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**FROM 'HYPHENATED CATHOLICS' TO
THE CHURCH 'CATHOLIC': PILGRIMAGE
OF HUMILITY AND HOPE INTO
'COMMUNION' OF LOVE AND TRUST**

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Abstract

There was a great deal of trepidation, uncertainty and anxiety in the church as the 50th year of Vatican II drew near, especially with regard to the future and destiny of the discernments of the council and the reform it had inaugurated. But as it has happened in the ages past, God appears to have decisively stepped in to light the way forward, pointing the directions the journey must go. The election of Francis as the Pope and the subsequent events that have followed have already profoundly transformed the church and her self-understanding, generating a new atmosphere of openness, courage, hope and trust. The following reflection scans the contemporary ecclesial landscape to examine how this new hopeful atmosphere will impact the reform in general and the perennial quest to recover and grow in the 'communion' that marks the 'Church Catholic', learning in the process to hold in creative tension all the diversity that characterizes this communion.

Introduction

Students and observers of the Church and her history, serious or casual, friend and foe alike, are invariably awestruck at how she reimagines herself and rediscovers her mission in differing times. What is usually ignored or sometime taken for granted is the real

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creative force or energy behind this constant and rhythmic recreating that punctuates her chequered history down the ages. The divine energy and the creative 'Spirit' that called the Church into being has been found to be constantly at work refashioning her, renewing and illuminating her from within so that she is enabled to perceive the realities afresh and rediscover her mission and call in the world. We are witnessing another such historic recreation underway in our own times, under our gaze!

The mass media is abuzz with ecstatic reports and clips — updated and broadcast instantaneously all over the social media — of the revolution and churning that has gripped the church since the election of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the self-described 'Pope from the end of the world,' and assumed the ministry of leadership in the Church as Pope Francis. Theologians, ecclesiologists, sociologists and every other specialist of every hue and tint, are already deeply engaged with the 'Francis Factor' as it is being described, diagnosing its nature and method as well as divining its effect on the church and the world at large into the foreseeable future. The ripples of this 'new Spirit moment,' as I would describe it, are felt even in enclosures where the Gospel message was perhaps a taboo or was kept out of the discussion as is evident in the frequent recourse to the 'Francis wisdom' in the statements and discussions of the politicians, legislators and leaders all across the world! The radical new way of being Church in and to the modern world that has been evolving ever since the inauguration of the ministry of Pope Francis, new both in substance and style but firmly anchored in the wisdom of the church and her kerygma, increasingly dubbed 'Francis Revolution', not only confirms another 'Spirit moment,' but invites the church as a whole to discern how to be partners in this Spirit-led 'recreation' project.

Pope Francis and the Global Catholic Moment

Analyzing the course of events that have happened in the Church since the election of Pope Francis and scrutinizing his actions as well as his pronouncements to date, more in informal platforms than the conventional magisterial modes, the consensus is gathering strength that the Church is all poised to rediscover or reclaim her true identity as is proclaimed in her creed — truly Holy and Catholic. Through a slew of simple yet solemn gestures, Pope Francis has not only broken with age old 'grinding' and mystifying traditions, but has generated a veritable revolution in the Church as to how she ought to understand and live holiness, in the process, her own very vocation to witness to

holiness is cast in a brand new light. Through his uniquely personal style rather than through preaching, or making life itself the method of preaching, he has thrust the divine mercy to the centre of Christian holiness and has invited everyone to search the peripheries, margins and underbellies of the societies to 'gather in God's loving embrace', all those who are usually left out by the society and even by the Church. He has challenged the church to discover ever new ways to experience and witness to a 'loving and merciful' God.

Along with the focus on the mercy of God, Pope Francis has been busy to take the church and everyone else concerned into the world of the poor and discover the beauty and power of the poor. The frantic yet amusing queries that followed the announcement of the new crop of cardinals that Francis has picked tell it all and without any room for doubt. Queries like 'Where is Burkino Faso or Ivory Coast or Haiti?' 'No one from the USA!' 'Many traditionally cardinalitorial sees ignored or bypassed' highlight what is happening. The amusing tweets that spread responding to the queries in the line of — 'Check the world map to find Burkina Faso or Haiti or Ivory Coast or Cotabota', etc., were equally revealing and inviting. The focus and gaze of the church is finally yet rightly shifting to where God's people are. Power of the poor, shift to the global south, transfer of power from the wealthy Catholics of the north to the 'Catholic rich' of the poorer south' are descriptions bandied around these days to capture the impact of what is unravelling before our very eyes. The gauntlet thrown by Francis to discover the poor and enter their world has received a generous response as well, if we can gauge the response it has received not just over the social media but in the halls and galleries of legislatures and world forums where the destiny of the poor and the dispossessed is usually bargained and sold! The papal exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, summoning the Church and the world to embark upon a joyful new evangelization, is receiving a generous focus and reference, perhaps unprecedented for a papal or Catholic document, in chambers of power all across the world, cutting across left-right-centre divides and generating as well as informing debates on wide spectrum from poverty and economy to development, justice and peace among others. Good reasons to inspire hope among the poor as well as those who fight their causes.

Call to Wake up to the Diversity in Communion

A closer study of this focus on the 'global south' and the poor of the world can reveal another important dimension that characterizes

this 'new portrait' of the Church that the Spirit is painting right before our eyes. Ever since the days of Vatican II there has been a conscious effort to recognize and highlight the rich diversity that characterizes the Catholic world — be it in cultures where the church is present, languages the people speak or the rites or traditions in which the faith is celebrated. However this focus on the 'universal' dimension has remained very often, for a variety of reasons, more a 'fascination to the strange and exotic' cultures and peoples, restricted to the symbolic gestures at various celebrations and ceremonies. The structures and styles of the church remained still 'Roman' than 'Catholic' until perhaps, to an extent, the travelling papal ministry of late John Paul II. The hierarchy and the structures had very little to boast that manifested this diverse face of the church.

With the election of the first non-European in centuries to shepherd the church, glacial shifts appear to be emerging in the structure and style of the church. The Church is becoming really 'global' in her appearance if the recent events can be read correctly. The council of cardinals that Francis constituted, 'Group of Eight' as it is described in some secular media, to advise him in reforming the ecclesial structures and in the governance, draws richly from Catholic pastoral insights from a rich and diverse landscape. Whether it goes far enough is to be debated, being limited as now to the leaders of the Latin tradition, but it is a right initiative in the right direction, nevertheless, and breathes fresh air into the stifling hallways and crannies of ecclesial power. The announcement of the new cardinals that followed confirmed the hopes of all who treasure the 'universality' of the church. Faces of different shades, shape and shine, with exotic sounding names representing a rich array of languages, sounds and accents, all ushered into the same bloodline — cardinal red! Let us hope and strive as well that the Holy Spirit reinforces and strengthens this 'revolution' and leads the church to rediscover her 'Catholic' visage.

To all appearances and facts, thus, the truly global Catholic moment appears to have arrived and thrust the church into the vortex of this 'new initiative' of the evolving and unceasing 'divine creativity', to borrow the description Pope Francis employs in his Apostolic Exhortation as he summons Christians everywhere to "embark upon a new chapter of evangelization, marked by this (Gospel) joy, while pointing new paths for the Church's journey in years to come."¹ Borrowing from the insights of the Christian past

¹Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1, 11.

and instructed in particular by John of the Cross and Irenaeus, Francis urges everyone to tear off the pall of gloom of self-doubts and misgivings generated by 'periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness' and wake up to the challenges of the new divine initiative happening right before our eyes. Renewing the clarion call of Vatican II, he urges a return to the sources to recover 'the original freshness of the gospel' that opens up ever fresh avenues of missionary initiatives. The Pope reminds:

With this newness (H)e is always able to renew our lives and our communities, and even if the Christian message has known periods of darkness and ecclesial weakness, it will never grow old. Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity.²

This recovery inevitably involves the rediscovery of the awe-inspiring diversity within the Gospel and the NT testimony as well the diverse faces of the people who live that Gospel.

Incarnational Mode, Embracing Diversity and Rediscovery of the Particular Church: Hallmarks of the New Missionary Impetus

Though quite early into the Francis papacy, there have been already efforts in various quarters to chart, even if in broad strokes, the markers and contours that framework this papacy as well as the new missionary call that Pope Francis has issued. Many do highlight, rightly as far as I can ascertain, that there is a marked shift in the tone, tenor, style, emphases and the sources that inform Francis and his ministry of leadership. Moving away from the highly centralized and commandeered style that marked the past, there is a greater aptitude for collegiality, an increasing recognition and appreciation of the role and wisdom of the local church in discernment, attention to the diverse styles that framework and characterize the life and ministry of the church. The tone is rarely condemnatory or judgmental or prescriptive, rather persuasive and dialogical. The overall outlook of the church is moving much more to the 'incarnational' mode that values the culture and context in which the Gospel is proclaimed to inform the method of proclamation as well as the discernment that guides the whole process. Introducing the scope and specific goals of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis makes clear his intent with no room for compromise or confusion when he says:

²Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 1, 11.

Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound "decentralization".³

There is a reiteration of the Vatican II insight of local / particular church as the prime and privileged agent and catalyst of this missionary enterprise. It is "the primary subject of evangelization" since "it is the concrete manifestation of the one Church in one specific place," and "is the Church incarnate in a certain place, equipped with all the means of salvation bestowed by Christ, but with local features." The pope endeavours to restore to the particular churches their inherent dignity and responsibility as he urges them to "undertake a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform" so as "to make this missionary impulse ever more focused, generous and fruitful."⁴

Boldly reflecting on the very style and nature of the papal ministry, he confesses the need for a 'pastoral conversion' of papacy itself to take adequate instruction from the ancient 'patricarchal churches' and foster local discernment and initiatives in gospel proclamation. The Pope invites "everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities"... a wise and realistic pastoral discernment undertaken in a community setting.⁵

Eschewing the clichéd triumphalistic and paternalistic postures of the yester years, the Exhortation breathes a fresh air of genuine yet liberating and empowering humility into the very self-understanding of the church herself. Reflecting on the Church as the agent of evangelization, Pope Francis describes her as 'first and foremost a people advancing on its pilgrim way towards God.' "Certainly a mystery rooted in the Trinity, yet she exists concretely in history as a people of pilgrims and evangelizers."⁶ In order to fulfil her vocation to evangelize which is critical to her very nature and identity, Church ought to remember she is walking the pilgrim way which entails continuous search to discover the fellow pilgrims and find the way forward and not claim to have found all the answers! This journey

³Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 16.

⁴Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 30. The pope is reinforcing the insights of *Christus Dominus*, 11.

⁵Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 33.

⁶Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 111.

also involves a continuous discovery of and encounter with the 'wayward world' to which salvation is to be offered.⁷

This pilgrim people is a 'people of many faces' as,

countless peoples have received the grace of faith, brought it to flower in their daily lives and handed it on in the language of their own culture... In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the "beauty of her varied face."⁸

"Evangelization joyfully acknowledges these varied treasures which the Holy Spirit pours out upon the Church. We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous."⁹ The Pope proudly declares that "all the different peoples among whom the Gospel has been inculturated are active collective subjects or agents of evangelization" in their own rights and urges and invites the traditional 'missionary cultures and civilizations' who held the 'high ground' in evangelization to recognize that "the faith cannot be constricted to the limits of understanding and expression of any one culture."¹⁰ The Pope does not hesitate to diagnose and expose the misadventures of the past in the name of missionary evangelization nor does he 'fine-tune' or 'soft pedal' his language when he invites the Church as a whole to an honest soul-searching and self-examination of her understanding of the call to be 'missionary disciples' and not just disciples and missionaries. His diagnosis can appear to be an indictment of the past, but without any rancour or any finger-pointing, but more of a confession, highlighting genuine growth in enlightenment. He reminds everyone:

We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous. While it is true that some cultures have been closely associated with the preaching of the Gospel and the development of Christian thought, the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural. Hence in the evangelization of new cultures, or cultures which have not received the Christian message, it is not essential to impose a specific cultural form, no matter how beautiful or ancient it may be, together with the Gospel. The message that we proclaim always has a certain cultural dress, but we in the Church can sometimes fall into a needless hallowing of our own culture, and thus show more fanaticism than true evangelizing zeal.¹¹

⁷Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 114.

⁸Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 116.

⁹Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 117.

¹⁰Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 118.

¹¹Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 117.

These words can appear to be of tough order, especially to those who led the misadventures in the past and set out, in the name of the Gospel and evangelization, to 'civilize' the peoples of the world or gather all 'into the one true faith' and in the process destroyed cultures, Christian traditions and their treasures of faith and wisdom! The history of the humankind and the church is replete with the trail of irreparable destruction that such ill-conceived misadventures and the accompanying domineering, condescending and paternalistic postures and projects have wrought in human societies and ecclesial traditions as well as the crisis of trust that they generated.

Even a cursory glance at the Indian church and the air of mistrust and sometimes an atmosphere of suspicion that has handicapped the communication and communion among the various strands of Christian tradition in India, even to the contemporary times, attests to the harm such misguided zeal can cause. This observation should not be construed, nevertheless, as an attempt to denigrate or discount the immense good that the missionaries had done, the infrastructures that they built or the foundation they had laid. Only a musing with the Spirit, spurred by the strong currents or streams of 'Francis revolution', wondering what immense potential would have been unleashed had the wisdom of the 'uncouth' natives and 'their divergent' traditions had been recognized and enlisted in the evangelization or missionary project in an endeavour of mutual dialogue, discovery and discernment! It is really edifying to see that the Indian church has in great measures put behind her the mistrust and suspicion of the past and is making quick and confident strides to discover and rally diverse traditions in an atmosphere of mutual appreciation and genuine partnership for God and his people. The fact that Francis finds insights and instruction in the Indian Christian experience as he reflects on the role of dialogue as a genuine method of evangelization should not only make all who make and share the Indian Christian experience proud of our discernments thus far, but ought to empower us to reinforce our efforts and be genuine partners in the project of evangelization. We need now all the more to discern how we can still better respond to the invitation and summons the Pope issues to every 'local/particular' church so that Gospel is proclaimed the best way to the contemporary times in contemporary language and not just in archaic clichés, however ornate and beautiful they may be. We had better take heed and listen:

Each particular Church should encourage the use of the arts in evangelization, building on the treasures of the past but also drawing upon

the wide variety of contemporary expressions so as to transmit the faith in a new “language of parables”. We must be bold enough to discover new signs and new symbols, new flesh to embody and communicate the word, and different forms of beauty which are valued in different cultural settings, including those unconventional modes of beauty which may mean little to the evangelizers, yet prove particularly attractive for others.¹²

Call of Evangelization: Pilgrimage of Discipleship in Solidarity of Dialogue and Discernment

Pope takes intense delight in describing himself, by extension every Christian, as a pilgrim, not having all the answers of life, but walking the path of discipleship, discovering the fellow pilgrims who share the walk and the way and maturing in the journey alongside the others. Pilgrim and disciple are two figures of speech that rhythmically punctuate every reflection he makes on the nature of the Christian call and vocation. Christian life is an evolving pilgrimage of faith and hope and it calls for the twin concomitant endeavours of dialogue and discernment. Pope reckons this pilgrimage of discipleship in faith and hope, discerning the call of the ‘Master’ and walking his way and learning to negotiate the twists and turns of the way, to be the preeminent and the most effective means of evangelization and announcing the Gospel. This journey inevitably calls for the virtue of discernment — surely the keystone of the Ignatian spirituality and method as well as those spiritual traditions impacted by the Ignatian perspective — and that concept can also be seen to be repeatedly reinforced in all his musings as well as his Exhortation on evangelization.

“Being Church means being God’s people,” Pope says as he contemplates on the nature and vocation of the church, “in accordance with the great plan of his fatherly love. This means that we are to be God’s leaven in the midst of humanity. It means proclaiming and bringing God’s salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way.”¹³ The Exhortation engages one full chapter to examine and reinforce the social and communitarian dimension of the Church’s life and proclamation. Chapter Four is appropriately titled and examines *the social dimension of evangelization*. Introducing the chapter, Pope reminds “if this (social) dimension is not properly

¹²Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 167.

¹³Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 114.

brought out, there is a constant risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization.”¹⁴

“At the very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others,” the pope reminds. “Our redemption has a social dimension because “God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men”... “From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelization. Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God’s love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others.”¹⁵

If her kerygma and evangelization should achieve their desired goals, the Church must herself be trained in the virtue of ‘solidarity’ and the attitudes and processes that are necessary to live that virtue, and then evangelize and seek the conversion of the society into a genuine mode of solidarity that discovers the real goal and purpose of the goods and wealth of the world. This solidarity must be firmly anchored in the strategy that reaches out to the poor and those on the peripheries of the society, not in pious modes of ‘doling out charity’, rather in genuine efforts to address and heal the injustice in the society and the unjust structures that create the under bellies of the society and give them clichéd titles of pity — the riffraff, the unfortunate, the marginalized.¹⁶ The reflection attempts a synthesis of the critical insights that frame and inform the Catholic social teaching and ought to guide the Christian proclamation and evangelization in diverse social contexts — Mandate of charity (181), Social responsibility of evangelization (183), Inclusion of the poor (186), Solidarity and structural transformation (189-90), human rights and *rights of peoples* (190, emphasis the author’s), self-centred paganism of the modern era (195-96), Option for the poor as a theological category (198), market and justice (206), to name some prominent ones among a rich array of themes that the reflection mines and gleans from the evolving trajectory of Catholic social teaching.

¹⁴Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 176.

¹⁵Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 178.

¹⁶The whole fourth chapter is an expose, brief yet incisive, of the social commitment that is integral to the Christian proclamation and the mission of evangelization.

If the social dimension of the kerygma is to bear fruit, this solidarity with the society, especially with those left on the margins of the society and who don't find a voice in the aerated halls of power where their fate is bargained, brokered and sold, ought to lead to genuine dialogue with society and diverse contexts in which the Gospel is proclaimed. Such dialogue will yield true discernments about the unique modes and nuances of proclamation as well as the strategy that best suits the needs of the particular societies. The Exhortation, therefore, assigns a preeminent place for dialogue in the evolving gospel proclamation and evangelization, a triple dialogue or a three dimensional dialogue: "dialogue with states, dialogue with society — including dialogue with cultures and the sciences — and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church" — echoing the triple dialogue strategy so familiar in Asian and especially Indian theological debates and ecclesial discernment, a recognition that the Church in Asia as a whole and we that form the Indian ecclesial reality — cutting across the ritual traditions — should be proud of and inspire greater contextual discernment.¹⁷

It is encouraging to see that the Exhortation has mined the discernment at work in various particular/local churches that make the global Catholic reality to glean and present to the universal church how this 'discernment-in-solidarity-and dialogue' process is best undertaken to serve and guide the Church's kerygma and evangelization. Thereby the document retrieves the perennial insight and perspective of the Church since the ancient times that the local/particular church is the preeminent and uniquely privileged context and milieu for the discernment that Christian pilgrimage and gospel proclamation call for. This ecclesial insight that was blunted or compromised and not fully lost, though, under pressures from the overly centralizing and 'one/uniform' way or the highway postures that held sway frequently in her chequered history. The atmosphere of collective discernment — discernment of diverse particular churches in communion — that is gathering strength and momentum under the solicitous care of a genuine pastor in the Petrine ministry bodes well for the foreseeable future. Such an atmosphere is bound to foster greater dialogue, mutual exchange and enlightenment in an ever increasing appreciation of communion that is foundational for the Catholic perspective and identity, all under the watchful guidance of the Spirit.

¹⁷Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 238.

Rediscovering Church Catholic as 'Communion of Local Churches in Collective Discernment'

The foregoing survey of the ecclesial and Christian landscape since the election and inauguration of the leadership of Pope Francis and the actions and discernments that have been witnessed in the Church ever since, however rapid and rudimentary, gives one hope and assurance that time is ripe for retrieving and celebrating all that would make the Church 'Catholic'. The Spirit that led the church in the ages past and guided the discernments at Vatican II appears to be all set to lead the church into another historical phase of self-discovery and living her life to the full. All this happening right when the Church is observing the 50th anniversary of the Council insights, scanning her 'memory' to live joy-fully her 'mission' and 'ministry' once again — the three coordinates of Francis revolution, often punctuating his reflections and messages — would be the right way forward. Conditions appear to be ripe for the universal Church to discover the 'Church Catholic' in her communion of local churches, incarnated in societies all across the world, an ideal that framed the discernment at Vatican II and especially informs its deliberations on the eastern churches laid out in *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, and what it implies for our own times.

The observations that Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meir make, as they present the results of their independent yet mutually enriching investigations into the origins of Christianity, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity*,¹⁸ as well as their insights marshalled therein can be profoundly enlightening the contemporary Church in her own discernment of the way forward. They inform us that when Ignatius of Antioch wrote about 'the church catholic' (*he katholike ekklesia*), in ca 110, presumably the first to employ the description, he described "a church more widespread geographically than the churches in one city or area, but *also a church that had managed to blend together diverse strains of thought so that the resultant koinonia, 'communion,' among Christians involved common views on important issues.*"¹⁹ They also highlight that "the somewhat-right-of-Paul strains of Christianity that emerged at Antioch and Rome in association with Peter were a key factor in the emerging church catholic" alongside the Pauline traditions. They are firmly convinced

¹⁸Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meir, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles Catholic Christianity*, New York/Mahwah, N.J: Paulist Press, 2004.

¹⁹Brown and Meir, *Antioch and Rome*, Preface, viii.

as well that “the only Christianity that can do justice to a NT containing diversity is one that resists sectarian purism in favor of constructively holding together tensions.”²⁰

The Vatican II Decree on the Eastern Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, does begin reflecting on the concept and ideal of ‘communion’ especially under the title ‘the Particular Churches’ or ‘Rites’, and ‘preservation of the spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches’ in numbers 2-6. The reflections do speak of the ‘wonderful communion’ among these particular churches that fosters unity (2), their equality in rank, sharing ‘the same rights and obligations, even with regard to preaching the Gospel in the whole world’ (3). The decree does highlight the debt owed to the eastern churches by the church universal (5) and do exhort the faithful of the eastern churches to strive to foster their rites, traditions and ways of life (6). Reflecting on the Catholicity that characterizes the church, the Council calls upon each part to contribute its own gifts to serve and enrich the communion (LG, 13) and affirms that the “multiplicity of local churches, unified in a common effort, shows all the more resplendently the catholicity of the undivided church” (LG, 23). The Council Decree on the Church’s missionary activity, *Ad Gentes*, envisions evangelization and her missionary endeavour as a mission that is incumbent on the church as a whole without any prejudice whatsoever and assigns the ‘particular churches’ a privileged place, role and responsibility in this shared mission (19), an activity that is guided by the same Spirit that “throughout out the ages... makes the entire church ‘one in communion and ministry’” (4).

The Council did manifest a genuine quest to retrieve the understanding of the Church Catholic dating back to its earliest formative period and spoke eloquently about the preeminent role particular churches ought to play in the life of the ecclesial communion as well as in the church’s evangelizing mission, so employing their unique gifts, patrimony, heritage and endowments as to enrich the communion. A survey of the past fifty years since the council, nevertheless, reveals at best a mixed bag in the Church’s efforts to translate the high ideals into her way of life. There was an immense outburst of energy and enthusiasm at the local level all across the church in the immediate aftermath of the Council, inspiring tremendous creative discernment in expressing, living and proclaiming the faith that resulted in bold and attractive innovations,

²⁰Brown and Meir, *Antioch and Rome*, Preface, viii.

celebrating the rich diversity of the Catholic reality, yet in genuine fidelity to the Gospel and the unity of the faithful. This initial phase was gradually run over, in many quarters, by a heavy gust of marauding forces of centralization that insisted on uniformity, assimilation and toeing the line at the expense of the creative forces within the communion. Most of the local/particular churches, especially in the erstwhile 'mission lands' were perceived to be wanting in growth and maturity and were soon forced to be carbon copies of their 'mother churches' who gave them faith. Many of the post-conciliar innovations became suspect at best if not suspended or terminated forthwith. The discernments that survived were in those regions — especially in the third world as it was euphemistically described by the 'mature communities' — that were daring in the Spirit to defy the stifling forces, thanks to the collective leadership of genuine visionary pastors who had the courage to buck the trend and those communities continue to thrive as is often repeated in the contemporary discourses.

The insights on the Eastern churches and their equality in dignity and evangelical responsibility remained, by and large, high ideals and aspirations as their implementation depended in large measures on the goodwill or good offices of the leaders of the Latin tradition, more often permitted as concessions and rarely perceived as their rights. The interest in the eastern traditions was in many quarters confined either to a curiosity aroused by the 'exotic' and the 'fascinating' elements of the eastern liturgies or an urge to 'preserve' and protect the proverbial 'endangered species', to borrow the words from the wildlife conservation debates. It must be acknowledged, nevertheless, that there were many pastoral and visionary leaders in the Roman tradition who were willing and bold to look beyond the ritual boundaries to foster the growth and blossoming of the eastern traditions as equal partners, which in the ultimate analysis has benefitted the universal Church as the contemporary ecclesial realities attest to. The history and experience of St Thomas Christians of India who have been thriving in vitality and vocations and have been sending out their sons and daughters on missionary enterprises all across the universal church are perhaps the best test case in this regard.

In Conclusion

Resisting sectarian purism in order to constructively hold together tensions and celebrate the diverse perspectives that characterize the Christian experience and live in '*koinonia*', to recall once again the

insights of Brown and Meir quoted above, has been an ongoing struggle for the 'Church Catholic' all across the centuries of Christian existence. Maintaining the 'creative tension' and keeping the balance has been quite often of tall order and the pendulum has quite often tended to swing either way, but more often in favour of 'affiliation-accommodation-uniformity' postures of unity and communion.

Though Vatican II had recovered the insights of the early Christian decades and had embarked upon a genuine quest to live the communion that marked those formative years, soon stifling centralizing forces appeared on the horizon in many quarters to slow the pace and confuse the path, even as the Spirit continued to guide the effort. The years immediately leading to the 50th anniversary of those discernments saw a renewed push by such 'forces of purism' and an air of diffidence, uncertainty and anxiety was palpable within the church about her way forward. But as witnessed repeatedly in the ages past, now too God appears to have the last laugh. When all hope appears to have been spent, the Spirit has intervened through the events of history — the unprecedented resignation of Benedict XVI, the election of the first Pope from the New World and the rest of the handiworks of the Spirit are there for anyone willing to see and listen. There is a renewed aptitude for dialogue, courage and willingness to encounter and celebrate diversity, a new level of confidence to trust the discernments of the local/particular churches in all areas of Christian life. The net result is an all-round vitality and joyful vigour that is growing from strength to strength, recasting the very self-perception of the church, and her voice is discovering the right tone, pitch, the depth and cadence to proclaim the Gospel to the contemporary times. And the world is waking up to listen. What shall be our prayer for our times, then? We had better borrow the words of that age-old prayer of the church: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful... Send forth thy spirit and renew the face of the earth! The ritual traditions are the ancient source of Catholicity — rites grew from unique matrix of culture, language, worldview and the like — particular/local churches. Now we have both inter-ritual and intra-ritual diversity that informs the Catholicity today. Hope that makes sense. Then surely we shall move from being hyphenated Catholics — Roman/Latin, Syrian, Chaldean and all other hues to become Church Catholic that can gather all these 'hyphens' into a meaningful verse that celebrates the divine creativity and splendour. Indeed a pilgrimage that calls for humility and hope in good measures alongside trust to live the Love that gathers us in communion!