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An Ecclesiological Exploration of the Four Marks of the Church

An Ecumenical Option for the Church in Nigeria



Chapter One Francis Sullivan and His Notion of the Church

Introduction

This first chapter is structured into two sections. In its first section, a general overview of the life and works of our author Francis Alfred Sullivan¹ will be presented. The historical and theological context of his theological elaborations will be surveyed in view of their possible influence on his works. The first section will be concluded with an investigation into Sullivan's theological method.

In the second section of chapter one, our preoccupation will turn to Sullivan's notion of the Church. Particularly significant is the fact that Sullivan refrained from proffering any definition of the Church. He however begins his reflection by explaining in what sense "we believe in the church."² Thereafter, he treats other themes, such as: the Church as the work of the Trinity, the Church and the Kingdom of God, the Biblical images of the Church, the Church as the Body of Christ, and the Church as one "complex reality."³

His treatment of each of these themes will be carefully studied. Let us now begin with the first part of this section namely; an overview of Sullivan's life and works.

1.1 An Overview of the Life and Works of Francis Sullivan

In this section, some considerations are made in the selection of the themes under study. Themes that will help us to strike a point at understanding the person of our author are judged particularly important at this moment. To that effect, topics such as; the early life and education of Sullivan, the developments of his ecclesiological

¹ In the rest of our studies, we will further refer to our author as either Francis Sullivan, or simply as Sullivan.

² Sullivan, The Church We Believe In, 3.

³ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 10. In this work, Dulles postulates the reason why it may not be wonderful to attempt a definition of the Church, and in line with the Second Vatican Council, he like Sullivan preferred to talk about the Church in terms of its models.

and theological thoughts, the historical and theological climate within which he operated and in fact his theological vision will form constitutively the major focus of this section. We begin first with the early life and education of Francis Sullivan.

1.1.1 Early Life and Education

Francis Sullivan was born on 21st May 1922 in Boston, Massachusetts, United States of America to George Edward and Bessie Sullivan. Francis Sullivan occupies a pride of place on the rostrum of twentieth and even twenty-first century theology.⁴ His early beginning is something of interest, because in it one witnesses a progressive and speedy rise of a genus. Worthy of note is the fact that already at the age of sixteen; Sullivan graduated from Boston College High School and proceeded to the Jesuit Novitiate in 1938, which then allowed entry as early as the age of fifteen.⁵ Also in 1945, Sullivan obtained his masters degree in Philosophy at Boston College in Weston. Immediately after this, he became instructor in Latin, English, and Algebra at Fairfield Preparatory College for two years (1945–1947).

⁴ See Fahey, review of "Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church", by Francis Sullivan, 358. It may be interesting to note that Sullivan spent a greater percentage of his life in the classroom, studying and forming theologians. After his doctoral graduation in 1956, Sullivan was in the same year absorbed to teach ecclesiology in the Gregorian University Rome, a service he rendered for 36 years and upon his retirement in 1992, took up another appointment as an adjunct professor of ecclesiology in Boston College till age and health could no longer allow him. A statistical view of his literary works shows some of these results; 8 published books, 76 articles published in different journals, 12 articles in the New Catholic Encyclopaedia on the following themes; Apostolic See; Apostolic Succession; Binding and Loosing; Diodore of Tarsus; Gates of Hell; Keys, Power of; Mopsuestia; Petrine Texts; Pope; Primacy of Pope; and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Also he has 9 articles published in the Encyclopaedia of Catholicism edited by Richard McBrien, on the following themes; Apostolic Succession; Apostolicity; Authenticity of Teaching; Catholicity; Heresy; Holiness; Magisterium; Marks of the Church; Unity of Church. Furthermore, Sullivan has reviewed 30 works of different authors, and 59 reviews made on his works cutting across different fields and in different languages. This is a remarkable achievement.

⁵ Although this fact is seen in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_A._Sullivan#Early_ Life_and_Jesuit_Formation, and is also repeated in Sullivan's home page, it is all the more given weight and authenticity by Sullivan himself in an exchange of e-mail with him on December 5, 2009. The mere fact that these incidents are corroborated in Sullivan's autobiography with particular reference to the curriculum vitae he sent to me adds impetus to the solidity of the testimony.

This duty was halted for another academic endeavour on Classics at Fordham University in 1948.

Having devoted much of his life to theology, his early beginning in philosophical study may if care is not taken be mistakenly overlooked. Although his first and only published work in philosophy was in 2003, one could still see in that, a heavy blend of some theological thoughts.⁶ Judging from the foregoing, one may assert with ease that apart from his course requirements in the University as a young Jesuit seminarian, his interest was more in theology than in philosophy, yet his philosophical discipline was of immense benefit to him in his theological elaborations.

The choice of such a topic as "Clement of Alexandria's Attitude toward Greek Philosophy" for his master's thesis in philosophy was very much revealing of his theological thirst. Desire therefore yielded to reality when after his master's in philosophy, the right moment materialized for him to begin his academic sojourn as a student of theology. Theology was a new academic encounter which saw him to his priestly ordination in 1951 in Weston College. Studying theology within this time formed an entirely new experience for Sullivan, because of its profound distinctness from the scientific considerations of Classics which has, till this moment, influenced notably his academic sojourn. Theology became as it were a subject of more fascination to him than Philosophy, although he never abandoned the fundamental principles of philosophy which he heavily employed in his theological explications.⁷

Having obtained his Licentiate of Sacred Theology in 1952, a new opportunity of continuing his doctoral studies at the Gregorian University Rome was offered to him. This was a new opportunity that became a turning point in his entire life and carrier. With a gradual evolution of time, the course of his life and his academic engagement became clearer and more distinctly perceived. Central to this is the influence his academic endeavour in the Gregorian University Rome had on him. Basically, this constituted in itself his very first departure from the regular and daily activities of the Jesuit life and formation, which impacted

⁶ Sullivan, "Clement of Alexandria on Justification through Philosophy", 101–113. Sullivan's article on Clement of Alexandria on Justification through philosophy, may be considered as a revisit to his master's thesis in classics in Fordham University, with the title "Clement of Alexandria's Attitude toward Greek Philosophy."

⁷ The veracity of this assertion displays itself in the array of works published by Sullivan. Sullivan's explication of concepts and his theological approach to matters are profoundly illustrative of this assertion.

heavily on him directly or indirectly in his subsequent approach to life and issues of various kinds.

Although, a student of Fundamental Theology, Sullivan's initial encounter with philosophy and the Patristics became veritable instruments at his disposal for use in his theological studies. In his doctoral dissertation, Sullivan was not drawn to any of the fields of Fundamental Theology. He chose to further his already developed interest in Patristics. He therefore opted for a study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia.⁸

This apparent manifestation of stubborn insistence to base his doctoral work on a patristic figure, rather than Fundamental Theology ought not to be perceived as a first step in disobedience. This should rather be conceived, as one of such smart ways typical of intelligent people, in which difficult situations of this nature may be overcome with prudence. Moreover, the choice of subject for his project ordinarily could not have been restricted to the unquestioned designation of his Superior. However, discovering that professors at either the Biblical Institute or the Oriental Institute could direct dissertations at the Gregorian, Sullivan wrote under the supervision of Fr. Ignacio Oritz de Urbina at the Oriental Institute, who had written on Theodore. In any case, Sullivan completed his research in 1955, published his work in 1956 and obtained the degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology. With this, the first stage of his life as a student was brought to a successful conclusion.

1.1.2 The Development of Sullivan's Ecclesiological and Theological Thoughts

Administratively, the wave of change ought not to be resisted especially when it has much to do with the common good. Sullivan's initially planned assignment of taking up the teaching of Fundamental Theology in Boston, gave way to the

⁸ Earlier on, Sullivan's former Provincial Superior John J. McEleney, through whose directive Sullivan did Patristics had already a programme for him, that upon his doctoral defense in the study of the fathers of the Church, he will be required to teach in Boston College University. Nevertheless, with the turn of events and a change in administration, the new Provincial Superior William E. Fitzgerald, ignorant of McEleney's decision advised Sullivan to focus on Fundamental Theology in view of teaching it upon completion in Boston College. Although, his preference would have been to study Patristics, he still had to obey, but smartly opted to write his work on a patristic figure; Theodore of Mopsuestia.

emergence of a new need of relieving Timothy Zapelana, the chair of ecclesiology in Gregorian at the time of his duty, because of reasons of age and health. With an enthusiastic acceptance of this great task and aware of its enormous demands, Sullivan gradually, steadily, and methodically blossomed in his theological engagement.⁹

More still, with the dawn of the Second Vatican Council and its effects, a new era of theological enterprise was created. Sebastian Karotemprel analyzed this, as the most important religious event of the twentieth century that created a new stage of encounter for every theologian. In his words; "Vatican Council II, by any standard, was the most important religious event of the twentieth century. It affected the course of the history not only of the Catholic Church but also of other Christian Churches and the relationship with the world and its religions"¹⁰. Sullivan makes the following testimony about the theological effects of Second Vatican Council, especially as it concerned his task as a professor of ecclesiology in Gregorian:

A little over twenty years ago, when lectures at the Gregorian University were still being given in Latin, I wrote a Latin text-book for the use of my students, in which I included several theses *de magisterio*. At that time I would never have thought of

⁹ Immediately after his doctorate in 1956, Sullivan was absorbed as an Adjunct Professor of ecclesiology in Gregorian University (1956–1959). And from 1959–1962, he functioned as an Extraordinary professor of ecclesiology in the same University. Having creditably exercised his duties these years in his alma mater, he was made an Ordinary professor of ecclesiology in 1962, a function he performed for 30 years (1962–1992). In the course of these years, he was the Dean, Faculty of Theology, Gregorian University (1964–1970), Chairman, Institute of Spirituality Gregorian University (1983–1986). After his retirement in Gregorian University in 1992, he still made himself available as Adjunct Professor of Theology in Boston College. Remarkably important is the fact that in 1994, the Catholic Theological Society of America in expressing gratitude for his meritorious service to God and humanity presented him with the John Courtney Murray Award.

¹⁰ Karotemprel, review of *The History of Vatican II. Vol. 3. The Mature Council: Second Period and Intercession. September 1963-September 1964*, 182. It must be noted that Karotemprel is not alone in assessing the Second Vatican Council in this manner. Many theologians of our time have had to talk about the Second Vatican Council in terms similar or completely identical to this. See also Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II", 716–727; O'Malley, "Developments, Reforms, and Two Great Reformations: Towards a Historical Assessment of Vatican II", 373–406; Pierson, "Roman Catholic Missions since Vatican II. An Evangelical Assessment", 165–167. Albergio, *A Brief History of Vatican II*.

writing a book on this subject in English for the general reading public. Still less would I have expected that people would know at once what the book was about, if I used the Latin word *Magisterium* as its title. Since then, however, much has happened to focus attention on the *Magisterium*, to the extent that it has become practically a household word.¹¹

The point in discourse is that the Second Vatican Council re-articulated the theology of the Church so that the subject as Sullivan had been teaching it which was largely based on Paul XII *Mystici corporis* was no longer judged adequate. More still, professors at this time were no longer expected to merely publish Latin versions of their class notes as books.

A statistical analysis of the publications of Sullivan, with special interest on the years of production, and the areas of concentration of the published works is quite revealing about the developments of his ecclesiological and theological thoughts. One observes that his first published work was on Christology, with particular emphasis on the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia.¹² This had much to do with the publication of his doctoral work. His interest in the Christology of Theodore can easily be traced back to 1951 in the very year of his priestly ordination, when Sullivan had already written a work on Theodore, which he described as "Some Reactions to Devreese's New Study of Theodore of Mopsuestia"¹³, which he all the more elaborated on another work captioned "Further Notes on Theodore of Mopsuestia"¹⁴. The later was in response to the work of John L. McKenzie on his interpretation of the commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on John 1: 46–51.¹⁵

As we have already noted, Sullivan's option for Theodore of Mopsuestia has much to do with his deep interest in the patristic figures, as well as his personal flare for Latin.¹⁶ Equally, his knowledge of other languages like Italian, German, and French were all facilitators in the development of his theology.

¹¹ Sullivan, Magisterium, Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church, 1.

¹² Sullivan's Curriculum vitae. This result is got from a study of the works of Sullivan, by closely observing the years of their publication.

¹³ Sullivan, "Some Reactions to Devreese's New Study of Theodore of Mopsuestia", 179–202.

¹⁴ Sullivan, "Notes: Further Notes on Theodore of Mopsuestia: A Reply to Fr. Mcenzie", 264–279.

¹⁵ See Mckenzie, "Notes: The Commentary of Theodore of Mopsuestia on John 1: 46– 51", 73–84.

¹⁶ One observes that it was with Latin that he delivered his duty in the first years of his professorship at the Gregorian, before the dawn and conclusion of Second Vatican

Although Sullivan is remarkably known for his theological works on the magisterium and ecumenism, some of his works are equally pneumatological.¹⁷ This distinction between ecclesiology, christology and pneumatology, ought not to be strictly considered as if one is completely divided from the other.¹⁸ An instance of this is seen in Sullivan's article in 1975 entitled; *The Ecclesiological Context of the Charismatic Renewal*.¹⁹ Apart from these exceptions, the dominant percentage of Sullivan's theological elaborations leaned more on ecclesiological issues.

1.1.3 Historico-Theological Context of Sullivan's Ecclesiology

Francis Sullivan, like any other theologian could not have been dislodged from the effects of the given context he flourished. This indeed has much to do with all of the historical/theological exigencies of the moment that formed a basic substratum upon which Sullivan operated, and which in some way could have moulded his ecclesiological elaborations.

Only a very few people like Francis Sullivan are given the opportunity of being schooled in two great traditions. This becomes all the more fascinating when it concerns such great moments of the First Vatican Council and the Second Vatican Council. Francis Sullivan may have to be described as the man, who received his academic formative years in the ecclesiological bent of the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council (the prevalent ecclesiology of the period was dominated by the ecclesiology of these two councils), and witnessed the new wave of thinking the

Council. Indeed, it is in this sense that one will understand why his first published work on ecclesiology, was done in Latin; *De Ecclesiae: 1, Quaestiones theologiae fundamentalis*, as well as few of a number of articles and book reviews.

- 17 To describe Sullivan in relation to his work on the magisterium and ecumenism alone, may not be wrong but may be too narrow to capture the expanse of his theological engagements. Statistically, from 1971–1985, Sullivan's concentration was heavily on the action of the Spirit in the Church. Within this period, only three of his works did not focus specifically on the Holy Spirit, one of which is *Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (1983).
- 18 Concerning the above assertion, one may say, the Church is the bride of Christ, and a study of the action of the Spirit, is a study of the action of the Spirit in the Church. Strictly speaking they emphasize specific areas of theological consideration, but that does not nullify intermittent criss-crossing of paths, and one field overflowing into the other.
- 19 Sullivan, "The Ecclesiological Context of the Charismatic Renewal", 119–138.

ecclesiological *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council inaugurated.²⁰ Thus, Sullivan responding to the spirit of change initiated by the Second Vatican Council developed a deep thirst for ecumenism, a passion for the proper interpretation of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, and convictions about the infallibility of the Pope, and the understanding and interpretation of the proper responsibility of the Magisterium.

In his treatment and consideration of the possibility of salvation outside the Church,²¹ Sullivan reveals that his interest was not merely academic, but is provoked by a personal experience. Concerning this, he writes:

My interest in the subject of this book was initially aroused during the late 1940s when I was studying theology in preparation for ordination to the priesthood at the Jesuit seminary in Weston, Massachusetts. The tranquility of those years was dramatically shattered by the news that Fr. Leonard Feeney, S.J., who had taught courses in English literature to many of us at Weston, had publicly denounced the Catholic archbishop of Boston as a heretic for declaring that non-Catholics could be saved. Fr. Feeney's contention was that Archbishop Cushing's view was in direct contradiction to the dogma which states that there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church. He backed up his claim by quoting a number of statements made by medieval popes

²⁰ This idea is explained by the singular fact that upon his graduation in 1956, Sullivan joined the staff of Gregorian University, Rome, from 1956–1959 as an Adjunct Professor of ecclesiology, and from 1959–1962 as an extraordinary Professor of ecclesiology in the same University. The experiences gathered within these years enabled him to become an Ordinary Professor of ecclesiology in the same University for thirty years till his retirement, from 1962–1992.

The topic on the possibility of salvation outside the church was so interesting to Sul-21 livan that he not only gave serious attention to it in the book "The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic," (1988), but furthered his study on it that in 1992, he came up with a book entitled "Salvation Outside The Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response." Steve R. Gordy has remarked that this work can creditably serve as a wonderful helpmate to students of Fundamental Theology, although in his opinion it does not confront issues of postmodernity. See Gordy, review of "Salvation Outside the Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response", 187. Gordy's position notwithstanding, Alan Race views it as providing "current Vatican II style of inclusivism with deep roots in the Christian past." See Alan, review of "Salvation Outside the Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response", 506. Nevertheless, fascinated by the way Sullivan handled the topic, Avery Dulles remarked: "His treatment is scholarly, judicious, and clear. Without getting bogged down in details or in the secondary literature, he presents the main lines of the story, with special attention to official church teaching." See Dulles, review of "Salvation Outside the Catholic Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response", 133.

and councils, which seemed to provide incontrovertible proof that "No salvation outside the church" was indeed a dogma of Catholic faith.²²

The position of Feeney was not erroneous in comparison to the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church. Already according to Sullivan, Pope Pius XII, in his encyclicals *Mystici corporis* (1943),²³ and *Humani generis* (1950),²⁴ had insisted that the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same, with the consequence that only Roman Catholics are really members of Christ's Body. According to Sullivan, "this of course was not a new idea in official Catholic teaching. Pope Pius XI in the encyclical *Mortalium animos* (1928),²⁵ excluding the participation of the Catholic Church in the then incipient ecumenical movement, had similarly declared that no one could be in the one church of Christ who was not in obedience to the authority of the Pope"²⁶.

The fact of the matter is that Christian faith and tradition are always anchored in a context from which they are given expression. To that effect, any attempt at an elucidation of the core deposit of faith, may be required to take cognizance of both the tradition and the specific context in question. It is in such a relationship between faith, tradition and context, that Christianity's strength is located; a strength that may have to be described theologically as the incarnational driving force of the Christian faith.²⁷ It is therefore not a thing of surprise when Fr. Feeney was condemned by the Vatican, and at the Second Vatican Council we see a paradigm shift in the position, that the Church of Christ no longer "is" the Catholic Church

²² Sullivan, Salvation Outside The Church: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response, 1.

²³ Pius XII, Mystici Corporis Christi (20 July, 1943): AAS 35 (1943): 193–248; See also, Pius XII, "Mystici Corporis Christi," available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_ father/pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-chri sti_en.html, accessed 29 February 2010.

²⁴ Pius XII, Humani generis (2 September, 1950): AAS 42 (1950): 561–578; See also, Pius XII, "Humani generis," available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/ pius_xii/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis_en.html, accessed 29 February 2010.

²⁵ Pius XI, Mortalium animos (10 January, 1928): AAS 20 (1928): 5–16; See also, Pius XI, "Mortalium animos," available from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos_en.html, accessed 29 February 2010.

²⁶ Sullivan, The Church We Believe In, 23.

²⁷ Boeve, God Interrupts History: Theology in a time of Upheaval, 30.

but "subsists" in the Catholic Church.²⁸ This inevitably opened up an avenue for an intensive engagement of theologians in ecumenism, and in no small measure had great effects on Francis Sullivan.

Together with the historical/theological context initiated by the Second Vatican Council, Sullivan enumerates some other historical moments which sparked off his theological thirst:

The first of these events, of course, was that extraordinary exercise of collegial Magisterium: the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). In 1968 came the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (a controversial exercise of ordinary papal Magisterium). In 1970 Hans Küng published his book entitled *Infallible? An Inquiry*, which sparked a lively discussion about the possibility of an infallible exercise of the Magisterium, and eventually resulted in the judgment of Rome that he could no longer be approved as a Catholic theologian. More recently a good deal of attention was given to the 'colloquium' to which Edward Schillebeeckx was summoned in 1979 by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.²⁹

These events have indeed stimulated a very considerable amount of theological publication to this very moment. Also, the emergence of Charismatic Renewal after the Second Vatican Council attracts Sullivan's attention and of course created a historical moment for a good deal of his theological enterprise.

Indeed, ever since the historical happening of the Second Vatican Council, scholarly works have appeared, treating diverse questions like the theology of the ecumenical councils and their relation to the papacy, the background and interpretation of the First Vatican Council, the problem of infallibility, the justification of dissent from ordinary papal teaching, the ecclesial function of theologians in the Church, and the question of Charism and Charismatic Renewal in the Church.³⁰ It

²⁸ For further reading and wider consultation, see also, Sullivan, "Quaestio Disputata: The Meaning of Subsistit in as Explained by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith", 116–125; Sullivan, "Quaestio Disputata: A Response to Karl Becker, on the Meaning of Subsistit in", 395–409; Ratzinger, Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith: The Church as Communion, 147. Becker, "The Church and Vatican II's 'Subsistit in' Terminology", 514–522; Sullivan, The Church We Believe In, 23–33; see also, Schelkens, "Lumen Gentium's 'Subsistit in' Revisited. The Catholic Church and Christian Unity after Vatican II", 875–893. See also Jared, "Questions and Answers on the New Responses of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith", 2–8. However, an elaborate study on this issue will be made in chapter three.

²⁹ Sullivan, The Magisterium: Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church, 1.

³⁰ Ibid.

is however within this historical/theological context that Sullivan flourished and developed his ecclesiology.

1.1.4 Sullivan's Theological Method

Dominant in Sullivan's theological works is his heavy inclination to historical elaborations. He does this by a characteristic style in which he leads his readers into the historical terrain of the development of a particular doctrine. This constitutes one of his ecclesiological methods, which points to his heavy inclination to historical elaboration. By wading through different epochs, Sullivan draws attention to the particular ecclesiology of a given period, its gradual evolution and the reasons behind which a particular doctrine was established.

Here, the benefits of this particular method is indeed illuminating, since it enables his readers to be abreast with the ecclesiological framework of a particular doctrinal formulation, within a particular concrete situation, with the most supposed motive of throwing open the convictions of the participants involved in that given age. Such a historical approach, when objectively undertaken as is characteristic of Sullivan, can be very revealing. Inbuilt in such a style is that it methodically expurgates biases and prejudices. In his appreciation of this particular method and in his review of Sullivan's work on *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*, Mozilla Mitchell remarked:

Sullivan is to be commended on his very thoroughgoing analytical, descriptive, and interpretative work, which is a self-critical approach to his own religious tradition with a view toward the future reunification of the church of Christ. Proceeding from the assumption of the general Christian denominational acceptability of the creedal statement of belief in the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, the author uses the dialectical method of analysis of each of these formulations within his own Roman Catholic tradition.³¹

Now, according to Sullivan, it is obvious that no one person in ones lifetime would be able to read all these documents and still be able to give a competent interpretation they all deserve.³² In an effort to elaborate further on this point, Sullivan while making reference to Bernard Lonergan, insists that method

³¹ Mitchell, review of "The Church We Believe In, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic", 153.

³² Sullivan, Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium, 9.