

Living Catholicity differently: On growing into the plenitudinous Plurality of Catholic Communion in God¹

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Introduction

The forerunner to the current volume, *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers* (2015), analysed the contemporary situation of the Catholic Church in North America and Europe as one minority choice amidst a welter of options. Any long-lingering, post-Christendom aspiration for totality has been doubly vanquished by secularism and postmodern pluralism. Joseph Ratzinger presciently recognised in 1969 that the Church was to become a “little flock.”² With this, a prevailing attitude of *commitment if, only, and for as long as something works for me* further erodes any sense of inherited loyalties and transgenerational identity. Somewhat paraphrased, the conclusion of the 2015 study was that the Church needs to become more attentive, imaginative, and responsive in effectively linking with the actual lived concerns and needs of the Catholic faithful.³ Only so will its distinctive offer be heard as having any continuing value.⁴

The twin concerns of the current volume, *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, are: a) to ask what changes are required to the Church’s “internal organization” and formal teaching if it is to be capable of demonstrating such greater responsiveness and lasting appeal; and b) to examine what “orientations ... theology and theologians” can offer in this regard.⁵ The intention is to pursue these concerns in relation to the lived reality of the Church and not simply at the level of idealised constructs.⁶ Implicit within this is recognition of the diversity of experience,

¹ The argument of this chapter about the nature of catholicity and its implications relates to a larger, multi-stranded project on which I am currently engaged under the overall title, *Catholicism Transfigured: Conceiving Change in the Church*. Thus far, various essays have appeared relating to this larger project which will finally issue in full-length, monograph treatment. I am grateful to Greg Ryan for his insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

² See Joseph Ratzinger, “What Will the Church Look Like in 2000,” in his *Faith and the Future* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), pp. 89-106 (pp. 103-105); compare Karl Rahner, “Church of the Little Flock,” in his *The Shape of the Church to Come* (London: SPCK, 1974 [1972]), pp. 29-34 (pp. 30, 34).

³ The phrase “effectively linking with” allows for the critical scrutinising, even subverting, of “lived concerns and needs,” e.g. by showing them to be distorted, self-frustrating, and in need of being resituated within a wider frame. Each specific contextual concern and felt need raises the question as to how Catholic communities should best read and engage the world in a manner which respects and reflects the “dynamic integrity” proper to Catholic tradition. Compare George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984); Paul D. Murray, “A Liberal Helping of Postliberalism Please,” *The Future of Liberal Theology*, ed. Mark D. Chapman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 208-218; Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), pp. 120-155, 156-175. On “dynamic integrity,” see no. 7 here.

⁴ See Hellemans and Jonkers, “Introduction,” here, p.?? [aanvullen](#)

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See *ibid.* Relevant here are: Murray, “Searching the Living Truth of the Church in Practice: On the Transformative Task of Systematic Ecclesiology,” *Modern Theology* 30 (2014): pp. 251-281; and Nicholas

perspective, and conviction which *de facto* operates within the Church in relation to practically any significant matter.

The specific purpose of this chapter, “Living Catholicity Differently,” is to examine what resources there are for living this intra-Catholic pluralism well: in a manner that holds identity and inclusiveness together, in what I have elsewhere referred to as a relationship of “dynamic integrity.”⁷ Presupposed here is that identity, stability, and continuity (“integrity”) and freshness, creativity, and contextual specificity (“dynamism”/“dynamic”) are each authentic to Catholic tradition.⁸ Where the former relates most obviously to the internal coherence of the tradition, the latter relates most obviously to the tradition’s extensive coherence with what is otherwise known of the world and the ever new circumstances within which the tradition is lived. But each has implications for the other: an adjustment in any one part of an integrated web of Catholic thought and practice – as configured at a given time and in a given context – will require potential adjustments in other parts.⁹

The resources identified here as bearing on the fruitful living of this *intra*-Catholic pluralism range across the conceptual-doctrinal and ecclesiological, through the structural and procedural, to the spiritual, habitual, and dispositional. The aim is to identify the elements in a systematic theology and practice of intra-Catholic diversity, debate, and disagreement. The hope is that this might be of service to the Church locally, regionally, and universally, on the journey towards becoming more truly Catholic¹⁰: a communion of communities¹¹ which can genuinely think and act *kath’olou*, in accordance with the whole truth of things in the complex simplicity of Christ (Eph 1:22; 1 Cor 15:28); inspired and effected by the Spirit, who is promised as leading the Church into the fullness of this complexly simple truth (Jn 16:3).

M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), particularly pp. 3, 25, 32-49.

⁷ See Murray, “Discerning the Dynamics of Doctrinal Development: A Post-foundationalist Perspective,” *Faithful Reading: Essays in Honour of Fergus Kerr*, eds. Simon Oliver, Karen Kilby and O’Loughlin (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 193-220, particularly p. 215. Whilst “dynamic integrity” has some resonance with Francis Sullivan’s evocative phrase, “creative fidelity,” it goes beyond the concern to find what Newman called “elbow-room” (or air to breath) through nuanced interpretation of the existing web of Catholic doctrine and allows for a greater degree of substantive reconfiguration in the light of fresh data, concerns, approaches, and concepts: see Francis Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996). For John Henry Newman on “elbow-room,” see “Letter to Emily Bowles” (May 19, 1863), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, XX, ed. Charles Stephen Dessain (London: Thomas Nelson, 1970), henceforth L&D, p. 447; also “Letter to W. J. O’Neill Daunt” (June 17, 1863), p. 476.

⁸ See Paul D. Murray, *Reason, Truth, and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 152-60.

⁹ For a fuller articulation of the coherentist account of Catholic theological rationality that guides this chapter, see *id.*, particularly pp. 91-161; *id.*, “Discerning the Dynamics of Doctrinal Development”, *op. cit.*; *id.*, “Searching the Living Truth of the Church in Practice”, *op. cit.*; *id.*, “On Valuing Truth in Practice: Rome’s Postmodern Challenge,” *The International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006): pp. 163-183.

¹⁰ For the Church as *in via*; always on the way to becoming visibly again what it most deeply already is, see Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission, Third Phase (ARCIC III), *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church – Locally, Regionally, Universally* (Erfurt: 2017), in press.

¹¹ See Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. R. C. De Peaux OP (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992 [1987]).

Alternatively stated, by presenting a constructive account of catholicity as a conceptual and practical resource for the beneficent living of intra-ecclesial plurality, this chapter can be viewed as providing an ecclesiological correlate to and something of the theological infrastructure for the coherentist account of Catholic theological reasoning which is assumed throughout (see no. 9 here).

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first, *“Living catholicity as an all-inclusive identity,”* provides vision and orientation in the form of a first-level theological reading of catholicity and *intra-Catholic* plurality. The second, *“Discerning catholicity: the principles of Catholic life,”* extracts and extrapolates relevant systematic principles from Johann Adam Möhler’s (1796-1838) hugely influential – although somewhat idealised – understanding of Catholicism as a living diversity held in harmonious unity.¹² The third, *“At what price? Assessing the cost of living catholicity between ecclesial idealism and experienced tensions,”* turns from the register of systematic principles to ask how this all works in practice. With particular reference to the experience of gay and lesbian Catholics, the question is raised as to whether the cost is unacceptably high in relation to contentious matters. The fourth, *“Growing into the fullness of catholicity: on becoming more fully the Catholic Church,”* explores what structural and procedural changes are necessary if the Church is indeed to become more responsive to the extensive demands of catholicity and more capable of living *intra-Catholic* plurality without suffering the costs either of fracture or of premature judgment and merciless exclusion. Here initial acknowledgment is made as to what might be learned from other Christian traditions in these regards. The fifth, *“The spirit of Catholicism: on becoming Catholic people,”* complements the fourth and completes the argument by exploring the kind of individual ethic of communion that needs to be nurtured in Catholics if we are indeed to live *intra-Catholic* difference well and be able “to remain on speaking terms with each other and to move forward in and with the Church” despite these, at times sharp, differences.¹³

Living catholicity as an all-inclusive identity

Deriving from the Greek adverbial phrase *kath’holou*, “according to the whole,” it is commonplace to say that “Catholic” simply means “universal.”¹⁴ Whilst there is some truth in this, it can be seriously misleading to move too quickly to a straightforward quantitative equation

¹² See Möhler, *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, trans. Peter C. Erb (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), henceforth *Unity*. For one example of Möhler’s influence on 20th century Catholic ecclesiology, see Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1984 [1982]), particularly pp. 13, 100, 129, 149-152. For further on Möhler’s influence on Congar, see notes 25 and 27 in the present essay; also Murray, “Expanding Catholicity through Ecumenicity in the Work of Yves Congar,” *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology*, eds. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: OUP, 2012), pp. 457-481, particularly pp. 458, 465-466, 469, 479.

¹³ Hellemans and Jonkers, “Introduction,” here, p.???. *aanvullen*

¹⁴ E.g., see “The word ‘catholic’ means ‘universal’ ...” Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Chapman, 1994 [1993]), §831, henceforth CCC, available at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P29.HTM. It is important to acknowledge that, having defined “catholic” as “universal”, the CCC immediately continues: “in the sense of ‘according to the totality’ or ‘in keeping with the whole.’”

of “Catholic” with spatio-temporal “universality” without engaging the deeper Christological and pneumatological roots of the qualitative fullness in communion towards which catholicity is orientated.¹⁵ Without this deeper appreciation, catholicity as universality – and, most specifically, catholicity as a *universal unity*, or a *unified universality* – tends toward a narrowed, staid uniformity and the requirement of conformity thereto. The classic example in modern Catholicism is the defensively anti-modernist homogeneity which Rahner referred to as the Pianine “monolithismus.”¹⁶ Within this narrowed frame, as more broadly within the formal counter-Reformation Catholicism that prevailed from the Council of Trent to Vatican II, diversities of perspective, practice, articulation, and judgment represented error *tout simple*.¹⁷ The counterintuitive argument of this chapter is that the needed corrective to this recurrent capacity for Catholic reduction is *more not less* catholicity; but more of a catholicity alive to the full “breadth and length and height and depth” (Eph 3:18) of what Catholicism is situated within and called to signify.¹⁸

The first extant uses of the adjective “*katholikos*” in relation to the Church – suggesting wholeness or fullness – are in the “Letter of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyrnæans” and the “Martyrdom of Polycarp.” Following statements about the importance of avoiding heresy by maintaining communion with the local bishop – who is, in turn, in communion with all the other Catholic bishops – St. Ignatius states: “Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”¹⁹ The precise meaning is unclear. Is the attributed wholeness, or fullness, specifically a feature of the Church’s teaching when compared with that of the heretical sects? Or does it pertain to the universal extent of the Church in comparison with the localised character of the heretical groups? There is a similar lack of clarity in the “Martyrdom of Polycarp”, where we find references to: the “bishop of the

¹⁵ For the contrast between the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of catholicity, see Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom: A Study of the Problem of Reunion*, trans. M. A. Bousfield, (London: Bles, 1939), pp. 93-95; also Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988 [1950]), pp.48-51; and Avery Dulles SJ, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), particularly pp. 30-47, 68-105.

¹⁶ See Rahner, “Theology and the Church’s Teaching Authority after the Council,” in *Theological Investigations IX*, henceforth *TI*, trans. Graham Harrison (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), pp. 83-100 (p.86); id., “The Second Vatican Council’s Challenge to Theology” (1966), id., pp. 3-27 (p.6).

¹⁷ See the “Syllabus of Errors” that was published together with Pope Pius IX’s “Encyclical Letter Condemning Current Errors. *Quanta Cura* (December 8, 1864), available in Latin at: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/encyclica-quanta-cura-8-decembris-1864.html>; and in English at: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9syll.htm> and <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9quanta.htm>. Compare Raymond F. Bulman and Frederick J. Parrella (eds.), *From Trent to Vatican II: Historical and Theological Investigations* (New York: OUP, 2006); and Darell Jodock (ed.), *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (London: CUP, 2000).

¹⁸ See Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, pp.30-105.

¹⁹ St. Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnæans,” §8, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, rev. A. Cleveland Cox (Grand Rapids/Edinburgh: Eerdmans/T&T Clark, 1996 reprint), pp. 86-92 (p.90); also id., §§4-7, pp. 87-89.

Catholic Church which is in Smyrna ..." (§xvi, p. 42); "the Holy and Catholic Church in every place ..." (p. 39); and to "... the whole Catholic Church throughout the world ..." (§viii, p. 40).²⁰

Where some patristic scholars interpret these texts as identifying the Church's wholeness or fullness primarily with the authenticity and purity of its teaching, others interpret them as primarily referencing the Church's geographic unity and totality.²¹ But perhaps the choice is a false one. What is clear is that for St. Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in the fourth Christian century, it was entirely natural to hold these together in the first two of his five-point explanation as to why the Church is called Catholic:

It is called Catholic then because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other; and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men's knowledge, concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly ...²²

The basic sense conveyed by the fleeting references both in the "Letter to the Smyrnæans" and the "Martyrdom of Polycarp," is of there being a wholeness, or fullness, in Christ within the great Church Catholic, in contrast to the partiality to be found in the heretical groups. This resonates with de Lubac, who finds the primary reference being to a fullness of truth about humanity in Christ which pertains to all people.²³ In Newman's terms, the concern is to maintain the space for "Catholic fullness" and not to settle for any lesser, partial truth.²⁴ Or as Congar put it, again displaying Möhler's influence, whilst particular individuals or groups within the Church may manifest a real, particular insight into truth, this can only ever be partial when compared with the fullness of truth given to the Church as a whole.²⁵ As we find in Vatican II's "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," *Lumen Gentium*:

²⁰ The Church of Smyrna, "The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. I., pp. 39-44; also id., §xix, p. 43.

²¹ See Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, p. 14, referencing J. N. D. Kelly, "'Catholic' and 'Apostolic' in the Early Centuries," *One in Christ* 6/3 (1970): pp. 274-87 (pp.274-80).

²² St. Cyril of Jerusalem, "Lecture XVIII. On the Words, and in One Holy Catholic Church, and in the Resurrection of the Flesh, and the Life Everlasting," §23, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, VII, trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids/Edinburgh: Eerdmans/T&T Clark, 1996 reprint), pp. 134-143 (pp. 139-140).

²³ See de Lubac, *Catholicism*, pp. 48-50, in particular: "the accent is on neither the spatial nor the dogmatic sense; it is on the unity and totality of the divine sphere," p. 48, no. 2; and "The Church is not Catholic because she is spread abroad over the whole of the earth and can reckon on a large number of members. ... For fundamentally Catholicity has nothing to do with geography or statistics." pp. 48-49.

²⁴ See John Henry Newman, "XII. Milman's View of Christianity," in his *Essays Critical and Historical*, Volume II, 8th edition (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1888), pp. 186-248 (p. 233).

²⁵ See Yves Congar, "Second Condition: Remain in Communion with the Whole Church," in his *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011 [1968, 1950]), pp. 229-264 (pp. 229-232); also id., *Divided Christendom*, p. 43; compare Möhler, *Unity*, §35 (pp. 167-168). The receptive ecumenical principle – that each tradition needs to attend to learning from the particular truths of others – follows as a logical correlate to catholicity thus understood, see *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. Murray (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase.²⁶

Indeed for Congar, as for Möhler, heresy represents precisely “the erection into a system of undue or partial emphasis on a particular point of view.”²⁷

Whilst “*katholikos*” itself is not to be found in the Greek New Testament, the basic notion of fullness in Christ and the Spirit is certainly to be found there and at multiple levels.²⁸ Resonant with 1 Cor 15:27 and alluding to Psalm 8, the writer of Ephesians tells us that God “has put all things under his [*Christ’s*] feet and has made him the head over all things” (Eph 1:22), the one who fills all things (see Eph 1:23), and who is “the fullness of God” (Eph 3:19). Nor does this represent any after-thought: it has always been in God’s plan “for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10). But nor either, for the writer of Colossians, is it a purely prospective reality: “all things in heaven and on earth were created ... through him and for him” (Col 1:16). Thus it is that “in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17), who “is all and in all” (Col 3:11), and in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1:19; also 2:9). Again, for the author of the Fourth Gospel, Christ is the Spirit-filled incarnate Word of God, through whom “All things came into being” (Jn 1:3; also 1:10) and have “life” (Jn 1:4), who is “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14), and from whose fullness, in turn, “we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16). This entire cosmic sweep is brought together in the Book of Revelation’s description of Christ as the “Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13); the one through whom and in whom all things have their source and find their fulfilment.

As such, the Word of God in Jesus Christ is believed to echo and resound in all of creation and in all times and places. So it is that Justin Martyr and other early Christian theologians, reworking an idea drawn from Stoic philosophy, could speak of there being “seeds of the word” (*logoi spermatikoi*) in the world.²⁹

It is this that forms the intrinsic relationship between Catholic fullness in Christ and the Spirit and the spatio-temporal category of universality. As variously written into the deep fabric of creation in all its variegated particularity, the whole truth of things in Christ and the Spirit touches on all things, all times, and all places. Christ in the Spirit, we might say, is the *universal*

²⁶ Vatican II, “*Lumen Gentium*. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.” (1964), §13, henceforth *LG*, available at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

²⁷ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, p. 29; also p. 44; and Congar, “L’hérésie, déchirement de l’unité,” in *L’Église est une: hommage à Moehler*, ed. Pierre Chaillet (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1939), pp. 255-269; compare Möhler, *Unity*, §18 pp. 123.

²⁸ For unique New Testament uses of “*kath’holou*” and “*kath’holēs*”, see Acts 4:18 & 9:31 respectively.

²⁹ See Justin Martyr, “Second Apology,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. I., pp. 188-193 (§§8, 10, 13, pp.191-193); id., “First Apology,” id., pp.163-87 (§46, p. 178); compare Vatican II, “*Gaudium et Spes*. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (1965), §44, henceforth *GS*, available at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

particular; or, in Avery Dulles' terms, "the concrete universal."³⁰ It is not simply that "in the particularity and contingency of his [*Jesus*'] human existence the plenitude of divine life is made available".³¹ Reflecting explicitly on the cosmic Christ of the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline writings, Dulles writes: "If Christ is the universal principle of creation and redemption, he has, so to speak, a cosmic catholicity."³²

It is this that manifests in the intrinsic Catholic missionary impulse. The concern to spread recognition of and response to the person of Christ to all times and places flows directly from this deep-rooted conviction about the universal relevance of Christ as the deepest story of all things. As Congar, the Church's ability and impulse "to extend over the whole world ... is in virtue of the universal assimilative *capacity* of her constituent principles."³³ Thus it was "plain" for the Vatican II fathers that such missionary activity both "wells up from the Church's inner nature" and "perfects her Catholic unity by this expansion."³⁴ Due to this impulse, from its earliest days the Church spread throughout the Roman Empire, "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8 & 13:47, citing Isa 49:6), and Christ's universal significance was reflected in the geographic and ethnic universality of the community which came to call itself the Catholic Church. Pope Paul VI expressed this eloquently during his 1970 Apostolic Pilgrimage to West Asia, Oceania, and Australia:

... the Church, by virtue of her *essential catholicity*, cannot be alien to any country or people; she is bound to make herself native to every clime, culture, and race. Wherever she is, she must strike her roots deep into the spiritual and cultural ground of the place and assimilate all that is of genuine value.³⁵

The Church cannot, without lived contradiction, become a community "closed in on herself."³⁶

³⁰ Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, pp. 9, 38. There is an echo here, whether conscious or not, of Hegel's use of this term, in contrast to the notion of "absolute universals," to speak of the multifarious specific instantiations of substance universals – and, hence, the universal Spirit – as being in and through "particularity" and "individuality," see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969 [1831]), pp. 603-604; also Robert Stern, "Hegel, British Idealism, and the Curious Case of the Concrete Universal," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15(1) (2007): pp. 115-153; Gillian Rose, *Hegel: Contra Sociology* (London: Athlone Press, 1981), p.207.

³¹ Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, p. 9.

³² *Id.*, p. 38.

³³ Congar, *Divided Christendom*, p. 94.

³⁴ Vatican II, "Ad Gentes. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity" (1965), §6, henceforth AG, available at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html; also *id.*, §§1, 5.

³⁵ Pope Paul VI, "Radio Message to All People of Asia from Manila" (November 29, 1970), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* LXIII (1971): pp. 35-40 (p. 39), available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1970/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19701129_popoli-asia.html, emphasis added.

³⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (hereafter CDF), "Communionis Notio. Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion" (May 28, 1992), §4, available at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communionis-notio_en.html, here citing St. Cyprian, *Epist. ad Magnum*, 6: PL 3,1142; also ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way*, §55.

In turn, this conviction about the intrinsic universal significance of Christ explains not only the worldwide spread of Catholic Christianity but also its involvement with every aspect of human life and culture. In Catholic understanding, following in the way of Jesus, living in the Spirit of Christ, is not about privileging special “spiritual,” explicitly “religious,” spheres of life, with the rest viewed as secondary. It is not simply a Sunday affair but an everyday reality; not simply about things done in church but about living in the world with the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), concerned with the entire gamut of human life: from conception to death and beyond; from home to polis, and all between.³⁷ Catholicity properly represents an extensive and encompassing vision, orientation, and practice with global reach, rooted in and impelled by the creative, redeeming, transforming action of God in Christ and the Spirit.

At the heart of catholicity, then, is no straightforward, undifferentiated universality but a concern for *both* universality *and* particularity; indeed, for a universality that *is* the holding of the diverse localities, the diverse particular centres, of Catholicism in gathered, configured communion.³⁸

A very significant degree of diversity is already evident within and amongst the New Testament churches.³⁹ With this, the Lukan vision of Christianity as radiating out “beginning from Jerusalem”⁴⁰ is off-set by the Markan instruction “[G]o, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (Mk 16:7), implying the existence of a continuing Jesus community and nascent Galilean church without any reference to a prior Jerusalem mission. Indeed, the Lukan Pentecost narrative itself proclaims not a reversal of the cacophonous dissonance of Babel through the restoration of monoglot uniformity but the achievement of a complex polyphonous praise and multiply specific harmonic resonance in which “each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.”⁴¹

It is with good precedent, then, that there has always been significant internal plurality within the Church, whether we think of the tension between Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches in the patristic period, or of the difference between St Bonaventure and St Thomas in 13th century Paris concerning the use of Aristotelian philosophy; with the latter, in turn, resonating with the contemporary contested preference either for more Platonic ways of proceeding (for which read *explicitly theologically oriented* but potentially *idealised*), or for more Aristotelian ways of

³⁷ It is this core recognition that integrates de Lubac’s vision of Church and humanity in *Catholicism* with his account of graced nature and associated location of the life of grace in ordinary human existence in his 1946 *Surnaturel: études historiques* and, in turn, the quite remarkable sweep of his otherwise seemingly disparate engagements; see also id., *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Chapman, 1967 [1965]).

³⁸ ARCIC III identifies this inextricable interweaving of the local and the universal with the practice of baptism, see ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way*, §51; echoing CDF, *Communio Notio*, §10.

³⁹ See Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York/London: Paulist/Chapman, 1984); James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1977); Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); and in wider scope, Oscar Cullmann, *Unity through Diversity: Its Foundation, and a Contribution to the Discussion Concerning the Possibilities of Its Actualization*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988 [1986]).

⁴⁰ Lk 24:47; also vv.49, 52-3; and Acts 1:8.

⁴¹ Acts 2:4-12; compare AG §4, where multiple references are given to the recurrence of the Babel-Pentecost contrast in the early fathers.

proceeding (for which read *naturally oriented* and *empirically responsible* but potentially *reductionist*).⁴² Similarly, we might think of the 16th century debate between Jesuit and Dominican theologians in relation to Molinism; a debate which was formally left open by order of Pope Paul V in 1607.

At a more practical level, despite the respective attempts of the Gregorian reform in the 11th century and the Tridentine reform in the 16th century to suppress local liturgical rites – more ‘successful’ in the latter regard, with the liturgical experience of most Catholics by the time of Vatican II being one of unbroken uniformity – in reality there have always been multiple liturgical rites operating within Catholicism at any one time. In the contemporary Church, this is most obviously so in relation to the various Eastern Rite Catholic churches,⁴³ particularly when coexistent alongside Latin Rite parishes in diaspora communities in Europe and North America. In turn, further liturgical pluriformity was explicitly reintroduced by the permission granted by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 for the “Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite” (the version of the Tridentine Roman Rite issued by Pope John XXIII in 1962) to be celebrated alongside the “Ordinary Form” as revised by Pope Paul VI in 1969.⁴⁴

However, whatever internal diversity has long been authentic to Catholicism, it is undoubtedly the case – particularly so in comparison with the preceding Pisan era – that since the latter half of the twentieth century the degree of theological and practical pluralism within Catholicism has experienced a significant quantum shift upwards.

⁴² This tension manifested most prominently in the public debate between the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, when Prefect of the CDF, and Bishop Walter Kasper, subsequently Cardinal President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, as to whether the “universal Church” is to be thought of as having ontological priority over the diverse local churches, or whether they are inextricably interdependent and mutually implicated in the reality of each other, see Kasper, “On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger,” *America* 184 (2001): pp. 8-14; Ratzinger, “A Response to Walter Kasper: The Local Church and the Universal Church,” *America* 185 (2001): pp. 7-11; also Kilian McDonnell, “The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches,” *Theological Studies* 63/2 (2002): pp. 227-250.

⁴³ Of course, the distinctiveness of the Eastern Catholic churches is not simply liturgical but also canonical, structural, and sacramental (in as much as married men are ordinarily admitted to presbyteral ordination), see Vatican II, “*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite” (1964), available at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_orientalium-ecclesiarum_en.html. Speaking in 1977, Pope Paul VI said: «E proprio nelle Chiese Orientali si ritrova storicamente anticipato e esaurientemente dimostrato nella sua validità lo schema pluralistico». [“It is precisely in the Eastern churches that the validity of the pluralistic scheme has been historically anticipated and comprehensively demonstrated” *my own translation*]. Pope Paul VI, “Discorso ai Partecipanti alle Celebrazioni per il IV Centenario del Pontificio Collegio Greco” (April 30, 1977), available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1977/april/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19770430_pont-collegio-greco.html; also LG §23.

⁴⁴ See Pope Benedict XVI, “*Summorum Pontificum*. Apostolic Letter given *Motu Proprio* on the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970” (2007), available at: https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20070707_summorum-pontificum.html.

On the one hand, there has been the demise of Neo-Scholastic philosophy and theology as an imposed common frame;⁴⁵ from which straitjacket each of the major 20th century Catholic theologians sought escape.⁴⁶ When combined with the proliferation in the surrounding intellectual milieu of potential conceptual and methodological dialogue partners, it is little wonder that a seemingly irrevocable plurality of perspective, approach, and position has been introduced into contemporary Catholic theology and ecclesial self-consciousness. Karl Rahner well referred to this situation as one of “gnoseological concupiscence,”⁴⁷ wherein no individual, no matter how learned, is capable of achieving integration of all that is to be known and of all the ways in which what is to be known can be known.⁴⁸

On the other hand, as also noted by Rahner, there has been the fundamental shift in Catholic self-consciousness to being a genuinely “world church”; a shift that was effected by all the world’s bishops gathering for full deliberative involvement in the four annual sessions of Vatican II as leaders of their own local churches (LG §23). In Rahner’s terms, this represented “a first assembly of the world-episcopate, not acting as an advisory body to the Pope, but with him and under him as itself the supreme teaching and decision-making authority in the Church.” As such, this was “a world-council with a world-episcopate such as had not hitherto existed and with its own autonomous function.”⁴⁹

In the light of this experience and in keeping both with *Lumen Gentium* and the Council’s “Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity”, *Ad Gentes*, regional associations of bishops’ conferences, such as the *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* (CELAM) and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), became significant forces pursuing the contextual adaption and inculturation of Catholic pastoral, liturgical, and missiological practice relative to local needs and circumstance.⁵⁰ In this regard, it is notable that Pope Francis has consistently emphasised the role of local churches in discerning and implementing Catholic practice that is appropriately fit for context.⁵¹ Similarly, he routinely incorporates quotations from national and regional bishops’

⁴⁵ See Gerald A. McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977).

⁴⁶ See Fergus Kerr OP, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians: From NeoScholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford/Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007); *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology*, eds. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray, *op. cit.*; Mark Schoof OP,, *Breakthrough: Beginnings of the New Catholic Theology*, trans. N. D. Smith (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970 [1968]).

⁴⁷ See Rahner, “Reflections on Methodology in Theology”, *TI*, XI, pp. 68-114 (pp. 70-74), and frequently throughout his essays in *TI*.

⁴⁸ Significant also here is Nicholas Rescher’s recognition that full knowledge of anything remains elusive in this order due both to intrinsic limits of resource and the infinite number of ways in which even a finite reality can be understood, see Rescher, *A System of Pragmatic Idealism, I: Human Knowledge in Idealistic Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 50-59, 63-74, 93-94, 136-140, 210-215, 260-264, 275, 279, 296; *id.*, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 181-182, 189-196, 210, 249, 318-319, 330.

⁴⁹ Rahner, “Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council,” *TI*, XX, pp. 77-89 (p. 80).

⁵⁰ See AG §22; LG §§13, §23; GS §44.

⁵¹ See Pope Francis, “*Evangelii Gaudium*. Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World” (November 24, 2013), §§16, 32, 33, 40, 49, 115-118 and no. 44, henceforth *EG*, available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html. For analysis, see Murray, “*Ecclesia et*

conference documents in his own teachings, thus according them a *de facto* authority (e.g. EG §51).

As a world-faith lived in relation to the diversities of culture and context, the variegated texture of global Catholic expression, albeit within recognisable patterns,⁵² is both inevitable and proper; particularly so in light of the universal significance and relevance of Christ. But appreciation for the intrinsic diversity and specificities of Catholic life and the pressures this exerts on catholicity needs to be pressed down deeper yet: beyond the collectivities of culture and community to the level of each and every individual as held within and called to live into the superabundance of God as source, sustainer, and consummation of all that is;⁵³ and to the level, consequently, of each and every individual as called into being to show forth a partial, particular but irreducibly important something of the plenitudinous “all in all” of the communion of God in Christ and the Spirit, albeit as generally confused and refracted by sin in this order.

In 1 Corinthians, St. Paul writes of each member of the Church, the body of Christ, having specific and essential functions to perform which, howsoever humble in appearance, deserve honouring by each of the other parts (1 Cor 12:12-30). Immediately prior to this, he writes of each of the baptised being in receipt of diverse specific gifts of the Spirit which are always given for the good of the whole⁵⁴ Each of these recognitions pertaining to the life of the Church in this order can be situated within and seen as realised reflections of the earlier-sketched Christo-Pneumato-centric cosmic vision of all things from all eternity being ordained to be created through and forever oriented towards the “all in all” of Christ, the Word, in the power of the Spirit. In a Catholic vision of the world, the importance of the individual thing-in-relation, the individual person-in-communion, whose every hair-on-head “has been counted” (Lk 12:7; Matt 10:30), is not just a matter of this order but of eternal significance, through creative intent and anticipated fulfilment. As we find in Ephesians 1:4-6:

[H]e chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good

Pontifice: On Delivering on the Ecclesiological Implications of Evangelii Gaudium,” *Ecclesiology* 12 (2016): pp. 13-33. Also significant is Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, On Love in the Family” (2016), §3, available at: https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf. For something of the controversy provoked by these statements, see Edward Pentin, “Full Text and Explanatory Notes of Cardinals’ Questions on ‘*Amoris Laetitia*,’” in *National Catholic Register*, at: <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/full-text-and-explanatory-notes-of-cardinals-questions-on-amoris-laetitia>.

⁵² As to what counts as ‘recognisable patterns’ is itself a matter of discernment and judgment within the *sensus fidelium*, in which the faithful as a whole should appropriately participate and not simply bishops, theologians, and the Vatican curial instruments of the episcopal magisterium, see Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church’s Reception of Revelation* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

⁵³ In the first article of the prima pars of the *Summa Theologiæ*, St. Thomas tells us that the proper subject of theology is God and “all things ... relative to him as their origin and end.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, 1, *Christian Theology (1a.1)*, ed. Thomas Gilby (London/New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode/McGraw-Hill, 1963), 1a.1.7, pp. 25-27 (p. 27).

⁵⁴ 1 Cor 12:7; also 1 Cor 12: 4-11; and Eph 4:7, 11-12.

pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Consequently, it is not just in key moments, movements, and individuals that seeds of the Word and the impress of the Spirit are to be found. Rather, potentially at least, it is in and through all things. Each and every particular word spoken is only possible as an analogical sharing in the one Word – even when the form of this sharing is one of ugly and untruthful contradiction – and each and every act performed is only possible as an analogical sharing in the one acting of the Spirit.

In this regard, when posing the question as to why there are so many different kinds of things, St. Thomas' response is significant. His argument is that the purpose of each type of created thing is to manifest something of the goodness of God but that each finite thing can only do this partially and inadequately and so God creates a great multiplicity of types of things, so that together creation can more adequately manifest God's goodness.⁵⁵ For present purposes, the interesting point is St. Thomas' conviction that each different kind of thing variously discloses something of God's goodness. By analogous extension and in the light of St Thomas' aforementioned teaching of God being the origin and end of *all* that is (see no. 52 here), we can say that in Catholic understanding it is not only each *type of thing* but each and every *particular thing* – precisely in its irreducible particularity – which can disclose a particular something of the superabundant and infinitely generative goodness of God's being in Christ and the Spirit. Indeed, a Catholic vision might even be taken to suggest that it is in this irreplaceable capacity to disclose a particular something of God that the true identity of each thing consists.

In the early chapters of the revised edition of his modern classic, *Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton gives eloquent expression to this Pneumato-Christo-centric vision of the significance of each and every particular thing as alive in and with Christ and the Spirit and as called to manifest this.⁵⁶ He writes of "the Life who dwells and sings in the essence of every creature and in the core of our own souls" (p. 20); and more personally, "God utters me like a word containing a partial thought of Himself" (*sic.*, p. 29). In this Catholic vision of things:

No two created beings are exactly alike. And their individuality is no imperfection. On the contrary, the perfection of each created thing is not merely in its conformity to an abstract type but in its own individual identity with itself (p. 23).

And again:

Therefore each particular being, in its individuality, its concrete nature and entity, with all its own characteristics and its private qualities and its own inviolable identity, gives glory to God by

⁵⁵ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, 8, *Creation, Variety, and Evil*, ed. Thomas Gilby (London/New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode/McGraw-Hill, 1967), 1a.44-49 (1a.47.1), p. 95.

⁵⁶ Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, rev. edn. (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clark Books, 1972 [1962]).

being precisely what He wants it to be here and now, in the circumstances ordained for it by His Love and His infinite Art.⁵⁷

One of the shaping influences on Merton's understanding of the particular "thisness" of things was the writings of the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins; most notably Hopkins' original notion of the unique "inscape" of each thing, which was in turn encouraged by Hopkins encountering Duns Scotus' (1266-1308) notion of the "*haecceity*" of things.⁵⁸ As Hopkins expresses this in "As Kingfishers Catch Fire":

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

And for the explicitly Christocentric depth dimension to this:

I say more: the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
Christ — for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.⁵⁹

Which is balanced in "God's Grandeur" by recognition of the Spirit's energising of such Christic showings:

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things; ...
...
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, pp. 23-24. There is significant resonance here with Newman's famous meditation: "I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created; I have a place in God's counsels, in God's world, which no one else has ..." Newman, "Part III. Meditations on Christian Doctrine. Hope in God – Creator. March 7, 1848," *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman*, ed. William P. Neville, second edn. (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1893), pp. 399-401 (p.399).

⁵⁸ See Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 24; compare Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Journal, 1866-1874," *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: OUP, 1986), pp.191 -222, particularly pp. 195, 204, 205, 211, 214, 215; John Duns Scotus, *Opera Omnia VII. Ordinatio II. Distinctione 1-3* (Civitas Vaticana, 1973), d. 3,p. 1,q. 4,no. 76; and d. 3,p. 1,q. 2,no. 48.

⁵⁹ Hopkins, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire," *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p.129.

⁶⁰ Id., "God's Grandeur," p. 128. In "The Windhover" Hopkins brings the Christic and the Pneumatic into conjunction: dedicated "to Christ our Lord," Hopkins offers the image of a kestrel hanging steady, "rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing" ("hovering by flying just enough into the wind to be held still," Greg Ryan), in a manner suggestive of Christ as the true Windhover, leaning into, held by, and alive in the Spirit, see Hopkins "The Windhover," *Gerard Manley Hopkins.*, p. 132.

In a true Catholic vision and sensibility, then, according to which each and every particular thing is spoken into being through the one Word in the one Spirit, we are compelled to understand each as called to express a particular something of this meaning and life. Merton bears repeating, “God utters me like a word containing a partial thought of Himself.”⁶¹ Or to transpose this into the coherentist terms introduced earlier: in this vision of reality in Christ and the Spirit, each is to be viewed as an irreplaceable *datum* – albeit generally distorted by sin, even near-radically so – within the Spirit-held and Spirit-impelled gathering of all in complex configured communion in Christ (see Eph 1:8-10 & 22-3), who as “the way, and the truth, and the life” is the living truth of things (Jn 14:6). Each is called into being as a particular shard and a particular refraction of the one true light that is Christ;⁶² to be fashioned as particular living pixels in the living icon that is the Church, so as together to reflect and disclose the glory of God in and as the face of Christ.⁶³ It is entirely in accordance with this logic to recognise that even allowing for its general imperfection, and messy sinfulness, it is properly the case that Christian life is uniquely lived by each of the baptised and the story of faith uniquely performed, ever afresh.

This all serves to give a dual orientation to the Catholic vision. On the one hand, the implication, as St. Thomas recognised, is that on account of the partiality of any particular showing (and before also taking account of the effects of sin), it is only together, in configured relationship, that the glory of God’s superabundant goodness can shine in the round through the created order – “like shining from shook foil” in Hopkins’ terms⁶⁴ – and, presumably, only fully so in the gathered and redeemed communion of saints, which is the Church victorious.⁶⁵ On the other hand, however, it is also necessarily the case that this shared-shards-shook-shining in the round is only possible as the total gathering of each and every one of these particulars in

⁶¹ Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, p.29.

⁶² Of Christ as the one true light, see Jn 1:9; 8:12; 9:5, compare Jn 9:1-41. On the calling to be light in this light, see 1 Thess 5:5; Eph 5: 8-9 & 13-14; Matt 5:14-16; compare Mk 4:21 & Lk 8:16-17. For the image of the human as a refracted shard of the light of Christ, see John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, ‘Mythopoeia’ (1931), in his *Tree and Leaf* (London: Harper Collins, 2001 [1964]), pp.83-90 (p.87)???? [Vraagtekens zijn van autew; laten staan of weglaten?](#), where he writes of:

[Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned ...](#)

man, sub-creator, the refracted light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.

I am grateful to Adam Shaeffer for drawing my attention to this wonderful piece.

⁶³ Compare 2 Cor 4:4 & 6. Were one technically able to produce it, a fitting icon of the communion of saints in the risen Christ would be a face of Christ in which each fragment of mosaic, each pixel, were composed of a different particular face of the people of God. Even more fitting would be if one were able to digitise this in such a fashion as each fragment-face, each pixel-person, could change for those of other members of the people of God, with the overall iconic visage altering accordingly in its specific presentation but always within a recognisable pattern and form.

⁶⁴ Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur”, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*. The context is:

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;”

⁶⁵ For an excellent discussion of the communion of saints as the gathering of all things in Christ and the Spirit, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (London: SCM, 1998).

redeemed communion, each of which is of eternal significance: “This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, is immortal diamond.”⁶⁶ It follows that the shared-shards-shook-shining in the round of creation’s Christo-Pneumato-catholicity would be correlatively diminished by the absence of any one of these particular “immortal diamonds.”⁶⁷ Each of these points is essential to a genuine understanding and living of the all-inclusive identity of catholicity.

If, then, catholicity is about universality, it is a universality that is inextricably associated and intertwined with – not simply balanced by – particularity; indeed, a universality which consists and exists precisely as the gathering of diverse particularities – geographic, temporal, and personal – in configured communion. Similarly, catholicity thus understood is not simply about the balancing of the competing pulls of centred identity and expansive inclusion. Rather, Pneumatic-Christic inclusivity *is* the identity of catholicity. For in Christ “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female ...” (Gal 3:28): such differences have been overcome, as structural divisions, precisely through there being both Jew and Greek in Christ, both male and female, and – scandalously and for too long – both slave and free, each of equal dignity and each with equal access. By extension, in Christ there is neither lay nor ordained, neither celibate nor married, neither heterosexual nor homosexual because in Christ there is both lay and ordained, celibate and married, heterosexual and homosexual, each of equal dignity and each with equal access to the grace and love poured out for us in Christ through the Spirit.⁶⁸

As such, the concern for extension, completeness, and inclusivity is not a matter of adapting to the mores of modern secular, liberal culture. On the contrary, it is Christo-pneumato-logically grounded and required. As Dulles puts it:

Christianity is inclusive not by reason of latitudinarian permissiveness or syncretistic promiscuity, but because it has received from God a message and a gift for people of every time and place, so that all can find in it the fulfilment of their highest selves.⁶⁹

All well and good, but if people die for lack of vision (Prov 29:18), it is equally the case that vision alone is not itself life but necessary inspiration and orientation *for* life which then requires transposing *into* life through principled discernment in relation to the specificities of context and circumstance. Having gained such vision and orientation in this first section of the chapter by pursuing a first-level theological, ecclesial, and spiritual reading of catholicity, we now turn towards what it might mean to live this in practice by seeking after some salient principles for the discerning and living of catholicity. What are the parameters within which this unfolds? What are the reference points and accountability-checks which need to be kept in view? What are the habits of mind which need to be practised? Such questions are here taken forward in

⁶⁶ Hopkins, “That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection,” *Hopkins*, pp. 180-181 (p. 181). I am grateful to Greg Ryan for reminding me of this particular piece.

⁶⁷ See “This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, ‘I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.’” Jn 18:9; also Jn 6:39 & 17:12.

⁶⁸ See 1 Tim 1:14; also 2 Cor 13:14; and Titus 3:6.

⁶⁹ Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, p. 9.

conversation with Möhler's early ecclesiological work, whilst recognising and seeking to move beyond the romantic-idealist orientation and ecclesial idealism with which it is itself marked.

Discerning catholicity: the principles of Catholic life

Möhler's analysis of *Unity in the Church* as the core *Principle of Catholicism* (see no.12 here) is in two parts. The first part pursues a retrieval of what Möhler understands to be the vital inner, spiritual dynamics of Catholic life and unity, with chapters in turn on "Mystical Unity," "Intellectual Unity," "Diversity without Unity," and "Unity in Diversity." As complement to this, the second part focuses on the external structures of Catholic unity and the essential role of order, episcopacy, and papacy as its visible instruments, with chapters on "Unity in the Bishop," "Unity in the Metropolitan," "Unity in the Total Episcopate," and "Unity in the Primate." Taken together, Möhler is best understood here both as wanting to renew Catholic ecclesial self-consciousness with something deeper, more vital than the typical juridical institutional formalism of post-Tridentine ecclesiology and, by implication, as wanting to present this retrieved and renewed Catholic principle as most attractive and fitting – more so than the culturally dominant Protestant alternative – for his contemporary context which was reacting against the arid rationalism and individualism of the 18th century *Aufklärung*.⁷⁰

In pursuit of this dual aim, Möhler assimilated and employed an unusually wide range of sources and culturally resonant influences – the latter generally without explicit reference – in such fashion as renders *Unity* a somewhat opaque and challenging text for today's reader. At one level it presents as a reflection on the history and dynamics of Catholic theology in the first three centuries, recounted through frequent citation of patristic sources in what might be regarded as an early forerunner and part inspiration for the *ressourcement* movement. At another level, Möhler was strongly influenced by the Romantic reaction to the age of reason and the emerging thought-world of German idealism – particularly through Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) – with its convictions concerning the unity of all things, material reality as the expression of the self-consciousness of absolute subject, or Spirit, and the individual human subject as reflecting and sharing in this process of self-conscious participation in differentiated unity.⁷¹ Also significant at this point was Friedrich Schleiermacher's experientially-grounded approach to Protestant systematics as an account of the distinctive self-consciousness of the Evangelical Church.⁷² These various contemporary influences encouraged the Möhler of *Unity* similarly to adopt a primarily pneumatological and experientially-grounded approach to his passionate presentation of Catholic wholeness; an approach which he saw as cohering with the way in which people come to faith through the action of the Spirit in the body of the Church.⁷³

⁷⁰ See Peter Riga, "The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961): pp. 563-587.

⁷¹ E.g. see Möhler, *Unity*, §31, p.153 and §8, p. 97; also no. 82 here.

⁷² The first edition of Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube* had been published by Reimer of Berlin in 1821, with the sub-title *Nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, "Presented in Accordance with the Principles of the Evangelical Church," see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube, 1821-1822 Studienausgabe*, ed. Hermann Peiter (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984).

⁷³ See Möhler, *Unity*, §1, p. 81; §6, p. 92; §8, p. 97; §10, pp. 101-102.

Möhler's argument essentially consists in idealistically contrasting what he regards as appropriate and inappropriate forms of intra-ecclesial diversity: where the former enrich and constitute the communion of the Church, the latter breach the Church's essential unity by separating off from it. He presents a four-step case in support of this position through the four chapters constituting the first part of the work.

In Chapter One, "Mystical Unity," the first step is to retrieve an understanding of Christian life as consisting first and foremost not in mere doxastic assent or moral adherence but in spiritual, "mystical," participation in the life of Christ through the personal indwelling of the Spirit,⁷⁴ who forms each together into the "spiritual unity" of the Church as "the body of Christ."⁷⁵ For Möhler, this "mystical unity" is the Church's central truth across generations and the Church's core calling (§3, p. 85; §7, p. 93). Nothing can be intentionally allowed to compromise or breach it; anything that does is to be regarded as the work of another, alien, spirit to that of the Holy Spirit of Christ (§3, p. 86). Equally, however, the true mystical unity of the body of Christ is no mere uniformity or commonality. The Spirit forms each in their uniqueness into the living body of Christ, "by a direct imprint in himself or herself" (§4, p. 87). As he later puts it in the fourth chapter, "each individual is to continue as a *living* member in the whole body of the Church ... his or her characteristic ... will never die in the whole" (§35, p. 167). On the contrary, "Single individuals grow and the whole flourishes", leading him, somewhat optimistically, to claim "No constraint of individuality comes from *the Spirit* of the Catholic Church."⁷⁶ With individuality thus, supposedly, fulfilled and resituated in the Church, he describes the Christianising process, again very idealistically, as "the destruction of all self-seeking" and "the greatest expansion of our individual lives, because all believers live in us and we in them."⁷⁷

In Chapter Two, "Intellectual Unity," Möhler's second step is to present both the essential role of doctrine as "the conceptual expression of the Christian Spirit" (p. 96) and the dynamic nature of the "living word" of tradition (*ibid.*), which as the movement of the Spirit in the Church (§16, p. 117) is brought to understanding in that same Spirit in the communion of the Church (§8, p. 97). However, for all that each individual will appropriate the living word of tradition in a properly individual way, the essential thing, following the paradigmatic example of the apostles, is for this never to fall into separation from the totality of all valid understandings in the Church: "none formed a separated life. They all saw themselves as a whole, and the solution, as long as it was possible, was given over to the totality (Acts 15)."⁷⁸ Consequently, it is necessary for each "to compare his opinion with that of the others" and to seek for harmony with "the whole" (§10, pp. 100-101). Indeed, in a manner again resonant with a coherentist approach to truth evaluation, the

⁷⁴ See *id.*, §4, p. 89; §8, pp. 96-98; and §42, p. 185.

⁷⁵ See *id.*, §1, p. 82-83; §2, p. 84; and later §40, p. 179; §42, p. 186.

⁷⁶ *Id.*, §42, p.186. As we shall probe later, gay and lesbian Catholics, amongst others, would generally not recognise themselves within this rose-tinted account of ecclesial existence.

⁷⁷ *Id.*, §4, p. 88. For further example of Möhler's highly idealised account of Church life, see §4, p. 89. Throughout there is little indication given of the distorting effects of sin within the habits, relationships, structures, and modes of understanding of Church life.

⁷⁸ *Id.*, §10, pp. 100-101; also §10, pp. 101-102; §7, pp. 93-95. Reflecting his cultural context, for Möhler the dialectic always concerns the relationship between the individual and the whole. Today this would more likely be posed in terms of the relationship between diverse local ecclesial communities and the universal Church.

validity of any particular understanding is to be assessed with reference to “the totality of all contemporary believers and to all earlier believers as far back as the apostles.”⁷⁹ The key principle is that “truth is in unity and love.”⁸⁰ Just as “the whole Church is a type of each of her members” so, in like manner, “each of the members is to become conscious of his or her character as counterpoint and impression of the whole” (§12, pp. 108-109). Whether, however, this can allow for the real significance of faithful difference is a moot point to which we shall return.

Having established that the Church’s variegated mystical union (Chapter One) must manifest in differentiated doctrinal unity (Chapter Two), Möhler’s third step in Chapter Three, “*Diversity without Unity*,” is to press for clearer perspective on the true character of Catholic unity by contrasting it with heresy. Key here is that he views heresies not as utter falsities, completely alien to Catholic truth but as partial truths which are turned into errors through distorted appropriation as total truths (§18, p. 123). On the one hand, heresy arises from the detaching of reason from the common life of faith in which it is properly situated and to which it is subordinate (§18, pp. 123-124). On the other hand, variously drawing support from St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Clement of Rome, St. Cyprian, and Tertullian, Möhler regards heresy as an act of egotistical separatism which assumes that truth can best be found from without the bounds of the Church.⁸¹ In contrast to Catholic truth, “According to its essence heresy is divisive and its principles are not capable of establishing unity” (§32, p. 158).

With this analysis in view, the argument culminates in Chapter Four, “*Unity in Diversity*,” with a positive discussion of the diversity that properly characterises Catholic unity and truth. Crucial here is a contrast Möhler draws between “*antitheses*” (*Gegensätze*) and “*contradictions*” (*Widersprüche*) (§46, pp. 194-198). Whereas true but contrasting antitheses, or distinctions, “can be found in unity,” contradictions disrupt and fracture by setting parts against the whole (p. 196). Reflecting what he has said about the partial truths of heresy becoming error by egotistically being pressed as total truth, he allows that an unacceptable, fracturing contradiction can be reclaimed as a reconcilable antithesis as long as it foregoes the desire “to live by itself” and enters “into community” through “a return to the Church” which “in her unity contains all antitheses and is all-embracing” of “all Christian truth of both contradictory schools.”⁸² In this regard he makes frequent use of musical imagery in order to speak of the “blending of the different tones of instruments and voices” in Catholic truth (§40, p. 179). Most significantly, having reflected on the way in which “A choir is formed from the voices of different persons ... each in their own way joined in one harmony” (§46, p. 194), he extrapolates:

⁷⁹ Id., §10, p. 102. One might, however, entirely endorse this position whilst asking what it actually means in practice? Which groups in the Church *de facto* carry out this assessment? Which groups should be included in this task but currently are not? And as will later be asked, how are the faithful to proceed when the very structures for appropriate Catholic – i.e. whole-Church – scrutiny are themselves serving to narrow deleteriously the range of Catholic experience and understanding considered relevant to this task?

⁸⁰ Id., §10, p.103. Once again, whilst agreeing with this principle, one cannot help but hear the sound of ecclesial idealism, prompting the question as to what happens when, as is generally the case, things do not function perfectly in this manner?

⁸¹ See id., §18, p. 124; §27, pp. 143-147; also §40, p. 178; §41, p. 181; §44, p. 190.

⁸² Id., §46, pp. 196-197; also §46, p. 198; §40, p. 178.

Thus it is possible and always necessary that believers ... reflect the infinity of the possible developments in the Christian religion, and thus preserve and activate life through the free play of many individuals moving in harmony (§46, p. 198).

As this suggests, both the influence of philosophical idealism and Möhler's tendency towards highly idealised portrayals of the Church are again close to the surface throughout this analysis.⁸³ For example, as regards the latter, in §44 we find:

Thus an infinite mass of individualities develop freely and untroubled beside one another in this matter. The Church looks upon all externality as given by the Spirit so as to form and act in the Spirit and to reveal the Spirit. All these differences, however, are enlivened by one Spirit which binds all in joy and peace. (§44, p. 193)

An inspiring vision, perhaps, but does it ring true? By contrast, seeking to engage all of this in more synthetic, critical, and constructive perspective, is it possible to extract and extrapolate any salient principles from Möhler's analysis which are of lasting significance for the discerning and living of Catholic truth today, even if such principles stand in some tension with each other? And what are the limitations of what he leaves us with?

Perhaps first is his emphasis on reconciled unity in the Spirit as the fundamental God-given life, core calling, and defining instinct of the Church, in which each lives her/his particular contribution to the communion of the Church in the communion of God. This goes to the heart of the Catholic spirit and presents it as attractively as possible. Equally, whilst this helpfully views significant diversity as essential to the Church's shared life, his situating of this recognition within his paramount emphasis on Catholic unity serves also to contain such diversity. A high premium is placed on the need to avoid this innate ecclesial diversity reaching breaking point and uncontained fracture.

Second, given that heretical contradictions are to be understood as valid but distorted contrasts, when faced with the challenge of a fresh or dissonant position, the Church's proper instinct should not be to protect the current configuration by outright rejection of the challenging voice. Rather, the properly Catholic instinct should be to seek to discern aright the partial truth at issue and to seek to accommodate it within an appropriately reconfigured understanding of Catholic unity.

Third, Catholic unity, Catholic communion, is properly understood as a dynamic rather than static reality; something living and growing rather than exhaustively determined. As Möhler's organic imagery for both Church and doctrinal development each begin to suggest and as his Tübingen mentor and colleague, Johann Sebastian Drey, drew out more explicitly, the specific contours of Catholic communion are being pressed, expanded, and appropriately reconfigured in

⁸³ As regards the former, see pp. 194 and 196. Peter Erb follows Harald Wagner in finding "clear parallels" between Möhler's *antithesis/contradiction* contrast and Schelling's 1802 work, *Bruno*, see Erb, "Introduction," *Unity*, pp. 1-71 (pp. 48-49), citing Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Bruno, oder über das göttliche und natürliche Prinzip der Dinge. Ein Gespräch* (1802), in *Schellings Werke*, 3, ed. Manfred Schröter (München: Beck and Oldenbourg, 1927), pp. 109-228, and Harald Wagner, *Die eine Kirche und die vielen Kirchen: Ekklesiologie und Symbolik beim jungen Mohler* (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1977), pp. 177-181.

relation to the specificities of circumstance and the fresh partial perceptions of the total truth of things in Christ and the Spirit which come to view there.

Fourth, the proper discerning and living of Catholic truth in communion takes time and requires patience, both on behalf of the Church as a whole and on behalf of those offering a challengingly alternative perception to that which currently represents the settled mind of the Church on a given issue.⁸⁴

Fifth, the Church should not feel panicked into moving too quickly to premature judgment on contentious issues before Catholic conversation has been granted the time and space it needs to run its course and come to appropriately discerned judgment. Möhler himself advocates something like this principle, albeit again through a highly idealised historical perspective (§40, p. 179).

Sixth, the need to allow sufficient time and space for Catholic conversation to run its course also means ensuring that all parties who need to participate in these conversations – “the faithful at large, pastors and theologians,”⁸⁵ what Möhler refers to as the “totality of all contemporary believers” (§10, p. 102) – indeed have access and opportunity so to do. As Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* recognised (§12), it is, most fundamentally, the body of the Church as whole that enjoys the gift of infallibility; and as is recognised in the 2014 International Theological Commission document on the *sensus fidei*, this includes those whose perspectives are dissonant with the Church’s currently prevailing understanding.⁸⁶

These six constructive principles for the discerning of Catholic life – either derived from Möhler’s argument in *Unity*, or extrapolated from it as close implications – provide, I suggest, the beginnings of a framework of responsibility-checks for the faithful living of dynamic Catholic unity, albeit with some inevitable tensions between them. They have, nevertheless, still been articulated at a level of considerable generality, and in Möhler’s case, as regards the fifth at least, on a somewhat idealised plane.

This charge of ecclesial idealisation has recurred throughout the current reading of Möhler’s understanding of Catholic unity. To take just four examples: in §4 Möhler describes ecclesial existence as being free from “the dark cloud of sin” and as representing the “destruction of all self-seeking”; an account smarting with tragic irony and dangerous self-delusion in the light of the clerical sexual abuse crisis. In §44 he describes the Church as an “infinite mass of individualities ... enlivened by one Spirit which binds all in joy and peace”; a vision which stands recurrently contradicted by lived historical reality – most recently in the acrimonious public questioning of Pope Francis by the four “dubia” Cardinals (see no. 50 here) and the associated vitriolic tone of many websites purporting to be guardians of Catholic orthodoxy. In §40 he presents the Church as only moving to doctrinal definition when forced so to do; a presentation that rings hollow when compared with the attempts by Pope John Paul II and the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to ban, by sheer force of authority, any discussion of the possibility of women’s ordination before the debates and discernment pertaining to this matter had properly been

⁸⁴ See International Theological Commission, “*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church” (2014), §71, available at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ See *id.*, §§80, 123.

allowed to run their course. Finally, in §42 he assures us that “No constraint of individuality comes from *the Spirit* of the Catholic Church” in a manner that jars starkly with the experience of Catholic people of difference, sexual and otherwise.

So what in practice might it mean to seek to live by the principles articulated here? What are Catholics to do when things do not function perfectly and when the lived reality of the Church falls far short of Möhler’s ideal type? How are Catholics to proceed when the very structures, processes, and habits intended as providing the means for whole-Church Catholic scrutiny and discernment are themselves serving to narrow deleteriously the range of Catholic experience and understanding which are considered permissible in relation to this task, “systematically straining out gnats and swallowing camels?”⁸⁷ Can an ecclesiological vision and associated habitus and principled framework for action explicitly shaped in service of the harmonious unity-in-diversity of Catholic truth genuinely allow for faithfully dissident voices of unresolved difference? In an ecclesiological structure and habitus in which the magisterial organs of the hierarchy are, as currently construed, the sole formal arbiters of the balance of Catholic truth, will there not be a near inevitable default to the suppression of dissent and the coercion of conformity to the current configuration of Catholic teaching?

Bradford Hinze rightly presses such questions sharply and directly in relation to Möhler’s otherwise attractive-sounding and understandably highly influential organic account of the intrinsic diversity in harmonious unity of Catholic truth. As he writes: “by celebrating the symphonic truth of Catholic Christianity, does Möhler suppress tension, conflict, and dialectical movement in the life of the Church in the interest of the melody and harmony orchestrated by the hierarchy?”⁸⁸ And again:

Are there not times when individual critical and creative voices challenge the church for the sake of the whole and when communities find ways to inculcate the living Gospel in local churches that can teach the universal church something about the fullness of faith? Must these contributions be discredited as expressions of egoism and sectarian pathos?⁸⁹

The next section accordingly asks after who pays the price of Catholic unity as currently configured and whether it is unnecessarily and unacceptably high.

At what price? Assessing the cost of living catholicity between ecclesial idealism and experienced tensions

⁸⁷ James Alison, “On Not Being Scandalised,” in his *Faith beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2001), pp. 170-193 (p. 180), extracted from a series of questions focussed on the need for religious authorities “to develop the self-critical habit of the sort which asks ‘Are we succumbing to the institutional tendency to bind up heavy burdens on people’s backs and not lift a finger to help them?’ Have we been trapped by our own arguments into systematically straining out gnats and swallowing camels?’ ‘Has our insistence on a certain sort of continuity of teaching led us to confuse the word of God with the traditions of men?’”

⁸⁸ Bradford E. Hinze, “The Holy Spirit and the Catholic Tradition: The Legacy of Johann Adam Möhler,” *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, eds. Donald J. Dietrich and Michael J. Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997), pp. 56-74 (p. 82).

⁸⁹ Id., p.88.

Here the focus turns from a framework of somewhat abstracted systematic principles for living the intrinsic diversity in communion of catholicity, to asking how this currently works in Catholic practice in relation to highly contentious matters. Various specific cases could be focussed on, such as artificial contraception, the roles of women in the Church – particularly so in relation to ordained ministry – and the range of LGBT issues. Drawing heavily on James Alison’s work, the specific focus here will be on the significant tension that exists between formal Catholic teaching concerning homosexual orientation being “intrinsically disordered” and the widely recognised reality – albeit formally denied, suppressed, and smothered in ambiguity – that the Church, like the world, is at once heterosexual and homosexual; indeed, that in some respects this is more the case in relation to the Church than wider secular society.⁹⁰

As an insider to Catholic clerical culture, Alison refers to “a discretely, but nevertheless, thoroughly, gay-tinted clerical system” within Catholicism and draws the implication: “... unlike many Protestant groups, as Catholics we have never really had the option available to us of seriously pretending that we didn’t know any gay people, or that there weren’t any gay people in our Church.”⁹¹ Nevertheless, despite this *de facto* ‘rainbow’ character of Catholicism, Catholics who have come to understand themselves to be gay or lesbian – and who might well experience significant acceptance as such by other Catholics – are placed in an excruciatingly destructive spiritual and psychological tension. On the one hand is their experience of the Church as the household and nursemaid of faith, through whose people, sacraments, and traditions God’s love and grace has been mediated. On the other hand is their sure knowledge that formal Catholic teaching judges not only their acts to be “objectively disordered” but their very identity as gay or lesbian which, in the self-understanding of many gay and lesbian people, is part of who they are and how they relate to others. It is little wonder, then, that for the gay or lesbian Catholic who seeks to hold appreciation for the Church as a true minister of grace together with adherence to this specific teaching on homosexual orientation as an intrinsic objective disorder, it can lead to a tortured state of tension between a self-harming attempt to deny, repress, and reorient one’s sexuality and a self-loathing recognition of one being what ought not to be.⁹²

In some respects, this state of tension might be thought as exceeding, in objective terms, that which might be experienced either by contraceptive-using Catholics vis-à-vis the traditional ban on ‘artificial’ contraception,⁹³ or by Catholics aggrieved by the ban on discussing women’s ordination to the presbyterate. In the former case, whatever the rights and wrongs of current teaching, the judgment concerning the intrinsically disordered nature of all acts of artificial contraception is precisely a judgment concerning the moral status of acts and not concerning the

⁹⁰ For the teaching, see CCC, §§2357-2358, at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P85.HTM. For the widespread ambiguity and hypocrisy, see Alison, “On Not Being Scandalised”, pp. 187, 189 and 186.

⁹¹ James Alison, “The Gay Thing: Following the Still Small Voice,” *Queer Theology*, ed. Gerard Loughlin (Oxford/Malden: Blackwell, 2007): pp. 50-62 (p.52); also id., pp. 50-51; and “On Not Being Scandalised,” pp.191-2.; compare Donald B. Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), particularly Chapter 7.

⁹² See Alison, “On Not Being Scandalised,” pp. 187-188; and “The Gay Thing,” p. 53.

⁹³ Pope Paul VI, ‘*Humanae Vitae*. Encyclical Letter on the Regulation of Birth’ (1968), available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.

intrinsic state of the persons who engage in such acts. Similarly and again regardless of its rights and wrongs, Catholic teaching concerning the impossibility of female presbyteral ordination is no longer premised on an Aristotelian denigration of women as intrinsically inferior – although such cultural misogyny can be assumed still to operate in the Church, as in society – but rather on an admixture of arguments concerning: i) symbolic representation, based on questionable assumptions both about gender complementarity and about Christian iconography; and ii) the Church’s perceived lack of authority to break with precedent. By contrast, many gay or lesbian Catholics find themselves judged by current Catholic teaching as “objectively disordered” in their very persons.

Nor, as alluded to earlier, is it adequate to seek to soften the force of this by claiming that Catholic moral theology distinguishes between the attraction – “orientation” – to same-sex sexual relations and the person who experiences such attraction, viewing the former both as accidental to the latter and as intrinsically objectively disordered in a way that the person who experiences such attraction is not in her/himself.⁹⁴ As Alison identifies, this attempted distinction is premised on a dogmatically-driven claim about empirical human nature, to the effect that homosexual orientation always represents a misdirection, a “disordering,” of what is properly, if confusedly, a heterosexual orientation.⁹⁵ By contrast, the empirical evidence is that a considerable number of gay and lesbian people do indeed experience their homosexuality as innate to who they are and not an accidental distortion of something else;⁹⁶ indeed, that seeking to suppress and reorient their homosexuality in a heterosexual direction would be to do violence to themselves.⁹⁷

The first section of this chapter culminated in a vision of Catholic communion as a complex, dynamic reality poised between the configured whole of currently perceived Catholic truth and the anticipated whole truth of all things in Christ and the Spirit. It presented catholicity as a state of lived tension between two responsibilities: the responsibility to maintain diversified Catholic communion by not pushing to breaking point; and the responsibility to become fully Catholic by including the truth of each. Catholicity thus appeared as a dynamic equilibrium: between the holding of all in centred, settled, mutual recognition and shared adherence to what is core; and an expansiveness which will stretch to recognise, gather, and include the totality of the real but always partial and irreducibly unique showings of the truth of God in Christ and the Spirit in the distinct “thisness” of each and every particular person – indeed, each and every particular created thing. In the case, however, of identity-constituting, same-sex orientation, we encounter the current formal limits of this defining Catholic capacity to recognise, gather, and include as God-given the varied particular created “thisnesses” of people of difference.

Nevertheless, standing in significant contrast to Catholicism’s formal incapacity to recognise and affirm same-sex orientation as a created difference is the widespread informal recalibration which has occurred over recent decades in Catholic homes, parishes, presbyteries, seminaries, and religious houses throughout the global North. Amongst the factors which have been in play here, are: tectonic societal shifts in attitude which extend far beyond the Church; the significantly higher number of gay and lesbian people who now feel able to be open about their sexuality; the

⁹⁴ See Alison, “The Gay Thing,” p.56.

⁹⁵ See “The Gay Thing,” pp. 58-59.

⁹⁶ See *id.*, p. 56.

⁹⁷ See “On Not Being Scandalised,” pp. 190, 192; and “The Gay Thing,” p.60.

correlatively higher frequency of opportunities for first-hand encounter and conversation with people of settled confidence in their sexual difference; greater cognisance of the violence that is done to the psychological health and lives of homosexuals, potentially to death, by the imposition of exclusively binary understandings of human sexuality and gender; and prayerful reflection on how the love of God appears to be moving and calling the people of God in this regard. As a consequence, the particular differentiated “thisnesses” of same-sex orientation and same-sex physical intimacy in the context of stable, loving relationships – each still profoundly problematic for official Catholic group-think – have come to be seen as being, in themselves, relative non-issues for many global North Catholics, perhaps the majority, for whom it has become “self-evident that the constructs which shore up the CDF’s position are not of God.”⁹⁸

Also notable here are the indications that this sea-change in actual Catholic thinking about same-sex orientation and partnerships has similarly occurred amongst many members of the hierarchy as well as laity.⁹⁹ As one supporting factor here, Alison points to a tension which he believes many clergy increasingly feel “between the Church’s new-found human rights teaching” condemning “unjust discrimination against gay people,” on the one hand, and the continuing official negative judgment on “homosexual inclination and acts,” on the other. As he views things: “As the momentum to take the former seriously grows, and hierarchs find themselves having to take positions on changes in civil legislation city by city and country by country, the latter becomes increasingly arcane and irrelevant.”¹⁰⁰

For significant numbers of clergy and laity alike, “something which seemed to be holy and sacred” – that is, the exclusive maintenance of strictly binary accounts of human sexuality and gender – is coming to be viewed as “neither holy nor sacred, but a way of diminishing people.”¹⁰¹ In relation to formal Catholic understanding, this situation poses the challenge as to whether Catholicism can learn “that something which appeared to have been commanded by God cannot in fact have been commanded by God, because it goes against what any of us can see leads to human flourishing.”¹⁰² It is significant that Alison himself introduces the category of catholicity and, by implication, the need for the Church to continue to grow in the way of catholicity, in the context of reflecting on the felt tension between the Church’s condemnation of discrimination against gays in the register of human rights and the Church’s continuing negative judgment on homosexual orientation. He muses, “... it is at least possible that the ambiguity produced by the creative tension between the two nudges us towards Catholicity.”¹⁰³

So Catholic teaching on homosexual orientation brings into focus *both*: 1) the perennial tension that exists between the relative stability of Catholic communion in currently configured identity and the recurrent reconfiguring of that identity with dynamic integrity through the gathering of all in the truth of God in Christ and the Spirit; *and* 2) the specific role that a faithfully dissenting minority can have in showing the need for some aspect of Catholic understanding and practice to be reformed and renewed if it is truly to serve charity, truth, and virtue and to protect against violence and evil. With this, 3) it has also brought into sharper focus that the default instinct of

⁹⁸ “On Not Being Scandalised” p. 186.

⁹⁹ See *ibid.*, p.191.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.190.

¹⁰¹ “The Gay Thing,” p. 56.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ “On Not Being Scandalised,” p. 190; also “The Gay Thing,” p. 50.

the magisterial representatives and authorities in the face of challenge is to protect the system as currently configured, even when this requires a certain amount of double-think.

Viewed in purely human terms, this latter instinct for system preservation is understandable (as distinct from justifiable). Quite apart from the likely continuing force of relatively suppressed homophobic anxieties, even amongst some who are themselves of homosexual orientation, there is a more pervasive and deep-seated, if entirely wrong-headed, anxiety in Catholic group-think, which assumes that accepting that the Church has been misguided in any one aspect of its teaching will thereby totally undermine any claim at all on the Church's behalf that it receives divine guidance and can teach with divine authority.¹⁰⁴ I describe this pervasive anxiety as 'wrong-headed' in as much as: a) the claim to being guided by the Holy Spirit and to being able to teach with divine authority does not require the Church to maintain that it is always correct in all respects; and b) by ironic contrast, it is in fact the near-total inability of the formal Catholic mind-set to accept the need ever to revise its teachings, even when relevant empirical data strongly suggest the need so to do, which, for many, places the Church's credibility as an authoritative teacher in question far more surely than would any appropriate admission of error in some specific regard. In matters of truth discernment, strident defensiveness and rejection of all challenge and critical scrutiny erodes rather than supports credibility.¹⁰⁵

Further, admixed with these negative motivations for preserving the system as currently configured is the somewhat more positive concern, à la Möhler, to maintain – as the core calling and most fundamental reality of Catholicism – the balance of unity at all levels of Catholic life, both within the local diocesan churches and between the diverse local and particular churches of the Church universal. But even this, in itself more positive, concern is ambiguous. Its unfortunate shadow-side, as Bradford Hinze was earlier quoted as recognising, is that it too readily leads the hierarchy to seek to suppress and marginalise what are perceived as challenging voices which threaten to disrupt the *status quo*. Again, however, there is a sharp irony and self-frustrating logic at work here: the very course of action designed to prevent *potential* rupture through the suppression and marginalising of those calling for the reconfiguring of some aspect of Catholic teaching and/or practice, in fact issues in the *certainty* of many finding themselves disenfranchised and alienated from Catholic life. Either way, Catholicism is diminished and effectively fractured.

The seriousness of this situation – relative both to: a) the intrinsic quality and truth of Catholic life, and b) the credibility of the Church's witness as to what it means to live difference for mutual flourishing – is such that it is incumbent both upon those with formal, hierarchical responsibility for the structural, procedural, and habitual dimensions of the Church's life, and upon those in faithful dissent each to seek respective ways to live unresolved Catholic difference beyond either hardened exclusion or frustrated and destructive anger. Best taken as placeholders, the final sections of this already over-long chapter trace the beginnings of a way ahead in each of these regards; beginnings which require further essay-length pieces for full and adequate treatment.

Growing into the fullness of catholicity: on becoming more fully the Catholic Church

¹⁰⁴ See id., pp. 174, 176.

¹⁰⁵ See id., pp. 175-177, particularly p. 176.

Cognisant of the fact of significant and seemingly ineradicable *intra*-Catholic plurality, this chapter has explored the concept and associated practice of catholicity as a critical-constructive resource for supporting a renewed practice of diversified Catholic communion. Where the first section presented an extended vision of catholicity in its various interrelated aspects and distinctions, and where the second explored what ecclesiological principles this might imply, the third asked after what all of this means in the context of long-term, serious dissensus. Accordingly, this current section begins the process of asking after the relevant institutional responsibilities and associated structural, procedural, and habitual implications in relation to such contexts of long-term Catholic dissensus.

A three-fold recognition-cum-conviction arises out of the argument of the chapter thus far and guides what is to follow. First is the recognition that the current substantive dissensus between formal Catholic teaching on homosexuality and the alternative prayed and considered judgment of a significant and growing number of lay and ordained Catholics is neither going to go away nor be quickly resolved. Second is the recognition that this represents a serious dissensus precisely *within* the Church and not simply *between* the Church and society construed as *alien other*. Third is the recognition and conviction that the hierarchical responsibility to hold the Church together, to maintain the Church in communion, is not about ensuring the fossilised preservation of teachings which become redundant for fear that relinquishing them will cause scandal but, rather, should be about ensuring that 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me' (Jn 18:9).

With all of this in view, what might it mean for the Church at local, regional, and international levels to seek, in its structures, procedures, and habits to become more responsive to the extensive demands of catholicity, more capable of living catholicity differently, without suffering the cost either of fracture or of premature judgment, alienation, and loss through widespread disenfranchisement? As *Gaudium et Spes* §44 reminds us, even those structures which are of the *esse* of the Church, as determined directly by Christ in Catholic understanding, can be and need to be adapted to time and context. Six points will be sketched in brief here, each requiring considerable further scrutiny, development, and delineation in subsequent work.

The first concerns the need to give time and space – as much time and space as humanly possible – for consideration and mutual learning concerning a novel or contested point prior to moving to judgment. Likely motivated by the dual anxiety to close down the prospect of disagreement and to project an image of Catholic clarity, the Catholic institutional habit is to be slow in learning – indeed, generally somewhat resistant to learning – and to be overly quick in issuing teaching. In the context, however, of sustained, substantive dissensus we need to become the opposite: more committed to and faster, more agile, more docile in Catholic learning; and significantly slower in moving to Catholic teaching.

As correlate to this, the second concerns the urgent need for all relevant parties to be given access by right, norm, and routine to the relevant conversations of the Church rather than for this to be largely by discretion. As Newman noted, "Truth is wrought out by many minds, working together freely."¹⁰⁶ By contrast, despite *Lumen Gentium's* teaching on the *sensus fidelium* and the right of laity to make their opinions known, Catholic decision-making is still canonically

¹⁰⁶ Newman, "Letter to Robert Ormsby," (March 26, 1863), *L&D* XX, pp. 425-426.

structured by a strict demarcation between the *ecclesia docens* and the *ecclesia discens*, with the latter having, at best, a purely consultative contribution to make. Vatican II's "Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church," *Christus Dominus*, emphasised that the bishops are not the primary initiators of action; indeed, that if all action were left to them their task would be utterly impossible. Rather, as Avery Dulles puts it, their "proper role is ... to recognize, encourage, co-ordinate, and judge the gifts and initiatives of others."¹⁰⁷ This needs to be understood as pertaining not only to the practical initiatives of laity but also their distinctive experience and prayed and reflected insights into the demands of faith in given contexts. For this to become both normal and effective, it needs to be moved from the relatively discretionary and occasional manner in which it currently operates to becoming a matter of routine requirement. With that, it needs to be developed beyond the purely consultative level at which it currently functions, without any responsive accountability, and be integrated into the Church's deliberative decision-making, whilst preserving the appropriate executive function of priest in parish and bishop in diocese. Something of this appears in view in Pope Francis' call for synodality to characterise the Church's entire life at every level.¹⁰⁸ Much could fruitfully be learned here by listening into the various differing relevant experiences and approaches of other Christian traditions.

Third, also implied by the first, is the need for Catholic practice to retrieve a much clearer differentiation of the various levels of authoritative teaching and to avoid elevating things prematurely to the vague and ironically undefined level of "defined" teaching. The latter attribution should be reserved for the settled understanding of the Church arrived at through relevant conversations having been allowed to run their course to consensus. Should some pastoral necessity or potential ecclesial crisis (e.g. the Church's unity and stability) require that a *pro-tempus* judgment be given prior to the Church's conversations having run their course and arrived at settled consensus – which can, as history teaches, stretch over decades and longer – then we need to develop means of clarifying that this is a provisional judgment with authority *pro-tempus*.

Fourth, with this there is need also for it to become both normal and universal to draw clearer distinctions between: a) authoritative teachings which are binding on all, in all places, in the same way; and b) teachings which can be specific to particular churches in the light of cultural appropriateness, history, local tradition, and the like. There is again potential here for fruitful receptive ecumenical learning on Catholicism's behalf.¹⁰⁹ Lest, however, this should conjure the

¹⁰⁷ Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, p. 125, referring to Vatican II, "Christus Dominus. Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church" (1965), available at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html. *Christus Dominus* refers eight times to the ministry of bishops as one of enabling and twice to the role of coordination.

¹⁰⁸ See Pope Francis, "Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops" (October 17, 2015), at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

¹⁰⁹ Compare Archbishop Rowan Williams' plea for the Catholic Church to embrace a more modest account of what it is necessary for all to hold in common in his "Address to the Rome Willebrands Symposium" (November 19, 2009), available at: <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/766/archbishops-address-at-a->

spectre of cultural relativism – another frequent anxiety point in magisterial teaching during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI – we need to remind ourselves that such a facility already exists as normal for the Eastern Rite Catholic churches where, for example, the theologically-argued maintenance of the binding norm of a celibate presbyterate for Latin Rite Catholic churches does not apply. This is an example of a genuine theological pluralism within the global Catholic communion and not simply of pastoral appropriateness; as too are the different decision-making structures which operate under the distinct Code of Canon Law for the Eastern Rite churches. As earlier noted, such real ecclesial pluralism within Catholicism has become far more manifest over the past fifty years with the migration of diasporal Eastern Rite communities to Western countries, with their own geographically overlapping but distinct episcopal jurisdictions, each in full communion with the other across their theological, canonical, and pastoral differences. With this in view, is it impossible to imagine a situation in which some of the current ‘hot button’ topics of potential Catholic division (e.g. women in ministry) might be similarly dealt with?

Fifth, combined with the third point above, there is a need to move from tending to view all dissent under the register of heresy and potential excommunication, or schism, to viewing it as an inevitable, normal, and even necessary and useful aspect of proper Catholic conversation short of settlement. The implication is that any perceived transgressions relative to the current articulation of non-irrevocably defined positions should be treated with a certain lightness and case-by-case appropriateness.¹¹⁰

Sixth, moving from the case of theologians who might judge it to be appropriate to continue to probe and challenge publicly some aspect of non-infallible Catholic teaching, and focussing instead on the many lay people and clergy who might find themselves in practical dissonance with some such teaching, it is necessary for the Church to continue to have confidence in the priority of mercy and to offer pastoral support and encouragement on this basis.¹¹¹

As already noted, each of these points requires considerable development. Even then, they would not provide a sufficient answer to the question as to what it might mean for the Church, institutionally, to take responsibility for living substantive difference well. They do, however, begin to indicate the kind of institutional virtues, habitus, procedures, and structural changes which are required if Catholicism is going to be able to live catholicity differently through long-term disagreement without this necessarily leading to fracture or alienation. As complement, the final section turns now to ask after the correlative virtues and *modus operandi* which might be relevant for those individuals and groups who find themselves both in principled dissent from some aspect of current Catholic teaching and convinced that the health of the Church’s life and witness requires that it be brought into the open.

The spirit of Catholicism: on becoming Catholic people¹¹²

willebrands-symposium-in-rome, where he asks “Is there a level of mutual recognition which allows a shared theological understanding of primacy alongside a diversity of canonical or juridical arrangements?”

¹¹⁰ See Alison, “On Not Being Scandalised,” p.184.

¹¹¹ See Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*.

¹¹² Compare Karl Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, trans. Justin McCann (London: Sheed and Ward, 1929 [1924]). For the notion of being a Catholic person, see Rowan Williams and Philip Sheldrake,

This fifth and final section completes the argument by exploring the kind of ethic and spirituality of disagreement in communion which, in some fashion or other, needs to be uniquely nurtured in and by each nascent Catholic person in contexts of deep-seated disagreement if we are indeed to be able “to remain on speaking terms with each other and to move forward in and with the Church” despite these, at times sharp, differences.¹¹³ More precisely, whilst also of more general relevance, the particular way these modes of Catholic living in contexts of principled ecclesial disagreement are articulated here is most specifically oriented to those who become convinced that a situation of informally reflected yet widely lived dissent needs to be explicitly developed into a more formally reflected challenge to some aspect of current teaching. Further, given that such principles of Catholic personhood and ecclesial existence need to be discerned, owned, and embodied in the particular circumstances of each individual Catholic life, it is inevitable that as articulated here they reflect the perspective and experience of the author and may not readily translate, in every detail, into others’ particular circumstances. That said, some interesting implied modes of living catholicity in the context of unresolved ecclesial difference do flow directly from the Catholic ecclesiological principles earlier extrapolated from Möhler’s work.

First, for example, we might identify the need for the Catholic dissident to resolve not to end in exclusion and separation. Indeed, once one has been gripped, as Möhler was, by the fundamental vision of sharing in the living communion of God in Christ and the Spirit in the communion of the Church and once one has awoken to this as the Church’s deepest calling and mission bar none, then “resolve” is the wrong verb. For it is not that one resolves, as if by force of will, to maintain Catholic communion in spite of its various lived contradictions. Rather, it simply becomes unthinkable – particularly after testing by long and serious consideration to the contrary – that one would allow things to end in exclusion and separation. But nor need that mean settling either for the suppression of one’s dissent in a life of repressed frustration, or for a frightened conformity which always plays it safe. On the contrary, the combination of a deeply-held dissent and a living Catholic conviction can issue in a sense of resolved clarity about needing both to live difference in open view and to seek to move the contested issue from the margins of Catholic conversation by bringing it closer to the centre.

Second, given it is reconciled unity in the proper diversity of living Catholic communion to which one aspires and not simply the victory of one’s position, then it behoves one to attend closely and fairly to the details of the teaching to which one is opposed and to whatever is of truth in it. The hermeneutics of suspicion have their place given the pervasive nature of sin and its corrupting effects. But they need to be balanced by and situated within a hermeneutic of charity, which also seeks to interpret decisions and teachings in their best light and in accordance with their best intentions – as Alison models in his remarkable reading of the CDF Notification against Sister Jeannine Gramick and Father Robert Nugent – with a view to asking as to what can be learned from them that still needs to be incorporated into a potential new configuration of Catholic teaching and practice.¹¹⁴

“Catholic Persons: Images of Holiness. A Dialogue,” *Living the Mystery: Affirming Catholicism and the Future of Anglicanism*, ed. Jeffrey John (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1994), pp. 76-89.

¹¹³ Hellemans and Jonkers, “Introduction,” here, p.???. *aanvullen*

¹¹⁴ See Alison, “The Gay Thing,” p. 50.

Third, as well as seeking after the partial if, perhaps, somewhat confused truth in a teaching to which one is opposed, it is vital that one also avoids any acrimony on one's own part and any demonising of one's opponents. The goal for which one is ultimately working is not their silencing or elimination; nor simply their grudging accommodation to long-term unreconciled difference. Rather, the ultimate goal is that of conversion, reconciliation, and renewal with one's sisters and brothers in Christ precisely in and through a significant difference which once had the capacity for division.

Fourth, as this implies, one needs to be actively patient: not passive, nor resigned, but actively patient. In a Catholic mind-set, it is better to achieve genuine reconciled unity in diversity by the long route than it is to gain a pyrrhic victory by a shorter one. The point is that it can be one thing to win a theological argument about the need for and possibility of a specific proposed change to Catholic teaching and quite another thing to win the hearts, minds, and support that are required in order really to establish change in the will, habits, and practice of the Church. As Newman recognised, "Great acts take time."¹¹⁵

What, however, about situations when the current configuration of the Catholic system appears utterly intransigent – in Alison's terms, "incurable" – but one's Catholic conviction and sense of vocation forecloses separation? Does not a combination of the first and fourth of these principles of living catholicity differently inevitably reduce one to mere passivity and to suffering in silence?

Here I think that Alison, deeply shaped through close engagement with and long reflection on the strangely Christologically-rooted work of René Girard, indicates a way to make transformative act of passion endured. For Alison, as for Girard, the repressive and exclusionary violence that exists in a system is both consequence and indicator of a false "sacred" being in thrall. In Alison's words, "The blessed who are not scandalised by Jesus understand that in each generation there will be attempts to shore up the sacred violently – that is just how things are in our fallen planet."¹¹⁶ The appropriate and necessary response to the recognition of such systemic violence is to seek to expose the idol, the false sacred, by bringing its cost into clear view in the hope that its guardians can hear and be converted by the ordinary peace and blessing of which the idol is a distortion.¹¹⁷ However, the reactionary violence of the false sacred is such that seeking to expose its cost will likely – near inevitably – mean that one will oneself more deeply come to bear and manifest that cost in one's own person and bodily, material existence. Of course, martyr-complexes are to be avoided; as too pain and suffering, whenever they can be so avoided without cost either to others or to one's own integrity. Nevertheless, in Alison's Girardian analysis, rather than always prioritising the avoidance of suffering from such reactive violence, the nonviolent way of the gospel – which seeks after the victory of peace *with not over* one's opponents – is, on occasion at least, precisely to accept the likelihood of such suffering and be prepared to bear in love the wounds of the false sacred in one's own bodiliness. The hope is that this will serve a transformative pedagogical function by evoking repentance and leading to renewal and reconciliation. In Alison's words:

¹¹⁵ John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 264.

¹¹⁶ Alison, "On Not Being Scandalised," p. 181.

¹¹⁷ See *ibid.*

The Christian faith enables us to inhabit the space of being victimised not so as to grab an identity but, in losing an identity, to become signs of forgiveness such that one day those who didn't realise what they were doing may see what they were doing and experience the breaking of heart which will lead to reconciliation.¹¹⁸

Seeking first to embody this in his own life and options (in the context of current Catholic teaching on homosexual orientation), Alison then offers this to others as the way in which to seek to live substantive unresolved Catholic difference transformatively. His fascinating and challenging analysis can well be understood as being driven by a creative re-appropriation of the category of sacrifice and sacrificial living, not as a transactional purchase or punishment but as a performance of love which transforms passion into transformative act.

This could be fruitfully deepened and extended, beyond what Alison himself does, by identifying a dynamic of life-giving, self-giving at the heart alike of: i) the life and ministry of Jesus unto death and resurrection; and ii) Christian understanding of the eternal Trinitarian life of God. In the latter regard, whilst in the eternal life of God this dynamic of life-giving, self-giving is from fullness unto fullness and so free from all threat of diminishment, when transposed into the conditions of finitude, material existence, and a sin-strewn world, it can be seen as bringing inevitable risk, likely resistance, and the potential for suffering in its wake, as in the life of Jesus. Nevertheless, as the life-giving, self-giving of God, it is always ultimately creative and transformative. Viewed in these terms and whilst steadfastly refusing any false mysticisms of the cross, which would treat suffering as a good and necessary thing in its own right (either as discipline, or atonement, or necessary means of divine salvific action), this nevertheless opens a way to actively embracing and living unavoidable suffering in a manner analogous to the practices of contemplative prayer and fasting. Just as contemplative prayer and fasting can be lived as intentional, loving sharings in the one act of God's life-giving, self-giving – in the conviction that they share in and can be vehicles for the transformative character of that act – so too can unavoidable suffering be lived as such a sharing in the costly life-giving, self-giving of God in this order.

Indeed, to press this further: if the living heart of Catholicism consists, as I believe Möhler correctly perceived, in sharing in reconciled communion in diversity in the one living communion of God in Christ and the Spirit, then living catholicity, being and becoming a Catholic person, consists in growing into conformity with this one loving act of divine life-giving, self-giving in and through the particular circumstances of one's life. This includes the unavoidable suffering and reactive violence that will be encountered there; particularly so, for present purposes, the act of suffering for the Church in love. Clearly this is dangerous terrain. If offered as specific advice to another, it risks making a glibly pious and, potentially, deeply damaging insertion into the particularities of their circumstances without appropriate insider-feel for the constraints and possibilities which those circumstances entail. In the Anglican context, Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris ask whether the "immense sacrifice" the Church of England

¹¹⁸ Id., p.172.

is asking of gay men and women is unacceptably high?¹¹⁹ In reply and by way of conclusion, I offer three thoughts.

First, beyond identifying conformity to this dynamic of life-giving, self-giving as the most basic movement of Catholic existence and beyond seeking to discern for oneself how to live and grow within this dynamic, it must be for each to discern the contours of its call, cost, and promise in the specificities of his/her own life and circumstance. Whilst it might be proper to draw attention to this general dynamic and its call on each person's life and whilst it might, therefore, be proper to invite another to consider its potential relevance for them in general, it can never be proper to assume to tell another in any given circumstance that they should proceed in this manner rather than through some more active means of resistance and work for change. Similarly, whilst, in relevant circumstances, Alison might be able to advocate an approach such as this to other gay men as an act of like-to-like ministry, it could never properly be directly and specifically advocated by a straight man to gay and lesbian people without that being in danger of being complicit in appearing to diminish the intolerable extent of the systemic sacred violence that is being endured.

Second, as to what grounds of hope we might have for believing that over time the Church will continue to learn, as it has learned on many previous occasions, to live catholicity differently: here it is helpful to remind ourselves that it is not sin and failure which should surprise us, whether within the Church or without, but the miracle of grace which, amidst sin and failure, is capable of reorienting and opening us further to the true dynamic of divine life-giving, self-giving in which we are held and of bringing this forth in anticipatory showings of transformed holiness. In this purview, the divine-human reality of the Church is such that whilst, viewed in one way, it is a human institution subject to sociological norms and pressures like any other institution, it is not just a human institution *tout court*. Most fundamentally, the Church is the miracle of grace in corporate, institutional form. The conviction of faith, sustained in hope through the witness of lives transformed in love, is that, over time, this miracle will keep winning-out through love, in and through the suffering which this entails.

Third, as sobering counterpoint to that note of ecclesial hope, lest it should return us to the complacency of an ecclesial idealism which would blind us and numb us to the reality of things: it needs be recognised that, realistically speaking, this spiritual practice of living catholicity differently is, as articulated here, a possible *modus operandi* only for the hard-core committed minority who are prepared to live with the tensions of sustained unresolved difference and to suffer in love for them. Whilst the judgment of faith might assure us that this costly practice of living Catholic difference will bear its fruit over time, we can be equally sure that it will not serve immediately or directly to stem the flood of people away from the Church. For many, current Catholic teaching on homosexuality is just one of the issues making the Church an irrelevance and leading them not to anything as formal or intentional as schism or heresy but simply, and most desperately, to the inability to hear the Church's preaching as the Good News of Jesus Christ (Mk 1:1). As such, learning to live catholicity differently is not simply a matter of life and death – sometimes quite literally – for Catholic people of difference, it is a matter of life and death for the health and witness of the Church as a whole.

¹¹⁹ Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris, "Introduction," in *An Acceptable Sacrifice? Homosexuality and the Church*, eds. Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris (London: SPCK, 2007), pp. 1-7 (pp. 6-7).

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