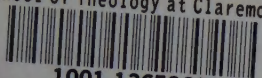


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THEOLOGICAL CONFRONTS

A CHANGING WORLD

EDITED BY THOMAS M. McFADDEN





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Theology Confronts A Changing World

*The Annual Publication
of the College Theology Society*

Edited by Thomas M. McFadden



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Introduction

Recent theology stresses the connection between praxis and reflection, between theoretical formulations and confrontation with the dehumanizing forces in any society. Theology has come to be regarded as not only leading to social change but also as proceeding from and formed by historical circumstances which supply its direction and focus. These perceptions have been the driving force behind what has come to be called liberation theology, especially insofar as radical change has been demanded in Third World countries. In Europe, too, religion's engagement with societal life is recognized as essential and a "political theology," which sees politics as the decisive sphere for living out the gospel, has emerged.

It is undeniable that this same effort to articulate the relation between faith and society under the conditions of contemporary life should be operative in the United States, even though, in fact, not a great deal has been accomplished so far. This volume is, however, one attempt to raise some of the issues that the church in the United States must confront if it is to join forces with liberation movements throughout the world in maximalizing human realization and freedom. In distinction from European and Third World terminology, however, the issues will be raised under the rubric of social change—an apparently more indigenous phrase for North Americans.

In the first section of the book, the church's role in social change is specifically addressed. Denis Goulet from the Overseas Development Council criticizes United States involvement in Third World "development," and suggests an agenda both for a more authentic response and the church's role in bringing such a response to reality. Richard McBrien questions under what organizational forms the church is to effect social change. Is its role solely prophetic, or can the church set up alternate structures to deliver the humanizing services that the state does not provide?

But liberating change is certainly not a movement whose

target consists entirely of configurations outside of the church. The church, too, is always in need of reform, and the second and third sections of the book demonstrate this quite clearly. Future ecclesial structures are suggested, as well as the collegial nature of the process of change and the necessary acceptance of diversity. Part 3 is perhaps the most controversial: two authors, Robert Kress and Sonya Quitslund, who have written extensively on the topic elsewhere, examine sexism in the church and strongly condemn the chauvanism involved in restricting ordination to males.

Part 4 examines several areas in which cultural change has altered theological perceptions. The crucial shift from an act-centered moral theology, which evaluates human conduct as only "accidentally" influenced by the intentions and dispositions of the individual involved, to a person-centered understanding of morality is shown to follow from a consistently more existential attitude in philosophy and culture. Changing social patterns should also have an effect on our perceptions of the sacramentality of marriage, and Bernard Lee constructs an argument that the categories of process thought are more capable of expressing the symbolic meaning of Christian marriage than the categories presently in use. Finally the new Rite of Penance comes under investigation, and its approaches compared and contrasted to civil attitudes toward the punitive and/or rehabilitative nature of punishment.

Most of the essays published in this volume were delivered at the College Theology Society's 1976 annual convention, held at Rosemont College; the essays not presented at that convention were submitted by College Theology Society members. The book demonstrates, therefore, the growing competence of college teachers of theology and religious studies, and their commitment to appropriate research and publication. An editorial board, composed of Sister Mary Charles Bryce of The Catholic University of America, Rev. William McFadden, S.J., of Georgetown University, and myself, evaluated literally scores of manuscripts and selected the ten essays included

here. The careful and informed judgments of the other editorial board members were always perceptive and clearly evidence their professional concern and broad theological knowledge.

As a publication of the College Theology Society, the book also reflects the leadership of the Society's national officers: Rev. James W. Flanagan, of the University of Montana, President; Rev. Jeremy Miller, O.P., of Emory University, Vice-President; Rev. Richard L. Schebera, S.M.M., of Saint Louis University, Secretary; and Dr. Thomas Ryan of Saint Joseph's College (Philadelphia), Treasurer.

And finally, with gratitude, the editor would like to acknowledge his sister, Carol, for her friendship, help and constant support.

*Thomas M. McFadden
Saint Joseph's College
Philadelphia*

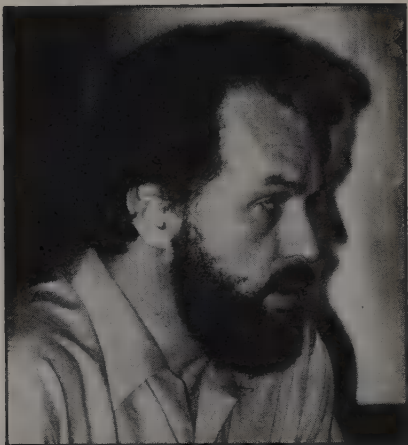
1

Confronting Social Upheaval

Beyond Moralism: Ethical Strategies
in Global Development
by Denis Goulet

The Church and Social Change:
An Ecclesiological Critique
by Richard McBrien

**Beyond Moralism:
Ethical Strategies
In Global Development**



Denis Goulet

Denis Goulet is a pioneer in a new discipline, the ethics of development. He holds Master's Degrees in Philosophy and Social Planning and a Ph.D. in political science (University of Sao Paulo, 1963). His approach to field work is to experience conditions of under-development in a mode of vulnerability to the adverse forces—economic, social, and political—which burden poor majorities. This he has done in Algeria, Lebanon, Spain, France and Brazil. Goulet is the author of numerous works on ethical and value questions posed by development theory, planning and action. His major books are *The Cruel Choice*, *A New Moral Order*, *The Myth of Aid* (with Michael Hudson), and the forthcoming *The Uncertain Promise: Value Conflicts in Technology Transfer*.

In 1969 he was a Visiting Fellow at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. After spending four years (1970-74) as a Research Fellow at the Center for the Study of Development and Social Change (Cambridge, Mass.), he is presently a Visiting Fellow at Overseas Development Council in Washington, D.C.

Precis

The Church has confronted the issue of political ethics throughout its history, but the vastness, technical complexity and rapidity of contemporary social change—not to mention the interdependence of notions—have transformed the old moral questions into the touchstone issue of economic and social development. Thus the task is to go beyond moralism, beyond the preaching of noble ideals that stand apart from strategies for authentic development. Genuine ethics must become a “means of the means,” i.e., a critical reflection on concrete measures leading to effective transformations of an oppressive socioeconomic structure. Thus strategies for change are crucial; strategies that will not be mere palliatives, attacking symptoms only, strategies creative of new possibilities. The church’s role in this process is not simple, since it must avoid both the “safe harbor” of Freudian illusions about some ahistorical fulfillment and the temptation to become another celebration of solely immanent human prospects. Instead, there is the complex task of witnessing to transcendence, of accepting the poor things of this world like creative prophecy and a hope-filled vision of God’s future.

Beyond Moralism: Ethical Strategies In Global Development

A Development Story

Mang Guimo, a peasant, is drinking *lambanog* (a native wine) with his neighbors. The landlord is asking for higher rentals, and some of the other peasants have to be evicted because the landlord will mechanize a portion of his lands.

Mang Guimo shares his thoughts with his drinking peers. Before Don Jose (the landlord) and I were born, the land was already there. When Don Jose and I shall die, the land will still be there. Whose is the land really?

When you and I were fighting as soldiers during the last war, Mang Guimo rambles on, we thought we were fighting for the Philippines. Now that the war is over, where is **our** Philippines?

For, indeed, while Don Jose can own seven hundred hectares, Mang Guimo cannot own even one square meter of land.

And what about the church? She always tells us that she may never take sides. She may never side with the poor even as they try to get their rights. She is after all, Mang Guimo continues in sarcasm, the common mother of both the rich and the poor. What does a good mother do if she sees her older boy beating up the younger, weaker son, and taking food? Shall she say, "I am the mother of both of them; I may not take sides in their quarrels?"¹

Introduction

Almost forty years ago Etienne Gilson published *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*.² The central lesson of this book is that "philosophy always buries its undertakers." Each time new fashions in thought decree the death of ancient philosophical questions, they return to the scene with new life and vigor. And so it is with development: even "practical" economists and planners now acknowledge that their disciplines resurrect basic questions about the good life and the just society. Benjamin Higgins warns his fellow economists that most concepts of development are too narrow because they skirt fundamental questions of social ethics. "It is well," he adds, "for the econometricians to push the methodology of economics as far as possible in the direction of that of the natural sciences; but when we come to development it is also well for us to remember that one of the ancestors of modern economics is moral philosophy."³ We do well to recall that before writing *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith had authored a work on *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In the words of Robert Heilbroner, an influential popularizer of development issues:

Dr. Smith lectured on problems of Moral Philosophy, a discipline a great deal more broadly conceived in that day than in ours. Moral Philosophy covered Natural Theology, Ethics, Jurisprudence, and Political Economy: it thus ranged all the way from man's sublimest impulses toward order and harmony to his somewhat less orderly and harmonious activities in the grimmer business of gouging out a living for himself.⁴

Perhaps the clearest statement of the link between development and ethics is made by political scientist David Apter, who writes that:

The most important consequence of the study of modernization is that it brings us back to the search for first principles. By this I mean that it requires the unity of moral and analytical modes of thought.⁵

Indeed, development brings three basic moral questions to the surface:

a) What is the relation between the fullness of good and the abundance of goods? b) What are the foundations of justice in, and among, societies? and, c) What criteria govern the posture of societies toward the forces of nature and technology?⁶ If answering these questions satisfactorily makes a country **developed**, then it follows that not every nation with a high per capita income merits that designation.⁷ One misses the "concrete dynamics of development"⁸ if one fails to examine the ideals and institutions of the good life and the good society.⁹

The drive toward development revitalizes ancient moral questions. But what is it that makes these questions specifically developmental? The answer lies in the unique cluster of modern conditions, which render obsolete old answers given to these questions. What are these modern conditions; what are their characteristic traits?

Life in our age is a highly self-conscious existence. We who tread planet earth in the wake of Darwin, Marx, and Freud can no longer naively believe, as did our ancestors, in the stability of natural species, the harmony of social intercourse, and the transparency of conscious motivations. Beyond these **subjective** alterations of the collective human psyche, however, four **objective** traits mark contemporary life.

1.) The first is the **vast scale** of most human activities. We have reached the point, in the size of our cities, our bureaucracies, our universities, and in the sheer volume of images and fantasies which assault our senses when, as Hegel puts it, a quantitative difference makes a qualitative difference.

2.) The second feature is **technical complexity** and the specialized division of labor which ensues therefrom. No single set of skills, manual, intellectual, or artistic can equip us to cope adequately with all our needs for unity, integration, and openness to change. While we crave new facts, we are crushed by information overload and can find no wisdom to match our science, no unifying threads around which to weave the countless strands of our expanding knowledge. In such a world, it becomes almost impossible to answer the disarmingly simple

questions: What is the good life and the relation between goods and the good, the basis of justice and equity, the right stance toward nature and technology?

3.) A third contextual condition of modern life is the **web of interdependence** which transforms local happenings into global events, and makes international conflicts impinge on local destinies. Clearly the growing interdependence of nations, communities and of individuals is a two-edged sword: at once a good and a bad thing.¹⁰ Starving nomads in the Sahel can be rescued by food airlifted from Nebraska thanks to a television report. But American napalm can also be dropped on helpless Vietnamese peasants for reasons unrelated to their local decisions or even to the wishes of their national leaders.

4.) The fourth, and most dramatic, modern condition is the **ever-shortening time lag** between changes proposed or imposed on human groups, and the deadline they face for reacting to these changes in ways which protect their integrity. Mass media, modern medicine, and technology constantly affect the consciousness, values, and destinies of people, leaving them scant time to take counsel with themselves, their traditions or their images of the future in order to shape a wise response.

Thanks to these modern conditions, the moral questions all societies faced in the past have become acutely contemporary development questions. By and large, normative questions have been ignored or badly answered by development experts and ethicists alike. Most development experts flee value-laden questions, branding them unscientific or impressionistic. Ethicists, in turn, have rarely looked to development processes and conflicts as the raw materials of their moral reflection. By remaining outside of social change dynamics, however, they risk imprisoning themselves within sterile forms of moralism which are useless when not positively harmful. The answers to the normative questions posed by development are not easy to supply: Neither ancient wisdoms interpreted in static fashion, nor uncritical modern scientific approaches can ever suffice. This is why new dialogues between ancient visions and modern hopes must be opened in ways which avoid ethnocentrism, dogmatism, and ideological manipulation.¹¹

One aim of this article is to suggest, however tentatively, how to go beyond moralism and devise ethical strategies for development. In so doing it can perhaps make some contribution to the general theme of this book: theology confronting a changing world. At no period in history has either society or church been immune to change. Yet probably never before have the citizens of society and the faithful of churches felt so powerless to control the direction, speed, and meaning of the changes they undergo.

I propose to discuss three points briefly: a) the conception of ethics as a "means of the means"; b) one possible and desirable change strategy; and c) the role of churches in development.

1. Ethics as "Means of the Means"

In a recent critical study of Nietzsche, French philosopher Gustave Thibon reinstates what he calls "the Nietzschean ideal of the sanctification of power. Heretofore power and purity could coexist, one separate from the other. It was possible, without causing too much damage, for the first to remain spiritually impure and the second materially ineffectual simply because **power had limited means at its disposal**: The worst whims of caesars did not **totally** threaten the equilibrium and survival of humanity. But nowadays power disposes of almost infinite means of destruction; therefore, can we seek salvation elsewhere than in the union of force with wisdom?"¹² Thibon is not seeking a new legitimation for political power, but rather some way of converting power to a higher ethic.

Ethicists can no longer imagine that ethics can exorcise evil from the realm of political power simply by preaching noble ideals. The Jesuit author James Schall has recently argued that Christians "have no formal social and political doctrine and that they are free to take on whatever ideological or practical form they wish in order to achieve the goals of Christianity."¹³ The Gospel, in short, issues no warrant for socialism or capitalism, for social change or for any *status quo*. This view, however, is vigorously refuted by a growing number of radical

pacifists. Chief among these is John Howard Yoder who sets out to prove "that the ministry and the claims of Jesus are best understood as presenting to men not the avoidance of political options, but one particular social-political-ethical option."¹⁴ Whatever be one's theoretical position, however, there is no doubting the prophetic summons to liberation which inspires such Latin American theologians of liberation as Gutierrez, Perez, Assman, Segundo, Dussel, and others. Yet we do need to recall that no theology of liberation or ethics of development can have any prescriptive power unless it is able to lead us **beyond moralism**. Somehow ethics must get inside the value dynamisms of the instruments utilized by development agents and become, as it were, a "means of the means."

What precisely does this enigmatic phrase signify? Many ethicists who comment on social justice rest content with portraying ideal ends and passing judgment on the means used by politicians, planners, or others to mobilize social energies. This approach fails because it remains outside the real criteria of decision invoked by those who, in plying their craft as decision makers, make and unmake social values. One may legitimately postulate, for ethics, the role assigned to sociology by Ralf Dahrendorf in these terms:

It is the sociologist's business to consider what a modern open civilized society might look like and what roads might lead to it. That is the domain of theory. It is also the sociologist's business once he is equipped with his theories to take part in the process of changing reality in making what is reasonable real. This is the domain of practice.¹⁵

Genuine ethics is a kind of **praxis**¹⁶ which generates critical reflection on the value content and meaning of one's social action. Unlike mere extrinsic treatment of means, ethical **praxis** conditions choices and priorities by assigning relative value allegiances to essential needs, basic power relationships, and criteria for determining tolerable levels of human suffering in promoting social change.¹⁷ Alternative development strategies, programs, and projects have varying impacts on populations

victimized by poverty, class privilege, economic exploitation, or political domination. This is why an ethic of social justice and equity needs to harness concrete instruments in support of the struggle conducted by social classes at the bottom of the stratification ladder. It is a hollow exercise to speak rhetorically about human dignity unless one builds social structures which foster human dignity and eliminate what impedes it: endemic disease, chronic poverty, an unjust system of land tenure, or political powerlessness. A vital nexus links any society's basic value choices to its preferred development strategy, and to the criteria it applies in all arenas of specific policy, be it employment, investment, taxes, education, etc.

Ethics is no doubt concerned with the ends of human action. And as Morris Ginsberg writes, "It is concerned also with the relative worth of the different ends in relation to the costs involved in attaining them, and this task it cannot fulfill adequately without inquiry into the basic human needs and grounds of our preferences and choices."¹⁸ Yet the manner in which ethics deals with means is also crucial. Ethics must strive untiringly to become a "means of the means" by transmitting, from inside the very instrumentalities and constraints surrounding decisions and actions, selected value allegiances and value criteria. The greatest danger faced in this enterprise is that development ethicists will fall into the role played by plantation preachers in the days of slavery, namely, giving good conscience to the rich while providing spiritual, "other-worldly" solace to the victims of unjust structures. Consequently, moral philosophers working in development teams cannot discharge their function merely by harnessing human aspirations or values to such developmental imperatives as growth, modernization, or even structural change. For this is to treat values instrumentally, as mere aids or obstacles to goals uncritically accepted as values. Ultimately it is development itself which must be critically subjected to the value tests of justice, human enhancement, spiritual liberation, and reciprocity in relations. These values judge development, not vice versa. My point, however, is that values can only judge development choices by getting inside their concrete specificity.

At this point it may be pedagogically useful to recall that ethical discourse can be carried on at four distinct levels: general ends, specific criteria which determine when these ends exist in concrete situations, clusters of interrelated means or systems which constitute strategies congenial or uncongenial to the ends sought, and individual means taken separately.¹⁹

The sharpest ethical disagreements in matters of social change are found in the two middle realms—the criteria which specify when desired goals are effectively reached and the systems of means, or strategies, deployed to obtain targeted objectives. Discussion over general ends on the other hand, rarely engenders debate for the simple reason that such ends are universal and are easy to disguise behind verbal smokescreens. Thus it is that even tyrants profess to cherish freedom and war-mongers to seek peace. And the fourth level, that of individual means, breeds little discord because each means usually can be put to a good or to a bad use and cannot be characterized as ethically good or bad except by reference to varying circumstances, motivations, constraints, and consequences. That most arguments should rage at the two middle levels is not a surprising conclusion once we recall that methodological differences usually mask ideological divergences. One's ethical stance as to ends is dramatically revealed in the measures one adopts to pursue them. Consequently, an ethics of development as "means of the means" requires not that moralists pose ideal goals and pass judgment on the means used by others to pursue these or other goals, but rather that decision makers versed in the constraints surrounding vital choices promote the values for which oppressed and underdeveloped groups struggle: greater justice, a decent sufficiency of goods for all, equitable access to collective human gains realized in domains of technology, organization, research, etc. This stance differs qualitatively from an ethic of pure efficiency in social problem solving or the mere rationalization and defense of elite interests.²⁰ The difference, finally, lies between a view of politics as the art of the possible (manipulating possibilities within given parameters) or as the art of creating new possibilities (altering the parameters themselves). In my view, a decisive

choice must be made between the two. Consequently, practitioners of development ought to adopt as their "moral imperatives in development" those strategies which harness existing social forces to implementing the values to which they give their allegiance. In practice this means preferring strategies, programs, and projects (and even modes of reaching decisions) which attach more importance to ethical considerations than to mere technical criteria of efficiency. Thus there is a kind of moral logic in Cuba's decision to place its medical investments in decentralized rural areas where the needier population is to be found. The same is true of Tanzania's efforts to upgrade the status of agronomy and other professions related to agriculture. The point is that a society's value options affect its preferred development strategy and the criteria it adopts in concrete policy arenas such as employment, education, or tax-

Ethicists should share responsibility for the practical consequences of joint decisions taken by teams of development planners, economists, and technicians. This practice holds out equal benefits to ethicists and to the quality of development itself. Unless economists, planners, and technicians assess the ethical import of their decisional criteria **from inside** the dynamics of their respective specialties, they will fall prey to the determinisms of what Ellul calls "pure technique."²¹ Ethicists, in turn, need the critical input made by problem solvers if they are to avoid purely extrinsic moralism. Only dynamic interaction between the two categories of interlocutors can lead to the formulation of ethical strategies which are a "means of the means."²² This approach to ethics views ideological, political, and technical choices as unavoidable. Without these choices, it is impossible to frame concrete policy. Among basic options to be taken is a position regarding change strategies for development. Which strategy will developers adopt?²³

2. Change Strategies

In societies where the masses are chained to conditions of degrading underdevelopment, can necessary changes ever come about solely by reformist problem solving, or is revolu-

tion required?²³ And is not the very term "revolution" itself fraught with ambiguities? Does it refer to the scope of transformations at the end of a change process, or to certain procedures (discontinuous social mutations, let us call them) for obtaining changes? I cannot here repeat earlier analyses I have made of change strategies.²⁴ My position, however, may be briefly summarized as follows.

An agent of developmental change needs to carry two arrows in his quiver: the arrow of revolution when basic structures must be altered, and the arrow of creative incrementalism when gradual problem-solving measures are necessary to create new possibilities. The problem is that most incremental measures are palliative, not creative; they attack symptoms of social ills instead of causes. Besides, it is no easy thing to identify, **before** decisions are taken, which steps are mere palliatives and which are potentially creative.²⁴

As I argued more extensively in an earlier work, *The Cruel Choice* (1971), palliative measures obstruct basic change because they lull people into believing that gradual amelioration is an adequate response to fundamental problems. As time passes, however, palliatives worsen the condition they set out to improve: They give birth to hopes they cannot satisfy or tinker with failing social mechanisms, thereby postponing treatment until the disease becomes incurable. Creative incremental measures, on the other hand, breed new possibilities for subsequent radical change, although at the moment of adoption they appear quite modest. Such measures contain a latent dynamism which propels society beyond immediate problem solving toward new possible futures. John Wilkinson aptly remarks that the "potential energy of a rock that has been sitting on top of a hill for a million years is harmless to anyone. Only when its energy can be made kinetic by some random push can it cause a new situation to arise."²⁵ Like energy, contemplated social changes enjoy a greater or lesser potential for generating major transformation. All potential social energy has to be kineticized. Of course, not all consequences of any given measure can be assessed before the fact. Nonetheless, change agents are not totally bereft of criteria for assessing the

change potential contained in contemplated moves. These criteria are both subjective and objective in nature.

An illustration may help. We may suppose that Country A favors the creation of an international ocean regime having sole authority over all seabeds and committed to using the ocean's resources exclusively for peaceful developmental purposes. Let us further assume that Country A embraces such a scheme because it sees it as a step in the direction of abolishing national sovereignties and creating world government. That country's leaders may reach the practical judgment that the cause of world government is advanced if world control over the oceans can be established before sovereign nations acquire uncontested rights over them. In this case, the measure is not merely palliative: subjectively at least, it is perceived as capable of creating new leverage for a more basic institutional change to come later.

An identical ocean regime, however, may be advocated by Country B for opposite reasons. Country B may abhor the idea of world government and the disappearance of national sovereignty. Nevertheless, the country wishes to prevent use of the ocean floor by powerful nations who might use it for warlike purposes or engage in commercial exploitation to the detriment of poorer nations. Relative to the final goal, world government, B's support of an international ocean regime must be considered a mere palliative. Incrementalism is at work in both cases, but a subjective criterion helps us discern whether the measure constitutes palliative or creative incrementalism. But we must inquire whether any objective criterion exists for discriminating between incremental steps which are mere patchwork and those which genuinely expand future possibilities.

According to Denis Gabor,²⁶ non-palliative measures, if programmed in a computer designed to isolate the consequences of a contemplated course of action, can be shown in projected games dealing with "futuribles" (i.e., future possibilities) to result in better conditions. The opposite is also true: palliatives, if played out, will make matters visibly worse. If this is true, it becomes possible to distinguish palliative from

creative incremental measures without appealing to subjective or to ideological norms. For the true believer in a free-enterprise economy or in Marxist Socialism, there is of course one simple, putative, objective criterion of discernment: the degree to which the measure envisaged strengthens or weakens the preferred system. Great wisdom is doubtless required of the programmer if he is to assess all relevant variables adequately in his computer-programming exercise. Nevertheless, if Gabor is right, it may become possible to judge the change potential of prospective measures according to some scaled coefficient of kinetic social-transformation value.

One is inescapably led to conclude that in many societies the structures of underdevelopment—poverty, dependence, technological powerlessness, and exploitation—must be drastically changed. Power relationships among classes and interest groups need to be overturned, and so, too, the rules governing access to resources. Yet the price paid in undertaking revolutionary strategies is very high: untold human suffering and sacrificed values. Nevertheless, Harvard historian Barrington Moore does well to remind us that:

Fairness demands recognition of the fact that the way nearly all history has been written imposes an overwhelming bias against revolutionary violence. Indeed the bias becomes horrifying as one comes to realize its depth. To equate the violence of those who resist oppression with the violence of the oppressor would be misleading enough.²⁷

After surveying the very high price paid by those societies which do **not** undergo needed revolutions, Moore concludes that "As I have reluctantly come to read this evidence, the costs of moderation have been at least as atrocious as those of revolution, perhaps a great deal more."²⁸ In a later work, Moore reflects sadly on the failure of many revolutions to better the lot of the oppressed. And he is struck once again by the high social costs attendant upon both problem-solving strategies within the *status quo* and revolutionary efforts to overthrow prevailing systems.²⁹

The lesson is that painless development strategies do not exist: there are no primrose paths to developmental liberation. Even a historical analysis tempered by the tragic pessimism born of the past is no excuse, however, for complicity with present evils. Particularly in the United States and other rich countries, we do well to remind ourselves that the human catastrophe forecast in the year 2000 by Forrester, Meadows and others of the "limits to growth" school is already the daily experience of hundreds of millions of people living in conditions of underdevelopment. These people lack essential goods, their lives are controlled by alien forces, and their basic rights are brutally repressed.

No change strategies are guaranteed to succeed: they all entail risks, the possibility of failure, and unpredictable conjunctural accidents. The uncertainties work both ways, however. Looking back to 1929, for instance, who would have judged Mao Tse Tung's chances of revolutionizing peasant China to be very high? His cadres had been almost annihilated by the betrayal of his Kuomintang allies, and the painful Long March was undertaken as a desperate survival measure. Yet that Long March, by placing the Chinese revolutionaries in living contact with peasant masses, enabled Mao to correct Marxist orthodoxy and to see peasants, not as bastions of conservatism and traditional loyalties, but as forming the indispensable mass base of any specifically Chinese revolution. In the last two decades only a small number of Latin American social revolutions have succeeded; many more have failed. The Peruvian revolution of 1968 is especially instructive, however, for who could have dreamed that the army allied to dissident members of the conservative ruling church, could become spearheads of a major shift in political power and social institutions? Many students of Latin American affairs believe that no social revolution can succeed in that continent unless it wins the allegiance of the following social forces: a mass base, dissident intellectuals and professionals, labor leaders, and elements of the military. Perhaps, if far-reaching social mutation is ever to occur in the United States, it too will require new alliances among such disparate forces as radical politicized

militants, dissident technocrats and bureaucrats working inside the "establishment," social prophets speaking to and for religious constituencies, critical intellectuals, and a mass base of "ordinary" American interest groups: workers, oppressed minorities and women, the ethnically marginalized, etc. The relevant point here is that no change strategy is conceivable without identifying the social forces which can implement it.

Accordingly, all individuals and groups who aspire to become change agents must constantly detect, or create, institutional leverage points whence they may contribute to overall change. This they do either by solving problems in a mode of creative incrementalism, or by seizing favorable opportunities to introduce abrupt discontinuities in oppressive social structures. Moreover, we cannot afford to ignore the important lesson learned by Orlando Fals-Borda in his study of rural violence in Colombia, namely, that subversion itself is a powerful institution-building force for development.³⁰

Every change strategy presupposes some realistic calculus of probable success. Suicidal attacks on institutions, in the naive belief that radical changes come easily or quickly, lead nowhere. Yet if excessive timidity is rarely rewarded, too realistic a sense of constraints also destroys opportunity. Vietnamese freedom fighters, the liberators of Guinea-Bissau, and struggling United States blacks all tell us that victory comes to those who sustain their commitment even in the face of failure. One need not subscribe uncritically to the view that the oppressed are historically destined to triumph in order to grasp that perseverance in struggle is the strongest weapon wielded by true agents of change. Even bitter defeats—like that inflicted on Allende's forces in Chile—can sometimes prepare future victories. The Kronstadt uprising in the Russia of 1905 was repressed, but it helped sow the seeds of revolutionary triumph in 1917. The dialectics of systematic change are as fraught with paradoxes and surprises as is history itself. Whatever the sinuous turns taken by events, however, it remains certain that the scales of societal change eventually are tipped by the intervention of human wills. And it is always a sobering truth to discover that our own wills help tip those scales!

3. Churches: Their Role in Development

But what role should churches play in promoting development? Gregory Baum argues that American theologians need to "rethink their relationship to the dominant culture of their country and engage in critical reflection on the American experience from the viewpoint of the poor."³¹ They must reflect, however, on something much broader than the American experience, inasmuch as "the United States cannot **assure** the existence of a developmental world order, but it can **prevent** such an order."³² An international order which promotes sound development for all chooses institutions and approaches to problem solving which give primacy to such values as: keeping collective violence (including the ongoing systemic violence practiced by those who exploit humans) to a minimum, maximizing social and economic well being so that a decent sufficiency of goods is available to all on a priority need basis, assuring the effective conditions rendering the exercise of human rights and of political justice possible, and governing resources in a mode of ecological integrity.³³ To these must obviously be added such values as the fostering of cultural integrity in diverse settings and the elimination of that special form of alienation in mindless affluence which Erich Fromm regards as no less dehumanizing than is alienation in misery.³⁴

The implications for Christian churches are obvious: they must deliberately choose to promote genuine development for all, liberation not domestication.³⁵ Development, as the signers of the Hartford Declaration remind us, can never be an absolute value. But neither can justice, peace, nor freedom be absolute values. Nevertheless, the Christian religion is the sacrament of God's incarnation in the flesh of human history. Consequently, Christian teachings on love of neighbor, building God's kingdom, and, in Paul's phrase, "redeeming the present," are empty rhetoric if they are not expressed in the historical practice of societal relativities. In concrete societies today, churches must decide whether to legitimize existing establishments, or become creative architects of new possibilities.

Churches which express redemptive incarnation have no

choice but to accept creative tension between two summons: to make history and to bear witness to transcendence. In order to make history they must recognize that underdevelopment, and the train of evils which go in its wake, are not **necessary** evils decreed by gods or assigned by nature, but human creations flowing from sinfulness, exploitation, ignorance, privilege. There is not, nor can there ever be, any warrant for Christian resignation in the face of stubbornly persistent structures of injustice, dehumanizing poverty, and humiliating domination. To resist these structures and to replace them with others which promote greater justice and dignity in the access to goods and their distribution, empowerment in important spheres of decision—this is what it means to make history and to transform oppressed peoples into veritable **subjects**, not mere **objects** of their social destiny.³⁶

One is entitled to ask, however, whether there is a specifically Christian way of making “making history”? The answer is affirmative: Christians are called to make history by bearing witness to transcendence. Thus neither development, nor history, nor any earthly utopia can become for them an idol, or surrogate god. History and earthly achievements enjoy, it is true, their proper autonomy. Therefore, one need not be religious, *a fortiori* one need not be Christian, in order to help build history: Marxists, humanists, and even militant enemies of religion can do it—in realms of science, politics, or simple good living. Yet many contemporary Christians are tempted to betray their own peculiar trust by reducing their religion to being merely one other instrument for transforming the world. Rene Voillaume,³⁷ a follower of Charles DeFoucauld, expressed the twofold danger facing Christians in these terms:

“Faced with a world drawn almost in spite of itself into the ever more rapid and impetuous advance of a civilization based on technical achievement, which tends to enslave humanity and shut it up within the bounds of a purely terrestrial kingdom, Christianity is at the moment exposed to two temptations. First there is the temptation to separate the destiny of

Christendom from that of the world by a movement of withdrawal, Christians retreating into a 'small residue' living in expectation of the advent of the spiritual reign of Jesus in their souls and in the life to come. This goes with a desire to extend the contemplative's way of life, set apart by vocation, to the whole community of the faithful. And on the other hand there is the temptation for the Christian to commit himself with his whole being to all sorts of scientific, economic, social and political activities, so as to bring Christian influence to bear on the structure of tomorrow's world, at the possible cost of reducing Christianity to being no more than the best solution to worldly problems, *de facto* if not *de jure*, and losing the sense of a spiritual kingdom, of the transcendent nature of Christ's mission, of worship, and of the divine supernatural destiny of all humanity.

A Christian must not succumb to either of these temptations, but must overcome them by transcending both, in a full realization of his vocation as man and son of God."

Equal respect for the specificity of the Christian contribution to history building was evidenced by Che Guevara when he urged Christians to join the revolution "without the pretension of evangelizing the Marxists and without the cowardice of hiding their faith in order to assimilate themselves."³⁸

There is no reading of the gospel, however, which can dispense Christians from the burden of bearing witness to their transcendent God by loving their neighbors as themselves: by giving them food and drink and comfort and lodging. "Whatever you do to any of these, the least among my brothers and sisters, you do to me." To struggle in order to change society with a view to achieving humane forms of development is indeed the central way in which Christians can simultaneously make history and witness to transcendence.³⁹

The most "religious" way to make history, however, even at the service of "radical" transformation of societal structures, is by using the "poor means." If indeed churches must speak the truth to power, they do so best when they speak from arenas of powerlessness they share with the oppressed. Christopher Dawson well understood that:

"The true makers of history are not to be found on the surface of events among the successful politicians or the successful revolutionaries: these are the servants of events. Their masters are the spiritual men whom the world knows not, the unregarded agents of the creative action of the Spirit."⁴⁰

One is forcibly struck by the contemporary evidence: those who have done the most to "humanize" and "Christianize" social change are the prophets who have resisted the enticements of power—Danielo Dolci, Dom Helder Camara, Kagawa, Martin Luther King, Jr. The sad truth is that most churches have allowed themselves to become infatuated with legitimacy, established power, and the hope of influencing policy makers. Yet legitimacy, established power, and influential policy making are precisely, and all too often, the institutional sources of the oppression, elitism, and privilege which perpetuate underdevelopment. This is why the truly religious makers of social history are not the plantation preachers, the corporate ethicists, or the professional moral pedagogues, but rather the struggling deviants, the social prophets, who summon power to truth by their example of taking upon their shoulders the vulnerability of the oppressed.

Because churches exist, however, and are all too human even in their sociological and institutional manifestations, there is room for church-sponsored policy research on development, for lobbying on behalf of victimized populations, for seeking greater economic or technical efficiency in arenas of planning or enterprise. My point is simply that there is no gainsaying the superior redemptive quality of the "poor means." Abbe Pierre, Dorothy Day, and Mother Teresa have done more to alleviate

material misery—hunger, joblessness, and hopelessness—than dozens of well conceived, church-funded, social welfare programs. This is simply to say that prophecy, in word and deed, is a better tool for making history in the religious mode than is ecclesiastical institutionalism. Most of us, however, must continue to work at such nonheroic tasks as research, writing, teaching, funding, programming and we should not abandon our proper responsibilities. But it does help if we avoid entertaining illusions regarding the relative efficacy of our own witness compared to that of those who struggle in poverty and powerlessness. Our God, after all, has chosen “the foolish of this world to confound the wise, the outcasts and derelicts to put to shame the respectable.”

Lest I be misunderstood here, let me emphasize that I consider most churches to be too institutionally passive, and resigned, in the face of prevalent injustice and inequality. My plea, therefore, is not to abandon the monumental task of changing history to a few heroic figures. On the contrary, mainstream Christianity must be awakened from its comfortable, or guilt-laden lethargy, as the case may be, and achieve an ever higher coefficient of insertion in temporal history. The “coefficient of insertion in temporal history,” when applied to a philosophy, refers to its ability to elicit from its adepts the conviction that the future is important and possible to fashion, and to supply them with pressing reasons for committing themselves in the present to build a desired future. Insertion in historical struggles is a necessity for the simple reason that the only alternative is cowardice.

No one gives such eloquent voice to the moral turpitude lying behind passive resignation in the face of oppression as does Nikos Kazantzakis. We read in his epic poem *The Qdyssey, A Modern Sequel*:

Cursed be all those on land and sea who eat their
fill,
cursed be all those who starve yet raise no hand in
protest,
cursed be the bread, the wine, the meat which day by
day

descends into the entrails of the exploited man,
and turns not into freedom's cry, the murderer's
ruthless knife.⁴¹

Accordingly, Christians cannot legitimately invoke either their sense of transcendence or their apocalyptic beliefs to excuse their sins of omission in the face of mass injustice. Teilhard de Chardin explains that it is precisely because they have "pre-adhered to God" that Christians are called to triumph over the world.⁴² Their very sense of transcendence, of the transfigured importance conferred upon **this world** by Christ's resurrection, ought to give Christians a special sense of urgency in building institutions which are genuinely developmental, more humanizing, and less alienating. As I wrote ten years ago, "a Christian will work for a more rational and equitable economic structure not because that is the condition in which the gospel can triumph; but because it is an urgent task, humanly worthwhile in itself, and any scorning of its value amounts to an affront to the profound significance of life with its right to solicit man's adhesion."⁴³ Any religion which functions socially and politically as opium for the masses is false religion. One is thankful to Marx for having forced Christians to abandon purely otherworldly notions of transcendence. Thanks to the demystification wrought by Marx, theoretically, and by Third World politics in the last two decades, we need no longer approach the question of what Huston Smith calls "ontological transcendence" in apologetical fashion, as if such transcendence "were a crutch for the maimed."⁴⁴

James Douglass correctly points out that contemplation, transcendence, and liberation from sin are the Way through which Christians learn the true dimensions even of earthly liberation.⁴⁵ Religion, in short, must avoid the twin abdications of a flight from history in which mystery and transcendence become illusions buttressing present alienation, and the flight from transcendence in which religion becomes but a disguised, and limping surrogate for full, and courageous,

secularity. A third alternative exists, of course: namely, that religion remain spiritual and redemptive, individualizing its incarnational mission and abandoning the realms of societal existence—economics, politics, technology, science and ecology—to the wolves of *Realpolitik* or sheer empiricism. But religion can never truly escape from living in a state of dialectical tension between immanence and commitment, on the one hand, and transcendence and detachment, on the other. It remains true, “that the poor we shall always have with us” but it is no less true that “if we see our brothers and sisters naked or hungry, and lift not a finger to help them, we have no faith within us.”

Although this tension ought to be a creative one, in practice it is often destructive. Many Christians, unable to bear the stress, let go, either of their commitment to social change or their fidelity to mystery. The greatest danger facing Christian social change agents today is clearly the loss of hope. The vital question then becomes: can churches themselves become messengers of hope in what Jacques Ellul calls a time of abandonment?⁴⁶ Too many efforts have been repressed, snuffed out, or undermined by the very errors committed by well intentioned reformers or revolutionaries. All around us prophets of doom preach the message that generous attempts to build a better world lead, on balance, to more suffering than deliverance.⁴⁷ It is as though social change experts were conspiring to preach that it is the better part of wisdom, and of valor, to settle for lesser evils and not to struggle for a better society. Such pessimism, however, seems to me to be a peculiar malady afflicting mainly intellectuals in rich countries. The oppressed masses themselves, those who experience in the flesh the sting and stigma of poverty, disease, and political oppression, cannot afford the luxury of indulging in despair. One is repeatedly struck by the buoyancy, the hope, the willingness to continue struggling displayed by Quechua peasants in Bolivia, rural blacks in Georgia, persecuted militants in Brazil and Chile, native Americans in North America. And even in a professionally detached publication issued by the World Bank we read recently that:

In a land where millions go to bed each night hungry, and others die or are physically or intellectually stunted from lack of food, it is hard to be optimistic about the future. In spite of the lack of fertilizer, in spite of the incredible string of natural misfortunes which have befallen Bangladesh, **its people have not given up hope.**⁴⁸

Churches, therefore, must "return to the people," to the experiences, sufferings, and hopes of the poor of Yahweh. Otherwise, they too will fall prey to the pessimism of the futurists, the social engineers, the disenchanted radicals of yesterday who become today's accommodators or "realists." Ultimately, realists end up being legitimizers of present evils. And in the longer historical run, the only valid form of realistic politics is creative Utopianism.

Conclusion

If any human institution exists which ought to be able to puncture the infatuation of our contemporaries in the rich world with despair, minimum solutions to social problems, and rationalized abdication from the struggle, it is the Christian church. The church has the resources to counter despair and nurture hope because it is a mystical body born of resurrection, yet made up of flesh and blood members. A resurrectional church is, by definition, capable of prophecy, even institutional prophecy in a technocratic age.⁴⁹ The sustained commitment to just and humane developmental change is not founded on any rational calculus of necessary or probable success. Rather it is based on a hope-laden belief that every effort is worth making to create new possibilities. Such a hope is the only soil in which ethical strategies for global development can be planted, watered, grow, and bear fruit.

The emerging consciousness of the Third World, the outraged demand voiced by every Spartacus and downtrodden group for bread, dignity, and freedom, may be a kind of 20th century *preparatio evangelica* for a new action of the Chris-

tian leaven in a secular world. More consciously than ever before, "The whole earth groans in labor pains awaiting liberation from the corruption of sin" (*Rom* 8,22). The whole earth, animate and inanimate, groans under a law of corruption and longs for the time of its freedom from pain and its full measure of happiness. One dares dream that, perhaps for the first time in their 20 centuries of incarnational experience, churches can witness to transcendence by making developmental history—and this time, not too little and not too late. This is the abiding Christian hope.

And surely, to sow the seeds of such a hope is part of the noble mission given to every Christian, and especially to every teacher of college theology in the "developed" world.

Footnotes

- ¹ From *Peasant Theology, Reflections by the Filipino Peasants on Their Process of Social Revolution* (Bangkok: World Student Christian Federation, Asia Region, January 1976), pp. 3-4.
- ² Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937).
- ³ Benjamin Higgins, *Economic Development, Problems, Principles and Policies* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., revised edition, 1968), p. 369.
- ⁴ Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 11th edition, 1966), p. 38.
- ⁵ David E. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), pp. 5-6.
- ⁶ These questions are analyzed at length in Denis Goulet, *The Cruel Choice* (New York: Atheneum, 1971).
- ⁷ For an earlier statement of this point see Denis Goulet, "The United States: A Case of Anti-Development?" *Motive* (January, 1970), pp. 6-13.
- ⁸ Cf. L. J. Lebreton, *Dynamique Concrète du Développement* (Paris: Les Editions Ouvrieres, 1961).
- ⁹ Cf. Anthony Arblaster and Steven Lukes, editors, *The Good Society, A Book of Readings* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1971).

- ¹⁰ This ambiguity, as it affects international relations, is examined in Denis Goulet, "World Interdependence: Verbal Smokescreen, or New Ethic?" in *Development Paper, No. 21* (Washington, D. C.: Overseas Development Council, March 1976), pp. 1-36.
- ¹¹ Cf. Robert Vachon, "Developpment et Liberation dans une Perspective Interculturelle et Cosmique," in *Bulletin Monchanin* 8, no. 2 (Cahier 49, 1975), pp. 3-30.
- ¹² Gustave Thibon, *Nietzsche ou le declin de l'Esprit*, Paris: Fayard, 1975, p. 75. Translation mine.
- ¹³ James V. Schall, "The Nonexistence of Christian Political Philosophy," *Worldview* 19 (April 1976), p. 26.
- ¹⁴ John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), p. 23. Cf. Richard K. Taylor, *Economics and the Gospel* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1973). A useful attempt to evaluate the significance of disagreements in these domains is found in James W. Fowler, "Faith, Liberation and Human Development," in *The Thirkfield-Jones Lectures*, Gammon Theological Seminary, February 26-27, 1974, pp. 1-33.
- ¹⁵ Cited in David Walker, "Ralf Dahrendorf's Vision for the London School of Economics," *Change* 8, no. 5 (June 1976), p. 24.
- ¹⁶ See Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).
- ¹⁷ On human costs, see Peter L. Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice* (New York: Basic Books, 1974). For a critical review of Berger, cf. Denis Goulet, "Pyramids of Sacrifice: The High Price of Social Change," *Christianity and Crisis*, 34 (1975), pp. 231-237.
- ¹⁸ Morris Ginsberg, *On Justice in Society* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 29.
- ¹⁹ On this, see Denis Goulet, *Etica del Desarrollo* (Barcelona/Montevideo: Estela/IEPAL, 1965), pp. 77-80.
- ²⁰ On this, see the interesting treatment of the "mercenaries of the status quo" in Tibor Mende, *From Aid to Recolonization* (New York: Pantheon, 1973), pp. 86-129.
- ²¹ See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), *passim*. The danger of surrendering to the exigencies of "pure technique" is well illustrated, in the realm of politics, in Charles Frankel, "Morality and U. S. Foreign Policy," *Worldview* 18 (June 1975), pp. 13-23.

- 22 For more on this point, see Denis A. Goulet, "Ethical Strategies in the Struggle for World Development," in *Global Justice & Development* (Washington, D. C.: Overseas Development Council), 1975, pp. 39-56.
- 23 Although written several years ago, the following review of current literature is still valuable. See Henry Bienen, *Violence and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).
- 24 *Is Gradualism Dead?*, Ethics and Foreign Policy Series (New York: Council on Religion and International Affairs, 1970), 34 pp.
- 25 John Wilkinson, "The Revolutionary Potential," paper delivered at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, January 17, 1969, p. 1. An abbreviated version of this paper has appeared in *The Center Magazine*, March 1969, pp. 72-76.
- 26 Information supplied to the author by Denis Gabor in a private conversation May 8, 1969, following discussion of several Gabor papers at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. These papers were entitled: "A New Anthropology"; "The Mass University"; and "Fighting Existential Nausea in the Technological Society."
- 27 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 505.
- 28 *Idem.*
- 29 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery and Upon Certain Proposals to Eliminate Them* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972).
- 30 Cf. Orlando Fals-Borda, *Subversion and Social Change in Colombia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).
- 31 Gregory Baum, "The Christian Left at Detroit," *The Ecumenist* 13 (September-October, 1975), p. 81.
- 32 Denis Goulet, "Needed: A Cultural Revolution in the U.S.," *The Christian Century* 91 (September 4, 1974), p. 816.
- 33 Cf. Richard A. Falk, *A Study of Future Worlds* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), pp. 11-32.
- 34 In "Introduction" to *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*, Erich Fromm, (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), p. ix.
- 35 On this distinction, see Denis Goulet, "Development . . . or Liberation?" in *International Development Review* 13 (September 1971), pp. 6-10.

- ³⁶ This distinction is eloquently analyzed and illustrated in Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).
- ³⁷ Rene Voillaume, *Au Coeur des Masses* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1965), p. 532. An abbreviated English translation of this work has appeared under the title *Seeds of the Desert*.
- ³⁸ Guevara's words cited in "Both Marx and Jesus," *Time*, June 5, 1972, p. 57.
- ³⁹ This twofold vocation is described at greater length in Denis Goulet, *A New Moral Order* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1974), chapter V.
- ⁴⁰ Christopher Dawson, *Dynamics of World History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1957), p. 364.
- ⁴¹ Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Odyssey, A Modern Sequel* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), Book X, lines 390-395.
- ⁴² Cited in Henri de Lubac, *The Religion of Teilhard de Chardin* (New York: Desclee, 1967).
- ⁴³ Denis A. Goulet, "Secular History and Teleology," *World Justice* 8 (September 1966), p. 13.
- ⁴⁴ Huston Smith, "The Reach and the Grasp: Transcendence Today" in Herbert W. Richardson and Donald P. Cutler, eds. *Transcendence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 9.
- ⁴⁵ James W. Douglass, "The Yin-Yang of Resistance and Contemplation," in Thomas E. Quigley, ed., *Freedom and Unfreedom in The Americas* (New York: IDOC Books, 1971), p. 112.
- ⁴⁶ See Jacques Ellul, *Hope in Time of Abandonment* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973).
- ⁴⁷ This is the message of the works cited earlier, Berger's *Pyramids of Sacrifice* and Moore's *Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery*. Another book by an important development writer in the same vein is Robert L. Heilbroner's, *An Inquiry Into The Human Prospect* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974).
- ⁴⁸ "New Rice Varieties Bring Hope for Food Increase in Bangladesh," in *Report: NEWS OF THE WORLD BANK GROUP*, May-June, 1975, p. R-2, article signed P.D.M. Italics mine.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Arend Theodoor van Leeuwen, *Prophecy in a Technocratic Era* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968).

The Church and Social Change: An Ecclesiological Critique



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Precis

The Christian responsibility to work for social justice at a personal level is clear, but that mandate becomes problematic when applied to the institutional church working through its recognized ecclesiastical organizations and subdivisions. Clearly, the church's mission includes the confrontation with evil societal structures, but how should the church participate in the transformation of the world? Should the official church "directly and explicitly engage in the process of social change or in providing specific social services normally supplied by governmental and other private agencies"? Several positions on this question have been advanced, but the only one that fully acknowledges both the church's mission and its limitations in the social sphere is the view that the church should provide specific social services on a substitutive basis alone. The church has no proper mission in the temporal order, but it may supply for the deficiencies of other responsible agencies. When such substitutive action is taken, however, disagreement among Christians about specific political or social choices should be expected and not constitute a test of orthodoxy. Thus the search for justice is not an exclusively Christian concern; what supplies Christian specificity is a commitment to justice within the context and proclamation of God's grace manifest in Christ. This proclamation implies the transformation of oppressive ecclesial structures in concert with political liberation.

The Church and Social Change: An Ecclesiological Critique

The argument upon which this article is based is fourfold:

1. Our understanding of the church's mission for social change is shaped and determined by our understanding of the Kingdom of God and of its relationship with both human progress and the church.

2. "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world," which are "a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel,"¹ comprises (1) proclamation, which includes a) specific negative criticism, and b) specific positive proposals, and (2) formal institutional action, which includes a) specific social services, and b) specific political engagement.

3. Although "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world" are authentically "a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel," they are not distinctively or exclusively Christian responsibilities.

4. The credibility and effectiveness of the church's distinctive sacramental, kerygmatic, and even diaconal functions are linked inextricably with her readiness and openness to internal structural reform.

At this particular time, however, we will focus only upon the second and third elements of the total argument.

Definitions

There are also four fundamental terms employed throughout this paper which require antecedent definition: church, Kingdom of God, social change, and justice.

By "church" I mean both the whole body or congregation of Christians who are called to acknowledge the lordship of Jesus in word, in sacrament, in witness and in service, for the sake of the coming Kingdom of God; and also individual groups or congregations of Christians at various levels of institutional organization, e.g., parochial, diocesan, regional, national, multinational, and transnational.

"Church" comes into being, to one degree or another, where there is 1) a corporate confession of the lordship of Jesus; 2) ratification of that confession of faith in Baptism, the Eucharist, and other sacraments; 3) regular nourishment on the biblical word of God as a force that summons the community of faith; 4) a sense of fellowship within the group, i.e., a common awareness of the call to become a community; 5) an acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the basis of one's values and ethical commitment; and 6) the existence and exercise of certain formal ministries designed to assist the community in remaining faithful to its mission and providing order and coherence to its internal life.²

Each of these ecclesial elements is a matter of degree. On the other hand, the noun "church" is not applicable except where all of these elements are present, to one degree or another. Thus, we have to distinguish between movements and associations **within** the church, and the church itself.

For purposes of this article, however, a further clarification is required. When we speak of the "church's" work for justice, we are speaking not only of "church" in a formal territorial sense (e.g., at the diocesan or parochial levels), but also of "church" in an official, or quasi-official, institutional sense. Here we would indeed include movements and associations **within** the church. No one seriously can question the duty of Christians to work for justice at a personal level or in informal

groups. The issue is whether the church, at the level of an official or quasi-official presence, is called to work for justice. The reality of "church" is engaged officially, or at least quasi-officially, not only at the traditional canonical levels, but also in and through recognized ecclesiastical organizations.

It is not always clear what such "recognition" would entail. Surely, if an organization, association, or movement is at least partially funded by another, clearly official ecclesiastical agency and/or if personnel is assigned to such organizations by authoritative officeholders within the church, then one can conclude that "recognition" has been conferred. Thus, the Justice and Peace Division of the United States Catholic Conference, for example, falls within our discussion of the problem at hand, even though that division cannot, under any theological circumstances, be called "the church" or "a church."

By "church" I also mean something far more specific than Gregory Baum's definition of "church" as that which happens "whenever and wherever people become friends through God's presence to them"³ or Rosemary Ruether's notion that "church is where the Spirit is," that is, "where the struggle against dehumanization and falsehood and for truth and real life is taking place."⁴

The church is universal in mission, but specific in identity. It is not just any congregation of people locked together in friendship and committed to the struggle for justice, but rather it is that specific congregation which confesses and celebrates the lordship of Jesus, the conviction that Jesus Christ is "the key, the focal point, and the goal of all human history."⁵

By "Kingdom of God" I mean the redemptive presence of God actualized through the power of God's reconciling Spirit. Literally, the Kingdom of God is the reign or rule of God. The kingdom happens whenever and wherever the will of God is fulfilled, for God rules where God's will holds sway. And since God's will is applicable to the cosmos, to nature, to history, to institutions, to groups, as well as to individuals, the Kingdom of God is as broad and as overarching as the claims and scope of the divine will itself.

Speaking precisely, one might argue that the Kingdom of

God is indistinguishable from God as such. The kingdom is not something other than God. The Kingdom of God is God insofar as God is redemptively present and active in our midst through the power of the Spirit. The kingdom is the divine redemptive presence, reconciling, renewing, healing, and liberating.

By "social change" I mean a change in the structures, or institutional interrelationships, of society significant enough to affect the way of life of that society.⁶

By "justice" I mean that cardinal virtue which is directed to the creation of a situation, condition, or state of affairs wherein the rights of each and all are respected, protected, and in proper equilibrium, one with another. There are at least four different kinds of justice: commutative, legal, distributive, and social.

"Commutative justice" relates to contractual obligations between individuals. It involves a strict right and the obligation of restitution.

"Legal justice" relates to the obligation of the individual citizen toward society in general and toward the government in particular.

"Distributive justice" relates to the obligation of a government to apply fairly and evenly the burdens and benefits of societal life among its citizens.

And "social justice" relates to the systems, structures, and institutions within which and by which individuals, groups, and governments operate. As such, social justice is directly concerned with social change.

All four kinds of justice, but especially the fourth, "social justice," are directed to the creation of a situation, condition, or state of affairs wherein the rights of each and all are respected, protected, and in proper equilibrium, one with another.

That is why Pope Paul VI and many others have insisted that there can be no peace without justice. Peace, the tranquillity of order, exists when there is indeed a state of personal, social, political, and economic equilibrium, none of which is achieved without the realization of the virtue of justice.

So, too, in a very real sense the Kingdom of God, in its final stage, is the state of justice perfectly fulfilled. God's will is finally and fully realized when all things have been reconciled to God through the work of the Son and the reconciling power of the Spirit (Eph 1:11-14).

Thesis 1:

"Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world," which are "a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel," comprises (1) proclamation, which includes a) specific negative criticism, and b) specific positive proposals, and (2) formal institutional action, which includes a) specific social services, and b) specific political engagement.

The Roman Catholic Church's official teaching has consistently supported the thesis that the pursuit of justice is a necessary part of the Church's mission: Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963), the Second Vatican Council's *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) and, of course, the document *Justice in the World*, of the Third International Synod of Bishops (1971).⁷ No assertion on this point, however, has been more direct and unequivocal than the one already cited at the beginning of this first thesis: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us," the synodal bishops declared, "as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."

The assertion is, for all practical purposes, undeniable. A counterargument would have to rest on the assumption that Christian morality is essentially and exclusively individualistic, that it has nothing whatever to do with our social, political, economic, or professional lives and values. But that position cannot be substantiated. Indeed, it is explicitly and forcefully rejected in all of the aforementioned ecclesiastical documents, especially in Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*:

Nor, on the contrary, are they any less wide of the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations, and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs in such a way as to imply that these are altogether divorced from the religious life. This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age . . .

Therefore, let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation.⁸

Where the real difficulty arises is in the matter of specificity. All must agree, if they are not to contradict contemporary Roman Catholic theology or the consistent teaching of the official leadership of the church, that the church's mission somehow includes concern for the realization of justice. The question remains, however: "How does the church express that concern for justice (and we are speaking here of **social** justice, in particular, and of the social change to which it is inevitably directed)?"

Does the church simply leave the matter to the personal discretion of each of its members? Or can we speak here of an official, or at least quasi-official, ecclesiastical activity wherein the

organized, institutionalized Christian community, at one level or another, is directly and explicitly engaged in the process of social change or in the providing of specific social services normally supplied by governmental and other private agencies? Four distinct positions have been defended.

1. National surveys have shown that there are many Roman Catholics and other Christians who would argue strongly for a personal, rather than a corporate, involvement in the struggle for justice.

But the position fails on at least three counts: (1) it reflects an excessively narrow, and biblically unwarranted, notion of the Kingdom of God; (2) it effectively denies the connection between creation and redemption; and (3) it is inconsistent with recent official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, especially *Gaudium et spes* (n. 43) and *Justice in the World*, of the Third International Synod of Bishops.⁹ These and many other documents speak of the responsibility of the church to do more than exhort her membership to personal Christian service. They speak also of the church's duty to "courageously denounce injustice."¹⁰ This last counterargument would not be so pertinent if it were not for the fact that those Catholics who defend an individualistic position often are, at the same time, vigorous advocates of papal and episcopal authority.

2. Does the church provide only a negative critique of the pretensions and values of the principalities and powers, challenging their innate tendencies to self-absolutization, i.e., to identifying themselves with the final and perfect Kingdom of God? This seems to be the position adopted by Johannes Metz. The task of the church, as a corporate, institutionalized reality, is to criticize what those in power have done or are doing rather than suggesting alternative courses of action. The mission of the church includes the specific denunciation of injustice, but the church is not competent to advocate positive solutions, nor to select among various solutions which have, in fact, been proposed and have become a matter of general political discussion and debate.¹¹

The problem with this view is that it seems to place the church too often in the role of the outsider, intensely dis-

satisfied with the way things are but of no help at all in offering constructive alternatives. Furthermore, if the church fails to endorse specific proposals for social change, by its silence it may, in fact, be contributing to the success of other, less acceptable, perhaps even totally unacceptable, solutions.

3. Should the church not only criticize but also offer alternative proposals and solutions to political and social problems which touch upon the virtue of justice? As Edward Schillebeeckx has argued, the church can no longer merely speak in general terms based on its reading of the historical past but must also "give a lead in those moral decisions that are opening up the future."¹² Indeed, "the church's critical function is not that of an outsider, pursuing a parallel path, but rather that of one who is critically involved in the building of the world and the progress of nations."¹³

Such a position avoids the difficulty surrounding the preceding view that the church's involvement in the process of social change should be limited to negative criticism. The church is no longer merely the outsider, but must take an active responsibility for devising and supporting concrete proposals and programs designed to achieve justice at all levels of society. On the other hand, such a position does not satisfy those who argue that the church, as an institution, must make an impact on behalf of justice within the social and political processes themselves. Indeed, even where the church seems to be struggling to maintain a perfectly neutral posture, it cannot avoid having some impact, direct or indirect, upon the quality and character of the social order. The church holds property. It has a certain measure of civic influence. It has an effect on the formation of personal values which have social and political implications. It has investments in companies which make an even more direct impact on the social, political, and especially economic orders. Indeed, official church teachings themselves seem at times to suggest a wider role for the church than critical proclamation, however prophetic and however constructive.¹⁴

4. Should the church, therefore, do more than speak against injustice and in support of proposals for the expansion of

justice? Must the church also commit itself institutionally to the realization of justice? Does its mission require that the church become an active participant in the process of social change both through the providing of specific social services normally supplied by governmental and other private agencies, and through specific political engagement?

There are many Christians today who would answer affirmatively, but they are, in turn, divided on two questions: (1) whether the church's providing of specific social services should be on a **substitutive** basis alone, or whether such ecclesiastical involvement is **proper** to the church's mission; and (2) whether the church can ever participate in a violent political process of social change, or whether her involvement must always stop short of complicity in violent action.

a.) Social Services.

There are those, especially Wolfhart Pannenberg, Juan Luis Segundo, and I include myself, who argue that whereas formal institutional action in the matter of specific social services, in addition to proclamation, is both justifiable and necessary, such action is to be initiated and maintained only where it is clearly a matter of supplying for the deficiencies of other responsible agencies, governmental or otherwise, or, as Segundo puts it, "only when there is a lack of personnel or institutions to handle imperative needs."¹⁵ In other words, specific social action of this kind is justified only when it is clearly **substitutive**. But even "her substitutive effort may unwittingly turn into an indirect use of power designed to preserve the Christian masses from the options offered by pluralism."¹⁶

Pannenberg makes a similar argument:

The church's devotion is to the impact of the future of God's Kingdom on present life in all its dimensions. The specifically social activities of the church (its welfare organizations, child care centers, nursing and hospital establishments, schools, etc.) are subsidiary and temporary. The church engages in these activities as a **substitute** for the political

structures of society. It is a strange twisting of its sense of mission when the church becomes jealous of the state and wants to monopolize certain welfare activities. The church's satisfaction is in stimulating the political community to accept its responsibilities.¹⁷

Such action has three beneficial effects: (1) an unmet need is fulfilled (the diaconal element); (2) the attention of government and other private parties is called to a previously unmet need (the prophetic, or kerygmatic, element); and (3) the church gives witness to her faith in Christ (the sacramental element).

Furthermore, it seems that such a position avoids the difficulties inherent in the preceding options, without, however, placing itself at odds with the admittedly ambiguous teaching of Vatican II; namely, that the church has "no proper mission" in the temporal or political order.¹⁸

On the other hand, there are Christians who reductively argue that the church as an institutional, corporate reality, does have a proper role in the social and political orders, without regard for the quality or even of the existence of other potentially responsible agencies. Ironically some of those who defend this view are themselves theologically conservative on most issues. They are the ones who see no need at all to justify the existence, for example, of Catholic schools, hospitals, counseling agencies, and the like.

The principle difficulty is the theological, and more directly, the biblical foundation of such a view. It is very problematical indeed that such a view could be supported by the classic texts of the Christian tradition, as Avery Dulles has pointed out.¹⁹ What warrants or criteria can the advocates of **proper**, over against **substitutive**, action present in defense of their view?

b.) Political Engagement.

The official, or at least quasi-official, involvement of the church in the social order raises questions about specific acts of political engagement as well as the supplying of social services. Such political engagements might include the organiza-

tion of a lobby on behalf of tax reform, or to alleviate the crisis of world hunger. Such direct involvement in the political process, however, should meet the following criteria: (1) The issue at hand must clearly be **justice-related**. (2) The ecclesiastical agency (U.S.C.C., a given diocese, etc) should have the **competence** to deal with the issue. (3) There should be **sufficient resources** within the church to deal with the problem effectively. (4) The issue should have a **prior claim** over other justice-related problems which compete for the church's attention. (5) The form of ecclesiastical action should not unnecessarily or unduly **polarize** the church itself.

Corollary:

A diversity of viewpoints is to be expected and tolerated, i.e., agreement with the specific form of political action selected by the church should not become a test of authentic Christian faith.

Differences arise among Christians, and even among theologians, on the limits of such political action. Must the church's direct involvement with the political process stop short of complicity in violence? I should argue that it must and here I should identify myself with the arguments Martin Luther King, Jr. provided in defense of nonviolent resistance to injustice.²⁰

On the other hand, there are some who leave room even for violent action on the church's part. This may indeed be representative of the thinking of some identified with the Latin American school of liberation theology. That view is purely problematical. The burden of proof lies entirely on the shoulders of those who want to defend the thesis.²¹

Thesis II:

Although “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world” are authentically “a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel,” they are not distinctively or exclusively Christian responsibilities.

But no matter how specific the church’s official pronouncements or actions on behalf of justice, I should argue that the church’s work for justice is not a distinctively or exclusively Christian responsibility.²² We are called to the realization of justice for each and for all because we are persons, creatures of God, brothers and sisters of one another under God. Our Christian faith specifies the rationale and the motivation. It does not initiate the responsibility. The demands of justice rest on the shoulders of every man and woman, not just upon the Christian’s.

What, then, is distinctive about the church’s mission? What is there that the church is called upon to do which is not, at the same time, an obligation upon the rest of humankind?

Christians alone acknowledge that Jesus is Lord. Christians alone proclaim that historic conviction of faith. Christians alone ritualize and celebrate that historic conviction of faith. Christians alone form fellowships specifically in the name of Jesus and in explicit openness to the Holy Spirit. Christians alone offer themselves as a model of the viability of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

By proclamation, by celebration, by example, and by service, the Christian community is called to be the sacrament of

divine salvation in Christ. "The church is a visible communion in grace . . . the earthly sign of the triumphant redeeming grace of Christ."²³ The church is "a sign lifted up among the nations to show to all the victorious Christ. . . ."²⁴ The church is "the continuance, the contemporary presence, of that real, eschatologically triumphant and irrevocably established presence in the world, in Christ, of God's salvific will . . . The abiding presence of Christ in the church is the sign that God in his merciful love identifies himself in Christ with the world."²⁵ The church is "the visible sacrament of (the) saving unity" brought by Christ.²⁶ The "first interior concern of the church . . . is the clarity and transparency of her sign-function."²⁷ The same position is taken by Henri deLubac,²⁸ Otto Semmelroth,²⁹ Piet Smulders,³⁰ Yves Congar,³¹ J. Groot,³² Gustave Martelet,³³ and most recently, Avery Dulles.³⁴

"The church therefore is in the first instance a sign," Dulles writes. "It stands under a divine imperative to make itself a convincing sign. It appears most fully as a sign when its members are evidently united to one another and to God through holiness and mutual love, and when they visibly gather to confess their faith in Christ and to celebrate what God has done for them in Christ."³⁵

But even those theologians who now emphasize the sacramentality of the church's nature and mission tend to neglect its most practical corollary: the church must be engaged constantly in internal structural reform.

Preconciliar Roman Catholic ecclesiology may have exaggerated the institutional aspects of the church, but much American and European postconciliar ecclesiology appears to ignore those aspects in favor of an approach that is more oriented toward peoplehood, on the one hand, and the charismatic, on the other. But the church is the sacrament of Christ in its entirety, not only through its people energized by the Spirit but also through its structures and institutional patterns of behavior. If its people can obscure the presence of Christ by their personal and collective sins, so can the structures and institutions obscure the presence of Christ by their rigidity and oppressiveness.

In almost every instance, substantial regard for the internal reform of the church is absent from the writings of the aforementioned sacramental ecclesiologists. They do not draw the practical corollary in practical detail.

On the other hand, Catholic theologians in the Latin American liberation school (and their North American collaborators) seem to be particularly unfriendly toward the issue of ecclesiastical reform. This is especially clear in Philip Berryman's article, "Latin American Liberation Theology," in *Theological Studies*, September 1973. He argues for "a theological primacy of human liberation over intrachurch reform,"³⁶ thereby setting the one against the other, as if mutually opposed. Hugo Assmann vigorously advances such a thesis, arguing that "the really profound discrepancy, which threatens to become an abyss, is that which exists between intrachurch reformers, nourished on North Atlantic theological progressivism, and Christians impelled by and committed to the fundamental challenges of the liberation process."³⁷

"Liberation theology is convinced," Berryman writes, "that church renewal cannot be sought independently of the struggle for liberation."³⁸ But the converse of that statement is also true. Fortunately, not all Latin American theologians of liberation exclude that other side of the formula. Gutierrez, for example, does acknowledge the importance of church reform in principle, but he devotes very little attention to the subject, and he is exceedingly unspecific when he does.

"The demands placed on the church by prophetic denunciation, by the conscientizing evangelization of the oppressed, and by poverty," Gutierrez writes, "sharply reveal the inadequacy of the structures of the church for the world in which it lives."³⁹

"As a sacramental community," he continues, "the church should signify in its own internal structure the salvation whose fulfillment it announces . . . As a sign of the liberation of man and history, the church itself in its concrete existence ought to be a place of liberation . . . If we conceive of the church as a sacrament of the salvation of the world, then it has all the more obligation to manifest in its visible structures the message that it bears."⁴⁰

The same document that the Catholic social activist cites so proudly, the Third International Synod's *Justice in the World*, is itself emphatic on this question of ecclesiastical reform.

The church is indeed called upon to give witness before the world of the need for love and justice contained in the gospel message, but that witness, according to the synod, is "to be carried out in church institutions themselves and in the lives of Christians."⁴¹

"While the church is bound to give witness to justice," the document states, "she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and life style found within the church itself."⁴²

I am not suggesting here that Catholic social activists must first be concerned about ecclesiastical reform and only thereafter turn their attention to issues of justice beyond the church's borders. The two concerns are not mutually opposed. Rather it is a question of fidelity to our common Roman Catholic tradition (i.e., taking the papal-episcopal structure seriously) and of applying the virtue of justice in a universal, not selective, manner.

Because the church is the sacrament of Christ, the church can do no less than subject itself constantly to the demands of God's justice, that it might indeed be a credible sign of the divine redemptive presence in our midst. The church can become thereby an even more effective agent of the kind of social change which hastens the advance of God's Kingdom.

Footnotes

- ¹ *Justice in the World*: Third International Synod of Bishops, Rome, 1971 (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1971), Introduction, para. 6.
- ² See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, n. 26.
- ³ *The Credibility of the Church Today* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), p. 47.
- ⁴ "Foreword," *Can These Bones Live?*, by Robert Lecky and H. Elliott Wright (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969), p. xiii.
- ⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, n. 10.
- ⁶ The term "social change" is rarely defined, even in the so-called standard references. See, for example, Robert Mac-Iver, *Society: An Introductory Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1950) and William F. Ogburn and Meyer Nimkoff, *Handbook of Sociology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953).
- ⁷ To be sure, there have been considerable developments that have taken place since *Rerum Novarum*, including, for example, the shift in emphasis from a purely economic to a more broadly political notion of justice and the church's involvement in the social order.
- ⁸ *Gaudium et spes*, n. 43. See also Peter Henriot, "The Concept of Social Sin," *Catholic Mind* 71 (October 1973) 39-53. The argument, of course, does not depend only upon these official magisterial texts. Among the several biblical themes which express this same concern are the social legislation for the poor in the Old Testament, the prophetic teaching, and Jesus' love ethic. There is, too, an affirmation of the created order and a strong sense of the unity of creation and redemption, linked by the central Christian idea of the incarnation of the Word. Finally, all of these themes come to a head in the overriding notion of the Kingdom of God as a kingdom of justice and peace as well as of holiness and grace.
- ⁹ For the quasi-official views of other Christian bodies see Paul Bock, *In Search of a Responsible World Society: The Social Teachings of the World Council of Churches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974); see also *Beyond Honesty and Hope: Documents from and about the Church in Latin America*, J.

Drury, trans. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Maryknoll Publications, 1970), and *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council: the Medellin Documents* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1970).

¹⁰ *Justice in the World*, III, 19.

¹¹ See "The Church and the World in the Light of a 'Political Theology'," in *Theology of the World*, W. Glen-Doepel, trans. (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), pp. 107-140. (For a critique, see J. Bryan Hehir, "The Idea of a Political Theology, I," *Worldview* 14 (1971) pp. 5-7; and "The Idea of a Political Theology, II," *Worldview* 14 (1971) pp. 5-7.) Although Andrew Greeley is critical of Metz's view, Greeley himself seems to come close to it—in practice, if not in theory. He suggests that, in the present order at least, the church is not competent to formulate positive solutions to current social, political, and economic problems. See his "Catholic Social Activism—Real or Rad/Chic?" *National Catholic Reporter* 11 (February 7, 1975)p.10; see also Avery Dulles, "Dilemmas Facing the Church in the World," *Origins* 4/35 (February 20, 1975) pp. 548-551.

¹² *God the Future of Man*, N.D. Smith, trans. (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), p. 159.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁴ For example, John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*: "For it must not be forgotten that the Church has the right and the duty not only to safeguard the principles of ethics and religion, but also to intervene authoritatively with Her children in the temporal sphere, when there is a question of judging about the application of those principles to concrete cases" (n. 160). And *Justice in the World*: (Members of the Church)"testify to the power of the Holy Spirit through their action in the service of men in those things which are decisive for the existence and the future of humanity. While in such activities they generally act on their own initiative without involving the responsibility of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in a sense they do involve the responsibility of the Church whose members they are" (II, 10). See also *Mater et Magistra*, n. 218 ff. and *Gaudium et spes*, n. 43 and 89. On the other hand, we cannot pretend that statements such as the following do not exist in the same documents: "Of itself it does not belong to the Church, insofar as she is a religious and hierarchical community, to offer concrete

solutions in the social, economic and political spheres for justice in the world" (*Justice in the World*, II, 9).

¹⁵ *The Community Called Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 1972), p. 96.

¹⁶ *Idem.*

¹⁷ *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 90-1.

¹⁸ *Gaudium et spes*, n. 42: "Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic, or social order. . . . (But) when circumstances of time and place create the need, she can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all men. This is particularly true of activities designed for the needy, such as works of mercy and similar undertakings. . . . The Council affirms, moreover, that the Church is willing to assist and promote all these institutions to the extent that such a service depends on her and can be associated with her mission."

¹⁹ *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 92-3.

²⁰ *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 84-8.

²¹ The matter of violent revolution was discussed at a World Council of Churches' Geneva conference on Church and Society in 1966 and again at a consultation at Zagorsk. See *World Conference on Church and Society* (official report), M. M. Thomas and Paul Albrecht, eds. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1967). See also Ronald Preston, "A Breakthrough in Ecumenical Social Ethics," in *Technology and Social Justice*, R.H. Preston, ed. (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1971), pp. 15-40. Finally, see Paul Bock., *op. cit.*, pp. 81-5.

²² See Charles Curran, "Is There a Catholic and/or Christian Ethic?" *Proceedings: Catholic Theological Society of America* (New York: Manhattan College, 1974), vol. 29, pp. 125-54. I am not entering here into the discussion whether or not there is, in fact, a distinctively Christian *configuration* of ethical values. See, for example, James Gustafson's response to Curran in the same volume, pp. 155-60, and also his *Can Ethics Be Christian?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

²³ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), pp. 55-6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

- 25 *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963), p. 18.
- 26 *Lumen gentium*, n. 9.
- 27 J. L. Segundo, *op cit.*, p. 82.
- 28 *Catholicism* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1950), p. 29.
- 29 *Die Kirche als Ursakrament* (Frankfort: Knecht, 1953).
- 30 "L'Eglise sacrament du salut," in G. Barauna, ed., *L'Eglise de Vatican II* (Paris: Cerf, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 313-18.
- 31 *The Church That I Love* (Denville: Dimension Books, 1969), chapter II.
- 32 "The Church as Sacrament of the World," *Concilium* 31 (New York: Paulist Press, 1968), pp. 51-66.
- 33 "De la sacramentalité propre à l'Eglise," *Nouvelle revue theologique* 95 (1973), pp. 25-42.
- 34 *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), pp. 58-70; see also my "The Church: Sign and Instrument of Unity," *Concilium* 58 (October, 1970), pp. 45-52.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- 36 Vol. 34, p. 379.
- 37 Cited by Berryman, *art. cit.*, p. 379.
- 38 *Art cit.*, p. 393. A similar argument is suggested by Jose Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 154: "...a specific discussion on the nature of this community of faith can only come legitimately out of the engagement of Christians in the struggle for liberation." On the other hand, Bonino, more than most other Latin American theologians of liberation, insists that "the ecclesiological question is a critical one for all contemporary theology" (p. 155). But see Jurgen Moltmann's "On Latin American Liberation Theology: An Open Letter to Jose Miguez Bonino," *Christianity and Crisis*, March 29, 1976, pp. 57-63.
- 39 *Op. cit.*, p. 117.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- 41 II, 8.
- 42 III, 2.

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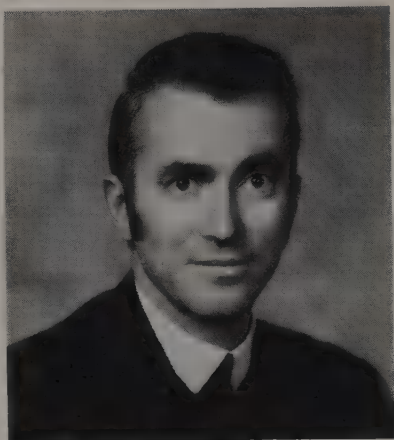
Confronting Future Needs

Futurists and Reformers:
The Shape of Tomorrow's Church
by Geoffrey B. Kelly, F.S.C.

Apologetics, Newman
and the Teaching Church
by Webster T. Patterson

Theological Considerations
on the American Experience
of Ethnicity
by Ronald D. Pasquariello

**Futurists and Reformers:
The Shape of Tomorrow's Church**



Geoffrey B. Kelly

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Precis

If, as Vatican II has asserted, the Church is *semper reformanda* or always in a process of reformation, then people who have some insight into what tomorrow's ecclesial structures may be authentically play a crucial role in the church. These futurists, able to combine both vision and hope, speak the prophetic word enabling the church to perceive the new and more vital configurations essential to its effectiveness. Yet these futurists and reformers do not all agree on the shape of tomorrow's church; the positions of Avery Dulles, Hans Kung, Richard McBrien, Gabriel Moran and Gregory Baum may be contrasted in at least some of their assertions. Thus Dulles prefers a sacramental model according to which the church would be the sign of Christ's incarnational presence; Kung, a model based upon *diakonia* (service) and evangelical reform. McBrien also emphasizes service, but combined with a democratization that would lead to "a root-shaking reform of the church's monarchical and bureaucratic structures." Moran is more radical, calling for authentic communities of men and women which would give rise to new and unforeseen structures. Baum sees the church according to the sociological category of a movement: mobile, open, and "where the action is." Transcending these differences, however, a common vision of an open, pluralistic and serving church emerges.

Futurists and Reformers: The Shape of Tomorrow's Church

Thomas Jefferson once said: "I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past." People who experience dissatisfaction with the church of their past and present may identify somewhat with Jefferson's remark, especially if they, at the same time, share his hope for the birth of a new world and are themselves working toward the rebirth of Christianity within that world. These are people who glimpse tomorrow in their decisions of the present, confident that today's history will yield its full meaning solely in terms of its wholeness or totality and, thereby, justify their hope. Only in light of the final unfolding of history itself can the significance of single moments be seen in their broader context and in relationship to the total meaning of any series of interconnected events.¹ Hence the importance of "futurism" and the need for "futurists" or people of vision to help persons and institutions live in awareness of the possibilities of growth and change that can make any future hopeful.

Analysis of the possible future is becoming a popular quasi science in these days of frenetic change. Books like *The Future of Hope, Religion in the Year 2000, Tomorrow a New Church*, and countless articles bearing provocative titles like "The American Church in the Year 2000," "Why Catholic Theology Needs Future-Talk Today" or "Our Faith of Tomorrow"² suggest that, even if the present realities of church life and theology may be somewhat beyond our full calculation and control, we can at least look with much faith and some hope at the future prospects for building a better earth and a more humanly appealing church. So much projection and speculation have entered the issue of planning for the future that we often wonder whether we are not actually living in "the

gap of time" between past and future. This is what Hannah Arendt calls that "small tract of non-time" which may, because of our respect for the past and creative anticipation of the future, turn out to be the true "region of the spirit . . . in which the activity of thought, of remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they touch from the ruin of historical and biographical time."³ To make assumptions about the future and to interpret events in view of one's anticipation of that future is always a risky yet necessary preliminary to intelligent planning for what may lie ahead in life.⁴ It is also tempting to think that the future of our human institutions, because of our own critical judgment and creativity, may be optimistic, and that these institutions may finally become structures of meaning and hope within the global, national and local communities.

That this is a definite hope for the church is evident from the spate of latter day "reformation literature" urging the church to make it easier for peoples to recognize the divine-human love and fellowship which should inspire all ecclesial structures. An uncertain future beckons the church to become, as it always should have been, an *ecclesia semper reformanda*. It would be tragic if, in the words of Avery Dulles, "the leadership of the church should be dragged kicking and screaming into the modern world."⁵ The authors whose analyses I will present in this essay are at least trying to prod the church in that direction even though they would hardly look on themselves as church reformers, still less as visionaries. If I call them "futurists and reformers" it is because they have analyzed the possible future shape of the church and, on this basis, have themselves engaged in appraisal, prediction, encouragement, even some wishful thinking on their own of what the church can and will become. Often their critique of the present situation comes across only as provocative bad news to "status quoers" who resent that theologians should rock boats that still slide around in brackish ecclesial swamps, places like Tridentine marsh or Vatican I creek, up which a futurist would not like to be caught without oars. Yet, if the church would ever take their proposals seriously, it could mean the most thorough ecclesiastical reform since Luther or Vatican Council II.

Toward A Bionic Church: Dulles' Church Models

One such writer is Avery Dulles who offers the means for constructing some kind of superbionic church from the best of five basic ecclesial models: institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald and servant.⁶ Dulles warns against exclusive reliance on any one model by pointing out the distortions which have followed and would follow any exaggerated stress on any one aspect to the detriment of another. He insists that each model, like stones of a mosaic, has something to offer to a balanced understanding of the church. He is rightfully suspicious of that narcissistic institutionalism which would reduce the church to the hallowed activities directed by a ruling elite empowered to teach, sanctify and govern.⁷ This is a model hanging over from past inebriation with status, official dignity and recompense for service to the organization. Dulles cites Bishop Emile De Smedt who had jolted some of the Council Fathers of Vatican II by rejecting the preliminary schema on the church as clericalist, overly juridical and triumphalistic,⁸ adjectives which later would be used by the Catholic left to describe nearly everything capable of generating rot in the church considered as institution. Theologians of that pre-conciliar era had been asked to engage in scholarly contortions to justify in scripture and tradition the exaggerated claims made by the Roman curators of an inflated institutional model of the church. For this reason, Dulles insists that the institutional model must never be taken as primary. Neither must it be done away with. No one faced with the undesirable prospect of an ecclesial anarchy would deny the need for organization and responsible decision making within a church which seeks to promote one's universal brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ. Hence Dulles is unwilling to unhinge the church from this essential human structure. The Church must be reformed, not (like Carthage) destroyed. Possible sources of moderation and reform for the institutional structures of the church lie in the other models.

Dulles himself prefers to portray the church under the model of its sacramental nature. Because Christ is the sacrament of God, the church is the sign or sacrament of Christ. This is a model which emphasizes the grace of Christ impelling believers toward communion with God and with one another as they enter into the rhythms of Christ's life, death, resurrection and continued life in the community. The church celebrates its Christ-likeness in its sacramental life. As sacrament, the church would attempt to integrate the best of the institutional and communitarian models. At the same time, the church would realize that it is but the sign of Christ's incarnational presence and that, therefore, it has an obligation to be less pretentious and more aware of its call to be a better sign of this presence.⁹

This model needs, however, to be complemented by the "herald" and "servant" models in which the Protestant churches are more at ease. The accent here is on the principle mission of the church: to proclaim the "Word of God" and to serve human needs throughout the world. The model of church as servant has the advantage of cutting through the confessional and parochial differences that often estrange people from one another. The church is called to join in alleviating suffering wherever those in need are to be found. All peoples become in a real sense one's brethren.¹⁰ Service is enjoined for the sake of a better humanity, not as an appealing device of recruitment into a specific church or as a not-too-well-disguised instrument of indoctrination.

Kung's Servant Church

This "servant" model likewise emerges as the basic component in Hans Kung's blueprint for church understanding and reform. In his monumental study, *The Church*, Kung subsumes all the charismatic structures with which the early church thrived and even the church offices which gave stability to the church as it weaned itself away from its parousial expectations under the note of **diakonia** or service. If the church is

to retain a true continuity with its origins and attempt to mirror the compassionate-redemptive service of Jesus to mankind, it must become what it always should have been, namely, a servant church. Its dimensions of unity, catholicity, holiness and apostolicity as well as its system of ecclesiastical office will depend to a great extent on the respect and encouragement accorded the charism of **all members**, in a word, on the ability of pastors to maintain a fellowship of mutual respect and service with their communities.¹²

Kung identifies the church as the fellowship and sign of those who aspire to the kingdom or reign of God which would be fully realized only at the end of time. The church is, therefore, called in the meantime to be a credible witness to the meaning of this reign for humanity everywhere. It must preach Jesus' message not simply to the world but more especially **to itself** since the church is at best only a provisional sign of that kingdom which cannot be brought about by human efforts. A realization of its inherent limitations should, he contends, lead to a sobering of church ambitions and an attitude of always seeking reform in order that the church be less an imperialistic theocracy and more a reliable servant of the human community.¹³

Kung extends this as a challenge to the summit of the hierarchical structure in his less than peaceful inquiry into infallibility. In a final chapter of that book, somewhat reminiscent of the "dream" with which Andrew Greeley closed his peevish, insightful critique of "mind-blowing romanticists" and hierarchical reactionaries,¹⁴ Kung observes that the outlook for the church could be brightened if the pope would take Cardinal Suenens' advice and adopt a genuinely evangelical view of the church. This would entail a decentralization of power and abandonment of the juridical-formalistic view espoused by the static bureaucracy, best described as extrinsicist, isolated and triumphalist. Kung links hope for the church with a complete overhaul of the Roman curial system to free it from its own Frankenstein, the monster of top-heavy administrative machinery oiled seemingly *ad infinitum* by a jealous hold on its quasi-royal prerogatives and power. The

“model pope” would, like the church itself, provide a new form of **service** to the believing community; he would be an “inspiriter” of the gospel and a leader in working for the betterment of the human condition both within and without the church.¹⁵ The credibility of such a leader and of such a church would follow naturally, not by decree.

Platform for the People of God: McBrien’s Agenda for Reform

In his book, which raises the question whose affirmative answer we have simply presupposed in this paper, *Do We Need the Church?*, Richard McBrien also states that the church’s total mission is best expressed by the scriptural title of “servant.” He does, in fact, call the church “the world’s deacon, a leavening influence in the body of history, serving within and not alongside the structures of the world.”¹⁶ McBrien is realist enough to declare that being a true servant is far more radical for the church than witnessing in rags with cigarband episcopal rings. Rather, the church must place itself and its immense resources at the service of the poor and become spokesman of the gospel ideals especially as these bear on Jesus’ known deference for the suffering and the outcast.¹⁷ McBrien’s practical program for implementing this is close to Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s vision of the future church which in his prison letters he described as on the brink either of total irrelevance or of a courageous rebirth. The outcome would be determined by the church’s willingness to take risks for others without fear for its survival as church.¹⁸

No ecclesiologist would deny that the church’s mission to the world is, as Bonhoeffer has urged, to serve, not in arrogant domination but in the manner of Jesus, compassionately and without any self-aggrandizing interests. That the church is far from accepting this challenge or far even from solving its own inner problems and, therefore, in need of radical reform, is the subject of McBrien’s latest book, *The Remaking of the Church. An Agenda for Reform*. McBrien locates the root causes of the church’s present disarray and conflict in the ec-

clesiastical leadership itself. He indicts this leadership for having failed to provide proper guidance in this era of change and for having failed to demythologize its own inflated self-image.¹⁹ McBrien himself would like to see a root-shaking reform of the church's monarchical and bureaucratic structures. However, he wishes at the same time to skirt the polarization which has frustrated Catholic Christendom in the aftermath of Vatican Council II which saw too many Catholics initiated into changes they hardly understood. Changes for these people had come too rapidly and unintelligibly. For others, on the contrary, the pace of modernization was tortoise-like. Some of these, especially the less pliant enthusiasts pressed for irresponsible changes without having examined the theoretical or practical underpinning of the "renewal" they were advocating. As a result, the church became fragmented into what McBrien designates as three basic camps: a) the pre-conciliar, b) the conciliar, and c) the post-conciliar. That theory and practice were not always linked he traces to a failure of the leaders to educate the people to an intelligent shift of perspective with its accompanying practices. At times "practices C" were introduced without sufficient theoretical support; these were, in turn, foisted onto people locked comfortably (if not bovinely) into "theory A." To give an example, the liturgical reforms (practice B) sanctioned by the Council (theory B) ignited in the United States a quasi-hysterical resistance of the Catholic Traditionalists (theory A) who then began to campaign for a return to the Latin Mass (practice A). "Theory C," McBrien insists, should evolve naturally and peacefully from "theory B"; it is in one sense "theory B, shorn of its ambivalences."²⁰ Among the examples of "theory and practices C" he lists: the charismatic movement and the related renewal of community experience; the growth of priests' councils and efforts to promote debate in the church; changes in clerical self-understanding and the new wave of self-criticism. McBrien holds the church's leadership responsible for articulating and communicating the theoretical justification for any necessary changes which, in turn, must grow out of the meanings perceived by the people who com-

pose church membership. As long as a theory-practice, perception-behavior lag exists, the church will continue its present fragmented, counter-witness to the world.²¹

To offset this, McBrien proposes an agenda for reform which would involve a thorough democratization of church structures. He does not claim that a democratic church would necessarily be holier than its monarchical counterpart but he would defend the premise that a church in which the entire believing community is involved in the call to witness, celebrate and serve is a less alienating, more effective sign of unity and holiness. In his own pragmatic way McBrien argues for constitutionalism, decentralization of power, intelligent planning and research, official accountability, election of bishops, limits on papal and episcopal power, a bill of rights, proper ecclesiastical court procedures especially in matters of divorce and remarriage, the liberation and recognition of the right to ordination of women, renewal of religious communities, greater freedom in decision making for the ordained, and a practical implementation of ecumenical agreements. His "bill of rights" is significant because it would give a certain legal protection to those in the church who have been and will continue to agitate for reform.²² In times past and present protesters within the church have been vulnerable to arbitrary censure and unfair sanctions.

Whether this agenda will constitute the direction the future church will take, or whether McBrien's proposals will go down as just another idealistic venture, only hindsight in the year 2000 may tell. George McCauley, for one, shares McBrien's hopes and endorses his agenda but fears that it may become "an exercise in idealism, doomed to be swallowed whole by the bureaucratic monster whose game it is ultimately playing."²³

Moran's Design for A New Reformation

One religious writer who refuses "to play this game" but who has persistently agitated for even more radical reform than that envisaged by McBrien is Gabriel Moran, whose latest

books, *Religious Body*, carries the subtitle, *Design for a New Reformation*. Moran's thesis is that "a valid religious body arises where **education** and **community** join to reveal the religious expressions of human life."²⁴ It is time, he says, to move away from the belief that the church **possesses** a divine message and can, therefore, in an authoritarian way, interpret all experience. Rather, the church must realize that it is part of the problem and begin honestly in true communities of men and women to seek to discover the "divine" in human relationships.²⁵

Part of Moran's hidden agenda is to take issue with Richard McBrien's program for reform. He is obviously not so sanguine as McBrien about the effects of decentralization in the church, should it ever become a reality. Decentralization, for Moran, is a wrong metaphor. How can one decentralize when there is no true center with which to begin? Moran eschews easy solutions to the church's bureaucratic monster. He agrees that the church is top heavy but also believes that allowing some of the power and most of the responsibility to trickle toward those at the bottom of the pyramidal structure, no matter how extensively pursued, will accomplish more than make the person at the top almost inaccessible. He would still have the power but would now be camouflaged behind even more bureaucratic red tape. "I shudder to think," Moran writes, "of what the pope's decentralization of the curia means. An authoritarian bishop is worse than an authoritarian pope; and an authoritarian local priest is a worse bargain still."²⁶

Nor does Moran believe a democratic election of pope and bishop will constitute a solution to the dehumanization of these power sources because, in his opinion, this still doesn't get at a stubborn root of problems in a hierarchically styled church, the existence of the split between clergy and laity. At present, the church is in the hands of a self-perpetuating clerical caste system which itself is "at the root of nonaccountability, identification of person with role and a religious form that is verbose, legalistic and authoritarian."²⁷ Not until communities are ready to elect or appoint men or women, perhaps for a time

only, to the priestly role, can a thoroughgoing overhaul of the religious community be initiated. Moran sees hope for the church in communities where sisterhood and brotherhood are experienced and where people are able to relate to one another as sisters and brothers. This would be a religious body cohabited by "priestly-prophetic" people able to criticize the past with reverence and to hope for the future without threat of failure or the compulsion of ideology. Power for growth and/or change in this body would be achieved through accountable representatives and through a central forum for debate and decision making.²⁸

For such a religious body to become a possibility, a whole new language flowing from a shared life and renewed by the critical vitality of poets, educators and political leaders must be developed. Moran demonstrates the importance of semantics for developing the criteria by which to judge and effect a new reformation by showing that without the proper words there is little hope of bridging the human differences that may stand in the way of reform. This is more apparent in today's world where bureaucratic societies have acquired the knack of blurring or inflating language to the point where inherently dynamic elements like church, education and community have been domesticated as sources of reform by being identified with a single institution and by not being allowed to interact. Moran's counter to this problem is clear: 1) religious education and religious communities need diversified forms and many points of intersection in order to revitalize the church; 2) adult women and adult men must be fully involved in all areas of the religious community's life.²⁹ It is religious education, not better preaching or superficially strong dogmatic decrees, which makes the relationships of community understandable and provides the means of reform for what is to be changed and tolerance for what must remain intractable. Efforts to reform the church must begin with a rebirth of consciousness and language; in a word, with a community life and a religious-educational environment favorable to lifelong growth in learning.³⁰

Resistance to Reform: From Legitimation To Orthodoxy

The difficulty with fearless but nonirenic religious writers like Hans Kung, Gabriel Moran and Richard McBrien is that the church triumphal against whom their most piquant observations are directed can so easily turn "persecuted" or militant, as the counter strategy may dictate, and dismiss their valuable, if not prophetic, insights as the wild, wounded outcry of radicals bent on a "workable" system's destruction. Many offended officials in the church fail to realize that Kung, Moran and McBrien stand for the kind of intelligent renewal which can reach the very roots of the church because it promises to involve all the people at the very matrix of the institution: its form and language, structure and communication, community and education. This is radical reform in the true sense of the word.

Kung, Moran and McBrien, whose programs for reshaping the church we have been analyzing, only heighten the dilemma which the church faces in any age. The church is constantly torn between a desire to return to its more charismatic beginnings while holding on, out of a sense of "loyalty" to the status, prestige, power and opportunities which have resulted naturally from its progressive institutionalization. Unfortunately, the church has tended to take necessary, time-conditioned human structures out of their historical context and to impute to them an aura of divine causality, locating them within a "sacred" frame of reference. And so the human byproducts of organization are turned, through a process of "legitimation," into suprahuman or supernaturally protected functions or dignities resistant to change. Cases in point would be the clerical caste system, many symbols of worship, the bureaucratic structure of offices, even the moral and dogmatic formulations with which the church has sought to define and concretize orthodoxy.³¹ It is understandable, then, that some in the church should feel threatened when present day futurists and reform-

ers should attempt to yank away the coverings of this legitimization and expose these structures as at least partly the outcome of natural sociological processes. In this secularized, pluralistic and critical time the result is to be expected: loss of confidence in the institution, fear, reactionary fulminations from the officials most threatened and further polarization of the kind Richard McBrien has so effectively criticized.

Intelligent planning for the church's future exacts that the leadership be aware of the sociological dynamics at work in all aspects of institutional growth. What is needed, it would seem, is for the church to develop a clearer definition of its own and the world's situation through greater attention to the sociopsychological laws operating to shape this situation and the theological insights, even from seeming unorthodox sources, best suited to appraise the faith implications of this situation. At most, the church may come up with only a precarious vision of what is and what should be. That in itself, if accepted as precarious and provisional, would be a fortuitous beginning. Realizing its symbiosis with the world might spare the church many of the anachronistic blunders which have undermined confidence in its pronouncements. Too often ecclesial assumptions about the world and about the church's own dogmatic/moral structural traditions have been eroded by a credibility gap of its own making, "a built-in disappointment mechanism regarding the church in the world."³² As Neil Hurley has indicated so well: "The church must learn to be a consumer and not only a producer, a learner and not only a teacher, a listener and not only a one-way communicator."³³

Baum's Sociological Analysis: From the "Third Man" to the "Fourth Way"

In this connection, Gregory Baum, in a recent address to the Catholic Theological Society of America, has called for theologians to accept the ideological critique of the church to which they have been led by sociologists. It is time, he stated, for the theological magisterium to "acknowledge the historicity

of error." In other words, Christian thinkers must ask whether the failings of the church were not built into its institutions through the unfortunate linkup of religion with the interests of the ruling class.³⁴

Baum himself, in his *The Credibility of the Church*, prefers to base the church of tomorrow on the sociological model of the "movement." The church would, then, become like an outer-oriented movement able to subordinate all its worthwhile inner aims of education, fellowship and organization to the larger goal of transforming the whole of society. Such a church might be capable of spreading its spirit of brotherhood and reconciliation in a massive effort to achieve solidarity with the human community in which it lives and whose suffering it attempts to alleviate. Baum feels that the term "outer-oriented movement" may aptly describe the more open church inaugurated by Vatican II.³⁵

It should be obvious, though, that this opinion is not shared by those impatiently waiting for the church to catch up to the promise of Vatican II's rhapsodic affirmations of the ideal of church life. Baum seems to advocate a floating kind of church membership in which people freely involve themselves in the "movement" in different ways depending on talent, situation or interest of the moment. Some may choose to have only limited contact with the movement's center. The typical member might be like François Roustang's "third man," neither a progressive nor conservative Catholic but able to "take the institutional church with a grain of salt." His criterion for accepting church teaching and participation in sacramental life is that they make sense. If they do not make sense, he does not rebel; he simply doesn't bother. The "third man" is strikingly similar to the believer described by McBrien as on route toward either practice B or theory/practice C. Should the notion of church as "movement" ever become accepted, Baum would see the hierarchy's ministry as one of promoting the gospel and formulating consensus. Sensitive following of the Spirit, involvement in the life of society and free participation in worship and social programs at mobile, open church centers would keynote this kind of church.³⁶ If Baum has his way, the church as

"movement" of the future might resemble Archie Hargraves' graphic description of it as a "floating crap game" moving "where the action is."³⁷

Richard McBrien, for one, finds Baum's concept of church too floating and expansive to be helpful in determining where and how to begin with church reform.³⁸ With Baum, the church seems to be coterminous with the Kingdom of God so that where we find the former, which may be everywhere, we find the latter, which may be nowhere. Moran, too, who is trying to focus attention on the true center of any religious body, would find Baum's description detached from that center. Baum does, however, seem to agree with the more experiential description of revelation with which Moran grounds both his understanding of the "religious" and his proposals to change ecclesial structures. Both believe that to make of revelation the trusted preserve or deposit of officials in the church government is to build guarantees of arrogance and disappointment into church life. "To invest a community of men with exclusive hope," he writes, "is always dangerous. People today suffer painful confusion because the government has represented for them the total good of society or the university the unique matrix of learning or the church the exclusive sacrament of salvation. According to Christian teaching, we recall, the primary means of grace is neither the sacramental liturgy nor the ecclesiastical community but life itself. Life, human life, saves. Because of God's redemptive presence to human history, salvation is offered in the social fabric out of which we come to be."³⁹

Baum speaks of a "third man" spearheading the church's openness to its future as "movement." Peter Hebblethwaite's church of the future, on the other hand, would be made possible by a "fourth man," one at odds with the church and weary with exhortations to bide his time and embrace the folly of the cross until the church eventually moves at its own cautiously retarded pace into the modern era. This "fourth type of believer" has learned by experience "the truth of Bernanos' maxim: 'It is easy to suffer for the Church—the difficult thing is to suffer at the hands of the Church.'"⁴⁰ This is the church

critic who sees his or her criticism as an expression of integrity and who is able to resist attempts to discredit him/her by church officials who blandish ready-made accusations that the critic may have lost either faith or mind or both. This "fourth way" of living out one's faith views the Christian church as composed of smaller communities able to learn and to love and asking only that the church move courageously toward its stated human goals. The church needs this critic whose principal role is to be a catalyst of change and to remind the church to take seriously its pronouncement that the Spirit's gifts are showered on all God's people.⁴¹ They exemplify the prophetic element on a painful collision course with the church's sacralized equilibrium. Part of this prophetic element, if the claim is not too presupposing, could come from theologians in the church aware that the ideal *ecclesia* may exist only beyond our lifetimes but nonetheless unwilling to rest with the status quo of an imperfect, sinful church on earth when that church also has the potential to embody all the best that is human.

Lately, Baum has marshaled his learning from the social sciences into a critique of religion aimed at helping the church achieve an even deeper self-understanding and realization of that potential. This is what he calls the task of "critical theology." Baum cuts through the thicket of ecclesial ideology to distinguish between what a religion intends to be and what are the actual structural consequences of its activity and teachings. Not all of these consequences are in accord with the gospel.⁴² Baum challenges the Christian church to awaken to a sense of social sin which has been obscured by the practice of confession and by an understanding of sin that is highly private, legal and action oriented. There are, he indicates, four levels in social sin, all of which affect the posture of the church. The first level would be the injustices and dehumanizing tendencies of various institutions; a second would be those symbolic legitimations, both cultural and religious, that promulgate ignorance and reinforce injustice; a third level is the false consciousness through which ideologies and institutions move people to do evil in the name of some kind of collective wellbe-

ing; a fourth level combines and intensifies the other three by way of the collective decision generated by false consciousness wittingly or unwittingly to increase injustice and intensify the dehumanization perpetrated by society.⁴³ Because of the well documented tendency of the church to support the dominant culture and allow society to legitimate its abuse of human rights, the church must share in the guilt aroused by awareness of these levels of social sin.

Part of the problem in the church's stress on the individual aspects of sin, as Baum points out, is that this has also permitted the church to avoid critical reflection on its corporate life. "Bishops and popes admitted, of course, that they were personally sinners and in need of divine mercy, but they did not acknowledge that their collective life, embodied in ecclesiastical organizations, was marked by sin and hence in need of an ongoing critique. Systematic criticism of the institution was regarded as disloyal. . . . Once we discover the inseparability of the personal and social in human action, and thus the need to de-privatize our religious tradition, we come to realize that a church's unwillingness to subject its corporate life to a systematic and principled critique is the great barrier that prevents it from proclaiming the gospel with power."⁴⁴ Unless the church can deprivatize the notion of sin, Baum sees the danger of the church becoming ultimately an ideology itself.

Baum speaks further of raising human consciousness to acknowledge the inseparable dialectic of the personal and the social in one's conversion to God. The church has critical responsibility for the social and political meaning and consequences of its teachings and presence in the world. It should, therefore, raise the consciousness of Christians, inspiring them to the kind of commitment whereby they would identify with the oppressed of the world and attempt to free peoples from economic and political, even ecclesiastical, injustice. This is liberation theology at its core. It is impossible for critical theology, and an effective church for that matter, to operate from a neutral standpoint in society. The present conflictual trends in society demand that the church identify with liberation

movements taking place around the globe. Baum takes as almost self-evident that the church's engagement in the liberation movement would include a certain liberation from its own injustices; in a word, a reform of its internal structures.⁴⁵

Conclusion: Possible Shape of the Church to Come

In this regard, the task of theology would obviously not be to defend magisterial pronouncements as a rear guard action against change. The first allegiance of the theologian, as Richard McBrien has pointed out, "is to the truth—a truth, to be sure, received and perceived in the context of the whole community of faith, but a truth embraced for its own saving sake and not as a rationale for the institutional *status quo*, not as ideology. Theology is not a branch of ecclesiastical diplomacy. It is a discipline in the service of the church, but what it offers the church is criticism—vigorous and independent criticism."⁴⁶ Learning, discussion and intelligent criticism of the ecclesial issues—not the thumping of croziers on the floor or the metallic clack of an episcopal ring on a rostrum—are needed if the church of tomorrow is to be freed from the risk of repeating the mistakes of yesterday and today.

This is an observation also made by Karl Rahner in his *The Shape of the Church to Come*, which continues his debate with the conservative elements of the German Church Synod of 1971.⁴⁷ In many respects this book may go down as his most radical and incisive criticism of and projection for the church. Rahner recommends that freely formed, smaller communities of believers be encouraged and challenges church leadership to resist its unchristian tendency to polarize the "opposition" by a "bigoted and pharasaic lamentation" of their critics' infidelity. No longer should the church methodology be based on a rigorous, conclusive deduction from everlastingly binding "principles" of dogma and morality. In his opinion, the appeal

to church loyalty or a return to "strict morality" is in reality only a blatant attempt to mask that petty sectarian mentality interested solely in defending its cozy traditionalism and a stale pseudo-orthodoxy.⁴⁸ He advocates, rather, a critical futurology of the church in which intelligent, creative and imaginative planning would take full account of the sociopolitical future and the changing ecclesial situation. This might, then, lead to a more open church, one which would be declericalized but not divested of leadership, ecumenical but not simplistic, moral without moralizing, democratized without being further bureaucratized, and committed to a sociocritical relationship with the world.

Such a sweeping ecclesial renovation would itself require an imaginative undertaking which may be beyond the present horizons of current church leaders. The hope for the church of the future, as for any present, may still lie more with the ability of courageous believers to bring about what Rahner calls the formation of open, declericalized "basic communities" and Moran, in turn, calls the "religious body." This will necessarily involve personal action, particularly in the interaction of community and education at its most effective level, the unsanctioned but ever innovative roots of the church. What this future church may look like can only be assumed from interpretations of the forces for reform which shape up in present day ecclesial struggles.⁴⁹ The full church-wide implementation of these and other visions for the church of tomorrow may have to wait for the convening of Vatican III or Jerusalem II or Geneva I.

Footnotes

- ¹ Carl E. Braaten, "The New Theology of the Future," *The Futurist Option* (New York: Newman Press, 1970), pp. 20-21.
- ² Jurgen Moltmann, et al., *The Future of Hope* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970); Andrew Greeley, *Religion in the Year 2000* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969); Bernard Besret, *Tomorrow a New Church*, tr. by M.J. O'Connell (New York: Paulist Press, 1973); William Byron, "The American Church in the Year 2000," *America* 120 (1969), pp. 37-40; Carl J. Peter, "Why Catholic Theology Needs Future-Talk Today," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Convention* (Bronx, New York: The Catholic Theological Society of America, 1972); Julian Harvey, "Our Faith of Tomorrow," *Catholic Mind* 73 (1975), pp. 2-5; pp. 146-167.
- ³ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future. Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Meridian Books, 1968), p. 13.
- ⁴ Just how risky can be seen from the expectations for the future enunciated by Gerhard Lenski in his *The Religious Factor. A Sociologist's Inquiry* (New York: Doubleday, 1963). Of the twelve changes and future developments listed on p. 361, only two appear to have been realized and even these two are not universally observable today, namely, "increasing support for welfare state policies" and "declining restraints on gambling and drinking."
- ⁵ Cited by Albert de Zutter, "American Theologian Says, 'Church Reform at Standstill,'" *National Catholic Reporter*, May 30, 1975, p. 4.
- ⁶ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974).
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 58ff. In describing the church as "mystic communion," "Body of Christ," "Sacrament of Christ," the stress is so obviously on "divine aspects" of the church that the institution can make inflated claims for itself and set up readymade loopholes to legitimate many of the patent abuses of freedom and humanity which have led in times past and present to a fragmentation of the fellowship. People still "pass the ammunition" in Northern Ireland even

as they "praise the Lord." Dulles points out further weaknesses in these models on pp. 55-57 and 69-70. Peter Hebblethwaite, citing Heinrich Boll, portrays the dilemma that a "dualistic" notion of church creates in the matter of internal criticism. "However, there is a Catholic version of this model, to which Heinrich Boll recently drew our attention. In an interview he said: 'You know that there are two definitions of the church: on the one hand the institution (which I detest because of its tie-up with the bourgeoisie) and on the other the Mystical Body. I refuse to play the game of eternally justifying the first by appealing to the second.' The strategy to which Boll alludes is a familiar one: you are not allowed to say a word in criticism of the institution because it is **really** the Mystical Body of Christ, and who would wish to find himself in opposition to so august a reality?" See "Church Membership and Models," *Commonweal* 101 (1974), p. 133.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-82, 91.

¹¹ Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), pp. 173-191.

¹² *Ibid.*; see also his section on "Ecclesiastical Office as Ministry," pp. 358ff.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-104.

¹⁴ Andrew Greeley, "The First Papal Press Conference: A Dream," Chapter 13 of *Come Blow Your Mind With Me* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 222-233.

¹⁵ Hans Kung, *Infallible? An Inquiry* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 241-246.

¹⁶ Richard McBrien, *Do We Need the Church?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 62.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-219.

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, E. Bethge, ed., (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 382-383. Bonhoeffer has written in his own program for the future of the church: "The church is the church only when it exists for others. To make a start, it should give away all its property to those in need. The clergy must live solely on the free-will offerings of their congregations, or possibly engage in some secular calling. The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others."

- ¹⁹ Richard McBrien, *The Remaking of the Church: An Agenda for Reform* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 14.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62; see pp. 22-69 for his development of the triadic structure of pre-conciliar, conciliar and post-conciliar theories and practices.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-69.
- ²² *Ibid.*, especially pp. 86ff. Many of the points on McBrien's agenda for reform have been supported from a sociologist's perspective by Andrew Greeley in his recommendations to the American hierarchy through his report to the U.S. Catholic Conference. He lists these recommendations under the general rubrics of "authority, theory, vocations and support systems." See "The State of the Priesthood in the United States," *Doctrine and Life* 22 (1972), pp. 351-380. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that Greeley begins his recommendation on authority with the uncompromising statement: "The most important task before this commission is the establishment of representative governance in the American church. If the commission does not take on this task and pursue it with all the strength at its command, then there is no reason for the commission to exist" (pp. 371-372).
- ²³ George McCauley, "Book reviews: The Remaking of the Church," *Theological Studies* 35 (1974), p. 567. Neither McBrien nor Gabriel Moran have been "swallowed whole"; they have been simply ignored by the very hierarchy which could effect the reforms they advocate.
- ²⁴ Gabriel Moran, *Religious Body. Design for a New Reformation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), p. 7 (emphasis mine). Moran mentions at the outset of his book that he chose the title "Religious Body," because it was "an intentionally ambiguous term. It refers both to the physical organism (the body as religious) and to human organization (a body of religious people)" (p. 1).
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 203.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 217.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 213-225. It is not clear, however, how this differs from McBrien's pragmatic call for more democratic elections of church officials, except that Moran suspects McBrien's more political solution to the problem will not achieve the declericalization of the church.

- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 65-67. Moran insists on the absolute importance of language to an understanding of community, education and religion and, consequently, to the possibility of moving toward a "new reformation." "Whoever owns the words," he writes, "owns the world" (p. 31). We can thus see why Moran wants to break the bureaucratic stranglehold on language. He is convinced that the power to change is ultimately in the hands of those who control language because these alone are able to define reality and conditions for belonging to any given society.
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227; see also p. 150.
- 31 For a fuller development of the sociological dynamics which have created the dilemmas facing the church as institution, see Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Sociology of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966), pp. 90ff.
- 32 Neil P. Hurley, "The Church's View of a New World," *America* 120 (1969), p. 45.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 34 Gregory Baum, "The Impact of Sociology on Catholic Theology," *Proceedings of the Thirtieth Annual Convention. The Catholic Theological Society of America*, June 9-12, 1975, p. 23. See also his earlier article, "The New Ecclesiology," *Commonweal* 91 (1969), pp. 123-128.
- 35 Gregory Baum, *The Credibility of the Church Today* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 198.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. pp. 207-208.
- 37 Quoted by Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Mac-Millan, 1965), pp. 125-126. That Harvey Cox still endorses this more mobile view of the church is evident from the very recent "Boston Affirmations" which he co-authored. This four page document is, in part at least, an answer to the "Hartford Appeal for Theological Affirmation." The statement from the Hartford group, spearheaded by Avery Dulles, Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, had urged Christians to reject "false and debilitating" secular ideas that had crept into the church. The "Boston Affirmations" decry instead the church's worldwide retreat from social struggles. Cox's main concern, as he stated in an interview, "was to anchor social concern in the biblical message and in the central tradition of the church." See Kenneth A. Briggs, "Theolo-

gians Plead for Social Activism," *The New York Times*, Tuesday, January 6, 1976, pp. 1, 21.

³⁸ Richard McBrien, *Church: The Continuing Quest* (New York: Newman Press, 1970), p. 57.

³⁹ Gregory Baum, "The New Ecclesiology," *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁴⁰ Peter Hebblethwaite, "The Church of the Future," *Commonweal*, 102 (1975), p. 621.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 622. Hebblethwaite sees a strong reason for the "fourth man" to have confidence in the future since "the ancient legal maxim, *consuetudo contra legem*, operates in the church—what is actually done overrides the law, and the law eventually catches up. And since at present the church has no way of enforcing its demands, precedents are being created. . . . Most of the bans and prohibitions of the decade have been ineffectual. The official church may proclaim that inter-communion should cease; but it cannot ensure that it ceases. It may pronounce a ban on birth control; but it cannot intrude on the privacy of the married. It may revise the code of canon law and present the church as an authority; but it cannot prevent the experience of the church from being one of community. It may exhort Christians to shun married priests; but it cannot punish them when they do not. It may hedge theological work around with prohibitions and guidelines; but the work will go on because the questions continue to be asked."

⁴² Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation. A Theological Reading of Sociology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), pp. 193-195.

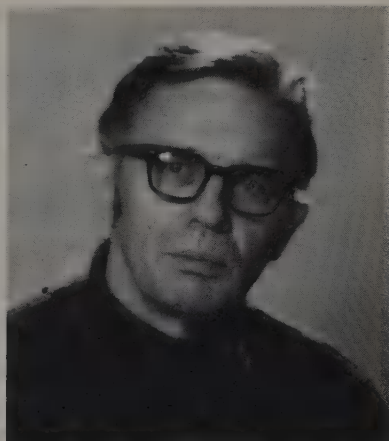
⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-221. Baum's observations here are reinforced by Gustavo Gutierrez who also sees that the need for internal reform is concomitant with church efforts on behalf of human liberation. He writes: "The demands placed on the church by prophetic denunciation, by the conscientizing evangelization of the oppressed, and by poverty sharply reveal the **inadequacy of the structures of the church** for the world in which it lives. These structures appear obsolete and lacking in dynamism before the new and serious challenges." *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 117.

- ⁴⁶ Richard McBrien, "Catholic Theology, 1974: Problems and Prospects," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Convention* (Bronx, New York: The Catholic Theological Society of America 1974), pp. 401-402.
- ⁴⁷ Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974). The book was occasioned by an exchange between Rahner and Cardinal Hoeffner of Cologne at the beginning of the synod. The Cardinal had insisted that certain basic truths of faith had to be presupposed before any synodal discussions could take place. Rahner, on the other hand, suggested strongly that these assertions were of little use to people today and could be irrelevant to the discussions.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31. Rahner's program for the future of the church is given principally in Parts Two and Three, pp. 45ff.
- ⁴⁹ On a more empirical base, Andrew Greeley projects that in the next three to five decades there will be greater dialogue between religion and the social sciences, greater concern for the development of small, intimate religious communities, and further consolidation of democratic practices in the churches. If this be true, then the imaginative programs for church reform proposed by Moran, McBrien, Baum and Rahner may, at least in part, be realized and their efforts to prod the church into adopting more human, and therefore more Christian, structures justified. See *Religion in the Year 2000*, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-173.

**Apologetics, Newman
and the Teaching Church**



Webster T. Patterson

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Precis

Although John Henry Cardinal Newman, celebrated theologian and principal proponent of the Oxford Movement, died in 1890, his relevance for the contemporary church continues. His understanding of the relationship between the hierarchy and the faithful as well as his appreciation of ecclesial consensus as a dynamic process are, in particular, important contributions to a solution of 20th-century problems with authority in the church. Newman maintained, for instance, that Roman Catholicism placed too great an emphasis on the hierarchy and assigned the laity a mistakenly insignificant role. He anticipated by almost a century the need for greater freedom of expression, creativity and responsibility by the laity. The key to his progressive insights was a dynamic concept of church consensus, i.e., that the church is always moving toward an ever more complete affirmation of the Christian message. Nor is this affirmation confined to hierarchical pronouncements. Rather the whole body of the faithful forms the "mind of the church" through and in which the Spirit of truth is revealed. As Vatican II has emphasized, the faith is not a static, propositional body of doctrines, but a living commitment shared by the community of believers. Only by immersion in that faith can the hierarchy fulfill their functions of witness and judge.

Apologetics, Newman and the Teaching Church

In a volume devoted to theology confronting a changing world, consideration not only of the Christian community's involvement in social change but also of change within the church seems apropos. If change is defined as an alteration in the structures and institutional interrelationships of a society significant enough to affect that society's way of life (*cf. Richard McBrien's previous article*), then important changes have been taking place in the church in the past century. Nor have these changes been solely in the area of polity; doctrinal development has also occurred to a degree unequaled since the 13th century. But the question that shall occupy us in this article is **how** should change take place in a church aware of the need for consensus, for the free expression of opinion, for a vital interaction among the faithful, theologians, and the hierarchy.

Our contention is that the approach and insights of John Henry Cardinal Newman have an enduring vitality and application for today's church. If faith in the church, which to many seems to be crumbling away on all sides, is indeed today's most critical apologetical issue, then Newman has much to say that is relevant. Among the most relevant and practical is Newman's shift from a static to a dynamic concept of consensus. Whereas Adolf Harnack regarded all change within the body of apostolic doctrine and practice as a corruption, Newman was able to see it as development. And this was a consequence of recognizing consensus as a dynamic, rather than a simply static factor within the life of the church. We will try to trace the genesis and implications of this perspective in the following pages.

Individual Opinion and Ecclesiastical Authority

One critical issue today is the conflict between individual opinion and ecclesiastical authority in the church. What is the place of individual opinion on matters of faith and morals in the Catholic Church? Over a century ago Cardinal Newman asked himself the same question, and the principles he used to arrive at a solution shed considerable light on the same question today.

Newman looked upon individual opinion as something both useful and necessary. Without freedom of opinion, a society cannot remain healthy. When freedom of opinion is stifled, a society falls victim to discontent and stagnation. This holds true of every human society, whether secular or religious. And just as the free expression of opinion is necessary for the general well being of every healthy civil society, so it is for the religious society which is the church.

"The active intellect is no less active within the church than without it," wrote Newman. "Man's natural tendency toward private judgment can be directed to the good of the church rather than against it, and this even in matters of religious doctrine. It is individuals, and not the Holy See, that have taken the initiative, and given the lead to the Catholic mind, in theological inquiry."¹

Newman vigorously rejected the Protestant contention that it has all the private judgment to itself and that Catholicism lives only under the oppression of authority. He rather compared the church to the civil state which exists by rivalry and collision. "Catholic Christendom," he said in his *Apologia*, "is no simple exhibition of religious absolutism, but presents a continuous picture of authority and private judgment alternately advancing and retreating in the ebb and flow of the tide; it is a vast assemblage of human beings brought together into one by the beauty and the majesty of a Superhuman Power. . . ."²

But consistent with his ever-present sense of balance, Newman also recognized the limitations of public opinion, especial-

ly as a guide in deciding important matters. He recognized that popular opinions are often influenced by private fears and emotions. Also, public opinion can be shaped easily by the propagandist who selects the truths which serve his ends and colors those which do not. Likewise, public opinion often lacks the note of personal responsibility. Opinions which are held in common by a great number are sometimes the responsibility of no one.

Despite these reservations, however, Newman's definite emphasis was on the need for greater freedom of expression, creativity and responsibility on the part of the layman. He anticipated by almost a century the present day emphasis on the role of the laity and recognized an overemphasis on the hierarchical organization of the church. The choice for Cardinal Newman did not consist in a decision between ecclesiastical authority and lay freedom. Rather, he saw the authority-obedience relationship between hierarchy and laity as needing completion by special stress on the **wholeness** of the church. This emphasis would give greater and due importance to the **sense of the faithful** in matters of religious concern and to the prophetic office of the laity.

In this respect Newman was far ahead of his time. He anticipated by a century the doctrine of Vatican II that the Holy Spirit operates not merely through the pope and hierarchy, but sanctifies and leads the people of God through the laity as well, "allotting His gifts to everyone according as He wills" (*I Cor. 12:11*). It was this conviction that the Holy Spirit resides in the **whole** church which led Newman to write his famous article, "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine."³

Newman was a great respecter of authority, but he recognized that authority was only a part, although an essential part, of any whole society. This is as true of the church as it is of the polity of any other organization. Newman recognized an overemphasis on the hierarchical organization of the church. Indeed, the term "church," in Newman's day, as well as in our own, too frequently was used to refer to the hierarchy, not to the Mystical Body, much less to the people of God.

This overemphasis on the hierarchical part of the church, which tends to replace the whole by the part, is still with us, despite the efforts of Vatican II. Problematic today is how to implement such documents of the Council as *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. Newman provided some direction by writings such as "*On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*."

Toward a Living Consensus

How Newman came to arrive at this position concerns the deeply felt conflict which he experienced in his own life between freedom and authority, between spirit and community. The story of this conflict, which involved his conversion from Anglicanism, is lengthy, complex, and is told in his own classic autobiography, the *Apologia*. But for the sake of brevity and clarity, it might be well to set forth two statements which sum up his views on the subject of polarization in the church in the one word **consensus**: 1) Newman's conversion was due to a change from a static to a dynamic concept of consensus in the church, and 2) a dynamic concept of consensus dominated Newman's thinking as a Catholic till the end of his life.

As regards the first statement, Newman's conversion was essentially due to a change from St. Vincent of Lerins' norm for belief, *quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus* (what is believed always, everywhere, by all), to Augustine's living norm, *securus judicat orbis terrarum* (the whole world judges securely).⁴ In his *Apologia*, Newman eloquently describes the impact which Augustine's words made upon him at the time: "For a mere sentence, the words of Augustine struck me with a power which I never felt from any words before . . . the theory of the *Via Media* was absolutely pulverized. I became excited at the view thus opened upon me."⁵

The view Augustine's words opened up was that "the deliberate judgment in which the whole church at length rests and acquiesces, is an infallible prescription and a sentence against such portions of it as protest and secede." Here was a

surer, simpler, and more vital norm of faith than that of St. Vincent of Lerins' rule of antiquity. "Nay," says Newman, "St. Augustine was one of the prime oracles of Antiquity; here then was antiquity deciding against itself. What a light was hereby thrown upon every controversy in the church!"⁶

This, briefly, in his own words is the fundamental breakthrough which led to Newman's conversion. Basically, it was an insight into the dynamic element in the church, an insight into that living consensus of the church as a whole as a norm of faith; in Newman's words, an insight into "the deliberate judgment in which the whole church at length rests and acquiesces." Eventually, this basic insight was to lead him to write *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and such Catholic works as his article "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine."

What, then, is this living consensus which was practically the inspiration of Newman's entire lifetime? Essentially it can be described as that communal and experiential dimension of the *sensus fidei* (sense of faith) which is implanted and sustained by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁷ It is a sense of faith which implies **discernment** or **judgment** (as implied in Augustine's saying, "*securus judicat*"—the whole world **judges** securely). It is a sense of faith which implies a particular kind of judgment best qualified by the word "experiential."⁸ For Newman the discernment exercised by faith is not by learning merely or only, but through a certain connaturality acquired through experience. He is best judge in a practical matter, says Aristotle, who has experience in that matter. And for Newman, lived faith is both practical and essentially experiential, a matter of the heart and emotions, not of the intellect only. Not only is it experiential, but it is communal.⁹ Truth, according to Newman, has an essential social dimension; it is the concatenation of many minds working together, a principle he developed at length in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.

In Newman's concept of consensus, therefore, certain elements would seem to be essential: experience (in the concrete), interaction and confrontation within the community, time and

deliberation, and, above all, the activity of the Holy Spirit in the **whole** church, not just in the hierarchical magisterium. The hierarchy, in Newman's view, is the **focus**, rather than the exclusive **locus** of the Holy Spirit's activity, i.e., the hierarchical magisterium is a norm of faith and morals insofar as it reflects a true, free, and living consensus of the faithful.

In spite of the fact that Newman had the greatest possible respect for ecclesiastical authority and although Newman himself never formulated the matter in these precise words, this essential interaction between the hierarchy and the living consensus of the faithful can be defended, it seems to me, as being perfectly consonant with the overall view Newman took of the church and the function of the magisterium. This is true for several reasons.

The first reason and the place to begin is with the following quotation from his work *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*:

"It is a common saying that political power is founded on opinion; this is true, if the word opinion be understood in the widest sense of which it is capable. A State depends and rests, not simply on force of arms, not on anything short of the sentiment and will of those who are governed. . . . And thus it is that countries become settled, with a definite form of social union, and an ascendancy of law and order, not as if that particular settlement, union, form, order, and law were self-sanctioned and self-supported, but because it is founded in the national mind, and maintained by the force of a living tradition."¹⁰

From this quotation it is clear that Newman is using the term "public opinion" (and therefore **consensus**) in a much broader and deeper sense than ordinarily used. He is using it in the same way one might say that the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution of the United States is based upon "public opinion" when they set forth such aims as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The framers of such documents

were not basing their formulations upon temporary judgments of a number of individuals dominated by private interests peculiar to entirely unique social and cultural circumstances. They consulted men in the sense of reaching down into the very essence of human nature itself. They were making explicit what is inherently buried deep within the human heart much in the same way as the Ten Commandments did long ago at Sinai. There was no question of taking a Gallup poll on the fleeting and ill-considered opinions and views of men, often contradicting one another, which all have upon the endless problems and circumstances of life.

The matter was much deeper than that. And that is why, by analogy, Newman regarded the hierarchical magisterium as having a serious obligation and profound need of giving advertence to that unique society, the whole body of the faithful, in which and through which the Holy Spirit is ever present and ever operating. In both cases, that of the nation and that of the church, Newman saw an absolute necessity for profound communication between the framers of the law and the community to be affected and directed by that law. Since no human community, whether civil or ecclesiastical, is ever static, but constantly changing due to new developments in human knowledge and human relations, this regard for the whole community which Newman at one time summarized under the word "consult" and at another under the word "public opinion" is a factor that must be perennially present in all decision-making on matters which affect the natural and supernatural life of man.¹¹

As history progresses, so does the communal experiential knowledge of man. In the passage of time, men interacting together arrive at certain deeply felt, if not clearly expressed, conclusions. These conclusions must be more explicit according to time and occasion as history and human circumstances require. Advertence to the living communal experience of the Christian community is more needed at some times than others; the occasions and times vary, as Newman pointed out in his article "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine." Perhaps the most prominent recent occasion has been

Vatican II. Pope John XXIII in convoking the council seemed to indicate this when he said that "if we turn our attention to the church, we see that it has not remained a lifeless spectator in the face of these events, but has followed step by step the evolution of peoples, scientific progress, and social revolution."¹²

In noting that as history moves on not only the world is profoundly changed but the Christian community "is also in great part transformed and renewed," Pope John pointed out that it is by this means that the Christian community is reinvigorated intellectually, interiorly purified, and thus made ready for trial. The trial of which Pope John spoke is that which Newman indicated 100 years before: the whole community of faithful must be subjected to the pains of growth and development, the chief characteristic of any truly vital body.

The Deposit of Faith

Newman's emphasis was on the **whole** church of which the hierarchical magisterium is a part, not separate and independent, but nevertheless a distinct part. What then is the relation between the part and the whole, between the hierarchical magisterium and the body of the faithful? It is true that in the flurry of controversy which followed publication of his article "On Consulting the Faithful" Newman rather unhappily took up the image coined by the chief Roman theologian of the day, Father Giovanni Perrone, S.J., the image of the seal and the wax.¹³ The analogy is unhappy because, although Newman used it for want of a better image at the time, it does not really express Newman's own view of the matter. The seal is the church teaching, the magisterium; the wax is the church taught, the faithful. The wax, the body of the church, has only that impression which the seal, the magisterium, gives it. But the question is: whence does the seal derive its impression? Directly from God? According to Daniel Maguire of Marquette University, Pope Paul VI at least implied this on one occasion. Paul said that "the magisterium 'could preserve and teach the faith . . . without the help of theology.' It would not be easy,

the pontiff concedes, since it would be done without revelation and inspiration and 'only with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.'"¹⁴

One might be tempted with Maguire to consider that the image of magisterial activity without human means sounds dangerously close to magic, but there is a grain of truth in it, and I think Newman saw it. The grain of truth is (to use Newman's analogy) that the mind is greater than any of the instruments it uses; it does not depend absolutely on any of them. Unlike the seal and the wax, the metaphor this time is Newman's own image, one which he develops at some length in a second and lesser known essay on the development of doctrine which Newman wrote as a Catholic toward the end of his life.¹⁵

In this essay, Newman is trying to answer the question: what is the deposit of faith, and where actually does it lie, if it is neither a list of propositions nor can be identified either with any single church Father nor with all of them put together. The answer he gives is that the deposit of faith is the same as the mind of the church. Just as an Aristotelian philosopher is not one who has everything Aristotle said in all its applications explicitly before him, so the church does not have Christ's revelation in all of its applications explicitly either. But given a specific problem, a true Aristotelian philosopher, given time, can answer the question as Aristotle would have, the reason being that he thinks like Aristotle; he has the Aristotelian *habitus*. For Newman, faith is a *habitus*; and given time, and a specific problem, the living apostolic mind which is the church as a whole can recollect itself as it were, and address itself to the concrete problem or application of the faith in the same way that an apostle would have. The allusion to recollection which Newman uses is taken from another example, that of an apparent nonlistening, inattentive school boy who, when called upon by the teacher, mentally gathers himself together and often comes forth with a surprising answer.

But is the mind of the church to be identified with that special department within the church known as the hierarchical magisterium? Or is it rather that the magisterium itself is an instrument, though admittedly a superior instrument, which the

mind of the church collectively speaking uses? With Vatican II, it seems to me that the case is the latter. If Vatican II stresses anything, it emphasizes the truth that the Holy Spirit operates in the church as a **whole** and not exclusively through one part only. Thus the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* states,

“The holy people of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office. . . . The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One (*cf. Jn 2:20, 27*), cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a supernatural sense of the faith which characterizes the People as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when from the bishops down to the last member of the laity it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals” (*Par. 12*).

It is true that the council adds that “all this it does under the lead of a sacred teaching authority to which it loyally defers.” But this is a long way from the image of the seal and the wax. In the view of Vatican Council II the hierarchical magisterium is seen as the **focus** of the Holy Spirit, not exclusively as the **locus**; as **within** the church, not on top and apart from it; as **evocative**, not coercive; as an instrument of God’s revelation, not as its source; as first having the obligation **to listen** (not “to extinguish the spirit”), and secondly, to teach.

All of this is clearly implied if not explicitly stated in the council’s doctrine on the sense of faith which is in all the members of the church (not only in the hierarchy), a sense of faith which enables the people of God to penetrate His word “more deeply by accurate insights, and apply it more thoroughly to life since He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank” (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 12*). The same view was expressed by Newman when he insisted that the sense of faith belonged to all the faithful, not merely to the so-called church teaching.

All of this may be well and good, someone might say, but should not the proposition be stated in reverse, not only for the sake of theological accuracy, but also to avoid the danger of at

least appearing to tone down the importance of authority, a principle both so traditionally Catholic and so necessary, especially for these troubled times. So inverted, the proposition would read thus: Newman held that a true and living consensus of the faithful is a norm for faith and morals in so far as it reflects the hierarchical magisterium.

To be sure, this way of formulating it would be better calculated to please many of the hierarchy today; and to some, it might seem more in line with the traditional Catholic way of thinking. But I submit that this was definitely not the mind of Newman, and in the circumstances of the present day I do not think he would consider this the desirable way to formulate the matter.

That this was not the mind of Newman can be seen clearly by anyone who reads his article "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine." Among other things he points out that such a way of formulating the proposition would simply not hold up when looked at historically. He points out that at the time of the Arian heresy in the fourth century, there was a period when the majority of the bishops in the world were Arian, not Catholic. He speaks of this period as a time when "the body of bishops failed" and there was a "suspense of the Church teaching."¹⁶ At this critical time the only thing that saved the day was the consensus of the faithful, the fact that the majority of the faithful, for the most part unlearned, simply held on to the faith and did not follow their bishops. Here was one case at least when a true and living consensus of the faithful proved to be a better norm for faith than the guidance of ecclesiastical authority. And other examples could be cited, as does Newman.¹⁷

But besides the fact that this reverse way of formulating the proposition is clearly not the mind of Newman, I submit that if he were alive today he would consider this latter formulation especially undesirable in view of the 20th-century historical situation. I submit this on the same grounds Karl Rahner presents in his *Free Speech in the Church*. In an age when totalitarian governments crush basic human rights and

freedoms, the church not only has an obligation, but a special obligation, not even to give the appearance that it is something of the same nature. Actually the church is not something of the same nature, the difference being that in the suppression of basic human rights and freedoms totalitarian governments are acting in perfect accord with their fundamental principles; but when the church appears to be doing the same thing, it is not acting in accordance with its basic principles.

Can it honestly be said that the church has not often given the appearance, at least, of acting like a totalitarian government? And does not this appearance seem almost, at times at least, to be an integrated part of the hierarchical magisterium's own self-image? Perhaps it is not a true self-image, but is there not a basis for concern here lest such be the real case? At least Karl Rahner thinks so; and it is difficult to see how Newman would differ from Rahner, especially in the light of his article "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine."

The Hierarchical Office

This does, however, bring up what is perhaps the most sensitive apologetical point in regard to today's church. Granted the basic function of consensus, what is the precise role of the hierarchy (papacy) in formulating that consensus? Why are not, for example, professional theologians a surer group to entrust with this formulation? Can one today really ask from intelligent and educated people the famous *obsequium religiosum*? For untold numbers who have left the church as well as for those still in it, this indeed is the crux of the contemporary religious crisis.

Is the magisterium simply to reflect the consensus of the faithful? Is it simply to be the mouthpiece, as it were, of the Holy Spirit everywhere throughout the church? Or is there some office of judge which belongs to a man as the authoritative teacher in the church? If he has first done his duty of acquainting himself with the life of the church, if he knows the thinking of theologians, the belief of the faithful, the tendencies

within the church, has appreciated them, properly evaluated them, does it then not belong to him to make a judgment upon their value, to make some authoritative statement or decision about their conformity with everything that has gone before and the line in which the church is to follow hereafter?

In other words, is the bishop to be conceived of simply as a witness, or is he not also, in some sense, judge? This is a delicate issue, but is perhaps the central issue when one wishes to approach this matter of consensus and magisterium within the church. If it were simply a matter of reflecting consensus, theoretically then, any kind of agency might be employed to do this. But if in addition to searching out the consensus, discovering the attitudes of the Christian people, there remains the obligation to weigh all this under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it would seem that the magisterium has its own proper action which consists in making some kind of judgment. Such would seem to be the view of Aquinas.

"To take order away from creatures," he says in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 69, 17, "is to deny them the best thing they have, because though each one is good in itself, together they are very good because of the order of the universe. . . . Now if we take away action from things, the order among things is withdrawn; because things differing in nature are not bound together in the unity of order, except through the fact that some are active and some are passive. Therefore it is unfitting to say that things have not their proper actions."

If all things in creation have their own proper action, as St. Thomas has often pointed out, so also do bishops. As Cardinal Alfrinck observed, bishops in their dioceses are not simply witnesses, but also judges; when they come together in a plenary council, it is not their office simply to say what is the faith of their diocese, but to make some kind of judgment about that faith.

Newman's point was that the hierarchy, generally speaking, has been too inclined simply to accent their function as judges and not to understand that they can judge only after they have immersed themselves in the life of the church, have really felt the problems, the questions, the difficulties that are present

within the whole body of the faithful. Only then are they able to make some kind of judgment and not before. It is not adequate to rely upon seminary training and a dated manual of theology and suppose in trotting this out that they are performing adequately their function as a teacher within the church.

This, of course, is somewhat of a caricature, but unfortunately it is not too far from the truth in some cases. Theological textbooks have emphasized the responsibility of the faithful in regard to official ecclesiastical pronouncements, without providing any kind of corresponding explanation of the responsibility of authorities in preparing and promulgating such statements. As Newman pointed out in his famous essay, this leads to misunderstanding of the very nature of the church, and in particular of the function of the magisterium in the whole teaching process that goes on in the church.

If Newman were alive today, I think he might very well write an *Apologia pro ecclesia* along the lines indicated here. Such a defense of the church would not be an all-out accent on the rights of the laity, sounding like a 20th-century version of Febronianism which would make ecclesiastical authority merely a mouthpiece of the democratic majority. Nor would it be a revival of Ultramontanism akin to the position of Cardinal Manning and W. G. Ward at the time of Vatican I. Newman's own sense of personalism led him to look upon the church essentially as a communion—a common union—as a body existing in history whose essential characteristics were fellowship, interpersonal relationships, and mutual sympathy. The church consisted of all her members, subdivided into local communities, all under their lawful pastors. But he did not identify the church with the hierarchy.

As regards the abuses and defects of hierarchical authority, his apologetic is as relevant in our own day as it was sane and balanced in his own. "There is a time for everything," he wrote, "and many a man desires a reformation of an abuse, or the fuller development of a doctrine, or adoption of a particular policy, but forgets to ask himself whether the right time for it has come; and, knowing that there is no one who will be doing anything toward it in his own lifetime unless he does it himself,

he will not listen to the voice of authority, and he spoils a good work in his own century, in order that another man, as yet unborn, may not have the opportunity of bringing it happily to perfection in the next."¹⁹

John Henry Newman did not commit this error. In his own life, he suffered greatly; but his views have been victorious, as is evidenced in the documents of Vatican II.

Footnotes

¹ *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1899), p. 265.

² *Ibid.*, p. 252.

³ *The Rambler*, I (New Series), July 1859. John Coulson, ed., *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961).

⁴ *Apologia*, p. 117. In his Glossary, Samuel D. Femiano, C.S.B., unfortunately mistranslates *securus judicat orbis terrarum* as "let him who is secure judge the world." Such a crucial mistake in translation not only misses Newman's whole point, but also, if taken seriously, knocks the props out from under Femiano's own book *Infallibility of the Laity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

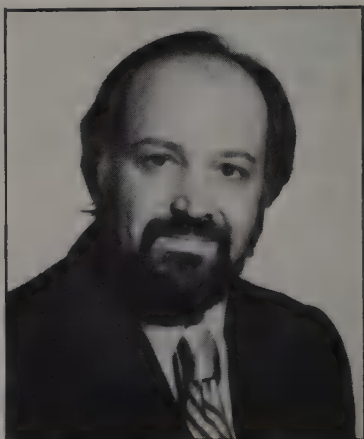
⁷ *Sensus Fidelium*, literally "sense of the faithful," but better described as an instinct or power of discernment whereby one who has the faith is able to distinguish between what is true and what is false, what is compatible with his faith and what is not, See Webster T. Patterson, *Newman: Pioneer for the Laymen* (Washington: Corpus, 1968), chapter 6, section II, "The Deposit of Faith and the Sensus Fidelium." In Newman's thought the term *consensus fidelium* adds a collective dimension to *sensus fidelium*; Newman himself describes the consensus of the faithful thus:

"1, as a testimony to the fact of the apostolic dogma; 2, as a sort of instinct, or *phronema*, deep in the bosom of the mystical body of Christ; 3, as a direction of the Holy Ghost; 4, as an answer to its prayer; 5, as a jealousy of error, which it at once feels as a scandal." cf. Coulson, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

- ⁸ Newman's famous distinction between "real assent" and "notional assent" comes in here. In "real assent" the whole man is involved (not just the intellect), including the experiential element. See Newman's *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1887), p. 133. Also see Patterson, *op. cit.*, "The Devotional Principle," pp. 130-140.
- ⁹ This is especially true in regard to the consensus of the faithful, or what Newman regarded as the social dimension of truth. According to Newman, the universal church has a life, a spirit, a genius of its own which is a test of true doctrine. Principles and doctrines incompatible with its life will be rejected by the Catholic community, even though the members of that community be unlearned, a practical busy people with no keen analytical view of the principles which govern them. Nevertheless, such people will be attracted or repelled by doctrines which are consistent or incompatible with a faith which is not merely a matter of intellectual apprehension but which is their life. See Patterson, *op. cit.*, "The Social Principle," pp. 119-130.
- ¹⁰ *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898) II, p. 317.
- ¹¹ On Newman's meaning and use of the word "consult," see Patterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-65; 79-81.
- ¹² Apostolic Constitution, "Humanae Salutis," December 25, 1961. Cf. *Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbott, ed., (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 704.
- ¹³ Discussing whether infallibility lies in the church teaching or the church taught Newman says: "I understand Fr. Perrone to say, on the contrary, that it resides *per modum unius* in both, as a figure is contained both on the seal and on the wax and primarily in the mind of the engraver." Letter of Newman to Dr. John Gillow, May 16, 1859, Birmingham Archives. See Patterson, *op. cit.*, 59.
- ¹⁴ Daniel Maguire, "Holy Spirit and Church Authority," *Commonweal* (1968), p. 218.

- ¹⁵ *Unpublished Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, Birmingham Archives. Newman wrote this essay in 1861 to answer some difficulties which he felt were not sufficiently treated in his noted book on the same subject. Actually, the so-called unpublished essay has been published three times. See Romuald Dibble, *John H. Newman, The Concept of Infallible Authority* (Washington; Catholic University Press, 1955), pp. 287-293; C. Stephen Dessain, *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1958), pp. 324-335; and Hugo de Achaval, "An Unpublished paper by Cardinal Newman on the Development of Doctrine," *Gregorianum* 39 (1961), pp. 585-591.
- ¹⁶ See Patterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-77.
- ¹⁷ James Hitchcock recently has pointed out that Newman might have found an excellent example of *consensus fidelium* in the works of Thomas More. However, as Hitchcock notes, "There is no evidence that Newman was familiar with More's polemical writings . . ." "Thomas More and The Sensus Fidelium," *Theological Studies* 36 (1975), p. 151.
- ¹⁸ Karl Rahner, S.J., *Free Speech in the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959). Rahner says: "In an age of totalitarian states, when individuality is suppressed and 'ideology' supplied, the church has to delimit her position more clearly, to prevent her own character and nature from being confused with those of a totalitarian state. She will now have to come down more firmly on the side of the individual's responsibility and freedom both in his secular and his religious life" (p. 17).
- ¹⁹ *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1899), VIII, p. 165.

**Theological Considerations
on the American
Experience of Ethnicity**



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Precis

America has once again become aware of the ethnicity of its citizens. The melting pot imagery has been recognized as inaccurate, indeed as an exhausted ideology whose purpose in the 19th century was to impose Anglo conformity on an increasingly diverse groups of people. Americans are seeking new ways of defining themselves, and ethnicity is coming to be recognized as one of the most important factors in that self-definition. Several reasons contribute to this upsurge: A refuge from the anonymity of a mass culture, a return to a personal foundation for moral values, and the political need for group organization. But if theology is understood as "reflection upon the meanings present in human experience and the meanings present in Christian tradition," then theologians must seriously consider the meanings implied in the renewed American emphasis on ethnic identity. One pivotal affirmation that ethnicity makes is the importance of primary relationships—of compassion, intimacy and friendliness—over against dominance, competitiveness, and mere efficiency. Cultural awareness also furthers the process of self-identification and appreciation, both of which are essential for the freedom and the capacity to love others. The Christian gospel affirms life in all its multiplicity: the same pluralism in a common humanity that ethnicity finds so precious.

Theological Considerations on the American Experience of Ethnicity

Some Reflections on American Ethnicity

There is an ethnic revival loose in the land. Those of us who had not noticed it, or had not read or believed the writings of Nathan Glazer, Milton Gordon, Horace Kallen, Andrew Greeley, Michael Novak, Daniel Moynihan and Geno Baroni¹ which documented it, were brought face to face with it by our presidential candidates. For the purposes of this essay, therefore, we will regard ethnicity as a cogent factor in American social life, and thus a relevant, not-to-be-neglected dimension of American experience.

For the sake of clarity, the problem of definitions must be faced at the outset, even though the definitions of ethnicity are so numerous and varied in scope that some researchers have regarded this as problematic for scholarly analysis. The definitions have shifted from those narrow in scope, to those that address the entire population of the country. The narrower definitions have the children of the mostly Catholic, southern European immigrants as referents. Slightly broader ones include all Americans who are non-WASPs. Most recently, ethnicity has been defined as "religious, racial, national, linguistic and geographical diversity in American society,"² a designation which will be accepted as adequate for the purposes of this essay.

Arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, there are some positive elements to the broadening of the definition of ethnicity-

ty. In the first place, the widening of its reference to include all Americans, as this last definition does, indicates the growing relevance of the idea of ethnicity for America's own self-understanding. Secondly, the extension of the definition to include all Americans and various kinds of diversity, overcomes the polarization that the narrower definitions presume. Thirdly, this last definition focuses on ethnicity as the legitimation of diversity in American society, which is one of the major contributions ethnicity offers theological reflection. Finally, this definition refers to ethnicity as a specifically American form of social life different from ethnic variations in other countries on the globe, cautioning the researcher against facilely importing theological and sociological analysis from other countries. The revival of ethnicity in our day is a sign that the theory of the melting pot is an exhausted ideology. America's brief history of its own self-understanding has moved from that of a pluralistic New Israel to that of a monocultural melting pot,³ which renewed interest in ethnicity calls into question. Early in the last century immigrants were to a large degree welcome, particularly as a source of cheap labor. The resident Americans who were in political and economic control, however, were overtaken by a national identity crisis, a fear of being snuffed out by the influx of immigrants. American life became defined in terms of the cultural singularity we have come to know as the theory of the melting pot.

Proponents of this theory asked immigrants and then their children, the ethnics, to accept a pattern of life that had become determined exclusively by the Anglo majority. In essence the theory of the melting pot was a mask for what historians and social scientists have labeled Anglo-conformity, the imposition of Anglo-American values on a growing influx of culturally diverse peoples.

The revival of ethnicity has raised many questions for America; in particular, it has called for a re-definition of America's own self-understanding. Ethnicity suggests that monoculturalism is not adequate to American reality at the beginning of the third century of our history and that the notion of cultural pluralism is a more apt designation for the

American experiment. Ethnicity suggests that freedom and dignity can be restored to America and to Americans only by carefully nurturing the distinct values and life styles present within the American borders. The ethnic revival asks that America examine its own systemic political prejudices which contribute to the violence encountered by those who do not wish to and cannot conform to the melting pot ideology.

The reasons for the upsurge of ethnicity in America in the past few years are numerous. In the first place, it should be obvious that ethnic differentiation persists despite strong, and sometimes violent, forces of socialization. This suggests ethnicity is not a superficial, private designation, but an important factor operative in the way people define themselves and locate themselves socially. Secondly, the increase in the power of the forces of centralization and the concomitant rise of impersonalization and bureaucracy (symbolized by big business, the computer, mass media, increased mobility and the anomity of urban life), have also contributed to the upsurge of ethnic self-identification since ethnicity allows the individual access to a sense of personal stability.⁴

A third reason is the collapse of traditional authority structures, which has been accelerated in this country by the crises over Vietnam and Watergate. It should not be inferred from this, however, that ethnics have returned to the old ethnic authority structures of church and family. Rather the breakdown of traditional American structures of authority has forced Americans back upon themselves for a lost source of stability. Evidence for this can be found in the nascent, but powerful, movements for neighborhood decentralization manifesting themselves in urban ethnic communities.⁵

Neighborhood decentralization is the effort of local populations to gain control over their lives by designing smaller political units. In the words of Daniel Bell, "the politicization of the decisions that affect the communal lines of persons makes the need for group organization more necessary, and ethnic grouping becomes a ready means of demanding groups rights or providing defense against other groups."⁶

Ethnicity is a real factor in American life. It persists over the years from generation to generation, despite our conscious attitudes towards it. It is not, however, like a precious heirloom that remains unchanged and impervious to social forces. It is a creative form of social life that grows and develops, is enriched and reshaped by the tides of history. It has many features—political, personal, psychological, historical, sociological, religious and theological—of significance for the future of this country. These must be addressed by all scholars, including American theologians.

Theological Considerations

That American experience is pointedly ethnic is extremely important to American theologians who have come to accept the pivotal place of contemporary experience within the matrix of theological reflection. David Tracy, for example, claims that theological enterprise involves reflection upon the meanings present in human experience and the meanings present in the Christian tradition.⁷ There does not seem to be universal agreement among theologians about how human experience is to be understood, but here it will be taken to mean life as it is lived and has been lived. It has therefore both a historical and historico-existential nuance which includes the past, present and the dialectical presence of the future. The task of Christian theology is to take the expressed and unexpressed meanings that life has for the people of God, to translate these into terms laden with Christian symbols and to hand them back to the people as tools for understanding and transforming their world. A critical analysis of ethnicity is an obligation for the American theologian because it is a broad dimension of American experience.

In terms of the preceding definitions, this essay is rather modest principally because it is only within the past few years that the experience of ethnicity has been thematized by social scientists. Thus all the dimensions of ethnicity have not yet been plumbed. Nevertheless, ethnicity has some concrete suggestions for theologians.

In the first place, it would be a gross error to mistake the resurgence of ethnicity as recidivistic, as a future-fearing return to the past. The renewed interest in ethnicity is more aptly described as a yearning for a society in which primary, affectional relations are dominant.⁸

Contemporary urban technological society's fragmentation of the labor market through specialization and its dispersion of the same market through geographical dislocation and increased mobility have given rise to the predominance of secondary and segmented impersonal relations. An alienation has resulted which is reflected in the individual's feelings of helplessness, homelessness, restlessness and anxiety. Accompanying this sense of alienation is a lack of intimacy, impersonalism, the atomizing of obligations and the loss of communal solidarity, in short, the loss of primary ties. Monocultural imperialism, exploitation and the concentration of economic power in the hands of a few, all produce estrangement of person from neighbor. These factors tend to pervert people and society, and alienate them from the community-forming power of God.

The ethnic revival seems to be trying to correct some of the disvalues of mass society by the restoration of primary relations so that compassion, friendliness, intimacy and common responsibility will again become relevant. It asks for the return of the power of mutuality over against the power of domination. The demand of ethnics for the values that cluster about the primary ties is a perennially relevant demand of Christianity. Love and justice reign where they are supported by the values found in primary relations.

The revival of ethnicity, therefore, and this is my second point, also calls for a new sense of cultural justice in our society. Cultural justice is a term which may sound unfamiliar to many and unnecessary to others, yet it uncovers an important area of human experience. It has a great deal to do with that measure of self-acceptance of self-respect that every individual must have to live a tolerable human existence. The individual is inevitably a cultural creature. The very fabric of personality is constituted by the culture in which individuals have their existence. The only way to live a tolerable life is to be able to

freely deal, negatively or positively, with the fabric of one's own personality. So individuals make a demand on society that part of their due is that they be accepted and respected for what they are.

To a large degree ethnics are saying that they have been rejected in this country for what they are, an idea that has been adequately thematized by Michael Novak.⁹ Interestingly enough, when *Time* magazine in December 1975 chose Mother Teresa of Calcutta as a living saint, she commented that the poor suffer more from rejection than from lack of material goods.

Rejection and its antithesis, acknowledgement or recognition, have often been highlighted by philosophers and psychologists as a key to personhood. I refer here to Hegel's treatment in his *Phenomenology of Mind*, where he says that self-consciousness exists only by being acknowledged or recognized.¹⁰ In another context, psychologist Andras Angyal adds, "A man in the most crucial way is a symbol, a message that comes to life only by being understood, acknowledged by someone. . . . Starting with the small child who urgently wants to be noticed, we all want to have a life in the thoughts and feelings of others, to have them reflect our individual existence, and reflect it in an understanding and affectionate way."¹¹

Each person cooperates in shaping the lives of others. Recognition is an obligation of justice, giving the other what is due, as well as of love, the participation with the other in the community-forming power of God. To the extent that ethnoculture defines the personality of individuals, then to that extent cultural justice, the right to free cultural self-expression, is a legitimate entitlement of each individual.

In the third place, the revival of ethnicity raises questions about the place of personal identity in theological reflection. This refers not to the subjectivity of the theologian, but rather to the place of God in the establishment of personal identity. Living within a social context that is as monoculturally oriented as America has been, ethnics have begun to ask: who am I and who are we as Americans?¹² This question is often repeated in one form or another in ethnic literature. We have to

recognize that, as Philip Hefner has pointed out,¹³ the process of self-identification is a religious enterprise and that, based on a Christian theology of creation, humans have a moral obligation to pursue a strong sense of personal identity.

This strong sense of personal identity is extremely important for the valid actuation of Christian love. Erik Erickson's psychology maintains that in order to experience close interpersonal relationships one must have a reasonable sense of personal identity. One who has failed to develop identity will shy away from close interpersonal relationships with others. The more sure persons are of themselves the more they will seek interpersonal relationships where they can express themselves with spontaneity and warmth, and thus be capable of real and mutual exchanges of love. The God who acts in history acts also in the individual history of the person. To the extent that one's ethnicity is an important part of a person's identity, to that extent is God active in bringing about the encounter of individuals with their ethnicity.

We must also recall in this context that persons can never be free unless secure in themselves, which will happen only when they are in touch with the depths of their own experience. Getting in touch with these depths has something to do with founding one's stability on God, as Isaiah 7, 9 indicates, ("Unless you stand on me, you shall not stand at all"). This does not mean that God resides at the bottom edge of the self; rather through the examination of one's self and the experience of self, one is brought to the experience of God. One's ethnocultural identity is an important aspect of this self-experience.

Fourthly, it is clear that the central concerns of the ethnics have to do with life. One aspect of this is the ethnic zest for life which is so often evidenced in the forms of food and festivity. The ethnics do approach these with an immediate and absorbing finality. But I am also thinking of those American ethnic concerns for better education, good housing, neighborhood decentralization, health insurance and welfare benefits, all of which manifest an abiding preoccupation for enhancing life.

The same care and concern for life are central to Judaism

and Christianity. A long life was the greatest desire of the Israelites, and the extension of the individual's life into the lives of relatives after death was their fondest hope. As Abraham Heschel has so perceptively indicated: "The cardinal difference underlying these two approaches is that the first, or ontological, approach accepts being as the ultimate, whereas the biblical approach accepts living as the ultimately real."¹⁴ **The chief attribute of the biblical person is life.** To be deprived of life is to be plunged into nothingness.

Jesus' whole message is about life and care for life. In the New Testament, life is the highest good: "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life?" (*Mark* 8, 36-37). Jesus' miracles, signs of God's Kingdom and integral to his message, are involved with the preservation of life. Jesus brings back life that is dead (*Mt.* 9:18), saves life that is in danger of death (*Mark* 5, 23), and makes whole (saves) life that is maimed or divided against itself. It is precisely in these terms that Jesus, according to Luke, defines his own mission: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them." (*Luke* 7, 22).

The close relationship between the care for life manifested by the miracles of Jesus and the preaching of the gospel, as this last text asserts, should not be overlooked. It suggests that they go hand in hand, that they should not be separated from each other. This is the meaning of Jesus' missionary command to his church: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (*Mt.* 28, 19). The task that Jesus left his church is this: to devote itself to life in order to raise it to its true value.

The secret of being human, according to the New Testament, is care for life. Human existence, devoid of life, is an absurdity. The overwhelming significance of the resurrection of Jesus is that it changes human existence from being-unto-death into being-unto-life. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, death has lost its sting (*1 Cor.* 15, 55). The Sermon on the Mount, as

well as the Ten Commandments, sets down the fundamental conditions for the care of life—worship, peace, justice, love, mercy, respect for human wisdom. They also caution the avoidance of the idolatry of work, the taking of life, covetousness, stealing, lying, and so forth.

Such a constellation of values calls for another kind of development which would subordinate technological development and prowess to an economic system of development that focuses on the satisfaction of human needs through the preservation and enhancement of the quality of life. This would mean the reorientation of available resources towards preventive as well as remedial care for human life, and a concomitant educational revolution that would be socially, not economically, oriented. Among the goals of such an economy would be “full employment, stable purchasing power, the efficiency of economic performance, and the re-orientation of the economy towards consumer concerns.”¹⁵

Ethnicity also raises the question of pluralism because and this is my fifth point—it forces us to recognize the rich variety of the world. Theology, Christian theology in particular, has not recognized this formally nor dealt with it adequately. Only relatively recently have we acknowledged a plurality of theologies. The question that ethnicity raises is that of a theology of pluralism because ethnicity indicates that reality is pluralistic.

It is of course apparent that Christianity has long been pluralistic. There is diversity present in scripture. I Cor. 12, 4 recognizes a plurality of life styles, vocations and services within the Christian community while affirming that Christians are but one body. Pentecost is an indication of the diversity of Christianity: one message heard through the cultural filtering systems of different languages. Probably the most instructive example of pluralism in contemporary Catholicism is the relationship of Rome and the Uniate churches.¹⁶ They are in full communion with Rome but they have their own bishops, their own canon law, their own liturgies and liturgical languages. These churches do not exist in separate geographical areas but along side the Roman Catholic churches of the Western rite. Thus pluralism within the church is not a matter of geography.

In the United States there are both Latin and Uniate bishops with jurisdictions covering the same areas.

The conception of pluralism that all this suggests is probably most adequately expressed in the idea of a diversity in unity. Wolfhart Pannenberg's conception of reality as in dialectical relationship with God, the future of this world, is helpful here. Pannenberg acknowledges finite individuality while preserving unity. He conceives a dialectic of negative mediation, which is perhaps best exemplified in terms of the subject of this essay by the following quotation from Moynihan and Glazer: "Americans become more American and less ethnic all the time but in the course of participating in this process they may also simultaneously become more ethnic."¹⁷ Such a dialectic is evident in such biblical expressions as "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." Antithesis is mediated through thesis, universality through particularity, unity through difference.

David Tracy has found an adequate explanation for this phenomenon in the idea of the literary classic which is often the quintessential expression of a particular culture, but has universal appeal and meaning.¹⁸ This same dynamic is also operative in such regional American playwrights as Tennessee Williams, William Inge and Preston Jones. Tennessee Williams' plays, for example, are rooted in the life of the deep South, yet their meaning transcends their milieu and addresses all persons of Western culture and beyond. Here universality is mediated through particularity.

Such a negatively mediating dialectic is not alien to the Christian tradition. According to the Catholic experience of the Trinity, which is also normative for our understanding of reality, God is triune in the real distinction between Father, Son and Spirit, and yet absolutely one in nature. The Trinity represents the ultimate fulfillment of diversity in unity and unity in diversity. The imperfect personal and social unities of humans are an anticipation or a prefiguring of that ultimate unity of the Trinity which will be integral to the experience of all mankind. Ethnic pluralism indicates that ours is a society of individual groups of people, within this diversity a unity is operative, and the unity is operative in the very workings of diversity.

Therefore, pluralism is not just a statement about diversity. Within the context of reality as history, pluralism is a statement that the world is dynamic, unfinished and open. Further than that, it is a statement that there is a unity manifest and operative in history, and that this unifying unity, the living God, is the future of this world.

In the sixth place, ethnicity is not a private, but a public political affair, which has implications for Christian social action. An interesting dynamic has manifested itself in the five year history of the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, viz., that private issues often rapidly become public and political affairs. Most of the groups that have come to the Center were initially usually concerned about particular private issues, issues involving only a few individuals. In the process of moving from one small issue to another, they often become involved with other people in their communities, and their interests broaden from particular programs to community development. The more they gain a sense of their own unjust situation, the more they begin to get a sense of their power to overcome injustice, the more they become sensitive to the fact that there are others who are suffering similar and perhaps worse injustices. Initially private issues become transformed into matters of public and political impact.

This dynamic seems to mediate between an existential and a political theology, because it moves from legitimate individual concerns to those that are central to the promises of the reign of God in the New Testament, namely the broader issues of freedom, peace, justice, reconciliation and love. It suggests that a radically incarnational theology is by that very fact eschatological.

Ethnic participation in such political action is an affirmation of the world. It is also an effort to transform the world in light of the coming kingdom which is a participation in God's love for the world. Such political practitioners are already in communion with God. Such action puts the fullness of individual life in the context of the larger love that God has for the world.

Finally, among the difficult things that ethnic resurgence

asks of American theologians is a reconsideration of tradition. Our great thinkers, particularly those who might be called theologians and philosophers of hope, who have been engaged with the conception of futurity, have maintained this sensitivity to tradition. Such a future-oriented theologian as Pannenberg for example, asserts that "dependence on what has been transmitted by tradition does not necessarily mean that a person remains constrained in a closet that has outlived its usefulness. Rather, the wealth of experience of a living tradition repeatedly becomes the starting point for new discoveries that carry things further. The diversity of the possibilities for life always remain conditioned by the richness and depth of the traditions in which a person stands."¹⁹ In a real sense, those who neglect the past are condemned to repeat it. They are starting from ground zero. While those who have an attitude of open, free fidelity to the past stand on the shoulders of their forebearers better equipped to meet the arrival of the future. Unfortunately, some less perceptive thinkers, mesmerized by the newness offered by the future have almost completely lost respect for a sense of the past, of tradition, and the extent to which the past is operative in our lives. To a large degree they have forgotten that men and women move into the future with what they carry from the past. Ethnicity reminds us of this need for a respect for the past, and promises a future rich in possibilities for human fulfillment.

Conclusion

These are only some of the considerations that the ethnic revival offers theology. In terms of contemporary theology's commitment to critical reflection on experience, ethnicity cannot be overlooked because it is a broad and relevant dimension of American experience. The ethnic factor calls on theologians of every cast of mind to examine the numerous possibilities of human existence latent in American ethnic experience. At the very least, it can mean the enrichment of all levels of theology. At its best it can mean a new contact by theologians with the people of God, and a new access to social and cultural justice.

Footnotes

- ¹ See Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT University Press, 1970); Milton Gorden, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Andrew Greeley, *Why Can't They Be Like Us?* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1971); Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* (New York: Macmillan, 1972); Geno C. Baroni, "Ethnicity and Public Policy," in *Pieces of a Dream*, Michael Wenk *et al.*, eds. (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1972), pp. 3-11.
- ² Andrew Greeley, "Is Ethnicity Unamerican?" *New Catholic World* 5 (1976), p. 106.
- ³ Briefly documented in Milton Gorden, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-160.
- ⁴ See Danuta Mostwin, "In Search of Ethnic Identity," *Social Casework* 53 (1972), pp. 301-316; and Joseph Giordano, *Ethnicity and Mental Health* (New York: American Jewish Committee; Institute of Human Relations, 1973).
- ⁵ See Art Naparstek, *Neighborhood Decentralization: An Option for Urban Renewal* (Washington: Publication of the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs, 1975).
- ⁶ Daniel Bell, "Ethnicity and Social Change," in *Ethnicity*, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, eds., (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 171.
- ⁷ See David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).
- ⁸ Andrew Greeley, *Why Can't They Be Like Us?*, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-44.

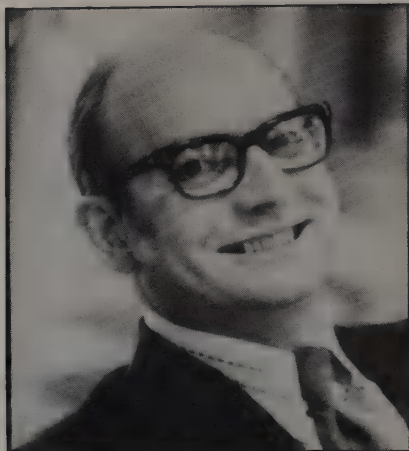
- ⁹ See Michael Novak, *op. cit.*, *passim*.
- ¹⁰ Georg F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, J.B. Baille, trans., (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), p. 229.
- ¹¹ Andras Angyal, *Neurosis and Treatment; A Holistic Theory*, E. Haufmann and R. M. Jones, eds., (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), p. 18.
- ¹² Geno C. Baroni, "Black, Brown and Broke: Can the Catholic Church Help in the City," *New Catholic World* 5 (1976), p. 104.
- ¹³ Philip Hefner, "The Self Definition of Life and Human Purpose: Reflections upon the Divine Spirit and the Human Spirit," *Zygon* 8 (1973), pp. 409-410.
- ¹⁴ Abraham Heschel, *Who is Man?* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 69.
- ¹⁵ Eugen Loeb, *Humanomics* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 145.
- ¹⁶ See John Macquarrie, *Christian Unity and Diversity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), pp. 43-44.
- ¹⁷ Glazer and Moynihan, "Introduction" in *Ethnicity*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- ¹⁸ David Tracy, "Ethnic Pluralism and Systematic Theology," Unpublished essay, 1976.
- ¹⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, Duane Priebe, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 127.

3
**Confronting
Sexism**

The Changing Church of the Future:
The Androgynous Church
by Robert Kress

A Theological Case
for the Ordination of Women
by Sonya A. Quitslund

**The Changing Church
of the Future:
The Androgynous Church**



Robert Kress

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Precis

The church is the sacrament of God's union with humanity, and clearly reform is demanded if that sacramentality is in any way obscured. But the sexist made predominance in the church today is just such an obscurity. Such sexism contradicts the message of Genesis' creation accounts, Jesus' own teaching, and the authentic writings of Saint Paul. One facet of the Hebrew creation story is that God is neither male nor female; He is androgynous, and humanity is fully in God's image and likeness only when both male and female. The teaching of Jesus also escapes the chauvanistic attitudes of his time. Jesus uses numerous images and examples of women and their activities and he chose women as the first witnesses of the Resurrection. Indeed, St. Paul—so often accused of misogyny—writes that in Christ “there is neither male nor female,” and several of his coworkers were women. If the church is to be faithful to its androgynous mission, therefore, several proposed reforms need to be enacted: sexist language and imagery will have to be avoided, Mary will be presented as the image of Christian life for all persons, matrimony will be perceived as an androgynous oneness in Christ, and of course women will be admitted to ordination.

The Changing Church of the Future: The Androgynous Church

The purpose of Vatican Council II was the *aggiornamento* of the church. This task is not to be perceived as an exercise in ecclesiological narcissism or ecclesiocentrism,¹ but within that wider horizon where "the church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such unity and union" (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 1). The Church, then, is the sacrament of salvation, as Vatican I had already asserted. The purpose of every ecclesial reform, and therefore of both Vatican I and II, is to make this sacrament appear more clearly as the anticipation and pledge of that communion between God and humankind which will be perfect only in the heavenly city described by John in the Apocalypse. In the meantime, however, during its earthly pilgrimage the church must take care lest the scandal of its own inadequacy obscure the primary scandal of Christ and the Cross (*I Corinthians* 1:17-31; *Galatians* 5:11).²

Perhaps the major task of ecclesiological reform is the fundamental rethinking of the basic approaches to the theology of the church, especially of those models of the church which are so shaped by the intimate union of the church and any given contemporary culture.³ I have attempted to do this elsewhere and must simply refer to those efforts to provide the wider context for the present more limited enterprise.⁴ In these current considerations I want to suggest that one persistent and contemporary scandal which obscures the full symbolic presence of the church as the sacrament of communion between God and **humanity** is the sexism of male predominance. The vision of the church as androgynous can contribute significantly to this reform, critical as it is, at least in contemporary Western society.

As the sacrament, both sign and cause, of God's saving communion with His creation, the church must reflect in its own being both the being of God and His created world. Since both God and Jesus can and must be thought of androgynously, so must the church.

God is "androgynous." In every theology and religion the world is always described as being, in some way or other, (in) the image and likeness of the gods or the God. Thus the being of the world somehow or other reflects the divine being. And from the being of this world some knowledge of God as its source can be gained. According to Genesis 1:27, the bisexual, androgynous human race, as the image and likeness of the creator God, is the primary source of our understanding of this God. Both Genesis 1 and 2 indicate that when God shares his being *ad extra* with that which is not God, the result is bisexual humanity.

Indeed, androgynous. In this context androgyny can be viewed as negative theology, for it prevents the "sexification" of God. Neither hermaphroditically nor polytheistically sexual, the **One** God of the Judeo-Christian tradition nevertheless exists so richly and fully that "His" created image can only be pluriform, even sexually. Thus in both Genesis 1 and 2 there is both unity and diversity in the human image and likeness of God, but neither domination nor subordination. There is no sexism. This equality is clearly taught in the first chapter. The peculiar literary form of the second chapter has been the occasion of many misinterpretations which have destroyed the "partnership" of the man and the woman as the image and likeness of God.⁵

A story in the lively Yahwist tradition rather than a historical chronicle, the rib scene has often been interpreted to mean that woman was created later than male man, that she is subsequent and secondary, therefore subordinate.⁶ However, this interpretation draws exactly the wrong conclusion, the direct opposite of what the sacred writer intended. Chapters like this one were written not only to explain true doctrine according to the Hebrew religion, but also to combat the false understanding of the neighboring Mesopotamians. Hence, Genesis 2

uses the literary context and metaphors common to the Near Eastern culture, but gives them a new meaning. Chapter two has, then, no intention of describing the creation of men and women chronologically. It intends, rather, to explain the origin and relationship of the two human sexes, and thus to refute other conflicting views. Against the Mesopotamian religions which asserted that the human race originated from the corpse of a dead god killed in a war among the gods, Genesis maintains that the entire world, and especially the bisexual human race, is an entirely free gift of the one god. Against the then reigning understanding that woman was the sexual slave of the male, her highest dignity being that of sacred prostitute in the fertility cults, Genesis maintains that man and woman are equally necessary for human being to be present. That is the meaning of Adam's "complaint" that "no helpmate suitable for man was found for him" (2:21), namely that human being is not possible without both male and female human beings. That is also the meaning of Adam's exultation, "At last bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh." This is not simply a random,arty concatenation of words, but a technical term to describe the precisely human. Thus Genesis 2, properly understood, teaches precisely the same doctrine as Genesis 1, namely that human being is, from the very beginning and equally, male and female.

Here I may remark parenthetically that, in the history of the Judeo-Christian tradition's understanding of male and female, whenever a choice of alternatives was possible, the one favoring the male and disfavoring the female was always chosen.⁷ This is true of both the Old and New Testaments, the Fathers of the church (how revealing a term), the scholastics and even contemporary churchmen (lest I succumb to the neo-barbarism of such non-literacy as churchperson).⁸

Obviously this grand Hebrew theory was not conscientiously practised in the daily life of the chosen people's citizens and institutions. But, neither was it ever simply and completely relinquished. Apart from the individual and, admittedly, few heroines, neither the prophetic nor the wisdom literature can be evaluated as being merely masculine. The wisdom litera-

ture, for all its misogyny, at times almost virulent, is nevertheless insistent on the feminine dimension of the divine being.

The Canticle of Canticles is also relevant to these considerations. It is hardly an allegory of God's love for the world or an anticipation of Jesus' love for the church. In spite of repeated and even current attempts to maintain such interpretations, the evidence is simply not there. Rather than these contrived "spiritual" explanations, the Canticle of Canticles should be taken for what it is—a love song celebrating the non-sexist, non-exploitative love of male and female human beings. It is a literary and theological return to paradise where, Edenlike, the androgynous human being celebrates its participation in the divine perichoresic being. It celebrates the understanding that being is neither domination nor subordination, but communion. Thus, in the final analyses, God can be prayed to as our Mother as well as our Father.

The Teaching of Jesus

As the final and definitive sacrament of God in this world (*John 1:14; 8:19; 12:44; 14:9; Hebrews 1:1-4*), Jesus is and acts androgynously. In the admittedly questionable typology of masculine and feminine sexual traits, Jesus exhibits both the tender and the strong, the active and the passive.⁹ Jesus seems to share none of the sexist attitudes and practices so typical of Jewish males in his contemporary society. For example, Jesus not only shows his familiarity with the everyday duties of women, he also uses them in his preaching: baking (*Matthew 13:33*), the bridal party (*25:1*), the woman's lost coin (*Luke 15:8*), the widow's lawsuit (*18:1*). In the gospels there is also a parallelism of male and female examples which can hardly be fortuitous. In Matthew's Gospel (*Chapter 13*) the Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed in a field (male) and the yeast in the flour (female); in chapter 24 there are men in the fields, women at the grindstone; in Chapter 25 the kingdom of heaven is like both the man and his servants, and the bridesmaids. Luke's gospel parallels the cures of a male leper and a widow (*Chapter 4*), the condemnations by the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South (*11*), the shepherd's search for the lost

sheep and the widow's search for the lost coin (15). Likewise the persistent neighbor of Luke 11:5 has his counterpart in the widow persistently pestering the evil judge (18:1).

Jesus' treatment of the sinful women is a most striking rejection of the religious and civil sexism of his contemporaries (Luke 7:36-50; John 8:1-11; 4:4-42). The latter incident, of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well, is especially significant. Men have frequently engaged in conversations with such women; that is hardly unusual, but also hardly theological. But Jesus acknowledged her ability to understand theology, something the church itself, until very recently, was reluctant to do, at least insofar as academic degrees were concerned.

There are many other possible examples of Jesus' androgynous being and behavior. Consider the following. First of all, Jesus was apparently adamant in his rejection of divorce (*Matthew 19:1-10*), which was a strictly sexist practice in his day. It is not inconsequential, then, that the resurrection of Jesus is first announced to women (*Matthew 28:5; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:5; John 20:12*). Thus Jesus would have symbolically undone that sexist practice whereby women, perpetually minors according to the law, were considered incapable of being official legal witnesses. Another significant text is often overlooked, namely Luke 8:1-3. This text emphasizes (is this again a deliberate Gospel parallel?) that women, like the Twelve, accompanied Jesus on his missionary journeys. Finally, and perhaps most strikingly in the macho society of his day, Jesus dares to refer to himself with that most female of all images: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem. . . . How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. . . ." (*Matthew 23:37*). "Jesus the Hen"—that is certainly a rejection of any and all possible sexism in regard to God and humankind, "Jesus the Hen" is an unequivocal assertion that God the Father and the "only one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus" (*I Timothy 2:5*) are not the sexist expressions of male chauvinism and domination, but rather of that divine and theandric androgyny "already" witnessed in the Garden of Eden.

Paul and the Primitive Church

As the sacrament of Jesus who is the sacrament of God, both androgynous, the church must, therefore, also be androgynous. Apparently the earliest or primitive church was more successful at this than later eras. Although St. Paul is often accused of, indeed berated for being a misogynist and chauvinist, "did he (really) begin male domination in the church?"¹⁰ The answer must be given resoundingly in the negative. St. Paul was not always as forceful as he might have been in regard to the freedom and full participation of women in the official and public life of the church. Indeed, we may feel that had he not made certain comprehensible compromises in his day, we might have been spared many critical situations in our own. Certainly the undisputedly authentic Pauline epistles are much more favorable than unfavorable to women. There is the revolutionary theory of Galatians 3:28, "All baptised in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. . . ." Some manuscripts also include male and female in the similar declaration in Colossians 3:11. Does its absence in many manuscripts indicate the hand of a chauvinistic copyist already at work, a scribal prolepsis of the Grand Inquisitor?¹¹ Not only in theory, but also in practice was Paul hardly a domineering male chauvinist. This is certainly indicated by the list of people to be greeted in Romans 16, which begins with a woman (Phoebe) and proceeds to a husband-wife team (Prisca and Aquila), whom Paul describes as "my fellow workers in Christ Jesus" and of whom he greets the woman first. The list proceeds with a male (Epaenetus), a female (Mary) and then a pair of names, one certainly male (Andronicus) and the other possibly female (Junias or Julias, who would be the first woman called apostle). The rest of the list contains an ample supply of women. In the Epistle to the Philippians (4:3) Paul also refers to women (Evodia and Synteché) who "have labored side by side with me in the Gospel" (*RSV*). The Goodspeed translation reads "they toiled at my

side in spreading the good news.” Certainly this indicates an intense cooperation of these women with Paul in the mission of evangelization. Such language hardly admits restriction to the Altar Society, bake sales and PTA projects. However, this text, like Luke 8:1-3, seems destined to be ignored totally by those ecclesiastics, clerical and lay alike, who are determined to exclude women from public office in the church. There are, of course, many other texts where Paul indicates that women were much “freer” in the early church than in the later. Which is not to say, sadly, that there are no problematic texts even in the certainly authentic Pauline writings.

The most famous would have to be I Corinthians 11:7 and 14:33-35, along with Ephesians 5:22-33, whose Pauline authenticity remains disputed.¹² Two general principles must be kept in mind in reading these texts, especially from the Corinthians. One is the Pauline pastoral principle that the overriding concern must always be the welfare of the other, especially of the weaker members of the Church, as well as prospective converts (*Romans 15:1; I Corinthians 9:1, 19, 22*). Perhaps the best summary is, “‘For me there are no forbidden things’; maybe, but not everything does good” (*I Corinthians 6:12*). The gist is clearly that the new found freedom of the Jesus people must never be used to the detriment of others. Paul restricted himself this way and thus felt that he could call upon others to do likewise. A second principle is that the texts must always be understood in the social and culture context of **that** time, and in such a context the application of the newly discovered Christic freedom was not always easy. Perhaps a third principle should also be insisted on, especially since in these texts Paul is reasoning as a rabbi. This principle would insist that these texts be read in the context of the Old Testament traditions, especially as these are distinguished into Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly and Deuteronomic. Such a procedure allows these texts to be interpreted in such a way that no male domination or essential superiority is demanded or even allowed.¹³

Texts from two other epistles are definitely less favorable to the status and role of women in the Church: I Timothy 2:9-15

and I Peter 3:1-7. Although both these texts are clearly a far cry from Galatians 3:28, they are not nearly as bad as some would make them out to be. For instance, two contemporary authors write:

Are there to be no virgins? What if, as is true now in the United States, there are more women than men? Is the answer a return to polygamy? Or will the unmarried and the sterile be eternally damned?¹⁴

The meaning is plain: she will be saved by the fulfillment of her curse, by which she was condemned to multiple pregnancies and to her husband's domination. Yet, if this is the true way of life and salvation for the Christian woman, then in no sense can she be said to have been saved by baptism in Christ Jesus; again, this is not Pauline. Furthermore, if this is the correct teaching, then there should be no room, in the Ecclesia, for unmarried women. Clearly, this runs counter to the position of Paul.¹⁵

Unfortunately, neither of these authors attends to the false teachers (Gnostic?) who "say marriage is forbidden" (*I Timothy* 4:3), against whom in part, at least, the Pauline epistle was written. In any case, salvation is not attributed to childbearing, as Tavard would have it, ignoring the hardly incidental coda of the exhortation, "provided she lives a modest life and is constant in faith and love and holiness" (*I Timothy* 2:15). Nor is Tavard's equation of "her curse" with "condemned to multiple pregnancies" very liberating, however well intentioned his righteous indignation and rage might be, since Eve's dignity as mother long antedates the curse (*Genesis* 1:28). In any case, Eve alone of the three protagonists in *Genesis* 3 is not cursed. Nor would childbearing as such be included in the curse, assuming there were one: rather, only the pain of childbearing and the husband's lording it over her would constitute the curse, at least according to *Genesis* 3:16. The cause of Women's Liberation as well as Christian Liberation is no less

ill served by such capricious "liberal" readings of the biblical text as by conservative biblicism. In conclusion we can say that, although Jesus, Paul and at least certain strains of primitive Christianity were thoroughly unsexist and libertarian, the early church did not entirely succeed in putting into practice Christ's message of freedom and equality.

This lack of total success is, of course, readily understandable—such a new message in such a hostile and uncongenial social, cultural and religious ambience. But, as understandable as it may have been, it was equally baneful. This failure provided the opportunity for the reinstitution of the old and familiar ways. Practically this meant that the male dominance which had become traditional in Judaism continued in the Christian church. Although the office of deaconess continued for several centuries in the East, women's role in the public and official life of the church soon diminished significantly.¹⁶ This trend was intensified by the increasing emphasis on the ascetical at the cost of the sacramental in the Christic liberation of sinful humanity. In this process celibacy and virginity came to be more and more highly prized as the means of sharing in Christ's victory over sin. Thus liberation from sin, original and personal, and their consequences were no longer primarily attributed to Baptism, but to virginity.¹⁷ Thus, St. Thomas comments on I Corinthians 11:6,¹⁸

Insofar as they take the vow of virginity or widowhood Christ thus becomes their spouse, they are elevated to the status and dignity of men in that they are freed from subjection to men and immediately united to Christ.

However, even this virginal liberation from both sin and male domination was not sufficient to enable women to enjoy Holy Orders and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The influence of Greek biology and philosophy, according to which woman is a *mas occasionatus* (*homme manqué*), remained (and remains) sufficiently strong to keep women "*in statu subjectionis*," and hence incapable of the "elevation" inherent in Holy Orders and

jurisdiction.¹⁹ As the relationship between the sexes became less and less complement and more and more of opposition and diversion, woman tended to become either the untouchable lady of courtly love or the scandal and temptation of sexual lust. This latter description of woman was, of course, intensified by the increasingly demanded celibacy of the already exclusively male hierarchy. Obviously this combination of celibacy and masculinity in the clergy could only marginalize women even more in the public and official life of the church. Eventually and inevitably not only sexual communion but even sexual cooperation became a sometime, if ever, thing. Thus the church has vacillated between unisex and non-sex, with the latter the undeniable theoretical preference, especially in regard to clerical and ecclesial office. Private practice and public policy have never, of course, simply and purely coincided.

Some Practical Proposals

How far has humanity come since Eden, that androgynous garden of paradise (*Genesis 1; 2*), and the church from that androgynous "sonship" of "being clothed in Christ" (*Galatians 3:27*)! Christianity has hardly perdured in that Pauline boast (and challenge?), "there are no more distinctions between . . . male and female." Thus it is not out of spineless conformity to the present aeon nor even out of legitimate apologetic concern that I suggest the following proposals for an androgynous church. It is, rather, because only a practically androgynous church truly reflects the ontology of Judeo-Christian creation theology (*Genesis 1:27; 2:23*) and of Christian redemption theology (*Galatians 3:28* with *2 Corinthians 5:16*). If God's very being is the communion in the one divine nature of the three divine persons, and if bisexual humanity is the image and likeness of this God, then certainly the church of Jesus Christ, in whom there is perfect communion of the divine and the human, must be an exemplar of androgynous communion.²⁰ Hence, the following "practical" proposals.

First of all, every effort must be expended to avoid and eliminate sexist language and imagery in church writing. I do

not subscribe to certain ventures (fortunately they seem to fail regularly) to rewrite the bible and traditional hymnals in order to eradicate every trace of sexism. I think we can safely remit such enterprises to the Marxists and secular humanists whose ontologies make them devoid of the resources to deal with failure, past, present or future. Nor do I subscribe to those "trans-sexual resolutions to sound stupid" bemoaned by Bill Buckley in the article cited earlier. I do think, however, that where modifications can easily and readily be made, they should. May two examples suffice. In the liturgy, for example, it would certainly be in keeping with the non-sexist Jesus to phrase the prayer of consecration "It will be shed for you and for all **people**" or "all humankind" rather than "all men." And the concluding doxology could be even more emphatically Christian by replacing the triple "him" with a triple "Christ." Such changes are easy and could, in the long run, be very salutary. The second example pertains more to theology, catechetics and homiletics. I think we would do well to de-emphasize the church as Mother/Wife in tandem with God as Father/Spouse. In itself, of course, this pairing is completely non-sexist. However, given certain contemporary conditions it might very well be fitting to avoid undue usage of this coupling. Likewise the image of Christ-husband and church-wife need not be relinquished completely, only judiciously employed. In the same vein every effort should be expended not to dwell on Christ as male, and certainly to avoid emphasizing Christ as male and church as female.

Another valuable contribution to a contemporary androgynous church would be a revitalized Mariology, in which the emphasis would not be on the extraordinary privileges of Mary, but on her being a human Christian believer whose faith was lived out in her status as woman.²¹ Thus she would be a model and inspiration for both female and male Christians.

Matrimony as a way of life which is essentially the androgynous sacramental manifestation of God's relationship with the world in both creation and Christ must also receive proper theological consideration. The moralistic and legalistic preoccupations of the past have done justice to neither the androgynous

nous ontology of both Old and New Testaments nor to those men and women called to live together androgynously in the Sacrament of Matrimony. A parallel concern must be the development of an adequate understanding of celibacy, free from the various anti-sex and anti-woman tendencies of the past.

All the previous suggestions taken together could have as their natural outcome the demand that a theology of God the Mother be developed, not to replace, but to complement and balance that of God the Father. Here we must recall what we said above about androgyny as negative theology. Since God is called Father not because "he" is a male, but because he is the source of new life, for which he then cares, God can also be called Mother with equal ease and equal precautions. Such a theology would be valuable not only for our understanding of God, but also for our understanding of ourselves. Most obviously such a theology would be supportive of woman's self-concept. But it can also be of equal value to men since it clearly indicates to them that they alone do not bear the entire burden of being the image and likeness of God.²²

The most practical and most pressing redress of male sexism and dominance in the church is, of course, the ordination of women to the sacramental ministry at all levels: deacon, priest, bishop. Recently on NBC's "Today Show," Cardinal Suenens said that the question was not yet mature.²³ That is an almost absolutely sure sign that everybody knows that there are no theological reasons prohibiting the ordination of women. It is simply a case of the proper authorities not being able to bring themselves to do it, for whatever motivations they may have.

All the reasons advanced in opposition to the ordination of women are based on two fundamental misunderstandings, both of which claim to certify an inferior status for women. From the Hebrew religious tradition come the misunderstandings of the rib and the "curse." It is erroneously maintained that the rib asserts that woman is an afterthought, both secondary and subordinate to the male, who as such and alone is the proper paradigm of human being. The curse is erroneously understood as God's will, as if Genesis 3:16 revealed what God wants when, in reality, this verse reveals exactly what God

does **not** want. This verse describes neither God's creating will nor his redeeming will. It describes, rather, the ungodly effects of sin. Some fundamentalist interpreters of this verse have gone so far as to reject "natural" or "painless" childbirth as ungodly and sinful because, they say, the bible says women are supposed to have pain in childbirth. Apart from this lunacy, the above mentioned two errors combine to define woman as inferior to man by both nature and sin. Hence woman is in a state of subjection, and incapable of occupying the superior position conferred by the Sacrament of Holy Orders and spiritual or ecclesial jurisdiction.

The second error is that of Greek philosophy and biology, wherein woman is considered a defective male and, in Platonic thought, in a state of greater punishment (the theory of descending reincarnation). Aristotle tended to equate the passive with the inferior. Since he discerned that women were passive in regard to men, he had, logically, also to discern that they were inferior. Whence comes the famous dictum, accepted and employed by St. Thomas, that women cannot be given jurisdictional rule in a society, for this is to place an inferior over a superior, and thus the good order of society, the common weal, is destroyed. It is interesting to note that someone as insightful and knowledgeable as St. Thomas Aquinas was able to use this argument even though he knew that women religious superiors like abbesses did in fact enjoy ecclesiastical jurisdiction.²⁴ To escape the dilemma he distinguished between *claves* (the keys, a traditional metaphor for the power of jurisdiction), which women did not have, and *usus clavium* (the use of the keys), which they did have, in order to avoid scandal which would ensue upon having a male with jurisdiction living in a convent.²⁵ One can only wonder what kind of academic grade St. Thomas would have given his students making such a distinction.

Historical investigation has established, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the only reason women have been excluded from ordination is their woman-ness. The question is, however, why should woman-ness be such a diriment impediment? In reality, of course, it is and cannot be unless one accepts the

double error described above. In that case woman would indeed be inferior, and really **not in God's image**.²⁶ Many people assert, of course, that the main reason women cannot be ordained is because Jesus didn't ordain women. If the church never did anything that Jesus didn't do, it would be a strange church—and wouldn't do much, if not most, of what it does do. Others say that women can't be ordained because the church has never done it before. In that case the church need only do it, and the objection would be allayed. In any case, the church is always doing and has always done things it hasn't done before. Was it not Pope Pius XI who responded to an objection that a proposed course of action was unacceptable because it was not traditional, that he had such a high regard for tradition that he didn't hesitate to start new ones.

Elsewhere I have tried to show that the "ordination" of women as regular "special or extraordinary ministers of holy communion" places them in a situation so similar to that of the traditional deacon that it is only by devious distinctions and capricious conceit that it can be denied that they thus share in the ministerial power of the sacrament of Holy Orders.²⁷

Finally, in this regard it should be noted that Vatican II goes so far as to speak of the office of the episcopacy in maternal terms: "In propounding it (Christian doctrine), bishops should manifest the church's maternal solicitude for all men. . . ." ²⁸ Furthermore, since the "ecclesial community exercises a true maternity" ²⁹ it can only, in the long run, be whimsy to restrict the official ministry of this church to members of one sex.

With none of this do I, of course, wish to assert that only as an ordained deacon, priest or bishop can either man or woman be fully Christian or apostolic. I wish only to assert that the exclusion, in principle, of women from Holy Orders has no theological basis. Nor does it adequately reflect that androgynous ontology we have discovered in God's creation and Christ's redemption. Such inadequacy heightens the secondary scandal of the sinful holy church, thereby obscuring the primary scandal of God's reconciliation in Christ. Admittedly there have always been heroic and outstanding women in Israel and in the

church. Admittedly the quiet unsung work of women has very likely been of more real human and Christian value than much of the pompous posturing of male monarchs and hierarchs. Admittedly; but it is still desirable that the public and official activity, role and status of women in the church not be restricted to crisis or marginal situations. My proposal is that in an androgynous church the contributing role of women be normalized. A thoroughly androgynous church would certainly make the church as the sacrament of Christ a more credible sign raised among the nations, a more effective sacrament of salvation.

If God is able and willing to have the human race be (in) his image and likeness bisexually and androgynously, what possible reason can there be for his sacrament, the church, priest and people, not to be so.

References

- ¹ As, for example, such eminent theologians as Karl Rahner and John Baptist Metz have pointed out. See Karl Rahner, *The Church After the Council* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 93. Also, *The Crucial Questions*, ed. Frank Fehmers (New York: Newman, 1969), pp. 144, 145.
- ² Thus Joseph Ratzinger at the 1966 Bamberg Katholikentag, cited by Ferdinand Kerstiens, *Die Hoffnungsstruktur des Glaubens* (Mainz: Matthias Grunewald, 1969), p. 15.
- ³ The influence of the given contemporary culture on both the selection and resolution of theological problems has been forcefully demonstrated, in regard to the doctrine of papal infallibility, by Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, *Unfehlbarkeit und Souveranitat, Die papstliche Unfehlbarkeit im System der ultramontanen Ekklesiologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Matthias Grunewald, 1975).
- ⁴ See my "The Ontology of Perichoresis as the Foundation of a Communion Ecclesiology," *The Jurist* 36 (1976).

- ⁵ As E. A. Speiser points out, "The traditional 'helpmate for him' is adequate, but subject to confusion. . . . The Hebrew complement means literally 'alongside him,' i.e., 'corresponding to him.'" See his *Genesis: Anchor Bible*, 1 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), p. xliv. As John L. McKenzie dares to say, "his partner and, in the context of the story, his equal." See his *The Two-Edged Sword* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1956), p. 76.
- ⁶ On the symbolism of rib, see the special note appended to the end of this paper.
- ⁷ Here, as for this entire paper, I shall take the liberty of referring to my own book for detailed substantiation of the points I make. See Robert Kress, *Whither Womankind? The Humanity of Women* (St. Meinrad: Abbey Press, 1975).
- ⁸ See the trenchant remarks of William Buckley, "On the Right," *Dubois County Daily Herald*, July 16, 1974, p. 8: "That there are grown people in the world who go around saying things like 'chairperson' is testimony not to bisexual attempts to create equality, but to trans-sexual resolutions to sound stupid."
- ⁹ See the summary of some current thinking on sexual traits and typology by Jakob David, "Auf der Suche nach der Rolle der Frau," *Orientierung* 38 (1974), pp. 128-130. Also worth consulting is F. J. J. Buytendijk, "The Existence of Women and the Psychoanalytic Conception," *The Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 60 (1970), pp. 36-37. Finally, the recent research of a German professor of medicine at the University of Bonn has led August Wilhelm von Eiff to say, "There is no identity of the sexes, and one should not make a man into a woman and vice versa." See his "Die Regulation des Sexualtriebs in psychometrischer Sicht," *Sexualität und Gewissen* A. Gross and S. Pfurtner, eds., (Mainz: Matthias Grunewald, 1973), p. 50.
- ¹⁰ This is the subtitle of an article, answered negatively, by Robert Osborne, "Paul and the Women," *The Lutheran* 13 (1975), p. 10.
- ¹¹ See Joan Morris, *The Lady Was A Bishop* (New York: Macmillan, 1973).
- ¹² See Andre Feuillet, "La dignité et le rôle de la femme d'après quelques textes Pauliniens: comparaison avec l'Ancien Testament," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1975), pp. 157-191.

- ¹³ This is the conclusion reached by Feuillet in the article cited in the preceding footnote.
- ¹⁴ Sister Albertus Magnus McGrath, *What A Modern Catholic Believes About Women* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1972), p. 37.
- ¹⁵ George Tavard, *Woman In Christian Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 34.
- ¹⁶ See the article, "Frau," in *Die Religion in der Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Kurt Galling, (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1957, 3rd edition), III, pp. 1071-72.
- ¹⁷ See *Whither Womankind?*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 72, 83, 120, 129, 137-139, 146, 151, 218, 246-252, 318.
- ¹⁸ *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura* caput XI, lectio 2.
- ¹⁹ See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae Supplementum*, q. 9., a.4:

Woman, according to the Apostle, is in a state of subjection, and therefore cannot have any spiritual jurisdiction, because, as the Philosopher says in the *Ethics* (Bk. VIII), civility (the civil order of society) is corrupted when dominion and rule are exercised by woman. Hence woman has neither the key of (Holy) Orders nor the key of jurisdiction. But some use of the keys is commissioned to the woman, as, for example, the correction of the woman subject (to her), because of the danger which could threaten if men and women lived together.

- ²⁰ Cf. footnote 4 above.
- ²¹ I have attempted a beginning in "Mariology and the Christian's Self-Concept," *Review for Religions* 31 (1972), pp. 414-419. I have developed these ideas in a book entitled *Mary: Woman for Today* to be published by Alba House in 1977.
- ²² See my "God Our Father and Mother," *St. Anthony Messenger* 82 (1975), pp. 14-18.
- ²³ March 30, 1976.
- ²⁴ See Joan Morris, *The Lady Was A Bishop*, *op. cit.*, where such massive information is provided that St. Thomas could not possibly have been unaware that women enjoyed both civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction.
- ²⁵ See *Summa Theologiae Supplementum*, q. 19, a.4.

- ²⁶ As Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines felt compelled to subtitle their *Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1973).
- ²⁷ *Whither Womankind*, *op. cit.*, Appendix 2, "Have Women Already Been Ordained," pp.311-320. The argument is admittedly speculative, but not therefore without value. The Roman Catholic Church not infrequently does something practical for the "care of souls," only later to realize what it has done and to commission its theoretical justification to its theologians.
- ²⁸ *Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office in the Church*, No. 13.
- ²⁹ *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*, No. 6.

Appendix: The Rib

That Eve should have had her origin from the rib of Adam has long fascinated readers of the Genesis narrative. Even such a classic commentary as Gerhard von Rad's *Genesis*, however, hardly gives an adequate explanation. The most satisfactory exegesis currently available is based on the assumption that Hebrew literature was influenced by and borrowed from the general Sumerian culture, whose impact was pervasive in the biblical world. Of the Sumero-Akkadian myths, the best known is the "creation" poem usually entitled, *Enuma-Elish*. In this poem the provenance of the biblical rib story is most likely to be sought. As Samuel Noah Kramer points out:

But perhaps the most interesting result of our comparative analysis of the Sumerian poem is the explanation which it provides for one of the most puzzling motifs in the biblical paradise story, the famous passage describing the fashioning of Eve, "the mother of all living," from the rib of Adam—for why a rib? Why did the Hebrew storyteller find it more fitting to choose a rib rather than any other organ of the body for the fashioning of the woman whose name, Eve, according to the biblical notion, means approximately "she who

makes live." The reason becomes quite clear if we assume a Sumerian literary background, such as that represented by our Dilmun poem, to underlie the biblical paradise tale; for in our Sumerian poem, one of Enki's sick organs is the rib. Now the Sumerian word for "rib" is *ti* (pronounced tee); the goddess created for the healing of Enki's rib was therefore called in Sumerian Nin-ti, "the Lady of the rib." But the Sumerian word *ti* also means "to make live." The name Nin-ti may thus mean "the lady who makes live" as well as "the lady of the rib." In Sumerian literature, therefore, "the lady of the rib" came to be identified with "the lady who makes live" through what may be termed a play on words. It was this, one of the most ancient of literary puns, which was carried over and perpetuated in the biblical paradise story, although there, of course, the pun loses its validity, since the Hebrew words for "rib" and "who makes live" have nothing in common.²

This same poem has inspired an interpretation which asserts that the woman is the civilizer of the male who is the savage. However, the text of the poem does not seem to support such a conjecture. Although in lines 5-8 the noun is "savage man" and the pronoun the male singular "he," in subsequent verses the noun is the generic and collective "mankind," and the referent the same as in lines 5-8.

Blood will I mass and cause bones to be.
I will establish a savage, "man" shall be his name.
Verily savage-man I will create.
He shall be charged with the service of the gods
That they might be at ease (6:5-8).

He alone shall perish that mankind may be fashioned (6:14).

Out of his blood they fashioned mankind.
 He (Ea) imposed the service and let free the gods.
 After Eas, the wise, had created mankind,
 Had imposed upon it the service of the gods
 (6:33-36).

May he shepherd the black-headed ones, his creatures (6:108).³

(Black headed ones is an idiomatic expression for the human race.)

Hence, although the biblical story clearly teaches that humanity or human being is complete and present only when both man and woman are present, there is no indication that the bible or its Sumerian source for the rib image also wishes to assert that the man alone and without the female is a savage, who is civilized only by the presence and influence of the female. This very romance-inspired notion may indeed not be without its truth, but its truth is not to be sought in the biblical or Sumerian texts. For the latter, man, i.e., both male and female humanity, would clearly be a savage and hence servant/slave of the gods because he is not (a) god. As a foreigner or alien to the divine civilization man is a being suited only for servile existence.

Given this provenance of the term rib, which can hardly be supposed to have been clarificative to its Hebrew readers, we may ask whether the rib imagery might have inspired some symbolic understanding for these readers and, if so, what. Such would not be an isolated instance in Genesis, as von Rad has shown in regard to the word "Eden," which was a foreign loan word but which would have evoked definite conceptions in the Hebrew reader.⁴ It is not awry, I think, to seek the symbolism possibly suggested by the rib in its association with images more generally familiar to the Hebrews, namely the heart and the breath. The rib encloses both. The whole context of the rib narrative indicates that the woman is the singular helper/part-

ner (*ezer*) proper to the man, who otherwise would be alone in helpless solitude. Presumably, a solely male existence would be impossible. Thus the "matrimonial" exultation of one flesh (vv. 23-25) only celebrates the "reunion" of that which was originally "already" one, together. Since for the Hebrew breath symbolizes life and heart or the whole (human) person, is it not germane to assume that the rib narrative would have evoked in the Hebrew audience the sentiments of a common and equally human life and existence shared by the man and the woman, however fallibly that might have been practiced in everyday living?

Footnotes

- ¹ *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), p. 82.
- ² *The Sumerians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 149.
- ³ E. A. Speiser, "Akkadian Myths and Epics," in *The Ancient Near East*, James Pritchard, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 36-39.
- ⁴ *Genesis*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

**A Theological Case
for the Ordination of Women**



Sonya A. Quitslund

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Precis

The reasons frequently alleged for refusing women ordination to the priesthood are theologically groundless, historically inaccurate, and pastorally harmful. The United States bishops' *Theological Reflections on the Ordination of Women* (1973) seems to imply some ontological difference between males and females, whereas the New Testament message is clear that through baptism in Christ all sexual, racial and economic differences have been overcome. Thus to argue that Christ would not call a woman to ordination because she is a woman is to miss the New Testament message. Indeed, women have exercised a variety of "sacramental" ministries throughout the church's history. Not only were women ordained deacons in the early church, but they continue to administer (with their husbands) the sacrament of Marriage, and, in extraordinary circumstances, Baptism and the Eucharist. If they can administer these sacraments, why not the other sacraments as well? Women also fulfill any number of other ministries in the church so that if priesthood is reunderstood as ministry to the needs of God's people, then a woman's call to these functions should be confirmed by ordination. A new perspective is demanded; a view of the church not as a static, unchanging monolith but as a dynamic process leading to new forms of life and service as these forms are demanded by the spiritual needs of the faithful.

A Theological Case for the Ordination of Women

The official position of the American hierarchy is clearly that no theological case can be made for the ordination of women, although the document in which their position was originally made is guilty of some equivocation if not outright contradiction. "*Theological Reflections on the Ordination of Women*" first appeared in 1973. Its four short pages attracted little attention until cited as reflecting the definitive position of the church by Archbishop Joseph Bernardin of Cincinnati, president of the United States Catholic Conference, as a quasi-official response to the Detroit Ordination Conference of November, 1975.¹ Bernardin insisted there are compelling reasons of "ponderous theological import" for excluding women from the priesthood, but he carefully refrained from anything specific. The original document contained seven theological reasons why women cannot be ordained. It did not open with such an absolute assertion but instead declared:

The question of ordaining women is an old one in the church, but it has not yet been thoroughly researched for Catholic theology. There is no explicit authoritative teaching concerning the ordination of women that settles the question. . . . The topic should be given exhaustive study. . . . A thorough study is required not because of sociological trends, but because of developments in the church within the past decade. The Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (No. 41) in 1963 listed the emancipation of women as a positive development of modern times. *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (No. 9, 29) in 1965 rejected any discrimination based on sex.

The document continues: "At the present time, it cannot be proven or disproven that women were ever ordained deacons."² But this statement overlooks the *Apostolic Constitutions* of the Syrian Church which, for obvious reasons, has two identical ordination rituals for deacons—one written with masculine pronouns, the other with feminine pronouns. Furthermore, why would Western synods and councils ban women deacons if the latter were nonexistent?

These historical controversies, however, should not detain us. The issue of early Christian women deacons and the nature of their ministry is more of antiquarian than contemporary interest. Most women who want the diaconate have a clear notion of the type of ministry to which they feel called. They are not interested in verifying the existence of a first or second century pair of shoes which they may or may not be allowed to fill. They want to serve now, to meet the needs of the community today. Significantly enough, it seems this is how the original ministry of deacon got started—in response to current needs in the church.

Yet, instead of examining the context in which various ministries arose in the New Testament to see if there might be some model for channelling contemporary energies willing to serve but unable to find suitable forms of ministry, the United States bishops resurrected seven old arguments, listed in order of increasing importance, to show why women have not been considered eligible for ordination. From these seven "scriptural and theological justifications," the bishops drew six "somewhat tentative conclusions" calling for a continuation of the presently established discipline of ordaining only males to the Roman Catholic priesthood.

But none of these justifications really relate to the historical realities of the first or 20th century Christian communities. The bishops admit the first four arguments either do not really apply or else have certain obvious weaknesses.³ It seems a rather sterile, frivolous exercise to offer arguments that are not really relevant if one is taking the matter at hand seriously.

The fifth reason offers the incarnation as the reason for the

ordination of men only and claims that the maleness of Christ was by divine design which thus necessitates a male priest to act in the person of the male Christ.⁴ But if Christ's maleness is key to his person and function as redeemer, how could he redeem what he was not: namely, woman? If he took on a male nature rather than a human nature, where does that leave woman? If she is by nature different because of her femaleness, does Baptism really have any relevance for her? How can she become one in Christ, enter into his passion, death and resurrection? The theological merit of this fifth argument is thus highly questionable since the early church Fathers insisted on the full humanity of Christ as fundamental to the entire doctrine of redemption. The bishops seem implicitly to exclude more than half the human race by implying women as such are not present in the religious symbol of the Incarnation. How then is woman included in salvation?

The sixth argument concludes that in selecting only men to fill the role of apostle and deacon (*Acts 1:21; 6:3*), Christ and the early church were guided not by sociological conditioning but by divine choice. Although the bishops clearly admit that the emancipation of women is a positive development of modern times, they do not seem to have taken into consideration all the facts and implications of the sociological conditioning of the early church and the fact that the gospels were written by men. Nevertheless, even after acknowledging this sociological conditioning, we must be cautious in drawing conclusions about what Jesus did or did not do in this regard.⁵ Christ must have broken with social conventions. How else can one explain the raised eyebrows, even outward hostility he encountered? Jesus counted women among his disciples and did not hesitate to teach them in spite of the fact that the rabbis of his day felt it was as unfitting to teach women Torah as for a father to teach his daughter immorality. It was with Martha, and not the Apostles, that Jesus discussed the implications of the resurrection prior to raising Lazarus (*Jn. 11, 20-27*). He often singled out women in a special way, seemingly in a clear attempt to counteract the male prejudice of his day and of his own disciples. The anointing in Mark 14:6-8 is striking in its

recognition of woman's right to minister. "Let her alone. Why must you make trouble for her? It is a fine thing she had done for me . . . She has done what lay in her **power**." Might this not be taken to justify women administering the anointing of the sick?⁶ Moreover, Jesus chose women to be the first witnesses of his resurrection, the most important event of his mission. Yet, by Jewish law, women were not accepted in courts of law as valid witnesses. These episodes certainly did not reinforce male superiority. Why then were they preserved? to impress possible male converts? or to win women converts?

If after three or more years of close association with Christ the Twelve still failed to grasp the true nature of his messiahship, can we assume their insight into the role Christ desired for women was any more perceptive? The early church at first did not understand Christ's eschatology. They expected a quick end to the oppressive world as they knew it and Christ's speedy return to establish the messianic kingdom. All the evidence supports the statement that the teaching church clearly did not comprehend the fullness of Christ's message from the very beginning. Why then assume that on the one point, namely of a male priesthood, the decision and tradition of the church is beyond question?

Even the seventh and therefore strongest argument cited by the United States bishops shares these same weaknesses. The argument concludes that since constant practice and tradition have excluded women from episcopal and priestly office, and because this has been unanimously supported, at least until recent times, as absolute and of divine origin, then this tradition "constitutes a **clear** teaching of the ordinary magisterium of the church. Although not formally defined, this is Catholic doctrine." Thus we come full circle. From the opening statement that "There is no explicit authoritative teaching concerning the ordination of women that settles the question," we arrive at a "**clear** teaching . . . that is Catholic doctrine." Ironically, this seventh argument ends up contradicting the sense of the document's opening statement rejecting any discrimination based on sex.

What Is Ministry?

Contemporary feminists who have not yet been totally alienated from the Christian tradition, who can accept the fact that Christ was a male human person and not feel demeaned or threatened by that, find all the above arguments unconvincing, as well as the host of biological, psychological, sociological ones they constantly encounter.

Part of the noncommunication that often occurs between these opposing sides or perspectives is that they are coming from two completely different directions which never seem to intersect. Ecclesiastics have tended to define ministry and priesthood in terms of biblical precedents or out of their own subjective self-identity, i.e., "a priest is what I am or do." The Detroit Conference made this quite evident; not even the clerical speakers agreed on the essence of their priesthood. Definitions ran the gamut from "a minister of sacraments" to "ministry of love and service" in which sacraments were not central at all.

Feminists approach the topic with similar diversity, although they generally lack any fixed idea about the sex or marital status of the proposed candidate. Most agree on at least two broad points: the depersonalizing features of the present priesthood are not of the essence of ministry, and there is a much greater diversity of ministries than generally recognized. A call to minister does not necessarily make one proficient in all areas of ministry. Thus, instead of being ordained to being a spiritual "jack (or jill) of all trades," as is currently the case, feminists would hope that in the future priesthood there might be those called to specialize in parish work, in a ministry to the sick and dying, in preaching, etc. Thus the feminist view of ministry is open ended, defined by the needs as they arise, while the ministry currently in force in the Roman Catholic Church is one that is defined by past needs and models. According to the present model, one must fit oneself to an already existing mold which well may not fit the capacities and talents of a given person.

Whether or when the two views can enter into fruitful dia-

logue remains a question—certainly not until church leaders are willing to grant some credibility to the prophetic voices filling the air and so to accept the basic proposition that women are ontologically suitable candidates for ordination. Women, however, are generally not claiming a right, ontological or otherwise, to ordination. They are simply asking to be allowed to test the call they believe they have received.

Is There An Ontological Difference?

Many would have us believe there is some profound metaphysical difference between men and women that pre-eminently qualifies the former for priesthood while irrevocably disqualifying the latter. No proponents of this “ontological argument” can exactly explain what they mean or how the ontological principle is operative, but this inherent incoherence in no way dampens the ardour of their conviction.

These “metaphysicians” insist women are just as human as men, perhaps even more so. But they tend to define women in their own terms and expect them to conform to the definition, to stay in their place, whether on a pedestal or in the home or in the convent. The woman who chooses to define herself, to step off the pedestal into the world of historical reality ceases to be “feminine.” Whether she succeeds or fails in her chosen career, it is assumed she must be intrinsically unhappy because she has gone “against nature.” But why it is ‘unnatural’ for a single (or married) woman to want to be a priest, but not for a male, remains an inscrutable mystery.⁸ This argument makes as much sense as considering the celibate state of a consecrated male or female as somehow holy, but the single state of a layperson as unnatural.

If we were to try to pinpoint a moment in time when women became categorized as different, 1 Tim 2:8-14 is as good as any other early Christian document. At least from this point in time, near the end of the first or early second century, woman’s place went into eclipse, first in one part of the Christian world, then in another. A few meteorite spirits in later centuries, like Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila, left traces of light but

in general little was done to counteract 1 Timothy. But the distinction between male and female in this passage is artificial and lacks any theological grounds. Indeed, it contradicts the very essence of Pauline kerygma. Paul taught that in Baptism we become one in Christ, that in Christ racial and sexual differences disappear (*Gal 3:28*). He never argued that women were ontologically different and so could not share fully and equally in the Christian mystery. Even though a tension can be sensed in Paul over the matter of woman's role, accentuated by those texts whose authenticity is disputed, it is clear he recognized women as his co-workers, even as holding ecclesial office.⁹

Ministries developed in the early church in response to needs. We have no adequate proof that from the beginning, everywhere and at all times ministries were defined in terms of sex. Being lay or female did not make one a nonprofessional Christian. One put one's gifts at the disposal of the community. No one disputed the radical change effected by Baptism. The transformation was sensed even before it was enunciated theologically. Baptism made one one in Christ, a participant in the transforming event of his passion, death, resurrection and glorification. For this reason, even though tradition and the New Testament would agree that only the Apostles were present at the first Eucharist, there is no indication that women were ever excluded from the Lord's Supper because of their sex.¹⁰

The change Baptism produces far exceeds that of the Eucharist because it becomes permanent and eternal. One misses the point then to think women want ordination simply for the sake of greater spiritual powers. The priestly power of consecration only changes bread and wine, species that will eventually disappear, but the reality of Baptism changes a person forever. It is because she has experienced her Baptism in a radically profound way that the woman today asks why she cannot or may not assume the full responsibilities of this baptismal commitment, a commitment that binds her, as it does every man, to cooperating in the transformation of herself **and the world** into Christ.

Are There Ontological Grounds for the Ordination of Women?

Few would question the diaconal nature of the service women have rendered the church down through the ages but rarely is this service recognized for its sacramental dimension. A sacrament, we have been told in recent years, is more than an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. It is an encounter with Christ. I submit that the ministry of women in times past as well as today has paralleled the sacramental ministry of the priest so that we may well ask: Through whose ministry has the encounter with Christ been more effectively realized?

Baptism initiates us into the community of faith, but who really prepares that baptized child for the act of personal faith upon which union with Christ depends? Most often it is the parents and the extended family or lay community (perhaps the teacher in school or at CCD classes) who elicit the first act of faith. The priest or deacon more often than not plays a minor role. Most children, let alone adults, do not even know the name of the priest who baptized them. No one denies that the personal aspect of this spiritual bond is at most tenuous. But, in spite of the central role played by the laity and most especially by mothers, the United States bishops do not seem to have taken any concrete action to show that women count as persons in the church or that the bishops are sensitive to the pressures, tensions, anxieties experienced by American mothers today.

And what about the sacrament of Penance? Again, I believe, it is mothers who first teach the healing message of reconciliation. If the child sins, recognizes it as such and seeks forgiveness from the injured party, does not confession of such sins become a trifle redundant? Isn't the act of personal reconciliation much more effective for genuine spiritual growth than reciting a list of misdemeanors and saying one Hail Mary or Our Father?

I do not mean to debunk the sacramental system or the ministry of priests. I simply want to suggest that women and men

perform a very similar ministry which in some instances appears more relevant to the participants—so much so that the official sacramental system appears increasingly irrelevant to more and more people. No one quarrels about the necessity of the basic spiritual needs of initiation into faith, reconciliation, nourishment, healing, etc., but they do question the forms. Cannot the same sacramental encounter be mediated through a variety of forms and ought not this variety be recognized officially before the sense of the sacred is totally lost, before people too readily attribute solely human values to reconciliation outside the confessional and thus regard seemingly outmoded rites and rituals as totally irrelevant?

We could take each sacrament and show how its life-giving powers are just as easily seen to be mediated through women today as through priests. If we believe there is such a thing as baptism of desire, as spiritual communion, as perfect contrition, can there not also be a ministry of desire or ordination of desire? And if so, are the leaders of the church showing true wisdom in their handling of this matter? "When ministerial forms are stabilized and works set, persons are fitted to the forms and works, rather than ministries suited to the diversified gifts with which persons are endowed."¹¹ And thus we enter into a static, potentially atrophying situation. The question is whether the church can afford to do this and still remain true to its mission to "go forth, preach and baptize."

Those who argue that a substantial difference exists between women and men seem to forget that according to sacramental theology, the change which takes place in Baptism far exceeds any difference between the sexes on the natural level. Baptism has plunged us into the transforming mystery of Christ's passion, death and resurrection; we have become one in him. Thus any discussion of suitability for the ministry, leaving aside the very basic starting point of a call by God, must be founded on a supernatural level, quite distinct from any solely natural or sexual differences. If we deny this, we are denying the greatness of Baptism and putting the Eucharist in a class by itself. For no one denies that in the Eucharist, what looks like bread and

wine ceases to be bread and wine. It takes on a new ontological reality. Can the effect of Baptism be any less if it is that which prepares and disposes us to partake of the Lord's Body and Blood, to be able to assimilate its deifying force?

To argue that Baptism gives one the right to ordination is clearly to overlook the concept of the call—that the priesthood is a special vocation. But to argue that Jesus would not call a woman because she is a woman is to miss the message of the New Testament. Women do not receive a different faith or grace in Baptism; they are just as really baptised into Christ as any male. The common priesthood of believers may not give every Christian full sacramental powers, but it certainly does give them a share in the same divine life. If in the life of grace we are being transformed into Christ, it is hard for me, a woman, to envisage any sacramental difference between me and my brothers. The only difference will be in the intensity of my response which depends not on my sex but on my acceptance of God's gift and His call.

Moreover, while we distinguish between sanctifying and sacramental graces, it must be recalled that all sacraments properly received communicate sanctifying grace—the deifying agent. Now if women can baptize, can confer the sacrament of Matrimony with their husbands, they are clearly cooperators in the communication of sanctifying grace.¹² Even as extraordinary ministers of the sacraments, they can be seen in an analogous role. It is thus increasingly difficult to accept that women can cooperate in this communication of sanctifying grace in some instances and not in others, viz., that in regard to the sacraments of the Eucharist, Reconciliation, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, women suddenly become unacceptable candidates. In terms of receiving the grace of a sacrament, the case is even stronger. If women can receive the sanctifying, deifying force of six sacraments, why not of the seventh?

With the percentage of Christians to world population dropping year by year, with significant growth evident among other Christian bodies, it is imperative that Roman Catholics ex-

amine with utmost care the theological consistency of past positions. The principles of collegiality, doctrinal development, hierarchy of truths ought to be analyzed and utilized. Committed laity increasingly sense a coresponsibility for what the church does and says. Vatican II as well as a more educated laity effectively raised the social consciousness of many American Catholics who now agonize as never before over financial mismanagement, social injustice—implicit and explicit pastoral shortsightedness or inconsistency in the church. Yet the issue of woman's place in the church touches everyone in a more direct fashion than most other problems which confront the believing community. Do I, male or female, think God is calling women to the ministry? would I feel comfortable being ministered to by a woman? if not, why not? The issue strikes deeply, to the very roots of our sexual attitudes.

On the Horns of the Dilemma

More than sexism, open or covert, is at stake here. Many sincere men in the church, some in very responsible places, are torn between the positive pastoral possibilities that they can associate with ordained women and the very real fear or belief that to take such a step might be contrary to God's will or design. To argue to the indefectibility of the church does not ease the burden of decision, for the church in times past erred in definite social/spiritual issues, such as usury, slavery, religious freedom. To be responsible for a possible mistake does not rest easy on men who believe "to whom much is given, much is expected." While Vatican caution is often aggravating to the layperson (and cleric, too), it is important in accepting one's coresponsibility for the church to enter more profoundly into the dilemma raised by this issue in the minds of those with whom the final decision rests.

George Tavard suggests that an unwritten underlying tradition of manhood or "undefined ontological structure" makes it at least inappropriate if not impossible for a woman to represent Christ's headship. If this is so, policy will not change until

"it is clearly shown, either that these symbolic functions (headship and manhood-personhood) need not be exclusive of each other, or that they do not have in fact the importance that theological reflection can read into them and that canonical legislation has taken for granted."¹³

If such an ontological structure can be proven then the magisterium is really in trouble because its tradition has been never to tamper with the ontological order or natural law. It is therefore not likely now, even in the light of social pressure, to claim the power to bypass natural laws. In short, there is an underlying fear that "whatever cultural or practical reasons one may advance for such ordinations, the problem is not cultural or practical" and so a matter of discipline, "but natural and ontological," thus outside the magisterium's traditional sphere of authority. No argument for the ordination of women can be persuasive unless the bishops first believe they have the power to ordain women.¹⁴

But this is not the only theological opinion current today. A special meeting to study several major questions dealing with the ordination of women was called by Bishops Vogel and Helmsing for June 1975. At the official Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation of October 1975, the findings of the June meeting, which suggested that the ordination of women had never before been a theological issue, were discussed. It is thus a new question and new arguments for or against it must be proposed. This is a much more positive position because it brings up the possibility of a new development of theology, as well as a possible catalyst for renewal in the church.

However, it seems to me that 'ontological' is being used inconsistently today in the whole issue of woman's status, arguing from a natural ontology and social conditioning to prove a point in a totally different sphere of discourse: the supernatural. If one were honestly to discuss the supernatural reality of woman, we would have to admit with Paul in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is neither male nor female, and so conclude that women can just as adequately image Christ the priest/physician as a man.

Genesis 1:27 tells us God created humankind in His image and likeness, male female He created them. God will not be fully represented until imaged by both women and men. How we accomplish this, which for many will involve a radical mind change, is another matter. Certainly our liturgical language ought to be an immediate priority, including the opening up of official ministerial roles to women, as well as to men, married and single. The celibate priest may well represent the unity of God but the parent represents the creativity of God in a way no priest, so long as he is celibate, can. The home in which the model of mutuality and reciprocity is found images the Trinity in a way in which the hierarchical ecclesiastical structures, such as are often found in chanceries and rectories, never can.

The centuries-old unanimity of canonists and theologians that the exclusion of women is 'absolute and of divine origin' has crumbled. Former arguments and practices are being revealed by study to have suffered from a sexist bias based on "culturally conditioned notions of male superiority." Church people are becoming aware that not only ordained ministry, but the whole complex of church law, language, life and ministry reveal a deep sexual bias. Biblical and theological studies are revealing not only a lack of support for the continued exclusion of women, but are showing, with new clarity, the liberating call of Jesus.¹⁵

Can a theological case be made for the ordination of women? **Theology is not revelation, it is ultimately opinion**, human reflection on and interpretation of Scripture. If one is open to the possibility, all sorts of theological, pastoral, sociological, psychological arguments can be proposed. The same is true if one opposes the ordination of women. Those who claim theology must rest on scripture and tradition, and use tradition to bolster their opposition to women priests are then hard put to show consistency between the issue of ordination of women and the Roman Catholic Church's decision to ignore Titus 1:5-9, a priest (elder) must be "a man of unimpeachable character, faithful to his one wife, the father of children who are believers, who are under no imputation of loose-living and are not out of control."

Some Modest Proposals

It is particularly this subtle, even insidious, 'ontological fear' which pervades the thinking and feelings of many which must be directly confronted. We urgently need to examine new theological alternatives, two of which can be recommended for a more careful scrutiny than perhaps they have received until now. Both process theology, regardless of the weaknesses one may detect in its supposed relativity, and the nonrelative views of Wolfhart Pannenberg, who insists no absolute meaning can be ascribed to a historically differentiated reality before the completion of that reality,¹⁶ sheds new light on the issue under discussion.

Modern biblical study has certainly shown that the static categories associated with Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophies fall short of an adequate reflection of the biblical world view. Can process theology offer a more adequate tool for dealing creatively, yet sensitively and seriously, with the issue at hand? If we accept a dynamic, evolutionary, open-ended world view of which the 'ecclesial community' is (or ought to be) the truest representative of the ultimate possibilities of created reality at any given moment in time, then the acknowledgement of the call to ministry felt by many women today would not suggest compromising tradition, let alone admitting gross injustice in the past, but simply a bold step into a newer, more dynamic era for the church.

In the process perspective God "lures reality on to newer and greater things,"¹⁷ preserving all that is of value from the past for the formation of the future. Process theology is thus certainly not hostile to the concept of tradition. Moreover, it offers a more exciting concept of the relationship between God, the individual and the church. God, as an integral part of the world's process, touches each entity from within the process itself.¹⁸ In the context of our present discussion, this could well imply that the call 'prehended,' to use Whitehead's term, by women today is a new element injected by God into the process. One of the stumbling blocks in accepting such an idea is the static theological concept of perfection common in the

West. This concept leaves no room for growth or improvement in spite of the fact that both growth and improvement in other contexts are signs leading to perfection. As Whitehead so clearly saw, if God is truly perfect then He must exemplify the perfection both of change and of full realization.¹⁹ If growth and improvement can be justified as "natural" to God, so much the more can it be posited of the church. The recognition of women as full ecclesial members can only hasten the full flowering of the church in time as it actualizes more of the possibilities proposed to it by God.

The church viewed within the context of this philosophical/theological system becomes "an event moving through history, evolving according to the shape the belief of its members takes and to why that belief relates to the larger environment where it is found."²⁰ Vatican II's insistence on the church's pilgrimage nature, its relation to and in the world, even the conciliar acceptance of the idea of doctrinal development, do not seem foreign to a process view.

Pannenberg, by way of contrast, offers another approach that is not incompatible with process thought, although the two theologies disagree on the eventuality of progress. For Whitehead, process is not necessarily progress; it simply avoids atrophy or stagnation. Pannenberg, on the other hand, believes most firmly in some progressive perfection to be realized in the end. He insists on the finiteness of human experience and repeatedly stresses that no concept of history can be absolutized. His central thesis is therefore that revelation is not completely understood in the beginning, but only at the end of revealing history. Revelation is a process; events continually revise the content of revelation until the end of history.²¹

While some would argue that the intrinsic rationality of Pannenberg leaves little room for mystery, and so should be used with caution, he restores reason to a determinative place within Christian faith and opens approaches that have often been summarily shut.²² His explanation of how this is done echoes some elements of process thought, but the latter would be more tentative in drawing the conclusion that Pannenberg does. Pan-

nenberg suggests events can transform reason, so that reason draws the right conclusion.²³

These theological options do not deal directly with the issue of women's ordination but their nuanced approaches offer possible starting points for a new discussion involving women in the church and a seemingly inflexible or myopic position on the part of the magisterium.

A second modest proposal is directed to bishops and teachers, whether university professors, pastors, or grade school religion teachers—anyone involved in forming attitudes on this matter. It is a plea for theological consistency. In this article we have seen an official document of 1973 go from a position of openness to the question of women's ordination to an affirmation that it is the **clear** teaching of the church that women cannot be ordained. This view was reiterated firmly in 1975. Now in 1976 an official study endorsed by an official commission of the bishops²⁴ finally admits that for 600 years women functioned as ordained deacons with a ministry perceived as sacramental.

How much more fruitful might matters have been had the bishops been willing to sit down with women to pursue in depth and utter seriousness their "calls to the ministry." Instead, the above-mentioned Ordination Conference in Detroit was treated with extreme caution by most bishops. Only a few bishops since then have actively supported local efforts.

As long as we have official church documents decrying any form of sex discrimination existing alongside of statements, such as those in 1973 and 1975, denying women a chance to test their call to the priesthood or a new form of ministry simply because they are women, or because there are sufficient numbers of male clerics and women are only to be used in their absence, total consistency has not been achieved. This article has tried to demonstrate the lack of any ontological grounds for the continued exclusion of women on the basis of sex alone. All the evidence argues to the total irrelevance of sex both in terms of the nature of the church and the actual ministry that flows from it.

Lastly, the spiritual needs of the people of God must be given priority, something which calls for tremendous faith. In these days of fiscal uncertainty, the temptation is to augment whatever produces income and to cut back on programs that cost money but generate none. The bishops, as those responsible for the spiritual growth and development of the people, ought to undertake a serious study of whether and how spiritual needs are being met. New ministries must be created to care for new situations, and the entire people of God must be educated to a proper appreciation of the sacramental reality, regardless of who the minister may be. If not, an incipient form of a sexist version of Donatism, the fourth-century heresy which linked the validity of the sacraments with the personal dispositions of the minister, already visible in some areas where lay extraordinary ministers are used, will grow unchecked. People will continue to think the Eucharist is holier or more proper from the hand of an ordained priest.

Conclusion

A three pronged approach has been proposed as a sort of *sine qua non* for the future of the church: 1.) The re-evaluation of the philosophical underpinnings on which traditional biases concerning women rest, with an openness to new, more dynamic theologies as a possible solution to the "ontological dilemma"; 2.) A concerted effort on the part of all not to teach as defined dogma what is not; 3.) a re-evaluation of spiritual priorities in the church and the recognition that spiritual needs must pre-empt financial concerns. Perhaps a poorer church would be a healthier and more Christian church.

Footnotes

- ¹ National Catholic News Service, Oct. 3, 1975, pp. 15-20. For a detailed treatment of the original statement by the bishops, see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Appendix E" in *Women and Catholic Priesthood: An expanded Vision*, Anne Marie Gardiner, S.S.N.D., ed., (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), pp. 241-259. The original bishops' statement is reprinted in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10 (1973), pp. 695-699, and *Review for Religions* 32 (1973), pp. 218-222.
- ² A new study commissioned by the National Council of Catholic Bishops says that women's ordination as deacons was seen to be valid in the early years of Christianity. The report entitled *The Role of Women in Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington: USCC Publications, 1976), is by Sr. Agnes Cunningham.
- ³ Each of the first four arguments concludes with statements like, "This entire presentation, however, seemingly has no direct bearing in the issue at hand," or "We must beware of constructing a case for or against the sacramental ordination of women on such fragmentary and indefinite information."
- ⁴ The article by Richard Norris, "The Ordination of Women and the Maleness of Christ," *Anglican Theological Review, Supplementary Series No. 6* (1976), pp. 69-80, provides the definitive answer to the argument that since Jesus was male, all priests must be male. It also includes an annotated bibliography on the subject of women's ordination.
- ⁵ Komonchak, *op. cit.*, p. 255.
- ⁶ Sonya Quitslund, "In the Image of God," *Bible Today* 84 (1976), pp. 791, 786-793.
- ⁷ Duns Scotus was the only major theologian prior to the 20th century who declared the exclusion of women from the priesthood an injustice.
- ⁸ See Haye van der Meer's conclusions in his *Women Priests in the Catholic Church?* Arlene and Leonard Swidler, trans., (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), pp. 157f.

- ⁹ Cf. Romans 16:1, where Phoebe is described as a deaconess of the church at Cenchrae.
- ¹⁰ Although there were times when they were excluded at the time of their menses or in relation to sexual intercourse.
- ¹¹ Address by Sr. Nadine Foley, O.P., to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, August 1975. Published in *New Visions, New Roles: Women in the Church* (St. Paul, Minn.: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 1975), pp. 60 ff.
- ¹² 1 Cor. 7 extends the possibility of a sanctifying influence even to mixed marriages.
- ¹³ George Tavard, "The Witness and Experience of Other Churches: III The Roman Catholic Church," in *The Ordination of Women, Pro and Con*, M. Hamilton and N. Montgomery, eds., (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1975), p. 117f.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- ¹⁵ Points taken from Priests for Equality press release, October 9, 1975. Priests for Equality is a Washington, D.C. based group headed by Rev. William Callahan, S.J. with a membership of more than 1250 United States Roman Catholic priests who have endorsed a charter calling for complete equality for women in the church and in society.
- ¹⁶ Don Olive, *Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1973), pp. 45; 104 f.
- ¹⁷ Robert B. Mellert, *What Is Process Theology?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), pp. 46f.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ²¹ Olive, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 107, 98.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- ²⁴ Bishop Michael McAuliffe writes the introduction to the study mentioned in footnote 2, hoping it "will help open new approaches to ministry for women."

4

Confronting A New Morality

Moral Theology in Transition
by Norbert J. Rigali, S.J.

Marriage in a Process Sacramentology
by Bernard Lee, S.M.

The Sacrament of Penance in a
Changing Church and Society
by Francis J. Buckley, S.J.

Moral Theology In Transition



Norbert J. Rigali

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Precis

Moral problems always occupy an important position in the consciousness of any faith community. Recent Roman Catholic experience is no exception: controversy on birth control, abortion, euthanasia and, generally, situation ethics has abounded. The pattern or unified perspective behind contemporary moral theology's approaches to these controversies forms the basis of this article, which asserts that there is a "unity of truth" toward which the apparently unrelated dynamics of contemporary moral theology tend. Traditional ethics is presented as absolutist, legalistic and founded upon an individualistic anthropology. In contrast, the "new morality" makes persons not laws the principal object of its attention, and stresses the need to emphasize the interrelational dynamic of human persons if the church is to formulate a morality expressive both of the gospel and contemporary psychology. Thus, as the traditional moral absolutes are being reevaluated under the light of a new understanding of human existence, flexible alternatives will continue to replace the absolutist answers of the past.

Moral Theology In Transition

Compared with the only recently ended era of the moral theology manual, the contemporary phase of moral theology appears to be an almost uninterrupted series of leaps and bounds. Whatever aberrations of the inchoative new age may have to be corrected by subsequent theological reflection, its remarkable energy and intensity are a *prima facie* indication that moral theology is developing toward a higher stage of truth. It is the purpose of this essay to explore the unity of truth toward which the at times apparently unrelated leaps and bounds seem to be directed.

Born in the climate of situation ethics,¹ contemporary moral theology has had to adapt to its environment by meeting the challenge with which situation ethics had confronted traditional ethics. In its simplest terms, the charge against traditional thought was that it had an exaggerated commitment to ethical laws at the expense of the moral relevance and significance of situations in which human acts are committed or omitted.

Out of a concern, then, to purify moral theology of the legalism that undeniably permeated the manuals, contemporary moral theology emerged. This concern was translated into practice, in the beginning, by a preoccupation with analyzing the general notion of absolute moral laws. The purpose of the analyses was to transfer this notion from the forefront to the background of moral consciousness² or, in the case of some moralists, to remove it from moral consciousness altogether.³

By shaking the notion of absolute moral laws loose from its dominant place in traditional moral consciousness, contemporary theologians were able to change the horizon within which moral theology is to be done. An absolutist, legalistic

frame of reference was exchanged for an open and broader horizon, whose still indefinite nature will be discussed below. With this new background of moral consciousness established, moral theology had moved into a position from which it could reexamine specific traditional absolutes, such as direct abortion, euthanasia, remarriage after divorce, homosexual behavior and premarital intercourse. One by one, the traditional absolutes have come under the reevaluating scrutiny of contemporary moralists; and, in each case, the reexamination has produced and continues to produce a flexible alternative to the absolutist answer of the past.

Meanwhile, many leading moral theologians have moved into the field of bioethics. This development in moral theology, at least until now, marks only an expansion of the matter of morality, brought about by the ever increasing biological possibilities generated by technology, rather than a transformation of traditional moral theology itself.

The broadest outline, therefore, of the metamorphosis of moral theology, as it has occurred thus far in the new era, can be summed up in two steps: the expansion of the horizon against which moral reflection takes place and the consequent introduction of flexibility into specific moral matters, previously viewed in an absolutist light. Among the more notable discussions during these recent years of change were, of course, the celebrated reconsideration of artificial contraception and deliberations over the question, Is there a specifically Christian ethic? In order to see where these currents of thought fit into the mainstream of the metamorphosis of moral theology, we must get to the heart of the challenge out of which contemporary moral theology was born, the challenge of situation ethics.

The Challenge of Situation Ethics

In a sense, the name, "situation ethics," is an unfortunate misnomer. It connotes that the core of its challenge to traditional ethics is a matter of too little regard for situations and too much concern for ethical laws. The disadvantage inherent in this formulation is that "situation" is a conception almost as impersonal and abstract as "ethical law" itself. In fact, the real challenge of situation ethics is that traditional ethics, with its

exaggerated notion of the role of law in morality, did not sufficiently have **persons** as the principal object of its attention.⁴

Since contemporary linguistics and philosophy have made us acutely aware of the essential difference that language makes, it is not surprising that the unfortunately named situation ethics was unable to sustain consistently its **real** challenge to traditional thought and, instead, drifted easily into becoming only another instance of pragmatism and utilitarianism.⁵ For "situation ethics" connotes that the situation, not laws, is the absolute in moral decision making. However, it is one thing to think of moral laws in this way; it is another thing to think that moral laws can be absolute only to the extent that they absolutely serve persons. In the first case, the situation, easily conceived in an abstract and even myopic manner,⁶ is the absolute; in the second, persons are the absolute.

Even if situation ethics itself could neither sustain its own challenge consistently nor provide a completely viable alternative to traditional ethics, it did succeed in radically challenging moralists to recognize that persons, not laws, are the ultimate measure of morality. To the extent that the challenge took hold in Catholic circles, the traditional teaching on birth control inevitably became questionable. For natural law, which artificial contraception was held to violate, had undeniably been understood and presented in an impersonal and excessively physical-biological way.

Reexamining the question of contraception, both the magisterium and theologians moved, although in different ways, toward a more personalist view of marital intercourse. While refusing to accept the notion that artificial contraception is morally neutral *per se*, the magisterium moved definitively away from the traditional hierarchy of ends in marital intercourse (procreation, mutual aid and a remedy for concupiscence) to the teaching that the procreative and unitive aspects of intercourse are conjoined, according to natural law.⁷ Contemporary moral theologians, on the other hand, adopting a dynamic reinterpretation of natural law, in which man is seen as called to master what is given in physical nature for the sake of human ends, concluded that it is in accord with natural law

to practice artificial contraception when it is fitting for spouses to express their mutual love in intercourse despite the existence of good reasons for not procreating new life.⁸

Their differences notwithstanding, the magisterium and the moral theologians have transformed their respective teachings in the light of the contemporary anthropology that sees the person as an interpersonal, unitive reality.

Like the situation ethics controversy, then, the debate over artificial contraception can be seen as an aspect of an encompassing intellectual thrust to establish morality and moral theology in the service of persons instead of laws. Moreover, this encompassing dynamism seems to underlie the emergence, in the late 60's, of the thesis that there is no specifically Christian ethic.

A Specifically Christian Morality

The notion of no distinctively Christian ethic appeared in the wake of two other developments. First, there was the widespread agreement, which had developed in Catholic theological and other intellectual circles, that artificial contraception is not per se contrary to natural law and immoral. This consensus went far toward bringing Catholic ideas of morality, however unofficial they may be, into line with the basic ethics of non-Catholic persons of good will. For the traditional Catholic teaching on this subject, dealing with a matter of everyday living, appeared to be the most prominent (if not the only) radical disagreement with non-Catholic notions of basic morality at a time when other controversies, such as those over abortion and homosexual behavior, had not yet emerged.⁹

The second development that preceded the thesis of no specifically Christian ethic was the dialogue between Catholics and non-Catholics, including nonbelievers, initiated in the spirit of Vatican Council II. In this new openness to others, Catholic theologians as well as their fellow Catholics understandably achieved a heightened awareness of the degree of unanimity that can be attained when persons of good will, not sharing the same faith, discuss together common human concerns.

Underlying the Council's spirit of dialogue was its clear teaching that God offers His grace to everyone.¹⁰ Theologians,

therefore, were deeply aware of "anonymous Christianity": the life of grace is lived, not only by Catholics or Christians, but by all persons of good will. Hence, an ethic of the graced life must be possible outside of Christianity, wherever there are persons of good will.¹¹

Against its historical background, the thesis of no specifically Christian ethic appears as another manifestation of the contemporary impetus to establish ethical laws squarely in the service of persons, thereby reversing a previous tendency to see persons in the service of laws. Moral laws exist, the thesis seems ultimately to be saying, only to enable persons to become fully human,¹² and for this reason everyone, not only the Catholic or Christian, is in principle capable of knowing, at least substantially, the totality of moral law.¹³

A New Anthropology

The recent evolution of moral theology in its entirety, then, can be seen as a movement from an ethic in which law is the focus of morality toward one in which the good of persons is central. Underlying this ethical development (and inseparable from it) can be discerned a new anthropological understanding, which sees the human person as, essentially, a relational and interpersonal reality, a being whose fulfillment consists, above all, in interpersonal relationships. I wish to show, then, that the transition from the traditional anthropology of human nature to a contemporary anthropology of the human person—a transition that is itself an aspect of the encompassing movement from the classical mentality to historical consciousness—has generated the need that an ethic centered on law be replaced by an ethic focused on persons.

Until the recent close of the era of the manuals, Catholic theology continued to employ the concepts of "nature" and "person" as they had been forged and refined in medieval theology. Boethius' definition of the person, *naturae rationalis individua substantia* (refined by the Thomistic notion of *subsistentia* and by the restatement of Richard of St. Victor, *intellectualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia*) remained the normative approach to anthropology. According to this view, the quintessence of personhood is the person's existing in and for himself. The person is "an undivided whole existing in-

dependently and not interchangeable with any other"; he is "the reality of a being which belongs to itself and is therefore its own end in itself."¹⁴

According to the Aristotelian frame of reference, within which it is understood in the manuals, nature is essence or substance, distinct from accidents, and the ultimate intrinsic principle of a being's operations. In the hierarchy of being, as it is viewed from this philosophical viewpoint, relation holds the lowest place, being the least actual of accidents.

Against this individualistic horizon of "person" and "nature," within which perfection seems to be self-sufficiency, freedom (understood as free will) is seen as an agent's ability to determine the acts that he causes or to refrain from acting at all. Morality then appears to be, essentially, a matter of whether the acts produced by the agent or the omission of acts conform to the nature of the agent, i.e., to natural law.

The supernatural life can be fitted into this fundamentally individualistic thought pattern. Grace as a supernature perfects the essence and, mediately through the theological virtues, the powers of the soul, thereby enabling a person to perform supernatural acts which are oriented to the supernatural end, the beatific vision. These supernatural acts can be conceived according to two categories: supernaturally informed acts in accord with natural law and acts, such as an act of faith, which are produced directly by theological virtues. On the basis of the latter category, moral theologians were able to spell out, in their treatises on the theological virtues, a supernatural law to which the Christian's acts should conform.

Furthermore, within this individualistic horizon, the human act itself could be understood as a kind of substance in the moral order. Theologians spoke of the three sources of morality, meaning that an act derives its morality from its object of intrinsic end (*finis operis*), its circumstances and its intention or extrinsic end (*finis operantis*). The object is seen as that toward which, primarily and in itself, the act tends by its very nature.¹⁵ The object, therefore, having to do with the nature of the act, *per se et primario* gives the act its species in the moral order.¹⁶ Hence the morality that an act derives from its object

is conceived before that derived from circumstances and intention, and it is called essential and substantial morality.¹⁷ On the other hand, the morality that comes to an act from its circumstances and intention or extrinsic end is secondary and accidental morality.¹⁸

Clearly the approach to morality in the manuals reveals a tendency to understand the human act as if it were a substance, possessing accidents, a something-in-itself, in the moral order. The human act seems to be a thing produced by a cause that is free and therefore accountable for the effect he has produced. The focal point of morality is undeniably the act-in-itself. The **person** who acts is so far removed from center stage that the human and personal element of morality, the inner-life element of intention, the element most directly related to the specifically human, i.e., intellect and will, is defined on the basis of the act-in-itself. The personal is the extrinsic end of the act-in-itself. Since it is only that, it constitutes only accidental morality.

An ethic that has persons in the background and acts-in-themselves in the foreground of morality, while compatible with the classical anthropology outlined above, cannot be expected to survive in the climate of the new anthropology of the person. Moreover, an ethic in which the person acting is relegated from the start to the area of the morally accidental can be nothing else but an ethic focused on laws.

When the human act is considered as a kind of substance in the moral order, something-in-itself produced by a cause that is free, the ethical question must be: Should the free cause have produced this thing, something else or nothing at all? The answer to the question then takes shape in this way: the cause should have produced this thing if the latter is in accord with the nature of the cause itself; but, if the thing produced is not in accord with the nature of the producer, the producer should have produced something else or nothing at all. In short, when the human act is considered as a thing-in-itself, effected by a free cause, ethics must be an ethic focused on the law of the nature of the cause, an ethic of natural law. It was noted above how such an ethic can be also (once grace as supernature is assumed) an ethic of supernatural law.

Therefore, if the challenge with which situation ethics confronted traditional ethics is a challenge to transform an ethic centered on laws into an ethic focused on persons, it is also, and at its deepest level, a challenge to replace the individualistic, substance/accidents anthropology that forms the horizon of traditional ethics with a new understanding of the person that will allow ethics to focus on him. It appears, then, not pure chance or coincidence that the challenge of situation ethics appeared at a time when a new understanding of the human person was taking hold in Western thought, at first through existentialism and then more through the personalism represented by Martin Buber.

The Primacy of Relation

Whereas traditional anthropology located the quintessence of the person in "incommunicability," the new anthropology formulates the quintessence with a diametrically opposed emphasis. Person is, essentially, an interpersonal reality: the person realizes or fulfills himself only in and through relations to others. Accordingly, relation, in the new anthropology, is the epitome, rather than the lowest form, of being.¹⁹

When interrelation between and among persons, rather than incommunicability is seen as the heart of personhood, the quintessence of freedom is no longer seen as the capacity to act or not to act (*exercitium*) and to act in one way or another (*specificatio*). Freedom becomes, primarily, the ability to relate oneself as a person to another person, the capacity to yield oneself to another and to accept the other into one's own existence. In a word, freedom becomes freedom to love.

If the emphasis upon incommunicability in traditional anthropology caused freedom to appear to be freedom to "do one's own thing" instead of freedom to love, it also caused the human act, as already noted, to appear to be a thing done by someone: murder, for example, is something one person does to another, and it is wrong. In the perspective of contemporary personalism, however, an act is not something done by someone, who is responsible for it; an act is not an effect-in-itself, produced by a free cause responsible for its existence. Act-in-itself is an abstraction, indeed the kind of abstraction that is particularly dear to philosophical conceptualism. The human

act is a person-in-act, a-person-actualising-himself-in-situation. Caring is the name for a person-caring-for-another; killing is the name for a person-killing-another. The human act is a person relating (or enclosing and refusing to relate) himself positively or negatively to the other or to the world of mankind.

When one ceases to consider the human act as if it were a thing-in-itself and sees it instead as a person's actualising himself in relation to the other, it becomes far more difficult than it was in traditional ethics to break morality down neatly into three distinct constituent elements: object, circumstances and intention. When an act is seen to be person-in-act, the act can no longer be cleanly separated by the mind from the directly personal element, intention. Similarly, when the reality of the human person is seen to be person-in-situation, and when, consequently, the human act is seen to be person-in-situation-in-act, it becomes impossible to separate (definitively, absolutely and once and for all) intentions from situations, and acts from both situations and intentions.

It is not being suggested here that the traditional approach to morality, with its three distinct categories, has become completely valueless and useless. Rather, it is being asserted that this approach can no longer be viewed, in the manner of traditional ethics, as absolute. It has definite limitations; and, in the light of contemporary anthropology, it at times breaks down completely. Because this approach has been found wanting in contemporary moral theology, moralists have been searching since the beginning of the new era for an adequate alternative. One knows a priori that the alternative will be far more complex and subtle than the traditional approach, and that the latter will appear simplistic in comparison with it. Because of its far greater complexity, the new approach can be and is being uncovered only gradually. Thus, at the base of the entire movement that is contemporary moral theology till now, one sees a preoccupation with the question of general norms of morality.²⁰ The search for the answer to this question is nothing but the quest for an analysis of morality that will allow an ethic

centered on persons to replace the traditional analysis of object/circumstances/intention that permitted nothing other than an ethic focused on law.

The Contribution of Psychology

Something must be said here, however cursorily, about the effect of psychology on contemporary moral theology. Traditional moral theology, of course, developed in times when psychology, as we know it today, did not exist. Contemporary moral theology, however, is being molded, as it should and must be, by insights from this relatively recent science. Freedom, for example, has come to be understood in moral theology as "fundamental option," a choice involving the "disposing" of oneself in relation to all that is. Were it not for depth psychology, this conception would hardly have found its way into moral theology. It is now a stock fixture and has brought about the reinterpretation of other basic moral concepts, such as responsibility and sin.

A discussion of the influence, just exemplified, of psychology upon contemporary moral theology lies far beyond the scope of this essay. In the present context only one point regarding psychology needs to be made. As much as, if not more than anything else, developmental psychology has disclosed the limitations and inadequacy of approaching morality in the traditional manner by considering the human act as an act-in-itself, a kind of substance in the moral order. In classical moral theology, the immaturity of a person acting could render what was considered an objectively wrong act, **subjectively** blameless. However, contemporary moral theology, realizing that the human developmental process flows from the objective reality of a dynamic human nature, cannot prescind from the immaturity of a person acting when it attempts to examine the **objective** morality of his acts. A general way of putting the matter is this: the realm of intention can no longer be, as it was in traditional ethics, absolutely divorced from the realm of objective morality. The line of demarcation between objective and subjective morality is not as absolute and clearly definable as was once thought.

Contemporary moral theology, in summary then, is an intellectual journey toward the creation of the ethics focused on persons that is required by contemporary anthropology. The journey is far from over, but it is proceeding in leaps and bounds.

Footnotes

- ¹ For a discussion of situation ethics as an intellectual climate, before being shaped into clearly defined ethical theories, see Louis Monden, *Sin, Liberty and Law*, Joseph Donceel, tr., (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), pp. 73-87. As a climate, situation ethics was, generally speaking, an effect of European existentialism. By the time it became ethics as such, situation ethics was being shaped also by other forces, notably by philosophical personalism.
- ² A very clear example of this approach is found in Charles E. Curran, *A New Look at Christian Morality* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides, 1968), pp. 73-123. Cf. also *Absolutes in Moral Theology?* Charles Curran, ed., (Washington & Cleveland: Corpus, 1968).
- ³ In this approach, love is the only moral absolute. Cf. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), pp. 69-86; John Giles Milhaven, *Toward a New Catholic Morality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 13-26.
- ⁴ Joseph Fletcher notes that situationism is a moral strategy "which has to be seen in tandem or partnership with a substantive companion-doctrine—personalism," the doctrine that the *summum bonum* is "human welfare and happiness." Accordingly, situationism is seen as an ethic for "who-askers (who will be helped or hurt?)," unlike traditional ethics, the ethics of "what-askers (what does the law prescribe?)." Cf. "Love is the Only Measure," *Commonweal* 85 (1966), p. 429.
- ⁵ A striking, albeit not untypical example is Fletcher's rash and facile assertion that President Truman's "decision about the A-bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki" was based on "agapeic calculus" (*Situation Ethics*, p. 98).
- ⁶ Cf. Herbert McCabe, "The Validity of Absolutes," *Commonweal* 85 (1966) pp. 432-437, at pp. 436-437.
- ⁷ Paul VI, Encyclical "Humanae Vitae," July 25, 1968, *AAS* 60 (1968), p. 488.
- ⁸ Cf. "The Theological Report of the Commission," in Peter Harris, et al., *On Human Life: An Examination of 'Humanae Vitae'* (London, 1968), pp. 224-244.

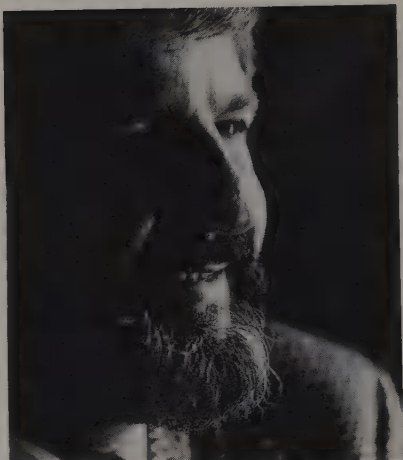
- ⁹ With regard to remarriage after divorce, it is to be noted that, although the indissolubility of marriage was at times proposed on the basis of natural law, in modern ecclesiastical practice only the consummated marriage of two baptized persons is absolutely extrinsically indissoluble.
- ¹⁰ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, paragraph 22.
- ¹¹ Proponents of the thesis that there is no specifically Christian ethic seem to have concluded to their thesis from this reasoning. I have contended elsewhere ("Christian Ethics and Perfection," *Chicago Studies* 14 [1975], pp. 227-240) that the conclusion is unwarranted and the answer to the question about a specifically Christian ethic is premature. I would add here that moral theologians are not yet even ready for the question. For, as it is the purpose of this essay to show, contemporary moral theology is still in the process of working out a basic **philosophical** approach to morality that is viable in the light of present-day anthropology. Only after an adequate understanding of morality itself has been established, will moral theology be prepared to ask about a specifically Christian morality. To answer the question, moralists will have to enter into dialogue with, among other things, New Testament scholarship—a dialogue that was completely bypassed when the question of a specifically Christian ethic was answered prematurely in the late 60's.

The opinion that the question has been prematurely raised and answered is supported by what appears shortly below: the **real** intention of the (misplaced) thesis that there is no distinctively Christian ethic was to establish that moral laws exist only to enable persons to become fully themselves.

- ¹² Cf. Josef Fuchs, "Is There a Specifically Christian Morality?" *Theology Digest* 19 (1971), pp. 39-45, at p. 41: "The will of God is nothing but the divine command that man be and live in the world in a human manner and realize his potentialities as a bodily-spiritual person."

- ¹³ Cf. Charles E. Curran, "Is There a Catholic and/or Christian Ethic?" *Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Convention, The Catholic Theological Society of America* (Bronx, 1974), pp. 125-154, esp. pp. 144-148.
- ¹⁴ Max Muller and Alois Halder, "Person I. Concept," in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology* IV, p. 404.
- ¹⁵ B.H. Merkelbach, *Summa Theologiae Moralis* (Bruges, 1956), I, p. 136: "... id in quod primario et per se ex natura sua [actus] tendit."
- ¹⁶ H. Noldin and A. Schmitt, *Summa Theologiae Moralis*, 27th edit. (Innsbruck, 1940), I, pp. 77-78.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78: "... essentialis et substantialis moralitas."
- ¹⁸ Merkelbach, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 139-140: "... secundaria et accidentalis moralitas."
- ¹⁹ A new understanding of the virtue of charity, heavily dependent upon the relational, interpersonal understanding of man is presented in Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," *Theological Investigations* VI (New York: Helicon, 1974), pp. 231-249.
- ²⁰ For several years Richard McCormick's "Notes on Moral Theology" in *Theological Studies* have regularly provided excellent summaries of the progress being made in understanding the area of moral norms. The latest report can be found in *Theological Studies* 37 (1976), pp. 71-87.

Marriage In A Process Sacramentology



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Precis

Theology is a type of story-telling and Christian theology tells the story of the Christian experience, of life lived under the influence of the Jesus event. Against this background, the author of this essay asks whether the story of marriage may not be told in some new ways to meet the new demands of contemporary life. These ways would be new to the Roman Catholic tradition, yet faithful to the sacramental character of marriage. The process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead forms the matrix out of which these reflections emerge. For process theology, each sacrament is a different transmutation of the Jesus event and the church's history, i.e., each sacrament selects an aspect of our Christ-imbued experience and symbolically represents it. Marriage transmutes the covenantal faithfulness of God revealed in Jesus; marriage is susceptible to being so lived as to be a public disclosure of God's covenant with us. Thus the shape of marriage receives an essential configuration from the shape of Christ's abiding and love-filled presence. Because a sacramental marriage must signify both these realities, it may never be dissolved even though, after a complete rupture of a sacramental marriage, a second marriage as a secular reality with its own proper goodness should be permitted.

Marriage In A Process Sacramentology

Introduction

In dealing with the theme of theology confronting a changing world, it is important to recognize that one area of human life in which great change is occurring is in respect to our understandings of sexuality and marriage. These changes are full of implications for the function of marriage as Christian sacrament. They are changes that pressure the church to look again at how it tells the "story" of the marriage sacrament, changes that ask the church for new inventiveness in its experience of marriage as a disclosure of God's steadfast care made manifest in Jesus Christ.

In recent years a great deal of attention has been given to storytelling and biography as a mode of theological discourse.¹ At the beginning of my reflections I want to stress that not only is storytelling a mode of theology, but theology is a mode of storytelling. A story does not simply relate a world. The telling of a story participates in creating a world.² Theology does not only systematically reflect upon Christian experience; but, like story, it participates in the construction of Christian experience. Theology has not received sufficient credit for being a teller of the Christian tale, and thus an artist of Christian life.

I think of what Stephen Crites has called "the narrative quality of experience."³ When we look at our own past histories (personally, or together as Christian community), the amount of people and events there are vast. It is an immense

cast of characters and a huge collection of plots and subplots, all susceptible to being constructed in many ways in the present and future, all of which may be in faithful continuity with history. I once had a friend who went through several sorts of "identity crises" over a period of two or three years. And three times as he moved through his identities he reread the personal journals he had kept for the past 15 years, made use of that material each time, and wrote three autobiographical statements. Each of the autobiographies disclosed quite a different sort of person, yet each was indeed in authentic continuity with his journals. But each biography had made a somewhat altered selection of elements from the past and had then constructed fairly different versions of the present. Our lives and stories do not often change that dramatically. But the process does seem to be a microcosm of the macrocosm of theology. Theology, like a human life, is at any given moment a historical emergent, getting part of its character from the past and part from the particular historical/cultural ways in which the past is appropriated and then integrated with new materials into a present.

Christianity, too, at any given moment fits the same description. It is a historical emergent, co-created by the character of the Jesus event and by historical/cultural appropriations of the Jesus event. Theology is both a teller and a creator in its promotion of Christian history.

I want to reflect on marriage as a secular reality and as sacrament. The hermeneutic which will guide my interpretation is process modes of thought, especially the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead in his description of experience and the role of symbol in human experience. I am probing whether process theology might not be able to tell the story of the Sacrament of Marriage in continuity with the Jesus event, but admitting of some new directions congenial to certain configurations of our changing society.

The Evolution of Sacrament

In the Roman Catholic Church our instincts have become so accustomed to the story of sacrament as formulated in the High Middle Ages and reaffirmed by the council of Trent, that it is probably good for us to recall that this story was long in the making.

The very notion of sacrament has undergone considerable development. Augustine used the notion frequently and well, but in a sense closer to "mystery" and/or "sacred experience" that unfolds, than to our later notion of sacrament as effective sign.

The seven sacraments have their own unique histories and differing modes of origin. In his historical life Jesus shared in the formulation of Baptism and Eucharist (and how directly he "instituted" the latter is of course a matter of scholarly discussion⁴). The sacrament of Reconciliation is of course rooted in the New Testament, but less expressly than Baptism and Eucharist. Raymond Brown has demonstrated very effectively I think⁵ (Feuillet's recent book notwithstanding⁶), that Christian priesthood could not have emerged until the end of the first century. In his study Brown singles out four "forms of definiteness"⁷ from the New Testament experience that are gradually built into the inherited mode of priesthood to make it into Christian Priesthood. These are: disciple, apostle, presbyter-bishop, and president of the Eucharist. And this is still another mode of origination.

Marriage and priesthood are both examples of experiences which do not of themselves contain an inner reference to the Jesus event, but have a natural susceptibility to being so construed (so "told"), with the addition of new elements of determination, that they become Christian sacrament. Marriage is a much more secular affair, naturally speaking, than priesthood. But under the power of the Jesus event, at work in Christian community, the secular reality was gradually transformed into sacrament in a way faithful to its inner character but not demanded by it.

Marriage itself has a long secular and religious history. In

the Old Testament marriage was a secular reality (never liturgized in public worship). Yet it was still "in the Lord," as the Genesis account of creation surely testifies. Even though marriage was not an official religious experience, a man's relationship with his wife, from Hosea on, was a theme for describing Yahweh's relationship with His people: a covenant that is steadfast and marked by tenderness. But the range of metaphor is great, from Hosea's marriage to Gomar, the prostitute, to some of the lovely passages in Wisdom literature. It was, of course, Paul who formulated marriage as a New Testament revelation of Christ's care for the church. Yet for a long time marriage remained a secular and civil reality, christianized by the faith of the partners. Canon 54 of the Synod of Elvira (306 AD) presumes, for example, that the marriages of baptized Christians and unbaptized pagans were celebrated in the same way.⁸ There was no separate church ceremony. Ignatius of Antioch had suggested that it would be fitting for a marriage to be concluded only after the bishop had approved. But this was never really practiced, and one theologian suggests that this was one more manifestation of Ignatius' episcopatism.⁹

In the early fourth century there are the first evidences of priestly prayer and blessing, but only as rites that surrounded the ceremony. In the late fourth and early fifth centuries we have the first nuptial Mass and solemnization. In the fifth century there are the first instances of marriage celebrated in conjunction with the Eucharist. But at that time the marriage was celebrated on the church porch, with the Eucharist following inside the church.

During the first ten centuries marriage remained under civil jurisdiction. The church obtains full jurisdiction during the 11th and 12th centuries. During the 13th century sacramental theology gets its first full formulation. The very first time that marriage is called a sacrament in an official church document is in 1184 at the Synod of Verona. The Thomistic story is, of course, the one which has dominated Western theology of marriage and the one which was canonized by the Council of Trent. Trent, however, marks no real development on marriage from the 13th century (it doesn't even have a systematic treatment of it).

No matter how the story gets told, and no matter how civil or how religious the ceremony is, there is a prevailing conviction that Christian marriage discloses through the mysteries of its own love the mystery of Christ's love for the church, which is of course the sacrament of God's love for the world.

In view of the superb work already done by Schillebeeckx,¹⁰ it would be redundant to try to trace these histories in detail. I have only wanted to indicate what I believe is the gradual development into official sacrament of a secular reality whose inner character was receptive to being restructured in such a way as to facilitate a disclosure of the encounter between God and human history: a sacrament of Covenant.

Elements of a Process Sacramentology

I want now to turn to Whitehead's thought to suggest in a very sketchy way some possible understandings of sacrament, especially the sacrament of Matrimony. For Whitehead the basic units of reality are not independent, discrete, substantial objects. They are events, also called actual occasions or actual entities. William James calls them drops of experience. The realities that we are and that we normally experience are organic collections of actual entities or drops of experience. The process is the reality. The analysis of reality is, therefore, an analysis of process of experience.

The universe is an interlocked community of all actual entities. The law of universal gravitation expresses an aspect of the spatial inter-relatedness of all units of reality. And temporally too we recognize an organicness, for every present moment stands on the shoulders of all past events.

But for all practical purposes, it is an extremely small spatial/temporal segment of the whole universe that shapes any new event directly and significantly. Whitehead calls that limited segment of the whole world "the actual world," the part of the whole world that makes a positive contribution to an event's actual identity, or, as Whitehead would say, to an event's real internal constitution.

Technically, the life of Jesus is, like all human life, not an

event or **an** actual entity, but a large, organic collection of them with shared historical identity. But I will speak metaphorically of the Jesus **event**, and of a human being as an actual event or actual entity. I might say now, as a beginning description, that a Christian is a human life whose actual world significantly includes the Jesus event, that is, a life whose real internal constitution is nourished by the Jesus event. (As we shall see shortly, a sacrament is a particular kind of dynamic which nourishes drops of experience.)

Gabriel Marcel described presence as that which has a hold on one's being.¹¹ Giving a slight processive twist, let us say that presence corresponds to what has a hold on one's becoming. I may be shaped somewhat negatively by an actual entity if my experience of it leads me to decide what I will **not** be. But the most positive sense of presence is saying yes to what I experience in another actual entity, and allowing what I affirm in that other entity to enter into the configuration of my own identity. Presence means "that which has effects." Large presence means significant effects. Each sacrament contains, via its symbols, aspects of the Jesus event to which the church has said a strongly affirming yes, and offers the Jesus event under those particular aspects as ingredients for the becoming of human lives. When a human life says its own yes and is thus shaped by the Jesus event, then God takes hold of human history. As historical ingredient, through the Jesus event, God increases the power of His presence.

There are many components in the identity of any actual entity, multiple aspects to its particularity. Many possibilities are realized in the coming-to-be of actual entities. Whitehead sometimes called those possibilities "forms of definiteness." There are so many aspects to the full concreteness of any actual entity that it will always be somewhat simplified when it is experienced by another actual entity. This corresponds somewhat to our experience in knowing other people and in being known by them. Getting to know someone means getting good insights into those components of that person's make-up that contribute most to his or her historical identity. The necessary process of simplifying data by letting a few key aspects mediate our expe-

rience of the total actuality is what Whitehead calls transmutation. Not all aspects of a reality are equally good clues to the sense of the whole actual entity. But those aspects which are so essential to identity that they provide an accurate sense of the meaning of the whole are aspects that Whitehead calls (in a technical sense) "important."

We can now better describe what constitutes Christian identity. "Christian" is what accrues to the identity of a human life when "important" aspects of the Jesus event become ingredients in the becoming of human experience in "important" ways. That means a life which cannot be accurately interpreted if "Christian" isn't one of the forms of definiteness involved in the transmutations that are made of that life when others experience it.

Transmutations have much to do with the kind of effect that one actual entity has on another. If I say the kind of Yes to some person that makes me open my life to that person's influence, the precise shape of that person's influence will be shaped by the shape of the transmutation. A strong Yes to a person I perceive as gentle will have a gentling presence in me. A strong Yes to that same person in view of that person's quick sense of humor will open me to laughter. Each sacrament is a different transmutation of the Jesus event. Thus, the particular shape of the Jesus event's presence, as promoted by each sacrament, is unique to that sacrament, and is particularized precisely by the symbols that are essential to each sacrament's character.

The discussion thus far provides the background for making a preliminary statement about the sense of symbol in Whitehead's philosophy. First of all, transmutation is not for Whitehead primarily a psychological category, although I have been speaking about it mostly in that way. **Every** transaction between **any** actual entities requires transmutation. Every actual entity gets simplified in the course of and as a condition for becoming a datum of experience for another actual entity. Even the earth "feels" the rock upon it under certain aspects: mass, weight, perhaps temperature, etc. The meaning of human awareness is precisely that we have become conscious of the

transmutations which are mediating the impact of other events and other persons upon us. At that point the transmutation functions as symbol—it refers us to the whole actual entity which is asserting itself to our experience through some of its aspects. Symbol, of course, is detachable from only the immediacy of the present encounter. Thus, the symbol which has emerged from the immediate interaction may continue to mediate the impact long after the transaction is over which gave rise to the transmutation, which in its turn gave rise to the symbol. Symbol (through memory, for example) may long continue to mediate real presence, as long as it continues to facilitate the shaping of one's becoming. But the symbolic act always **pre-**supposes a moment of causal efficacy between actual entities, of which transmutation played a necessary role. The time differential between the transmutation and the symbolic reference may be so temporally negligible that we have no consciousness of the fact that conscious awareness follows, however quickly, an initial causal event. The time differential may be as short as the time it takes for the light and sound waves which strike the retina and the ear drums to get translated into conscious awareness, or the time differential may be as long as the time in between the Lord's Supper and the continued insertion of the Jesus event into history through the bread and wine of this day's Eucharist. In either case, symbolic reference is a matter of transmutation become conscious.

Societies as well as persons need symbols for the maintenance of vital life. I not only transmute other actual entities, I must transmute even my own past history, for there is no way that I could continue to contain it all and interact with it in all its concrete detail. Those transmutations are the symbols through which I know who I am, and through which my self-identity accrues. And the same is true for a society. It can't remember its whole history, and it can't even remember all of its foundational moments. So it must transmute all of that, trying to get into the transmutation the most important aspects of its foundational intuitions. And then it must find specific ways (ritual moments) in which those defining characteristics are presented to its members for affirmation and re-affirma-

tion. These are the systematic ways in which a society aids and abets the confrontation between foundational intuitions and on-going experience, not controlling those new moments, but nourishing them with what it has found to be life-giving. The system of rites, celebrations, myths, special languages, etc., constitute such a dynamism. All of those items together make up a society's "symbolic code." No society can propagate itself without an effective symbolic code. In the Roman Catholic tradition, the system of seven sacraments has come to be one of the major components of that church's symbolic code. It is a systematic way in which, through effecting symbols, the major forms of definiteness of the Jesus event are over and over again offered as ingredients in the becoming of Christian lives.

Each sacrament involves a form of definiteness or a set of forms of definiteness from the Jesus event. Each is a transmutation, and through its symbols offers something of the New Testament for inclusion in new experience, giving the Jesus event a hold of the becoming of human life. And as part of the symbolic code of the Roman Catholic tradition, each of the seven sacraments has elements of the church's history as well as elements of the Jesus event built into it.

In human life as in all reality, presence (which means having effects) always involves the dynamic of transmutation. When the transaction involves consciousness the transmutation functions as symbol, a symbol which may then be detached from that immediate causal relationship and then continue to mediate an on-going influence even when the original cause is "gone." In that sense, all conscious commerce between persons is mediated by symbol and shaped by the symbols that do the mediating. What is special about sacrament is not the mode of presence, therefore, but the extraordinariness of what become present and its power over human history. (Thus a Whiteheadian, though for different reasons, would be as impatient as a Tillichian with the expression "merely symbolic.")

The Sacrament of Marriage

Since we have established the point of view from which the

story of marriage is being told, we may now deal specifically with its meaning as sacrament.

Marriage is a secular reality, although in most cultures it is at least shaded with religious meaning. The church doesn't institute marriage. It finds it there and transforms it. It finds marriage susceptible to being lived as a disclosure of God's covenant with us. The Old Testament was responsive to that susceptibility, and the New Testament has steadily added to it.

Christian sensibility has deliberately posited into the identity of marriage a commitment to embody forms of definiteness that symbolize God's care for the world as disclosed in the care of Jesus Christ for the church. The "shape" of marriage receives essential configuration from the "shape" of God's covenant, and thus becomes Christian sacrament. As sacrament, marriage makes the Jesus event an active presence in human life.

Against this background of a process sacramentology, I want to suggest six items for reflection. Some simply point out implications; others are suggestions for further consideration and study.

The first item is about presences, which means having effects. My concern is with the public character of all sacraments, although we are concerned here only with marriage. God is present to human life through the Jesus event every time the human reality of marriage takes into its own process of becoming the steadfast **and** tender love of Christ for the church. But the presence of God is not only for the spouses themselves. Their relationship is public as well. It is constantly experienced by others. And since presumably it contains within it something that is truly "of God," the spouses offer the presence of God to the experience of the Christian community which is their context. We need a better orientation in this regard to reap the benefits of the fact that any two people's marriage is everybody's sacrament as well. When any community seriously takes care of a marriage it is taking care of itself as well.

The second point consists in boldly stressing the word *and*. The covenantal forms of definiteness which marriage as sacra-

ment appropriates into its own character are quantitative *and* qualitative, God's love for us in Jesus is both steadfast *and* affectionate. In Yahweh's words in Jeremiah: "I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you." In the tradition, far more attention has been focused on the quantitative aspect, especially under the category of indissolubility.

Perhaps even stressing *and* is too dualistic. The spouses must be not just constant, but constant in affection. Constantly caring well! Two people who remain under one roof with a relationship that is a living hell are no more sacrament than two people whose cohabitation has been permanently suspended by mutual agreement, but who maintain a relation of respect. I have a great deal of sympathy with Andrew Greeley's desire to change the discussion "from indissolubility to intimacy,"¹² not out of disregard for steadfast commitment but for the practical reason that psychological intimacy contains within its very psychodynamics a strain towards permanency. The best way to insure the quantitative is to assure the qualitative.

In addition to proposing some sound pastoral recommendations, Greeley is pointing in a direction that is very deep in Western culture, and that has been long in the making. In a recent study, John Miles has indicated what he thinks is a kind of protestantizing of Catholicism.¹³ He feels that there are increasingly more Catholics whose identity as Catholics depends primarily upon their **intention** to be Catholic, and not upon juridical and "visibility" arguments. Protestant theology has tended to emphasize that the church is more of an intentional society than a visible society. But Miles does not think that Catholicism is becoming a child of Luther and Calvin, but rather that Protestantism and Catholicism are both children of the enlightenment, of More and Erasmus. The modern world is marked by a deepening self-awareness and an increasing stress on subjectivity and innerness in human experience. Modern psychology is both a product and a facilitator of that movement, and generally speaking, so is philosophy. Andrew Greeley also dealt with this intentionality phenomenon several

years ago in an article in which he spoke of "the communal Catholic." Not before this modern era could the church, in an official document, have spoken of marriage as "a school of deeper humanity."¹⁴ Process modes of thought would insist at this point that human nature does not have fully fixed structures. The structures of being human undergo development.

What the experience of "being married" looks like has undergone a lot of change in these last 4000 years of Western history. And that is happening now. The modern enhancement of the element of subjectivity alters the structures of human experience, which in turns alters what the experience of "being married" is like. This places on the agenda of Christian marriage a pressing need for the enlargement of the role of **qualitative** forms of definiteness in its structures, i.e., much more attention to tenderness, gentleness, affection, and intimacy in the heart of the married experience. In the past these elements have not been lacking either theologically or functionally, but they have not dominated our awareness the way that the symbol of indissolubility has.

My third point has to do with need for a spirituality of marriage, and with possibilities for an "eros" spirituality from the process (and biblical) understanding of God. Marriage initiates a community of persons, an ongoing relationship. The sacrament is not the ceremony, or at least, the ceremony is but a tiny moment of the sacrament. The sacrament is the full relationship in which is found a steadfast caring that got there derivatively from the Jesus event.

We cannot speak of the presence of God in a married relationship as simply there or not there. Schillebeeckx speaks of the "density" of presence. The density of God's sacramental presence corresponds to how large a hold steadfastness and constancy of affection have on the whole relationship in all its moments of becoming. That density will vary greatly at times. Therefore the relationship needs to be frequently nourished by new occasions that foster a continuing reappropriation of those forms of definiteness which made it into sacrament in the first place. I mean, of course, a rich spirituality.

In the long history of Christian marriage, we have not had a well developed spirituality of marriage. Among the many reasons is that sexuality has not been approached very positively. The reasons are manifold, and many studies have dealt with the roots of these attitudes. Augustine is one of the giants of Christianity, but in this respect he certainly didn't help the cause. But a deeper reason rests in the structure of Western consciousness, or better, Western unconsciousness. The modes of thought which have dominated Christian reflection have insisted on the utter changelessness of God (a necessary conclusion in a system that presupposes change to be related to imperfect being). God, in this conceptualization, is perfectly happy with a fullness of being to which nothing can be really added. God is the one who only gives, for there is nothing He can receive. It is a one way street. Since there is nothing God can receive, He never gives with vested interests. In a word, God is all agape—there is no divine eros. Therefore the human eros, in its essential makeup, has nothing to say about God in His essential makeup. Human passion is volatile, irrational, driving—all the things that theology has assured us God is not.

The biblical picture of God, which sometimes alludes to God's changelessness, also speaks of God's ability and willingness to change His mind. Abraham and Moses both bargain with God and change the terms of agreement. In Jeremiah 18, Yahweh says that sometimes He decides to destroy a nation, but that when the nation honors Him instead He changes His mind and builds that nation up. The bible also speaks of God's impatience, joy, tenderness, anger, etc.—all elements of eros. I don't mean to take those texts literally, of course; but they are indicators that the religious experience of God is a dipolar experience: there is reason to call God changeless, and there is reason to affirm that God does change. The Hebrew experience was able to live easily with that paradox. When Greek metaphysics was the hermeneutic guiding interpretation, the eros of God was chalked up as anthropomorphism.

In process thought, the bi-polar understanding of God elaborates both the changeless and perfectly fulfilled aspects of

God's character. The concrete expressions of that abstract character "become" in the course of God's deep, interactive involvement with historic event. When the biblical experience is interpreted out of a process hermeneutic, there is real justification for speaking of a divine eros, and of doing it in such a way that forms of definiteness of the divine eros coincide with forms of definiteness of human eros. Human sexuality itself can become sacrament in ways that the Western Christian tradition has not thus far allowed. I have dealt with "the appetite of God" more fully elsewhere¹⁶; all I want to do at the moment is indicate the need for a much deeper spirituality of marriage than we have had thus far, and to indicate one aspect of that spirituality that a process theology of marriage is particularly equipped to promote: the sacramentality of Eros.

The fourth point, like the previous one concerns deep cultural changes which are full of implications for the sacred realities that are sacramentally disclosed through historically and culturally shaped human experience. I refer in particular to the feminist movement. When the secular realities which underpin sacred realities undergo change, then adjustments must be made in how the sacred realities are construed.

Because God has been understood almost entirely under the male metaphor, it has been the husband's love for his wife which has been interpreted as disclosing God's love for the world or Christ's love for the church. "Bride of Christ" has been a traditional image of the church. The Pauline use of marriage symbols when speaking of Christ and the church is a usage drawn from a very male dominated structure of marriage. Long overdue changes in that structure alter the basic metaphor, and therefore demand that changes be introduced into the basics of the sacramental sign of marriage.

I believe that process theology addresses this situation from two points of view. The first is simply the strong reminder that both the structures of secular human experience and religious human experience are in the process of becoming. But secondly, and this is an area of process thought that has not been attended to but offers rich possibilities, I suggest the need for a better theological formulation of an androgynous God. The

natural theology of God in Whitehead's thought carries many of the images that are often associated with the feminine typology, as well as the masculine typology. The consequent nature of God means the uncompromisingly receptive way in which God receives the world. In some ways, the traditional typology is transcended, for the initiative which God takes in the creative act (masculine typology) is never a matter of coercion; rather, God "lures" the world to become more (feminine typology).

The fifth point about marriage reflects a technical position in process thought; the process of symbolic reference presupposes the moment of causal efficacy which includes a transmutation that consciousness transforms into symbol. That translates into this obvious conclusion: no one can agree to build into marriage's identity forms of definiteness that are not known. Some experience of God as constant in affection is necessary before secular marriage can become Christian marriage. A certain level of faith experience is necessary before one can knowingly make a valid sacramental marriage commitment. Or as a minimum, there would have to be a deep commitment to being shaped by a Christian community which contains within itself an active and energizing understanding of the covenant of God.

I would want to affirm for marriage's sacramental character the necessity of Confirmation, which **should** be the sacramentalization of a freely chosen, informed, mature commitment to the church, based upon one's previous experience in faith. But that is not in fact how Confirmation often functions; thus the fact of having been confirmed is no guarantee of the kind of faith experience requisite for the possibility of a Christian Sacrament of Marriage. I am not speaking of juridical requirements, and that is what makes the issue difficult. Pastorally, how can one know whether two people are sufficiently rooted in faith experience **to be able** to create marriage after the model of what their faith knows?

As I pose these questions I have in mind, for example, former students who ask me to preside at their marriage. They are comfortable enough being called Catholic or Christian, although they are inactive and do not live consciously out of

any religious perceptions. Sometimes it is fairly clear to me that there is neither the requisite faith experience nor commitment within a community where that faith experience now thrives. Yet I sometimes sense the possibility, or even probability, that these people will later (as many do) take up the religious option. I place on the agenda, therefore, the need for a theology, a spirituality, and a pastoral *savoir faire* which can attend carefully to the level of faith experience requisite to the possibility of real sacrament.

But the fundamental question is whether there is an intrinsic reason why the church might not provide some option between a sheer secular marriage and a full sacramental marriage. It seems to me that marriage, during the earliest centuries of the church, was something of that sort. Or to pose the question through metaphor: in the early Christian practice, the secular reality of marriage was performed on the steps of the porch, **outside**; and this was followed by a procession into the **inside** of the church where the Christianization took place. My question is whether there is any theological reason why the couple might not stay on the porch a while longer, whether there might not be the possibility of a marriage between those on whose lives Christianity has some claim, but where there is an insufficient faith experience to make a valid sacramental commitment. In this case I clearly mean a marriage that is open to future sacramentalization and that is carefully nurtured in that direction. (I am clearly not speaking of "trial marriages"—that trivializes marriage. I don't know anything that would prevent trial marriages. But I don't know anything that prevents them now.)

The sixth topic I wish to discuss is the touchiest, and the one which is most clearly in the nature of a probe. I mean indissolubility. To begin with I want to point to a basic pluralism in the tradition about how pluralism is to be understood (and I rely heavily upon Schillebeeckx¹⁷).

In the Patristic tradition, generally, it was not **permissible** to dissolve a marriage. Marriage was a moral commitment with a moral obligation, because the contract created a situation of rights and duties valid for life. In contrast, the scholastic tradi-

tion held that it was not **possible** to dissolve a marriage since marriage creates an objective bond with ontological ramifications.

I will not deal here with New Testament texts other than to say that the texts themselves seem to be open to either of these interpretations.

A process theology of marriage is, of course, nearer the Patristic position, which is also nearer the tradition of most of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The ontological, objective bond makes sense when Aristotelian metaphysics is the hermeneutic for theological reflection on the permanence of marriage, much as transubstantiation is the best rendering of real presence in a hylomorphic world.

Process thought, like existentialism, has been accused of making permanent commitment impossible, but that is a gross misreading. There is nothing in either system that demands permanent commitment, but both systems are open to it. Sartre, for example, in *Being and Nothingness*, speaks of the need for some principle to preside over the long succession of our days and nights to rescue them from sheer atomicity and give them a personal, existential identity.¹⁸ Permanent commitment could be one such presiding principle. In process thought also, all the dynamics are there for the functioning of a permanent commitment. The future has a causality in the present,¹⁹ and a commitment once made may always be held out in front of new moments of becoming, guiding them in terms of its requirements.

I think of Charles Reich's unnerving observation in *The Greening of America*, that what the late twentieth century person knows better than anyone else is that no promise, no contract, no treaty long endures when all of the feeling has gone out.²⁰ Process thought and existentialism both affirm the radical freedom (not the moral freedom) of each subsequent moment to reverse the decisions of the previous moment. If any commitment is not broken, it is not because it **cannot** be, but for some other reason. That "some other reason" must reside

in values and reasons that transcend any present set of circumstances. And such is the character of God's covenant with us which is steadfast in its care, and which calls for there to be steadfast caring somewhere in human experience so that we may be able to understand a steadfast God. In that context, it is never permissible to dissolve a marriage.

Against this background I want to ask whether the story of marriage may not be told in some new ways to meet the new demands of human life today, ways in which the story hasn't been told in the Roman Catholic tradition thus far, but which may yet be faithful to the sacramental character of marriage. I begin with this prefatory note. I want to hold strongly and firmly that it is **never** permissible to dissolve a sacramental marriage. However, process theology would not speak in terms of an "objective bond" in an ontological sense; it would speak of a real moral bond. Process thought stresses that the process is the reality. Sacramental marriage is a process. And for any of an untold number of reasons, that process is sometimes permanently ruptured and destroyed. Such ruptures do happen. And every such rupture represents a tragic failure against marriage and against its intrinsic "ought."

Further, I want to hold that in those instances when one person withdraws unilaterally from the relationship, some aspects of the sacramentality may still function for the other spouse who does not marry again but continues a faithful orientation to the relationship. In the extreme metaphor, Yahweh was steadfast even to Israel the whore (yes, I know the metaphor is sexist).

Yet I want to raise the question of whether, after a full rupture of a sacramental marriage, a second marriage might not be possible, not as sacrament, but as a secular reality, still with its own goodness; and whether such a secular second marriage might not be recognized and allowed to function as such within Christian community (along with a host of other realities that are not intrinsically religious activities and institutions).

I am theologically convinced that if a second marriage were allowed it could not (rather than should not) be sacramental,

because the steadfastness present in God's covenant with His people is of such a character that a second marriage could not be its symbol. The steadfast love of God for us in Jesus Christ is **never** interrupted. It looks backward and forward. It is integral and inviolate. There is never a question of God's fidelity starting over. It's a pale comparison, but I think of the old casuistry regarding fasting, that once a fast is broken it is broken and fasting all the rest of the day still cannot make it a fast day. Thus steadfastness, once it has been permanently ruptured in a human relationship, cannot ever be a symbol of the steadfastness of God in a second version. A second version may indeed be strong and enduring, it may be holy, it may be so greatly informed by the love of God that it is able to disclose that love. In that sense it is sacrament, the way that all that is good may be a sacrament of our encounter with God. But it's not a fidelity that can look backwards as well as forwards with the integrity of an unbroken and unremitting vow. And so it does not carry within its own form the ability to exhibit the configuration of God's covenantal fidelity, and therefore cannot be a symbol for the love of Christ for the church.

A problem which this theology raises, which I wish only to identify at the moment, has to do with a marriage which was ruptured through the agency of either or both of the spouses. If one spouse survives the other, and bears responsibility for the decision to terminate the relationship, then I think it questionable whether that spouse could enter into a second sacramental marriage even after the death of the other spouse, since the integrity of faithful love has already been ruptured.

These proposals bear many similarities with practice in the Orthodox Churches. Since marriage is shaped by the eschaton, by the character of the Kingdom of God, it needs to be understood in terms of a *theologia gloriae*, for through the Sacrament of Marriage "the church, rejoices, so to speak, in this foretaste and anticipation of the Kingdom of God."²¹ But there is much difference between an initiated eschatology (which is our situation) and a realized eschatology. While the kingdom is breaking in, we still live in a world in which sin is connatural.

Even though marriage may not be dissolved, "yet it is being dissolved all the time by sin and ignorance, passion and selfishness, lack of faith and lack of love."²² "It is sufficient, however, to study only once the text of the rite of the second marriage to realize immediately the radical difference of its whole 'ethos.' It is indeed a penitential service, it is intercession, it is love, but nothing of the glory and joy of that which has been broken remains."²³

The whole case for a process theology of marriage does not rest upon this last discussion. I think the earlier sections must all stand on their own merits. Even in the last two sections, I do not feel that the intrinsic logic of the theological argument requires the practices I have suggested by way of a probe. But the Christian story of marriage seems to me to be open to being created in this way, if that would meet today's requirements better and still be in keeping with the basic sacramental symbols, albeit with major revision.

I conclude with the poignant reminder by Alfred North Whitehead, that sociological wisdom

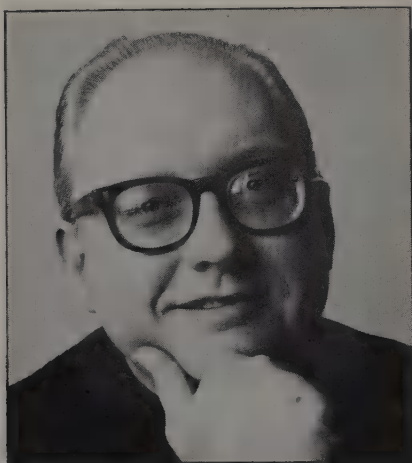
consists first in the maintenance of the symbolic code; and secondly in fearlessness of revision, to secure that the code serves those purposes which satisfy an enlightened reason. Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay either from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows.²⁴

Footnotes

- ¹ See, for example, James Wm. Clendon Jr., *Biography as Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974).
- ² John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval* (Niles, Ill.: Argus, 1975), pp. 9 sqq. The French structuralists, who are a strong influence on Crossan's work, have perhaps the deepest insights into how stories create and express the lives we lead.
- ³ Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 30 (1971), pp. 291-311.
- ⁴ Cf. the discussion of this topic in Willi Marxsen, *The Lord's Supper as a Christological Problem* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).
- ⁵ Raymond E. Brown, *Priest and Bishop* (New York: Paulist, 1970).
- ⁶ Andre Feuillet, *The Priesthood of Christ and His Ministers* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975). There would be very little support in contemporary New Testament scholarship for the position that Jesus understood himself to be a priest and handed his priesthood on to the apostles.
- ⁷ "Forms of definiteness" is a Whiteheadian category that will be explained later. It refers in this context to the realized possibilities which give something real its identity.
- ⁸ Similarly, *Epistola ad Diognetum*, v. 6 and Ambrose's *De Institutione Virginis* 6. cf. Migne PL 16, 316.
- ⁹ E. Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), vols. I and II, p. 245.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, esp. vol. II.
- ¹¹ Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existence* (New York: Citadel, 1962), p. 36.
- ¹² Andrew Greeley, *The New Agenda* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), chapter 4, "From Indissolubility to Intimacy."

- ¹³ John A. Miles, Jr., "Catholicism as a Protestantism," *Theology Today* 32 (1976), pp. 365-370.
- ¹⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 52.
- ¹⁵ The distinction between the abstract character of God (which is full and perfect) and God's concrete actuality (which becomes) is essential to Hartshorne's natural theology. Cf. Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), and *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1967).
- ¹⁶ Bernard Lee, "The Appetite of God," in *Religious Experience and Process Theology*, Harry James Cargas and Bernard Lee (New York: Paulist, 1976), pp. 369-384.
- ¹⁷ *op. cit.*, pp. 280-287.
- ¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Citadel, 1965), p. xlv.
- ¹⁹ J. Gerald Janzen, "Modes of Presence in the Communion of Saints," in *Religious Experience and Process Theology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-172. Janzen discusses the causality of the future in what he feels must supplement my ecclesiology in *The Becoming of the Church* (New York: Paulist, 1974). I am grateful for his critique, with which I agree and believe that the causality of the future is a necessary component of a process presentation of commitment.
- ²⁰ Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 245.
- ²¹ Alexander Schmemmann, "The Indissolubility of Marriage: The Theological Tradition of the East," in *The Bond of Marriage*, William W. Basset, ed., (Notre Dame, Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 103.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.
- ²⁴ Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism* (New York: Capricorn, 1959), p. 88.

**Punishment and Penance
In A Changing Church
and Society**



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Precis

Several reasons have been traditionally advanced to justify the imposition of punishment upon wrongdoers. An analysis of penal codes uncovers four major purposes behind criminal law: retribution, deterrence, the protection of society, and rehabilitation. But to what extent does the church, both through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and its Code of Canon Law, merely reduplicate these civil purposes? The question is an especially important one today since our contemporary American culture is beginning to emphasize retribution rather than rehabilitation as the major goal of criminal sanctions. The teaching of Jesus is, of course, crucial in coming to a Christian understanding of sin and punishment. The scriptures make clear, however, that law and punishment were understood to be part of the mission of Christ and of the church, but within certain limits. While the church has the power to bind as well as to loose, the ultimate purpose of its mission is to forgive and reconcile. The church has not always presented this ultimate purpose clearly throughout its history, but the new *Ordo Penitentiae* does much to spotlight the healing power of love. In the new *Ordo*, the priest's role as judge is entirely placed within the context of his vocation to be a teacher and a father, a healer of the evils brought about by sin. Christians must, therefore, resist the simplistic reduction of all punishment to retribution.

Punishment and Penance In A Changing Church and Society

Growing numbers of Americans are disenchanted with a system of punishment for crime which aims at legality rather than justice. The rate of violent crime is forever rising. People are afraid to walk the streets at night. Witnesses of crimes refuse to testify for fear of retaliation. Society spends a great deal of money on crime, its prevention and punishment, and with precious little results.

Not only the state is concerned with evil. The church, too, has a legitimate interest in struggling against evil in its individual and social dimensions. Catholics in recent years have been growing more aware that all sin has a social aspect and that the church as a community must take a stance towards evil in society. But this is nothing new. Throughout history church and state have tried four ways of dealing with evil: retribution, social protection, deterrence, and rehabilitation.

Some proponents of prison reform and champions of change in our American system of criminal justice are reviving interest in retribution, since the possibilities of rehabilitation seem sharply limited. Harvard's James Q. Wilson writes, "Government has no way of changing in any systematic fashion family backgrounds, deepseated attitudes, friendship patterns."¹ But society can protect itself and deter crime, the sociologist insists, by giving promptly to all those convicted of serious crime a mandatory minimum sentence.² Wilson advocates a return to retribution as well: he wants sentences "to give appropriate expression to our moral concern over the nature of the offense and to conform to our standards of humane conduct."³

“Wicked people exist. Nothing avails except to set them apart from innocent people. And many people, neither wicked nor innocent, but watchful, dissembling, and calculating of their opportunities, ponder our reaction to wickedness as a cue to what they might profitably do. We have trifled with the wicked, made sport of the innocent and encouraged the calculators. Justice suffers, and so do we all.”⁴

While attitudes to crime and punishment are changing in civil society, the church, too, is revising its thinking—but in the opposite direction. Our culture cries out for retribution; our church calls for reconciliation. In the past the absolution of the priest in Penance was considered a judicial act which commuted eternal punishment to temporal punishment, part of which would be the “penance” imposed by the priest. The stress was on retribution. Now the church celebrates healing and rehabilitation. Is this just one more example of the church being behind the times and out of step with reality? Or is it the living out of the Christian paradox and a prophetic call for justice in an unjust world?

Actually, any dichotomy between retribution and reconciliation is simplistic. The New Testament evidence indicates that the church should not concern itself **exclusively** with either retribution or the reform of the sinner. All four purposes of punishment are mentioned in the New Testament: retribution, social protection, prevention, and rehabilitation.

Scriptural Background

Jesus Christ moderates the strict application of retributive justice. “You have learned how it was said: ‘Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.’ But I say this to you: offer the wicked man no resistance. On the contrary, if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer him the other as well” (*Matthew 5:38-39*). Christ also cautions against passing judgment on offenders, “Do not judge and you will not be judged: because the judgments you

give are the judgments you will get, and the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given" (*Matthew 7:1-2*). As these passages indicate, self-denial and mercy are the Christian ideals.

Nevertheless, Jesus does advocate correction of others. "Take the plank out of your own eye first, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye" (*Matthew 7:5*). "If your brother does something wrong, go and have it out with him alone, between your two selves. If he listens to you, you have won back your brother. If he does not listen, take two or three others along with you: the evidence of two or three witnesses is required to sustain any charge. But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community; and if he refuses to listen to the community, treat him like a pagan or a tax collector" (*Matthew 18:15-18*). Matthew juxtaposes this passage to the parable of the lost sheep, indicating that he saw the exercise of fraternal correction within the church as continuing the work of Christ, who sought out the sheep who were lost. Although treating the offender like a pagan or tax collector surely points to some form of excommunication, in the general context of Matthew's gospel, however, Jesus goes out of his way to befriend pagans and tax collectors (*cf. 8:5-13; 9:10-13; 11:10; 21:31-32*). They are the prototypes of those he came to save. Hence the church must retain a loving concern even for those being punished.

Beside correction, Jesus allows for prevention of evil as a legitimate result of punishment. His statement to the paralytic healed in Jerusalem, "Be sure not to sin any more, or something worse may happen to you" (*John 5:14*), is a clear allusion to the power of punishment to deter evil behavior. So, too, are many of the gospel references to hell, *e.g., Matthew 5:10-30; 18:6-9; 25:31-46*.

But the major thrust of Christ's mission was to reform sinners, to heal them. "It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. I did not come to call the virtuous but the sinners" (*Mark 2:17*). The many cures wrought by Jesus must be seen in this context of his struggle against evil, sin and all its causes and effects. This is not retribution but rehabilitation and

reconciliation, as Paul rightly notes in II Corinthians 5:19.

Paul's letters develop these themes: "Never repay evil with evil. . . . Never try to get revenge; leave that, my friends, to God's anger. As scripture says, 'Vengeance is mine; I will pay them back,' the Lord promises. But there is more: 'If your enemy is hungry, you should give him food, and if he is thirsty, let him drink. Thus you heap red-hot coals on his head.' Resist evil and conquer it with good" (*Romans 12:17-19*). "Love is always patient and kind. . . . It does not take offense, and is not resentful; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes" (*I Corinthians 13:5-7*; cf. *4:21*; *II Corinthians 11:20*; *12:16*). Retribution, therefore, must give way to mercy, vindictive justice to patience. This is the norm, the Christian ideal.

There is still room, however, for correction and punishment, so long as it is not done with a vengeful spirit. With regard to the man in Corinth living with his father's wife, Paul writes, "A man who does a thing like that ought to have been expelled from the community. Though I am far away in body, I am with you in spirit and have already condemned the man who did this thing as if I were actually present. . . . With the power of our Lord Jesus he is to be handed over to Satan so that his sensual body may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. . . . Get rid of all the old yeast. . . . You should not associate with a brother Christian who is leading an immoral life, or is a usurer, or idolatrous, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or dishonest. You should not even eat a meal with people like that" (*I Corinthians 5:2-13*).

Such a stand reflects the attitude of Jesus in Matthew 18, treating the offender like a pagan or tax collector, for the ostracism is intended to bring the offender to his senses and lead to reform of life.

Approval of medicinal punishment also underlies other passages: "If anyone refuses to obey what I have written in this letter, take note of him and have nothing to do with him, so that he will feel that he is in the wrong; though you are not to regard him as an enemy but as a brother in need" (*II Thessalonians 3:14-15*). "I mean men like Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom

I have handed over to Satan to teach them not to be blasphemous" (*I Timothy 1:20*). "If a man disputes what you teach, then after a first and second warning have no more to do with him" (*Titus 3:10*).

This form of group pressure offsets the pressure of passion or pride. The paradoxical result: genuine liberation! "If one of you misbehaves, the more spiritual of you who set him free should do so in a spirit of gentleness" (*Galatians 6:1*). This is an imitation of God's corrective punishment, which also liberates: "When the Lord does punish us like that, it is to correct us and to keep us from being condemned with the world" (*I Corinthians 11:32*; cf. also *Hebrews 12:5-12*; *James 1:2-4*; *Revelation 3:19*).

The welfare of the community is also to be considered. A dangerous source of corruption should be removed, like leaven at Passover (*I Corinthians 5:7*). Punishment can protect the community: "Insist that certain people stop teaching strange doctrines. . . . These things are only likely to raise irrelevant doubts instead of furthering God's designs" (*I Timothy 1: 3-4*).

Punishment can also have a deterrent effect: "If any of them are at fault, reprimand them publicly as a warning to the rest" (*I Timothy 5:20*). Deterrence from evil is one of the motives implicit in the passage often cited to justify retribution: "You must all obey the governing authorities. Since all government comes from God, the civil authorities were appointed by God, and so anyone who resists authority is rebelling against God's decision, and such an act is bound to be punished. . . . Only if you do wrong ought you to be afraid. It is not without purpose that the ruler carries the sword; he is God's servant, to inflict his avenging wrath upon the wrongdoer. You must obey, then, not only to escape punishment but also for conscience's sake" (*Romans 13:1-5*).

While civil authorities may indeed be carrying out God's vengeance or retribution, their own motives may extend far beyond retribution to include social protection and prevention of crime, looking more to the future than to the past. Punishment may not only deter other potential criminals from crime.

It may deter the criminal himself from future crimes, and so become a form of behavior modification or rehabilitation.

Against this scriptural background it becomes clear that right from the beginning law and punishment were understood to be part of the mission of Christ and the church, but within certain limits. While the church has the power to bind as well as to loose, to retain as well as to forgive sins (*Matthew 9:8; 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23*), the ultimate purpose is to forgive and reconcile.

Purposes of Punishment

A deeper analysis of the four major purposes behind criminal law, or four basic views of punishment: retribution, deterrence, social defense, and rehabilitation, will be useful for our analysis of punishment as imposed by the church and also by the state.⁵

1. According to the theory of **retribution**, punishment restores and reestablishes the equilibrium which was disturbed by the offense. Some partisans of this position insist that the human judge should, as far as possible, render a verdict which represents correct moral judgment of the offender's real culpability before God, even though the judge lacks God's complete knowledge of the individual's responsibility and knows that God alone will reestablish a perfect equilibrium only at the final judgment. Such is the opinion of Pius XII in his addresses to the Italian Association of Jurists in 1954 and 1955.⁶

This theory has a long history in the church. Still, it is difficult to see how a human judge could decide what kind of punishment is to be equated with any degree of moral culpability, or how he could decide the degree of culpability with all of the limiting factors of knowledge and freedom in any given case. One can understand the demand for restitution of stolen property, but how can the imprisonment of the thief restore equilibrium to the violated social order? The execution of a murderer cannot really make up for the loss of another person's life; it may even compound the evil, as the woman of

Tekoa pointed out to King David in her successful appeal for clemency toward Absalom (*II Samuel 14: 1-21*).

Some of those who apparently invoke the principle of retribution to justify punishment are really arguing for social protection, "getting the criminals off the streets." To repair damage done and to care for the victims of crime can be a form of punishment and can genuinely protect and foster community life. But not all punishment repairs damage done to the offender or the offended members of society.

On the other hand, all sin harms the sinner. This itself is a form of retribution, not arbitrarily imposed by a fallible human judge but flowing from the very nature of sin. That is the meaning of the story of Adam and Eve. Surely the church, reflecting God's mercy, should try to undo the effects of sin on the sinner, healing his wounds, and the effects of sin on others, healing the wounds of society. But many of those effects are invisible and cannot be touched by the penal law of the church. Far better if we recognize the narrow limits of our ability to restore the order upset by sin, leave retribution in this world and the next largely in the hands of God and civil society, and direct our attention as church to other purposes of punishment more central to the New Testament message.

2. The **deterrent** or preventive function of criminal law is connected to its educational role. Law can certainly alert the conscience to evils otherwise overlooked. Legislation on civil rights, for ecology, and against sexual, racial, and religious discrimination has been effective in forming consciences and reinforcing values. The criminal code reveals the rights which society judges to be most precious. Indeed, it teaches much by what it does not condemn as criminal. Omissions may be due to moral blindness, but they may also be due to concern for legitimate pluralism, to esteem for due process and the rights of the accused, or even to sensitivity concerning what is possible in a human system of law lest unbearable burdens be laid on anyone's shoulders: *De minimis non curat lex*.

Hence great caution is necessary when restricting freedom in the name of deterrence or prevention of crime. The argument

of Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor is instructive, but too often forgotten:

"Nothing has ever been more insupportable for man and human society than freedom. . . . Man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom. . . . Instead of taking possession of men's freedom, Thou didst increase it, and burdened the spiritual kingdom of mankind with its sufferings forever. Thou didst desire man's free love, that he should follow Thee freely, enticed and captivated by Thee. In place of the firm ancient law, man must hereafter with free heart decide for himself what is good and what is evil, having only Thy image before him as his guide. . . . We have corrected Thy work."⁷

Ominous word, those. "We have corrected Thy work." We must beware lest for the best of motives we presume to "correct God's mistakes" and subvert His gift of freedom through coercion, refusing to "turn the other cheek," forgetting that "all who draw the sword will perish by the sword" (*Matthew* 26:52). It may be that the church must protect the sheep from wolves and drive certain sinners from its midst. But let us not act with unquestioning self-confidence. In safeguarding some values we may be endangering others. As times and cultures shift, we may be sacrificing a greater for a lesser good. The parable of the wheat and the tares ought not be forgotten (*Matthew* 13:24-30). Christian education should promote freedom, not destroy it. "The truth will set you free" (*John* 8:32).

3. How can the church best foster freedom and respect the principle of subsidiarity in its efforts to prevent crime and **protect the common good**? Granted that the church may use forms of social pressure to protect itself, as Paul did, the initiative need not always descend from above, from the lawgiver, the bishop, the superior. Why not follow the principle of frater-

nal correction suggested by Matthew and Paul and more recently by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation Within the Church?⁸ The group itself could sometimes initiate the pressure from below. Would this not be more effective in bringing about a reform of life?

How can this more democratic approach be encouraged by law? Perhaps the pastor might remind the group of the law and its basis in the gospel, leaving them to draw their own conclusions. After all, others in the community are often given the charism of prophecy or of discernment of spirits. But how can the Code of Canon Law regulate fraternal correction to ensure that the common good is safeguarded and the rights of all respected? St. Ambrose threatened Emperor Theodosius and brought about his public repentance for a public crime. Should similar acts be encouraged or discouraged in a pluralistic society? Under what conditions?

Social protection involves the credibility of the church. If the church does not practice what it preaches, who will take it seriously? If it proclaims solicitude for the poor and oppressed, what should it do about a pastor who preaches racial hatred or defends those who exploit the defenseless? Under what conditions can or should he be removed from office? At the same time, how can one's rights to legitimate differences of opinion about noninfallible teachings of the church be safeguarded? How can one be protected against unfounded accusations? And what if one is condemning as evil a situation which one's bishop or national conference of bishops considers to be healthy and desirable; for example, an economic system, a war, a set of laws on marriage or divorce or abortion? Social protection means protecting the rights of all, even the unpopular. The lives of the Hebrew prophets remind us of this.

The new Rite of Penance in sections 4-5 and 7-8 points out that the whole church is weakened by venial sin, citing to this effect Vatican II's *Constitution on the Church* (II), and Paul VI's 1966 Apostolic Constitution, *Paenitemini*. Should the community be protected from venial sin? How? To what extent should the church's penal code take venial sin into account? Should it look only to the objective order and prescind from

subjective dispositions? At a time when some Christians are rediscovering the importance of social sin, and even in-deliberate sin, many others are often vague and confused about sin, its reality, effects, and importance. If punishment is limited to mortal sins, in which a fundamental option is made against God and the church, then much of the spiritual life will be neglected and the cumulative harm to the church can be great. Objective sin, whether mortal or venial, knowing or unknowing, voluntary or involuntary, deliberate or accidental, does in fact do damage to the person and to society, and it merits attention. Often that damage is beyond human control or repair. We can ask God to heal it, root it out of us, take it away, cleanse us, free us from its power. The sacrament of reconciliation can deal with it. Should the Code of Canon Law neglect it? What of civil law?

Is it right for the law to presume guilt under any circumstances? Or should it leave the judgment of guilt to the sacrament of Penance and concern itself only with the external forum? Can church law ever inflict punishment without having the conversion of the sinner as one of its motives—and does not that necessarily involve the internal forum?

Canonists are fond of distinguishing vindictive from medicinal penalties. Medicinal penalties aim at the reform of the delinquent; vindictive penalties aim at the good of the community. In practice, however, the distinction is unreal. The reform of the delinquent is part of the good of the community, the good of the community can lead to and flow from the reform of the delinquent. Whenever Jesus or Paul speaks of fraternal correction, no matter how serious, they have a medicinal end in view.

Experience with the marriage legislation of the church should show how difficult it is to separate neatly internal and external fora. Lack of the proper intention invalidates; it pertains to the internal forum and can be almost impossible to prove in the external forum. Hence limiting concern to the external forum would work great hardships and harm the common good. What is true of marriage can also be true of the penal code in Canon Law, for it can give to Christians the im-

pression that the external act is all that is really important in the eyes of the church. But to be faithful to the gospel, the church must show more concern for the interior than the exterior, for the spirit than the letter.

4. The final major purpose of law is **medicinal or rehabilititory**. The criminal should be restored to his place in society so that he can contribute his due share to the common good. The healing function of punishment must be foremost in the consciousness of the church, for it is most prominent in the New Testament teaching about punishment. If the entire life of the church, including the renewal of Penance, must intensify the experience of God and reveal His mystery to the faithful,⁹ its penal code especially ought to reveal God's mercy behind the concern for justice, His desire that the sinner be converted and live (*Ezekiel 18:23,32*). Every effort must be made to adapt the law of the church to this central thrust of Christian revelation.

Part of rehabilitation is moral growth and development, learning from one's mistakes and obeying not simply out of fear of punishment or social conformity but because one recognizes the good which the law aims to achieve and thus freely chooses to cooperate in bringing that good into existence. Education is an important aspect of the restoration of the criminal. It is not enough, then, that the law tells what to do; it must tell why. The law must motivate by pointing out values. The canonical principle that the reason for the law need not and should not be included in the law (*Ratio legis non cadit sub lege*) should be thoroughly reexamined to see whether it is counter-productive, in effect endorsing voluntarism and authoritarianism, and stunting proper formation of conscience.

The present code very properly reminds those in authority that they are shepherds of their flock, that they should love others as their children and brothers and sisters in Christ, that they should exhort and warn rather than coerce, since benevolence often effects more than severity, entreaty more than threats, charity more than power; but if punishment must be given, harshness should be tempered with leniency so that reform might result (*Canon 2214*).

Since this is so, occult offenses or public offenses harming the culprit more than the community might well be handled simply by warning the offender. The new Rite of Penance relegates excommunication to an appendix. This might indicate a shift from thinking of the church primarily as a perfect society comparable to the state towards a more theological approach to the church in which it is seen as the Body of Christ, sharing in his tenderness and compassion for sinners. From such a standpoint, is it ever legitimate to exclude anyone from the public prayers of the church, as Canon 2262 envisages? Surely the church in its prayers must have a charity as broad and deep as that of Christ, who prayed for those who nailed him to the cross and gave his life for all without exception. Even in a time of persecution "prayers should be offered for everyone . . . and especially for kings and others in authority. . . . To do this is right and will please God our savior; He wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth" (*I Timothy 2:1-4; cf. also Romans 5:6-8; I Peter 3:18; I John 4:9-10*). If it is objected that John says we need not pray for others when there is a sin unto death (*I John 5:16*), commentators are divided on the meaning of "sin unto death," and a perfectly sound interpretation holds that it refers to final impenitence, about which none of us can judge with certitude.

The whole question of automatic penalties (*latae sententiae*) must be reviewed in the light of the predominantly medicinal nature of punishment in a church characterized by mercy and love. What kind of an image of the church do automatic penalties project? Are they doing more harm than good? Jesus and Paul called for fraternal correction first. They cannot be ignored.

Church History

The penitential practices of the church have fluctuated throughout history, sometimes emphasizing the vindictive aspect, sometimes the medicinal. The rite of public penance was modeled on the catechumenate and was reserved for sins which clearly manifested a total breakdown of Christian life, a

collapse of the God-man relationship: murder, adultery, apostasy. The lengthy instruction and fasting and the repeated prayers of the community aimed at changing the dispositions of the sinner so that he could leave behind an old way of life and enter the community like a new person. This clearly had a medicinal intent, just as baptism had.

Nevertheless, Tertullian, the first witness to a detailed public rite, says that its purpose is retributive and humiliating.

“Admission of guilt prepares for satisfaction, from admission penance is born, by admission God is appeased. And so exomologesis is a discipline for man’s abasement and humiliation, imposing such conduct as attracts mercy. . . . By passing judgment on the sinner it acts as a substitute for God’s wrath and by temporal punishment discharges the eternal penalties.”¹⁰

The Irish Penitentials, on the other hand, stressed the medicinal aspect more than the juridical. Penance is considered a remedy for sin, sins are cured, the confessor is a physician.¹¹

St. Thomas tried to balance both aspects, but leaned more toward the medicinal.

“Here is sought not merely the restoration of the equality of justice as in vindictive justice, but rather the reconciliation of friendship.”¹² “The different effects of the sacraments are like different medicines for sin and participations in the power of the Lord’s passion.”¹³ “Sacramental grace is aimed at two effects: to remove the defects left by previous sins and to perfect the soul in what pertains to divine worship.”¹⁴

Now that the church sees itself as a sacrament and understands its entire life as sacramental, the function of penal legislation in the church must be clearly connected to the sacrament of penance and reconciliation. Both sacrament and code have

personal and communal aspects. Both sacrament and code educate. Both sacrament and code heal. Both sacrament and code are directed against sin. Both sacrament and code reveal God's mercy and love. If they do not do so sufficiently now, they should be changed to do so more clearly.

New Emphases of the Rite of Penance

The new Rite of Penance will have profound effects on the life of the church. Its pastoral concern embodies many practical principles in a warm and moving way, as the following paragraphs indicate.

"Through the sacrament of Penance the Father welcomes the son returning to him, Christ lifts the lost sheep onto his shoulders and brings it back to the fold, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies once again or dwells more fully within his temple. This is made manifest through the renewed or more fervent participation at the table of the Lord, where, when the prodigal returns from afar off, there is great joy in the banquet of the Church of God" (#7 *d*).

"In order that the confessor be able to fulfill his office properly and faithfully, diagnose the diseases of souls and apply effective medicines to them, and wisely exercise the role of judge, let him acquire the knowledge and prudence necessary for this by diligent study under the guidance of the magisterium of the Church, and especially by fervent prayer to God. For the discernment of spirits is an intimate knowledge of the work of God in the heart of men, a gift of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of charity, . . . When he welcomes a repentant sinner and leads him to the light of truth, he does what a father does, revealing to men the heart of the Father and bearing the image of Christ the Shepherd" (#10 *a, c*).

“The penitent should compare his life with the example and commandments of Christ” (#15). “The priest or the penitent himself reads some text of sacred scripture . . . for through the word of God the believer is enlightened to recognize his sins and is called to conversion and to trust in God’s mercy” (#17). “The priest, if necessary, helps him to make an integral confession, encourages him to repent sincerely of the offenses given to God, helps him with suitable advice to begin a new life, and when needed instructs about the duties of Christian life” (#18).

1. According to the new rite, the priest ought to be a **teacher**. He helps the penitent form his conscience in the light of scripture and the example of Christ, thus giving the reasons which lie behind the commandments of Christ and the church. Priest and penitent cooperate in discerning the movements of the Holy Spirit who is at work deep in the heart, healing sin and encouraging spiritual progress (#10, 15-18). Church law, even penal law, can facilitate this process.

The priest ought to be a **father**, a giver and preserver of life, and a **healer**, a restorer of health, dedicated to strengthening both individual and social organism against the onslaughts of disease (#7, 10). Since the Body of Christ is damaged by all sin, mortal and venial, hidden or public, it is a work of love to correct the sinner and protect the common good. These are among the purposes of criminal law, both in the church and in civil society.

The priest ought to be a **judge** who pronounces sentence in union with Christ (#6). As a shepherd he must seek out the stray and lead him back. As a father, too, he exercises authority—but all of this is done to reveal the loving action of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit so that the sinner may be touched and moved to repentance (#7). This spirit must permeate the law itself, which extends the ministry of the church.

2. Frequently penitents experience the description of the pastoral role of the priest given by the new Rite of Penance as a

beautiful ideal, but far removed from the actual situation. Many priests limit their role to that of judge; others are almost totally mechanical. It is not unusual for priests to rush penitents through a confession, frustrating their hunger for some sign of fatherly concern—and all because they do not want to burden the penitents waiting in line outside the confessional! Would Jesus have acted that way?

Surveys show that few penitents have received penances other than the recitation of prayers. Fewer still have found confessors with the charism of discerning the action of the Holy Spirit. Rare indeed is the man of prayer who prays with the penitent and deepens the experience of the sacrament as prayer.

There are many reasons for this. Seminary training in the past stressed taciturnity, as if the impact of the confessor's words varied in inverse proportion to the number of words spoken. Almost all the time devoted to the formation of confessors was spent on acquainting them with the different species of sins so that they could name the sin accurately. Much less attention was given to the dynamics of interpersonal communication or even to helpful techniques of getting to the root causes of sin or effective ways of breaking down sinful habit patterns.

It will take a long time to remedy this defective training. But the ideal set forth in the new Rite should certainly affect the interpretation and application of Canon 877, which specifies that faculties to hear confessions should be granted only if the confessor is "*idoneus*" (suitable or qualified), and that the faculties may be withdrawn if the priest is no longer qualified, even though he be a pastor. Clearly not all priests have the necessary knowledge or prudence nor the charism of discernment of spirits. Not all can reveal the heart of God, the Father, and the concern of the Good Shepherd in their dealings with penitents. And those gifts, once given, need not and do not last a lifetime. If the sacrament is to be a genuine experience of God's merciful love, those priests who lack the necessary gifts must not be allowed to be confessors, and those who have lost the gifts must be removed. This canon is now rarely enforced properly; almost all the attention is given to the possession of the requi-

site knowledge about moral theology and canon law, to the neglect of other qualities equally or more necessary. The Cure D'Ars should have taught the church a salutary lesson about the relative value of academic knowledge and practical wisdom in the confessional; we are slowly realizing the implications of his life and ministry. Until discernment of spirits in granting faculties becomes common practice, any automatic exchange of faculties on a national basis should be postponed.

3. The new Rite of Penance will have a much broader impact on church life than its effect upon the Code of Canon Law. It will affect both individual Christians and the community as a whole. The individual experience of the sacrament will be quite different: less formal, more prayerful and hopeful. The initial greeting should put the penitent at ease, as Jesus treated sinners who came to him. The scripture reading is not set ahead of time and may be chosen by the penitent. A free-flowing dialogue should get at the causes, effects, and possible remedies for sin. The wording of the act of contrition is not specified. The penance can be any word or act which symbolizes a break with the past and the beginning of a new life of Christian service.

This informal spontaneity is needed to break down the defense mechanisms which have been all too frequently set up to keep the confrontation with sin on a superficial level. A cursory examination of conscience, a mechanical recitation of the same familiar faults, a stereotyped response from the priest, a memorized act of contrition, a predictable penance—all this can anesthetize the penitent to the pain of sin. It can be a form of escape from reality. Neither priest nor penitent in the past anticipated a sudden change, a reversal of life. No major reform was really expected. Although Protestant descriptions of the sacrament of Penance as magic or an excuse to go on sinning were exaggerated caricatures, there was an element of truth to the charges, at least insofar as many Catholics experienced the ritual.

But the whole point of the sacrament is to dramatize the action of God in the depths of the soul, to intensify awareness of

God's presence and power, and to evoke fuller cooperation in the process of spiritual resurrection and growth. Confession should not be a soporific but a challenge. For this to happen, honesty is needed, and courage, and time. Normally the human person is not touched radically by an encounter lasting only three minutes. Sacraments do not annihilate human nature; they build on it.

Thus the informal elements built into the new Rite of Penance are primarily intended to create an atmosphere of prayer, bringing sinner and God into a solemn encounter. Informality is not casualness. It can coexist with solemnity. The imposition of hands called for in the new rite is a break with the formal separation of priest and penitent. But it should be a very solemn act. In this gesture the church through the priest imparts to the penitent the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit who had filled Jesus with the power to set people free from sickness and sin, who had enabled Jesus himself to love wholeheartedly and resist all temptation, and who finally raised the crucified Christ to new life now enters the life of the penitent in a new way. Nothing is impossible to the power of God's Spirit. No limits can be set to what He is able to do in human lives. What a sense of freshness, excitement, and joy should result! But it comes precisely through the solemnity of the ritual. It was the very formalism and lack of solemnity which led us to take the Holy Spirit for granted and to set limits to what we expected him to do.

4. Rehabilitation can take place for entire communities or groups within a community as well as for individuals. Hence the new Rite of Penance includes not only a form for the reconciliation of individual penitents but rites for the reconciliation of several penitents with either individual or general confession and absolution and penitential celebrations with no absolution at all.

These communal celebrations are all intended to awaken a realization of how the church as a community is involved in the effects of sin and the task of reform. The hymns, scripture readings, homily, common examination of conscience, and

prayers for one another should build up a sense of "the social aspect of grace and sin, by which the actions of individuals in some degree affect the whole body of the church" (#25). The entire church works for the conversion of sinners by our fraternal correction and support, our love, example, and prayers (#4,8). In fact, sinners "frequently join together to commit injustice. It is thus only fitting that they should help each other in doing penance so that freed from sin by the grace of Christ they may work with all persons of good will for justice and peace in the world" (#5).

This renewed social awareness should show itself in works of the church devoted to healing wounds in individuals and society: parish activities, family service agencies, hospitals, schools, the Campaign for Human Development, and church lobbies for foreign aid, health care, fair housing, and more equitable tax structures.

Social rehabilitation is such a clear goal of the sacrament of reconciliation that other social goals may be overlooked. But in reality protection of society and deterrence from sin can come not only from punishment but also from a deeper sense of responsibility to contribute to the common good. This can be intensified by increasing appreciation of the value of the group and of the contributions that members of the group make to one another. One moves beyond a punishment/reward mentality to a sense of group identity and purpose. The only competition for Christians should be that of doing good to one another: "Nobody should be looking for his own advantage, but everybody for the other person's . . . just as I try to be helpful to everyone at all times, not anxious for my own advantage but for the advantage of everybody else" (*I Corinthians* 10: 24,33; cf. *Galatians* 2:3-4).

The new Rite of Reconciliation, therefore, leads to a broader yet sharper sense of sin: personal sin, social sin, original sin. All sinners have contributed to the cumulative impact of sin on the world. All of us are obliged to counteract this by individual and combined efforts. This is an essential part of the mission of the church.

5. The section of the new Rite of Penance dealing with

general absolution may have a particularly profound effect upon the attitudes and behavior of the church. The Rite incorporates the Pastoral Norms on General Absolution issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on June 16, 1972. In one sense these norms are a major advance, opening the door to a celebration of the sacrament which can radically alter the image the faithful have of it. Just as in the eleventh century allowing absolution before satisfaction gradually led to calling the sacrament "confession" rather than "penance," so allowing absolution before confession by species and number stresses the importance of repentance or change of heart. This, too, may lead to calling the sacrament "reconciliation" rather than "confession." At least it puts the emphasis where it belongs, on conversion and purpose of amendment from our side, and on the action of God which restores us to full responsibility in the community. It is more important to hate sin and root it out of life than to put it into words.¹⁵

General absolution is now permitted whenever there is grave necessity, as for example¹⁶ when the number of penitents is so great that the available confessors cannot hear their confessions properly within an appropriate time,¹⁷ with the result that the penitents without their own fault would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time (*diu*). "Diu" is a relative term; it need not mean a year or a month or a week. It may be a day.¹⁸

The norms indicate that the conditions needed for general absolution can be fulfilled not only in the missions, but also in other places. It will happen more and more frequently as the positive advantages of this form of the sacrament become clear. This has already been the experience in Alaska, where individual confessions tripled after the introduction of general absolution. Penitential celebrations with general absolution can heighten awareness of certain kinds of sins which do not readily yield details of species and number, as for example social sins for which responsibility is diffused over many people, or objectively grave sins in which subjective guilt is diminished because of conditioning or inadvertence. It is a pastoral mistake to reserve general absolution only for mortal sins and

only to cases of grave necessity; venial sins can be forgiven in many ways already, why not through general absolution?

6. In the section on general absolution the Rite insists that **“individual, integral confession** and absolution remain the only ordinary way for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God and the church, unless physical or moral impossibility excuses from this kind of confession” (#31). Those who receive general absolution “should go to individual confession before they receive this kind of absolution again, unless they are impeded by a just reason” (#34). Why this insistence on detailed, specific confession? Granted that integrity is required *jure divino*,¹⁹ what is the reason for the divine law requiring integrity?

It is certainly not based on the example of Jesus Christ. As far as we can tell from the gospels, Jesus never demanded details of species and number. He did not do so for the paralytic (*Mark 2:1-12*), for the man at the pool of Bethzatha (*John 5:1-15*), for the woman taken in adultery (*John 8:3-11*), nor for the thief on the cross (*Luke 23:29-43*). In the parable of the prodigal son, the father even interrupts the recital (*Luke 15:21-22*).

The main purpose of integrity is not to provide a basis for a judicial decision to forgive or retain; that would be based more on the dispositions of the penitent than the kind and number of sins. Rather it is to safeguard the integrity of the sign of God's forgiveness. God does not simply beam upon mankind with a fatuous, generalized benevolence, overlooking what we do. His knowledge descends to the most intimate details of our lives, the very hairs of our heads (*Matthew 10:30; Psalm 139*). Jesus knows what is in the heart of man and needs no one to tell him (*John 2:25*). God knows what we are most ashamed of and fear to look at in ourselves. Yet His love for us is not weakened. Knowing our sinfulness perfectly well, He is still ready to forgive us and sends His Son and His Spirit to touch our hearts. He does not wait for us to make the first move but seeks out the straying sheep. He wants us to know that our sins do constitute a barrier between ourselves and Him, but only from our side, not from His. As soon as we are sorry, all is

forgiven, no matter how heinous; our very repentance is the result of His mercy at work within us.

God gives us a sign of this in the sacrament of reconciliation. How often confessors say that they are not put off by knowing the sinfulness of others; instead they are moved at the trust the penitent displays. This is itself a sign of God's forgiveness working through them. Without a full avowal of our sinfulness in all its ugliness, we could suspect that the pardon was not complete. To reassure us, God insists that we tell all, to hear that all is forgiven.

This is particularly important in contemporary society, where the person is reduced to a nameless face in the crowd. God insists upon giving us through the priest a sacramental sign of His personal attention, understanding, pardon, and reconciliation. This is the reason behind the law which requires confession by species and number of those sins which have already been forgiven through general absolution. The new Code of Canon Law could clarify this when restating the law.

Conclusion

The church must act as a leaven within our changing culture, promoting the right kinds of changes and motivating them by Christian faith. At a time when our contemporaries are losing hope in reforming criminals, we Christians must reaffirm our belief that rehabilitation, though difficult, is possible with the grace of God and the support of a Christian community.

David Rothenburg, executive director of the Fortune Society, which aids prisoners and ex-prisoners, writes that he has "seen people change from violent, antisocial beings into productive, self-accepting community leaders. . . . Almost everyone who changed from antisocial to productive said after much struggle he began to accept himself as someone worth caring about and **being**. In every instance, another human being, someone who believed in that person's worth, had transcended the barriers of suspicion and fear through concern and intelligent guidance."²⁰ That is a striking testimony to the healing power of love.

Christians must resist the simplistic reduction of all punishment to retribution. Moral development and moral education and even moral cure are possible. That hope is needed by the world today.²¹

Footnotes

- ¹ *Thinking about Crime* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 177.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 201.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 208. See also his essay in *The Americans: 1976*, Irving Kristol and Paul Weaver, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Commission on Critical Choices for Americans, 1976).
- ⁵ See L. Harold de Wolf, "From Retribution to Prevention and Social Restoration," *Jurist* 33 (1973), pp. 25-48. De Wolf develops his own views and discusses a compendium of contemporary theories about punishment in *Contemporary Punishment: Views, Explanations, and Justifications*, Rudolph J. Gerber and Patrick D. McAnany, eds., (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972).
- ⁶ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 47 (1955), pp. 60-85.
- ⁷ *The Brothers Karamazov*, Part II, Book V, V.
- ⁸ *Acta Apostolica Sedis* 67 (1975), pp. 5-23. English translation in *The Pope Speaks* 19 (1974-75), pp. 319-32. Section 6 is especially important for our purposes.
- ⁹ Carl Peter, "Renewal of Penance and the Problem of God," *Theological Studies* 30 (1969), pp. 494-495.
- ¹⁰ *De Poenitentia*, 9, 2-5. See *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina I, Tertulliani Opera I, p. 336.

- ¹¹ Gerard Mitchell, "St. Columbanus on Penance," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 18 (1951), pp. 47-48; "The Origins of Irish Penance," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 22 (1955), pp. 1-14.
- ¹² *Summa Theologiae* III, 90, 2.
- ¹³ *De Veritate* 27, 5 ad 12.
- ¹⁴ *Summa Theologiae* III, 62, 5.
- ¹⁵ See F. Sottocornola, "II Nuovo 'Ordo Paenitentiae'," *Notitiae* 90 (1974), p. 75.
- ¹⁶ The term *nimirum* which appears in the text is the equivalent of *verbi gratia*. "As a matter of fact the latter expression was explicitly employed to describe the same situation of serious need in the 1944 Instruction on General Absolution (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 36 [1944], pp. 155-156)," as Carl Peter mentions in his article, "The New Norms for Communal Penance: Will They Help?" *Worship* 47 (1973), p. 5.
- ¹⁷ For a discussion of the meaning of "properly" and "appropriate" in this context, cf. Francis J. Buckley, "Recent Developments in the Sacrament of Penance," *Communio* (1974), pp. 94-95.
- ¹⁸ For example, St. Alphonsus Liguori in *De Sacramento Paenitentiae*, section 490, cites Suarez, Viva, Renzi, and Fagundez as interpreting "*diu*" as less than 2-3 days, and then adds, "It seems to me hard for one who is in mortal sin to remain without absolution for even one day." Vermeersch in *Theologia Moralis*, (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 3rd edition), vol. 3, section 588, says that one is excused from integrity by the inconvenience of not remaining in the state of grace for even one day and goes on to cite Viva: "It is a very grave inconvenience to lack '*diu*' the sacramental grace of forgiveness of sins and the helps of grace to avoid sin in the future, as well as the grace of the Eucharist, especially because contrition is difficult for a sinner remaining long in the state of mortal sin."
- ¹⁹ Cf. Carl Peter, "Auricular Confession and the Council of Trent," *Jurist* 28 (1968), pp. 294-297.
- ²⁰ "Failure of Rehabilitation: a Smokescreen," *National Catholic Reporter*, April 16, 1976, p. 10.
- ²¹ This article is an amplification of my "Le nouvel 'Ordo Paenitentiae' et la loi penale," in *La Discipline Ecclesiastique*, Concilium, volume 107 (Paris: 1975), pp. 65-76. An English translation is being prepared.

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