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Keynote and Presidential Address, 1984: The Immaculate Conception and Recent Ecclesiology: III. Mary, The Church, and Sinlessness

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THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AND RECENT ECCLESIOLOGY:

III. Mary, the Church, and Sinlessness

How does the grace of the Immaculate Conception illuminate the problems of ecclesiology? How does it clarify the new being to which we are called in the Church of God?

The purpose of this paper is to answer these questions with respect to a specific and crucial issue: the sinlessness of the Catholic Church, which is, as St. Ambrose put it, *ex maculis immaculata*. In order to address this issue, I must begin again with the original questions and summarize for the reader the pre-requisite clarifications which I have tried to bring to them in previous papers.

I began to pose these questions in a 1982 paper read to this Society, in which I argued that answers to them could not emerge until one had worked through a three-fold stack of difficulties.¹ The Immaculate Conception can have a bearing on ecclesiology only insofar as the Blessed Virgin is a model, prototype, or archetype of the Church. Only so can we reason from *her* mysteries to the Church's. But a stack of difficulties concerns exactly this typological relation. One faces a great multitude of traditional comparisons, to which one has to bring some sort of intelligible order. At the same time, a second stack of difficulties invests the two terms being compared. Controversies among ecclesiologists (such as whether the Church's formal sinlessness prevents one from also calling the Church "sinful" in certain regards) and other controversies among Mariologists (such as the one over co-redemption) have had the result that Mary/Church typology has become embroiled in a number of disputed topics, whose theological resolutions are partially interdependent. But

¹ W. H. Marshner, "The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception in Modern Ecclesiology: Prolegomena," *MS* 33 (1982): 124-146: cited hereafter as [1982].

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one can hardly take sides in these disputes any longer, without facing the fact that the very notion of 'resolving a theological dispute' has become problematical. Radically new ways of "doing theology" have come into practice since Vatican II; and in some of these new approaches, our familiar Mariological and ecclesiological disputes, including the very ones which shaped Vatican II, are no longer considered interesting, or even valid. Hence a third stack of difficulties. These three stacks—typological, theological, and methodological respectively—I undertook to burrow through.

On the methodological issues I took a short-cut in the 1982 paper. Instead of handling them on their own level (meta-theologically), I showed how certain stances on method correspond to stances on a broad but substantive question about salvation.

God worked salvation in the midst of Israel, in a series of mighty deeds. He sent forth His Son to be born in time, to lay down His life "as a ransom" in time. But those who need to profit from these deeds are mostly elsewhere in time. How does God's salvation, anchored to finite points of time and space, reach the men who begin to exist only at distant points of time and space? This is the broad question to which I just alluded. It is a question about the mediation of salvation. Better said, it is the question of what relation exists (and how that relation is founded) between the original *loci* of God's salvation-historical action and the ever-new *loci* of man's *metanoia*. No matter how novel it may otherwise be, every method of theology pretending to be Christian will posit some such relation; otherwise God's deeds in Jesus Christ will have no special and privileged relevance to our current and recurrent spiritual needs.

Well, then, as being is of only two orders, intentional or real, the foundations of relations are of only two kinds, and relations themselves are of only two kinds: mind-dependent or real.² If the relation we were just asking about is mind-dependent, then our present relation to God's past acts rests merely upon our

² There is a wonderful treatment of relations and of this distinction between real and mind-dependent ones in John of St. Thomas, *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*, ed. B. Reiser, 3 vols. (Rome: Marietti, 1930).

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faith in them as preached under certain descriptions, or else merely upon our “commitment” to use these descriptions in our own acts of self-interpretation. But if the relation is real, then our present relation to God’s past acts rests upon some *reality*—a reality which incorporates us into Jesus Christ, assimilates us to the God who acted in Him, and quickens us with the life which conquered death in Him—some reality which flows down from the unoriginate Wellspring of all things, enters history by a virgin’s consent, and from this beach-head deploys throughout history, into the past to justify those who waited in hope for Christ, and into the future to sanctify the remotest generations of those who confess His coming. This reality, appropriated to the Holy Spirit, can only be the thing we call “grace.”

Now, the Immaculate Conception is a special, unrepeatable condition of grace. The Church is a structured community, organized to perform repeatable kinds of events, through which salvation comes to new generations. Mary’s special condition of grace can hardly have an archetypal bearing on this structured community, unless the events which the latter is organized to perform are events communicating grace—not just events of preaching and remembering the past, and not just events of collective self-interpretation. Therefore I argued in the 1982 paper that Mary could have no serious typological relation to the Church, unless the general relation between God’s unrepeatable acts in the past and man’s ever-repeated acts of finding salvation were *real*. This stance on the general question I called “ontological correlation.”³

But where this stance is taken, theological method must center on the tools necessary to give an account of such correlation. These are the metaphysical tools pertaining to an ontology of grace, i.e., of participation in divine Persons. To use these tools is to adapt a rationally defensible metaphysics powerful enough to speak of divine things, yet open to correction and supplementation in the light of the revealed data, whereby alone this mysterious reality of grace is available to us under guaranteed descriptions (especially 2 Peter 1:4). Such was the method of the

³ Marshner [1982], 136f.

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Fathers and the Schoolmen (though they differed in various degrees, of course, in their choice of a metaphysic and in the literary forms of their reflection). Other methods of "doing theology," anti-metaphysical or exclusively hermeneutical, are thereby seen to exclude or overlook the very foundations for the Mary / Church comparison which our topic demands. I therefore set aside those other methods as useless, along with certain recent ecclesiologies based on them, ecclesiologies of mere "proclamation" or "service."⁴ For to take seriously the grace of the Immaculate Conception is to realize that any adequate ecclesiology must be based on the concept of ontic grace, mediated from and through God Incarnate by a Church organized to live out of such a grace and to bestow it ministerially. Thus, a resolution of the methodological options had the welcome side-effect of substantially reducing the range of recent ecclesiologies which merit a Mariologist's attention.

Continuing this inquiry in a second paper, read to this society in 1983, I turned to the stack of typological difficulties.⁵ To say that one thing is a "type" of another, I argued, is a non-specific or polyvalent mode of comparison. A type can be anything from an empty symbol to a moral example to an archetypal pattern.⁶ As the distinctive product of spiritual exegesis, types are based on the axiom that there is a dramatic unity to the history specially planned by God. I distinguished types from personifications and argued against the view that Mary is the personification of the Church.⁷ I considered several plausible senses of the question, "Who is the Church?" and in all of them rejected the answer, "Mary." I also rejected the view that Mary is "in person" the Bride of Christ.⁸

⁴ Ibid., 137-139.

⁵ W. H. Marshner, "The Immaculate Conception and Recent Ecclesiology: II. Christo-conformity, Maternity, and Brideship in Mary as Type of the Church," *MS* 34 (1983): 127-158; cited hereafter as [1983].

⁶ Ibid., 130-133.

⁷ On the difference between types and personifications, I am happy to find supporting remarks in John Henry Newman, *Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching* (4th ed.; London: Burns, Oates and Co., 1872), vol. 2, *Letter to Pusey*, pp. 409f.

⁸ [1983], 136 and 155ff.

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Then, before proceeding to better-grounded comparisons between Mary and the Church, I undertook to show how 'Church' varies as a term of such comparisons. It seemed rather clear that the Church was variably conceivable in three dimensions. First, we might take the Church as including her divine Head and, under Him, those who enjoy His friendship in this world and the next (the *Totus Christus*); or we might take the Church as these His friends, standing in contrast to their divine Head (the *membra Corporis* or *Sponsa Christi*); or we might subtract from this Spouse the faithful departed, leaving only the Church *in statu viae* (the *ecclesia militans*)—these are all variations in the dimension which I call altitude. Secondly, we might take the Church as embracing all the just since righteous Abel, or else all of God's people since the call of Abraham, or else God's new people since some founding event of the New Testament—all variations in another dimension, which I call temporal width, and which also involves variation in degree of institutional continuity. Thirdly and lastly, we might take the Church at any given width and altitude but vary our concept of it in a third dimension altogether, a dimension of aspectual abstraction. The Church is ordered by hierarchical offices in one aspect, by degrees of sanctity in another, and by internal causal relations in still others (internal relations by virtue of which the Church is at once *opus Dei operans* and *opus Dei operatum*).⁹

⁹ *Ibid.*, 137-140. The dimensions of width and altitude are concerned with the extension of the Church, i.e., with the question of which persons (human, angelic, Divine) are to be reckoned as members of it; the third dimension is more intensional, i.e., it concerns the various ordering relations among these persons. Thanks to the fact that there are many such relations, each constituting the Church as a different (partially) ordered set, and thanks to the fact that a definition picking out any one of the theologically accepted senses of 'Church' will invite confusion unless it delineates only one such ordered set, two important conclusions follow.

The first is that the plurality of valid images or definitions of the Church is irreducible in principle; a final "unity" of definition can only be secured by ascending to a higher set-theoretical order; then one can say that the Church in its total mystery is "the set of all supernaturally structured orderings of persons human, angelic, and Divine," or words to that effect, as I did in [1983], p. 140. (In other words, the Church as a whole is a set of ordered sets; but I do not know whether this whole set is itself an ordered set, or whether it is the

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For our purposes, the most important aspects emerging in this third dimension are based upon the modes of human action in the Church. First, there is vicarious action, i.e., acts of jurisdiction or magisterium, done in the *absence* of Christ as visible, public leader, and hence done *in loco Christi*. This class of action, strictly limited to the sacred hierarchy, constitutes the aspect of the Church of which Mary is *not* a type. Second, there is ministerial action, in which man acts as an instrumental cause, under the principal agency of Christ Himself, to perform the Sacraments. Though largely limited to the sacred hierarchy, this class of actions is not strictly so limited; for in the case of emergency baptism, at least, even the layman can exercise this crucial

power set of the set of ordered sets, the ordered power set, etc.; my theological *habitus* is frankly rather baffled by the variety and precision of the tools which set-theory has made available.)

The second conclusion is that this irreducible plurality of valid (lower-order) images or definitions of the Church demands, guarantees, and necessitates a *plurality of typological perspectives*, when Mary is compared to the Church as its type.

The importance of these two conclusions does not lie so much in the fact that they help to obviate various confusions, or that they invalidate some over-ambitious attempts at ecclesiological "synthesis." No, they clarify a point of method. They allow one to see many traditional ecclesiological theses as solutions to problems of co-ordinating and ranking the several valid definitions, harmonizing truths about the Church which emerge from one valid aspect of it with truths about it which emerge from another, extrapolating truths from one aspect to another, etc. A vivid example of such procedure was presented in [1983], in connection with the question whether Mary is ultimately "in" the Church or "above" it. Another example will emerge below, as we handle the thesis that the Church is sinless.

Finally, it may be useful at this point to settle some accounts with Fr. Avery Dulles. He has spoken of a plurality of "models" in his well-known *Models of the Church* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974). I have spoken of a plurality of valid images or definitions, each delineating the Church as an ordered set of persons (where the persons to be ordered are selected in the two dimensions of altitude and width, and where the ordering itself is selected in a third dimension of aspectual abstraction). How are my several ordered sets different from Fr. Dulles's models?

Well, to begin with, model theory is not a vague possibility waiting to be invented and, in the meantime, open to arm-chair whimsy. It is an established meta-mathematical discipline, which has proven fruitful in dozens of applications to philosophical topics, ever since the pioneering efforts of Alfred Tarski

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mode of action, done *in persona Christi*. To capture the aspect of the Church which this kind of action constitutes, I spoke in the 1983 paper of the *ecclesia ministrans*, and I argued that the Blessed Virgin is most deeply a type of the Church in this aspect; I shall return to this point below. Thirdly, there is a mode of action which seems to have no convenient name; neither vicarious nor ministerial, it is action in which ecclesial man is principal cause of supernaturalized acts incumbent upon all citizens of the Abiding City—acts of faith, prayer, hope, intercession, asceticism, mercy, and charity—the component acts of Christian spirituality, practised to perfection in the Religious Life. To single out this aspect of the Church, I spoke of the *ecclesia fidelium* or (as I now prefer) the *ecclesia credens*. Here too, of course, and most famously, Mary is our *typos*.¹⁰

in the 1920s. According to the precise and intelligible canons of this discipline, any and all of my ordered sets would indeed be a model of the Church, whereas none of Fr. Dulles' "models" would be a model at all, of anything. What he calls "models" are at best what some philosophers of science call paradigms or metaphors—i.e., suggestive descriptions around which a theory (an ecclesiology) might be elaborated, and for which a model might then be constructed.

Furthermore, when models are used in the sciences, it is with a view to testing a theory, via its model, against the facts one finds in some accessible domain of evidence. The historical and current reality of the Catholic Church is our domain of evidence in the present case. As soon as one poses the question, however, of how Fr. Dulles' "models" (or the real models perhaps constructible from his "models") would fare in such a test, one quickly sees that one is on the wrong track. One sees that most of his "models" are not even metaphors in the relevant sense, but prescriptions—sloganized prescriptions, each of which offers a program for how the Church ought to be viewed, rather than a theologico-descriptive concept of how it is. Indeed, until one perceives this prescriptive slant, it remains unintelligible how Dulles can sequester the Church's institutional reality into one "model," to which all the others are preferred alternatives. So the first thing that needs to be said is that my ordered sets are genuine models, subserving a descriptive-theoretical purpose, and Fr. Dulles' are not.

Then, in the second place, Dulles' metaphor/prescriptions are alternatives or rivals to each other—rival proposals for capturing the strategic center of the Church's mystery; my ordered sets are nothing of the kind; they are complementary, each modeling a distinguishable aspect of the Church's mystery at a given height and width.

¹⁰ The appropriateness of summarizing so wide and various a slice of the Church's life under the one action of faith (*credens*) or as the action of "believ-

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Furnished with these precisions about 'type' and 'Church,' I turned to the main burden of the 1983 paper. Mary is a type of the Church under a variety of traditional comparisons. How are these reducible to unity? Is there one overarching perspective, or one ultimate basis, by virtue of which Mary-type-of-the-Church reduces to a unitary concept? I argued in the negative. I argued that there are rather three distinct and irreducible perspectives in which Mary is a type of the Church, that in each of these perspectives she is a different kind of type, and that in each perspective the Church is taken according to different parameters in its three dimensions.¹¹ Still, something unifies the three perspectives, and something orders the three of them.

What unifies them is the fact that all three spring from the ontology of grace. Here is the central point of continuity from the 1982 paper to the one of 1983. All three perspectives begin as angles of vision on the mystery of grace—grace seen in first act

ers" (*fidelium*) is admittedly hard to see, so long as one thinks of faith in the technical sense made familiar during the struggle against the Reformation, that is, as an act or disposition of intellectual assent to revealed propositions, considered in abstraction from any "formation" by love (so that faith in this technical sense may be either *fides charitate formata* or *fides informis*). But I think my terminology will appear quite appropriate when one takes 'faith' in the richer, Pauline sense.

As I understand St. Paul's *pistis*, it is man's rightful reaction to the whole divine message. So, insofar as that message contains matters of mysterious fact ("I and the Father are one"; "As the Father has sent me, so I send you," etc.), *pistis* is indeed assent to the propositions picking out these facts; but insofar as the message contains promises ("Ask and it shall be given you"), consolations ("Fear not, I have overcome the world"), commands ("Love one another, as I have loved you"), and instructions ("When you pray, pray like this: Our Father . . ."), the response called *pistis* is trusting the promise, feeling the consolation, obeying the command, and carrying out the instructions. Thus prayer, hope, intercession, asceticism, and all the other spiritual "exercises" are acts of *pistis*. So of course we are justified by *pistis*! Moreover, from this perspective, the narrower and more technical sense of faith emerges not as a falsification of St. Paul's sense but as a penetration to the root of it. Assent to the revealed facts is utterly fundamental. Why *should* I trust Jesus's promises, take His consolations, obey His commands, or follow His instructions, unless I accept intellectually that He *is* God with us, and that He commissioned these Apostles, who provide further facts, promises, commands, etc.?

¹¹ [1983], pp. 143-151.

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as causal influx *ex parte Dei*, grace seen in second act as dynamism to fervent love, and grace seen thirdly as begotten of faith and of free cooperation *ex parte hominis*.

In the first perspective, as divine causal influx, grace is incorporative configuration to Christ; the Church emerges (with or without including her Head) at maximum width and as an immense concatenation of persons ordered by degree of Christ-conformity; Mary emerges as the highest created member in this ordering, the *caput secundarium* or *collum*, symbolizing the Church by virtue of her full and exemplary exhibition of this Christ-conforming quality which constitutes the Church.

In the second perspective, as unfolding dynamism, grace is fervent yearning to possess Christ more fully, to serve Him, and to share Him with others; the Church emerges this time without her divine Head, standing overagainst Him as His Spouse, at a width best taken to begin with Mary herself, and under the aspect just described as the *ecclesia credens*; Mary now emerges as the prototype and supreme moral example in the Church, the "heart of the Mystical Body."

Lastly, in the third perspective, as begotten of human cooperation by faith, grace is Christ engendered in the soul as in a mother's womb and growing there as at a mother's breast; the Church emerges at lowest altitude (*ecclesia militans*) and narrowest width (*ecclesia ex latere Christi*), under the aspect described above as the *ecclesia ministrans* (for the ministering Church is the maternal Church, bearing and nurturing children with her Sacraments—children to whom she has given new birth in Christ through baptism, the Sacrament flowing as water from Christ's opened side and, as the Church's ministerial act, bringing Christ to birth in us by bringing us to birth in Him—children, too, to whom she gives continual nourishment by her other Sacraments, especially the Eucharist). Mary now emerges as the Mother also, but in a way which transcends the maternity of the Church; by her divine Maternity she is no longer in the Church but above it, in this perspective, having given birth to the Church's Head; her virginal Maternity stands to the Church's virginal maternity as higher analogue and archetype.

So much for the three perspectives and what unifies them. I

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also said that something orders these perspectives. Mary has that fullness of grace whereby she is a type of the Church in the first perspective, and has that radiance of charity whereby she is its type in the second perspective, only *because* she is to be the Mother of God and hence is to transcend the Church in the third perspective. So the third perspective is prior to the others in the order of explanation. This point turns out to have great importance.¹²

I.

Having reviewed the conclusions reached in previous papers, I am ready to explore a new issue of direct relevance to the present paper. I wish to focus on the Immaculate Conception, to see what special contribution this mystery makes to each of the typological perspectives. I want to see what new thing it tells us, not only about Mary but also about the sinlessness of the Church.

To begin again with the first perspective, grace is a conformity to Christ which incorporates us into Him. The Immaculate Conception is a special condition of this grace. What is special about it? Fundamentally, it is special in its mode of conferral. Upon no other created person is grace conferred directly by God in the first instant of conception. From this characteristic there follows a second: a preservative character. This grace preserves the Blessed Virgin from all stain of original sin. Now, what is the point of a grace which preserves someone from original sin? Why would a grace be conferred in such a way as to do that? The answer can only be that the person receiving this grace is to mark a break with the old Adam, a decisive and irreversible turning toward a New Adam. So the special light which the Immaculate Conception brings to our first perspective is this: Mary's fullness of incorporative, Christ-conforming grace is now seen as *supreme configuration to the New Adam*.

But what, in general, is an Adam? As we all know, 'Adam' and 'Eve' are not proper names but theological epithets. 'Adam' denominates an individual in relation to a "many" (Romans 5);

¹² [1983], pp. 152f.

an Adam somehow finds a universal order of human beings who come from him and depend upon him. 'Eve' denominates an individual who, vis-à-vis this "many," stands on a unique footing *with* the Adam: she is the only one whose origin is wholly from him, the only one whose love for him is that of a spousal contemporary or *socia*, the only one who then cooperates with him in giving origin to the "many." These three traits of an Eve, not surprisingly, correspond closely with our three perspectives on grace, Mary, and Church, to the first of which I now return.

Mary's grace is supreme configuration to the New Adam. As the old Eve was formed and derived from the old Adam's flesh more totally than any other human being, so Mary is formed and derived from the New Adam's spirit more totally than any other human being. Thus, at the first instant of her conception, she is already the New Eve in first act. Under her supremacy in this regard there descends and spreads the whole panoply of the "many," the Church, a new mankind likewise configured to the New Adam and likewise derived from Him, but less immediately so and to lesser degrees.

Is the Church, then, sinless in this perspective? Yes, because grace, the underlying reality which, in its various degrees, constitutes the Church in this regard, banishes sin as light dispels darkness. The New Mankind is a kingdom of light, a communion of saints. Whoever stands in this kingdom and this communion stands somewhere in a "great chain" of sanctity.¹³

¹³ Of course, when one takes the Church at narrower width, she emerges as professing a detailed creed and gifted with definite Sacraments, thanks to which grace can be sacramental and can be accompanied by certain distinctive beliefs and by certain definite "characters"—beliefs and characters which are also Christ-conforming, but in a quite different way from grace itself. The presence of these beliefs and characters can then form a new and more inflexible frontier between the Church, as a visible polity, and the world's many polities—inside of which frontier a new and surprising possibility emerges. It is the possibility of a person possessing one or more of these characters, with an intellectual faith, yet lacking sanctifying grace because of serious, post-baptismal sin. Thanks to his "dead" (inactive) faith and the character(s), such a person belongs to the Church; he is officially a "member." Does his sin also enter into the Church? Does he stand *with* his sin in the "great chain" of sanctity?

In the second perspective, grace flowers in fervent love—love which does not seek its own but yearns to serve, and so waits to be commanded, and when commanded obeys. This agapistic actuation, in the case of a grace whose quiddity is supreme configuration to the New Adam, can only be some staggering charity and some fateful obedience concerning this New Adam and coinciding with His own loving obedience, whereby He willingly assumes the form of a servant and becomes obedient unto death. The actuation of Mary's grace can be seen as her whole conscious life, but it has a definite center or apex: I refer to her triumph of faith in pronouncing the *Fiat*. This is the word of obedience *par excellence*, which unties the disobedience of Eve. This is the assent to Life *par excellence*, which reverses Eve's seduction to death. So the special light which the Immaculate Conception sheds on our second perspective is this: Mary's exemplary and proto-typical charity is now seen as the shouldering of the vocation to be the new co-founder of the human race, to live the life of the *Socia Christi*. After her example in this regard, we the "many" are called to walk. As she actuated her grace, so we, though living out lesser destinies, must actuate ours. As grace is already the quiddity of the New Mankind in us, we have it in our power to give actuality to the New Mankind by walking in newness of life. Only by such acts can we actuate the Church in this perspective, for by no other means is the *ecclesia credens* given agency.

Is the Church, then, sinless in this perspective? Most certainly. For what constitutes the Church in this perspective is the ac-

No, I should answer. Just as a person is in Christ thanks only to the reality by which Christ is in him, so also a person is only in the chain of sanctity by virtue of the reality through which that chain is *in* him. Sin is not a reality in us by which the chain is present in us but, quite the opposite, a reality by which the Church as chain of sanctity is in some measure banished from us. In those of us who have received the Sacraments, grave sin banishes everything of the Church from us, except the indelible characters of these Sacraments (and, as a rule, our inactive faith). These remain in our souls as accusatory remnants, somewhat as ruins remain behind to accuse a plundering conqueror. The sins of us sinners are not in the Church, because these last remnants of the Church in us do not partake of our sin, do not coalesce with it, but resist its devastation and bear witness against it.

tuation of grace. From this angle, no act is really *of* the Church unless it is the kind of operation which grace yields. Sins cannot be acts of this Church, nor of the new man. This point has been made famous, of course, by Journet.¹⁴ It is also confirmed by a profound and simple truth of practical reason. As Jesus put it, you cannot serve two masters, God and the world. To “serve” in the relevant sense is to love. “For either you will love the one and hate the other, or else you will cling to the one and despise the other.” Love is a directedness of concern and attention, an *impulsus ad aliquid*, a turning to *face* one way or another. That is why *conversio ad Deum* must be *aversio a mundo*, and why acts flowing from the God-ward directionality must be clean different from acts flowing from the opposite one. Only the former are acts of the Church believing.¹⁵

The third perspective now completes the first two. Grace is Christ come-to-birth in ourselves and others by our cooperation, especially by the celebration of baptism. Mary’s grace is partly different but partly the same. Her grace does not arise *by* human cooperation initially. But this is wholly due to her uniqueness of origin as the New Eve, as already remarked in connexion with the first perspective. Rather, what is relevant for the third perspective is the fact that Mary’s grace is specially designed *for* her cooperation, for bringing Christ to birth in others, in the “many.” What gives her grace this design is again the fact that, thanks to the Immaculate Conception, it is in a special condition. It is a condition of total and preservative purification. Purification to what end? To make, I suggest, a pure womb—a new womb from which God, taking flesh, can make all things new.

¹⁴ Charles Journet, *L’Église du Verbe Incarné*, II (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1951), Excursus VI, “Sur l’Église sans tache ni ride,” pp. 1115-1129.

¹⁵ Many versions of the idea called “fundamental option” in moral theology are in opposition to these truths. They pretend that a person can be at once turned toward God in the core of his or her personality and yet turned toward the world by actions traditionally considered mortally sinful. Such ideas fail to do justice to the self-definitional role of intention, as manifested in ordinary free choices. For a superb critique, see Joseph M. Boyle, “Freedom, the Human Person, and Human Action,” in William E. May, ed., *Principles of Catholic Moral Life* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1980), pp. 237-266.

Why this sudden mention of the womb? Why this abrupt shift from the spirit to the flesh? It is explained by a comparison of the two Adams. According to the flesh, the old Adam exists *before* his Eve, and she is derived *from* him. According to the spirit, the old Adam again exists before his Eve, and she is derived from him. The same prepositions, the same relations characterize the New Adam and Eve according to the spirit but are reversed according to the flesh. It is still true according to the spirit, in other words, that Christ exists before His Eve and that she is derived from Him. But according to the flesh, she pre-exists Him, and He is derived from her. In the old Adamitic arrangement, the relations of precedence and origin flow the same way in both respects, flesh and spirit. In the new Adamitic arrangement, they flow in opposite ways. What causes this change between the two arrangements? A change in the causality, I submit, between flesh and spirit. In the old arrangement, the flesh of itself was to convey the spirit; the fleshly communication of human nature was to cause and carry the communication of grace. Hence the flesh of the old Adam had to have precedence and priority of origin in both respects. But in the new Adamitic arrangement, the flesh "profiteth nothing," and spiritual things are communicated spiritually. This does not mean that the flesh is discarded. *Caro est cardo salutis*. But it means that the flesh (now impure because of the Fall) can no longer convey the spirit *of itself* but must be purified *by* the spirit in order to become an *instrument* of the spirit. By virtue of the Immaculate Conception, Mary's flesh is the first appearance of this new instrumentality, wherein the flesh relinquishes its failed causal primacy and becomes the spirit's servant. Through her servant-flesh the true Master will come in the flesh in the form of a Servant.

Thus, as a preserving-pure of Mary's womb, the grace of the Immaculate Conception emerges in our third perspective as *capacitation for the New Adamitic Maternity*. The Maternity to which this singular Conception is ordered is to yield a "New Adam," which means a Person who bears within Himself an intrinsic relation to an entire humanity founded upon Him, concentrated in Him, and indebted to Him for supernatural goods. In this way, the Divine Maternity becomes the true motherhood

not just of a single God/Man but of all His correlative “many.” Mary is again New Eve, but this time as “mother of all the living.” I shall dwell on this point in a moment, but first an aside.

Notice how the Immaculate Conception has brought all three of our perspectives on grace, Mary, and the Church—all three typological perspectives—into a sudden and surprising unity. It is not the reductive unity of a single perspective, but the symbolic unity of a single and magnificent title: the New Eve. No wonder theologians have thought to find an implicit teaching of the Immaculate Conception in the Fathers of the Second Century, in their fascination with the Mary/Eve comparison. But in quick succession many Fathers also compared Eve and the Church. Taken from Adam’s side while he slept, the old Eve is a type of the Church taken from the New Adam’s wounded side, as He “slept” upon the Cross the sleep of death. So the Church is a new Eve, but there is a higher New Eve, taken from the New Adam according to the spirit, as we have seen. This New Eve, immaculately conceived, is an even higher type of the Church. Again, turning in love to Adam her spouse, the virgin Eve is a type of the virgin Church espoused as a spotless bride to the New Adam. So the *ecclesia credens* is a new Eve in spiritual love, but again there is one who, by supreme exemplarity in such love, is a higher New Eve and a higher type of the Church. And yet again, by giving birth of the living who are Adam’s children, the old Eve is a type of the Church which gives second birth to the spiritually living, the race and members of the New Adam. So the *ecclesia ministrans* is a new Eve in baptismal maternity, but yet again there is one who, by divine maternity, is a higher New Eve and a higher type of the same Church. In all three regards, there is one old Eve and two new ones. The old Eve was sinless in her origin from Adam’s side, but not sinless in her love, and in sin did she conceive his children. The New Eve who is Mary was sinless in her origin, sinless in her love, and sinless in her maternity. If she is the higher and better type of the Church, which is also New Eve, what shall we say of the Church? If freedom from all taint of sin is implicit in this title for Mary, why is it not implicit for the Church as well? We have seen that the Church *is* sinless in two perspectives; let us return to com-

plete our consideration of the third.

I had been making the point that, for Mary, to be mother of the New Adam is to be mother of a new humanity. In the prayerful epilogue to his *Mystici corporis*, Pius XII professed that Christ, while yet in the virgin's womb, was already head of the mystical body.¹⁶ His canonized predecessor, Pius X, had put the point this way:

Christ on the one hand assumed His flesh and, on the other hand, conjoined to Himself a spiritual body, formed of those who would believe in Him; as a result, one can say that Mary, carrying in herself the Savior, carried also all of those whose life the Life of Christ contained.¹⁷

These modern Popes were merely refining an idea which had already received its clear and classic formulation in the 12th Century: the idea that Mary is *mater Ecclesiae, quia eum peperit qui caput est Ecclesiae*.¹⁸ But the foundations of the idea are securely patristic. An Adam has a correlative "many"; the old Adam was not born, but the New one was, and His "many" were therefore born with Him. Quite striking is this passage from a Christmas homily of St. Leo the Great:

When we adore the origin of our Savior, it turns out that we are celebrating our own origin. In fact the generation of Christ is the generation of the Christian people, and the birthday of the Head is the birthday of the body. . . . For despite the distance in the succession of time, the whole number of the faithful, born of baptism, was

¹⁶ "Ipsa [Maria] fuit, quae Christum dominum, jam in virgineo gremio suo ecclesiae capitis dignitate ornatum, mirando partu utpote caelestis omnis vitae fontem edidit," *ActApS* 35 (1943): 247.

¹⁷ St. Pius X, *Ad diem illum*, 1904.

¹⁸ These words are from Berengaud's commentary on the Apocalypse, *PL* 17, 876D. An obscure figure, Berengaud has been dated from as early as the 9th Century to as late as the 12th. What he meant by these words was explained by him as follows: "ejus membra, quem Beata Maria virgo peperit, quotidie Ecclesia parit. Unus ergo masculus est, quem Virgo Maria peperit et Ecclesia quotidie parit: quia Christus cum omnibus membris suis unus Christus est," *ibid.*, 877A. Isaac of Stella has a similar remark, *PL* 194, 1862f.

crucified in the Passion with Christ, was raised again in His resurrection, was placed at the right hand of the Father in His ascension, and just so was born with Him in this nativity.¹⁹

Let us try to reflect on this idea. St. Paul tells us in Romans that we, in baptism, go down into the tomb with Christ; we die with Him to sin, in order that we might come out of those waters alive again, with the life of His resurrection. How can we join in His death in baptism, unless He already *at* His death has joined us with Himself on the Cross? And how can we die with Him on the Cross, unless He has already taken us into Himself at the Incarnation? This chain of inferences about union with Christ—from union at baptism, through union at Calvary, to union in Mary's womb—notice the two extremes which it connects: baptism and the womb of the Blessed Virgin. I need not remind the members of this Society how familiar to the Fathers, and how beloved, was the doctrine that baptism is the womb of the Church, the mystical womb in which the Church as a virgin mother virginally conceives and brings forth new children of God.

But what, now, is the relation between the Church's womb of baptism and Mary's womb of the Incarnation? If our inferences are correct, these two wombs, the one mystical, the other physical, are connected in such a way that the former is the continuation of the latter, exactly as Christ's mystical body is the continuation of His physical body through the medium of His grace. Is this conclusion in conflict with Paul? Must we choose between tomb and womb as the correct description of baptism? I think not, for the reason which St. Leo has shown us. If we are joined to Christ in His death, we are joined to Him in His birth. St. Paul reveals the former, in order that we may penetrate to the latter. As the whole transaction of Passion and redemption is begun and grounded in the Incarnation, so our baptismal entrance into the death and resurrection of Christ is grounded in His taking flesh. Our baptism is *ultimately* an entrance into that grounding event and hence into its locus—the pure womb

¹⁹ PL 54, 213 A B.

which inaugurates the New Adamitic arrangement, with its new relation between flesh and spirit—the servant womb which is the first dawn of flesh transformed into an instrument of the spirit. And surprisingly enough, we need not verify this conclusion by a long chain of inferences; we can take it directly from the authority of Irenaeus:

Himself pure, He purely opens the pure womb which regenerates men unto God, the womb which He Himself made pure.²⁰

See from Irenaeus how holy baptism has no other function but the function already begun and already exercised by Mary's womb—the womb which regenerates men unto God. See, then, how the Church's sacrament is but the continuation and prolongation of the Virgin's womb. How could it be otherwise, really? We must become His members there where He became our Head. We must acquire His spirit where He acquired our flesh. We must become heirs with Him, where He became a servant with us.

But see, also, something more. See the connection between our cleansing from sin (for baptism is the washing of regeneration) and *her* Immaculate Conception. For the Immaculate Conception is *how* God made that womb pure. Mary's womb and baptismal water therefore yield the same quality: sinlessness in all who are born therefrom. *Ex maculis immaculata* said St. Ambrose, words which pertain equally to the sinless Virgin and to the sinless Church, conceived in baptismal water, espoused to God in the one locus where divinity espouses humanity, and presented to the heavenly Bridegroom "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). Is the Church sinless in this third perspective—the Church which pours the waters of sinlessness and rises out of them? Of course. One feels like a fool to ask the question.

We have now completed our survey of the special contributions which the mystery of the Immaculate Conception makes to the three typological perspectives on Mary and the Church. It

²⁰ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV, 33, 11; PG 7, 1080.

was suggested at the end of my 1982 paper that this mystery would bring into stunning harmony the bewildering variety of Patristic comparisons between Mary and Eve and the soul and the Church. We have seen how it does so, yielding from every perspective the figure of the New Eve. It was also suggested at the end of that paper that the Immaculate Conception would tell in favor of the thesis that the Church is sinless, and we have seen how it does this, too. With reservations already expressed about "personification," we can otherwise accept this interesting statement by Semmelroth:

Wenn es nun das Wesen der Kirche ist, in Christus zu sein als sein mystischer Leib, dann muss diese Kirche wesentlich, seit dem ersten Augenblick ihres Bestehens also, ohne Erbsünde sein. Sie muss die ohne Erbsünde Empfangene sein. Im Mutterschoss der Gesamtmenschheit, die ihrerseits von der Erbsünde belastet in Gottentfremdung lebt, wurde die Kirche empfangen: ohne Erbsünde. Wie also sollte diese Kirche personifiziert sein können in einer Gestalt, die nicht ebenso ohne Erbsünde ist? Und zwar nicht von der Erbsünde befreit, nachdem sie mit ihr belastet war. Vielmehr kann die Kirche, deren Wesen ist, ohne Erbsünde zu sein, nur von einer Gestalt personifiziert sein, die vom ersten Augenblick ihres Daseins ohne Erbsünde, unbefleckt empfangen ist.²¹

II.

For Semmelroth, and also for Journet, the matter would now be settled: the Church is sinless. Their approach to ecclesiology makes it easy for them to speak of a heart, *Wesen*, or "essence" of the Church, to which the sinless Virgin, who realizes that same essence intensely, gives a clue. My approach to ecclesiology does not allow the luxury of so summary a procedure. Without denying that there are aspects of the Church more central than others and deeper than others, I do not know how to extract an "essence" from that set of diverse ordered sets which is my "model" of the Church overall. I have been compelled, therefore, to pay attention to the differences which separate one or

²¹ O. Semmelroth, *Urbild der Kirche* (2nd ed.; Würzburg, 1954), p. 151.

dering from another and one perspective from another; I have been compelled to conceive ecclesiological reflection as a work of coordination among these aspects, and to conceive ecclesiological theses as solutions to problems of coordination. For me, therefore, the question of whether we ought to say that the Church overall and *simpliciter* is sinless, is still open. Granted, the Church is sinless in all those aspects or configurations of which Mary is a type, but the Church has an important aspect of which Mary is not a type, and it is there, alas, that a sin of the Church is most easily conceived.

I refer, of course, to the Church militant as ordered by hierarchical office, living by what I have called vicarious actions of jurisdiction and magisterium and by their correlative actions of canonical obedience. Both locally and universally, the Church so considered is a structure of command, an "organization" committed to definite internal and external policies by the official actions of its leaders. That Mary is not a type of the Church in *this* aspect I have already argued in two previous contexts (not because anyone disagreed, but because this aspect needed to be better defined).²² This is the aspect in which the Church has an institutional frontier: it is a matter of law and of sociological fact whether someone is a "member in good standing" of the Catholic Church or not. This is the aspect, therefore, in which the Church's frontier does not run vertically through a man's heart, dividing his actions and leaving his sins outside, but horizontally through the population, dividing members from non-members, as a nation's *legal* frontier divides citizens from non-citizens, and therefore includes the whole member inside, sins and all. His sins may not be Catholic acts but they are acts of a Catholic. This is the aspect, therefore, in which a hierarchy, by an action at once official and sinful, can commit the Church to a wrongful policy. For neither Pope nor Council nor national Conference nor local Ordinary is impeccable, either in private life or in ecclesiastical capacity.

²² See [1983], pp. 133-4, where the context was personification in the sense of the question, "Who is the Church?" understood to mean, "Who can say, 'What I do, the Church does officially?'" ; see also [1983], pp. 141-2, where the context was vicarious authority or lieutenancy in the Church.

It is the latter capacity, of course, which matters most for the problem we are now discussing. Maybe 'rules' is too strong a word, but there are definite proprieties to be observed in the practice of ascribing faults to a large social body or polity. American citizens are routinely sinners, but no one would say, "America is sinful," if all he meant was that there are sinners in her citizenship. Nor would anyone take "France is sinful" to mean only that there are Frenchmen who sin. No one would make claims of this kind unless he wished to say something decidedly stronger. If one thought that America's duly elected leaders had committed the country to a wicked course of action (an unjust war, perhaps or domestic oppression) with the indifferent consent or rabid enthusiasm of the populace, as measured by polls and expressed in surveys, *then* one might say, "America is sinning." It would be an act of political criticism. Or if one thought that the French as a whole were sunk in a pattern of vices, and that practically all of them sinned on a kind of regular schedule, by national ethos and mutual connivance, *then* one might say, "France is sinful." It would be an act of social criticism. Or if one were a very high Tory, convinced that America's founding ideas were wicked insurrections against God and King; if one had followed Charles X into exile and had come to the view that after 1830 the whole French nation under successive regimes had ratified a pact of national apostasy—*then* one might say that one's country was sinful. It would be an act of ideological criticism. Well, the proprieties are the same when one speaks of the Church. The fact that the Church is "not without sinners," as Journet loved to say, is neither here nor there. For no one would say that the *Church* is sinful if he meant no more than that. (And if someone did say it on that basis, he would be convicted of speaking fatuously.) Lapses, failures, and stumbles—the isolated private sins of the Church's members and leaders—have never been the issue. What is the issue, then? Certain virulent enemies of the Church denounce her as sinful in the sense of ideological criticism, meaning that she is founded on a satanic corruption of the primitive Gospel or on obscurantist principles inimical to mankind; and this is indeed an issue, but an apologetical one, not ecclesiological, because

the charge is false. Other enemies of the Church denounce her as sinful in the sense of social criticism, meaning that Catholics are a rum lot; observations on the vices of certain Catholic countries, social classes, or ethnic enclaves are made to *imply* that the Church itself is a mischievous moral informant or, at least, a sorry moral influence. This charge is a more worrisome issue for ecclesiology, but it is still largely apologetical because the implication is fallacious.²³ There remains, however, the possibility of political criticism.

Wrong-doing of hierarchs in their official capacity—official sin—is no abstract topic for Catholics in recent decades. The imputations of it have multiplied alarmingly and from opposite sides of a politico-ecclesial spectrum. The Church has sinned, it is said, against the poor, by long alliance with the ruling classes, by compromises with oppression, by omission to struggle for peace and justice. The Church has sinned, it is said, against the faithful, by feckless toleration of heretical dissent, by careless installation of mendacious teachers and catechisms, by ruthless destruction of liturgical pieties. “Polarization” has virtually reached the point where the bishops cannot do anything, and cannot abstain from doing anything, without sinning in someone’s opinion. And while these opinions cannot all be right, it is difficult to be confident that they are all wrong.

It seems wise to concede that official sin is a *reality* in the Church in this hierarchical perspective, in which Mary is not a type. But the question remains whether such sin really does commit the Church, really renders such sin ascribable to the Church, even in this perspective. And the further question remains of how this perspective coordinates with the others (in which Mary is a type) to yield an overall judgment.

My answer begins with the latter question. How does the hierarchical perspective coordinate with the typological ones? I addressed this issue already in the 1983 paper, in terms which will now prove useful. In the first place, the hierarchical aspect com-

²³ This issue has been treated unforgettably by Newman in the chapter entitled “The Religious State of Catholic Countries No Prejudice to the Sanctity of the Church,” in his *Difficulties Felt by Anglicans*.

compares to the other three as the absence of Christ compares with His presence. In the one perspective, the hierarchy rules and teaches vicariously, as interim lieutenants for an absent public leader; in the other perspectives Christ is present, indwelling the Church through His grace and touching her through His sacramental causations. Christ's public absence is accidental for the Church, a matter of "a little while" and "again a little while." His interior presence is essential. So my first conclusion is that the hierarchical perspective is secondary in comparison to the typological ones, standing at one remove (at least) from the heart of the Church's mystery. This is what the Fathers of Vatican I, in rejecting Kleutgen's draft schema, did not recognize, while the Fathers of Vatican II recognized it clearly. In the second place, the hierarchy in its jurisdictional capacity (which is the only capacity relevant here) compares with the Christ-filled Church of the other three perspectives as a regulator or moderator compares to a living and on-going enterprise, not as an animator compares to inert matter. The *ecclesia credens* is already living and active. She takes verbs of action in her own right: she prays and hopes, fasts and serves. The *ecclesia ministrans* is likewise gifted with native action: she baptizes and chrismates, ordains and consecrates. This is why the residual reality of a living Church remains in the Orthodox East, despite the schism which has removed these sees from the concertating jurisdiction of the Vicar of Christ. The Eastern Churches are spiritual agents but are otherwise paralyzed in a juridical chaos. An overall power to teach afresh, moderate quarrels, prune excesses, and direct apostolates—this is what they lack, because it is the specific contribution of the jurisdictional hierarchy. So my second conclusion is that the official sins of this hierarchy, if such there be, are at most failures and mistakes of regulation, not actuations-in-sin of the social whole. This is where the analogy between the Church and a national state breaks down. The government is what gives a nation its whole agency as nation, and so the government's sins commit the nation to sin. The hierarchy does not give the Church its whole agency as Church but only a specific kind of agency, the kind whereby she can regulate her inner life and confront the State externally, on the stage of history, as a policy-

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making actor in her own right. The sinlessness of the Church in the three Marian perspectives cannot be compromised, therefore, over-ridden or undone by sins in the hierarchical perspective.

But now let us return to the earlier question: are these sins really sins *of the Church*, even when we confine the word 'Church' strictly to its meaning in the hierarchical perspective? We have already seen that they are not sins of the Church in the other perspectives, for somewhat the same reason that sins of the federal regulators are not sins of the industries which they regulate (if the reader will forgive so profane a comparison). But are they sins of the Church hierarchical? Are they sins of the regulating Agency as such? Or do they remain sins of the individual regulators, local bishops and bureaucrats?

Let us recall that the hierarchy as a whole is the vicarious agent of Jesus Christ. *He* remains the true Ruler of the Church; and even in His public absence, this title is no fiction. It is made a reality even in the jurisdictional/magisterial order by the instructions, the directives, the Gospel He has left behind Him. In secular affairs, when the sovereign departs, the orders he has left behind are at the mercy of his vicegerents, as several of the parables of Jesus remind us. So, to prevent this, the true Sovereign has made it impossible for His instructions to be destroyed, lost, mis-interpreted, or tampered with. The hierarchy as a whole, acting in the only ways in which it *can* act as a whole, is so protected by the gift of infallibility that it simply cannot pervert the doctrinal foundations for ecclesiastical policy. Policy depends upon dogma for its intellectual justification or rationale and upon faith in dogma for its motivation to be implemented or obeyed. Sinful policies have no justification in dogma, nor any motivational basis in the Faith. Therefore sinful policies can usurp only a precarious existence in the Church, groundless, fleeting, and local. The same is true for another reason. Portions of the hierarchy which sin are not only subject to rebuke and correction from sounder portions but are also subject to the corrective action of God, to Whom the *ecclesia credens* will be praying for deliverance, like an importunate woman. My answer then is that these sins cannot be ascribed to the Church as total

hierarchy, even if they are sins of the Pope, but remain local disturbances. For these reasons, I come by my own route to concur in the judgment of Journet. That the Church is sinless is a valid thesis of general ecclesiology.

But this thesis has an important opponent, whose argumentation we have not yet examined. Fr. Yves Congar, O.P., impressed as I am by the multiplicity of facets to the Church and distrustful of reductive unities, has concluded that, despite the Church's essential sanctity, the claim that the Church sins is somehow an important complementary truth.

III.

What exactly does Père Congar oppose to what I have said so far? It is not easy to tell. In fact, it is surprisingly difficult. Just when one thinks one has understood the thought of Congar, it eludes one's grasp. It has a quicksilver quality. Let me illustrate.

On the one hand, he says that he and Journet are not really in conflict:

Nous avons vu qu'une des affirmations les plus répétées de Mgr Journet est que l'Église est sans péché, bien qu'elle ne soit pas sans pécheurs. Nous admettons cet énoncé: il est exact si l'on s'en tient à une considération formelle de l'Église.²⁴

That there is nothing wrong with such "formal consideration" Congar had just conceded:

Le point de vue formel est excellent en théologie: il fait la force de saint Thomas et de ses commentateurs.²⁵

But its excellence does not exclude there being another kind of view or consideration, which is also appropriate:

²⁴ Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P., "Chronique d'ecclesiologie," *Bulletin Thomiste*, 8 (1947-1953): 1211-1232; reprinted in *Sainte Église, Études et approches ecclésiologiques* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1964), p. 667.

²⁵ *Sainte Église*, loc. cit.

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Mais l'Église est un tout concret et, si on la prend comme telle, on peut parler d'elle autrement.

In particular, one can speak of her as a social body compromised by the sins of its members. A series of texts from the Fathers authorizes this other mode of speech. One of Père Congar's favorite exhibits is from St. Augustine's *Retractationes*:

Ubi cumque autem in his libris commemoravi Ecclesiam non habentem maculam aut rugam, non sic accipiendum est quasi iam sit, sed quae praeparatur ut sit, quando apparebit etiam gloriosa. Nunc enim propter quasdam ignorantias et infirmitates membrorum suorum habet unde quotidie tota dicat: Dimitte nobis debita nostra.²⁶

But Journet had also cited and acknowledged such texts and had agreed that it was sometimes allowable to speak of the Church

selon une notion "empirique, phénoménale, descriptive, statistique,"²⁷

according to which notion Congar professes to have written his own efforts to distinguish

dans l'Église un aspect où on ne peut parler de péché, et un aspect où on le peut.²⁸

So it appears at first blush as though Congar and Journet not only agree as to the *existence* of a conceptual difference between

²⁶ *Retract.* II, 18, where the context points to the Donatist quarrel. Congar cites this text in a review of Vonier's *The Spirit and the Bride* in *RSPT* 25 (1936): 763-769; reprinted in *Sainte Église*, pp. 495ff. *À propos* of the fact that there are liturgical acts of the Church in which she prays for forgiveness, I would observe in the spirit of Journet that making the prayer is an act of repentance and so is an actuation of grace and so is an act of the Church, even while the sins repented were, during their commission, outside the being of the Church. In other words, an inference from the fact that the Church repents to the conclusion that the Church sins is invalid.

²⁷ *Sainte Église*, p. 667, citing Journet's review of Congar's *Vraie et fausse réforme* in the Spring, 1952, number of *Nova et Vetera*.

²⁸ *Sainte Église*, loc. cit.

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the Church “taken formally” and the Church “taken in its concrete historical reality” but also agree as to the *nature* of that difference. And it is thanks to this two-fold agreement, so it appears, that Congar can side with those who see no contradiction between his own position and Journet’s:

Entre la position de Mgr Journet et la nôtre, il n’y a donc pas de contradiction, le recenseur de *L’Ami du Clergé* a eu raison de le noter (1952, p. 523). Nous reconnaissons que, à parler formellement, Mgr Journet a raison.²⁹

On the other hand, it quickly turns out that the second part of the agreement is illusory. Congar and Journet do not really agree at all as to the nature of the conceptual difference. Here their conflict is first of all practical.

Faced with a duality of valid concepts, such that 1) the Church considered this way is sinless and 2) the Church considered that way is sinful, the theologian is obligated to assign a place to each consideration—a *Sitz im Leben*, if you will. In what context, for what purpose, in what round of pastoral duty, is the one or the other consideration helpful, appropriate, to the point? Journet evidently thinks that his “formal” proposition of sinlessness, so tirelessly repeated by him, is appropriate for general consumption by the faithful. They are to love, defend, and meditate upon the Church first and foremost in her “formal,” theological splendor. Only secondarily, as special need may arise, are they permitted to think of their Holy Mother in a way that is more sociological than theological, a way wherein to be “concretized” is to be “compromised,” that is, to be “concretized” in each generation of her inadequate, weak, aberrant members and leaders is for the Church to be “compromised” by their weaknesses, languishing under them and sharing in them. Well, Congar thinks just the opposite. The talk of sinlessness in formal principles and *rationes* is for the seminary lecture-hall, he thinks. The real world, with its real challenges, demands the frank admissions of the “concrete” mode of speech:

²⁹ Ibid.

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Journet répète sans se lasser la formule: l'Église n'est pas sans pécheurs, mais elle est elle-même sans péché. Ceci est parfaitement exact si l'on considère l'Église en ses principes et dans sa pure raison formels. Et certes, la science théologique se doit d'en parler ainsi. Il nous semble cependant que, si elle veut rejoindre de très réels problèmes, *qui sont posés par les hommes d'aujourd'hui*, elle ne peut en rester là.³⁰

In other words, if theology wants to have an influence outside of classrooms and choir stalls, if it wants to address the problems of real people, it must learn to speak the concrete idiom of a sinful Church. The Fathers have pointed the way, and this is what the faithful of today, who think in terms of historical realism, not abstract metaphysics, need to hear.

However, this practical disagreement is only the tip of an iceberg; hidden beneath it is a much larger, theoretical disagreement. When he reverses Journet's sense of priorities, Congar is not saying that an *engagé* theology must learn to speak un-theologically. It is not Congar but Journet who holds that the "empirical, phenomenal, descriptive" notion of the Church, according to which she sins, is sub-theological. Congar disagrees. Congar thinks that his patristic catena gives this "larger" and more "concrete" notion a standing inside theological science itself. Were current theology to recover this notion, it would not be stooping beneath itself, nor going outside itself, but forwarding itself:

³⁰ Review of volume II of Journet's *Église du Verbe Incarné* in *RSPT* 37 (1953): 748-769; reprinted in *Sainte Église*, p. 622. The emphasis in the last sentence is Congar's, and I think it does much to illuminate the context of his concerns. These "men of today" who were urgently raising the issue of sin in the Church—who are they likely to have been but the then-energized laity of the French Catholic Left, still smarting perhaps over the Worker-Priest movement, and ready to see real "sin" in the Church's long alliance with the forces of the Right? As is well known, Congar's theology of lay action went far beyond the then-standard models of "Catholic Action," giving to the laity a wide freedom for "concrete" political options. But I should be surprised if Père Congar is pleased with all the fruits which have fallen from this tree in the last thirty years. As I remarked above, once the laity is ecclesio-politicized in a Right/Left pattern, the accusations of political "sin" can only multiply in the bosom of the Church.

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Nous reconnaissons que, à parler formellement, Mgr Journet a raison. Mais il nous paraît bon de pousser l'explication théologique jusqu'au sens plus large du mot "Église," qui n'est pas seulement celui du langage de la rue, pas même seulement celui des questions posées par nos contemporains, mais celui d'une large tradition patristique et même théologique.³¹

So the two men disagree profoundly. They are at odds over the nature of the difference between the two concepts of the Church which they both use. For Journet, the difference is between a theological concept and a non-theological one. For Congar, it is between two theological concepts. Why do I call this disagreement profound? Not only because much is at stake, but because one must descend into quite deep issues in order to see who is right.

For example, Journet will not win his point by observing that Fathers and Doctors have as much right to speak loosely at times as the rest of us do, because Congar can agree completely. Nor will it help him to insist that theology must sift, evaluate, rank, and screen its data, if it is to form the concepts which are really right. For again Congar can agree. Clearly, we do not make progress until we find out what makes a concept native and "proper" to theology.

We are confronting here the problem of *concept formation* in theological discourse. To do it justice would take us far beyond our present interests, but a few remarks will be in order. The most important thing to get clear about theology is that it is an explanatory enterprise; for once we agree to this, a very considerable body of literature on the nature and requirements of explanation becomes pertinent. Now, in any explanatory discourse we find two things: a field of phenomena to be explained, and an ontology (a set of ultimate or relatively ultimate entities) in terms of which the explanations of these phenomena are to be given. In chemistry, for example, the phenomena are the observed behaviors of certain substances; the ontology consists of atoms, molecules, and their properties. In theology, the phe-

³¹ *Sainte Église*, p. 667.

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nomena include a social body called the Church, along with religious experiences, non-natural events, authoritative texts, etc., while the ontology consists of divine Persons, angels, hidden causal actions, internal graces, the metaphysical components of creatures, such as human souls, etc. A concept is "proper" in such a discourse, "scientific" in it, when it has explanatory power. In order to have such power, the concept must define something in the field of phenomena in terms of something in the ontology of the science in question. Thus, a scientific concept of iron is one that defines this familiar substance in terms of atomic properties. A scientific concept of the Church is one that defines this familiar social body in terms of divine Persons, actions, graces, or whatever. More of that in a moment. Because scientific concepts thus link the seen with the unseen, so to speak, their formation involves hypotheses, and rival hypotheses yield rival concepts. A theological system is built upon concepts formed in this way, that is, upon definitions debated, defended, and settled. It is important to realize, however, that what allows room for rival concepts, and hence rival theories, within the same science is not just the uncertainty of the unseen but the need to make decisions (controvertible, revisable, defensible decisions) about the seen, the phenomena. Concept formation involves decisions about what is central and what peripheral, or what is paradigmatic and what defective, or what is essential and what accidental, or what leads to fruitful understanding and what misleads, in the phenomena being defined. These decisions compose an approach to the data, an evaluative sifting of them; and every theological system presupposes such a sifting.

Look for a moment at Journet's ecclesiology. Journet inherits and furthers a definite Thomistic system, whose concepts were formed on a particular and definite way of carrying out this sifting. According to this way, the communication of supernatural life and direction, from Christ the Head and Vine, to His members, by the working of the Holy Spirit, in the form of internal graces, is what is taken as central, paradigmatic, essential, and illuminating about the phenomenon called the Church. An "essence" incompatible with sin is thus established, and the sinlessness of this phenomenon, insofar as it is really Church, then fol-

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lows as a corollary. Differently stated: texts like John 15 and I Corinthians 12 are assigned a definitional role; then, with the help of accepted truths about sin and grace, a text like Ephesians 5:27 is given the status of a corollary. Texts apparently conflicting with this corollary (whether in Scripture, like Apoc. 2:4-5, or in the Fathers) must now be dealt with. Either they must be taken to *falsify* the conceptualization just sketched, requiring it to be revised somewhere, or else they must be taken as non-germane. Thomistic procedure adopts the latter course: the contrary line of texts is read as non-germane because, though seeming to speak of the Church, they do not really refer to that Entity as such as sinful but refer collectively to Christian *people*, among whom there are sinners. The offending data are thus neutralized, sifted out.^{31a}

^{31a} To refer to the Church *as such* is always to refer to some ordered set of people, so that the ordering relation itself and whatever finds it is part of what one is referring to; to refer collectively to the Christian people, however, is to refer to an unordered set of people, collected simply on the basis of having what it takes to be called a "Christian," which may be nothing more than a juridical or sociological trait. I discussed the difference between ordered and unordered sets in [1983], pp. 139f. We can now see its relevance to the quarrel between Congar and Journet, and to wider quarrels as well.

An ordered set provides some basis for saying whether the sins of the persons ordered contribute to the ordering, or cohere with it, or contradict it. In the three typological perspectives, the Church emerged in each case as an ordered set, with an order so constituted that sin contradicted it. In the hierarchical perspective, the Church emerged as an ordered set to whose order sin could not contribute. *An unordered set gives us no such basis for judgment.* If we wish to exclude sin from an unordered set of Christians, our only resource will be to define 'Christian' so narrowly, or so ideally, that no sinners will belong to the set. Do the polemics of Puritan New England spring to mind, or the views of Montanus? Then we may recognize the tendency to view the Church as an unordered set—the set of true Christians—as a potent source of ecclesiological error. And the tendency to view the Church as an ordered set, so that sin can disappear from it without removing sinners, turns out to be an elementary principle of Catholicism.

As we have seen, the distinction between ordered and unordered sets is a tool which Congar and Journet did not possess in their altercation. They relied instead on the scholastic distinction between formal and material senses of a proposition, which I am about to explain in the text above. I observe here that there is a connection between their tool and mine. The order present in an or-

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This last move does not satisfy Congar; yet he seems to accept the technique used to make it. The technique to which I refer is the application to these data of the *logical* distinction between the formal and material senses of a proposition. As this distinction may seem obscure or unacceptably subtle to some readers, let me say a word about it. A certain body of people, organized in a certain way and marked by certain influences, form the referent of the term 'Church.' When I point to these people and say, "This is the Church," I bring this referent under the description, 'the Church,' just as, when I point to Mr. Reagan and say, "This is the President," I bring under that description the man who is its current referent. Now consider the statement, "Necessarily, the President is a U.S. citizen." Read *formaliter*, this is a true statement about the President "as such," whoever he may be, because U.S. citizenship is a prerequisite of the office, legally defined. Read *materialiter*, this is a false statement about Ronald Reagan, the man who happens to be the President, but whose defection to another nation and citizenship is perfectly possible. The case is similar with the statement, "Necessarily, the Church is sinless." Read *formaliter*, this is a true statement (our two authors seem to agree) about the Church "as such," whoever its current membership may be, because sinlessness is a gift and consequence of the organized influences which (by Journet's definition) render any body of persons the Church. Read *materialiter*, however, it is a false statement about a current slice of humanity, the slice which happens to be the Church, but whose defection into sin, whether singly or collectively, is perfectly possible.³²

dered set is its "structural moment" and so enters into the concept of that set and yields "formal" truths about whatever the concept applies to. But the scholastic distinction covers many other kinds of cases as well and hence is a dangerously blunt instrument in the use we are examining.

³² In other words, formal truths are based on the *sense* of a given description (Let us call it *D*.) and on what follows logically from the sense of *D*, regardless of what or who happens to be the referent of *D*; but material truths are based on other descriptions, logically independent of *D*, which happen *also* to be applicable to what happens to be the referent of *D*.

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Thus, as I said, the distinction in logic seems to be applicable to the case at hand. But one must observe that logic is one thing, and metaphysics another. Metaphysicians like to understand “formal” and “material” hylomorphically. They like to associate descriptions applicable to a certain referent with “forms” inherent in that referent, so that the predicates in the above statements become true of their subjects “by virtue of the form.” Whereupon, since “matter” receives form imperfectly and yields with the form a “concrete” or “composite” whole, the same predicates can fail to be true of their subjects “concretely” or “by virtue of the matter.” It is clear that Journet tends to understand his assertion about the Church’s formal sinlessness in this metaphysical manner (indeed, the hylomorphism of his ecclesiology is relentless); Congar’s attitude is less clear. He accepts the claim that the Church is sinless “formally speaking”; whether he accepts it as a logical matter or as a metaphysical one, he does not say, though his decision to characterize his own view of the Church as “concrete” and “larger” suggests that he shares the metaphysical tendency. But he need not. As my examples show, the paradox about the Church is easily matched by a paradox about the U.S. Presidency, i.e., with a case where there is no “form” at all *in rerum natura*. So if he wanted to, Congar could retain his agreement about “formal” sinlessness with Journet and yet set aside much or all of Journet’s hylomorphism. What he cannot do, so long as he retains that agreement, is avoid the logical/conceptual issue. For the formal mode of speaking is grounded in the concepts chosen.

Put it this way. I have just sketched Journet’s position, to show how his contention that the Church is sinless follows “formally” from his concept of the Church and is sustained by his procedure for sifting out non-germane data. I have also said that Congar has a disagreement with Journet over the status of his own, more “concrete” concept of the Church; he thinks it is properly theological and hence fruitful for explanatory purposes. But the disagreement cannot end there. Journet’s position simply does not leave any room for a second theological concept. In order to make room for it, Congar has got to quarrel with something in what I have sketched above. Does he in fact

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do so? Where does he do so? This is where the famous Dominican is especially hard to follow. He seems to want incompatible things: he wants to agree that Journet's Thomistic conceptualization is correct ("à parler formellement, Mgr Journet a raison"), and yet he wants to hold that a conflicting catena of texts is theologically germane. But if they are germane, they falsify the Thomistic system, require a revision of it somewhere, and hence offer a different way to "parler formellement," in which Journet will not be right. In other words, when one is speaking formally and when one is not depends entirely upon what *concepts* one has formed in theology. Any time a concept of the Church is shown to have explanatory power, it will count as a properly theological concept and will yield its own way of speaking "formally." Congar, it seems, does not wish to press his own concept of the Church in this direction; he wishes it to remain "concrete"; he wishes to derive nothing formal from it. Yet he wishes it to do an explanatory job, to make sense of texts which Journet's concept had to sift out of the data. But if it does that job, it ought to be a better concept, better grounded in the data; and if Congar's concept is better, why should *it* not determine what is "formally" true of the Church? This is what I find hard to follow. Is Congar prepared to offer a rival conceptualization of the Church or is he not? From what I have quoted so far, of course, it appears that he is not. But there is more. Let us see how it unfolds.

First, Congar sets up an opposition between revealed mystery and conceptual system:

Pourtant, même pour ceux qui, comme c'est notre cas, partagent la confiance de Journet dans la conceptualisation et le raisonnement, il reste parfois un léger malaise. D'une part, en effet, plusieurs conceptualisations, plusieurs systematisations sont possible à partir du même donné, quand ce donné est transcendant comme est celui de l'Économie divine de la Révélation et de l'Église . . .³³

³³ *Sainte Église*, p. 666.

Who can disagree? Systems come and go, the data remain. Systems are human efforts; the data are divine. But what is the point of this remark for Congar? Abstractly, there would be three possibilities. Some writers have made this kind of remark out of a pious agnosticism: no system is much good, they were saying, because human reason is powerless before the things of God. Congar rules out this interpretation for himself; he says he shares Journet's confidence in reasoning and systematization. Secondly, other writers have made such a remark in defense of theological relativism: every system is good, they say, but each in its own time, relative to its own horizon of culture, its own conceptual matrix, or its own historical problematic. Congar is not quite so clear about this possibility, but he *seems* to rule it out; he does not say that Journet is right merely on his own systemic premises; he says that Journet is right *simpliciter*, in a formal mode of speaking which has permanent, non-relative validity, but to which Congar wishes to oppose another mode of speaking, more concrete, but no less permanently valid. So relativism does not seem to be the point. Thirdly, still others have contrasted datum and system in the interests of scientific progress: the currently dominant system is not the only one compatible with the data, they say, because in fact it ignores significant data and therefore ought to be replaced by something better.

Two pieces of evidence suggest that this last is Congar's real meaning. The first is a methodological remark of his:

Journet a fait un grand effort d'information, un effort qui suscite souvent l'admiration. Mais son propos de théologien spéculatif intervient parfois intempestivement dans un domaine qui est celui de l'histoire. Se demander en quel sens tel auteur a dit ceci ou cela revient alors à se demander, dans l'absolu et l'intemporel de la spéculation, en quel sens l'énoncé en question est juste ou n'est pas juste . . . L'exposé en reçoit une grande cohésion spéculative, mais aux dépens, peut-être, d'une certaine richesse venant de l'histoire comme telle, qui appartient aussi à la théologie.³⁴

³⁴ Ibid.

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Admittedly, certain expressions here could lead one to think that Congar's point is anti-speculative, as though only the method of "positive" or "historical" theology were sound. But this interpretation would put Congar in conflict with his own previously-cited statements. It is therefore better to read him as saying something like what follows.

One must not allow one's system to distort the data. The historical exegete must depose what the data are, and the speculative theologian impoverishes his own work if he does not await and accept that deposition.³⁵ For, through the exegete, history provides to the theologian a richness of Biblical and Patristic treatments of the great mysteries, a dynamic pattern of changing problematics, and a wealth of stubborn facts—data to which systematizers have all too often failed to do justice, sometimes by outright ignorance of the facts, sometimes by overlooking shifts of problem (and so assigning to independent pieces of data a systematically convenient but historically false mutual relevance), and sometimes by superimposing upon the many treatments a narrow filter of selectivity. Thus, no matter how agreeably Thomistic an ecclesiology may be, it cannot be acceptable unless it avoids these mistakes. Now here we have a catena of texts, such as the one cited above from St. Augustine, in which the taint of sin is frankly acknowledged in the Church as we find her in history. When the theologian confronts this statement, he must not hold his system immune from it, asking only what acceptable sense *his* system can give to it, deciding that that sense must be an informal, "descriptive" one, and thereby legislating how Augustine must have spoken here. No, he must first interrogate the datum itself in its historical reality. Did Augustine intend to speak theologically in this passage or not? Did he intend to complete or to balance his general ecclesiological views by this passage, or did he merely lapse from his general and

³⁵ I agree with this point, of course, but I would add that historical exegesis is likely to be crude unless it is informed from within by a serious theological competence, and that such competence presupposes a speculative equipment. In theology, if I may paraphrase Kant, speculation without exegesis is empty; exegesis without speculation is blind.

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steady conviction (e.g., for the sake of momentary convenience in the Donatist debate)? These are questions for the historical exegete. But Journet proceeds in the wrong way, and to that extent his system must be revised. Such I take to be Congar's point in the above remark.

My construal is confirmed, I think, by a second piece of evidence, in which Congar offers the very direction in which, he believes, his catena of texts demands a revision of Journet's system. It is the direction of eschatology:

Notre seconde remarque porte sur un point que nous croyons décisif, celui de l'eschatologie. C'est la grande redécouverte de ces dernières années en exégèse . . . Or, il est assez notable que Mgr Journet, non seulement en parle peu, mais qu'il en évite jusqu'au mot, auquel il préfère "anagogique" . . . [Journet] envisage l'eschatologie par le côté où elle est déjà présente . . . Pour Journet l'Église est vraiment le Royaume, mais elle l'est "à l'état pérégrinal et crucifié." Il ne voit pas assez que ces deux adjectifs dévorent la vérité du substantif, car le Royaume, s'il comporte vraiment une phase terrestre où il commence germinalement dans l'Église, implique dans sa pleine notion la résurrection des corps, la gloire et la plénitude des dons de l'Esprit. Cela, à coup sûr, Journet ne le nie pas . . . Mais, à notre avis, l'une des grandes acquisitions du renouveau des études bibliques (et patristique) a été de mieux nous faire comprendre que l'Église est toute tendue vers le Royaume eschatologique; que son mouvement s'explique par son terme; que cette situation d'entre-deux, entre le déjà advenu et le encore attendu, marque profondément l'être même de l'Église et explique un grand nombre de ses caractères.³⁶

In this light, the text from St. Augustine (and many others like it), far from showing a loose manner of speaking, shows deep theoretical significance: eschatology provides a new conceptual framework, within which that significance can emerge. The eschatological arrangements of God

ont des données propres qui ne se réalisent pas dans l'Église terrestre, sinon en quelques anticipations partielles et momentanées . . .³⁷

³⁶ *Sainte Église*, pp. 667-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 622.

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and perfect sinlessness, no doubt, is among them. Journet applies Ephesians 5:27 "purely and simply" to the Church in its earthly condition;³⁸ but Congar's line of contrary texts can now be seen not as descriptive/sociological lapses from this application but as offering a theological *rival* to it, an eschatological understanding in which the Fathers are speaking of the Church herself in the fullness of her mystery but

comme n'étant pas encore sans tache ni ride.³⁹

So, between the Church and the Kingdom there yawns a "pas encore," a "not yet." The Church is continuous with the Kingdom, of course, but there is such a difference in properties between the one and the other, that one cannot speak of one Reality in two states; one must acknowledge two realities—two, in the sense in which a motion and its term are two.

All of this is perfectly clear. The Kingdom of God is sinless; the Church is not; yet she is a vector towards sinlessness. The Church is a movement of life, and as this life is one of love toward God, the Church lives by a movement *away* from sin. Impurities she has, and must have, in this world; but they do not alter her essential dynamic. Moreover, we can now appreciate the Church's *essential* temporality, an appreciation at which Congar hints, when he complains that for Journet,

le temps ne serait, à la limite, que le cadre d'existence de réalités de soi intemporelles.⁴⁰

When one sees the Church as a movement towards the Kingdom, time and historicity cease to be a mere framework around her and become intrinsic determinants of her.

Have we grasped it at last—the clear and final position of Fr. Congar? I am afraid not. There are so many difficulties with this eschatological position, when it is taken as a conceptualization

³⁸ Ibid., p. 661.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 666f.

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rival to Journet's, that Congar seems to draw back from it. Before observing these retrogressions, let us remind ourselves of what the difficulties are.

First, it is all very easy for St. Augustine, St. Bernard, and all the rest of us, to say that the Church, imperfect now, will be perfect hereafter. Who can deny it? But to conceptualize this difference in terms of a tension between "Church" and "Kingdom," to erect a general doctrine around that pair of terms—well, the hard facts of exegesis are simply not favorable. In the parables of Jesus, it is often enough the "Kingdom" which is portrayed in non-eschatological guise: a mustard seed which grows in time, a net holding a mixed catch of fish, a field sown with good and bad plants. It is the "Kingdom" which awaits the judgment and the harvest! Vice-versa, in the epistles, it is not the Kingdom but the "Church" which, already as handiwork of the apostles, is being presented to Christ as "spotless," notwithstanding St. Augustine's occasional opinion to the contrary. If, in most of the works of the Fathers, the Church tends to absorb traits of the Kingdom, it is for the simple reason that the Biblical data do not suffice to keep them apart. Important documents, too, of the ordinary magisterium, by their choice of words, make nonsense of the dichotomy Congar is trying to build upon.⁴¹ One cannot conclude too much, of course, from the vagaries of a living, shifting terminology; a further conceptual analysis is required. Still—and this is the first difficulty—a proposed conceptualization in theology should not offer violence to the general tenor of the verbal facts.

⁴¹ I cannot resist citing this eschatological text from the Sixth Council of Toledo (mid-seventh century), in which I italicize portions embarrassing for Congar: "*Ecclesiam* quoque *catholicam* credimus *sine macula* in opere et *absque ruga* in fide corpus eius esse, *regnumque habituram* cum Capite suo omnipotente Christo Jesu, postquam hoc corruptibile induerit incorruptionem et mortale immortalitatem 'ut sit Deus omnia in omnibus.' Hac fide corda purificantur, hac haereses extirpantur, in hac *omnis Ecclesia collocata iam* in regno caelesti *et degens* in saeculo praesenti gloriatur, et non est in alia fide salus . . ." *D-Sch*, 493. Note that in the first sentence of this text, one and the same Church is both historical and eschatological: it is already immaculate and *will* reign. In the second sentence, one and the same Church is both historical and anagogical: spending time in this world, yet already installed in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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Secondly, a sound conceptualization must not only accord with the facts which support it but also make sense of the facts which seem to be against it. Now, suppose that already in NT times the main thrust of Christian teaching was as Journet would want it to have been: a preaching of the Church as immaculate mystery. Still, we all know how easy it is to think of the Church in human, sociological terms. Thus Journet's theory has no difficulty in explaining the existence of Congar's line of texts. But suppose the dominant message of primitive times was as the eschatological theory would want it to have been: the preaching of an impure Church standing in tension with a sinless Kingdom. Then, since this dichotomy would have been re-inforced empirically by our all-too-human experience, how are we to explain the emergence of the contrary line of texts, those which support Journet? I suppose that Protestant scholars, untroubled by the authority of Fathers and Councils, and sometimes delighted to exhume an alleged stratum of Christian teaching older than (and in conflict with) familiar Catholic doctrines, could meet the difficulty: they could say it was by confusion, by Hellenizing corruption of the primitive kerygma, that transcendent features of the Kingdom became attached to the Church; it was part of a general movement of thought, whereby the historical/eschatological categories of early Christianity were distorted into the static/anagogical categories of Patristic Catholicism. But this solution amounts to making important portions of Patristic Christianity serious blunders. Congar evidently declines to take so radical a line.

Thirdly, if one enters carefully into the mental universe of ancient Christian thinkers—in particular, if one takes care to set aside modern notions of history—it is surprising how little distinction can be maintained between anagogy and eschatology. Christ rose from the dead in order to be raised up to the right hand of the Father; there, crowned as in the vision of Daniel 7, he reigns as messianic Lord (Acts 2:36). His rule is thus simultaneously a kingdom of Heaven (whence He reigns) and a kingdom given to the Saints (His people on earth).⁴² By ruling in

⁴² Compare Daniel 7:27 with 1 Peter 2:9.

Heaven, He is able to assure that, so long as history exists, His Church will have a realization on earth, existing under the conditions of time, and from which those who die in Christ depart to be "with the Lord" (Phil. 1:23). But a day will come when time and history shall be no more. What will be the condition of the Church on that day? She will be then what Christ already is: risen, glorious, reigning, and rejoicing in the sight of the Eternal Father, a Kingdom without end. So the difference between Church and Kingdom, between now and then, is really measured by the difference between earth and Heaven. Christ's "now" in Heaven is the content of the Church's "then" beyond time. So there is no tension between looking up and looking ahead. The former does not need to replace the latter. The Church still looks ahead—the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come"—but she looks up in order to *see* what is ahead.⁴³ Indeed, where salvation history is concerned, the idea that things future are things above and may be seen there, far from being a Greek concept, is the fundamental premise of Jewish apocalyptic. Hence (to return to the point), Journet's anagogy is not so easily set into conflict with early Christian eschatology as Congar's case would seem to require. To be sure, there is a visible conflict between Journet's anagogy and the "rediscovered" sense of eschatology which has been prominent among certain exegetes, and which Congar praises. But it is at least open to question how far that rediscovered sense is a faithful portrayal of early eschatology and how far, on the contrary, it is a distortion created by projecting into the Biblical past a distinctively modern notion of history (history as a cumulative, developmental process), which is dubious enough in its own right.⁴⁴ I do not wish to argue this subject

⁴³ We may add that the Church also looks within, in order to see what is ahead. For the things which are Above have been poured down into her bosom. A divine katabatic influx (corresponding to my first perspective on grace and the Church) underlies and makes possible our anagogical vision and our eschatological hope (corresponding to my second perspective). Only because the Church is realized eschatology can she look up and forward to the Kingdom which is unrealized eschatology. Journet may emphasize this fact more strongly, but Congar does not deny it.

⁴⁴ By the modern notion of history, I mean the idea that human history as a whole is a cumulative process, a development or maturation. Where this idea

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at length here; for purposes of pointing out this third difficulty for Congar, it suffices to observe that the sense of eschatology upon which he relies cannot be taken for granted.

A fourth difficulty returns us squarely to the conceptual problem. Congar is saying that the duality between time and End-time has conceptual centrality for our understanding of the Church, that the Church is inherently temporal, historical, imperfect, standing to the End-time Kingdom as a movement stands to its term, or as an *impulsus* of love stands to its object, never at rest, never perfect, until it enjoys the full possession of that object. This is a striking departure because all conventional ecclesiology has studied the Church in one of two ways: as a structure (queried as to its parts and notes) or else as an agent (queried as to her rights and policies). Congar, if I read him correctly, is proposing a third alternative altogether: to study the Church as a movement. Without denying that one can look at the Church in the conventional ways, he maintains that to stop with them is to overlook the crucial fact that the Church is a

is assumed, this world's history is thought to provide a vector of advance distinct from the vertical vectors of katabatic grace and anableptic response—as though there were a special line of change, worked in temporal things and thus in the Church militant itself, which had to be brought to its own completion, before the things of earth could receive the things Above in eschatological completeness. It is this idea, it seems to me, which makes history resemble purgatory (a God-directed linear process, advancing by fire and pain towards justice) and which gives the “rediscovered” sense of eschatology its distinctive difference from anagogy. For whatever this completion is supposed to be—this upshot which history is laboring to produce—“rediscovered” eschatology has hopes about it, while anagogy ignores it.

When I say that the modern notion of history is dubious, I mean that it cannot be taken for granted as a “discovery” or “acquisition” of the modern mind. (To be sure, it has been a powerful and energizing belief, and one can well argue that the Church has had to come to terms with its power. But that is another matter.) By a “discovery,” I mean something like a fact or a well-confirmed scientific hypothesis, such as general relativity. The idea that history has (despite its local ups and downs, and despite occasional reversals, cycles, or spirals) an overall linearity vectored toward greater humanity and justice, is neither a fact nor a scientific hypothesis because, until history in fact ceases, the nature of its overall pattern (and indeed the existence of any such pattern) remains a guess—neither observable nor testable by observation. By an “acqui-

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transient entity, not a permanent one, a *transitional* structure-and-agent, launched by the *déjà advenu* towards the *encore attendu*. What is deeply intriguing about this alternative is that it directs the mind towards a new ontology for the Church. Conventional ecclesiology has drawn upon familiar parts of scholastic ontology—the four causes of a substance, the means and ends of an agent—transposed analogically, of course, to a social body. Congar's proposal carries the mind to a far less familiar terrain of entities: to *ens fluens*, the kind of thing which the student (usually when he first comes to the questions *de gratia actuali*) is surprised to learn is an entity at all. The advantage of this kind of entity, of course, is that it has termini *a quo* and *ad quem*. The relation of a movement to its terminus is distinctively different from the relation of a structure to its limits or of an agent to his goals. To posit that the glorious Kingdom of the resurrected Saints is the terminus *ad quem* of the Church therefore, is to posit a new and exciting paradigm, which will require the formation of a new body of concepts. But that is where the difficulty arises, and it is twofold.

sition" of the modern mind, I mean a conceptual break-through, like the discovery of non-Euclidean geometries or the refutation in philosophy of the Verifiability Criterion. It is obvious that the developmental notion of history is not in this sense an "acquisition," since many philosophers of history argue that it is arrant nonsense (See, for example, chapter 1 of Arthur Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* [Cambridge, 1965].).

Of course, there is another possibility. Perhaps the developmental linearity of human history is a matter of divine Revelation—a truth implicit in Christianity itself, long hidden, but at last brought to explicitness for Christian consciousness by post-Enlightenment cultural developments. This position seems to be the favored one, indeed, among a variety of Christian thinkers, from Lamennais in the 19th century to Maritain and many others in the 20th. However, the argument for this position is shockingly loose.

First, Christianity certainly rejects the view, held by some ancient thinkers, that identical events are fated to occur again and again in cosmic cycles. In that sense, the Christian view of history is "linear" and posits continual novelty. But it is a large step from there to saying that history is developmental. For novelties can be discontinuous, mutually off-setting, and frustrating to development.

Secondly, Christianity holds that history is dominated by a master storyline, revealed in the narrative of salvation history, whose end has been an-

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First, if the Church is inherently transient, temporal and historical, then she (unlike the Kingdom) is essentially and necessarily imperfect. She cannot be sinless precisely because she is a movement *toward* sinlessness. So not-yet-sinless will be a property belonging to her *essential* constitution, because historicity belongs thereto, and sin indwells our history. But what belongs to the essential constitution of a thing belongs in its concept. And from its proper concept flow those properties which are "formally" true of the thing. So, if Congar is serious about his eschatological view, he cannot lay his Church-concept down alongside Journet's as a complementary addition, more concrete. He must rather replace Journet's concept altogether. Journet's affirmation of sinlessness will be flatly wrong "formally

nounced in advance. But it does not follow that *everything* which happens in history is part of at least one sub-plot of this master story, nor does it follow that historical changes are cumulatively building towards this pre-announced terminus. It remains possible that much historical occurrence is simply irrelevant to the master story, and it remains possible that God's final intervention will be strongly discontinuous with the drift of empirical history (I use the word 'drift' advisedly; its ambiguity is perfect here.). In other words, the Christian conviction that history has a unique and central story, from which it derives whatever "meaning" it has as a whole, simply does not carry the entailment that universal history works like a well-constructed novel, in which there are no incidents ultimately irrelevant to the central plot, and in which, on the contrary, every single event bears an ultimate "meaning" which is its contribution to the outcome of the central plot. Failure to observe this non-sequitur has been epidemic, alas, among Christian "philosophers of history."

Third and finally, Christianity holds that all history is subject to plan, subject to divine providence. But this only means that everything God does or permits to happen is done or permitted for the sake of at least one end agreeable to Him; it does not mean that there is some *one* end, the Master End, for the sake of which everything He does or permits is done or permitted. To take a parallel, the point that every boy has at least one girlfriend does not mean that there is some one girl who is the friend of every boy, a universal sweetheart. Perhaps each has his own. It may also be a truth of Christianity that all of the different ends for the sake of which God does or permits things in history—all of those ends, I say—have something to do with someone's coming to salvation in Jesus Christ. But this would only mean that total history, so far as it is the unfolding of the divine plan, has no other meaning or object than the filling up of the "number of the elect"—an idea which few historical developmentalists are likely to find satisfying.

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speaking." In a word, to whatever extent Congar embraces his eschatological "rediscovery," he contradicts both Journet and his own profession to agree with him.

Secondly, once the eschatological "not yet" enters the concept of the Church, it is difficult to see how its adverbial effect can be limited to the one property of sinlessness. The End-time Kingdom will be one and universal; the Church is a dynamism towards those perfections. But precisely as a "towards," she is a "not yet"—not yet one, because in every historical realization she is divided; not yet universal, because in every historical realization she is provincial. But what is true in every case by virtue of her essential historicity is itself true of the Church essentially. So the Church is necessarily divided and provincial! Now, to be sure, one can try to contain this evil-sounding conclusion within orthodox limits. One can say that the Church is *juridically* one and Catholic, by virtue of the world-wide communion of diocesan Ordinaries with the Holy See; the Church's not-yet-oneness means only that we have imperfect charity towards one another in this life; and her not-yet-universality means only that not all cultures, classes and temperaments have as yet been fully reflected in the Church's worship or theology. But it is difficult to see why juridical relations should form an exception to the general "not yet." Why not conjecture that the Church is many denominations "not yet" one, occupying different parts of the world and different sectarian positions, and therefore "not yet" universal? After all, juridical unity is an indispensable thing *if* the Church is supposed to be an agent. But what if she is really a movement towards agency? Intercommunion of dioceses is indispensable to Catholicity, if the Church is supposed to be a structure. But what if she is really a *tendency* to structure, such that this latter, short of the eschaton, never quite jells? Or maybe the structure jells only at the center, leaving concentric circles of unstructured Church around the familiar Roman substance. I seem to

But to say that the modern notion of history cannot be taken for granted in theology is not to say that it is not true in part or in some version; I do not think it is, but that is another issue. Nor have I proved that this notion of history is at the bottom of the "revival" of eschatology which Congar celebrates; I have suggested that it is, but I cannot argue the matter further in this essay.

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have wandered into a grove of trees which have grown very tall since Vatican II. I doubt that the darkness of their shade can be wholly agreeable to Père Congar. I doubt that he has ever been prepared to see the classical hallmarks of Catholic ecclesiology destroyed so radically by the simple technique of postponement.⁴⁵

These are some of the difficulties, then, which stand in the way of offering the eschatological duality of Church-and-Kingdom as a full-blown rival to Journet's concept of the Church. Congar's unique erudition put him in a position to feel the force of these difficulties. I think it is not altogether surprising, then, that when we find him returning to this topic a few years later, we find him drawing back from the eschatological duality in several important regards.

We find first that the talk of the Kingdom is replaced by talk of the Church in heaven:

Il est certain que l'Église eschatologique est toute pure: au ciel, il n'entrera rien de souillé (Ap. 21:27). Le peuple de ceux qui aiment et louent Dieu: c'est cela essentiellement l'Église.

Ce peuple se prépare et existe déjà ici-bas.⁴⁶

Are we back to dealing, then, with one Reality in two stages, as Journet had wanted? This is not quite clear. For we find next

⁴⁵ There is another difficulty against such postponement, and it is specifically Mariological. The Virgin immaculately conceived is living proof that sinlessness is possible *in history* in a mere human being; she is proof that sinlessness can exist while *we await* the resurrection. This fact will have little influence on the ecclesiology of those who make Mary's typological relation to the Church a matter of vague "personification" or of undefined symbolism. But for those who penetrate, analyze, and unpack that typological relation as I have tried to do above, in part I of this paper, her historical sinlessness emerges as paradigmatic for the Church. She prevents the Church's sanctity from drifting off into the future; she anchors it in history.

⁴⁶ Yves Congar, "Comment l'Église sainte doit se renouveler sans cesse," first given as a lecture in 1961; reprinted in *Sainte Église*, p. 145.

In this address we also find Congar pulling back from the charge of "sin" against the Church. He suggests that sin requires a truly personal agent, so that a collective agent or social body really cannot be said to sin, though it can be said to have "faults" and "woes" (*misères*) because of the sins of persons within it. It is now these faults and woes which he is prepared to attribute to the Church herself, institutionally considered. But this distinction is unimpressive. A social entity never acts at all except through the actions of its offi-

that the constituting of this Reality here below involves not only the gifts of God but also the responses of men, which are never wholly adequate (except in the Virgin). Thereupon a new duality emerges:

Ce qu'il y a de valable pour Dieu dans la réponse des hommes, ce qui est fait par eux en foi et amour, construit l'Église pour l'éternité: c'est *cela* EN VÉRITÉ l'Église. Dieu le voit et le sait. L'Église, pour lui, n'est que cette part sainte. Mais nous ne pouvons la connaître, nous, que très imparfaitement. Ce que nous appelons, *nous*, l'Église, c'est la communauté visible de ceux qui professent croire en Dieu et en Jésus-Christ, qui ont reçu son baptême et demeurent dans l'institution gouvernée par les évêques et par le pape. C'est une certaine réalité historique.⁴⁷

So the new duality is epistemological: what God knows and calls the Church *vs.* what we know and call by that name. The real Church is the one that God knows, of course, and it turns out to be what the Puritans thought it was: the set of the *true* Christians, whose deeds have eternal value. But these saints are being formed, apparently, in our Church, the only one known to men, the historical entity defined by Bellarmine. (It seems a curious thing for Tridentine orthodoxy to be vindicated on the basis of human ignorance rather than divine Revelation, but let that pass.) It remains that the true Church is all holy, but we cannot see it, and the Church we can see is a subject of blame:

. . . cet ordre des misères ou des fautes historiques sur lesquelles portent d'ailleurs plus particulièrement aujourd'hui les questions et parfois le scandale. Touchent-elles l'Église? L'Église en est-elle le sujet? Oui, elles touchent, elles ont pour sujet ce que *nous* appelons l'Église.

And this is preceded by the familiar profession of agreement with Journet:

cers, its personnel; but if those actions are done in their official capacity, the social entity itself acts. And if the acts of a government, let us say, are unjust, vicious, duplicitous, genocidal, well, it strikes me as quibbling not to call them sins. I would have expected a man of the Left to understand that.

⁴⁷ *Sainte Église*, p. 145.

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je souscrirais à la formule de Mgr Journet (l'Église est sainte, bien que faite de pécheurs), mais en la complétant par la consideration de cet ordre des misères, etc.⁴⁸

Have we come back to where we started? No, we have come to yet another doctrine, though it looks like where we started. Recall that when we started, it was a question of two concepts; now it is a question of two Churches. In the meantime, there was a question of postponing a predicate; now it is a question of changing the subject. Congar is prepared to say that there is a sinless Church, but he cannot make up his mind whether it is an abstraction or a reality, a thing in heaven, a thing in the future, or a thing in history but seen only by God. I can see no point in pursuing these vacillations any further.

IV

I set out to illustrate the quicksilver character of Congar's thought. I have quoted from only a few pages, from just two or three of the many works in which he treated this and related topics. But the sample is sufficient. It shows that Congar had no steady compass in his demurrals from Journet. He could articulate a partially dissenting thesis but could not secure it in a system nor tether it in safe confinements. Yet his demurrals were not pointless. Journet *had* resolved the problem of sin in the Church on too narrow a basis. In section II of this paper I undertook to resolve it on a broader basis. When I turned to Congar in section III, it was to see if he had anything decisive to say against my solution; what I found instead was material illustrating the need for it. Section II, therefore, is the real finale of this series of papers. It presents a resolution of a problem of ecclesiology through tools and perspectives developed in the light of the Immaculate Conception.

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⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 147.