

## THE RATZINGER/KASPER DEBATE: THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH AND LOCAL CHURCHES

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*[The discussions between Joseph Ratzinger and Walter Kasper on the relationship between the universal Church and the local/particular churches touch on one of today's major theological and pastoral issues. If the universal Church is ontologically and temporally prior to the local church, then how is the local church fully Church, and how are bishops truly vicars of Christ and not simply delegates of the pope? Does a renewed eucharistic ecclesiology and a renewed theology of the episcopal office compromise the character of the universal Church and papal primacy? Does the simultaneity of local churches and universal Church point to a solution?]*

VATICAN II HAS BEEN widely recognized as a recovery of the theological significance of the particular or local churches. Therefore, the debate between Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and Cardinal Walter Kasper on the relation between the universal Church and the local churches is of utmost importance. William Henn, O.F.M. Cap., notes that “it is widely considered to be one of the most pressing theological tasks of the Church today.”<sup>1</sup> In my article I review here the four public documents of this conversation (two of which are not available in English) and offer some reflections and conclusions.

On May 28, 1992, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued a letter entitled “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on

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<sup>1</sup> “Historical-Theological Synthesis of the Relation between Primary and Episcopacy during the Second Millennium,” *Il Primato del successore di Pietro: Atti del simposio teologico, Roma, dicembre 1996* (Vatican City, Editrice Vaticana, 1998) 228–29; Kilian McDonnell, “Our Dysfunctional Church,” *The Tablet* [London] 255 (September 8, 2001) 1260–61.

Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion.”<sup>2</sup> The letter opened with acknowledging that the concept of communion “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” (no. 1). But the concern of the document was mostly defensive in that it argues that some present the communion of the particular churches “in such a way as to weaken the concept of the unity of the Church at the visible and institutional level” (no. 8). Behind this focus on the particular churches is the conviction that the particular church “is a subject complete in itself, and that the universal Church is the result of a reciprocal recognition on the part of the particular churches” (ibid.). This the CDF labels as “ecclesiological unilateralism,” an expression of an impoverished concept of communion (ibid.). The CDF ascribes this ecclesiological deviation, in part, to a misunderstanding of eucharistic ecclesiology. While the CDF grants undoubted value to the rediscovery of eucharistic ecclesiology, its proponents have sometimes placed “a one-sided emphasis on the principle of the local church” in claiming that “where the Eucharist is celebrated the totality of the mystery of the Church would be made present in such a way as to render any other principle of unity or universality inessential” (no. 11). In response to what the CDF considers an unbalanced presentation of eucharistic ecclesiology, it proceeds on the assumption that the particular churches are a part of the one Church of Christ, having a relationship of “mutual interiority” with the whole, that is, with the universal Church (no. 9). In every particular church the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active. The CDF quotes an address of John Paul II to the Roman Curia where he states that particular churches are formed “out of and in the universal Church” (*ex et in Ecclesia universali*).<sup>3</sup> This is why, the CDF continues, the universal Church cannot be conceived as the sum of the particular churches or as a federation of particular churches. The CDF then draws the conclusion: The universal Church “is not the result of the communion of the churches, but in its essential mystery it is a reality ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular church” (no. 9). Ratzinger had already used this formulation in books published in 1989 and 1991, well before the CDF’s 1992 letter.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, this is Ratzinger’s personal formulation.

<sup>2</sup> *Origins* 22 (June 25, 1992) 108–12.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, Address to the Roman Curia, December 20, 1990, no. 9, *Acta apostolicae sedis* 83 (1991) 740–49, at 746.

<sup>4</sup> Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 75: “. . . the priority of the universal church always preceded that of particular churches.” The German edition was published in 1987; see also his *Call to Communion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991) 44: “The temporal and ontological priority lies with the universal Church; a Church that was not catholic would not even have ecclesial reality . . .”

Immediately following the assertion of the ontological and temporal priority of the universal Church, the CDF cites the authorities of the Fathers that “the Church that is one and unique, precedes creation and gives birth to the particular churches as her daughters” (no. 9).<sup>5</sup> The Church “that is one and unique” expresses itself in the particular churches: “she is the mother and not the offspring of the particular churches” (ibid.). Pentecost is the event in which the one unique Church is manifested temporally “in the community of the 120 gathered around Mary and the Twelve Apostles, the representatives of the one unique Church and the founders-to-be of the local churches” (ibid.). Therefore, the Church, “in its origins and its first manifestation is universal,” out of which have arisen the particular churches (ibid.).

### REACTION OF WALTER KASPER

In a Festschrift published in 1999, Walter Kasper, then Bishop of Rotenburg-Stuttgart, took issue with the position of the CDF.<sup>6</sup> Bishop Kasper situated his response to the letter of the CDF in the context of the relation of the office of the local bishops to the Petrine office as seen in the documents of Vatican II. He focused his remarks first on the relation of the college of bishops to the Petrine ministry, and then on the relation of the local church to the universal Church.

He noted that difficulties do not arise because of the possible *legal* conflict between the two carriers of the highest power in the Church, that is, between the pope alone and college of the bishops in union with the

<sup>5</sup> The CDF cites Clement of Rome, *Second Epistle to the Romans* 4.2: “I do not suppose you are unaware that a living church is the body of Christ for the scripture says, ‘God made man male and female.’ The male is Christ, the female is the church. Besides the books and the apostles say that the church not only exists now, but has done so from the beginning.” *Patres Apostolici*, ed. F. X. Funk, 2 vols (Tübingen: Laupp, 1901) 1.200. Ratzinger cites this text as belonging to Clement of Rome, though it has long been acknowledged, on internal grounds, that it was authored by another person, very likely from Corinth, shortly after the *Shepherd of Hermas*, therefore ca. 150. Though not from Clement of Rome, it is still an important witness, being the oldest extant Christian homily. Joseph C. Plumpe, *Mater Ecclesia: An Inquiry into the Concept of the Church as Mother in Early Christianity* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1943) 22–23. Ratzinger also cites the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2.4: “[An aged woman appears] ‘Who is it?’ I asked. ‘The church,’ he said. I answered, ‘And why is she so aged?’ ‘Because,’ he said, ‘she was created before all [the others].’ This is why she is aged. It is for her that the world has been formed’ ” (text based on *Sources chrétiennes* 53 bis. 94–96). See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism* (London: Longmans, Green, 1950) 27.

<sup>6</sup> “Zur Theologie und Praxis des bischöflichen Amtes,” *Auf neue Art Kirche Sein: Wirklichkeiten—Herausforderungen—Wandlungen* (Munich: Bernward bei Don Bosco, 1999) 32–48.

pope. There is, in fact, no valid act of the college of bishops apart from the pope. Rather the problem is that the highest authority of the Church has two subjects inadequately distinguished: the college of bishops in union with the pope, and the pope alone. The inadequacy arises from the inclusion of the pope in both subjects, and from the teaching authority inherent in both subjects. This inadequate distinction is brought to the question of “whether the authority and the initiative of the college [of bishops] is *practically* reduced to a naked fiction, if the pope can at any time bind up [such initiative], or contrary wise, if he can decide and act—not as a *private person*, but as head of the college—without the formal involvement of the college.”<sup>7</sup> Kasper formulates the question in terms not of doctrine but of praxis. In other words, the dogmatic tradition of papal and collegial authority and initiative is not in doubt; what is questionable is whether the way that authority and initiative are exercised does not practically nullify or make fictitious the authority and initiative of the college of bishops. The praxis question is both an inner Catholic and an ecumenical question.

Kasper agrees with the CDF that the individual dioceses are not an administrative district of the universal Church. Rather the diocese is a part of the church (*Teilkirche*) in which the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church acts and is present. The diocesan church is formed in the image of the universal Church “in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists,” (*in quibus et ex quibus una et unica Ecclesia catholica existit*) according to *Lumen gentium* no. 23. Kasper also agrees with the contrasting formula that the individual churches are formed out of and in the Church (*ecclesiae ex et in Ecclesia universali*), a formula the CDF takes from an address of John Paul II. Both the CDF and Kasper agree that “the particular church (*Teilkirche*) is in truth the Church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup> Particular church and universal Church are in a relation of mutuality; they are perichoretically in one another. This means that the structure of the Church cannot be grasped by secular categories, and belongs to the realm of mystery. “She [the Church] can only function through a miracle because of the work of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

In moving beyond the formula *ecclesiae ex et in Ecclesia universali*, the CDF has taken the particular/universal Church relationship as found in Vatican II and developed it further. But Kasper contends that this further development beyond Vatican II is, in fact, a reversal (*Umkehrung*). No objection is taken to the CDF’s rejection of the self-sufficiency of the particular church, nor of the universal Church as simply a gathering of the particular churches. In fact, no Catholic theologian could embrace what the

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

CDF rejects here. But what needs to be criticized, continues Kasper, is the response of the CDF to the ecclesiological threats, namely the declaration that the universal Church is ontologically and temporally prior to every individual particular church. Kasper contends that CDF identifies the *una, sancta, catholica, et apostolica ecclesia* with the universal Church in a way that excludes the particular churches. This constitutes the reversal. What cannot be granted is that the formula *una, sancta, catholica, et apostolica ecclesia* refers exclusively to the universal Church, apart from the concrete historical reality of the local churches.

Kasper notes the CDF's "Pentecost Church" of Acts 2 is the universal Church. He has no objection to this identification, as long as the universal Church is not taken as an abstraction, as long as the concrete historical universal Church is meant, which Kasper holds is Luke's view. The Pentecost Church was, in fact, "universal and local in its single reality."<sup>10</sup> "Of course this is a Lukan construction, for, looking at the matter historically, there were supposedly from the beginning a number of communities in Galilee alongside the Jerusalem community."<sup>11</sup> From the very beginning the Church is constituted "from and in" local churches.

The ontological and temporal priority of the universal Church becomes completely problematic when by some secret unspoken assumption (*unter der Hand*) the Roman church is de facto identified with the pope and the curia. Again, Kasper is not talking about dogmatic formulation, but about praxis and an undeclared assumption identifying (de facto) universal Church and the pope and curia. If this is the case, then the 1992 Letter of the CDF cannot be considered an aid in the clarification of communion ecclesiology of Vatican II, but must be seen as its dismissal (*Verabschiedung*). Also it is an attempt to restore Roman centralism, a process which is already an actuality. The relationship between local church and universal Church has been thrown out of balance.

This lack of balance Kasper also detects in the *Motu proprio* of John Paul II, *Apostolos suos*, "On the Theological and Juridical Nature of Episcopal Conferences," issued in May 21, 1998, in response to the Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985.<sup>12</sup> Kasper judges this document to be a "provisional formulation" (*Zwischenergebnis*) and far from a final determination of the theological discussion on episcopal conferences. He criticizes the position that an episcopal conference exercises full teaching authority only when every member of the conference agrees in a decision. Granted that there have been false developments in conferences,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> *Acta apostolicae sedis* 90 (1998) 641–58; *Origins* 28 (July 30, 1998) 152–58.

but one does not use an abuse as the basis of clarification of the theological nature of bishops' conferences.<sup>13</sup>

The specifically theological content of *Apostolos suos* is thin and lacking in full maturity. The document sees the bishops' conference as purely functional in a pastoral sense, a useful organization for accomplishing certain tasks. The most that can be said of the specifically theological content of an episcopal conference is that it exercises a *collegialitas affectiva*. Kasper uses this category, which was found in the provisional draft (*instrumentum laboris*) of *Apostolos suos*, but is not found explicitly in the final document.<sup>14</sup> Evidently Kasper thinks that, although the vocabulary of the offending distinction has been removed from the final document, its content has not. At the pastoral level, the *collegialitas affectiva* (which excludes collegiality in the strict sense) is the sum total of the theological content of episcopal conferences, even though this affective collegiality is based in the ontological and sacramental reality of the bishop's office of collegiality. Something is missing from this logic. Kasper finds it "astonishing" (*erstaunlich*) and a mark of the imbalance (*Unausgeglichenheit*) in the final text of *Apostolos suos* that it expressly excludes the conference of bishops from being even a partial realization (*Teilverwirklichung*) of the collegiality of the episcopate. For this reason, whatever validity *Apostolos suos* has in law or in the practical discipline of the Church, it is still a provisional position. The discussion is not closed.<sup>15</sup>

In the context of the bishops' conference, Kasper poses the question of a mediating instance of a regional/continental expression of the Church between the diocese and the Petrine function at the level of the universal Church. Here he asks, as others have asked, whether it is not possible, using the ancient patriarchates as a model, to create a new form of the patriarchate. In this way, would it not be possible to fill with new life the

<sup>13</sup> "Zur Theologie und Praxis des bischöflichen Amtes," *Auf neue Art Kirche Sein* 45.

<sup>14</sup> "Draft Statement on Episcopal Conferences," *Origins* 17 (April 7, 1988) 731–37. The draft distinguishes between *actio collegialis* and *affectus collegialis*. "While the first express the exercise of collegiality in the strict sense and involve the *actio collegialis*, for the second, on the other hand, generated by *affectus collegialis*, one can make a reference to the notion of collegiality according to an analogical, theologically improper, use. . . . In the first case there is an effective collegiality, not without, but rather enriched by *affectus*, while in the second, one can speak of affective collegiality even if one cannot exclude some *effectus*. It is clear that the concept of collegiality can only properly be applied to the former case, while for the latter it is more precise to use the concept of coresponsibility. Both collegiality and coresponsibility should tend to the finality of *communio*, even if at different levels" (ibid. 733).

<sup>15</sup> "Zur Theologie und Praxis des bischöflichen Amtes," *Auf neue Art Kirche Sein* 46.

concept of the local churches gathered around a metropolitan see?<sup>16</sup> In this same line he proposes a way of choosing bishops which is in keeping both theologically and practically with the various levels of ecclesial life. Taking his departure from the three-leveled relationship in which each bishop finds himself, that is, his relation to the local church, to the conference of bishops, and to the universal Church, Kasper proposes a process of choosing bishops involving all three levels. The local church chooses its bishop with the cooperation of the bishops' conference, leaving Rome a veto over the choice. Such a process respects the theological and practical imperatives of the local church and the universal Church relationship.<sup>17</sup>

### JOSEPH RATZINGER'S RESPONSE

The text of Kasper's essay appeared in 1999. Ratzinger published an essay entitled "On the Relation of the Universal Church and the Local Church in Vatican II," in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, on December 22, 2000.<sup>18</sup> Ratzinger notes a tendency since the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985 to summarize the whole ecclesiology of the council in the concept of "communion." He greeted this new centering of ecclesiology and has tried to promote it. But one needs to recognize that, though the word *communio* does not have a central place at Vatican II, it can serve as a synthesis of the council's ecclesiology.

All the essential elements of the concept of communion are found in 1 John 1:3. Trinitarian life is extended in the encounter with the Son of God made flesh, who comes to humankind in the proclamation of the Church. This trinitarian communion, extended to all, has a sacramental character, specifically eucharistic (1 Corinthians 10:16 f.). The communion ecclesiology is in its most interior aspect eucharistic ecclesiology, standing in closest relation with the eucharistic ecclesiology which the Orthodox theologians have developed in such an impressive way. Here the ecclesiology is entirely concrete and still remains entirely spiritual, transcendent, and eschatological. In its deepest interiority communion ecclesiology is eucharistic ecclesiology. While the Eucharist is always celebrated in one specific place, it is at the same time universal because there is only one Christ, one body of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 22, 2000, 46. In this section of my article, all succeeding references, unless otherwise noted, are to p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Ratzinger's positive evaluation of eucharistic ecclesiology is important because the CDF criticized what it considers a one-sided emphasis on the local church in some eucharistic ecclesiologies. "The rediscovery of a eucharistic ecclesiology, though being of undoubted value, has however sometimes placed one-sided emphasis on the principle of the local church. It is claimed that where the Eucharist is

Ratzinger confesses in the same newspaper article that he was thankful that the synod of 1985 placed the concept of communion at the center. But he continues, since that synod, the category of “communion” has become “a handy slogan” (*Schlagwort*) involving “a leveling and falsification” (*verflacht und verfälscht*) of communion. Just as in the case of “the people of God,” so also in communion there has been a progressive horizontalizing that leaves out of consideration the concept of God. A sociological analysis of the local church is not a substitute for a theology of the Church. In this sociological framework, communion ecclesiology began to reduce itself to the relationship of the local church to the universal Church, more specifically degenerating into the church-political question of the competencies of the local church and the universal Church.

The question of competence is rightly posed. And without a doubt there have been imbalances which demand correcting. Likewise, there can be an undue Roman centralizing, which must be recognized as such and corrected. But the discussion becomes skewed when the proper task of the Church is not kept in mind. “The task of the Church is not primarily to speak of itself, but of God.” The Letter of the 1985 Synod reacted against a sociological view of the Church by ordering talk about God to the common work of the Church. However, the same kind of sociological narrowing to the empirical church is still found.<sup>20</sup> The CDF letter of 1992 that addressed this narrowing by writing of the ontological and temporal priority of the universal Church was not well received in some quarters. “There are theologians today, who appear to take it upon themselves as a duty to judge negatively the documents of the CDF, and this one was met with a volley of criticisms, and there was scarcely anything good they could say of it.”

Ratzinger defends the ontological and temporal priority of the universal Church by reference to the teaching of the Fathers that the one and only Church precedes creation and gives birth to the particular churches. The Fathers continued the rabbinic teaching, argues Ratzinger, that the Torah and Israel pre-existed, and that creation was conceived as a “room” in which the will of God operates; but the will needs a people, Israel. This special people lives for the will of God and makes the light of God shine in the world. The CDF 1992 document on communion ecclesiology (no. 8)

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celebrated the totality of the mystery would be made present in such a way as to render any other principle of unity or universality inessential.” “Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” no. 11; *Origins* 22 (June 25, 1992) 110.

<sup>20</sup> “We cannot replace a false unilateral vision of the Church as purely hierarchical with a new sociological conception which is also unilateral.” Synod of Bishops: Final Report [no. 1/3], *Origins* 15 (December 19, 1985) 444–50, at 446–47.

refers to Clement of Rome<sup>21</sup> and the *Shepherd of Hermas*<sup>22</sup> where the mystery of the Church precedes creation. Ratzinger deduces: “The Fathers were convinced of the identity of the Church and Israel, and were therefore not able to see the Church as something that accidentally (*zufällig*) came into being at the last hour, and rather recognized in this gathering of the peoples under the will of God as the inner teleology of creation.”

Christology expands and deepens this perspective. In dependence on the Old Testament, the history is presented as the “love-history” between God and humankind. God finds and prepares the bride of the Son, the one bride which is the one Church. The idea of a man and woman becoming one body (Genesis 2:24) is joined to the idea of the Church as the body of Christ, which on its part has its sacramental expression in the Eucharist. The one body of Christ is expanded: Christ and the Church are two in one flesh, one body, and in this way “God is all in all.”

Given this basis Ratzinger twice expresses his inability to understand the opposition to ontological priority. “I find it difficult to understand the claims against it. It appears to me to be possible to reject this precedence only if—perhaps because of great difficulty about human inadequacy [to grasp the mystery]—one either will not or cannot grasp it. In this case it [ontological priority] appears as theological fanaticism (*theologische Schwärmerei*), and what is left are only the empirical forms of the Church with its togetherness and oppositions. In this case the Church as a theological theme can be deleted. If one sees the Church only as a human organization, then, in fact, what remains is only desolation (*Trostlosigkeit*). One is not representing the ecclesiology of the Fathers, but has also departed from the ecclesiology of the New Testament, and the Israel-idea of the Old Testament.” Avery Dulles vigorously supports Ratzinger’s view.<sup>23</sup>

If one is looking at the New Testament, continues Ratzinger, one does not have to wait until the deuterio-Pauline letters or the Apocalypse in order to meet the assertion of the ontological priority of the whole Church over the local church. In the very heart of the great Pauline letters, namely Galatians, the apostle speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem, and this not as an eschatological reality, but indeed as something present: “This Jerusalem is our mother” (4:26). In support of his position Ratzinger refers to Heinrich Schlier’s contention that for Paul and for the related Jewish tradition, the Jerusalem above was the new present age. If one accepts this biblical and rabbinic teaching on the temporal precedence of Israel and the Church,

<sup>21</sup> See n. 5 above.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> “The ontological priority of the Church universal appears to me to be almost self-evident, since the very concept of a particular church presupposes a universal Church to which it belongs, whereas the concept of the universal Church does not imply that it is made up of distinct particular churches.” “Ratzinger and Kasper on the Universal Church,” *Inside the Vatican* 20 (June 4, 2001) 13.

Ratzinger notes, then one cannot honestly deny the ontological priority of the one Church, the universal Church.

Ratzinger turns to the Pentecost event of Acts as a basis of the priority of the universal Church. The narrative is a “theological declaration” (*theologische Aussage*) on the basis of which the CDF notes that the Church begins with the gathering around Mary and the 120, together with the renewed community of the Twelve, who are not members of a local church, but are the apostles who will carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. The number twelve embraces both the Old Israel and the New Israel, the one Israel of God which is oriented to all the nations of the world, founding the one people of God in all peoples. In the very hour of its birth the Church speaks all languages, thus anticipating the *Catholica*. The list of the twelve peoples refers to the universality, with a fourteenth added, namely Rome, undoubtedly to stress the idea of the whole world.

For Ratzinger the ultimate question is not the precise time when the Christian community comes into existence for the first time. Rather it concerns “the inner beginning of the Church” in time (*um den inneren Anfang der Kirche*) which Luke describes, a beginning transcending all that is empirical, going back to the power of the Holy Spirit. On the basis of this interior beginning in the Spirit Ratzinger contends that Kasper’s exegesis of Acts 2 is not justified, namely, that the Jerusalem community is at the same time the universal and the local community. What is first in the report of Luke is not the original Jerusalem community, but the Old Israel made new in the Twelve, and this new reality, the New Israel, is one. The miracle of tongues shows forth the oneness of the New Israel, a unity which spans all times and all places, and this even before it comes to a question of forming a local Jerusalem community. Even so, Ratzinger grants, one should not overrate the question of the temporal precedence of the universal Church born from the Spirit in the Twelve, even though Luke clearly (*eindeutig*) records it.

Ratzinger takes up one of Kasper’s major objections: “The formula (of the universal Church’s priority) would be completely problematic, if, on an unspoken assumption, the universal Church were identified with the Roman church, *de facto* with the pope and the curia. If this happens, then one can say that the document of the CDF is not a help in clarifying communion ecclesiology (of Vatican II), but must be understood as the dismissal of that ecclesiology and an attempt to restore Roman centralism.”

Ratzinger notes that Kasper uses the hypothetical (“if, on an unspoken assumption”) from which he leaps into fact. For this reason the letter from the CDF appears to have been falsely interpreted (*unterschoben zu sein*). Kasper, says Ratzinger, makes the theological restoration of Roman centralism and the consequent desertion (*Abfall*) from the ecclesiology of Vatican II a necessary consequence of the universal Church’s precedence

over the local church. Ratzinger continues: “This interpretative leap (*Sprung*) astounds and masks a wider suspicion. He [Kasper] formulates the more extensive accusation (*Anklage*) by expressing a growing inability to imagine the one, holy, catholic, and universal Church in any concrete way. The pope and the curia remain as the only elements in the presentation [of the universal Church], and if one theologially ranks them [pope and curia] too high theologially, a person must then feel threatened.”

Ratzinger then asks the question: “What was the council’s concept of the universal Church (*Gesamtkirche*)?” The letter of the CDF does not, “by an unspoken assumption,” identify the universal Church with the Roman church, *de facto* with the pope and the curia. “This should not have been said.” But the temptation remains that one will come to that conclusion if one has first identified the local Jerusalem church and the universal Church, that is, if one has reduced the concept of the Church to the appearance of an empirical community of the Jerusalem community, and left the theological depth out of one’s perspective.

To meet this deficit in theological depth, Ratzinger attempts to sketch the christological and trinitarian formulations of *Lumen gentium* nos. 2–4. Ecclesiology is dependent on Christology and belongs to it. Further, Christology has a trinitarian dynamic. To speak of the Church is to speak of God. This trinitarian overture is the key to the right interpretation of the text of Vatican II, and here one learns what the one, holy Church is out of and in (*aus und in*) all its concrete historical realizations. Here one learns what “universal Church” means, receiving further clarification when the inner dynamic of the Church is shown in its relation to the kingdom of God.

Keeping this background in mind, one asks the more specific question: in what precisely does the ontological and temporal precedence of the universal Church consist? Where can one see it at work? *Lumen gentium* gives the answer when it speaks of the sacraments, and first of all of baptism (no. 7). The sacrament of baptism is entirely a theological process, and is much more than the socialization into a local church, as it is unfortunately often misinterpreted today. “Baptism does not come out of the individual community, but in it (the local church) the door is opened for us to the one Church. In baptism the individual church is in the presence of the one Church, the New Mother, and the ‘antecedents’ of the local church is only from the universal Church (*und nur von ihr her*), from the heavenly Jerusalem.” The universal Church always precedes and creates the local church in baptism. And it is in this perspective that the Letter of the CDF can say there are no strangers in the communion of the Church: everyone is everywhere at home whether in Rome, Kinshasa, or Bangalore.

Taking the lead from *Lumen gentium* (no. 7), Ratzinger passes from baptism to the Eucharist. “The Eucharist does not have its origin in the local church and does not end there. . . . The Eucharist always comes from

the outside, out of the whole, the one body of Christ coming to us and leading us into the body. This *extra nos* of the sacraments is repeated in the office of the bishop: the Eucharist needs the sacraments of the priestly ministry, rests upon it, so that without it the community cannot give itself the Eucharist. The community must receive the Eucharist from the Lord through the mediation of the one Church.” Likewise the bishop does not come out of the local church, and is not an isolated individual, but stands in the historical continuity with the college of the apostles. The office of bishop comes out of and leads into the one Church.

Therefore baptism, Eucharist, and apostolic ministry come from outside the local church. Precisely here, Ratzinger continues, is it evident that no opposition exists between the local church and the universal Church. In the local church the bishop represents the one Church, and he builds up the one Church in so far as he builds up the local church. The office of the successor of Peter is a special case of the office of the bishop and in a special way carries the responsibility for the unity of the whole Church. But this office of Peter and his responsibility cannot in any way exist, if the universal Church were not already presupposed. Were that the case then it would be a grasping in the void, and would represent an absurd claim. Without a doubt, one must always rediscover through effort and pain the right relationship between episcopacy and primacy. But the wrestling with this relationship “is only rightly set in motion if the proper mission of the Church is considered from the perspective of the primacy, and [only] if the mission is always arranged in proper order to it [the primacy] and subordinated to it.”

The “ecclesiological relativism” of Leonardo Boff constitutes an example of the antithesis to the theology Ratzinger has just laid out. Ecclesiological relativism justifies itself with the conviction that the “historical Jesus” had not thought about a Church, much less of founding one. The real formation of the Church takes place only after the Resurrection in a process of the “de-eschatologizing” (*Enteschatologisierung*) from the hard sociological necessity of institutionalization. At the beginning, according to Boff, there was no universal “catholic” Church, but only differentiated local churches with different theologies, and different offices. No institutional church can declare that it is the one Church of Jesus Christ willed by God. All institutional formation comes out of sociological imperatives, and, as such, are human constructions, which one can, and indeed must, again radically change into new relationships. The theological quality of the various constructions are at most secondary, and for this reason one can say that in all, or at any rate, in many of these constructions “the one Church of Christ” subsists. In view of Boff’s ecclesiology, as Ratzinger understands it, he asks: by what right can one speak in any meaningful way of the one Church of Christ?

In contrast, Ratzinger continues, the Catholic tradition has chosen a different point of departure: it trusts the evangelists and believes them. In the church institution and Spirit stand in a different relation to one another than in the streams just mentioned. The promise of the Holy Spirit is not a vague proclamation, but was meant as the reality of Pentecost. The Church is not brought about or made by human beings, but is created through the Spirit. It is and remains a creation of the Holy Spirit. Institution is not a random scaffold to be taken down and rebuilt, something which really has nothing to do with the faith. Rather institution belongs to the body-nature of the Church itself.

Vatican II, true to the Catholic tradition, posits the exact opposite of this “ecclesiological relativism.” There is a Church of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ himself willed it and the Holy Spirit, against all human failures, created it from the day of Pentecost, created it for always, and the Church retains its essential identity. The institution is not an inevitable exteriority, theologically irrelevant and entirely deleterious, but, in its essential core belongs to the concreteness of the Incarnation. “The gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

#### KASPER RESPONDS

In an article appearing in *Stimmen der Zeit*,<sup>24</sup> Kasper responded, a translation appearing in three English-language periodicals.<sup>25</sup> Together with Ratzinger, Kasper rejects the absolutizing of pluralism, the self-sufficiency of the local church, ecclesiological relativism, and the sociological reduction to the empirical church.<sup>26</sup> But the ontological and temporal priority presents great difficulties not only historically, but also biblically and systematically. Ratzinger himself candidly admits the historical problems. Kasper objects to the way in which Ratzinger uses the Lukan account of Acts 2, namely, identifying the Jerusalem church with the universal

<sup>24</sup> “Das Verhältnis von Universalkirche und Ortskirche: Freundschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit der Kritik von Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 218 (2000) 795–804.

<sup>25</sup> “On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger,” *America* 184 (April 23–30, 2001); “On the Church,” *The Tablet* 255 (June 23, 2001) 927–30. *The Tablet* translation by Robert Nowell differs in particulars from that of Ladislav Orsy in *America*. Avery Dulles pointed out that the English of Orsy’s translation is “much sharper than the original” (*Inside the Vatican* 20 [June 4, 2001] 18). The references in my article are to *The Tablet* version. Kasper’s article also appeared in *The Furrow* 53 (2001) 321–32.

<sup>26</sup> Almost in the same breath Ratzinger links what he judges to be Leonardo Boff’s sociological understanding of Church with Kasper’s accommodation to the empirical church.

Church.<sup>27</sup> What is normative is not just the Jerusalem community on the day of Pentecost, but the whole process which Luke lays out in the course of Acts by which the Pentecost community unfolds “to become the Church of all nations and peoples.”<sup>28</sup> Exegetically one cannot isolate the dramatic Pentecost events of Acts 2 from the continuing unfolding narrative in the remainder of Acts.

Kasper points to the plurality of New Testament ecclesiologies, for instance, Luke uses *ekklēsia* for both the local congregation (in the house churches: Acts 1:13; 2:42; 12:12) and for the universal Church (9:31; 15:14). In undisputed Pauline letters the focus is on the local community. “*Ecclesia* primarily means the individual church or the individual congregation: hence Paul can talk about *ecclesiae*, in the plural, meaning local congregations. According to him the one Church of God achieves representation in each local assembly.”<sup>29</sup> Thus Paul can speak of the Church of God which is in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1; see Romans 16:1). “The Church of God is present in the Church which happens to be in that particular place.”<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, this focus on the local church in the letters written from prison, widely regarded as deutero-Pauline, fades almost entirely into the background.

Without expanding on this theme, Kasper references Joachim Gnilka on the relation between Christ and the church in Colossians and Ephesians. Gnilka notes the cosmological and Christological hymn at the beginning of Colossians (1:15–20) relating Christ to the world, including both first creation and new creation.<sup>31</sup> Christ is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. . . . He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church.” The people of Colossae should pray that God would open the door so that the (universal) mystery can be made known (4:3). Also, in Ephesians 1:23, Church and cosmos are bound together. The Church has a cosmic function as the body of the cosmic Christ who is the *plēroma*, the Church implementing, on a principle of spiritual subsidiarity, Christ’s headship over “all things,” just as in a Roman fountain the water spills over the upper basin into the lower.<sup>32</sup> With this universal cosmological background it is not surprising that in both Colossians and Ephesians the ecclesiological perspective is that of the universal Church rather than the local. The cosmological Christ specifies the universal Church.

The early Church did not present a one-sided ecclesiology in which the

<sup>27</sup> “On the Church,” *The Tablet* 255 (June 23, 2001) 927–30, at 929.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 928.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Freiburg: Herder, 1994) 326–43.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 336.

local church is the starting point with the universal Church being the sum total of the local churches coming together. Nonetheless, early ecclesiology did start with the local church, led by a single bishop, in which local community the one Church of God is present. Precisely because the one Church of God is present in each local church, these various local churches are linked in communion.

Kasper acknowledges there is no disagreement on the pre-existent mystery of the Church. The two agree that the appeal to Galatians 4:26 is to the mystery of our mother, the heavenly Jerusalem. Kasper reinforces Ratzinger's position by adding Hebrews 12:22–23, with its reference to the “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” The biblical interpretation of this biblical witness is undisputable, indeed, indispensable for understanding the Church, says Kasper. But, he asks, “what contribution does it make toward answering the question about the priority of the universal Church?”<sup>33</sup> The objection is not to the priority of God's eternal will to save humanity through a community of salvation, the Church, but to Ratzinger's assumption that this mystery of the pre-existent Church in God's eternal will is only the universal Church, and not the actual church which exists “in and from” the local churches. If one insists with Ratzinger that the pre-existent Church is only the universal Church apart from the local churches, then one has opted for an ecclesiological abstraction.

#### RATZINGER'S FINAL RESPONSE

The editors of *America* asked Ratzinger to respond to Kasper's earlier article which he did in the November 19, 2001, issue.<sup>34</sup> Ratzinger noted that he was responding with hesitation lest he give the impression that “there is a longstanding dispute” between himself and Kasper.

Ratzinger stated that he was grateful for Kasper's acknowledgment that they share common ecclesiological foundations. Though Ratzinger refers to Kasper's response as “a sharp critique” and an “attack,”<sup>35</sup> he gratefully acknowledges that it is not personal. Ratzinger returns to what he considers Kasper's “leap” from hypothesis to fact. Linguistically, wrote Ratzinger, he formulates his “attack” as a hypothesis: “were one to identify the universal Church with the pope and the curia, then restoration of Roman centralism would be at hand.” But the “attack,” the second part of the statement, clearly takes on the tone of a factual affirmation. “The claim that there is a will to bring on a Roman ‘restoration’ makes sense only if Rome itself is

<sup>33</sup> “On the Church,” *Tablet* 255 (June 23, 2001) 927–30, at 930.

<sup>34</sup> “A Response to Walter Kasper: The Local Church and the Universal Church,” *America* 185 (November 19, 2001) 7–11.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 8.

thinking and acting that way, not if such interpretations are merely proposed, so to speak, by a third party.”<sup>36</sup> Ratzinger acknowledges that Kasper is talking about the CDF’s further development of communion ecclesiology of Vatican II, which development “practically” amounts, more or less, to a reversal of it.<sup>37</sup> This warning, from a bishop of Kasper’s credentials, needs to be taken seriously. Basically Kasper’s intention, in Ratzinger’s reading, is that theology and an interpretation of the faith by the magisterium is being used to introduce a strategy for gaining power or to reverse the council. Again, the attack is not directed against Ratzinger personally, but against “a text from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is the office of the Holy See in charge of doctrine.” This is “an emphatic criticism” of the doctrinal integrity of an instrument of the magisterium.

Ratzinger believes there is an agenda behind Kasper’s rejection of the ontological and temporal priority of the universal Church, namely Roman centralism and the role of the local bishop. Or, in other words, the identification of the universal Church with the pope and his curia, the latter two having their own church-political agenda. In response, Ratzinger takes the question out of the realm of church politics and situates it in the link between the Church and God: “the Church is not there for itself, but to serve God’s presence in the world.” Ratzinger responds to the “attack.” “The church of Rome is a local church and not the universal Church—a local church with a peculiar, universal responsibility, but still a local church,” the CDF never dreamt of identifying the reality of the universal Church with the pope and curia.<sup>38</sup> For this reason “the fears [of centralism] voiced by Kasper are groundless.”<sup>39</sup> More than that, “the inner precedence of God’s idea of the one Church, the one bride, over all its empirical realizations in particular churches, has nothing whatsoever to do with the problem of centralism.”<sup>40</sup>

The central point of Kasper’s ecclesiology is the simultaneity and perichoretic relationship of the universal Church and the local churches. Ratzinger grants the principle, but denies that it is to the point in a discussion of the Church’s pre-existence. That pre-existence is postulated on a theol-

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 10. Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Denver thinks Kasper’s argument against excessive centralism is an argument for a less vigorous papacy. The Archbishop asks: “How else but through a vigorous Petrine ministry would the church begin to deal with the challenges facing her? . . . The perceived bad manners or clumsy arrogance of this or that Vatican official may be irritating, but the work of Cardinal Ratzinger’s office—which seems to be the focus of most of the unhappiness about centralization—has never been more needed, nor more respectfully and thoughtfully exercised” (*America* 185 [July 30–August 6, 2001] 19).

ogy of creation willed by God, but needing a people who lives for God's will, namely Israel, which the Fathers understood as the greater Israel in the new age, the Church. The history of the Old Testament is interpreted as a love story where God finds and prepares the bride of his Son. On the strength of the Genesis account of man and his wife becoming one flesh, the idea of the bride is fused with the idea of the Church as the body of Christ. The teleology of this development is that there is only one bride, only one body of Christ, not many brides, not many bodies. Though the body has many organs, "variety becomes richness only through the process of unification."<sup>41</sup> The ecclesiological principle which issues from this biblical development is "the inner priority of unity."<sup>42</sup> Because this principle issues from a "self-evident biblical view of history," Ratzinger concludes: "I cannot understand how my position can be refuted by means of biblical theology."<sup>43</sup> Further, the linking of the ontological priority of the universal Church with the pope and the curia "makes no sense," because ontological priority of the universal Church is only an expression of the inner priority of unity, demonstrated in salvation history.<sup>44</sup> Therefore the inner precedence of God's idea of one Church over all its empirical realizations in particular churches is basically unrelated to the problem of centralism. If centralism is a problem, it is another problem.

Ratzinger thinks that Kasper has modified his objection to the ontological and temporal priority of the universal Church when he characterized the pre-existence of the Church as properly understood as being indispensable for the understanding of the Church. And Ratzinger is "astonished" that Kasper neglected to reflect on what he had said about the trinitarian dimensions of baptism in its relationship to the universal Church. Ratzinger cites an occasion when Kasper spoke of his own baptism. In that baptism Ratzinger contends that Kasper "had not been socialized into this particular community, but born into the one Church."<sup>45</sup> Ratzinger concludes: "this statement clears up the controversy—for that is the issue here."<sup>46</sup>

Finally, Ratzinger, wishing to show "the relativity of exegetical judgments," cites the liberal Protestant exegete Rudolf Bultmann who read the Pauline evidence in a way that is "the exact opposite" of the reading by the Catholic exegete Joachim Gnilka who was cited by Kasper. Gnilka holds that in the Pauline letters the local community is the focus, while in the deutero-Pauline letters the local church fades and "the Church as a whole, the universal Church, not the local church is in view."<sup>47</sup> To this Ratzinger opposes Bultmann's view "of the priority of the Church as a whole over the

<sup>41</sup> Ratzinger, "A Response to Walter Kasper" 10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* 334.

individual community.” The view of Bultmann is all the more telling in that he “could never be accused of Platonism or of a bias in favor of bringing back Roman centralism. Perhaps it was simply because he stood outside these controversies that he was able to read and expound the texts with a more open mind.”<sup>48</sup>

### KASPER’S FINAL RESPONSE

The editors of *America* asked Kasper to respond briefly to Ratzinger’s comments, which he did in a letter published in the issue dated November 26, 2001.<sup>49</sup> The request to be brief placed major restrictions on Kasper.

One of the most stinging negative remarks that Ratzinger had made about Kasper’s doctrine of the Church was it tended “to dissolve the Church into purely sociological entities.” This Ratzinger had done by pointing to what he considered Kasper’s excessive focus on the empirical church, but also guilt by association, that is, mentioning the “ecclesiological relativism” of Leonardo Boff when critiquing Kasper. In Ratzinger’s presentation of Boff, the institutional church forms from below according to the socio-cultural forces.<sup>50</sup> This charge, Kasper noted, received wide public attention and had made his task more difficult as president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Kasper notes that progress has been made in the exchange as Ratzinger no longer holds to that charge.

Also seen as progress are the common affirmation of ecclesiological foundations, and the agreement with the formula that “local churches and the universal Church are incorporated into and interpenetrate one another, so that one can speak of their being simultaneous.” This principle is absolutely central to Kasper’s position from which he does not depart. Ratzinger, says Kasper, now grants this perichoretic relationship “holds true for the Church as it has existed throughout history” which means that the local church and universal Church are simultaneous in all concrete historical manifestations. Kasper does not press the point but simultaneity would evidently include his understanding of Pentecost. Therefore, concludes

<sup>48</sup> Ratzinger, “A Response to Walter Kasper” 11.

<sup>49</sup> “From the President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity,” *America* 185 (November 26, 2001) 28–29. All the following citations of this letter are to two brief columns on these two pages.

<sup>50</sup> In the original version “Das Verhältnis von Universalkirche und Ortskirche” 798, n. 16. This note does not appear in the *America* or *The Tablet* translations. Kasper refers to Henri de Lubac’s warning concerning an excessively sociological view of the Church, while at the same time recognizing that socio-cultural forces can have a considerable meaning. De Lubac, *Quellen kirchlicher Einheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1974) 45 f. Kasper used the German translation. The original title was: De Lubac, *Les Églises particulières dans l’Église universelle* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1971) 43–56.

Kasper, “I no longer care to attribute too much importance to the really rather speculative question of whether the situation is precisely the same or perhaps different with regard to the pre-existence of the Church.”<sup>51</sup> The disagreement persists, but is of lesser importance.

Kasper ends with a reference to Henri de Lubac, revered as a modern “Church Father” by both of them. Kasper had quoted de Lubac: “A universal Church prior to all individual churches or seen as existing in itself apart from them, is merely an abstraction.”<sup>52</sup> This would indicate that while Kasper is not going to give a great deal of importance to the disagreement on the pre-existent Church, he is gently insisting on the importance of simultaneity of the local with the universal Church, which saves the universal Church from becoming a logical construct.

Kasper notes a further important area of agreement. Ratzinger has “made over” the thesis of the ontological and temporal priority of the universal Church, turning it into “the priority of inner unity.”<sup>53</sup> This Kasper sees as a reformulation he can accept on both philosophical and scriptural grounds, avoiding as it does “the confusing language about the precedence of the universal Church.”<sup>54</sup> Further, Kasper had earlier seen the debate about the primacy of the universal Church, less as a matter of church teaching and more a matter of various philosophical presuppositions. “One side tends to take as its starting point the Platonic view of the primacy of ideas, and finds the universal in them; the other tends to an Aristotelian view that the universal is realized in actual reality (an approach that has nothing to do with a reductionist reliance on empirical data).”<sup>55</sup> Ratzinger, following Kasper’s lead,<sup>56</sup> accepted for the sake of the argument his contention that Ratzinger had a more Platonic view, while Kasper’s was the more Aristotelian.<sup>57</sup> Ratzinger’s “making over” of his thesis of the ontological priority of the universal Church into “the priority of inner unity,” Kasper notes, can be accommodated in both the Platonic and Aristotelian perspectives. “Unity as a transcendental determination of being makes variety and multiplicity possible to begin with” in both philosophical systems.<sup>58</sup> The formulation “priority in inner unity” has the added benefit of “standing in opposition to the postmodern principle of absolute pluralism.”<sup>59</sup>

Kasper graciously hedges on Ratzinger’s conviction that Kasper’s own

<sup>51</sup> “From the President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity” 28.

<sup>52</sup> De Lubac, *Quellen kirchlicher Einheit* 52.

<sup>53</sup> “From the President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity” 29.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Kasper, “On the Church,” *Tablet* 255 (June 23, 2001) 927–939, at 930.

<sup>57</sup> Ratzinger, “The Local Church and the Universal Church” 10.

<sup>58</sup> Kasper, “From the President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity” 29.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

experience of infant baptism “clears up the controversy.” The experience, as interpreted by Ratzinger, was that Kasper “had not been socialized into this particular community [in which the baptism occurred], but [was] born into the one Church.”<sup>60</sup> Both agree that one becomes a member of the Catholic Church through baptism. “But one becomes so—as the temporal-spatial event of baptism makes clear—in a specific (episcopally structured) local church. The principle of simultaneity holds true precisely of the sacramental event.”<sup>61</sup> Kasper holds his ground.

Wanting to show the diverse ecclesiological perspectives in the New Testament Kasper had cited Joachim Gnilka in his *America* article, to the effect that in the Pauline letters the local community is the focus, while in the deuterio-Pauline letters the local church fades and “the Church as a whole, the universal Church, not the local church is in view.”<sup>62</sup> To this, as though borrowing fire from the enemy camp, Ratzinger quoted Rudolf Bultmann to the exact opposite, namely, “the priority of the Church as a whole over the individual community.” Kasper blunts the blow by noting that Bultmann has presuppositions Ratzinger does not share.

Finally, Kasper returns to the question of “church politics.” Ratzinger had said he wanted to strip away “all the false associations with church politics from the concept of the universal Church and to grasp it in its true theological (and hence quite concrete) content.”<sup>63</sup> Kasper responds that if the Church is not “some sort of Platonic republic, but a historically existing divine-human reality, then it cannot be wholly wrongheaded and be chalked off as mere political reductionism to ask about concrete action, not in political, but in pastoral life.”<sup>64</sup> Kasper does not allow the real pastoral issues in Roman centralism to be dismissed as church politics.

## REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Behind the Ratzinger/Kasper debate there is an unspoken bias. For some centuries a major factor in ecclesiology has been Roman centralization which, in part, accounts for its universalist bias. Further, a methodological bias reinforces the universalist tendencies. The ecclesiologist favors the universal Church in describing the objective and formal elements (Word, grace, sacrament, apostolic ministry), that which is universal in all realizations of the Church, elements that both constitute the Church and distin-

<sup>60</sup> Ratzinger, “The Local Church and the Universal Church” 11.

<sup>61</sup> Kasper, “From the President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity” 29.

<sup>62</sup> *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* 334.

<sup>63</sup> Ratzinger, “The Local Church and the Universal Church” 11.

<sup>64</sup> Kasper, “From the President of the Council for Promoting Christian Unity” 29.

guish it from other communities. This methodological bias means that the question of the local church is either slighted or not raised at all.<sup>65</sup>

Following the thread of the debate between these two theologians is complicated by the category shifts within the conversation. The discussion moves back and forth touching on (1) the metaphysical (non-historical), (2) the historical, (3) the theological (mystery which embraces the two previous categories), and finally (4) the pragmatic. The involvement of pragmatic with theological issues makes it difficult to separate them out, especially when either side protests that what is at stake in the pragmatic is the nature of the Church. On the other hand, ecclesiology can be turned into ideology, the defense of prevailing structures and procedures.<sup>66</sup> If one uses universal Church as an abstract category apart from the communion of the particular churches, and if speaking of the universal Church one really means the pope and the curia (or vice versa), understanding is clouded. The distinction between the universal Church and the particular churches is, of course, valid but confusion reigns if there is no recognition that the distinction between the two is, in fact, inadequate because the particular churches are integral to the universal Church.<sup>67</sup>

The two theologians agree on the Church as a mystery hidden in God from eternity, pre-existing in the Old Israel according to the Fathers. Ratzinger uses this pre-existing mystery to assert the ontological priority of the universal Church, while Kasper asserting the pre-existing mystery must be of the whole Church (universal and local), not just one aspect of the Church (universal), therefore denies the ontological priority of the universal Church. Both grant that the universal Church exists "in and from" the local church, and the local churches exist "in and from" the universal Church. Kasper's fear is that Ratzinger's universal Church is a logical construct, an abstraction, existing apart from the historical reality. Ratzinger's fear is that Kasper's emphasis on the empirical church reduces ecclesiology to sociology.

The key to the debate seems to be the simultaneity of the universal Church and local churches, and their perichoretic relationship, one of mutual inclusion, reciprocity. Even when Ratzinger grants simultaneity, he

<sup>65</sup> Hervé Legrand, "Le développement d'Églises-sujets, à la suite de Vatican II: Fondements théologiques et réflexions institutionnelles," *Les Églises après Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981) 149–84; Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Local Church and the Church Catholic: The Contemporary Theological Problematic," *Jurist* 52 (1992) 446.

<sup>66</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, "Introduction," *Episcopal Conferences: Historical, Canonical and Theological Studies*, ed. Thomas J. Reese, S.J. (Washington: Georgetown University, 1989) 22.

<sup>67</sup> Angel Antón, S.J., *El Misterio de la Iglesia*, 2 vols. (Madrid-Toledo: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1987) 2.115; Henn, "Historical-Theological Synthesis" 256.

insists on sequence: first the universal Church, then the local. He denies simultaneity has anything to do with the pre-existence of the Church, meaning the universal Church. Ratzinger's fear is that Kasper identifies the universal Church and the local church, that Kasper's empirical church is the Church with the depth left out. Kasper denies such identification and the evacuation of theological depth, but asserts that one does not step out of the local church into the universal Church (or vice versa). The local church is the Church in a given place. Because of simultaneity and perichoresis, one is already in the universal Church when one is in local church. Simultaneity and perichoresis has everything to do with the pre-existence of the Church, and with the denial of the ontological priority. Though as long as Ratzinger grants the simultaneity and perichoresis of the universal Church and the local churches (Kasper's central point and a point of convergence) he would not press the point as regards pre-existence. Whether simultaneity and perichoresis are precisely the same for the pre-existent Church as for the Church since Pentecost is a speculative question. But Kasper insists that the pre-existent Church has to be the mystery of the Church as it has existed throughout history, namely the simultaneity and perichoresis of the universal Church and the local churches. Otherwise it is an abstraction.

Supplying what he considered Kasper's want of "depth," Ratzinger presented the ontological priority of the universal Church on the basis of trinitarian doctrine, Christology, Eucharist, baptism, and the nature of the Petrine ministry. And he expressed "astonishment" when Kasper did not respond on these points. Kasper has no disagreement with Ratzinger on these points, except to suggest that where Ratzinger sees them expressed in the Church (the universal Church), Kasper sees them expressed in the church which is simultaneously universal and local. Again, one does not step out of the universal Church into the local church.

The convergence with Kasper is in Ratzinger's contention that the celebration of the Eucharist in the local church is at the same time the celebration of the universal Church. Ratzinger believes that in baptism the universal Church precedes the local church because one is baptized into the universal Church so that a believer is at home in all local churches. Though Kasper does not identify universal Church and local church, he does not believe one can separate them because they are simultaneous. Therefore a baptism into the local church, as are all baptisms, is a baptism into the universal Church.

Both affirm the historicity of Pentecost, but Kasper denies that Acts can be interpreted apart from the narrative of the whole book. The entire process laid out by Luke in Acts is what is normative, not just Acts 2 in isolation. In the course of the discussion Ratzinger grants that it is not of ultimate importance to isolate the precise moment in which the Church comes into existence. Rather "the inner beginning of the Church," and "the

inner priority of unity,” as manifested in Acts, are the significant points with which Kasper agrees. These two insights are Ratzinger’s major contribution to the discussion and he is to be congratulated. They are points of convergence.

Ratzinger lays great stress on the Church’s pre-existence, and in so doing enters a mode of mystery that is non-historical, without the usual space/time limits or time sequence. It seems inconsistent, therefore, that when coming to the Pentecost event he (and Avery Dulles) wants to shift into a purely historical mode, insisting on time sequence (Pentecost comes first then the realization of the universal Church in particular churches; further, it is absurd to have a universal Petrine ministry, if there were not first a universal Church).

Kasper acknowledges that universalist ecclesiology has been a tool of centralization, but denies that decentralization means a diminished papacy. Rather it would mean that the vigorous exercise of the Petrine ministry would be carried out in a collaborative way such as to avoid making collegiality a naked fiction. He has not been the only bishop or cardinal to call attention to centralization as a problem. For his part Ratzinger denies that the CDF letter is a reversal of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, or that an interpretation of the faith is being used as a strategy for gaining power.

In a veiled way Ratzinger judges Kasper’s stress on “the empirical church” to be a kind of sociological reductionism, an ecclesiological leveling, a charge without basis in fact. Kasper’s text is clear: “the empirical church” is simply the Church as it exists historically, concretely, being simultaneously universal and local. In no way is Kasper’s “empirical” a sociological category. This is pertinent to the “ecclesiological relativism,” which Kasper’s ecclesiology ostensibly in some way represents for Ratzinger. In relation to Kasper’s ecclesiology, Ratzinger expands on Leonardo Boff’s more sociologically determined ecclesiology. Whatever Boff thinks of the adequacy of Ratzinger’s summary of his ecclesiology, many will find it difficult to understand the propriety of Ratzinger’s introducing a paragraph on Boff, in a kind of guilt by association, when addressing issues of Kasper’s theology. Boff and Kasper inhabit different ecclesiological universes.

Ratzinger’s quotes Rudolf Bultmann in support of the priority of the universal Church. Several things need to be noted. Bultmann speaks of the “speculation” about the pre-existence of the Church, which is not the same as either Ratzinger or Kasper’s mystery of the Church’s pre-existence. Ratzinger is speaking of ontology and of the mystery of the Church. Bultmann is not, but of the “churchly organization,” which is the acknowledgement of operative socio-cultural factors, not something Ratzinger stresses. Bultmann agrees with Kasper that *ekklēsia* in Paul is used for both the local and the universal Church, and that “the local church is a manifestation of

the total Church,"<sup>68</sup> which seems to be an expression of the simultaneity of the universal Church and local church, Kasper's main point.

One cannot but be impressed by the candor, indeed force, with which Ratzinger and Kasper address each other, without descending into personalities. To have two curial cardinals publicly discussing what may be the most important theological issue facing the coming conclave is a sign of great hope.

<sup>68</sup> *Theology of the New Testament* 1.94.