

Structure of the Church East and West Two-Lung Traditions vs. One-Lung Deviations

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I begin with this question: what is the right starting point for theological reflection on the structure of the Church? One might think, “Well, the New Testament, of course” But this answer is not enough. As Fr. Raymond Collins pointed out to us, last night, the New Testament evidence is “less than clear.” Fr. Collins indicated three New Testament pictures, as you may recall: the charismatic, the Christian rabbinic, and the household overseer. It is important to add, however, that the New Testament text itself does not tell us whether these are three *structures* or are three different ways of describing *one structure*. In immediately sub-apostolic times, we find only one structure: every local church, with its laity, deacons, and presbyters, is ruled by a bishop (at least one, and everywhere but in a super-massive diocese like Alexandria, at most one). Scholars have given this arrangement the name ‘monepiscopate’. But was it the original structure, put in place by the apostles themselves? Fortunately, I don’t think we need to resolve that question. I think that there is a way to concede that apostolic arrangements may have been originally a bit fluid — without having to concede what neither Eastern nor Western Hierarchs should ever concede: namely, that there was originally *no one Church structure*.

My approach is to draw an analogy between the *monepiscopate* and the *attractor* in a physical system’s phase space. By *phase space*, we mean a graph on which each point corresponds to a possible state of a physical system. Take, for example, a very simple physical system like a pendulum. You can start the pendulum off with any kind of wild push you want, and for a little while the swing of the pendulum will be irregular. But, within a few moments, it will settle into an equilibrium state in which the swing and period of the pendulum is perfectly predictable according to Huyghen’s Law. That equilibrium state is the *attractor* of the system. Similarly, if you take a bathtub full of water, you can disturb the water any way you like — kick it, splash it, stir it — and for a while there will be chaotic waves. But again within a few moments it will settle into its equilibrium state, in which the water lies flat and still. Analogously, I think, the social system of the Apostolic Church — whatever may have been the

arrangements in the very first days, when the Apostles themselves were still touring from town to town (and often had to flee a town early because of persecution, leaving behind them, perhaps, irregular or temporary leaders (the *proistamenoï* of 1 Thessalonians 5:12) — quickly settled down into the state that we see everywhere in Ignatios of Antioch (whose date is 107 A.D., by the way, not 117!). Indeed, we see it already in the “pastoral epistles” of the New Testament. Everywhere the particular church turns out to be a community furnished with presbyters and deacons under the presidency of a single bishop. “Without these,” says Ignatios, “there is not even the name of a church.”¹ To this day, in both the East and the West, we insist upon these points: every church must have a bishop and must exhibit the three grades of Holy Orders. This is a “two lung Tradition”; and this structure, in place as a *living tradition*, is the right light in which to read the New Testament evidence. Therefore, to conclude, the right starting point for theological reflection on the structure of the Church is not the New Testament text alone, in my opinion, but that text read within the living Apostolic Tradition of the monepiscopate. From that starting point, we can begin to ask the interesting questions.

Now, suppose, I am the bishop in my diocese. In case doctrinal or canonical problems arise which I and my clergy cannot agree on how to solve, is there within the Universal Church any visible authority outside my diocese to whom I should or must appeal? Both the East and the West answer this question in the affirmative. For the West, I should or must appeal to an ecumenical council or to the Apostolic See of Rome. For the East, I should or must appeal to an ecumenical council or to my metropolitan see with its synod.

Now comes the divisive question: Is there within the Church by divine law a *permanent* (not sporadic) such visible, supra-diocesan governing authority? The West says “yes” — by divine law, there is the permanent primacy of the See of Rome, the permanent authority of Peter’s successor. The East says “no” — by Divine Law there is a *sporadic* visible governing authority, an ecumenical council visibly meeting; but when a council is not in session, there are only metropolitan or patriarchal authorities existing by ecclesiastical law.

Behind this crucial division between the Eastern and Western answers, there lies the text of canon #28, from Chalcedon. As this will be the topic of another paper, I shall not pursue this point of controversy further. Rather, I want to turn to the theological significance of our common ground, as mentioned so far: the two-lung traditions about the monepiscopate and the

¹ Letter to the Trallians, chapter 3.

existence of some sort of supra-diocesan authorities; for these traditions already mandate an account of the Church — a theology of the Church, a *logos* of the Church — in which she, precisely *as* the body of Christ, is an institution (a *visible* society, *visibly* governed). I shall document this point from Eastern and Western sources alike, and then I shall use it to criticize a number of one-lung deviations.

It does not take long to document this point from the West. Surely known to all of you is the most commonly accepted theological definition of the Church in Western Theology, namely, the one written by St. Robert Bellarmine. He said,

The Church is the set of people, joined together by a profession of one and the same Christian Faith and by communion in the same Sacraments, under the governance of legitimate pastors, especially the Roman Pontiff. ²

As you see, Bellarmine seized as the most obvious and crucial fact to state, the point that the Church is a visible society, visibly governed. He did not say any more about the interior mystery of the Church. And for this, his definition has often been criticized (very much so by Western writers, not only by Eastern), and as a result there has been a large development of ecclesiology in the 20th century, beginning with books like *Corpus Mysticum* by Émile Mersch and the magnificent three-volume *L'Église du Verbe Incarné* by the late Cardinal Charles Journet.

It is sometimes alleged that definitions like Bellarmine's are a purely Western phenomenon. However, definitions that sound like Bellarmine's are also recurrent — indeed, wide-spread — in the Eastern Church. I will begin with Metropolitan Philaret Drozdov of Moscow. His *Larger Catechism* is considered one of *the* characteristic professions of faith of holy Russia, and in remarks on article IX of the Creed, Drozdov had this to say,

The Church is the society, established by God, of people who are united by the Orthodox Faith, the Divine Law, the Sacred Hierarchy, and the Sacraments. ³

Point by point, he has fastened upon the same elements as Bellarmine did, and put the Church's visible structure first in his account.

Among the Greeks, there is Constantine Baphides. He published a catechism in 1886, and

² *De controversiis, De Ecclesia*, III, 1.

³ *Christian Catechism of the Orthodox Eastern Graeco-Russian Catholic Church, Examined and Approved by the Holy Synod and Published at the Command of His Majesty the Emperor* (Moscow, 1823).

in it he said,

The Church is the Kingdom of God, established by our Savior, embracing all who believe in our Lord in Orthodox fashion, who are sanctified by the grace of His Sacraments, and who live under the spiritual governance of this Kingdom's pastors and teachers.⁴

Notice that he said the Kingdom of God was *established* (or set up, or instituted) by our Savior. What one establishes or sets up is an institution. That should be obvious.

Let me go, now, to some Eastern definitions which have, basically, the same form, but also have the merit of adding more about the Church's internal mystery. Let us read Macarius Bulgakov, who was Metropolitan of Moscow until 1879. He wrote the following:

The Church is the society of those who rightly believe in (and are baptized into) Jesus Christ — a society founded by Christ both directly and through His holy Apostles, and which, having been made alive both visibly (by spiritual pastors, teachers, the administration of sacred things and their governance) and invisibly (by the supremely efficacious Grace of the Holy Spirit), is lead by Christ to eternal life.⁵

Next, let us hear Nicholas Malinovski, who was at one time rector of the seminary in Volodya. He said,

The earthly or visible Christian Church is the society founded by our Lord Jesus Christ, of those who truly believe in Him, and form Christ's spiritual body in which there continues (and shall continue, and shall be perpetuated . . .) that great work of perfecting and sanctifying human beings which our Redeemer finished while He tarried on earth, and whose aim is that all human beings be brought into the way of salvation and conjunction with God — that is, be brought into the Kingdom of God.

The whole definition was an impossibly long sentence, of which I have brought together the beginning and the end. Now I supply the middle. At the point where he said, "in the church there continues, and shall continue, and shall be perpetuated," he explained that the perpetuation is through the teaching of the Faith, through the Sacraments, and through the visible

⁴ *Orthodoxos Christianike katechesis*, Constantinople, 1886.

⁵ *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, 4th ed., St. Petersburg, 1883.

governance of the Hierarchy— thanks to the invisible operation of the Holy Spirit under the invisible Head— Who is Jesus Christ, Himself.⁶

This is a wonderful definition for several reasons: not only does it begin with the obvious and the visible (the social), and then move to the interior and the mystical, but it also brings out what is most central when one tries to describe what is going on within the Church. There is a *finished work* of Christ, he says, “a work finished while He tarried on Earth,” and the Church does not complete that work. Christ has finished our redemption. Rather, what the Church does is perpetuate it, hand it on. The finished work has to come down to each new generation, to be received in grace, in faith and so on. (The wording is remarkably like the teaching of Cardinal Journet, for those of you who are familiar with his “Church of the Word Incarnate”.)

I go now to Archbp. Philaret Gumilevski, once the Archbishop of Tchernigovia. He said:

The Church is the society, founded by the Lord, of those who believe in Christ, united by the Word of God, the Sacraments and the Hierarchical governance, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance towards Eternal Salvation.⁷

There is both the element of the Holy Spirit, and also the eschatological element.

Next, let me go back to the Greeks. There was an absolutely remarkable fellow who was a professor at the University of Athens in the 1890’s named Chrestos Andrutsos. He said,

The Church is the sacred edifice, built by the Incarnate Word of God for the salvation and sanctification of human beings, bearing His Divine authority and power, consisting of people who have the One Faith and share in the same Sacraments, distinguished into a people and a ruling clergy — which has its source from the Apostles by its continuous succession and from the Lord Himself through the Apostles.⁸

What I very much like about this definition of the Church is two things. Notice that he insists that the Church militant is in some real sense distinguished into a body of the faithful who are ruled, and a body of the clergy or hierarchs, who do the ruling. Also, this hierarchical body has its source from the Apostles and, through them, from Christ. Thus the origin of the hierarchy is traced back through the Apostles to the “historical Jesus.” For Andrutsos, there is no room for

⁶ *Compendium of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*.

⁷ *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Tchernigovia, 1854). Third ed., St. Petersburg, 1882.

⁸ *Dogmatike* (Athens, 1907), p. 262.

those speculations which are now, unfortunately, widespread in some Western quarters, to the effect that the Bishops cannot really trace their office back to the “historical Jesus” — no, no — but sprouted up later, thanks to the processes of history which, “from the eyes of Faith, we can see is the work of Holy Spirit.” Fr. Raymond Brown once remarked, “I don’t see that tracing our origin to the Holy Spirit, rather than the historical Jesus diminishes the authority of Bishops.” Well, the Holy Spirit is a very fine source, to be sure! Nevertheless, the tradition of the Church is that the office arises historically from Christ, through the Apostles.

Zikos Rhosis was another scholar who taught at the University of Athens in the early years of the 20th century. He said,

The Orthodox and truly Catholic Church is the society established and founded by Christ and the Apostles — the Society of people united to Christ and to each other by right faith, hope and charity; by the same right dogmas; and the same right worship, over whom the Bishops (the genuine successors of the Apostles) rule.⁹

That, again, is a wonderful definition. Unlike the ones we have read so far, it brings in the three theological Virtues, and it mentions *worship*, rightness of liturgical worship (*orthopraxis*, we call it).

One more Greek, absolutely remarkable fellow, named Nikolas Damalas. He taught at the University of Athens also, and published a book with an awfully bold title: *Peri Archon* — “On First Principles.” That had been Origen’s title! Well, he certainly gave us an idea of how grand his intentions were in this work. He said the following:

The Church is the *fellowship* [here, for the first time in these definitions, we find the Greek word, *koinonia*] of God with man, in which God achieves the conversion, justification, sanctification and redemption of human individuals (who freely and by their own power cooperate with the divine will). God achieves this through His instruments, namely, those of the Church pastoring (or the Apostles and their successors, the bishops) as well as the priests and pastors established by the bishops.¹⁰

There you have an allusion to the grades of hierarchy, and also a very important point about how mankind stands towards the efficacious grace of the Holy Spirit. We do not stand toward it

⁹ *Systema dogmatikes* (Athens, 1903), p.59.

¹⁰ *Peri archon* (Leipzig, 1865), p. 125

purely passively, *Calvinistically*; rather, there is such a thing as a genuine cooperation of human free will with grace—and that comes out very nicely in this definition. Again, Eastern theology understands this visible, social character of the Church precisely as an aspect of what it takes to be “the Body of Christ”. If you ask Eastern theologians whether or not the Church should be called “the Body of Christ”, everyone’s answer would be, “Yes, of course — haven’t you read 1 Corinthians?” Well, this has not prevented some Western theologians from maintaining that the II Vatican Council somehow *dethroned* the idea that the Church is “the Mystical Body” and replaced it with another idea. I think we need the “other lung” to breathe a bit into the West

Next let us read another selection from Metropolitan Philaret Drozdov’s *Larger Catechism*. Here we shall see a bit of the question/answer section.

Q: What does it mean to “believe in the Church”?

A: It means to venerate piously the true Church of Christ, and to obey Her doctrines and precepts, having a firm conviction that the grace coming down from her One, Eternal Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is present in Her, operates salvifically, teaches and rules.

Q: How can the Church be an object of faith, when she is visible (and faith, as the Apostle says, is the “evidence of things not seen”)?

A: First, although the Church is visible, the divine grace appropriated to her and sanctifying her is invisible, and this grace is the main object of faith in the Church. Secondly, the Church which is visible insofar as she exists on earth (and all Orthodox Christians living on earth belong to her) is at the same time invisible insofar as she also exists in Heaven (and all those who have fallen asleep in true faith and holiness belong to her).

It is good to see here no separation between the Mystical Body which is a visible society on earth, and the Mystical Body which is the “Church Triumphant” already in Heaven.

Q: How do we know that Divine Grace is present in the True Church?

A: First, because her Head is Jesus Christ, the God-man, full of Grace and Truth, who fills up with grace and truth His Body, which is the Church. Secondly, because He promised to His disciples the Holy Spirit, that He might be with them forever, and also because in fulfillment of this promise the Holy Spirit raises up shepherds for the Church, and consecrates them.

This is wonderful because it points out the invisible contribution to the constitution of the sacred hierarchy. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to stir up vocations and to render consecrations to the priesthood and episcopate fruitful and valid.

Q: Why is the Church One?

A: Because, it is one spiritual Body, has one Head — Christ — and is animated by God's one Spirit.”¹¹

There you have it— a seamless connection between the Church's visibility as a governed society and her status as the Body of Christ. There is no separation of these ideas. It is not as though there is a superficial Church which merely strikes the eye, which is a visible thing and has juridical what-not to it, while on the hand there is *another* Church; a higher church, a nicer and nobler church which is purely spiritual and the Body of Christ. No such separation is present!

One last quote — you must be getting the point of these by now— but I cannot resist quoting another, absolutely remarkable Russian named Yevgeny Akvilonov. Akvilonov taught in St. Petersburg and published a very highly regarded book called *Tserkov* — “The Church” — with a subtitle which reads, “Scientific definitions of the Church and the Apostolic doctrines about Her as the Body of Christ.” Akvilonov was the *Sabastian Tromp* or the *Émile Mersch* of the Eastern Church. Here is what he said.

The Church is the Divino-Human organism headed by the Lord Jesus Christ and animated by the Holy Spirit, founded and governed by the Lord according to the will of God the Father, having in her earthly part, a divinely established priestly hierarchy. The Church consists of all the believers in Heaven, and all those on earth who strive for eternal life in blessed union with the Triune God and with each other.¹²

Again, a wonderful definition. Notice that even though the Church is called an organism, she is *founded*, according to a *will*. She does not spring up by nature, as it were, out of the soil of humanity under the rainfall of grace.

Next, I give an example of what I think is a “one-lung deviation” from the East, which I want to criticize in light of the classic definitions cited up until now. Alas, my example is from

¹¹ *Larger Catechism*, p. 254.

¹² *Tserkov*, (St. Petersburg, 1898), p. 254

Alexey Stepanovich Khomiakov (1804-1860). He was at one time a soldier, then a poet and a playwright, and towards the end of his life he turned towards religious topics and wrote a series of very beautifully written but highly polemical works in French during the time of the Crimean War. The French books were then translated into Russian, but I am happy to say that the synod in Moscow did not allow the Russian translation to be published until a prologue was added that pointed out certain deviations from strict orthodoxy (perhaps excusable — the fellow admittedly had no theological education; he'd never even read Drozdov's catechism). He had read, however, the Fathers of the Church...and, well, he was an *imaginative* fellow. He presented a novel ecclesiology. He took the word 'Church' in the widest sense — the total Mystical Body of Christ, both in Heaven and on Earth, under the Old as well as the New Covenant. He said, "The Orthodox Church is the true and sole Church of Christ." Catholics and Protestants are just *sects* expelled by the Church; they are two peas in a pod, the same thing in essence, and their essence is *rationalism*.¹³ He said further, "The Church is a living Body, animated by Christ, the Head, and by the Holy Spirit. The difference between the Church visible and the Church invisible exists only from the human point of view — not at all from the divine point of view."¹⁴ Then he said, "...from the creation of the world, the Church has always had her essential properties. She has always been One, Holy and Catholic..." But "These essential properties," he said (and this is where things get interesting) "belong to the whole community as the *whole*; they do not belong to any *part*; they do not belong to any one or any several members. True, the grades of hierarchy pertain to some members and not to others, but *infallibility* and the *necessary condition* for infallibility (namely, **holiness**) do not belong to some members alone, but only to the *totality*."¹⁵

This was a Hegelian influence. This was Hegel's idea of the universe (a necessary "totality" every part of which was non-necessary or "contingent") coming into ecclesiology. Then he made a move which the synod in Moscow was not about to allow to be published without correction. He said, "Even when the bishops are united in an ecumenical council, their decrees are not infallible by virtue of themselves, but by virtue of their acceptance by the whole Christian people."¹⁶ (Sounds like Gallicanism, yes?) Then he said, "no distinction is to be drawn between the Church teaching and the Church learning — every person in the Church, by turn, teaches and is taught — likewise, no distinction is to be drawn between the Church ruling and

¹³ *L'Eglise latine et le protestantisme au point de vue de l'Eglise d'Orient* (Lausanne, 1872), p. 36.

¹⁴ "Tserkov odna" in *Collected Works II*, p. 3.

¹⁵ *L'Eglise latine*, pp. 107-108.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

the Church ruled. The Church is the ‘Kingdom of Liberty’ because it is the Kingdom of Love...”¹⁷ So there’s no rule; there’s no subjection; there’s only *love*. “The Church is not an external authority,” he insisted, “but an inner life of love and unity.”¹⁸ So the essence of the Church lies in all its members’ harmony and unity of spirit and life. What constitutes the Church is not its *visible unity*, but this *invisible bond* of mutual love.

There you have a *severing* between that which is interior and spiritual in the Church from that which is visible and body-like. Obviously there is something wrong with denying that infallibility attaches to any part of the Church if you mean it does not even attach to the bishops assembled in an ecumenical council — so that, when they make decrees, those decrees are not infallible of themselves, but by acceptance of the total Christian people. An idea like that cannot stand up to the test of history. I think particularly of the Monophysite crisis, where there was a patriarch in Alexandria who certainly thought himself a part of the Christian people, and countless thousands of faithful in Egypt and elsewhere who defended the formula of St. Cyril — “one *physis* of the Word Incarnate”— so as to reject the two-natures formula of Chalcedon. Are we going to say that, thanks to their non-acceptance, Chalcedon was not an infallible council — that its dogmas were not irreformable? Surely, you can see why the synod of Moscow did not want this book published without a monitory preface. Well, that’s my example of a “one-lung deviation” from the East. One can only go so far in the program to de-juridicize the Church. (One may certainly wish for less layers of bureaucracy in administration. But you can only go so far in trying to define the Church without Her visible governance as a genuine power of rule!

Now I turn to a topic more congenial to my heart; I want to criticize some Western “one-lung deviations.” In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, there was suddenly unleashed an enormous tide of novel speculation about how the Church was to be considered. One of the central documents to consult about this tide was the survey of recent ecclesiologies written by Fr. Avery Dulles — subsequently given a Cardinal’s hat. Fr. Dulles wrote a book called *Models of the Church*, in which he gave first what he called “the Institutional Model.” He quoted Bellarmine, but only to trash “institution” as an utterly unacceptable idea. Then he moved on to something called the “*Communio* Model,” but unfortunately there was an unresolved ambiguity between ‘*communio*’ translated as ‘community’ (which is a social body), and ‘*communio*’

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68

translated as ‘sharing’ (which could be something purely spiritual and invisible). Thanks to that ambiguity, Dulles was able to put into that one model people who are otherwise *impossible* to combine!¹⁹

Then, after a couple of other really dreadful models, Fr. Dulles turned to one that had a better sound to it, at least. Chapter IV of *Models of the Church* was devoted to the model that wants to define the Church as a Sacrament. In favor of this view, he was able to quote Fr. Otto Semmelroth, and Fr. Karl Rahner. This position succeeds in holding one’s attention only by playing on the ambiguity of the Latin word ‘*sacramentum*’. As I’m sure you all know, the Greek word ‘*mysterion*’ had no obvious Latin equivalent. For a while, it was translated with ‘*arcanum*’, but then for various reasons the Latins settled upon ‘*sacramentum*’. Well, in the Latin Fathers, ‘*sacramentum*’ was used just as broadly as ‘*mysterion*’ was Greek — it meant any visible reality which contained an invisible aspect acknowledged by Christian faith, different from the visible aspect that even unbelievers could see. If you want to find this original definition, you cannot do better than turn to St. John Chrysostom, “First Homily on I Corinthians”, where he said this:

There is *mysterion* when we consider things other than those which we see. The believer’s judgment is one thing, and the unbeliever’s judgment is another. As for me, I hear that Christ has been crucified, and I at once admire His Love for man. The unbeliever hears of it, too, and thinks it was folly.

In other words, Our Lord’s saving passion and death was a *mysterion* or *sacramentum* precisely because there is something in it that faith acknowledges, which the eye cannot see, so that unbelievers could not penetrate what was really happening, on the Cross. Chrysostom continues:

The unbeliever, seeing Baptism, thinks it is only water. Whereas I, considering not only what I see, think of the purification of the soul worked by the Holy Spirit.

There you have it. Baptism was a *sacramentum*, but so was the Incarnate Lord Himself; so was the ritual washing of feet; so were the symbolical pages of Holy Scripture (because, when you read those pages, there is a spiritual meaning that is not on the explicit surface of the text.) Well,

¹⁹ He put into that one “model” Fr. Emile Mersch (who made Church a kind of mystical continuation of the Incarnation) and Heribert Mühlen (who completely rejected the view that the Church continues the Incarnation). Mühlen took the view that the Church is a thing of the Holy Spirit. In his novel account of the Trinity, God the Father is the “I” Person; God the Son is the “Thou” Person; and the Holy Spirit is the “We” Person. He said that the Church is the “We” that stands over against the Son in “bridal confrontation.”

in this sense, of course the Church is a sacramentum. Christians believe that there is more to her than pagans are able to see! But, taken in this sense, the claim that the Church is a sacrament is just a statement of an obvious fact. It explains nothing. It is not an ecclesiology. It is one of those agreed facts which any ecclesiology is supposed to explain!

Now then, I said that there was an ambiguity about '*sacramentum*'. I've given you one side of the ambiguity — the old usage. A new usage developed in the West, beginning with the pioneering work of Peter Lombard, who defined '*sacramentum*' by combining the ideas of a sign and a cause. The things that are most particularly to be called *sacramenta* are those which not only *signify* supernatural realities but also *cause* what they *signify*. This led to the challenge of counting up how many *sacramenta* there are in this stricter sense. The number reached, as you all know, was seven.

Now, all of these *sacramenta* in the later sense are visible, ritual events, in which a natural and meaningful material or gesture is specified in its meaning by spoken words which accompany it. Word and gesture, together (as form and matter, so to speak), comprise a complete ritual event, which clearly signifies an invisible event (such as the cleansing of the soul) and also causes what it signifies. The claim that the Church is a *sacramentum* in this technical sense would indeed be a theology. It would be highly informative, if it were true! Alas, the Church fails to meet a single basic test of that technical definition. The Church uses many rituals, some Sacramental, some not. But the Church herself is not a ritual. The Church uses many forms of words, some to confect Sacraments, some to greet archimandrites, but she herself has no constitutive form of words, thanks to which she is "Church." The Church can be regarded as a vast assemblage of events, but she herself is not an event. And, I'm sorry, but the Church is not a cause of grace — other than by celebrating those *mysteria* in which God truly does cause grace (like baptism and chrismation, holy penance, the eucharist, and so on)!

Now, you might say, "Look, isn't it the case that the Church is a sign? Doesn't she have to be decrypted? The world sees the Church and says, "I don't get that organization — what is it about those people?" And Faith knows an answer, which the world does not see. So isn't the Church, in that sense, a sign?" Yes, but this is to return to *sacramentum* in the broad sense, and one has to be careful these days about any such return, because it can be put to secularizing uses.

Think of the "signs of the times" about which we have been hearing since *Gaudium et Spes* was promulgated. Faith often wants to see the hand of God in a way in which the world does not see; the trouble is that there is rarely any one, unambiguous reading of the so-called "signs of the times." When Constantinople, alas and regrettably, fell to the Turks, it was a sign

of the times — yes, but a sign of what? Was it a sign of God’s wrath upon the East, for it’s schism, or was it a sign of God’s love for the East for its fidelity—“for whom He loveth, He chasteneth”? The same ambiguity infests this “theology” of the Church as “sacrament.” In Fr. Dulles’ chapter on this model, I asked myself the question, “What do these people say the Church is a sign of?” I counted sixteen different answers. Some said the Church is “the sign/Sacrament of Christ,” but others, like Fr. Schillebeckx, said, “The Church is the Sacrament of dialogue”; or “the Church is the Sacrament of mankind’s coming unity.” Like the U.N.? There is simply no clear answer to the question, “What is the Church a sign of?” This is yet another point on which she does not meet the test for the technical definition of a *Sacramentum*.

Hopefully, if one reads Eastern theology, one does not fly off into this kind of “one-lung deviation.”