THE EMERGING WORLD CHURCH: A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

I

My assigned topic and the theme of this convention are, I take it, inspired by an observation of Karl Rahner. Speaking at the Weston School of Theology in 1979, he asserted that the main achievement of Vatican II was to have been the first official self-actualization of Catholicism as a world Church.[1] Since Rahner propounded this thesis he himself has enlarged upon it in other writings, as have other authors such as Walbert Bühlmann in his recent book, *Weltkirche*.[2] The emergence of the world Church, as explained by these authors, marks the end of the period when Catholicism as a whole could be equated with its expression in the forms of Graeco-Roman, Mediterranean, or European culture. We are witnessing the birth of a new multicultural Catholicism in which all the regional churches may be expected to interact, mutually criticizing and enriching one another.

Both Rahner and Bühlmann recognize that the selection of Vatican II as the moment of emergence of the world Church is somewhat arbitrary. The council obviously built on the prior labors of far-sighted popes and missionaries, especially since World War I. The actualization of the world Church at Vatican II was, moreover, only rudimentary. The emergence occurred as much in the lived experience of the council as in its formal teaching. Even through the indigenous hierarchies of Asia and Africa played a relatively minor role in comparison with their European counterparts, the Catholic Church at Vatican II exhibited greater geographic and ethnic inclusiveness than ever before in its history.

The novelty of the present situation can be illustrated by contrast with the period from 1500 to 1900, the great epoch of missionary expansion. In that period Christianity, though it was disseminated to all parts of the globe, remained an essentially European phenomenon, exported in European form. Christians of other continents took European names, used European languages in their worship, studied the religious history of the West, and learned their theology from European textbooks.

[1] K. Rahner, "Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979), 716-27. Another translation may be found under the title "Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council" in Rahner's *Theological Investigations* XX (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 77-89. Several other essays in this volume touch on the same theme.

[2] W. Bühlmann, *Weltkirche: Neue Dimensionen, Modell für das Jahr 2001* (Graz: Styria, 1984), with a "Nachwort" by K. Rahner, pp. 220-34. Similar in content to Rahner's Afterword is his article "Perspektiven der Pastoral in der Zukunft," *Schriften zur Theologie* XVI (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1984), pp. 143-59.

We cannot say that this period has come to an end, but it is surely on the wane. Vatican II took some cautious steps in the direction of de-Europeanization. It admitted the vernacular into the liturgy, provided for the establishment of the international Synod of Bishops, gave new status to regional and national bishops' conferences, and endorsed the principle of missionary accommodation. Since the council the trend has been carried further by the virtual abolition of the Latin liturgy, the increased vitality of the Church in the Third World, and the global travels of Paul VI and John Paul II. The churches and hierarchies of the various continents are acquiring a new sense of their own distinctive identity. They do not simply learn from Europe. They now feel a responsibliity to shape the future of the Church in their own parts of the world and to contribute insights based on their own experience.

A great number of factors have conspired to bring about this epochal shift. One obvious ingredient was the demise of European colonialism. In organizations such as the United Nations the new national states of the Third World hold a commanding majority and are asserting themselves with commensurate vigor. A second factor is the statistical growth of Christianity in the Third World. Bühlmann points out that South America today contains more Catholics than Europe and that more Catholics live in the southern hemisphere than in the northern. This numerical preponderance of the "Third Church," as Bühlmann calls it, is constantly increasing.[3] A third element is the decline of the classical culture that provided the intellectual apparatus for European Catholicism, and its displacement by the new scientific and technological mentality. Connected with this development is yet a fourth, the collapse of the Christian culture that permeated the public life of Europe until relatively recent years. Today, for the first time since antiquity, Christians in most European countries find themselves in what Rahner describes as a "diaspora situation." Generally speaking, they are a minority surrounded by a secular culture which the Church can no longer control.

Although our authors are by no means pessimistic, they are conscious of the perils of the present juncture. Only once before, Rahner asserts, has Christianity been forced to undergo an abrupt cultural shift. That was in the first century, when Gentile Christianity separated itself culturally from the Jewish mother church. For a brief period the Jewish and Hellenistic forms of Christianity existed side by side. Their coexistence occasioned a sharp conflict and nearly led to schism. Division was staved off by frail compromises such as the decrees of the so-called Apostolic Council, which made certain laws obligatory for Jewish Christians but not for Christians of Gentile extraction. Whether this settlement was ever implemented, and how long it could have been enforced, are moot questions. The crisis was eventually solved by the virtual extinction of the Jewish Christian community after the destruction of Jerusalem. The

[3] Some statistics are given by Bühlmann, *Weltkirche*, pp. 140-57. For an earlier set of figures see his *The Coming of the Third Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1977), pp. 129-40.

Church then became once again monocultural, and such it has remained, generally speaking, until the present day.

The first century crisis shows how cultural shifts can involve matters of life and death for the Church. The current crisis is more complex than that of the first century, for it involves not two but many cultures. It is by no means easy to see how the Church can adjust to the new technological culture of the West and at the same time implant itself in the ancient, traditional cultures of Asia and Africa. Can a Church that simultaneously moves in these contrary directions keep enough internal homogeneity to remain a single social body? Can the Church adopt new symbols, languages, structures, and behavioral patterns on a massive scale without losing continuity with its own origins and its own past? If Rahner and Bühlmann are even approximately correct, the emergence of the world Church sets the main agenda for Catholicism in the decades to come. The problems accompanying this transition cannot be adequately handled without a comprehensive pastoral strategy, and this will no doubt involve the formation of new structures and methodologies.[4]

II

Before turning to these practical matters it would be well for us, as theologians, to reflect on what is theologically at stake. The Church is being called to insert itself into the contemporary cultures of six continents (the two Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Oceania). This insertion is called, in recent theological literature, inculturation—a term that made its first appearance in official Catholic literature in the public message issued by the international Synod of Bishops in 1977. Since then John Paul II has frequently used the term, notably in two of his apostolic exhortations, *Catechesi tradendae* (1979) and *Familiaris consortio* (1981).

Inculturation has been defined as "the process of a deep, sympathetic adaptation to and appropriation of a local cultural setting in which the Church finds itself in a way that does not compromise its basic faith in Christ."[5] As this definition suggests, inculturation raises a theological problem: Under what conditions can the Church appropriate a particular human culture without impairing its fidelity to Christ and the gospel? Since every culture carries with it a set of meanings, attitudes, and behavioral patterns, the acceptance of a new culture would seem to bring with it a modification of the Church's established meanings, attitudes, and behavioral norms. Quite evidently, we are here confronted with a new phase of the age-old problem of Christianity and culture, and our

[4] Rahner insists on the urgency of a comprehensive pastoral strategy in the two papers mentioned in note 2 above.

[5] This definition is from William Reiser, "Inculturation and Doctrinal Development," *Heythrop Journal* 22 (1981), 135-48; quotation from p. 135. For a fuller discussion see Ary A. Roest Crollius, "What Is So New About Inculturation?" *Gregorianum* 59 (1978), 721-38.

understanding of the world Church will depend in large measure on how we understand the relationship between Christianity and culture in general.

In his classic study, *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr constructed a typology that may be adapted to the problem before us.[6] For the sake of simplicity, I shall here reduce Niebuhr's five types to three: a confrontation model; a synthesis model; and a transformation model.

By the confrontation model I mean the kind of opposition between Christianity and culture that has sometimes been advocated in modern Protestant theology, whether sectarian or dialectical. In some of his early work Karl Barth, reacting against the "culture Christianity" of Schleiermacher and Ritschl, seemed to be saying that Christianity and culture must always be in conflict.[7] This theory harmonizes with Barth's actualistic ecclesiology in which the Church is seen as continually being formed anew by the word of God. In the footsteps of Paul Tillich one may object that no Christian preacher, even though he be a Karl Barth, can proclaim the gospel without at least provisionally accepting the language and other cultural forms in which he frames the message.[8] Even a critique of culture, it would seem, must be mounted in a culture. However that may be, the confrontation model has never found a comfortable lodging in the Catholic tradition, and it would scarcely be conducive to the kind of world Church that Rahner and others are proposing. Barth's observations, however, remain a salutary warning against an uncritical identification of the gospel with a given cultural expression.

In the synthesis model, by contrast, culture is regarded as good in its own order and as perfective of the human. The classical culture of Greece and Rome, purified by revelation and grace, has frequently been seen as providing Christianity with a suitable cultural base. But further cultural developments have been admitted. Orthodox Christianity tended to identify Christianity with Byzantinism or with "Holy Russia." In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Protestant theologians of Europe and North America looked upon individualism, personal freedom, and the capitalist system as the fruits of the gospel when planted in favorable soil. In the Catholicism of the same period, Christian culture was identified rather with the civilization of the Middle Ages. The Thomistic revival, guild socialism, pre-Raphaelite painting, and Gregorian chant were so many facets of a thorough-going program of restoration. Many agreed with Hilaire Belloc when he wrote: "Europe will return to the Faith, or she will perish. The Faith is Europe. And Europe is the Faith."[9] By the

[6] H. R. Niebuhr in his *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951) proposes five models: Christ Against Culture, the Christ of Culture, Christ Above Culture, Christ and Culture in Paradox, and Christ the Transformer of Culture. In his discussion he refers to these respectively as advocating the rejection of culture, accommodation to culture, the synthesis of Christ and culture, dualism between Christ and culture, and the conversion of culture.

[7] See, for instance, K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 258; cf. pp. 267-68.

[8] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951)

[9] H. Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1920), p. 261.

faith, of course, Belloc meant Roman Catholicism as it had existed before the Reformation.

Christian missionaries from Europe and the United States, working in all parts of the world, were content, even proud, to disseminate Western civilization together with the gospel. They believed that in so doing they were performing a human as well as an apostolic service.

Since World War II this Eurocentric Christianity has been in general disrepute. The synthesis has never been very convincing even in Europe, where Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic Christians disagreed about what kind of culture should be paired with Christian faith. In Asia and Africa the identification of Christianity with European culture has been increasingly perceived as a form of cultural imperialism, and has provoked hostile reactions. Even in the West many Christians today regard the synthesis model, in all the forms here mentioned, as a misguided effort to link Christianity with a dying culture.

We come, therefore, to the transformation model, which appears to be clearly favored by Vatican Council II and by papal documents issued since the council. This model strikes a kind of balance between the previous two. With the confrontation model it asserts that Christianity imposes demands on every cultural heritage, calling for continual renewal and reform. With the synthesis model it holds that Christianity must embody itself in appropriate cultural forms. The essentials of the transformationist position may be set forth in the following five points:

1. In a certain sense, Christianity is supracultural. The living presence of the Holy Spirit, which is constitutive of the Church, is not reducible to any culture, however sacred. Thus Paul VI could correctly state, "The gospel, and therefore evangelization, cannot be put in the same category with any human culture. They are above all cultures."[10]

2. Christianity has always been, and must be, culturally embodied. Human culture gives the Church a language, artistic forms, and conceptual structures so that it can communicate itself to individuals and societies. As John Paul II has put it in the letter by which he established the Pontifical Council for Culture, "The synthesis between faith and culture is not only a demand of culture but also of faith . . . A faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully received, not entirely pondered, not faithfully lived."[11]

Expanding somewhat on this second point, we may say that, sociologically speaking, Christianity has certain features of a culture. Like a culture, it is a system of meanings, historically transmitted, embodied

[10] Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 20; Eng. trans. in A. Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II; More Postconciliar Documents* (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1982), p. 719.

[11] John Paul II, Letter to Cardinal Casaroli establishing Pontifical Council for Culture (May 20, 1982), quoted from *Osservatore Romano*, May 21-22, 1982, p. 3.

in symbols, and instilled into new members of the group so that they are inclined to think, judge, and act in characteristic ways.[12]

3. Culture is broader than Christianity or any religioin, for it includes matters of civility, social customs, artistic and literary conventions, and many other ingredients that, at least in the modern West, are separate from religion. In a secularized society such as our own, Christianity has the sociological status of a subculture.[13]

4. Christianity is not exclusively linked to any one culture. According to the gospels, Jesus himself challenged the cultural and racial exclusiveness of the Jewish religious authorities. Paul advanced the process of cultural weaning by insisting that circumcision should not be obligatory for pagan converts to Christianity. Vatican II encapsulates this theme for the contemporary Church:

> . . . the Church, sent to all peoples of every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, nor to any particular way of life or any customary pattern of living, ancient or recent. Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with various cultural modes, to her own enrichment and theirs too.[14]

5. The evangelization of cultures — to borrow a term from Paul VI — pertains to the mission of the Church. It cannot simply accept cultures as they stand but must, as Paul VI insisted, regenerate and inwardly renew them.[15] The Bishops' Synod of 1977 stated that Christianity must not only find roots in human cultures but must transform them.[16]

III

Using a finer sieve one may divide proponents of this transformationist position into two subtypes or, perhaps better, two tendencies, since the division between the two is not always clear. The first type stresses cultural autonomy, the second, the reciprocity of cultures.

The autonomist position goes back in Protestant theology to Ernst Troeltsch who proposed a polymorphic doctrine of truth and espoused a radical cultural relativism.[17] The specific kernel of all genuine religion, he believed, is unique and divine, but the particular form of a religion

[12] This sentence mirrors the famous definition of culture given by Clifford Geertz: "It denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life"—*The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 89.

[13] "By secularization we mean the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the dominance of religious institutions and symbols—P. L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1969), p. 107.

[14] Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, 58; Eng. trans. in W. M. Abbott (ed.), *Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966), p. 264.

[15] *Evangelii nuntiandi, loc. cit.* (n. 10 above).

[16] "Message to the People of God," *Origins* 7 (1977), 324.

[17] For material in the present paragraph see E. Troeltsch, *Christian Thought: Its History and Application* (New York: Living Age Books, 1975), pp. 42-53.

is determined by the type of culture in which it inheres. Christianity in the West, according to this view, is inseparably bound up with the ancient and modern civilization of Europe. The Christianity of the Russians and other non-Western peoples (Jacobites, Nestorians, Armenians, and Abyssinians) is so different as to be another religion. The great religions of Asia, for Troeltsch, corresponded to other types of culture in which contact with the divine had to be differently experienced. It would be quite impossible for these diverse religions to be synthesized or for one to be converted into another. All religions are under obligation to increase in depth and purity by their own inner impluse. In this process contact with Christianity may be of help to other religions, but Christians should not attempt to convert Hindus and Buddhists to their own religion.

In contemporary Catholicism certain tenets of transcendental theology, especially as expounded by Bernard Lonergan, have been used to justify a sort of cultural relativism. Lonergan rejects the normative view of culture, which he identifies as classicist, and favors what he describes as the modern, empirical concept of culture. Christian classicism, canonizing a particular form of culture, preached that culture along with the gospel, but the classicist view is no longer acceptable.

> To preach the gospel to all nations is to preach it to every class in every culture in which it has not been known. To make it known there, there must be found in the local language the potentialities for expressing the gospel message, and it is by developing these potentialities and not by imposing an alien culture that the mission will succeed.[18]

Classicist orthodoxy, which identified Christianity with a single cultural expression, according to Lonergan, "was never more than the shabby shell of Catholicism. The real root and ground of unity is being in love with God—the fact that God's love has flooded our inmost hearts through the Holy Spirit he has given us (Rom 5:5)."[19] On the gound that the experience of divine love is not dependent on the prior preaching of the gospel, Lonergan can claim that his theory provides the framework for a fruitful encounter between all religions with a basis in religious experience.[20] In Lonergan's doctrine of the outer word of God there may be resources for a closer affinity among cultures touched by the gospel, but these resources remain largely dormant in many presentations.

A number of Indian Catholic theologians, most notably Raimundo Panikkar, have tried to protect the indigenous religions and cultures from the intrusions of a Christianity that has assumed Western cultural forms. For Panikkar Jesus is only one, albeit the most important, of many epiphanies of the Christ. The Christian must find Christ already present in the epiphanies recognized by Hinduism and help make that presence explicit. Christianity in India should consequently be "not . . . an

[18] B. J. F. Lonergan, "Revolution in Catholic Theology," in his *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), p. 233.

[19] B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 327.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 107-109, 112, 119.

imported, fully fledged and highly developed religion, but Hinduism itself *converted*—or Islam, or Buddism, whatever it may be."[21]

In theological works of this tendency it is common to read that the main effort of Christian preachers should be not to convert Indians to Christianity but to bring them closer to God in their own religions.[22] Some suggest that Indian Christian communities should treat the Hindu scriptures as being for them, at least in an analogous way, an Old Testament, pointing the way to Christ much as did the Hebrew Bible for the early Jewish Christians. These nonbiblical scriptures may therefore find a place in Christian liturgical worship, and specifically in the eucharist.[23]

This polymorphic or relativist version of transformationism expresses many sound insights that we shall have to consider. The danger is, however, that in emphasizing the barriers between cultures the theory could promote a certain alienation among Christians of different races and nations. When the Bible, dogmas, sacraments and ecclesiastical structures are branded as culture-bound, the sources of continuity and communion in the Church are weakened. The idea of a visible world Church is undercut, and its place is taken by an invisible fellowship of an elite who have undergone intellectual, moral, and religious conversion within their own cultures and religions.

I turn, therefore, to the second type of transformationism, which accents reciprocity. In formulating this position, which is my own, I am indebted to Ary Roest Crollius,[24] who has in turn borrowed some ideas from David Tracy.[25] Both Tracy and Roest Crollius contrast three attitudes: cultural univocity, cultural equivocity, and cultural analogy. By univocity they mean approximately what I have described as synthesis and what Lonergan describes as classicism. Their equivocity corresponds to the kind of cultural relativism or polymorphism I have attributed to Troeltsch and Panikkar. Their third attitude, cultural analogy, would recognize the originality of each culture, the inadequacy of each, and the consequent need for mutual criticism and openness. This third attitude, which I prefer to call cultural reciprocity, seems to me most consonant with recent papal teaching and most acceptable on theological grounds.

The reciprocity theory differs in several major respects from the polymorphic. It does not see the gospel simply as stimulating interior

[21] R. Panikkar, "The Relation of Christians to their Non-Christian Surroundings," in J. Neuner (ed.), *Christian Revelation and World Religions* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), p. 169 (italics Panikkar's).

[22] Some examples are cited by William Reiser in the article referred to in note 5, above. See especially the quotations from Thomas Mampra, p. 144.

[23] See, for example, Ishanand Vempeny, *Inspiration in the Non-Biblical Scriptures* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1973), esp. pp. 188-91.

[24] A. A. Roest Crollius, "Inculturation and the Meaning of Culture," *Gregorianum* 61 (1980), 253-74.

[25] D. Tracy, "Ethnic Pluralism and Systematic Theology: Reflections," in A. M. Greeley and G. Baum (eds.), *Ethnicity* (*Concilium* 101; New York: Seabury, 1977), pp. 91-99.

impulses in other religions and cultures, but holds that the Christian message, in articulated form, introduces a new element into the situation. As John Paul II points out, the gospel message does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it must always be transmitted by apostolic dialogue.[26]

The reciprocity theory, moreover, is not content with a merely empirical, non-normative concept of culture. It discriminates among cultures in the light of their harmony or lack of harmony with the divinely established order. There is thus a qualitative difference among cultures. John Paul II holds that inculturation must be subject to the two principles of compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal Church.[27] These two principles, I believe, may be considered normative in the evaluation of cultures.

Most importantly, the theory of reciprocity stresses that cultures do not simply exist side by side. They are not like sealed containers but more like houses with doors and windows. They can mutually criticize and enrich one another through dialogue. Rejecting the synthesis and autonomist models, Roest Crollius remarks, "Neither the mere conservation of traditional cultural values nor the seclusion of cultural *apartheid* contains a promise of life."[28] For our present purposes, the reciprocity theory has the advantage of showing how multiple inculturation may be of benefit to the universal Church.

As Paul VI insisted in opposition to certain contemporary trends, the universal Church is more than a federation of particular churches. Autonomous local churches, as he warned, can easily fall prey to local separatist forces.[29] It is essential, in my judgment, for the Church to retain its capacity, so astonishing to the ancient world, of bringing Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, into a single people. In Christian antiquity the sense of worldwide fellowship was assiduously cultivated by adherence to a single rule of faith, concelebration of the liturgy, eucharistic communion, letters of peace, mutual hospitality, and charitable assistance.[30] The centripetal tendencies of regional churches in our own day must be offset by equivalent practices.

If the Church is, even analogously, a single people, it must have something like a common culture, for, as Christopher Dawson says, "The society without culture is a formless society—a crowd or collection of individuals brought together by the needs of the moment."[31] The Catholic Church as a whole must have a system of meanings, historically transmitted, embodied in symbols, and instilled into its members so that

[26] John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*, 53; Eng. trans. in Flannery, p. 794.
[27] John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 10; Eng. trans. in Flannery, p. 821.
[28] Roest Crollius, "Inculturation and the Meaning of Culture," p. 272.
[29] Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 62; Eng. trans. in Flannery, p. 741-42.
[30] For these and similar practices see L. Hertling, *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1972).
[31] C. Dawson, *Religion and Culture* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1948), p. 48.

they are inclined to think, judge, and act in characteristic ways. In order to be a Christian, therefore, it is not sufficient to be inculturated into a basic community, a parish, or a diocese. One must be socialized into the universal Church, with its shared meanings, common symbols, and normative behavior patterns. The worldwide unity of the Church cannot be merely ethereal and abstract; it must be expressed in tangible signs and upheld by overarching structures of unity. Otherwise, as James Gustafson explains, the Church could not "remain an historically and socially identifiable community through time and across cultural boundaries."[32]

IV

This is the point where the most serious tensions arise between the two versions of the transformationist model. Advocates of cultural autonomy object, not without reason, that the traditional symbols and structures of unity, such as the Bible, the creeds, sacraments, episcopacy, and papacy, are shot through with the particularities of Semitic and Western culture, and are therefore alienating to non-Westerners. In reply some have pointed out that the transformative power of Christianity comes from culturally transcendent principles such as faith, love, reason, and justice.[33] But to say no more than this would be to overlook what is most central and specific to Christianity.

The source and center is not some abstract metaphysical principle or virtue by a concrete universal, Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity, as a historical religion, cannot escape from what has been called "the scandal of particularity."[34] Grounded in the once-for all events of biblical history and in the personal life of its founder, the Church has gradually progressed in self-understanding through irrevocable decisions made at specially graced moments of its history. Salvific truth owes much of its disclosive and transformative power to its embodiment in the concreteness of human history.

It may seem unfitting for God to have revealed himself through the symbols and culture of a militaristic, patriarchal, ethnocentric society such as that of ancient Israel. If God had wanted the best, we may admit, he would have spoken rather through the philosophers, statesmen, poets, and artists of Greece and Rome. But even in the cultural order he evidently preferred to choose the weak and foolish things of the world, lest any flesh should glory in his sight (1 Cor 1:29).

The particularities of the biblical culture are not, and need not become, ours. We do not have to wear beards if or because Jesus wore one, nor are we obliged to imitate the marriage customs and menus of the biblical peoples. But if we wish to nourish ourselves from the wellsprings of the

[32] J. Gustafson, *Treasure in Earthen Vessels* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 42.

[33] Cf. Tracy, "Ethnic Pluralism," p. 97.

[34] This term is often used by C. H. Dodd; e.g., *The Bible Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 107.

faith, we must go back to the biblical events and symbols, seen in their own context. Just as the life of a nation is sustained by the memory of the founding events, as enshrined in sagas and rituals, so the corporate life of the peole of God is shaped by ancient texts and by ceremonies that actualize what those texts record. Thanks to its native power of transcendence, the human mind is never locked in a single culture but is capable of drawing inspiration from times and cultures remote from its own. Far from being alienating, these voyages of the spirit are liberating.

For the sake of the emergent world Church we must resist the conventional view that particularity is divisive and that inclusiveness must be abstract. To escape the dilemma between segregated concreteness and featureless generality we must learn to appreciate concrete universality and inclusive particularity. Only in this way will it be possible for the Church of the future, with all its cultural differences, to affirm its own origins and its own past history, culturally conditioned though both of these may have been. Recognizing that foundations are only foundations, we can move forward to build the future. The biblical and ecclesiastical paradigms can inspire us to new imaginative achievements, faithful to what has been given but not slavishly repeating it. New symbols, rites, words, and concepts must be found to actualize the biblical and traditional patrimony in new circumstances. The foundational symbols, however, will always be needed to maintain the sense of continuity and to provide standards of authenticity.

V

Since the principles grounding the world Church call for unity and variety, continuity and change, the applications will freqeuntly be controversial. Some local churches will consider that their pastoral situation requires departures from what has long been accepted as universal Catholic tradition, whether in liturgy, in doctrine, in ministry, or in moral conduct. Impasses such as occurred between Jerusalem and Antioch in apostolic times will erupt again. Such disputes can rarely be settled by sheer deductive argument from authoritative texts. Solutions must be found through discernment in communities committed to the gospel and protected from partisan politics and external manipulation. New structures and forums for discernment may have to be instituted for the world Church. Vatican II took steps in this direction by calling for the internationalization of the Roman curia, for regional episcopal conferences, and for the international Synod of Bishops.

These and other structures can profitably be used to assure a fair hearing for all parties, to prevent hasty judgments based on prejudice or passion, and to afford access to guidance from the Holy Spirit. Consensus is always to be sought. It must be recognized, however, that in many disputes no conceivable solution can do justice to all the values cherished by all the parties. Realism may require the acceptance of compromises not fully satisfying to any.

If the Catholic Church is to continue in its role as a great international force for unity and truth, justice and peace, it is important to preserve solidarity among the regional churches. Dialogue is needed both because each particular church may have special insights of value to the others and because each, being immersed in a particular culture, has its own characteristic blind spots. Each local or regional church is accountable to its sister churches and to the church of Rome, which presides over the whole assembly of charity. As noted in *Lumen gentium*, the Petrine see has a dual responsibility: to protect legitimate differences and to see that these differences do not hinder unity.[35] Far from becoming less important, the papacy takes on greater responsibilities than ever as the new world Church becomes a reality. The papacy has been effectively used as a symbol and agent of unity by the recent popes, including John Paul II. The new structures of collegiality, such as the Synod of Bishops, are still in the early stages of development.

The emergence of the world Church as depicted by Rahner need not be viewed as a blow to Catholic unity. Diversity is surely needed for Catholicism to become vitally implanted in the six continents, but such diversity cannot flourish except within a larger unity and on the solid basis of tradition. Various though the ministries, rubrics, devotional practices, spiritualities, and theological interpretations may be, they will not displace the shared symbols and structures of unity and continuity. Within this framework the inner differences can be enriching. Just as a living body has greater unity by reason of the functional interrelationship of its different parts, so the world Church can be more intimately knit together if each of the local churches develops its own distinctive character. Deeply integrated into the life of its own people, each regional community can make its specific contribution to the life of the whole, while receiving input and correction from other communities. Like a choir with many parts and voices, the universal Church, fashioned "from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Apoc 5:9-10), can reflect, in many shapes and colors, the incomparable splendors of its Lord.

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[35] Vatican II, *Lumen gentium*, 13; Eng. trans. in Abbott, p. 32.