledge workers and theoreticians facilitates one's acceptance of that pluralism as legitimate.

4) *The change in the Roman Catholic Church's teaching about the one Church which was documented in Vatican II represents a normal development of doctrine and not a reversal of the past.* From a *logical* point of view there has been a reversal. To say that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church and that others are false churches is not logically or conceptually consistent with saying that the one Church subsists in the Catholic Church and is manifested in various elements of other churches and ecclesial communities. However, normal development of an individual, of a society, and of the self-understanding of both is not simply logical. Genuine development also involves the emergence of the new and the grasp of elements within experience of which one was not previously aware. These are processes more aptly called "psychological" and "sociological." Thus the shift in teaching on the true Church at Vatican II is but one working out of normal processes of human development—the emergence of ontic reality and the progression in ability to classify from category to continuum.

Nor need we say that the acceptance of this view implies an admission that the old teaching on the true and the false churches was simply

[32] By "knowledge workers" I mean persons whose primary activity in life is the increasing of our knowledge of reality.

erroneous. Admittedly, the continuum of ecclesial reality existed long before Vatican II; in fact, it existed during the whole period when the textbook notions on the true Church were being propounded. It would appear that the textbook teaching conflicted with what truly existed, and that it was therefore wrong. However, such a way of looking at things mistakes the very nature of the teaching function.

A teacher is always replying to an implicit question on the part of the learner in terms of categories familiar to both. The learner is always saying, at least implicitly, "In terms of the categories that I can understand, what is the answer to this question?" Thus, when a five-year-old child asks, "Mother, how are boys different from girls?" the mother is correct in giving an answer that from an adult point of view would be so simplistic as to be incorrect. To give a verbally correct answer that would satisfy an adult would be to give an answer that in the situation would actually be false. It would be a reply to a nonexistent adult and not to a child asking for answers in terms he could grasp. All teaching is historically conditioned and relational in the concrete. It is not pedagogically correct in that it corresponds to some ideal abstract standard but in that it meets the differentiation capacities of the persons teaching and taught. Hence, in a genuine but limited *pedagogical* sense, the older teaching about the true and the false churches was correct *for its time.* When Roman Catholics had only two categories—true and false—to classify candidates for ecclesial status, then a prospective church had to fall within the category closest to it. Only when the average Catholic and the average Church teacher moved in differentiation capacity from category to continuum did the old teaching become pedagogically false. Exactly at what moment this falsity occurred is a historical judgment, not a dogmatic one.[33]

[33] I believe that the principles here noted can be applied to other areas of theology. For example, they can help us understand why it is now incorrect to judge the ordinations of non-Catholic Christians as simply invalid. We have now reached the stage of discrimination that permits us to grasp that the ministers of the various churches fall along a continuum and that they represent varying degrees of representation of the living risen Christ in their respective communities.