

THE PARISH IN TRANSITION:

Shades of the Past in the Shape of the future

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I. Introduction

I should acknowledge from the very outset that, in my thirty years as an ordained priest, I have never had the honour of holding the very demanding office of Parish Priest, with all of its responsibilities and challenges, - perhaps greater today than at any time in the recent past. While offering this disclaimer, I should at the same time like to point out that my never having been a Parish Priest does not mean that I have been totally removed from the parochial field of endeavour, as it were. I have, in fact, been rather directly involved in parochial affairs and parish administration, even though one step removed from its immediate demands. I was for ten years, the Vicar General and Chancellor of the then Prelature, now Diocese of Malaybalay, Bukidnon, in the Philippines, during the episcopal administration of Bishop Francisco Claver, S.J., its first prelate Ordinary.

During those ten years I commuted between Manila and Malaybalay, teaching in the School of Theology for several months each year, while spending the rest of the time attending to my various administrative tasks in the Prelature, which then had about twenty five parishes. In fact, my contact with the dedicated men who had been serving in the "front lines" of the Church's mission in the parishes for so many years gave me an extraordinary opportunity to enrich my teaching in the Seminary with something of a real life understanding of the actual demands on the life of a parish priest, as I had observed them during my stay in Bukidnon. As I listened to, lived with, and learnt from the many priests who had been directly engaged in that ministry for so many years, I found that I was able to transmit their experience into the formative program of those prepar-

ing for the diocesan priesthood who would succeed them in this noble undertaking.

Equally important was my contact with the people in the various parishes, and particularly with those in our very active *lay leadership program*. This program initially grew from an experimentation largely limited to "extraordinary ministers" of liturgical affairs, to the much fuller responsibilities which fell to them in the total life of the parish, as exercised in the later phases of the diocesan *Lay Leadership Program*. Ultimately, we came to view this whole undertaking as a rather extraordinary and exemplary development of the theory and practice of the Basic Christian Community, rooted in the total Christian experience and commitment of the people in the parishes. My understanding of an exposure to this program will also serve as something of a background for some of the comments which I shall subsequently make about the notion and necessity of *shared ministry* in the life of the parish.

This *shared ministry*, rooted in the ecclesiological developments of Vatican II, has been clearly reflected in the provisions on the parish in the new Code of Canon Law of 1983. This shows that the changes taking place are not only juridical in nature, but are based on sound theological or ecclesiological reasons. Hence, as the title of this paper indicates, many of the changes presently taking place, and the "new forms" towards which we are moving in today's Church, bring us back to the roots of the earliest Christian communities from which as "*Church*," we have come.

Some of the changes in the life of the contemporary Church, as well as in today's parish, may appear to many to be somewhat drastic, or *radical*. It frequently happens that when drastic or radical changes take place, many have the uneasy feeling that the Church is undergoing a transformation to the point where it is no longer the Church that they have always known and loved. This was one of the unfortunate responses on the part of some to the changes that took place in the aftermath of Vatican II, most notably in the liturgy. On the contrary, while the changes may indeed be radical and drastic, careful reflection often reveals that they are *radical* not in the sense that they signify an *uprooting of what is*, but rather a *return to the roots* from which that with which we are familiar has originally sprung. Understood in this way, we might say that a continuing process of radical change in the understanding and life of the Church is a constant challenge to all who claim love of and allegiance to her. *The Church is alive, so growth is an essential indication of that life.*

Beyond the recognition of the necessity of growth, *fidelity to our roots*

is equally necessary to guarantee the authenticity of our growth, not into something different, to be sure, but to the same Church experiencing, expressing and extending itself in the context of the ever-changing challenges of the contemporary world.

I trust that these preliminary comments will become clearer in the course of this paper.

II. The Definition of a Parish

A. Preliminary Considerations

Etymologically, the word "parish" comes from the Greek word *paroikia*. I believe a rough English equivalent of this would be *neighbourhood* - where people have their dwelling (*oikia*) alongside one another (*para*). In ordinary parlance, "the neighbourhood" can have different primary connotations.

First of all, it can refer to an area, a place. It carries with it a connotation of familiarity, in the sense that its houses, street, atmosphere, "character," are all part of a familiar whole which convey a sense of unity and identity to the clearly defined area that it embraces. In Lagos, for example, one would have different perceptions of the "neighborhoods" of Surulere, Victoria Island or Mushin.

Another notion of "the neighbourhood" can refer more specifically to the people who live together in a certain area. The relationship of the people is ordinarily of a higher importance than the geographical definition of the place. In many parts of New York City, for example, which were some years ago the enclaves of white, Irish Catholics, the "face" of the neighbourhood has been totally transformed. A person returning there on a nostalgic trip might remark that "it is an altogether different neighbourhood." The streets and the houses are wholly familiar. In a very real way it "looks" the same. But the entire atmosphere is changed. No one looks familiar. Perhaps a different language is spoken. It just is not the same place. In this sense, "the neighbourhood" is totally different, because the people are different, - not only their individual personal identities, but in their over-all cultural or "community" identity.

I think that these notions indicate a basic distinction which we do well to bear in mind, for they give us something of an indication of the two distinct ways in which "the parish" is spoken of in the Church. This holds true not only for popular expression and understanding, but even more importantly in terms of canonical definition. We shall consider the sig-

nificance of this a little later, for the primacy of parish as "place" or parish as "people" grows out of the basic ecclesiological concepts which define the primary meaning of the Church.

B. Historical Synopsis of the Parish.

1. In early Christian Centuries.

In the *Commentary* on the New Code of Canon Law it is noted that "For approximately the first four centuries parish and diocese were coextensive."¹ In a true sense, it can be said that this entity represented the "local Church," which was essentially *the Christian community together with its Bishop*. "Christianity began as a religion of the cities, but at the end of the 3rd century it became necessary to establish centres of pastoral ministry in the countryside and provide them with their own permanent pastors."² While the general unity of the whole under the single jurisdiction of the Bishop remained, it was sub-divided for the purpose of more manageable pastoral care of the members of the community in the outlying rural areas, under the guidance of one delegated to this task by the Bishop. This "division" of the local Church into smaller communities marks the beginning of what later came to be known as "parishes," which would eventually take on a separate identity of their own. They were to become "local communities" within the larger "local Church"

Apart from the mere identity of the local communities, there are other elements in the early centuries of the Church which deserve our consideration at this point. Foremost among these, for our present purpose, is the notion of *ministry* within these communities. While total "*jurisdiction*," such as it was in those times, belonged solely to the Bishop, the same does not hold true of what can properly be called ministry. From the New Testament times it is undeniable that ministry was not something that was the exclusive possession or responsibility of those who held places of jurisdiction or who were "ordained" to particular ministries within the community.

In Eph 4:11-14, Paul identifies the five ministries of "...apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of services for the faithful to build up the body of Christ." These ministries are in no way restricted to those who have jurisdictional pastoral care for the community, but rather are gifts or "charisms" of the Spirit distributed within the community. In 1 Cor 12:4-11 Paul defines this ministry thus:

There are different gifts but the same Spirit; there are different ministries but the same Lord; there are different works but the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone. To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one the Spirit gives wisdom in discourse, to another the power to express knowledge. Through the Spirit one receives faith; by the same Spirit another is given the gift of healing, and still another miraculous powers. Prophecy is given to one; to another power to distinguish one spirit from another. One receives the gift of tongues, another that of interpreting the tongues. But it is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as he wills.

These are the gifts which are given indiscriminately, we might say, to those who belong to the Christian community, "to each as the Spirit wills." They are all "given for the common good," and their source in the Spirit is itself its own authentication. The way these gifts are exercised within the community is described in Acts 2:42,44-47. William Bausch, in his book *Ministry*, says: "Luke describes for us there a close-knit community and how they continued in the teaching of the apostles, in praying, breaking bread, praising God, being in communion with one another, holding things in common, proclaiming the word of the Lord, and moving out to those in need."³ This is, continues Bausch, "a group of people engaged in the priestly and prophetic work of Jesus." It is, we might say, a picture of the earliest form of a "parish." In this same vein, Maria Harris defines ministry as "the priestly and prophetic work of the church."⁴ Bausch continues:

This means that the whole church is priestly insofar as it preserves tradition, celebrates ritual, and gathers community. The whole church is prophetic insofar as it speaks boldly the challenging word and serves the needs of others. These acts are not the property of individuals; they belong "to all who believed... continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread in their houses.... praising God..." (Acts 2:42 ff)⁵

Continuing along this same line of thought, we read in the comments of George MacRae a further observation about ministry in these early Christian communities:

Christian ministry is oriented to the needs of the Christian community and is rooted in the ministry of Christ. ... ministry gets its meaning from an understanding of the church, since the mission of Jesus is felt in the New Testament to be entrusted to the church, not to ministers, at least not as individuals... [That's why St. Paul, while he says that] God "entrusted to" us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:19), nevertheless understands the church as a whole to be involved in his own apostolate. To the Philippians he can even speak of their "partnership in the gospel" (1:5). And indeed, the so-called "Great Commission" of Matthew (28:18-20), though clearly addressed to the "eleven disciples, "must be heard, in the context of Matthew, as addressed to the whole church.⁶

2. In the Middle Ages.

Together with the development of the notion of priesthood there was a corresponding change in the whole concept of the Christian community. While in the earlier times the notion of *community* held a place of primacy, in the course of the centuries it was, to a certain extent, superseded by the *primacy of the priesthood*, independent of the community. In the fifth century, the Council of Chalcedon had decreed that no one could be ordained to the priesthood "absolutely," — that is, without a community into which and for which he was ordained. Priesthood without community was considered not only an anomaly, its conferral was judged to be invalid, and without effect. The canon of Chalcedon states this in very clear terms:

Neither presbyter, deacon, nor any of the ecclesiastical order shall be ordained at large, not unless the person ordained is particularly appointed to a church in a city or village, ... or to a monastery. And if any have been ordained without a charge, the holy Synod decrees, to the reproach of the ordainer, that such an ordination shall be inoperative, and such shall nowhere be suffered to officiate.⁷

It would seem, however, that such a primacy of the local community had been lost by the time of the Third Lateran Council in the twelfth century, for ordination at that time was allowed not on the basis of its being for service within a particular community, but rather on the as-

urance that the one to be ordained would have a community to support him, and which would guarantee him a proper living. In this a very important shift is introduced not only in the primacy of the community as such, but also in the meaning of ordained priesthood. Rather than the priest being for the community, it came to mean that the community was for the priest. It implies says Bausch, that:

... ordination, which formerly was tied in to the presidency of the local community, is altered to impart a personal investment of power that the individual could carry with him anywhere in his own person. What we are seeing here is a movement from delegation to a place, to acquisition of power for the person, regardless of community and place. Ordination has lost its communal rootedness and received a new twist, that of giving personal power.⁸

The Fourth Lateran Council confirmed this direction in the understanding of priesthood, together with the critical shift away from the primacy of the community of the earlier centuries. Previously,

Ordination was always centered on community and was a response to it, its need for leadership, its need for eucharistic presidency, its need to recognize its gifted leaders. Now ordination is abstracted from all of this. It becomes a ritual for transferring private power, independent of community. The priest, wherever he goes in the world, has the individual power to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ and to forgive sins. With such awesome personal power, he had indeed arrived at the status of sacred person... [The priest] becomes a man apart. His power is forever and follows him wherever he goes - with or without a community. He was now ordained absolutely. He could even finally do that totally inconceivable thing in the minds of the early Christians: he could celebrate a private Mass with no people present at all ... The [former] community-oriented recognition of ordination becomes, in effect, private personal power to celebrate Mass.⁹

We can now try to summarize the effects of this shift of emphasis in the life of the local communities down through the succeeding centuries. With this so-called "absolutization" of the ordained priesthood, we shall

see a very clear change in the whole concept of ministry within the Christian community.

3. The "Clericalization" of Ministry.

Bausch observes that "while 'priest' may indeed be a legitimate term to describe the one presiding at the sacrifice of the Eucharist, it is woefully inadequate to describe the one presiding over the community. In other words, of all of the wide gifts and tasks of this community leader, there has been an undue focus on one single role.¹⁰ Gradually, all of the ministerial responsibilities of the Christian community fell to the priest, while in the process, the "lay" members of the community itself became to a very large extent relatively passive in the affairs of the community. The priest "performed," while the community, that is, vast majority of it, - the laity, - "attended." Whereas formerly the emphasis was clearly on the liturgical celebration of the whole community, in which everyone participated actively, a gradual change came about wherein "the faithful" attended the Mass which was "celebrated" by the priest.

In the course of historical development, Fr. Burghardt observes, five distinct roles have emerged and have been emphasized as belonging exclusively to the Catholic priesthood. In the process, it seems quite evident that the notion of the common priesthood of all baptized Christians has virtually disappeared from conscious awareness in the Church, with the consequence that the "priestly roles" themselves do not have any direct bearing on the ministerial responsibilities of the laity within the community. These priestly roles are stated by Burghardt as follows:

... (1) the jurisdictional role emphasizing the priest as one who holds full authority from the bishop and gives authoritative teaching; (2) the cultic role, popular during medieval times, which saw the priest largely in terms of the performer of the sacred mysteries; (3) the pastoral role in which the priest is seen primarily as community leader and healer; (4) the prophetic role in which the priest is seen as the mighty proclaimer of God's word, the aspect chosen largely by the Protestant tradition; and (5) the monastic role in which the priest is viewed as the holy man, the guru, the spiritual director of souls.¹¹

It would be no exaggeration to suggest that it is a combination of all of these roles which have been "traditionally" attributed to the parish

priest, as this all-inclusive role has developed from the time of the Council of Trent right down to the present day. We shall see, however, that this exclusivity of ministry in the Christian community has been not only questioned by the renewed ecclesiology of Vatican II, but that clear steps have been taken to recover what has been lost from the concept of ministry in community as described above in the New Testament times and in the early Church. But that takes us a step ahead of ourselves.

Let us first look at the other side of the coin. What happened in the Christian community as its ministry became the exclusive domain of the "parish priest"? To put it simply, and perhaps even to oversimplify, it seems that, in the words of Bausch,

... any of the laity who aspired to church ministry were ultimately made to fall within the bishop's orbit and become clericalized. The original lay ministries of subdeacon, exorcist, porter, and acolyte were thus clericalized and made stepping stones to the priesthood. Even when new religious orders were founded, it was felt quite necessary for its members, all laymen at first, to be ordained priests, even if they never did celebrate Mass. In due time, unspoken law was that it was unthinkable that any official ministry could exist outside the clergy.¹²

If I may jump ahead a bit again, I would mention here that we still seem to fall into the same pattern today, in our serious efforts to re-establish within the Christian community the ministerial role which properly belongs to the laity, and is not the exclusive possession of the clergy.

4. The Codes of 1917 and 1983: Two Paradigms of Parish.

At this point we shall deal directly with the strictly canonical aspect of "The Parish in Transition." Against the admittedly sketchy background which I have tried to present, I would like now to show how the influence of the tremendous ecclesiological insights of Vatican II have influenced the way in which the notion of "parish" has been codified in the new Code of Canon Law of 1983. This can best be seen, I believe, by contrasting some of its essential provisions with those which prevailed in the Code of 1917.

I shall try to point out the notion of "church" which is presupposed in each of these two places. I shall also attempt to indicate the catalysts which led to the new vision of "church", and consequently of "parish."

Finally, I shall try to indicate how these new insights are, to a great extent, a *rediscovery* of what is actually quite *old* in the life of the Christian community, — a manifestation of the *nova et vetera* which is constantly asserting itself as a sign of unity and continuity in the renewal of the Church itself. By way of conclusion, I shall then propose some suggestions for further reflection on the situation and direction of the parish in the church today, if it is to give substance to the hopes that emerged in the on-going renewal of Christian life in the post- Vatican II Church.

(a) *The Parish in the Code of 1917.*

- (1) The parish is primarily a *territory with people attached to it*. A descriptive definition is offered by E.P. McCaslin in his doctoral dissertation on the *Division of Parishes*:

... A parish is that distinct portion of a diocese which has its own particular church administered by a proper pastor, whose duty it is to exercise in the internal forum the ordinary jurisdiction which is necessary for the care of souls committed to his care.¹³

Bertram Griffin describes the parish, characterizing it as based on a "feudal concept": "The parish was a territorial division of the church and the people were assigned to that territory.... a member of the parish was attached to the land almost like a serf in feudal times."¹⁴ In a large city with many parishes, if you lived on the side of the street you belonged to one parish; to another if you lived on the other side of the street. It is as though the parish had an identity of its own, apart from the people who "belonged" to it. In this way, actual neighbours may well belong to different parishes.

- (2) Secondly, the parish is an *endowment*, or in the older language of the Church, a *benefice*, which is conferred on the pastor to whom it is entrusted. The parish could be entrusted to a pastor in one of two ways. If it was a permanent endowment conferred upon him, then he was considered an *irremovable pastor*. He had a tenure there which was beyond the bishop's capacity to take away from him. This was something that only the Holy See could do. The other way in which a pastor could come into possession of his parish was as a *removable pastor*. His tenure was not quite as secure. There was a mutuality here by which the pastor was obliged to provide pastoral care to those who belonged to the parish. In return, he had a right to the income of the

parish, after the basic and necessary expenses were taken care of. A significant part of the "benefice" lay in the fact that the "stole fees," - the income from baptisms, marriages, funerals, - belonged to the pastor, as did the special collections at Christmas and Easter. While some of these benefits of the endowment were curtailed at various times and in various places, still the basic notion remained, and it was considered normal that a senior priest would be given one of the "better parishes" as something that was due to him as his right. The total administrative responsibility of the parish was in the hands of the pastor, or parish priest.

- (3) For special reasons, a *non-territorial parish* could be established, but this was possible only with a special indult from the Holy See. It was beyond the competence of the local Ordinary to do other than define territorial parishes. A case in point. I come from a city in the United States which had a population of about 30,000 people, at the time I was growing up, and which was 80% Catholic. There was one parish in the strict sense, that is, territorial. In addition, there were seven other parishes: two Italian, two Polish, one German, one Lithuanian, and one Ukrainian. The one territorial parish to which I belonged, was referred to by the others as "the Irish parish" In the present Philippine or Nigerian context, merely looking at the number of people to be served in a parish, that multiplicity of parishes does not really make much sense. However, in the context of the New Code, it makes eminently good sense, as we shall see.

(b) *The Parish in the Code of 1983.*

- (1) The Parish is first and foremost a *community*, as it is expressed in can. 515:

A parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church; the pastoral care of the parish is entrusted to a pastor as its own shepherd under the authority of the diocesan bishop.

Very obviously the primacy of community is here reasserted, reflecting the original concept which we saw in the early Church. First and foremost, the term "parish" refers to the community, and not simply to a particular territory. Thus the people do not *belong* to the parish. They *are* the parish! Consequently, whatever is said about the parish should apply most essen-

tially to the people who make up the community, and not to any impersonal institution or structure which, while important in community affairs, always hold a subordinate place to the community itself.

We may note at this point that the same distinction holds true between the 1917 and 1983 Codes with reference to the diocese. Whereas in the 1917 Code the diocese was primarily defined in terms of its territorial boundaries, in the 1983 Code it is "a portion of the people of God" (Can. 369). Furthermore, it is the diocese which constitutes, in the strictest sense, the "local Church." Hence the importance of seeing the "parish" as "a definite community within a particular (or 'local') church."

While we stress the importance of the primacy of community in the current definition of the parish, we must take note of the fact that the ordinary way to define the community itself is still by way of geographic boundaries. It says in Can. 518:

As general rule, a parish is to be territorial, that is it is to embrace all Christ's faithful of a given territory. Where it is useful, however, personal parishes are to be established, determined by reason of the rite, language or nationality of the faithful of a certain territory, or on some other basis.

This first part of this canon, while still reflecting something of the territorial nature of the ordinary parish, clearly gives to that aspect a secondary consideration. The primary emphasis is certainly on the community as such. It should be all too obvious that in carrying out the establishment of parishes along the lines referred to in the canon, the goal should be greater unity of the members of the parish, and not signify or lead to division from or conflict with other homogeneous communities in any form whatsoever. We shall look at the implications, as well as the striking innovations of this canon, below.

- (2) The parish considered as a benefice or endowment, as well as the insistence on the prevailing rights of the pastor as irremovable in his "possession" of the parish, are concepts that no longer appear in the new code. Primacy instead is given to the obligation that the parish priest has to serve the pastoral needs of the community. Priests who serve the needs of the parish are to be provided for by a system of salary, rather than by having a right to the income of the parish as a benefice redounding to their own enrichment. Theoretically, at least, as far as the personal income of the parish priest goes, there should

no longer be "rich" and "poor" parishes, to be distributed as rewards, — or punishments! — to the clergy, depending on their more or less deserving of "plums" or "sour grapes," as the case may be. Regarding "parish income" as such:

The stole fees, or offering people give at the time of a wedding, funeral or a baptism belong to the parish. Now all parishes are equal canonically, since the benefice system disappears. Now it is possible for a pastor to pastor more than one parish since parishes are no longer benefices. Hence, the organization of parish life is no longer tied to the concept of benefice, but to the concept of pastoral care and mission.¹⁵

Closely tied in with the notion of the income belonging to the parish is the new provision in the 1983 Code that mandates the establishment of a finance committee in each parish. The management of parish funds is no longer the sole domain of the parish priest. Can. 536 states:

In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to can. 532. It is ruled by universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it comprises of members of the faithful selected according to these norms.

Of course this comes as a bit of bad news to roving priests and deacons who have been deluded into thinking that all baptismal stipends and other such offerings belong to the minister of the sacrament. *They belong to the parish.* Canons 281, 848 and 1264 provide guidelines for establishing the norms to be followed in giving proper remuneration for ministerial services rendered.

- (3) Regarding the establishment of parishes, it is now totally within the domain of the local Bishop to determine the lines along which a parish may be defined. In the Code of 1983, it is stated in Can. 515, #2:

The diocesan bishop alone is competent to erect, suppress or alter parishes; he is not to erect, suppress or notably alter them without hearing the presbyteral council.

This marks a very significant departure from the provisions of the 1917 Code, wherein the bishop was strictly limited to establishing parishes

along territorial lines. Any other type of "personal" parish, such as one based on nationality or language, could be established only by a special indult of the Holy See. The contemporary growth of the *Basic Christian Communities*, for example, may now indicate the desirability of establishing parishes built around the common interests of communities which are based on characteristics other than the fact that a group of persons just happen to live within the same geographical boundaries. Needless to say, mere geographical proximity is no indication of the presence of a true community.

The possibilities that emerge from transforming such communities into true parishes is by no means intended to isolate these communities, or restrict them merely to matters of their own immediate interest. In fact, one of the responsibilities of the parish priest of every parish community is to convey the sense of belonging to and having responsibility for the larger community, — that is, for the local Church, which is the diocese, and for the universal Church throughout the world.

5. Parish Ministry.

In the "new parish" of the post-Vatican II Church, it is quite clear that ministry is not something that is to be predicated merely of the priests in the parish, in such a way that it pertains to the laity only by default. The previous shadowy presence of the ministry which belongs to every one who is baptized into Christ, and which was unmistakably clear in the early Church as we have seen, has once again taken on substance, and is understood to belong not only by *canonical right* but by *baptismal reality* to every Christian.

In the contemporary context of post-Vatican II ecclesiology, the fact is that mission or apostolate, and the ministry by which they are served, are predicated of *the whole Christian community*, and are exercised and fulfilled through the various gifts that are distributed to all the members of this community working in harmony with one another. That is a concept of ministry which we have only begun, perhaps, to rediscover and appreciate anew in today's Church. The mission of Christ belongs to the Church, and the Church is the *People of God*.

In its immediate presence in and to the world, the parish is a particular community of the people of God, and as such it is called together by the Spirit to continue the salvific mission of Christ to the world. Each community, as well as each member of the community, has a mission in its own right. This demands much more reflection, if we are to see the very

broad implications it has for the life of the parish.

III. Catalysts of Transition

For the most part, when we consider drastic changes occurring in the life of the Church, we view these as taking place over the course of a very long period of time, — frequently measured in terms of centuries. Recent history, however, has accomplished the most extraordinary and radical changes in the liturgy and life of the Church in brief periods that are easily within the memory of many people who cannot even be considered unusually old, by any standard.

The changes that we have mentioned in the concept and structure of the parish partake of this same rapid growth in everything that touches our Christian lives. Of course, the total experience of Vatican II, and the atmosphere of *aggiornamento* which this introduced into every phase of the theology and life of the Church provides the over-riding context for all the rest that has happened. Using William Bausch's analysis of the elements which have contributed to the transition that has taken place in the Church, I shall attempt to apply these elements to the more limited perspective of the parish, which is here the main point of concern. He singles out *five specific factors* which have helped us to change our "perceptions and focus" in a rediscovery of the Church, and to respond to the challenges and opportunities which this second look at the Church has occasioned. They are as follows:

A. Research and Discovery

Under the "general rubric" of research and discovery, we are reminded that during the past 150 years there has not only been an enormous outpouring of new discoveries about our Christian roots, but also a revitalized *interest* in going back to our roots. Most noteworthy in this journey into the past is the whole exciting adventure of scriptural renewal, as well as the discovery of documents and the technology of dating and interpreting these which modern methods have made possible. Some of these discoveries gave us new insights into the life of the early Church, thus inspiring us to renew our own Christian lives in accordance with the roots from which we have come. The *Didache*, for example, which has served as such an important source of understanding the first generations of Christians, was discovered only in 1875. In 1945 a whole Gnostic library was unearthed, which enabled us to understand so much more about the

writings of St. Paul. In 1948, the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in a cave near the Dead Sea, and provided us as well with the earliest copy of the Old Testament which we now possess. All of these discoveries had a tremendous impact on the study of Scripture, and on our understanding of the early Church.

Some of the "revelations" concerning early Christian community and ministry have influenced our own renewed notions of these. Bausch summarizes this in a way which well serves our own present purpose. He observes that our reading of these documents in the context of their times reminds us that:

... Ordinary Christians were lectors and acolytes, exorcists and porters before they were pulled into the clerical state. Yet we know, for example, that Origen, antiquity's greatest theologian until Augustine, both read and expounded the scripture at Caesarea while still a layman. It was commonplace for lay people to take communion home with them so that they might receive during the week. It was usual for them to take a full and intimate part in the preparation of the catechumens. All this is a way of saying that the records show that the early Christians saw themselves indeed as a "royal priesthood, a chosen race," and holiness resided in them collectively.¹⁶

In 1972 Pope Paul VI took the unusual step of "declericalizing" some of the ministries in the Church, when some of the so-called "minor orders" were changed into "canonical ministries," while others were eliminated altogether. They are no longer seen as "steps" to "major orders," and being "installed" into a ministry no longer implied that one is going to "go all the way to the priesthood." Somewhat difficult to understand, however, is why these ministries are still a prerequisite for all candidates for ordination to the priesthood. Fr. Bausch also presents his own difficulty relative to the term "extraordinary ministers of Communion," when referring to laymen. Says he: "It is hard to figure why something that is a right by baptism and the ordinary practice of the early church needed to be designated as 'extraordinary' and required episcopal mandate, especially only a year after a sensible effort to declericalize the ministries."¹⁷

This is not altogether surprising, though, given the fact that in the 1917 Code, even the ordained deacon was considered an "extraordinary

minister" of baptism, a "power" which he possessed, but which he could not exercise without the permission of the parish priest or the bishop.¹⁸ Likewise, in the old Code, the deacon was only an "extraordinary minister of Holy Communion," a ministry which he could exercise only with the permission of the Bishop or the parish priest, and this was to be granted only for a serious reason!¹⁹ See how far we have come!

B. The Shortage of Ordained Priests.

This second factor has certainly had an impact on many of the changes which have taken place. The bottom line in our understanding of Christian community is that ministry, and especially sacramental ministry, is an absolute necessity in the life of the people. All would agree that an authentic Christian community must have the Eucharist as its central point of unity and source of strength. It is also eminently clear that there simply are not enough priests to provide for this ministry within the existing communities. Throughout the world, and especially in those areas which are predominantly "Catholic," such as in Latin America, there are an estimated 44,000 parishes without priests. Beyond that, especially in "missionary" parts of the Church, the ratio of priests to people is such that it is all but impossible that the Eucharistic liturgy can in any way be central in the life of the people.

To get a clear picture of this situation, we do not have to look beyond our own experience. In the Philippines, where I have been assigned for almost forty years, according to the 1986 Catholic Directory, there are 44,454,030 Catholics, 84% of the population. There are 2,037 parishes, and 3,273 diocesan priests. At this point, I would submit that it is the presence of *diocesan priests* that gives an indication of the vitality of priestly ministry in any nation, for they are those who, by their proper call and ordination, live alongside the people (*dia-oikein*), who are gathered into and belong to Christian communities or "parishes" (*paroikia*) by their very identity. The average Philippine parish is a "community" of 21,823 persons. For each diocesan priest, there are 13,582 Catholics. Just how often can such "communities" come together for liturgical celebration?

While I do not have on hand detailed statistics of the average size of the Nigerian parishes, which would differ significantly in different regions of the country, some general similarities to the Philippine situation may be noted. Based on the figures given in the 1992 *Catholic Diary & Church Directory*,²⁰ which are rather incomplete, we find that in an estimated

over-all population of 100,297,834, there are 8,371,169 Catholics, representing roughly 8% of the total population. The number of priests is 2,105, of which 83% or 1,752 are indigenous Nigerians, presumably diocesan priests for the most part. On the national level, there is a ratio of one priest for every 3,976 Catholics. Given the large number of priests involved in such ministries as Seminary formation and other non-parochial ministries, the ratio in parish ministry becomes much wider. It is also noteworthy that the ratio of priest to Catholics is quite different in the various Ecclesiastical Provinces: 1:3,152 in Kaduna, 1:5,155 in Lagos, and 1:3,637 in Onitsha. Taking into account the number of indigenous (and presumably diocesan) priests in the same Ecclesiastical Provinces, we find that they represent 64% in Kaduna, 66% in Lagos, and 92% in Onitsha.²¹ The Directory includes no data concerning the population of individual parishes.

The real picture, however, is not quite so "bright." It is all too obvious for anyone in direct contact with many parish communities that "the averages" given above very often do not represent the reality at all. One parish, with one priest and many outstations, is not at all a rarity.

C. The Rise of Worldwide Charismatic Movements.

In great part, these movements have been undertaken by and for the laity. We are not here referring to the fanatical fringe, but rather to the solid spirituality and orthodox doctrine typified in those serious efforts on the part of many to live a more deeply committed Christian life. Regarding these movements, Bausch says:

*... They are essentially democratic, open to men and women. Their proliferation is a testimony to the endurance of that democratic Spirit, first preached by Peter on the first Pentecost. Perhaps the current explosion is a kind of Freudian reaction to a too long suppression or absorption of giftedness by the institution. Basically, such movements need no institution, they need no clergy. The Spirit breathes freely.*²²

This should also give food for thought, and provide abundant grounds for pastoral discussion, for it raises some very difficult questions about the relevance and effectivity of some present parish institutions in meeting the felt needs of the Christian community. We may conclude this section with the following comment:

*Maybe it's a reaction to all institutions in general and the sense of powerlessness among the people that global institution engender, or maybe it's a prophetic retreat from the false salvation so abundantly promised by advanced technology that has given the world both insecticides and pollution, energy and toxic waste. Salvation is better sought in the old ways of myth and giftedness. Prophecy and healing are back in vogue, but so is the demonic. How else to explain worldwide hunger in the midst of plenty and the madness of stockpiling overkill weapons? If prophecy, healing, and the demonic were a part of Jesus's world, they are a part of ours too, and they need Jesus's basic response. It is this sort of reaction that is tilting the current church off its hierarchical axis towards more community-based, ministry-oriented communities whose ultimate dignity and source is not ordination but baptism. The charismatic movements are symptoms rather than causes of world unrest and ecclesiastical impotency. Some would claim these symptoms are creative.*²³

I submit that a reflection on these points may open the way to some creative discussion on the part of those entrusted with special pastoral ministry and responsibility. This in turn may move us in the direction of a more creative perception of what the parish is and should be in the presence of the challenges that we confront today.

D. Vatican Council II: "A Prism of Change".

It has been remarked that Vatican II "did not so much invent new changes as reflect them," and for this reason the Council has been referred to as a "prism of change." The ecclesiology of Vatican II is responsible for a new vision of the Church as a whole, and consequently gives us a new awareness of the "parish," which is the local Church in microcosm. The colonial changes described above reflect the ecclesiological developments, which have presented us with a new model of the Church, as it were. This is shown in a shift of emphasis in our understanding of the Church from *institution* to *mystery*, from the *vertical* to the *horizontal*, from the *hierarchical* to the *communitarian*. The implications of this shift are expressed thus:

... We might take note here of three fundamental notions from this council that would greatly validate a shift from sole hierar-

chical control to a collaborative clergy-lay type of ministry. The first is seeing church as a mystery rather than as an institution, thereby opening the way for many gifts. The second is insisting on the priesthood of all the people of God, which obviously is going to have impact. The third is sensing the church as an inheritor of a genuine mission rather than as a haven for the saved, thereby reminding all of their common innate evangelism.²⁴

The common ministry which belongs to all as baptized into the Church is stated in the words of the council: "The lay apostolate is a participation in the saving mission of the church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself."²⁵ This certainly goes far beyond the notion of the lay apostolate of Catholic Action described by Pius XI as "participation of the faithful in the mission entrusted to the hierarchy." This contemporary concept of lay ministry can be seen in much broader perspective in a full reading of the documents of the Council, especially in Chapter 4 of *Lumen Gentium*, "The Laity," and in the whole of the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.

It was in 1977, on the fifteenth anniversary of this last mentioned document, that the bishops of the United States issued their own statement on the laity, "The laity: Called and Gifted." In it they say:

One of the chief characteristics of all men and women today is their growing sense of being adult members of the church...laymen and women feel themselves called to exercise the same mature independence and particular self-direction which characterize them in other areas of life....The adult character of the People of God flows from baptism and confirmation which are the foundation of the Christian life and ministry...Baptism and confirmation empower all believers to share in some form of ministry....Because lay women and men do experience intimacy, support, acceptance and availability in family life, they seek the same in their Christian communities...This is leading to a review of parish size, organisation, priorities, and identity. It has already led to international communities, basic Christian communities, and some revitalized parish communities....²⁶

This theological expression of the meaning and ministry of the Christian community cannot but have a significant effect on the shape and substance of the actual place where the individual community is formed and lived: the parish. It not only moves us to take a renewed look at the parish itself, but at the various roles which must be recognized within it. No longer can the ministry of the parish be considered primarily, much less exclusively, as belonging to the parish priest. The ministry that is rooted in baptism and which exists within the common priesthood of all the faithful is a reality that must be recognized and reckoned with as belonging to all the members of a particular Christian community. Vatican II insists on this very strongly, as Bausch reminds us when he says:

... We are ministers, says Vatican II, because through our common baptism we belong to Christ. Ordination is seen as one kind of ministry (although admittedly special and sacramentalised) among other baptism-based ministries within the church. To be a priest is not to be all ministers in miniature. Ordination confers a particular ministry, not all ministries. All the people of God share in the one basic priesthood grounded in the common life of Christ. All ministries and all spiritualities, whether lay or clerical, are aspects of that, and this common source rules out any caste system.²⁷

Certainly these words, reflecting the spirit of the Council, represent a clarion call to all who are engaged in the renewal and restructuring of the parish and parish ministry in today's Church.

E. The emergence of Basic Christian Communities.

The fifth and final catalyst in the process of transition that is widely recognized in the Church today is the emergence of *Basic Christian Communities*, which may be described as "... a group of Christians bonded by intimacy, frequent contact, and mutual aid." In the original Latin American model, they are formed in such a way that they transcend the affairs of the sanctuary, as it were, and enter into the process of political and social betterment. They give great importance to selecting and developing lay leaders and to building lay ministries, as these are considered essential ingredients in the struggle for the transformation of society. A missionary in Africa describes the BCC as follows:

... In our parish we like to say that to be a good Christian one must follow three-not-two-rules: love God, love your neighbour, and build a better world. We expect basic communities, therefore, to become actively involved in development work. We encourage them to participate in their village government and to work in whatever way possible for the betterment of the village.²⁸

The impact of the BCC on the situation of the present day parish in many parts of the world is well enough known by all who are concerned with and are aware of the dynamics of Christian community renewal. Surely many of the characteristics which are proper to be BCC will provide fertile ground for an on-going discussion on the shape that the parishes must take, if they are to respond effectively to the needs of the times.

IV. Today's Parish: Shades of the Past in the Shape of the Future.

All that has been said above may provide a framework for taking a new look at our own parishes, and reviewing our own parish experience. There is a great concern these days with *renewal* in the life of the Church. We need only mention here the dynamic impact of the *RENEW* program which has been so energetically undertaken and is presently being so vigorously pursued in various dioceses in Nigeria. I trust that what has been discussed thus far may serve to remind us that in our efforts at renewal we are not looking for something that is *totally* new, — unknown, untried, and unproven. The emphasis on renewal, as this has been a continuing challenge thrust upon us by Vatican II is on the *re-part* of the *renewal*. This means that we can best move forward in the life of the Church by reflecting on where we have come from. Even more than that, we can revitalize some of our flagging institutions by re-discovering some of those aspects of them which have flourished in the past but have unfortunately been lost, or neglected, in the course of time. I believe that this is precisely what we must try to do in the renewal and revitalization of our parishes today.

Once we recognize the significance of seeing the parish as *community* rather than *institution*, and as *people* rather than *place*, then we are already moving in the direction of authentic renewal.

Once we recognize that this community of people is composed of those who are baptized into Christ, and as such, share in His priesthood, and therefore in His total salvific mission, then we recognize not only what

the task is that must be done within the parish, but we must also recognize that *everyone*, priest and parish community, — or better perhaps, priest *with* and *within* parish community, each in his or her own way, — is entrusted with responsibility for continuing the one mission of Christ.

When Fr. Bausch says that "...the parish remains one of the more viable places of hope and potential in our secular society," he is speaking directly of the American scene, but we can take those same words and apply them to our own situation whether it be in Asia or Africa. To be truly *viable* means that we must be able to identify the life signs of our parish, and instill renewed vigour in those areas where we find it less than *fully alive*. Participation and dialogue, to be sure, are key ingredients in the renewal and development of life in the parish. If the parish is truly a *community* then there must be communication *within* the community in order to make its life flourish and to bring out its total potential. This takes patience, understanding and effort on the part of all, and involves a great deal of risk as well.

Everyone involved in parish ministry, and dedicated to contributing his or her own energies and talents in dealing effectively with the pastoral challenges of the present day renewal of the parish, should seek the best means of rediscovering the richness of our roots. In this way, we may give contemporary substance to many of the shadows of our past, which are now struggling to regain their rightful place and emphasis in the *renewal* of Christian communities. The parish as a *ministering* community is one very crucial vision which we must try to clarify in our own attitudes and understanding. The Lord Himself proclaimed that He came to minister, and not to be ministered to. We have in the past, perhaps reduced our parish communities to the status of merely *being ministered to*, and deprived its members of the responsibility and opportunity, as being one in the priesthood of Christ, of *ministering* to one another, and to all in need. Hence the importance of restoring *full ministry* to all, for it belongs to *everyone* by right of baptism.

By way of conclusion, I might propose for consideration the results of a survey by Andrew Greeley on the Catholic parish in the United States, based on the question: *What Do People Want? We might compare his list with our own awareness of the felt needs of the people in our parishes here in Nigeria. The survey shows that the people want:*

1. Liturgies that nourish their faith and, above all, good sermons that do the same.
2. That the parish have as its agenda everyday practical concerns: family

life, children, teens, etc.

3. A democratic form of leadership.
4. The parish should be an alive and dynamic place.
5. Priests should be able to work well with others.
6. There should be a sense of community.
7. There should be opportunity to develop spiritually.
8. There must be care for people who are hurting.

The same research showed that the parishes most effectively equipped to meet these needs were:

... those which (1) provided organizational activities such as adult education, liturgical planning, youth ministry, help to the elderly and (2) had a definite pattern of shared responsibility and ministry. The qualities that showed up as conducive to such effectiveness were: (1) many opportunities for the people to participate in the parish, (2) the quality of the parish staff, and (3) the overall vision of the parish.²⁹

It would be opportune to also take a moment to consider the necessary ingredients for effective parish renewal which showed up in the same survey, for these can give us grounds for reflection on our own attempts to move forward in this most challenging task. These are:

1. Participatory leadership
2. Awareness of people's needs.
3. A clear sense of priorities.
4. More people being trained to participate sensibly (formation programs).
5. Personal commitment Christ and church.
6. The opportunities to meet in small groups.
7. Attentiveness to relationships, especially to the male-female ones in ministry.
8. The enablement of all to minister to one another.
9. The availability of resources.

In a parish of many thousands of people, spread out over a number of different far-flung villages, or even different towns, this represents quite a challenge. What is the meaning of "community" in such a "parish"? There are many questions which may be posed as starting points for

further reflection. In all of these, where should we begin? Perhaps that could be the first question that each one concerned about parish ministry should put to him/herself, in trying to grapple with the meaning and demands of the parish, in our own concrete situation in the Church today.

Wherever the process begins, if it is undertaken in a way that is guided by the Spirit, it should be the start of a very interesting journey. Though it may not be altogether clear exactly where it will lead, certainly, under the influence of the Spirit, it will take the Church to places unexplored, where she may discover the newness of her past and the freshness of many things which were long ago discarded. In a sense, our future lies in our past. Not in going back to something that is no longer alive or relevant to the needs of the modern day. But by rediscovering our roots and nurturing them, we shall bring to new life, with renewed energy, the dynamism of the whole continuing history of the People of God as it exists in each particular community at each particular age throughout the history of the Church.

I shall conclude with one last quotation from Fr. Bausch. In talking about the necessity of re-establishing shared and collaborative ministry in the parish, he says:

The processes of enablement, empowerment, and encouragement are not easy.... It was easier in the old days to bark out orders on Sunday morning and retire to the counting room. This "new" way is so imperfect, so vulnerable and, often, so untidy. But then we pick up the New Testament and there they are: all the very same nonsense, idolatry, favoritism, rivalries. But there, too, is the risen Jesus in their midst calling, healing, reconciling, and making his word powerful and fruitful in spite of all. There too is the many-gifted community, struggling for direction, sharing ministries, and striving for that ideal that Luke, in his comfortable hindsight, inflates as one of devotion "to the apostles' teaching, and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2: 42ff). May be it was those "varieties of gifts... and varieties of service (1 Cor 12:4 that somehow made it all work out.

... in our own anxious times, we are backing off from an over-centralized and too top heavy church and taking a second look

at these "varieties" of local community gifts and services. It is possible that we may do much worse than the first generations of Christians who took this path. Then, again, we may do much better, the roots are there. The spirit is here.³⁰

In the continuing discussions reflections and attempts to grasp the dimensions and demands of revitalizing and restructuring our own Christian communities, and in our attempts to go back to our roots, we should always remember that, provided He is invited, **THE SPIRIT IS HERE!**

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- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- 18 Cf. Can. 741.
- 19 Cf. Can. 845.
- 20 *1992 Catholic Diary & Church Directory* (Iperu- Remo, Ogun State: Missionary Society of St. Paul, 1992), 263 pp. All statistical summaries are my own. The sources of the estimated over-all population

are not given. However, it is interesting to note that, even without any total population figures given for the Archdiocese of Onitsha, the total over-all estimate is well beyond the 88.5 million figure published in the recent National Census.

- 21 *Ibid.*
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