ECCLESIOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF VATICAN II'S TRINITARIAN ANTHROPOLOGY



Fifty years have passed since the opening of the Second Vatican Council, an event that invited the Church to rediscover the Church itself as an icon of Trinitarian life. In this article the author reflects on how the Council also points the way for ecclesiology to review its own method and themes by drawing upon the Trinitarian anthropology that the Council outlines. What this article proposes is that in finding its "place" in the agape of the Christ event, the Church is to be explored in terms of its intrinsic relation to human society. On this basis significant themes are suggested as important for consideration by those constructing and communicating ecclesiology.

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Fifty years have passed since the announcement of the Second Vatican Council, the great ecclesial event of the twentieth century that set the tone for subsequent ecclesial developments. Yves Congar who played such an active part in it, commented, "Something happened at the Council and the dominant values in our way of looking at the Church were changed".[1] It has repeatedly been affirmed that the Council was primarily pastoral. The oft-recounted story tells of how, in responding to a visitor who asked him what he expected of the Council, Pope John XIII moved to the window in his office, opened it and said: "what I want from the Council is that it will let some fresh air in". The *aggiornamento* he promoted did indeed mean interior pastoral renewal in terms of enlivening the Church's faith and communitarian life, and relating faith in a new way to the world and society.
However, it was not strategic or pragmatic motives but rather deep ecclesiological considerations that came to the fore during the Council. The dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, is eloquent testimony to that.[2] So too the pastoral constitution on the Church, *Gaudium et spes*, that marked an "anthropological shift", as it were, in Catholic ecclesiology based, as Otto Pesch puts it "on the very nature of the thing itself",[3] that is, on the very nature of the Church in its theo-anthropological significance. Indeed the whole Conciliar project of reform revolved around the crucial issue facing the contemporary Church, that of linking and re-presenting the link between theocentrism and anthropocentrism.[4]
In this article, I propose that the Trinitarian anthropology put forward at the Council has much to say to us regarding ecclesiology itself. In its broadest sense ecclesiology is the theological study of the Church. Such study can range from exploration of the rich notion of the Mystical Body to addressing questions of people, structures, and ministries. Vatican II itself reveals a number of ecclesiologies while today it is often said that there are two broad lines of ecclesiology, idealist and realist historical.[5] The Council's hermeneutic of reform, however, linked to a profound Trinitarian anthropology can hold together many different dimensions of ecclesiology. It's an anthropology that is presented in the Council as flowing from the Christ event and lived out in the Church as it journeys along the pathways of history. What I want to develop in this article is simply a reflection on what this Trinitarian anthropology has to say to those engaged in exploring and teaching ecclesiology today.
I shall proceed as follows. Firstly, I shall review in broad brush strokes the link between Trinitarian anthropology and ecclesial existence underlying the Council's teaching on

1) "Moving Towards a Pilgrim Church" in A. Stacpoole (ed.), *Vatican II by those who were there*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1986 , p. 129.
2) See Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "The Ecclesiology of Vatican II" in *L'Osservatore Romano* [English Edition] 23 January 2002, p. 5. See also W. Kasper, *Theology & Church*, SCM, London 1989.
3) O. H. Pesch, *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Preistoria, svolgimento, risultati, storia post-conciliare*, Querinana, Brescia 2005, p. 52.
4) See Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on Divine Mercy, *Dives in misericordia* (30 November, 1980), 1. See also Kasper, *Theology & Church*, cit., pp. 32-94.
5) On the variety of ecclesiologies in Vatican II see A. Acerbi, *Due ecclesiologie. Ecclesiologia giuridica ed ecclesiologica di comunione nella "Lumen gentium"*, EDB, Bologna 1975. For a very fine and concise update on recent ecclesiology, see Neil Ormerod, "Recent Ecclesiology: A Survey", *Pacifica* 21 (Februrary 2008), pp. 57-67.

the Church. Secondly, I shall consider how ecclesiology, its very method, needs to be more attentive to what a renewed ecclesial praxis in the light of Trinitarian anthropology means for it. Thirdly, I shall propose a number of themes that need to be borne in mind in contemporary research and communication of ecclesiology.[6]

1. Trinitarian Anthropology and Ecclesial Existence

It is well recognized that a key dimension of Vatican II was the re-reading of the mystery of the Church and its mission in terms of the mystery of the Trinity.[7] This is very clear in *Lumen gentium's* presentation of the "Ecclesia de Trinitate". However, the profound "Trinitarian logic" that shapes the Church as a realm of relationship and reciprocity is perhaps even clearer in the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et spes*.[8] On the one hand, *Gaudium et spes* affirms a Christian anthropology rooted in the person of Jesus Christ, "the key" to human history. In GS, n. 10 we read:

> «The Church […] holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history. […] Hence under the light of Christ, the image of the unseen God, the firstborn of every creature, the Council wishes to speak to all men in order to shed light on the mystery of man and to cooperate in finding the solution to the outstanding problems of our time».

In setting about this task of proclaiming Christ, the key to human history, the Church underlines the mystery of the origins of the human person in God's creative plan, namely, a being created in the image and likeness of God. The classic text is *Gaudium et spes*, 22, quoted so often by Pope John Paul II:

6) On the question of method in theology and ecclesiology in general see B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, Herder & Herder, New York 1972; P. Coda, *Teo-Logia, La Parola di Dio nelle parole dell'uomo*, LUP, Rome 2004 and T. G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology*, T&T Clark, London 2005.

7) On Vatican II's Trinitarian ecclesiology see M. Philipon, "La Santissima Trinità e la Chiesa" in AA.VV., *La santissima Trinità e la Chiesa*, edited by G. Baraùna, Vallechi, Florence 1965, pp. 328-350; B. de Margerie, *La Trinité chrétienne dans l'histoire*, Beauchesne, Paris 1975; N. Silanes, *La Iglesia de la Trinidad en el Vaticano II, Estudio genetico-teologico*, Secretariado Trinitario, Salamanca 1981; M.D. Chenu, "La nuova coscienza del fondamento trinitario della Chiesa," *Concilium*, XVII (1981), pp. 874-887; M. Bohnke and H.P. Heinz, *Im Gespräch mit dem dreieinigen Gott: Elemente eine trinitarishe Theologie*, FS Wilhelm Breuning, Düsseldorf 1985; B. Forte, *La Chiesa della Trinità*, San Paolo, Milano 1995; Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Vision and Versions* Orbis, Maryknoll NY 2000. See also International Theological Commission, "Select themes on Ecclesiology" in M. Sharkey (ed.), *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents*, 1969-1985, Ignatius, San Francisco 1989, pp. 267-304.

8) See P. Coda, "L'antropologia trinitaria e la *Gaudium et spes*" *Nuova Umanità* 10 (1988), 17-47. See also E. Chiavacci, "La teologia della *Gaudium et spes*" in N. Galantino (ed.), *Il Concilio venti anni dopo*. Vol. 3: *Il rapporto Chiesa-mondo*, AVE, Rome 1986, pp. 13-40.

> «The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of him who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear [...] He who is "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), is himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam he restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as he assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every man.»

In presenting Jesus Christ, in the power of the Spirit, as revealing both God the Father and God's plan for humanity, *Gaudium et spes* lays the foundation for a view of Christian anthropology that is radically Trinitarian. What it tells us is that through the outpouring of the Spirit into our hearts, we become human precisely in becoming sons in the Son in the heart of the Father. It is a powerfully communitarian vision of our humanization. Becoming one in Christ, the new humanity that is born from the Christ event reflects the divine community and is the place where we grow in mutual love. In *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24 this point is made succinctly:

> «God, who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God, who "from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely God himself. For this reason, love for God and neighbour is the first and greatest commandment. Sacred Scripture, however, teaches us that the love of God cannot be separated from love of neighbour: "If there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself [...]. Love therefore is the fulfilment of the Law" (Rom 13:9-10; cf. 1 John 4:20). To men growing daily more dependent on one another, and to a world becoming more unified every day, this truth proves to be of paramount importance. Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, "that all may be one... as we are one" (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for he implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.»

In a way that echoes Gregory Nazianzen, Richard of St. Victor and Scheeben, Vatican II opens our reflection to a consideration of the Church as a prophetic sign and instrument of the realization of humanity "Trinitized" in Christ and in his Spirit.[9]

9) *Lumen gentium*, 4.

The Church is a "new" people that has been "made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Reconciled in mutual love and with the new commandment of love as its law, this people lives in communion, being-for-one-another in Christ. It is within this Trinitarian communional realm of the Church that the mystery of the person blossoms. Certainly, we can think here of the impressive witness to the wonder of the indwelling of the Trinity in one's soul reflected in the writings of saints and mystics such as the Rhineland mystics or Teresa of Avila that have perhaps all too easily been neglected in theology. But, it is also important to recognize the process of fulfillment is a process of "ecclesiasticisation" within a communitarian experience of God. Pope Benedict describes it:

> «My own self is taken away and I am filled with a new and greater subject, in which my "I" is still there but transformed, purified, "open" through the insertion into the Other, who acquires new space in my existence. Thus, we become "one in Christ" (Gal 3: 28), a unique new subject, and our "I" is freed from its isolation. "I, but no longer I": this is the formula of Christian existence established in Baptism, the formula of the resurrection in time, the formula of the Christian "novelty" called to transform the world [...]. In fact, we are called to become new women and men, to be able to be true witnesses of the Risen One and thus bearers of Christian joy and hope in the world, concretely in that community of men and women in which we live.»[10]

What Vatican II wants us to see is that the corporate reality of the Church and the inter-relating among Christians is both a participation in and in some way mirrors the Trinity. The ecclesial "Trinitization" of each individual consciousness occurs both through the objective forms of the presence, in the power of the Spirit, of the Crucified-Risen Christ who precedes the Church and forms us as his Body through the Word, sacrament and ministry, *and* the subjective dimension of the actualization of that encounter in our lives through living out the Church's "precept of love" in a mutual giving and receiving.[11] It is the Church fully alive that is to be «a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race.»[12] Through the Holy Spirit, men and women, nurtured by the Word and sacrament, are enabled to live in their mutual relations a life patterned on the Crucified-Risen love of Christ that translates into history the very life of Trinitarian *perichoresis*. Ecclesial existence, or more precisely, baptismal spirituality that lies at the heart of all Church life is ultimately about being enabled to «live the life of the Trinity.»[13]

10) See his address to the participants at the fourth Italian national ecclesial convention, Verona, 19 October, 2006, *AAS* XCVIII (2006): 217-252, at 217.
11) See *Lumen gentium*, 9.
12) *Lumen gentium*, 1.
13) *Novo millennio ineunte*, 29. See also Edward Hahnenberg, "The Mystical Body of Christ and Communion Ecclesiology: Historical Parallels," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 70 (2005), pp. 3-30; M. Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Eerdmans Grand Rapids MI 1998.

2. Implications for Ecclesiology

Following on from what we've just seen, it is possible now to reflect on what this means for ecclesiology itself. What implications are there for those engaged in exploring and teaching ecclesiology? What does it mean to say ecclesiology finds its "place" within the economy of the Triune God's self-communication in the Christ event.[14]

2.1 Ecclesiology finds its "place" in the agape *of the Christ event*

Although strictly speaking ecclesiology as a discipline only emerges in the second millennium, nevertheless it is clear that ecclesiological reflection has from earliest times attested to the need of locating reflection upon the Church within the Church understood as the place where we encounter the Christ event. It's enough to think of Irenaeus' writings on this theme.[15] On the one hand, ecclesiology depends upon its "tools," the ecclesial "instruments" with which the Church is endowed - Scripture, the living Tradition, and Magisterium. But there is a further point. Those engaged in theological reflection upon the Church are called to participate in the reality of the Church so that their lived ecclesial faith gives them, as it were, an intuitive experience of the Church, even before they have a clear idea of it.[16] This means ecclesiology is never a cold, isolated, merely speculative or individual endeavour. It is participative, communitarian, and communicative.

Ecclesiology presupposes participation in ecclesial communion both in the diachronic sense (communion with the apostolic memory of the revelation of Christ that reaches us through the living Tradition of the Church in an "uninterrupted process of reception"[17]) and the synchronic sense (the catholic communion with the Church that today lives and believes, a communion that is characterized both by multiplicity mirroring the universality of the Church but also by unity reflecting the communion in the same faith, visibly expressed in the collegiality of bishops with the Pope).[18]

There is a vital communitarian element in the *fides qua* that is to be lived out by those engaging in or studying ecclesiology. In many ways, the first letter of John provides significant pointers explaining the shape of this ecclesial *fides qua* underlying ecclesiology. If God is love (1 Jn 4: 8, 16), that is, gift of self, then only those who live ecclesial *agape* can gain access to knowing God, the transmission of

14) For a recent review of theological method and ecclesiology see Pedro Rodriguez, "Theological Method for Ecclesiology", in P. Phan (ed.), *Gift of the Church*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN 2000, pp. 129-56.

15) See the recent excellent work on Irenaeus by B. Benats, *Il ritmo trinitario della verità*, Città Nuova, Roma 2006, pp. 137-165.

16) See Pope Paul VI's comment in his encyclical on the Church, *Ecclesiam Suam* (6 August 1964), n. 37.

17) Cf. W. Beinert, *Die Rezeption und ihre Bedeutung für Leben und Lehre der Kirche*" in Id. (ed.), *Glaube als Zustimmiung. Zur Interpretation kirchlicher Rezeptionsvorgänge*, Herder, Freiburg 1991, pp. 15-49, at p. 37.

18) See Walter Kasper's comments in *An Introduction to Christian Faith*, Burns and Oates, London, 1980, pp. 2-3

whose revelation is intimately linked to understanding the Church. Ecclesiology is a knowledge gained in living mutual love, in the Spirit. It is not a question of knowing abstract notions "out there" but rather inhabiting the wisdom that is Christ who exists as community as Bonhoeffer puts it.
Ecclesial epistemology involves being able to engage in a giving and receiving of the light of Christ. To know is to "become the other" that is known. The agapic love, modeled on Christ's kenotic self-giving, involves making ourselves one with others, entering into what others are saying as the basis of our research, exploration and study. In other words, ecclesiology requires a praxis of communion as a style of reflecting together on the Church, the "place" we inhabit in Christ. In this light, the elements of a spirituality of communion outlined in *Novo millennio ineunte* can be re-read also as a template for building that space of communion where ecclesiology can take place:

> «A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the face of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are a part of me" [...] A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me". A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters...and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy.»[19]

It is on this basis that ecclesiology best combines insights and best faces nodal points of difficulty regarding the mystery of the Church in a living sapiential unity whose intelligibility stems from the mystery of God as he communicates himself and is shared in by those engaging in ecclesiology. Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838), so much a founder of modern ecclesiology, wrote that «the Church exists through a life directly and continually moved by the divine Spirit, and is maintained and continued by the loving mutual exchange of believers.»[20] So too ecclesiology. Consequently, the «very disinterested service to the community of the faithful», that ecclesiology is, «entails in essence an objective discussion, a fraternal dialogue, an openness and willingness to modify one's own opinions.»[21] Medard Kehl, taking on board the modern theory of communication writes of the com-

19) *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 43.
20) See Johann A. M., *Unity in the Church or The Principle of Catholicism Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, ed. and trans. P. C. Erb, Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1996, p. 93.
21) John Paul II, "Discorso ai teologi ad Altötting", November 18, 1980: AAS 73 (1981) 104 quoted in Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian, *Donum Veritatis*, (24 May 1990), n. 11.

municative unity of believers.[22] In summary, Vatican II's process of reception invites those engaged today in ecclesiology to develop a synodal/conciliar/communion style of ecclesiology itself.[23]

2.2 Understanding the Church in relation to Human Civilisation

The ecclesial "Trinitarian" anthropology is not, however, simply to be viewed *ad intra*, in a resultant methodology that would be closed in on itself. It necessarily prompts ecclesiology to reflect on the Church in terms of its historical journey, under the guidance of the Spirit, in the building up of the human civilization of love. While subordinating ecclesiology to the mystery of the Triune God, the Council suggests a Spirit-prompted openness to the world in dialogical outreach making its own the «joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age»[24] precisely because Christ «has united himself in some fashion with every man.»[25] The Spirit of God fills the whole universe guiding the journey of the Church and also the universal destiny of humanity so that the People of God may ever more deeply accede to an adequate self awareness and self-configuration.[26] August Franzen writes:

> «In the Christian revelation attested in the NT, the nature of the Church is not expressed in timeless abstract concepts but in metaphors (analogies)…. Since for the most part these analogies are employed dynamically rather than statically, stressing the building of the house, the cultivation of the field, and the feeding of the flock, rather than the house itself, etc., they allow for the possibility of historical developments and changes in the Church's understanding of itself with the passage of time.»[27]

Rooted in God's eternal plan, the Church is an institutional-charismatic people journeying in time, gathering up the inheritance of Israel's and Jesus' history of salvation, rendering it present and understanding it here and now in the "bits and pieces" of life. What Vatican II brings out is that the Church cannot be viewed in some abstract universal manner as if given once and for all in static rigid fashion that would never see development or growth. The Church rather is a reality that develops and manifests its nature precisely in relating to the various periods of history through which it passes. It is like a seed cast into the furrows of history that then grows and develops. Jesus' parable of the Kingdom comes to mind: «The Kingdom is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the

22) Medard Kehl, *Die Kirche Eine katholische Ekklesiologie*, Echter, Wurzburg, 1992.
23) Y. Congar, "Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality," *Concilium* 8 (1972), pp. 43-68. See also G. Lafont, *Imagining the Catholic Church: Structured Communion in the Spirit*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota 2000.
24) *Gaudium et spes*, 1
25) *Ibid*. 22.
26) See *ibid*., 11.
27) Karl Rahner, *Sacramentum Mundi*, s.v., p. 250.

greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade» (Mk 4:30). The Church's history, at times apparently slow, laboured and tragic, is also an amazing and exciting journey of God's project, fully proclaimed and realized proleptically in Jesus, becoming concrete in humanity, in solidarity with the various pathways of history and imbued with a striving forward towards definitive fulfillment.

It is in this sense that the missiologists, Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder have written that mission is the «mother of the Church».[28] The point is that Church comes to know itself in relationship - that is, its very nature is relationship. Accordingly, attentiveness to history, culture and society is important in ecclesiology because the Church only comes to be through the interaction and co-operation of the divine and human factors throughout the ages:

> «the special character of revelation and respect for the Church's incarnational principle require the Church to be embodied in the humanity to which salvation is to be proclaimed and in which Christ is to be born anew. For the Church this adaptation does not involve any relativizing of its divine structure; it means, rather, a progressive self-realization in the direction of its eschatological goal. In this process the Church continually allows fresh aspects of its being to emerge in the course of time and in its confrontation with different peoples and cultures.»[29]

Ecclesiology requires diachronic and synchronic modes of exploration of how the Church is related to and involved in the building up of human civilisation. The diachronic moment in ecclesiology is the review of how the apostolic memory of the revelation of Christ has reached us through the living Tradition of the Church in ever new configurations of the Body of Christ responding to ever new periods of history and cultural *kairoi*. The image of Church is not limited to an "idealized" vision of the early Church of the New Testament (though the apostolic church will always be normative) because the church is never in a pure state. We need to take into consideration those concrete historical configurations that the Church has taken on in the course of the centuries that have conditioned its self-understanding.[30] As L. Sartori observed the history of the Church is not simply one of failures and limits but also of values that different eras of history highlight and bring forward in the Church.[31] There is a deep value, therefore, in viewing the Church's history as an appropriate hermeneutical place (without denying the limits

28) S. B. Bevans and R. Schroeder, *Constants in Context*: *A Theology of Mission for Today*, American Society of Missiology Series 30, Orbis, Maryknoll NY 2004, p. 10
29) Franzen, *Sacramentum mundi*, pp. 252-253
30) See H. Fries, "Mutamenti dell'immagine della Chiesa ed evoluzione storico-dogmatica," in *Mysterium Salutis*, VII, Queriniana, Brescia 1972, pp. 267-346; O. Köhler, "La Chiesa come storia," in *Mysterium Salutis*, VIII, Queriniana, Brescia 1975, pp. 651-732. See also the number of *Concilium* (57 [1970]) dedicated to this theme and A. Dulles, *Models of Church*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1988.
31) See L. Sartori, "Chiesa" in *Nuovo dizionario di teologia*, Paoline, Rome 1977, pp. 122-148. Cf. H. Küng, *The Church*, Sheed and Ward, Search Press, London 1967, pp. 3-23.

or ambiguities!) of the Church's own growth in self-understanding within history. The synchronic moment in ecclesiology also requires an exploration of how the Church today lives and believes, as it engages with the challenges of the growing secularization of Europe, the encounter with religious and cultural worlds of the East and the need to join unity, pluriformity and globalization. A particular issue is how the multiplicity that mirrors the universality of the Church is to be expressed in a way that reflects communion in the same faith, visibly expressed in the collegiality of bishops with the Pope. Above all, this exploration in a synchronic sense means attentiveness to what today "the Spirit is saying to the churches" (Rev 2:7).

3. Significant Themes in Constructing and Communicating Ecclesiology

What I've been proposing so far moves us in the direction of an historical ecclesiology, a topic that is gaining considerable attention in recent years. The issue of an historical ecclesiology is not, however, without problems. The risk of ecclesiological monophysitism or nestorianism lurks in the background.[32] The role and place of the social sciences is a complex question.[33] Nevertheless, it is true that Vatican II encourages a view of the Church growing in self-understanding when, for instance, along with its teaching in *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*, it affirms in *Dei Verbum*, n. 8 that, under the guidance of the Spirit there is a growth in ecclesial self-understanding:

> «For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (see Luke, 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through Episcopal succession the sure gift of truth. For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her.»

Arising from what we have reviewed so far, I would like now to conclude this article by proposing a number of themes that guide the constructing and communicating

32) See G. Sigismondi, "La versione ecclesiologica delle controversie cristologiche" in F. Chica, S. Panizzolo. H. Wagner (edd.), *Ecclesia Tertii Millennii Advenientis*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1997, pp. 289-296.

33) Joseph Komonchak has been the main American proponent for the inclusion of the social sciences as integral to the project of ecclesiology. See his work, *Foundations in Ecclesiology*, ed. F. Lawrence, vol. 11, Lonergan Workshop Journal, Supplementary Issue Boston, Boston College, Boston 1995. See also N. M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000; C. M. Bellitto, *Renewing Christianity: A History of Church Reform from Day One to Vatican II,* Paulist, New York 2001; B. Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology through the Centuries*, Paulist, Mahwah NY 2004; S. B. Bevans and R. Schroeder, *op.cit.*

of ecclesiology rooted in a Trinitarian ecclesial anthropology promoted by Vatican II. Recognition of how the *Church discovers herself along the pathways of history*. Ecclesiology needs to constantly listen to the Church's story as one inserted into the story of humanity. The Church is a people progressively discovering the identity Jesus has given it, growing more and more to grasp the universalisation of its message. While the Church is the place of the self-understanding and self-realisation of God's plan for humanity, the Church itself learns in relational interaction with the surrounding unfolding of history. Vincenzo Paglia has argued, for instance, that key moments of reform and insight for the Church have coincided with outreach to the poor.[34]

Exploration of the *inculturation of the Faith* in the dynamic of unity and multiformity is a rich vein within ecclesiology.[35] Inculturation concerns the relationship that exists between the Gospel message as proclaimed by Jesus and handed by the apostles and the variety of cultures and social traditions that it has met and meets along its history. Firstly, there's the foundational period of the Church's first steps in Semitic, Greek-Hellenistic and then Latin cultures. But two thousand years have seen the Gospel message impact with Celtic and German, Hungarian and Slavic cultures as well as the Americas, the traditions of Africa, and the religions of Far East. Within the Church there is a law of the incarnation of faith. Faith is never abstract but rather expressed in various cultures, taking them on, discerning, transforming and creating new directions. Exploration of this law of inculturation indicates another law, that of unity in pluriformity. The unity is given by the message of Jesus Christ that is one. The pluriformity comes from the variety and diversity of expressions that the faith takes on in its creative encounter with cultures.

The *Church-World relationship* is a constant that needs to be kept in view. The relationship between the Church and social and political institutions is not simply a question of a study of the strategies the Church adapted in response to various regimes from monarchies to democracies. Rather it has to do with how the Church (and the Gospel leaven of which it is guardian) has been present in the evolution of events. This has to do with the relationship between the Church "society" and civil/political "society" in God's plan. The "Trinitarian logic" throws light on all of this too.[36] The distinction between Church and society must always be viewed against the radically relational structure of the Church *both* towards God from which it is born and to whom it tends, under the guidance of the Spirit, in Christ *and* towards the world to which it is sent. This double relationship is a challenge and represents a tension that can be beneficially explored in the history of the Church.

34) V. Paglia, *Storia dei Poveri in Occidente*, Rizzoli, Milano 2003.
35) On the theme of inculturation see Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter on the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate *Redemptoris missio* (7 December 1990), nn. 52-54. See also Cardinal Ratzinger, "Faith, Religion and Culture" in Id., *Truth and Tolerance*, Ignatius, San Francisco 2003, pp. 55-109.
36) See S. Dianich, *La Chiesa in Missione. Per una ecclesiologia dinamica*, Ed. Paoline, Milan, 1985, in particular, pp. 219-258 ('la missione "de Trinitate"'). See also G. M. Zanghí, "Chiesa e Mondo. Appunti per una riflessione sul problema," in Id., *Occidente, la mia terra, storia, società, politica alla luce del paradigma trinitario*, Città Nuova, Rome 2008, pp. 128-146.

Ecclesiology can also be viewed as *discerning the series of "Kairoi" that make up the Church's history, that is, particular moments of God's intervention in history*. While respecting and leading human freedom to its highest expression, the triune God is at work within history, leading it to the fullness of salvation and freedom. Since the Spirit is at work in humanity, it is possible, therefore, to discern within the history of the Church, itself a divine-human reality, the working of the Spirit in synergy with the needs and aspirations as well as the discoveries and defeats of humanity. In biblical terms, we can speak of *kairoi*, specific moments of the irruption of the Spirit and turning points of culture and ecclesial society. In the Old Testament such *kairoi* were linked with "prophets" in the history of Israel. We can also see prophetic outpourings in the life of the Church for the good of society (Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena...). Linked to all of this would be the issue of reform in the Church. As Vatican II puts it, "Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth. The Church is always in need of this, in so far as she is an institution of men here on earth."[37]

A key element in constructing and communicating ecclesiology is an examination of *the Institution and Charism polarity within the Church*. Here we are talking about two co-essential dimensions of the Church, apostolic and prophetic. The first assures the Church's continuity, visibility and organisation, while the second underlines novelty, adaptation to new situations and movement towards the future. In *Lumen gentium* 4 we read how the Spirit "directs with hierarchical and charismatic gifts."[38] While, as Thomas Aquinas put it, what principally constitutes the Church is the Holy Spirit at work in people's hearts,[39] it is important to reflect on how the "means" (hierarchical gifts, sacraments and charisms) of ecclesiogenesis are to serve the "goal" of the Church in the world bringing about inner personal and outer historical transformation.

Conclusion

Yves Congar once noted that the text of Matt. 18:20 on the presence of Christ in the community can be considered "the great Conciliar text".[40] It is clear that the Council invites us to rediscover how through, in and with Christ, the Church itself is to be an icon of Trinitarian life. In this short article I've proposed that as well as exploring the nature of the Church in the light of the Trinitarian paradigm, the Council also points the way for ecclesiology itself in its own method and themes to draw upon the Trinitarian anthropology that the Council outlines.

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37) Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, n. 6.
38) Cf. Eph 4:11-12; 1 Cor 12:4; Gal 5:22.
39) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, II, q. 106, a.1.
40) See "The Conciliar Structure or Regime of the Church," *Concilium* 167 (1983), pp. 3-9, at p. 6.