

**“The Office of the Bishop within  
the *Communio Ecclesiarum*:  
Insights from the Ecclesiology of Jean-Marie Tillard”**

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But it is unrepentant presumption and insolence that induces men to defend their own perverse errors instead of giving assent to what is right and true, but has come from another. The blessed apostle Paul foresaw this when he wrote to Timothy with the admonition that a bishop should be not wrangling or quarrelsome but gentle and teachable. Now a man is teachable if he is meek and gentle and patient in learning. It is thus a bishop's duty not only to teach but also to learn. For he becomes a better teacher if he makes daily progress and advancement in learning what is better (St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle*, 74, 10.1)

It is a great privilege for me to speak to you this evening in a lecture series honoring the life and work of the Dominican theologian, Jean-Marie Tillard. In my presentation I will be reflecting on the ministry of the bishop in the Roman Catholic church and my overall perspective has been influenced by Tillard's own considerations of the topic. Tillard's theological achievement, although immense, has not been above criticism. The most common critique of his thought concerns his penchant for a certain romantic or idealistic vision of the church, one that, in his critics' view, is divorced from the church's concrete reality.<sup>1</sup> Consequently I would like to begin and end my reflections by placing the topic in specific pastoral contexts. I will begin by offering a profile of the typical U.S. bishop today, and conclude by considering three alternative examples of episcopal ministry that exemplify a quite different understanding of the bishop's office.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Healy, *Church, World and Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30-2.

I have the privilege of speaking regularly throughout the United States, usually at diocesan religious education and pastoral conferences, as well as diocesan study days for clergy. Over the last six years I have spoken in over 30 U.S. dioceses. As an ecclesialogist interested in church leadership structures, I regularly query my hosts at these events regarding the character and quality of episcopal leadership in their diocese. My experiences certainly do not qualify as a formal empirical study, but, as the result of my many conversations with diocesan leaders, an anecdotal profile of the typical U.S. bishop has emerged. I would like to share it with you as the starting point for my reflections. Obviously any single feature of this profile admits of exceptions.

## **AN ANECDOTAL EPISCOPAL PROFILE**

Most of the bishops in our dioceses are good men who strive for holiness and work very hard to fulfill the demands of their office as they understand it. I have seldom heard reports of bishops who were mean-spirited or petty in their dealings with people, and rarely have I heard of bishops who have taken advantage of their office for personal gain. They demonstrate a profound and sincere love for the Catholic Church and its faith. They worry about a religious and moral relativism endemic to our age and call for more robust assertions of a distinctive Catholic identity. This identity, they insist, can only be preserved through an unambiguous exposition of Catholic doctrine articulated in theological language that is, as they would invariably put it, neither liberal nor conservative but “genuinely orthodox.” They take the demands of their apostolic office seriously, and are committed to safeguarding the apostolic faith against dubious contemporary theological trends. These trends, in their view, cannot be reconciled easily with the faith of the church. They fear for the integrity of the faith in the face of a North American culture that they see as deeply inhospitable to gospel values. They frequently

invoke the apocalyptic language of “a culture of death” and in this regard remain indebted to the prophetic mode of counter-cultural engagement embodied in the pontificate of John Paul II.

Our bishops are almost universally credited for their “loyalty,” as they are described, and frequently describe themselves, as “obedient sons of the church.” This obedience is, almost without fail, directed toward Rome. They have a high sense of accountability but, again, they believe that it is to Rome and not to the people of God that they must be accountable. They often demand a similar loyalty from their clergy and other diocesan employees, at times to the point of demanding formal demonstrations of their employees’ embrace of all Catholic teaching.

These bishops genuinely value lay ecclesial ministry. However, they put more emphasis on distinguishing the ordained priesthood from lay ministry than they do on the need for collaboration between the two. Many of these bishops are credited by the people who work for them as being good listeners. Some make a real effort to consult their chancery staff and clergy; far fewer make a genuine effort to consult those laity not in their employ. Their pastoral solicitude for the people of their diocese is generally oriented toward the sacramental life of the church. Consequently, their concern that a shortage of priests may compromise that sacramental life has led them to place enormous energy and resources into cultivating an increase in priestly vocations.

Our bishops are generally pragmatic ecumenists eager to make common cause with other Christian leaders, particularly in addressing what they see as pressing social issues: abortion or immigration policy. They are less interested in promoting ecumenical dialogue at a more doctrinal or theological level and, when forced to do so, instinctively act the part of a Vatican apologist, unflinchingly defending the latest Vatican statement against its critics.

With this brief profile I have tried to capture some common characteristics of many of our U.S. bishops, particularly those who have been appointed within the last ten years or so. I need to say again that there are a number of bishops who do not fit this profile. Whether this generalized profile does justice to the character of the Canadian episcopate I leave for you to decide.

Many of the elements in this profile are surely worthy of praise. Our bishops' concern for the sacramental life of their parishes is laudable and flows directly from their pastoral obligations as shepherds of their dioceses. Likewise, their commitment to reinforcing Catholic identity, properly understood, can be read as a response to Vatican II's insistence (LG 25, CD 12) that preeminent among the bishop's responsibilities is that of preaching and teaching the Catholic faith.

However, there is also much in this profile that suggests, in my view, an inadequate theological understanding of the full dimensions of the episcopal office. It is tempting to argue that these inadequacies are directly the result of a failure of our bishops to live up to the teachings of Vatican II. However, that judgment is not entirely accurate. In fact, I believe that key elements of this profile are the indirect consequence of certain ambiguities evident in the council's teaching itself. Let me explain.

The bishops at the council often had a much clearer sense of what they wished to avoid than what they wished to pursue. For example, regarding the liturgy, they recognized the inadequacies of the Tridentine rite of the mass but were less certain about the shape of any reformed rite. They were also aware of the obvious problems with a passive theology of the laity as mere recipients of the ministrations of the clergy, but were not sure what a positive theology of the laity should look like. For all of the important individual contributions the council made

to our understanding of the office of the bishop, it did not provide an internally coherent ecclesiological account of the episcopal office and thus created the conditions for a post-conciliar episcopate that continues to suffer from significant ecclesiological deficiencies.

With that in mind, the balance of my presentation today will be comprised of two parts. In the first part I will sketch out two specific ambiguities in the teaching of the council that have had an impact on the office of the bishop today. In the second part of my presentation I will draw on the work of Jean-Marie Tillard, which I believe offers us a helpful ecclesiological framework for producing a coherent theology of the episcopate appropriate to the church of the twenty-first century.

## **PART ONE: TWO ECCLESIAL AMBIGUITIES IN CONCILIAR TEACHING**

One of the unwritten principles governing the conduct of Vatican II was offered by Pope Paul VI. Early in his pontificate, the pope expressed a concern that the documents of the council might engender harmful church divisions. Consequently, though the rules of the council allowed a document to be approved with a two thirds majority, Pope Paul made it known that he wished the documents to be approved by a moral (rather than absolute) unanimity among the bishops. A cursory review of the final voting suggests that the council heeded the pope's concerns; no document was opposed in the final vote by more than a handful of bishops. But there was a price to be paid for this high level of unanimity. Significant compromises were made, often by juxtaposing two different viewpoints in the same document without developing how they related to one another. Such was the case with the first conciliar ambiguity I wish to consider.

### A. Apostolic Office and the Apostolicity of Life

The first ambiguity concerns the council's treatment of the apostolicity of the church.

For our purposes it will be helpful to distinguish between two aspects of the church's apostolicity: 1) the apostolicity of church life and, 2) apostolic office or succession.<sup>2</sup> The apostolicity of church life, what John Burkhard also calls "substantive apostolicity,"<sup>3</sup> assumes that the apostolic faith resides in the life of the church itself. The church's apostolicity is manifested in communal worship, sacramental practice and the ministerial outreach to the poor and marginalized. The apostolic life of the church also includes the daily witness of its ordinary believers, the community's artistic expressions, its laws, customs, and so on. To assert the church's apostolicity in this sense is to claim that in and through the church's life a vital connection to that apostolic message and mission can be discerned.

The second element of the church's apostolicity is captured by the term "apostolic succession" or office, and it refers to the belief that the bishops hold an office that has succeeded to the authority of the apostles and is charged with ensuring the integrity of the apostolic faith. One can find in the council documents passages that allude to both of these elements.

Several conciliar texts allude to the substantive apostolicity rooted in the life and witness of the entire Christian community. One of the most important is found in chapter two of *Lumen gentium* in a passage that considers the whole people of God's fulfillment of its prophetic office. The council writes eloquently that

The whole body of the faithful who have received an anointing which comes from the holy one cannot be mistaken in belief. It shows this characteristic through the

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<sup>2</sup> In his recent book, Burkhard also addresses two other aspects of the church's catholicity, an apostolicity of origin and apostolicity of doctrine. John Burkhard, *Apostolicity Then and Now: An Ecumenical Church in a Postmodern World* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 26-41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

entire people's supernatural sense of the faith, when, from the bishops to the last of the faithful, it manifests a universal consensus in matters of faith and morals. By this sense of the faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the people of God guided by the sacred magisterium which it faithfully obeys, receives not the work of human beings, but truly the word of God, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The people unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply through right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life (LG 12).<sup>4</sup>

A similar testimony to the faithful's role in preserving the apostolic faith is found in *Dei*

*Verbum*'s assertion that tradition develops

through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts. It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who, on succeeding to the office of bishop, have received the sure charism of truth. Thus, as the centuries go by, the church is always advancing towards the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in it (DV 8).

This passage recovers the ancient insight that tradition includes more than doctrine; it embraces the whole life of the church. Moreover, the council taught that this apostolic tradition resides, not exclusively with those who hold apostolic office, but with all believers "who ponder these things in their hearts" and actively participate in the dynamic unfolding of tradition.

The council considers the second element, apostolic office, in some detail in chapter three of *Lumen gentium* and in The Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishop, *Christus Dominus*, where it affirms the obligation of the bishops to preach the gospel and preserve the integrity of the apostolic faith.

The council failed, however, to fully integrate its consideration of substantive apostolicity with its teaching on the responsibilities of the apostolic office. In the two passages I quoted above, the witness or insight of the whole faithful is merely juxtaposed to the teaching office of the bishop; the relationship between the two is never really developed. This lack of integration is

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<sup>4</sup> The English translation of all Vatican II documents is taken from *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery (Northport: Costello, 1996).

particularly evident in *Lumen gentium*'s chapter on the hierarchy which asserts the obligations of the bishops to teach the faith but makes no mention of their concomitant obligations to attend to the apostolic witness of the community they serve. Indeed, in the entire chapter the only mention of attending to the faith witness of the people is the exhortation in LG 27 that bishops should not refuse to listen to their people whose welfare they were ordained to promote. Later, in chapter four, lay people are exhorted to disclose their needs to their pastors (LG 37) and in *Christus Dominus*, the bishop is encouraged "to approach people and to initiate and promote dialogue with them" (CD 13). However, in none of these passages is the exhortation to consult the faithful justified by the belief that the people of God offer some Spirit-assisted insight into the apostolic faith itself.

This failure to correlate the apostolicity of life with the apostolic office was addressed, to some extent, in select post-conciliar pronouncements. Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic letter, *Novo millennio ineunte*, explicitly mentioned the need for consultative structures that allow for a fruitful dialogue between the faithful and church leadership. The pope even quoted St. Paulinus of Nola: "Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes."<sup>5</sup> Two years later in the pope's post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the bishops' office, *Pastores gregis*, he reminded bishops that what "every Bishop has heard and received from the heart of the Church he must then give back to his brothers and sisters, whom he must care for like the Good Shepherd. In him the *sensus fidei* attains completeness."<sup>6</sup> Here we find a rare acknowledgment of the bishop's dual responsibilities to teach authoritatively and to listen to the witness of the faithful.

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<sup>5</sup> *Novo millennio ineunte*, # 45.

<sup>6</sup> *Pastores gregis*, # 28.

In spite of these occasional post-conciliar texts, the episcopal profile I offered earlier suggests that the typical American bishop has little sense of his obligation to be immersed in and attentive to the diverse faith witness of the whole people of God. Of course, it is true that our bishops will, on occasion, consult key lay figures, particularly when the financial or legal expertise of the laity are required, but there is very little evidence that our bishops consider it necessary to consult the faithful for insight into the breadth and depth of the Catholic faith itself. I have heard few accounts of our bishops embodying what Cardinal Newman once referred to as the *conspiratio fidelium et pastorum*, “the breathing together of the faithful and the pastors.”<sup>7</sup> We continue to reap today the consequences of this inconsistency in conciliar teaching.

### **B. The Bishop’s Relationship to His Local Church and His Relationship to the College of Bishops**

The second ambiguity of conciliar teaching concerns the conceptualization of the bishop’s twofold relationship to his local church and to the universal church. This was largely the result of a closely related ambiguity concerning the relationship between the local church and the universal church. It is a commonplace in the history of ecclesiology to mark the gradual demise of a theology of the local church over the course of the second millennium. The historical causes for its demise are too many to be explored here. However, the principal fruit of the demise of a theology of the local church was a universalist ecclesiology that treated the local church as little more than a branch office of a universal corporation.

Many of the council bishops and *periti* were aware of this difficulty and we can find several passages in the council documents that attempt to address this shortcoming. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, for example, highlighted the ecclesial significance of the

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<sup>7</sup> John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (1859; reprint, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1961), 71-2.

local church, linking it with the ministry of the bishop and the celebration of the eucharist (SC 41), as is the case in *Christus Dominus* 11. *Lumen gentium* acknowledged the theological significance of the local church, affirming that

In any community of the altar, under the sacred ministry of the bishop, a manifest symbol is to be seen of that charity and “unity of the mystical body, without which there can be no salvation.” In these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or dispersed, Christ is present through whose power and influence the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is constituted. For “the sharing in the body and blood of Christ has no other effect than to accomplish our transformation into that which we receive” (LG 26).

Perhaps the council’s most profound articulation of a theology of the local church is found in The Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad gentes*, which speaks especially in article 19 of the need for a mature local church that possesses within it all of the resources necessary to fulfill its mission. Here we see the true maturation of a theology of the local church, one that starts from an appreciation of the marvelous particularity of each church and sees this diversity in local churches as a contribution to the church’s catholicity.<sup>8</sup> We must also acknowledge the council’s uneven but real recognition of the ecclesiological significance of various groupings of local churches and their bishops, in the form of synods and episcopal conferences (AG 20; CD 36-43; SC 22, 36).

This rediscovery of a theology of the local church led the council, in several passages, to at least implicitly suggest a theology of the universal church as a communion of local churches, asserting that in the local church “the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Christ is truly present and active” (CD 11, see also LG 23). We should not minimize these contributions.

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<sup>8</sup> Gilles Routhier, “Beyond Collegiality: The Local Church Left Behind by the Second Vatican Council,” *CTSA Proceedings* 62 (2007): 1-15, at 5.

Emmanuel Lanne famously referred to the recovery of a theology of the local church as a “Copernican revolution” in Catholic ecclesiology.<sup>9</sup>

Flowing from this tentative reassertion of a theology of the local church there is an overarching presumption in the documents regarding the bishop’s pastoral responsibilities to his local flock. In the third chapter of *Lumen gentium* the council taught that in the early centuries of the church “the bishops ... took on the ministry to the community, presiding in God’s place over the flock of which they are the pastors, as teachers of doctrine, priests for sacred worship and ministers of government” (LG 20). According to the council, each bishop who is given a pastoral charge over a local church exercises that authority with a power that is “proper, ordinary and immediate” and, as such, they are not “to be regarded as vicars of the Roman Pontiff” (LG 27). This restoration of the full dignity and authority of the local bishop was further strengthened in *Christus Dominus* by the council’s deliberate abandonment of the centuries old “concessions system,” a system in which the pope *conceded* certain faculties (e.g., regarding marriage and penal law) to bishops for five year terms. The canonical assumption underlying the concessions system was that the faculties were proper to the pope but could be delegated to the individual bishops. Instead, Vatican II assumed that these faculties were proper to the bishops with only certain cases “reserved” to the pope (CD 8).

In *Lumen gentium* 23, a consideration of episcopal collegiality begins with each bishop’s relationship to his own local or particular church:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Lanne, “L’Église locale et l’Église universelle: Actualité et portée du theme,” *Irénikon* 43 (1970): 490.

<sup>10</sup> For a compelling theological argument for the use of the term “local church” over “particular church,” see Gilles Routhier, “‘Église locale’ ou ‘Église particulière’: querelle sémantique ou option théologique?” *Studia Canonica* 25 (1991): 277-334. See also Hervé Legrand, “La realization de l’Eglise en un lieu,” in *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie*, edited by Bernard Lauret and François Refoulé (Paris: Cerf, 1993), III: 145-59.

Individual bishops are the visible source and foundation of unity in their own particular churches, which are modeled on the universal church; it is in and from these that the one unique catholic church exists. And for that reason each bishop represents his own church whereas all of them together with the pope represent the whole church in a bond of peace, love and unity.

Yet, in spite of these positive developments, the fact remains that this nascent theology of the local church and its bishop was not sufficiently developed at the council and was often eclipsed by the continued influence of a universalist approach to the church, one that still owed much to the papo-centrism of Vatican I and tended to focus more on the bishop's relationship to both the episcopal college and the pope as head of that college than on his relationship to his local church.

For example, in a crucial passage, *Lumen gentium* 22 states that a bishop "is made a member of the episcopal body in virtue of the sacramental consecration and by hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college." The impression is thereby created that the bishop's *primary* relationship is to the episcopal college and not the local church. This same universalist approach is evident in *Christus Dominus* which treated the bishop's relationship to the universal church *before* it considered the bishop's relationship to his local church.<sup>11</sup>

According to Gilles Routhier, at the heart of this ambiguity is a juxtaposition of two different theologies of the church

One that inserts a certain type of universalistic ecclesiology and another which is not strictly speaking local but multipolar and that does justice to the diversity of cultures leading to a development on assemblies of churches "into several groups, organically united groups that ... enjoy their own discipline, their own liturgical usage, and their own theological and spiritual heritage" (LG 23).<sup>12</sup>

Routhier highlights a dimension of the topic briefly mentioned above, namely that what is at issue is not, strictly speaking, merely the relation between the local and universal church, but the

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<sup>11</sup> Gilles Routhier, "Finishing the Work Begun: The Trying Experience of the Fourth Period," in *History of Vatican II*, Volume V, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll: Orbis; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 182.

<sup>12</sup> Routhier, "Beyond Collegiality..." 7.

interplay of three ecclesial realities, the universal church, the individual churches and various groupings of churches.<sup>13</sup> Consideration of the third term, the various groupings of churches, raises important questions for the office of the bishop directly related, for example, to the authority of episcopal conferences and the synod of bishops. However, these are topics that I will not be able to consider within the parameters of this essay.

The council's tendency to link the office of the bishop primarily to the episcopal college has continued in post-conciliar magisterial pronouncements. The 1983 Code of Canon Law continued the practice of the formal ordination of Vatican diplomats, curial officials and diocesan auxiliaries to titular sees, that is, to local churches that no longer exist. The priority of the bishop's relationship to the college over his local church was perpetuated in the 1990 Rite of Episcopal Ordination,<sup>14</sup> in Pope John Paul II's *Pastores gregis*, and in his apostolic letter on episcopal conferences, *Apostolos suos*.

This predilection for privileging the bishop's relationship to the college over his relationship to the local church has had quite clear pastoral consequences. It has led many of our bishops to comprehend their episcopal role as one of mediating the relationship between the universal church and their local flock uni-directionally, that is, moving *from* the universal church and *to* the local church. Concretely, this means that bishops see their responsibility as that of bringing Rome to their local church, and not their local church to Rome. This is confirmed in the many accounts bishops offer in their diocesan newspapers regarding their *ad limina* visits. The rhetoric is often oriented toward what the pope has to say *to* their local church, not toward how the bishop reported to the pope the wisdom, insight and concerns of his local church.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> For an in-depth analysis of this rite, see Susan Wood, *Sacramental Orders* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), 28-63.

These two ambiguities in conciliar teaching have led to serious deficiencies in the exercise of episcopal ministry today. Until these inconsistencies are resolved we will continue to be beset by a well intentioned but ultimately inadequate conception of episcopal office. This suggests a real pastoral urgency to find a more internally coherent ecclesiological vision, one capable of drawing from the insights of the council while successfully resolving the council's ambiguities. For that, I believe our most promising resource lies in the work of the Dominican theologian, Jean-Marie Tillard.

## **PART TWO: THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL VISION OF JEAN-MARIE TILLARD O.P.—RESOLVING THE AMBIGUITIES**

Soon after his death, Jean-Marie Tillard was referred to in one obituary as the “spiritual son of Yves Congar.”<sup>15</sup> This is no small praise, given Congar's status as perhaps the greatest Catholic ecclesologist of the twentieth century. Like Congar, Tillard was well versed in biblical and patristic theology. Like Congar, Tillard benefited immensely from his participation in ecumenical endeavors in general, and from ecumenical contact with Eastern Orthodoxy in particular. Like Congar, Tillard was a *peritus* at the council (although his role was much less significant than that of his Dominican confrere). Yet, in some ways, Tillard was a more systematic thinker, at least in his more mature ecclesiological writings. Although not without its own difficulties, Tillard's ecclesiological vision offers a fruitful foundation for resolving the ambiguities in conciliar teaching outlined above.

Tillard is often associated with “communion ecclesiology” and, as Brian Flanagan has pointed out, in some of his earlier work Tillard exercised little restraint in his consideration of

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<sup>15</sup> Henri Tincq, “Jean-Marie Tillard, un théologien œcuméniste, fils spirituel du Père Congar,” *Le Monde*, November 15, 2000.

the theological concept of “communion.” Tillard’s writing in the 1980s, for example, gave the impression that the notion of “communion” provided “an answer to every ecclesiological question.” However, in his most mature work, *L’Eglise locale*, Tillard demonstrated an ability to place certain methodological controls on his use of the concept, successfully integrating communion into developed explorations of “other ecclesiological concepts such as apostolicity and catholicity.”<sup>16</sup> It is precisely this integration of essential ecclesiological concepts that makes his work so helpful in developing an ecclesiological foundation for episcopal ministry today. I cannot hope to offer anything like a comprehensive overview of Tillard’s ecclesiology. For that one must turn to any of a series of recent studies of his thought.<sup>17</sup> In this paper I will limit myself to elements of Tillard’s thought that respond to the two conciliar ambiguities that I have just discussed.

### **A. Apostolic Office and Apostolicity of Life**

Tillard’s ability to shed new light on the apostolicity of the church is a direct result of his subtle and sophisticated study of biblical and patristic texts. Tillard resisted the inclination to proof-text in support of his argument, pursuing instead a careful reading of both familiar and obscure texts from the biblical and patristic tradition.<sup>18</sup> Tillard roots the church’s apostolicity in the witness of the apostolic church of Jerusalem. His often lyrical meditations on the event of Pentecost identify the privileged role given to the apostles as a direct link to Christ. The witness

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Patrick Flanagan, “Communion, Diversity, and Salvation: The Contribution of Jean-Marie Tillard, O.P. to Systematic Ecclesiology (Ph.D., diss., Boston College, 2007), 11.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to Flanagan’s dissertation, one should consider the fine study by Christopher Ruddy, *The Local Church: Tillard and the Future of Catholic Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 2006) as well as Jeffrey Vanderwilt, *A Church without Borders: The Eucharist and the Church in Ecumenical Perspective* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> For an investigation of Tillard’s approach to biblical and patristic texts, see Flanagan, 91-8.

of the apostles and the apostolic community of Jerusalem remain uniquely normative in the life of the church.

To fully appreciate Tillard's theology of apostolicity we must recognize the centrality of two interrelated concepts, memory and reception. "Memory" is a concept he began exploring early in his career in connection with his study of the eucharist.<sup>19</sup> For Tillard, at the heart of the church's apostolicity is the corporate memory of the apostolic witness. By its *martyria* or witness, the "apostolic community is the group through which the Spirit gives the church its 'memory.' Nothing will be 'remembered' of Christ Jesus except in terms of what the apostolic community shall have passed on of its own 'memory'."<sup>20</sup> All other Christian communities are deemed "apostolic" to the extent that they have embraced as their own this apostolic memory. All subsequent expressions of the church's apostolicity are viewed by Tillard, not as extrinsic additions but rather as a communion, a participation in, the apostolic memory of the church of Jerusalem.<sup>21</sup> It is because of the apostolic anchor, if you will, of the witness of the church of Jerusalem, that this apostolicity may be expressed in multiple cultural and historical contexts.<sup>22</sup>

The apostolic memory has been handed on to other Christian communities who live in a communion of memory with the church of Jerusalem and all other apostolic churches. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that "memory" is, for Tillard, a richer evocation of what is meant by the apostolic tradition. This memory resides primarily in the life of each Christian community, in its liturgy, its preaching, its Christian service and its actualization in the daily witness of believers. As such, this memory is not static. It is not simply a list of propositional truths, but a

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<sup>19</sup> Jean-Marie R. Tillard, *L'Éucharistie: Pâque de l'Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1962).

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Marie R. Tillard, "The Apostolic Foundations of Christian Ministry," *Worship* 63 (1989): 290-300, at 293.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Marie R. Tillard, *L'Église locale: Ecclésiologie de communion et catholicité* (Paris: Cerf, 1995), 40; see also *Église d'Églises: L'ecclésiologie de communion* (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 28.

<sup>22</sup> Tillard, *Église d'Églises*, 144.

living reality that takes flesh in the life and witness of each Christian community.<sup>23</sup> This memory finds expression not only in ecclesiastical doctrine and speculative theology but in the language of art as well. Tillard points to the tradition of iconography and music as expressions of the church's pluriform memory. He writes: "Quite often what the churches do not dare to say in their official documents is said more freely in their hymn-books."<sup>24</sup> It is the church itself that is the subject of the apostolic memory. Tillard explores the role of the whole community in the expression of the apostolic memory by way of his reflection on the *sensus fidei*. According to Tillard, the *sensus fidei* refers to an "instinctive flair" possessed by the people of God for discerning authentic insights and expressions of the apostolic faith.

This brings us to a second seminal concept in his thought, "ecclesial reception."<sup>25</sup> For Tillard, "reception" involves "recognition" by an individual and/or community in which, in some sense, what is received is already "known," however implicitly, by the receiver/receiving community.<sup>26</sup> Thus reception can only follow upon a prior recognition in which the receiver/receiving community *recognizes* their own faith, however new its expression, in that which they receive. This ecclesial process of recognition-reception is the actualization of the community's *sensus fidei*; it entails the communal discernment of which concrete expressions of the faith are or are not in keeping with the apostolic memory of the church. It is ecclesial reception, then, that gives to the church's apostolic memory its dynamic character. When one community receives some element of the witness or practice of another community, they are

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>24</sup> Jean-Marie R. Tillard, "Reception—Communion," *One in Christ* 28 (1992): 307-22, at 314.

<sup>25</sup> For an extensive review of theologies of reception, including Tillard's, see Richard R. Gaillardetz, "The Reception of Doctrine: New Perspectives," in *Authority in the Roman Catholic Church*, edited by Bernard Hoose (London: Ashgate, 2002), 95-114.

<sup>26</sup> Tillard, "Reception—Communion," 312.

affirming a communion of memory, even when the expression of that memory takes on a distinctive form. Finally, since it is the local church that is generally the locus of this ecclesial reception, inculturation plays a crucial role in this process. Inculturation occurs at the meeting point of divine revelation “and the specific character of the place.” Inculturation names the process of the gospel being received in a specific local context.<sup>27</sup> For Tillard, it is inculturation that preserves the catholicity of the church.<sup>28</sup>

It is Tillard’s development of the twin concepts of memory and reception that offers a helpful basis for uniting what Vatican II merely juxtaposed, namely, the apostolicity of church life and the apostolicity of office. Tillard holds that the apostolic memory of the church abides in the life of the church but is guarded by the church’s apostolic ministers, its bishops. Yet this memory is not their private possession. Bishops are to serve as guardians over the church’s memory. It is this guardianship that lies at the heart of the ministry of *episkopē*; the bishop is to be a minister of memory. As such the bishop’s unique “oversight” is exercised in presiding over the process of ecclesial reception engaged by the whole local church. The bishop is “entrusted with the task of *watching over* the way the gift of God is *received* and passed on from one group to the other, one generation to the other.”<sup>29</sup> Thus the bishop becomes the minister responsible for serving the “memory” of the church. He writes: “the ministers of *episkope* receive from the *sensus fidelium* the church’s awareness that something is needed for the well-being and the mission of the community, or the conviction that what has been declared still needs to be

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>28</sup> Ruddy, 83.

<sup>29</sup> J-M.R. Tillard, “Tradition, Reception,” in *The Quadrilog: Tradition and the Future of Ecumenism* [Festschrift for George Tavard] (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1994), 328-43, at 336.

refined.”<sup>30</sup> There is, Tillard believes, a necessary and healthy tension between the corporate exercise of the *sensus fidei* and the bishop’s apostolic oversight of the memory of the church. This is because it is often the exercise of the corporate *sensus fidei* that reveals new expressions and applications of the one apostolic faith. This tension ensures, if you will, the catholicity of the apostolic faith, a catholicity that is realized, as we shall see in a moment, in the life of the local church.

Tillard’s theology of apostolicity and apostolic office has found its way into several ecumenical documents. The Munich document that emerged out of Orthodox-Roman Catholic dialogue and which Tillard helped author along with the Greek Orthodox theologian and now Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas, asserts that while the bishop brings to the people both the word of salvation and the eucharistic gifts, he “...is also the one who “receives” from his church, which is faithful to tradition, the word he transmits.”<sup>31</sup> In ARCIC’s noteworthy document, “The Gift of Authority,” a document in which Tillard’s contributions have been widely acknowledged, the ministry of the bishop is closely bound to understandings of reception and ecclesial memory. ARCIC affirms that each reception of the faith of the church in a new historical and cultural context, leads to “a fresh remembrance,” a “rediscovery” of neglected elements from the tradition now seen from within a new horizon of interpretation.<sup>32</sup> “The Gift of Authority” also offers a wonderful synthesis of Tillard’s understanding of how apostolic office

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<sup>30</sup> Tillard, “Reception—Communion,” 319; *L’Église locale*, 314-24.

<sup>31</sup> The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, “The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity,” in *The Quest for Unity: Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1996): 59 [II, #3].

<sup>32</sup> The Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue (ARCIC II), “The Gift of Authority,” *Origins* 29 (May 27, 1999): 17, 19-29, at #s 24-5.

and the apostolicity of the life of the community are intrinsically related. In a passage that was almost certainly penned by Tillard we find this assertion:

Those who exercise *episcopate* in the Body of Christ must not be separated from the ‘symphony’ of the whole people of God in which they have their part to play. They need to be alert to the *sensus fidelium*, in which they share, if they are to be made aware when something is needed for the well-being and mission of the community, or when some element of the Tradition needs to be received in a fresh way. The charism and function of *episcopate* are specifically connected to the *ministry of memory*, which constantly renews the Church in hope. Through such ministry the Holy Spirit keeps alive in the Church the memory of what God did and revealed, and the hope of what God will do to bring all things into unity in Christ.... The bishops, the clergy and the other faithful must all recognise and receive what is mediated from God through each other. Thus the *sensus fidelium* of the people of God and the ministry of memory exist together in reciprocal relationship.<sup>33</sup>

Were our bishops today to be more mindful of their ministry as servants of the church’s apostolic memory, a memory that always resides in the life of the church, we would see a quite different style of episcopal teaching, one more closely attuned to listening attentively to the distinctive faith witness of their local communities. We would also see bishops who consulted the faithful, not just in search of their expertise in fields of pragmatic usefulness, but as a necessary component of their authoritative teaching ministry.

## **B. The Bishop as Pastor of a Flock and Member of the Episcopal College**

This now brings us to Tillard’s response to the second ambiguity in conciliar teaching, the bishop’s relationship to both his local church and the episcopal college. His work directly engages the core issue, that is, the relationship between the local churches and the universal church. He finds a fresh perspective in his careful and insightful reading of Pentecost.

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<sup>33</sup> “The Gift of Authority,” # 30.

Tillard believed that the church of Jerusalem was simultaneously local and universal. Its locality was grounded in the specific religio-cultural context of Jerusalem.<sup>34</sup> The apostles were Palestinian Jews who spoke in Aramaic and continued to observe the Law of Moses. At the same time, the church of Jerusalem was also universal by virtue of its missionary thrust and the ability of those from other nations to hear the gospel preached “each in their own tongue.” The diversity of nations finds a home in the church of Jerusalem. Tillard in no way rejects the reality of the universal church. Tillard’s understanding of the way in which local churches recognize their communion with one another has led to accusations of congregationalism. But this is based on a misunderstanding. Tillard does not hold that recognition *constitutes* the communion among the churches, rather, recognition is the *ecclesial discovery* of a communion that is already present.<sup>35</sup> However, if Tillard expressly rejects congregationalism, neither can he accept a priority given to the universal church of the kind proposed by the CDF in its controversial 1992 statement, *Communio in notio*.<sup>36</sup> The church universal for Tillard is not a Platonic ideal but the flesh and blood people of God always gathered and sent in local Christian communities.<sup>37</sup>

His analysis of the bishop’s office flows directly out of his treatment of the relationship between the local churches and the universal church. Central to his thought is the relationship between synodality and collegiality. For Tillard, synodality refers to the communion that exists

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<sup>34</sup> Tillard, *L’Église locale*, 34-42, 53.

<sup>35</sup> Tillard, “Reception – Communion,” 311; *Église d’Églises*, 284; Jean-Marie Tillard, “Confesser ensemble la foi apostolique. Intervention du P. Tillard à Commission Foi et Constitution,” *Documentation Catholique* 86 (1989): 967-70, at 969.

<sup>36</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” *Origins* 22 (June 25, 1992): 108-12. This document referred to the ontological and chronological priority of the universal church over the local church (# 9). Tillard’s position is quite similar to that of Cardinal Kasper in his famous dispute with then Cardinal Ratzinger over the CDF document. A summary of this debate is found in Kilian McDonnell, “The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches,” *Theological Studies* 63 (2002): 227-50.

<sup>37</sup> Tillard, *L’Église locale*, 228.

among the local churches whereas collegiality refers to the communion that exists among the bishops. He was unrelenting in his criticism of Vatican II and the Code of Canon Law for failing to adequately root collegiality in synodality.<sup>38</sup> As I noted above, the same difficulty is evident in both *Pastores gregis* and *Apostolos suos*.

Tillard does not see the episcopal college as a reality anterior to the communion of churches. The episcopal college is in a sense the concrete embodiment of the communion of churches. Consequently, the bishop's relationship to his own local church and his relationship to the college of bishops must be simultaneous; he is neither first a local bishop who later enters the college nor is he, as certain conciliar texts suggest, first a member of the episcopal college who is only subsequently related by pastoral charge to a local church. Because the local church always abides in the communion of churches, the local bishop is always simultaneously pastor of a local flock and member of the college.

He contended that the universalist ecclesiology that places the episcopal college outside the communion of churches actually “wounds the authentic nature of the episcopate.”<sup>39</sup> This wound is evident, he insisted in the dubious practice of formal ordinations in which auxiliary bishops, curial officials and diplomats are ordained to the episcopate as an honorific and assigned a titular see. The assignment of a titular see suggests an at least vestigial sense of the bishop's bond to his church—all bishops must be assigned to a local church—yet the fact that this *sedes* is a church without members suggests the extent to which this insight has been trivialized.

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<sup>38</sup> Jean-Marie Tillard, “In Search of Vatican II: Archbishop Quinn's *The Reform of the Papacy*,” *One in Christ* 36 (2000): 176-84; *L'Église locale*, 279. See the helpful distillation of Tillard's argument in Ruddy, *The Local Church*, 109.

<sup>39</sup> Tillard, *L'Église locale*, 228.

In Tillard's ecclesiology there can be no competition or tension between the bishop's bond to the local church and his relationship with his fellow bishops in the college. This is because the universal church is nothing other than the communion of churches. The bishop both presides over his local church and facilitates his church's communion with all other local churches in the *communio ecclesiarum*. The bishop proclaims the faith to his local flock but not as if that faith were not already been present in the life of his community. His ministry is a *testificatio fidei* not a *determinatio fidei*. Consequently, a bishop must not just preach and teach; he must also attend to the unique inculturation of the faith within his community. Moreover, he is obliged as well to bring that unique faith witness to the entire *communio ecclesiarum* by means of his participation in the episcopal college.

Tillard's ecclesiology successfully embedded episcopal collegiality within the synodality of the communion of churches and presented the episcopal college not as a governing board over the universal church but as a sacramental embodiment of the communion of churches. Because of this, Tillard re-conceives the office of the bishop as a ministry committed to facilitating a two way conversation within the *communio ecclesiarum*. On the one hand, the bishop moves *from the college to his local church*, sharing with his flock the shared memory of the entire people of God in all its rich diversity. On the other hand, the bishop also moves *from his local church to the communio ecclesiarum* by way of his participation in the episcopal college, often in its various regional forms. He thereby offers his own church's distinctive actualization of the apostolic faith as a contribution to the catholicity of the church's memory. The bishop helps facilitate an ecclesial gift exchange within the *communio ecclesiarum* of the kind that is so richly explored in *Ad Gentes* 22:

The seed which is the word of God grows out of good soil watered by the divine dew, it absorbs moisture, transforms it, and makes it part of itself, so that

eventually it bears much fruit. So too indeed, just as happened in the economy of the incarnation, the young churches, which are rooted in Christ and built on the foundation of the apostles take overall the riches of the nations which have been given to Christ as an inheritance.... [T]he Christian life will be adapted to the mentality and character of each culture, and local traditions together with the special qualities of each national family, illumined by the light of the gospel, will be taken up into a Catholic unity.

This gift exchange is often mediated through participation in varieties of regional groupings of churches and their bishops at the provincial and regional levels. Consequently, we must imagine this gift exchange as engaging the bishop at three levels: the local church, the regional groupings of churches and the universal church.<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Tillard's ecclesial vision offers a helpful starting point for a theology of the episcopate, one capable of providing a corrective to the episcopal portrait with which I began my presentation. In that portrait bishops see themselves as expositors of an apostolic faith which they share with their brother bishops in the episcopal college, *sub Petro et cum Petro*. For them the faith of the universal church is found almost exclusively in Vatican pronouncements. It is their obligation to present that faith, as authoritatively taught by the pope and his curia, to their local flock. These bishops understand the conciliar term, *communio hierarchica*, "hierarchical communion," to engage them in a set of ecclesial relations in which loyalty and accountability move in an ascending direction while the ministry of teaching moves in a descending direction. I have suggested that the roots of this view lie in two ecclesial ambiguities in the conciliar texts. The first concerns the inability of the council to connect an understanding of apostolic office with the apostolic faith which abides in the life of the church. The second concerns the council's

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<sup>40</sup> Routhier has strongly emphasized the need for ecclesiology to further explore this "tripod configuration." Routhier, "Beyond Collegiality..." 10.

inability to correlate the bishop's relationship to his local church with his relationship to the episcopal college.

Tillard's theology of the episcopate offers a helpful response to these two difficulties. He responds to the first by presenting the apostolic office of the bishop as a ministry of memory which presides over the creative reception of the apostolic faith by his local church. This view demands that the bishop, precisely because of his apostolic office, listen to the distinctive and diverse testimonies of his people as they seek to incarnate the gospel in their daily lives. This ministry of listening does not compete with the ministry of apostolic oversight; it is an essential component of that oversight. He responds to the second ambiguity by re-imagining the universal church as a communion of churches. He then situates episcopal collegiality *within* ecclesial synodality, negating any false prioritization of the bishop's relationship to the college over his relationship to his local church

As was noted earlier, Tillard's vision has been accused of being abstract and romantic. Yet his insights can be brought into a fruitful conversation with the concrete experience of the church today. There are many places in the church where elements of his vision have been realized. Let me conclude by offering three examples of episcopal ministry that embody key elements of Tillard's ecclesiological vision.

Consider the witness of the late Bishop Raymond Lucker who served as the diocesan bishop of the rural diocese of New Ulm, Minnesota.<sup>41</sup> Over the course of his ministry, Lucker refused to keep an episcopal residence, preferring to make his car his office while residing in various parish rectories throughout his diocese. This itinerant lifestyle allowed him to visit up to

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<sup>41</sup> The material concerning the witness of these three bishops is drawn from Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008).

fifty parishes each year. Lucker came to know his people as few bishops have, and although his reputation during his tenure was that of an outspoken liberal bishop, Lucker always believed he was expressing positions motivated by his pastoral concern for those he served and his conviction that their own simple insights had something to offer the larger church.

Or we might consider the episcopal ministry of Francisco Claver, who served in the Philippines as bishop of Malaybalay Diocese and later as Vicar Apostolic of the Diocese of Bontoc-Lagawe. When he first became bishop in Mindanao, he began his ministry by conducting extensive interviews with the local peoples, seeking to understand their daily concerns and the ways in which the gospel spoke to their lives. He continued that commitment to attend to the witness of the people he served in his subsequent episcopal assignments. Indeed, Claver has often spoken eloquently of his experience of local, non-Christian indigenous peoples “teaching” the local Christians about gospel values from the riches of their own cultural heritage. Claver knew well how the apostolic faith was being revitalized in the faith of his people.

Finally, we have an embodiment of this approach to episcopal ministry in the example of Don Samuel Ruiz, who served for almost forty years as bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico. Over 80% of his flock were indigenous Mayans who stood at the bottom rung of the Mexican social ladder. The title of one of his books says much about how he understood his ministry, *Cómo me convirtieron los indígenas*, “How the indigenous people converted me.”<sup>42</sup> Ruiz embraced his ministry as teacher of the faith but he grew in his convictions that the faith of the church must take root in the cultural context of his people. He acknowledged his own episcopal authority, but felt that this did not preclude his engagement in

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<sup>42</sup> Bishop Samuel Ruiz (with the collaboration of Carlos Torner), *Cómo me convirtieron los indígenas*, [Colección Servidores y Testigos] (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 2002).

substantive consultation with the people he served. As he grew into his episcopal office, Ruiz would speak with greater frequency of his episcopal ministry as a ministry of “accompaniment” with the people. He came to believe that ecclesiastical structures like the presbyteral council and diocesan pastoral council were insufficient for establishing the kind of broad-based participation in the life of the diocese that he thought was necessary. These canonically mandated structures could not take into account the great regional diversity of the diocese. So he invited the various regions in his diocese to develop their own pastoral plans as a way of “incarnating” the gospel in their local communities. In so doing the indigenous communities made use of a traditional Mayan democratic process, the convocation of local assemblies. After over a decade of preparation, a diocesan assembly comprised of leaders from these communities met to approve a diocesan-wide pastoral plan, remarkable for its grassroots origins.

In three quite distinct contexts, these bishops embodied key elements of Tillard’s theology of episcopal office. First, they saw no contradiction between their role as teacher and their obligation to listen to their flock. Second, they cultivated a deep bond with the church they served. As such, they were able to function as ecclesial agents for the necessary local inculturation of the apostolic faith. For them, the dialogue with the local pastoral context of their church was not a matter of undertaking some formal program; it was a direct consequence of simple involvement in the life of the people.<sup>43</sup> Finally, these bishops viewed themselves as servants of the communion between their churches and the entire *communio ecclesiarum* and were willing to speak authoritatively not only from the universal to the local, but also from the local to the universal.

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<sup>43</sup> Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1988), 38.

To be quite frank, their embodiment of episcopal ministry stands at a distant remove from the exercise of episcopal office that has become common among many but not all of the bishops in the United States. However, their witness offers us hope for a new vision of episcopal ministry adequate to the needs of the church today.