overlook the shortcomings already mentioned in order to arrive at a balanced appreciation of this book about "Asian missiology."

James H. Kroeger, M.M.


This small book (73 pages in the Italian original) was first put together as a series of conferences at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches at Bossey (Switzerland). The author's assignment was "to make known the Catholic Church in its various aspects to pastors and theologians of various Christian professions from every part of the world." What was asked was a presentation of "the Catholic Church's self-understanding deriving from the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council."

Bruno Forte, not yet 40 years old this year (1988), theology professor in Naples, has chosen to give this ecclesiological synthesis the framework of three basic questions: "Where does the Church come from? What is the Church (in the "in-between time")? Where is the Church going?" His work has a decided ecumenical perspective, which underlies both its considerable strengths and its few weak points. But without doubt, overall it is a remarkable achievement.

Part One, "Ecclesia de Trinitate," gives a rapid but excellent historical background to the ecclesiology which was worked out by Vatican II. The focus is on the Trinitarian "program." This first section summarizes the argument of the entire work.

Part Two, "Ecclesia inter tempora," is the substance of the synthesis, spelling out the Trinitarian pattern of the Church through the two great themes, People of God and Communion. The first theme enables Forte to sketch the fundamental structure of the Church in the doublet "community/charisms and ministries" instead of the more official "clergy/laity" and "religious/non-religious" doublets of Vatican II. The insistence on this new doublet is interesting in the new light it sheds on the laity and ordained ministry within the "total ecclesiology"-rooted in "the ontology of grace." Forte draws corollaries of his reconceptualization in a (rather difficult) section on "laicity" (secularity in the Church, of the Church, of the world). The central thrust here is to stress the "secularity of the Church," i.e., the "turning to the world" which was undoubtedly one of the axial shifts worked in the Catholic vision by Vatican II. Forte himself holds that his reconceptualization goes beyond
Vatican II, but he insists that it is faithful to the insights of the Council itself.

The development of the communio-theme is without doubt the heart of the book. As a pulling together of diverse strands into a compact, intricately inter-weaving synthesis, this section is masterfully constructed.

Everything under the heading of communion that is of any real value has been integrated here, and there are no loose ends. The “strands of communion”: in the Spirit, in the “holy things” (word, sacrament, ministry), of the community of the faithful; the primacy of the local church in the ecclesiology of communion (there is an unerring hand at work here, linking the principles of ecclesiality with the constituents of local church, drawing out corollaries for both communion and mission); the consequences of the local church as primary ecclesial subject of mission; finally the meaning of the Church universal (the catholica unitas) as communion of local churches. The theology of the local church as “the operative center” of ecclesiology today has rarely been sketched more strongly and coherently. Taken together with the excellent things Joseph Komonchak of Washington, D.C. has written and a couple of Forte’s fellow theologians from Italy, and Herve Legrand’s work on the theme, we have the emergence of a theology of local church well on its way already to an undeniable and secure “place in the sun” in ecclesiology — one of the really strong, new things that have emerged in the wake of Vatican III.

Part Three: “Ecclesia viatorum” deals with the eschatological dimension of the Church and its three major consequences for ecclesiology: the relativization of the Church, and of the world, and in faith the assurance of the final homeland. Here the Virgin Mary, as in Lumen Gentium, appears as eschatological icon of the Church, the “perfectly redeemed” one in the communion of the saints in the Kingdom. The work concludes with corollaries of the eschatological character of the Church, especially regarding the ecumenical endeavor.

The presentation of the content of the work which has just been made gives little indication of the richness of the synthesis, of the way Forte has made everything hang together with such skill and “style.” I have been teaching ecclesiology for nearly thirty years now, and have had to try to understand in some depth the “axial shift” that took place as the perspectives opened up by Vatican II began to reveal their meaning and consequences in theology and ecclesial life. I must say that working with this work for about a year now has been an exciting experience and I believe I can say this precisely because I have been teaching ecclesiology since 1959.

If I have a negative criticism to register, it is this: from our Asian and Philippine perspective, I miss an explicit section on the Church’s mission. I know there are sections in at least three places where mission is touched on. Still, handling systematic ecclesiology in the Philippines would call for an explicit
part on Mission. For a semester course, I have added two "theses": one on the understanding of mission in Asia which the FABC documents give us, and another on the understanding of church mission in the Philippines which emerges from studies like, e.g., Fr. James Kroeger’s excellent 1985 Gregorian dissertation on *The Philippine Church and Evangelization, 1965-1984*. These two areas of reflection complement the Forte book adequately, I believe. A fundamental theology of mission can be drawn from Forte’s own pages, but we have to spell it out more concretely, and FABC (echoing the experience and thought of Asian churches) and the "Philippine experience" — well detailed in the Kroeger book — spell out its concrete meaning in our local contexts. Too, the kind of thing Vincent Cosmao has done with his *To Change the World, Agenda for the Church* needs to be integrated more fully into this synthesis.

When I have spoken with some enthusiasm of the Forte book, people ask me if it can be made into a textbook. My answer would be: not for undergraduate classes in the seminary, unless the professor "fills it out" with rather full lectures and notes. But for a "renewal course" for, e.g., priests who want to see as a whole the "new ecclesiology" and to catch its vision, power and sweep — I can think of nothing better at the present time. This is not to say that it is not too dense and too difficult for airport-lounge reading, or any hurried reading for that matter. This is also not to say that I make my own every single position Forte takes in these pages.

We still await a really good *de ecclesia* textbook for seminaries in the Philippines. Until it comes (may it come soon!), a competent teacher of ecclesiology can take Forte’s synthesis and build on it. I have read it attentively more than fifteen times over and still find many new things at each re-reading. The overall vision, *ni fallor*, is along Congar’s lines. (But what ecclesiologist today, whoever he is, does not stand on the shoulders of that giant of a theologian and man of the Church?) Still Forte’s work has an originality, grandeur and beauty of its own, and one can only be grateful that it has been made available to us.

*C. G. Arévalo, S.J.*


At a time when "new spiritualities" are proliferating, many without any clear theological foundation, and owing more to the presumed needs (or fads) of the moment than to any roots in ecclesial tradition, this little collection of various key strands of the spirituality of the patristic era is more than wel-