

Preface

The divine revelation unfolds to us that God is Love. God has fashioned the human beings from the dust of the earth to be in his image and likeness, to participate in his love. Human experience shows that love requires at least two persons. It is said that perfect love requires three, so that the two can pour out their love together on someone else. In God, the three persons love one another with an eternal love, forming a communion. God is a magnificent “We”, a communion of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That unfathomable dynamic love has made God to come out of God’s self to meet the creatures so as to transform them into his children and thus bring them into the trinitarian love and communion. This is brought about by paying the great price of the blood of the innocent Lamb and the outpouring of the Spirit of love. The community thus generated through love relationship, permeated with the presence of the triune God, we call “the Church”. The Church fully realizes her nature and vocation only when she “gratefully” prostrates in adoration before the Mystery that brought her to existence and communicates this experience to others in charity, so as to help others to participate in the divine communion (1 Jn 1: 1-4). John says that in heaven, the four living creatures and twenty four elders day and night, without ceasing, worship the one seated on the throne. Myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands sing with full voice to the Lamb that was slaughtered, yet now standing victorious to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honour, glory and blessing (cf. Rev 4-5). Already, the Eucharistic communion here on earth is the pledge of that eternal glory. True, one cannot simply live in the idealized world. We live amidst concrete persons. Proclaiming the good news of Jesus, of loving our neighbour as he loved us, demands that we shape our life according to his own life style. Here, we must remember that we are made of dust, and therefore fragile, liable to sin, falsehood and hypocrisy. However, trusting in God who formed us and called us to be the community that perpetuates the memory of the paschal mystery of Our Lord Jesus, and contemplating our destiny, that is, the heavenly Church of the Redeemed, we can understand the nature and mission of the pilgrim Church.

The Church is made for the glory of the triune God; in giving glory to God by loving and caring for his creatures we find true happiness and glory for ourselves. We receive the grace of the Holy Spirit to be truly what we should be in the measure we love the Church. The relational and social needs of every

individual are honestly fulfilled in the communion of love. While mere self-fulfilment makes us egoistic, our being part of the Church spurs us to be self-transcendent, to go out of ourselves, to go beyond ourselves to meet the other and come back to ourselves and receive ourselves at a higher level. Here lies the mission of the Church: to go out of herself to bring the triune God into the lives of people and bring people into the life of God, where both God and humankind may be glorified.

Keeping this perspective in mind and with the help of Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium and the writings of the noted theologians of our time, I have made a modest attempt to explain the nature and mission of the Church. Taking the orientations from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* and with the communion ecclesiology in perspective, I have chosen the principal images and symbols to explain the theme at hand without ever claiming to be exhaustive. My own knowledge of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is deepened through my interactions with the students of theology and I am indebted to them. These pages are written keeping in mind the students of Ecclesiology at the undergraduate level and I wait for the suggestions of my readers so as to prepare a solid manual of Ecclesiology in future.

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Finally, thanking the Almighty God, I dedicate this book to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Image and Model of the worshipping and missionary Church.

AUTHOR