

# The Theological Locus of Ecclesial Movements

*Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger*

Only when the person is struck and opened up by Christ in his inmost depth can the other also be inwardly touched, can there be reconciliation in the Holy Spirit, can true community grow.

In his great encyclical on mission, *Redemptoris missio*, the Holy Father says:

Within the church, there are various types of services, functions, ministries and ways of promoting the Christian life. I call to mind, as a new development occurring in many churches in recent times, the rapid growth of “ecclesial movements” filled with missionary dynamism. When these movements humbly seek to become part of the life of local churches and are welcomed by bishops and priests within diocesan and parish structures, they represent a true gift of God both for new evangelization and for missionary activity properly so-called. I therefore recommend that they be spread and that they be used to give fresh energy, especially among young people, to the Christian life and to evangelization, within a pluralistic view of the ways in which Christians can associate and express themselves.<sup>1</sup>

It was a wonderful event for me personally when I came into closer contact with movements such as the Neocatechumenate, Communion and Liberation, and Focolare and experienced the energy and enthusiasm with which they lived the faith and were impelled by their joy in it to share with others the gift they had received. This was in the early 1970's, a time

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<sup>1</sup>*Redemptoris missio*, 72.

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when Karl Rahner and others were speaking of a winter in the Church. And it did seem that, after the great blossoming of the Council, frost was creeping instead of springtime, and that exhaustion was replacing dynamism. The dynamism now seemed to be somewhere else entirely—where people, relying on their own strength and without resorting to God, were setting about creating a better world of the future. That a world without God could not be good, let alone a better world, was obvious to anyone who had eyes to see. But where was God in all this? Had not the Church in fact become worn-out and dispirited after so many debates and so much searching for new structures? What Rahner was saying was perfectly understandable. It put into words an experience that we were all having. But suddenly here was something that no one had planned. Here the Holy Spirit himself had, so to speak, taken the floor. The faith was reawakening precisely among the young, who embraced it without ifs, ands, or buts, without escape hatches and loopholes, and who experienced it in its totality as a precious, life-giving gift. To be sure, many people felt that this interfered with their intellectual discussions or their models for redesigning a completely different Church in their own image—how could it be otherwise? Every irruption of the Holy Spirit always upsets human plans. But there were and are more serious difficulties. For these movements had their share of childhood diseases. One could feel the power of the Spirit in them, but the Spirit works through human beings and does not simply free them from their weaknesses. There were tendencies to exclusivity and oneness that made them unable to insert themselves into the life of the local churches. Bouyed up by their youthful elan, they were convinced that the local church had, as it were, to raise itself to their level, while they had to keep themselves from being dragged into a structure that, to be sure, sometimes really was somewhat crusty. Frictions arose in which both sides were at fault in different ways. It became necessary to reflect on how to properly relate the two realities, the new awakening [*Aufbruch*] in the context of the present situation, on the one hand, and the permanent structures of the Church's life, the parish and the diocese, on the other. To a large extent the issues at stake are very practical ones whose theoretical content should not be unduly inflated. On the other hand, we are dealing with a phenomenon that recurs periodically in various forms throughout the history of the Church. There is the permanent basic structure of the Church's life, which gives continuity to the organization of the Church throughout history, and there are the ever renewed irruptions of the Holy Spirit, which ceaselessly revitalize and renew this structure. But this renewal hardly ever happens entirely without pain and friction. In the end, then, we cannot dismiss the fundamental question about how to determine correctly the theological location of these "movements" within the structural continuity of the Church.

*I. Attempts to Clarify the Issue Through a*

*Dialectic of Principles**A. Institution and Charism*

The duality of institution and event, or institution and charism, immediately suggests itself as a fundamental model for resolving the question. But if we try to analyze the two terms more closely in order to arrive at valid rules for defining their relationship, something unexpected happens. The concept of “institution” comes to pieces in our hands when we try to give it a precise theological definition. After all, what are the fundamental institutional factors in the Church, the permanent organization that gives the Church its distinctive shape? The answer is, of course, sacramental office in its different degrees: bishop, priest, deacon. The sacrament that, significantly, bears the name *ordo* is, in the end, the sole permanent and binding structure that forms so to say the fixed organizational pattern of the Church and makes the Church an “institution.” But it was not until this century that it became customary, for reasons of ecumenical expediency, to designate the sacrament of *ordo* simply as “office” [*Amf*]. This usage places *ordo* entirely in the light of institution and the institutional. But this “office” is a “sacrament,” and this fact signals a break with the ordinary sociological understanding of institutions. That this structural element of the Church, which is the only permanent one, is a sacrament, means that it must be perpetually recreated by God. It is not at the Church’s disposal, it is not simply there, and the Church cannot set it up on its own initiative. It comes into being only secondarily through a call on the part of the Church. It is created primarily by God’s call to this man, which is to say, only charismatically-pneumatologically. By the same token, the only attitude in which it can be accepted and lived is one unceasingly shaped by the newness of the vocation, by the unmanipulable freedom of the *pneuma*. The reason—ultimately, the only reason—why there can be a priest shortage is this. The Church cannot simply appoint “officials” by itself, but must await the call from God. This is why it has been held from the beginning that this office cannot be made by the institution, but has to be impetrated from God. What Jesus says in the gospels has always been the case: “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few; pray the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his harvest” (Mt 9:37: *RSV*). This also explains why the calling of the twelve is the fruit of a night that Jesus had spent in prayer (Lk 6:12ff).

The Latin Church has expressly underscored this strictly charismatic character of priestly ministry by linking—in accord with ancient Church tradition—priesthood with virginity, which clearly can be understood only as a personal charism, never simply as an official

qualification.<sup>2</sup> The demand for their uncoupling ultimately rests on the notion that the priesthood must not be considered charismatically, but must be regarded as an office that the institution itself can fill in order to guarantee its own security and the satisfaction of its needs. When the attempt is made to take control of the priesthood for purposes of institutional security, the sort of charismatic bond implied by the requirement of celibacy is a scandal that has to be removed as quickly as possible. But when that happens, the Church as a whole is also being understood as a purely human organization, and the security that is obtained by these means fails to deliver precisely what it was meant to achieve. That the Church is not *our* institution, but the irruption of something else, that it is by essence “*ius divini*,” means that we can never simply make the Church ourselves. It means that we may never employ purely institutional criteria, that the Church is wholly itself precisely where it breaks through the criteria and methods of human institutions.

To be sure, alongside the sacrament, which is really the fundamental ordering structure, there are also institutions of purely human right in the Church. These institutions serve various forms of administration, organization, and coordination that can and must develop according to the needs of the times. But it must be said that, while the Church does need such homegrown institutions, when they become too numerous and too powerful, they jeopardize the order and the vitality of the Church’s spiritual essence. The Church must constantly check its own institutional structure in order to keep it from taking on too much weight—to prevent it from hardening into an armor that stifles its real, spiritual life. It goes without saying that, when the Church fails to get priestly vocations for a longer period of time, it can fall into the temptation to create for itself what one might call an ersatz clergy of purely human right.<sup>3</sup> The Church must of course try to organize temporary structures in cases of need, and it has successfully done so time and again in the missions or in mission-like situations. We can only heartily thank all those who have served and continue to serve the Church as leaders of prayer and heralds of the gospel in such emergency situations. If, however, this should become a way of neglecting prayer for vocations to the sacrament, if the Church gradually began to use such situations to gain self-sufficiency and to make itself as it were independent of God’s gift, it would be acting like Saul, who, hard pressed by the Philistines, waited long for Samuel, but, when Samuel failed to appear and the people were breaking rank, lost his patience and offered the holocaust himself. He had

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<sup>2</sup>That priestly celibacy is not a medieval invention, but goes back to the earliest period of the Church, is shown clearly and convincingly by Card. A.M. Stickler, *The Case for Clerical Celibacy: Its Historical Development and Theological Foundations* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995). Cf. also C. Cochini, *Origines apostoliques du célibat sacerdotal* (Paris-Namur, 1981); S. Heid, *Zölibat in der frühen Kirche* (Paderborn, 1997).

<sup>3</sup>The 1997 instruction on the ministry of the laity ultimately concerns this question.

thought that, given the urgency of the situation, there was no other option and that he could and must take God's business into his own hands. But now he was told that by doing just that he had thrown everything away: I want obedience, not sacrifice (cf. 1 Sm 13:8–14; 15:22).

Let us return to our question: How do we characterize the relationship between the permanent pattern of Church order and ever new charismatic irruptions? The institution-charism model does not answer this question, because the antithesis [of the two terms] does not adequately capture the reality of the Church. Nevertheless, we can infer a few initial rules from what we have said so far:

*a)* It is important that the spiritual office, the priesthood, itself be understood and lived charismatically. The priest himself should be a “pneumatic,” a *homo spiritualis*, a man awakened and driven by the Holy Spirit. It is the Church's task to make sure that this character of the sacrament is seen and accepted. The Church must not put numbers in the foreground and lower spiritual standards out of zeal for the development of its organizational structures. If it did so, the Church would disfigure the meaning of the priesthood itself. A ministry poorly performed does more harm than good. It becomes an obstacle on the way to the priesthood and the faith. The Church must keep faith and must acknowledge the Lord as its creator and sustainer. And it must do everything it can to help those called to remain faithful beyond the initial awakening, to keep from gradual suffocation in routine, and to become more and more truly spiritual men.

*b)* Where the spiritual office is lived pneumatically and charismatically in this way, there is no institutional hardening. Rather, there is an intrinsic openness to charisms, a sort of “nose” for the Spirit and his action, so too charism can recognize its own origin in the office holder, and ways of fruitful collaboration in the discernment of spirits are found.

*c)* In situations of scarcity, the Church must create stopgap structures. But these structures must be conceived as intrinsically open to the sacrament; they must tend towards it, not lead away from it. In general the Church must keep the number of self-created administrative structures as small as possible. It must not overinstitutionalize itself, but must always remain open to the Lord's unforeseen, unplanned calls.

### *B. Christology and Pneumatology*

Now, what has been said raises a question: if it is only partially correct to see institution and charism as opposites, so that this pair of terms provides only partial answers to our question, are there perhaps other theological viewpoints that can deal with it more adequately? The contrast between christological and pneumatological approaches to the Church is becoming an increasingly prominent theme in contemporary theology. This contrast generates the claim that sacrament belongs on the

side of Christology and the incarnation, which has to be supplemented by the pneumatological-charismatic perspective. It is true, of course, that Christ and the *Pneuma* have to be distinguished. But just as we must not treat the three persons of the Trinity as a *communio* of three gods, we correctly distinguish Christ and the Spirit only when their diversity helps us better understand their unity. The Spirit cannot be correctly understood without Christ, but it is equally impossible to understand Christ without the Holy Spirit. “The Lord is the Spirit” Paul tells us in 2 Cor 3:17 (RSV). This does not mean that the two are simply the same thing or person. But it does mean that Christ can be among us and for us as the Lord only because the incarnation was not his last word. The incarnation reaches its apex in the death on the cross and in the resurrection. This means that Christ can come only because he has gone before us into the order of life of the Holy Spirit and communicates himself through and in that Spirit. St. Paul’s pneumatological Christology and the farewell discourses of the Gospel of John have not, I think, been incorporated clearly enough into our vision of Christology and Pneumatology. But the new presence of Christ in the Spirit is the essential condition for the existence of sacrament and of a sacramental presence of the Lord.

This sheds light once again on “spiritual” [*geistlich*] office in the Church and on its theological location, which the tradition has defined with the term *successio apostolica*. “Apostolic succession” means precisely the opposite of what it might appear to mean, namely, that through the continuous chain of succession we become as it were independent of the Spirit. Linking to the line of succession in fact means that the sacramental office is never simply at our disposal, but must be given each time by the Spirit, that it is precisely the spirit-sacrament, which we can neither create nor institute ourselves. Functional competence as such is not by itself sufficient for that, the Lord’s gift is necessary. In the sacrament, in the Church’s representative, symbolic action, the Lord reserves to himself the permanent institution of the priestly ministry. The totally specific combination of “once” and “always” characteristic of the mystery of Christ appears very beautifully here. The “always” of the sacrament, the presence of the historical origin in every age of the Church, implies a link with the *ephapax*, with the event of the origin that happens once only. This link with the origin, this stake planted in the ground of the once-only and unrepeatable event, is nonnegotiable. We can never take refuge in a free-floating pneumatology, we can never leave behind the ground of the incarnation, of God’s action in history. But the converse is also true. This never-to-be-repeated event imparts itself in the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of the risen Lord. It does not vanish, like something dead and gone, into the forever irretrievable past, but has the force of the present, because Christ has passed through the “curtain, that is, through his flesh” (Heb 10:20: RSV) and has thereby released what endures forever in what takes place only once. The incarnation does not stop with the historical Jesus, with his “sarx” (2 Cor 5:16!). The “historical Jesus” has eternal significance precisely because his flesh is transformed in the resurrection,

so that he can make himself present to all places and all times in the power of the Holy Spirit, as the farewell discourses in John wonderfully show (cf. especially Jn 14:28: “I go and I come to you”: RSV). Given this christological-pneumatological synthesis, we can expect that a deepening of the concept of “apostolic succession” will be truly helpful for resolving our problem.

### C. Hierarchy and Prophecy

Before we pursue further this line of thought, we need to mention briefly a third proposal for explaining the duality [*Gegenüber*] between the permanent order of ecclesial life, on the one hand, and pneumatic movements, on the other. There is a certain tendency today that, building on Luther’s interpretation of Scripture in terms of the dialectic of law and gospel, opposes the cultic-sacerdotal aspect and the prophetic aspect of salvation history. On this reading, the movements would be ranged on the side of prophecy. This too, like the other proposals that we have considered so far, is not entirely false. It is, however, extremely inexact and for this reason unhelpful as it now stands. The issue raised in this connection is too big to be dealt with in detail here. The first thing that would have to be said in addressing this point is that the law itself has the character of a promise. It is only because the law has this character that Christ could fulfill it and, at the same time, “suspend” [*aufheben*] it in the act of fulfillment. Second, the writing prophets never meant to annul the Torah, but, on the contrary, to vindicate its true meaning against misuse. Finally, it is also important that the mission of prophecy was always entrusted to single persons and never became a settled class [*Stand*]. Insofar as prophecy claimed to be a “class,” it was criticized by the writing prophets just as sharply as the priestly “class” of the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup> There is simply no warrant in Scripture for dividing the Church into a left and a right, into the prophetic class (represented by the orders or the movements), and the hierarchy. On the contrary: this is a construction that is completely foreign to scripture. The Church is not structured dialectically, but organically. It is correct, then, only that there are various functions in the Church, and that God continually stirs up prophetic men—they can be laypeople or religious, but also bishops and priests—who proclaim to it the right word that is not pronounced with sufficient force in the normal course of the “institution.” It is quite obvious I think that we cannot interpret the nature and task of the

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<sup>4</sup>The classical antithesis between prophets sent by God and professional prophets is found in Amos 7:10–17. A similar situation occurs in 1 Kings 22 in the contrast between the 400 prophets and Micah; again in Jeremiah, e.g., 37:19. Cf. also J. Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology: Its Role in the Light of Present Controversy* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 118ff.

movements from this perspective. It certainly does not capture their own understanding of themselves.

The foregoing reflections thus yield rather meager results for our question. Yet these results are important. The choice of a dialectic of principles as our starting-point does not lead to the desired solution. Instead of attempting to resolve the question using such a dialectic of principles, we must, in my opinion, choose a historical approach, as befits the historical nature of the faith and the Church.

*II. The Perspectives of History:  
Apostolic Succession and Apostolic Movements*

*A. Universal and Local Offices*

Let us ask the question then: what does this origin look like? Anyone who has even a modest acquaintance with the debates surrounding the nascent Church, to whose pattern all Christian churches and communities appeal in order to legitimate themselves, knows how little prospect there seems to be of getting anywhere with this kind of historical question. If, in spite of that, I risk a tentative solution from this angle, I do so insofar on the presupposition of the Catholic view of the Church and its origin. This view, while offering a fixed framework, also leaves open areas for further reflection that by no means have been fully explored. There is no doubt that, from Pentecost on, the immediate bearers of Christ's mission are the twelve, who very soon appear also under the name "apostles." It is their task to bring the message of Christ "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8: *RSV*), to go out to all nations and to make disciples of all men (Mt 28:19). The territory assigned them for this mission is the world. Without being restricted as to place, they serve the upbuilding of the one body of Christ, the one people of God, the one Church of Christ. The apostles were not bishops of particular local churches, but just that, "apostles," and as such they were responsible for the whole world and for the whole Church that was to be built: the universal Church precedes the local churches, which come into existence as its concrete realizations.<sup>5</sup> To put it even more clearly and unequivocally:

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Communio nis notio* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 29, no. 9; cf. there also my introduction, 8ff. I have presented the relations between them in greater detail in my little book: *Called to Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), esp. 43f. and 75–103. The fact that the one Church, the one bride of Christ, which carries on the heritage of the people of Israel, of Zion, the "daughter" and "bride," has priority over the empirical concretization of the people of God in the local churches is so evident in scripture and the Fathers that it is hard for me to understand the oft-repeated contestation of this claim. It is enough to re-read de Lubac's *Catholicisme* (1938) or his *Méditation sur l'Église*, 3d ed. (1954), or the marvelous texts that H. Rahner collected in his book



Paul was never the bishop of a particular place nor did he ever intend to be. There was only one division of labor at the beginning, and Paul describes it in Gal 2:9: We—Barnabas and I—for the gentiles, they—Peter, James, and John—for the Jews. However, this initial division was soon superseded. Peter and John recognized that they too were sent to the gentiles and at once went beyond the limits of Israel. James, the brother of the Lord, who after the year 42 became a sort of primate of the Jewish Church, was doubtless not an apostle.

Without going into further detail, we can say the following: the apostolic office is a universal one whose scope is the whole of humanity and thus the whole of the one Church. It is the missionary activity of the apostles that gives rise to the local churches, which now need responsible leaders. It is the duty of these men to guarantee unity of faith with the whole Church, to form the life within the local church, and to keep the communities open in order to encourage further growth and to make possible the gift of the gospel to those fellow citizens who do not yet believe. This local ecclesial [*ortskirchlich*] office, which initially appears under many names, gradually takes on a fixed, uniform figure. Quite clearly, then, two structures existed side by side in the nascent Church. There was of course a certain fluidity between them, but they can be clearly distinguished: on the one side, the local ecclesial ministries, which gradually grew into permanent forms; on the other side, the apostolic ministry, which very soon ceased to be restricted to the twelve. We can clearly distinguish two concepts of apostleship in Paul. On the one hand, he vigorously underscores the uniqueness of his apostolate, which rests upon his encounter with the Risen Lord and thereby places him on a level with the twelve. On the other hand, he understands “apostle” as an office extending far beyond this group, as in 1 Cor 12:28: this broader concept is also in the background when he styles Andronikos and Junias as apostles. We find similar terminology in Eph 2:20, where talk of the apostles and prophets as the foundation of the Church is certainly also meant to include more than just the twelve. In the second century the Didache speaks of prophets, which it very clearly understands in terms of such a missionary, supralocal office. It is all the more interesting that the Didache says of them: “they are your high-priests” (13:3).

We may assume then that the two types of office—the universal and local—continued to coexist far into the second century, that is, into a time when the identity of the bearer of the apostolic succession was quite certainly already becoming a serious question. Various texts suggest that this coexistence of the two structures was not entirely free of conflict. The third Letter of John shows us a very clear example of such a conflict situation. However, the more the then accessible “ends of the earth” were reached, the harder it became to keep open a meaningful place for the “itinerants.” Abuses of office on the part of these itinerants may also have

contributed to their gradual disappearance. Now it was up to the local communities and their leaders, who had in the meantime acquired a very clear profile as bishop, priest, and deacon, to spread the faith in the respective territory of their local churches. That at the time of the Emperor Constantine Christians made up around 8% of the population of the Empire, and that even at the end of the fourth century they remained a minority, shows what an immense task this was. In this situation those who presided over the local churches, the bishops, had to recognize that they were now successors of the apostles and that the apostolic task lay entirely on their shoulders. The realization that the bishops, the responsible leaders of the local churches, are the successors of the apostles, was very clearly articulated in the second half of the second century by Irenaeus of Lyon. This definition of the essence of the episcopal office implies two foundational elements:

a) Apostolic succession entails, first of all, the familiar idea that the bishops guarantee the continuity and unity of faith—in a continuity that we call sacramental.

b) But apostolic succession implies an even more concrete task, which goes beyond the administration of the local churches: the bishops must now ensure the carrying on of Jesus' mission to make all nations his disciples and to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. They are responsible—Irenaeus underscores this—for keeping the Church from becoming a sort of federation of local churches that as such are juxtaposed and for ensuring that it retain its universality and unity. The bishops must sustain the universal dynamism of the apostolate.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning, we spoke of the danger that the priestly office could be understood ultimately in purely institutional and bureaucratic terms, that it might forget its charismatic dimension. Now a second danger appears: the office of the apostolic succession can atrophy to a merely local ecclesial ministry, it can lose sight—and heart—of the universality of Christ's mission. The restlessness that drives us to bring the gift of Christ to others can die out in the stasis of a solidly established Church. Let me put the matter starkly: the concept of apostolic succession projects out beyond the merely local church, in which it can never be exhausted. The universal dimension, the element that transcends the local ecclesial ministries, remains indispensable.

### *B. Apostolic Movements in the History of the Church*

We must now probe more deeply into, and put more concrete historical flesh on, this thesis, which already anticipates my final conclusion, inasmuch as it takes us directly to the ecclesial location of the

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. on this section once more J. Ratzinger, *Called to Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 83ff.

movements. I said before that, for a great variety of reasons, the universal ecclesial ministries gradually disappear in the second century and are absorbed by the episcopal office. In many respects this development was not simply historically inevitable, but also theologically necessary, since it brought to light the unity of the sacrament and the intrinsic unity of the apostolic ministry. But it was also—as was said—a development that was not without its dangers. For this reason it was perfectly logical that as early as the third century a new element should appear in the life of the Church that we may without controversy call a movement: monasticism. Now, one can object that early monasticism had no apostolic and missionary character, that it was, on the contrary, a flight from the world to islands of holiness. To be sure, we can observe the absence of a missionary tendency to spread the faith throughout the world at the beginning of monasticism. With Anthony, who stands as a clearly defined figure at the beginning of monasticism, the dominant impulse was the desire to live the *vita evangelica*—the desire to live the gospel radically and in its totality.<sup>7</sup> His conversion story is remarkably similar to that of Saint Francis of Assisi. We find in both the same impulsion to take the gospel literally, to follow Christ in radical poverty, and to let him alone give shape to one's whole life. Anthony's departure into the desert was a removal from the solidly established local ecclesial structure, from a Christianity that had gradually adapted itself to the demands of worldly life, in order to follow Christ without ifs, ands, or buts. But this move generates a new spiritual fatherhood that, while not having a directly missionary character, nonetheless supplements the fatherhood of bishops and priests by the power of a wholly pneumatic life.<sup>8</sup>

In the works of Basil, who gave Eastern monasticism its permanent form, we see the very set of problems that many movements have to face today. Basil had absolutely no intention of creating a separate institution alongside the normal Church. The first and, in the strict sense, only rule that he composed was not conceived—in Balthasar's words—as the rule of an order, but as an ecclesial rule, as the “manual for the committed Christian.”<sup>9</sup> Yet this is true of the origin of almost all movements, not least those of our own century: the point is to seek, not a community apart, but Christianity as a whole, a Church that is obedient to the gospel and lives by it. Basil, who had first been a monk, accepted the episcopal office and thus powerfully illustrated in his own life the charismatic character of that office and the inner unity of the Church.

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<sup>7</sup>See Athanase d'Alexandrie, *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. G. Bartelink, *Sources Chrétiennes* 400 (Paris, 1994); in the introduction especially the section: “L'exemple de la vie évangélique et apostolique,” 52f.

<sup>8</sup>On the theme of spiritual fatherhood I would like to refer to the insightful little book of G. Bunge, *Geistliche vaterschaft: Christliche Gnosis bei Evagrius Pontikos* (Regensburg, 1988).

<sup>9</sup>H.U. von Balthasar, *Die Großen Ordensregeln*, 7th ed. (Einsiedeln, 1994), 47.

Basil, like today's movements, was obliged to accept the fact that the movement to follow Christ radically cannot be completely merged with the local church. In the second draft of a rule, which Gribomont calls the small Asketikon, Basil conceives movement as a "transitional form between a group of committed Christians open to the Church as a whole and a self-organizing and self-institutionalizing monastic order."<sup>10</sup> The same Gribomont sees the monastic community that Basil founded as a "small group for the vitalization of the whole" and does not hesitate "to call [Basil] the patron not only of the teaching and hospital orders, but also of the new communities without vows."<sup>11</sup>

So much is clear: the monastic movement creates a new center of life that does not abolish the local ecclesial structure of the post-apostolic Church, yet does not completely coincide with it, but is active within it as a vitalizing force. This center also functions as a reservoir from which the local church can draw a truly spiritual clergy [*geistliche-Geistliche*] that constantly renews the fusion of institution and charism. An index of this is the fact that the Eastern Church selects bishops from among the monks, thus defining the bishop's office charismatically, perpetually renewing it, as it were, from the apostolic source.

If we now look at the history of the Church as a whole, we see that the local church, as that ecclesial form whose defining mark is the episcopal office, cannot but be the supporting structure that permanently upholds the edifice of the Church through all ages. On the other hand, the Church is also criss-crossed by successive waves of new movements, which reinvigorate the universalistic aspect of its apostolic mission and precisely in so doing also serve the spiritual vitality and truth of the local churches. I would like to mention briefly five such waves that followed early monasticism. In these waves, the spiritual essence of what we may call "movements" emerges more and more clearly, as does the definition of their ecclesiological location.

1) I would call the missionary monasticism that flourished especially between Gregory the Great (590–604) and Gregory II (715–731) and III (731–741) the first of these waves. Pope Gregory the Great recognized monasticism's missionary potential, which he exploited by sending Augustine—who was to become Archbishop of Canterbury—and his companions to the heathen Angles on the British Isles. Even earlier, Patrick, who was likewise spiritually rooted in monasticism, had conducted his mission to Ireland. In this way, monasticism now became the great missionary movement that led the Germanic peoples to the Catholic Church and thereby built up the new Christian Europe. Connecting East

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<sup>10</sup>J. Gribomont, "Les Règles Morales de S. Basile et le Nouveau Testament," in Aland-Cross, ed., *Studia Patristica*, vol. 2 (1957), 416–426; Balthasar, *Die Großen Ordensregeln*, 48f.

<sup>11</sup>J. Gribomont, "Obéissance et Evangile selon S. Basile le Grand," *Vie Spir. Sappl. Nr. 21* (1952), 192–215, esp. 192; H.U. von Balthasar, *Die Großen Ordensregeln*, 57.

and West in the ninth century, the monk brothers Cyril and Methodius brought the gospel to the Slavic world. Two of the constitutive elements of the reality of “movements” clearly emerge from all this:

a) The papacy did not create the movements, but it did become their principal reference-point in the structure of the Church, their ecclesial support. This brings into view perhaps the deepest meaning and the true essence of the Petrine office as such: the Bishop of Rome is not just the bishop of a local church; his office is always related to the universal Church and therefore has, in a specific sense, an apostolic character. It must keep alive the dynamism of the Church’s mission *ad extra* and *ad intra*. In the Eastern Church, the Emperor had at first claimed a sort of office of unity and universality. It was no accident that Constantine was called “bishop” *ad extra* and “equal to the apostles.” But that could at best be a temporary, ersatz function, one fraught, moreover, with obvious perils. Nor is it an accident that, from the second century on, when the universal ministries were coming to an end, the papal claim to exercise this aspect of apostolic mission begins to be heard more and more clearly. It is no chance, then, that the movements, which go beyond the scope and structure of the local church, always go hand in hand with the papacy.

b) The motif of evangelical life, which we find already at the beginning of the monastic movement with Anthony of Egypt, remains decisive. But it now becomes apparent that the *vita evangelica* includes the service [*Dienst*] of evangelization. The poverty and freedom of the evangelical life are conditions for a service to the gospel that goes beyond one’s own homeland and its community. At the same time, this service is the goal and the intrinsic reason for the *vita evangelica*, as we shall soon see in greater detail.

2) I want to mention just briefly the reform movement of Cluny, which was of such decisive importance in the tenth century. Likewise supported by the papacy, this movement brought about the emancipation of the *vita religiosa* from the feudal system and from the dominion of episcopal feudal lords. By the association of individual monasteries in a congregation, it became the great movement of piety and renewal in which the idea of Europe took shape.<sup>12</sup> The reforming dynamism of Cluny subsequently gave rise to the eleventh century Gregorian reform.<sup>13</sup> This latter movement rescued the papacy from the quagmire of strife among the

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<sup>12</sup>B. Senger points out the connection between the Cluniac reform and the shaping of the idea of Europe in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (=LThK), vol. 2, 2d ed., 1239. He likewise draws attention to the “juridical independence and help of the popes.”

<sup>13</sup>Even though P. Engelbert can rightly say that “it is impossible to ascertain a direct influence of the C.R. (=Cluniac reform) on the Gregorian Reform” (LThK, vol. 2, 3d ed., 1236), B. Senger’s observation (LThK, vol. 2, 2d ed., 1240) that the C.R. helped to prepare a favorable climate for the Gregorian reform is nonetheless still valid.

Roman nobility and from its secularization and, in general, took up the battle for the freedom of the Church, for its distinctive spiritual nature, a battle, however, which then degenerated into a power struggle between pope and emperor.

3) The spiritual force of the evangelical movement that exploded in the thirteenth century with Francis of Assisi and Dominic continues to be felt even today. In the case of Francis, it is quite clear that he had no intention of starting a new order, a community apart. He wanted simply to call the Church back to the whole gospel, to gather the “new people,” to renew the Church with the gospel. The two meanings of the word “evangelical life” are inextricably intertwined: whoever lives the gospel in poverty, giving up possession and progeny, must at the same time proclaim that gospel. There was a need for the gospel in Francis’s time, and he saw it precisely as his essential task to proclaim, along with his brothers, the simple core of Christ’s message to men. He and his followers wanted to be evangelists. And the very fact of being evangelists made it necessary to go beyond the borders of Christendom, to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.<sup>14</sup>

In the controversy with the secular priests of the University of Paris, who, as representatives of a narrowly closed local ecclesial structure, struggled against the evangelizing movements, Thomas Aquinas summed up the novelty and, at the same time, fidelity to the origin carried in the two movements and in the form of religious life to which they gave shape. The secular priests would accept only the Cluniac type of monasticism in its late, rigid form: monasteries separated from the local church, living in strict enclosure, and serving contemplation alone. Such monasteries could not upset the order of the local church, whereas conflicts inevitably broke out everywhere the new preachers appeared. By contrast, Thomas Aquinas emphasized that Christ himself is the model and, on the basis of this model, defended the superiority of the apostolic life over a purely contemplative form of life. “The active life that brings to others the truths attained through preaching and contemplation is more perfect than the exclusively contemplative life . . .”<sup>15</sup> Thomas knew that he was heir to the

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<sup>14</sup>The exemplary edition of the *Fonti Francescane* by the Movimento Francescano (Assisi, 1978), with helpful introductions and bibliographical material, remains normative for the understanding of Saint Francis. Instructive for the self-understanding of the mendicant writers is A. Jotischky, “Some Mendicant Views of the Origins of Monastic Perfection,” in *Cristianesimo nella storia* 19, no. 1 (February, 1998), 31–49. The author shows that the mendicant authors appealed to the primitive Church, and especially to the desert fathers, in order to give an account of their origin and their significance in the Church.

<sup>15</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3.40.1.2. Cf. also J.P. Torrell, O.P., *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996). See there the stimulating and clarifying discussion of the position of Saint Thomas in the controversy surrounding the mendicant orders, esp. 75–95.

successive renaissances of the monastic life, all of which appealed to the *vita apostolica*.<sup>16</sup> But in his interpretation of the *vita apostolica*—which he drew from the experience of the mendicant orders—he took an important new step, which had indeed been present in practice in the previous monastic tradition, but had as yet been little reflected upon in such an explicit way. The appeal to the primitive Church as a justification of the *vita apostolica* had been universal. Augustine, for example, designed his whole rule ultimately on the basis of Acts 4:32: they were one heart and one soul.<sup>17</sup> To this essential pattern, however, Thomas Aquinas adds Jesus' missionary discourses to the apostles (Mt 10:5–15): the authentic *vita apostolica* is the life that observes the teachings of Acts 4 and Mt 10: "The apostolic life consisted in the fact that the apostles, after they had left everything, went through the world, proclaiming and preaching the gospel. This becomes clear in Mt 10, where they are given a rule."<sup>18</sup> Matthew 10 now appears as nothing less than a religious rule, or better: the rule of life and mission that the Lord gave to the apostles is itself the permanent rule of the apostolic life, which the Church always needs. It is this rule that justifies the new movement of evangelization.

The Paris controversy between the secular clergy and the representatives of the new movements, in which these texts were written, is of permanent significance. A constricted and impoverished idea of the Church that absolutizes the local ecclesial structure could not tolerate the new class of preachers. For their part, these necessarily looked for their backing in the bearer of an office pertaining to the Church universal, in the pope as guarantor of the mission and the upbuilding of the one Church. It was logical, then, that all this gave a great boost to the development of the doctrine of primacy, which—beyond the coloring of a certain historical period—was now understood anew in the light of its apostolic root.<sup>19</sup>

4) Since the question that concerns us here does not have to do with Church history, but with understanding the forms of the Church's life, I must limit myself to only a brief mention of the movements of

<sup>16</sup>Thus Torrell, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 89–90.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. A. Zumkeller, in Balthasar, *Die Großen Ordensregeln*, 150–170. On the place of the rule in Augustine's life and work, C. Vigni, *Agostino d'Ippona: L'avventura della grazia e della carità* (Cinisello Balsamo, 1998), 91–109.

<sup>18</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra impugnantes Dei cultum et religionem* 4, cited in Torrell, *St. Thomas Aquinas*, 90.

<sup>19</sup>I first presented the connection between the mendicant controversy and the doctrine of the primacy in a study that appeared in a *festschrift* for M. Schmaus (*Theologie in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 1957), which I then included with minor additions in my book *Das neue Volk Gottes* (Düsseldorf, 1969), 49–71. Y. Congar took up my work where it left off, expanding what had been developed chiefly in terms of Bonaventure and his interlocutors to cover the whole field of the relevant sources: "Aspects ecclésiologiques de la querelle entre mendiants et séculiers dans la seconde moitié du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et le début du XIV<sup>e</sup>": *AHD* 28 (1961): 35–151.

evangelization in the 16th century. Preeminent among them are the Jesuits, who now also take up the world-wide mission in the newly discovered America, in Africa, and in Asia, though the Dominicans and Franciscans, powered by the continuing impact of their original impulse, do not lag far behind.

5) Finally, we are all familiar with the new spate of movements that began in the nineteenth century. This period saw the emergence of strictly missionary congregations, that from the very outset aimed not so much at renewal within as mission on those continents that had hardly been touched by Christianity. In this respect, these new congregations largely avoided conflict with the local ecclesial structures. There even arose a fruitful cooperation that lent new strength not least to the historical local churches, inasmuch as the impulse to spread the gospel and to serve love animated them from within. An element that, while by no means absent from the movements, can easily be overlooked, now comes powerfully to the fore here: the apostolic movement of the nineteenth century was above all a female movement, in which there was a strong emphasis on *caritas*, on care for the suffering and the poor—we know what the new female communities meant and continue to mean for the hospitals and for the care of the needy—and a central emphasis on schools and education. Thus, the whole gamut of service of the gospel was present in the combination of teaching, education, and love. When we look back from the nineteenth century, we see that women always played an important role in the apostolic movements. Think of the bold women of the sixteenth century like Mary Ward or, on the other hand, Teresa of Avila, of female figures of the Middle Ages like Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Siena, of the women in the circle of Saint Boniface, of the sisters of the Church Fathers and, finally, of the women in the letters of Paul and in the circle around Jesus. The women were never bishops or priests, but they were co-bearers of apostolic life and its universal task.

### *C. The Breadth of the Concept of Apostolic Succession*

After this survey of the great apostolic movements in the history of the Church, we return to our thesis, the statement of which I already anticipated after our brief analysis of the biblical data: the concept of apostolic succession must be given greater breadth and depth if we wish to do justice to all that it claims. What does this mean? First of all, we must keep the sacramental structure of the Church as the permanent core of apostolic succession. It is in this structure that the Church receives ever anew the heritage of the apostles, the heritage of Christ. It is the sacrament, in which Christ acts through the Holy Spirit, that distinguishes the Church from all other institutions. The sacrament means that the Church gets its life as a “creature of the Holy Spirit” from the Lord and is constantly recreated by him. In saying this, we must keep in mind the two inseparable components of the sacraments that we mentioned earlier:



first, the incarnational-christological element, that is, the Church's being bound to the "once only" of the incarnation and of the Easter events, the link to God's action in history; second, and simultaneously, the making present of this event in the power of the Holy Spirit, hence, the christological-pneumatological component, which guarantees at once the novelty and continuity of the living Church.

This account sums up what the Church has always taught about the essence of apostolic succession, the real core of the sacramental concept of the Church. But this core is impoverished, indeed, it atrophies, if we think in this connection only of the system based on the local church. The office of the succession of Peter breaks open the merely local ecclesial model; the successor of Peter is not just the local bishop of Rome, but bishop for the whole Church and in the whole Church. He thus embodies an essential side of the apostolic mission, which must never be absent from the Church. But the Petrine office itself would in turn be understood incorrectly and would become a monstrous exception, if we burdened its bearer alone with the realization of the universal dimension of apostolic succession.<sup>20</sup> There must also always be in the Church ministries and missions that are not tied to the local church alone, but serve universal mission and the spreading of the gospel. The pope has to rely on these ministries, they on him, and the collaboration between the two kinds of ministries completes the symphony of the Church's life. The apostolic age, which is normative for the Church, conspicuously displays these components as indispensable for the Church's life. The sacrament of *ordo*, the sacrament of succession [*Nachfolge*], is necessarily included in this structural form, but it is—even more than in the local churches—surrounded by various ministries, and here the contribution of women to the Church's apostolate cannot be overlooked. We could even say, summing up the whole discussion, that the primacy of the successor of Peter exists in order to guarantee these essential components of the Church's life and to ensure their orderly relation with the local ecclesial structures.

In order to obviate misunderstandings, I must say quite clearly here that the apostolic movements appear in ever new forms throughout history—necessarily, because they are the Holy Spirit's answer to the changing situations in which the Church lives. And just as vocations to the priesthood cannot be produced, cannot be established by administrative protocol, it is all the more true that movements cannot be organized and

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<sup>20</sup>The aversion to the primacy and the disappearance of the sense of the universal Church doubtless have to do with the fact that the concept of the universal Church is thought to be tied to the papacy alone. The papacy, isolated and without any living connection with universal ecclesial realities, then appears as a scandalous monolith, that upsets the image of a Church reduced to purely local ecclesial ministries and the coexistence of juxtaposed communities. But this image precisely does not capture the reality of the ancient Church.

planned by authority. They must be given, and they are given. We must only be attentive to them—we must only learn, using the gift of discernment, to accept what is right while overcoming what is unhelpful. One looking back at the history of the Church will be able to observe with gratitude that it has managed time and again in spite of all difficulties to make room for the great new awakenings. To be sure, the observer cannot overlook the succession of all those movements that have failed or led to permanent divisions: Montanists, Cathari, Waldensians, Hussites, the Reform movement of the sixteenth century. And we must, I think, say that both sides share the guilt for the permanent division in which these finally resulted.

### *III. Discernments and Criteria*

Thus, the final task of this presentation must be to ask about criteria of discernment. In order to be able to answer this question well, we would first have to define a little more precisely the term “movement,” perhaps even essay a typology of movements. Obviously, it is not possible to do all this here. We ought also to beware of too strict a definition, for the Holy Spirit always has surprises in store, and only in retrospect do we recognize that the movements have a common essence in the midst of their great diversities. However, I would like, as a kind of first try at clarifying terminology, very briefly to distinguish three different types, that can be observed at any rate in recent history. I would call them movement, current, and action. I would not characterize the liturgical movement of the first half of this century, or the Marian movement that had been gaining increasing prominence in the Church since the nineteenth century, as movements, but as currents. These currents might subsequently solidify in concrete movements like the Marian Congregation or groupings of Catholic youth, but they nevertheless extended beyond them. The sorts of petition drives for the proclamation of a dogma or for changes in the Church that are becoming customary today are for their part not movements, but actions. The Franciscan awakening of the thirteenth century probably provides the clearest illustration of what a movement is: movements generally come from a charismatic leader and they take shape in concrete communities that live the whole gospel anew from this origin and recognize the Church without hesitation as the ground of their life, without which they could not exist.<sup>21</sup>

Although this approach to a sort of definition is doubtless very unsatisfactory, it does already bring us to the criteria that, so to say, take the place of a definition. The essential criterion has just emerged quite by

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<sup>21</sup>Helpful for the definition of the essence of movements is A. Cattaneo, “I movimenti ecclesiali: aspetti ecclesiologici,” in *Annales Theologici* 11, no. 2 (1997): 401–427; see esp. 406–409.

itself: rootedness in the faith of the Church. Whoever does not share the apostolic faith cannot lay claim to apostolic activity. Since there is only one faith for the whole Church, indeed, since this faith is the cause of the Church's unity, it is impossible to have the apostolic faith without the will to be one, to stand in the living communion of the whole Church. And this means, quite concretely, the will to stand by the successors of the apostles and the successor of Peter, who bears responsibility for the harmonious interplay of the local and universal Church as the one people of God. If the "apostolic" dimension is the location of the movements in the Church, then the will to the *vita apostolica* must be fundamental for them in all ages. Renunciation of property, of progeny, of the imposition of one's own image of the Church, that is, obedience in the following of Christ, have at all times been considered the essential elements of the apostolic life. To be sure, these cannot be applied in the same way to all the participants of a movement, but they are, in different ways, reference points for each of their lives. The apostolic life is, in turn, not an end unto itself, but creates freedom for service. Apostolic life calls for apostolic activity: pride of place is given—again in different ways—to the proclamation of the gospel as the missionary element. In the *sequela Christi* evangelization is always primarily "evangelizare pauperibus"—proclamation of the gospel to the poor. But this proclamation never happens through words alone; love, which is its inner center, at one and the same time the center of its truth and of its action, must be lived and in this way be proclamation. Thus, social service is always connected in one form or another with evangelization. All of this presupposes—and the source is usually the flame of the initial charism—a deep personal encounter with Christ. The formation and upbuilding of community does not exclude the personal element, but calls for it. Only when the person is struck and opened up by Christ in his inmost depth can the other also be inwardly touched, can there be reconciliation in the Holy Spirit, can true community grow. Within this basic christological-pneumatological and existential structure, there can be a great diversity of accents and emphases, in which Christianity is a perpetually new event and the Spirit unceasingly renews the Church "like the youth of the eagle" (Ps 103:5).

This perspective also enables us to see the risks to which the movements are exposed as well as the means to remedy them. There is the risk of one-sidedness resulting from the over-accentuation of the specific task that emerges in one period or through one charism. The fact that the spiritual awakening is not experienced as *one* form of Christian existence, but as a being struck by the totality of the message as such, can lead to the absolutization of the movement, which can understand itself simply as the Church, as *the* way for all, whereas this one way can communicate itself in very different modes. Time and again, then, the freshness and totality of the awakening also leads almost inevitably to conflict with the local community, a conflict in which both sides can be at fault, and which represents a spiritual challenge to both. The local churches may have made peace with the world through a certain conformism, the salt can lose

its savor, a situation that Kierkegaard described with mordant acuity in his critique of Christendom. Yet even where the departure from the radical demands of the gospel has not reached the point that provoked Kierkegaard's denunciation, the irruption of the new is experienced as a disruption, especially when it appears with all kinds of childhood diseases and misguided absolutizations, as not infrequently happens.

Both sides must open themselves here to an education by the Holy Spirit and also by the leadership of the Church, both must acquire a selflessness without which there can be no interior consent to the multiformity in which the faith is lived out. Both sides must learn from each other, allow themselves to be purified by each other, put up with each other, and discover how to attain those attitudes of which Paul speaks in his great hymn to love (1 Cor 13:4ff.). Thus, it is necessary to remind the movements that—even though they have found and pass on the whole of the faith in their own way—they are a gift to and in the whole of the Church and must submit themselves to the demands of this totality in order to be true to their own essence.<sup>22</sup> But the local churches, too, even the bishops, must be reminded to avoid making an ideal of uniformity in pastoral organization and planning. They must not make their own pastoral plans the criterion of what the Holy Spirit is allowed to do: an obsession with planning could render the churches impermeable to the Spirit of God, to the power by which they live.<sup>23</sup> It must not be the case that everything has to fit into a single, uniform organization. Better less organization and more spirit! Above all, *communio* must not be conceived as if the avoidance of conflict were the highest pastoral value. Faith is always a sword, too, and it can demand precisely conflict for the sake of truth and love (cf. Mt 10:34). A concept of ecclesial unity in which conflicts are dismissed *a priori* as polarization, and in which domestic peace is bought at the price of sacrificing the integral totality of witness will quickly prove to be illusory. Finally, we must not allow the establishment of a blasé enlightenment that immediately brands the zeal of those seized by the Holy Spirit and their naive faith in God's Word with the anathema of fundamentalism and allows only a faith for which the ifs, ands, and buts become more important than the very substance of what is believed. All must let themselves be measured by love for the unity of the *one* Church, which is only one in all local churches and appears as such again and again in the apostolic movements. The local churches and the apostolic movements must constantly recognize and accept the simultaneous truth of two propositions: *ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia—ubi episcopus, ibi ecclesia*. Primacy and episcopacy, the local ecclesial system and apostolic movements, need each other: the primacy can live only with and through a living episcopacy, the episcopacy can preserve its dynamic and apostolic unity only in

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. Cattaneo, "I movimenti ecclesiali," 423–425.

<sup>23</sup>See the powerful remarks on this point in Cattaneo, "I movimenti ecclesiali," 413f. and 417.

ordination to the primacy. Where one of the two is weakened, the Church as a whole suffers.

What should remain at the conclusion of all these considerations is above all gratitude and joy. Gratitude that the Holy Spirit is very evidently at work in the Church and gives it new gifts even today, gifts through which it relives the joy of its youth (Ps 42:4, Vulgate). Gratitude for many people, young and old, who accept God's call and joyfully enter into the service of the gospel without looking back. Gratitude for the bishops who open themselves to the new paths, create room for them in the local churches, and struggle patiently with them in order to overcome their one-sided tendencies and to guide them to the right form. And above all let us thank in this place and at this time Pope John Paul II, who is a leader to Christ for us all—by his capacity for enthusiasm, by his ability for inward rejuvenation in the power of the faith, by his discernment of spirits, by his humble and courageous struggle for the fullness of services for the sake of gospel, by his unity with the bishops around the world, a unity in which he both listens and guides. Christ lives, and he sends from the Father the Holy Spirit—that is the joyful and life-giving experience that is ours precisely in the encounter with the ecclesial movements.—*Translated by Adrian Walker\**

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