

HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE AXIOM
EXTRA ECCLESIAM NULLA SALUS

by

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INTRODUCTION

In March, 1963, the writer was invited to explain the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus to a group of Protestant ministers.

The writer presented the traditional Catholic explanation based on the distinction between membership in the Church re and voto.

This traditional explanation was not enthusiastically received by the Protestant ministers. The Catholic doctrine, that Protestants in good faith belong to the Roman Catholic Church by desire, was neither clear nor acceptable to them.

The Protestant ministers expressed a desire to know (a) how the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus is verified in Scripture and in the Fathers, (b) when and by whom the axiom was coined, (c) what was the original meaning of the axiom, and (d) whether the interpretation of the axiom has since been changed. Finally, the ministers asked whether an explanation of the Catholic doctrine, that there is no salvation outside the Church, could be elaborated that would be more convincing to Protestants than the explanation based on the re-voto distinction.

How can the above questions be answered in a manner that will be acceptable to our Protestant brethren and that will promote the Catholic-Protestant ecumenical dialogue? That is the problem which this thesis will attempt to solve.

The writer is aware that many authors have in various

ways dealt with the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus. An excellent outline-history of the axiom is found in E. Dublanchy's article in Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique. Documents of the Church that pertain to the axiom, and some theological explanations of the axiom, are clearly exposed in Msgr. J. C. Fenton's series of articles in the American Ecclesiastical Review.

F. X. Lawlor in Theological Studies and L. Scipioni in Sacra Doctrina discuss the relationship between the mediation of the Church and the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus.

A concept of degrees of membership in the Church, that allows Protestants in good faith to be classified as really belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, is proposed by some contemporary theologians, for example, A. Chavasse in Nouvelle Revue Théologique, André Liégé in Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques, by Charles Journet in his book, Théologie de l'Eglise, and Yves Congar in Chrétien Désunis.

Guillermo Quintana in his work, La Sanctificación Social en el Cuerpo Místico, examines the collective, ecclesial nature of salvation according to Scripture and the Fathers, and he reviews the theological opinions of the non-Catholic Christian religions on this point.

However, no author, as far as this writer is aware, has dealt with the historical development of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus with a view to discovering what manner

of explaining the axiom would be most effective in the current Catholic-Protestant, inter-faith dialogue.

Not long after having been faced with the questions posed by the Protestant ministers, and with the problem involved, the writer happened upon an enlightening article by Augustin Cardinal Bea.

In this article Cardinal Bea affirms that many of the basic truths of the Catholic faith have been explained in diverse ways, in successive periods of history, in order to suit varying historical circumstances:

The theologian must never forget that many theological statements which express absolute and eternal truths need to be understood and interpreted in the light of the ideological background of the times in which they were developed. Historical circumstances and concrete problems that had to be resolved often caused a presentation of the truth without perfect balance. Emphasis was placed on one aspect of an eternal truth to the detriment of others, and thus the truth itself did not yield the fullness and depth of its meaning.¹

This passage provoked the idea that a survey of the various ways in which the doctrine, that there is no salvation outside the Church, has been explained in successive periods of history might offer a clue as to how best to propose this doctrine to Protestants today.

¹"The Ecumenical Responsibility in Teaching Theology", The Ecumenist, Vol. 1, no. 3 (Feb.-March 1963), p. 41.

Note: the other authors, whose works have been referred to in general in this Introduction, are quoted in the thesis and listed in the Bibliography.

The method of this thesis, then, is historical. It is to review the historical aspects of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus in order to discover (a) how the axiom is verified in Scripture and the Fathers, (b) when and by whom the axiom was coined, (c) what was the original meaning of the axiom, (d) whether the interpretation of the axiom has since been changed, and (e) whether an explanation of the axiom can be presented that may be more convincing to Protestants today than the traditional explanation based on the re-voto distinction.

CHAPTER ONE

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The unity of salvation-history appears in the interdependence of the two Testaments. The Old Testament depended upon the New since the events of the Old Testament looked forward to their fulfilment in the New Testament; and the New Testament depended upon the Old since the New Testament was born of the remnant of Israel, and received its king from David's line. Moreover, the two Testaments are closely connected by reason of the fact that mankind's salvation in the New Testament was foreshadowed and prophesied in the Old Testament.

The authors of the New Testament did not write in the comprehensive, detailed style of a text book. They took basic ideas for granted. They presumed in the reader a considerable knowledge of Old Testament revelation. It follows, then, that the pattern of mankind's salvation in the New Testament cannot thoroughly be understood without some reference to the Old Testament.

The purpose of this chapter is to discover some of the roots in the Old Testament of the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church.

Concerning the salvation of mankind, the Old Testament indicates that, according to his salvation-plan, God does not deal with men as individuals, but rather collectively, that is, as members of a visible body. The Old

Testament also indicates that, according to his salvation-plan, God does not effect mankind's salvation directly, but rather through the instrumentality of human representatives on earth.

For example, at the dawn of history God elevated the human race, as one body, to the supernatural order. And this he accomplished through Adam.

After the Fall, God elected to reinstate mankind by means of a visible body, a great nation, his chosen people (Gen. 12:2,3; 18:18; 22:18). God gradually formed this nation through his chosen representatives, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. First, God turned the family of Abraham into a distinct group, living apart from the rest of men and possessing the promise of a glorious future. Transferring it to Egypt, God changed this group from a band of nomads into an organized society. At this point, through Jacob, God revealed that the Saviour would emerge from the tribe of Juda (Gen. 49:10).

In the desert, through Moses, God's salvation-plan expressed itself more definitely in the Covenant. By this Covenant God established between himself and his people an intimate relationship, a union like that which exists between members of a family:

We tend to conceive of the ancient Semitic covenant in terms of the modern contract. Certainly it was a bilateral agreement, but it did not merely confer mutual rights: it established status. By a

covenant, persons entered into a quasi-familial relationship; by the Sinai covenant Yahweh, so to speak, joined the family of Israel.²

In order to act more effectively through his representative on earth and in order to establish more solidly this union with his people, God invested Moses with the offices of prophet, king and priest; and by the same token God provided Israel with a creed, a code and a cult.

Later, through the mediation of David, God developed his people into a more truly monarchical society, a kingdom. This society resembled a Church since its government was theocratic and its bonds of union were basically religious. After the division of the kingdom, through the mediation of his prophets, God further transformed the nation by inculcating in it a keen awareness of his oneness, his power and his holiness; and after the Babylonian captivity he inspired it with a passionate zeal for the observance of the Law.

By these progressive transformations of Israel in the Old Testament, God foreshadowed, and prepared for, the ultimate, salvific transformation in the New Testament in which he would raise the new people of God to the status of his own adopted sons (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:4-6). This status of filial adoption, which is synonymous with

²Thomas Barrosse, "God's Plan of Salvation: Unfolding and Realization", Scripture, Vol.15, n.29 (Jan. 1963), p. 9.

salvation, is to be attained, according to God's salvation-plan, in the New Israel, the Church of the New Testament.

Special foreimages of salvation in the New Testament are found in the Old Testament in what are called types. These types are persons, places, things or events in the Old Testament which prefigure their counterparts in the New Testament. For example, the passage of the Jews from Egypt to the land of promise is a type of the passage of Christians, by baptism, from the slavery of sin to the state of grace.

Particularly to the point here are two Old Testament types: the Ark of Noah (Gen. 29: 7-8) and the House of Rahab (Josue 2:1-21). Both are adumbrations of the Church of the New Testament, and typologically both reveal the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church. This fact is verified by Jean Danielou in his study of the Fathers and of the traditional doctrines contained in their writings.³

Concerning the Ark, Father Danielou submits that no theme occurs more frequently in the Fathers than "this symbolism of the ark of Noah as a type of the Church which saves men from divine judgment by means of water".⁴ He cites several prominent Fathers as witnesses to this tradition, for example, Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome and Chrysostom.⁵

³From Shadows to Reality, trans. Wulstan Hibberd, London, Burns Oates, 1960.

⁴id. p. 69.

⁵id. pp. 98-102.

Secondly, Father Danielou demonstrates that, in Christian tradition as proposed by the Fathers, the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church is typified in the story of Rahab and her house.⁶ Several Fathers bear witness to this tradition, for example, Origen, Hilary, Cyprian and Gregory of Elvira.⁷ The Fathers interpret the destruction of Jericho as a type of the end of the world; and they interpret the house of Rahab, in which it was necessary to be lodged in order to be saved from destruction, as a type of the one Church outside of which there is no salvation. And Father Danielou concludes that, since outstanding Fathers of various schools agree on this typology, "we are face to face with something that is part and parcel of revelation".⁸

The nature of salvation in the New Testament was not only foreshadowed in the Old Testament; it was also prophesied. Indeed, it was precisely "the manifestation of salvation in its fullest sense" that the Prophets of the Old Testament were inspired by God to proclaim.⁹

The Prophets present the person of Christ as the

⁶ *id.* p. 244.

⁷ *id.* pp. 249-59.

⁸ *id.* p. 69.

⁹ R. A. Dyson, The Kingdom of Promise, Westminster, Newman, 1950, p. 41.

source of all salvation. He will expiate sin and bring men justification (Is. 53:10,11). Through him "all the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord" (Ps. 21:28). The Messiah will bring salvation by exercising the office of prophet, teaching the commandments of God (Deut. 18:15-18). Isaias declares that the fullness of the spirit of Yahweh will rest upon him (11:2) and that his words will enlighten even the Gentiles (42:6,7). The Prophets describe him as a king (Jer. 30:9; Ez. 37:24; Os. 3:5). The very word Messiah, meaning anointed, implies kingship. But he will be no ordinary ruler, for he will share Yahweh's divine power (Ps. 109:1-3). His sway will be universal (Ps. 71:11) and it will be eternal (Ps. 44:7). The Messiah will also perform the function of priest. He will be superior to all the priests of Aaron because he is to be ordained not by reason of heredity but by a solemn act of Yahweh (Ps. 109:4).

It is basically through Christ's mediation as prophet, king and priest that mankind will be saved; and, as will be discussed later,¹⁰ in accord with God's salvation-plan Christ will depute the Church of the New Testament to mediate salvation by exercising ministerially these same three offices in his name from Pentecost until the Parousia.

The necessity, for salvation, of membership in the Kingdom of the New Testament, the New Israel, is implied in

¹⁰Cf. pp. 15-17.

the prophecies of the Old Testament. This necessity is implied by the fact that, in their descriptions of salvation, the Prophets place as much importance upon the Kingdom and its benefits as upon the King and his blessings.

It is in the Kingdom that salvation is to be found. Its members will receive a plentiful effusion of the Spirit (Joel 2:28.29). Its members will be cleansed from their sin (Ez. 37:23) and will live holy lives (Soph. 3:13) in a covenant of peace (Ez. 37:26). They will undergo a spiritual renovation: "I will give my law in their bowels, and I will write it in their heart" (Jer. 31:33). And the Kingdom will endure forever (Mich. 4:7). These texts reveal the interior, invisible aspect of salvation.

At the same time, salvation will have an external, visible aspect; for, it will be attained in a visible society, the second efflorescence of God's chosen people: "And it will come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set forth his hand a second time to possess the remnant of his people" (Is. 11:11). It is upon the New Israel, a visible society like the Old, that God will bestow the graces of salvation:

Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising (Is. 60:1-3).

These verses, E. Power observes, declare the New

Israel to be "the centre and source of religious knowledge and salvation."¹¹ Also, the last verse reveals that the New Israel will not be restricted to the Jews. It will be the means of salvation for all mankind.

The doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church is proclaimed more clearly in the following significant prophecy:

And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be prepared in the top of mountains, and high above the hills, and people shall flow to it. And many nations shall come in haste, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths, for the law shall go forth out of Sion, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem . . . nation shall not take sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more. And every man shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and there shall be none to make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken (Mic. 4:1-4).

In his commentary on the above passage, K. Smyth explains its full meaning:

It is only from the New Sion that God will teach men his truth and the way of life: here appears the Church Visible with all the notes of Universality, Uniqueness and Divine Authority . . . the promise of the New Testament is Eternal Life, and the spiritual blessings which lead to it. And in fact the Church is in glad possession of infallible truth which no error can endanger, and of sanctifying grace which neither unworthy ministers can impede nor human

¹¹"Isaias", Cath. Comm. on H. S., London, Nelson, 1953, sect. 450 b.

frailty exhaust. Thus in the indefectible holiness of the Church of Christ each Christian finds the heavenly peace which the world can neither give nor take away. And this is promised by the Lord of hosts as if solemnly invoking all his power and majesty.¹²

The function of the New Israel, according to the Prophets, will be to bring all nations to the one, true faith. The Prophets often describe this function in military terms (v.g. Ps. 2:9). Their military language is metaphorical, for the conquest is in fact spiritual (Ps. 66), and the victory is to be won by the justice and mercy of the King (Ps. 71). However, the metaphor of warfare is appropriate since in the near East military defeat most often meant adopting the religion of the conqueror.¹³

In their visions of the future, by a foreshortened perspective called compenetration, the Old Testament Prophets were wont to describe two events or things, closely related but widely separated in time, as if they were identical.¹⁴ What is to the point here are passages in which the Prophets picture the two phases of the New Israel as one and the same thing. For example, the prophecies of Zacharias frequently identify the New Israel on earth and in heaven, the temporal

¹²"Micheas", Cath. Comm. on H. S., sect. 535 b.

¹³R.A. Dyson, op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁴Paul Heinisch, Theology of the Old Testament, trans. William Heidt, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1950, p. 299.

and the eternal Jerusalem (v.g. Zach. 14:1-9). In Zacharias, S. Bullough observes, "the twin ideas of the Church of Christ on earth and the everlasting Jerusalem of Heaven are fused."¹⁵

The Church militant and the Church triumphant are in fact essentially connected. The former is the inchoative stage of the latter; the latter is the fulfilment of the former. Therefore membership in the Church on earth is the prelude to salvation in the Church in heaven. Thus the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church is implied in this prophetic fusion of the inchoative and the consummative phases of the Church.

Finally, there is a theme, predominant in the Old Testament, which is relevant to the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church. This theme is the principle of election. The principle of election states that in the process of salvation it is God who takes the initiative. Man's role is to cooperate. God calls, man answers.

In keeping with the principle of election the whole of salvation history has been determined by God. The principle is evident in God's choice of Israel.¹⁶ God referred to Israel as "my people" (1 Par. 11:2); for he elected the nation and fashioned it according to his design. He chose

¹⁵"Zacharias", Cath. Comm. on H. S., sect. 545 a.

¹⁶E. F. Sutcliffe, "Genesis", Cath. Comm. on H. S., sect. 136 f.

the Patriarchs, the Kings and the Prophets, and he assigned to them their functions.

The principle of election governs both Covenants: salvation in the New Testament is equally dependent upon God's fixed design.

To be valid, therefore, the interpretation of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus must acknowledge God's design; it must be in accord with what God has determined regarding the nature of the Church and the manner in which mankind is to be saved in the Church.

This chapter has exposed some of the principles in the Old Testament that contribute towards an understanding of the meaning of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus. In summary, principles concerning salvation in the New Testament that can be drawn from the Old Testament are: (a) that salvation involves a real transformation of the person who is saved, (b) that salvation is granted to man collectively, (c) that the society in which man is saved is a visible society, (d) that the precise nature of this society is determined by God, and (e) that salvation is communicated by God to man through human representatives.

It is noteworthy that in general Protestants more or less define salvation in terms that are the opposites of the five characteristics listed above. In general Protestants hold that salvation derives merely from God's benignity

rather than from an internal change in man, that salvation essentially is a relationship between God and the individual as such, that the Church is basically invisible, that the visible Church is arbitrarily established by man with a structure suited to his needs, and that all contact between God and man is direct, so that a hierarchy is in fact unnecessary.

In this definition, or view, of salvation the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus is meaningless.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Gospels describe mankind's salvation in terms of the Kingdom of God rather than in terms of the Church. The Gospels relate that during his public life Christ preached the Kingdom of God (Mt. 4:23). To inaugurate the Kingdom was the very purpose of his coming (Lk. 4:43). For the Jews who were steeped in the Old Testament the Kingdom was a familiar and significant notion. That the Messiah would establish the Kingdom and that the Kingdom would bring the realization of God's promises was clearly the expectation of Israel.

Christ frequently described the Kingdom in eschatological terms. The Kingdom was to reach its full stature after the Parousia (Mt. 25:1-46) when Jesus would drink of the vine with the blessed (Mt. 26:29) who, having risen, would live as angels (Mt. 22:30) and enjoy perfect happiness (Mt. 5:3-10).

Nevertheless, the Kingdom is described as a present reality. Christ assured his listeners that the Kingdom of God had come upon them (Lk. 11:20), that it was in their midst (Lk. 17:21). Although the Kingdom is an eschatological notion, with Christ eschatology entered time. With the advent of Christ the Kingdom began its existence on earth, an existence that is not definitive but peregrinal,

covering the time between the two Comings.¹

Members of the Kingdom on earth experience a real, internal change. They undergo a new birth received from above by the action of the Spirit (Jn. 3:5). As a result they live with a new life that is not properly theirs but Christ's (2 Cor. 5:15), and, by a mystical contact with Christ, this new life flows from him to them in a manner comparable to the flow of life from the main stem of the vine to its branches (Jn. 15:1-8).

According to the Gospels, the unity of the Kingdom of God on earth is not merely mystical; it is also visible, as visible as the unity of Israel in the Old Testament. The accounts of the institution of the Eucharist² manifest in their meaningful expressions the intention of Christ to initiate a society that would be a renovation of Israel, a new people of God with a new and eternal Covenant.

In his work of inaugurating the Kingdom Christ devoted more time and attention to briefing the Twelve than he did to enlisting members. St. Luke tells us that Christ named them apostles (Lk. 6:13). The mission of the Apostles is the key to the meaning of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus as it was understood in the early Church.

¹Charles Journet, Théologie de l'Eglise, Bruges, Desclée de Brouwer, 1960, pp. 16-17.

²Mt. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25.

The name apostle, sheliah, signifies one who is sent. The sheliah and his role was well known in the time of Christ. He appeared in the rabbinical writings of the time. He was understood to be a deputy, or an agent, appointed to a task with full power and authority to act in lieu of the person who sent him.³ The sheliah was no ordinary representative; his juridical identity with the sender was such that he acted completely as if he were the sender himself.⁴

Christ presented himself as the person sent by the Father, the sheliah par excellence (Mt. 10:40; Lk. 10:16). Saint Paul described Christ as "the Apostle and high priest of our confession" (Heb. 3:1). Christ had a plenipotentiary power to do the Father's work.

Christ in turn invested the Apostles with a power and a mission parallel to his own. This parallel is indicated by the similarity between Mt. 11:5 and Mt. 10:7-8. In the first text Christ described his work by quoting messianic prophecies of Isaias (Is. 35:5-6; 61:1). In the second text Christ described the work of the Twelve in almost identical terms.

The Twelve were to exercise the very same offices as

³L. Scipioni, "La Chiesa Causa Necessaria e Universale della Salvezza", Sacra Doctrina, Vol. 5 (1960), p. 271.

⁴Rabbi I. Epstein, The Babylonian Talmud, London, Soncino Press, 1936, p. 229.

Christ. To them he confided the mysteries of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:11) that they might teach (Mt. 28:20). He assigned them to rule the Kingdom (Lk. 22:24-30) over which they were to enjoy the widest jurisdiction (Mt. 18:15-18; Jn. 20:21). And he commissioned them to sanctify, for upon them he conferred the power to perform the great rite (Lk. 22:19) which became the central liturgical act of the Church (1 Cor. 11:23-29).

The special function of the Twelve appears also in John's account of Christ's priestly prayer (Jn. 17:11-20). Their office is as essential as Christ's; for there is a clear-cut analogy between their function and his (vv. 16,18). They are to remain on earth in his place (v. 11). Through them others will come to believe in Christ (v. 20). Christ asks that they be "sanctified" (vv. 17,19). This term translates the Greek word hegiasmenoi, which means consecrated, deputed to a sacred work, selected from among others for a ministry. W. Leonard⁵ comments on this passage as follows: "What is asked is that God should consecrate them for the priestly office of preaching the truth, for what Saint Paul calls the 'hierurgy of the Gospel', Rom. 15:16. Their mission is the continuation of the mission of Jesus."

It is obvious, then, that the Apostles were empowered

⁵"The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint John", Cath. Comm. on H. S., sect. 806 g.

to effect mankind's salvation as Christ's legates. From this mission it can be deduced that outside the Kingdom over which the Apostles preside there is no salvation.

The necessity for salvation of accepting the Apostles' message and of entering the Kingdom is declared even more explicitly in the Gospels. To accept the Apostles and their message is tantamount to accepting Christ and therefore equivalent to accepting the Father Himself (Mt. 10:40). Conversely, to reject the Apostles and their message is tantamount to rejecting Christ and equivalent to rejecting God the Father (Lk. 10:16). Those who do not enter the Kingdom, through the faith preached and the baptism administered by the Apostles, will be condemned (Mk. 16:16).⁶ It is clear that Christ's followers understood that there is no salvation outside the Kingdom; for, when they realized the hardships involved in being a member of the Kingdom, they asked, "Who then can be saved?" (Mk. 10:23-26)

In the light of the special mission given to the Apostles, as revealed in the Gospels and presented here, it is not reasonable to hold, as some liberal Protestants do, that Christ's gathering together of his followers gave rise to nothing more than an unorganized fraternity of believers. It gave rise to an organized society under the Apostles.

⁶For Scriptural proof of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus E. Dublanchy proposes this as the key text. Cf. "Eglise", D. T. C., Vol. 4, cols. 2155-56.

St. Luke's Acts of the Apostles describes the infant Church. After Pentecost the Apostles realized that the Parousia was by no means imminent, and that they did not have to wait for it for their messianic expectations to be fulfilled. With the coming of the Holy Spirit and the miracle at Pentecost the Apostles perceived that the messianic age had arrived and that they and their followers were the New Israel.

The break of the Christians from the Old Israel was formal once it was determined that Gentiles could be admitted without circumcision and that the Law no longer bound even Jewish converts. "This proved that the Church could no longer be considered a Jewish sect. It was the New Israel, the new chosen people."⁷ The New Israel was an independent society centred around the Eucharist (Ac. 2:42). It was also an organized society:

Indeed not merely historically, but in the very nature of things, to follow Christ meant joining others who were already following him, and it therefore involved entering into a whole system of relationships already established among them.⁸

This society began to be called the Church, ekklesia. The term ekklesia meant the summoning of people into a body,

⁷C. S. Dessain, "The Acts of the Apostles", Cath. Comm. on H. S., sect. 819 b.

⁸M. Bévenot, "Christianity in Apostolic Times", Cath. Comm. on H. S., sect. 635 a.

a convocation.⁹ In the Acts of the Apostles ekklesia can mean simply an assembly (19:39-40), or an assembly of Christians in one locality (20:17), but generally in Acts the word refers to all the faithful called by God into the society governed by the Apostles (5:11; 8:1,3; 9:31; 12:1,5; 20:28).¹⁰

How the Church was related to the Kingdom of God can be gathered from the Acts of the Apostles. In a perceptive article on the genesis of the Church¹¹ David Stanley explains that Luke's purpose in Acts was to show that the coming of the Kingdom was realized and manifested by the organization of Christians into a body under the Apostles. That is to say, according to God's salvation-plan, the Kingdom on earth became a reality only in so far as the visible Church, which the Apostles were deputed to organize, became a reality. Father Stanley refers to three passages in Luke's account of Paul's missionary activities: Ac. 14:21-22; 19:8-9; 20:25-31. According to Father Stanley's exegesis these texts reveal that the motive behind Paul's missionary work was the principle that only in the Church could the blessings of the Kingdom be enjoyed. For, the coming of the Kingdom was

⁹James Good, "Ecclesia: Title of Christian Society", Irish Ecclesiastical Record, Vol. 77, no. 2 (Feb. 1952), p. 129.

¹⁰Dublanchy, op. cit., col. 2108.

¹¹"Kingdom to Church: The Structural Development of Apostolic Christianity in the New Testament", Theological Studies, vol. 16, no. 1 (Mar. 1955), pp. 1-29.

synonymous with the establishing of the Church.¹² It was obvious to the early Christians, then, that outside the Church there is no salvation.

There are clear indications in the Acts of the Apostles that from the very beginning the Apostles exercised the prophetic, regal and sacerdotal offices Christ bestowed upon them. They were witnesses of the life and resurrection of Jesus and these were the basis of the faith (Ac. 5:27-32; 10:34-43); therefore Christians professed the doctrine they taught (Ac. 2:42). At Ephesus Paul reminded the bishops that the Spirit had placed them to rule the Church (Ac. 20:28). The story of the conversions in Samaria reveals that God gave the Spirit through the laying on of the Apostles' hands (Ac. 8:4-25). Even Cornelius, despite his special spiritual gifts, was obliged to subject himself to the Church and be baptized (Ac. 10:48).

In Acts, of the Twelve Peter stands out as the leader. He arranged for the election of Matthias, he was spokesman for them at Pentecost and after, and among them he was the principal thaumaturge.

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The Epistles of the New Testament reveal the lineaments of the early Church. In the Epistles the Church is acknowledged to have an important internal unity. It is a

¹²id., p. 21.

communion of the spirit (Phil. 2:1). Its members share in common their salvation (Jude v. 3) and their future glory (1 Pet. 5:1). They enjoy a communion of life with Christ himself (Heb. 3:14) and a common sharing in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4).

The Church has also an important external unity. St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians describes various aspects of the nature of the Church. It proclaims the mystical union between Christ and the faithful. But, at the same time, it describes a Church that has a visible unity. Christ assigned to the Church Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers (4:11), so that the Church might teach and rule. The Epistle describes Gentile converts as "citizens with the saints and members of God's household" (2:19). This description, Dom Butler points out, implies a visible, organized Church:

This fellow-citizenship with the saints does not mean a purely interior, mystical oneness of the predestined or of those in the state of grace. It means fellow membership of a concrete historical union of baptized believers, considered as identical with the Old Testament organized polity of Israel.¹³

The whole tenor of the Epistle to the Ephesians, Butler observes, belies any idea that the Church has only an

¹³The Idea of the Church, London, Darton Longmans and Todd, 1962, p. 173. Dom Butler quotes passages from a study of the Epistle to the Ephesians by the Anglican scholar, J. A. Robinson. Robinson argues that, according to St. Paul, the Church has an essential external unity.

invisible unity: "The notion that the end product of redemption, as far as this world is concerned, is a purely invisible Church is alien to the whole thought of the Epistle."¹⁴

Furthermore, the Epistle to the Ephesians likens the Church to an edifice; and Christians are built together to form this edifice, a temple holy in the Lord (2:21-22). This notion of edificatio is significant. Of all the scriptural images of the Church, it best illustrates the structure of the Church. The figure of building up the messianic community was not uncommon in Jewish writings.¹⁵ The same image is developed in Sacred Scripture. Of the New Testament temple of God, Christ is the foundation-stone upon which everything else rests (Is. 28:16; Dan. 2:34-44; Ps. 117:2; Mk. 12:10; Ac. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 2:7). That is to say, Christ is the possessor of supreme authority over the Church. In changing Peter's name to Kepha, the foundation-stone, Christ signified that, after his Ascension, Peter, the foundation-stone of the temple of the New Testament, would exercise supreme authority over the Church:

Et Pierre est le fondement qui porte ce nouveau temple, bâti en pierres vivantes, qui après le départ de Jésus devait s'élever à la place du vieux

¹⁴id., p. 172.

¹⁵Scipioni, op. cit., p. 276.

sanctuaire. Voila le sens de ce nom Kepha: le rocher.¹⁶

The Apostles, in turn, are the foundations of the edifice (Eph. 2:20). And upon them the faithful are built together into a temple holy in the Lord (Eph. 2:21-22).

In the continuous work of constructing the Church Christ remains the principal agent. "Upon this rock I will build my Church" (Mt. 16:18). Peter does not replace Christ; Peter is Christ's instrument, Christ's vicar. Similarly, in their work of building up the Church by the exercise of their prophetic, regal and sacerdotal powers, the Apostles act ministerially, as instrumental causes.¹⁷

The purpose of these powers exercised by the Apostles is to actualize Christ's work of redemption, to apply the fruits of the redemption to the human race down through the centuries. "Le sens ultime de ces pouvoirs est de signifier que la mission rédemptrice du Christ est toujours actuelle, qu'elle l'est efficacement par la médiation de ceux qui l'appliquent concrètement aux hommes dans l'histoire."¹⁸ It is to the Church of the Apostles, and to her alone, that Christ has assigned the function of mediating the salvation

¹⁶Anton Fridrichsen, "Eglise et Sacrement dans le Nouveau Testament", Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses, Vol. 17, no. 4 (July-Aug. 1937), p. 342.

¹⁷Scipioni, op. cit. pp. 274-76.

¹⁸A. de Bovis, "La Fondation de l'Eglise", Nouvelle Revue Théologique, Vol. 85, no. 1 (Jan. 1963), p. 16.

he gained for the human race. It is precisely for this reason, declares Michael Schmaus,¹⁹ that there is no salvation outside the Church.

This special role of the Church explains why the writers of the New Testament Epistles, concerned with the problem of defections from the Church, insisted so strongly on the fact that persons, who reject the teaching and authority of the Apostles and who separate themselves from the Church, forfeit their salvation.

The second chapter of St. Peter's Second Epistle ruthlessly condemns those who repudiate the teachings of the Church. St. Jude's Epistle is wholly dedicated to the proposition that those who disregard the authority of the Apostles are damned; their attitude is for them "a source of destruction" (Jude 10). St. John says that such a person "has not God" (2 Jn. 9). St. Paul says that such a one "is perverted and sins, being self-condemned" (Tit. 3:10-11).

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In the Book of the Apocalypse what is relevant to the matter of the Church and salvation is St. John's mighty vision of two diametrically opposed domains under the leaderships respectively of Christ and of Satan. Christ's

¹⁹La Iglesia, trans. Lucio Ortega, Madrid, Ediciones Rialp, 1960, p. 612: "Cristo ha confiado a la Iglesia por El fundada, y a nadie mas, la mediacion de la salvacion preparada por El. La Iglesia es, por tanto, necesaria para la salvacion."

Church is symbolized by the city of Jerusalem, Satan's empire by the city of Babylon. The two cities signify two states of soul: "These two signs, presented allegorically as outward perceptible marks, belong each of them in reality to the spiritual order. They symbolize adherence to two opposing societies, the two cities of Hermas and of Augustine and indeed of the whole Christian tradition."²⁰ These two states of souls correspond to what are called 'the state of grace and 'the state of mortal sin. St. Paul likewise makes a division between the members of the Church and the followers of Belial (2 Cor. 6:14-18). But the idea is typically Johannine, consonant with his themes of light and life as opposed to darkness and death. Each society has its brand: the seal of the citizens of Jerusalem (Apoc. 7: 2,4) and the mark of the citizens of Babylon (Apoc. 13:17). The seal signifies dedication to God; the mark represents allegiance to evil.²¹ Those who bear the seal are "the members of the Church on earth at any given moment."²²

This division of mankind on earth into two camps is a realization in advance of the categorical separation of the elect from the damned at the General Judgment. The Baptist's

²⁰ R.J. Loenertz, The Apocalypse of Saint John, trans. H. Carpenter, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1948, p. 97.

²¹ William Heidt, The Book of the Apocalypse, Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1962, pp. 63-64.

²² ibid.

preaching verifies that the final separation of the just from the damned is anticipated on earth (Mt. 3: 10,12).

From the two cities of the Apocalypse it can be concluded that all who bear the seal of holiness are aggregated into one society, the Church, and, therefore, outside the Church there is no salvation. All who are in the state of grace belong somehow to the Church.

The Church, then, can be looked at from two points of view. She is at once the society of the just and the means of salvation. These two aspects of the Church are sometimes called the Church as an organism and the Church as an organization.

It is important to bear these two facets of the Church in mind lest, in order to show how Protestants in good faith belong to the Church, one envisage the Church as merely the aggregate of all the saved. Such an incomplete manner of conceiving the Church, Henri de Lubac points out, leads some authors to imply inaccurately that the Catholic Church is as extensive as the a-temporal Kingdom of God.²³

Christ's Church on earth and the a-temporal Kingdom of God are not identical, as Dom Butler explains:

There is a distinction: the word kingdom carries the meaning of reign, the reign of God. Whereas God reigns from eternity to eternity, Christ's reign is

²³The Splendour of the Church, trans. Michael Mason, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1956, p. 65.

in the process of extending its sway through history and will only become exactly identical with the reign of God, generally speaking, at the Second Coming.²⁴

In order to understand the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus one must understand the Church to be both God's kingdom in its temporal, earthly phase and the organization founded by Christ to establish that kingdom: "The Church, then, should be at once conceived as the sphere in which the Messias' writ already runs on earth and the instrument for the propagation of the reign."²⁵

The two aspects of the Church are intimately connected. The Church as the invisible Kingdom of God on earth is realized and manifested by the Church as Christ's visible agent of salvation. In other words, the Church as an organization is the cause and a sign of the Church as a communion of grace.

It is true that the Church has an invisible unity which consists in the common sharing by all its members of the supernatural life of grace. This sharing of the life of grace has something of the infinite and the eternal about it. However, in God's salvation-plan, the supernatural life of grace is not attainable except in and through an earth-bound organization, that is to say, salvation is not attainable, according to God's salvation-plan, except in the visible

²⁴op. cit., p. 34, note 4.

²⁵ibid.

Church established to provide the means of salvation. This, Anton Fridrichsen points out, is the gist, according to the teachings of St. Paul, of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus:

Derrière la communauté visible il y a une perspective d'infini, en dessous d'elle une profondeur insondable. Mais cette éternité, cet infini, ne sont saisissables, présents, réels, que dans l'Eglise, dans la communion des croyants maintenue par la Parole, les sacrements, l'Esprit et l'amour actif. Aussi avoir part à cette communion est-il la condition indispensable du salut personnel et n'en peut être séparé ou distingué; la communion avec Dieu et avec le Christ n'est donnée que dans l'Eglise. Au sens de Paul on peut dire *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*.²⁶

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The basic lines of God's salvation-plan show through the Old and New Testaments. Salvation involves an interior renovation which unites a person to God. This interior change cannot be acquired except in and through the Church, which is a visible, organized society governed by God through his human representatives.

The New Testament reveals in particular that these human representatives, the Apostles and their successors, are fully and exclusively deputed by God to communicate salvation to the human race, and thereby to swell the ranks of his chosen people until the end of the world, when their official function will cease and the elect will enjoy

²⁶ op. cit., pp. 346-47.

perfect union with God eternally.

The function of the Apostles and their successors is epitomized by St. John: "What we have seen and heard we announce to you, in order that you also may have fellowship with us, and that our fellowship may be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn. 1:3).

Almost all modern writings on the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus have been focused on the question of how non-Catholics in good faith can be said to be in the Church. There is no indication in the New Testament of the precise solution to this problem. The authors of the New Testament took it for granted that all the saved had to be, and were, in the ranks of the visible Church.²⁷

The authors of the New Testament did not consider the question of good faith. They were preoccupied with God's salvation-plan in its clear-cut, objective lines. On the subject of salvation they tended to think and write in apocalyptic terms - with the black and white definiteness of the final reckoning:

The absence in the Gospels and Epistles of any attempt to distinguish between the objective status of schism and the possible good faith of the schismatics is characteristic of the New Testament with its eschatological and apocalyptic objectivity.²⁸

²⁷ Laurentius Klein, "Who Does Belong to the Church?", Worship, Vol. 37, no. 4 (Mar. 1963), p. 214.

²⁸ Butler, op. cit., p. 52.

The fact that some, through invincible ignorance, might be serving God to the best of their ability outside the visible, apostolic Church did not concern the New Testament writers. For them this was not a live issue.

CHAPTER THREE

THE FATHERS

The Fathers of the Church were faithful bearers of tradition. Their prestige stems from the fact that they proposed the truths of revelation as interpreted by the magisterium of the Church.

The earliest Fathers implied the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church in their affirmations that whoever does not submit to the doctrine and discipline of the Church has no right to be called a Christian and loses all claim to salvation. Justin Martyr condemned schismatics as "Impious atheists, and wicked sinners, men who profess Jesus with their lips but do not worship him in their hearts."¹ Addressing renegade Christians, Clement of Rome wrote, "It is better for you to be found little ones, but honourable within the flock of Christ, than to seem to be pre-eminent but to be cast out from his hope."² And Ignatius of Antioch warned such persons, "Make no mistake, brethren. No one who follows another into schism inherits the kingdom of God."³

Clement of Rome stated the reason why heretics and schismatics cannot be saved. It is because of the authority

¹Dialogue with Trypho, Ch. 35, Frs. of the Ch., Vol. 2, p. 201.

²I Epist. ad Cor., Ch. 57, no. 2, Frs. of the Ch., Vol. 1, p. 53.

³Epist. ad Philadel., Ch. 3, Frs. of the Ch., Vol. 1, p. 114.

to teach and sanctify which, in accord with his salvation-plan, God the Father conferred upon the Apostles through his Son:

The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent from God. Christ, therefore, is from God and the Apostles are from Christ. Both, accordingly, came in the proper order by the will of God.⁴

Cyprian of Carthage in his Liber de Unitate Ecclesiae was the first of the Fathers to deal at length with the question of salvation outside the Church. In this work he connected the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church with the Old Testament types of the Church; the Ark of Noah⁵ and the House of Rahab.⁶

But more fundamentally, in the Liber, Cyprian based his teaching that there is no salvation outside the Church on the Church's indissoluble unity. This indissoluble unity of the Church became the basis of practically all patristic writings on the subject.⁷ Cyprian argued that, since in the Church Christ, the one Lord, acts through Peter, the Church

⁴I Epist. ad Cor., Ch. 42, Frs. of the Ch., Vol. 1, p. 42.

⁵Ch. 6, Frs. of the Ch., Vol. 36, p. 100.

⁶Ch. 8, id., p. 103.

⁷Schmaus, op. cit., p. 790.

has a oneness that is absolutely inviolable.⁸ As a result, any person who resists Peter breaks his relationship with Christ. Therefore, not the noblest life, not even martyrdom, can suffice for such a person to be saved. "Such a man can be slain; he cannot be crowned."⁹

In general subsequent Fathers adopted Cyprian's approach and used his ideas. For example, Hilary of Poitiers proclaimed all schismatics to be consigned to the devil.¹⁰ St. Jerome declared that apart from submission to Peter, the supreme authority in the Church, salvation is impossible.¹¹ Cyril of Jerusalem condemned all dissidents on the score that the Catholic Church alone has received from God spiritual jurisdiction over mankind.¹² St. Augustine affirmed that prayers offered outside the Church,¹³ and even martyrdom,¹⁴ are of no avail for salvation. And, in the same vein, St. Fulgentius in the sixth century held that all schismatics are destined for the eternal fire.¹⁵

⁸Ch. 4, Frs. of the Ch., Vol. 36, pp. 98-99.

⁹Ch. 14, id., p. 10.

¹⁰In Ps. 118, Ch. 15, no. 5, P.L., Vol. 9, col. 607.

¹¹Epist. 15, no. 2, P.L., Vol. 22, col. 355.

¹²Catechesis, Ch. 18, no. 28, P.G., Vol. 23, col. 1049.

¹³In Ps. 42, no. 4, P.L., Vol. 36, col. 478.

¹⁴Epist. 108, no. 9, P.L., Vol. 33, col. 410.

¹⁵De Fide, Ch. 38, P.L., Vol. 65, col. 704.

Precisely who formulated the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus is not known. In no document of the Church does the axiom, as such, appear. Some theologians¹⁶ attribute its origin to Cyprian of Carthage on the basis of two texts. In a letter dealing with the expulsion of renegade virgins for their scandalous lives, St. Cyprian wrote, ". . . cum domus Dei una sit et nemini salus esse nisi in Ecclesia possit."¹⁷ In another letter, discussing the question of baptism outside the Church, he wrote, ". . . salus extra Ecclesiam non est."¹⁸

Other theologians¹⁹ attribute the origin of the axiom to Origen at Alexandria who, in his Commentary on the Book of Josue, dealing with the episode of Rahab and her house, wrote, "Nemo ergo sibi persuadeat, nemo seipsum decipiat: extra hanc domum, id est extra ecclesiam nemo salvatur."²⁰ Later, at the turn of the Fifth Century, St. Augustine made statements that more or less approximate the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus. In his Sermon to the People of

¹⁶V.g. Henry St. John, "Our Separated Brethren", Worship, Vol. 37, no. 1 (Dec. 1962), p. 75. The adage, he says, is an unquestionable doctrine "which first appears, in so many words, in the writings of St. Cyprian in the third century, though its lineage goes back to the day of Pentecost and further."

¹⁷Epist. 62, no. 4, P.L., Vol. 4, col. 371.

¹⁸Epist. 73, no. 21, P.L., Vol. 3, col. 1123.

¹⁹V.g. Henri de Lubac, op. cit., p. 155.

²⁰Hom. 3, no. 5, P.G., Vol. 12, col. 841.

Caesarea, he wrote, ". . . gratias agere Deo de salute ejus, quam non potest haberi nisi in Ecclesia Catholica."²¹ And in the Treatise on Baptism against the Donatists, Augustine wrote, "Salus, inquit, extra Ecclesiam non est. Quis negat?"²² The doctrine of the necessity of the Church was made axiomatic by the Fathers in the third and fourth centuries. Gradually it was crystallized in the words extra ecclesiam nulla salus. This form has become proverbial.

The meaning of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus was associated by the Fathers with the mystery of the unity of the Church. Therefore a clearer understanding of the meaning of the axiom can be gained by exploring further the teachings of the Fathers on the Church's unity.

First, it is clear that the Fathers understood the Church to be both a redeeming body and the body of the redeemed. This principle the Fathers stated in terms of the Church gathering together and uniting into one body the peoples of the world scattered and divided. St. Cyril of Alexandria described the Church as she who calls together all men and unites them in a single whole.²³ St. Augustine declared that the Church gathers together her numbers from all nations, "Ex omnibus gentibus multitudinem congregat

²¹No. 6, P.L., Vol. 43, col. 695.

²²Bk. 4, ch. 17, P.L., Vol. 43, col. 170.

²³Catechesis 18, Ch. 24, P.G., Vol. 33, col. 1044.

Ecclesia", and in the same passage he referred to the Church as the body of Christ gathered into one, "corpus Christi in unitatem collecta."²⁴ Consistently the Fathers taught that the Church is an hierarchical institution building up the body of the saved, and it is a communion of grace, the body of the saved itself.

Secondly, although the Church is an hierarchical body, building up the body of the saved, and the Church is a communion of grace, the body of the saved itself, nevertheless, for the Fathers, there is no question at all of the Church being composed of two separate or separable realities. These two aspects of the Church are distinguishable, but in reality they are mutually inclusive. The hierarchical institution is the communion of grace, and vice versa.

The communion of grace, then, considered apart from the hierarchical organization, is in no sense a Church. Ignatius of Antioch made this point clearly and briefly: "Apart from these, the members of the hierarchy, there is nothing that can be called a Church."²⁵ Reasoning along the same lines, Clement of Rome argued that schismatics who had broken away from the hierarchical institution of the Church had at the same time separated themselves from the communion

²⁴Contra Faustum, Bk. 12, ch. 16, P.L., Vol. 42, col. 263.

²⁵To the Trallians, no. 3, Frs. of the Ch., Vol. 1, p. 103.

of grace which is indivisible: "Do we not have one God and one Christ, and one Spirit of Grace poured out upon us?"²⁶

The point, that the Church as institution coincides with the spiritual union of its members by grace, was tellingly made by Irenaeus of Lyons in his *Adversus Haereses*: "Where the Church is there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is there is the Church and all grace, and the Spirit is Truth."²⁷ In like fashion, St. Augustine proclaimed repeatedly that the life of grace can be enjoyed only in the Catholic Church: those who are separated from the Church, Augustine affirmed, do not have charity;²⁸ outside the body of Christ which is the Church the Spirit vivifies no one.²⁹ In other words, the life of grace in the Mystical Body coincides with, and is inseparable from, the visible Church. This was the common teaching of the Fathers. Yves Congar asserts that the early Fathers as well as those of the fourth and fifth centuries "had no notion whatever of a Mystical Body which was not corporeally visible, or was not a definite and individual reality,

²⁶ I Epist. ad Cor., Ch. 46, no. 6, Frs. of the Ch., Vol. 1, p. 45.

²⁷ Bk. 3, ch. 24, no. 1, P.G., Vol. 5, col. 869.

²⁸ De Bapt. cont. Donat., Bk. 1, ch. 16, no. 21, P.L., Vol. 43, col. 148.

²⁹ Epist. 185, Ch. 2, no. 50, P.L., Vol. 33, col. 815. Cf. also Sermo 215, no. 9, P.L., Vol. 38, col. 1076.

identical with and inseparable from the apostolic Church."³⁰

Thirdly, the visible and invisible aspects of the Church are intimately related as cause to effect. Since the communion of grace is a sharing of a new life, the Fathers frequently conveyed this causal relationship under the image of the Church as a Mother. "By her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, by her Spirit we are animated."³¹

Natural life is received from a father and a mother; the supernatural life is received from God and the Church:

"Primo nativitas ex masculino et femina; secunda nativitas ex Deo et Ecclesia."³²

Fourthly, it is Christ who is the principal cause of the life of grace and of salvation. The visible Church acts as his instrument. Therefore, Christ, the source of all grace, is, in a mysterious manner, in the visible Church. This sublime idea the Fathers expressed by various images picturing Christ as contained in the Church. For example, the Church is the Tabernacle of Christ's presence;³³ she is

³⁰ Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problems of Reunion, trans. M. A. Bousfield, London, Centenary Press, 1939, p. 74.

³¹ Cyprian of Carthage, Lib. de Unit. Eccl., Ch. 5, Frs. of the Ch., Vol. 36, p. 100.

³² Augustine of Hippo, Sermo 121, no. 4, P.L., Vol. 38, col. 680.

³³ Berengard, In Apocalypsim, Ch. 13, P.L., Vol. 17, col. 884.

the Temple into which he brings his divinity;³⁴ she is Paradise and he is the Tree of life.³⁵

According to the Fathers, the Church as an hierarchical organization (usually called simply the Church) and the Church as a communion of grace (often called the Mystical Body of Christ) are one and the same thing; and the life of grace, therefore, is not given by God apart from the hierarchical Church. This unity of the Church explains why the Fathers affirmed so categorically that there is no salvation outside the Church.³⁶ It was on the basis of this unity of the Church that the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus was formulated.

The Fathers did not deal with the question of the salvation of persons in good faith outside the Catholic Church. For them this was not an issue. In general they had much the same attitude as the authors of the New Testament. They were concerned only with the implementation of God's salvation-plan in an ordinary and objective manner:

³⁴Origen, Comm. in Lucam., Hom. 18, P.G., Vol. 13, col. 1848.

³⁵Irenaeus, Adv. Haer., Bk. 5, ch. 20, no. 2, P.L., Vol. 7, col. 1178.

³⁶Augustine is representative of the common teaching of the Fathers in this matter. A clear exposition of how Augustine's doctrine, that there is no salvation outside the Church, is based on this unity of the Church is found in G. Favara, "Chiesa e Grazia nel Sant'Agostino", Divus Thomas, Vol. 4 (1952), pp. 375-395.

The ancient Christians with their strong insistence on the objectivity of Christian reality were in general men of their own age. . . for them the institute of redemption was as much independent of man's subjectivity as earth and sky and the laws of nature.³⁷

St. Augustine, it is true, made at least one reference to the possibility of salvation for persons in good faith outside the Church.³⁸ But he did not elaborate. In his writings, St. Augustine, typical of the Fathers, is preoccupied with the normal state of affairs:

He tends to argue according to the normal (not necessarily the most frequently verified) scheme of things laid down in the given revelation and the instituted means of grace, and to mention no exceptions to the rules, which might cover such subjective abnormalities as inculpable ignorance or error held in good faith.³⁹

Also, the question of inculpable ignorance was not vital for the Fathers because, with their limited geographical horizon, they appear to have been under the impression that the Gospel had been preached to virtually the whole world. St. Augustine, for example, felt able to exclaim: "Chorus Christi jam totus mundus est."⁴⁰

In the Middle Ages the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla

³⁷ Butler, op. cit., p. 140.

³⁸ Epist. 43, Ch. 1, no. 1, P.L., Vol. 33, col. 160.

³⁹ Butler, op. cit., p. 141.

⁴⁰ Ennarat. in Ps. 149, No. 7, P.L., Vol. 37, col. 1953.

salus was not treated as a part of a complete presentation of the theology of the Church. St. Thomas did not work out any treatise De Ecclesia. Neither did any other Scholastic theologian. Cardinal Turrecremata's Summa de Ecclesia in the Fifteenth Century is generally recognized as the first treatise; but it was not a full-scale systematic development of the theology of the Church; it was mainly a polemic against the princes of that time who challenged the universal power of the Pope.

Neither, in the Middle Ages, was there any cause for the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus to be treated in its own right. In that period the axiom raised no questions. Inculpable ignorance of the credentials of the Church was not considered an issue, since it was presumed that the entire world had been evangelized. And secondly, with the ruthless objectivity that characterized the theological thinking of that era, the possibility of Christians outside the Catholic Church in good faith was not considered an issue. In that era the Church was to a great extent identified with the State and with society in general. In that monolithic society heretics and schismatics were condemned, even to death, to protect the State. To undermine the Church was to undermine the social structure. The individual's subjective convictions, his possible good faith, was given very little consideration.

In modern times, for three reasons, the situation has completely changed. First, the voyages of discovery brought to light the hordes of unevangelized inhabitants of the new world. Secondly, in the intellectual world there has been a wholesale shift of emphasis from ontology to psychology. Now scholars in almost every field are preoccupied with the subjective disposition of the individual.⁴¹ Thirdly, and most important, the Reformation has resulted in the permanent establishment throughout the world of non-Catholic Christian religions. Today there are countless Protestants who have inherited a sincere belief in their own denominations, who practise their religion in all good faith and who live holy lives.

This situation has forced Catholic theologians to investigate the question of how the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus is to be reconciled with the salvation of Protestants in good faith.

⁴¹Butler, op. cit., p. 139: "Since Descartes and his cogito, ergo sum, we have been more and more initiated into introspection and psychology . . . there has been, over the centuries, a gradual interiorization of the Western outlook, partly perhaps due to a growing Christian maturity, partly reacting on Christian thought itself to make it more 'subjective'."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THEOLOGIANS

The axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus was not questioned by the Reformers. It was in fact included in many of their early creeds. The necessity of the Church for salvation was taught in Calvin's Institutio Christianae Religionis, in the Belgic Confession of 1561, in the Scotch Confession of 1560, in the Irish Articles of Religion in 1615, and in a sense in the Westminster Confession of 1647.¹

Each Protestant Church claimed that it was the true Church. The obvious theological need of the time, therefore, was to define the Church and to determine the requisites for membership in it, so that the true Church founded by Christ could be distinguished from the pretenders.

Robert Bellarmine, the outstanding theologian of the Counter-Reformation, formulated a definition of the Church that ever since has occupied a prominent place in Catholic ecclesiology. Previous to Bellarmine's definition there was a tendency in Catholic circles to describe the Church broadly as the society of all persons united by faith and charity to Christ before and after the Incarnation. For example, Melchior Cano, the eminent Spanish Dominican, had proposed that the Church could be defined as composed of all the just

¹Cf. Msgr. J. Fenton, "The Theological Proof for the Necessity of the Catholic Church", A. E. R., Vol. 118 (Jan.-June 1948), p. 222.

from the time of Abel until the consummation of the world.²

Bellarmino, involved in controversy with the Reformers over the nature of the Church, took exception to Cano's definition. Bellarmine maintained that since the time of Christ the only Church is the Roman Catholic Church. Assembling truths that were implied in Church practice or found in Catholic tradition, Bellarmine defined the Church in terms of profession of the true faith, participation in the Sacraments, and subjection to the hierarchy:

Nostra autem sententia est, Ecclesiam unam tantum esse, non duas, et illam unam et veram esse coetum hominum ejusdem Christianae fidei professione, et eorumdem Sacramentorum communione colligatum, sub regimine legitimorum pastorum, ac praecipue unius Christi in terris Vicarii Romani Pontificis.³

This definition emphasized the visible, institutional character of the Church. It served to counteract the movement by the Protestants to depreciate the importance of the hierarchy and to accent the invisible sharing of the life of grace as the only essential characteristic of the Church. It also served, in the confusion of the times, to clarify the meaning of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus, since the sense of the axiom depends entirely on the meaning of the term ecclesia. Bellarmine's definition played an important

²Dublanchy, op. cit., col. 2163.

³De Ecclesia Militante, Cap. 2, Opera Omnia, Vol. 2, p. 317.

role in the post-Reformation theological disputes. Latterly, it was used by Pius XII in his encyclical Mystici Corporis.⁴

Today it is accepted that the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus refers to the Roman Catholic Church. Today it is also accepted that Protestants in good faith can be saved. The problem at hand is to reconcile these two facts.

The purpose of this chapter is briefly to review and appraise the five major solutions to this problem that have been proposed by Catholic theologians. These are the re-voto distinction, the body-soul distinction, the distinction between necessity of precept and necessity of means, the distinction between the Roman Catholic Church and the Mystical Body of Christ, and the distinction between complete and partial membership in the Church.

I

The re-voto distinction was used as far back as the time of St. Ambrose to reconcile the necessity of baptism for salvation with the case of catechumens who died without being able to receive this sacrament. The distinction stated that where baptism by water, re, was not possible baptism by desire, voto, sufficed for salvation.

Robert Bellarmine was one of the first to employ this same distinction with respect to the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus. He used it to answer objections against his

⁴No. 29, New York, America Press, 1943, p. 15.

definition of the Church. If Church membership required subjection to the pope, how could excommunicated persons, who had repented and were in the state of grace but had not yet been officially re-admitted into the Church, be saved? How could catechumens who died before entering the Church be saved? Bellarmine answered that such persons could be saved because they belonged to the Church by desire. He argued that the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus means that there is no salvation for persons who belong to the Church neither in actual fact nor by desire, neque re ipsa nec desiderio.⁵

This re-voto distinction proved useful in the post-Reformation controversies. In the Seventeenth Century Cardinal du Peron employed it in his Réplique à la Réponse du Sérénissime Roi de la Grande-Bretagne. In this letter du Peron explained that, when membership in the Church is impossible, God accepts in its place a sincere desire to enter the Church.⁶

The re-voto distinction has become the traditional Catholic solution to the problem of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus and the salvation of non-Catholics in good faith. And it is understood that in cases of invincible ignorance of the Church it suffices for salvation that the desire to enter the Church be implicit. The re-voto solution

⁵op. cit., ch. 3, p. 319a

⁶Dublanchy, op. cit., col. 2164.

received a kind of official approbation in the encyclical Mystici Corporis of Pius XII⁷ and in the letter Suprema Haec of the Holy Office.⁸

The re-voto distinction is in accord with the infinite mercy and justice of God. For, it upholds the universal salvific will of God, and rids the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus of any suspicion of predestinationism. Furthermore, the re-voto distinction indicates that, by reason of their subjective disposition, persons outside the Catholic Church in good faith have a certain relationship to the Church. They are related to the Catholic Church in the order of intention.

But, the re-voto distinction does not indicate how in the objective order such persons are related to the Church. It does not explain how Protestants in good faith can be said objectively to belong to the Church. This is the weakness of the re-voto solution. It does not adequately explain the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church; for, this doctrine states that all who are saved must somehow be in the Church.

II

At the turn of the Eighteenth Century some professors at the Sorbonne, such as Honoratus Tournely, in an effort to

⁷No. 121, America Press, p. 49.

⁸A.E.R., Vol. 127 (July-Dec. 1952), p. 308.

establish an objective bond between Protestants in good faith and the Church, introduced the distinction between the soul and the body of the Church. Tournely and his confreres accepted the re-voto distinction. But they suggested in addition that, to the subjective desire to enter the Church, there corresponds an objective relationship to the Catholic Church. The bond that relates Protestants in good faith to the Church, according to Tournely, is the life of grace, which everyone who is saved possesses, and which constitutes the soul of the Church. The visible organization of the Church constitutes only its body.

In order adequately to explain the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus Tournely combined the re-voto and the body-soul distinctions. He taught that everyone in order to be saved must belong in actual fact, re, to the soul of the Church; but some persons, non-Catholics in good faith, in order to be saved need only to belong by desire, voto, to the body of the Church.⁹

Despite the peculiar division it introduces into the Church, the body-soul distinction was popular for some time with many name theologians. For example, in the Nineteenth Century this solution was proposed by Cardinal Mazzella, by the German Jesuit, Christian Pesch, and by the Dominican

⁹Cf. Dublanchy, op. cit., col. 2165; also Fenton "The Meaning of the Church's Necessity for Salvation", A. E. R., Vol. 124 (Jan.-June 1951), pp. 219-20.

scholar, Eduardus Hugon.¹⁰ It has also appeared in many manuals of theology.¹¹

This solution based on the distinction between the body and the soul of the Church is noteworthy in that it represents the first attempt to establish, over and above the subjective relationship of the re-voto distinction, an objective relationship between Protestants in good faith and the Catholic Church. However, all this distinction succeeds in doing is to show that all who are saved are united by a common sharing of the life of grace. It does not in any intelligible fashion show how persons outside the Catholic Church in good faith can be said to belong to the visible Church. Moreover, this solution seems to imply that the visible and invisible aspects of the Church are separable realities,¹² and that the common sharing of the life of grace is the only essential characteristic of the Church.

The basic difficulty with the body-soul distinction

¹⁰Dublanchy, op. cit., col. 2165.

¹¹V.g. A. Tanguerey's Theologicae Dogmaticae Brevior Synopsis, Tournai, Desclée, 1952, pp. 124-25: ". . . anima Ecclesiae consistit in interioribus habitualis gratiae sive supernaturalis vitae donis; ad hanc pertinent omnes iusti viatores . . . qui inculpabiliter extra corpus Ecclesiae manet, salvus esse potest, dummodo per fidem et caritatem, vel contritionem perfectam, ad animam Ecclesiae pertineat."

¹²This disruption of the unity of the Church was particularly noticeable in the way certain theologians, for example John Polman of Cambrai and Charles d'Argentré of the Sorbonne, explained the body-soul distinction. Cf. Stanislas Jaki, Les Tendances Nouvelles de l'Ecclésiologie, Rome, Herder, 1957, p. 239.

is that, applied to the question of salvation outside the Church, it is a metaphor. Metaphors limp, they are of necessity vague, they cannot be pushed to ultimate conclusions. Metaphors, therefore, cannot successfully be used as technical terms to solve a theological problem. Justifiably, then, this body-soul solution has now pretty well been discarded..

III

In an effort to solve the vexing problem posed by the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus and the salvation of non-Catholics, some theologians limited the necessity of the Church for salvation to a mere necessity of precept. A necessity of precept binds only those who recognize the precept and its binding force. In other words, these theologians held that the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus is applicable only to those who are culpably outside the Catholic Church, and that persons inculpably outside the Church can be saved independently of it.

A sponsor of this opinion in the Nineteenth Century was Joannes Perrone, a professor at the Roman College and one of the leading figures in the revival of ecclesiastical studies in his time. Perrone enuntiated his thesis as follows:

Culpabiliter in haeresi vel schismate vel incredulitate ex hac vita decedentibus nulla salus esse

potest, seu extra ecclesiam catholicam nulla datur
salus.¹³

If the axiom applies only to heretics, schismatics and infidels in bad faith, then it follows that persons outside the Catholic Church in good faith can be saved without any relationship whatsoever with the Church. This conclusion was stated explicitly, at the beginning of this century, by the Belgian theologian, M. Verhelst. Regarding persons who love and serve God outside the Catholic Church, he observed: "Il est cependant hors de doute que Dieu ne refuse pas ces brebis errants. Elles peuvent donc se sauver hors de l'Eglise . . . donc celle-ci n'est pas l'unique moyen de salut pour tous."¹⁴

According to this solution, based on a mere necessity of precept, the truth, that there is no salvation outside the Church, is not universal; it admits of exceptions.

It is interesting that Cardinal Newman accepted this opinion. Newman was interpreting a paragraph in Pius IX's encyclical Quanto Conficiamur.¹⁵ In the first two sentences Pius IX states that it is completely contrary to Catholic doctrine to hold that persons outside the Church can be saved

¹³Praelectiones Theologicae, Turin, Marietti, 1839, Vol. 1, p. 258.

¹⁴This quotation and Verhelst's reasoning is presented by T. Zapalena, De Ecclesia Christi, Rome, Univ. Greg., 1954, Vol. 2, pp. 323-24.

¹⁵Denz. 1677.

And in the next sentence the Pope states that persons, who are outside the Church through invincible ignorance and who obey the natural law and are ready to obey God's will, can be saved. Newman came to the conclusion, which he admitted was surprising, that the Pope's second statement, that non-Catholics in good faith can be saved, provides exceptions to the universal principle, extra ecclesiam nulla salus, affirmed in the first statement:

Who would at first sight gather from the wording of so forcible a universal that an exception to its operation, such as this, so distinct, and, for what we know, so very wide, was consistent with holding it?¹⁶

The fact is that Pius IX, as popes are wont to do, simply affirmed two truths side by side without entering into the theological problem involved.

In fairness to the supporters of the solution based on a mere necessity of precept, it must be admitted that some texts in the New Testament, taken by themselves, imply what we call a necessity of precept. For example, according to St. Mark's Gospel (16:16), Christ condemned those who rejected the preaching of the Apostles: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned." Commentators have remarked that this peremptory

¹⁶Certain Difficulties felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching, London, Longmans, 1920, Vol. 2, p. 336.

condemnation is directed only against persons in bad faith.¹⁷

Other texts in the New Testament and in the Fathers can be similarly interpreted.¹⁸ Perrone used such texts to prove his thesis.¹⁹ It is true that these texts, taken by themselves, can be said to prove only a necessity of precept.

But, when the doctrine of the New Testament and of the Fathers is considered as a whole,²⁰ it is apparent that the necessity of the Church for salvation is not merely a necessity of precept, it is a necessity of means. Therefore, the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus is applicable to all who are saved. All who are saved must somehow belong to the Church.

IV

In the second half of the Nineteenth Century, in an effort to solve the problem of salvation outside the Church, some turned to a distinction between the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church. This solution conceives the Mystical Body as wider, more comprehensive,

¹⁷v.g. Dublanchy, op. cit., col. 2155: "La condamnation de Jésus, étant portée uniquement contre ceux qui refusent positivement de se soumettre à l'Eglise, n'atteint pas ceux qui, ignorant en toute bonne foi la divine autorité de cette Eglise, ne sont point de fait soumis à son enseignement."

¹⁸Cf. supra p. 24 and p. 31.

¹⁹op. cit., pp. 259-60.

²⁰Cf. supra Chapters Two and Three.

than the visible Church.

When the problem of salvation outside the Church was raised at the First Vatican Council, Félix-Antoine Dupanloup, one of the outstanding Fathers at the Council, submitted the following proposition: "Corpus Mysticum Christi latius patet quam Corpus visibile Ecclesiae et comprehendit in totali sua extensione omnes justos, etiam eos qui sine culpa extra communionem Ecclesiae versantur."²¹

This broad concept of the Mystical Body had a precedent in the very wide notion of the Mystical Body found in St. Thomas Aquinas. St. Thomas, thinking in terms of the Communion of Saints rather than in terms of the visible Catholic Church, derived his view of the Mystical Body from the grace of Christ the Head, gratia capitis, from which all the just receive their participation in the life of grace.²²

Considered from this point of view, the Mystical Body includes not only all the just on earth but also the saved in heaven. In fact, in St. Thomas' view the Mystical Body includes, with certain distinctions, all who benefit from any

²¹ Joannes Mansi, Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio, Graz in Austria, Druck, 1961, Vol. 51, col. 786. Dupanloup opposed another Father of the Council who proposed that the Mystical Body should be conceived as completely identical, prorsus identice, with the visible Church.

²² A brief, clear exposition of St. Thomas' idea of the Mystical Body of Christ is given by D.M. Nothomb in "L'Eglise et le Corps Mystique du Christ", Irenikon, Vol. 25 (1952), pp. 227-248.

kind of grace:

Le corps dont le Christ est la tête est donc cette communion organique et intime de tous les membres du Christ, unis a Lui par la grâce, ou au moins par la foi, s'il s'agit des membres actuels, ou par les grâces actuelles s'il s'agit des membres potentiels, bref de tous ceux qui sont vivifiés ou mus de quelque façon par l'influx vital qui découle de Lui, source de toute vie surnaturelle.²³

A quite different view of the Mystical Body was presented by Pius XII in his encyclical Mystici Corporis. Pius XII was dealing exclusively with the visible Church and the Mystical Body on earth. There are two themes that pervade the encyclical: (a) that the visible Church on earth can rightfully be called the Mystical Body of Christ, and (b) that apart from the visible Church, which is the Mystical Body on earth, no person can be vivified by the Spirit, that is, by the life of grace.

This identification of the visible Church and the Mystical Body caused something of a furor in the ranks of Catholic theologians; for, it is not a simple matter to take as identical such disparate concepts as that of a temporal, visible society of human beings and that of a timeless, invisible participation in the supernatural life of grace.

Even after the publication of Mystici Corporis, in an article on the Mystical Body and the Church, Valentin Morel

²³Nothomb, op. cit., p. 233.

maintained that the Mystical Body is the more extensive:

" . . . le Corps Mystique terrestre déborde l'Eglise catholique romaine."²⁴ Morel argued that in the customary language of Catholic theology the Mystical Body of Christ includes all persons, non-Catholic as well as Catholic, who possess the life of grace; and he insisted that it is contrary to all tradition to take the Catholic Church and the Mystical Body as synonymous and co-terminous. In support of his opinion Morel quoted no less an authority than Emile Mersch.²⁵

Apparently, because of opinions such as this, it was deemed necessary in the encyclical Humani Generis to correct those who took lightly the doctrine contained in Mystici Corporis: "Quidam consent se non devinciri doctrina . . . quae quidem docet corpus Christi mysticum et Ecclesiam Catholicam Romanam unum idemque esse."²⁶

Although St. Thomas proposed an a-temporal concept of the Mystical Body, he did not of course deny the existence of the visible Church. He merely prescind from it. St. Thomas, as Dom Butler remarks,²⁷ held that the Church on earth is a visible, hierarchical organization. Moreover, in

²⁴"Corps Mystique du Christ et Eglise Catholique Romaine", Nouvelle Revue Théologique, Vol. 70 (1948), p. 719.

²⁵id., p. 718.

²⁶A. E. R., Vol. 123 (July-Dec. 1950), p. 391.

²⁷op. cit., p. 54, Cf. Summa, II IIae, q. 39, a. 1.

keeping with the doctrine of the New Testament and the Fathers, St. Thomas held that the visible organization of the Church is the instrumental cause, and the external manifestation, of the sharing of the life of grace on the part of its members.²⁸

The fact is that there are two ways of looking at the Mystical Body of Christ. It can be conceived a-temporally as the body of all the just, or it can be conceived as the invisible aspect of the visible Church on earth.

As far as the problem at hand is concerned, it is incontestable that the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus refers to the visible, Roman Catholic Church. The problem posed by the axiom, then, cannot validly be solved in terms of a Mystical Body that is more extensive than the visible Church. Therefore, this solution, based on a difference of latitude between the Church as an organization and the Mystical Body, is unacceptable.

V

Today most theologians take a different tack. In order to validly solve the problem of salvation outside the Church, they draw a distinction between a complete and a partial membership in the Church. They maintain that while Catholics belong fully to the visible Church, Protestants in good faith

²⁸Cf. III, q. 64, a. 2, ad 3um.

belong to the same Church in an incomplete, imperfect manner.

According to the current solution, in addition to being related in the subjective order to the Catholic Church in virtue of their implicit intention, Protestants in good faith belong in the objective order to the Church by reason of certain endowments of the true Church which they possess.

These elements of the heritage of the true Church are often called vestiges of the Church.²⁹ Since these vestiges are the property of the Catholic Church, they form the basis for a belonging to the Church; and since these vestiges are imperfect, compared to the full complement of the means of salvation found in the Catholic Church, they result in an imperfect belonging to the Church.

Although the idea is found in Augustine,³⁰ likely the first person to speak of vestiges of the Church in the context of the Reformation was John Calvin. While claiming that his version of Christianity was the true Church, Calvin allowed that traces of the true Church were found in other Christian communities.³¹

The same idea was proposed by Karl Adam in his Spirit

²⁹Cf. Charles Boyer, "Vestigiae Ecclesiae - Elements of the Church", Unitas, Vol. 8, no. 2 (Summer 1956), pp. 67-70.

³⁰Sermo ad Caes. Pleb., no. 2, P. L., Vol. 43, col. 691. St. Augustine explained that, whatever truths and sacraments a Christian sect may have, they are in reality the goods of the Catholic Church.

³¹Cf. Boyer, op. cit., p. 68.

of Catholicism:

True there is only one Church of Christ. She alone is the Body of Christ and without her there is no salvation. Objectively and practically considered she is the single and exclusive channel by which the truth and grace of Christ enter our world. But those also who know her not receive these gifts from her; yes, even those who misjudge and fight against her, provided they are in good faith, and are simply and loyally seeking the truth. Though it be not the Catholic Church itself which hands them the bread of truth and grace, yet it is Catholic bread that they eat. And while they eat of it they are, without knowing or willing it, incorporated in the supernatural substance of the Church.³²

Various theologians have used various terminologies to express the incomplete kind of belonging to the Church that they assign to Protestants in good faith. A. Chavasse speaks of "une rattachement anormal et amoindri", as opposed to "une appartenance plénière".³³ Yves Congar speaks of dissident Christians belonging in a manner that is "imparfaite, tendancielle, invisible et morale".³⁴ Charles Journet speaks of their belonging "d'une manière initiale, tendancielle, déjà salutaire".³⁵ D. Lialine states that a non-Catholic Christian is, of the Church, "visiblement et

³²Trans. Justin McCann, London, Sheed & Ward, 1929, p. 75.

³³"Ordonnés au Corps Mystique", Nouvelle Revue Théologique, Vol. 70, (1948), p. 697.

³⁴Chrétiens Désunis, Paris, Cerf. 1937, p. 282.

³⁵op. cit., p. 357.

partiellement membre".³⁶ And André Liégé assigns to Protestants in good faith an "appartenance partielle et imparfaite mais réelle a l'Eglise".³⁷

This solution to the problem at hand, based on a belonging to the Church that is incomplete as compared to full membership, appears to be a sound one; for, it does not introduce a division in the Church itself, but rather it introduces a division into the manner of belonging to it.

However, presented briefly and independently of the fundamental Catholic doctrines that justify it, this solution is inadequate for purposes of the Catholic-Protestant dialogue. How can Protestants reasonably be expected to give a hearing to so subtle and unflattering a statement of their status unless the statement is clearly set in the structure of Catholic theology and related to the fundamental truths upon which it is based?

For an adequate and convincing presentation of this solution in the Catholic-Protestant dialogue, the idea of partial membership in the Catholic Church must be integrated into the framework of God's salvation plan and of the special function assigned by God to the Church.

³⁶ "Une Etape en Ecclésiologie", Irenikon, Vol. 20, (1947), p. 44.

³⁷ "L'Appartenance à l'Eglise et l'Encyclique Mystici Corporis Christi", Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques, Vol. 32 (1948), p. 357.

Within Catholic circles the re-voto distinction and the concept of degrees of belonging to the Church are quite easily understood and are acceptable. But it is too much to expect Protestants to understand and accept that they belong to the Catholic Church by desire even though they are not aware of this belonging, and that they are saved by means of gifts that have been usurped from the Catholic Church, unless these ideas are thoroughly explained and shown to be reasonable by relating them to the basic Catholic truths, regarding the Church and salvation, upon which they are based.

CHAPTER FIVE

AN INTEGRATED SOLUTION

The problem at hand hinges on two seemingly contradictory truths, namely, that there is no salvation outside the Church, and that Protestants in good faith can be saved. It would be exceedingly naive to assume that there can be a simple solution to this problem. It is complicated. Is there salvation outside the Catholic Church? To this question, if one answers yes or answers no, in either case the answer is true in one sense and false in another sense.

The meaning of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus is not easily explained because it is closely connected with the concept of the Church. And the concept of the Church is complex. It comprises a set of seeming opposites: the Church is at once human and divine; she is united by love and ruled by laws; although the Church exists in the present, she will not attain her plenitude until the Parousia; as Christ's Body the Church is mystically a part of him but as Christ's Spouse she is his partner.

The complexity of the Church is manifested in the many images of the Church found in Scripture, each of which is an attempt to illustrate one of her many facets.

A simple definition of the Church is necessarily an ambiguous one. So too, a simple explanation of the adage extra ecclesiam nulla salus is necessarily an ambiguous one.

The spectrum of attempted explanations reviewed in the preceding chapter reveals the difficulty involved in the task of adequately explaining this adage.

In the past there has been a tendency, exemplified by some of the solutions reviewed in the preceding chapter, to begin from the fact that Protestants in good faith can be saved, and then proceed to envisage a Church of such a nature that Protestants in good faith can conveniently be fitted into the Church (solutions II and IV), or need not be included in the ranks of the Church (solution III).

This approach can lead to error; for, the Church has a fixed nature, given to her by Christ, which is independent of the condition or disposition of those who belong to her. The Church is not, like a purely human society, formed by her members; on the contrary, she forms them.

A more correct approach, therefore, would be to begin from the nature of the Church, and then proceed to determine in what manner Protestants in good faith belong to the Church. For, in this matter priority must always be given to the nature of the Church and to the function assigned to her by Christ in the economy of salvation. This point was made by Pope Leo XIII:

He who seeks the truth must be guided by these fundamental principles. That is to say, that Christ the Lord instituted and formed the Church: wherefore when we are asked what its nature is, the main thing

is to see what Christ wished, and what in fact he did.¹

The solution that follows is based on the nature of the Church and of salvation according to the doctrine of the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Fathers as outlined in Chapters One, Two and Three above. And the solution that follows is correlated with, or integrated into, the general framework of these truths.

The Nature and Function of the Church

By the Fall of Adam the whole of mankind was plunged into a state of alienation from God and of domination by Satan. In order to rescue mankind from this plight, the Second Person of the Trinity appeared on earth in the form of a man. By his death on the Cross Christ atoned for the sin of Adam and for all the personal sins of men. And now, glorified in heaven, Christ fulfils his work of redemption. Christ is now in the process of actualizing his redemption of mankind by effectively liberating men of good will from Satan's bondage and restoring them through the life of grace to union with God.

In this actualizing of the redemption of mankind the Church plays an essential role. Christ transmitted to the

¹Pope Leo XIII, Satis Cognitum, The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII, ed. John J. Wynne, New York, Benziger, 1903, p. 354.

Church his prophetic, sacerdotal and regal powers. He invested her with a full complement of the precious means of salvation: infallible truths, the seven Sacraments, a complete organization. The Catholic Church was endowed by Christ with these riches so that she might, instrumentally, generate in human souls the life of grace. The life of grace and union with God are hers to give. As Christ is the unique Mediator, the Church is the unique Mediatrix. As a result the Church is constantly engaged in claiming souls from the ranks of Satan, re-claiming them when they lapse, and fortifying them that they might persevere in the love of God.

At the same time, by this exercise of her salvific power, the Church fills her own ranks with those that are sanctified; for the life of grace in the souls of men is realized and manifested by membership in the visible Church. The Church not only saves; it is also the society of all the saved. In the very nature of things, therefore, salvation consists basically in a transfer from the domain of sin to the domain of the Church. No one can be saved without in some manner or other belonging to the Church.

In her work of redeeming mankind, the Church is pitted against the forces of Satan and of evil. Scripture portrays salvation as a struggle between the army of Christ and the army of Satan vying for the souls of men. This warfare is a basic theme in St. John's Apocalypse which pictures the Church

engaged in mortal combat against the adversaries of Christ down through the centuries until the Last Day. St.

Augustine affirmed that Christ established the Church so that by means of this divinely instituted organ he might make war against the false powers in the world.²

Where the salvation of single persons is concerned, this global struggle is reproduced in individual souls:

Cette opposition de la lumière et des ténèbres, du Christ et de Bélial (2 Cor. 6:15), se produira non seulement entre les chrétiens et leurs adversaires, mais à l'intérieur même de chaque chrétien, entre ce qui relève en lui du ciel et ce qui relève encore de l'enfer.³

Depending on which of these two sides an individual chooses, he is ranked with Christ or against him. The human race on earth at any given moment, then, is divided into two societies: the society of those who are the children of God and the society of those who are the children of darkness. There is no neutral ground.⁴ One belongs either to the

²"Dominus ut adversus regna temporalium errorum belligeraret, non pacem sed gladium missurus in terram . . . in manifestatione posuit tabernaculum suum, scilicet Ecclesiam suam, quae in hoc saeculo non habet fundamentum." In Psalm. 18, no. 6, P. L., Vol. 21, cols. 712-13.

³Journet, op. cit., p. 51.

⁴The case of a member of the Catholic Church who falls into the state of mortal sin does not disrupt this categorical division. Technically he is a Catholic but practically, as long as he remains in this state, he is on the side of Satan, like a traitor who carries the citizenship papers of his country but in reality is on the side of the enemy.

ecclesia sanctorum or to the ecclesia malignantium. The former is the Catholic Church, and apart from it there is no salvation. Protestants in good faith possess the life of grace without full membership in the Church; they are, however, on the side of the Church; they belong to the Church.

Degrees of Belonging to the Church

Salvation is not a static thing; the transfer from enslavement to sin to union with God is not an entry into a fixed and changeless state. Salvation is a dynamic thing; salvation is worked out by human beings amid a constant interplay of contending forces whose thrusts towards evil or in the direction of good cease only at death. Just as in warfare the tide of victory can swing back and forth, and the outcome is not settled until final victory, so too in the matter of salvation the tide of attainment can rise and fall, and eternal happiness is not completely assured until the Judgment.

Salvation has a dynamic character by reason also of the fact that sanctity, or union with God, is a life. Since this supernatural state of union with God is a life, it has qualities similar to physical life. It is characterized by growth, it tends towards completion.

The life of grace and union with God, then, is not a matter of all or nothing. It admits of degrees or stages, and at every stage there is a tending towards greater perfection.

In the very transfer from the domain of Satan to the domain of Christ there are something like stages. The Council of Trent enumerated the following steps in the process of justification: faith, a salutary fear of God's justice, hope, initial love, penance, and a decision to enter the Church and to keep the commandments.⁵

Full membership in the Church,⁶ it is true, constitutes in a sense an arrival, a term. For, ideally it is anticipated that a full member of the Church will remain faithful, and, as long as he does so, he is saved. In this ideal sense St. Paul occasionally addressed the faithful as saints, and referred to them as having attained salvation.⁷ But in reality it is only in the next life that salvation is definitive. Life in the Church on earth is dynamic; it is militant; the spiritual struggle continues. Attaining full membership in the Church by baptism is merely an initiation; thenceforth salvation consists in a development, a movement towards a more intimate union with Christ.

From the dynamic quality of salvation here described, it follows that salvation on earth is not restricted to one uniform and complete level of attainment. There are degrees

⁵Denz. 798.

⁶By full membership is meant the normal kind of membership in the Church which consists in profession of the true faith, participation in the Sacraments, and subjection to the hierarchy.

⁷Cf. 1 Cor. 14:33; Eph. 5:3; Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 2:12.

of union with Christ. And, since union with Christ is synonymous with belonging to the Church, there are degrees of belonging to the Church.

From the very nature of salvation, therefore, it appears that there can be a kind of belonging to the Church that is inferior to full membership, and that this kind of imperfect belonging to the Church involves a tending, or orientation, towards full membership in the Church.

Orientation towards the Church

God wills the salvation of all men. He grants salvation to all who sincerely serve him according to their lights. Normally, God grants salvation by means of full membership in the Catholic Church which he established to be his instrument of salvation. But he is not bound to do so.

In the abnormal situation of Protestants in good faith, God grants them salvation without full membership in the Church. This does not mean that there is another road to salvation separate from that of the Church. For, salvation is not granted to Protestants in good faith independently of the Church. They are related to the Church. Their salvation entails an orientation towards the Church.

Protestants in good faith are orientated towards the Church (a) in the subjective order by reason of an implicit intention, and (b) in the objective order by reason of certain gifts, or means of salvation, which they possess and

which pertain properly to the Catholic Church.

(a) Regarding orientation towards the Church in the subjective order, Catholic tradition has always held that it is possible to belong to the Church by desire, voto, as well by full membership, re. And for non-Catholics who are ignorant of, or unconvinced by, the credentials of the Church, it suffices that the intention be implicit, voto implicito. That is to say, it suffices that such persons have the general intention to obey the will of God in all things. This general intention includes an intention to enter the Church, since, in the full implementation of God's will, all men are saved by means of full membership in the Catholic Church.

This implicit intention to enter the Church is present even if a person is openly hostile towards the Church. For, ~~persons~~ in good faith do not really condemn the Church but rather a false concept of it; and in reality it is the Church that will afford them the fulfilment of their religious aspirations:

. . . ce qu'ils rejettent vilement sous le nom de l'Eglise catholique n'est qu'un fantôme de leur esprit, tandis que l'idéal religieux auquel ils tendent de tout leur désir et de toutes leurs⁸ forces trouve sa forme achevée dans l'Eglise.

⁸Jean-Hervé Nicholas, "Médiation de l'Eglise", Revue Thomiste, Vol. 46 (1946), pp. 428-29.

All Protestants in good faith, therefore, are orientated towards full membership in the Church by their implicit intention to enter the Church.

(b) In the objective order Protestants in good faith are orientated towards the Church because of the vestiges of the true Church⁹ which they possess.

They possess habitual grace; they use the Bible; they have fragments of the traditional truths, the sacramental system, and the organization, with which Christ endowed the Catholic Church.

The existence in Christian sects of a portion of the means of salvation, that by right pertain exclusively to the true Church, is not a phenomenon peculiar to the Reformation. From the time of the Apostles groups have separated themselves from the Church, and have carried off with them portions of her truths, her Sacraments and her precepts.

However, no matter where they are found, these saving gifts of God remain in fact the property of the Catholic Church. Therefore, Protestants who attain salvation by means of them, and insofar as they do so, are saved by the gifts of the Church. She nurtures them. Although they are estranged, they are her children. They belong to her.

However, these saving gifts, torn from the true Church,

⁹Cf. supra p. 58.

are less productive; they are imperfect. Therefore, those who are saved by them are imperfect children of the Church. They belong in an incomplete manner to the Church.

Protestants in good faith, because of the vestiges of the Church they possess, are orientated towards full membership in the Church. The characteristics of salvation are verified in their regard; for them also salvation is essentially a growth, a tendency towards a more perfect fulfilment. As long as their manner of belonging to the Church is inferior to full membership, they are, by the very nature of things, ordered towards full membership in the true Church where alone God's saving gifts are found in all their richness and are fully effective.

That the vestiges of the Church by nature lead to the Church is stated, in figurative language, by Father Boyer: 'Finally, those elements which are found outside their natural setting can be compared to exiles who are tormented by nostalgia. By their very nature they are inclined towards their native land.'¹⁰

The fact that Protestants in good faith are ordered towards the Catholic Church is due ultimately to God's salvation-plan. He established the Catholic Church as the unique mediatrix of man's salvation. It is his will that all be saved through her. Hence, whenever God grants his

¹⁰ op. cit., p. 70.

supernatural gifts outside the Catholic Church, he grants them with a view to the Church:

La volonté de Dieu sur l'homme a réellement pris corps dans l'Eglise: elle est le chemin que Dieu a ouvert aux hommes. C'est ainsi que la volonté de Dieu est orientée vers l'Eglise . . . c'est à cause¹¹ de l'Eglise que la grâce est donnée à un tel homme.

From the function of the Church and the nature of salvation, therefore, it can be concluded that Protestants in good faith are neither completely in nor completely out of the Church. They belong to the Church in an imperfect manner, and at the same time they are orientated towards full membership. Theirs is an inchoative, tendencial belonging to the Church. With respect to full membership they are in via as compared to ordinary members of the Church who are in termino.

¹¹Otto Semmelroth, L'Eglise Sacrement de la Rédemption, trans. Germain Varin, Paris, Editions St. Paul, 1962, p. 140.

CHAPTER SIX

THE CATHOLIC-PROTESTANT DIALOGUE

The Catholic-Protestant dialogue seems gradually to be moving towards a confrontation. Two truths are inescapable: that the Catholic Church is the one, true Church, and that true Christian unity can be achieved only on her terms. The need of dealing with these truths in the Catholic-Protestant dialogue is becoming evident.

Pope John XXIII initiated a free and easy dialogue between Catholic and Protestants. Thus far in this dialogue a friendly spirit has been maintained by dealing mostly with those elements of Christianity which Catholics and Protestants have in common. By this policy centuries-old barriers of suspicion and bigotry have been broken down. However, this policy now shows signs of leading to a stalemate.

Catholic theologians are beginning to suggest that the basic issues upon which Catholics and Protestants differ must be met. "In the inter-faith dialogue", Paul Dickinson remarks, "reticence about one's essential doctrinal positions can hardly further mutual understanding."¹ Protestants themselves, according to Cardinal Bea, are coming to realize that basic differences must be aired: "Even our separated brethren, as their authoritative representatives have

¹"Unity in Christ", Crosslight, Vol. 3, no. 4 (Summer 1961), p. 39.

declared, wish to hear the whole truth, even though it may at first be distasteful to them."² And the report of the meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches at Enugu, Nigeria, in January 1965, suggested that problems of inter-faith relations with the Catholic Church should be discussed:

The World Council of Churches is an association of many churches belonging to different confessional families. The Roman Catholic Church is one single Church. It follows that their collaboration poses some special problems. A frank discussion is the best means of resolving them.³

One of the vital issues in a frank and thorough Catholic-Protestant dialogue would surely be the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus. Charles Boyer holds that it is time for a clear statement of the doctrine that the Catholic Church is the true Church and that outside her there is no salvation. "How are they to know this if we do not say it?" he asks.⁴ To compromise on this point, asserts Stanislas Jaki, is to render a disservice to non-Catholics:

On a eu l'occasion de voir combien les aspirations d'ordre vital ont poussé les chercheurs de l'unité vers la solution la plus favorable pour les

²The Unity of Christians, New York, Herder, 1963, p. 108.

³Jerome Hamer, "World Council at Enugu", The Ecumenist, Vol. 3, no. 3 (Mar.-April 1965), p. 46.

⁴"Current Trends in Catholic Ecumenism", Problems Before Unity, Graymoor Symposium, Montreal, Palm Publishers, 1962, p. 65.

schismatiques, les hérétiques et les infidèles. Ces aspirations d'ordre vital ne servent plus la cause de ceux-ci, si sous la prétexte de compassion, de sympathie, elles contribuent, ne fût-ce que dans une mesure minime, à affaiblir l'importance de l'unique Eglise-sacrement: l'Eglise Romaine, Corps Mystique du Christ.⁵

A failure in the past to proclaim exactly what is the Catholic concept of membership in the Church has resulted in some uncertainty and misunderstanding.

For example, on the eve of the Second Vatican Council Bishop Stephen Neill, a prominent ecumenist, expressed uncertainty as to what the Catholic Church teaches regarding Christians in good faith outside her fold. He asked that the Council explain "what is the official point of view of the Roman Church concerning the status of believers in good faith of the other Christian Churches."⁶

And a misunderstanding of Catholic doctrine was apparent in the Toronto Declaration of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. The declaration stated: "All the Christian Churches, including the Church of Rome, hold that there is no complete identity between the membership of the Church Universal and the membership of their own Church."⁷ The truth is that the Catholic Church

⁵op. cit., p. 248.

⁶"An Anglican Plea for Clear Answers", Cross Currents, Vol. 12, no. 2 (Spring 1962), p. 222.

⁷Bernard Leeming, The Churches and the Church, London, Longmans, 1961, Appendix V, p. 298.

does not admit the existence of a super-Church which comprises other Christian churches.

As long as the meaning of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus remains uncertain, or is misunderstood, real progress in the dialogue is impossible. The task is lucidly and convincingly to present the Catholic doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church. And in this task it is important to bear in mind how different in this matter are Catholic and Protestant ideas.

The doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church is based on three fundamental truths: (a) that salvation entails an interior change, the acquisition of a new life which is a sharing of the divine life, (b) that this new life, according to God's salvation-plan, is acquired and developed through the offices of the successors of the Apostles, the hierarchy of the Church, and (c) that the acquisition of this new life involves incorporation into a visible institution, which is the Catholic Church.

These three truths are completely opposed to Protestant beliefs. Protestant theology has traditionally held that salvation consists merely in a relationship with God through faith and trust, that the Church is helpful but not necessary for salvation, and that the Church is essentially an invisible body composed of all who believe in Christ and hold fast to the Bible.

These fundamental differences of belief have been described by Dr. William Adam Brown, a recognized Protestant authority on the ecumenical movement in America:

The Roman Catholic notion of salvation is to be rid of mortality and finiteness by the acquisition of a new immortal nature . . . in contrast to this the Protestant asserts that man needs no change of nature, but only a change of relation.⁸

To the Catholic the church is an institution given to man by God to do for him what he cannot do for himself. To the Protestant the church is an instrument offered him by God in order to help him to do more effectively what through God's grace he has been empowered and commanded to do.⁹

Catholic theology gives the visible church a central place in the religious life and makes man dependent upon it both for the definition of the ideal and for the help that makes its realization possible.¹⁰

But this church, as the Protestant conceives it, consists of all those believing spirits who, trusting in God for their salvation, turn back to the book which God has given them for their guidance for the new light which may yet break forth from the word of God.¹¹

Another Protestant author, Ernest Johnson, has explained that the individualism basic to the Protestant concept of salvation gives the Church a secondary role and

⁸The Church Catholic and Protestant, London, Scribners, 1935, p. 240.

⁹id., p. 251.

¹⁰id., p. 140.

¹¹id., p. 239.

thereby renders the axiom meaningless:

The average Protestant believes in self-determination: his individual freedom has no corporate foil or counterpoise. Religious life in its typical Protestant form is atomistic and nominalistic. Catholic religious life is more organic, more realistic - in the Scholastic sense. Hence, while the Catholic conception of liberty stands within the framework of the church, Protestant conceptions subordinate the church to the individual. For, typically, the Protestant church is a 'gathered' entity - a communion of the separately and previously redeemed. Extra ecclesiam nulla salus has lost its meaning.¹²

From the diverse points of theology described above it is clear that there is a radical disagreement between Catholics and Protestants on the nature of salvation and the function of the Church. This disagreement should be taken into account in any attempt, in the Catholic-Protestant dialogue, to explain the Catholic doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church. A superficial explanation of this doctrine, owing to the deep theological differences involved, would be futile. But there is hope for an explanation that is thorough and carefully put together.

An encouraging note is that Protestant thinkers are more inclined today than ever before to study the Catholic doctrine regarding the nature and function of the Church. This is due in large part to a growing dissatisfaction on the

¹²"Religious Liberty", Christendom, Vol. 9, no. 2 (1944), p. 182.

part of Protestants with their own ecclesiology. They tend more and more to agree with Emil Brunner that "the problem of the Church is one problem to which Protestant research has as yet found no solution."¹³

The traditional Protestant concept of a purely invisible Church is losing favour in some quarters. Protestant theologians of the neo-orthodox school are strongly against this concept. Karl Barth, for example, holds that "if we seek to solve the problem of the unity of the Church by appealing to an invisible Church, we speculate as Platonists instead of listening to Christ."¹⁴ According to Gustave Weigel, a movement towards admitting that the Church must be a visible institution is gaining strength.¹⁵ The English ecumenist, Francis Clark, has also noted a tendency, on the part of non-Catholics, to admit the necessity of an authoritative Church that has the power to teach and to sanctify.¹⁶

From the ideas proposed in this chapter, one can conclude that there are definite indications that the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus will be an issue in the Catholic-

¹³Quoted by Bea in The Unity of Christians, p. 120.

¹⁴"L'Eglise et les Eglises", Oecumenica, Vol. 3, (1947), p. 141.

¹⁵"Ecclesiology and Ecumenics", Problems Before Unity, Graymoor Symposium, p. 42.

¹⁶"Trends in Ecumenical Ecclesiology", The Heythrop Journal, Vol. 4, no. 1 (Jan. 1963), p. 29.

Protestant dialogue because both sides are beginning to feel the need of forthright discussion. Evading this issue in the past has caused some confusion.

An important consideration in the dialogue is the fact that Catholic and Protestant theologies are uncommonly divided on this question of the necessity of the Church for salvation. Yet, owing to some dissatisfaction with their own theology of the Church, Protestants are at present disposed fairly to appraise the Catholic position.

Since the Catholic solution to the problem of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus and the salvation of Protestants in good faith is so dependent upon basic, general, Catholic truths regarding the nature of the Church and the concept of salvation, and so foreign to the traditional Protestant way of thinking, a thorough and integrated presentation of the Catholic solution, as proposed in the preceding chapter, can hope to be intelligible and acceptable to our Protestant brethren.

The story of God's dealings with mankind in the Old Testament set up a pattern for the fulfilment of mankind's salvation in the New Testament; the types in the Old Testament foreshadowed persons and events involved in mankind's salvation in the New Testament; and the prophecies of the Old Testament described more precisely the manner in which God would grant salvation to mankind in the New Testament.

From the Old Testament the following principles can be established: that salvation entails a real, internal change in the person who is saved, that this salvific change is communicated to man by God through human representatives, that men achieve salvation not individually but collectively, and that the community by means of which God grants salvation is a visible society, the New Israel.

These principles corroborate the doctrine of the necessity of the Church for salvation. To this extent, the Old Testament verifies the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus.

The writings of the New Testament deal with the foundation of the Church and its early growth. They explain the collective nature of salvation in terms of the Kingdom. The Kingdom realizes God's promises of salvation; its members experience a new birth; and in its earthly phase the Kingdom is a visible society, it is the Church.

According to the New Testament, the Church is presided over by the Apostles who are empowered ministerially to

exercise Christ's redeeming offices. It is through the Apostles and their successors that Christ actualizes mankind's salvation. The New Testament affirms that the Church is an organized, hierarchical society, that the Church is exclusively opposed to the society of all the damned, and that membership in the Church is necessary for salvation.

In this manner the Old Testament verifies the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus.

The Fathers of the Church were preoccupied with the problem of defections from the Church and the emergence of rival Christian sects. In this situation, the Fathers warned emphatically that outside the Church of the Apostles it is impossible to be saved. From the time of Cyprian of Carthage in the third century to the time of Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century, the Fathers stated, as axiomatic, that outside the Church there is no salvation. Thus it was the Fathers of this period who originated the axiom which has assumed as its fixed form extra ecclesiam nulla salus.

For the Fathers, this axiom meant simply that those, who are not subject to the doctrine and discipline of the Apostles and their successors, cannot be saved. The reason such persons are damned, according to the Fathers, is because the life of grace is not given outside the Church, since by God's design this life is engendered in the souls of men through the instrumentality of the Apostles and their successors.

The insistence of the Reformers on a purely invisible Church prompted Catholic theologians to define the Church in legal terms. This canonical definition clarified the meaning of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus by determining precisely who, from a legal point of view, are in and who are out of the Church. At the same time, this definition highlighted the problem of the salvation of Protestants in good faith. Formerly, the problem of persons outside the Church in good faith had been ignored. But now Catholic theologians had to penetrate more deeply into the questions of the nature of the Church and of the meaning of the axiom.

Some theologians proposed solutions that have been discarded because they do not jibe with the real meaning of the axiom or the true nature of the Church. However, two solutions, the re-voto distinction and the concept of degrees of belonging to the Church, have proved acceptable.

Through the centuries, then, there has been a development of the dogma of the necessity of the Church for salvation. Without contradicting its original meaning, theologians have come to understand the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus in different lights and in greater depths.

By viewing membership in the Church from the angle of a sharing of the life of grace as well as from the canonical or institutional point of view, and by acknowledging that the means of salvation with which Christ endowed his Church are in part available to Protestants, it can be concluded that there

is a belonging to the Church that is less than full membership and that involves an orientation towards the Church. It is in this manner that Protestants in good faith belong to the Catholic Church. In other words, the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus, where Protestants in good faith are concerned, means that apart from, or independently of, the Catholic Church there is no salvation.

How is this explanation of the axiom to be presented in the Catholic-Protestant dialogue? Certainly it will not suffice simply and briefly to propose the distinctions between membership re and voto or between a full and an incomplete belonging to the Church.

The exigencies of the Catholic-Protestant dialogue require that the Catholic solution to the problem be related to the more basic truths that validate it.

This solution should be related to the idea of salvation as a transfer into a society whose God-given function is to save mankind, to the notion of salvation as a dynamic process that admits of degrees, and to the concept of the Church as the normal and fully appointed society on earth of all those who sincerely serve God and will be saved.

There are definite indications that if, in the Catholic-Protestant dialogue, the Catholic interpretation of the axiom extra ecclesiam nulla salus is integrally and intelligibly presented, Protestants will give it every consideration.

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