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The Church as Communion in Small Christian Communities in South Korea

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In light of the development of an ecclesiology of communion in the Catholic Church in recent decades, the Catholic Church in South Korea has implemented a structure of small Christian communities (SCCs) in each parish. However, there has been a lack of real understanding and analysis of SCCs in terms of the idea of the Church as communion. Instead, they have generally been regarded as one of the best ways for evangelization and for parish renewal. This seems to be because the SCCs have been implemented while mostly focusing on the mission of the Church, without fully considering the essential nature of the Church as a whole.

This dissertation traces the implementation and establishment of SCCs in the Church of South Korea. It then analyzes this development in light of the ecclesiology of communion developed on the universal level in the teaching of Vatican II and subsequent magisterial teachings (noting Christological, ecclesial, and evangelical dimensions of the idea), and on the regional level in the documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC; noting especially understandings of communion as liberation, as dialogue, and as harmony).

It is concluded that SCCs in South Korea have promoted communion in the Church, especially in terms of personal communion with Jesus Christ through meditation on the

Gospel, friendlier communion among the parishioners, more active participation of the laity in the parish and in the evangelization of their neighborhood. However, there are still some issues to be resolved and points to be developed, in order to find a truly inculturated model for the SCCs and proper methods of Gospel-sharing and of lay spirituality fitting for the Korean environment. The dissertation makes suggestions towards that end.

SCCs have been true expressions of ecclesial communion and centers of evangelization in South Korea. Accordingly, it can be said that with the help of the SCC movement the Church in South Korea is in process toward becoming a true local Church, a true Church-in-communion.

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INTRODUCTION

In official ecclesiastical documents and in much theological literature since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a growing awareness and agreement that an idea of the Church as communion best explains the essential nature of the Church. For instance, the “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” issued in 1992 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, spoke of the concept of “communion” as being “at the heart of the Church’s self-understanding,”¹ and said that “the concept of communion (*koinonia*), which appears with a certain prominence in the texts of the Second Vatican Council, is very suitable for expressing the core of the Mystery of the Church, and can certainly be a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology.”²

More specifically, the bishops who participated in the 1985 Extraordinary Synod proclaimed in the latter’s Final Report that the ecclesiology of communion was the central and fundamental idea of the Council’s documents, and in so doing they urged that the idea of the Church as communion be more clearly understood and concretely incorporated into people’s lives. This ecclesiology of communion was affirmed at the 1987 Synod on the laity, in which the Synod Fathers discussed the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world in light of an understanding of the Church as mystery, communion, and

¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” no. 3. Text is in *Origins* 22, no. 7 (1992): 108-12.

² *Ibid.*, no. 1.

mission.

Proceeding from this concept, John Paul II emphasized in his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, that the parish community is most suitable for celebrating the Eucharist, which is the living source from which it is built up and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole Church. He also stressed that small Christian communities (SCCs) or basic ecclesial communities (BECs), where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another, are “true expressions of ecclesial communion” and centers of evangelization.

During the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC, 1990), the Asian bishops suggested as a response of the Church to the demands of evangelization in Asia the formation of SCCs that are similar but not identical to the basic ecclesial communities described in Latin American liberation theology. The bishops stressed that the Church in Asia will have to be a communion of communities, where laity, religious, and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers.

In response to the teaching of the Asian bishops, the bishops of South Korea have encouraged the formation of SCCs specifically in order to promote communion and participation in the local Church and to evangelize culture and society. Since 1992, when Cardinal Stephen Kim, the Archbishop of Seoul, proposed that the basic structure of the parishes in his archdiocese be that of a communion of SCCs, other dioceses in South Korea have also formed SCCs as an integral part of parish life.

The purpose of this dissertation is to present the ecclesiological dimension of the SCCs in South Korea and to analyze it in the light of the ecclesiology of communion developed in the teaching of Vatican II, in the Final Report of the 1985 Synod, and in

subsequent magisterial documents. The dissertation will trace the implementation and establishment of SCCs in the Church of South Korea and analyze this development in the light of magisterial teachings and the FABC documents. There are four chapters, as follows:

Chapter one will present the historical, theological, and pastoral background of the development of SCCs in South Korea. The discussion will compare these SCCs with the Ban Gatherings that had already been formed in South Korean parishes, with SCCs in South Africa, and with BECs in Latin America, respectively. The chapter will describe present statistics on SCCs and parishes in the Korean Catholic Church.

Chapter two will deal with the ecclesiology of communion and will begin by studying the idea of communion in the Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church. Further significant background texts to be considered here are the documents of Vatican II, the Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, the documents of the 1987 Synod, and the teaching of John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*. The correlation between the idea of the Church as communion and the idea of the Church as a sacrament for the salvation of the world will be analyzed.

Chapter three will present the way in which this ecclesiology of communion, endorsed and promoted for the universal Church, is being developed in Asia. Particular attention will be given to the theological understanding of the lay Christian faithful in the 1986 FABC document entitled “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia,” and to the pastoral importance of SCCs as presented in the 1990 FABC document, “Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium.”

Chapter four will consist of a theological evaluation of the small Christian communities in South Korea in light of the teaching both of Vatican II and subsequent

magisterial doctrine regarding the Church on the universal level and of the FABC documents on the regional level. Special attention will be given to the relationship between SCCs and the parish. The chapter will end by presenting some suggestions for an inculturated ecclesiology of communion in South Korea.

CHAPTER ONE

THE HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN SOUTH KOREA

For more than two hundred years since the foundation of the Korean Catholic Church in 1784, when Peter Seunghoon Lee was baptized a Catholic in Beijing, China, the Church in South Korea has grown in membership and organization. Especially since 1984, with the commemoration of the bicentennial anniversary of the foundation of the Korean Roman Catholic Church, when Pope John Paul II celebrated a solemn Mass in Seoul and canonized 103 martyrs, the Church has rapidly grown in numbers and in size. By the year 2010, the Roman Catholic Church in South Korea had 5,120,092 Catholics among a total population of 50,643,781; there are 16 dioceses, 4,374 ordained priests, and 1,571 parishes.¹

The Church in South Korea, however, has had some problems for which it has faced criticism. For instance, the Church has been regarded as too hierarchical and patriarchal and as having lost a vital sense of community. Also, it has been perceived as being deficient in fostering the Catholic identity of the faithful and in providing them with the necessary spiritual support.² In response to these problems, the bishops of South Korea have

¹ Cf. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, *교세 통계표* [A Statistical Survey Report of the Korean Catholic Church] (Seoul: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, 2010).

² Cf. Keeju Park, "2000년대 복음화와 소공동체 [Evangelization of the Second Millennium and the Small Christian Community]," *신학과 사상* [Theology and Thought] 9 (1993): 101-02.

suggested the formation of small Christian communities (SCCs) in parishes and have tried to find a solution by a renewal of the parish as a communion of small Christian communities.

This chapter will discuss the historical and theological background of the SCCs in South Korea and describe the process of implementation of SCCs in South Korea in the context of the pastoral response to the problems of the Korean Catholic Church during the early 1990s. In order to clarify the characteristics of SCCs in South Korea, the latter will be compared with the Ban Gatherings³ that had already been formed in South Korean parishes, with SCCs in South Africa, and with basic ecclesial communities (BECs) in Latin America, respectively. This chapter will conclude with a presentation of statistics on SCCs in the parishes of South Korea.

1. The Background of SCCs in South Korea

1.1 Historical Background of SCCs in South Korea

Up to the end of the 1980s, the Korean Catholic Church, faced with an increase in the number of Catholics, tried to cope with this outward expansion without a more profound inward reflection on the new theological understanding of the Church following the Second Vatican Council. That is to say, the Korean Catholic Church focused mainly on the management or organization of the faithful and the supplying of meeting places for them.

As Bishop Peter Kang, then an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Seoul, pointed out, the Church in South Korea grew rapidly in the 1980s but after that it

³ Since 1970, many parishes in South Korea have had structures similar to small Christian communities, namely “Ban Gatherings.” The word “Ban” means “neighborhood” in Korean. These gatherings consist of groups of about 40-50 families living in the same neighborhood. While Ban Gatherings are similar to small Christian communities in some ways, they have been considered principally as sub-groups organized in a parish for administrative efficiency and convenience.

experienced a crisis of identity; compared with its external and outward growth, it lacked a corresponding internal and spiritual maturity. Concerning the crisis of identity, he asked the following in 1992:

Is our church maturing enough internally while it is rapidly increasing outwardly? Is the Catholic Church in South Korea good as it stands? Is the present condition of the Korean Catholic Church an acceptable condition for the Church? What is the desirable direction for the Korean Catholic Church to pursue?⁴

The critical nature of the situation was recognized not only by some pastors but also by the lay faithful themselves. According to a social survey report by the Committee for the Pastoral Council of the Korean Catholic Church, the faith life of Korean Catholics was mainly centered on sacramental obligations such as the observance of Sunday Mass and it was excessively individualized in parish life with no feeling of community among the faithful nor solidarity with one's neighbors.⁵ In this report, the faithful pointed out several problems which the Korean Catholic Church should address, such as the secularization of the Church, excessive materialism in the Church, the authoritarian attitude of the clergy, and a tendency toward anonymity on the part of the faithful in huge parishes.

These problems were finally addressed in a pastoral letter to the Archdiocese of Seoul. In his pastoral letter of 1992 Cardinal Stephen Kim of Seoul described the crisis the Korean Catholic Church was encountering:

Today's Korean Roman Catholic Church has achieved great growth in terms of size and number. However, this growth has caused the Church to lose a sense of

⁴ Peter Woil Kang, “한국 천주교 소공동체 도입에 대한 성찰 [A Reflection on the Introduction of SCCs in the Korean Catholic Church],” in *2004 소공동체 심포지움 전국모임 후속 자료집* [Additional Sources of the National Meeting of Small Christian Communities in 2004], ed. Administrative Office for Evangelization (Seoul: Administrative Office for Evangelization, 2004), 15-16.

⁵ Cf. The Committee for the Pastoral Council of the Korean Catholic Church, *200주년 기념사목회의 사회조사보고서* [A Social Survey Report of the Committee in the Bicentennial Anniversary of the Korean Catholic Church] (Seoul: The Committee for the Pastoral Council of the Korean Catholic Church, 1985), 355-57.

community, of communion (*koinonia*), and of service (*diakonia*) based on the spirit of the Gospel. In other words, while external growth has continued, it has been more difficult for the ministerial priests to have personal encounters with parishioners and for the lay faithful to sustain their membership and a sense of solidarity. Simply put, as time passes, the Christian community has become a community whose core is empty and whose shell is thick.⁶

In this hierarchical system, the lay faithful in huge parishes did not take part in the lay apostolate voluntarily and actively. Rather, they were forced to remain as passive objects in a Church excessively dependent on the clergy. Some even found it difficult to understand the proper status of the laity in the Church; instead, they were satisfied with a passive and isolated status. Pastors, on the other hand, were unable to give spiritual advice to individual parishioners through personal meetings. They failed to do what Pope John Paul II subsequently urged, namely to “devise new and effective ways of shepherding the faithful”⁷ so that everyone truly would feel part of the parish and part of the universal People of God. Pastors merely assumed a position as administrators or supervisors in the Church.

As a result of these critical reflections on the hierarchical structure of the Church and on the passive attitude of the faithful in the parish, there has been a search for an appropriate understanding of the Church, that is, a true way of being a local Church in South Korea.

1.2 Theological Background of SCCs in South Korea

While searching for a solution to the crisis in the Church of South Korea, Bishop Kang had a chance to attend the Fifth Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’

⁶ Stephen Cardinal Kim, “1992 사목교서 [1992 Pastoral Letter],” in *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community], ed. Administrative Office for Evangelization (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1995), 66.

⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 25. Text is in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 92 (2000): 449-528.

Conferences⁸ in 1990. In its final statement the Asian bishops declared that the Church in Asia must become a communion of communities and a participatory Church through the development of small Christian communities (SCCs). After attending this Assembly and being influenced by the theological understanding of SCCs in the FABC document, Bishop Kang strongly suggested the formation of SCCs as a key task for the Catholic Church in South Korea.

During the Fifth Plenary Assembly, the Asian bishops, aware of Asian realities, searched for a path along which the Asian Church should walk. In fact, the Catholic Church in Asia has often been perceived as not sharing in the contemplative traditions of Asia and as being primarily concerned with external rituals and festivals. The bishops, however, continually teach that central to the Catholic tradition is the incarnation and the idea of sacramentality, and that genuine sacramentality is the antithesis of empty ritualism. From this perspective, they asked: “What should the Church be in and to this changing Asian world marked by so much diversity, poverty, suffering and injustice, and with so many movements for social transformation?”⁹

As a response of this question, the bishops taught that in the context of Asia the

⁸ The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) was established in 1970 with Pope Paul VI in attendance during his pastoral visit to Manila. FABC was officially confirmed when its statutes were accepted *ad experimentum* by Pope Paul VI on November 16, 1972. Over the years it has investigated several problems which the Church in Asia has encountered and has suggested ecclesial responses that fit the Asian context. The FABC documents are regarded as essential sources for understanding the Church in Asia today. As a transnational body, FABC binds together the various local Churches of Asia, represented by their bishops, in fellowship and mutual cooperation. FABC functions through a hierarchy of structures consisting of the Plenary Assembly, the Central Committee, the Standing Committee, and the Central Secretariat. The highest body of the Federation is the Plenary Assembly, ordinarily convened once every four years, in which the presidents and delegates of each bishops' conference participate. For a brief history and evaluation of the FABC, see Felix Wilfrid, “The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): Orientations, Challenges and Impact,” in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970-1991*, eds. Gaudencio B. Rosales & C.G. Arevalo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), xxiii-xxx.

⁹ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 283.

Christian community must live in companionship as true partners with all Asians as they pray, work, struggle, and suffer for a better human life, and as they search for the meaning of human life and progress.¹⁰ On this point, Vatican II had already taught as follows:

The Church has existed through the centuries in varying circumstances and has utilized the resources of different cultures in its preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ, to examine and understand it more deeply, and to express it more perfectly in the liturgy and in various aspects of the life of the faithful.¹¹

Each local Church thus has to be conscious of its own cultural context and to discern what ministries and what ecclesial structures are required in order to fulfill its mission so that the Church can respond to the task entrusted to her by the servant Lord.

At this point the Asian bishops asked what a truly local church is and how the Asian churches can become truly local churches. They suggested “a new way of being Church” as a way of becoming a truly local church.¹² For the Asian bishops, a new way of being Church was best embodied and expressed in the theological understanding of the Church as a communion of communities and as a participatory reality.

The bishops proposed an ideal form of the Church in Asia, that is, a communion of communities. “The Church in Asia will have to be a communion of communities, where laity, religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers.”¹³ As the bishops had earlier said, communion can be lived to the fullest only when every member of

¹⁰ Cf. Ibid.

¹¹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58. English text in Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II*, New Revised Edition (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992). Unless otherwise noted, the English translation of Vatican II documents in this dissertation is taken from this work.

¹² The bishops especially stress “being Church” rather than “doing Church.” Even though the bishops in their document emphasized deeds as a response of the Church to the challenges of Asia, they strongly pointed out that responding with the very being and heart of the Church has primacy over simply doing. The bishops clearly recognized that effective doing can only result from the very depths of the Church's being and authentic living. Cf. “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 287-89.

¹³ Ibid., 287.

the local Church is empowered and given the opportunity to participate in the mission of Christ according to his/her state of life.¹⁴

The bishops reserved the word “communities” for ecclesial communities especially at the grassroots level. These Christian communities assume various forms such as small Christian communities, neighborhood groups, basic ecclesial communities, and covenant communities.¹⁵ In these communities, the faithful “pray and share together the Gospel of Jesus, living it in their daily lives as they support one another and work together, united as they are in one mind and heart.”¹⁶ These small communities, operating at a smaller level than the parish, allow for deeper human and Christian relationships and become the most fundamental ecclesial realities.¹⁷ Simply put, the Church is to be a communion of small Christian communities in which the faithful pray, share the Gospel, and live their daily lives.

Another theological understanding of the Church by the Asian bishops at the Fifth Assembly was expressed by the notion of a participatory Church. The bishops stated that the Church in Asia should be “a participatory Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful - lay, religious and cleric alike - are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized.”¹⁸

The Church is not just a Sunday congregation of individuals in which people see each other as strangers, having no relationship with one another after the liturgical

¹⁴ Cf. “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 191-93. The understanding of communion by the Asian bishops will be discussed at further length in chapter three.

¹⁵ Cf. “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 287.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Cf. “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church,” (1977) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 76.

¹⁸ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 287.

celebration. Instead, the Church is a community of authentic participation in which all the faithful share in the mission of God's people in the Church and in the world, and the lay faithful share in their own way the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ. In other words, the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church *ad extra* is indispensable. "Without the full participation of lay people, the Church cannot fulfill the mission for which it is sent into the world."¹⁹ The participation of the lay faithful *ad intra* within the inner life of the Church develops participative leadership,²⁰ an idea which has not yet been fully developed. Lay leadership has often been understood as a subservient leadership under the clergy with their hierarchical status.²¹ Simply put, the Church is to be a participatory Church in which the lay faithful, taking their proper role in the mission and the ministry of the Church, truly become members of the People of God and witnesses to Christ.

From these perspectives, the Asian bishops searched for ecclesial structures in which all the faithful would assume a more active role in the Church and experience genuine Christian fellowship, which is based on a recognition of charisms and ministries.²² These structures, consequently, would enhance the participation of the lay faithful in the mission of Christ and the communion between clergy and the faithful. So it was that the Asian bishops suggested the establishment of small Christian communities as one of the tried and effective ways of promoting communion and participation at the grassroots level.²³ The bishops saw

¹⁹ "Statement of the First Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate," (1984) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 237.

²⁰ Cf. "Message of the Fourth Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate," (1988) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 297.

²¹ Cf. Internal Congress on Mission, "Basic Christian Communities and Local Ministries," (1979) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 150-51.

²² Cf. "Statement and Recommendations of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1982) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 59.

²³ Both terms, SCCs and BECs, appeared in FABC documents until the formation of AsIPA. The

in these communities “a new way of being Church” where the faithful might daily practice the Gospel, manifest the various charisms of believers in the communities, and exercise participative leadership.²⁴ From this there followed three characteristics of SCCs.

First, Christian living and action must be based on the Word of God. It is through the Word of God that the faithful meet Jesus. It is also the Word of God that gathers the faithful together. The faithful need “to listen to Christ as the Word, in the Scriptures and in the Church,” but the faithful also need “to listen to the Word in persons and in events, in the ebb and flow of life.”²⁵ In this regard, SCCs aim to help their members to listen to the word of God and to live the Gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service. Thus, the communities are a solid starting point for building a new society. They are an expression of a civilization of love. In SCCs the faithful infuse Gospel values into earthly realities and help transform human society.

Second, charisms are enduring gifts of the Spirit given to Church members to build the Church through their service and ministries. Endowed with these charisms, different members perform different services in the Church, each in his or her own manner. In SCCs, the faithful take more and more responsibility within their Church, and discover various charisms by which they may serve their communities.²⁶ SCCs call and enable the lay faithful with special charisms to exercise ministries as evangelists, catechists, preachers, prayer leaders, and spiritual counselors.

Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) was formed in 1993 to promote the building of SCCs in all the Churches in Asia. The significant role of AsIPA in developing an understanding of communion within SCCs in Asia will be discussed at length in chapter three.

²⁴ Cf. “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 287-88.

²⁵ “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 196.

²⁶ Cf. “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church,” (1977) in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 76.

Third, the role of leadership in the Church is to discern and activate the various charisms of the whole Christian community in order to build up communities of love and fellowship. Such leadership helps to make these communities into evangelizing communities and empowers the faithful to face their challenges in the world with inward power from above, not worldly power, in the light of the Gospel. A style of leadership therefore has to be designed to fit the culture, attitudes, and values of local situations. SCCs promote a style, which is called “a shared participative leadership,”²⁷ where there is consultation, dialogue, and sharing. It is clearly recognized that the emerging leadership of the laity in SCCs never negates that of the clergy. SCCs should never aim at the creation of “clerical” lay leaders or “mini-priests”; rather, they inspire lay people to assume their proper role in the Church.

A workshop during the Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC gave additional insights into SCCs. The bishops in the assembly had a workshop on the theme of “alternative ways of being Church in the Asia of the 1990s.” For this workshop, a discussion paper²⁸ was prepared by Fr. Oswald Hirmer, a promoter of SCCs from the Lumko Institute in South Africa.²⁹ In this paper, he introduced a five-stage model of a maturing Church, and also a

²⁷ Ibid., 77.

²⁸ Oswald Hirmer, *Alternative Ways of Being Church in the Asia of the 1990s*, FABC Paper no. 57d (Bandung, Indonesia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1990).

²⁹ The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) launched the Lumko Missiological Institute in 1962. It is a place where new missionaries can study African languages, anthropology, and related subjects and learn how to adjust to African culture. In the 1970s, Fr. Fritz Lobinger, a prominent head of the institute, suggested that a local church should be a community of communities and that every member of the local Church should share real responsibility for the life, mission, and ministry of the church. In 1976, the members of SACBC recognized the value of SCCs and decided to adopt the term small Christian communities and to establish SCCs as a pastoral priority in Southern Africa. Since that time, the Lumko Institute has continued to study the formation and function of BECs in Brazil and has encouraged the development of SCCs in South Africa, filling both a religious and a social need in the rural areas and townships. See Joy Brain, “Moving from the Margins to the Mainstream: The Roman Catholic Church,” in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 197; also, Mario I. Aguilar, “An African Theology of Praxis through Small Christian Communities,” *African Ecclesial Review* 37 (1995): 146.

method of Gospel-sharing, namely the Seven Step Method designed by the Lumko Institute. This workshop was received with enthusiasm by the bishops, including Bishop Kang.

In the discussion paper,³⁰ Fr. Hirmer suggested that the analysis associated with the five-stage model of a maturing Church would help people to discover where they are and what will be the next step on their pastoral journey. After introducing the first four stages, namely “the provided-for Church,” “the parish council Church,” “the awakening Church,” and “the task group Church,” he highlighted the idea of “a communion of communities.” However, he stressed that he did not regard the Korean Church or any Church as being at present a communion of communities. Rather, he saw the latter as “an ideal as high as Christian love and charity.”³¹ In his words,

We may never fully achieve it but the ideal still remains, giving direction and hope. Its deepest theological reason lies in the “interior life” of the blessed Trinity which must be reflected in those who are called to become members of the divine household.... A communion of communities can reflect the “love pact” (covenant) of God with his people in a deeper way than a congregation of individual church-goers.³²

Fr. Hirmer, in the workshop, also suggested Gospel-sharing as an alternative way of being Church in Asia. According to him, in a way quite different from private reading of the Gospel or even collective Bible-study, Gospel-sharing in groups emphasizes or adds a certain theological dimension to the use of Scripture.³³ First, when believers come together in the name of Jesus and welcome him in their midst, they, as a community of the faithful,

³⁰ This paper was one of the most catalytic materials in promoting SCCs in South Korea. After the workshop in FABC, Bishop Kang sent two priests and two nuns of the Seoul Archdiocese to a Lumko training course held in Thailand. Also, Stephen Cardinal Kim, the Archbishop of Seoul, held seminars about SCCs in 1992 and 1993 in which Fr. Hirmer re-presented the five-stage model of the parish and advocated forming SCCs in South Korea. This matter will be discussed at length in the next part of this chapter.

³¹ Oswald Hirmer, *Alternative Ways of Being Church in the Asia of the 1990s*, 10.

³² Ibid.

³³ Cf. Ibid., 12. The Seven Step Method will be explained below, p. 21.

express their belief in the risen Christ who promised his disciples that he would stay with them until the end of the age (Mt 18:20; 28:20). Second, while in Bible-study the words of Scripture are words of information which can be “cut to pieces” (discussed) and talked about, in Gospel-sharing the members understand the biblical text as a “sacramental sign” of the Lord’s presence. “The Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:14).³⁴ The many words of Scripture become a sign of the living Word and a concrete possibility for meeting the risen Christ. The aim of Gospel-sharing, therefore, is not simply to understand a text, but rather to experience the reality of Christ’s presence, as in the Eucharist. In a certain sense it may be doubtful how a biblical text can be applied to life if the original meaning is not fully understood, as may be the case in just sharing the Gospel with others. In this regard, Fr. Hirmer explains, third, that even if the actual text is “wrongly” understood in the strict exegetical sense, it may be rightly understood in the context of the Bible as a whole. In addition, even if one member of the group comes to a really heretical explanation of the text, this can be corrected by the community by means of sermons, catechism classes, Bible-study.³⁵

Both papers, the final statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC and the discussion paper prepared by Fr. Hirmer, are very useful for a theological understanding of what SCCs are and how they can be implemented in South Korea. The pastoral response to the internal crisis of the Korean Catholic Church was based on the development of such SCCs.

³⁴ All translations of the Scripture in this dissertation are taken from the NRSV (New Revised Standard Version) except in citations from other works.

³⁵ Cf. Oswald Hirmer, *Alternative Ways of Being Church in the Asia of the 1990s*, 12-14.

2. The Process of Implementing SCCs in South Korea

2.1 SCCs in the Archdiocese of Seoul

As mentioned above, the Asian bishops through the FABC documents recommended the creation of SCCs as a new way of being Church. It was hoped that such communities would become the locus for the practice of the Gospel, for the manifestation of various charisms, and for the exercise of participative leadership by the laity. In response to the FABC documents, the Catholic Church in South Korea encouraged the formation of SCCs.

In his 1992 pastoral letter, the Archbishop of Seoul referred to SCCs and he suggested taking a journey of renewal:

We are taking a journey to find the ideal form of community which early Christians showed in their desire to live truly in Christ. We are to begin the journey of renewal in order to achieve internally and externally an evangelizing community, that is, a community which offers hope and attractiveness to people through the proclamation of the Gospel by words and acts and through the unification of the faithful in communion and service according to the teaching of Christ.³⁶

Inviting the faithful to participate in a journey of renewal, Cardinal Kim suggested searching for the ideal ecclesial structure. This form of community, most of all, aims at carrying out evangelization. He uses the word evangelization here not just in terms of proclaiming Christ to those who do not know Him or conferring baptism and the other sacraments. Rather, Cardinal Kim, following the teaching of *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, understands it as “bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”³⁷ The evangelizing

³⁶ Stephen Cardinal Kim, “1992 사목교서 [1992 Pastoral Letter],” 68-69.

³⁷ Ibid., 68; Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 18. Original text of the

community is therefore understood in the context of what Pope Paul VI taught:

The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love, and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the mighty works of God which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh by Him and reunited. In brief, this means that she has a constant need of being evangelized, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigor and strength in order to proclaim the Gospel.³⁸

This search for an ideal form of community mainly came from a critical reflection on the existing hierarchical structure, especially on the sub-structures of parishes, the “Ban Gatherings.” The Archbishop stated in his 1993 pastoral letter:

Even though Ban Gatherings as basic and dynamic groups of a parish are outwardly proceeding well, inwardly they are merely formal meetings. Therefore, we cannot say that Ban Gatherings can truly be called Christian fraternal communities in which all the faithful share their lives, pray together, and follow Christ.³⁹

Accordingly, he stressed the necessity of forming small Christian communities:

These [small Christian] communities are a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a civilization of love. . . . Therefore, we should do our best to transform Ban Gatherings into small Christian communities.⁴⁰

From this perspective, in December 1992, the Archdiocese held a seminar for the diocesan priests’ council in order to find the ideal form for such communities.⁴¹ In this

Exhortation in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68 (1976): 5-76. English text in Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World: Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1976).

³⁸ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 15.

³⁹ Stephen Cardinal Kim, “1993 사목교서 [1993 Pastoral Letter],” 77. This pastoral letter was issued in November 1992.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 77-78.

⁴¹ The materials for these seminars were later issued in 1994. Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *공동체를 향하여 [Toward Community]* (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1994).

seminar, Fr. Hirmer again presented the five-stage model of the parish and the way of Gospel-sharing in communities. Both of which may now be examined more closely. The first stage is “the provided-for Church.” In this model, lay faithful are regarded as people who have no ecclesial authority; on the contrary, the pastor becomes the master over his flock. The laity have only the right to receive from the clergy goods and a strong help for salvation. No further rights are accorded to the laity apart from allowing them to give religious instruction and to administer the local Church funds. While this radical form was mainly developed in the past and has now largely disappeared, in Hirmer’s estimation, it still remains where a small group of people around the pastor (e.g., Legion of Mary members) or “ward-leaders” are reporting to the pastor about the needs of the community and only the pastor feels a responsibility for answering those needs.⁴²

The second stage is “the parish council Church.” This model stands for the Church managed with the aid of a parish council. The parish council makes it possible for the faithful to exercise their right of expressing an opinion and being heard at a decision-making level. In the parish council, the lay faithful offer their opinion regarding parish matters and consult with the pastor about the pastoral plan and its implementation. While this model has some advantages, such as a limited participation of the laity, basically it cannot insure the active participation of all the lay faithful. The participants in the parish council have only a consultative voice in specific functional areas. They cannot represent the voice of all the parishioners; they only present to the pastor some suggestions based on their own experience or knowledge. Thus, while this model encourages the participation of the laity, it is still

⁴² Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *공동체를 향하여* [Toward Community], 23-25.

based on a largely passive role of the laity in the Church.⁴³

The third stage is “the awakening Church.” In this stage, Christians ask the questions: “What is the Church? Who is the Church?” There is a great longing in them to be more than just individual Sunday church-goers. The faithful begin to have a self-awareness of being true Christians and become aware of their role in the Church. They discover the new perspective or outlook of active participation in the Church and are actively involved in Church matters. This awareness cannot be imposed but has to be freely achieved through various programs or courses. In this stage, all the members of the Church envisage their Church as being on the move toward being a true local Church.⁴⁴

The fourth stage is “the task group Church.” In a parish in which the faithful have become aware of their common responsibility, task groups or committees evolve to fulfill the needs of the community. Task groups are called to be concerned with the youth, the aged, the newly-weds as well as divorced persons, the sick, the unemployed, workers, managers, migrants, the poor, social action, catechetical programs, liturgy, and various associations. A Church equipped with various task groups is a mighty step forward on the journey towards being a participatory Church. Basic functions of the Church are fulfilled efficiently. However, the danger of this model is that members of task groups may be trained as mere functionaries without building community or without receiving the help they need to grow spiritually. Those who carry responsibility in the Church may be satisfied at having achieved an efficient Church where necessary functions are being performed in a well-organized

⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 26-30.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 31-34.

way.⁴⁵

The fifth stage is “a communion of communities.” This stage is suggested as the model of an ideal Church. The soul of a Church envisaged as a communion of communities is evident where there is a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ, respecting the common dignity of all and accepting a common responsibility for fulfilling Christ’s mission in the world. These communities may be called “Christian faith communities,” or “basic” or “ecclesial” or “small” Christian communities.⁴⁶ There are four important characteristics of these communities: a) the faithful gather in their neighborhood away from the parish building; b) they make Gospel-sharing their spiritual basis; c) they carry out the mission of the Church; and d) they are united with the parish, and so with the universal Church.⁴⁷

An essential characteristic of SCCs is the coming together to do Gospel-sharing, using “the Seven Step Method” designed and developed by the Lumko Institute.⁴⁸ Although Fr. Hirmer spoke of various Gospel-sharing methods such as “the Group Response,” “the Look-Listen-Love method,” “the Life-Bible-Notes,” and “the Amos Programs,” he strongly suggested “the Seven Step Method” for use in SCCs because it is the basis of the other methods.⁴⁹ It presents a method of approaching Sacred Scripture communally and prayerfully which “may help us encounter God and one another and help us open our eyes to

⁴⁵ Cf. Ibid., 35-37.

⁴⁶ While Fr. Hirmer did not specifically use the term small Christian communities, he implied the model of SCCs as in South Africa, which is different from BECs in Latin America, as will be shown below, pp. 48-55.

⁴⁷ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *공동체를 향하여* [Toward Community], 38-41.

⁴⁸ The steps are as follows: “the prayer for inviting the Lord” (the first step); “reading the Gospel” (the second step); “meditation on the passage” (the third step); “hearing in silence” (the fourth step); “sharing meditation or experiences” (the fifth step); “discussion about practice” (the sixth step); “concluding prayer” (the seventh step). Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *사목을 위한 성서의 사용* [Use of the Bible for Ministry] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1993), 16-68.

⁴⁹ Cf. Oswald Hirmer, , *Alternative Ways of Being Church in the Asia of the 1990s*, 14-17.

the presence and to the working of God in our everyday life.”⁵⁰ Fr. Hirmer thus suggested building a parish on the principle of a communion of communities through SCCs and proposed Gospel-sharing in the SCCs to mature the spirituality of the SCCs and the vision of a participatory Church.

In his pastoral letter of 1994, Cardinal Kim announced that a seminar about SCCs would be presented twice for pastors, and he urged all pastors in the Archdiocese to attend this seminar. In addition, at the parish level he strongly suggested that all pastors should make it a priority to establish and nourish small Christian communities and that they should now adopt the idea that the foundational structure of the parish was a community of communities.

Since then, in order to activate SCCs, the Archdiocese has published materials on SCCs and focused on educating and nourishing the leaders of SCCs.⁵¹ The Administrative Office for Evangelization,⁵² in particular, has provided educational programs for SCC leaders in parishes in order to foster the formation of an evangelization team at the parish level. The leaders who participated, forming an evangelization team in the parish, have continuously explained to all the faithful in each parish the needs and characteristics of SCCs in accordance with the pastoral path of the Archdiocese, “Evangelization through SCCs.”⁵³

⁵⁰ Fritz Lobinger, *Building Small Christian Communities*, Training for Community Ministries, no. 19P (Delmenville, South Africa: Lumko Missiological Institute, 1981), 7.

⁵¹ At the beginning of the implementation of SCCs, the materials and the programs were mainly borrowed from the Lumko Institute in South Africa.

⁵² The Archdiocese of Seoul established the Administrative Office of Evangelization in October 1992 in order to enhance evangelization in preparing for the third millennium.

⁵³ Stephen Cardinal Kim, Archbishop of Seoul, in his pastoral letter (1992) announced the long-term pastoral motto of the Archdiocese, “Evangelization of the Second Millennium and the Small Christian Community.” Thereafter, the motto has been concretized in the idea of “evangelization through SCCs.” Cf.

2.2 SCCs in other dioceses in South Korea

The implementation of SCCs in the Archdiocese of Seoul acted as a catalyst in stimulating other dioceses in South Korea to adopt SCCs as their own pastoral policy. For instance, the Bishop of Suwon, Paul Choi, commented on the necessity of SCCs as follows:

First, all members, including the lay faithful, should be subjects in the Church in accordance with the ecclesiology of the People of God. The actual situation, however, of the Korean Catholic Church is far from realizing this. For this reason, in order to offer an opportunity for the lay faithful to participate actively in the Church, the building of SCCs in parishes is required. Second, in recognizing the lack of participation in carrying out the mission of the Church, the Korean Church turns to SCCs as it looks for the way to evangelize the Church itself as well as to evangelize the world.⁵⁴

This pastoral policy had an effect on the selection of the agenda of the Suwon Diocesan Synod in 1997-2000. After the opening of the synod was proclaimed in October 1997, various agendas were discussed by all the faithful. Among those agendas, the synod decided in 1999 two policies, the activation of SCCs and the activation of youth faith life, as a key to new evangelization in the Suwon Diocese. In this synod, all the members of the diocese, the priests, the religious, and the lay faithful, discussed how SCCs might be activated. They asked the following three questions: Is the renewal of parishes through SCCs the best way for new evangelization of the Church? What are the constitutive principles of SCCs? What are the operating principles of SCCs? After long discussion in search of answers to these questions, the synod concluded that SCCs should be places in which the

Stephen Cardinal Kim, “1992 사목교서 [1992 Pastoral Letter],” 65-74. For further consideration, cf. WollKi Chung, “한국교회 소공동체 사목 추진 과정 [The Ministry Development Procedure in Promoting the Small Christian Community in the Korean Catholic Church],” in *2004 소공동체 심포지움 전국모임 자료집* [The Sources of the National Meeting of Small Christian Communities in 2004], ed. Administrative Office for Evangelization (Seoul: Administrative Office for Evangelization, 2004), 28-36.

⁵⁴ Paul Deokgee Choi, “반모임- 교회상을 지향하는 교회론적 접근 [An Ecclesiological Approach toward Ban Gatherings],” *신학과 사상* [Theology and Thought] 9 (1993): 34.

faithful can recognize God's will through prayer and Gospel-sharing, places of faith promotion in which the faithful can mature spiritually, and places of Gospel proclamation in which the faithful can build the kingdom of God by shining the light of the Gospel on the world.⁵⁵ Subsequently, in 2001 Bishop Choi advised all the pastors in his diocese as a matter of priority to implement and activate SCCs in all parishes.

The Bishop of Incheon in 1994 chose as a pastoral motto "Evangelization and the Preparation of SCCs." Since then, the Diocese of Incheon has introduced to pastors and SCC leaders the relationship between evangelization and SCCs and the Seven Step Method in Gospel-sharing. As a result, in the final document of the Incheon Diocesan Synod in 2000, an activation plan for SCCs was suggested as the approach to be adopted for the new evangelization.⁵⁶

In the Diocese of Masan, basic training on SCCs was held in 1994 for all pastors, with the theme of "evangelization in the third millennium and SCCs." Since then, a training program for SCCs has been provided to SCC leaders annually. The Bishop of Masan in his pastoral letter of 2000 suggested the carrying out of social justice, mission, and practice of love through SCCs.⁵⁷

The Archdiocese of Daegu launched SCCs in 1992 and offered several programs for lay leaders of SCCs in 1996 and 1997. Especially in preparation for the Archdiocesan synod, the Archdiocese taught SCC leaders about the meaning of the synod, the renewal of the

⁵⁵ Cf. Chanjong Lee, "수원교구 시노드: 그 이후의 노력과 전망 [The Synod of the Suwon Diocese: Endeavor and Perspective after the Synod]," *사목* [Ministry] 322 (2005): 30-41.

⁵⁶ Cf. Hyochul Kim, "인천교구 시노드: 그 이후의 노력과 전망 [The Synod of the Incheon Diocese: Endeavor and Perspective after the Synod]," *Ibid.*, 19-29.

⁵⁷ Cf. WollKi Chung, "한국교회 소공동체 사목 추진 과정 [The Ministry Development Procedure in Promoting the Small Christian Community in the Korean Catholic Church]," 100.

Church, the structure of SCCs, and the role of SCC leaders. In 1999, following the suggestion of the synod, each parish renewed the structure of its parish council so as to comprise the SCC leaders.⁵⁸

It is not easy here to evaluate and summarize the facts relating to SCCs in all the dioceses in South Korea. However, it might be said that every diocese in South Korea has SCCs at least in structure. Since every parish used the structure of Ban Gatherings for implementing SCCs, there are now no more Ban Gatherings in South Korea. In recognition of the place of SCCs in every diocese, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea established in 2001 the Committee of SCCs, a sub-committee under the Committee for Evangelization.⁵⁹ As time passed, the necessity for pastoral cooperation and collaboration among dioceses at the national level arose from the common pastoral policy on SCCs. Accordingly, at the initiative of the Archdiocese of Seoul and the Diocese of Masan, a national meeting on SCCs was held in 2001 on the theme "Pastoral Ministry through SCCs" with the participation of delegates from many dioceses.⁶⁰ Participants from various dioceses shared their experience of SCCs with each other and discussed the ecclesiological meaning of SCCs. They confirmed that the parish as a community of SCCs is similar to the early Christian community and a manifestation of the idea of communion which was introduced at Vatican II.

The second national meeting was held in 2002, in which new materials on SCCs

⁵⁸ Cf. Ibid., 95-97.

⁵⁹ The Catholic Bishops' Conference has established 17 national committees composed of priests, religious, and laity, with a bishop as the president. Each national committee deals with specific duties, undertaking projects entrusted to it by the general assembly of the episcopal conference. The Committee for Evangelization was established in 1985 with the aim of searching for methods of evangelization in Korea.

⁶⁰ The number of the participants was 154 (3 bishops, 40 priests, 17 religious, 94 lay faithful) from 11 dioceses. See *가톨릭 신문* [*The Catholic Times*], 1 July 2001.

and various methods of developing SCCs were introduced. The participants considered the important role of the laity in implementing and developing SCCs and discussed the vitality and activity of the lay apostolate in the parish. In addition, they proposed holding the third AsIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach) assembly in South Korea in order to have pastoral exchange with the Asian Catholic Church and to deepen the study of SCCs on an international level.⁶¹

From a more pastoral point of view, in 2002, the “National Council of SCCs” was constituted, consisting of the secretaries of the pastoral administration offices in every diocese, together with the participation of directors of the SCC offices in many dioceses. It was established in order to enhance collaboration and cooperation on SCCs among dioceses and parishes, to find a role model for SCCs, and to encourage theological and pastoral study. The National Council of SCCs suggested the formation of a “Theological Study Committee” for the activation of SCCs and established it in February 2003.⁶² This committee, on a national level, has studied the ecclesiological dimension of SCCs in South Korea, has analyzed the problems which many parishes encounter in implementing SCCs, and has investigated how the inculturated SCC program differs from the Lumko model and is more fitting for the culture and context of South Korea.

2.3 Assessment of the process of implementation of SCCs in South Korea

As was mentioned previously, SCCs in most dioceses in South Korea were

⁶¹ Cf. WollKi Chung, “한국교회 소공동체 사목 추진 과정 [The Ministry Development Procedure in Promoting the Small Christian Community in the Korean Catholic Church],” 87.

⁶² Cf. WollKi Chung, “한국교회 소공동체 사목 추진 과정 [The Ministry Development Procedure in Promoting the Small Christian Community in the Korean Catholic Church],” 88-89.

inaugurated with the guidance and strong pastoral exhortation of the local bishop. In the early stages, however, there was not sufficient consensus about the formation of SCCs nor was there adequate consultation and dialogue among the total membership of the Church - the bishop, the pastors, and the laity. For instance, in the Archdiocese of Seoul, despite the strong urging of the archbishop, most pastors resisted implementing SCCs in their parishes because they did not know exactly what SCCs were and they considered SCCs to be a pastoral burden.⁶³ The major reason for the resistance on the part of pastors came from the fact that, in the early stages, the archbishop unilaterally attempted to launch SCCs in the archdiocese without any consultation and dialogue to bring about consensus. In addition, some priests who were accustomed to a traditional way of ministry raised questions about the necessity of SCCs. They could not fully understand why Ban Gatherings had to be transformed into SCCs. Another issue was related to Lumko's SCC model: Seoul pastors wondered why they had to import a model from South Africa instead of inventing an inculturated community model fitting the Korean context. The indifference of some pastors also became an obstacle to implementing SCCs. For them, forming SCCs was regarded as troublesome work dictated from above, that is, by the administration of the archdiocese.⁶⁴

The same thing happened on the parish level. Many pastors tried to enforce the new policy in their parishes while their parishioners were not ready to follow them due to lack of sufficient information, education, and confidence. This “top-down” strategy in implementing

⁶³ While here I mainly discuss the evaluation of SCCs in the Seoul Archdiocese, the assessment of SCCs in other dioceses is not much different because other dioceses also launched SCCs from the pastoral policy of the bishop.

⁶⁴ Cf. Dongyeop Cha, *공동체 사목 기초: 소공동체 원리와 방법* [*The Foundation of Ministry for the Church Community: The Principles and Methods of Small Christian Communities*] (Seoul: Catholic Publishing Company, 2001), 81-82.

SCCs evoked a negative response to their implementation.⁶⁵

Under these circumstances, the most urgent task was not to build structures for SCCs at the parish level, because there was already the similar structure of Ban Gatherings, but rather to make parishioners aware of the characteristics of SCCs, of the need for SCCs in the parish, and of the role of the laity in SCCs. For these reasons, various seminars on SCCs and monthly educational programs for the lay leaders of SCCs were held at the diocesan level. Unfortunately, however, these educational programs and courses were not sufficient in number for the lay faithful. Because of the restriction of time, quite a few lay leaders did not have a chance to attend the training programs.⁶⁶ In other cases, people had no interest in the programs, because the content seemed boring and excessively focused on operating SCCs, without sufficient theological reflection on the principles of SCCs. Moreover, these educational opportunities were not offered to parishioners in general. With the exception of a few lay leaders, many parishioners had little chance to attend the educational programs. Even though there were several programs and educational courses in most dioceses, these were mainly open to lay leaders of SCCs and not to every parishioner.

Despite various negative responses at the beginning, as time passed, recognition of the significance of the SCCs grew among priests and the laity. As for pastors, they have now begun to recognize the value of SCCs in their parishes. Some have experienced the revitalization of their parish, an increase in the number of catechumens, and the spontaneous attendance of the lay faithful at the Eucharist due to the activity of the SCCs. Most of all, the

⁶⁵ Cf. Stephen Kyung Nam Shin, "Small Christian Communities and Religious Education: A Study of the Movement in the Archdiocese of Seoul," (Ph. D. diss., Fordham University, 2004), 39.

⁶⁶ The monthly education courses for lay leaders of SCCs are usually held on a weekday during the day. Thus, it is very difficult for many working men and women to attend the courses.

lay faithful themselves have activated their ministry in SCCs and have come to realize their responsibility for evangelization, and have a greater awareness that they are subjects in the Church. They have experienced an active role in the parish and they have been encouraged to share in the common task of the Church in local society.

Within this perspective, three positive aspects of the SCCs in South Korea might initially be highlighted here. First of all, one of the most outstanding aspects of SCCs is the recovery of the value of the Word. Truly, the Word of God stands at the center of the lives of people in SCCs, and SCCs offer them personal insight into the Word of God and its significance for their daily living. The participants in SCCs deepen their understanding of the Word through the practice of Gospel-sharing, and this makes the Word truly central to their faith communities. SCCs enable members to read and meditate on the Word more often and more regularly and to encounter God through Gospel-sharing. The members read and listen to the Word in SCCs regularly and not just at Sunday Mass. Furthermore, familiarity and intimacy with the Word leads the lay faithful to a more fruitful attendance at the Eucharist.

In South Korea, the lay faithful who belong to SCCs have a weekday meeting once or twice a month. During these meetings, they select a passage from the Gospel to read, often the Gospel of the coming Sunday, and then they share their reflections on the Gospel. In this way, the lay faithful who attend SCC meetings can participate more actively at Mass the following Sunday because they are acquainted with the Gospel passage.

Emphasis on the Word in SCCs never leads to a disregard for the value of the Eucharist in the parish. Rather, SCCs express and confirm ecclesial unity in the Eucharist, in accordance with the Church's teaching that "the Eucharist is the creative force and source of

communion among all the members of the Church,”⁶⁷ and “the parish is a community properly suited for celebrating the Eucharist, which is the living source for its upbuilding and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole Church.”⁶⁸ The parish remains the necessary center for liturgical and sacramental activity, and SCCs become places for the active preparation of the lay faithful for the liturgy. The more the lay faithful attend SCCs and deeply understand, meditate on, and share the Word in their situation, the more they participate actively in the parish Eucharist and enhance communion with the whole Church. This accords with the teaching of Vatican II: “Just as from constant attendance at the Eucharistic mystery the life of the Church draws increase, so a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from increased veneration of the Word of God, which stands forever.”⁶⁹

Second, before the implementation of SCCs in South Korea, the laity were not fully performing their mission and ministry, because of a rigid hierarchical system and the huge size of parishes. Today, however, the participants in SCCs have gradually experienced a greater life of communion with others and a more active participation in the parish. Primarily through SCCs, the laity have begun to realize their status in the Church. Using a method of sharing their personal faith life as well as meditating on the Gospel, they have gradually come to understand that they should no longer remain passive receivers of the sacraments or spectators at Sunday Masses, but should rather be active subjects with their own proper responsibility in the community.

⁶⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” no. 5. *Origins* 22, no. 7 (1992): 108-09.

⁶⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 26. Original text of the Exhortation in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81 (1989): 393-521. English text in *Origins* 18, no. 35 (1989): 561-95.

⁶⁹ Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 26. The relationship between the parish and SCCs in the Korean Catholic Church will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

In South Korea, until the formation of SCCs, it was generally accepted that the pastor had the sole authority to control the inner affairs of the parish. Lay persons were regarded merely as passive recipients of the sacraments or observers of liturgical actions performed by the clergy. Needless to say, they seldom played a participative role in parish affairs. SCCs led to a change of awareness regarding the role of the laity in the Church, especially in parish affairs. Through the regular meetings of the SCCs where much discussion takes place, the lay faithful have become more and more concerned about parish affairs. The members of SCCs consider themselves as participative subjects in the parish and not as mere pawns controlled by the pastor. In the meetings, as the participants look for the best ways to assist their pastor and to deal with parish matters using their charisms and abilities, they experience a sense of co-responsibility with their pastor in the parish.

In fact, before the implementation of SCCs, there were already many lay leaders in the Ban Gatherings. However, those leaders were all nominated by the pastor and, in their dependence upon him, they were simply his assistants. They acted as messengers of the pastor or distributors of information. In SCCs, on the contrary, the leaders are elected by the members of the SCC and then the election is ratified by the pastor. Through many seminars and formation programs about SCCs, lay leaders have begun to realize a new leadership which is active and participative. They no longer remain passive leaders under the pastor. Rather, they practice an active leadership in their communities. Each leader, in consultation with the members of the SCC, determines the time and place of the meeting. The leader leads the meeting and encourages the members to participate actively in the meeting, shares an aspect of the faith as it was received in the training programs, leads discussions about parish issues and seeks solutions for them, and encourages the members to take an active

role in social affairs. Together with the members of the SCC, the leader tries to evangelize the society and culture of the neighborhood. Through this kind of activity, the lay leader assumes the position of an animator among the lay faithful as they accomplish together the ministry and mission of the Church.

Third, in Korean SCCs the spirit of evangelization is clearly stressed in the process of preparing for baptism and in the process of re-evangelization. On the one hand, as mentioned above, the purpose of building SCCs in Korea was to foster evangelization. In many dioceses, SCCs actually function as a school in the Church, where inquirers, candidates, and catechumens go through the various steps of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and where the newly baptized realize more deeply the value of an evangelical life. On the other hand, members of SCCs are free to speak of various experiences in their life and their faith. They share with each other their faith stories and witness to what the Spirit has done in their lives.⁷⁰

3. The Characteristics of SCCs in South Korea in Comparison with Other Related Communities

3.1 Characteristics of SCCs in South Korea Compared with Ban Gatherings

As discussed above, from the 1970s there were in the Korean Catholic Church “Ban Gatherings” on the parish level, each consisting of about 40-50 families. In the early stages, these groups were organized to provide an efficient administrative structure for pastors in

⁷⁰ The 1974 Synod of bishops was devoted to the theme of evangelization. It explored how the Church should best perform its essential missionary task in the world today. In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* following this Synod, Paul VI specifically addressed the topic of small Christian communities (i.e. *communautés de base*) and their connection with evangelization. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58. A further evaluation of SCCs will be given below in chapter four.

the face of a rapid increase in the number of parishioners. In the early 1980s, however, partly due to liberation theology and the rise of BECs in Latin America, but even more importantly due to reflection on the communion ecclesiology that had developed since the Second Vatican Council, the Korean Catholic Church began to realize the value of small communities, which were more than simply gatherings.

In fact, the Korean Catholic Church in 1984 held a Pastoral Council on a national level. The agenda of this Council, understanding the laity in the light of the Second Vatican Council and the importance of lay people in the Korean Catholic Church, referred to small communities as follows: "... the laity sees it as important to form various basic communities based on the Gospel in order to develop the Church; so, the laity of the future will make an effort to activate small Christian communities."⁷¹

While Ban Gatherings have the potential to become SCCs because they hold regular meetings in homes and have communion with the universal Church, they differ from SCCs in terms of Gospel-sharing and, more importantly, because of the communion among the lay faithful in the communities. Thus, as a way of being a truly local Church, the Korean Catholic Church chose to implement SCCs rather than to correct or improve Ban Gatherings.

SCCs in South Korea are generally understood as having the following four characteristics, which will be further considered below, to show how SCCs differ from Ban Gatherings. First, the members of SCCs gather in a neighborhood but as true communities. They meet in their homes by turns once or twice a month. Second, the groundwork of the

⁷¹ The Committee for the Pastoral Council of the Korean Catholic Church, *사목회의 의안, III-평신도* [*The Agenda of Pastoral Council, III- the Laity*] (Seoul: The Committee for the Pastoral Council of the Korean Catholic Church, 1984), 70. Interestingly, the proceedings did not explicitly mention "Ban Gatherings" which already existed in most parishes; instead, they spoke of basic communities with Gospel sharing.

meetings is Gospel-sharing. Through Gospel-sharing they obtain spiritual nourishment and mutual encouragement in faith. Third, they carry out the mission of the Church. Besides sharing the Gospel, they offer service to their neighbors who need help in various ways. Fourth, SCCs are united with the universal Church. Each SCC is linked to the parish and other SCCs. Lay leaders of SCCs are sent to the parish council and the pastors visit SCCs regularly.⁷² In this sense, a parish can be understood as a community of SCCs.

a) *Communion in a Community: From Gatherings to Communities*

Ban Gatherings characteristically have an administrative structure. The members in Ban Gatherings generally hear an announcement concerning the parish or they receive a directive from the pastor about parish events. As administrative sub-structures of a parish, Ban Gatherings promote a passive role with regard to parish management. There is hardly any common prayer among fellow members in Ban Gatherings. While, externally, Ban Gatherings take the form of communities, they do not lead a communitarian life in which members share faith-responses with each other and have various experiences of communion with God and with each other.

SCCs, on the contrary, are not administrative units but living cells of the church.⁷³ They are ways of actualizing communion ecclesiology at the grassroots. Members of SCCs do not remain passive recipients of directives from clergy. Rather, they experience community as they share experiences with each other and reflect on the Gospel.⁷⁴

⁷² Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1995), 25-27.

⁷³ Cf. Ibid., 22.

⁷⁴ Cf. Stephen Kyung Nam Shin, "Small Christian Communities and Religious Education: A Study of the Movement in the Archdiocese of Seoul," 88.

Furthermore, they actualize the role of the laity as subjects in the Church. In fact, various opinions or suggestions arising out of SCCs are discussed at the parish council,⁷⁵ whose members are leaders of SCCs. In this way a pastor can create a pastoral plan not from pure theory or on the basis of his personal pastoral experience and theological studies but with the active participation of lay leaders, including all the members of SCCs who are endowed by God with various charisms and who live in direct day-to-day contact with their fellow parishioners.

Ban Gatherings do not have regular meetings. Members of a Ban gather only when there is some big event in the parish or when the pastor has a special announcement to make. SCCs, however, have regular meetings. The Seoul Archdiocese suggests that SCC meetings be held once a week.⁷⁶ Also, while Ban Gatherings consist of 40-50 families, SCCs are limited to 15 families or less.⁷⁷ This limitation of numbers enables SCC members to participate more actively and to establish friendlier and more spiritual relationships among the members, thus forming true communities.

b) *Life Centered on the Word: From Sacramental Ritualism to the Word*

The clearest distinction between Ban Gatherings and SCCs is Gospel-sharing. While some parishes in the 1980s adopted a system of sharing in Ban Gatherings, the sharing was a

⁷⁵ The Seoul Archdiocese firmly suggests that each SCC should send its leader to the parish council and that the pastor should regularly visit SCCs in order to make a firm connection between SCCs and the parish. Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community], 38-45.

⁷⁶ In fact, contrary to the suggestion, the meetings are generally held once a month (once a month in 71% of SCCs, twice a month 12%, and once a week 15%). Cf. The Office of Lay Ministry of the Archdiocese of Seoul, *구역 반장 신앙실태조사* [A Survey Report on the Faith Life of the Leaders of Ban] (Seoul: the Office of Lay Ministry of the Archdiocese of Seoul, 1995), 41.

⁷⁷ Cf. Dongyeop Cha, *공동체 사목 기초: 소공동체 원리와 방법* [The Foundation of Ministry for the Church Community: The Principles and Methods of Small Christian Communities], 76.

kind of dialogue about matters of Church teaching and timely issues in the parish. After 1992, Gospel-sharing⁷⁸ was introduced as part of the procedure in implementing SCCs. “The basis of SCCs is Gospel-sharing. Here is the difference between general meetings and SCCs. Gospel-sharing is to invite the risen Lord into their lives, to hear his Word directed toward them, and to have a personal meeting with him.”⁷⁹ SCCs can grow as faith communities when the Word comes alive among the people. The members of SCCs listen to the Word, share what they listen to and feel, and then live out the Gospel according to the inspiration of the Word. Through Gospel-sharing, they experience the presence of Christ in the form of the Word and are encouraged to spread his word actively to the world.

The Korean Catholic Church always emphasized the importance of sacramental obligations such as the observance of Sunday Mass, but many Korean Catholics were not familiar with the Word of God. For the most part, the faithful received the Word in a passive way. However, through Gospel-sharing in SCCs, the faithful began to recognize the significance of the Word. Gospel-sharing, furthermore, helped members to proclaim the Word to their neighbors in daily life, following the example of Jesus. They no longer understand life and the Word separately, but live in the Word and commit themselves to society according to their reflection on the Word. In this sense, they conform to what Marcello Azevedo says with regard to BECs in Latin America, namely, SCCs “embody Church as herald, Church of the word of God.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ The Archdiocese of Seoul, striving to activate SCCs centered on the Word, has explained various methods of Gospel sharing including of “the Lumko Seven Step Method” to the lay leaders of SCCs since 1992.

⁷⁹ Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community], 26.

⁸⁰ Marcello De C. Azevedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities: A Meeting Point of Ecclesiologies,” *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 613.

c) *Harbinger of Mission: From Passivity to Activity*

While SCCs are recognized as a way of “being Church,” Ban Gatherings are simply administrative units in a parish. Therefore, the lay apostolate in Ban Gatherings cannot but remain in an assisting role, helping to carry out the plan or project of a pastor. The Gatherings do not promote the voluntary taking on of work and the assuming of a positive role in the mission activity of the Church. Before the implementation of SCCs, the lay faithful barely realized that they should be acting as subjects in the mission of the Church. After Ban Gatherings were transformed into SCCs, 51.2% of the parishioners of the Archdiocese of Seoul who actively and regularly participated in SCCs began to engage in the mission and life of the Church.⁸¹ They began to develop as active agents and to carry out the mission of the Church with responsibility.

The members of SCCs, most of all, listen to the Word, analyze the present situation, and search for the plan of the Lord in the world. Through the contextual interpretation of the Gospel and critical reflection on actual situations, the faithful “live the Gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service.”⁸² Thus, they become aware of their role of mission in the world. In this sense, as a special characteristic of SCCs, Gospel-sharing cannot be regarded simply as knowledge of the literal meaning of the text because the Gospel gains true meaning only when it is brought into the arena of actual life and is interpreted in that context. The members of SCCs seek to plant the seed of the Gospel in the world and make an effort to share the fruits of their faith with the world. In SCCs, the Gospel is understood not as abstract doctrine but as a concrete motivation to mission. From this perspective, SCCs

⁸¹ Cf. The Catholic Times, *가톨릭 신자의 종교의식과 신앙생활* [*The Religious Consciousness and Faith Life of the Korean Catholics*] (Seoul: The Catholic Times, 2000), 47.

⁸² John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 25.

become “a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a ‘civilization of love.’”⁸³

d) *Partakers in Ministry: From Dependence to Participation*

Before SCCs were established in parishes, most parishioners considered the observance of Sunday Mass as the sole duty that they had to observe. In most parishes, only ten percent of parishioners joined some church groups in the parish and actively took part in the mission and ministry of the Church.⁸⁴ The rest of the parishioners were like spectators at Sunday Masses. In the process of implementing SCCs, however, more and more parishioners began to realize that the Church is not for the clergy only but for all members of the community and that the lay faithful have to share responsibility with the clergy for the ministry of the Church.

The lay faithful were no longer mere beneficiaries of one-sided pastoral and sacramental activities of priests but with priests they were equal partners in the mission and ministry of the Church. They began to work actively not as agents of the clergy but as the People of God in their parishes and SCCs. As for the lay leaders, before the implementation of SCCs, the leaders of Ban Gatherings were totally approved by the pastor, so that they were dependent and thus simply assistants of the pastor. In SCCs, however, the leaders are elected by the members of the SCC and their election is ratified by the pastor. The Bishop of Suwon, Paul Choi describes the role of the pastor in parishes and SCCs as follows:

⁸³ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 51. English Text in *Origins* 20, no. 34 (1991): 541-68. Pope John Paul II said this with reference to “ecclesial basic communities” in the “young churches.”

⁸⁴ Cf. Peter Wooil Kang, “교회는 공동체들의 공동체 [The Church as a Community of Communities],” *경향잡지* [The Kyunghyang Magazine] (March, 1993): 19.

Until now, while the role of a pastor has been that of a subject in most matters, the lay faithful in a parish have remained as objects. From now on, pastors will take a role as educators forming the leaders of SCCs, helpers synthesizing and analyzing the situation of society and the Church, and as animators giving vitality to SCCs and indicating the way of SCCs.⁸⁵

In summary, while Ban Gatherings have some similarities with SCCs in that they are small groups in the same neighborhood within a parish, they are mainly regarded as administrative sub-structures of a parish. SCCs, unlike Ban Gatherings, are organized as living cells of the Church. Through Gospel-sharing in SCCs, the members of SCCs are made aware of the mystery of the incarnate Word and live out the values of the Gospel in the world. Through active attendance at SCCs, the lay faithful play their proper role of mission in the world and actively participate in the ministry of the Church. The lay faithful in SCCs realize that the Church is a communion of SCCs, and that in and through their parishes they are united with the life and work of the universal Church.

3.2 Comparison of SCCs in South Africa and in South Korea

SCCs were officially and systematically introduced in South Africa in 1976 when the Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in South Africa was launched.⁸⁶ The Pastoral Plan, seeing the Church, above all, as “a community serving humanity,” suggested building SCCs in which everyone could feel at home, the poor and the needy could be better cared for, and the faithful could work for justice in society and for an end to discrimination, separation, and

⁸⁵ Paul Deokgee Choi, “반모임- 교회상을 지향하는 교회론적 접근 [An Ecclesiological Approach toward Ban Gatherings],” 53-54.

⁸⁶ This pastoral plan was initiated under the influence of Vatican II and the 1973 Synod of Bishops on the theme of evangelization. Important ideas and greater knowledge were further gained from the example of SCCs in Zambia and East Africa. This experience inspired the implementation of the pastoral plan. Cf. Michael Wuestenberg, “A Comparison between the SCCs of Burkina Faso with Those of S. Africa,” *African Ecclesial Review* 37 (1995): 181.

the segregation of apartheid.⁸⁷

However, while the official policy is to have SCCs in most areas, in practice they seem to be optional. In many parishes, the SCCs are confined to certain areas or villages. There are still many parishes in South Africa without SCCs and, even where they exist, not every Catholic attends them. Despite these difficulties, more and more priests and other animators use these programs and have made great efforts to convince people of the value of SCCs. Nevertheless, according to Fr. James O'Halloran, who has spent a lifetime working with SCCs in Africa, in South Africa only one in ten parishes have identifiable small Christian communities.⁸⁸

a) *Similarities of SCCs in South Africa and in South Korea*

In the past, both in Africa and in Asia, pastoral strategy was centered on the administration of the sacraments by the priest and the reception of the sacraments by lay people. In such a pastoral context, little attention was paid to the community-dimension of faith and to the responsibility of all community members for evangelization and mission. After critical reflection on this situation, AMECEA (The Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa) and SACBC (The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference) in Africa and FABC (The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences) in Asia have presented a new vision of the local Church and a new way of being Church in their particular areas. Even though there is some difference of emphasis between the two

⁸⁷ Cf. Cardinal Wilfrid Napier, "Community Serving Humanity: Evangelizing Southern Africa Today," in *Mission and Evangelization*, ed. Michael A. Hayes (London; New York: Burns & Oates, 2004), 14-16.

⁸⁸ Cf. James O'Halloran, *Signs of Hope: Developing Small Christian Communities* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 6.

Continents, the Church generally being seen as a family in Africa⁸⁹ while it is seen as a community in Asia,⁹⁰ ultimately these visions of the Church converge on the idea of the Church as communion and as a communion of communities.

Apart from this common vision of the Church, the SCCs in South Africa and in South Korea have more direct similarities because of the critical role played by the Lumko Institute in the formation process in both places. The Lumko Institute has offered the Church in South Africa and beyond a transforming vision of a community Church based on the teachings of Vatican II. It has also empowered emergent community leaders through formation and training to take on responsibility not merely as helpers but as collaborative co-workers. In South Korea, the Archdiocese of Seoul first of all accepted the vision of the Church as a communion of communities and decided to follow the model of SCCs in South Africa, which had been fostered by the Lumko Institute, and it employed the Seven Step Method of Gospel-sharing in SCCs likewise developed by the Lumko Institute.⁹¹

In most dioceses in South Korea, SCCs have been launched and activated following the model of the Archdiocese of Seoul. Many dioceses have come to see SCCs as an ideal image of the Church, especially SCCs with characteristics taught by the Lumko Institute.

⁸⁹ Especially during the Extraordinary Synod for Africa (1994), the bishops referred to the Church as the Family of God and highlighted the vitality of the Church-as-Family. The Church-as-Family manifests to the world the Spirit whom the Son sent from the Father so that there should be communion with the triune God and among all the faithful. Therefore, the notion of the Church-as-Family was related to the vision of a Church as communion. Cf. The African Synod, "Message of the Synod," in *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, eds. by The African Faith & Justice Network Synod (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 72-86; idem, "Propositions" in *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, 87-108.

⁹⁰ The bishops in the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC understood the Church as a community realizing its communion and mission in its own being and life. At its deepest level, the Church is a communion rooted in the life of the Trinity and thus in the sacraments of the loving self-communication of God. In this perspective, the Church is a community of authentic participation and co-responsibility, where the talents and charisms of each one are accepted and exercised in diverse ministries. Cf. "Statement and Recommendation of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC," in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, 53-65.

⁹¹ See above, pp. 21-22.

The materials or guiding sources for SCCs in South Korea have derived mainly from the Lumko Institute, and many books on SCCs have been translated from the Lumko Institute. In the early stage of building SCCs in South Korea, the Administrative Office for Evangelization in the Archdiocese of Seoul published many books on SCCs, and most of these books were greatly influenced by materials from the Lumko Institute.⁹²

In addition, from the beginning until now in the process of building SCCs, there have been formation and training courses for SCC leaders at the diocesan level. The structure and content of these courses has come from the Lumko Institute. Even if a close look shows that the theological content draws on various resources such as the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, the teaching of FABC documents, the mission and ministry of the laity in the local Church, biblical hermeneutics for a contemporary context, and the understanding of various models of the Church including the People of God and the communion of communities,⁹³ it is still clear that the methods of building SCCs and of forming leaders in SCCs are deeply indebted to the Lumko Institute in South Africa.

b) *Differences in Inculturated SCCs in South Korea*

In South Africa, SCCs arose as a pastoral response to the socio-cultural situation with its high rate of illiteracy, political tension, apartheid, and an ecclesial situation

⁹² For instance, the book *소공동체를 어떻게 만들것인가?* [*How Can We Make a Small Christian Community?*], one of most important books for introducing the characteristics of SCCs, is translated from the book *Building Small Christian Communities* (1981) issued by the Lumko Institute. Also, *소공동체란 무엇인가?* [*What is the Small Christian Community?*] (1993), *사목을 위한 성서의 사용* [*Use of the Bible for Ministry*] (1993), *공동체를 향하여* [*Toward Community*] (1994), and *그리스도인 공동체와 그 지도자들* [*The Small Christian Community and Its Leaders*] (1994) are all based on books by the Lumko Institute. All of these books have been considered as foundational sources for establishing SCCs in South Korea.

⁹³ Cf. Byungchul Ahn, *말씀의 향기: 구역반 모임 복음화 교재* [*Scent of the Word: Evangelization in Small Christian Communities*] (Seoul: Catholic University Press, 2006).

characterized by many forms of discrimination within the Catholic community.⁹⁴ The first distinctive feature of SCCs in South Korea, however, is that they were implemented by a pastoral plan responding to a crisis centered on the inner structure of the Church: namely, the external growth of parishes without internal maturity, isolation or anonymity of parishioners without the care of the pastor, a passive attitude of the lay faithful without active participation in parish matters, and stagnation in the rate of new catechumens. So, while SCCs in South Africa were constructed on the vision of “community serving humanity,”⁹⁵ SCCs in South Korea were established rather differently, for the vitality of the faith life, the enhancement of the lay apostolate in the Church, and evangelization through communities.

The second and most distinctive characteristic of SCCs in South Korea in comparison with those in South Africa is that before the establishment of SCCs in South Korea there were already small group meetings at the parish level, the Ban Gatherings. The main task of implementing SCCs in South Korea was not the building of a new structure or system of SCCs. Rather it involved converting some existing structural aspects with a conscious change from administrative gatherings to small communities to form an alternative way of being Church. It is noteworthy that while in South Africa one in ten parishes has identifiable small Christian communities, in South Korea, at least structurally, all parishes in most dioceses have small Christian communities.⁹⁶

A third difference is that while SCCs in South Africa have only one source of

⁹⁴ Cf. Cardinal Napier, “Community Serving Humanity: Evangelizing Southern Africa Today,” 13-17.

⁹⁵ Cf. Southern African Catholic Bishop’s Conference, *Community Serving Humanity: Pastoral Plan of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa* (Pretoria: SACBC, 1989).

⁹⁶ Cf. see part four of this chapter, p. 55-58.

materials for meetings, the Bible, in South Korea people have guidelines published by each diocese. Even though nowadays some parishes in South Africa provide guidelines for their SCCs, those instances still remain the exception.⁹⁷ However, most dioceses in South Korea publish a monthly or bimonthly booklet for their SCCs. This booklet generally contains various educational resources for the lay faithful such as explanations of the catechism, Bible interpretation, Gospel meditations, theological explorations of social issues, and effective Gospel-sharing directives. For instance, the regular monthly booklet of the Archdiocese of Seoul contains “a meditation prayer,” “a theological lecture for this month,” “a report after visiting an SCC,” “searching for God in our lives: theological understanding of social issues,” “an explanation of a sacred picture,” and “Bible study with SCCs.”⁹⁸ In the monthly booklet of the Diocese of Suwon there are “Sunday homilies for the month with pictures,” “introduction of a model SCC of the month,” “brief explanation of the catechism,” “some announcements about SCCs,” and “three Gospel-sharing methods” such as the Seven Step Method, the Group Response, and Sharing with a Gospel picture.⁹⁹

A fourth difference between SCCs in South Korea and those in South Africa is that the vision of SCCs in South Korea is focused primarily on evangelization. As discussed above, the Archdiocese of Seoul launched SCCs as an effective way to actualize evangelization. Since the Archbishop clearly pointed out in his pastoral letter of 1993 that the purpose of building SCCs in the diocese was to achieve evangelization, the Archdiocese of Seoul has continuously suggested that SCCs be developed from communities of

⁹⁷ Cf. Fritz Lobinger, “Christian Base Communities in Africa and in Brazil,” 150.

⁹⁸ E.g., the Archdiocese of Seoul, *소공동체 영적성장을 위한 길잡이* [A Guide for Spiritual Improvement of SCCs], no. 298 (April 2006).

⁹⁹ E.g., the Diocese of Suwon, *나눔의 소공동체* [Small Christian Community of Sharing], no. 136 (September 2006).

communion to communities of mission.¹⁰⁰ To this end the Archdiocese issued a special guidebook for catechumens, *함께 하는 여정* [*On a Journey Together*].¹⁰¹ According to this guidebook, SCCs should not remain only as a communion of Catholics but they should be open to catechumens. Catechumens, who are incorporated into SCCs, not only learn but also experience the faith through the members' Gospel-sharing, prayers, faith-experience sharing, and practice of love to neighbors. In this way, SCCs become an excellent place for evangelization, and in SCCs the lay faithful realize and actualize the mission of the Church. Following the example of the Archdiocese of Seoul, most dioceses in South Korea regard SCCs as a good means for evangelization as well as for encouraging the communion of members.¹⁰² Nowadays many parishes urge catechumens to attend the meetings of SCCs and arrange for the lay leader of SCCs to play an important role in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.¹⁰³

However, the vision of SCCs in South Africa is centered on serving all human beings through working for justice. In their vision, the Church's evangelizing mission through SCCs cannot be limited to preaching, catechesis, administration of the sacrament of baptism, and development of a spirituality based on personal and family prayer. Rather, it should include efforts to build a "more human world" in which people would share their resources and all would love each other as brothers and sisters. In this sense, the SCC in

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *공동체 선교 활동* [*Mission Activity of Small Christian Communities*] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1998).

¹⁰¹ Cf. The Integral Pastoral Institute, *함께 하는 여정* [*On a Journey Together*] (Seoul: The Integral Pastoral Institute, 2007).

¹⁰² At the national level, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea in 2001 established the Committee of SCCs as a sub-committee under the Committee for Evangelization, not the Committee for the Lay Apostolate. See above, p. 25. This fact seems to mean that the most anticipated role of SCCs in South Korea is to actualize evangelization.

¹⁰³ See below, chapter four, pp. 253-55.

South Africa is not only a place in which its members share the Gospel and the experience of faith, but also notably a place in which its members are actively engaged in justice and human rights in their neighborhood, with particular reference to the provision of food, clothing, shelter, employment and education to the poor and the needy.¹⁰⁴

3.3 Difference between basic ecclesial communities in Latin America and SCCs in South Korea

a) *Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America*

The current phenomenon of basic ecclesial communities¹⁰⁵ in Latin America can hardly be discussed in a univocal way due to the fact that there is a broad spectrum of such communities. However, while there are diverse realities in Latin America, a certain commonality can be induced from those communities, especially in distinction from the SCCs in South Korea. Here I will focus mainly on Brazil, because this is regarded as the place where BECs originated in Latin America.¹⁰⁶

Chronologically, BECs originated in Brazil in the 1950s as a result of pastoral necessity, as a response to the unavailability of priests in parishes with a high density of population and a great number of baptized persons.¹⁰⁷ However, looking at the identity and

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Cardinal Napier, "Community Serving Humanity: Evangelizing Southern Africa Today," 16-17.

¹⁰⁵ The term is used to translate the Spanish *comunidad ecclesial de base* or the Portuguese *comunidade ecclesial de base*. These are generally called basic ecclesial communities, as well as basic Christian communities, small Christian communities, and basic Church communities. Hereafter I will use the term basic ecclesial communities (BECs) because this seems to be a better literal translation of the Latin American term. For further details of BECs, see Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Basic is Beautiful: Basic Ecclesial Communities from Third World to First World* (London: Fount, 1993), 17.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. George Kwame Kumi, "Basic Ecclesial Communities as Communion," *African Ecclesial Review* 37 (1995): 162.

¹⁰⁷ The first BECs were formed when Agnelo Rossi, Bishop of Barra do Piraí, in 1956 initiated an evangelization movement using lay catechists to cover areas not reached by pastors. Cf. *Ibid.*, 164.

characteristics of BECs in Latin America today, it can be said that these BECs emerged especially from the social situation of the area in the 1960s and from critical reflection on the situation of the Christian faith.

The people of Latin America in the 1960s suffered from “a stratified and discriminatory society which came from the colonial past, the consolidation of privileged national oligarchies that arose in the post-independence period, and the predatory and generalized invasion of international capital in their regions. All this led to the fusion of the national military and oligarchic powers with international economic power in a model of concentrated wealth, dependency, oppression, and repression.”¹⁰⁸ In this regard, Leonardo Boff, one of leading liberation theologians, succinctly stressed that BECs in Latin America emerged in the struggle for liberation, and the very identity and purpose of BECs is grounded in the liberation of the oppressed from injustice.¹⁰⁹

Faced with this situation, the Assemblies of Latin American Episcopal Conferences at Medellin (1969) and Puebla (1979), reading the Second Vatican Council in their own context, were very attentive to the reality of poverty and injustice in Latin America. These assemblies gave a theological understanding of the poor as the oppressed in society, and made a “preferential option for the poor.”¹¹⁰ They provide the ecclesiological background to the development of the BECs in the pastoral context of the Latin American Catholic Church.

¹⁰⁸ Marcelo de C. Azevedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities,” in *Mysterium Liberationis*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Victoria, Australia: Collins Dove, 1993), 642.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Leonardo Boff, *EcclesioGenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 34-44. The fourth chapter in this work was written on the theme “An Oppressed People Organizing for Liberation.”

¹¹⁰ This phrase was described in detail in the Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, “The Final Document of the Third General Conference: Evangelization in Latin America’s Present and Future,” in *Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 263-67.

Early reflection upon and evaluation of the existence and progress of the BECs took place during the assembly at Medellin. Here the bishops, describing the basic ecclesial community (BEC) as the first and fundamental ecclesiastical nucleus, stated that “this community becomes the initial cell of the ecclesiastical structures and the focus of evangelization, and it currently serves as the most important source of human advancement and development.”¹¹¹

The more important source for assessing the progress of BECs is the final document of the assembly at Puebla. In this document, the BEC is understood as an ecclesial reality, a community of faith, hope, and charity in Latin America. Accordingly, when united in BECs,

Christians strive for a more evangelical way of life amid the people, work together to challenge the egotistical and consumeristic roots of society, and make explicit their vocation to communion with God and their fellow humans. Thus they offer a valid and worthwhile point of departure for building up a new society, the civilization of love.¹¹²

From this perspective, in the spirit of the Medellin Conference and in accord with the guidelines set forth by *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the bishops at Puebla pledged that they would promote, guide, and accompany the BECs by fostering the discovery and gradual training of animators for these communities. The ideals of the BECs as represented by both conferences can be broadly summed up by four key phases: a center of evangelization, renewal of the church institution, nurture of the vocation and life of the poor as Christians, and active participation in service and missionary witness.¹¹³

¹¹¹ The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, “The Final Document of the Second General Conference,” in *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, II Conclusions*, third edition (Washington, DC: Secretariat for Latin America National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979), 185

¹¹² The Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops, “The Final Document of the Third General Conference: Evangelization in Latin America’s Present and Future,” 212-13.

¹¹³ Cf. John Guiney, “Comparing BCCs in S. America and Africa,” *African Ecclesial Review* 30

b) *Differences between BECs in Latin America and SCCs in South Korea*

The general characteristics of BECs in Latin America are well expressed in the phrase “basic ecclesial communities” itself. The term “basic” in BECs, from an ecclesiological point of view, implies that the lay faithful are the base of the hierarchical structure of the Church. BECs are mainly active communities of lay people. In Brazil and many countries in Latin America, the term “basic,” more significantly, is also understood from a sociological perspective as at the base of society. BECs are composed of the oppressed, the poor, and the down-trodden. In fact, most of the thousands and thousands of BEC members are poor.¹¹⁴ While this is not an exclusive characteristic of BECs, it is an understandable feature because poor people feel more strongly the need for mutual support and community.¹¹⁵ In this regard, the Catholic Church in South Korea uses the term “small” instead of “basic” in referring to its own Christian communities. The term “small” is used in contrast with huge parishes, and is understood in a quantitative sense without any discrimination or any preferential option. The suggested size for SCCs in South Korea is 15 families or less, because the limitation of numbers enables SCC members to participate more actively and to share the experience of faith more freely and to enhance spiritual relationships among the members.

The ecclesiality of BECs and SCCs is expressed both in their unity and faith and in their linkage to the institutional Church. The fundamental motivating force for the BECs is faith in Jesus Christ, the desire to live his commandment of love, and to carry out his

(1988): 170.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Marcelo de C. Azevedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities: A Meeting Point of Ecclesiologies,” *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 602.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 639.

mission by the power of the Holy Spirit in communion with the local and universal Church.¹¹⁶ Also, by relating with the institutional Church, BECs want to reverse the confrontational and/or hostile approach to the hierarchy that used to be a hallmark of basic communities in the sixties, especially in Italy and France or in the so-called “underground church” in the United States.¹¹⁷ As for community, the members of BECs and SCCs are moving toward a Christian lifestyle that contrasts sharply with the individualistic and selfish, privatized, and competitive style. They strive to live the faith by sharing experiences of life, and to nourish and support each other by living out communion.¹¹⁸

The first specific contrast between BECs in Latin America and SCCs in South Korea follows from the fact that the origin of BECs was “from below,” from the grassroots of pastoral practice, from the struggle of the oppressed poor. BECs emerged from the bottom up, from Christians who felt the hierarchical structure of the Church treated the lay faithful as clients or passive receivers of sacraments and who therefore created a new kind of Christian community where the lay faithful became active participants of the Church and “the poor people became subjects of their own history.”¹¹⁹ On the contrary, SCCs in South Korea started “from above,” from guideline-documents and pastoral planning. The implementation of SCCs resulted from directions “from above” with the pastoral aim of the inner renewal of the Church, the activation of faith life, the improvement of the lay apostolate in the Church, and evangelization through communities. Since SCCs in South Korea were initiated from pastoral planning, there is little anti-clerical or anti-institutional

¹¹⁶ Cf. Jose Marins and Team, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: The Church from the Roots*, Pastoral Exchanges Series no. 11 (Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 1983), 18.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Marcelo de C. Azevedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities,” 602.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 638.

¹¹⁹ Joseph G. Healey, “Basic Christian communities in Africa and in Latin America,” *African Ecclesial Review* 26 (1984): 223.

sentiment and little demand for a more autonomous status within the parish or local Church. In this regard, some critics of SCCs in South Korea see various problems or weaknesses being partially the result of the hierarchy imposing SCCs as a pastoral strategy “from above.”¹²⁰

John Guiney, however, does not see this as a significant shortcoming. He finds in the context of the African SCCs that where an ardent serious pastoral effort was made to set up SCCs, they have been warmly received by the people. Furthermore, he states that from his pastoral experience where due attention was paid to the AMECEA guidelines for setting up SCCs, the communities had favorable effects not only on their members but also on all of the faithful in the local Church.¹²¹ In fact, in the context of the Catholic Church in South Korea when it is recalled that in the early stages the lay faithful did not have a full awareness of being Christians owing to their lack of education and their courses of formation, the fact that SCCs were founded from above cannot be regarded as a wrong method but as an inevitable fact. In reality, it can be said that the leaders of the Church in South Korea in the process of implementing SCCs did not simply impose them “from above” but rather played the role of catalysts for building up SCCs.

¹²⁰ See Hyesuk Ryoo, “친교의 공동체 실현을 위한 현안과제와 전망 [The Task and Perspective for Accomplishment of the Church as Communion],” *사목 [Ministry]* 320 (2005): 74; Hyunjun Park, “소공동체 운동과 사목문화 그리고 평신도의 영성 [SCCs, the Culture of Ministry, and the Spirituality of the Laity],” *우리신학 [Woori Theology]* 6 (2007): 33-37; Jemin Lee, *한국교회의 미래를 생각하며-소공동체와 한국교회* [For the Future of the Church in South Korea- SCCs and the Church in South Korea], <http://www.rijemin.com/bbs/zboard.php?id=rijemin01> (accessed January 28, 2010).

¹²¹ Cf. John Guiney, “Comparing BCCs in S. America and Africa,” 168. In this matter, Fr. Lobinger, after experiencing BECs in Brazil, points to the similarity of African SCCs and Latin American BECs. “It is often said that the African SCCs were started from above, while the Latin American BECs emerged from below. My visit to Brazil convinced me that this contrast is at least exaggerated. Again and again I was told that the BECs did not emerge by themselves. The bishops, priests and religious made the start or were essentially involved in the founding process.” Fritz Lobinger, “Christian Base Communities in Africa and in Brazil,” *African Ecclesial Review* 29 (1987): 152.

As a second point of contrast, BECs in Latin America use Gospel-sharing as a basis for pastoral reflection according to the method of seeing, judging, and acting. This method enables the participants of BECs to make an integrated approach to the Bible which is helpful for bridging between faith and the secular dimension of life.¹²² On the grounds of what the Gospel demands, the participants of BECs realize the need for the transformation of a society whose organization is in itself unjust in many ways and very much the source of their own poverty. Thus faith is not locked in the mind and even less within a private, individual horizon. “Faith is a dynamic factor of personal conversion and societal transformation.”¹²³

The SCCs in South Korea, however, tend not to begin their Gospel-sharing with some experience from daily life. Rather, they begin with a passage from the Bible itself. The members normally choose the Gospel of the coming Sunday instead of selecting a text more appropriate for their everyday situation, because it helps them prepare for the Sunday liturgy with the whole community.¹²⁴ For this reason, compared with Latin American BECs, it is often noted that SCCs lack the kind of political dimension and commitment to social change which are marks of Latin American BECs.¹²⁵ In fact, there is very little in the way of consciousness raising, struggle for liberation, or in-depth social analysis evident in an SCC meeting in South Korea. Instead, the missionary activity of SCCs is usually of a basic charitable or evangelistic nature, such as visiting the sick, meeting with lapsed Catholics, and assisting someone in financial need.

¹²² Cf. John Guiney, “Comparing BCCs in S. America and Africa,” 173.

¹²³ Marcelo de C. Azevedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities,” 603.

¹²⁴ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체란 무엇인가?* [*What is the Small Christian Community?*] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1997), 14.

¹²⁵ Cf. John Paul Vandenakker, *Small Christian Communities and the Parish* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 118.

Third, BECs are a place where the dichotomy between the sacred and secular is broken down through Christian praxis.¹²⁶ BECs integrate social reflection and conscientization about realities of life, with reflections and sharing on how the Scriptures affect people's lives. In other words, they integrate the secular and the religious dimensions of life. In the context of violent reality which oppresses people, BECs play an important role in developing a liberating praxis through "the intimate link between faith and life, between faith and action, between faith and its ethical projection, between the evangelical project and action to transform an oppressive and unjust society."¹²⁷ It is in BECs that the Church's preferential option for the poor has begun to be effectively realized and that the faithful have been given a real opportunity to work with commitment for the transformation of the world.¹²⁸ SCCs in South Korea, on the other hand, unlike BECs in Latin America, for the most part, began with little attention to a critical reflection about society but were organized with the pastoral needs of parish renewal in mind. Thus, South Korean Catholics actually find it difficult to attain a dynamic integration between reflection on faith and social action.¹²⁹

Fourth, BECs in Latin America can be understood more clearly within the context of the theology of liberation. While liberation theology in its early stages did not clearly address ecclesiological questions, it could hardly avoid touching on ecclesiological implications when it asked the following questions: "What is salvation? What does it mean

¹²⁶ "Praxis is not a synonym of practice, action, or behavior. It is not an antonym of theory. Praxis expresses the combination of action and reflection that manifests and attempts to realize the historicity of the human person. ... [Thus,] Christian praxis is the concrete expression in life of the historical impact of faith." Marcelo de C. Azevedo, "Basic Ecclesial Communities," 651.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 640.

¹²⁸ Cf. John Guiney, "Comparing BCCs in S. America and Africa," 170.

¹²⁹ Cf. Hyesuk Ryoo, "친교의 공동체 실현을 위한 현안과제와 전망 [The Task and Perspective for Accomplishment of the Church as Communion]," 76-77.

to proclaim God as Father in a world of injustice and inhumanity? In what do the authentic life and message of Jesus of Nazareth consist?”¹³⁰

These questions and their answers cannot be confined within a new way of doing theology or within the central content of the Gospel proclamation. Rather, they are better understood within an ecclesiological reflection on the structure of the Church, considering the real situation of the people in Latin America. Liberation theology, from this perspective, pointed out the insufficiency of the earlier models of the Church - Christendom and neo-Christendom - to respond to the situation in Latin America. A new model was needed that would refer not only to “the internal structure of the Church” but would also have to do “with its relationship with its broader surroundings, with its place in society as a whole, with its interconnections with the various sectors and classes of society.”¹³¹ A new vision of the Church in Latin America responds to concrete situations of oppression and to the steps already being taken in the direction of liberation.

The vision of the Church in liberation ecclesiology is shaped from the starting point of the poor, in the option for them, in the life rising up among them. It is at this point that liberation ecclesiology meets with BECs. As Church, the BEC is a decentralized Church, a Church in the service of the world and in solidarity with the poor and their cause, and a Church with a prophetic vocation in the world. In BECs the poor, as a point of departure and as a central reference point in the understanding of humanity in salvation history and of God’s action upon the world, become subjects for the evangelizing Church.¹³² In addition,

¹³⁰ Alvaro Quiroz Magana, “Ecclesiology in the Theology of Liberation,” in *Mysterium Liberationis*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Victoria, Australia: Collins Dove, 1993), 198.

¹³¹ Ibid., 199.

¹³² Cf. Marcelo de C. Azevedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities,” 648.

as Church the BEC is a visible, efficient, sacramental mediator of communion with God, with others and with history. In liberation ecclesiology, “the belief that the Church is the mystery of this communion between persons cannot be reduced to a simple intellectual affirmation without repercussion in daily life. Rather this sign of the presence of God should lead to a mutual commitment in truth and in justice.”¹³³

Whereas liberation theology is the context in Latin America for BECs, Africa and South Korea stress incarnation theology and/or communion ecclesiology, and the SCC is often described as a communion of families, the parish as a communion of SCCs. Father John Guiney sums up the nature of SCCs in Africa in three key words: communion, localization, and incarnation. SCCs should be rooted in the fellowship of Christ, where people are nourished and enabled to participate in the building up of communion. When this communion is actualized and lived in SCCs at the local level, the communion of SCCs is never isolated from the local church but becomes the local Church itself. Accordingly, the members of SCCs, who encounter, share, and live the Gospel, build up the Church and carry out its mission of salvation for all in their own locality through hearing, celebrating, and witnessing to the word of God.¹³⁴ Guiney’s understanding of SCCs also shows that SCCs cannot exist apart from their context. This evaluation of SCCs in Africa shows that they are similar to the SCCs in South Korea. SCCs in South Korea can be characterized by their pastoral response to their specific situation: the needs of inner renewal of the Church, the encouragement of the lay faithful to active participation in the ministry of the Church, and evangelization through communities. SCCs in South Korea are not places of socio-cultural

¹³³ Jose Marins and Team, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: The Church from the Roots*, 28.

¹³⁴ Cf. John Guiney, “Comparing BCCs in S. America and Africa,” 168.

conscientization.

While BECs in Latin America and SCCs in South Korea have noteworthy differences, they nevertheless have many things in common in their fundamental and ecclesiological aspects. They have searched for a true way of being Church in their own situation at the grassroots level. In BECs and SCCs the lay faithful assume active responsibility for mission and ministry in their local Church. BECs and SCCs, expressing ecclesial communion, as centers of evangelization, both strive to be “a hope for the universal Church.”¹³⁵

4. Present Statistics on SCCs and Parishes in the Korean Catholic Church

The third AsIPA general assembly was held in Uiwang, South Korea in September of 2003. For this assembly a report was presented on the Korean Catholic Church, especially on SCCs in the country.¹³⁶ This report was the first in which each diocesan office for SCCs gave their number and information on their activities. The following data on the number of SCCs, the rate of parishioners' attendance at SCC meetings, and the number of SCC meetings per month has been taken from the report (Table 1).

¹³⁵ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58.

¹³⁶ Cf. The National Committee for Small Christian Communities, *Report on the Korean Catholic Church: AsIPA General Assembly III* (Seoul: The National Committee for Small Christian Communities, 2003).

Table 1

Sections Diocese	Catholics	Parishes	SCCs	Attendance at SCCs ¹³⁷	Number of the meetings per month
Seoul	1,409,022	237	20,000 ¹³⁸	*	1
Chunchon	70,340	48	1,094	85.0%	2
Daejon	215,895	96	2,689	43.0%	1.08
Inchon	372,213	85	5,864	52.1%	1.5-2.0
Suwon	568,584	140	12,029	49.0%	2.84
Wonju	60,985	36	(580)	*	1
Daegu	391,607	132	4,527	*	*
Pusan	374,532	98	5,350	54.9%	1
Cheongju	127,995	57	1,577	*	1
Masan	146,915	61	1,180	51.8%	1
Andong	44,211	32	(420)	*	*
Kwangju	294,771	100	3,345	25.0%	1.5
Jeonju	161,194	71	2,242	42.0%	1
Jeju	57,198	23	546	40.0%	1
Total	4,295,712	1,216	est. 61,400	(55.0%)	*

Since Seoul Archdiocese did not offer a specific number, and Wonju and Andong dioceses did not report, it is hard to estimate the total number of SCCs in South Korea in 2003. However, since all the bishops of South Korea assumed in their pastoral plans the implementation of SCCs in their dioceses, we can estimate the number of SCCs in both dioceses. Since the social and ecclesial situation in the dioceses of Wonju and Andong is similar to that of Jeju Diocese, we can extrapolate that there are 582 in Wonju Diocese and 422 in Andong Diocese. Accordingly, we can say that the total number of SCCs in South Korea in 2003 was about 61,400. As for the rate of attendance at SCC meetings, variations

¹³⁷ The rate of attendance is calculated not as the portion of attendants from among “all parishioners,” but as the portion of attendants out of the average number of “adult participants at Sunday Mass.” In the Korean Catholic Church, about 25% of parishioners usually participate in the Eucharist on Sunday. Cf. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, *교세 통계표* [A Statistical Survey Report of the Korean Catholic Church] (Seoul: The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, 2004). Asterisk (*) in the table means that there is no data because the dioceses did not report.

¹³⁸ The Archdiocese of Seoul did not clarify the number of SCCs, but reported “about 20,000.”

ranged from 25% to 85%. It is not easy to analyze the reasons for the difference in the rate of attendance at the SCC meetings. However, one predictable reason might be the concern the pastor shows for the SCCs. If the pastor has a special concern for building up SCCs and activating them in the parish, attendance in the SCC meetings increases.¹³⁹ With regard to the number of SCC meetings per month, meetings are usually held once a month in most dioceses. In Suwon Diocese, meetings were held three times a month because of the strong suggestion of the bishop and the pastors.¹⁴⁰

Seven years later, in 2010, the following data were collected (Table 2).¹⁴¹

Table 2

Section Diocese	Catholics	Parishes	Catholics per parish	Number of SCCs			SCCs per parish
				2003	2010	Variation	
Seoul	1,406,710	219	6,423	about 20,000	14,910	-about 5,090	68
Chunchon	78,089	57	1,370	1,094	1,499	405	26
Daejon	262,561	116	2,263	2,689	3,060	371	26
Inchon	437,621	113	3,873	5,864	6,051	187	54
Suwon	743,833	191	3,894	12,029	13,396	1,367	70
Wonju	68,892	44	1,566	(580)	(766)	(186)	17

¹³⁹ In the Korean Catholic Church, even though the lay faithful are increasingly aware of their autonomous role in the Church and their co-responsible participation in Church ministry, the tendency to depend on the clergy is still found in most parishes. This tendency undoubtedly has had an effect on the SCC movement.

¹⁴⁰ The Diocese of Suwon had a diocesan synod in 1999-2001. The two main agenda items of the Synod were “Activation of Faith Life of the Youth” and “Activation of SCCs.” After the Synod, the bishop of Suwon diocese suggested that SCC meetings should be held more than once in a month for the activation of SCCs. Cf. Chanjong Lee, “수원교구 시노드: 그 이후의 노력과 전망 [The Synod of the Suwon Diocese: Endeavor and Perspective after the Synod],” 30-41.

¹⁴¹ In fact, as of 2010 there is no single report containing the present statistics on SCCs. The above data was obtained from personal calls to the office of SCCs in each diocese. Wonju Diocese and Andong Diocese did not have data on the number of SCCs. After calling directly to several parish offices in both dioceses, I estimated the numbers following a method of statistical analysis. Unfortunately, *A Statistical Survey Report of the Korean Catholic Church* issued by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea does not have a section on SCCs, even though the number of participants in other associations such as Cursillos, Legion of Mary, M.B.W., and M.E. are indicated. Cf. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, *교세 통계표* [*A Statistical Survey Report of the Korean Catholic Church*] (Seoul: The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, 2010).

Section Diocese	Catholics	Parishes	Catholics per parish	Number of SCCs			SCCs per parish
				2003	2010	Variation	
Daegu	450,826	154	2,907	4,527	4,650	123	30
Pusan	415,157	110	3,774	5,350	5,072	-278	46
Cheongju	148,358	68	2,182	1,577	1,799	222	26
Masan	161,449	73	2,212	1,180	1,279	99	18
Andong	46,730	36	1,298	(420)	(402)	(-18)	11
Kwangju	329,951	119	2,773	3,345	5,456	2111	46
Jeonju	182,268	86	2,119	2,242	2,564	322	30
Jeju	67,496	25	2,700	546	681	135	27
Uijongbu	235,504	66	3,568	*	2,755	*	42
Total	5,120,092	1,571	3,259	e. 61,400	64,340	2,940	35.8

As can be seen from the above table, the number of SCCs in 2010 increased in comparison with 2003. In Seoul Archdiocese, the number of SCCs as of 2010 decreased greatly, because Uijongbu Diocese was established in 2004.¹⁴² As of 2010, the total number of SCCs in the Korean Catholic Church can be estimated as 64,340. On an average, each parish has 35.8 SCCs and each parish has an average of 3,259 Catholics. Accordingly, the number of parishioners per SCC is 91. Considering that 25% of the parishioners usually participate in the Eucharist on Sunday and 50-60% of the participants of Sunday Mass attend the meeting of SCCs, we can estimate that the average number of parishioners at a monthly meeting of an SCC is about 11-13.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown the history and characteristics of SCCs in South Korea. To sum up, the Archdiocese of Seoul, faced with the internal crisis of identity in the Korean

¹⁴² The Diocese of Uijongbu was established in 2004. The territory (2,626km²) of the diocese was taken totally from the Archdiocese of Seoul. Joseph Lee Han-Taek, S.J., Auxiliary of Seoul, was appointed as the first ordinary of the new diocese. Cf. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, *Newsletter*, no. 48 (Fall, 2004), p. 3.

Catholic Church, first realized the significance of small communities in its reflection on the document of FABC V. The Asian bishops in the 5th Plenary Assembly in 1990, in order to enhance the role played in the Church by all the faithful, suggested an ideal form for the Church in Asia, that is, a communion of communities. To concretize this ideal form, the bishops suggested the building of small Christian communities as a tried and effective way of promoting communion and participation at the grassroots level. They envisioned SCCs as ecclesial structures in which all the faithful would be encouraged to take a more active role in the mission and ministry of the Church.

Proceeding from this insight, beginning in 1992, SCCs in South Korea were formed on the foundation of Ban Gatherings which had already existed in most parishes. SCCs, unlike Ban Gatherings, however, are organized as living cells of the Church. Through Gospel-sharing in SCCs, the members are made aware of the mystery of the incarnate Word and live out the values of the Gospel in the world. Through active attendance at SCCs, the lay faithful play their proper missionary role in the world and actively participate in the ministry of the Church. Finally, the lay faithful in SCCs realize that the Church is a communion of SCCs, and that this is a true way of being Church.

The characteristics of SCCs in South Korea have been illustrated and compared with those of Ban Gatherings, SCCs in South Africa, and basic ecclesial communities in Latin America. While Ban Gatherings have the potential to become SCCs, they differ from SCCs in the area of Gospel-sharing and, more importantly, the communion of the lay faithful in the communities. In the early stage of implementing SCCs in South Korea, the Lumko Institute in South Africa played a catalytic role. Therefore, the overall appearance of SCCs in South Korea is similar to that in South Africa. The characteristics of SCCs in South Korea, however, are different from those in South Africa in terms of localization and

inculturation. Moreover, the pastoral aim of SCCs in South Korea is mainly directed to the inner renewal of the Church as expressed in the activation of faith life, the enhancement of the lay apostolate in the Church, and evangelization through communities, with minimal socio-cultural conscientization or education of the lay faithful. While SCCs in South Korea started “from above,” from guideline-documents and plans for pastoral planning, BECs in Latin America emerged “from the bottom up,” from the grassroots of pastoral practice, from the struggle of the oppressed poor. In the context of oppressive violence, it was in BECs that the Church’s preferential option for the poor began to be effectively realized and that the faithful were given a real opportunity to work with commitment for the transformation of the world.

Finally, I have described the statistics on SCCs and the parish in the Korean Catholic Church. The statistics show that without exception there are SCCs in every diocese in South Korea and the participation of the parishioners has increased as time has passed. It might be said from the statistics that SCCs in the parish have gradually taken root in the Korean Catholic Church.

The next chapter will deal with the concept of “communion” and the idea of “the Church as communion.” The chapter is crucial for this dissertation in that the theological understanding of the idea of “the Church as communion” in the teaching of the Church will become the foundational criteria for analyzing SCCs in South Korea, which will be discussed in the final chapter. In particular, the chapter will assess SCCs according to the teaching of the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the Vatican II documents, the 1985 Synod documents, the 1987 Synod documents, and John Paul II’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNION ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES, THE CHURCH FATHERS, VATICAN II, THE 1985 SYNOD, AND THE 1987 SYNOD

The Church, according to Vatican II, “in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of union [*unionis*] with God and of unity among all men.”¹ The sacramental aspect of the Church implies that the Church is fundamentally a community of people who have union with God and with one another and manifest or live out this union and unity in the world for the unity of all people. The light of Christ “shines out visibly from the Church” for the benefit of all; the Church has a “universal mission.”² Christ works through the Church to join people “more closely to himself.”³ More specifically, the Spirit unifies the Church “in communion [*in communione*].”⁴ The idea of the Church as communion goes beyond merely juridical and institutional understandings and represents the mystical, sacramental, and inter-personal dimensions of the Church.

Since the Council, an understanding of the Church as communion has become increasingly popular among theologians and Church leaders.⁵ The proponents of an

¹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1. Translation amended to say “union” instead of “communion.”

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., no. 48.

⁴ Ibid., no. 4.

⁵ For explorations of the idea of the Church as communion, cf. Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Visions and Versions* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000); J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. R.C. De Peaux (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992); Nicholas M.

ecclesiology of communion understand communion to be the basic and indispensable concept for properly describing the theological nature of the Church. The concept of communion is applied to the life of the immanent Trinity, to all the faithful's participation in Christ, to the unity among the Church's members, to the collegiality of bishops, to the relationship between local churches and the universal Church, and the promotion of communion is the Church's mission in the world. Communion thus describes the Church's essential nature, essential for its ministry, mission, and practical life.

This chapter will first discuss the biblical and patristic concept of communion and then describe the role of communion in the images of the Church found in the documents of Vatican II, especially focusing on *Lumen Gentium*. The later part of the chapter will deal with the meaning of "the Church as communion" in the 1985 Extraordinary Synod and analyze the correlation between the idea of the Church as communion and the idea of the Church as a sacrament for the salvation of the world. The chapter will end with a discussion of the implications for the laity of an understanding of the Church as communion, which are mainly expressed in the 1987 Synod and in John Paul II's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*.

1. Communion in the Tradition of the Church

The word "communion" comes from the Latin *communio*, which translates the Greek word *koinonia*. In secular Greek, *koinonia* denotes "participation" or "fellowship" with a close bond. In human life it expresses a close partnership such as common sharing in

Healy, "Ecclesiology and Communion," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 31, no 3 (2004): 273-90; Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion*, ed. Stephan Otto Horn and Vinzenz Pfnür, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

a thing, common enterprises, legal relations, even marriage.⁶ Etymologically, it is not certain whether the Latin *communio* comes from *cum moenus*, a defensive installation such as a camp or fortress, or *cum munus*, a common task, duty, undertaking.⁷ This etymological understanding of communion is noteworthy, but the true meaning of communion in Christianity can be better understood from its biblical, ecclesial, and theological usage.

1.1 Scripture

a) *The Old Testament*

In an etymological sense, there is a link between *koinonia* and the Hebrew *habar* (חָבַר) which means “to bind, to be united, be joined, to tie a magic knot or spell charm,” but this concept is never used to refer to the relationship between God and man in the Old Testament.⁸ On the contrary, this word was mainly used in a pejorative or a magical sense.⁹ For instance, “Ephraim is *joined* to idols” (Hos 4:17); “As robbers lie in wait for someone, so the priests are *banded* together” (Hos 6:9); “Can wicked rulers be *allied* with you, those who contrive mischief by statute?” (Ps 94:20).

In the Old Testament, it is the notion of “covenant” that most closely approaches the meaning of communion in the sense that it involves the closest “fellowship” between God and his people.¹⁰ The covenant is founded on the divine promise: “I will be with you”

⁶ Cf. Friedrich Hauck, “Κοινωνία,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 798-800.

⁷ Cf. Robert Kress, *The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 35.

⁸ Cf. Michael McDermott, “Biblical Doctrine of Koinonia,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 19 no. 1 (1975): 64-77; 19 no. 2 (1975): 219-33.

⁹ Cf. H. Cazelles, “חָבַר” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 193-97.

¹⁰ Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, “Communion,” in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated*

(Ex 3:12), and it is expressed both in the presence of God among his people and in their adherence to him. While it is certain that in the covenant there is no suggestion of any intimate union between the Creator and his creation or between the all-holy God and those who are made holy only by virtue of their vocation from him, still in terms of the relationship of vocation and obedience a communion between God and man is established in the covenant.¹¹

While the covenant, as discussed above, is a relationship in which God takes Israel as his people, the covenant “is not to be conceived as a treaty between equals, but as God’s freely chosen commitment of Himself which involves a corresponding obligation for the recipients of His gift.”¹² Likewise, even if the sacrificial meal, described in Deuteronomy 12:5-7, is commanded to be celebrated in the presence of the Lord at a proper place, it is not considered as establishing a communion between Israel and God.¹³ This is because in the community of Israel there is a great distance between the almighty creator God and the human being he created. Simply put, the idea of *koinonia* in the Old Testament is limited to the community before God, which is called under God’s supremacy, but it is not yet developed as a *koinonia* with God himself or a participation in the life of God.

Furthermore, the covenant between God and his people, the pilgrim people of Israel, is not complete in itself; rather it looks to a new relationship with God which might

Encyclopedia, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 664-65. In this regard, it is notable here that Israel was given the title of “community of God” *qahal Yahweh* (קהל יהוה, cf. LXX ἐκκλησία). In Deuteronomy *qahal* refers to the assembly of Israelites who receive the Decalogue and through it becomes the people of Yahweh, that is, Yahweh’s covenant community. Also, cf. F.-L. Hossfeld and E.-M. Kindl, “קהל” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 552-53.

¹¹ Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, “Communion,” 664.

¹² Michael McDermott, “Biblical Doctrine of Koinonia,” 66.

¹³ Cf. *Ibid.*

properly be described as one of personal communion rather than external observance. The prophet Jeremiah sheds light on this aspect of the covenant:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more (Jer 31:31-34).

This new covenant promised by God will be seen by the New Testament writers as having been fulfilled in Christ.

b) *The New Testament*

In the New Testament, *koinonia* does not originally mean “community;” rather it denotes “participation” (e.g. 1 Cor 10:17), “fellowship” (e.g. Acts 2:42), and “sharing” (e.g. Rom 15:26, Phil 4:15).¹⁴ This very flexible term can thus be translated differently depending on the context. First of all, according to Paul, the faithful are called into participation [εἰς κοινωνίαν] in God’s Son, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:9). This indicates that the basis of Christian identity does not consist in the sharing of a thing, but exists in *koinonia* with the incarnate Son. Simply put, Christians are called and lifted up to participate in Jesus Christ. To belong to this participation means not only to follow the teachings and

¹⁴ Cf. George Panikulam, *Koinonia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life*, Analecta Biblica. No. 85 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979); J. Y. Campbell, “Koinonia and Its Cognates in the New Testament,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51, no 4 (1932): 352-80; Leopold Sabourin, “Koinonia in the New Testament,” *Religious Studies Bulletin* 1, no 4 (1981): 109-15. M. Jack Suggs, “Koinonia in the New Testament,” *Mid-Stream* 23, no 4 (1984): 351-62; Betty Jane Lillie, “Koinonia in the New Testament: Integral Dynamic of the Christian Life,” *Proceedings – Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 28 (2008): 55-66.

deeds of the earthly Jesus but also to “enter into a spiritual communion with the risen Lord.”¹⁵ By being called into this *koinonia*, the Christian participates in the new life of Christ, as St Paul says in Romans: “we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

A highly significant use of *koinonia* occurs with regard to the Eucharist. St. Paul highlights this aspect in his first letter to the Corinthians: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing [κοινωνία] in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing [κοινωνία] in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:16-17). *Koinonia* primarily means participation in Christ himself. What the cup of blessing brings in the Eucharist is *koinonia*, participation or sharing in the body and blood of Christ. Considering that blood and life are clearly associated each other (cf. Lev 17:11), this participation means a communal sharing in the very life of Christ. Likewise, since body [σῶμα] refers to whole person in biblical understanding,¹⁶ the common sharing in that body brings about a sharing in the whole person of Christ. Accordingly, the sharing of the cup and the bread is participation in the life of Christ himself.

This vertical *koinonia* with the Lord brings about a horizontal *koinonia* between believers. In the Eucharist, *koinonia* in the one eucharistic body of Christ leads to *koinonia*

¹⁵ Friedrich Hauck, “Κοινωνία,” 804.

¹⁶ Cf. Eduard Schweizer, “Σῶμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1048; John A. T. Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 9; Paul McPartlan, “The Body of Christ and the Ecumenical Potential of Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” *Ecclesiology* 6 (2010): 148-65, pp. 154-58.

with one another and a unity of all Christians in the Lord.¹⁷ Those who participate in the Lord's Supper are renewed as part of the one Body of which they became members at baptism and thus become one reconciled community, whatever their social or economic differences (cf. 1 Cor 10:16-17, 12:27). The twofold aspect of *koinonia* is strikingly described in Acts 2:42-45, where the common life shared by the early Christian believers in Jerusalem is observed: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship [κοινωνία], to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ... All who believed were together and had all things in common [κοινά]; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." For believers, the breaking of bread or common prayers and the sharing all things among them are not two separate factors; rather, those are two expressions of one *koinonia*, which constitute the life of Christians: the unity among them in the Lord by participating in the Body of Christ and by sharing what they have with each other.

In order that people might become truly one with Christ and with one another by participation in the Lord's Supper, they should first be baptized into Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:13), confess the same faith, and live out the Gospel message. Then, "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). If there is contradiction or inconsistency in faith among Christians, or if among themselves they believe in and proclaim different Gospel messages, they cannot exist in full communion with Christ the one Lord nor among themselves. As Francis Sullivan says, analyzing the letter of Paul to the Galatians: "Christian communion

¹⁷ Cf. George Panikulam, *Koinonia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life*, 17-30; James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 616-17.

stands or falls on the issue of holding the same faith on the basis of the same Gospel message.”¹⁸ Thus, “*koinonia* of faith [κοινωνία της πίστεώς]” (Philem 1:6), and “*koinonia* in the Gospel [κοινωνία εἰς το εὐαγγέλιον]” (Phil 1:5) can be understood as foundational aspects of *koinonia* with the Lord.

Koinonia among Christians is expressed in sharing what one has with others, especially in care for the poor. For Paul, this fraternal love is found particularly in the aid offered by the churches in Asia to the poor churches in Judea (cf. Rom 15:26). Here the sharing of material goods is an effective and visible sign of the deeper sharing of the same faith and the same life in Christ that the Jewish Christians had with their Gentile brothers and sisters.¹⁹ Material gifts are related to spiritual gifts in that while spiritual gifts come from the Jerusalem Church to the Gentile Churches, material gifts are provided from the richer Gentile Churches to the Church in Jerusalem. St. Paul expresses this correlation in his letter to the Romans:

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share [κοινωνίαν] their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share [ἐκοινωνήσαν] in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things (Rom 15:25-27).

There is not only reciprocal sharing to meet the needs of each Church but also a mutual giving and receiving on the basis of *koinonia* with Christ and *koinonia* of faith. Therefore, the mutual sharing is none other than an act of faith in Christ and a proclamation of the essence of the Gospel. It is not a mere expression of generosity on the part of the

¹⁸ Francis Aloysius Sullivan, *The Church We Believe in: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 39. Cf. J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, 145.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

Gentile Christians.²⁰

St. Paul highlights the link between *koinonia* and the Holy Spirit: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit [κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος] be with all of you” (2 Cor 13:13). Here the genitive “of the Holy Spirit” can be interpreted either in a subjective way as “the communion given by the Holy Spirit” or in an objective way as “participation in the Holy Spirit.” In fact, it is not generally interpreted as in parallel with the subjective genitives “of the Lord” and “of God.”²¹ For Paul, *koinonia* had already developed associations with the Holy Spirit in whom Christians participate, and the life of faith is characterized as a participation in the Holy Spirit (cf. Phil 2:1). The triadic formula thus focuses on the grace and the love which characterize God’s dealings with humanity in Christ and on the believers’ joint participation in the Holy Spirit.²²

The idea of communion is properly described not only in the letters of St. Paul but also in the first letter of St. John who writes that the bond of unity among Christians is the result of hearing the proclamation of faith and being gathered into a fellowship with God:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life - this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us - we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship [κοινωνίαν] with us; and truly our fellowship [κοινωνία] is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (1 Jn 1:1-4).

John is not just declaring a message but opening up to his hearers a fellowship (*koinonia*) that he and his community already enjoy with God in Christ, the Word made flesh.

²⁰ Cf. George Panikulam, *Koinonia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life*, 57.

²¹ Cf. Michael McDermott, “Biblical Doctrine of Koinonia,” 223-27.

²² Cf. Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 32A (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1984), 587.

Those who believe in what was declared by witnesses and thus confess the common faith with them will have *koinonia* with the witnesses in belief. This *koinonia*, however, cannot be treated as just a fellowship among members in a social or public sense. The above text implies that the “we,” representing the whole Johannine community or at least the author and his fellow bearers of tradition, are already in *koinonia* with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, to join in the Christian community and to be in *koinonia* with the Christians mean to participate in *koinonia* with the Father and with his Son.²³

What was revealed to the recipients of the letter and thus proclaimed is eternal life. It is the life of God Himself and since only the Son has come down from God, he is the only one who can communicate that life to earth and make possible in himself a union between believers and the Father.²⁴ This highlights a fundamental aspect of *koinonia*. Through receiving and believing in the proclamation of the eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ, Christians not only have fellowship with the Father through the Son, but they also fundamentally participate in divine life itself which is revealed to us through Jesus Christ. The fruit of *koinonia* is none other than living in divine life, as it is described in the Gospel according to John: “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (17:20-21); “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me” (6:56-57).

It is generally regarded that the first letter of John does not clearly designate the role

²³ Cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 30 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982), 185.

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

of the Holy Spirit with regard to *koinonia*. However, according to Raymond Brown, this letter can be interpreted as implying a pneumatological dimension in that the Spirit as “the teacher of all things” (Jn 14:26) is within those who are eyewitnesses of the truth.²⁵ In the Johannine literature, the role of the Spirit is seen as not only instructor but also witness of the truth in the world: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (Jn 16:13); “When the advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf” (Jn 15:26). In the above text from the letter, this role of the Holy Spirit is replaced by the “we” (1 Jn 1:2) of the community. The reason why “we” can testify and declare the truth of eternal life is that the Holy Spirit is within “us,” remains with “us,” and guides “us” along the way of all truth.²⁶

From John’s perspective, then, *koinonia* between the Father and the Son in the divine life, testified by the Holy Spirit, flows into *koinonia* between those who believe in the truth of Jesus Christ and the triune God. Through proclamation of this truth to others, *koinonia* is open to all the people whom God Himself calls through his Son to unity in the Holy Spirit.

1.2 The Patristic Period

a) *Ecclesial Communion*

In the post-apostolic era, the Church was faced with tense situations of splits or divisions and was endangered by schism and heresy. Against these threats, the Fathers of the Church emphasized the importance of ecclesial unity in eucharistic communion. The word

²⁵ Cf. Ibid., 184.

²⁶ Cf. Ibid.

communion [*koinonia*] thus was understood as “the bond that united the bishops and the faithful, the bishops among themselves, and the faithful among themselves, a bond that was both effected and at the same time made manifest by eucharistic communion.”²⁷

Reception of the Eucharist from a bishop, in other words, participation in eucharistic communion, was considered as entering into communion not only with the Lord but also with the bishop and likewise with all who received the Eucharist from him. St. Ignatius of Antioch highlighted the communion between the people and their bishop that was expressed in a valid Eucharist:

Let that Eucharist be held valid which is offered by the bishop or by one to whom the bishop has committed this charge. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful to baptize or celebrate agape [ἀγάπην ποιεῖν] without the consent of the bishop.²⁸

I congratulate you who have become one with him [your bishop], as the Church is one with Jesus Christ and as Jesus Christ is one with the Father, so that all things may be in harmony.²⁹

Communion in the Eucharist not only meant communion with the bishop as presider but also referred to communion within the local church presided over by the bishop. In other words, when people broke off communion with their bishop who presided at the Eucharist in his local church, it meant that they no longer lived in the Church and could no longer receive the Eucharist. St. Cyprian of Carthage asserted succinctly in an argument with Florentius Puppianus, a bishop and confessor in the Decian persecution, the relationship between the

²⁷ Ludwig Hertling, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity*, trans. Jared Wicks (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1972), 16.

²⁸ St. Ignatius, “The Letter of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyrnaeans,” no. 8 in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Francis X. Glimm, Joseph M.-F. Marique and Gerald G. Walsh, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 1 (New York: Cima Publishing, 1947), 121. Amended translation.

²⁹ St. Ignatius, “The Letter of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Ephesians,” no. 5 in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 89.

bishop and the Church:

Whence you ought to know that the bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop and, if there is anyone who is not with the bishop, he is not in the Church. And in vain they flatter themselves who creep up not having peace with the priests of God and they believe they are in communion secretly with certain ones when the Church is one, catholic, is not divided nor rent, but is certainly united and joined, in turn, by the solder of the bishops adhering to one another.³⁰

Ecclesial unity in eucharistic communion was thus not limited to a local church within itself; it also referred to the unity among eucharistic communities and between their bishops. The bishops were aware of other bishops as being in communion with themselves in the Eucharist. For instance, as Ludwig Hertling observed, even if in the middle of the second century Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, and Pope Anicetus did not reach consensus on the date of Easter, nevertheless, they celebrated the Eucharist together. Ecclesial communion still remained:

In this case the sign of ecclesial unity consisted in the fact that, in spite of their difference of opinion and their failure to reach agreement, the bishop of Rome let the visiting bishop celebrate the Eucharist in his own community and in his presence. Obviously Polycarp gave Holy Communion to the clergy and the people of the Roman church, just as the bishop of Rome was himself accustomed to do. From this fact all saw that the bond of ecclesial unity between the two bishops remained intact.³¹

Ecclesial unity among local churches was expressed by this union among bishops. The faithful in a community were in communion with other communities in which the same Eucharist was celebrated insofar as there was communion between their bishops. In the early centuries, when Christians were about to embark on a journey, they would obtain a letter of communion from their bishop. This letter would enable the Christian travelers to participate

³⁰ St. Cyprian, "The Epistles of Cyprian," in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donalson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), Epistle LXVIII, 374-75.

³¹ Ludwig Hertling, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity*, 23-24.

in the Eucharist celebrated at other local churches, to be given hospitality by their bishops, and thus to be received as brethren in those churches.³²

Accordingly, many early Fathers such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Cyprian, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Alexandria, and St. Augustine saw the Eucharist as the sacrament of Church unity.³³ In the early Church, baptism was seen as bringing about the individual's first incorporation into ecclesial unity, but thereafter this union was constantly consolidated through the Eucharist.³⁴ St. Augustine, in one of his sermons for Easter Sunday, explained that, since "the bread is one; we though many, are one body":

Was that bread made of one grain of wheat? Were there not, rather, many grains? However, before they became bread, these grains were separate; they were joined together in water after a certain amount of crushing. ... Then came the baptism of water; you were moistened, as it were, so as to arrive at the form of bread. But without fire, bread does not yet exist. What, then, does the fire signify? The chrism. For the sacrament of the Holy Spirit is the oil of our fire. ... Therefore, the fire, that is, the Holy Spirit, comes after the water; then you become bread, that is, the body of Christ. Hence, in a certain manner, unity is signified.³⁵

Here the Bishop of Hippo not only underlined the ecclesial unity which was initiated by baptism and was completed and nourished by the Eucharist, but importantly he described the role of the Holy Spirit in that unity.

In terms of forming the unity of Christians, the Holy Spirit should not be neglected by focusing solely on Jesus Christ who is present in the Eucharist. Moreover, in the

³² Cf. *Ibid.*, 28-29.

³³ Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 88-92. For instance, St. Ignatius, *Philadelphians*, 4,1; St. Cyprian, *Epistle*, 69, c.5.n.2; St John Chrysostom, Homily 46 in *Johannem* and Homily 24 in *I Cor*; St. Cyril, *Johannem*, 11,11 and *Dialogue on the Trinity*; St. Augustine, *Sermons* 227, 229, 234, and 272. One of the most famous syntheses of the Eucharist is given by St. Augustine: "O mystery of true faith! O sign of unity! O bond of love! (*O sacramentum pietatis! O signum unitatis! O vinculum caritatis*)" St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John 11-27*, ch. 6, no. 13. trans. John W. Rettig, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 79. (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 271.

³⁴ Cf. Ludwig Hertling, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity*, 27.

³⁵ St. Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, no. 227, trans. Mary Sarah Muldowney, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 38 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959), 196-97.

Church's life, even if Christ's presence in the Eucharist is highly emphasized, the role of the Holy Spirit should not be underestimated. St. Cyril of Alexandria understood Christian unity to be one of communion in the Holy Spirit as well as in Christ and thus described communion in the Church in a Trinitarian way:

Just as the strength of the sacred flesh makes one body of all those into whom it has come, in the same way, in my opinion, the Spirit of God, one and indivisible, which lives in us, leads us to spiritual unity. ... We are all, therefore, one being in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit [ἐν Πατρὶ καὶ Υἱῷ καὶ ἁγίῳ Πνεύματι]. One being, I declare, in an identical state. ..., one being developing in a manner consistent with piety, by our communion [κοινωνία] in the sacred flesh of Christ, by our communion [κοινωνία] in the one Holy Spirit.³⁶

Both in the Biblical tradition and in the post-apostolic tradition, then, communion in the Church refers to participation in the Eucharist, in which Christians confess in faith one Lord Jesus Christ, one Spirit, and one God the Father. In receiving Holy Communion, they experience unity with the triune God, not only with the Son. In the breaking of the bread, Christians have communion with their bishop and with each other in the one body of Christ: “we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom 12:5; cf. 1 Cor 6:15; Eph 5:30). From this point of view, the Church is a visible sign of unity in communion with Christ.

b) *The Cappadocian Fathers*

The idea of *koinonia* was particularly developed with regard to the Trinitarian life of God and our participation in that life by the Cappadocian Fathers. Amid various understandings of *koinonia* found in New Testament, the Eastern Christian tradition,

³⁶ Original text is St. Cyril, *Commentariorum in Joannem*, Patrologiae Graecae Cursus Completus, vol. 74, 559-62. This text is cited from J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, 25-26.

especially the Cappadocian Fathers, highlights the meaning of *koinonia* in the Second Letter of Peter,³⁷ that is,

His [Christ's] divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants in the divine nature [θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως] (2 Pet 1:3-4).

Koinonia, above all, is seen as participation in the divine nature. St. Basil of Caesarea, in his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, emphasizing the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life, expresses this aspect of *koinonia* as follows:

Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension to the kingdom of heaven, our adoption as God's sons, our freedom to call God our Father, our becoming partakers of the grace of Christ, being called children of light, sharing in eternal glory, and, in a word, our inheritance of the fullness of blessing, both in this world and the world to come.³⁸

Simply put, *koinonia* as participation is founded on the idea of *koinonia* in the divine nature itself. According to Nicholas Sagovsky, for St. Basil *koinonia* is seen as the bond that unites the three hypostases of the triune God in one *ousia*. *Koinonia* is not something added to God; rather it is essential to God. The very being of God may be expressed as “*koinonia*: the three hypostases, which are God, are united in one *koinonia*, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ One of the peculiarities of St. Basil's teaching on God, says John Zizioulas, is that “instead of speaking of the unity of God in terms of His one nature, he [St. Basil] prefers to speak of it in terms of the *communion of persons*:

³⁷ Cf. Nicholas Sagovsky, *Ecumenism, Christian Origins, and the Practice of Communion* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 146.

³⁸ St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, no. 36, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), p. 59.

³⁹ Nicholas Sagovsky, *Ecumenism, Christian Origins, and the Practice of Communion*, 158.

communion is for Basil an ontological category. The *nature* of God is communion.”⁴⁰

St. Gregory of Nazianzen teaches about *koinonia* as participation with reference to the specific way in which God the light enlightens Christians and Christians participate in the light. For Gregory, God is seen as the True Light:

The Father was the True Light which lightens every man coming into the world. The Son was the True Light which lightens every man coming into the world. The Other Comforter was the True Light which lightens every man coming into the world. Was and Was and Was, but Was One Thing. Light thrice repeated; but One Light and One God.⁴¹

And then, he speaks of the participation of Christians in the light of God, when writing about baptism:

The Word recognizes three Births for us; namely, the natural birth, that of Baptism, and that of the Resurrection. ... Let us discourse upon the second, which is now necessary for us, and which gives its name to the Feast of the Lights. Illumination is the splendor of souls, the conversion of the life, the question put to the God-ward conscience. It is the aid to our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh, the following of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Word [Λόγου κοινωνία; *Verbi participatio*], the improvement of the creature, the overwhelming of sin, the participation of light [φωτὸς μετουσία; *lucis communicatio*], the dissolution of darkness.⁴²

For St. Gregory of Nyssa, *koinonia* designates a strong and intimate bond. If there is

⁴⁰ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 134. Italics in original. The focal point of the Cappadocian Fathers' trinitarian theology is the idea of *hypostasis*. According to Zizioulas, interpreting the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, “one substance, three persons,” one might say that the unity of God, the “ontology” of God, consists in the *substance* of God. The saying can be read in terms of the ancient Greek ontology: “God first *is* God (His substance or nature, His being), and then exists as Trinity, that is, as persons.” This interpretation, in fact prevailing in Western theology, assumes that “the ontological ‘principle’ of God is not found in the person but in the substance, that is in the ‘being’ itself of God.” However, among the Greek Fathers, especially the Cappadocian Fathers, “the unity of God, the one God, and the ontological ‘principle’ or ‘cause’ of the being and life of God does not consist in the one substance of God but in the hypostasis, that is, the person of the Father.” “God as person – as the *hypostasis* of the Father – makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God.” The substance never exists in a “naked” state, that is, without hypostasis, without “a mode of existence.” Cf. *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁴¹ St. Gregory of Nazianzen, “Oration 31: The Fifth Theological Oration - On the Holy Spirit,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 318-28, p. 318 (PG 36, 133-34).

⁴² St. Gregory of Nazianzen, “Oration 40: The Oration on Holy Baptism,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 360-77, p. 360. (PG 36, 361-62).

communion with light, then there is no communion with darkness. If there is communion with all those who share in God's nature, then there is no communion with all the opposite who are engaged in evil.⁴³ As Sagovsky says, for St. Gregory there are two contrasted *koinoniai*: that of light and that of darkness; that of incorruption and that of corruption; that of good and that of evil.⁴⁴

In sum, for the Cappadocian Fathers, *koinonia* is at the center of understanding the nature of the triune God and the participation of Christians in God. As Zizioulas analyzes, for them “the being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion [*koinonia*] it would not be possible to speak of the being of God.”⁴⁵ Christians, being partakers [κοινωνοί] of the divine nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:4), participate in the life of God. In this sense, we might say with the Cappadocian Fathers that the being of God is a relational being, one of *koinonia*, and that Christians live their life of *koinonia* in the Church and in the world by participation and sharing (*koinonia*) in the life of God.

2. Communion in the Documents of Vatican II

As discussed above, communion had a visible and actual sense in early Christianity in that the Church was mainly understood as a communion of local churches in which each bishop celebrated the Eucharist, and the faithful participating in the Eucharist had communion with the presider and with all their brothers and sisters who likewise received

⁴³ Cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, “On virginity,” Chapter 15 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 343-71. p. 361. (PG 46, 317-416). This understanding, as St. Gregory cites, comes from the Second Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians: “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership [μετοχή] is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship [κοινωνία] is there between light and darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14).

⁴⁴ Cf. Nicholas Sagovsky, *Ecumenism, Christian Origins, and the Practice of Communion*, 163.

⁴⁵ John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 17.

the Body of Christ. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the visible unity expressed in communion among local churches was increasingly accompanied in the West by deference to the jurisdiction of Rome. The foundation of the ecclesiastical edifice was, most of all, the pope.⁴⁶ As Avery Dulles critically says, at this time “the vertical lines of authority from Rome to the bishops replaced the horizontal lines of communion among bishops and among churches. The pope came to be viewed as the supreme and universal bishop – the sovereign bishop of the Catholic Church.”⁴⁷ This view was further developed and emphasized in the midst of the controversies of the Reformation. Catholic theologians described the Church as a juridical body in which all the members, including bishops, were subjects of the pope, the vicar of Christ.⁴⁸

From the thirteenth century onwards, communion was mainly understood in a spiritual and interior sense. Scholastic theologians viewed communion mainly as a mysterious grace-relationship of the individual with God. The sacraments, especially baptism and the Eucharist, brought people into the universal communion of the grace of God

⁴⁶ Cf. Yves Congar, *Power and Poverty*, trans. by Jennifer Nicholson (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1964), 59. Congar gives special attention to the reform of St. Gregory VII (1073-85). Gregory VII claimed for the Church “the completely autonomous and sovereign system of rights proper to a spiritual society” and also claimed “the sovereign rights of the pope’s authority not only over the Church but also over kings and their kingdoms.” Congar describes the results of Gregory VII’s papacy as follows: “An ecclesiology of Christian anthropology has given place to an ecclesiology of supreme power, privileges and rights ‘of the Church’ i.e. of the clergy or the hierarchy. This has occurred especially as a result of the Gregorian reform (last thirty years of the 11th century), and of the conflicts between the Papacy and kings or emperors.” Yves Congar, “Mother Church” in *The Church To-Day*, ed. Joseph Ratzinger et al., trans. by M. Ignatius (Cork, Ireland: Mercier Press, 1967): 37-44, p. 43.

⁴⁷ Avery Dulles, “The Church as Communion,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Theology*, ed. Bradley Nassif (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 129-30.

⁴⁸ For instance, St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621) defined the Church as follows: “This one and true Church is the assembly of men, bound together by the profession of the same Christian faith, and by the communion of the same sacraments, under the rule of legitimate pastors, and in particular of the one Vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman Pontiff.” Original text is in *De Ecclesia Militante*, cap. 2 (Opera Omnia; Milano, 1857ff.) II. The above text and reference are cited from John A. Hardon, “Robert Bellarmine’s Concept of the Church,” in *Studies in Medieval Culture*, vol. 2, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Michigan: Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 1966), 120.

rather than into communion with their bishops and with their local churches and other churches. A spiritual and mysterious communion was emphasized so that the faithful were seen primarily as members of the Body of Christ which was conceived as being mystical and invisible. Communion was thus understood as invisible; what were visible were bonds of obedience within the juridical institution of the Church.⁴⁹

These rather disconnected juridical and spiritual understandings of the Church prevailed up to the early 20th century. Paul McPartlan, in this regard, referred to “an awkward ecclesial schizophrenia” in that the Church was understood as “an external organization, dispensing a communitarian grace, the life of the Mystical Body, which is the ‘real’ Church.” The word “Church” was thus used for “two different realities which seemed to be related only extrinsically, namely the visible Church and the Mystical Body.”⁵⁰ According to him, the unifying solution was the idea of the Church as sacrament, for which we are mostly indebted to Henri de Lubac (1896-1991). Just as the visible sign in any sacrament is related to what is signified, the visible Church as “the sacrament of Christ” is related to the Mystical Body. The sign cannot be seen “as extrinsic to what is signified or arbitrarily paired with it”; rather it is “filled with what it signifies, makes it present, and is the indispensable doorway into what is signified.”⁵¹ De Lubac himself said in 1938:

In the likeness of Christ who is her founder and her head, she [the Church] is at the same time both the way and the goal; at the same time visible and invisible; in time and in eternity. ... The Church, the only real Church, the Church which is the Body of Christ, is not merely that strongly hierarchical and disciplined society whose divine origin has to be maintained, whose organization has to be upheld against all denial and revolt. ... If Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him, in the full and

⁴⁹ Cf. Avery Dulles, “The Church as Communion,” 130.

⁵⁰ Cf. Paul McPartlan, “Eucharistic Ecclesiology,” *One in Christ* 22, no 4 (1986): 314-31, p. 317.

⁵¹ Ibid.

ancient meaning of the term, she really makes him present.⁵²

Prior to Vatican II there were many scholars, besides de Lubac, such as Charles Journet (1891-1975), Yves Congar (1904-1996), Karl Rahner (1904-1984), and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), who recovered biblical and patristic models of the Church. They searched for an ecclesiology going beyond a merely juridical understanding of the Church and increasingly highlighted the idea of communion in the self-understanding of the Church.⁵³

The retrieval of a biblical and patristic vision of the Church in Vatican II was already anticipated in Pope John XXIII's opening speech of the Council. The Pope, declaring the defense and advancement of truth as a principal duty of the Council, certainly emphasized the necessity of the sacred tradition of truth received from the Fathers. This tradition of truth originated from the biblical and apostolic witness in the Church and has developed in the history of the Church in order to intensify the light of faith throughout the world. The Pope said:

From the renewed, serene, and tranquil adherence to all the teaching of the Church in its entirety and preciseness, as it still shines forth in the Acts of the Council of Trent and First Vatican Council, the Christian, Catholic, and apostolic spirit of the whole world expects a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and a formation of consciousness in faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way

⁵² Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 73-74 and 76. Original text entitled, *Catholicisme: les aspects sociaux du dogme*, was published in 1938.

⁵³ The above theologians' understanding of the Church played a leading role in bringing about the vision of Vatican II. Already in the 19th century, Johann Adam Möhler (1796-1838), who is evaluated by Doyle as "the originator of a modern Catholic version of communion ecclesiology," argued that the Church is basically a fellowship or communion with God through Jesus and the Spirit that is shared among Christians. Cf. Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology: Visions and Versions*, 1-9 and 23-37.

in which it is presented is another.⁵⁴

From and within these perspectives, the idea of the Church as communion, renewed by the Council, can be seen especially in the first four chapters of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*⁵⁵: The Mystery of the Church (Chapter one), The People of God (Chapter two), The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church and the Episcopate in Particular (Chapter three), and The Laity (Chapter four). These four chapters will now be examined in three sections, The Mystery of the Church, The People of God, and The Church as a Structured Community, in which the Council's multiple use of the idea of communion will be noted.

2.1 The Mystery of the Church

Vatican II described the Church using various terms such as “mystery,” “communion,” “sacrament,” “body of Christ,” “People of God,” “temple of the Spirit,” all derived from biblical, patristic and liturgical sources.⁵⁶ *Lumen Gentium* begins with a chapter on “The Mystery of the Church.”⁵⁷ This title, however, during discussions at

⁵⁴ John XXIII, “Opening Speech for Council of Vatican II,” in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York: Herder and Herder, Association Press, 1966), 703-19, p. 715. Original text is in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962): 786-96. Here the Pope seemed to hint at two fundamental ideas for the work of the Council: *ressourcement* (return to the sources) and *aggiornamento* (updating). Cf. Andrea Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, English ver. ed. Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995): 1-67, pp. 14-15; Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology*, 74.

⁵⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, setting forth the Church's present understanding of its own nature, would be regarded as “the great achievement” of the Council and as “the vitally important center to which the other decrees must be referred.” Cf. Gérard Philips, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: History of the Constitution,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1, general ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 105.

⁵⁶ Cf. Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Significance of Vatican Council II for Ecclesiology,” in *The Gift of the Church: A Textbook on Ecclesiology in Honor of Patrick Granfield, O.S.B.*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 76.

⁵⁷ The first project of 1962 contained a first chapter on “The Nature of the Church Militant.” The title, “The Mystery of the Church,” appeared in the second draft in 1963, which was accepted as the basis of

different sessions, evoked various objections. Some Fathers said the Church is not a mystery, since it is visible. Proponents of this objection understood the word “mystery” as of very limited value, suggesting something secret or abstruse or invisible. Accordingly, they feared that the title might abandon the truth of the visible Church for an ideology of an invisible Church.⁵⁸

The term “mystery,” however, understood in terms of biblical and patristic theologies, refers to something far from invisible, intangible, and abstract. As used in the Gospel, mystery refers to God’s eternal plan of salvation and its manifestation in the person and work of Christ. When Christ said to his disciples, “to you has been given the secret [μυστήριον] of the kingdom of God” (Mk 4:11), he was telling them that God’s hidden plan of salvation, which had been for centuries the object of Jewish hope and was summed up in the idea of the kingdom, was now being revealed to them and becoming a reality in their lives.⁵⁹ Especially in the writing of St. Paul, mystery is fully developed and used to designate the divine plan of salvation: “He [God] has made known to us the mystery [μυστήριον] of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”

discussion by a vote of 2231 in favor and only 43 against. Cf. Gérard Philips, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: History of the Constitution,” 110-11. Lawler and Shanahan evaluate this as a significant “transition from a juridical vision that sees the Church as institution and structure to a theological one that sees it as mystery and graced communion,” and as “a transition from a fixation on hierarchical office and power to an appreciation of co-responsibility and service, from an exclusive focus on Roman primacy to an inclusive ecclesial communion,” and as “a transition from a focus on the external reality of institution to a focus on the internal reality of grace.” Cf. Michael G. Lawler and Thomas J. Shanahan, *Church: A Spirited Communion* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 2-3.

⁵⁸ Cf. Aloys Grillmeier, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Chapter I, The Mystery of the Church,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1, general ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 138.

⁵⁹ Cf. Kevin McNamara, “The Mystery of the Church,” in *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary*, ed. Kevin McNamara (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968), 75,

(Eph 1:9-10; cf. Col 1:26-27). Furthermore, Christ himself is the mystery in person, “manifested in his incarnation and glorification.”⁶⁰

The Latin translation of μυστήριον is *sacramentum* and the Council employed the term “sacrament” to indicate the true nature of the Church. According to the first article of *Lumen Gentium*:

Since the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of union [*unionis*] with God and of unity [*unitatis*] among all men – she here purposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the whole world, to set forth, as clearly as possible, and in the tradition laid down by earlier Councils, her own nature and universal mission.⁶¹

The Council mentions the Church “in Christ” being “in the nature of sacrament, a sign and instrument” [*in Christo veluti sacramentum seu signum et instrumentum*]. This view is, on the one hand, directed against the triumphalism, clericalism, and juridicism of counter-reformation and neo-scholastic ecclesiology and, on the other hand, intended to revive the sacramental aspect of the Church’s life.⁶² Above all, the Church does not exist by its own power or for its own benefit. The Church is founded on the sign-mystery of Christ’s manifestation in his own incarnate person. Incorporated into Christ, the Church continues the presence and mission of Christ in the world. From Christ, the Church has an intrinsically sacramental structure.⁶³

Even if it is generally admitted that the Church has a sacramental structure, the notion of the Church as sacrament was not easily acceptable because from the early days of

⁶⁰ K. W. Irwin, “Sacramental Theology,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Detroit, MI: Thomson/Gale; Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2003), 466.

⁶¹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1. Translation amended to say “union” instead of “communion.”

⁶² Cf. Speech of Bishop Emile de Smedt criticizing the first draft of the Constitution, *De Ecclesia*. Richard R. Gaillardetz, *The Church in the Making: Lumen Gentium, Christus Dominus, Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 13.

⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 8; also, K. W. Irwin, “Sacramental Theology,” 465-72.

scholasticism the term sacrament had been used in the narrow sense by application to the seven individual sacraments. Catechisms and manuals of theology have started from this narrow concept of sacrament in the Church and thus explained the sacraments in terms of signs which symbolize an invisible grace and are administered by the authorized ministers of the Church.⁶⁴ The Council, however, employed a wider sense of sacrament, understanding the Church itself in this way.⁶⁵

The Council highlighted the term unity as an essential mark of the Church. The Father in his eternal salvific design created the whole universe and called us together in the Church.⁶⁶ Especially, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, “the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:17), is both expressed and brought about.”⁶⁷ The Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful directs and sanctifies the Church, “guiding the Church in the way of all truth and unifying her in communion [*in communione*] and in the works of ministry.”⁶⁸ The Church is considered to be “a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁹

It is clear that the unity of God is not a uniformity, because the nature of the *triune* God fundamentally involves unity and plurality. Likewise, the unity of the Church cannot be understood strictly as a uniformity which rejects the multiplicity of charisms and ministries in the Church. The relationship between unity and diversity can be correctly expressed in the

⁶⁴ Cf. Aloys Grillmeier, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Chapter I, The Mystery of the Church,” 139-140; Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 113-14.

⁶⁵ While the first article of *Lumen Gentium* designates the Church as being “in the nature of sacrament,” the Council in other passages referred to the Church as “the universal sacrament of salvation.” Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 48, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 45, and *Ad Gentes*, no. 1. This idea will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁶⁶ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid., no. 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., no. 4. Cf. Vatican II, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 2; Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 32.

⁶⁹ Ibid. This citation comes from St. Cyprian, *Liber de Oratione Dominica* 23, PL 4, 536.

term “communion.” The Spirit unifies the Church “in communion [*in communione*].”⁷⁰

Aloys Grillmeier recognized unity as a unity of communion in his commentary on article 4 of *Lumen Gentium*:

The Church is a unity of communion in the holy Eucharist, in the Holy Spirit, in the (visible) hierarchical government and in the various forms of service. It is an animated bodily unity in the variety of its members and their functions. And the hierarchical order is a self-communication of the Spirit just as are charismatic endowments.⁷¹

From this perspective, we might say that the Church is the sacrament of a *unity of the human race in communion with God*.⁷²

The Council, as seen above, taught that the unity of the Church comes from the unity of the triune God. The unity of God flows into the Church’s unity of communion through the Church’s participation in the divine life. The Father has created us in accordance with his eternal design and has called us “to share [*ad participandam*] in his own divine life.”⁷³ The aspect of communion as participation is highlighted in the Eucharist.

Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion [*ad communionem*] with him and with one another. “Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). In this way all of us are made members of his body (cf. 1 Cor 12:27), “but severally members one of another” (Rom 12:4).⁷⁴

Accordingly, the Church might be said to be a sacrament of the *communion among the faithful* who participate in the Body of Christ.

The idea of the Church as sacrament of communion with God is profoundly linked

⁷⁰ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

⁷¹ Aloys Grillmeier, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Chapter I, The Mystery of the Church,” 142.

⁷² Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1, 4.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, no. 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

to the Church's "mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God."⁷⁵ The Church does not exist only for the faithful, but for all people of the world. From the Church, the light of Christ must shine out to all people by the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments, and in this way the Church accomplishes her universal mission and becomes the community of salvation. The Council stresses that "all are called to this [eucharistic] union with Christ."⁷⁶ By the example of its life and by its preaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace, the Church leads all people to faith, freedom and the peace of Christ, and thus it opens "before them a firm and free road to full participation in the mystery of Christ."⁷⁷ The missionary effort of the Church thus is understood both as an invitation to participate in communion with God and as a sharing of the communion of God with all (cf. 1Jn 1:2-3).

2.2 The People of God

In the second chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, the Council teaches that the Church as the People of God lives and shows the mystery of the Church, discussed in the first chapter, amid the unfolding of history in the world. McNamara shows the continuity and complementarity of the first two chapters of *Lumen Gentium*:

While chapter one takes a global view of the mystery, tracing it from its eternal origins in the life of Trinity through its various historical anticipations and realizations to its final perfection in the future kingdom, chapter two concentrates on the period between the founding of the Church by Christ and the second coming, on what is variously called "the time of the Church" or "the time of the Holy Spirit."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ibid., no. 5.

⁷⁶ Ibid., no. 3.

⁷⁷ Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 5.

⁷⁸ Kevin McNamara, "The People of God," in *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary*, ed. Kevin McNamara (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968),

Similarly, Gérard Philips, the primary drafter of the final text of *Lumen Gentium*, points out the logical connection of the two chapters: “The first two chapters give the doctrine on the mystery of the Church, both in its transcendent dimension and in its historical realization, and describe precisely the fundamental proprieties [sic] of the fellowship of salvation.”⁷⁹

The first two chapters relate not only to the mystery of the Church but also to the mystery of universal salvation. While the first chapter shows that the Church, as the community of faith, hope, and charity, communicates to all people the truth and grace which God the Father bestows through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, the second chapter illustrates the place of the Church in the larger perspective of the history of salvation. Yves Congar explains the idea of the “People of God” in the context of its messianic character:

This People [The People of God] possesses life and is advancing toward an end established for it by God. Chosen, established, consecrated by God to be his servant and his witness, the People of God is, in the world, the sacrament of salvation offered to the world. By this we mean to say that God who has willed the salvation of all men has placed in the world a cause, of itself sufficient to achieve this purpose effectively. Thus, He has sent Jesus Christ into the world, and has made the Church, dependent on him and derived from him, a messianic People...⁸⁰

Even though the idea of the People of God highlights the historical and social aspects which properly belong to the Church insofar as it is a human reality, the image cannot be understood as itself sufficient to embrace the whole reality of the Church or as displacing the idea of the mystical body of Christ. As Congar strongly asserts,

under the new Dispensation, that of the promises realized through the incarnation of the Son and the gift of the Spirit (the “Promised One”), the People of God was

105.

⁷⁹ Gérard Philips, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: History of the Constitution,” 131.

⁸⁰ Yves Congar, “The Church, the People of God,” in *The Church and Mankind*, Concilium, vol. 1, trans. by K. Sullivan (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press, 1965), 20-21.

given a status that can be expressed only in the categories and in the theology of the Body of Christ.⁸¹

Just as the members of the Church comprise one body, that is, the Body of Christ, so too the people who are called together by God form *one people* of God for the salvation of all people. God has willed “to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people;” “established by Christ as a communion [*in communionem*] of life, love and truth, it [the people of God] is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all.”⁸² Citing St. Cyprian’s description of the Church as the “*inseparabile unitatis sacramentum*,” the Council then describes the Church as follows:

All those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the Church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity.⁸³

The Council then identifies the relationship between the common priesthood and hierarchical priesthood in the light of the participation of all members of the Church in the priesthood of Christ:

Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares [*unum ... et alterum ... participant*] in the one priesthood of Christ.⁸⁴

Even though the common priesthood of the faithful is different from the priesthood of the hierarchical ministry, both of them originate and participate in the one priesthood of Christ.

⁸¹ Ibid., 35. Along the same line, Aloys Grillmeier summarizes: “People of God and body of Christ signify the same reality, the People of God and of Christ.” Grillmeier, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Chapter I, The Mystery of the Church,” 154.

⁸² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

⁸³ Ibid. Cf. St. Cyprian, *Epistle*, 69, c. 6 (PL 3, 1142).

⁸⁴ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

The Council emphasizes not so much the distinction of the two priesthoods but rather their relationship, their communion in the *one* priesthood of Christ. The two priesthoods are “ordered one to another.” Accordingly, when the Council affirms the organic or functional inequality of the members in the context of the baptismal equality of all the faithful in the dignity of Christian existence, this should not be understood in terms of subordination, but of communion.

All the faithful exercise their priesthood in receiving the sacraments and especially by participating in the offering of the Eucharist. In the eucharistic communion, they manifest in a concrete way the unity of the People of God:

Taking part [*participantes*] in the eucharistic sacrifice, the source and summit of the Christian life, they [the faithful] offer the divine victim to God and themselves along with it. ... both in the offering and in Holy Communion [*sacra communione*], each in his own way, though not of course indiscriminately, has his own part to play in the liturgical action. Then, strengthened by the body of Christ in the eucharistic communion, they manifest in a concrete way that unity of the People of God which this holy sacrament aptly signifies and admirably realizes.⁸⁵

The distinction between the common and the ministerial priesthood is certainly seen in the celebration of the Eucharist. The ministerial priest “effects the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people.”⁸⁶ However, at the same time, a mutual coordination of the two priesthoods and thus the unity of all the faithful is also seen in the Eucharist. The Eucharist remains, in its totality, a communal act of all the faithful. As Grillmeier comments,

In the Eucharist Christ gives himself to the Church and thus constitutes from within, through the reality of the body and blood which is given to all, the unity of the people of God. The eucharistic body of Christ is thus the integrating and

⁸⁵ Ibid., no. 11.

⁸⁶ Ibid., no. 10

constructive principle of the mystical body of the Lord, the Church.⁸⁷

This is reminiscent of the well-known principle of de Lubac, italicized in the following statement:

The Eucharist is the mystical principle, permanently at work at the heart of Christian society, which gives concrete form to this miracle [i.e. the Church as the Body of Christ]. It is the universal bond; it is the ever-springing source of life. Nourished by the body and blood of the Saviour, his faithful people thus all “drink of the one Spirit,” who truly makes them into one single body. Literally speaking, therefore, *the Eucharist makes the Church*.⁸⁸

For de Lubac, the Church is understood as the “marvel” and the Eucharist as “the mystical principle, permanently active” to realize the Church.⁸⁹ Accordingly, “the Church and the Eucharist are formed by one another day by day: the idea of the Church and the idea of the Eucharist must promote one another mutually and each be rendered more profound by the other.”⁹⁰ The unity of the Church is characterized by the unity of all in the Eucharist, who form a single body of Christ. De Lubac emphasized that the Eucharist which “contains the whole mystery of our salvation” is especially “the sacrament of unity: *sacramentum unitatis ecclesiasticae*,”⁹¹ citing St. Cyril of Alexandria as follows:

To merge us in unity with God and among ourselves, although we have each a distinct personality, the only Son devised a wonderful means: through one only body, his own, he sanctifies his faithful in mystic communion, making them one body with him and among themselves. Within Christ no division can arise. All united to the single Christ through his own body, all receiving him, the one and indivisible, into our own bodies, we are the members of this one body and he is thus, for us, the bond of unity.⁹²

⁸⁷ Aloys Grillmeier, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Chapter II, The People of God,” 161.

⁸⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages, Historical Survey*, trans. Gemma Simmonds with Richard Price and Christopher Stephens, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 90. Italics mine.

⁸⁹ Cf. Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Fairfax, VA: Eastern Christian Publications, 2006), 79.

⁹⁰ Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 260.

⁹¹ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, 89.

⁹² Ibid., 91. Original text is in St. Cyril, *Commentariorum in Joannem*, no. 11, cap. 11 (PG 74, 559-

The Council teaches that the People of God is present in all the nations of the earth.⁹³ “Each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to attain to fullness in unity.”⁹⁴ All the faithful, spread out throughout the world, therefore, are “in communion [*communicant*] with each other in the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, the People of God is made up of different ranks, offices, duties, states, and conditions of life: “the one people of God has room for all callings and ways of life, which allows for the development of the individual and still serves the good of the whole.”⁹⁶ The Holy Spirit, distributing special gifts among the faithful of every rank, encourages them to assume “various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church.”⁹⁷ The diverse gifts, offices and local churches all hold “a rightful place in the communion of the Church [*in ecclesiastica communione*].”⁹⁸ The reciprocal relationship among all the faithful in the Church is thus none other than one of communion: “Between all the various parts of the Church there is a bond of close communion [*communio*] whereby spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal resources are shared.”⁹⁹

2.3 The Church as a Structured Community

While the chapters on “The Mystery of the Church” and “The People of God” deal

60).

⁹³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Aloys Grillmeier, ““Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Chapter II, The People of God,” 168.

⁹⁷ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12.

⁹⁸ Ibid., no. 13.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

with the essence of the Church, emphasizing that the Church, being instituted and constituted by the triune God, is a communion and the visible sacrament of saving unity, chapters three and four, entitled “The Hierarchical Constitution of the Church and the Episcopate in Particular” and “The Laity,” describe the visible structure of the Church, especially emphasizing the episcopate and the laity. This ordering, whereby these chapters follow the earlier chapters, is deliberate, according to Karl Rahner, because “in the order of the history of salvation and objectively the nature of the Church is prior to its hierarchical organization, though it never existed in fact without this constitution. It is only because the Church is the fellowship of the redeemed that it can also be constituted as a hierarchical society.”¹⁰⁰

In its teaching on the hierarchical structure of the Church, the Council begins its account of the episcopate not with the Petrine ministry but with the apostles whom the Lord Jesus constituted in the form of a college:

The Lord Jesus, having prayed at length to the Father, called to himself those whom he willed and appointed twelve to be with him, whom he might send to preach the kingdom of God (cf. Mk 3:13-19; Mt 10:1-42). These apostles (cf. Lk 6:13) he constituted in the form of a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from amongst them (cf. Jn 21:15-17).¹⁰¹

The basic structure of ecclesial office has thus been collegial from the very beginning, when the Lord founded the Church. The Council affirms not only the collegial unity of the “twelve” but also the primacy of Peter. Peter, however, is not considered as being apart from the apostolic group; rather, despite his prominent position of leadership, he

¹⁰⁰ Karl Rahner, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Chapter III, The Hierarchical Structure of the Church, with Special Reference to the Episcopate, Article 18-27” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. 1, general ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 186.

¹⁰¹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 19.

is one of the twelve and also the head of apostolic assembly. Having dealt with the apostolic office, the Council speaks of the episcopal college in vital connection with the apostolic college: “Just as, in accordance with the Lord’s decree, St Peter and the rest of the apostles constitute a unique apostolic college, so in like fashion the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are related with and united to one another.”¹⁰² The inner structure of the episcopal college, according to the Council, is fundamentally the same as the structure of the apostolic college. From this teaching comes also the relation between the pope and the bishops in the episcopal college. Just as Peter did not hold his office outside of and independently of the apostolic college, but was first of all an apostle with the other apostles, so the pope does not hold his office outside and independently of the episcopal college, but is first of all a bishop with the other bishops.

The way a bishop is constituted a member of the episcopal body is, according to the Constitution, “in virtue of the sacramental consecration and by the hierarchical communion [*hierarchica communione*] with the head and members of the college.”¹⁰³ First, the episcopal college has its foundation in the sacrament of episcopal ordination. Episcopal collegiality is not “something dependent for its existence on a grant of papal jurisdiction,” but is rooted in episcopal consecration as the fullness of the sacrament of Orders.¹⁰⁴ It is by

¹⁰² Ibid., no. 22. The Council put this link in the context of the apostolic tradition: “The apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved in the whole world by those who were made bishops by the apostles and by their successors down to our own time.” Ibid., no. 20.

¹⁰³ Ibid., no. 22.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Seamus Ryan, “The Hierarchical Structure of the Church,” in *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary*, ed. Kevin McNamara (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968), 179-180. Karl Rahner, in this regard, gives an interesting remark: “It must be taken for granted that the subject possessing ‘supreme’ and ‘full’ authority in a society cannot be constituted by another authority within the same society. Hence, if the episcopate has such authority, it cannot receive it from the Pope, whatever be the structure of this college, as for instance, that it can only exist with and under the Pope, and whatever be the juridical presuppositions necessary for the exercise of its powers.” Karl Rahner, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Chapter III,” 195.

episcopal ordination and not from the Pope that every bishop receives his episcopal office:

The holy synod teaches that the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred by episcopal consecration, that fullness, namely, which both in the liturgical tradition of the Church and in the language of the Fathers of the Church is called the high priesthood, the acme of the sacred ministry. Now, episcopal consecration confers, together with the office of sanctifying, the duty also of teaching and ruling....¹⁰⁵

Second, the individual bishop can have his episcopacy in no other way than in his communion with the other bishops. This aspect is well demonstrated in the liturgy of ordination itself. The fact that he must be ordained by at least three bishops signifies that he is being received by the community of bishops into the community.¹⁰⁶ Episcopal ordination, by its very nature, is directed towards and anticipates the brotherly communion of the bishops with one another and with their head.

Accordingly, as Seamus Ryan states, these two factors are not independent of one another but intimately related.

In the sacramental foundation the idea of communion is already contained, since through the reception of the sacrament the bishop is admitted to the college or communion of bishops. This acceptance into the college of bishops is of its very nature a commission to work in communion with his fellow bishops in the building up of the Church. It will be clear, therefore, that the second requirement for membership of the college - actual communion with his fellow bishops - is closely associated with the first, being no more than the practical realization of what consecration in itself already implies.¹⁰⁷

By its understanding that the sacramental and collegial aspects of the episcopal office are not divided but integrated, the Council avoids “the radical dissociation of sacrament from ecclesiastical government” which had characterized Western ecclesiology

¹⁰⁵ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 21.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “The Pastoral Implication of Episcopal Collegiality,” 46.

¹⁰⁷ Seamus Ryan, “The Hierarchical Structure of the Church,” 180.

since the Middle Age.¹⁰⁸ In that theology, the notion of *potestas iurisdictionis* was totally unrelated to the *potestas ordinis* and separable from it. “The power of order was defined simply in terms of its bearing on the eucharist” as the power of transubstantiation and offering Mass, “without any reference to the Church.” On the other hand, “the power of jurisdiction was understood simply in relation to the Church – a Church no longer understood in its deepest nature as a eucharistic community, but more and more simply as an organization” needing to be governed.¹⁰⁹

The Council teaches that episcopal consecration confers the office of sanctifying, teaching, and ruling, and constitutes the recipient as a member of the episcopal college. It seems to imply, therefore, that the visible juridical structure of the Church cannot be analyzed and exhausted purely in juridical terms, but that it flows from the nature of the Church, that is, the sacramental nature of communion: “Episcopal consecration confers, together with the office of sanctifying, the duty also of teaching and ruling, which, however, of their very nature can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college.”¹¹⁰

Insofar as an individual bishop is assigned to a particular Church, he exercises his pastoral office over the local church, not over other churches nor the Church universal. The individual bishops are “the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in these [*in quibus*] and from these [*ex quibus*] that the one and unique Catholic Church exists.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 180-81.

¹¹⁰ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 21.

¹¹¹ Ibid., no. 23.

The role of the bishop as the source and foundation of unity in his Church is manifested in the *sacramentum unitatis*, the Eucharist. Following the biblical and patristic tradition on the understanding of eucharistic communion, the Council finds in the Eucharist the connection between a bishop and his local church, and thus the real bond of unity in the Church universal. The bishop, who is pastor of his local community, is most of all presider of the eucharistic celebration, in which all those who are gathered around him participate in the one Body of Christ and express their unity in the eucharistic communion. This aspect is highlighted in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*:

[All] must be convinced that the principal manifestation of the Church consists in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in the same liturgical celebrations, especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.¹¹²

The Council teaches that the Church of Christ is present in all local churches united to their pastors, where “the faithful are gathered together through the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and the mystery of the Lord’s Supper is celebrated.”¹¹³ A local church or diocese is not just an administrative unit of a larger organization or a portion of the Church universal, but is in itself truly a Church in which the whole mystery of the Church is present.¹¹⁴ “In each altar community, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, a manifest symbol is to be seen of that charity and unity of the mystical body,”¹¹⁵ and in these communities “Christ is present through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church is constituted.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 41.

¹¹³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 26.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “The Pastoral Implication of Episcopal Collegiality,” 44.

¹¹⁵ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 26.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*; cf. Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, no. 11.

As discussed above, the bishop is not only the pastor of a local church but also a member of the episcopal college. Each bishop represents his own Church, and at the same time, all bishops live “in communion with one another and with the Roman Pontiff in a bond of unity, charity, and peace.”¹¹⁷ The bishops united in the episcopal college represent their various and diverse Churches throughout the world and at the same time signify their unity in the one universal Church of God through their communion with one another and with their head, the bishop of Rome. Thus, the college of bishops is not only the communion of bishops but also the visible sign and principle of the unity in communion of local churches where the same Eucharist is celebrated. If, in the local church, the bishop is the visible sign and principle of unity, then in the universal Church, the college of bishops in its hierarchical communion with one another and with the Roman Pontiff is the visible sign and principle of unity among the local churches.

In this way, the unity and catholicity of the universal Church rests on the communion of the bishops with one another and with their head. In other words, as Ratzinger states, “collegiality of the bishops fulfills its meaning only if the individual bishop really and truthfully represents his individual Church and thus, through him, a part of the Church’s plenitude is inserted into the totality of the Church’s unity.”¹¹⁸ We might say in this perspective that the communion of local bishops in the college of bishops is the sacrament of the communion of local churches in the universal Church.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., no. 22. In this regard, Ratzinger affirms two aspects of the episcopate in its relationship with the Church. The individual churches are marked by a “vertical structure” in that each has a bishop at its head, and at the same time, the many individual churches are also horizontally connected among bishops. However, the structure of the individual community remains incomplete even though it represents the whole Church. It is complete only when the bishop does not stand alone but lives in communion with the other bishops of the different churches. Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, “The Pastoral Implication of Episcopal Collegiality,” 44-45.

¹¹⁸ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Pastoral Implication of Episcopal Collegiality,” 55-56.

In the Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus*, the Council sees the episcopal office as primarily one of service in the midst of the community and then as one promoting communion among members in the Church:

In exercising their office of father and pastor, bishops should stand in the midst of their people as those who serve. Let them be good shepherds who know their sheep and whose sheep know them. Let them be true fathers who excel in the spirit of love and solicitude for all and to whose divinely conferred authority all gratefully submit themselves. Let them so gather and mold the whole family of their flock that everyone, conscious of his own duties, may live and work in the communion of love.¹¹⁹

The office of ministry in the Church is exercised not only by bishops, but also by priests and deacons.¹²⁰ In preaching the Gospel and guiding the faithful, especially in the Eucharist, the priests share [*participes*] “in the unique office of Christ, the mediator.”¹²¹ From the fact that the priests truly share in the priesthood of Christ comes the proper relationship between priests and their bishop. The priests as “prudent cooperators of the episcopal college” constitute “together with their bishops a unique sacerdotal college [*unum presbyterium*].”¹²² In the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priest, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the Council succinctly speaks of the relationship:

All priests share [*participant*] with the bishops the one identical priesthood and ministry of Christ. Consequently the very unity of their consecration and mission requires their hierarchical union [*hierarchicam communionem*] with the order of bishops. This unity is best shown on some occasions by liturgical concelebration, and priests also affirm their union with the bishops in the eucharistic celebration.¹²³

With regard to the diaconate, the Council affirms that deacons receive the laying on of hands

¹¹⁹ Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, no. 16.

¹²⁰ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid. Cf. Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 14.

¹²³ Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 7. Along the same line, the Decree teaches in other passage: “The priestly ministry, being the ministry of the Church itself, can only be fulfilled in the hierarchical union [*communione hierarchica*] of the whole body of the Church.” Ibid., no. 15.

“not unto the priesthood, but unto the ministry.”¹²⁴ It describes the diaconate in terms of the deacon’s ministry for the Church, again with a fundamental reference to communion: “Strengthened by sacramental grace they [deacons] are dedicated to the People of God, in conjunction [*in communione*] with the bishop and his body of priests, in the service of the liturgy, of the Gospel and of works of charity.”¹²⁵

The Council describes the laity as “the faithful who by baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the People of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ.”¹²⁶ By reason of one baptism and one faith in one Lord, the whole Christian people constitutes one chosen People of God. There is a basic equality which exists between all the members of the Christian community, since “there is a common dignity of members deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as sons, a common vocation to perfection, one salvation, one hope and undivided charity.”¹²⁷

At the same time, there is no doubt that within the Church there is a great diversity of individuals and groups with different responsibilities, functions, and powers such as bishops, priests, the religious, and the lay faithful. All the faithful, following their respective vocations, cannot remain separate, but should be closely joined and knit together in the Body of Christ. Various functions, offices, and charisms are exercised and implemented for the unity of the Church as a whole. As the Council states, “so amid variety all will bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ: this very diversity of graces, of ministries and of works gathers the sons of God into one, for ‘all these things are the work of

¹²⁴ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 29.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., no. 31. For a theology of laity and its history, see Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965).

¹²⁷ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.

the one and the same Spirit' (1 Cor 12 :11).”¹²⁸

The Church in its hierarchical structure, accordingly, should be understood not merely as juridical, as if the laity were of inferior rank and the ministers exercised control over them as rulers; but as “a communion of life, love, and truth,”¹²⁹ and a communion in which all the members, each with a personal dignity and vocation, live in harmony to promote its unity. As the Council teaches,

The distinction which the Lord has made between the sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God involves union, for the pastors and the other faithful are joined together by a close relationship: the pastors of the Church - following the example of the Lord - should minister to each other and to the rest of the faithful; the latter should eagerly collaborate with the pastors and teachers.¹³⁰

The co-operation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church comes not simply because as members of the Church they share the tasks or affairs of the Church with other members but rather because, whatever role one assumes, for instance, as teacher or pastor or lay person, each person without exception has to strive to build up the body of Christ with one's own gifts which are bestowed by God not only for oneself but for the Church.¹³¹ The faithful are not regarded as a purely passive element in the Church where they take a role of obedience and subordination to the hierarchy. They are co-workers with ministers in the Church. The pastors “were not established by Christ to undertake alone the whole salvific mission of the Church to the world, but it is their exalted office so to be shepherds of the faithful and also recognize the latter's contribution and charisms that everyone in his own way will, with one mind, cooperate in the common task.”¹³² In the life of the Church, the

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., no. 9.

¹³⁰ Ibid., no. 32.

¹³¹ Cf. Ibid., no. 33.

¹³² Ibid., no. 30.

laity thus have communion with their pastors in such a way that they, cooperating in the work of the Church with their gifts and charisms endowed by the Holy Spirit, build up the *one* Body of Christ, the Church. Indeed, it is their “right and duty” to exercise their charisms for the good of the Church and the world “in communion with” their brothers and sisters in Christ and with their pastors.¹³³

As has been seen, Vatican II, especially in *Lumen Gentium*, repeatedly uses the term “communion” to express the nature of the Church and the multiple relationships that exist between its members. The life of communion in the Church is manifested in its hierarchical structure in such a way that ministers (the pope, bishops, priests, and deacons) recognizing themselves as servants of the People of God, live their lives with the people and for the people. In the same way the lay faithful, assuming themselves to be full-fledged members of the Church, participate or cooperate in the ministry and the mission of the Church.

3. The Church as Communion According to the 1985 Synod

On the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul in 1985, Pope John Paul II, recalling that that year was the twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, announced an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to take place from November 25 to December 8. This convocation was based on his conviction that Vatican II still remained an effective and fundamental event in the life of the modern Church: “fundamental for examining the riches entrusted to her by Christ who, in her and by means of her, prolongs and communicates to men the *mysterium salutis*, the work of Redemption; and fundamental for the fruitful contact with the modern world for the purpose of

¹³³ Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 3.

evangelization and dialogue on all levels and with all people of upright conscience.”¹³⁴

Accordingly, the purpose of the Synod could not be limited simply to a commemoration of Vatican II. Most of all, it was intended “to revive ... ecclesial communion ... in the mutual sharing of sufferings and joys, struggles and hopes;” “to exchange and examine experiences and information about the application of the Council at the level of the universal Church and the particular Churches;” and “to promote further study and the constant incorporation of Vatican II into the life of the Church.”¹³⁵

In order to achieve this goal, six months before the opening of the Synod a questionnaire was designed and sent to patriarchs and presidents of episcopal conferences by the general secretariat.¹³⁶ The replies from various conferences around the world served as material for the initial report of the Synod and this insured that from the very beginning the Synod had a collegial nature, even though there were very different views among conferences and there was not enough time to examine each particular Church’s situation in the light of Vatican II.¹³⁷

During the Synod, the Fathers, considering the pastoral experiences of bishops who

¹³⁴ John Paul II, “Address of 25 January 1985,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 4 February 1985, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ There were four general and thirteen particular questions. The general questions were: 1) “What was done to make the Council known, faithfully received and implemented?” 2) “What benefits for the life of the Church in your area followed from the Council?” 3) “Were there errors or abuses in the interpretation and application of Vatican II? Why? What was done or should be done to correct the situation?” 4) “What new needs, associated with change, emerged in the implementation of the Council? What should be done after the 1985 synod, so that the Church’s life will continue to develop according to the spirit and letter of Vatican II?” Cf. Alberto Melloni, “After the Council and the Episcopal Conferences: the Responses,” in *Synod 1985 – An Evaluation*, Concilium 188, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and James Provost (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 14-15.

¹³⁷ John Cardinal Krol, one of the three co-presidents of the Synod appointed by the Pope, recalled that the Synod was a great grace for the Church in that “it saw the bishops gather together in unity and consensus while using their full freedom of speech for discussion. It also had the advantage of having no fixed agenda and yet being able to reach important results. It was able to present a synthesis of Vatican II to the church at large. It was able to face reality about the pastoral situation today.” John Krol, “Report on the Synod,” *Origins* 15, no. 32 (1986): 532.

had interpreted and implemented Vatican II in their local contexts, discussed the identity of the Church and how the Church manifests herself in the world of today. In this regard, Hermann Pottmeyer singled out various views arising from the broad consultation with bishops and conferences before the Synod and categorized them in three groups:

The conservative German cardinals, Ratzinger, Höffner (Cologne) and Meisner (Berlin) had introduced the term *mysterium*. In doing so they had voiced their criticism of the post-conciliar debates on structure, which they felt to be excessive. A counterpoise was provided by the representatives of the English-speaking Churches in particular, led by Cardinal Hume; under the motif of *communio* they called for structural reforms, especially the broadening of collegiality. The Church in the “Third World,” it was felt, identified a certain common cause with them here; the latter were looking for a more independent development of local churches under the heading of *enculturation*.¹³⁸

Even if this categorization cannot fully demonstrate or reflect the varied spectrum of interpretations and practical applications of Vatican II, it is very useful for understanding in their proper context, without making them absolute, the terms “mystery” and “communion,” which were employed by the Synod Fathers as descriptions of the nature of the Church. “Inculturation” (or as Pottmeyer says “enculturation”) can be seen as the mission activity of the Church and the proclamation of salvation to the world in a co-relationship between the Gospel and culture, or more broadly, between the faith and the world.

The Synod’s *Final Report* presented the following particular themes: The Mystery of the Church, Sources of Life for the Church, The Church as Communion, The Mission of the Church in the World.¹³⁹ Of these four themes, the three which refer to the nature of the

¹³⁸ Hermann Pottmeyer, “The Church as Mysterium and as Institution,” in *Synod 1985 – An Evaluation*, Concilium 188, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and James Provost (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 99. Fr. Komonchak observed slightly differently, “At the Synod, ‘mystery’ was particularly promoted by bishops from Western Europe and the Roman curia, while ‘People of God’ was particularly stressed by Third World bishops.” Joseph Komonchak, “The Theological Debate,” in *Synod 1985 – An Evaluation*, Concilium 188, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and James Provost (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 62.

¹³⁹ The peculiar themes of the Synod in the *Final Report* were already implied in the preparatory

Church will now be examined in three sections: Church as Mystery, Church as Communion, Mission of the Church.

3.1 Church as Mystery

a) *Mystery of the Church*

While the Synod Fathers stated that the central theme was three-fold, that is, the celebration, verification, and promotion of Vatican II, they gave special attention to the further promotion of Vatican II in the *Final Report* by identifying difficulties and suggesting various theological, spiritual, and practical measures.¹⁴⁰ In order to promote a deeper reception of the Council, the Synod Fathers pointed out some partial and selective readings of the Council and some superficial interpretations of its doctrine. In doing so they gave some principles of interpretation: the close inter-relationship among the four Constitutions of Vatican II as the interpretative key for the other documents, the correlation of the pastoral character and the doctrinal vigor of the documents, the connection of the spirit with the letter of the Council, the Council's continuity with the tradition of the Church, and the reading of the Church of today and the signs of our time in light of the Council's own doctrine.¹⁴¹

statement of Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels, Belgium, who served as relator of the Extraordinary Synod. He presented an initial overview of the more than 100 reports received prior to the Synod from national hierarchies. There were, he said, four special aims of the Synod: "to examine more deeply the mystery of the church in its vocation to sanctity;" "to return to the sources such as the word of God, the living tradition, and the authentic interpretation of the Magisterium;" "to rediscover the richness of the church as communion, especially under the aspects of universal church and particular churches," and "to insist on the communion between bishops-priests, bishops-theologians, priests-laity, men-women, poor-rich;" and not to "focus exclusively upon matters internal to the church" but to encourage its "dialogue with the modern world." Cf. Godfried Danneels, "An Overview," *Origins* 15, no. 26 (1985): 429.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Joseph Komonchak, "The Theological Debate," 53-54.

¹⁴¹ Cf. The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, I. 5. Text is in *Origins* 15, no. 27 (1985): 444-50. Pope John Paul II also clearly stated this task in the closing address of the Synod: "it was necessary that at this moment above all those who were called to take part in it [the Synod] express their judgment on Vatican II in order to avoid divergent interpretations." John Paul II, "Closing Address of the Synod," *Origins* 15, no. 27

One of central interpretative criteria indicated by the Synod was the idea of the Church as mystery. The Synod Fathers, in their “Message to the People of God,” recalling the title of the first chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, stated that “the Church cannot renew herself without more profoundly rooting this spiritual note of mystery in the hearts of Christians.”¹⁴² Furthermore, the *Final Report* at the Synod stated that “mystery” is a fundamental category for an understanding of the Church:

The Council has described the Church in diverse ways: as the people of God, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the family of God. These descriptions of the Church complete one another and must be understood in the light of the Mystery of Christ or of the Church in Christ.¹⁴³

In the background, there was an awareness that the signs of the present time are different from the signs at the time of the Council. While the Synod Fathers acknowledged that the Council had affirmed the legitimate autonomy of temporal realities, they themselves expressed concern about secularism, which “consists of an autonomist vision of man and the world, one which leaves aside the dimension of mystery, indeed neglects and denies it.”¹⁴⁴ In light of this the Fathers urged the opening of a way to the dimension of the “divine” or of mystery in order to encourage a return to the sacred and to overcome secularism.

The mystery of the Church was already emphasized in the proposal of German bishops who analyzed the post-conciliar situation of the Church in Germany and searched for a theological and pastoral response. Pottmeyer, citing the analysis of Cardinal Meisner, described the situation in Germany as follows:

Bishops and priests [in Germany] are overburdened by organizational and

(1985):451-53, p. 452.

¹⁴² The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, “A Message to the People of God,” *Origins* 15, no. 27 (1985):441-44, p. 443.

¹⁴³ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. A. 3.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, II. A. 1.

bureaucratic tasks. Since, at the same time, there is a decrease in the number of priests and active Church members, many have come to see the Church as a depersonalized organization. The ecclesiastical apparatus obscures the Church as *mysterium*. That is why so many young people leave the Church and go to the sects which flourish among the young.¹⁴⁵

Supporting this analysis, Cardinal Höffner said: “The present crisis in the Church is widely due to the secularized world being imported into it, above all in the form of spiraling emancipation, subjectivism, horizontalism and consumerism.”¹⁴⁶ Accordingly, behind the German bishops’ proposal to emphasize the Church as mystery there was a critical evaluation of the state of the Church in the modern world, especially in Germany.

Different contexts result in different interpretations of the text. Since the context of the Synod differed from that of Vatican II, the meaning of “the mystery of the Church” as employed by the Synod was somewhat different from the meaning it had at the Council. As discussed above, before the Second Vatican Council, a juridical or institutional approach to the Church was dominant and the Church was described above all as a perfect society whose members were unequal in a strict pyramidal-hierarchical structure.¹⁴⁷ In the documents of the Council, the one-sided or pyramidal vision of the Church was replaced by more spiritual, liturgical and communal approaches. The Church was understood as the mystical body of Christ, as the People of God, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, etc., while the institutional approach was not generally treated as an integrating perspective.

In this light, the Council understands “mystery” not in the sense of something mysterious but as the way in which God’s salvific plan for all human beings is manifested

¹⁴⁵ Hermann Pottmeyer, “The Church as Mysterium and as Institution,” 100.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Yves Congar, “Moving Towards a Pilgrim Church,” in *Vatican II: Revisited by Those Who Were There*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Minneapolis, MN: Winston Press, 1986): 129-52, p. 133. See above, this chapter, pp. 79-81.

and fulfilled in Jesus Christ and now carried forward in and through the Church. The very first article of *Lumen Gentium*, in the chapter entitled “The Mystery of the Church,” depicts the Church as a kind of *sacrament*. In the eighth article the Church is compared to the mystery of *the incarnate Word*. Just as the humanity and the divinity of Christ must be acknowledged in one and the same Jesus of Nazareth without confusion or division, so also one and the same Church without confusion or division is both human and divine.¹⁴⁸ In this regard, the International Theological Commission made this succinct summary:

The Church, radiant with the glory of Christ (cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 1), manifests to all men the “utterly gratuitous and mysterious design of the wisdom and goodness” of the Eternal Father, who elects to save all men by the Son and in the Holy Spirit (cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 2). In order to underline at once and at the same time the presence in the Church of this transcendent divine reality and the historically expressive character of its manifestation, the Council designated the Church by the word *mystery*.¹⁴⁹

Differing slightly from this understanding, the Synod understood mystery from a pastoral analysis of the crisis of the Church in the world. The Fathers observed that in the wealthy nations the constant development of an ideology of materialism and consumerism had deteriorated and weakened spiritual realities and values, so that the young were critical of the Church and considered it as a mere institution. They saw that, because of a partial reading of the Council, a unilateral presentation of the Church as a purely institutional structure had not sufficiently emphasized the dimension of mystery. On the basis of this analysis they proclaimed: “It is necessary to understand the profound reality of the Church and consequently to avoid false sociological or political interpretations of the nature of the

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8; Joseph Komonchak, “The Church: God’s Gift and Our Task,” *Origins* 16, no. 42 (1987): 738-39.

¹⁴⁹ International Theological Commission, “Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council,” (1984) in *Texts and documents: 1969-1985*, ed. Michael Sharkey (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 271. In fact, the Commission itself anticipated that this document would constitute a contribution to the task of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod.

Church.”¹⁵⁰ To the Synod Fathers, mystery served to indicate this profound reality of the Church, far from any sociological or political conceptions of the Church.

b) *Lack of an Idea of the Church as the People of God*

This understanding of the idea of mystery is also implied in the Synod’s lack of emphasis on the Church as the People of God. There is only one reference to the “People of God” in the whole of the *Final Report* and this title is treated as only one of the many ways that the Council described the Church.¹⁵¹ Fr. Komonchak critically stated in this regard:

Somewhere between the Council and the Synod, it came to be believed that to stress the mystery of the Church required one to underplay the Church as the People of God, to the point that some observers even speak of the Synod’s having “entombed” the expression “People of God.”¹⁵²

Why did the Synod Fathers not emphasize more fully the dimension of the Church as the People of God? One of the main reasons seems to lie in their critical assessment of what took place after the Council, that is, an overemphasis on the sociological, institutional, bureaucratic dimensions of the church and a comparative downplay of the divine and sacramental dimensions, especially in connection with the concept of “the People of God”. Cardinal Ratzinger spoke about this as he recalled the development of ecclesiological ideas:

When our journey started out twenty years ago, the word communion had not yet been discovered by progressive postconciliar theology. At that time everything centered on the people of God, a concept which was thought to be a genuine innovation of the Second Vatican Council and was quickly contrasted with a hierarchical understanding of the Church. More and more, “people of God” was understood in the sense of popular sovereignty, as a right to a common, democratic determination over everything that the Church is and over everything

¹⁵⁰ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, “A Message to the People of God,” 443.

¹⁵¹ Cf. The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. A. 3.

¹⁵² Joseph Komonchak, “The Theological Debate,” 55. Fr. Komonchak did not indicate who are “some observers.”

that she should do.¹⁵³

When the Synod Fathers, focusing on the mystery of the Church, clearly asserted that “we cannot replace a false unilateral vision of the Church as purely hierarchical with a new sociological conception which is also unilateral,” the “new sociological conception” seemed to refer to the sociological interpretation of the Church as the People of God.

There is no doubt that “People of God” should not be interpreted in biological, racial, cultural, political or ideological terms, since grammatically the genitive “of God” provides the phrase with its own specific and determinate significance in theological understanding. Nonetheless, it is regrettable that owing to some tendencies to misinterpret People of God the concept was not fully highlighted in the *Final Report*. To see the Church as the People of God is not to disregard or neglect the idea of the Church as mystery. Rather, it expresses the concrete form of the Church as mystery in the world and in history in order that the Church might be the sign and the instrument of the salvation of the world. When Vatican II presents “People of God” in *Lumen Gentium*, this concept also “refers to the mystery of the Church as it walks on its pilgrimage in the period between the Ascension and the Parousia.”¹⁵⁴ The expression “People of God” implies “simultaneously mystery and historic subject, in such a fashion that the mystery constitutes the historic subject and the historic subject discloses the mystery.”¹⁵⁵

When the Synod Fathers, following the teaching of Vatican II, stated that the Church is “sacrament, that is, sign and instrument of communion with God and also of communion

¹⁵³ Joseph Ratzinger, “Communio: A Program,” *Communio* 19 (1992): 441.

¹⁵⁴ Joseph Komonchak, “The Church: God’s Gift and Our Task,” 741.

¹⁵⁵ International Theological Commission, “Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council,” 274.

and reconciliation of men with one another,”¹⁵⁶ they tended to emphasize the first half of this sentence and neglect the second half. They said, for instance, that “the Church makes herself more credible if she speaks less of herself and ever more preaches Christ Crucified and witnesses with her own life.”¹⁵⁷ It is no doubt correct that the Church is sign of the mystery of Christ and of communion with God. At the same time, however, the Church should also be a sign and instrument of communion among all men, as a historical and actual reality in the world. The Church, “as a pilgrim now on earth,”¹⁵⁸ in its sacraments and institutions, takes its place “among the creatures which groan and travail yet and await the revelation of the sons of God.”¹⁵⁹ In this sense, the understanding of the Synod Fathers on the Church as mystery does not seem to highlight fully a certain aspect of the sacrament, that is, a “realization” or “manifestation” of the mystery in the world through the Church. A more balanced understanding of the Church’s nature is given in the idea of the Church as communion.

3.2 Church as Communion

a) *Communion as a Leading Principle in the Church’s Life*

After treating the mystery of the Church and then the sources of the Church’s life, the *Final Report* goes on to consider the idea of communion in understanding the life of the Church. The Synod Fathers stated that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council’s documents.”¹⁶⁰ Bearing in mind one of the aims of the

¹⁵⁶ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. A. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 14.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., no. 48.

¹⁶⁰ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 1.

Synod, which was to promote further study and the constant incorporation of Vatican II into the life of the Church, the above statement can be considered to be an important achievement of the Synod not only with regard to the documents of the Council but also with regard to identifying the foundational paradigm for further theological understanding of the Church.

Communion is referred to primarily as “communion with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁶¹ Communion in the Church does not come about ‘from below’. It is grace and gift, a common participation in the one truth, in the one life, and in the one love which God communicates to us in word and sacrament through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. “The ecclesiology of communion cannot be reduced to purely organizational questions or to problems which simply relate to powers.”¹⁶² The Fathers seemed to be aware of the possible danger of a socio-political understanding of communion, such as had been seen in the misunderstanding of the idea of the People of God. Communion cannot be employed as a means to justify any univocal egalitarian structure or as an abstract principle to fortify the power of a very strict hierarchical structure. It is above all the communion which is obtained in the Word of God and in the sacraments. Baptism is referred to as “the door and the foundation of communion in the Church”, and eucharistic communion is described as “building up the intimate communion of all the faithful in the Church.”¹⁶³

As the Fathers indicated, communion certainly cannot be confined only to structural questions. Nonetheless, if it is understood apart from actual structure, or if it is not related to the life of all the faithful in the Church, or if it does not induce any change in their life in the

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Church, then it becomes merely one of many plausible principles and does not bear any fruit. Rather, in the life of the Church, the Fathers placed the ordering of the Church in the context of communion, which seems very useful for a proper understanding of the function or role of the various ministries in the Church's structure and its life. It is not a juridical system but an idea of communion that is "the foundation for order in the Church."¹⁶⁴

First of all, the idea of communion is "the sacramental foundation of collegiality" of bishops.¹⁶⁵ Following the teaching of the Council on the college of bishops and its head,¹⁶⁶ the Fathers understood collegiality not in a merely collective, egalitarian, or juridical way but as an aspect of communion. Even though the Fathers did not clearly spell out the words "hierarchical communion" in collegiality, they certainly implied that an idea of communion should be a fundamental principle for a proper understanding of collegiality. In their own words, the Fathers said:

The theology of collegiality is much more extensive than its mere juridical aspect. The collegial spirit is broader than effective collegiality understood in an exclusively juridical way. ... Collegial action in the strict sense implies the activity of the whole college, together with its head, over the entire Church. Its maximum expression is found in an ecumenical council.¹⁶⁷

Within this perspective, the Fathers said that "because the Church is communion

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., II. C. 4.

¹⁶⁶ That is to say, a bishop "is constituted a member of the episcopal body in virtue of the sacramental consecration and by the hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college," and the college of bishops "has for all that no authority unless united with the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, as its head." Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 22.

¹⁶⁷ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 4. Furthermore, with regard to episcopal conferences, during the Synod, Bishop James W. Malone, president of United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, said: "The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on collegiality and the impetus which this teaching gave to episcopal conferences should be reinforced. ... Vatican II's decree on the role of bishops spoke of an episcopal conference as a kind of council in which bishops jointly exercise their pastoral office." James W. Malone, "The Value of Collegiality," *Origins* 15, no. 26 (1985): 430-31. This suggestion was not fully expressed in the *Final Report* of the Synod.

there must be participation and co-responsibility at *all* of her levels.”¹⁶⁸ Recalling that the relationship between a bishop and his presbyterate is founded on the sacrament of Orders, the Synod Fathers affirmed that the role of priests is primarily to assume and carry out in their daily work their bishop’s tasks and care.¹⁶⁹ The Fathers did not describe the relationship between priests and their bishop only in sacramental terms; namely, priests celebrate the sacraments on behalf of their bishop. This could be interpreted to mean simply that the bishop has sacramental power and that he bestows it upon priests and the priests receive it and so carry out this office in their parish. Instead, the Fathers asserted that there should be “friendly relations and full trust” between bishops and their priests and that bishops should “be close with all their strength to their priests and give them help and support in their difficult work in parishes.”¹⁷⁰ These statements demonstrated that the Fathers understood the relationship between a bishop and his priests in terms of communion within the Church’s hierarchical structure.

Observing a new collaboration between the laity and clergy, the Fathers positively evaluated the commitment of the laity in the service of the Church as one of the greatest fruits of the Council.¹⁷¹ Even though in the *Final Report* there was not much mention of the lay apostolate and its implementation in the Church, the Fathers no doubt were aware of the importance of the role of the laity in the Church’s life and they encouraged them to participate in the ministry and mission of the Church. For instance, in the interventions during the general congregations of the Synod, many Fathers gave a high evaluation to the

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., II. C. 6. Italics mine.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28.

¹⁷¹ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 6.

commitment of the laity to the Church's life and discussed how the role of the laity could be encouraged more and more.¹⁷² The communal aspect of the Church as a whole was well expressed in the report of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to the Synod Secretariat:

A deepened and developed understanding of the nature of the Church requires that the Church at each level (local, particular, regional, etc.) should establish ways to ensure the exercise of both co-responsibility between laity and clergy, and collegiality of bishops. Such structural developments will help to ensure that the Church at each level has the capacity to exercise responsibility for its life and worship as a community within the wider communion.

[Thus] the concept of *koinonia* is important for an understanding of the Church. The practical implications of this concept require the capacity for each level of *koinonia* to exercise the responsibility necessary for its integrity as a community within the universal *koinonia*.¹⁷³

All the members of the Church, with regard to the communion among them, have a responsibility to help other members of the Church with their charisms and ministry without any confusion or despising of each other. With regard to pastors, this does not underestimate the importance of the official ministry of holy orders nor reduce the ministry to merely a function such as liturgical celebration of the sacraments or distribution of the sacraments. Rather, it clarifies the full meaning of this ministry in the Church. And with regard to the lay faithful, this encourages them to have a proper role in the Church, as active subjects. Only in

¹⁷² The titles of some interventions are indicative: Cardinal Richard J. Vidal of the Philippines on "the mission and responsibility of the laity"; Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich in Ireland on "lay leaders and Eucharistic ministers and lay participation in parish councils and diocesan commissions"; Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, on "the promotion of the laity as one of the principal fruits of the Council and a task for the future." Roman Arrieta Villalobos, the Archbishop of San José de Costa Rica, indicated the task of encouraging the lay apostolate in the Church: "The Church, assisted by Christ, will be able to look to her future with confidence if the following five points are elsewhere put into practice: the discovery of the true apostolic vocation of the laity; their careful formation; the coordination of their apostolic efforts; encouragement of their work; their nourishment with the Eucharist. In this way, they will be the great hope of the new millennium. May pastors act always as a stimulus and never as an obstacle to their activity." *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 9 December 1985, pp. 2-11.

¹⁷³ The Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, "Vatican II and the 1985 Synod of Bishops," *Origins* 15, no. 12 (1985): 179-80.

this way, as the *Final Report* says, can all the faithful experience the fact that “we are all the Church.”¹⁷⁴

b) *Unity and Pluriformity*

The Synod Fathers stated that the ecclesiology of communion is “the foundation ... for a correct relationship between unity and pluriformity in the Church.”¹⁷⁵ The Fathers, however, in their use of communion as a true theological principle in the relationship between unity and diversity in the Church, seemed to highlight the aspect of unity rather than the aspect of diversity. With regard to the unity of the Church, the Fathers said:

...we have but one baptism and one Eucharist with which the unity and the uniqueness of the Church are signified and built up. This is of great importance especially today, because the Church, *in as much as she is one and unique*, is as a sacrament a sign and instrument of unity and of reconciliation, of peace among men, nations, classes and peoples.¹⁷⁶

Instead of simply repeating the teaching of the Council, which taught that the Church is, in the nature of sacrament, “a sign and instrument of union with God and of unity among all men,”¹⁷⁷ the Synod Fathers added the phrase “in as much as she is one and unique” and thereby stressed the aspect of oneness and unity.

Likewise, when the Synod Fathers employed the concept of “the Church as messianic People,” which is seen in article 9 of *Lumen Gentium*, they interpreted it in terms of the unity of the Church: “In the unity of the faith and the sacraments and in the hierarchical unity, especially with the centre of unity given to us by Christ in the service of

¹⁷⁴ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 6.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., II. C. 1.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., II. C. 2. Italics mine.

¹⁷⁷ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1. Translation amended.

Peter, the Church is that messianic people of which the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* speaks (no.9).” The Council understood the messianic People as the universal sacrament for all, stating that “Established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it [the messianic People] is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all - as the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt. 5:13-16) it is sent forth into the whole world.”¹⁷⁸ The Synod Fathers, differing from the Council, highlighted the ecclesial unity of the messianic People, stressing hierarchical unity as well as the unity of faith and the sacraments. From this understanding of the messianic People with its hierarchical unity, the Fathers stated that the ecclesial communion with Peter and his successors is “the anticipation and prophetic sign of a fuller unity.”¹⁷⁹

It may be said that this focus on the aspect of unity in the Church’s life results in insufficient emphasis on the aspect of diversity. In a theological sense, the inter-relationship between unity and diversity is shaped according to the unity with diversity of the triune God, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, and thus, as the Council states, the unity of the Church exists from “the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸⁰ It is unfortunate that the Synod Fathers did not fully emphasize the unity of “communion” of the triune God when describing the diversity in the Church. Instead, the Fathers simply said: “the one and unique Spirit works with many and varied spiritual gifts and charisma [sic] (1 Cor 12:4ff).”¹⁸¹

Even though the Fathers emphasized oneness or unity rather than diversity, by

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., no. 9.

¹⁷⁹ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

¹⁸¹ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 2. The original text in the Scripture better describes the aspects of diversity in the Church: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone” (1 Cor 4:4-6).

placing the relationship between unity and diversity in the perspective of the Church as communion, they indicated that the idea of communion is an essential principle for the Church. Most of all, for the Synod Fathers the theological principle of pluriformity in unity is expressed in the mutual relationship between the universal Church and the particular churches:

The one Eucharist is celebrated in various places For this reason, the unique and universal Church is truly present in all the particular Churches (*Christus Dominus*, 11), and these are formed in the image of the universal Church in such a way that the one and unique Catholic Church exists in and through the particular Churches (*Lumen Gentium*, 23). Here we have the true theological principle of variety and pluriformity in unity.¹⁸²

In every particular church which under the sacred ministry of the bishop celebrates the Eucharist of the Lord, whether it is small, poor, or living in the diaspora, “Christ is present” and through his power and influence “the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is constituted.”¹⁸³ The universal Church is “a corporate body of churches [*corpus ecclesiarum*].”¹⁸⁴ In other words, the one Catholic Church is composed of a multitude of particular Churches in which the Church of Christ is truly present and operative.¹⁸⁵ Jean-Marie Tillard, after analyzing the convictions of the early centuries with regard to communion in the Eucharist, described the essential link of the Church with the Eucharist as follows:

Because the eucharistic body is truly the Body of the Lord assuming all believers unto himself, every eucharistic celebration causes the entire Church to receive communion. The universal Church is immanent in the local church through communion in the eucharistic body. And correlatively, the local church, when it celebrates the memorial of the Lord, is in a sacramental way communion of the

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 26.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., no. 23.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, no. 11.

Church in its totality, a totality which embraces all times “since the just man Abel,” all places, all situations.¹⁸⁶

For this reason, the universal Church cannot be conceived as the sum of the particular churches, or as a federation of particular churches. It is, above all, the communion of the particular churches. When the Synod Fathers described the mutual relationship between the universal Church and the particular churches on the basis of the one Eucharist celebrated in various particular churches, they seemed to imply that “communion” is the true theological principle to be used in understanding the relationship between the universal Church and the particular churches and between particular churches themselves, although the term “communion” was not actually employed.

c) *Communion and Basic Communities*

Within the context of the Church as communion, the Synod Fathers connected the idea of communion with basic communities:

Because the Church is communion, the new “basic communities,” if they truly live in unity with the Church, are a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. They are thus cause for great hope for the life of the Church.¹⁸⁷

In fact, reflecting on the Synod of 1974, Pope Paul VI already described the basic/small communities as “a hope for the universal Church,” especially in terms of evangelization:

The last Synod devoted considerable attention to these “small communities,” or *communautés de base*, because they are often talked about in the Church today. What are they, and why should they be the special beneficiaries of evangelization and at the same time evangelizers themselves? ... These communities will be a place of evangelization, for the benefit of the bigger communities, especially the individual Churches. And, as we said at the end of the last Synod, they will be a

¹⁸⁶ J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, 26.

¹⁸⁷ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 6.

hope for the universal Church.¹⁸⁸

For Pope Paul VI, the role of these communities was especially one of evangelization. The most fundamental vocation of such communities was that they, “as hearers of the Gospel which is proclaimed to them and privileged beneficiaries of evangelization,” become “proclaimers of the Gospel themselves.”¹⁸⁹ Unlike Pope Paul VI, the Synod Fathers of 1985 do not speak of the communities in relation to evangelization. Instead, they give special attention to the participatory or co-responsible aspect of the communities in the context of the life of the Church.¹⁹⁰ This does not mean that the role of the communities with regard to evangelization is underestimated, because the Fathers certainly know this and thus cite article 58 of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which emphasizes the communities’ role of evangelization. However, the Synod Fathers seem to highlight other aspects of the communities such as the active participation of all their members in the mission and ministry of the Church and the communion that exists between the members of the communities, though unfortunately they did not give any further explanation of those aspects.

In order for such communities to be a true expression of communion and an effective way for encouraging communion, the Fathers suggested a condition, namely that the communities should “live in unity with the Church.”¹⁹¹ In fact, this condition has been emphasized from the beginning by the bishops in the Latin American Church in which basic

¹⁸⁸ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58. English text in Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World: Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1976).

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ In the *Final Report*, the statement on basic communities occurs not under the theme “The Mission of the Church in the World,” but in the part on “The Church as Communion,” especially in the section on “Participation and Co-responsibility in the Church.”

¹⁹¹ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 6.

ecclesial communities sprouted early:

It is essential that all the ecclesial communities be open to the dimension of catholic communion, in such a way that none is closed in upon itself. To assure the fulfillment of this requirement is a task which is incumbent particularly on the hierarchical ministries, and in a very special way on the bishops who, collegially united with their head, the Roman Pontiff, are the principle of the catholicity of the Churches.¹⁹²

The requirement of basic ecclesial communities to remain in communion with the Church was described in the teaching of Pope Paul VI:

The communities which by their spirit of opposition cut themselves off from the Church, and whose unity they wound, can well be called *communautés de base*, but in this case it is a strictly sociological name.... This name belongs to the other groups, those which come together within the Church in order to unite themselves to the Church and to cause the Church to grow. These latter communities will be a place of evangelization, for the benefit of the bigger communities, especially the individual Churches.¹⁹³

The Pope suggested that in order for these communities to be a hope for the universal Church, the following seven criteria must be fulfilled. First, ecclesial communities should “seek their nourishment in the Word of God and ... not allow themselves to be ensnared by political polarization or fashionable ideologies, which are ready to exploit their immense human potential.” Second, ecclesial communities should “avoid the ever present temptation of systematic protest and a hypercritical attitude, under the pretext of authenticity and a spirit of collaboration.’ Third, ecclesial communities should “remain firmly attached to the local Church in which they are inserted, and to the universal Church.” Fourth, ecclesial communities should “maintain a sincere communion with the pastors whom the Lord gives to His Church, and with the magisterium which the Spirit of Christ has entrusted to these

¹⁹² The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, “The Final Document of the Second General Conference,” (1968) in *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, II Conclusions*, third edition (Washington, DC: Secretariat for Latin America National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979), 184.

¹⁹³ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58.

pastors.” Fifth, ecclesial communities should “never look on themselves as the sole beneficiaries or sole agents of evangelization ... but, being aware that the Church is much more vast and diversified, accept the fact that this Church becomes incarnate in other ways than through themselves.” Sixth, ecclesial communities should “constantly grow in missionary consciousness, fervor, commitment and zeal.” Seventh, ecclesial communities should “show themselves to be universal in all things and never sectarian.”¹⁹⁴

It is unfortunate that the Fathers did not give any further explanation for the meaning of “living in unity with the Church.” Nonetheless, from the fact that the Synod Fathers share Pope Paul VI’s understanding of basic communities as a hope for the universal Church and that many bishops expressed ideas similar to those of the Pope in their interventions during the Synod,¹⁹⁵ it seems that the Synod Fathers’ understanding of “basic communities’ unity with the Church” is not far from the understanding of Pope Paul VI.

3.3 Mission of the Church

a) “Aggiornamento”

The Synod Fathers affirmed the continuing significance of Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*. Rather than simply accepting the teaching of the Constitution, the Fathers asserted the necessity of a new

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Ibid. For more discussion of these seven criteria in the Korean context, see below, chapter four, pp. 256-58.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Cardinal Miguel Obando Bravo, Archbishop of Managua, Nicaragua, “Fourth General Congregation Interventions,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 9 December 1985, p. 5; José Ivo Lorscheiter, Bishop of Santa Maria, Brazil, “Written Interventions,” ” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 16 December 1985, p. 14; Philippe Delhay, Secretary General of the International Theological Commission, “Tenth General Congregation Interventions,” ” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 23-30 December 1985, p. 4; J.-M. Tillard, “Final Report of the Last Synod,” in *Synod 1985 – An Evaluation*, Concilium 188, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and James Provost (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 73-74.

interpretation of the signs of the time:

We perceive that the signs of our time are in part different from the time of the Council, with greater problems and anguish. Today, in fact, everywhere in the world we witness an increase in hunger, oppression, injustice and war, sufferings, terrorism and other forms of violence of every sort. This requires a new and more profound theological reflection in order to interpret these signs in the light of the Gospel.¹⁹⁶

The Fathers saw the reality of the present world as one in which sufferings and problems have increased. This awareness, although not without justification, seems to prevent them from describing fully the dynamic relationship between the Church and the world.¹⁹⁷ This can be seen by analyzing how the Synod's understanding of "aggiornamento" differs from that of Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI.

Pope John XXIII used the term *aggiornamento* in January 1959, when he unexpectedly announced the Council as well as a Roman Diocesan Synod. Here the term *aggiornamento* actually referred to the updating of the Code of Canon Law.¹⁹⁸ Pope John's idea of *aggiornamento* was well expressed in his opening speech to the Second Vatican Council, even though he did not openly mention the term:

It is necessary first of all that the Church should never depart from the sacred patrimony of truth received from the Fathers. But at the same time she must ever *look to the present*, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world which have *opened new avenues* to the Catholic apostolate.¹⁹⁹

Pope Paul VI, following upon and developing the concept of *aggiornamento* of John XXIII,

¹⁹⁶ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. D. 1; cf. *Ibid.*, II. A. 1.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. J.-M. Tillard, "Final Report of the Last Synod," 66; Hermann Pottmeyer, "The Church as Mysterium and as Institution," 105.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. John XXIII, Allocuzione del Santo Padre Giovanni XXIII con la quale Annuncia il Sinodo Romano, il Concilio Ecumenico e L'aggiornamento del Codice di Diritto Canonico [Address by the Holy Father John XXIII with which He Announced the Roman Synod and the Second Ecumenical Council and Reforms of the Code of Canon Law], AAS 51 (1959), 68.

¹⁹⁹ John XXIII, "Opening Speech to the Second Vatican Council," (October 11, 1962) in *Pope John XXIII: Essential Writings*, ed. Jean Maalouf (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 110-11. Emphasis added. Original text is in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962): 786-96.

saw it as an aspect of Church renewal in relation with the world:

We cannot forget Pope John XXIII's word *aggiornamento* which we have adopted as expressing the aim and object of our own pontificate. Besides ratifying it and confirming it as the guiding principle of the Ecumenical Council, we want to bring it to the notice of the whole Church. It should prove a stimulus to the Church to increase its ever growing vitality and its ability to take stock of itself and give careful consideration to the signs of the times, always and everywhere "proving all things and holding fast that which is good" (1 Thess 5:21) with the enthusiasm of youth.²⁰⁰

The Synod Fathers, however, distinguished between a true and a false interpretation of *aggiornamento* in certain post-conciliar tendencies:

The true and false meaning of so-called "aggiornamento" is discovered. An easy accommodation that could lead to the secularization of the Church is to be excluded. Also excluded is an immobile closing in upon itself of the community of the faithful. Affirmed instead is a missionary openness for the integral salvation of the world. ... But integral salvation is obtained only if these human realities are purified and further elevated through grace and familiarity with God, through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit.²⁰¹

Without describing the inter-relationship between the realities of the world and the Church, the Fathers assumed *aggiornamento* as a part of the one-way description of the need for the Church to "purify" values honored by the world.²⁰² Simply put, while Popes John XXIII and Paul VI employed the term *aggiornamento* in order to focus on Church renewal in order to face the various challenges of modern society, the Synod Fathers applied it to the need of the Church to transform and purify cultures in mission activity. While the Synod Fathers properly asserted that the salvation of the world through the Church is a fundamental meaning of *aggiornamento*, it seems regrettable that an appreciation of various dimensions of the world, including the cultural and social dimensions, was not more emphasized. The

²⁰⁰ Paul VI, Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 50. AAS 56 (1964): 609-59. English text in *The Pope Speaks* 10, no. 1 (1964), 253-92.

²⁰¹ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. D. 3.

²⁰² Cf. Joseph Komonchak, "The Theological Debate," 63.

Fathers seem to highlight the mission of the Church to the world and not to give much positive assessment to the social, cultural, or political realities of the world.

b) *Evangelization and Inculturation*

The Synod Fathers firmly emphasized the importance of evangelization: “the mystery of the divine life that the Church brings to all peoples to participate in must be proclaimed.”²⁰³ In fact, to have greatest impact, the content of faith needs to be expressed properly and variously in the words, concepts, symbols, and actual lives of a given culture. Inculturation in the Church not only implies the fact that the Word of God in faith enlightens an historical and social aspect of culture but also urges that all the faithful “must try to infuse a Christian spirit into people’s mental outlook and daily behavior, into the laws and structures of the civil community.”²⁰⁴

Pope Paul VI highlighted the mutual relationship between evangelization and culture:

The kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.²⁰⁵

Echoing the teaching of Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli*, demonstrated succinctly that “the work of evangelization which they [SS. Cyril and Methodius] carried out – as pioneers in territory inhabited by Slav peoples – contains

²⁰³ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. B. 2.

²⁰⁴ Paul VI, Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, no. 81. AAS 59 (1967), pp. 257-99. English Text in *Proclaiming Justice & Peace: Documents from John XXIII-John Paul II*, ed. Michael Walsh and Brian Davies (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984), 141-64.

²⁰⁵ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.

both a model of what today is called ‘inculturation’, the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures, and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church.”²⁰⁶ If evangelization is properly understood in the context of dialogue with cultures, then there should be a mutual enrichment, as Pope John Paul II described elsewhere:

On the one hand, the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the biblical world or, more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived), nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.

On the other hand, the power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates. When that power enters into a culture, it is no surprise that it rectifies many of its elements. There would be no catechesis if it were the Gospel that had to change when it came into contact with the cultures.²⁰⁷

The Synod Fathers, along the same lines, but in the context of communion, stated as follows:

Because the Church is communion, which joins diversity and unity in being present throughout the world, it takes from every culture all that it encounters of positive value. Yet inculturation is different from a simple external adaptation, because it means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, no. 21. AAS 77 (1985): 779-813. English text in *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*, ed. J. Michael Miller (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), 228-53.

²⁰⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 53. AAS 71 (1979): 1277-1340. English text in *The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations of John Paul II*, ed. J. Michael Miller (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1998), 68-118. Later, this understanding was affirmed by the Pontifical Biblical Commission as follows: “This is not, as is clear, a one-way process; it involves ‘mutual enrichment.’ On the one hand, the treasures contained in diverse cultures allow the word of God to produce new fruits and, on the other hand, the light of the word allows for a certain selectivity with respect to what cultures have to offer: Harmful elements can be left aside and the development of valuable ones encouraged. Total fidelity to the person of Christ, to the dynamic of his paschal mystery and to his love for the Church makes it possible to avoid two false solutions: a superficial ‘adaptation’ of the message, on the one hand, and a syncretistic confusion, on the other.” The Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” *Origins* 23, no. 29 (1994): 521. With regard to a mutual enrichment, Vatican II had already taught: “the Church has been sent to all ages and nations and, therefore, is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, to any one particular way of life, or to any customary practices, ancient or modern. The Church is faithful to its tradition and is at the same time conscious of its universal mission; it can, then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby *enriching both itself and the cultures themselves*.” Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58. Italics mine.

²⁰⁸ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. D. 4.

Thus, for the Synod Fathers, in the background of theological reflection on inculturation there was the concept of the Church as communion in which the diversity of cultures and the unity of faith are simultaneously affirmed. If one is really speaking of communion in the life of the Church, then it is impossible to underestimate the diverse values of cultures whereby all human beings develop and perfect their many bodily and spiritual qualities.²⁰⁹ From this perspective, the Synod Fathers, citing the teaching of Pope Paul VI on the “evangelization of cultures,” paid attention to the need to evangelize the human culture and cultures:

The separation of Gospel and culture was defined by Paul VI as “the drama of our age, as it was for other ages. It is therefore necessary to make every effort towards a generous evangelization of culture, more precisely of cultures. They must be regenerated through the encounter with the good news. But this encounter will not be brought about if the good news is not proclaimed” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20).²¹⁰

3.4 Concluding Reflection on the 1985 Synod.

Highlighting the idea of communion, the Synod Fathers described the mission of the Church in a following way: “The Church as communion is a sacrament for the salvation of the world.”²¹¹ To accomplish mission means to proclaim salvation through Jesus Christ in the world. “The primary mission of the Church, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, is to preach and to witness to the good and joyful news of the election, the mercy and charity of God which manifest themselves in salvation history.”²¹² Christians, living in particular social and cultural conditions, should cooperate with God and men for the salvation of the

²⁰⁹ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 53.

²¹⁰ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. D. 4; cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.

²¹¹ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. D.1.

²¹² *Ibid.*, II. A. 2.

world. Therefore, salvation cannot be understood merely spiritually and internally. It has above all an integral dimension. “The salvific mission of the Church in relation to the world must be understood as an integral whole. Though it is spiritual, the mission of the Church involves human promotion even in its temporal aspects.”²¹³ The integral dimension of salvation is more clearly expressed in the phrase “a missionary openness for the ‘integral salvation’ of the world.”²¹⁴

This term “integral salvation” had already been introduced in the document of the 1974 Synod, convened on the theme of evangelization:

Among the many matters treated at the Synod we paid particular attention to the problem of the inter-relation between evangelization and integral salvation, or the full liberation of man and peoples. It is a matter of considerable importance and we were profoundly at one in reaffirming the close link between evangelization and liberation. We were led to this conclusion because we ourselves share the lives and the common fate of our fellow-Christians and of other men.²¹⁵

While the term “integral salvation” was directly employed in the 1974 Synod, the integral dimension of salvation through the missionary activity of the Church can be traced back to Vatican II itself. The Council, speaking of the apostolate of the lay faithful, understood the Church’s mission as an integral whole:

The work of Christ’s redemption concerns essentially the salvation of men; it takes in also, however, the renewal of the whole temporal order. The mission of the Church, consequently, is not only to bring men the message and grace of Christ but also to permeate and improve the whole range of the temporal. The laity, carrying out this mission of the Church, exercise their apostolate therefore in the world as well as in the Church, in the temporal order as well as in the spiritual.²¹⁶

²¹³ *Ibid.*, II. D. 6.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II. D. 3.

²¹⁵ The 1974 Synod of Bishops, “Declaration by the Synod Fathers,” trans. by Austin Flannery, *Doctrine and Life* 25 (1975): 56. This declaration was approved by the Synod Fathers at the closing session, 26 October 1974.

²¹⁶ Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 5.

Here, the idea of a dichotomy or separation between the spiritual order and the temporal order and the idea of opposition between the Church's spiritual mission and its *diaconia* in the world is excluded. Instead, the Church's mission activity is strongly taught to involve not only conversion in a religious-spiritual dimension but also the transformation of the socio-political realm and of cultural situations in light of the Gospel.

The Church, even though it may actually exist as a small flock, can never renounce its "universal mission" to all human beings in the world. This is above all because "established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, it [the Church] is taken up by him also as the instrument for *the salvation of all* - as the light of the world and the salt of the earth (cf. Mt 5:13-16) it is sent forth into the whole world."²¹⁷ The Church as communion manifests itself as "the universal sacrament of salvation"²¹⁸ for all. In this regard, the Synod Fathers described the Church as "a sign and instrument of unity and of reconciliation, of peace among men, nations, classes and peoples."²¹⁹ The Church is not merely a sign or result of the divine love of God for the world but it is also the instrument of universal salvation for all through communion. As Kasper said, "the Church is simultaneously the fruit of salvation and the means of salvation; for it is both an actualizing sign of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, and a sacramental instrument for passing on this eschatological salvation to all human beings."²²⁰ In its essential nature, the Church cannot be confined within herself. Rather, as the CDF said, the Church "is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavor, for she is sent to the world to announce and witness,

²¹⁷ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9. Italics mine.

²¹⁸ Ibid., no. 48; cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 45.

²¹⁹ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 2.

²²⁰ Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church*, 121.

to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her, and to gather together all people and all things into Christ so as to be for all an ‘inseparable sacrament of unity.’”²²¹

To sum up, employing the idea of communion as a leading principle in the Church’s life, the Fathers emphasized the communal aspect of the Church as a whole and the active participation and co-responsibility of all the faithful in the Church. The mission of the Church, as the first duty of all the faithful, is explained as a missionary openness for the integral salvation of the world and the universal salvation of all. The Church is seen as *the sacrament of communion for the salvation of the world*.

4. The Lay Faithful in the Church as Communion According to the 1987 Synod and *Christifideles Laici*

In order to choose the theme of the ordinary Synod which was scheduled to be convened in 1986, in February 1984 Pope John Paul II presented to the members of the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod the themes proposed by the various local churches and also asked for their opinions about priorities. Three months later, the Pope announced the theme of the Synod to the Council of the Secretariat, emphasizing that

in fact, the mission of the laity, because it forms an integral part of the mission of salvation of the whole People of God, is of fundamental importance for the life of the Church and for the service that the Church herself is called to offer to the world of man and the temporal order.²²²

Taking the theme of the laity for the Synod, indeed, did not mean creating a new

²²¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” no.7 *Origins* 22, no. 7 (1992): 108-12, p.109.

²²² John Paul II, Address to the Council of the Secretariat of the Synod, 19 May 1984. The English translation is cited from Eduardo Pironio, “Preface,” in *Towards the Synod of Bishops 1987*, ed. Pontifical Council for the Synod (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1985), 5.

paradigm for the laity in the Church and in the world; rather it implied an *aggiornamento* of the teaching of Vatican II on the laity in order to take account of the present ecclesial situation and of the historical condition of contemporary society. Acknowledging the Second Vatican Council's comprehensive reflections on the nature, dignity, responsibility and mission of the laity in the Church and the world, Pope John Paul II asserted that "the need for the Church to resume her reflection on the vocation and mission of the laity in the context of the salvation worked by God in Christ Jesus through history has in no way grown weaker: on the contrary, it has become stronger and more urgent than ever."²²³

Accordingly, the task of the Synod was to look for "concrete ways through which this rich 'theory' on the lay state expressed by the Council can be translated into authentic Church 'practice'" in the "new situations" of today.²²⁴ This, in fact, was a great challenge for the Synod Fathers. Many varied considerations regarding the identity and role of the laity in the Church's life were presented during the Synod's work: in the *Lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum Laboris*²²⁵; in the introductory report; in the presentations of individual bishops and lay people; in the summary reports after discussion in the Synod hall; in the discussions and reports of the 'small groups' and the final 'Propositions' and the 'Message to the People of God;' and finally in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles*

²²³ Ibid. Cf. The 1987 Ordinary Synod, "Lineamenta," *Origins* 14, no. 38 (1985): 624-34, p. 626.

²²⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2. Original text of the Exhortation in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81 (1989): 393-521. English text in *Origins* 18, no. 35 (1989): 561-95. In this regard, Peter Coughlan argued that the task of the Synod would be "to consider the practical applications of what was known and clearly understood" rather than "to seek for a fuller and deeper understanding of the identity of the laity, and of their vocation and mission." Peter J. Coughlan, "The Search for a Positive Definition or Description of the Laity from Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, to John Paul II's *Christifideles Laici*, 1988: A No Through Road," (Ph. D. diss., University of London, 2005), 244.

²²⁵ The *Lineamenta*, the Synod's consultation document, is prepared beforehand by the Synod Secretariat to promote discussion and consultation on the Synod's theme in local churches throughout the world. The *Instrumentum Laboris*, the Synod's working paper, is a summary of responses to the *Lineamenta*, resulting from an analysis of the reflections, experiences, suggestions and proposals received from bishops' conferences and others throughout the world.

Laici.

These works will be examined and analyzed in two sections which focus on the identity and role of the lay faithful in the idea of the Church as communion, and on the manifestation of communion by the lay faithful in the parish.

4.1 The Identity of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Communion

a) *The Framework of an Ecclesiology of Communion*

In January 1985, Pope John Paul II surprisingly announced that an Extraordinary Synod would be held at the end of that year. Immediately there were some anxieties that the preparation for this Extraordinary Synod would interfere with the Synod on the laity due to take place in 1986. It seemed very possible that wide consultation would be greatly reduced and that even the value of the Synod would be endangered.²²⁶ These anxieties, however, were ended when the scheduled meeting was postponed to 1987 and the bishops were thus given more time for preparation. Moreover, it seemed that the emphasis of the extraordinary Synod in 1985 on “communion” might serve as a foundation and framework for the 1987 Synod.²²⁷

The title of the Synod, “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World, Twenty Years after the Second Vatican Council,” does not clearly express the self-understanding of the Church as communion. However, the idea of communion plays a significant role in determining the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church, because

²²⁶ Cf. Peter Coughlan, *The Hour of the Laity: Their Expanding Role* (Newton NSW, Australia; Philadelphia: E.J. Dwyer, 1989), 8.

²²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, 9.

the Church is a “communion of life, love and truth.”²²⁸ No vocation or mission can stand by itself; instead, it carries in itself the idea of communion. It is always in communion with God and with all the faithful within the Church. And, since the Church exists in the world to serve the salvific plan of God for all, every Christian’s vocation or mission should serve the goal of communion among all people. As the Synod Fathers stated, “to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see daily activities as an occasion to join themselves with God, fulfill his will, serve other people, and lead them to communion with God in Christ.”²²⁹

During the Synod, the identity of the laity in the communion of the Church was deeply discussed. Cardinal Eduardo Pironio, one of Presidents Delegate of the Synod, acknowledged that the Synod’s aim was an authentic “ecclesiology of communion” and that this was inspired and shaped by the Extraordinary Synod of 1985. For him, “the idea of a ‘missionary communion’ is fundamental,” for it clarifies “the vocation and mission of the laity.” Only within an ecclesiology of communion can we understand better “the participation of the laity in the evangelizing mission of the Church” and “the identity of the priest and of the religious.”²³⁰

Cardinal Basil Hume of Westminster suggested to the Synod Fathers that the concept of “the Church as *koinonia*” which is emphasized in the 1985 Extraordinary Synod “must remain central to our thinking.” Within the idea of the Church as communion, the Cardinal was convinced that baptism enables every Christian “to share fully in the single mission of Christ, which is expressed and realized in a diversity of specific vocations and

²²⁸ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

²²⁹ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 5. English text in *Origins* 17, no. 29 (1987): 500-09.

²³⁰ Eduardo F. Pironio, “Greeting at the Opening of the Synod,” in *Lay Voices at the Synod*, ed. Pontifical Council for the Synod (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1988), 36.

gifts” and thus that all the faithful are called to the active, conscious participation in the life and love of God which is the very mystery of the Church.²³¹

After the discussion and reflection on the laity in the Synod hall, the Synod Fathers concluded that the idea of the communion of the Church plays a pivotal role in understanding the vocation and mission of the laity. Thus, in the *Propositions* they unhesitatingly asked the supreme pontiff that the documents of the Synod should be written “in light of the ecclesiology of communion.”²³² Accepting this suggestion, the Pope described the status of the laity in the first three chapters of his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* under the following titles: The Dignity of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mystery; The Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Life of Church as Communion; The Co-responsibility of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mission. In fact, all three titles should be seen in the light of the communion and mission of the Church since in general “the Exhortation intends to stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share, both as a group and as individuals, in the communion and mission of the Church.”²³³

b) *The Identity of the Lay Faithful in Light of Communion*

In Part I of the *Propositions*, entitled “Called by God to Communion with Him and to a Mission for the Salvation of the World,” the Synod Fathers began with the Christian’s incorporation into Christ through baptism. It is through Baptism that all the faithful share the

²³¹ Cf. Cardinal Basil Hume, “Fourteenth General Congregation Interventions,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 26 October 1987, p.6.

²³² The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 2. The concluding documents of the Synod included a message to the people of God and a set of propositions submitted to Pope John Paul II. The propositions, voted upon by the Synod delegates, cover the major areas of the Synod discussions.

²³³ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 2.

“same Christian dignity and together form the people of God.”²³⁴ The *Instrumentum Laboris* also highlighted this point: “There is a common dignity of members [of the Church], deriving from their rebirth in Christ, a common grace as his children, a common vocation to perfection.”²³⁵ In Baptism we are incorporated into the Body of Christ and come to have the same dignity with other members of the People of God.

Baptism is indeed as much the “sacrament of unity” as is the Eucharist. It is because of Baptism and the Eucharist that the Church is called the people of God. The notion of the “people of God” and its underlying Trinitarian foundation are clarified in article 4 of *Lumen Gentium*: “the universal Church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” It was in this light that the Synod Fathers in their “Message to the People of God” declared:

All lay faithful have a dignity which they hold in common with clerics and religious, since there is only one people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.²³⁶

The dignity of the faithful is rooted deeply in the communion of the Church which originates from the unity of the Trinity. This dignity, as the source of equality for all members of the Church, “guarantees and fosters the spirit of communion and fellowship” and simultaneously becomes the “hidden dynamic force in the lay faithful’s apostolate and

²³⁴ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 3. Yves Congar had earlier reflected on this point and insisted that every Christian does not need to wait for a vocation other than “his vocation to a Christian life.” He is called to live his profession of faith in the very circumstances of his life, this is the “will of God, who has given us a place in his plan of salvation.” Yves Congar, *Priest and Layman*, (UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), 12.

²³⁵ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, “Instrumentum Laboris,” *Origins* 17, no. 1 (1987): 18. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.

²³⁶ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, “Message to the People of God,” *Origins* 17, no. 22 (1987): 387. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

mission.”²³⁷ A proper understanding of the various ministries of the laity in the Church derives from the communion of the Church.

Ecclesial communion is characterized by the diversity and complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, charisms and responsibilities. The lay faithful, by their own gifts from the Holy Spirit, are related to the whole body and offer a totally unique contribution to the whole body. No one should remain in isolation from the community, but with a lively sense of fellowship all should live in continual interaction with others. What distinguishes individual persons is not an “increase in dignity,” but a “special and complementary capacity for service.”²³⁸ The charisms, the ministries, the different forms of service do not make the Church divided, but all exist “in communion and on behalf of communion.”²³⁹

The *Final Report* of the 1985 Synod expressed a slightly different perspective on the laity. While the *Propositions* of the 1987 Synod and *Christifideles Laici* highlighted the equal dignity of all the faithful that is enjoyed within the communion of the new People of God, the *Final Report* of the 1985 Synod emphasized the vocation of all the faithful to holiness, that is, “an invitation to an intimate conversion of heart and to participate in the life of God, One and Triune.”²⁴⁰ With regard to the Christian’s vocation to holiness, the 1987 Synod Fathers also described it, but emphasized a different aspect. This will be compared and analyzed in the following section.

²³⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 20.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. A. 4. The equality of all in the Church is often described as an aspect of the Church as the People of God. While in the *Final Report* of the 1985 Synod the phrase “People of God” appears only once, in *Christifideles Laici* the expression is used 21 times.

c) *The Life of Holiness in the World*

The Second Vatican Council, in describing the position of the faithful in the secular world, looked at the world as the place in which they receive their call from God.²⁴¹ From this point of view, the Synod Fathers analyzed the “secular character” of the lay faithful. The term “secular” here should not be defined only in a “sociological sense, but most especially in a theological sense.”²⁴² It is perceived in light of the act of God the creator and redeemer, who invites the faithful to sanctify the world in their marriage or celibate life, in their family, profession or various activities in society. This is what it means to “participate in the work of creation.”²⁴³ We might say, therefore, that “the work of creation” does not cease at the moment of God’s creating of the world. There is a salvific economy of God from the first moment of creation to its fulfillment at the end of time.

Pope John Paul II stated the same point from the Council, insisting that the world is the “place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ.”²⁴⁴ They are not called to abandon the world. Rather, they are invited in Baptism, with Christ and in Christ, to consecrate the world, becoming the light of the world and leading the world to its destination, which is God himself. This is the call to “be *present* and *active* in the world.”²⁴⁵

In light of this, the life of holiness for the faithful in the world obtains a profound meaning for the 1987 Synod Fathers, especially when compared with the 1985 Synod Fathers’ reflection on holiness. As mentioned above, the 1985 Extraordinary Synod

²⁴¹ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

²⁴² The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 4.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 15.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. Emphasis added.

highlighted the term “holiness”:

Because the Church in Christ is mystery, she must be considered the sign and instrument of holiness.... The call to holiness is an invitation to an *intimate conversion* of heart and to *participate* in the life of God, One and Triune, and this signifies and surpasses the realization of man's every desire.²⁴⁶

For the 1985 Synod, then, holiness is not simply a virtue attached to us from outside, but it is the very life of the Church from within, because the Church herself is the Church of Christ and in Christ. Holiness, most of all, means belonging to God and being of God. Holiness means an intimate *conversion* of heart and a *participation* in the divine life.

Conversion or *metanoia*, nonetheless, cannot be understood simply as a spiritual change of mind or repentance from sins. If *metanoia* is understood in terms of communion, it enlightens not only the relationship between God and human beings but also the fellowship among the faithful and the unity of all human beings, and assumes a foundational role for the ministry and mission of all the faithful as well as their vocation. As Cardinal Ratzinger argued:

Metanoia is synonymous with obedience and faith; that is why it refers to the community of those who are called to the same way; where there is belief in a personal God, there *horizontality and verticality*, inwardness and service, are ultimately not opposites. ... *Metanoia* is not just any Christian attitude but the fundamental *Christian act* per se, understood admittedly from a very definite perspective: that of transformation, conversion, renewal, and change.²⁴⁷

The idea of “participation” was likewise important for the 1985 Synod. “In living

²⁴⁶ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. A. 4. Italics mine.

²⁴⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 60. Italics in original. Likewise, John Navone understands Christian conversion as “both an event and a lifelong process of ongoing response to the grace and demand of the God of all human kind whom Jesus Christ as the suffering Messiah reveals to be in the service of all in establishing communion, community, and friendship among all and between them and God.” John Navone, *Self-Giving and Sharing: The Trinity and Human Fulfillment* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 1.

and fruitful participation in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ,”²⁴⁸ all the faithful join in and enjoy the divine life. Accordingly, there is encouragement to have “participation at all levels of the Church.”²⁴⁹ For instance, evangelization is the first duty not only of the bishops but also of priests and deacons, indeed, of all Christians, because all the faithful should participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Jesus.²⁵⁰

The Fathers of the 1987 Synod developed these ideas, opening the term “holiness” into its concrete aspects in the world: “Holiness today cannot be attained without a commitment to justice, without a human solidarity that includes the poor and the oppressed. The ideal holiness of the lay faithful must integrate the social dimension of transforming the world according to the plan of God.”²⁵¹ The lay faithful are not called to build up a society of justice and love simply in the sociological sense. A society without God cannot find its true peace, justice and love. It cannot find its meaning and destination in itself. God is its true peace, justice and love.

The incarnational and historical dimensions of Christian spirituality must be evident to all the Christian laity, so that holiness in the concrete sense might be provided for the lay person to be truly made in the likeness of the incarnate Word, who gave himself for men. The social doctrine of the Church is to be considered an integral part of spiritual formation.²⁵²

The role of the laity in the world always carries in itself a salvific characteristic. In

²⁴⁸ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. B. b). 1.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., II. C. 6.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., II. B. a). 2. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10-13; Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 2.

²⁵¹ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, “Message to the People of God,” 387. Among the many interventions on this matter, Brazilian Bishop Pinto Carvalheira’s intervention is noteworthy in that he understood the term “holiness” in terms of the ecclesial aspect: “Any form of holiness of ‘flight’ or ‘evasion’ should be avoided. In *Gaudium et Spes* the need for a relationship Church-World is stressed. Holiness is in no way a ‘personal matter’. The world, with its very ambiguities is the proper place for sanctity to be attained. The ecclesial character of holiness should be particularly stressed. Participation in the divine life takes place in a community of disciples, for example, CEB [*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*], groups for evangelization, spiritual formation or mission.” Bishop Pinto Carvalheira, “Sixth General Congregation Interventions,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 12 October 1987, p. 13.

²⁵² The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 5.

other words, their activities and presence should always point to the ultimate goal, which is the salvation of the world and God himself. Thus the faithful must see their “daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ.”²⁵³ A life of holiness in the world that is founded on communion with the divine life expresses itself not as a spiritual life or a secular life but as an integral life truly following the example of the Lord, Jesus Christ who gave himself for men.

4.2 The Communion of the Lay Faithful in Parish Life

a) *The Parish Council and Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities*

Ecclesial communion always has a “universal dimension,” yet at the same time it “finds its most immediate and visible expression in the parish,” where “the Church is seen locally.”²⁵⁴ The Synod Fathers singled out the importance of the parish in an ecclesiology of communion. The parish is seen, first of all, in its theological reality as a eucharistic community and “as the primary place for the celebration of the sacred liturgy and the sacraments, whereby the community is formed and made missionary,” and it serves as a place in which “the experience of ecclesial communion” is provided and fulfilled.²⁵⁵

In the life of the Church, the Synod Fathers pictured the parish as a “dynamic community of communities.”²⁵⁶ Spiritual movements, basic ecclesial communities and other apostolic groups energize the parish and are in turn nourished by the parish. The lay

²⁵³ Ibid. Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

²⁵⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 26; Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.

²⁵⁵ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 10.

²⁵⁶ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, “Message to the People of God,” 388.

faithful, therefore, are invited “to enter intensely into the life of their parishes” and to participate “in the various forms and activities of the apostolate.”²⁵⁷ In this spirit, the Synod Fathers specially called for a renewal in parishes, so as to foster:

- a) adaptation of parish structures according to the full flexibility granted by canon law, especially in promoting participation by the lay faithful in pastoral responsibilities;
- b) small, basic or so-called “living” communities, where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another; these communities are true expressions of ecclesial communion and centers of evangelization, in communion with their pastors.²⁵⁸

For the Fathers, the collaboration of clergy and men and women religious as well as laity was crucial in the life of the parish.²⁵⁹ This collaboration is expressed concretely in the “parish pastoral council” where parishioners take part in determining the pastoral needs and aspirations of the community.²⁶⁰ The Fathers discussed parish pastoral councils as an important part of the *participatio actuosa* of the lay faithful in the life of the Church, that is, in communion. They did not describe clearly the specific characteristics of parish pastoral councils; instead, they implied their role, confirming also the function of the diocesan pastoral council that was strongly recommended by Vatican II’s Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus*.²⁶¹ For the Synod Fathers, nonetheless, the pastoral council, whether at the diocesan level or at the parish level, is a most effective way to encourage the active participation of the laity in the community life of the Church

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 11; cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 26.

²⁵⁹ Cf. Ibid., no. 10

²⁶⁰ Ibid. Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 25

²⁶¹ The decree recommended that bishops establish diocesan pastoral councils in which clergy, religious, and laity participate. The function of this council is (1) to investigate and consider pastoral matters, (2) to formulate practical conclusions on them. Cf. Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, no. 27.

through “consultation and collaboration.”²⁶²

As just seen, the Synod Fathers paid special attention to “small, basic or so-called ‘living’ communities,” designating thereby both small Christian communities in Africa and basic ecclesial communities in Latin America. These Christian communities have generally been formed from “the need for more intense personal and community relationships among the faithful and a greater participation in the life and mission of the Church.”²⁶³ An analysis of the many interventions by the Synod Fathers on these communities demonstrates the interesting fact that while most of the Fathers agreed on the importance of the communities in the Church’s life, their focus varied according to their continent of origin: those from Latin America emphasized *the evangelization of the poor toward social and political transformation*, while those from Africa emphasized *the active participation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church*.

In Latin America, “basic ecclesial communities” are, above all, a place in which the faith of believers is nourished and strengthened even amid the hard reality and conflict of their lives. The lay faithful in these communities are fully aware of “being members of the church and have no doubts as to their mission in spreading the Gospel and transforming their hard reality of oppression.”²⁶⁴ The basic communities, in addition, constitute a *vital fact* where the laity might fulfill the requirements of their “baptism without dichotomies between faith and life.”²⁶⁵ The basic ecclesial community constitutes “a permanent school of lay formation which permits the layperson to live and experience the preferential love for the

²⁶² The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 10.

²⁶³ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, “Instrumentum Laboris,” 14.

²⁶⁴ Celso Pinto da Silva, “Basic Christian Communities: The Poor as Evangelizers,” *Origins* 17, no. 20 (1987): 361.

²⁶⁵ Terrazas Sandoval, Archbishop of Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), “Eighth General Congregation Interventions,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 19 October 1987, p. 3.

poor, [and] gives an adult and responsible fidelity to his ecclesial being in its double dimension of building the Church herself and of transforming the temporal reality.”²⁶⁶

Archbishop Rueda Hernandez of Bucaramanga, Colombia, highly evaluated the basic Christian communities as “promoting the Christian life, fostering mutual understanding and lending fraternal help” following the example of the early Christian communities. The bishop, however, saw potential dangers in these communities such as rejecting the authority of bishops, distancing themselves from the ecclesial communion, trying to be exclusively charismatic and involving themselves in political interests.²⁶⁷

While basic ecclesial communities are both praised and criticized by the bishops of Latin America, “small Christian communities’ are without doubt highly evaluated by African bishops, especially since they were launched by the pastoral plan of the bishops. Archbishop Elias White Mutale of Kasama, Zambia, observed the situation of his country and indicated the active and positive participation of the laity, specifically in leading and preaching at Sunday services without a priest. The bishop said:

The reasons for such positive developments in the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church are due to the promotion and fostering of the small Christian communities to which we Bishops of AMECEA (The Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa) Region have pledged ourselves as our pastoral approach.²⁶⁸

The small Christian communities have been a place in which the common priesthood of the laity in all its dimensions is alive and flourishes easily.

In summary, Latin American basic ecclesial communities, in the context of violent

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Rueda Hernandez, “Seventh General Congregation Interventions,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 12 October 1987, p. 16.

²⁶⁸ Elias Mutale, “Eleventh General Congregation Interventions,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 19 October 1987, p. 12.

reality especially where the poor are oppressed, emphasize the aspect of transformation of unjust social-political situations and consciously integrate faith with social action. On the other hand, African small Christian communities, within the pastoral plan of the pastor, highlight the aspect of manifesting or carrying out the ministry of the laity in the Church. However, both basic ecclesial communities and small Christian communities, as “centers of evangelization,” were generally considered by the Synod Fathers to be a true expression of ecclesial communion.²⁶⁹

b) *The Mission of Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities*

The emphasis on communion *ad intra* especially in small Christian communities and *ad extra* especially in basic ecclesial communities cannot be understood as two separate realities in the life of the Church. Rather, these two aspects are synthesized in the idea of the Church as communion, which is at the same time the idea of the Church as the sacrament of salvation. In fact, the idea of the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation was emphasized from the very beginning of the Synodal work. In the *Lineamenta*, the Synod Secretariat, seeing the Church as “a living sign and efficacious instrument of the love of God for humanity and the world,” stressed that the Church not only welcomes the gift of salvation but also simultaneously proclaims, announces, and communicates this gift of salvation to people in every age.²⁷⁰ In a word, the Church can be called “the *saved* community” and at the same time “the *saving* community.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Cf. The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 11; John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 26.

²⁷⁰ Cf. The 1987 Ordinary Synod, “*Lineamenta*,” 627.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

These dual aspects of the Church were already reflected in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Pope Paul VI when he spoke of evangelization. To the Pope, the Church as the community of believers, the community of hope, and the community of brotherly love needed to be called together afresh and reunited by Christ. The Church cannot exist sufficiently in itself; rather, being evangelized by constant conversion and renewal, it becomes an evangelizer.²⁷²

Ecclesial communion in the Church cannot be separated from the Church's mission, that is, the proclamation of salvation to the world and communion with all humanity. Pope John Paul II echoed this point, stating, "the life of Church communion will become a sign for all the world and a compelling force that will lead persons to faith in Christ."²⁷³ For the Pope, communion and mission cannot achieve their profound meaning unless they are understood synthetically. Communion and mission are united in that it is "one and the same Spirit who calls together and unifies the Church and sends her to preach the Gospel 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8)." "The Church knows that the communion received by her as a gift is destined for all people."²⁷⁴ In a word, "communion leads to mission, and mission itself to communion."²⁷⁵

From this perspective, Pope John Paul II articulated two roles that the faithful should fulfill in their ecclesial communities: "an active and responsible participation in the life of the community" and "a missionary zeal and activity towards the many people who still do not believe and who no longer live the faith received at Baptism."²⁷⁶ This sentence can be understood in a reverse sense, also; namely, that the crucial criteria for an ecclesial

²⁷² Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 15.

²⁷³ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 31.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 32.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 34.

community are communion and mission. From this point of view, the Pope in *Christifideles Laici* pointed out the “criteria of ecclesiality” for ecclesial communities.²⁷⁷

Before unfolding the criteria in detail, the Pope clearly expressed the context of the criteria: “It is always from the perspective of the Church’s communion and mission, and not in opposition to the freedom to associate, that one understands the necessity of having clear and definite criteria for discerning and recognizing such lay groups [communities].”²⁷⁸ The first criterion is respect for the call of every Christian to holiness. This holiness is not treated as an escape from the secular world; rather, holiness in the Church is accomplished by an ecclesial community through “fostering and promoting a more intimate unity between the everyday life of its members and their faith.”²⁷⁹

The Pope then emphasized communion within the Church. The second criterion is that this communion is manifested in obedience to the Church’s Magisterium. The third criterion is that the ecclesial community remains in filial relationship to the Pope, the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal Church, and with the local bishop, the visible principle and foundation of unity in the particular Church. The fourth criterion is that the evangelization and sanctification of humanity and the Christian formation of people’s conscience are enhanced in the ecclesial community.²⁸⁰

The fifth and final criterion demonstrated a somewhat different view from Pope Paul VI in his seven criteria, which were seen above. Pope Paul VI did not specifically recommend an engagement in human society, because he warned against becoming

²⁷⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 30.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.* Cf. Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 19.

²⁸⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 30.

“ensnared by political polarization or fashionable ideologies.”²⁸¹ However, Pope John Paul II suggested “*a commitment to a presence in human society*, which in light of the Church’s social doctrine, places it [the lay community] at the service of the total dignity of the person,” furthermore, he advocated that “associations of the lay faithful must become fruitful outlets for participation and solidarity in bringing about conditions that are more just and loving within society.”²⁸²

Here, Pope John Paul II employed the idea of “solidarity” as the key to the mission of ecclesial communities to individuals and society. In fact, the Pope did not argue for work for justice and peace as an “integral part of evangelization,” as was touched upon in the *Propositions* of the 1987 Synod.²⁸³ Instead, he understood the social-political aspects of evangelization in terms of “solidarity,” which he had already described elsewhere as meaning “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all.”²⁸⁴ For him, “the ‘evil mechanisms’ and ‘structures of sin’ can be overcome only through the exercise of the human and Christian solidarity to which the Church calls us and which she tirelessly promotes.”²⁸⁵

Solidarity as a Christian virtue, however, is not regarded just as cohesion with one’s neighbor in a feeling of compassion. It is, above all, to be understood in the perspective of

²⁸¹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58.

²⁸² John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 30. Italics in original.

²⁸³ In this regard, the 1987 Synod Fathers stated: “Zeal to establish justice and peace and to strengthen human progress is considered an *integral* part of evangelization. Especially where poverty, injustice and oppression are found, Christians, insofar as they make the social order ever more just, prepare for the coming of the kingdom.” [emphasis added] *Propositions*, no. 30. This proposition was not selected by the Pope for comment when he wrote *Christifideles Laici*.

²⁸⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38. AAS 80 (1988): 513-86. English text in J. Michael Miller, ed. *The Encyclicals of John Paul II* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), 426-477. This paragraph was cited in *Christifideles Laici*, no. 42.

²⁸⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 40.

communion in the Church's life. The Pope asserted:

Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and strong, there is discerned in the light of faith a new model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our solidarity. This supreme model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God, one God in three persons, is what we Christians mean by the word "communion."²⁸⁶

In a word, the Pope located the criteria of ecclesiality for Christian communities all within the ecclesiology of communion. In order for the community to be truly ecclesial, it should foster and encourage the faithful to participate actively and responsibly in the Church through their vocation from God which is given in community and for community, and to proclaim continuously the universal salvation of all, which is willed by God's salvific plan on earth, living the Gospel in mission activity. Simply put, the communities should be a place in which the vocation of the faithful to holiness is promoted, the fellowship (*koinonia*) of the faithful is manifested, and missionary activity through evangelization is encouraged, the purpose of such activity being precisely to foster and build communion.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has studied the concept of "communion" and the idea of "the Church as communion" in the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the Vatican II documents, the 1985 Synod documents, the 1987 Synod documents and *Christifideles Laici*.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *habar* which etymologically can be regarded as a parallel word for *koinonia* does not refer to the relationship between God and man or to the unity of the people of Israel. It is in the New Testament that the significant and various aspects of *koinonia* are described. *Koinonia* in the New Testament is used not only

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

in a Christological sense but also with pneumatological and ecclesiological meaning. All the faithful are called into participation in God's incarnate Son (cf. 1 Cor 1:9). Especially in the Eucharist, when they share in the body and blood of Christ, they participate in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:16-17). This vertical *koinonia* with the Lord brings about horizontal *koinonia* between believers. *Koinonia* in the one eucharistic body of Christ leads to *koinonia* with one another and to the unity of all Christians with the Lord. Those who participate in the Lord's Supper become part of the one Body and thus become one reconciled community. The link between the Holy Spirit and *koinonia* is highlighted by St. Paul. The communion of the Holy Spirit is an essential aspect of the faithful's life (cf. 2 Cor 13:13; Phil 2:1).

Trinitarian and missionary aspects of *koinonia* are described in the first letter of John. In John's perspective, *koinonia* between the Father and the Son in the divine life, testified to by the Holy Spirit, flows into *koinonia* between those who believe in the truth of Jesus Christ and in the triune God. Furthermore, through proclamation of this truth to others, *koinonia* is open to all the people whom God Himself calls through his Son to unity in the Holy Spirit.

In the patristic period, the scriptural meaning was largely retained. The Cappadocian Fathers especially highlighted the being of God as a relational being in *koinonia*, and in this perspective understood *koinonia* in the life of Christians as participation in the divine nature. They emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit through whom the faithful are led to communion with the Father and the Son. The word *koinonia* or *communio* was broadly understood as the bond that unites the bishops and the faithful, the bishops among themselves, and the faithful among themselves, a bond that is effected and manifested in eucharistic communion.

On the basis of the biblical and patristic teaching, Vatican II used the concept of communion extensively in its teaching on the Church, and the Fathers of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod subsequently described “communion” as a central characteristic of the Church wherein various understandings of the Church and its mission are integrated. In this perspective, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, acknowledging the value of the concept of communion for theological reflection on the mystery of the Church, subsequently insisted that communion should be integrated with the concept of the People of God and with that of the Body of Christ and that it should be properly related also to the idea of sacrament.²⁸⁷

The Church is a sacrament of communion. The communion of believers in the Church has its source and center in Christ, and the Church is “established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth,”²⁸⁸ having the Holy Spirit as the principle of its unity. Moreover, it is intended to be “for each and everyone the visible sacrament of ... saving unity.”²⁸⁹ By the example of its life and by its preaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace, the Church leads all men to the “new brotherly communion [*novam fraternam communionem*]” which Christ founded by His death and resurrection.²⁹⁰ Considering the Synod’s central theme to be the celebration, verification, and promotion of the Second Vatican Council, the 1985 Synod Fathers proclaimed in the *Final Report* of the Synod that “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council’s

²⁸⁷ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” no.1 *Origins* 22, no. 7 (1992): 108-12, p.108.

²⁸⁸ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*,

²⁹⁰ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 32.

documents,”²⁹¹ and that “the Church as communion is a sacrament for the salvation of the world.”²⁹²

It has been within the perspective of the Church as communion that the Council and Catholic teaching since the Council have encouraged participation and co-responsibility at all levels of the Church, have described the structure of the Church (e.g., the universal Church as a communion of particular churches), and have expressed the importance of mission for the salvation of the world. With regard to these three points, the following summary observations can be made.

First, the Council, in the idea of the Church as the People of God, highlighted the equality of all the faithful in Christian dignity, describing not only the distinction of the common and ministerial priesthoods but also, fundamentally, their relationship, that is, their communion in the one priesthood of Christ. The unity and the multiplicity of the People of God are harmonized in the communion in the Holy Spirit. In the 1985 Synod, the Fathers asserted that the identity of the lay faithful and the equal dignity of all the faithful which is rooted deeply in the communion of the Church originate from the unity of the Trinity. The charisms, the ministries, the different forms of service in the Church thus exist in communion and for communion. This idea became for the Asian bishops the foundation for their understanding of the ministry and mission of the laity in the Asian context. This will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Second, in the idea of the Church as a structured community, the Council understood that bishops have a role as visible signs of unity in the Church. This is

²⁹¹ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 1.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, II. D. 1.

manifested in the Eucharist in which all those who are gathered around the bishop participate in the one Body of Christ and express their unity in eucharistic communion. Thus, the college of bishops is not only a communion of bishops but also the visible sign of the communion of local churches wherein the same Eucharist is celebrated. The idea of communion in the hierarchical structure of the Church is thus expanded to the whole life of the Church. The life of communion in the Church is manifested in the way that ministers live their lives with the people and for the people and the lay faithful participate or cooperate in the ministry and the mission of the Church. The Church's hierarchical structure, accordingly, should be understood not merely as juridical, but as a communion in which all the members, each with a personal dignity and vocation, live in harmony to promote the Church's unity.

The 1985 Synod Fathers extended this idea to basic communities and stated that basic communities are a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. In the 1987 Synod, the Fathers more concretely and locally developed this idea, highlighting the parish as a "dynamic community of communities." Accepting and proceeding from this concept, John Paul II reemphasized in *Christifideles Laici* that the parish is the community most suitable for celebrating the Eucharist, which is the living source for its development and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole Church. He also stressed that within parishes in communion with their pastors small Christian communities/basic ecclesial communities are true expressions of ecclesial communion and centers of evangelization. This idea will be discussed in the next chapter. The necessity and role of small Christian communities in parishes in Asia will be examined and the idea of the parish as a communion of communities

will be discussed as a new way of being Church.

Third, the 1985 Synod Fathers asserted that the communion of the Church should become a sign for the world, a compelling force that will lead persons to faith in Christ, and that the Church must have a missionary openness for the integral salvation of the world and the universal salvation of all. Communion and mission are united in that it is one and the same Spirit who calls all together, unifies the Church and sends it out to preach the Gospel to the world.

Furthermore, the Church should exist locally and in a given situation. This means that every local church should be inculturated in its place. Accordingly, in a concept of the Church as communion the diversity of cultures and the unity of faith should be simultaneously affirmed. In their application of the idea of the Church as communion, the Asian bishops have particularly concentrated on having truly inculturated churches which exercise an effective role in the evangelization of Asia. Within the framework or paradigm of inculturation and evangelization, the next chapter will discuss how the ecclesiology of communion, endorsed and promoted at the universal level in the Church, is being applied and developed in Asia in accordance with the documents of the FABC (The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences).

CHAPTER THREE

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNION ACCORDING TO THE DOCUMENTS OF THE FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES

The goal of this chapter is to describe how the idea of the Church as communion, which is promoted and endorsed in the teaching of the Church at the universal level, has been developed in the Asian context. In a very real sense, local churches should be closely connected with the universal Church. At the same time, they cannot exist apart from their own socio-political, cultural, and historical contexts. The way of understanding the ecclesiology of communion in Asia should therefore be related both to the teaching of the universal Church and to the specific Asian context. The Asian bishops' approach to the idea of the Church as communion can be discussed and analyzed only when these two points are acknowledged.

In Asia, the bishops' special concern is basically to build truly local churches. In order to achieve this aim, the bishops in Asia have felt the necessity and importance of exchanging experiences with each other and of deliberating together on common Asian questions and problems. At the Asian bishops' meeting in November 1970, on the occasion of the visit of Pope Paul VI, 180 bishops searched for a new way through which they could more truly be "at the service of people in Asia" and more fully engage themselves "in the common task of responding to the deepest aspirations of peoples as well as to demands of

the Gospel.”¹ After the meeting, they recognized the necessity for “a permanent structure for the effective implementation of the decisions of this meeting,”² and four years later, in 1974, came the first formal meeting of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC).³ Since then, FABC documents have been regarded as essential sources for understanding the Church in Asia today.

This chapter will begin in part one with a brief observation of the Asian context in which the Church is located and inculturated. By considering the variety of Asian situations and by analyzing the FABC documents, it will describe in part two how the idea of “communion” discussed in the previous chapter is being developed in Asia. Finally in part three it will show how the idea of the Church as communion has taken its place in the life of the Church. To that end, the theological understanding of the lay Christian faithful in the 1986 FABC document and the pastoral importance of small Christian communities in the 1990 FABC document will be discussed in terms of an ecclesiology of communion.

¹ “Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops’ Meeting,” (1970) in Gaudencio B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970-1991* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 5. All of the important documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) have been collected and published in a four-volume collection: Gaudencio B. Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970-1991* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992); Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1992-1996* (Manila, Philippine: Claretian Publications, 1997); Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1997-2001* (Manila, Philippine: Claretian Publications, 2002) Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 2002-2006* (Manila, Philippine: Claretian Publications, 2007). These four volumes are hereafter referred to in the dissertation as *FAPA* vol. 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively.

² “Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops’ Meeting,” (1970) in *FAPA* vol.1, 8.

³ In regard to episcopal conferences and a international form of episcopal consultation, Vatican II had generally reflected: “An episcopal conference is a form of assembly in which the bishops of a certain country or region exercise their pastoral office jointly in order to enhance the Church’s beneficial influence on all men, especially by devising forms of the apostolate and apostolic methods suitably adapted to the circumstances of the times. ... Moreover, contacts between episcopal conferences of different countries are to be encouraged for the promotion of the common good.” Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, no. 38. More specifically, Pope John Paul II evaluated that the FABC “has helped to foster union among the local churches and has provided venues for cooperation in resolving pastoral problems.” John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 26. Text is in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 92 (2000): 449-528.

1. The Context of Asia

The statement of the First FABC Assembly expressed the framework of the Church's life in Asia: "to preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly *incarnate in the minds and lives of our people*."⁴ One of most important stimuli for the foundation of the FABC was a critical awareness of the different situations of peoples in Asia and of the Church's response to them. This statement appeared at the very first meeting of the bishops of Asia:

It is our resolve, first of all, to be more truly 'the Church of *the poor*.' If we are to place ourselves at the side of the multitudes in our continent, we must in our way of life share something of their poverty. ... In the inculturation of the life and message of the Gospel in Asia, there have been hesitations and mistakes in the past, but we are more than ever convinced that dialogue with our fellow Asians whose *commitment is to other faiths* is increasingly important. We also urge on all a deep respect for *the culture and traditions* of our peoples, and express the hope that the catholicity of the Church, the root of our diversity in the oneness of faith, may serve to help Asians remain truly Asian, and yet become fully part of the modern world and the one family of mankind.⁵

The Asian context in which the local churches live can be appreciated by analyzing the economic and socio-political situation and the religious and cultural situation, and by reflecting on the Church's approach to those two situations.

1.1 The Economic and Socio-Political Situation

In regard to economic development, Asian countries are generally considered to be undergoing a process of dynamic development, but there are still many nations which cannot be classified under this single category:

⁴ "Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 14. Italics are mine. Hereafter, italics in original, unless otherwise stated.

⁵ "Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting," (1970) in *FAPA* vol.1, 5-6.

The countries of East and Southeast Asia grew extremely rapidly during the last quarter century. The eight best performers - Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Korea, China, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia - grew at an average of over 5.5 % per year in per capita terms between 1965 and 1990. ... But as remarkable as was the growth performance of these eight core economies, not all Asian developing countries were able to follow their lead. South Asia, the Philippines, Burma, Central Asia, and many of the Pacific Island nations all recorded average or below average growth in comparison with developing countries in other regions of the world.⁶

This research shows that except for a few countries of Asia, many people in most countries are suffering from poverty. Furthermore, in Asia economic growth does not automatically bring a decrease in the number of poor people or the improvement of the quality of life for all. Rather, since industrialization and development have brought wealth and prosperity only to a few and wealth was not correctly distributed to others, especially to the poor, the gap between the rich and the poor has widened.⁷ The rich few become richer, whereas millions are kept in poverty and destitution. The FABC bishops regarded poverty as both the origin and the result of various dark realities:

For most people the first priority in life is still the struggle for survival. For the majority, there is no substantial improvement in their lives. Local economies are caught up in a global economy that exercises excessive and aggressive trade exchanges which suck out much of Asia's assets. Thus economic structures are

⁶ Steven Radelet, Jeffrey Sachs, Jong-Wha Lee, *Economic Growth in Asia* (Harvard Institute for International Development, July 1997), 3. This paper was prepared as a background paper for the Asian Development Bank's study, "Emerging Asia: Changes and Challenges." For further study on economic development in each country see *Asian Economic Development- Present and Future*, ed. Robert A. Scalapino, Seizaburo Sato, and Jusuf Wanandi (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1985); *Asia in the 1980s: Interdependence, Peace, and Development: Proceedings and Papers of a Symposium Held at the Institute of Developing Economies on March 3-6, 1981*, ed. Yoshiyuki Hagiwara (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1982). For further study on poverty in Asia, see Gunnar Myrdal, *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

⁷ In order to understand the socio-economic reality more correctly, says Matthew Kurian, it is not enough simply to cite "discrete data on poverty, unemployment, rising prices of commodities of common consumption" or to have an "emotional approach on sentiments of identification with and charity to the poorest of the poor." Instead, "a detailed scientific analysis of the dynamics of socio-economic and political systems as they operate in each country in Asia" is necessary and crucial. Cf. K. Matthew Kurian, "Socio-Economic and Political Reality in Asia," in *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity: Towards a Relevant Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 60.

characterized by dependence, exploitation of cheap labor, destruction of natural resources and the environment, unfair prices in trade. There also exists illiteracy, problems connected with migrant labor, exploitation of women, child labor, landlessness, problems of peasant farmers, poor working conditions, inadequate salaries, and unemployment and underemployment. All these lead to mass poverty.⁸

The bishops also observed negative effects of rapid and indiscriminative industrialization on the life of the people:

Industrialization and all that goes with it violently threaten our peoples with irreparable alienation and the disintegration of patterns of life and social relationships built up over the centuries. Stable meanings and values which have supported their lives are deeply shaken, and Asian peoples today are left in confusion and disorientation, even in despair and darkness of spirit.⁹

Accordingly, in Asia the term “the poor” does not designate only persons who in a purely economic category need some materials for life; but rather it denotes the oppressed, the exploited, and the marginalized who are poor and those who simultaneously experience alienation and disorientation in many parts of the socio-political reality.¹⁰

Poverty, repression, oppression, and exploitation which are realities in Asia are a result of the greed of economic interests and political power. For instance, in some communist countries such as China, Vietnam, and North Korea,¹¹ where people have suffered from severe poverty, the basic freedoms and the human rights of the people have been grossly neglected in the name of equality. Also, in many developing countries of Asia,

⁸ The FABC Office of Evangelization, “Conclusions of the Theological Consultation,” (1991) in *FAPA* vol.1, 335-336.

⁹ “Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 13.

¹⁰ Cf. also Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 43.

¹¹ Economic and political philosophies or ideologies of various governments in Asia cannot be categorized simply. Nonetheless, according to Mariampillai, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, North Korea, and Laos are considered to be governed on the basis of communism or socialism; Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea follow capitalism; other countries of Asia stand in a middle path. Cf. D. Bosco M. Mariampillai, “The Emerging Asian Theology of Liberation in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences 1974-1986,” (Th. D. diss., Ottawa, Canada: Saint Paul University, 1993), 68.

authoritarian governments greedy for economic materials often oppress or exploit the poor and the weak, especially women and children. Even though most Asian countries have some sort of democratic government, there are tendencies towards centralization of power and pervasive corruption at various levels of government.¹²

In general, it is true that people in many Asian countries, governed by dictatorial, authoritative, and military regimes, have suffered not only from economic poverty but also from various forms of exploitation. In a certain sense, this fact makes it difficult for Christians to live out the truth of the Gospel in the world, because sheer survival in the face of poverty or liberation from oppression might be more urgent tasks for them. However, according to the bishops, “seen with the eyes of faith, these difficulties are as so many challenges to mission” since “God speaks to us from the travails and the progress of our countries, and bids us from the contemporary challenges of our world to renew our sense of mission.”¹³

1.2 The Religious and Cultural Situation

If poverty is the common denominator linking the Asian reality with that of the rest of the Third World, the specific character defining Asia within the other poor countries is its multifaceted religiosity.¹⁴ In fact, Asia is the cradle of the world’s major religions. For instance, Judaism, Islam and Christianity originated from West Asia; India is the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism; Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism belong to the East Asian tradition.

¹² Cf. “Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (2000) in *FAPA* vol.3, 7.

¹³ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 279.

¹⁴ Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 69.

A plurality of religions has been a constant fact of history in Asia. The religions of Asia have molded the lives and cultures of Asian people for several millennia and continue to give meaning and direction for their lives even today.¹⁵ The religions of Asia are indeed living religions, permeating every aspect of the life of the individual, family and society. The religiosity of Asia was positively evaluated by Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*:

Without denying the existence of bitter tensions and violent conflicts, it can still be said that Asia has often demonstrated a remarkable capacity for accommodation and a natural openness to the mutual enrichment of peoples in the midst of a plurality of religions and cultures. Moreover, despite the influence of modernization and secularization, Asian religions are showing signs of great vitality and a capacity for renewal, as seen in reform movements within the various religious groups.¹⁶

However, this richness of the diverse religions has not always been positively evaluated, because it has sometimes led to religious or cultural disharmony. Since Asian religions still constitute a powerful force controlling the consciences of people and influencing every area of their social life, they can serve to bring together peoples and nations in unity and harmony, but they can also cause division and fragmentation. In the

¹⁵ According to a recent survey, Asia now has 359,614,000 Christians, 961,961,000 Muslims, 868,348,000 Hindus, 379,080,000 Buddhists, 6,373,000 Confucianists, 3,392,000 Taoists among a total population of 3,995,674,000. See Encyclopedia Britannica, "Adherents of All Religions by Six Continental Areas, Mid-2007." <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1360391/religion-Year-In-Review-2007> (accessed March 28, 2010).

¹⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 6. The Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Asia, called for in the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (no.38) by Pope John Paul II, was part of a series of continental synodal assemblies called in light of the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. The first such assembly was held for the African continent in 1994. Then came the Special Assembly for America (1997), the Special Assembly for Asia (1998), the Special Assembly for Oceania (1998), and the Second Special Assembly for Europe (1999). For the Synod for Asia, the Pope chose as the synod's theme "Jesus Christ the Savior and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia: 'That They May Have Life and Have It Abundantly' (Jn. 10:10)." According to the "Instrumentum Laboris," this theme is "most appropriate for Asia, especially in the context of its plurality of religions and cultures, as well as the variety of socio-economic and political situations. This plurality and variety provides fertile ground for the saving message of Jesus Christ the Savior and opportunity for Church initiatives to demonstrate the Lord's love for Asia's peoples through various acts of loving service aimed at putting into action the Lord's Gospel of life." The 1998 Synod for Asia, "Instrumentum Laboris," no. 3. The text in *Origins* 27, no. 38 (1998): 634-52.

view of the Asian bishops, it is unfortunate that the Asian peoples have experienced the latter to a large extent.¹⁷ For instance, religious fundamentalism often bound to “cultural communalism” has given rise to numerous conflicts and bloody violence. Such conflicts and violence have resulted in the loss of human lives and the destruction of sacred temples, especially in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.¹⁸

When we encounter the dark realities of the Asian people, especially poverty, oppression, and the lack of respect for human dignity, religions in Asia have aspects, both positive and negative: positive in the sense that being in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, they proclaim justice and peace and work for human rights and dignity; negative in that they sometimes take a passive attitude to corrupt governments or political powers in order to protect their faith. In this regard, Aloysius Pieris, one of leading Asian liberation theologians, argued that religion has both an enslaving and a liberating dimension: an enslaving dimension in that there are elements of superstition, ritualism, dogmatism, or transcendentalism, and, socio-politically, a tendency to legitimize an oppressive status quo; a liberating dimension in that there is interior liberation from sin, and, socio-politically, the organizational motivational potential of religion for radical social change.¹⁹ The Catholic local churches in Asia seem no exception to this evaluation as will be discussed now.

1.3 Critical Reflections on Local Churches in Asia

The Catholic Church in Asia is truly a little flock, an infinitesimal minority in comparison with the number of people who profess other religious faiths or belong to other

¹⁷ Cf. “Asian Christian Perspectives of Harmony,” (1996) in *FAPA* vol.2, 237.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 38-39.

religious traditions. In Asia, Catholics (124.0 million in 2008) represent only 3.0% of about 4.0 billion Asians and slightly more than 1% if the Philippines are excluded.²⁰ However, it is remarkable that the Church in Asia continues to grow. The number of Catholics increased from 84.3 million in 1988 to 124.0 million in 2008. In particular, Asian priests as of 2008 numbered 53,992 (30,991 diocesan priests; 21,811 religious priests) and the number of lay religious is 168,733 (10,041 men, 158,692 women).²¹

It is impossible to describe here the situations of all the local churches in Asia because of the variety of their origin and historical development and because of the difference of their status within their different socio-political and religio-cultural situations. At present, while some particular Churches are carrying out their mission in peace and freedom, some other Churches are experiencing intense trials in the practice of their faith in situations of violence and conflict or oppression by other groups for religious or other reasons. For instance, there is a harsh persecution of the Church in China and in North Korea, severe poverty and deprivation for the faithful in Vietnam, isolation of Christians in Laos and Myanmar, and a difficult coexistence of a few Christians with the majority in some predominantly Islamic countries.²² Nonetheless, Pope John Paul II's reflection on the

²⁰ The following data shows the population of Catholics and the percentage of Catholics in several countries in Asia: Philippines (73,726,000/ 81.50%); India (18,813,000/ 1.63%); Indonesia (6,881,000/ 3.01%); Vietnam (6,187,000/ 7.17%); South Korea (4,914,000/ 10.10%); Sri Lanka (1,461,000/ 7.22%); Pakistan (1,098,000/ 0.67%); Malaysia (919,000/ 3.31%); East Timor (963,000/ 94.59%); Japan (537,000/ 0.42%); Thailand (344,000/ 0.51%); Taiwan (290,000/ 1.26%); and Singapore (181,000/ 3.73%). Cf. *Statistical Yearbook of the Church, 2008* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010).

²¹ While the number of priests (diocesan and religious) of Europe has decreased (from 201,854 in 2003 to 192,729 in 2008), the number in Asia has increased (from 46,800 in 2003 to 53,922 in 2008). In particular, the rate of ordination of diocesan priests of Asia shows well the growth of the churches in Asia, at least in a quantitative sense. In 2008, in Europe the number of ordinations of diocesan priests was 1,853 and the ratio of the number of ordination to the number of priests (136,063) was 1.36%. In Asia the number was 1,217 and the percentage (among 32,860 priests) was 3.70%. Cf. *Ibid.*

²² Cf. The 1998 Synod for Asia, *Propositions*, no. 51, 52, and 53. The text is in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 140-65; cf. John Paul II,

general history of the local Churches in Asia is noteworthy in that it not only analyzes the past but also implies the task and mission of the Church in the present and the future. The Pope described the situation of the Church in Asia “before the Second Vatican Council” as follows:

Educational and charitable works went hand in hand with the preaching of the Gospel. Consequently, the good news continued to reach more people, especially among the poor and the underprivileged, but also here and there among the social and intellectual elite. New attempts were made to inculturate the good news, although they proved in no way sufficient. Despite her centuries-long presence and her many apostolic endeavors, the Church in many places was still considered as foreign to Asia and indeed was often associated in people’s minds with the colonial powers.²³

One of the reasons why the Church was considered foreign might have come from the Western Christian missionary approach to other Asian religions, popular devotions and spiritualities. In fact, the Good News of salvation by Jesus Christ the Lord was proclaimed to the people of Asia without adequate regard for Asian cultures or a proper appreciation of these elements.²⁴ Pieris asserts that major religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and to some extent Taoism, have always let themselves be contextualized within the world view of the cosmic religion [e.g., animism] of a given culture. The major religions have practically been domesticated and integrated into various cosmic religions or indigenous cultures. However, in the case of Christianity, at the beginning stage of mission activity in Asia, the missionaries did not take account of various indigenous cultures to the extent that other religions had done.²⁵

Although the Pope acknowledged that the misunderstanding of the Church as a

Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9.

²³ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9.

²⁴ Cf. The 1998 Synod for Asia, “Instrumentum Laboris,” no. 14.

²⁵ Cf. Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, 72.

foreign body occurred in the past, the Asian bishops feel that this misunderstanding still exists even now. According to the bishops,

Even after Vatican II, ... prejudices are very much alive in Asia. As a social institution the Church is perceived as a foreign body in its colonial origins while other world religions are not. The Church remains foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structure, in its worship, in its western-trained leadership and in its theology. Christian rituals often remain formal, neither spontaneous nor particularly Asian.²⁶

While the Church is admired for her educational service, health care, works of charity, and endeavors for human rights and dignity, one reason why Christianity had difficulty taking root in Asia was the lack of understanding by Christian theologies of Asian cultures. Besides this, in certain countries, the alignments between Church authorities and socio-political elites and a mute response of the Church to corrupt governments in return for the protection of Christians and of the organization of the Church, de facto legitimizing and preserving the socio-political *status quo*,²⁷ have evoked a negative attitude towards the Church among Asian peoples.

Another critical reflection on the Church in Asia looks to the inner structure of the ecclesial community. The Asian bishops confessed:

We have come to the clear realization that there is a big gap between the vision of the Church as the People of God, promulgated by Vatican II almost twenty years ago, and the actual situation existing in our Church today. Dialogue, sharing, co-responsibility are words that we use regularly, but now we clearly see that the vast majority of our laity do not share in dialogue with their clergy; nor do they share the responsibility for the work of the Church with their clergy in a partnership of brotherhood.²⁸

One of characteristics of the Asian Catholic Church is an excessive emphasis on the

²⁶ The FABC Office of Evangelization, "Conclusions of the Theological Consultation," (1991) in *FAPA* vol.1, 337.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid*.

²⁸ "The Statement of the First Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate," (1984) in *FAPA* vol.1, 235.

hierarchy. Bishops and priests in Asia are generally considered to have controlling and coercive power. This is partly due to the authoritarian attitude of foreign missionaries. In the early stage of evangelization in Asia, foreign missionaries were regarded as powerful and knowledgeable persons, and so they acted as teachers or supervisors in a hierarchical system, underestimating the role of the laity in the Church. This trend, without critical reflection on its origin and nature, has continued to the present time.

Another reason arises from the traditional hierarchical culture. The cultural tendency or ethos in Asia has been influenced mainly by Hinduism, Confucianism and Buddhism.²⁹ In particular, Confucianism highlights moral values such as ways of polite behavior, loyalty, and faithfulness, and emphasizes distinctive roles in hierarchical orders: the ruler reigns over the people with patriarchal responsibilities; the people should abide by his instructions.³⁰ In the Asian Catholic Church, this relationship between ruler and people seems to have been transferred to the relationship between the clergy and the laity.

These critical understandings of the Asian Catholic Church certainly do not mean that its future is dark and desperate. Rather, there are many signs of hope for a bright future for the Church and there are many encouraging factors that are helping the Church become truly the Church in Asia. First of all, as Pope John Paul II pointed out, “one solid cause of hope is the increasing number of better-trained, enthusiastic and Spirit-filled lay people, who

²⁹ Here I am not only referring to the religious hierarchy such as the caste system in Hinduism or a *wat* (Buddhist sacred precinct with monks’ quarters) in Buddhism; rather, I mean the hierarchical understanding of life by the people in those religions and its effects on society. Accordingly, Confucianism is primarily understood here not as a religion in the strict sense but as an aspect of a philosophy of life or cultural mindset.

³⁰ Cf. Jahyun Kim Haboush, “Confucianism in Korea,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 10-15; *The East Asian Region: Confucian Heritage and Its Modern Adaptation*, ed. Gilbert Rozman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

are more and more aware of their specific vocation within the ecclesial community.”³¹ In a number of particular churches in Asia, the laity increasingly exercise their proper role in the life of the Church. Also, in terms of the mission of the Church, as the Asian bishops observed, there is today an undeniable thirst and hunger especially among the laity for prayer and contemplation and for solidarity with the suffering and powerless poor. There is an increased commitment of the laity to tasks and struggles for justice and human rights.³²

Second, the number of vocations to the priesthood, the religious life, other forms of consecrated life, and missionary institutes, has increased. The Christian witness of love and service to the poor shown by the clergy and religious has contributed greatly to revealing to the peoples of Asia “the authentic countenance of Jesus Christ and the true nature of the Church,” and through these people the faith of many Christians has been encouraged and nourished.³³

Third, small/basic ecclesial communities at the grassroots level have been formed and developed in many churches in Asia. These communities have certainly become a hope for the Church in Asia because “in these communities an experience of genuine fellowship and love is often found as well as the emergence of diverse charisms and ministries.”³⁴ During the Synod for Asia, the bishops highlighted the important role of the grassroots ecclesial communities:

They [small Christian communities/basic ecclesial communities] provide

³¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 9.

³² Cf. “Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 59.

³³ The 1998 Synod for Asia, “Instrumentum Laboris,” no. 16. For instance, John Paul II praised Mother Teresa of Calcutta, “who was known all over the world for her loving and selfless care of the poorest of the poor,” and remains “an icon of the service to life which the church is offering in Asia in courageous contrast to the many dark forces at work in society.” John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 7.

³⁴ “Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 59.

effective ways of promoting participation in the local Church, especially on the part of the laity. ... Through them the Church becomes part of the daily life of the people in the local place. They are a “solid starting point for the new society based on a civilization of love” (*Redemptoris Missio*, no. 51). They aim at living the Gospel in an atmosphere of fraternal love and service. Hence they are to be promoted.³⁵

In conclusion, to become truly local churches in Asia means that the churches should be faithful to the truth of faith in unity of communion with God, and continuously proclaim, in communion with all peoples, God’s love for humanity in the social, political, religious, cultural, and economic realities of Asia. In other words, it means that the Church in Asia should go on its journey as “the sign and instrument of union with God and of unity among all men,”³⁶ and thus as “the universal sacrament of salvation.”³⁷ The Synod Fathers succinctly proclaimed the task of the Church as follows:

The local Churches of Asia are called upon to live and witness to their identity as communities of disciples of Jesus Christ, fully aware of the many forces at work in them. The Churches must be immersed in the diverse, contrasting, and even conflicting realities of Asia. Only such immersion will help the Church to define her mission to the peoples of Asia in an intelligible and acceptable manner.³⁸

2. Some Further Aspects of Communion in the Documents of the FABC

2.1 Communion as Liberation

From their reflections on the economic and socio-political situations in Asia, the FABC bishops highlighted the idea of “liberation” as a way to understand the Church in the Asian context. The bishops stated “in order that we may discover our genuine and specific place in the multi-religious cultural context of Asia, we need to rediscover Jesus Christ as

³⁵ The 1998 Synod for Asia, *Propositions*, no. 30.

³⁶ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1. Translation amended to say “union” instead of “communion.”

³⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 48.

³⁸ The 1998 Synod for Asia, *Propositions*, no. 3.

the Liberator of Asia, and his Church as the servant and instrument of that liberation.”³⁹

Communion can be developed in two aspects when considered in association with the idea of liberation: communion with Jesus as liberator and communion with all those engaged in mission as liberation.

a) *Communion with Jesus as Liberator*

The Asian bishops closely connected the Church with Jesus Liberator: “Asian Christians are to become a Church deeply committed to Jesus Liberator. Such commitment by all Christians will make the Church a communion of committed disciples.”⁴⁰ In the history of salvation, Jesus came to us to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour (cf. Lk 4:18-19). The mission of Jesus was to save and to liberate the world. Accordingly, to be committed to Jesus means that a Christian assumes the liberating mission of Jesus as one’s own mission and thus follows it in one’s own time and place. The understanding of Jesus as liberator employed by the Asian bishops had already been reflected in the documents of the bishops in Latin America:

It is the same God who, in the fullness of time, sends his Son in the flesh, so that He might come to liberate all men from all slavery to which sin has subjected them: hunger, misery, oppression, and ignorance, in a word, that injustice and hatred which have their origin in human selfishness.⁴¹

This idea was also highlighted in liberation theology in Latin America. According to

³⁹ “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 191.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ The Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, “The Final Document of the Second General Conference,” in *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, II Conclusions*, third edition (Washington, DC: Secretariat for Latin America National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1979), “Justice,” no. 3, p. 33.

Gustavo Gutierrez, Jesus liberates men from sin and thus enables them by his death and resurrection to live in “communion with God and with all men.”⁴² He asserted that the redemptive and liberating work of Jesus cannot be limited to the strictly “religious” sphere. Rather, liberation is seen in three reciprocal interpenetrating levels: liberation from the conflictual aspect of the economic, social, and political process; liberation through the critical understanding of history with its idea of man’s responsibility for his own destiny; liberation from sin by Christ and admission to communion with God which is the basis for all human brotherhood.⁴³

Above all, Gutierrez gave special attention to the concept of sin, that is, “the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression.”⁴⁴ For him, sin is not considered as “an individual, private, or merely interior reality” which does not challenge the order in which we live; instead, it is regarded in its collective dimensions as “a social, historical fact, the absence of brotherhood and love in relationships among men, the breach of friendship with God and with other men, and, therefore, an interior, personal fracture.”⁴⁵

In regard to Jesus as liberator, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF)

⁴² Cf. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 176. Also, Jon Sobrino reflects upon “Jesus as the liberator” from a theological reading of the historical Jesus. From observation of the poor in Latin America, he understands that liberation is correlative to oppression in the shape of unjust poverty. The theology of liberation is not arbitrary or manipulative but integral: 1) since “there is ample biblical evidence for seeing the person and mission of Christ as primarily liberative,” and “both New Testament and patristic christologies were made from a Salvationist standpoint”; 2) since “experience shows that approaching Jesus Christ from liberation is generally – though there are always exceptions – more of a help than a hindrance to grasping and confessing his totality”; and 3) since “christological reflections that start from the liberative aspect do not usually reduce the totality of Christ, but, on the contrary, rediscover dimensions of him absent from other christologies.” Cf. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 7.

⁴³ Cf. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 21-37, especially 36-37.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 175.

also affirmed that “Christ, our Liberator, has freed us from sin and from slavery to the Law and to the flesh”⁴⁶ and “the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of freedom and a force for liberation.”⁴⁷ Especially when the Congregation explains the true meaning of liberation, it closely connects liberation with redemption from a point of view where Jesus Christ is the origin and center:

The words of Jesus: “The truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32) must enlighten and guide all theological reflection and all pastoral decisions in this area [with regard to the theme of freedom and liberation]. This truth which comes from God has its centre in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. ... Truth beginning with the truth about redemption, which is at the heart of the mystery of faith, is thus the root and the rule of freedom, the foundation and the measure of all liberating action.⁴⁸

The whole work of Jesus Christ is not only liberative work, but also and more fundamentally, it is redemptive work for all in freeing them from all kinds of evil, especially sin: “Through his Cross and Resurrection, Christ has brought about our Redemption, which is liberation in the strongest sense of the word, since it has freed us from the most radical evil, namely sin and the power of death.”⁴⁹ The christological understanding of liberation had already been reflected on by Pope Paul VI: “As the kernel and center of his Good News, Christ proclaims salvation, this great gift of God which is liberation from everything that oppresses man but which is above all liberation from sin and the evil one.”⁵⁰

When understanding the aspects of sin, the CDF, like Gutierrez, insisted that “the most radical form of slavery is slavery to sin” in which all “other forms of slavery find their

⁴⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation,” *Origins* 14, no. 13 (1984):193-204. p. 196.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation,” *Origins* 15, no. 44 (1986):713-28. p. 715.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 9. English text in Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World: Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1976)

deepest root.”⁵¹ However, sin was not understood so much socially or structurally, as in liberation theology; rather, it was explained in the frame of the totality of humanity and understood primarily in a theological aspect. Since sin “strikes man in the heart of his personality,”⁵² it is the greatest evil. Since sin’s first effect is to introduce “disorder into the relationship between God and man,” our understanding of it cannot be restricted to social sin.⁵³ Most of all, then, sin is understood in terms of the relationship between human beings and God.

The Asian bishops noted the socio-political dimension of sin, and highlighted the need for liberation from sin. This liberation is seen theologically and it has its summit in Christ: “Our solidarity requires a resolve to work with our Asian sisters and brothers in liberating our societies from whatever oppresses and degrades human life and creation, most especially from sin. We offer *the radical freedom of life in Christ*.”⁵⁴ Simply put, to confess Jesus Christ as our liberator means to invite him into the life of Christians and thus to live in the freedom of life in Christ in the world.

In particular, the bishops discussed the idea of liberation in terms of the rights and dignity of all the faithful in an inner-ecclesial dimension. They took liberation into account especially in explaining the communion of all the faithful in the Church. The FABC related the communion of liberation with full dynamic membership of the ecclesial community:

The communion of liberation is not lived in a static manner as a calm, composed Body of Christ in the sharing of all spiritual and material gifts among ourselves. Rather, it is lived within the dynamism of life in the Church and the dynamism of challenges from outside the Church. This dynamism implies that we, within the

⁵¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation,” 196.

⁵² Ibid., 197.

⁵³ Cf. Ibid.

⁵⁴ “Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1995) in *FAPA* vol.2, 8.

Church and among ourselves, recognize all members of the Church as mature subjects and persons with dignity and freedom, with their gifts and powers as well as rights and responsibilities.⁵⁵

For the Asian bishops, inequality or oppression is a phenomenon not only in society but also in the Church. Sometimes in the Church there are many temptations which prevent the faithful, especially the lay faithful, from being fully recognized as members of the People of God.⁵⁶ To confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and our Liberator does not only mean that Jesus frees us from our sins and liberates us from the slavery of sins. It also implies that those liberated and freed by Jesus Christ should constitute a community in which they, in communion with all the faithful, encourage and promote the vocations and charisms of each person and help one another to live as responsible subjects in the Church without any oppression or discrimination and without any infringement or violation of the freedom of other members.

b) *Communion with All in Mission as Liberation*

The Asian bishops' understanding of the Church in close relation with Jesus Christ as the liberator leads to the Church's communion with all in solidarity:

Such a commitment [commitment to Jesus the liberator] by all Christians will make the Church a communion of committed disciples – be they clergy or laity – working for the liberation of Asia. Such a communion with Jesus Christ and among ourselves is no alienation from the peoples or realities of Asia. On the contrary, our communion is strengthened when we become truly Asian Churches, rooted among our peoples and in solidarity with them.⁵⁷

In the work for liberation, the bishops highlighted the role of solidarity with people amid the

⁵⁵ “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 191-92.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 194.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

dark realities of Asia. Thus, the Church's liberating activity for the poor does not mean just an understanding or sympathy for the poverty, deprivation and oppression of peoples. Rather, it involves sharing life in solidarity with other people, accepting their aspirations, "knowing their despair and their hope, and walking with them in their search for authentic humanity in Christ Jesus."⁵⁸ The approach of the Asian bishops to liberation seems closely connected with that of the Latin American liberation theologies from the following three points of view.

First, methodologically, the starting point of the FABC's interpretation of Christian faith is not merely a contemplation of God and revelation in an abstract sense. On the contrary, the Asian bishops began their reflection by considering the present social reality of poverty, oppression and violence within Asian life. The Asian bishops explain the theological method appropriate to the Asian context as follows:

Doing theology in an Asian context means taking into account contextual realities as resources of theology. Methodologically, these enter into a theology done in a given situation. ... As Asian Christians, we do theology together with Asian realities as resources, insofar as we discern in them God's presence, action and the work of the Spirit. We use these resources in correlation with the Bible and the Tradition of the Church. Use of these resources implies a tremendous change in theological methodology. The cultures of peoples, the history of their struggles, their religions, their religious scriptures, oral traditions, popular religiosity, economic and political realities and world events, historical personages, stories of oppressed people crying for justice, freedom, dignity, life, and solidarity become resources of theology, and assume methodological importance in our context.⁵⁹

In other words, the starting point is the concrete and historical *praxis* of human beings, that is, the suffering of the poor, their struggle and hope, and a critique of oppressive

⁵⁸ International Congress on Mission, "The Gospel, the Kingdom of God, Liberation and Development," (1979) in *FAPA* vol.1, 144; "Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 15.

⁵⁹ The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology, Doing Theology in Asia Today," in *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil*, ed. Vimal Tirimanna (Bangalore, India: Claretian Publications, 2007), 280.

and inhuman societies. Likewise, as McGovern observed, liberation theology in Latin America “arose out of a profoundly disturbing experience, the experience of Christian faith confronted by the misery of massive numbers of poor in Latin America.”⁶⁰

Second, the Asian bishops’ analysis of the Asian reality made them re-examine the present Asian situation in the light of faith. From the belief that “Christ has a special love for the poor and wishes to be identified and served in the naked, hungry, thirsty, and imprisoned,” the bishops suggested that “the Church, as a witness to Christ, must make a wholehearted commitment to the poor and is impelled to opt in favor of them.”⁶¹ Latin American liberation theology likewise emphasized the response of Christian faith to the situations in Latin America.

The aspiration to liberation is beginning to be accepted by the Christian community as a sign of the times, as a call to commitment and interpretation. The Biblical message, which presents the work of Christ as a liberation, provides the framework for this interpretation.⁶²

Moreover, influenced by liberation theology, the Latin American bishops made “a preferential option for the poor” at the CELAM conference in Puebla in 1979.⁶³

Third, as discussed many times in the previous chapters, both the FABC and liberation theologians in Latin America highlighted small Christian communities/basic

⁶⁰ Arthur F. McGovern, *Liberation Theology and Its Critics: Toward an Assessment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 24. He argued that “traditional faith perspectives had encouraged charity along with acceptance of suffering. They did not, in the view of liberation theologians, provide real inspiration or hope for changing society, nor did they give any indication of God’s power and grace at work on behalf of the poor. Liberation theology sought to establish a new method of theology that would respond to these issues.” *Ibid.*, 23-24.

⁶¹ “The Statement of the Third Bishops’ Institute for Social Action,” (1975) in *FAPA* vol.1, 208. Shortly before this assembly, the Second Bishops’ Institute for Social Action gave special concern to this aspect of the Gospel, and so dealt with the Gospel under the theme ‘Social Dimensions of the Gospel: Oppressed People and the Role of the Church.’ Cf. “The Statement of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Social Action,” (1975) in *FAPA* vol.1, 203-05.

⁶² Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 35.

⁶³ See above, chapter one, pp. 47-48.

ecclesial communities as focal points for mission activity, where personal meditation on the Word of God is shared and communicated with others in the communities and the members are encouraged to live out the Word. Sharing and discussing both the experience of actual life and meditation on that experience in the light of the Gospel, Christians in the communities discover a more evangelical way of life among the people and fulfill their vocation in a concrete context.

While there are thus a few common viewpoints between the FABC and liberation theologies in Latin America, the FABC acknowledged the danger of a political or ideological approach to liberation, which is sometimes found in some liberation theologies.⁶⁴ The Asian bishops observed:

Many [youth] are unable because of poverty to liberate themselves from the bondage of ignorance and illiteracy, and are shackled to a life severely limited by inadequate skills and knowledge. They are also vulnerable to the temptations of materialism and consumerism; they become *prey to various ideologies* that claim to offer liberation from poverty and injustice.⁶⁵

The FABC emphasis on Christian reflection and prayer obviously echoes the understanding of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith rather than that of some liberation theologians. The Congregation observed a harmful tendency in the political or ideological understanding of liberation.

There are many political and social movements which present themselves as authentic spokesmen for the aspirations of the poor, and claim to be able, though

⁶⁴ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith distinguishes an authentic theology of liberation from an ideological interpretation of liberation: "An authentic theology of liberation will be one which is rooted in the Word of God, correctly interpreted. But from a descriptive standpoint, it helps to speak of 'theologies' of liberation, since the expression embraces a number of theological positions, or even sometimes ideological ones, which are not simply different but more often incompatible with one another." Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation," *Origins* 14, no. 13 (1984):198.

⁶⁵ "The Statement of the Fourth Bishops' Institute for Social Action," (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 181. Emphasis added.

by recourse to violent means, to bring about the radical changes which will put an end to the oppression and misery of people. So the aspiration for justice often finds itself the captive of ideologies which hide or pervert its meaning, and which propose to people struggling for their liberation goals which are contrary to the true purpose of human life.⁶⁶

According to the Congregation, an effective defense of justice or movement for liberation “needs to be based on the truth of mankind,” that is, the belief that human beings are “created in the image of God and called to the grace of divine sonship.”⁶⁷

For the Asian bishops, the most essential element to achieve genuine human liberation and development is not a political policy or revolutionary strategy but “prayer which awakes one to one’s responsibility towards the world.”⁶⁸ Prayer is not treated as a mere pious spiritual action or a petition for spiritual or material goods. Rather, it encourages Christians to commit themselves to true liberation for “the establishment of just and loving relationships among men.”⁶⁹ From this perspective, the bishops concluded that it is “prayer” that creates “the love to bring about the conversion in men’s hearts and the renewal of societal structures.”⁷⁰

Most of all, the specific characteristic of the FABC’s understanding of liberation lies in the fact that liberation is explained in terms of mission activity. The bishops assumed that liberation is the vocation of the local churches in Asia.

⁶⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation,” 196.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 203. In this regard, Cardinal Ratzinger emphasized the truth of the Gospel and its proclamation as fundamental to liberation: “The Church’s real contribution to liberation, which she can never postpone and which is most urgent today, is to proclaim truth in the world, to affirm that God is, that God knows us, and that God is as Jesus Christ has revealed him and that, in Jesus Christ, he has given us the path of life.” Joseph Ratzinger, “Christ the liberator: An Easter Homily,” (1986) in *The Essential Pope Benedict XVI: His Central Writings and Speeches*, ed. John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York : Harper SanFrancisco, 2007), 59.

⁶⁸ “The Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly,” (1982) in *FAPA* vol.1, 58.

⁶⁹ “The Statement of the Second Plenary Assembly,” (1978) in *FAPA* vol.1, 33.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

The Synod of Bishops of 1971, in the document, *Justice in the World*, has affirmed that “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation” (1971 Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, Introduction). We affirm this teaching again, for we believe that this, in our time, is part and parcel of “preaching the Good News to the poor” (Mt 11:5; Lk 4:18). It is our belief that it is from the material deprivation of our poor people, as well as from their tremendous human potential, and from their aspirations for a more fully human and brotherly world, that Christ is calling the churches of Asia.⁷¹

The mission of the Church is not something different from the sharing of life with the poor in Asia, since “the majority of the peoples of Asia among whom the Christian communities live are poor.”⁷² The Church should carry out its missionary activity with the firm conviction that the poor are ultimately a privileged community and agents of salvation.⁷³ The preaching of the Good News to the poor thus does not mean just seeking their theoretical conversion to a particular faith or their acceptance of a package of doctrines but rather an integral “search for human development” in “justice, brotherhood and peace.”⁷⁴ Holiness and justice, evangelization and liberation are not mutually contradictory; rather they constitute an integral proclamation of the Gospel:

Engaged in tasks of justice in accordance with the spirit and the demand of the Gospel, we will realize that the search for holiness and the search for justice, evangelization and the promotion of true human development and liberation, are not only not opposed, but make up today the integral preaching of the Gospel, especially in Asia.⁷⁵

⁷¹ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 15-16.

⁷² International Congress on Mission, “The Gospel, the Kingdom of God, Liberation and Development,” (1979) in *FAPA* vol.1, 143.

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷⁴ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 16; Cf. “The Statement of the Second Plenary Assembly,” (1978) in *FAPA* vol.1, 33.

⁷⁵ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 16.

For Christians, to become “effective agents of liberation”⁷⁶ implies that they proclaim the Good News to all, especially the poor, and endeavor to build them up in the justice and peace of God in the world. The communion of all the faithful with Jesus Liberator should extend to communion with all in the mission activity of liberation. For the Asian bishops, the communion of liberation with all is not separate from the work of evangelization. Human development and true liberation find their fundamental basis in evangelization, and the integral reality of liberation is then respected. Simply put, in the Asian context, liberation is one aspect of the evangelical mission of the Church, and a crucial one.

2.2 Communion as Dialogue

In order to build up a true Church in Asia, the Asian bishops have searched for a way that the Gospel’s message and meaning can be effectively proclaimed in harmony with the realities of Asia and its peoples, that is, in harmony with its cultures, religions or religious traditions, and especially in harmony with the poor. In order not to despise or ignore the values of Asian realities, cultures, and traditions, they employed the word “dialogue:”

The local church is a Church incarnate in a people, a Church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, and the religions – in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own.⁷⁷

The Asian bishops anticipate that a “multifaceted dialogue” will purify the local

⁷⁶ “The Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly,” (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 192.

⁷⁷ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 14.

churches more and more from sin and enable them to fulfill more effectively their “evangelizing mission in Asia,” and eventually will lead the Asian peoples to a “fuller communion with God and among themselves, which is the ultimate goal of all evangelization.”⁷⁸

The section that follows will discuss three dimensions of dialogue in the Asian context: dialogue with the poor, dialogue with culture, and dialogue with religions. Before this discussion, however, there must be dialogue with God, that is, Christian prayer.

a) *Prayer: Dialogue with God*

Christian prayer is not a one-side monologue of the faithful speaking to God in the name of Jesus Christ. Rather, it is “a personal communion with God our Father, in Christ Jesus. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5), enabling us to turn to God and with confidence to call Him Father (cf. Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6).”⁷⁹ Christian prayer is an encounter between the self-manifestation of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit and man in response. It springs from two sources: God’s saving work in humanity, which has been manifested in the world and is preserved in man’s heart; and man’s experience and confession of the grace of God in his own life through words and deeds. It always has a mode of dialogue. Furthermore, prayer cannot be understood merely as communication between man and God but above all it is a pathway to communion with God. “To be in solidarity with God, prayer is indispensable. Prayer expresses our inner spirit

⁷⁸ The FABC Office of Evangelization, “Conclusions of the Theological Consultation,” (1991) in *FAPA* vol.1, 345.

⁷⁹ “The Statement of the Second Plenary Assembly,” (1978) in *FAPA* vol.1, 31-32.

and impels us towards ever deeper communion and intimacy with God.”⁸⁰

Christian prayer has an ecclesial dimension. “Christian prayer is prayer within the community of those who have accepted the Gospel, of those who seek to live their lives in communion with Christ, and who in fellowship work to second Christ’s saving work within history.”⁸¹ Where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, the Lord is present there (cf. Mt 18:20). Praying together in the name of the Lord leads to communion among his disciples.

Christian prayer is centered on “the Eucharist, source and summit of a worship that is uniquely sacramental.”⁸² The Eucharist embodies Jesus’ whole life, culminating in the Paschal Mystery of his suffering, death, resurrection and final glory. It is a pleasing sacrifice or offering of love to the Father for the salvation of the world. Christ’s sacrifice is an act both of obedience to the Father and of love towards all human beings.⁸³ “Through his own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he [Christ] offers life to men.”⁸⁴ The Asian bishops, in this perspective, succinctly emphasize the dialogical aspect of the Eucharist: “in Asia, where the characteristic mode of the Church’s existence is that of dialogue, the Eucharist is a unique experience of God’s dialogue with us and our response to God: a dialogue of life, a dialogue of love.”⁸⁵

Christian prayer has a social dimension. It creates the freedom and joy of loving

⁸⁰ “The Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly,” (1995) in *FAPA* vol.2, 8.

⁸¹ “The Statement of the Second Plenary Assembly,” (1978) in *FAPA* vol.1, 32.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Cf. “The Statement of the Ninth Plenary Assembly,” (2009) in <http://www.fabc.org/plenary%20assembly/FABC%20IX%20PA%20Final%20Document.pdf> (accessed June 12, 2010).

⁸⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 1. English Text in *Origins* 32, no. 46 (2003): 753-768.

⁸⁵ “The Statement of the Ninth Plenary Assembly,” (2009), 5.

commitment to others.

Christ gave his life for us. We, too, then, ought to give our lives for our brethren (cf. 1 Jn 3:16). It [Christian prayer] enables us to find Christ in our brothers and sisters, especially in the suffering and the afflicted, in the poor and the powerless, in the least of these.⁸⁶

Christian prayer sends Christians into the world and encourages them to transform it according to the designs of the Father. "Far from alienating us from sharing in man's responsibility for the world and for the establishment of just and loving relationships among men and groups in society, prayer commits us to the true liberation of persons."⁸⁷

Accordingly, prayer in dialogue with God can be seen as communion with God. There is then communion among the faithful through communal prayers and especially through participation in the Eucharist. Moreover, prayer leads the faithful to have a loving commitment to others, because Christians have a responsibility to bring the spirit and power of the Gospel to the world and to proclaim the salvation of the world.

b) *The Threefold Dialogue of Evangelization*

The Asian bishops' special attention to "dialogue" was evaluated by Felix Wilfred, executive secretary of the Theological Advisory Commission of the FABC:

If we were to summarize the orientation of the FABC in one word, then it is dialogue. It is around this focal point that the FABC's understanding of the Church and its mission revolves. Dialogue frees the Church from becoming a self-centered community, and links it with the people in all areas and dimensions of their lives.⁸⁸

The importance of dialogue in the Church had already been taught by Vatican II. *Gaudium*

⁸⁶ "The Statement of the Second Plenary Assembly," (1978) in *FAPA* vol.1, 32.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁸ Felix Wilfred, "The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)," in *FAPA* vol.1, xxiv-xxv.

et Spes especially highlighted dialogue as the mission of local Churches:

In virtue of its mission to enlighten the whole world with the message of the Gospel and to gather together in one spirit all women and men of every nation, race, and culture, the Church shows itself as a sign of that amity which renders possible sincere dialogue and strengthens it. Such a mission requires us first of all to create in the Church itself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, and to acknowledge all legitimate diversity; in this way all who constitute the one people of God will be able to engage in ever more fruitful dialogue.⁸⁹

In line with Vatican II, the FABC has understood dialogue as a key for building up a truly local Church in the context of Asia. Dialogue has three special dimensions: dialogue with the poor, with cultures, and with the religions of Asia:

From our experience of dialogue emerged the conviction that *dialogue was the key we sought* - not dialogue in the superficial sense in which it is often understood, but as a witness to Christ in word and deed, by reaching out to people in the concrete reality of their daily lives, in their particular *cultural context*, their own *religious traditions*, their *socio-economic conditions*. We were happily surprised to see that our spontaneous sharing led to the same conclusions as those of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC, Taipei, 1974, namely, that the areas to be explored were those of inculturation of the Christian faith, the encounter with Asian religions, and the challenge posed to the Church by the poverty of the vast majority of our people.⁹⁰

Dialogue with the Poor

Dialogue with the poor, without doubt, involves a genuine experience and understanding of the poverty, deprivations, and oppression of peoples. For the Asian bishops,

⁸⁹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 92. The Council promoted different aspects of dialogue: dialogue with the modern world (especially in *Gaudium et Spes*), dialogue with other religions (especially in *Nostra Aetate*), dialogue with other Christians (especially in *Unitatis Redintegratio*), and dialogue with political authorities (especially in *Dignitatis Humanae*). The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue describes four different forms of dialogue as constitutive of the Church's evangelizing mission: dialogue of life (common living as good neighbors), dialogue of action (collaboration for development and liberation), dialogue of theological exchange (understanding of different religious heritages), and dialogue of religious experience (sharing of spiritual riches). Cf. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Inter-religious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, no. 42. English text in *Origins* 21, no. 08 (1991): 121-35.

⁹⁰ "Letter of Participants of the First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate," (1978) in *FAPA* vol.1, 94.

accordingly, dialogue fundamentally means a “dialogue of life.”⁹¹ It does not mean merely “to work for the poor, as it were from the outside or from above, like a beneficent or an administrative agency;” rather, it means “to work with the poor, and therefore to be with them, and so to learn from them their real needs and aspirations.”⁹² Solidarity with the poor cannot be confined to commitment and effort to bring about social justice in their societies or to the change and transformation of unjust social structures, even though these are crucial and never to be underestimated. Instead, it is to be understood as an awareness that the Church assumes the grief and anguish of the poor as its own grief and anguish.⁹³ The sharing of experiences and insights with people in dialogue is a way to be a living Church among them. The Church’s destiny as a pilgrim in the world should not be different or separate from the destiny of all in the world. From this perspective, the Asian bishops described the figure of the local Church in Asia as follows:

Our community is being called upon to assume a truly human face: a Church that does not resist being incarnated in weak humanity; a Church that will not turn away from the crosses of history; a Church that does not hold back in emptying itself; a Church that dares to be the Church of the poor. Through this Church, the face of Jesus who loves the poor will shine forth in Asia.⁹⁴

If the Church, in dialogue with the poor, shares their destiny, then at the same time the Church can share its treasures with them. In other words, through dialogue with people, the message of the salvation of all humanity through Christ and of God’s love for the world is proclaimed and communicated to all in the world, especially the poor.⁹⁵ The address of

⁹¹ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 15.

⁹² “Final Reflections of the First Bishops’ Institute for Social Action,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 199-200.

⁹³ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1.

⁹⁴ The FABC International Theological Colloquium, “Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life,” (1994) in *FAPA* vol.2, 224-25.

⁹⁵ Cf. “Final Reflections of the Second Bishops’ Institute for Social Action,” (1975) in *FAPA* vol.1, 203- 05.

Pope John Paul II to the Asian bishops expressed this:

In fulfilling her evangelizing mission therefore, the Church cannot neglect the needs of the poor, the hungry, the defenseless, the oppressed, and the culturally deprived. But those involved in that mission must know that their responsibility goes far beyond healing the wounds of this life. They must also communicate the 'new life' which comes through the grace of Jesus Christ.⁹⁶

Dialogue is “an essential part of the Church’s mission because it has its origin in the Father’s loving dialogue of salvation with humanity through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁷ In this way, the Church’s dialogue with the poor is not merely a struggle for their liberation from an oppressive social structure or a demoralizing political system but is rather a way or invitation to the communion of salvation for all human beings.

Dialogue with Culture

In order to be a truly local Church, the Asian bishops suggested that the Church should become incarnate in a people through a deep and mutually enriching dialogue between the Gospel and that people’s particular culture and tradition.⁹⁸ Efforts to build up a truly local Church through a reciprocal relationship between the Gospel and local cultures are based on the vision and teaching of Vatican II on culture. Describing the word “culture” as “all those things which go to the refining and developing of man’s diverse mental and physical endowments,” the Council, in *Gaudium et Spes*, positively assessed the culture or customs proper to each human community.⁹⁹ With this understanding, the Council underlined the Church’s engagement with culture, i.e., inculturation:

⁹⁶ John Paul II, “Address to the Sixth Plenary Assembly of FABC,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 25 January 1995, p. 6.

⁹⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 29.

⁹⁸ Cf. “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 14.

⁹⁹ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 53.

In his self-revelation to his people, fully manifesting himself in his incarnate Son, God spoke in the context of the culture proper to each age. Similarly the Church has existed through the centuries in varying circumstances and has utilized the resources of different cultures to spread and explain the message of Christ in its preaching, to examine and understand it more deeply, and to express it more perfectly in the liturgy and in the life of the multiform community of the faithful.... The Church is faithful to its traditions and is at the same time conscious of its universal mission; it can, then, enter into communion with different forms of culture, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves.¹⁰⁰

Culture should not be seen merely as a means for something else, but should be respected as the place where human knowledge, belief, and behavior are integrated. The dialogue of the Church with culture thus takes place not simply by adopting the external forms and symbols of a certain culture or by forcing doctrines of faith into a culture, but by reaching deeply into the spirit and soul of a people which is expressed and manifested in their culture.

In a Christian sense, according to the Asian bishops, inculturation, far from being simply a technique for the propagation of the faith, “belongs to the very core of evangelization, for it is the continuation in time and space of the dialogue of salvation initiated by God and brought to a culmination when he uttered his Word in a very concrete historical situation.”¹⁰¹ The importance of the task of inculturation for the Church in Asia was also observed and confirmed by Pope John Paul II:

Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is and a more effective instrument of mission. This engagement with cultures has always been part of the Church’s pilgrimage through history. But it

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., no. 58. In light of the Council, Pope John Paul II stated: “Culture must be held as the common good of every people, the expression of its dignity, liberty and creativity, and the testimony of its course through history. In particular, only from within and through culture does the Christian faith become a part of history and the creator of history.” Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 44. English text in *Origins* 18, no. 35 (1989): 561-95.

¹⁰¹ “Letter of Participants of the First Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate,” (1978) in *FAPA* vol.1, 94.

has a special urgency today in the multiethnic, multi-religious and multicultural situation of Asia, where Christianity is still too often seen as foreign.¹⁰²

In the process of encountering the world's different cultures, the Church has not only transmitted her truths and values and renewed cultures from within, but she has also received from the various cultures the positive elements already found in them. The truth of the Gospel should not be confused or distorted in evangelical mission activity through inculturation. Rather, as the Pope indicated, "the various cultures, when refined and renewed in the light of the Gospel, can become true expressions of the one Christian faith."¹⁰³

If there is an intimate and mutual relationship between the local church and its cultural context, it is inevitable that a local church is conditioned or affected by the culture in which it is rooted. Through the dialogue of the Church with culture, the Church participates in various aspects of society such as language, politics, economy, religions, and culture. The Asian bishops stated:

The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures... It [a local church] seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people; its meaning and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, and its songs and its artistry.¹⁰⁴

In this regard, the 1985 extraordinary Synod affirmed that the Church takes from every culture all that it encounters of positive value because "the Church is communion, which joins diversity and unity in being present throughout the world." However, it said, the special concern in the area of inculturation is not the mutual enrichment between the Gospel and cultures, rather it is the transformation or conversion of culture into the truth of the

¹⁰² John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 21.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ "The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly," (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 14.

Gospel. It asserts that inculturation means “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures.”¹⁰⁵

While the 1985 Synod Fathers highlight the transformative role of the Gospel in cultures, the FABC bishops pay special attention to the reciprocal interrelationship between the truths of faith and cultural values, not underestimating but respecting those values. Hence, when the bishops assert the necessity of dialogue with cultures, this already means in a literal sense *dia-logue*, that is, not a monologue of the Church to culture but an inter-related communion between the Church and culture. Ultimately, it seeks to indicate a true way of inculturating a local church in a given culture.

Another aspect of communion in dialogue with cultures can be seen in the idea of the Church as universal sacrament. As discussed in Chapter two,¹⁰⁶ a local church should share in communion the same Gospel, the one truth of faith, and the one Eucharist with other local churches; but it should also have communion with the total reality of a given culture. If it is true that the universal Church is manifested in the communion of local churches, the Church at the same time assumes the communion of diverse local cultures and traditions which local churches encounter and with which they dialogue. In this regard, Pope John Paul II stated in an address on December 21, 1984:

Paragraph 13 of the fundamental conciliar document [*Lumen Gentium*] recalls the Church’s attitude with regard to “the abilities, the resources, and customs” proper to the various peoples: the Church sees in them other “gifts” which the various cultures bring to her and is therefore very happy to take them to herself, although feeling committed to purify, strengthen and elevate them. ... The universal Church is presented as a *communion of (particular) churches* and, indirectly, as a *communion of nations, languages, cultures*. Each of these

¹⁰⁵ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. D. 4. Text is in *Origins* 15, no. 27 (1985): 444-50.

¹⁰⁶ See above, chapter two, pp. 98-99.

churches brings its own “gifts” to the whole, ...¹⁰⁷

From this perspective, we might say that the universal Church is inculturated in the world in a communion with all local cultures and that the world is thereby enlightened by the truth of the Gospel which the Church proclaims. It is in this way that the Church “ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit.”¹⁰⁸ Hence the Church is manifested as a universal sacrament in and for the world.

Dialogue with the Religions

Interreligious dialogue is of special importance in Asia because the great religious traditions continue to inspire and influence the lives of millions of people. A comment from the FABC on the Asian way of thinking implies how Asian Christians approach other religions:

The Asian way is one of integration and inclusion. Rather than saying “A is true, so B must be false”, the Asian tends to say “A is true, and B is also true in some sense.” This is not to say that truth is relative. There is but one truth: but truth is a mystery which we approach reverently while we try to seek to understand its various aspects and dimensions. Hence the Asian Christian is open to dialogue, a dialogue based on profound respect for individuals, communities and their religious traditions.¹⁰⁹

This does not mean, however, that the Church’s continuous efforts in religious dialogue are merely a means for keeping harmony with other religious traditions; instead, they are “an expression of the presence of God’s Word and of the universal action of his

¹⁰⁷ John Paul II, “Address to the Cardinals, Members of the Pontifical Household and the Curia,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 21 January 1985, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13.

¹⁰⁹ The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology, Doing Theology in Asia Today,” in *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil*, ed. Vimal Tirimanna (Bangalore, India: Claretian Publications, 2007), 256.

Spirit in the religious traditions.”¹¹⁰ It is in this perspective that the Asian bishops point out the necessity of dialogue with the religions:

In this dialogue [with the religions], we accept them as significant and positive elements in the economy of God’s design of salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. ... How then can we not give them reverence and honor? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them?¹¹¹

The words of the Asian bishops recall the teaching of Vatican II on the relation of the Church to religions. In the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, the Council affirms that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions [i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.],” and highly regards them for their manner of life and conduct, their precepts and doctrines, which “often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”¹¹² The Council thus urged Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, to “enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions,” and to “acknowledge, preserve, and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians.”¹¹³

For the Asian bishops, to establish positive and constructive relations with religious traditions is not only to show recognition or respect for the profound spiritual and ethical meaning in them, but is also an authentic way of living and expressing the Christian faith.¹¹⁴ The basis of interreligious dialogue is the conviction of Christian faith that “the universal

¹¹⁰ The FABC Office of Evangelization, “Conclusions of the Theological Consultation,” (1991) in *FAPA* vol.1, 345.

¹¹¹ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 14.

¹¹² Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Cf. “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 14-15.

salvific will of God ... is ... leading all peoples to unity.”¹¹⁵ The 1987 Synod Fathers and Pope John Paul II highlight the role of the laity in promoting unity and communion among peoples through dialogue.

All the faithful, especially the lay faithful who live among the people of other religions, whether living in their native region or in lands as migrants, ought to be for all a sign of the Lord and his Church, in a way adapted to the actual living situation of each place. Dialogue among religions has a preeminent part, for it leads to love and mutual respect, and takes away, or at least diminishes, prejudices among the followers of various religions and promotes unity and friendship among peoples.¹¹⁶

Dialogue itself is not an aim or goal of the Church; instead, it is a way in which the local churches in Asia proclaim Jesus Christ to their fellow humans.¹¹⁷ Dialogue and proclamation thus are not contradictory but complementary in the process of evangelization.

Pope John Paul II wrote to the bishops of Asia as follows:

Although the Church gladly acknowledges whatever is true and holy in the religious traditions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam as a reflection of that truth which enlightens all people, this does not lessen her duty and resolve to proclaim without fail Jesus Christ who is “the way, and the truth and the life.”...The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, interreligious dialogue at its deepest level is always “a dialogue of

¹¹⁵ The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, “Theses on Interreligious Dialogue: An Essay in Pastoral Theological Reflection,” in *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil*, ed. Vimal Tirimanna (Bangalore, India: Claretian Publications, 2007), 7.

¹¹⁶ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 30a. English text in *Origins* 17, no. 29 (1987): 500-09; John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 35.

¹¹⁷ Cf. International Congress on Mission, “The Gospel, the Kingdom of God, Liberation and Development,” (1979) in *FAPA* vol.1, 131. Walter Kasper likewise argued for the importance of dialogue in relation to the mission of the Church: “The Christian message withstands every syncretism and relativization, especially relativization in the name of a wrongly understood dialogue. Dialogue does not produce truth, dialogue discovers the truth which is given to us once and for all in Jesus Christ. ... So dialogue and mission are no opposites, they do not exclude each other.” Walter Kasper, *That They may All be One: The Call to Unity Today* (London: Burns & Oates, 2004), 38-39.

¹¹⁸ John Paul II, “Letter to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 23 July 1990, p. 15.

salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify, and understand better the signs of the age-long dialogue which God maintains with mankind.”¹¹⁹ In the light of the economy of salvation, there is “no conflict [for the Church] between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue.”¹²⁰ As the 1985 Synod Fathers confess, this is because “God can use the dialogue between Christians and non-Christians and between Christians and non-believers as a pathway for communicating the fullness of grace.”¹²¹

As a matter of fact, the Asian bishops’ focus is not on interreligious dialogue itself. Rather, they express a special concern for building up inculturated churches in Asia through dialogue:

In the course of the last two thousand years the Church has encountered and dialogued with various peoples, cultures and religions, with varying levels of success. Today, however, especially in Asia, in the context of the Great Religions, which are in a process of revival and renewal, the Church is aware of a markedly different situation. We do not ask any longer about the relationship of the Church to other cultures and religions. We are rather searching for the place and role of the Church in a religiously and culturally pluralistic world.¹²²

For the Asian bishops, interreligious dialogue means nothing other than “to purify the local churches more and more from sin and enable them to fulfill more effectively their

¹¹⁹ John Paul II, “Address to the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue,” (13 November 1992) in *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 40. Pope John Paul II organized the first World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, Italy, on October 27, 1986. There were 160 religious leaders spending the day together fasting and praying. The Pope said to the religious leaders: “We hope that this pilgrimage to Assisi has taught us anew to be aware of the common origin and common destiny of humanity. Let us see in it an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the transcendent goal which he sets for us.” John Paul II, “Address to the Representatives of the Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the World Religions,” in Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*, ed. Francesco Gioia (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1997), 216.

¹²⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 55. English Text in *Origins* 20, no. 34 (1991): 541-68.

¹²¹ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. D. 5.

¹²² The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, “Theses on Interreligious Dialogue: An Essay in Pastoral Theological Reflection,” in *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil*, 2.

evangelizing mission in Asia.”¹²³

In conclusion, for the Asian bishops, dialogue is not used merely anthropologically but primarily theologically. Confessing that “in Christ God has entered into dialogue with human beings, offering them salvation,” the bishops state that “it is in faithfulness to this divine initiative that the Church should be committed to a dialogue of salvation with all women and men.”¹²⁴ The Church, reaching out to the people of Asia through dialogue and proclaiming the Good News to them, invites them to the communion of salvation. As Kasper succinctly says, Christianity “extends an invitation to other religions and cultures to meet Jesus Christ and through participation in its own fullness to attain their own fullness and perfection (*via eminentiae*).”¹²⁵

2.3 Communion as Harmony

The ideas of communion as liberation and as dialogue, in a certain sense, are not concepts particular to the Asian bishops; rather those ideas are generally described at the universal level of the Church, and the way to develop those ideas in the Asian context and the specific points which are highlighted in the documents of the FABC were accordingly discussed in the above sections. The idea of communion as harmony, however, seems to be

¹²³ The FABC Office of Evangelization, “Conclusions of the Theological Consultation,” (1991) in *FAPA* vol.1, 345. Acknowledging that interreligious dialogue is of prime importance to the Asian Church, the FABC bishops established the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) in 1978. The Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA) sponsored by the OEIA has played a role of helping the bishops appreciate interreligious dialogue in the context of their Christian mission in Asia. For instance, BIRA was held in 1984 on the general theme of “Theology of Dialogue.” Since then the statements of BIRA have focused on a particular theme in the theology of dialogue such as “The Church at the Service of God’s Reign” (1985), “Discerning the Spirit at Work in and Beyond the Church in Asia” (1986), and “Living and Working Together with Sisters and Brothers of other Faiths in Asia” (1987). For the statements of the Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue, see *FAPA* vol.1, 247-61 and 299-301.

¹²⁴ The FABC Office of Evangelization, “Conclusions of the Theological Consultation,” (1991) in *FAPA* vol.1, 344.

¹²⁵ Kasper, *That They may All be One: The Call to Unity Today*, 187.

distinctive and peculiar to Asia because it occurs within an Asian way of thinking and comes from the ethos of Asian cultures and religions.

This section will describe the FABC's understanding of harmony in the Asian religious and cultural context and then the role of the idea of communion as harmony in the evangelical mission of the Church.

a) *Harmony in the religious and cultural pluralism of Asia*

The FABC bishops are very much at home in the pluralistic Asian milieu, having been born into and having lived amidst such rich diversity and plurality. Without pluralism and diversity there is no room for the Christian Gospel in Asia, a continent dominated by many of the world's principal religions.¹²⁶ The FABC bishops recognize that cultural diversity and religious pluralism lie at the heart of what it means to be Asian. Accordingly, cultural diversity and religious pluralism are regarded as something not "to be regretted and abolished," but "to be rejoiced over and promoted, since they represent richness and strength."¹²⁷ In the Asian context where diverse cultures and religions are intertwined, it is harmony which is highlighted and has priority over everything else:

There are various Asian cultures and various philosophies, but there are certain general lines of approach that are typically Asian, certain values that are paramount in Asian cultures arising from the various philosophical traditions and the concrete social-religious cultural situations in which Asians live. One of these values is harmony. Asians live in an atmosphere charged with communal tensions. What is needed is a vision of unity and harmony, and a language of reconciled diversity that will enable people of different communities to work together for

¹²⁶ Cf. Jonathan Yun-ka Tan, "'Missio ad Gentes' in Asia: A Comparative Study of the Missiology of John Paul II and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)," (Ph. D. diss., Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2002), 272-73.

¹²⁷ "Final Statement of the Eleventh Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue," in *FAPA* vol.1, 321.

peace and the building of a more just society.¹²⁸

Pope John Paul II also affirmed the importance of the idea of harmony in Asian cultures and religions:

Asian peoples are known for their spirit of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. ... It can still be said that Asia has often demonstrated a remarkable capacity for accommodation and a natural openness to the mutual enrichment of peoples in the midst of a plurality of religions and cultures. ... This “being Asian” is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the Gospel in a way that is faithful both to her own tradition and to the Asian soul.¹²⁹

The FABC bishops described two characteristics of harmony in the Asian context. First, the “concepts and practices of harmony” are crucial for coping “with the ongoing dialectic of unity and diversity.”¹³⁰ Harmony is understood as “evolving by respecting the otherness of the other and by acknowledging its significance in relation to the totality.”¹³¹ Second, harmony is not reduced to an exterior and objective order; rather, it has a strong experiential and affective component.

Just as true dialogue must be a sharing of faith-experience and not simply a comparison of doctrines, so also harmony must be, in the first place, an experience and sharing of experience in which all religions are involved, and not

¹²⁸ The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology, Doing Theology in Asia Today,” in *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil*, 256. The Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs (BIRA) has tried to clarify each religion's concept of harmony: BIRA V/1 (1992) on Islam; BIRA V/2 (1994) on Buddhism; BIRA V/3 (1995) on Hinduism; BIRA V/4 (1996) on Taoism and Confucianism. For instance, harmony in the Muslim understanding is called *Shura* which means deliberation or consultation, in which no one may impose his or her will on others, and which is to be protected until in one way or another those involved arrive at a decision agreed upon by all. At the core of Buddhism is the internal and external balance (harmony) which should be a way of life. In Hinduism, harmonious integration of the whole and the parts at all levels (cosmic, social and individual) marks the quintessence of the Hindu quest. The Hindu way and view of life, its ethos, values and goals, etc., are all permeated, colored and governed by this ideal. In Chinese traditions, harmony is the most precious thing in personal relationships. Cf. “Bishops Institute for Interreligious Dialogue (BIRA) Documents,” in *FAPA* vol.2, 143-65.

¹²⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 6.

¹³⁰ The Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, “Working for Harmony in the Contemporary World,” in *FAPA* vol.2, 155.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

just a discussion about the exterior order. In this way people of all faiths will be able to radiate in society the peace and harmony they have experienced in their own faith and through dialogue with brothers and sisters of other faiths.¹³²

This idea of harmony cannot but affect the style of life in Asia. “Harmony is not a matter of simply living in peace, but a creative and dynamic force in relationships.”¹³³ With this understanding, the FABC bishops succinctly describe the Asian vision of life as follows: “In the rich diversity of ancient Asian cultures and faiths is a vision of unity in diversity, *a communion of life* among diverse peoples.”¹³⁴

The bishops then reflected on harmony from a Christian perspective. Harmony is, above all, divinely inspired, since “God is the source and summit of all harmony and he is the foundation and the fulfillment of it.”¹³⁵ More specifically, it draws its inspiration and strength from the harmonious unity of the Trinity: “The marvelous mystery of unity and communion of the Trinity is a model as well as a powerful challenge in our efforts to create harmony in all areas of life.”¹³⁶ The trinitarian dimension of harmony becomes the origin of all dimensions of harmony:

The harmony of the universe finds its origin in the one Creator God, and human harmony should flow from the communion of Father and Son in the Spirit, and ought to be continually nourished by the ‘circumincession’ (*perichoresis*) in divine life.¹³⁷

¹³² “Final Statement of the Eleventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” in *FAPA* vol.1, 321-22.

¹³³ The 1998 Synod for Asia, *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 33.

¹³⁴ “The Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly,” (1995) in *FAPA* vol.2, 5.

¹³⁵ The Theological Advisory Commission of FABC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” (1995) in *FAPA* vol.2, 288.

¹³⁶ “Final Statement of the Eleventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” (1988) in *FAPA* vol.1, 319.

¹³⁷ The Theological Advisory Commission of FABC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” (1995), in *FAPA* vol.2, 285. The bishops, referring to the teaching of Nicholas of Cusa, described the dynamic relationship of harmony, which has its origin in the relationship of Trinity: “Experience of the triune Divine is a demand to accept the other as the other and to respect differences and promote relationships, for one cannot exist without the other. The ineffable mystery of the Divine is not a static self-identity but a dynamic relationality, a constant self-outpouring, not ultimate dissolution, but *coincidentia oppositorum* (Nicholas of

More particularly, the bishops highlight the aspect of communion as harmony in the Church. “In a unity of life and the plurality of harmonious relationships of the believers in the Father and the Son, on the one hand, and among themselves, on the other,” the Church becomes “the sign and instrument for the world for its restoration to harmony in Jesus Christ.”¹³⁸ The Asian bishops said:

To reduce structural conflicts and realize more harmony within the Church community, there is need for more sharing and participation, for more understanding and forgiveness among the various sections of the Churches. As a Church we are called to a harmonizing of our hierarchical and functional differences. It is only a Church that lives and bears witness to a life of communion and dialogue within itself that can become a witness and a messenger of harmony to the world.¹³⁹

It is within this perspective that the mission of the Church is developed and explained. In order to become more effective churches in Asia, according to the Asian bishops, the churches should “understand and situate their local roles as *sacrament of harmony* radiating a reconciling grace on conflictual realities.”¹⁴⁰

b) *The Church's Harmony in Mission*

The Church is called to be a sacrament of harmony, and the harmony among Christians, according to the FABC bishops, is to be shared with others through mission activity: “The Christian community has to appreciate this new vision of harmony and

Cusa).” Bishops Institute for Interreligious Dialogue, “Working for Harmony in the Contemporary World,” (1995) in *FAPA* vol.2, 157. For further discussion of Cusa on harmony, see Anton G. Weiler, “Nicholas of Cusa on Harmony, Concordance, Consensus and Acceptance as Categories of Reform in the Church, in *De Concordantia Catholica*,” in *Conflict and Reconciliation: Perspective on Nicolas of Cusa*, ed. Inigo Bocken (Leiden, Netherlands; Boston, MA: Brill, 2004): 77-90.

¹³⁸ The Theological Advisory Commission of FABC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” (1995), in *FAPA* vol.2, 274.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 288-89.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 295.

manifest it in the way it lives its daily life. The mission of the community is in a way a communication of its own inner life of harmony.”¹⁴¹ The challenges of the diverse realities in the Asian situation call Christians to a new spirituality or lifestyle that will enable them to be witnesses, messengers and mediators of harmony. This idea is based on the radical values of the Gospel and enriched further by similar insights and values from other faiths and cultures in Asia.¹⁴² The role of harmony in mission activity was already stated by Vatican II:

In virtue of its mission to enlighten the whole world with the message of the Gospel and gather together in one Spirit all men of every nation, race and culture, the Church shows itself as a sign of the spirit of brotherhood which renders possible sincere dialogue and strengthens it. Such a mission requires us first of all to create in the Church itself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony [*concordiam*], and acknowledge all legitimate diversity; in this way all who constitute the one people of God will be able to engage in ever more fruitful dialogue, whether they are pastors or other members of the faithful.¹⁴³

More specifically, for the FABC bishops, the harmony that the Church seeks to live is defined as companionship or partnership with all:

The Christian community, it seems to us, must live in *companionship*, as true *partners* with all Asians as they pray, work, struggle and suffer for a better human life, and as they search for the meaning of human life and progress. Because the human person created in Christ, redeemed by Christ and united by Christ to himself is the way for the Church, the Church must walk along with him/her in human solidarity.¹⁴⁴

Here the evangelical mission of the Church has a new meaning and a distinctive mode. It is neither an insertion of the truth of the Gospel into non-Christian cultures, nor merely a

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 296.

¹⁴² Cf. Ibid., 286.

¹⁴³ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 92. Also, the Council describes the characteristic of a future missionary as follows: “He must approach men with an open mind and heart; he must willingly accept the duties entrusted to him, and generously accommodate himself to the different customs and the changing circumstances of other peoples. In harmony [*concordi animo*] and mutual love he will cooperate with his brethren and with all who dedicate themselves to this work, so that together with the faithful, and imitating the apostolic community, they might be of one heart and soul (cf. Acts 2:42; 4:32).” Vatican, II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 25.

¹⁴⁴ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 283.

planting of a new local church in places where it does not yet exist. Rather, it is a proclamation of the salvation of all through the sharing of Christians' experiences and lives with all, in harmony with the thought, culture, and religions of people in the pluralistic Asian context. The Christians' "living in companionship" is none other than a mission activity of the Church in "solidarity" with peoples and realities in Asia. For Christians in Asia, "to proclaim Christ means above all to live like him, in the midst of our neighbors of other faiths and persuasions."¹⁴⁵

The FABC bishops do not neglect the importance of proclamation, but they also value "friendship and trust, relationality and relationship-building, dialogue and consensus, as well as solidarity and harmony as constitutive elements of the task of Christian mission in Asia."¹⁴⁶ The FABC bishops describe the mission of the Church in the following way:

Mission, being a continuation in the Spirit of the mission of Christ, involves a *being with* the people, as was Jesus: 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (Jn 1:14). Therefore, mission includes: *being with* the people, responding to their needs, with sensitiveness to the presence of God in cultures and other religious traditions, and witnessing to the values of God's Kingdom through presence, solidarity, sharing, and word.¹⁴⁷

Mission should be more than words and deeds; it involves the very life of the Church. It is not a coincidence that when the FABC bishops describe mission activity, they highlight the idea of "being together" as well as the idea of "dialogue." According to Donal Dorr, "the notion of dialogue conveys the impression that mission is not just a matter of *doing things for* people. It is first of all a matter of *being with* people, of *listening* and

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 282.

¹⁴⁶ Jonathan Yun-ka Tan, "Missio Inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences," (2004) in *FABC Papers*, no. 109. <http://www.ucanews.com/html/fabc-papers/fabc-109.htm> (accessed June 12, 2010).

¹⁴⁷ "Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 280.

sharing with them.”¹⁴⁸ By “picturing Jesus in the midst of his people,” Dorr chooses the word “solidarity” as a key to understanding the mission of Jesus and then of the Church. Solidarity is crucial for missionaries because “those who go forth without solidarity with those to whom they come are not genuine missionaries but exploiters and colonizers” and “those who are not in solidarity with people are all too likely to deprive them of their self-esteem and despoil them of their cultural heritage.”¹⁴⁹ He puts solidarity at the heart of the mission of the Church:

Like Jesus, we are called to share the life of the people among whom we feel called – and have chosen – to work. For each of us, mission cannot really begin until we are able, with some authenticity, to experience the people we live and work with as “my people.” For us, as for Jesus, sharing in the life of a community is not just a preliminary to mission but is the very core of mission. For it is our solidarity with others which is the basis both for our openness to *receive* what they have to offer and for our willingness and eagerness to *share* with them the gift of faith in Jesus and the other gifts we have been given.¹⁵⁰

While Dorr’s emphasis on the idea of solidarity in mission is not identical with the idea of harmony in the Asian bishops, both ideas clearly involve the concept of “being together” or “sharing with each other.”

According to the Asian bishops, the mission of the Church means that with Asian sisters and brothers the Church “strives to foster communion among Asian peoples who are threatened by glaring economic, social and political imbalances” and “explores ways of utilizing the gifts of our diverse religions, cultures and languages to achieve a richer and deeper Asian unity.”¹⁵¹ These two aspects of mission can be explained in terms of mission as harmony.

¹⁴⁸ Donal Dorr, *Mission in Today’s World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 16.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 191-92.

¹⁵¹ “Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1995) in *FAPA* vol.2, 8. Cf. The 1998 Synod for Asia, “Instrumentum Laboris,” no. 39.

First, the Church's struggle with people against poverty and injustice can be seen in the mode of harmony, living with them: "The building up of this fraternal community cannot be effected from the outside but can be achieved only by being *with* others and *for* others."¹⁵² The life of Christians following Jesus leads to the Church's life among the people.

Like Jesus, we have to "pitch our tents" in the midst of all humanity building a better world, but especially among the suffering and the poor, the marginalized and the downtrodden of Asia. In profound "solidarity with suffering humanity" and led by the Spirit of life, we need to immerse ourselves in Asia's cultures of poverty and deprivation, from whose depths the aspirations for love and life are most poignant and compelling. Serving life demands communion with every woman and man seeking and struggling for life, in the way of Jesus' solidarity with humanity.¹⁵³

Second, harmony with various religious traditions is highlighted. Rather than placing great importance on growth that can be measured in terms of numerical and territorial expansion, the FABC bishops prefer to transform and heal the brokenness in Asian cultures and Asian realities.¹⁵⁴ Harmony with other cultures and religions cannot be understood merely as inclusivism or exclusivism but as pluralism which is "accepted in resonance with the constitutive plurality of reality," because "inclusivism does not respect the identity of each religion, and exclusivism does not recognize the relationality of

¹⁵² "Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1982) in *FAPA* vol.1, 57.

¹⁵³ "Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1995) in *FAPA* vol.2, 8.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Jonathan Yun-ka Tan, "'Missio ad Gentes' in Asia: A Comparative Study of the Missiology of John Paul II and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)," (Ph. D. diss., Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 2002), 245-246. Tan pointed out that the FABC bishops have consistently sought to carry out a *missio inter gentes*, even though they did not use that term. Realizing that, 1) the local churches would never dominate Asia in the manner Christendom dominated medieval Europe, and 2) for their survival they have to become truly rooted in the Asian milieu, he argued that "a *missio inter gentes* approach would be perfectly at home within the diverse and pluralistic *Sitzen im Leben* of Asian cultures and religions. Rather than proclaiming 'to' (*ad*) the nations in the hopes of getting them to abandon their religions in favor of the Christian Gospel, the FABC Bishops have chosen a mission paradigm that seeks to 'immerse' the local churches in the diverse and pluralistic Asian *Sitzen im Leben*." Cf. *Ibid.*, 275.

religions.”¹⁵⁵

This understanding of harmony is the foundation for a new approach to the religions in Asia. Religions are not to be converted but to be brought into partnership. An Asian theologian describes the idea of religions as partners:

By some quirk of history mission became a campaign not against Satan and Mammon but against other religions. Often the other religions were seen as the works of Satan. Conversion was seen as turning away not primarily from the evil powers of Satan but from other religions. As a matter of fact, the other religions are also opposed to the sinful forces of Satan and Mammon. In promoting the kingdom, then, our enemies are Satan and Mammon, not other religions. The other religions are rather our allies.¹⁵⁶

The important role of harmony in the plurality of religious situations was affirmed in the *Lineamenta* of the Asian Synod, in which the role of harmony and communion in mission activity was highlighted:

Christian mission is respectful to all religions and their followers. In the past, Christian mission with its proclamation of Jesus Christ and conversion also meant at times alienation from one's own people and culture. Christian mission is not meant to be an alienation, but a greater communion and harmony with all brethren. The ultimate scope of all mission is communion with God and one another.¹⁵⁷

The close connection between harmony and communion was also described by Pope John Paul II:

The mission of Jesus not only restored communion between God and humanity;

¹⁵⁵ The Bishops' Institute for Interreligious Affairs, "Working for Harmony in the Contemporary World, in *FAPA* vol.2, 157-58.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Amaladoss, "Identity and Harmony: Challenges to Mission in South Asia," in *Mission in the Third Millennium*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 32. Michael Amaladoss, S.J. is professor of theology at Vidyajyoti College of Theology in Delhi, India. He has served as a consultant to the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and was a president of the International Association of Mission Studies.

¹⁵⁷ The 1998 Synod for Asia, *Lineamenta*, no. 28. During the Synod's final plenary session, Cardinal Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja of Jakarta, Indonesia, one of the Asian Synod's three president-delegates, said that "the credibility of the evangelizer lies in his or her being a man or woman of God more than a scholar, in being a person who lives simply but with depth." Julius Riyadi Darmaatmadja, "A Church With a Truly Asian Face," *Origins* 28, no. 2 (1998):24-28, p. 26.

it also established a *new communion* between human beings alienated from one another because of sin. Beyond all divisions, Jesus makes it possible for people to live as brothers and sisters, recognizing a single Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt 23:9). In him, a *new harmony* has emerged, in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, ... neither slave nor free, ... neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).¹⁵⁸

The Asian bishops’ understanding of communion as harmony is not formed solely within the categories of a traditional Christian theology; rather it is constituted in the acceptance of Christian revelation and in the application of its principles to the diverse situations in Asia. This is because the Asian bishops begin not with abstract concepts and categories, but with the life experiences and other challenges arising from the ongoing encounter with contemporary Asian realities and specific Asian contexts. For the bishops, the task of the Asian churches is thus to “build bridges of solidarity and reconciliation with peoples of other faiths and join hands with everyone in Asia in forming a true community of creation.”¹⁵⁹

3. The Life of the Church in Asia as Communion

Following the teaching of the Scriptures and the Second Vatican Council, the Asian bishops affirmed that the Church has to be understood as a communion: “the Church is at its deepest level a *communion* (*koinonia*) rooted in the life of the Trinity, and thus in its essential reality a sacrament (*mysterium et sacramentum*) of the loving self-communication of God and the graced response of redeemed mankind in faith, hope, and love.”¹⁶⁰ As has been seen, the Asian bishops understood this communion in three ways: communion as

¹⁵⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 13.

¹⁵⁹ “Statement of the Sixth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1995) in *FAPA* vol.2, 8.

¹⁶⁰ “Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1982) in *FAPA* vol.1, 56.

liberation, dialogue, and harmony.

In order to search for what truly belongs to the local churches in the Asian context, they emphasized that the local churches in Asia “are to realize their lives and destinies as Church in the midst of the harsh realities of the contemporary histories of our people” and “must listen to the Spirit at work in the many communities of believers who live and experience their own faith, who share and celebrate it in their own social, cultural and religious history.”¹⁶¹ To accomplish these aims, the bishops suggested the active participation and co-responsibility of the laity in the Church and the development of “a new way of being Church”¹⁶² which is concretely expressed in the idea of the Church as a communion of small Christian communities.

3.1 The Lay Faithful in the Church as Communion

The Asian bishops during the Fourth FABC Assembly envisaged the role of the lay faithful in ecclesial structures. The assembly was held in 1986 with the theme: “The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World of Asia”. This was in direct preparation for the Synod on the Laity (1987). The bishops examined the roles of the lay faithful in the context of Asia in the areas of: politics, youth, the plight of Asian women, the family, the world of education, mass media, the world of work, business and health services. Especially in the assembly, the bishops discussed a way through which Christians and the Church of Asia might move ahead “as community” for the salvation of Asia.¹⁶³

In dynamic communion with Jesus and with one another, all members of the Church

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 56-57.

¹⁶² I will discuss this phrase in detail below, p. 217-25.

¹⁶³ Cf. “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 177-198.

are recognized as “mature subjects and persons with dignity and freedom, with their gifts and powers as well as rights and responsibilities.”¹⁶⁴ This statement cannot be taken as an abstraction or as a simple verbal expression of the responsibility of the faithful in the Church. It is rather to be seen in the Asian context as a sincere reflection on the status of the lay faithful in present ecclesial structures.

In the two years before the Assembly, the bishops clearly realized the great gap between the vision of the Church as the People of God, taught by Vatican II, and the actual situation existing in the contemporary Asian Church.¹⁶⁵ The bishops honestly admitted that “the vast majority of our laity do not share in dialogue with their clergy; nor do they share the responsibility for the work of the Church with their clergy in a partnership of brotherhood.”¹⁶⁶ These statements should be understood not only as a promotion of lay involvement in the Church but also as a critical reflection on the need for ecclesial structures in which the participation of the laity is enhanced.

a) *Ministry and Mission of the Lay Faithful in Asia*

The exercising of various functions in the Church by the lay faithful is not due to any concession on the part of the ordained or religious; nor does it flow from the scarcity of the ordained. Rather, it originates from the priestly, prophetic, and royal roles of the faithful.¹⁶⁷ In particular, the common priesthood of the faithful is highlighted by the FABC bishops:

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 192.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. “Statement of the First Bishops’ Institute for the Lay Apostolate,” (1984) in *FAPA* vol.1, 235.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 192-93.

Our proper concern for the ministerial or ordained priesthood – either to improve the quality and number of priests or to meet the problems of formation – must not diminish or distract us from interest in and concern for the common priesthood of the faithful. This latter, though general in the sense of being shared by all Christians, is a real priesthood of life. It has its origins in Christ himself. The Christian disciple lives and participates by his/her day-to-day life in all the mysteries of redemption, viz., suffering, death and resurrection. The ministerial priesthood has meaning and fullness only in relation to the common priesthood.¹⁶⁸

The common priesthood which originates from the priesthood of Christ does not lower or put aside the ministerial priesthood; rather it is regarded as *a real priesthood of life* and it provides a framework in which the ministerial priesthood gains full meaning in the Church. Vatican II already said that though the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood “differ essentially and not only in degree,” they share in “the one priesthood of Christ” and “are ordered one to another.”¹⁶⁹ In a broad sense, Vatican II emphasized the unity of all the faithful in the Church, in accordance with the one priesthood of Christ, rather than searching for the specific identity of the lay faithful. In this regard, Peter Coughlan concisely comments:

The organizing or structuring principle of the Church [in *Lumen Gentium*] is not the *duo genera* or stratified orders of hierarchy and faithful. It is the unity of the People of God, graced by the Spirit of Christ, in the multiple charisms, callings and ministries that are interdependent and mutually supportive in a community that is constantly called to be more fully communion, a communion that is, under the breath of the Spirit, communion in mission.¹⁷⁰

The FABC bishops, following the teaching of the Council, developed the understanding of the common priesthood in the special context of Asian churches. While the Council highlights the reciprocal relationship between two priesthoods in the one priesthood

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 192. Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

¹⁶⁹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

¹⁷⁰ Peter J. Coughlan, “The Search for a Positive Definition or Description of the Laity from Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, to John Paul II’s *Christifideles Laici*, 1988: A No Through Road,” (Ph. D. diss., The University of London, 2005), 111.

of Christ, the FABC bishops put weight on the common priesthood in order to encourage the lay faithful to participate more actively in Church ministries.

Nonetheless, the emphasis on the common priesthood does not mean that all services or activities undertaken by the lay faithful in the Church are treated as proper ministries or as something replacing the official ministry.

In the recognition of services as ministries there is need for prudence and caution. Not every charism or service needs to be recognized as ministry but only those which the life and growth of the community require to be exercised with stability, continuity and responsibility. Hence the local Churches should not be overhasty in recognizing new ministries, while at the same time being aware of the urgent call for services in the community and alert to the emergence of charisms and talents among the laity.¹⁷¹

In this regard, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, after following various discussions on the ministries of the lay faithful at the 1987 Synod on the Laity, Pope John Paul II critically judged some tendencies.

In the same Synod Assembly, however, a critical judgment was voiced ... about a too-indiscriminate use of the word “ministry,” the confusion and the equating of the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood, the lack of observance of ecclesiastical laws and norms, the arbitrary interpretation of the concept of “supply,” the tendency towards a “clericalization” of the lay faithful and the risk of creating, in reality, an ecclesial structure of parallel service to that founded on the Sacrament of Orders.¹⁷²

Even though there is in the Church’s structure a distinction between those ministries conferred through ordination and those granted on the basis of baptism without ordination, these two kinds of ministries are interrelated and interdependent because “all are, even if

¹⁷¹ “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church,” (1977) in *FAPA* vol.1, 78-79.

¹⁷² John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 23. In its propositions, the Synod did not express such a tendency but articulated its position in this way: “The church needs a greater number of laity in parish activity in order to carry out evangelization suited to today's circumstances. These tasks of the laity are not derived from sacred orders. ... it does not seem opportune to set up the tasks of the laity too readily in instituted ministries. Indeed those ministries can obscure the many gifts and tasks of the laity in marriage and the family, in daily work, in science, in the economy, in the fine arts, in culture and politics.” The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 19.

differently, true expressions of the Church's *diakonia* in the world."¹⁷³ For the FABC bishops, *diakonia* (service) becomes a paradigm in which various ministries are harmoniously inter-related and it plays a role for establishing criteria for discriminating which are proper ministries.

All Christians are charismatic by vocation and in virtue of their baptismal consecration; but not all are engaged in the ministry of the Church in the same manner and with the same intensity. We term services those ways of sharing in the Church's ministeriality which are undertaken spontaneously and on occasions. These are already in their own manner an expression of the Church's service (*diakonia*) and indeed indispensable for the Christian presence in the world.¹⁷⁴

From this perspective, the Church is understood as "a communion of service."

All Christians are called to serve as Christ did. The Church is a communion of service in which, even though there are a variety of functions, services and ministries, all persons are equal, co-responsible and interdependent. It is within this context and against this background that the various distinctive ministries of the Church find their *raison d'être* and their specific character.¹⁷⁵

Service of the lay faithful is not limited to within the Church only. It is further expanded to the world. As Kasper indicates, "the place of the Church within the pluralistic world can best be described in terms of the 'diaconal Church.'"¹⁷⁶ Especially in the face of the dark realities in the heart of Asia, the Asian bishops have urged the faithful to struggle for a full human life. The Church should now be more involved in a wider range of issues pertaining to fundamental human rights and freedom in various areas.¹⁷⁷ Since the laity "live in a more direct and day-to-day contact with people,"¹⁷⁸ they are the ones most called upon to respond to these realities and problems. For instance, the involvement of a lay person in political

¹⁷³ "Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church," (1977) in *FAPA* vol.1, 74-75.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁷⁶ Walter Kasper, *That They May All be One: The Call to Unity*, 186.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. "Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 180.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

activity cannot be regarded as a merely personal and political duty. Rather, it is a duty rooted “in Christ who called his community of disciples to be a leaven in the world and thus to labor for the common good.”¹⁷⁹

Service of the lay faithful in and to the world is connected with “the renewal of Asian society according to the values of the Gospel.”¹⁸⁰ For the Asian bishops, the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed should be built in the concrete experiences of the social, political, economic, religious and cultural world of Asia. Thus, discipleship of Christ is “not at all a withdrawal from the world, but an immersion into the well-spring of Asian reality so that it might have life.”¹⁸¹ There is no dichotomy between the world and the Church. Following the teaching of Vatican II, the FABC bishops state that “there must not be in Catholics what Vatican II has described as a ‘pernicious opposition between professional and social activity on one hand and religious life on the other’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43).”¹⁸² Only in this way, according to the bishops, do the lay faithful express themselves as “the primary evangelizers of culture and of cultures, and of the whole fabric of life in society.”¹⁸³

b) *Participation and Co-responsibility of the Laity in a Renewal of Inner Structures*

The shape of the communities in which the lay faithful participate in the mission of

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 180.

¹⁸⁰ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 282-83.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 196. This statement recalls Congar’s argument on the role of Christians in the world: “We have to start from the will of God, for it is that that sets the Christian apart from the world to make him a citizen of another City and, at the same time, does not withdraw him from the world but leaves him to work therein. To all, God directs a call that raises them above the world; it is this call that properly constitutes the people of God.” Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965), 422.

¹⁸² “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 283. cf. The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. D. 6.

¹⁸³ Ibid. cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 18-20; John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 44.

Christ and take co-responsibility in the Church's inner life is described by the Third FABC Assembly as follows:

The Church should be a community of authentic participation and co-responsibility, where genuine sharing of gifts and responsibility obtains, where the talents and charisms of each one are accepted and exercised in diverse ministries, and where all are schooled to the attitudes and practice of mutual listening and dialogue, common discernment in the Spirit, common witness and collaborative action.¹⁸⁴

The lay faithful should not be onlookers in their ecclesial communities. They should be active subjects and agents who have responsibility in the life of the Church. Fully incorporated into Christ by baptism and confirmation, Christians should exercise charisms and take part in the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁵ In developing the principle of participation in terms of an ecclesiology, the bishops of the Fifth FABC Assembly state that the Church in Asia should be “a participatory Church where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful – lay, religious and cleric alike – are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized.”¹⁸⁶ In a participatory Church the faithful experience that “they ‘belong’ [to the Church] and that together they are the Church.”¹⁸⁷ This does not imply a structure of the Church in which the clergy play a predominant role, organize everything by themselves and where the laity play only a passive role as receivers and observers. Instead, within a participatory Church, each one of the lay faithful, according to his or her own vocation and condition, contributes to the building up of the Body of Christ. Pope John Paul II well summarized this vision in terms of communion:

Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an "organic" communion,

¹⁸⁴ “Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1982) in *FAPA* vol.1, 56.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 14.

¹⁸⁶ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 287.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 281.

analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a diversity and a complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms and responsibilities. Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body.¹⁸⁸

The Church is not just a Sunday congregation of individuals in which people see each other as strangers, having no relationship after the liturgical celebration. Instead, the Church is a community of authentic participation in which all the faithful participate in the mission of God's people in the Church and in the world, and the lay faithful "in their own way share the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ."¹⁸⁹ The participation *ad intra* of the lay faithful within the life of the Church develops what may be called their "participative leadership," something which has not yet been fully developed and has often been understood as a subservient leadership under the clergy with their hierarchical status.¹⁹⁰ The participation of the laity *ad extra* in the mission of the Church is indispensable. Without the full participation of lay people, the Church cannot fulfill the mission for which it is sent into the world.¹⁹¹ Simply put, the Church is a participatory Church in which the lay faithful, taking their proper role in the mission and the ministry of the Church, become members of the People of God and witnesses to Christ.

The participation and co-responsibility of the lay faithful are intertwined and mutually related.¹⁹² Common participation in the ecclesial mission enables and fosters continual growth towards a more mature ecclesial co-responsibility. Moreover, the co-

¹⁸⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

¹⁸⁹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Internal Congress on Mission, "Basic Christian Communities and Local Ministries," (1979) in *FAPA* vol.1, 150-51.

¹⁹¹ Cf. "Statement of the First Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate," (1984) in *FAPA* vol.1, 237.

¹⁹² Cf. The 1987 Ordinary Synod, "Lineamenta," *Origins* 14, no. 38 (1985): 624-34. p. 632.

responsibility of all members in the Church enhances and promotes the active participation of the lay faithful in the mission of the Church.

Theological reflection on the participation of the lay faithful and co-responsibility in ecclesial communities has led to a concern in Asia for the renewal of inner structures in the Church. The appeal from the Asian bishops has come from their analysis of “the structures of present ecclesial organization (sometimes so large, amorphous and impersonal) which often image-forth institution in its less attractive aspects, and not community.”¹⁹³ According to the bishops, Church groups not infrequently remain individualistic in ethos and in practice. Sometimes organs of lay participation and co-responsibility have not been established or have been left inactive and impeded, existing only in name.¹⁹⁴ In response to this analysis, the bishops suggested a renewal of inner structures in which the maturity, dignity and freedom of all the members of the Church might be recognized on the basis of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility:

It [Vatican II] asked for a shift of emphasis so as to recognize the laity of our Churches as full-fledged members, with their own gifts and charisms, their rights and duties. The principles of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility stressed by Vatican II demand that we re-examine our ecclesial structures with respect to their purpose and thrust and reorganize them to yield optimum benefit. The renewal of inner ecclesial structures does not consist only in strengthening and multiplying the existing parochial and diocesan organizations, nor in creating new ones. It consists in creating the right atmosphere of communion, collegiality and co-responsibility for an active and fuller lay initiation, participation and action.¹⁹⁵

The role of the laity in a renewal of ecclesial structure has not been fully emphasized in the teaching of the Church at the universal level. According to Paul VI, the

¹⁹³ “Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1982) in *FAPA* vol.1, 57.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 193.

vocation of the laity is confined mainly to their mission to the world:

Lay people, whose particular vocation places them in the midst of the world and in charge of the most varied temporal tasks, must for this very reason exercise a very special form of evangelization. Their primary and immediate task is not to establish and develop the ecclesial community – this is the specific role of the pastors – but to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world.¹⁹⁶

However, the FABC bishops highlighted the whole vocation of the laity, not only their role of evangelical mission but also their positive or constitutive role in the renewal of the Church. Not only the pastor but also all the faithful have a responsibility for the renewal of the Church. Among many principles for the renewal of the Church, “communion” is singled out by the FABC bishops as the primary principle and the central characteristic of renewed ecclesial communities:

There is no one-sided renewal of clergy or laity. In a Church of communion we, clergy as well as laity, are mutually related and mutually conditioned. We feel the need for a basic change of mind and heart. In a Church which is a communion that tries to liberate others from oppression and discrimination, collegiality and co-responsibility are urgent. We cannot afford to destroy our communion by words or acts of domination and discrimination. A magnanimous spirit of understanding and a recognition of the gifts of the other must be promoted. In this respect, the clergy leadership has a duty to make the initial moves to foster lay involvement and to recognize the emerging leadership of the laity.¹⁹⁷

In a Church of communion, clergy and laity are mutually related and mutually conditioned. In a Church of communion, oppression and discrimination are overcome and collegiality and co-responsibility are promoted and the charisms and gifts of all the faithful are recognized. Dynamic communion with Jesus and among the faithful and a faith response to the challenging call of Asian realities are truly realized in the idea of the Church as communion. As the FABC bishops succinctly say, “the Church as communion means that all

¹⁹⁶ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 70.

¹⁹⁷ “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 194.

the members of the Church, anointed in the Spirit, are called to bear witness to the Church as mystery, to strengthen and promote communion of faith and commit themselves in co-responsibility to the one mission of the Church.”¹⁹⁸

The principle of collegiality, as seen above, refers to the doctrine that all bishops, by virtue of their episcopal consecration and their hierarchical communion among themselves and with the head of the college, the pope, have a corporate responsibility for the unity of faith and of communion in the universal Church.¹⁹⁹ The college of bishops has two dimensions: “in so far as it is composed of many members, it is the expression of the multifariousness and universality of the People of God; and of the unity of the flock of Christ, in so far as it is assembled under one head.”²⁰⁰ It is in the college that bishops manifest the principle of “unity in diversity” in the Church, exercising their own proper authority for the good of their faithful, and for the good of the whole Church.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the basic principle of collegiality cannot be restricted simply to the relationship between the papacy and the episcopacy but it can also be understood as a principle which expresses a co-relationship among all the faithful – bishops, priests, and the lay Christians – in the Church.²⁰²

On the local level, collegiality can be understood as the relationship between the lay

¹⁹⁸ The Office of Theological Concerns, “The Spirit at Work in Asia Today,” (1997) in *FAPA* vol.3, 311.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 22.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Cf. Ibid., no. 23; Vatican II, *Christus Dominus*, no. 3.

²⁰² The understanding of collegiality as something pertaining to all Christians of the Church is also present in liberation ecclesiology. Citing no. 21 of the decree *Ad Gentes*, “the Church has not been truly established... unless there exists a laity worthy of the name,” Leonardo Boff argued that not only bishops and priests but also the lay faithful are responsible for the entire reality of the Church. With this conviction he said: “collegiality is no longer the monopoly of episcopate and clergy. Now it belongs to the whole People of God.” Cf. Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiology: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 32.

faithful and the bishop, who is “the visible principle and foundation of unity”²⁰³ in his local church. If the principle of collegiality is expanded and applied to all members of the Church, it signifies the reciprocal relationship and communion of various ministries and charisms among all the faithful in local churches. In this perspective, at the more local level of the parish, it designates a proper mutual relationship between the pastor and parishioners and among parishioners themselves.

Co-responsibility of the lay faithful does not mean the laity are merely followers of the pastor or executors of a decision which is made by the pastor only; instead, it should imply more lay initiative and involvement in decision-making.²⁰⁴ The FABC bishops recognized that the lay apostolate still remains “basically parish-oriented, inward-looking and priest-directed,” and they strongly recommended a much more vigorous exercise of it:

The ordained leadership need not fear or be over concerned about juridical problems in starting newer forms of lay apostolate or ministries relating to the contextual realities of their Churches. Instead, they should encourage and promote more vigorous, world-oriented forms, initiated and directed by the laity themselves. Such initiatives will help the laity to mature, and consequently make the whole Church more effective and relevant in its mission to Asia.²⁰⁵

The principle of co-responsibility is practiced more effectively within the framework of an understanding of the Church as communion. Each members of the lay faithful “can never remain in isolation from the whole community; [they] must live in continual interaction with others, with a lively sense of fellowship, rejoicing in an equal dignity and common commitment to bring to fruition the immense treasure that each has

²⁰³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.

²⁰⁴ Cf. “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 194.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

inherited.”²⁰⁶ The principle of co-responsibility is based on the teaching of Vatican II on the equality of all the members of the Church: “Although by Christ’s will some are established as teachers, dispensers of the mysteries and pastors for the others, there remains, nevertheless, a true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the Body of Christ.”²⁰⁷

A renewal of ecclesial structures in accordance with the principles of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility enables the lay faithful to live as participative and responsible subjects of the Church. This is concretely expressed by the FABC bishops when they promote “a new way of being Church” in the Asian context.

3.2 A New Way of Being Church

We have seen above how the bishops of the Fourth FABC Assembly in 1986 emphasized the principles of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility in relation to the role of the lay faithful in the Church and in the world. Four years later, in the 1990 document of the Fifth FABC Assembly these principles were applied more directly to ecclesial structures and developed more practically and pastorally within an ecclesiology of communion.

Each local church is, to some extent, influenced by its human context and lives in a dialectical relationship with the human society into which it is inserted as the Gospel leaven.²⁰⁸ Since each local church should respond to the task entrusted to it by the servant Lord, it has to read the signs of the times and to discern what ministries and what ministerial

²⁰⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

²⁰⁷ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 58.

structures are required in order to fulfill its mission. It is at this point that the Asian bishops searched for what truly is a local church and for the way in which Asian churches can become truly local churches. So they asked: “What should the Church be in and to this changing Asian world marked by so much diversity, poverty, suffering and injustice, and with so many movements for social transformation?”²⁰⁹

The FABC bishops gave special concern to “being Church” rather than to the “doing of the Church.” Even though the bishops in their documents have pointed out deeds as a response of the Church to the challenges of Asia, they emphasized that responding with the very being and heart of the Church has primacy over simply doing.²¹⁰ The bishops recognized that effective doing can only result from the very depths of the Church’s being and authentic living. From this perspective, they suggested “a new way of being Church”²¹¹ as a way of becoming a truly local church.

The Church is not regarded as simply an institution; instead, it is a way of being. The FABC bishops might be said to share this same point of view on the Church with the Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas. The Church is “a mode of existence, a way of being,” he says, since “the mystery of the Church, even in its institutional dimension, is deeply bound to the being of man, to the being of the world and to the very being of God.”²¹² He describes ecclesial being in connection with the very being of God, that is, communion:

²⁰⁹ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 283.

²¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 289.

²¹¹ While the final statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC was entitled “Journeying Together Toward the Third Millennium,” during the assembly the bishops discussed the theme: “The Emerging Challenges for the Church in Asia in the 1990s: A Call to Respond.” The full title of one of the subsections is “A New Way of Being Church in the 1990s: Response at the Level of Being.” Cf. “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 273-89.

²¹² John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985), 15.

From the fact that a human being is a member of the Church, he becomes an “image of God,” he exists as God Himself exists, he takes on God’s “way of being.” This way of being is not a moral attainment, something that man *accomplishes*. It is a way of relationship with the world, with other people and with God, an event of *communion*, and that is why it cannot be realized as the achievement of an individual, but only as an ecclesial fact.²¹³

When the FABC bishops put emphasis on a “new” way for the Church in the Asian context, they not only affirmed that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church exists in the local churches and is formed out of them,²¹⁴ but they also emphasized the fact that the identity of the Church is always manifested locally – coming out of local history, local culture, and local social and economic experiences. The bishops envisioned the local church in Asia as follows:

It [the local church] is a community which strives to remain in unfeigned unity with its pastors, within the bonds of local and universal communion in the one Church. It is called to give witness to the meanings and values it professes, incarnating these in the ways of life of its own people, expressing them in its presence, dialogue and praxis in all the spheres of its activity as Church in history, within its own real world.²¹⁵

In a certain sense, this can be seen as “a radically new vision of Roman Catholicism, especially in Asia, where for centuries Catholics had lived under a European ecclesial umbrella.”²¹⁶ Thomas Fox stresses the difference between Asian thinking on ecclesiology and Western methodology.

The ideas and theologies that were beginning to be generated in Asia ... were not unlike other notions of Church sprouting up elsewhere in the world. At the same time, however, the Asian theologies had their own unique views. One could honestly call them “post-Western.” More accurately, the Asian leadership saw itself as more interested in engaging the future than rejecting the past. It just happened to be that the vision of a globally networked Church, should it come to

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23; The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 2.

²¹⁵ “Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1982) in *FAPA* vol.1, 60.

²¹⁶ Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 14.

fruition, should it stress the richness of local cultures and theology, could have the effect of reducing the burden of Western colonialism in Asia.²¹⁷

While the FABC bishops did not mention any burden of Western theology or speculative thinking or too many theoretical theologies, they obviously recognized that the local churches in Asia should fit into their own context. The bishops succinctly said: “If the Asian churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future.”²¹⁸ Simply put, the bishops’ understanding of “a new way” of being Church implies and is based on two aspects of communion: communion with the universal Church and communion within the Asian context.

More specifically, the bishops envisioned this new way of being Church in four aspects, the first of which they understood as enabling the other three. First of all, the new way of being Church is as a communion of communities.

The Church in Asia will have to be a *communion of communities*, where laity, religious and clergy recognize and accept each other as sisters and brothers. They are called together by the word of God which, regarded as a quasi-sacramental presence of the Risen Lord, leads them to form small Christian communities (e.g., neighborhood groups, Basic Ecclesial Communities and "covenant" communities).²¹⁹

As for communities, the bishops applied this word especially to ecclesial communities at the grassroots level. These small communities operate at a level smaller than the parish, allowing for deeper human and Christian relationships.²²⁰ Before the Fifth Assembly (1990), the bishops of the Third Assembly of FABC (1982) already observed that “in grassroots ecclesial communities” the experience of genuine Christian fellowship and

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church,” (1977) in *FAPA* vol.1, 70.

²¹⁹ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 287.

²²⁰ Cf. “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church,” (1977) in *FAPA* vol.1, 75-76.

love is often found as well as the emergence of diverse charisms and ministries.²²¹ In this sense, they considered that the presence of small communities was related with early Christian communities: “There is, in some countries, the rapid multiplication of “grassroots ecclesial communities,” so often alive with the freshness and enthusiasm of early Christian times.”²²² The bishops recognized that these communities “are motivated by a healthy reaction to the breakdown of traditional structures of community, and more positively, they stem from a concern with human persons rather than with impersonal structures, a concern above all with those who are small, neglected or despised.”²²³

The idea of the Church as a communion of communities can primarily be understood at the diocesan level. At this level, the diocese is seen as a communion of parishes. This vision was described in the 1998 Asian synod:

The diocese is a communion of communities. The Spirit is calling us to live and witness unity within the local Church by becoming a more participatory Church, where bishops, priests, religious, and laity, including youth, through a dialogue of life and heart, share a common vision of *the new way of being Church* as a communion of communities.²²⁴

The idea of a communion of communities is also analogously employed at the parish level. Francis Hadisumarta, Bishop of Manokwari, Indonesia, proposed the idea during his intervention in the Asian Synod:

The Second Vatican Council set forth a vision of the Catholic Church as a

²²¹ Cf. “Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1982) in *FAPA* vol.1, 59.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 278.

²²⁴ The 1998 Synod for Asia, *Propositions*, no. 15. This proposition might certainly be related with the statement of the Fifth FABC Assembly (1990) in which the Asian bishops envision a new way of being Church in the Asia of the 1990s, since in both there are many common elements such as, the idea of the Church as a communion of communities, a participatory Church, a dialogue of life, mission of the Church. Cf. “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 287-88. Interestingly, however, the Synod’s “Lineamenta,” its “Instrumentum Laboris,” and Pope John Paul II’s Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, did not mention the idea of a new way of being Church.

communion of churches (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 23). ... In our day, ecclesial structures are beginning to reflect this rediscovered conciliar vision. Parishes are living more and more as a communion of basic ecclesial communities, united at the parish level in a council with representatives from each Basic Ecclesial Community and supported by a diversity of ministries.²²⁵

The idea of a parish as a communion of small communities was succinctly expressed in a document of the Office of the Laity of FABC:

The Church, which is rooted in a Trinitarian God of communion, is a living organism and constantly undergoing transformation. In the course of her pilgrim journey through history towards the realization of her full identity as a communion of communities (Jn 17:21), she is challenged by the world and its rapidly changing value systems. ... One of the greatest achievements of the Second Vatican Council was to re-project the image of the Church as a communion of communities by affirming her local character built on faith, and translated into human relationships centered in Christ. This can be achieved through the establishment of many neighborhood communities in each parish.²²⁶

Second, the vision of a new way of being Church is that of a “*participatory Church* where the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to all the faithful – lay, Religious and cleric alike – are recognized and activated, so that the Church may be built up and its mission realized.”²²⁷ This dimension comes especially from the “desire for participation” in communities. The desire for participation and the longing to share in shaping one’s personal and communal destiny are passionately felt in the Church and fulfilled in greater lay involvement in the Church’s life and ministry.²²⁸ This does not mean any disconnection with the pastor; rather it encourages communion of the lay faithful with their pastor: “it is a community in true *oneness with its pastors*, the bishops and their collaborators in the ordained ministry, whom the Spirit has chosen to govern the Church (Acts 20:28), and who stand in the midst of the

²²⁵ Francis Hadisumarta, “The Church as Communion,” *Origins* 28, no. 2 (1998):119-21. p. 119.

²²⁶ AsIPA Fourth General Assembly, “SCCs/BECs Towards a Church of Communion,” (2006) in *FAPA* vol.4, 180.

²²⁷ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 287.

²²⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 278.

faithful as those who serve.”²²⁹

Third, the vision is of a Church in dialogue with Asian religions and cultures. “Built in the hearts of people, it is a Church that faithfully and lovingly *witnesses* to the Risen Lord Jesus and reaches out to people of other faiths and persuasions in a dialogue of life toward the integral liberation of all.”²³⁰ The bishops observed that in Asia the Catholic Church is often perceived as not sharing in the contemplative traditions of the continent, but as being primarily concerned with externals, with rituals and festivals. According to the bishops, this is because the Catholic tradition has failed to incarnate itself in the traditions and cultures of Asia. Also, there is a misunderstanding of the sacramentality of the Church. Genuine sacramentality cannot be identified simply with an observance of rituals; rather, it is manifested in a celebration of “the mystery of the Divine in everyday reality.”²³¹ Thus, for the faithful to be witnesses to Jesus the Lord means to live the life of Christ in their lives (*incarnatio*) and to express his love to others (*sacramentum*).

Fourth, a new way of being Church is to become “a leaven of transformation in this world” and to serve “as a *prophetic sign* daring to point beyond this world to the ineffable Kingdom that is yet fully to come.”²³² This vision comes from a new consciousness of solidarity. For the FABC bishops, the dark reality of Asia is not regarded as an inevitable fate but as something to be struggled against. Thus, they proposed a new consciousness of solidarity in the struggle against injustice, and a sense of solidarity which crosses national, ethnic and class boundaries, boundaries of religion and sex.²³³

²²⁹ “Statement of the Third Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1982) in *FAPA* vol.1, 56.

²³⁰ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 287.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 278.

²³² *Ibid.*, 287-88.

²³³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 277.

A new way of being Church involves a renewal of the sense of mission, and of the important role of the local church in evangelical mission. The local church living and acting in communion with the universal Church is the acting subject of mission.

It is the local Churches and communities which can discern and work out (in dialogue with each other and with other persons of goodwill) the way the Gospel is best proclaimed, the Church set up, the values of God's Kingdom realized in their own place and time. In fact, it is by responding to and serving the needs of the peoples of Asia that the different Christian communities become truly local churches.²³⁴

According to Fr. Peter Phan, the vision of a new way of being Church in Asia is connected with a new ecclesiology, an ecclesiology which, in a sort of Copernican revolution, de-centers the Church in the sense that it makes the center of the Christian life not the Church but the reign of God. In ecclesiology,

the mission of Christians in Asia is not to expand the Church and its institutional structures (*plantatio ecclesiae*) in order to enlarge the sphere of influence for the Church over the society but to be a transparent sign and effective instrument of the saving presence of the reign of God, the reign of justice, peace and love, of which the Church is a seed.²³⁵

Finally, the new way of being Church impacts the sense of spirituality. In accordance with this vision, "to live an authentic spirituality" is "nothing more and nothing less than a following of Jesus-in-mission, an authentic discipleship in the context of Asia."²³⁶ There is no dichotomy between faith and life, or between love and action in the spirituality of this new way of being Church. Spirituality plays the role of "integrating every aspect of Christian life: liturgy, prayer, community living, solidarity with all and especially with the

²³⁴ Ibid., 281.

²³⁵ Peter C. Phan, "Reception of Vatican II in Asia – Historical and Theological Analysis," (2006) in *FABC Papers*, no. 117, p. 126.

²³⁶ "Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 288.

poor, evangelization, catechesis, dialogue, social commitment.”²³⁷

Two specific aspects of spirituality were discussed by the bishops. First was the spirituality of those who place their complete trust in the Lord. It is “the spirituality of the powerless, of the *anawim*.” Renunciation and simplicity, compassion for and solidarity with all, and especially with the poor, meekness and humility – virtues promoted by active non-violence – are some of the significant features of this spirituality in Asia. Second was the “spirituality of harmony.” It expresses Christians’ intimate communion with God, their docility to his Spirit, their following of Jesus, as they challenge the disharmonies of the Asian world. It moves attention away from images of exterior organization, power or mere secular effectiveness to images of simplicity, humble presence and service.²³⁸

What is clear in the vision of a new way of being Church presented by the FABC bishops in 1990 is a paradigm shift in the self-understanding of the Church. It is most of all a shift of the mode of existence of the Church from the idea of the Church as a strictly hierarchical structure in which the pastor takes a dominant role in the life of the Church and the laity assume a passive position to the idea of the Church as a communion of communities in which all the faithful experience that they “belong to” and “become” the Church. It is this shift to an understanding of the Church as a communion of communities that enables the Church to be participatory, prophetic, and in dialogue with religions and cultures.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Cf. Ibid., 288-89.

3.3 Small Christian Communities in the Church as Communion

The bishops further explained the meaning of the idea of a communion of small communities, especially at the parish level, and the ideal shape of small communities, that is, of small Christian communities. In the statement of the Fifth FABC Assembly, the bishops described the various forms of small communities (e.g., neighborhood groups, basic ecclesial communities, Word-centered communities, and covenant communities) presently in existence in many countries in Asia. For the Asian bishops, “small communities” designate not only “small” communities in terms of size; but also communities that are “at the grassroots level” where all the faithful are enabled to take a more active role in the mission and ministry of the Church. Thus, these communities were also named “basic” Christian communities:

These basic Christian communities have been developing in the rural areas among the villages and out-stations. There are also neighborhood or block groups in the towns and cities, as well as interest groups, professional groups and age groups, in all of which people come together to deepen their faith commitment.²³⁹

The importance of basic communities for the renewal of local churches was already described in a workshop paper of the 1979 International Congress on Mission held in Manila, Philippines:

If our *present concern and essential focus* is a *radical renewal in our local churches and on-going evangelization process*, and if the Church is to respond to the world meaningfully and adequately with its *services and ministries*, then we have to start “from the bottom” anew. The rebuilt local church can only grow from the bottom and from within, if it is to transform its milieu. *Authentic Church renewal* and relevant service-presence to the world can be assured if we do all to facilitate the *emergence and growth of basic Christian communities* and if they relate and grow into a diocesan-level, national-level, and world-wide

²³⁹ “Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church,” (1977) in *FAPA* vol.1, 76.

fellowship.²⁴⁰

More recently, the role of communities at the basic level for the Asian local church has been continuously emphasized in the documents of the Asian bishops.

The vision of communion and solidarity of the Church in Asia for the twenty-first century is best realized at the most fundamental or basic level of the Church. It is at this level that the contribution of the BEC [basic ecclesial community] to the building up of the Church in Asia is best seen. It is in this sense that BEC truly offers an alternative or new way of being Church.²⁴¹

Building Basic Ecclesial Communities is a new way of being Church in Asia. BECs provide proper orientation to an overall comprehensive pastoral plan. They provide effective ways of promoting participation in the local church, especially on the part of the laity. ... They are a “solid starting point for the new society based on a civilization of love” (*Redemptoris Missio*, no. 51). They aim at living the Gospel in an atmosphere of fraternal love and service. Hence they are to be promoted.²⁴²

Fully rooted in the life of the Trinity, the Church in Asia has to be a communion of communities of authentic participation and co-responsibility, one with its pastors, and linked “to other communities of faith and to the one and universal communion” of the holy Church of the Lord. The movement in Asia toward Basic Ecclesial Communities expresses the deep desire to be such a community of faith, love and service and to be truly a “community of communities” and open to building up Basic Human Communities.²⁴³

While the Asian bishops have employed various terms “basic/small ecclesial/Christian communities” for communities at the basic level, the characteristics of the communities seem very similar to those of small Christian communities of South Africa. In fact, during the Fifth FABC Assembly, the bishops had a workshop on the theme “Alternative Ways of Being Church in the Asia of the 1990s.” For this workshop, a discussion paper was prepared by Oswald Hirmer, a promoter of Small Christian

²⁴⁰ International Congress on Mission, “Basic Christian Communities and Local Ministries,” (1979) in *FAPA* vol.1, 151-52.

²⁴¹ “Colloquium on Church in Asia in the 21st Century,” ” (1997) in *FAPA* vol.3, 36.

²⁴² The 1998 Synod for Asia, *Propositions*, no. 30.

²⁴³ “Statement of the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (2000) in *FAPA* vol.3, 3.

Communities (SCCs) from the Lumko Institute in South Africa. In the paper Hirmer suggested the building of small Christian communities at the parish level as an effective way of promoting communion and participation at the grassroots level.²⁴⁴ This suggestion has been referred to by the Asian bishops frequently since the establishment of the committee known as the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA)²⁴⁵ in 1993.

In response to the vision of the Fifth FABC Assembly, the AsIPA Desk of the FABC Office of Laity was set up and had as its major tasks to adapt Lumko materials for the Asian context, to develop its own materials, and to hold training courses on SCCs for all the bishops' conferences of the FABC.

Our starting point was to share our numerous experiences in the area of formation especially those related to the Lumko Approach, the BILA [Bishops' Institute for the Lay Apostolate] and BISA [Bishops' Institute for Social Action] series, organized by the OL [Office of Laity] and the OHD [Office of Human Development], as well as the varied experiences of the participants who have been involved at various levels. We also noted that the approaches we had adopted were related to the Lumko Approach that had been introduced recently into Asia and that it needed contextualization.²⁴⁶

Declaring that the local Church is renewed when parishes within it are restructured

²⁴⁴ Cf. Oswald Hirmer, *Alternative Ways of Being Church in the Asia of the 1990s*, FABC Paper no. 57d (Bandung, Indonesia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1990). See above, chapter one, p. 14-15.

²⁴⁵ The meaning of "AsIPA" is as follows: AsIPA is *Asian* because it seeks to implement the vision articulated by the Asian Bishops and to face the realities of the Asian peoples that challenge the Church in Asia; it is *integral* in that it seeks to achieve a balance between the "spiritual" and the "social", between the individual and the community, between the hierarchical leadership and the co-responsibility of the laity; it is *pastoral* in that its goal is to implement the vision of the new way of being Church, and particularly to train lay people to carry out their mission in the Church and in the world; as an *approach*, AsIPA is a process of realizing the vision of a participatory Church. It is a pastoral, christological, and ecclesiological approach, which is "Christ – and community – centered." Cf. "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach Towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia," (1993) in *FAPA* vol.2, 107-11. See above, chapter one, pp. 12-13.

²⁴⁶ "Asian Integral Pastoral Approach Towards a New Way of Being Church in Asia," (1993) in *FAPA* vol.2, 107. In the very first assembly of AsIPA the bishops stated: "The FABC Office of Laity had undertaken to implement the FABC #5 resolution [a new way of being Church] by offering a number of Lumko courses in Asian countries. Fr. Oswald Hirmer has accompanied Asian churches in the process of development of small Christian communities by helping them adapt Lumko material to the local situation. The material used has, in the course of the years, developed into AsIPA programmes." "Report of the First AsIPA General Assembly," (1996) in *FAPA* vol.2, 137.

as “a community of small communities,”²⁴⁷ AsIPA specifically emphasized the importance of building up SCCs in the local churches of Asia. The pastoral importance of SCCs in the Church can be examined in light of the ecclesiology of communion which has been articulated in the documents of FABC, and which was described above.

First of all, the aspect of communion as liberation is manifested in the prophetic role of SCCs. SCCs witness “to the faith in the social, political and economic situations of life.”²⁴⁸ Especially through the method of Gospel-sharing in the meetings of SCCs, the members listen to the Word, analyze the present situation, and search for God’s saving plan in the world. Contextual interpretation of the Gospel and critical reflection on actual situations enable the faithful to live out the Gospel in their neighborhood and to become agents of liberation in that context. The FABC bishops developed the liberational role of SCCs in the world more generally and gently, that is, as an instrument of spiritual and social transformation:

SCC’s lifestyle of prayer and reflection, solidarity and compassion, service and involvement at a local level serve as a leaven that makes life a little better in our world. Networking and action of SCCs in a parish setting therefore becomes a potent force for spiritual and societal change which expresses solidarity with the poor, weak and suffering.²⁴⁹

Second, communion as dialogue is manifested in the way of life of SCCs. In the meetings of SCCs, the members, hearing and reflecting on the Gospel, have a dialogical communion with God and they have a communion among themselves in a mode of dialogue

²⁴⁷ “The Final Statement of the Second AsIPA General Assembly,” (2000) in *FAPA* vol.3, 108.

²⁴⁸ The Third AsIPA General Assembly, “SCCs/BECs – Empowering People to Serve,” (2003) in *FAPA* vol.4, 175.

²⁴⁹ The Second AsIPA General Assembly, “Final Statement,” (2000) in *FAPA* vol.3, 110. Pope John Paul II described the liberative aspect of SCCs/BECs in a broader sense. “They [small communities] aim to help their members to live the Gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service and are therefore a solid starting point for building a new society, the expression of a civilization of love.” John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 25.

through sharing reflections and personal experiences. The communion with Christ and among the members themselves leads them, in turn, to dialogical communion with their neighbors. They proclaim the Gospel to their neighbors through dialogue. Dialogue certainly does not mean just communication in a verbal sense. It involves a dialogue of life. “SCCs have become an effective means for proclamation through the dialogue of life. In this context they pave the way for incarnation of the Church in the cultural milieu of the place, making it ever more relevant to the changing circumstances.”²⁵⁰

Third, the idea of communion as harmony can be seen in the bishops’ understanding of SCCs as “a seedbed of inculturation.”²⁵¹ As was seen above, diversity is a reality in Asia. To become a truly local church and to proclaim the Gospel to Asia thus means to live in harmony with peoples of varied cultural, religious, economic and political backgrounds. The more the faithful live a harmonious life with peoples and realities in Asia, the more the churches in Asia are inculturated. SCCs help the faithful to live harmoniously with others through sharing life’s joys and pains, reaching out and serving others, getting involved in life issues in one’s particular context.²⁵² When SCCs engage in a fellowship of life with their diverse neighbors and work together for a common goal, the life of harmony in the Church is encouraged.

These various aspects of communion in SCCs lead to an enhancement of the active and participative role of the lay faithful in the Church and the world. As the bishops observed, “the SCCs have definitely increased the participation of laity in pastoral planning,

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 109.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 110

²⁵² Cf. Ibid.

in liturgy, in sharing the faith and in social and charitable services and actions.”²⁵³ The faithful should not be satisfied with participating in the body of Christ through eucharistic communion. As Tillard says, it is necessary that, “day after day,” Christians “be what they have become, according to Augustine’s remarkable intuition. They must become instruments of communion and by that fact instruments for the salvation of humanity.”²⁵⁴

In a certain sense, all the faithful should become sacraments for the world, expressing the grace and love of God and proclaiming salvation to all. The sacramentality of the Church cannot be confined only to seven designated sacraments; rather it should be constituted in the fact that the Church, as the continued presence of Christ in the world, celebrates the mystery of salvation in the world. Thus, when the members of the SCCs live out their sacramental life by forgiving one another, by caring for the sick, by building and strengthening the domestic church, by using their gifts for service and by exercising a liberating leadership, they are celebrating and manifesting their communion with Christ and with all.²⁵⁵

While AsIPA argues that in building small Christian communities at the parish level, the common responsibility of all the faithful is necessary and their roles are complementary since the aim is one and the same, namely growing as a participatory, co-responsible Church where all live up to their full potential, it asserts that a major responsibility for building the communities rests on the pastors.

As leaders of the Local Church, the bishops are the chief promoters of the

²⁵³ The Third AsIPA General Assembly, “SCCs/BECs – Empowering People to Serve,” (2003) in *FAPA* vol.4, 176.

²⁵⁴ J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. R.C. De Peaux (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 32.

²⁵⁵ Cf. The Fourth AsIPA General Assembly, “SCCs/BECs Towards a Church of Communion,” (2006) in *FAPA* vol.4, 180.

SCCs/BECs which are the most localized expression of being Church. The SCC/BEC should be the clear priority in the diocesan pastoral vision. Their primary task is to motivate the priests who are their direct collaborators in shouldering this responsibility at the parish-level. When bishops and priests take an active interest in SCCs/BECs there is a perceptive growth and flourishing of communities.²⁵⁶

The fact that bishops and priests have an active role in forming the communities does not mean that they control or have power over the laity through small Christian communities in the parish. Rather, the latter should be understood as a form of communion of the lay faithful with the pastor. As Pope John Paul II indicates, the basic/small communities will only be “truly effective” if “they live in union with the particular and the universal Church, in heartfelt communion with the Church’s Pastors and the Magisterium, with a commitment to missionary outreach and without yielding to isolationism or ideological exploitation.”²⁵⁷

In the *Propositions* of the Asian Synod, the bishops saw the basic ecclesial communities as providing effective ways of “promoting participation in the local church, especially on the part of the laity.”²⁵⁸ Reflecting on this Proposition, Pope John Paul II rephrased the words as “an effective way of promoting communion and participation in parishes and dioceses, and as a genuine force for evangelization”²⁵⁹ Pope John Paul II emphasized that the parish remains the “ordinary place” where the faithful express, experience, and live out ecclesial communion. The presence of the communities, therefore, does not do away with the parish, which remains necessary for the Church to fulfill her mission.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 183.

²⁵⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 25.

²⁵⁸ The 1998 Synod for Asia, *Propositions*, no. 30.

²⁵⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 25.

As Vatican II taught, particular churches are “constituted after the model of the universal Church”; and, the one and unique Catholic Church exists “in” and “from particular churches.”²⁶⁰ In this sense, the nature of the Church can be summed up in the terms *communion*, *koinonia*. The local church becomes, analogously, the totality of the eucharistic communities in communion with the bishop. In today’s terminology, the local church “is a diocese (entrusted to a bishop), made up of parishes, each one of these being a eucharistic community.”²⁶¹ From this perspective, just as the universal Church can be called a communion of dioceses, a diocese can be called a communion of parishes.

The Church appears as a communion of local churches, spreading throughout the world; and conversely, each local church itself is “a communion of the baptized, gathered together into communities by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of their baptism, for the eucharistic celebration.”²⁶² The idea of the universal Church as a communion of local churches and of the local church as communion of parishes can be analogously adjusted to the grassroots level, especially, when considering communion as an essential principle of the mission and ministry of the Church. Accordingly, a parish can itself be seen as being constituted in and manifesting itself as a communion of small communities in which all the faithful have communion with God by reflecting and sharing the Word of God, have communion among the members themselves, and have communion with the world by proclaiming and living out the Word.

²⁶⁰ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.

²⁶¹ J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, 29.

²⁶² Ibid.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter the various ways the FABC bishops have understood the Church as communion have been described. The bishops' first and most important concern has been the building of truly local churches in Asia, churches which are not cut off from the Asian context. The specific characteristics of the Asian context are identified in two dimensions: poverty and oppression in the economic and socio-political situation, and diversity in the religious and cultural situation.

The bishops highlighted the idea of communion in the life of the Church and developed the idea in terms of liberation, dialogue, and harmony. Amid the dark realities of the Asian context they suggested that the Church cannot be cut off from the world, but should search for the liberation of all in a communion of solidarity. Given the diverse cultural and religious contexts, they argued that true evangelical mission consists not in the injection of the Gospel into cultures or religions, but in a dialogue with cultures, religions, and people. After a critical reflection on local churches in Asia they said that the ideal shape of the Church is "being together" with all the peoples in Asia, in harmony with them.

The idea of communion has led to a new understanding of the Church and the Church's life. There is a transition from the structural emphasis on the hierarchy to the constitutional emphasis on the inner organization of communion. In a Church of communion, the laity do not remain passive agents but take a participative and co-responsible role in the Church through exercising various charisms and ministries. For this task, the FABC bishops suggested a renewal of inner structures based on the principles of collegiality, co-responsibility and communion.

In order to enhance the role of the lay faithful and to manifest various aspects of

communion effectively in the local church and in Asia, the Asian bishops in the Fifth FABC Assembly (1990) suggested the ideal form of the Church in Asia, that is, a communion of communities. Especially in following and accepting the model of South African small Christian communities, the bishops suggested the formation of small Christian communities within parishes. In small Christian communities, according to the Asian bishops, all the faithful can experience communion: communion with God through meditating and reflecting on the Word, communion among the faithful through sharing reflection on the Word and on experiences of the life of faith, communion with all people through proclaiming the Good News to all in liberating solidarity, in a dialogue of life, and in harmony with the local neighborhood.

In response to the FABC documents on SCCs, the bishops of South Korea have encouraged the formation of SCCs within parishes especially in order to promote communion and participation in the local church and to evangelize culture and society. The next chapter will give a presentation and theological evaluation of SCCs in South Korea in light of the FABC documents on the regional level and the teaching of Vatican II and subsequent magisterial teachings regarding the Church on the universal level. It will also describe the way in which parishes are structured into SCCs which enhance and promote communion in the Church pastorally and practically, and analyze how far the structure of a parish as a communion of SCCs is helpful to manifest the vision of the Church as communion effectively in the life of the local church of South Korea.

CHAPTER FOUR

AN EVALUATION OF THE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

IN SOUTH KOREA

In the South Korean Catholic Church, Cardinal Stephen Kim, the Archbishop of Seoul, in accordance with no. 51 of *Redemptoris Missio*, anticipated that SCCs would be “a sign of vitality within the Church, an instrument of formation and evangelization, and a solid starting point for a new society based on a civilization of love.”¹ With this pastoral vision of SCCs, Bishop Peter Kang, one of the most important promoters of SCCs in South Korea, described SCCs as “a fundamental methodology or process in South Korea in order to proceed towards an ideal image of the Church which Vatican II suggested.”²

As discussed in the above chapters, the bishops at the 1985 Extraordinary Synod declared that the central and fundamental idea of the Second Vatican Council’s documents is “the ecclesiology of communion,” and within this perspective they stated that basic communities/small Christian communities are “a true expression of communion and a means

¹ Stephen Cardinal Kim, “1993 사목교서 [1993 Pastoral Letter],” in *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community], ed. Administrative Office for Evangelization (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1995), 77. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 51. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 83 (1991): 298. English Text in *Origins* 20, no. 34 (1991): 541-68.

² Peter Kang, “한국 천주교 소공동체 도입에 대한 성찰 [A Reflection on the Introduction of SCCs in the Korean Catholic Church],” in *2004 소공동체 심포지움 전국모임 후속 자료집* [Additional Sources of the National Meeting of Small Christian Communities in 2004], ed. Administrative Office for Evangelization (Seoul: Administrative Office for Evangelization, 2004), 19.

for the construction of a more profound communion.”³ Reflecting on these statements and highlighting the principles of communion, collegiality, and co-responsibility in the life of the Church, the FABC bishops stated that the formation of small Christian communities “where laity, religious and clergy recognize and accept each other sisters and brothers” was necessary for the Church in Asia.⁴

Accordingly, our concern now turns to the question as to how SCCs in South Korea conform to and manifest both the teaching of Vatican II and subsequent magisterial teaching regarding the Church on the universal level and the teaching of the FABC documents on the regional level. The question is closely related to the title of this dissertation, that is: how are SCCs in South Korea serving an ecclesiology of communion? To answer this question, in part one, this chapter will evaluate SCCs in South Korea with reference to the teaching of the Catholic Church at the universal level regarding communion, and will particularly highlight three dimensions of communion: christological, ecclesial, and evangelical.⁵ In part two, it will then evaluate SCCs in South Korea according to the FABC understanding of communion, namely as liberation, dialogue, and harmony, respectively.⁶ After assessing SCCs in South Korea according to these various aspects of communion, the chapter will discuss in part three the place of SCCs in the hierarchical structure of the Church, considering especially the parish as a communion of SCCs. Finally, in part four, some suggestions will be made for an inculturated ecclesiology of communion in South Korea.

³ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 1 and II. C. 6. Text is in *Origins* 15, no. 27 (1985): 444-50.

⁴ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 287.

⁵ See above, chapter two, pp. 70-72, 85-88, 112-17, 128-31, 133-35.

⁶ See above, chapter three, pp. 168-203.

1. An Evaluation of SCCs in South Korea in Terms of the Triple Dimension of Communion

If the concept of communion is employed as a key to ecclesiology, as the CDF recommends, it must always involve “a double dimension: the *vertical* (communion with God) and the *horizontal* (communion among men).”⁷ When we consider the life of the Church more specifically, the horizontal dimension can be viewed in two ways: communion of the faithful *ad intra* within the inner life of the Church and communion of the faithful *ad extra* in the mission of the Church.

The “Particular Themes” in Part II of the Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod can be read in terms of this triple dimension of communion. Except for the second one, “Sources of Life for the Church,” the other three themes, “The Mystery of the Church,” “The Church as Communion,” “The Mission of the Church in the World,”⁸ respectively, stand for communion with God, communion among the faithful, communion with all. Pope John Paul II’s subsequent apostolic exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, also seems to present the triple dimensions; The Dignity of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mystery (chapter one), The Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Life of Church as Communion (chapter two), The Coresponsibility of the Lay Faithful in the Church as Mission (chapter three).⁹

This threefold approach to communion echoes the first letter of John. “We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship [κοινωνίαν] with

⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” *Origins* 22, no. 7 (1992): 108-12, p.108.

⁸ Cf. The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. See above, chapter two, pp. 101-03.

⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*. More specifically, *Christifideles Laici* relates communion within the Church (communion with God and with the faithful) to mission (communion with all). “The life of Church communion will become a sign for all the world and a compelling force that will lead persons to faith in Christ: ‘that *they may all be one*; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that *they also may be in us*, so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ (Jn 17:21). In such a way *communion leads to mission*, and mission itself to communion.” no. 31. Italics mine.

us; and truly our fellowship [κοινωνία] is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:3-4). From John’s perspective, communion of the faithful with the Father and with the Son flows into communion among the faithful (“our fellowship”), and, through proclamation of this truth to others, communion is open to all people (“fellowship with us”).¹⁰ Accordingly, in this section, the idea of communion in SCCs in South Korea will be analyzed in terms of three dimensions, namely communion with God, communion among the faithful, and communion with all.

1.1 Communion with God – Christological Perspective

As was discussed in the first chapter, the Korean Catholic Church has generally taught that there are four important characteristics of SCCs: a) the faithful gather in their neighborhood apart from the parish building; b) they make Gospel-sharing their spiritual basis; c) they carry out the mission of the Church; and d) they are united with the parish, and so with the universal Church.¹¹ Among these characteristics of SCCs the most important one in South Korea is Gospel-sharing. The participants in SCCs deepen their understanding of the Word through the practice of Gospel-sharing, and this makes the Word truly central to their faith communities. The first book on SCCs in South Korea, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community], explained the characteristic as follows:

The basis of the meeting of the SCC is Gospel-sharing. Gathering itself is not sufficient to become a community. Gospel-sharing is the difference between SCCs and general small meetings. Gospel-sharing is to invite the risen Lord into their lives, to hear his Word directing toward them, and to have a *personal fellowship* with him. Although the Gospel cannot be the sole scriptural material

¹⁰ See above, chapter two, pp. 69-71.

¹¹ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *공동체를 향하여* [Toward Community], 38-41. Also, see above, chapter one, p. 21.

for reflection, since the Gospel is a result of meditation and reflection on Jesus Christ by the early Christians, it is strongly suggested that the sharing begins with the Gospel. ... The basic method of Gospel-sharing is the Seven Step Method.¹²

Vatican II emphasized the importance of Scripture in the life of all the faithful. According to the Council, the Word of God “can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life.” “Scripture verifies in the most perfect way the words: ‘The Word of God is living and active’ (Heb. 4:12).”¹³ From this perspective, the Council strongly exhorted all the Christian faithful to gain “the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures, and it presented various ways:

Let them [all the faithful] go gladly to the sacred text itself, whether in the sacred liturgy, which is full of the divine words, or in devout reading, or in such suitable exercises and various other helps which, with the approval and guidance of the pastors of the Church, are happily spreading everywhere in our day.¹⁴

Most SCCs in South Korea have used the Seven Step Method as a way of Gospel-sharing. The steps are as follows: first step (the prayer for inviting the Lord); second step (reading the Gospel); third step (meditation on the passage); fourth step (hearing in silence); fifth step (sharing meditation or experiences); sixth step (discussion about practice); and seventh step (concluding prayer). In terms of the threefold dimension of communion, the steps can be broadly divided into three: from the first step to the fourth step (members listen to, meditate, and encounter the Word); the fifth step (they bring themselves together as brothers and sisters, sharing their experience with God with one another); the sixth and

¹² Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1995), 26. Italics mine. Later, this book became one of most important books for implementing SCCs in most dioceses in South Korea.

¹³ Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 21.

¹⁴ Ibid., no. 25.

seventh steps (they decide to disseminate the truth of the Gospel to the world and to live out communion with God and with the faithful in the world).¹⁵

In the very first step of this method, the participants invite Jesus personally and warmly into their meeting in a spontaneous prayer. This shows that the group understands itself as a group of believers recognizing the presence of the Risen Lord in their midst. During the meeting the members not only hear the Gospel passage and talk about it, but they meditate on the Gospel within their daily life and reflect upon their life in light of the Gospel. In this way, they experience God's presence among them (cf. Jn 1:14). The aim of Gospel-sharing, therefore, is not to "understand" a text but to "meet" the Lord and to be in contact with him. The participants of Gospel-sharing do not come together to talk about Jesus or to discuss the original meaning of the biblical text. Rather, they gather in order to have communion with Jesus Christ who loves and accepts them.¹⁶

A Christ-centered life thus develops from being a life in which the obligations of sacramental ritual alone are emphasized to being a life in which personal communion with Jesus Christ through meditation on the Gospel is also highlighted. Communion with God is not merely limited to the ritual act of receiving Holy Communion but it is extended to a Christian life centered on the Lord. The faithful certainly have communion with Jesus Christ through the reception of the Eucharist, but they also experience communion in the incarnate Word who is present among them. As *Sacrosanctum Concilium* teaches,

To accomplish so great a work Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. ... He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present

¹⁵ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *사목을 위한 성서의 사용* [*Use of the Bible for Ministry*] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1993), 16-68.

¹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 13.

when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised “where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).¹⁷

The intimate relationship between the Word of God and basic communities/small Christian communities has been consistently emphasized in the teachings of the Church. Pope Paul VI asserted that basic/small communities should seek “their nourishment in the Word of God and ... not allow themselves to be ensnared by political polarization or fashionable ideologies.”¹⁸ Pope John Paul II also said that if the basic/small community is to be Christian it “should be founded on Christ and live in him, as it listens to the word of God.”¹⁹

The Korean Catholic Church has greatly appreciated the Gospel-sharing method in SCCs. A recent survey shows that Gospel-sharing in SCCs is highly regarded for nourishing the spirituality of the lay faithful. A questionnaire was given to the SCC lay leaders in the Seoul Archdiocese. To the question: “By attending the meeting of the SCC, what is most helpful for your spiritual development?” 47.9% of the participants answered: “I am making an effort to live my life in light of the Gospel more and more,” and 14.7% of the participants answered: “I realize that the Gospel is not an old-fashioned and boring book, so I am frequently reading and meditating the Gospel not only in the meeting but also privately.”²⁰ Fr. WollKi Chung, one of the vigorous promoters of SCCs in the Seoul Archdiocese, highly praises Gospel-sharing as one of successful results of SCCs:

¹⁷ Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 7.

¹⁸ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58. English text in Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World: Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference, 1976).

¹⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 51.

²⁰ Cf. The Integral Pastoral Institute, *소공동체 현황과 과제: 천주교 서울대교구 구역, 반장 신앙생활 실태조사 연구 보고서* [*The Present State and Task of Small Christian Communities: A Survey Report on the Faith Life of the SCCs Leaders in the Archdiocese of Seoul*] (Seoul: The Integral Pastoral Institute, 2005), 70-71.

As a result of continuously following the Seven Step Method, Gospel-sharing is basic to most SCCs and the Word of God gradually becomes a foundation of Christian life. Gospel-sharing plays a crucial role in what characterizes and identifies SCCs.²¹

Communion with Jesus Christ in the Gospel-sharing method does not confine itself to the communion of the faithful with the Son alone but has a Trinitarian dimension.²² To illuminate one's life and situations in light of the Gospel does not mean having a personal relationship with Christ alone in confessing him as one's Lord, but it also implies that one can experience the love of God the Father and feel the fruitful activity of the Holy Spirit in life. As Vatican II teaches, following St. Paul, Christ is "the image of the invisible God,"²³ so that believers might "have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father (cf. Eph. 2:18)."²⁴ In accordance with this teaching, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "the whole Christian life is a communion with each of the divine persons, without in any way separating them. ... Everyone who follows Christ does so because the Father draws him and

²¹ WollKi Chung, "한국 교회 소공동체 사목 추진과정 [The Pastoral Process Involved in the Promotion of the Small Christian Community (SCC) in the Korean Catholic Church]," in 2004 소공동체 심포지움 전국모임 후속 자료집 [Additional Sources of the National Meeting of Small Christian Communities in 2004], ed. Administrative Office for Evangelization (Seoul: Administrative Office for Evangelization, 2004), 105-06. For further evaluation on Gospel-sharing in SCCs, see Dongyeop Cha, "복음나누기와 소공동체 운영원리 [Gospel-Sharing and the Operating Principle of Small Christian Communities]," in 2005년 소공동체 봉사자 전문교육 1 단계 [The First Step of Professional Education for the Small Christian Community Leaders] ed. The National Committee for Small Christian Communities (TaeJön: The National Committee for Small Christian Communities, 2005), 28-45; Hyesuk Ryoo, "친교의 공동체 실현을 위한 현안과제와 전망 [The Task and Perspective for Accomplishment of the Church as Communion]," 사목 [Ministry] 320 (2005): 74; Yoonchol Kang, "21세기를 준비하는 본당 소공동체 운동의 전망 [A Perspective of Small Christian Communities in Preparation for the 21st Century]," 사목 [Ministry] 228 (1998):55-56.

²² "The communion of Christians with Jesus has the communion of God as Trinity, namely, the unity of the Son to the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit, as its model and source, and is itself the means to achieve this communion: united to the Son in the Spirit's bond of love, Christians are united to the Father." John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 18.

²³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 7. Cf. Col 1:15.

²⁴ Ibid., no. 4. In particular, the role of the Holy Spirit in the communion of the Church is emphasized: "Guiding the Church in the way of all truth and unifying her in communion [*in communione*] and in the works of ministry, he [the Holy Spirit] bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and in this way directs her." Consequently, the Church is described in the Trinitarian viewpoint as "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Ibid.

the Spirit moves him.”²⁵ The faithful, through communion with Jesus Christ, the sacrament of God, have communion with the triune God. And so it is that SCCs in South Korea are places where Christians have communion with God through the Word in the Holy Spirit.

1.2 Communion among the Faithful – Ecclesial Perspective

Another characteristic of SCCs in South Korea is that the faithful gather in their neighborhood away from the parish building. In SCCs, the faithful are gathered around the Gospel, the Word of God.²⁶ In other words, God calls them to a community which is based on the Gospel, and it is in that community that the members have personal communion with the Lord through Gospel meditation. SCCs consist of lay faithful of diverse ages, characteristics, and gifts, and they have fellowship among themselves in SCCs through sharing not only Gospel meditation but also the experience of faith in their lives, even in the most temporal aspects. SCCs in South Korea consist of 15 families or less and their monthly meetings are usually held in members’ homes in rotation.²⁷ This enables SCC members not only to know each other better but also to participate more actively and to establish friendlier and more spiritual relationships.

As Vatican II states, God calls men “not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve

²⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 259.

²⁶ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1995), 25.

²⁷ While it is suggested that the SCC meetings be held once a week, a survey of SCCs shows that the meeting is generally held once a month: once a week (6.4%); every other week (18.6%); once a month (68.8%). Cf. The Integral Pastoral Institute, *소공동체 현황과 과제: 천주교 서울대교구 구역, 반장 신앙생활 실태조사 연구 보고서* [The Present State and Task of Small Christian Communities: A Survey Report on the Faith Life of the SCCs Leaders in the Archdiocese of Seoul], 65-69.

him in holiness.”²⁸ The faithful do not remain alone but live in community, as the one People of God. However, God does not give people a single personality or a single characteristic; rather, he endows them with various personalities and specific gifts within the community. “As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also are the faithful in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). Also, in the building up of Christ’s body there is engaged a diversity of members and functions.”²⁹

The relationship among all the faithful in the Church can be seen as one of communion: “All the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit.”³⁰ Furthermore, in the communion of the Church, “each part contributes its own gifts to other parts and to the whole Church, so that the whole and each of the parts are strengthened by the common sharing of all things and by the common effort to attain to fullness in unity.”³¹ With such an understanding we might say that the lay faithful in South Korea, through sharing Gospel meditation, the experience of faith in their life, and even material goods (cf. Acts 4:32), live out the idea of the Church as communion in their SCC meetings and in their inter-related life, this idea being “the foundation for a correct relationship between unity and pluriformity in the Church.”³²

More specifically and practically, effective sharing in SCCs is encouraged by the Seven Step Method of Gospel-sharing. The fifth step of the Method is “the sharing with each other what the members have heard in their hearts.” In this step, the members share with one

²⁸ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

²⁹ Ibid., no. 7. Cf. St. Paul: “for as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Rom 12:5).

³⁰ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13.

³¹ Ibid.

³² The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 1.

another their faith experience and help each other to grow in the faith.³³ “Sharing” is highlighted in the meetings of SCCs. The foundation for the theological understanding of sharing lies in God’s self-revelation to human beings.

God is revealed by sharing Himself with us. The mystery of the incarnation is a perfect sharing and a self-offering of God. Jesus’ whole life, from nativity to death, is to share his life with us and to offer himself for us. The self-sharing of Jesus has a summit in the Last Supper in which he gives his body and blood (cf. Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20). ... Thus, Gospel-sharing is not just a skill or technique for close relationship among the members; instead, theologically it is strongly based on the Scripture.³⁴

An aim of Gospel-sharing is to discover the Word of God among many other voices.³⁵ If a member thinks only of his/her own meditation on the Gospel, he/she is in danger of hearing only the voice of his/her own desires. Instead, by sharing with others how he or she encounters God’s Word, each becomes open to the others and shares some of their faith experience. Gospel-sharing also enables the members to open their eyes to see how God leads each one of them. When they listen to and sympathize with others’ experiences in the faith, they realize God’s work within others and praise him for what he does in many people and in many ways.

In SCCs, communion with Jesus Christ in Gospel meditation leads to communion among the members in Christ by the way of Gospel-sharing. Communion here implies not only the personal encounter and unity between God and a Christian but also the sharing of the Gospel and of life within the fellowship of other members of the SCC. Among the

³³ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *사목을 위한 성서의 사용* [Use of the Bible for Ministry] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1993), 27-32.

³⁴ YoonChol Kang, “복음나누기 프로그램 [Gospel-Sharing Program],” in *2005년도 소공동체 기초교육* [A Preliminary Education on Small Christian Community in 2005] ed. The National Committee for Small Christian Communities (Taejon: The National Committee for Small Christian Communities, 2005), 200.

³⁵ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체란 무엇인가?* [What is the Small Christian Community?] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1997), 12.

faithful in SCCs in South Korea, in the words of St. Paul, communion with the Lord becomes “*koinonia* of faith [κοινωνία της πίστεώς]” (Philem 1:6), and “*koinonia* in the Gospel [κοινωνία εἰς το εὐαγγέλιον]” (Phil 1:5).

Following St. Paul, Vatican II describes the Church as the Body of Christ. Christ, the head of the body, “mystically constitutes as his body those brothers of his who are called together from every nation.” “Through baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ: ‘For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body’ (1 Cor 12:13).” Through participation in the Eucharist, they share in the Body of the Lord and are “taken up into communion with him and with one another.”³⁶ In SCCs, even though the Eucharist is not celebrated, Christ, as the mystery of the Word, is central, and he plays a crucial role in uniting the members in a true Christian community. The baptized who gather in SCCs, coming together around the Word, participate in the mystery of the Word, and build up the one body in which all the faithful are united with Christ as their head, and are nourished and held together from Christ (cf. Col 2:19). Communion which is clearly manifested in the Eucharist can thus be analogically expressed in SCCs. Through Gospel-sharing, the members constitute one body in Christ. In this sense, we might say that the mystery of the body of Christ is manifested and expressed in SCCs through communion among the faithful who are centered on the Word, namely Christ.

An important role of SCCs in South Korea, which has been emphasized from their inception, is the activation of the apostolate of the laity. As discussed in the first chapter, most bishops in South Korea have acknowledged that the lay faithful, especially in huge parishes, generally do not participate in the lay apostolate voluntarily and actively. In light of

³⁶ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 7.

this, the bishops feel the need for a sub-structure within the parish where the parishioners no longer remain passive objects in the Church but where they exercise their apostolic responsibilities more actively.³⁷ For instance, Paul Choi, Bishop of the Suwon Diocese, described SCCs as a place where all the faithful can participate in the Church not as assistants but as subjects. He said that one of essential tasks for the present and future Church in South Korea is to provide a pastoral structure in which the lay faithful actively participate in the Church as subjects and that this task can be implemented in SCCs.³⁸ An activation of the apostolate of the laity through SCCs has been generally acknowledged. For instance, eight years later, Fr. Dongyeop Cha assessed that “encouragement of the apostolate of the laity through SCCs has been appropriate and successful in promoting the correct identity and active mission activity of the laity, which is proposed in the ecclesiology of the People of God.”³⁹

In this regard, the characteristic point of basic ecclesial communities (BECs) in Latin America is somewhat different from that of SCCs in South Korea. BECs in Latin America have had special concern for critical reflection on the institution of the Church. According to Leonardo Boff, “through the latter centuries, the Church has acquired an organizational form with a heavily hierarchical framework and a juridical understanding of relationships among Christians” and thus “in reaction, the basic church communities have

³⁷ See above, chapter one, p. 23-26.

³⁸ Cf. Paul Deokgee Choi, “반모임- 교회상을 지향하는 교회론적 접근 [An Ecclesiological Approach toward Ban Gatherings],” *신학과 사상* [Theology and Thought] 9 (1993): 30-31.

³⁹ Dongyeop Cha, *공동체 사목 기초: 소공동체 원리와 방법* [The Foundation of Ministry for the Church Community: The Principles and Methods of Small Christian Communities] (Seoul: Catholic Publishing Company, 2001), 170. Cf. Mingoo Yoon, “한국천주교회 소공동체 운동 [Small Christian Communities in the Korean Catholic Church],” *사목* [Ministry] 339 (2007): 63.

sprung up.”⁴⁰

Owing to the scarcity of ordained priests and a negative critique of the existing ecclesial structure, BECs in Latin America seem to over-emphasize the idea of communities made up only of the lay faithful. As a result, there is not enough reflection on the specific identity and role of the laity, especially in terms of the relationship among all the faithful in the Church and of the faithful with clergy. Instead, there are two opposite or conflicting axes: a sacramental, clerical axis verse an axis of the Word and the laity. According to Boff,

Although the great majority of basic church communities owe their origin to a priest or a member of a religious order, they nevertheless basically constitute a lay movement. ... We are not dealing with the expansion of an existing ecclesiastical system, rotating on a sacramental, clerical axis, but with the emergence of another form of being Church, rotating on the axis of the Word and the laity.⁴¹

Basic ecclesial communities/small Christian communities are indeed basically constituted of lay faithful, and they mostly depend on lay involvement. The more important point, however, is not to build an exclusive Christian structure in which only the lay faithful gather and play a crucial role, but to have Christian communities in which the principle of co-responsibility and participation is manifested in the inter-relationship among all the faithful without any exclusion of Church members. The lay faithful must participate in the life of the Church more actively without undervaluing the role of other members of the Church. As Vatican II teaches, all the faithful according to their proper roles should cooperate with one mind in the entire salvific mission of the Church toward the world.⁴² “In their diversity all bear witness to the wonderful unity in the Body of Christ. This very

⁴⁰ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴² Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 30.

diversity of graces, ministries and works gathers the children of God into one.”⁴³

In this regard, we might say that SCCs in South Korea are more balanced and more in line with the vocation and mission of the lay faithful than BECs in Latin America. While the latter mostly focus on a certain reformed community life in which only the laity participate, the former emphasize an activation of the apostolate of the laity in the Church through SCCs and take into consideration their relationship with other members of the Church, including clergy. Simply building or developing BECs/SCCs, however, cannot be the aim of the Church’s ministry and mission. Rather, the communities should be considered as an effective means for encouraging the participation or fellowship of the laity in the Church.

In SCCs in South Korea, through the sharing of Gospel meditation, faith experience, and material goods with one another, the various members experience communion among themselves. There is “a bond of close communion [*communio*],” in which “spiritual riches” and “temporal resources” are shared.⁴⁴ In this sense, SCCs in South Korea might be called truly Christian communities which are nourished by the Word and constituted by the Holy Spirit “as a communion [*in communionem*] of life, love and truth.”⁴⁵ In short, SCCs in South Korea can be regarded as places where the laity are better able to live out the life of communion and to fulfill their apostolate according to the principles of participation and co-responsibility.

⁴³ Ibid., no. 32.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ibid., no. 13, where the Council particularly refers to a communal sharing between different parts of the Church.

⁴⁵ Ibid., no. 9.

1.3 Communion with All – Evangelical (Missiological) Perspective

The third characteristic of SCCs in South Korea is that they carry out their mission activity within the neighborhood.

Gospel-sharing with one another in SCCs is not only for the members. Just as Jesus himself goes toward, meets, and heals those who are alienated, poor, and sick, the members of SCCs are called to put into practice God's love in their neighborhood. Through this activity, the community encounters the world and is able to transform the world by the power of God's love.⁴⁶

The missionary activity of SCCs is expressed and encouraged especially in the Gospel-sharing method, the Seven Step Method. From the first step to the fifth step of the procedure, the members of SCCs experience the Lord among them and an intimate fellowship with one another. In the sixth step, the members of SCCs discuss urgent and common problems and decide on common action to solve the problems. In practice, we cannot consider Gospel-sharing in SCCs as one thing and service to one's neighbor as another. Rather, reflection on the Scriptures in SCCs is seen as an aid to the faithful so that they "can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love" to their neighbors.⁴⁷ Service to people in the neighborhood is nothing other than a concrete living out of the Gospel. This characteristic of SCCs has been consistently emphasized by the promoters of SCCs in South Korea:

SCCs without a missionary activity cannot become authentic SCCs. When the members work together, the community is activated and grown up. The unity of the members can be achieved by Gospel-sharing and fellowship (communion) among them. More than that, it is better strengthened when they work together for the common wealth of the local society and for those neighbors who need help.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community], 26-27.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 26.

⁴⁸ YoonChol Kang, "복음나누기 프로그램 [Gospel-Sharing Program]," in *2005년도 소공동체*

SCCs in South Korea have been highly respected for the activities of the members in their neighborhoods. They readily offer service to their neighbors both Christian and non-Christian who need help in various ways: caring for the old, visiting the sick, helping the poor, and assisting at events such as weddings and funerals.⁴⁹ These activities are not trivial things for Christians. Rather, they are among the crucial mission activities of the lay faithful, because the activities imply the practice of God's love very concretely and practically in their place of life (*Sitz im Leben*).

This characteristic of service has been strongly encouraged by the FABC bishops:

We need to listen to Christ as the Word, in the Scriptures and in the Church, but we need also to listen to the Word in persons and in events, in the ebb and flow of life; to listen to the poor and the needy and to reach out to them as Jesus did, for they are the least of his brethren.⁵⁰

Pope John Paul II states, "to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ."⁵¹ These activities are certainly involved in the mission of the Church as described by Vatican II: the Church "has been sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the *love of God* to all men and to all peoples."⁵²

In sharing and discussing their lives in the light of the Gospel, Christians in SCCs

기초교육 [A Preliminary Education on Small Christian Community in 2005], ed. National Committee for Small Christian Communities, 204-05.

⁴⁹ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1995), 37; Hyesuk Ryoo, "친교의 공동체 실현을 위한 현안과제와 전망 [The Task and Perspective for Accomplishment of the Church as Communion]," in *소공동체 현황과 과제* [The Present State and Task of Small Christian Communities], ed. The Integral Pastoral Institute, 279-80.

⁵⁰ "Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 196.

⁵¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 17.

⁵² Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 10. Italics mine. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 31.

discover a more evangelical way of life among their neighbors and accomplish their call to communion with God and with their fellow human beings. The proclamation of the Good News cannot be confined only to announcing the message to non-believers. Rather, the Good News is better proclaimed when the faithful spread the light of Christ to neighbors by living out God's love. As Pope Paul VI says, "evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social," since "evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realized."⁵³ This is especially appropriate, since the meetings of SCCs are held not in parish buildings but in the actual places where people live, that is, in each others' homes. The Gospel message is reflected upon, accepted, and proclaimed, not apart from their actual conditions or situations but always in the context of their lives. From this perspective, we might say that SCCs in South Korea are truly "outposts of evangelization" of the Church, where evangelization of the neighborhood is effectively accomplished.

A survey of the mission activity of SCCs, however, shows that SCCs in the Archdiocese of Seoul are somewhat lacking in autonomous activity of the lay faithful. According to the statistics on mission activity for neighbors, 30.8% of the SCC lay leaders in the Seoul Archdiocese answered: "it generally depends on the guidance of the pastor;" 19.8% of the participants answered: "there is no autonomous plan of common activity;" 15.3% of the participants answered: "while there is a plan of common work, the plan is not activated." Only 29.3% of the participants answered: "we make a plan of our own accord

⁵³ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 29.

and carry out the plan.”⁵⁴ It seems therefore that the mission activity of the members mainly depends on the guidance of their pastor and that activity is rarely planned simply according to the needs they see.

One of main reasons for this might be that SCCs in South Korea have been implemented under the guidance and strong pastoral exhortation of the local bishop. In the process of building up SCCs, many pastors tried to force their parishioners to attend SCCs and to share the Gospel through the Seven Step Method in the meeting without adequate consultation and dialogue with the lay faithful who become the actual members of the SCCs. This “top-down” strategy in implementing SCCs has often resulted in a passive attitude of the members toward common work and their over-dependence on the pastor.

While the common activity of mission in SCCs can be characterized often as passively accepted or as overly dependent on the pastor, this does not mean that the importance of mission activity of SCCs should be dismissed. As discussed in the first chapter, the purpose of building SCCs in South Korea was precisely to foster evangelization. In fact, in the SCCs of South Korea, one way in which the missiological role is strongly highlighted is in the process of preparation for baptism, namely in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). In many dioceses, SCCs function as a school in the Church where inquirers, candidates, and catechumens can learn not only the doctrine of the Church but also the practice of Christian life in the Church and in the world.

⁵⁴ The Integral Pastoral Institute, *소공동체 현황과 과제: 천주교 서울대교구 구역, 반장 신앙생활 실태조사 연구 보고서* [*The Present State and Task of Small Christian Communities: A Survey Report on the Faith Life of the SCCs Leaders in the Archdiocese of Seoul*], 221. While this survey is limited to the Archdiocese of Seoul, most SCCs in South Korea have been similarly evaluated. Cf. Deukgil Yoon, *소공동체 운동 해야하나?: 21세기 한국 천주교회의 나아갈 길* [*Why Should We Have the Movement of Small Christian Communities?: The Future of the Korean Catholic Church in 21st Century*], (Seoul: The Catholic Faith Life Institute, 1995), 69-72.

According to a special guidebook for catechumens, *함께 하는 여정* [*On a Journey Together*], SCCs should not remain only as a communion of Catholics, but they should be open to catechumens.⁵⁵ It is strongly recommended that catechumens be invited and incorporated into SCCs where they can experience in advance of baptism both communion with the Word of the Lord and communion among the members. The Archdiocese of Seoul describes the relationship between catechumens and the lay faithful and their respective roles:

The Archdiocese of Seoul decided to form SCCs in which the catechumens and the lay faithful meet together and help or encourage each other in the journey of faith. In this form of SCCs, the catechumens can experience the family of God by attending SCCs in advance. The catechumens who are brought into SCCs are able to learn and experience the example of faith which is rooted in the Christian life. The participants of SCCs lead the catechumens to an encounter with God who is among us, through Gospel meditation, Gospel-sharing, and the practice of love to neighbors. And then, after the catechumens are baptized, the members of SCCs take care of them so that they may be more faithful and live out the Gospel in their life.⁵⁶

The process of learning the catechism through SCCs can be considered a paradigm shift in terms of mission activity. In the Church of South Korea, catechism classes had been generally held in the parish building, and only priests, sisters, or a few catechists taught the doctrine of the Church. Only a few Christians thus were regarded as persons responsible for

⁵⁵ Cf. Immanuela Kim, “소공동체 교리교육: 함께 하는 여정 [Catechism in Small Christian Communities: On a Journey Together,” in *2005년도 소공동체 기초교육* [*A Preliminary Education on Small Christian Community in 2005*] ed. National Committee for Small Christian Communities, 274-77. See above, chapter one, p. 44.

⁵⁶ Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [*A Guide for the Small Christian Community*] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1995), 49. Besides the role of SCCs for the catechumens, the Archdiocese proposed that the way of catechism should be changed from a one-way teaching of the catechist to a dialogical way among the catechist and the catechumens, and to a way centered on the Word such as the Gospel-sharing method in SCCs. The program of the meeting of catechumens thus consists of: 1) Introduction, 2) Opening Prayer, 3) Story of Life, 4) Gospel Sharing, 5) Adaptation of the Word in the Life, 6) Questions and Answers, 7) Concluding Prayer. Cf. Immanuela Kim, “소공동체 교리교육: 함께 하는 여정 [Catechism in Small Christian Communities: On a Journey Together],” 283-89.

catechumens. However, after the formation of SCCs where the lay faithful and the catechumens attend together, the members of SCCs become aware of their own relationship to catechumens in terms of the mission of the Church. Mission activity of the Church, the calling to promote unity of communion with God and among all men,⁵⁷ cannot be understood as an exclusive prerogative of the clergy or the religious. The laity, even when engaged in temporal affairs, can, and must, do significant work for the evangelization of the world.⁵⁸ In SCCs in South Korea, the lay faithful play the role of active agents of mission through sharing their faith experience and their Gospel meditation with catechumens in their neighborhood. The catechumens who are invited into the communion of the faithful can thereby feel and experience the unity of the People of God in advance.⁵⁹

In conclusion, SCCs are not just communities in which the members share Gospel meditation with each other. They are communities in which the lay faithful read the Good News, share the Good News, and carry out the Good News in their neighborhood. Especially through meditation on the Gospel in their own context and in service to their neighbors, the participants in SCCs recognize themselves as evangelizers proclaiming the good news to others and through this process they are themselves evangelized. Pope John Paul II has spoken of this double aspect:

In both accepting and proclaiming the Gospel in the power of the Spirit the Church becomes at one and the same time an “evangelizing and evangelized” community, and for this very reason she is made the servant of all. In her the lay faithful participate in the mission of service to the person and society.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 35.

⁵⁹ The relationship between the faithful and catechumens in SCCs has an echo from the first letter of John. In the perspective of John, to join in the Christian community means to be already in *koinonia* with the Christians, and to participate in *koinonia* with the Father and with his Son. See above, chapter two, pp. 70-72.

⁶⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 36. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 15.

Since the lay faithful in SCCs live communion among themselves in the faith (and are thus evangelized), and live out communion in the neighborhood in accordance with the truth of Gospel (and are thus evangelizing), SCCs in South Korea can be called living communities or “centers of evangelization,”⁶¹ and instruments “for the salvation of all.”⁶²

It is appropriate finally to examine them in light of the seven criteria which Pope Paul VI highlighted in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,⁶³ when he emphasized that SCCs should be both evangelized and evangelizing, and that, in order for small communities to be truly ecclesial entities and to be a hope for the universal Church, they should fulfill certain conditions.

First, ecclesial communities should “seek their nourishment in the Word of God and ... not allow themselves to be ensnared by political polarization or fashionable ideologies, which are ready to exploit their immense human potential.”⁶⁴ A characteristic of SCCs in South Korea is that emphasis is placed on the ecclesial aspect, especially with regard to evangelization, not on politics. Also, Gospel-sharing (the Seven Step Method) is the starting point for SCCs in South Korea, and this nurtures the spirituality of SCCs and the vision of an ecclesial communion.

Second, ecclesial communities should “avoid the ever present temptation of systematic protest and a hypercritical attitude, under the pretext of authenticity and a spirit of collaboration.”⁶⁵ SCCs in South Korea have never presented any systematic objection or

⁶¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, no. 26.

⁶² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

⁶³ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 58. Also, see above, chapter two, pp. 120-21.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

a hypercritical attitude to the Church or to the world. In fact, SCCs have never acted as a critical group against the Church, but have remained as ecclesial communities within the Church.

Third, ecclesial communities should “remain firmly attached to the local Church in which they are inserted, and to the universal Church, thus avoiding the very real danger of becoming isolated within themselves, then of believing themselves to be the only authentic Church of Christ, and hence of condemning the other ecclesial communities.”⁶⁶ In this regard, SCCs in South Korea take a positive view of the hierarchy. SCCs never neglect or act as a substitute for the parish but rather relate intimately with the parish.

Fourth, ecclesial communities should “maintain a sincere communion with the pastors whom the Lord gives to his Church, and with the magisterium which the Spirit of Christ has entrusted to these pastors.”⁶⁷ SCCs in South Korea, as discussed above, grew out of Ban Gatherings which had been organized as an efficient administrative structure “for pastors.” Because Ban Gatherings were converted to SCCs, the underlying structure remains, and this background affects SCCs so that they strongly desire to be in communion with the pastor.

Fifth, ecclesial communities should “never look on themselves as the sole beneficiaries or sole agents of evangelization - or even the only depositaries of the Gospel - but, being aware that the Church is much more vast and diversified, accept the fact that this Church becomes incarnate in other ways than through themselves.”⁶⁸ SCCs in South Korea do not consider that they are the exclusive agents of evangelization with special charismatic

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

qualities. In fact, in the Korean Catholic Church the lay faithful take part in various lay-apostolate groups such as the Legion of Mary, Marriage Encounter, Movement for a Better World, and Cursillo. SCCs do not minimize the mission activity of these groups. Rather, many lay faithful participate in SCCs while at the same time they attend one or two of these groups.

Sixth, ecclesial communities should “constantly grow in missionary consciousness, fervor, commitment and zeal.”⁶⁹ SCCs in South Korea encourage the members to live the Gospel in a spirit of fraternal love and service and to carry out their mission in the world. In fact, members of each SCC accomplish missionary action through practicing love of neighbor, meeting with lapsed Catholics, and helping catechumens to experience their faith more deeply.

Seventh, ecclesial communities should “show themselves to be universal in all things and never sectarian.”⁷⁰ Since SCCs in South Korea were implemented by a pastoral plan from above, there is little possibility of their becoming a sect within the parish or the local Church. Each SCC is managed and operated with the help of guidelines issued by the diocese.

SCCs in South Korea certainly adhere, therefore, to the criteria established by Pope Paul VI and can truly be called ecclesial communities. SCCs, where people hear the Gospel and at the same time proclaim it, are indeed places of “evangelization,” and thus “a hope for the universal Church.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

2. An Evaluation of SCCs in South Korea According to the Further Understanding of Communion by the FABC

As discussed in the first chapter, SCCs in South Korea have been formed in accordance with the suggestion of the FABC, especially the Fifth FABC Assembly (1990) where the Asian bishops declared that the Church in Asia must become a communion of communities and a participatory Church through the establishment of SCCs. After attending this Assembly, Bishop Peter Kang, then an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Seoul, suggested the formation of SCCs as a key task for the Catholic Church in South Korea.⁷²

SCCs in South Korea are very much indebted to the FABC's understanding of communion. In order to evaluate the role and success of SCCs in South Korea, we must discuss now how far the ecclesiology of communion employed by the FABC is actualized in SCCs in South Korea. As was discussed in the third chapter, the Asian bishops in the FABC have described communion as liberation, as dialogue, and as harmony.⁷³ In this section, communion in SCCs in South Korea will be analyzed according to these three aspects: liberation, dialogue, and harmony.

2.1 Communion as Liberation

From their reflections on the economic and socio-political situations in Asia, the FABC bishops employed the idea of communion as "liberation" in the local churches in Asia and stated that "we need to rediscover Jesus Christ as the Liberator of Asia, and his Church

⁷² See above, chapter one, pp. 8-13.

⁷³ See above, chapter three, pp. 168-203.

as the servant and instrument of that liberation.”⁷⁴ The bishops especially highlighted the Church’s liberating activity for the poor, which means sharing life with them and walking together with them in their search for authentic humanity in Christ Jesus.⁷⁵ From this perspective, the bishops suggested that the Church in Asia, through the preaching of the Good News to the poor, should carry out its missionary activity of liberation, which is part of an integral “search for human development, for justice, brotherhood and peace.”⁷⁶

With regard to communion as liberation, however, the Catholic Church in South Korea is not free from criticism, because the idea of liberative communion is not fully emphasized and carried out. In fact, since the Korean War (1950-1953), South Korea has achieved rapid economic development in industrialization and urbanization. As a by-product of this rapid growth, however, a huge gap between the rich and the poor has developed, and as time passes this gap is widening because of the unfair distribution of economic wealth. Currently in South Korea this problem is one of the main issues of social justice. In this situation, the Church, unfortunately, does not seem to be a Church that expresses “its solidarity with and respectful affection for the whole human family”⁷⁷ or a Church that takes seriously “the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.”⁷⁸ Rather, the Church in South Korea is often criticized as being for the middle classes with little interest in the poor or in national issues.⁷⁹ This passive

⁷⁴ “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 191.

⁷⁵ Cf. International Congress on Mission, “The Gospel, the Kingdom of God, Liberation and Development,” (1979) in *FAPA* vol.1, 144; “Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 15.

⁷⁶ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 16.

⁷⁷ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

⁷⁹ Cf. Soongyong Kwak, “한국천주교회 사목과 제2차 바티칸공의회: 교회와 사목의 진단과 친교 교회로서의 대안 조명 [Ministry in the Korean Catholic Church and the Second Vatican Council:

attitude of the Church toward social justice and political issues has had a direct affect on the social action of SCCs.

SCCs in South Korea are not so much concerned with political reformation or social justice as with religious and charitable matters. Common activities in SCCs in South Korea, as discussed above, consist of visiting the sick, meeting with lapsed Catholics, and assisting people in financial need rather than in narrowing the gap between the wealthy and the poor, searching for the common good, and eradicating social evil. This trend seems to result from the fact that Catholics in South Korea come mainly from the middle class or at least the Catholics so regard themselves. Also, in the Korean Catholic Church, the laity chiefly pursue religious consolation or personal happiness in the Church and the clergy have a conservative attitude toward social reform.

Fr. Kiwoo Lee, chairman of the Committee of Pastoral Ministry for the Poor in the Archdiocese of Seoul, believes that the idea of a “preferential option for the poor” has not been fully emphasized in SCCs:

In the procedure of evangelization through SCCs, the Archdiocese of Seoul not only underestimated the privileged status of the poor for the mission of the Church but also, without any pastoral policies for the poor, treated SCCs merely as a means for activation of the parish community “whose core was empty and whose shell was thick.” ... In the matter of evangelization for the poor in SCCs, the Archdiocese had just a vague anticipation that if SCCs were activated and successfully established, the members of SCCs automatically might have a concern for the poor neighbors. The archdiocese did not offer any plans or guidelines for the evangelization of the poor.⁸⁰

Diagnosis of Ministry in the Perspective of an Ecclesiology of Communion],” in *한국그리스도사상* [Christianity in Korea] no. 13 (Seoul: Institute of Christianity in Korea, 2005) 18-54; Sangtae Shim, *제삼천년기와 한국교회의 새 복음화* [The Third Millennium and New Evangelization of the Korean Catholic Church] (Seoul: Institute of Christianity in Korea, 2004) 43-64; Jemin Lee, *교회는 누구인가? 사목적 교회를 위하여 교회의 사목을 위하여* [Who is the Church? Towards a Ministerial Church and a Ministry of the Church] (Waegan, Korea: St. Benedict Publisher, 2001) 375-91.

⁸⁰ Kiwoo Lee, “The Evangelization of the Poor and SCCs,” 129. For the necessity of SCCs which was described in the pastoral policy of the Archdiocese of Seoul, cf. Stephen Cardinal Kim, “1992 사목교서

While SCCs in Latin America show a special concern or preferential option for the poor,⁸¹ SCCs in South Korea, on the other hand, do not pay much attention to liberation of the poor or the reform of unjust structures in society. Rather than working together for “the promotion of true human development and liberation”⁸² in society, the members of SCCs in South Korea have mainly searched for a personal or communal practice of God’s charity in their neighborhood and a more direct mission activity that leads neighbors to the Christian community.

Another reason why SCCs in South Korea have not fully responded to the idea of communion as liberation arises from the method of Gospel-sharing itself, that is, the Seven Step Method. In the meeting of SCCs, the members normally select a passage from the Gospel to read, often the Gospel of the coming Sunday, rather than selecting a text which might be more appropriate for their everyday situation. This practice obviously enables the lay faithful who attend SCC meetings to participate more actively at Mass the following Sunday because they are acquainted with the Gospel passage. However, in this way very specific problems for them or for their neighbors are not the starting point for reflection and it is difficult to connect the meditation on the Gospel with their specific problems or with unjust situations in society.⁸³

[1992 Pastoral Letter],” in *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community], ed. Administrative Office for Evangelization (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1995), 66.

⁸¹ For instance, the Latin American bishops in Puebla, emphasizing that “when we draw near to the poor in order to accompany them and serve them, we are doing what Christ taught us to do when he became our brother, poor like us,” asserted that “commitment to the poor and oppressed and the rise of ‘grassroots communities’ have helped the Church to discover the evangelization potential of the poor.” “The Final Document of the Third General Conference: Evangelization in Latin America’s Present and Future,” in *Puebla and Beyond: Documentation and Commentary* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 265.

⁸² “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 16.

⁸³ Cf. Oswald Hirmer, *Gospel-Sharing: Why are There Four Different Ways of Gospel-Sharing*, http://www.tarsus.ie/Site_5/MAYNOOTH_files/Gospel-sharing%2520handouts.pdf (accessed July 10, 2010).

The Archdiocese of Seoul has already acknowledged this danger and has introduced new and different methods of Gospel-sharing in SCCs:

The communities can sometimes follow the other method, that is: they first analyze the local situation in great detail, only then do they turn to the scriptures, selecting passages of the bible which refer specifically to the main problems of the local situation. In this way the communities deal for a longer time with the main problems of the situation, and base their sharing and their reflections again and again on the same problem, reading various texts about the same topic, viewing it from different angles.⁸⁴

In fact, the Administrative Office for Evangelization introduced various ways and methods such as “the Group Response,” “the Look-Listen-Love method,” “the Life-Bible-Notes,” and “the Amos Programs.” The Group Response method does not suggest personal sharing but asks the questions: “Which problem of our own lives is reflected in our biblical text?” The participants ask themselves which problems or situations in their locality are reflected in this particular biblical text. They try to see this situation with the eyes of God and thus in a special way use their prophetic gift. The Look-Listen-Love method invites the members of the group to relate a daily life experience which the group helps to reflect on in the light of “God’s view.” The Life-Bible-Notes method begins with a social situation, and then suitable Bible texts are used in communities. The Amos Program offers a pattern of analysis of social problems, how to confront them with the demands of the Gospel, and how to search for root causes of these problems.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, while introducing these “reverse” ways of Gospel-sharing to accompany with the Seven Step Method, the Archdiocese certainly expressed a preference

⁸⁴ Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체란 무엇인가?* [What is the Small Christian Community?] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1997), 14-15.

⁸⁵ Cf. Administrative Office for Evangelization, *사목을 위한 성서의 사용* [Use of the Bible for Ministry] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1993), 16-68.

for the Seven Step Method and very clearly described the danger of the reverse way of Gospel-sharing as follows: “in that way we might select only those passages of scripture which suit our wishes and would in this way fail to hear God’s Word for us today.”⁸⁶ Accordingly, in SCCs in South Korea, the Seven Step Method has consistently been the basis for Gospel-sharing in SCCs and the other methods have hardly been used. Since in SCCs in South Korea the way of Gospel-sharing where there is the reading of the Gospel and then its adaptation to the situation is generally used instead of the way of first reading their situation and then reflection on it according to the Gospel, it may be natural that SCCs are not closely connected with activities relating to urgent issues or problems in the neighborhood, including liberative actions such as protests against social evils, struggles against structural problems in society, and solidarity with the oppressed.

Undoubtedly, the communion of all people can be manifested in personal or communal practices of God’s love in the neighborhood such as caring for the old, visiting the sick, and helping the poor. In order to be truly Christian communities, however, SCCs should not overlook the suffering of the poor and their struggle in oppressive and inhuman societies. As the FABC bishops wisely stated, “the search for holiness and the search for justice, evangelization and the promotion of true human development and liberation,” are not in opposition but representative of one reality, namely “the integral preaching of the Gospel.”⁸⁷ On the journey towards being a true Church in South Korea, the task of SCCs should be involvement not only in evangelization through expressing God’s love but also in evangelization through commitment to liberation. This is because without neglecting any

⁸⁶ Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체란 무엇인가?* [*What is the Small Christian Community?*] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 1997), 15.

⁸⁷ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 16.

one side, all aspects of evangelization have one aim, that is, the proclamation of integral salvation for all.

2.2 Communion as Dialogue

For the FABC bishops, dialogue is not understood just in an anthropological sense, as a written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people. Rather, in a theological sense it expresses a way of evangelizing Asia by inviting the people of Asia to the communion of salvation. The bishops, confessing that “in Christ God has entered into dialogue with human beings, offering them salvation,” stated that “it is in faithfulness to this divine initiative that the Church should be committed to a dialogue of salvation with all women and men.”⁸⁸ Especially, in order to reach out to people in their concrete realities such as their socio-economic conditions, their particular cultural context, and their own religious traditions, the bishops understood dialogue as a crucial key for witnessing Christ in word and deed in Asia.⁸⁹

With regard to communion as dialogue, SCCs in South Korea can be positively evaluated. Through Gospel-sharing in SCCs, which might be called a communion of dialogue between the Word and the members, Jesus, the living Word, is as it were being reborn, reinterpreted, and incarnated again in the local context. This communion is extended to neighbors through “the dialogue of life.”⁹⁰ Namely, when celebrating life’s joys and pains together, reaching out and serving neighbors, helping poor neighbors, and getting involved

⁸⁸ The FABC Office of Evangelization, “Conclusions of the theological Consultation,” (1991) in *FAPA* vol.1, 344

⁸⁹ Cf. “Letter of Participants of the First Bishops’ Institute for Missionary Apostolate,” (1978) in *FAPA* vol.1, 94.

⁹⁰ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 15.

in life issues in their particular context, SCCs make Jesus more alive and effective in society and live out a communion of dialogue with all. While the members of SCCs in South Korea do not particularly express their special concern for the poor, they, in close relationship with their neighbors, do proclaim in the way of dialogical life salvation for all men, including certainly the poor and the oppressed.

In South Korea where the culture is predominantly non-Christian, the lay faithful have many opportunities for contact with people of other faiths or non-believers. The SCCs' regular meetings in private homes are themselves a sign of the concern of Christianity for that neighborhood. Moreover, the outreach or charity extended to neighbors out of Christian love becomes a catalyst for building a culture of love. Through these acts, the unique riches of the Gospel and Christian faith can permeate more and more the non-Christian culture.

Since the members of SCCs live in direct day-to-day contact with their neighborhood, they can infuse the "mind of Christ" into the mentality, customs, and norms of their neighborhood, and reversely, they can reflect their Christian life within their own context and culture. Dialogue with culture in SCCs thus means that the members of SCCs proclaim the truth of the Gospel to neighbors, not just by adapting the Gospel to the culture but by respecting the reciprocal relationship between the truths of faith and cultural values. In this sense, SCCs in South Korea can be called inculturated Christian communities because through the dialogue of life with neighbors in the cultural milieu of their own place they become "a solid starting point for the new society based on a civilization of love."⁹¹

As discussed above, a plurality of religions has been a constant fact of history in Asia, and the religions of Asia have molded the lives and cultures of Asian people for

⁹¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 51.

several millennia and continue to do so still today. The religious situation in South Korea, however, is a little different from that in the rest of Asia, since many Korean people do not have any religion even though there are various religions in the country.⁹² For this reason, the Church in South Korea has not paid as much attention to interreligious dialogue as other local churches in Asia have done.⁹³ The Korean Catholic Church has instead emphasized much more the evangelization of non-Christians. The rather neglectful attitude of the Church of South Korea toward dialogue with other religions has had an effect on SCCs in South Korea.

SCCs in South Korea do not seem to have played an active role in the area of interreligious dialogue. Guidelines on the activities of SCCs by dioceses or archdioceses do not mention or suggest interreligious dialogue for the members. Interreligious dialogue is not mentioned in the various plans for activation of SCCs, which have been proposed by SCC promoters or pastors in South Korea. A survey of SCCs leaders and their communities also shows that interreligious dialogue is not included as a main concern of SCCs.⁹⁴

These facts, however, do not mean that SCCs in South Korea have nothing to do with interreligious dialogue. Especially if we agree with the Asian bishops' statement that dialogue with other religions is not only to show "recognition or respect for the profound

⁹² According to a census of population (as of November 1, 2005), in South Korea there are 10,726,000 Buddhists (22.8%), 8,616,000 Protestant Christians (18.3%), 5,146,000 Catholics (10.9%), 130,000 Won Buddhists (0.3%), 105,000 Confucianists (0.2%), 247,000 other religions believers (0.5%) among a total population of 44,554,000. Notably, the number of non-believers is 21,593,000 (46.9%). Cf. Korea National Statistical Office, *2005 Population and Housing Census* (Seoul: Korea National Statistical Office, 2006), 32-33.

⁹³ Cf. Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), xvii-xxvii.

⁹⁴ Cf. The Integral Pastoral Institute, *소공동체 현황과 과제: 천주교 서울대교구 구역, 반장 신앙생활 실태조사 연구 보고서* [*The Present State and Task of Small Christian Communities: A Survey Report on the Faith Life of the SCCs Leaders in the Archdiocese of Seoul*] (Seoul: The Integral Pastoral Institute, 2005).

spiritual and ethical meaning in them,” but is also “an authentic way of living and expressing the Christian faith,”⁹⁵ dialogue can be seen as a sharing of Christian life in friendship and a manifestation of God’s love in fellowship. Interreligious dialogue cannot be understood just as a means to convert people from other religions to Christianity. Rather, “as a pathway for communicating the fullness of grace,”⁹⁶ dialogue should be a way in which God’s salvific will is manifested in the world by Christians’ life of love and in which all are invited to communion with God through “a dialogue of salvation”⁹⁷ regardless of their religions.

Even though it is not easy for the members of SCCs in South Korea to converse freely with people of other religions about the identity of Christianity or the doctrines of various religions, through a “dialogue of life” they can encounter other religions and their adherents without any hostility. In other words, they can conduct a dialogue with religions as they carry God’s love to their neighbors and they can have a good relationship with non-Christians as they strive for the common good together. Clearly, therefore, in living this aspect of communion as dialogue, SCCs also practice communion as harmony, which will be considered more closely in the next section.

In SCCs in South Korea, the idea of communion as dialogue is mostly understood in terms of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Communion with God and among Christians in SCCs cannot be enjoyed only within themselves. It should be extended to the neighbor, culture, and society. For this task, dialogue with the poor, with culture, and with religions, is

⁹⁵ “The Statement of the First Plenary Assembly,” (1974) in *FAPA* vol.1, 14-15.

⁹⁶ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. D. 5.

⁹⁷ The FABC Office of Evangelization, “Conclusions of the Theological Consultation,” (1991) in *FAPA* vol.1, 344.

an important feature of SCCs. The more SCCs accomplish this threefold dialogue, the more the communities will be truly Christian communities as “good centers for missionary outreach.”⁹⁸

2.3 Communion as Harmony

As was discussed in the third chapter, there are various Asian cultures, religions, and traditions, and the cultures and religions are intertwined.⁹⁹ In this regard, the FABC bishops recognized that cultural diversity and religious pluralism are things not to be regretted and abolished but to be accepted as lying at the heart of what it means to be Asian.¹⁰⁰ Among certain general approaches to this reality of Asia, the bishops highlighted the idea of “harmony” that enables people of different communities to work together for peace and the building of a more just society.¹⁰¹ For the bishops, harmony is understood not only as a way of living in peace and without conflict but in terms of mission it also describes the Asian Catholic Church’s proper attitude towards the Asian reality: “The Christian community has to appreciate this new vision of harmony and manifest it in the way it lives its daily life. The mission of the community is in a way a communication of its own inner life of harmony.”¹⁰²

In SCCs in South Korea, the members experience the unity of faith in their various charisms and abilities through Gospel meditation, Gospel-sharing, and common work for

⁹⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 51.

⁹⁹ See above, chapter three, pp. 160-62.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. “Final Statement of the Eleventh Bishops’ Institute for Interreligious Affairs on the Theology of Dialogue,” in *FAPA* vol.1, 321.

¹⁰¹ Cf. The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology, Doing Theology in Asia Today,” in *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil*, 256.

¹⁰² The Theological Advisory Commission of FABC, “Asian Christian Perspectives on Harmony,” (1995), 296.

their neighbors. In their meetings, especially, they discover the value of harmony in order to improve co-relationships. When they share their lives with one another, they realize that harmony among them is necessary for enhancing and developing their fellowship. They often gather not just for meetings but for good fellowship and in cases of need they help each other with their various abilities. Fellowship among the members leads them to live harmoniously with each other in the neighborhood. Through living and enjoying a harmonious life with one another, they express the joy and hope of Christians to their neighbors. Their life of harmony is a sign and instrument of harmony in the neighborhood.

This vision of harmony is more specifically expressed by Christians' "living in companionship" in solidarity with other peoples in the reality that is Asia. In a vision of harmony, the Christian life of proclaiming Christ means above all "to live like him, *in the midst of our neighbors* of other faiths and persuasions."¹⁰³ Vatican II describes the basic reality of a Christian's life in the world as a feeling of togetherness with neighbors:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts.¹⁰⁴

In SCCs in South Korea the meetings are usually held in rotation once or twice a month in the homes of members. The regular meetings in private homes can be themselves a sign of the harmony of Christianity within that neighborhood. In other words, SCCs are to exist "in the midst of their neighbors."

The members of SCCs, joined with their neighbors, work together for the common good and put into practice the love that springs from the keeping of God's commandments.

¹⁰³ "Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC," (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 282.

¹⁰⁴ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1.

By working together they realize that living a life of harmony with all is a most effective way of evangelization. In the activity of SCCs, evangelization is understood not just as the conversion of neighbors to Christianity so that they become members of the Catholic Church. Rather, it is more broadly the vocation of the lay faithful in the world to be accomplished in many ways. Through a life of harmony the lay faithful better realize the work of the Holy Spirit in their neighbors and experience God's providence in their neighborhood. In communion as harmony, the members of SCCs engage in a fellowship of life with their many neighbors and work together for the common good. In this way, they fulfill their vocation in the world and accomplish evangelization.

3. SCCs in the Communion of the Church

SCCs in South Korea have been constituted as part of the parish. Unlike SCCs in South Africa or BECs in Latin America, SCCs in South Korea have been built upon the foundation of a previous structure within parishes, namely the Ban Gatherings. The innate quality of union with the parish was strongly confirmed when SCCs were first implemented and it was emphasized that one of their main characteristics is “to be united with the parish, and so with the universal Church.”¹⁰⁵

The relationship between SCCs and the parish, however, is not just a structural one. It must also be understood from a theological and ecclesiological perspective. To be precise, understanding the parish as a community of communities is not the same as understanding it as a sum of communities or a collection of communities or even as a series of smaller

¹⁰⁵ Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community], 27.

communities. Rather, it raises some significant ecclesiological questions: how are SCCs related to the parish and to one another within the communion of the Church, and how can SCCs be understood as enabling communion to function effectively in the parish? Before discussing these questions, this section begins with a discussion of the theological foundations of the parish. What is the proper relationship between a pastor and the lay faithful in the parish and how should SCCs be intimately related to the parish as the eucharistic community?

3.1 Communion between the Pastor and the Laity in the Parish

With regard to the hierarchical structure of the Church, Vatican II, in explaining not only the universal reality of the Church, but also the nature of the episcopate in relation to the universal Church and how the bishops in their dioceses express the nature of the Church, said:

The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful. The individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular Churches, which are constituted after the model of the universal Church; it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists.¹⁰⁶

While in Vatican II the “particular Church” was singled out as having special ecclesial significance, the Christian assembly operating at a lower level also has its own significance in the Church’s life because it embodies the eucharistic mystery of the Church in a genuine sense. Following upon the above statement, the Council, implying the eucharistic reality on the parish level, asserted:

¹⁰⁶ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23.

In each altar community, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, a manifest symbol is to be seen of that charity and unity of the mystical body, without which there can be no salvation. In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present through whose power and influence the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church is constituted.¹⁰⁷

In this regard, Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* said simply and clearly:

The parish is founded on a theological reality, because it is a Eucharistic community. This means that the parish is a community properly suited for celebrating the Eucharist, the living source for its upbuilding and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole Church.¹⁰⁸

As a eucharistic community, however, the parish cannot be regarded only as an institution for the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy; rather it is a place in which the eucharistic mystery is embodied in the faithful, and thus “the faithful gather to grow in faith, to live the mystery of ecclesial communion and to take part in the Church’s mission.”¹⁰⁹ Accordingly, the pastor is not only the presider at the eucharistic assembly but also the overall pastoral leader of the parish community. Thus, as Pope John Paul II indicates, pastors should “devise new and effective ways of shepherding the faithful, so that everyone, especially the poor, will feel truly a part of the parish and of God’s People as a whole.”¹¹⁰ Furthermore, while pastors have a preeminent and leading role in parishes, this does not imply that pastors are rulers with power to command authority over the lay faithful in the parish. The relationship between the pastor and the laity is above all described as one of

¹⁰⁷ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 26. In the same point of view, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* clearly highlighted parishes: “...parishes, set up locally under a pastor who takes the place of the bishop, are the most important, for in some way they represent the visible Church constituted throughout the world. Therefore the liturgical life of the parish and its relation to the bishop must be fostered.” Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 42.

¹⁰⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 26.

¹⁰⁹ John Paul II, John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 25. Text is in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 92 (2000): 449-528.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

brotherhood in and for the Church by Vatican II:

Even though the priests of the new law by reason of the sacrament of Order fulfill the preeminent and essential function of father and teacher among the People of God and on their behalf, still they are disciples of the Lord along with all the faithful and have been made partakers of his kingdom by God, who has called them by his grace. Priests, in common with all who have been reborn in the font of baptism, are brothers among brothers as members of the same Body of Christ which all are commanded to build up.¹¹¹

In the parish, undoubtedly, the pastors, participating in the ecclesiastical ministry of the bishop, “sanctify and govern that portion of the Lord’s flock assigned to them, render the universal Church visible in their locality, and contribute efficaciously towards building up the whole body of Christ.”¹¹² At the same time, in terms of the lay faithful, the parish is a place in which the laity carry out manifold activities such as active participation in the liturgical life of their community, cooperation in proclaiming the word of God particularly by means of catechetical instruction, care of the souls of people, and the efficient and effective administration of the temporalities of the Church.¹¹³ The distinction between the pastors and the other faithful exists within a profound union, for they “are joined together by a close relationship.” The pastors of the Church “should minister to each other and to the rest of the faithful; the latter should eagerly collaborate with the pastors and teachers.”¹¹⁴

Accordingly, Pope John Paul II says:

All of us, pastors and lay faithful, have the duty to promote and nourish stronger bonds and mutual esteem, cordiality and collaboration among the various forms of lay associations. Only in this way can the richness of the gifts and charisms that the Lord offers us bear their fruitful contribution in building the common house.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 9.

¹¹² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28.

¹¹³ Cf. Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10.

¹¹⁴ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 32.

¹¹⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 31.

Consequently, the ordained ministries in the Church are not to be understood simply as conferring a “hierarchical status,” rather, they should more and more be seen as ecclesial, and communal. The role of the pastor in his various tasks such as proclaiming the Word, presiding at liturgical celebrations, especially the Eucharist, and in his pastoral care and concern is to inspire, to encourage, to foster initiatives, and to help charisms to develop. Lay people take part in the Church not in an upper-lower, two-tier relationship, but in a collaborative and reciprocal relationship. Participating in the threefold office of Christ in their own proper way¹¹⁶ with their gifts, charisms, and ministries that exist in communion and for communion,¹¹⁷ the lay faithful are in a relationship of communion with their pastor in the parish, who has his own proper share in the threefold office of Christ.¹¹⁸ “The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are ... ordered one to another.”¹¹⁹ The communion and participation of the lay faithful in parish life should be enhanced and encouraged since “their activity within Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness.”¹²⁰ In the life of the Church, the lay faithful can never remain in isolation from one another, but must live in a continual interaction both with the other faithful and with the pastor, with a lively sense of fellowship-communion.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31; Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 2.

¹¹⁷ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28.

¹¹⁹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

¹²⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 27, quoting from Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10. Cf. The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 6.

¹²¹ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 20.

3.2 Eucharist in the Relationship between the Parish and SCCs

As discussed above, the parish is a place in which the Word is proclaimed, the Eucharist and the other sacraments are celebrated, and manifold activities of the laity are exercised in communion with the pastor. Above all, the parish is the vital basic structure for the celebration of the Eucharist, in which the ministerial priest makes present “the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people” and, at the same time, the faithful, “by virtue of their royal priesthood, participate in the offering of the Eucharist.”¹²² The participation of the faithful in the Eucharist, however, does not just mean and cannot be fulfilled simply by attendance at Sunday Mass. Rather, since the Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life,”¹²³ the eucharistic life of the faithful should continue in their accomplishment of the mission and ministry of the Church in the world.

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI asserted in the same perspective that “the Eucharist, since it embraces the concrete, everyday existence of the believer, makes possible, day by day, the progressive transfiguration of all those called by grace to reflect the image of the Son of God (cf. Rom 8:29ff.),”¹²⁴ and that “eucharistic spirituality is not just participation in Mass and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. It embraces the whole of life.”¹²⁵

At the Last Supper, the apostles heard from the Lord: “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24). St. Paul comments: “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,

¹²² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

¹²³ Ibid., no. 11.

¹²⁴ Benedict XVI, II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 71. Benedict XVI, The Sacrament of Charity: *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007).

¹²⁵ Ibid., no. 77. Furthermore, the whole of part three of *Sacramentum Caritatis*, entitled as “The Eucharist, a Mystery to be Lived,” deals with the Christian’s eucharistic living.

you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). The remembrance of the Lord in the Eucharist thus implies by its nature proclaiming the Gospel to the world. In this sense, as Paul McPartlan points out, "to gather and to go, assemble and disperse, is the rhythm in the life of the eucharistic Church."¹²⁶ As a matter of fact, every celebration of the Eucharist ends with the words of dismissal which in Latin are "*Ite missa est.*" These words show the relationship between the Mass just celebrated and the mission of Christians in the world. The end of the Mass does not end the eucharistic life of the faithful. Rather, it is from this point that the missiological dimension of the Eucharist begins.¹²⁷

We believe that the Church's mission stands in continuity with the mission of Christ: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21). So, whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, namely, whenever we receive communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, we not only proclaim the Lord's death until he comes, but we also receive the spiritual power needed to carry out the Church's mission. In this regard, De Lubac understands the idea of eucharistic communion in close relationship with the calling to mission for universal salvation. He states: "Those who, by receiving Christ, have received all, have been raised up for the salvation of those who could not know him. Their privilege constitutes a mission. There is no other way for them to keep their riches."¹²⁸ Also, he says of the Eucharist: "Our churches are the 'upper room' where not only is the Last Supper renewed but Pentecost also."¹²⁹

By the Eucharist, the faithful are strengthened for mission and are sent forth to live

¹²⁶ Paul McPartlan, *Sacrament of Salvation: An Introduction to Eucharistic Ecclesiology* (Edinburgh: T.& T.Clark, 1995), 61.

¹²⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, no. 51.

¹²⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard and Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 243.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

that mission wherever they are called. Pope John Paul II pointedly asserts: “The Eucharist thus appears as both the source and the summit of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit.”¹³⁰

In South Korea, as discussed above, fostering evangelization was the pastoral motive of forming SCCs; in other words, the formation of SCCs aimed at carrying out evangelization. Most bishops in South Korea, implementing SCCs in their dioceses, chose pastoral mottos such as “Evangelization through SCCs,” “Evangelization and the Preparation of SCCs,” and “Evangelization of the Second Millennium and SCCs.”¹³¹ The strong relationship between SCCs and evangelization in South Korea is also indicated by the fact that the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea established the Committee of SCCs as a sub-committee under the Committee for Evangelization. In fact, in accordance with the desire of Pope John Paul II for basic ecclesial communities, SCCs in South Korea, following this pastoral direction, have striven to become “an instrument of formation and evangelization.”¹³²

Since SCCs in South Korea have been implemented for evangelization, they inevitably rely on the Eucharist which is the source and summit of all evangelization. In order to accomplish the aim of SCCs, namely evangelization, the faithful should participate regularly in the Eucharist. From this perspective arises the relationship between the parish and SCCs. The parish is the place in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved. In the parish Eucharist, the faithful, receiving Holy Communion, are called to be united with each

¹³⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 22. English Text in *Origins* 32, no. 46 (2003): 753-768. Cf. Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5, where the Eucharist is described as “the source and the summit of all preaching of the Gospel.”

¹³¹ See above, chapter one, p. 23-25.

¹³² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 51.

other in communion and then to go out in mission. Hence, the parish is the place in which SCCs are connected and united. In the parish Eucharist, by its very nature, the faithful are called to carry out the mission of the Church, evangelization. Hence, the parish is the place in which the very aim of SCCs is promoted and enhanced. Simply put, SCCs rely on the eucharistic community, the parish, and the parish is the central place where SCCs are connected, nourished, vitalized, and enhanced.

3.3 The Parish as a Community of SCCs – Hierarchical Perspective

According to Vatican II, as discussed in the second chapter above, each bishop represents his own Church, and at the same time, all bishops, living “in communion with one another and with the Roman Pontiff in a bond of unity, charity, and peace,”¹³³ express the unity of local churches in the one universal Church of God. The college of bishops thus is not only the communion of bishops but also the visible sign of unity in the communion of local churches where the same Eucharist is celebrated. Following this teaching, Jean-Marie R. Tillard describes the universal Church as a communion of local churches:

The nature of the Church...is summed up in *communion, koinonia*. It is the *Church of churches*. Understood in its full context, it is the *communion of communions*, appearing as a *communion* of local churches, spread throughout the world, each one itself being a *communion* of the baptized, gathered together into communities by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of their baptism, for the eucharistic celebration.¹³⁴

The idea of the Church as a communion of local churches can be applied analogously to a more local level, that is, the local church itself is a communion of parishes.

¹³³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 22. .

¹³⁴ J.-M. R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. R.C. De Peaux (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 29.

According to Vatican II, as “prudent cooperators of the episcopal college,” priests, “called to the service of the People of God, constitute, together with their bishop, a unique sacerdotal college [*unum presbyterium*] dedicated it is true to a variety of distinct duties.”¹³⁵ In the parish, “under the authority of the bishop,” priests “render the universal Church visible in their locality and contribute efficaciously towards building up the whole body of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:12).”¹³⁶ The relationship of priests with their bishop is described as being not only juridical but also based on friendship and co-operation:

By reason of this sharing [*participationem*] in the priesthood and mission of the bishop the priests should see in him a true father and obey him with all respect. The bishop, on his side, should treat the priests, his helpers, as his sons and friends, just as Christ calls his disciples no longer servants but friends (cf. Jn. 15:15). All priests, then, ... by reason of the sacrament of Orders and of the ministry correspond to and cooperate with the body of bishops and, according to their vocation and the grace that is given them they serve the welfare of the whole Church.¹³⁷

In the 1985 Extraordinary Synod, the relationship between a bishop and his presbyterate was developed and understood in terms of communion. From the acknowledgement that “because the Church is communion there must be participation and co-responsibility at all of her levels,” the Synod Fathers argued that “friendly relations and full trust must exist between bishops and their priests,” and that bishops should be “close with all their strength to their priests and give them help and support in their often difficult

¹³⁵ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28. For a study on the history and theology of the parish, see Karl Rahner, “Theology of the Parish,” in *The Parish – from Theology to Practice*, ed. Hugo Rahner, trans. Robert Kress (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1958), 23-35.

¹³⁶ Ibid. Pope John Paul II highlights the parish’s universal aspect and its concrete expression: “The ecclesial community, while always having a universal dimension, finds its most immediate and visible expression in the parish. It is there that the Church is seen locally.” John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 26.

¹³⁷ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 28.

work, especially in parishes.”¹³⁸

Priests, however, do not have communion only with their bishop in his local church, but they have also a brotherly relationship among themselves.

In virtue of their sacred ordination and of their common mission all priests are united [*nectuntur*] together by bonds of intimate brotherhood, which manifests itself in a spontaneously and gladly given mutual help, whether spiritual or temporal, whether pastoral or personal, through the medium of reunions and community life [*communione vitae*], work and fraternal charity.¹³⁹

If the relationship between priests and their bishop and among themselves can be seen as one of communion, we might say that, just as the communion of bishops constitutes the visible sign of unity in the communion of local churches, the communion of pastors with and under their bishop constitutes the visible sign of unity in the communion of parishes. In this sense, a diocese can be seen analogously as a communion of parishes.

In Vatican II's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the parish is said to be a “kind of cell” of the diocese, and is described as a place that provides an outstanding field for the exercise of the apostolate of the laity.¹⁴⁰ SCCs in South Korea are likewise referred to as “cells” of the parish community, and as special places for the exercise of lay ministry in the parish.

Like the cells of a human body, SCCs are the cells of the parish. They have a reciprocal union with each other and a unity with their parish pastor and their bishop. In this way, the lay faithful realize that as active members they constitute one Church.¹⁴¹

In order to develop and deepen the relationship between SCCs and the parish, the

¹³⁸ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 6.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10; John Paul Vandenakker, *Small Christian Communities and the Parish* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 216.

¹⁴¹ Soongyong Kwak, “소공동체 신학원리 2 [Theological Principle of SCCs],” in *2005년도 소공동체 기초교육 [A Preliminary Education on Small Christian Community in 2005]* ed. National Committee for Small Christian Communities, 120.

Church of South Korea has suggested some guidelines.

The members of SCCs should visit other SCCs. Also, SCCs should be intimately linked with their parish community. Concretely, in order that SCCs may have a strong bond with the parish, and further with the universal Church, SCCs should send their leaders to the parish pastoral council, and parish pastors should visit SCCs periodically. In this way the parish manifests itself as a community of SCCs.¹⁴²

SCCs in the parish have communion with their pastor in a reciprocal participation: Some SCC leaders participate in the parish pastoral council and the pastor participates in SCCs. SCCs in the parish have communion with each other through visiting neighboring communities, sharing one community's experience with other communities, and working together for the parish.

The communion between the pastor and SCCs is expressed not only in this structural relationship, but also by a genuine participation in parish affairs. As a matter of fact, through the regular meetings of each SCC where much discussion takes place, the lay faithful's concern for and involvement in parish affairs increases. In the meetings, as the participants look for the best ways to assist their pastor and to deal with parish matters using their charisms and abilities, they experience a sense of communion with their pastor. This is especially the case in the assembly of the SCC leaders which in most parishes is held once a month in order to share the issues and problem of SCCs and to discuss their work for the parish. Nicholas Cardinal Cheong, the Archbishop of Seoul, described that assembly as follows:

The assembly of the SCC leaders is constituted of the lay leaders coming from each SCC. In the assembly, they share pastoral knowledge and plans with their pastor for the future of the parish, discuss the present pastoral issues of the parish.

¹⁴² Administrative Office for Evangelization, *소공동체 길잡이* [A Guide for the Small Christian Community], 27.

The assembly is a good place for encouraging active participation of not only SCC leaders but also all the faithful in the parish.¹⁴³

The FABC bishops' vision of a new way of being Church, that is, the parish as a communion of communities, translates in the Church of South Korea into a vision of the parish as a communion of SCCs. This idea is expressed in the proper spiritual leadership of the pastor with regard to SCCs, the evangelical role of SCCs centered and based on the parish as the eucharistic community, the active participation of the SCC leaders in the parish pastoral council, and the involvement of SCC members in the matters and issues of the parish.

3.4 The Role of SCC Leaders in the Parish Pastoral Council

As discussed above, the pastor in the parish is not only a presider at the Eucharist but also a pastoral and spiritual leader of the community. Following the example of the Lord, who “came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28), the pastor should work together with the lay faithful, promote their dignity, and help them fulfill the part proper to them in the mission of the Church.¹⁴⁴ The function of the pastor is not primarily of an administrative nature, but pastoral: he is a servant who helps all the parishioners participate in the life, mission, and ministry of the parish. Vatican II emphasizes:

They [priests] should be willing to listen to lay people, give brotherly consideration to their wishes, and recognize their experience and competence in the different fields of human activity. ... Priests should also be confident in giving lay people charge of duties in the service of the Church, giving them

¹⁴³ Nicholas Cardinal Cheong, *희망을 안고 하느님께: 서울대교구 시노드 후속 교구장 교서* [Toward God with Hope: Post-Synodal Document of Archbishop of Seoul] (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 2003), 105.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Vatican II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no 9.

freedom and opportunity for activity.¹⁴⁵

One of the best loci for accomplishing these tasks is the parish pastoral council, which is an important place for the laity to participate in the life of the Church. Speaking to this issue, Pope John Paul II expressed the value of the parish pastoral council:

The Second Vatican Council's mention of examining and solving pastoral problems "by general discussion" ought to find its adequate and structured development through a more convinced, extensive and decided appreciation for parish pastoral councils.¹⁴⁶

In this regard, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea (CBCK) states in *Korean Pastoral Guidelines* that "the parish pastoral council is a consultative organization which evaluates the overall life of the parish community in its relationship with the pastor, seeks the formation of a better community through collecting the opinions of parishioners, and proposes practical directions."¹⁴⁷

In the Korean Catholic Church, in order to enhance consultation with the laity, most parishes have set up a pastoral council in which representatives of the parishioners, including a few SCC lay leaders, consult about parish matters. In fact, however, SCC leaders do not generally form the majority of the pastoral council, which is actually structured in its membership primarily to deal with the functional needs of the parish. Thus, in the Church of South Korea, the parish pastoral council generally consists of several functional departments such as the department of liturgy, the department of social affairs, the department of mission, and the department of youth. As a result, even though some SCC lay leaders attend meetings

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 27. Vatican II recommended that parish councils as well as diocesan councils be set up to assist the Church's apostolic work and it encouraged the clergy and religious to work with the laity. Cf. Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 26.

¹⁴⁷ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, *사목지침서* [*Korean Pastoral Guidelines*] (Seoul: Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, 1995), 174.

of the parish pastoral council by assignment, their role in the council is limited mostly to presenting suggestions or propositions relating to plans for the implementation of SCCs, rather than actively taking part in decision-making about overall parish affairs. Parish pastoral councils therefore are currently not properly structured to help the implementation of the full vision of the nature and purpose of SCCs. Certainly, functional professional departments are needed in the parish, but their proposals or suggestions are not representative of all the parishioners because the members of each functional department are simply specialists in the matters of that department.

To realize fully the vision of the Church as a “communion of communities,” parishes need to restructure the pastoral council. To put it concretely, the council should be a place where SCC lay leaders as representatives of all the parishioners can freely speak out on parish matters, where they can convey to the pastor suggestions and opinions from each SCC, where they can play an active and a central role in decision making, where they can have co-responsibility with the pastor in parish ministry and parish management. Since in a certain sense SCC lay leaders represent their respective SCCs, the council should in fact be made up largely if not completely of SCC lay leaders. Simply put, the pastoral council should become a more representative structure, in which all the parishioners are involved through their SCC leaders and the pastor thereby listens to the opinions of the parishioners in the process of decision-making.

Fortunately, a structural change of parish pastoral councils has begun as a result of the pastoral suggestion of the bishops. For instance, Nicholas Cardinal Cheong, the Archbishop of Seoul, suggested in his Post-Synodal Document following the Synod of the Seoul Archdiocese (2000-2003):

In order for the faithful to participate actively in the mission of the Church for evangelization, the parish structure should be changed to one in which the faithful can participate actively and balanceable opinions are collected from all the parishioners. For this task, the pastor should encourage SCCs to work actively and autonomously as cells of a parish.¹⁴⁸

Following this suggestion, many parishes in the Archdiocese have formed parish pastoral councils consisting primarily of SCC leaders.¹⁴⁹ The Daegu Archdiocese also revised the parish pastoral structure to enable the active participation of the faithful, harmonious collaboration, and active communication. The primary characteristic of the newly reformed parish pastoral councils is that the basic membership of the councils comes from SCCs and the opinions and work of SCCs are treated as important issues in the council.¹⁵⁰ Compared to current pastoral councils which are composed of functional department leaders, the structure of the new councils provides that the leaders of SCCs are in the majority without excluding the functional specialists.

The vision and role of SCCs in the parish can greatly enhance the value of the pastoral council in the parish. At present, however, this task seems not fully realized in South Korean parishes. Nevertheless, there is no need for disappointment. In fact, the SCC movement in South Korea is helping in the process of establishing true local churches. In South Korea, more and more SCCs are sending their leaders to the meetings of the parish council where the leaders can convey the opinions and suggestions of the SCCs. The pastor

¹⁴⁸ Nicholas Cardinal Cheong, *희망을 안고 하느님께* [Toward God with Hope]: *Post-Synodal Document of Archbishop of Seoul* (Seoul: Seoul Archdiocese, 2003), 172.

¹⁴⁹ This does not mean however that the assemblies of SCC leaders have ceased in those parishes. While in the assembly SCC leaders mainly discuss the activation of SCCs, the improvement of SCCs, and the role of SCCs in the parish, the parish pastoral council deals with overall parish matters, presided and guided by the parish pastor. In addition, it is almost impossible for all SCC leaders to participate in the parish pastoral council, because the number of SCC leaders is too large (about 40 SCC leaders per parish). See above, chapter one, pp. 57-58.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. WollKi Chung, "Collaborative Leadership in Promoting the Small Christian Communities at the Parish Level in Korea," (D. Min. diss., The Catholic Theological Union at Chicago, 2008), 125-26.

also regularly visits SCCs in order to hear the voices of the members. Within this process, the parishioners increasingly experience their co-responsibility with the pastor in dealing with parish matters.

4. Toward an Inculturated Ecclesiology of Communion in South Korea

Since their implementation in 1992, SCCs have been generally accepted as a new way of being Church in the Korean Catholic Church, fulfilling the expectations of the FABC bishops. The Asian bishops previously recommended the creation of SCCs in each of the nations represented during the Fifth FABC Assembly in 1990, because they were convinced that within the ecclesiology of communion SCCs are a new way of being Church, that is, of practicing the Gospel, of manifesting the various charisms of the lay faithful, of incarnating the Church locally in dialogue with religions, traditions, and cultures, and of becoming a leaven of transformation in this world.¹⁵¹

While SCCs in South Korea are generally regarded as having played a crucial role in the life of the Church, especially in terms of evangelization and the role of the laity in the Church and the world, at the same time, they have been criticized on various counts. These criticisms are succinctly summarized in the Post-Synodal Document of Archbishop of Seoul:

In spite of many achievements, many members of the Archdiocese complained about a top-down method in the process of establishing SCCs and in the pastoral plan for SCCs, and also about uniformity in the technique for Gospel-sharing, mostly using the Seven Step Method. Also, they indicated the necessity of an inculturated model for the SCCs in which Korean mindset, culture, and social context are considered.¹⁵²

In South Korea, an urgent and essential task is to devise a truly inculturated model

¹⁵¹ Cf. “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 287-88.

¹⁵² Nicholas Cardinal Cheong, *희망을 안고 하느님께* [*Toward God with Hope*], 108.

or image for SCCs that is suitable for the Korean context. The goal is that SCCs should be one of the most effective basic ways of building up the Korean Catholic Church as a community-Church, a true Church-in-communion. In this section, some suggestions for this task will be discussed, especially in terms of an ecclesiology of communion. These are suggestions as to how SCCs might enhance the communion life of the Korean Catholic Church and so enable that Church to be a sign and instrument “of communion with God and of unity among all people”¹⁵³ in South Korea.

4.1 For an Inculturated Lay Spirituality

SCCs in South Korea are made up of lay faithful and their success is entirely dependent on lay involvement. However, in practice the SCCs do not truly raise the consciousness of the laity in the world, especially in terms of the spirituality of the laity. This is mainly because the implementation of SCCs, in accordance with the pastoral plan of the Korean bishops, has paid too much attention simply to establishing the structure of SCCs in the parish without sufficient consideration of the basic role and function of the laity in the Church and the world.

At present, SCCs do not respond to the spiritual needs of the lay faithful. ... SCCs in South Korea have been developed according to a pastoral plan of the ministers, rather than according to the will and needs of the laity. SCCs in South Korea are the focus of the plan for pastoral ministry in the Church, but the lay faithful’s spiritual desire and their proper vocation in the world are rather neglected.¹⁵⁴

The lack of a lay spirituality in the SCCs in a certain sense follows from the fact

¹⁵³ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Hyunjun Park, “소공동체 운동과 사목 문화, 그리고 평신도의 영성 [SCCs, the Ministerial Culture, and the Lay Spirituality],” *우리신학* [Woori Theology] 6 (2007): 26-27.

that the activation of SCCs is a goal in a pastoral plan drawn up by ministers, and not really a means for enhancing the mission and ministry of the laity themselves in their concrete context. This lack of lay spirituality also seems to make it difficult for the lay faithful to participate in SCCs actively and vigorously.

The Second Vatican Council describes the position of the lay faithful in the secular world, looking at the world as the place in which they receive their call from God.¹⁵⁵ It is in the ordinary conditions of life that the laity perform their work according to God's will, not separating their union with Christ from their life but living and acting in communion with Christ in their ordinary and secular lives.¹⁵⁶ During the period of Vatican II, Christian Duquoc argued the necessity of a theological understanding of the laity and of their spirituality:

The emergence of the laity in the Church is not merely an ecclesial phenomenon; it has arisen out of a general evolution in our civilization. It means the emergence of a new type of spirituality, not different from the others insofar as it is rooted in the Gospel, but distinct from them in that it embraces the whole human reality. The laity have not yet fully realized their place in the Church; they have not yet created their own type of spiritual existence.¹⁵⁷

The laity discover their holiness in the world and, through engagement with the world, pursue the development of their faith. The 1987 Synod Fathers integrated and synthesized the two dimensions of the lay faithful, secular identity and spiritual identity:

To respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see daily activities as an occasion to join themselves with God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ. Hence the incarnational and historical dimensions of Christian spirituality must be evident to all the Christian laity, so that holiness in the concrete sense might be provided for the lay person to be

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 4; Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43; Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 21.

¹⁵⁷ Christian Duquoc, "Preface," in *Spirituality in Church and World*, Concilium, vol. 9, ed. Christian Duquoc (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press, 1965), 2.

truly made in the likeness of the incarnate Word, who gave himself for men. The social doctrine of the church is to be considered an integral part of spiritual formation. All Christians have been called to show love toward neighbors, especially the poor, and to build up a society of justice and love.¹⁵⁸

Within this understanding, the FABC bishops highlighted that Christian spirituality should above all be incarnated and inculturated in each specific context: “Christian spirituality must be incarnated. It grows and matures in the midst of continuous tensions and struggles with the destructive powers of sin and its consequences, of conflict and injustice.”¹⁵⁹ Lay spirituality is understood in the sense that lay people are called to live their discipleship of Jesus and share in his mission in their own context, in accordance with their proper lay state, that is, in accordance with “the specific character of their witness and action in the world.”¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, lay spirituality involves the integration of “every aspect of Christian life: liturgy, prayer, community living, solidarity with all and especially with the poor, evangelization, catechesis, dialogue, social commitment, etc.”¹⁶¹ There is no dichotomy between faith and life, or between love and action. In all things, the laity are to find a profound sense of the holy, a deep sense and awareness of God, his presence and mystery.¹⁶²

Especially for the FABC bishops, the spirituality of the new way of being Church is understood in terms of solidarity with all people and harmony with all the cultures and religions of Asia. It is a spirituality of the powerless, in which compassion for and solidarity with all, and especially with the poor, involving meekness and humility, is required. Also, it is a spirituality of harmony in which Christians’ intimate communion with God, their

¹⁵⁸ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 87.

¹⁵⁹ “Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1985) in *FAPA* vol.1, 195.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁶¹ “Statement of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC,” (1990) in *FAPA* vol.1, 288.

¹⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*

docility to his Spirit, their following of Jesus, is expressed in resonating deeply with the various realities of Asia, especially when they encounter the disharmonies of the Asian world.¹⁶³

Within this perspective, the contribution to lay spirituality in South Korea made by SCCs can be assessed according to the extent to which the members of SCCs have solidarity with their neighbors and encourage harmony and peace in their own specific context at the heart of service for others. It is beyond the limits of this dissertation to describe all the features that depict and represent modern Korean society. Nonetheless, one of the specific features that characterize Korean society is the rapid growth of cities. Industrialization centered in some cities under the control of the government has brought great growth in terms of the size and number of such cities and a concomitant impoverishment of rural communities.¹⁶⁴ In the process of industrialization and urbanization, people in South Korea have suffered from severe competition, individualism, self-alienation, and excessive materialism. Both the struggle for personal profit based on excessive individualism and social relationships based not on an intimate and friendly bond but on an external and formal bond have become in a certain sense a burden on people in Korean society.¹⁶⁵

The Church's liberating activity for those who suffer from this agony, and its solidarity with them, were not successfully accomplished prior to the formation of SCCs. This was above all because the rapid urbanization in society also directly gave rise to some

¹⁶³ Cf. Ibid., 288-89.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Kilmyung Roh, "Urbanization and the Korean Catholic Church," *가톨릭 신문* [*Catholic Times*], 14 May 1995, p. 5; Moonsoo Park, "미래를 준비하는 한국교회의 현재 [The Present of the Korean Catholic Church Preparing the Future]," *사목* [*Ministry*] 203 (1995): 27-42.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Hyunjun Park, "소공동체 운동과 사목 문화, 그리고 평신도의 영성 [SCCs, the Ministerial Culture, and the Lay Spirituality]," 32.

problems in the Church, such as a “bureaucratization” of the urban parishes, a “middle-classification” of the members of the Church, and as a result of these problems, a lack of pastoral concern for the poor.¹⁶⁶

Against this background, SCCs in South Korea can be an alternative framework for recovering truly human relationships and finding personal meaning in society. This is to say that people who live in extremely formalized and fragmented social relationships can now taste in SCCs a real personal relationship with one other, which originates from communion between God and human beings. By extending God’s charity to their neighbors, serving the needy with their various charisms and abilities, and living harmonious lives in the neighborhood, the members of SCCs can discover their significant role in the world, not just in terms of evangelization but in terms of communion with all people in their specific context, as is commanded by God.

Lay spirituality is not just a theoretical concept; it consists in the encounter with people and realities of various kinds, not only on joyful occasions but also in suffering and painful conditions, in the midst of which the lay faithful encounter God and experience his grace. The more SCCs in South Korea truly become communities in their neighborhood, communities which successfully play a role of service, fellowship, and sharing in the faith, the more those communities can become a place in which an authentic lay spirituality is encouraged and the vocation of the laity is effectively exercised.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Kilmyung Roh, “Urbanization and the Korean Catholic Church,” *가톨릭 신문* [*Catholic Times*], 14 May 1995, p. 5; Jongyong Kim, “미래 사목환경 변화와 본당의 실천적 운영 방향 [The Transition of Ministerial Environment and the Practical Operation of the Parish],” in *Korean Society of the Future and the Korean Catholic Church*, ed. The Integral Pastoral Institute (Seoul: The Integral Pastoral Institute, 2007), 68-97.

4.2 Collaborative and Participative Leadership

Vatican II clearly and significantly stated that the laity share in the mission of Christ and have an active part to play in the life and action of the Church.¹⁶⁷ Therefore the lay apostolate, in its many aspects, should be exercised both in the Church and in the world. From this perspective, leadership in the Church has a wider dimension. It cannot be identified only with hierarchical leadership. As Susan K. Wood describes, “ministry in the Roman Catholic Church calls for collaboration between laity and ordained because both are both incorporated into the life of Christ at baptism and called to mutual responsibility in the Church.”¹⁶⁸ Leadership cannot lie simply in the wisdom and power of an individual, rather it should be exercised with reference to the responsibility of the whole community.

The leadership of SCCs flows from that principle. Before the implementation of SCCs in South Korea, there were already many lay leaders in Ban Gatherings. However, those leaders were all nominated by the pastor and, because of their dependence upon him, they were in effect simply his assistants. They acted as messengers of the pastor or distributors of information. In SCCs, on the contrary, the leaders are elected by the members of the SCC and then the election is ratified by the pastor. Generally speaking, the leaders of SCCs are lay faithful, and their leadership is exercised above all by coordinating and animating the members of the SCCs. Furthermore, the leaders take a role in developing interpersonal relationships and solidarity; that is, praying together, sharing together, and working together in all contexts. With the help of their leader, the members can participate actively in SCCs and thus exercise their charisms and gifts in the Church and in the world.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10.

¹⁶⁸ Susan K. Wood, “Introduction,” *Ordering the Baptismal Priesthood: Theologies of Lay and Ordained Ministry*, ed. Susan K. Wood (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), ix.

Through many seminars and formation programs, lay leaders in SCCs have begun to realize a new style of leadership that is active and participative. They no longer remain passive leaders under the pastor. Rather, they practice an active leadership in their communities. Each leader, in consultation with the members of the SCC, determines the time and place of the meeting, leads the meeting and encourages the members to participate actively in the meeting. The lay leader assumes the position of an animator among the lay faithful as they accomplish together the ministry and mission of the Church. More concretely, the role of the SCC leaders is described in three aspects:

As companion, the leader of the SCC should encourage the growth of the members. He/She makes a cordial environment where all members can share their joy and grief and their circumstances with each other in the SCC. In order to achieve that, he/she should become their companion. ... As guide, the leader of the SCC should help and enlighten the members to live a Christian life that is nothing other than self-giving or self-dedication for the Church and the world. ... As facilitator, the leader of the SCC should inspire the members to discover the true meaning of life in the community and in their own life situation (*Sitz im Leben*).¹⁶⁹

Most importantly, lay leaders are not set apart from their communities. On the contrary, in exercising their charisms and gifts within their communities, the leaders realize and experience the genuine role of the laity in the Church. In sharing their awareness and experiences in ministry and mission, they also encourage other members to participate more actively in their communities.

Such lay leadership never replaces or weakens the leadership of the ordained. Rather, it needs precisely to be fostered by the ordained leadership. The FABC bishops have stressed this point many times. Clerical leadership has a duty to make the initial moves to

¹⁶⁹ Yongsoo Kim, “소공동체 리더쉽 [Leadership in SCCs],” in *2005년도 소공동체 기초교육* [A Preliminary Education on Small Christian Community in 2005] ed. The National Committee for Small Christian Communities (Taejon: The National Committee for Small Christian Communities, 2005), 255-56.

foster lay involvement and to recognize the emerging leadership of the laity.¹⁷⁰

The ordained leadership need not fear or be over-concerned about juridical problems in starting newer forms of lay apostolate or ministries relating to the contextual realities of their churches. Instead, they should encourage and promote more vigorous, world-oriented forms, initiated and directed by the laity themselves.¹⁷¹

A new way of being Church needs a collaborative leadership. All pastoral leaders are called upon to actively involve and renew themselves through participation in the life of SCCs.¹⁷²

If so, what is the proper relationship between clerical leadership and lay leadership? According to WollKi Chung, friend-leadership can be a good model of leadership in collaboration. Most of all, in a theological sense, the friendship comes from Jesus' calling of the disciples and his sharing with them in his life and mission from the very beginning (cf. Mk 1:16-17). Jesus' incarnation, his living with us, and sharing of all his knowledge of God cannot be identified with a master-servant relationship but rather with friendship: "I do not call you servants any longer, ... but I have called you friends" (Jn 15:15).¹⁷³ Since friend-leadership in itself implies mutual responsibility and participation, in which diversity and difference are integrated on the foundation of ontological equality, friend-leadership can be exercised in collaboration among all the church members:

Friend leadership is ideal leadership because friend leadership is working in equality and mutuality on the basis of the ... communion paradigm. This friend leadership of priests and their coworkers will help all the leaders of the parish experience the friend leadership and exercise it.¹⁷⁴

The development of SCCs in South Korea has obviously brought about the

¹⁷⁰ Cf. "The Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly," (1985) in *FAPA* vol.1, 194.

¹⁷¹ "The Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly," (1985) in *FAPA* vol.1, 194.

¹⁷² The Second AsIPA General Assembly, "Final Statement," (2000) in *FAPA* vol.3, 110-11.

¹⁷³ Cf. WollKi Chung, "Collaborative Leadership in Promoting the Small Christian Communities at the Parish Level in Korea," 303-07.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 307.

emergence of lay leaders in the parish and reflection on their participative leadership in relation to the pastor. Leadership in the Church is no longer regarded as being exercised only by the ordained priests; rather a collaborative leadership between priest and laity is now assumed. When the members of the Church realize that they all – priests, religious, and laity – are called to share in and contribute to the Church with their various gifts and charisms and their leadership, all the members can truly constitute one People of God in a “new brotherly communion [*novam fraternam communionem*].”¹⁷⁵

4.3 The Increasing Role of Lay Women

One of the unfavorable traditions of Korean society can be identified as the patriarchal male-dominant tradition. The Korean patriarchal system, which was systematized in the Choson dynasty (1392-1897), has always functioned by one-sided sacrifices on the part of women. The concept of the “man-superior/woman-inferior” was especially concretized socially and morally by means of the national ideology of the dynasty, Confucianism.¹⁷⁶ Such an unjust custom oppressing women has dominated in Korean culture for a long time, even though the human rights and equality of women have been enhanced in recent years.

Unfortunately, this patriarchal structure became one of the major obstacles to mutual relationships and collaboration in the Korean Catholic Church. In the life of the Church in South Korea, the important positions have been taken by men, and women have

¹⁷⁵ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 32.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University press, 1992) 231-82; Wanne J. Joe, *A History of Korean Civilization* (Seoul, South Korea: Chungwang University Press, 1972), 304-09.

been expected to take low positions even though women are actually involved in many activities of the Church.¹⁷⁷ In the Korean Catholic Church, lay women have suffered from a double inequality. The lay faithful have themselves had a “subordinate role” in the clerical structure of the parish, and, what is worse, lay women, further, have often been “excluded even from lay leadership and become the archetypal representatives of the passive recipients of clerical sacral power.”¹⁷⁸

According to Vatican II, the essential equality of all people is emphasized from a theological perspective:

All people [*omnes homines*] are endowed with a rational soul and are created in God’s image; they have the same nature and origin and, being redeemed by Christ, they enjoy the same divine calling and destiny; there is here a basic equality between all people and it must be given ever greater recognition.¹⁷⁹

Within this understanding, the Council observes that in many cases women [*mulieres*] are not treated equally with men [*vir*] with regard to embracing a state of life or acquiring an education or cultural benefits, and it describes the unequal situation of men and women as regretful, because in this situation the basic personal rights of women are not fully respected.¹⁸⁰ In a more ecclesial perspective, Pope John Paul II emphasized the participation of lay women in the Church and in society:

Without discrimination women should be participants in the life of the Church,

¹⁷⁷ In South Korea, more lay women than lay men participate in Mass every Sunday and every weekday, and are regularly involved in various apostolic or devotional groups such as the Legion of Mary, Marriage Encounter, Movement for a Better World, and Cursillo. In the Korean Catholic Church in 2009, there were 2,119,601 active Catholic men and active 2,992,774 Catholic women. Especially, in the Legion of Mary there are 183,712 women and only 79,859 men. See the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, *통계보고서* [A Statistical Survey Report of the Korean Catholic Church] (Seoul: The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Korea, 2010).

¹⁷⁸ Illsun Youn, “Toward Authentic Partnership for Mutual Ministry in the Korean Catholic Context,” (D.Min. diss. Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, 2002), 39.

¹⁷⁹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 29. Amended translation.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Ibid.

and also in consultation and the process of coming to decisions. ... Women, who already hold places of great importance in transmitting the faith and offering every kind of service in the life of the Church, ought to be associated in the preparation of pastoral and missionary documents and ought to be recognized as cooperators in the mission of the church in the family, in professional life and in the civil community.¹⁸¹

In the Asian context, the FABC bishops have spoken of the role of lay women in the Church, and of the need for a participatory Church in which women can and should contribute significantly in various ministries of teaching, healing, catechizing, and organizing.¹⁸² For them, only if the gifts of the Spirit to women are given due recognition, and if women share in the freedom of the children of God, can the Church in Asia be a sign of the Kingdom of God in Asia.¹⁸³ Favoring such a perspective, Pope John Paul II accepted the proposition of the Asian bishops in the 1998 Synod for Asia and said:

Women should be more effectively involved in pastoral programs, in diocesan and parish pastoral councils, and in diocesan synods. Their abilities and services should be fully appreciated in health care, in education, in preparing the faithful for the sacraments, in building community and in peacemaking. As the synod fathers noted, the presence of women in the church's mission of love and service contributes greatly to bringing the compassionate Jesus, the healer and reconciler, to Asian people, especially the poor and marginalized.¹⁸⁴

In South Korea, as SCCs have developed,¹⁸⁵ the role of lay women has been emphasized more and more not only in the SCCs but also in the totality of parish life. Through continuing attendance at regular meetings of SCCs, lay women have exercised their

¹⁸¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 51; The 1987 Ordinary Synod, *Propositions*, no. 47.

¹⁸² Cf. "The Statement of the Fourth Plenary Assembly," (1986) in *FAPA* vol.1, 194.

¹⁸³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁸⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia*, no. 45; cf. the 1998 Synod for Asia, *Propositions*, no. 35. The text is in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 140-65.

¹⁸⁵ Lay women participate in SCCs more than lay men. According to survey statistics on SCCs, 44% of lay women regularly attend meetings of SCCs as compared with 20% of lay men. Cf. Deukgil Yoon, *소공동체 운동 해야하나?: 21세기 한국 천주교회의 나아갈 길* [Why Should We Have the Movement of Small Christian Communities?: The Future of the Korean Catholic Church in 21st Century] (Seoul: The Catholic Faith Life Institute, 1995), 44.

special charisms and gifts from God in those SCCs. In addition, women leaders of SCCs have emerged as full partners with lay men in parish pastoral councils and they have come to participate more actively in decision-making processes concerning parish matters.¹⁸⁶ Communion in the Church cannot be fully accomplished if, owing to gender, any members are neglected or their charisms or abilities for the community are restricted. In this sense, SCCs in Korea, where the role of women can be enhanced and developed, can be seen as a place for encouraging communion within the Church.

4.4 The Proper Relationship Between SCCs and Other Lay Associations in the Parish

The Second Vatican Council, within the perspective of emphasizing the apostolate of the laity, suggests that the laity should “exercise their apostolic activity either singly or grouped in various communities or associations.”¹⁸⁷ The lay faithful are called to be involved in the apostolate not only as individuals, but also as groups. “The group apostolate is in happy harmony ... with a fundamental need in the faithful, a need that is both human and Christian,” and “it offers a sign of the communion and unity of the Church in Christ.”¹⁸⁸ In accordance with this teaching, Pope John Paul II especially highlights the value of the group apostolate in terms of Church communion:

¹⁸⁶ For instance, in the case of the Archdiocese of Seoul, in 1995 the members of parish councils consisted of 72% men and 28% women. But in 2001 parish councils were composed of 64% men and 36% women. Cf. Administrative Office of the Synod of the Archdiocese of Seoul, *서울대교구 교세통계 분석 보고서* [A Statistical Survey Report of the Archdiocese of Seoul] (Seoul: Administrative Office of the Synod of the Archdiocese of Seoul, 2002), 8.

¹⁸⁷ Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 15.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., no. 18. Various kinds of apostolic associations are mentioned: “Great variety is to be found in apostolic associations. Some look to the general apostolic end of the Church; others aim specifically at evangelization and sanctification; others work for the permeation of the temporal order by the Christian spirit; and other engage in works of mercy and of charity as their special way of bearing witness to Christ.” Ibid., no. 19.

Church communion, already present and at work in the activities of the individual, finds its specific expression in the lay faithful's working together in groups, that is, in activities done with others in the course of their responsible participation in the life and mission of the Church.¹⁸⁹

In the Korean Catholic Church, since the 1950's, various spiritual movements or associations have been introduced and have grown with vigor. In those groups, lay faithful have promoted the Christian call to holiness and acknowledged concrete and specific ways of how to inculturate Gospel values in Christian communities and in all spheres of life.¹⁹⁰ The Legion of Mary can be particularly singled out as one of the representative lay spiritual associations in the Korean Catholic Church in that it was introduced to the Korean Catholic Church as the first lay association in 1953, and now it is the largest such association, with over 270,000 active members and over 250,000 auxiliary (praying) members as of 2010. In fact, for more than 50 years, the Legion of Mary has contributed significantly to the development of the Church and to evangelical mission in South Korea, and it has played a central role in the ministry of the parish.¹⁹¹

As SCCs have developed in the Church of South Korea, however, the role of

¹⁸⁹ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, no. 29.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Youngok Kang, “한국천주교 소공동체와 사도직 운동 [SCCs in the Korean Catholic Church and Apostolic Movements],” in *2004 소공동체 심포지움 전국모임 후속 자료집 [Additional Sources of the National Meeting of Small Christian Communities in 2004]*, ed. Administrative Office for Evangelization (Seoul: Administrative Office for Evangelization, 2004), 229-248. For instance, the number of lay people taking the course of Cursillo was 8,323 (in 2007), 8,898 (in 2008), 9,101 (in 2009). The number of lay people belonging to Movement for a Better World (M.B.W.) was 680 (2007), 1,850 (2008), 1,228 (2009). The number taking the program of Marriage Encounter (M.E.) was 7,830 (2007), 7,488 (2008), 6,897 (2009). The number of attending the intensive program of Charismatic Renewal Movements was 24,123 (2007), 32,240 (2008), 38,157 (2009). The whole number of Focolare was 7,922 (2007), 8,986 (2008), 8,925 (2009). In particular, the total number of people in the Legion of Mary was 231,297 (2007), 261,610 (2008), 263,571 (2009). See the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea, *교세 통계표 [A Statistical Survey Report of the Korean Catholic Church]* (Seoul: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Korea). Respectively published in 2008, 2009, 2010.

¹⁹¹ Cf. Joohyun Ro, “통계자료로 본 신심단체들의 발전방향 [A Development of Spiritual Associations on the Basis of Statistical Data],” in *통계자료에 근거한 단체와 소공동체 발전 방향 [A Development of Spiritual Associations and SCCs on the Basis of Statistical Data]*, ed. The Integral Pastoral Institute (Seoul: The Integral Pastoral Institute, 2007), 9.

spiritual movements or associations, especially the Legion of Mary, has changed and unfortunately decreased. SCCs are focused on the ministry of the parish and regarded as vital cells in parish renewal, whereas other associations are considered to be merely assistant or supplementary means for achieving that pastoral goal. So SCCs have been the basis of the renewal of the parish.¹⁹² In fact, in certain parishes, in the name of activating SCCs, some pastors have neglected the Legion of Mary and other spiritual movements or groups, and suggested that members of those associations are obliged to attend the meetings of SCCs.¹⁹³

The various spiritual movements and apostolic associations, however, have their own spiritual charisms and apostolic purposes, and with their own specific characteristics they encourage their members to participate in the mission and ministry of the Church. In addition, those various groups represent various particular gifts and charisms of the lay faithful in the Church and exemplify the diversity and unity of the Church.

Accordingly, it is not correct that various associations in the parish should be neglected so as to activate SCCs, and vice versa. Rather, the relationship between SCCs and various groups should be understood in terms of communion. On the one hand, according to an ecclesial principle, it is certain that the Church universal is a communion of local churches; the local church can be seen as a communion of parishes; and the parish can be analogously seen as a communion of SCCs. At the same time, on the other hand, various groups in the parish, where the parishioners fulfill and exercise their abilities and charisms

¹⁹² Cf. Soongyong Kwak, “제2차바티칸 공의회 교회상 실현을 위한 단체와 소공동체 관계 모색 [A Search for the Proper Relation between SCCs and the Parish Groups in Order for Implementation of Ecclesiology of Vatican II],” in *통계자료에 근거한 단체와 소공동체 발전 방향 [A Development of Spiritual Associations and SCCs on the Basis of Statistical Data]*, ed. The Integral Pastoral Institute (Seoul: The Integral Pastoral Institute, 2007), 76.

¹⁹³ Cf. Dongki Chon, “Movement of SCCs [소공동체 운동],” *사목 [Ministry]* 339 (2007): 23.

freely, are crucial and vital to the life of the Church. An excessive focus on the structure of the Church can lose sight of the fundamental nature of the Church. To suggest that the idea of the Church as communion is central to the life of the Church and simultaneously that the parish consists only of SCCs, and that SCCs are the only places where parishioners can accomplish their vocation, reflects a misunderstanding of the idea of communion, because communion is basically concerned with harmony, co-operation, mutual respect, and diversity in unity.

Within this perspective, the idea of the Church as communion needs to be further developed. The parish cannot be understood just as a communion of SCCs; rather, it is a communion of SCCs and other spiritual movements, associations, and communities. Furthermore, the parish should be understood as a communion of all the members of the eucharistic community, constituting one People of God, including the pastor, the religious in the parish, the members of the parish pastoral council, the members of the Legion of Mary, the members of various spiritual movements or associations, the members of SCCs, and also those who are not members of the communities.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has evaluated SCCs in South Korea in two respects: first, with regard to the triple dimension of communion, namely the christological, ecclesial, and evangelical dimensions, which were developed mainly in Catholic magisterial teaching on the universal level; and second, with regard to the idea of communion as liberation, as dialogue, and as harmony, which was underlined in the FABC documents.

The participants in SCCs in South Korea deepen their understanding of and

reflection on the Word through the practice of Gospel-sharing. In this way, the faithful have communion with God as they encounter the Word, Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. Also, SCCs become places where the members are enabled to have friendlier and more spiritual relationships among themselves and thus they encourage communion among the members in Christ. In service to their neighbors who need help in various ways, caring for the old, visiting the sick, helping the poor, and assisting at events such as weddings and funerals, the faithful in SCCs discover a more evangelical way of life among their neighbors and accomplish their mission, that is, of promoting communion with their neighbors.

With regard to communion as liberation, SCCs in South Korea do not pay much attention directly to the liberation of the poor or the reform of unjust structures in society. Instead, the members of SCCs in South Korea have mainly searched for a personal or communal practice of God's charity in their neighborhood. In the aspect of communion as dialogue, SCCs in South Korea can be positively evaluated in the broad sense that the faithful live out a communion of dialogue when celebrating life's joys and pains together, reaching out and serving neighbors, helping poor neighbors, and getting involved in life issues in their particular situations. In SCCs, fellowship among the members leads them to live harmoniously with each other and to be agents of harmony in their neighborhood. Through living and enjoying a harmonious life, they express the joy and hope of Christians to their neighbors.

Hierarchical communion is manifested in the Korean Catholic Church in a vision of the communion of SCCs in each parish. The college of bishops, in the teaching of the Church, is not only the communion of bishops themselves but also the visible sign of unity in the communion of local churches. This idea can be applied analogously to a more local

level, that is, just as the communion of bishops constitutes the visible sign of unity in the communion of local churches, so the communion of pastors with and under their bishop constitutes the visible sign of unity in the communion of parishes. Furthermore, at the grassroots level, in the Church of South Korea, the idea of the parish as a communion of SCCs is seen in the proper spiritual leadership of the pastor with regard to SCCs, the evangelical role of SCCs centered and based on the parish as the eucharistic community, the active participation of the SCC leaders in the parish pastoral council, and the involvement of SCC members in matters and issues of the parish.

Finally, the chapter critically reflected on the present situation of SCCs and presented four suggestions for an inculturated ecclesiology of communion in South Korea. First, in the situation of Korean society, where the people of South Korea have suffered from severe competition, individualism, and self-alienation, a new awareness of lay spirituality in the world is urgently needed. SCCs in South Korea can be an alternative framework for recovering truly human relationships and finding personal meaning in society. Second, the development of SCCs in South Korea obviously has brought about the emergence of lay leaders in the parish and reflection on their participative leadership with the pastor. Accordingly, leadership in the Church should be more broadly considered. Third, as SCCs have developed in South Korea, lay women have played an important role. Women leaders in SCCs have emerged especially as full partners with lay men in parish pastoral councils and they have come to participate more actively in decision-making processes concerning parish matters. The role of women should be enhanced and further developed to encourage communion within the Church. Fourth, while SCCs are focused on the ministry of the parish and are regarded as vital cells in parish renewal, other associations are often unfortunately

considered to be merely an auxiliary or supplementary means for achieving pastoral goals. It is not correct to neglect various associations in the parish so as to activate SCCs, and vice versa. Rather, the relationship between SCCs and various groups should be more deeply understood in terms of communion.

Admittedly, there are some weak points in the SCCs, such as a top-down strategy in implementing them, a foreign and not fully inculturated SCC model, and a lack of concern for social justice. An inculturated model or image for SCCs that is suitable for the Korean context is urgently needed. The model should be devised not only by some pastors or administrators but through various consultations and suggestions from all the faithful, especially parishioners. In this way, the parishioners can participate in the SCCs more actively and freely, and then SCCs can truly be communities in which the participants feel themselves to be active subjects in the communion of the Church.

CONCLUSION

There has been a significant shift in Catholic theology in the last hundred years away from a juridical understanding of the Church as a perfect society to an understanding of the Church as communion. In the former vision, the Church was described as a juridical body in which all the members were subjects of the pope, the vicar of Christ, and communion was mainly understood in a spiritual and interior sense.¹ However, in the latter vision, the Church is understood sacramentally and personally. Vatican II embraced this vision of the Church: “The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of union [*unionis*] with God and of unity among all men.”² This sacramental understanding of the Church implies that the Church is fundamentally a community of people who have a unity of communion with God and live out this communion in the world for the unity of all people.

The idea of the Church as communion has become one of the outstanding self-understandings of the Church, and it should thus be a framework for understanding the ecclesiality of various Church communities, including SCCs. In this perspective, the main goal of this dissertation has been to contribute to a better understanding of the Church as communion by analyzing the recent development of SCCs in the Church of South Korea.

¹ See above, Chapter two, pp. 78-80.

² Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1. Translation amended.

In fact, in the Korean Catholic Church, there has been a lack of understanding and analysis of SCCs in terms of the idea of the Church as communion. Instead, they have generally been regarded as one of best ways for evangelization and for parish renewal. This seems to be because SCCs in South Korea have been implemented while mostly focusing on the mission of the Church, without fully considering the essential nature of the Church as a whole. An overemphasis on one aspect of the Church can make it difficult to understand the Church entirely and wholly. This dissertation thus deliberately endeavored to describe the value and role of the SCCs in terms of communion and of the idea of the Church as communion, and sought to propose a proper way forward for SCCs in the Korean Catholic Church.

The concept of communion and the role of communion have been articulated in various images since the very early period of the Church. According to the Scriptures, communion is outstandingly manifested in the Eucharist: when the faithful share in the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, they participate in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:16-17). This vertical *koinonia* with the Lord brings about horizontal *koinonia* between believers. *Koinonia* in the one eucharistic body of Christ leads to *koinonia* with one another and to the unity of all Christians with the Lord. Trinitarian and missionary aspects of *koinonia* are especially described in the first letter of John. In John's perspective, *koinonia* between the Father and the Son in the divine life, testified to by the Holy Spirit, flows into *koinonia* between those who believe in the truth of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, through proclamation of this truth to others, *koinonia* is opened to all people.

The scriptural meaning of communion was renewed and developed in the documents of Vatican II and in subsequent magisterial teachings, especially highlighting the following

three aspects.³ First, the Church is the sacrament of a *unity of communion with God*. The Church is brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Church has its source and center in Christ and is established by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth, having the Holy Spirit as the principle of its unity. Second, the Church is the sacrament of *communion among the faithful* who participate in the Body of Christ. Participation in the Eucharist means the communion of the faithful with Christ in the Church. Within this aspect, the unity and diversity of the Church are harmonized. The charisms, the ministries, the different forms of service in the Church are understood in communion and for communion. Third, the Church is understood as the sacrament of *unity among all people*. The fruits of salvation and communion with God, which already exist in the Church, should be communicated to all for the unity of all in God. The communion of the Church should become a sign for the world, a compelling force that will lead persons to faith in Christ, and the Church must have a missionary openness for the integral salvation of the world and the universal salvation of all. The Church as communion thus is a sacrament for the salvation of the world.

More structurally, the idea of the Church as communion is related to and reflected in *hierarchical communion* in the Church.⁴ Bishops are regarded as the visible signs of unity in the Church, because in the Eucharist all those who are gathered around the bishop participate in the one Body of Christ and express their unity in eucharistic communion. Accordingly, the college of bishops is not only a communion of bishops themselves but also the visible sign of the communion of local churches wherein the same Eucharist is

³ See above, Chapter two, pp. 83-93.

⁴ See above, Chapter two, pp. 93-103.

celebrated. The idea of communion in the hierarchical structure of the Church has been expanded to the whole life of the Church in recent magisterial teachings. Therefore, the Church's hierarchical structure should be understood not as merely juridical, but as a communion in which all the members, each with a personal dignity and vocation, live in harmony to promote its unity.

The idea of communion was closely and directly connected with basic/small communities especially by the 1985 Extraordinary Synod Fathers, when they asserted that the communities are “a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion” and thus give “cause for great hope for the life of the Church.”⁵ Furthermore, in the 1987 Synod, the Fathers developed this idea in a more concrete and local way, picturing the parish as a “dynamic community of communities.”⁶ The Synod Fathers called for the adaptation of parish structures, especially in promoting participation by the lay faithful in pastoral responsibilities and the construction of small/basic communities where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another.

The Asian bishops developed the idea of communion within their special context and spoke of *communion as liberation*, *communion as dialogue*, and *communion as harmony*.⁷ Amid the dark realities of the Asian context, they suggested that the Church's life cannot be cut off from the world, but that there should be a search for the liberation of all in a communion of solidarity. In the diverse cultural and religious contexts, they argued that true evangelical mission consists not in the injection of the Gospel into cultures or religions, but

⁵ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod, *Final Report*, II. C. 6.

⁶ The 1987 Ordinary Synod, “Message to the People of God,” 388.

⁷ See above, Chapter three, pp. 168-203.

in a dialogue with cultures, religions, and people. After a critical reflection on local churches in Asia, they said that the ideal shape of the Church is “being together” with all the peoples in Asia, in harmony with them.

Within the idea of the Church as communion, the Asian bishops advocated the active participation and co-responsibility of the laity in the Church, where, in dynamic communion with Jesus and within communities, all members of the Church are recognized as mature subjects and persons with dignity and freedom, with their gifts and powers as well as rights and responsibilities. For this, the bishops suggested the formation of SCCs within parishes. They were confident that in SCCs all the faithful would experience communion: communion with God through meditating and reflecting on the Word, communion among the faithful through the sharing of their reflection on the Word and on experiences of the life of faith, communion with all people through proclaiming the Good News to all in liberating solidarity, dialogue of life, and harmony in the local neighborhood.⁸

The Archdiocese of Seoul first realized the significance of small communities in its reflection on the documents of the Fifth Plenary Assembly of FABC (1990), in which the Asian bishops suggested the building of small Christian communities in Asia as a tried and effective way of promoting communion and participation in the Church at the grassroots level. Proceeding from this insight, beginning in 1992 when the Archdiocese of Seoul launched SCCs, such communities were formed in most dioceses in South Korea, indeed, this became the pastoral policy of the bishops.

It can be generally said that SCCs in South Korea have promoted communion in the Church, especially in terms of the maturity of faith through the practice of Gospel-sharing,

⁸ See above, Chapter three, pp. 225-32.

the friendlier communion among the parishioners, the more active participation of the laity in the parish, and an awareness of evangelization in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, there are still some issues to be resolved and points to be developed, such as finding a truly inculturated model for the SCCs and proper methods of Gospel-sharing and of lay spirituality fitting for the Korean environment, developing participative leadership and enhancing the role of lay women, and fostering a fruitful relationship between various parish groups and SCCs. Among these, creating an inculturated model for the SCCs seems very crucial and urgent, because only such a model can actually assume the ethos and pathos of Korean Catholics, and then play a catalytic and elementary role for the development of a truly local Church in South Korea.

This dissertation mainly dealt with Catholic teaching on the concept of communion and the idea of the Church as communion, and used an historical and analytical methodology diachronically. Further study can analyze various Korean cultural factors in order to pursue a still more inculturated model for the SCCs. Such study might search for a correlation or mutual relationship between the theological understanding of communion and the sociological understanding of Korean culture, and could use a comparative and analytical methodology synchronically. For instance, the Korean word “어울림 [Eoulrim: being or playing together]” which is one of the highly-evaluated characteristics in Korean culture could be considered in comparison with the Christian understanding of communion. Linguistically, the Korean word “우리 [Uri: we or us]” that is very frequently used in dialogue instead of I or me⁹ literally means binding together. The word is in fact

⁹ Koreans would like to say “our father,” “our country,” and “our house,” instead of “my father,” “my country,” and “my house.”

etymologically originated from the word “울 [fence or enclosure].” These words in a certain sense express the collegial spirit which animates Korean culture. Besides these, there are many characteristics of Korean culture which can be related and compared with communion such as “계 [Kye: small intimate gathering],” “두레 [Durye: agricultural gathering].” A study of these Korean cultural factors could be very helpful in the search for a still more inculturated model of SCCs.

In conclusion, it can be said that with the help of the SCC movement the Church in South Korea is in process toward becoming a true local Church. The more the lay faithful in SCCs experience a new way of being Church, activate a new type of leadership, foster co-responsibility in the parish, give service to their neighbors, and evangelize the culture and society, the more they will come to realize and actualize their role in the Church and in the world. The Korean Catholic Church will then become a community-Church, a true Church-in-communion.

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