

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: A RESPONSE TO MICHAEL FAHEY

In responding to the paper, I will be guided by Herbert W. Richardson's genuine understanding "that every cultural epoch is characterized by a dominant intellectus, which undergirds not only the thought of an age but also its institutions."¹

The dominant intellectus of our age is relativism, but of a special kind and with a very particular slant. It affirms that all judgments bear a socially relative character and, by their very nature, tend to eliminate divine transcendence. Furthermore, this relativistic intellectus both justifies and institutionalizes social differentiation, cultural pluralism, and even ideological conflict.

Richardson also notes "that Christian faith has not opposed, but has accepted, the various cultural intellectus. But it has accepted them only by qualifying them. That is, Christian faith has correlated an appropriate conception of faith with each of these intellectus in order to redeem them from their anti-human tendencies."² The kind of faith coordinated with the defect of the relativistic intellectus of today is "faith as the power of reconciliation which works to unite the many relative perspectives and to thwart ideological conflict"³ (*fides reconcilians intellectum*).

¹*Toward An American Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1967), p. 36. He singles out five intellectus in the history of mankind: mystical rationalism, scientific naturalism, skeptical criticism, gnosticism, and relativism. The different cultural intellectus generate different types of idolatrous unbelief, and it is Christianity's duty to correlate each type with an appropriate type of faith. The five correlating types of faith are: *fides quaerens intellectum*, *fides perficiens intellectum*, *fides formans intellectum*, *fides crucificiens intellectum*, and *fides reconcilians intellectum* (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 35-49). Our present interest falls on the fifth pair.

²*Ibid.*, p. 46. To demonstrate his statement, Richardson gives the following formula on the same page: "A secular intellectus plus a specific form of faith yields a Christian, or religious, intellectus. This can be illustrated as follows:

- a. mystical rationalism + humility—Christian Platonism
- b. scientific naturalism + belief—Christian Aristotelianism
- c. skeptical criticism + sense of the heart—Christian individualism
- d. gnostic wisdom + the foolishness of the cross—Christian fideism
- e. relativism + universal reconciliation—Christian sociotechnicism."

³*Ibid.*, p. 44. He explains it further in the same place: "In our time, therefore, faith affirms reconciliation in opposition to the relativistic intellectus which denies its possibility. In intellectual discussion, faith expects agreement and not only dialogue. In war, faith expects and works for peace. In economic struggle, it calls for the common good. In the working together of the Churches, it anticipates ecumenical reunion. In all these acts, faith affirms something the intellectus of relativism cannot see, i.e., the power of divine unity working in all things to reconcile the ideological conflict generated by relativism itself. Quite concretely,

Within this framework, I sum up the paper presented in two fundamental theses which reflect, by their very nature, the general theme of the discussion itself.

Thesis No. 1: Divinization and humanization thought-patterns are unclear alternatives and need thorough overhauling. Though this overhauling is yet to come, it is clearly suggested that theologians abstain from using the category "the Church" in the context of mission and substitute for it terms like "Christianity," "Christian communities," or "the new humanity in Christ."

Thesis No. 2: The responsible presence of the Church in the world does not originate exclusively from a particular mandate from Christ; it is also rooted in the human vocation itself. This fact is a clear indication that secular realities have to be handled as God-intended and God-given. In this perspective, it is suggested that speaking of the multiple *munera* or tasks rather than of the mission of the Church would be more intrinsic to the activity of the Church.

Let us now analyze the nature and validity of these two theses.

THESIS NO. 1

It is hardly debatable today that the radicality of the separation between divinization and humanization often led, unfortunately, to sheer metaphysical dualism. Yet the attempt to entirely collapse distinctions between the "two poles" might be equally dangerous. Particularly, if, by trying to counterbalance the two extreme positions, one proposes not only a reexamination or reformulation but also the complete elimination of certain terms of traditional theology, such as mission or church, that might be considered by some people as the main cause of the overemphasis on the disparateness between the divine and the human. Beyond such an orientation and effort might lie the supposition that the *raison d'être* of the Church has nothing or hardly anything to do with the trinitarian missions. Contrary, however, to such a position, Christian theology has always claimed the Church as the

too, faith as the affirmation of such a power of reconciliation also affirms that all those institutions and movements of our time which are working to overcome ideological conflict are special instruments of redemptive power. One thinks immediately of the United Nations, the Peace Corps, the worker priests, federal mediators, and ecumenism. These are the institutions where God is working in the world today, but only the *fides reconcilians* will have the eyes to see."

immediate, concrete result of the *ad extra* activities of the Word and the Spirit.

I have always been puzzled by these and similar statements found so often in contemporary theological writings. I read, on the one hand, that "the truth is that the Church can only be understood in relationship to the world,"⁴ while, on the other, the questions always reverberate in my ears, mind, and heart: "How does he [Christ] still wield his power as the Lord, who internally dominates history, not merely as history's transcendental guarantor? Has not the process of secularization long ago put him in the corner, from which only the metaphysical acrobatics of theology can entice him out? How is his 'spirit' still poured out over the face of this secular world? How is the theology of history not merely an elaborate mystic to disguise the godlessness of our present situation?"⁵

This brings me to what lies at the heart of the first thesis, i.e., to the affirmation that though humanization-theology is a Christocentric or, more accurately a Jesus-centered theology, it is so only in a very particular or limited way. It posits the divinity of Jesus and claims the full revelation of God in him. But this divinity of

⁴Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), p. 72. Such an understanding led Robinson and Cox to the rejection of religion, metaphysics, and even God. Cox writes very characteristically in *The Secular City*, p. 1: "The effort to force secular and political movements of our time to be 'religious' so that we can feel justified in clinging to our religion is, in the end, a losing battle. Secularization rolls on, and if we are to understand and communicate with our present age we must learn to love it in its unremitting secularity. We must learn, as Bonhoeffer said, to speak of God in a secular fashion and find a nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts. It will do no good to cling to our religious and metaphysical versions of Christianity in the idle hope that one day religion or metaphysics will once again regain their centrality. They will become even more peripheral and that means we can now let go and immerse ourselves in the new world of the secular city."

⁵Johannes B. Metz, "A Believer's Look at the World," in *The Christian and the World* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1965), p. 70. The intricate nature of the problem is perceived very clearly by Cox as he responds to Michael Novak's criticism of *The Secular City*: "I would defend the need to extricate the Gospel from 'religion,' but only if Bonhoeffer's definition of the term 'religion' remains constant in the discussion, i.e., religion as dependency, inwardness and a metaphysical perspective which sees *this* world somehow subsumed within another one. Against this kind of 'religion' the Gospel calls men to maturity, away from a fascinated obsession with his own soul and toward *this* world and this *saeculum* as the appropriate sphere of Christian existence": "An Exchange of Views," in *The Secular City Debate*, ed. Daniel Callahan (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 118. It seems to me, unless I have misread him, that Michael Fahey's preference for "the new humanity in Christ" as a replacement for "church" localizes the problem in the same way. He has opted for collapsing together the divine and human, but on the side of the human.

Jesus means only Jesus as the man for others.⁶ Bishop John A. T. Robinson's words are representative in this regard:

Jesus is 'the man for others', the one in whom Love has completely taken over, the one who is utterly open to, and united with, the Ground of his being. And this 'life for others, through participation in the Being of God', is transcendence. For at this point, of love 'to the uttermost', we encounter *God*, the ultimate 'depth' of our being, the unconditional in the conditioned. This is what the New Testament means by saying that 'God was in Christ' and that 'what God was the Word was'. Because Christ was utterly and completely 'the man for others', because he *was* love, he was 'one with the Father', because 'God is love'.⁷

This overemphasis on Jesus the man makes one wonder whether "Jesus-without-God did not receive too high a status among the secular Christians. They often spoke in ultimate terms of his call, his demand, his promise. In classic Protestant terms, so to repair to a man among men is to engage in idolatry. Must he not be transparent to something or someone else, wherein ultimate commitment can be more properly grounded? These questions were rarely faced in the world-oriented theology, eager as it was to shun 'God-talk' and to concentrate on the human figure of Jesus and the believing community."⁸

An integrated theology of the humanity and divinity of Jesus is missing entirely in such an atmosphere of one-sided-humanity-preference because of the fact that God, though maintained, is restricted to this world as his authentic self-manifestion.⁹ And we

⁶Robert Richard, S.J. writes, for example, on Cox: "The entire book attempts to define the spiritual perspective, and even blueprint the career, of precisely the individual in the secular city who has made the 'man for others'—the Bonhoeffer Christ, therefore—his unique ideal. In our opinion, the creative spirit of *The Secular City* is not only Christological, but profoundly so, in essence": *Secularization Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967), p. 44. Yet Cox always betrays a certain linguistic shyness in talking about God. Consequently, the divinity of Jesus receives very little attention in his writings. Can I just pretend that Jesus is God or can I ever systematically exclude from my consciousness the otherness of Jesus just because I find God-talk very problematic today?

⁷*Honest to God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 76.

⁸Martin E. Marty, *The Search for a Usable Future* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 55. The introductory section of the Hartford Statement seems to point in the same direction: "The renewal of Christian witness and mission requires constant examination of the assumptions shaping the church's life. Today an apparent loss of a sense of the transcendent is undermining the church's ability to address with clarity and courage the urgent tasks to which God calls it in the world. This loss is manifest in a number of pervasive themes. Many are superficially attractive, but upon closer examination we find these themes false and debilitating to the church's life and work" (*Origins*, February 6, 1975, p. 522).

⁹Karl Rahner sums up the situation very clearly by saying that the emerging doctrine and way of life today "sees the meaning of Christianity to lie solely in

are left with Jesus-the-man-for-others without Jesus-the-other signified by his divinity. This silence about Jesus-the-other is simply deafening in contemporary secularist theology.

Now, if the Church is the result of the *ad extra* activities of the Word and the Spirit, it is evident that our understanding of the Church will depend on and reflect our understanding of Christ. For ecclesiology without Christology, created in a vacuum, so to speak, would offer no viable alternative to the contemporary man and should be judged simply and utterly superfluous luxury. For, as Rahner says, "the self-communication of the triune God in that divine expression we call the hypostatic union, is fundamentally and ultimately what the message of Christianity (coming historically from outside) says."¹⁰ The Church, too, is rooted in and must reflect fundamentally and ultimately the hypostatic union.

Is this dependence solved by eliminating traditional terms such as mission and Church? This question should be asked again and again by those who are aware of the fact that "there are only three absolute mysteries in christianity: the trinity, incarnation, and sanctifying grace."¹¹ The internal relationship of these mysteries, particularly the essential unity of incarnation and grace, is so fundamental to Christianity that without this trinitarian foundation one can hardly hope for the validation of the Christian message. In this perspective,

it is essential that the *a posteriori* christology of Jesus of Nazareth should be joined to an *a priori* existential christology of the humanity of God, based on metaphysical anthropology. This christology would explain how God's absolute and definitive revelation involves the divinised humanity of the God-Man, and how the absolute saviour and the definitive eschatological acceptance by humanity of God's

responsibility for man and human society. God becomes only a name for man's inviolable dignity, for the future he has to struggle to attain. Theological concepts, prayer, worship—all become mere catchwords that help man understand and practice his responsibility. Jesus himself, however unique, is only the model for neighborly love in a world struggle for social and political goals. And the Church? She must see her role to lie *only* in social commitment toward the oppressed, and her mission to be only that of humanizing the world. Otherwise, she deflects men from their real task and defends repression": "Is the Church Sent To Humanize the World?" *Theology Digest* 20 (1972), p. 18.

¹⁰*Faith Today*, translated by Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (London: Sheed and Ward, 1967), p. 44. He also remarks that "our theological statements must be seen to overcome narrow-mindedness and human prejudices and finally lead men not to the formulas of faith but to the mystery of God himself, who surpasses all understanding and who, in the peace which he offers us, has already overcome and reconciled, from first to last, the dialectic of divided, finite realities" (*ibid.*, pp. 41-2).

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 31.

self-communication necessarily leads us to the teaching of Chalcedon.¹²

The very fact that contemporary Catholic theology has moved, in a few years, from the "kingdom of God" to the "body of Christ" to the "people of God" in Vatican II is an indication of that ongoing search for the identity of the Church that would do justice to its true nature and Christological foundation.¹³

Can, then, one collapse together the divine and the human on either side of the two alternatives? Can one claim that the present task of Christians goes beyond (perhaps, even supersedes) confessing Jesus as Lord? Should not one rather weigh seriously the revelatory process manifest in both creation and salvation? If not, human vocation and Christian calling become indistinguishable. The Holy Spirit is no longer the Spirit of God who engrafts to himself those who have heard the Word and responded to it positively; he becomes nothing more than Hegel's world-spirit, Teilhard's *telos*, or Marx's dynamic of history. That is, the Holy Spirit becomes history itself, necessarily sanctioning historical process and progress. If humanity and the world are manifestations of God, that is merely another way of saying that historical process is Absolute Spirit. Christians, then, are merely those pitiful creatures who unnecessarily see or imagine they see a Christic dimension to reality.¹⁴

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹³Cf. Carl E. Braaten, "The Church in Ecumenical and Cultural Cross-fire," *Theology Digest* 15 (1967), p. 286. Braaten also remarks that Protestant theology has, in the meantime, returned "to the kingdom of God concept as the right starting point for a doctrine of the Church." So "we start with the idea of the kingdom of God in Jesus' preaching as the basis of the Church. The direct implication of this is that there can be no church-centered thinking about the Church.

"Even the 'people of God' concept tends to suggest that the Church must be a chosen people as an end in itself, instead of as a provisional instrument in God's hand to pioneer the future of the whole world. Starting with the kingdom of God as the basis of the Church, it is essential to drive through the world to reach the kingdom of God. That is, there is no relation between the kingdom of God and the Church that does not include the world" (*ibid.*, p. 286).

¹⁴A glance at Julian Huxley's *Religion Without Revelation* (New York: The New American Library, 1957) will verify the above observations. When he defines God as "a number of vital but separate facts, some material and some spiritual, but regarded as a unity, as a creation of the human soul..." (p. 24), it is easy to understand that for him "beliefs are essential tools of the human mind—no more than tools, but no less than essential" (p. 17). Also, that "revelation" can only mean for him a successful organizing of human experience in a new way. "There is no revelation concerned in it more than the revelation concerned in scientific discovery, no different kind of inspiration in the Bible from that in Shelley's poetry" (p. 26).

THESIS NO. 2

If we turn now to the second thesis we find it affirming that the responsibility toward the world to be displayed by the Church is rooted not so much in a mandate from Christ as in the human vocation itself. It is only natural to formulate this thesis as soon as one accepts the basic position that the normal or ordinary locus of God's activity is the world.

The affirmation of this thesis is necessary to counterbalance my reflections concerning the first thesis. For far be it from me to create the impression that the only thing a theologian is supposed to do is to parrot previously established (and defined) doctrinal points of Christian belief. On the contrary, I strongly affirm with that great student of history, Arnold Toynbee, that "our present-day task is to renew our contact with the indispensable essence of religion by finding new expressions of it which will be as meaningful for us as the traditional expressions were for our ancestors when they coined them."¹⁵

This exigence for re-expression is particularly evident in reference to the human and the divine and their mutual relationship. For on this point, a theologian cannot content himself with merely asserting his belief in both transcendence and immanence and, in reality, court the real danger of embracing one only and negating the other. Still less can he opt for a one-sided position no matter how popular such a position might be. And one-sidedness is such an acute problem today that Karl Rahner, for example, does not hesitate to label apostasy the doctrinal claim "that the authentic meaning of Christianity, its essential message, indeed the Church's whole mission, consists in one thing—brotherly love."¹⁶

¹⁵"Preface," John Cogley, *Religion in a Secular Age. The Search for Final Meaning* (New York: The New American Library, 1968), p. xxi. This need for re-expression and re-examination gains very positive and beautiful expression in Michael Schmaus' *Dogma I: God in Revelation* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1976), pp. 8-14. He raises two questions in particular, and both are crucial questions arising from the sphere of Christian faith as it confronts the radical hopes and strivings of modern man: "First, is there not a necessary contradiction between the Christian faith and the modern conception of the world, so that one excludes the other? Secondly, will not such radically future-oriented efforts bring about a reduction of what is human instead of a genuine humanity" (p. 10).

¹⁶"Is the Church Sent To Humanize the World?" *Theology Digest* 20 (1972), 18. Cf. the entire article, "The Mission of the Church and the Humanizing of the World," *Doctrine and Life* 21 (1971), 171-8 and 231-42. It is interesting to note that Michael Schmaus, in writing about theology that would mean something to modern man, lists six characteristics of modern men: (1) the movement toward the union of all men and nations; (2) dedication to a world understood solely in terms of itself;

He finds the word "heresy" not strong enough to signify the real danger present in the contemporary attitude conveniently termed "absolute horizontalism," "social-political or social-critical commitment," or simply "responsibility for the world." In such a situation the theologian must try to create a new and adequate language which would be able to carry both yet would also maintain transcendence as transcendence and would affirm the world as fully world. Is there such a language available to us today in regard to our problem?

NEW INSIGHTS

First, let me say that as one reflects on the complex nature of this important problem, one is struck by the depth of the theological reflection devoted to it already in contemporary literature. Though the terminology is not there yet, the foundational pattern that might lead to it is powerfully experienced and formulated. When Karl Rahner says, for example, that "for man no experience of God is possible which is not mediated through an experience of the world"—the world meaning not so much the material world of things and objects as the world of our fellowmen—then the human "thou" must be considered as "radically constitutive of man's self-understanding" to such an extent that he can even be described as "that being who, through his relationship to the world of *men*, is always ordered to God."¹⁷ Rahner even goes one step farther by stating unequivocally, and this is the point of interest for our particular topic,

(3) understanding the world as hominized, i.e., as the creation of man himself; (4) even man is looked upon as the object of his own creative transformation; (5) the following virtues are considered as indicative of the future of this man in transformation: the spirit of enterprise, inventiveness, initiative, courage, tolerance, altruism, fellowship, and the willingness for sacrifice; (6) "weariness, irritation, and even hostility towards God are other characteristic elements in our hominized world. God does not manifest himself; he cannot be found there. If there were a God in the world, he would simply be a hindrance to it. God does not involve himself in a world created by man. He neither speaks nor acts; he is not seen; he is not heard. Modern man, on his side, generally has no use for God. He does not need him. Indeed, it often seems as if he had no capacity for God. The dictum of Augustine that man's heart is restless until it finds rest in God, Pascal's observation that man transcends himself infinitely—these seem to have no meaning now, or at best a very limited validity. If God did exist in our hominized world, it would be as an enemy of man and his freedom, one to be fought against. The humanism to which our hominized world aspires will therefore be a God-free, even a Godless, humanism, and as such inimical to God" (*ibid.*, p. 7).

¹⁷Rahner, "Is the Church Sent to Humanize the World?" *Theology Digest*, p. 20.

it is in this relationship with persons that, in a sense, man is saved. For every relationship that he freely enters is upheld and borne along by the movement by which he transcends each moment of his experience. Now in this transcendence man is already being related to God. It follows that when a man freely achieves an authentic loving relationship with another person, a "thou," he always realizes at the same time an authentic relationship with God, even though this may remain unconscious and unformulated. This authentic relationship with God, aided by grace, brings with itself the gift of salvation. And this is so even where the person is not aware of the explicit ground of the relationship, a relationship which is both horizontal and vertical. Man must not strive to make this involvement with God all the more explicit.¹⁸

At another place, Rahner and Daniel Morrissey, O.P. approach the same human mystery from a different viewpoint, but reach the same conclusion nevertheless. They find Paul Tillich's theological method of correlation very apt for Catholic theology.

Correlation describes theology as the correlating of two poles, the revelation of God in Christ and the situation to which the Christian must speak. Tillich saw the function of theology as the statement of the truth for every new generation. The method of correlation explains Christian faith through existential questions in mutual interdependence with theological answers.¹⁹

Rahner is not the only advocate of the application of the method of correlation. It is noticeably present in contemporary writings. As a matter of fact, the entire history of theology offers signs and hints of the struggle for prevalence between the two poles. Contemporary theology is, however, remarkable for its affirmation of the importance of the human element in the struggle. Some references will be helpful on this point.

Though overlooked by the official circles of the Roman Catholic Church, Evelyn Underhill was able to write already in 1937 that

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 20. In dealing with the horizontal and vertical relationships, Rahner, then, develops a genuine insight for their mutuality. "Christianity does not add this vertical dimension of man onto the horizontal, nor does it divide man by placing two demands on him. In speaking of God, Christianity simply uncovers the radical meaning and dignity of man in relationship to his interpersonal 'thou.'

"The vertical relationship to God, inasmuch as it can be distinguished from the horizontal, possesses the greater dignity and signifies in itself the more fundamental duty of man. But in saying this we must add that each dimension remains absolutely decisive for the other: that God cannot be found except in one's fellow-men: above all, since God has become man, that there can be no authentic love of God which does not communicate its own ultimate depth to the love we give to men. "Christianity defends the vertical relationship because it knows that otherwise horizontalism would not survive for long" (*ibid.*, p. 21).

¹⁹*Theology of Pastoral Action* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), p. 11.

just as natural science could not exist without experience and the thought concerning experience, so theology cannot exist without the religious consciousness and reflection upon it. Nor do we mean by 'experience' anything less than the whole experience of the human race, so far as it has shared in the Christian consciousness. As Mazzini finely said, "Tradition and conscience are the two wings given to the human soul to reach the truth."²⁰

Furthermore, what the theologians perceive so clearly is also affirmed very strongly on the most practical level of Christian thought, namely, in the life of the parish. For "the parish, in its structure, mentality, piety, and mission must correspond to the essential interdependence of life as it is in God's world," recognizing its God-given, unbreakable unity with all men as the most significant fact of human life. Any and all issues of human existence, the religious issue included, must, then, begin "with the mutual, interlocking shape God has already given all life." Even the theology of baptism must reflect this initial human reality. For baptism "is not merely an effective sign of the incorporation of a person into the Body of Christ, but it is also—and even more—a sign of his previous incorporation into the body of mankind."²¹

THE HUMAN CONDITION AS A LOCUS THEOLOGICUS

The terms used in the above theological reflections indicate a serious search for a better understanding the role of the human element in the theological enterprise of man and also a search for a new language for it. I feel, however, that neither Rahner's revelation and situation nor Underhill's theology and religious consciousness nor Harmon's baptismal incorporation into both the Body of Christ and the body of mankind is a truly *new* language underlining the *new* understanding of the importance of the role the human element must play in theological awareness and reflection. I propose, therefore, that Christian theology accept and fully affirm that there are two equally important loci of theology, namely, God's self-revelation in the human condition and God's

²⁰*Worship* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937), p. ix. She did not advocate an uncritical acceptance of experience and religious consciousness. On the contrary, she affirmed clearly that "no experience can be taken at its face value; it must be criticised and interpreted" (*ibid.*). Theology and religious consciousness, tradition and conscience come, however, very close to Rahner's two poles of the correlation, i.e., revelation and the situation.

²¹Cf. John J. Harmon, "Parochial Imbalance and Fraternal Solidarity," in John McCudden's *The Parish in Crisis* (Techny, Illinois: Divine Word Publications, 1967), p. 4.

self-revelation through the prophets and, most of all, in our Lord Jesus Christ. Or, to use Michael Schmaus' words, "the self-revelation of God in divine actions and his self-revelation in divine utterances."²² I am convinced that, in this way, a theologically valid and humanly appreciable answer is given to the problem of divinization and/or humanization.

When Melchior Canus first raised the question of theological locus, he actually reached out of the realm of revelation and into the human element to some extent by proposing that, in addition to Scripture, Tradition, and the definitions of ecumenical councils (this latter embracing the teachings of the popes, of the Fathers, and of scholastic theologians), natural reason, the authority of philosophers and of experts in law as well as the authority of human history should be found worthy of mention²³ as *loci theologici*. The last category, the authority of human history, could have been especially apt to call attention to the importance of the human condition in the theological process.

The overemphasis on the divine, however, prevented theologians for a long time from recognizing the human condition as a valid source of theological reflection. Even the definition of theology as a supernatural science that treats of God and of creatures in their relationship to God seems to indicate a kind of blindness toward man's concrete, existential condition. Yet the opportunity for discovering this has always been there. For in determining the subjective principle of dogmatic theology as reason enlightened by the gift of faith and the secondary material object as the creatures in their relationship to God²⁴ at least the

²²*Ibid.*, p. 51.

²³*De locis theologicis* (1563), Lib. 1, c. 3.

²⁴Cf. G. Van Noort, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. I: *The True Religion* (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1961), pp. xviii-xix. Schmaus, looking at both past and present theologies, calls attention to the fact "that the mind of modern man works with different concepts, images, and attitudes—with another understanding of being and a different feeling for life—from that which characterized earlier ages. As a result, certain ideas which formerly were self-evident and seemed important and significant are now either inaccessible or hardly accessible to the contemporary mind: they seem obsolete and outworn, remote from life and from the world. If we do not advert to this transformation, neither our preaching nor our theology will be effective where they must be effective if they are to have any point—namely, with modern man." He calls the traditional theology a theology of concept or of essence. Its greatest representative is Thomas Aquinas. It is characterized by ontological thinking. It is concerned with truth in the first place; in the second, with man. It looks not for the place of truth in life, but for truth itself. Then he adds pointedly: "There is another type of theology which may be called realistic or existential. Its first question concerns action or function. It interprets divine

backdoor to the human condition was made available though it remained unseen and undiscovered by the searching mind.

It was up to some theologians of the twentieth century to see more clearly, under the influence of growing human awareness in contemporary developments, the true meaning and importance of the human condition in theological reflection. Since then, theology has definitely become anthropological in orientation.

Such an anthropological theology will be concerned with man in community, and in the totality of his being; it will be existential, dynamic, and eschatological. A theology that is communal and total in this sense teaches that the Christian faith aims at the perfection of the whole man, not only his soul, and of mankind as a whole. Its message is addressed to the individual, but insofar as he is a member of the community. Christianity does not conceive of the individual as isolated but as the member of a community, who comes to the possession of his unique and indelible individuality through his membership. He attains his own individual ego only as a member of the whole, which is moving towards a destiny that is an inexpressible mystery, and he is called to participate in the life of that mystery.²⁵

The same kind of conviction and insight must have inspired the editors of the *New Theology* series when they wrote in 1964: "By theology we mean the rich diversity of analytic and synthetic undertakings by which the Word of God and world of man are understood and brought into confluence."²⁶ In this perspective, the primary objective of theology is clearly recognized, i.e., to seek man in his historical situation, in his human condition.²⁷ The terms "Word of God" and "world of man" are actually a reference to the frequently advocated and above quoted distinction between "revelation-through-work" and "revelation-through-word" or, to use scholastic language, a reference to "natural" and "supernatural" revelation.

truth primarily not in its being but in its relationship to man. Naturally it does not by-pass the question of truth, but its main concern is to investigate it and to describe its place in life. This theology is closely related to the way in which Sacred Scripture itself bears witness to divine revelation. Its great representatives are Augustine, Bonaventure, Newman" (*ibid.*, p. xiv). Here attention is focused on man as the receiver of revelation in history.

²⁵Schmaus, *Dogma I: God in Revelation*, p. 14.

²⁶Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, *New Theology No. 1* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1964), p. 11. Cf. also John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), *passim*, especially p. 4 where he singles out six factors of importance for theology: experience, revelation, scripture, tradition, culture, and reason.

²⁷Cf. Schmaus, *Dogma I: God in Revelation*, pp. 53-69 where he gives us a very interesting analysis of the Old Testament from the viewpoint of our own contemporary struggles, skepticism, and unbelief. It is a refreshing and comforting reading for all those who despair easily in view of contemporary unbelief.

But even Schmaus admits rather quickly that these distinctions are impracticable, that they must be explained in different ways. Neither does he believe that the problem would be solved by merely replacing them with the distinction between the revelation of creation and the revelation of Christ, for everything is, to some extent, a revelation of Christ. Not even "preparation for the revelation of Christ" and the "accomplishment of the Christ-revelation" would really solve the issue at hand. The reason thereof is simple. In the present diaspora-situation or post-Christian era one could hardly advocate that the conditions that had prevailed before the call of Abraham are still with us.²⁸

What does all this mean concretely? It means simply that the traditional starting point of theology, i.e., the data of revelation, in the sense of exclusively supernatural revelation, is not the best possible approach to the theological enterprise today. A double datum, namely, the human condition and supernatural revelation or God's self-revelation in the human condition and God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ (and the prophets), if revelation is accepted in its more general sense, is a much more promising starting point. This is especially true if one understands that temporal priority should go to the human condition more often than not. A careful reading of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, of the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, and even of some parts of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church²⁹ will support and verify this claim.

The following statement is worth quoting in this regard: "Recent studies and findings of science, history, and philosophy raise new questions which influence life and demand new theological investigations."³⁰ The editors of the Documents of Vatican II

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 53-4. Though Vatican I seems to have applied the term "revelation" to what is called "supernatural revelation," Schmaus is convinced that "it is keeping with the spirit of the council if we understand creation, too, to be divine revelation" (*ibid.*, p. 67). This interpretation is also supported by the stand of Vatican II with the difference, however, that revelation in creation is related more closely to revelation in Christ. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, nos. 3-6; Walter M. Abbott, S.J., (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: American Press, 1966), pp. 112-4.

²⁹Cf. Pastoral Constitution, nos. 11, 12, 22, 25, 32, 38, 39, 42, 62; Dogmatic Constitution, nos. 28, 35, 48, etc. Cf. also S. J. Kilian, O.F.M., "The Catholic Theologian and Non-Christian Religions," *Thought*, 49 (1974), 21-42; also, my article, "Fundamental Option: An Essential Datum of the Human Person," *The American Benedictine Review*, 21 (1970), 192-202; and finally, my book to be published soon, *Theological Models of the Parish* (New York: Alba House, 1976).

³⁰Pastoral Constitution, no. 62; Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 268.

footnoted this text as follows:

This statement reveals the Council's own conviction that the notion of a theological "aggiornamento" means more than a rephrasing of conventional theological teaching in contemporary terminology. This same view had been set forth by John XXIII as a salient point of the Council's program in his address of Oct. 11, 1962, at the initial public session of Vatican II.³¹

The doubters should read and analyze the entire number 62 of the Pastoral Constitution to see that the Council has called not only for the appropriate use of the findings of the secular sciences, especially psychology and sociology, in addition to the theological principles, but also for the appropriate use of literature and art.

For they strive to probe the unique nature of man, his problems, and his experiences as he struggles to know and perfect both himself and the world. They are preoccupied with revealing man's place in history and in the world, with illustrating his miseries and joys, his needs and strengths, and with foreshadowing a better life for him. Thus they are able to elevate human life as it is expressed in manifold forms, depending on time and place.³²

Then the Council adds characteristically that "in this way the knowledge of God can be better revealed. Also, the preaching of the gospel can become clearer to man's mind and show its relevance to the conditions of human life."³³ Karl Rahner hastens to remark in reference to this text that "the kerygma of the gospel is said to be already rooted in the human situation to some extent before this fact becomes manifest through literary art."³⁴

It should be clear by now that the human condition is not looked upon here as something destructive, antagonistic to the transcendent-supernatural reality, nor as something negative or even neutral in itself. On the contrary, it is envisaged as a revelatory agent thereof. Outside the Judeo-Christian world it is most likely the only such agent. Not even the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ has abrogated it, however. It has become a part of our heritage and is playing its revelatory role in our lives and our

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*; Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 269.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴"Christianity and the New Earth," *Theology Digest* 15 (1967), p. 278.

Rahner also states that out of the Council's ultimate Christian understanding of human existence arises the duty of the people of the Church "to work together to bring modern human existence in all its dimensions to a form more worthy of man . . . not because the people of the Church are Christians and men *besides*, but precisely because the people of the Church are Christians" (*ibid.*, p. 275).

theology provided that it is recognized as a partial- or co-agent of the entire revelatory process. But only as a partial- or co-agent. It would be a terrible mistake, and apostasy, in Rahner's words, to isolate it as the *only* or *always* the primary agent, factor, and source of theological endeavor in spite of the fact that the diaspora-situation can give it prominence in many peoples' lives by making it primarily responsible for opening them up to the transcendent.

Christian theology is called upon, therefore, to be the dialogic science rooted in these two forms of revelation. It has to respect, build upon, and be guided by both. It should be careful to acknowledge its indebtedness to both, prevent dominance of the one over the other, and claim the validity of both. For if it is true that the exigencies and needs of the human condition must withstand the judgment of revelation concerning their genuineness, profound humanity, and verifiability, it is equally true that any claim in the name of revelation addressed to man must respond to and be in harmony with very basic and undeniable human realities, such as, the dignity of the human person, the supreme value of human freedom, responsible choice, and happiness in growth, development, and community awareness.

In this sense, I can fully subscribe to and support the claim that the responsible presence of the Church in the world does not originate directly and exclusively in a particular mandate from Christ for it is rooted in the human condition as a God-given and God-intended fundamental reality that can never be abrogated, denied, or even ignored. On the contrary, it has to be reckoned with most seriously by those who believe that revelation in Christ has perfected, and not destroyed, what creation had clearly established as a permanent factor in the ongoing and ever-growing process of self-awareness of mankind.

So far as I can see, the "Hartford Statement" and the "Boston Affirmations" are nothing else but contemporary efforts toward spelling out more clearly the two *loci theologici* of the theological process, i.e., the human condition and supernatural revelation. Unfortunately, they did so in contradiction to each other or at least in isolation from each other. In so doing, they were courting the dangers of previous intellectus produced by the historical process. Because I fully subscribe to Richardson's vision that today's theological relativism can be overcome only by *fides reconcilians intellectum*, I also strongly affirm that the present orien-

tation toward an either/or position between divinization and humanization is only a faint sign of an underlying deeper struggle for recognition of the human condition as a legitimate, full-fledged *locus theologicus* that must enter and always remain in dialogue with whatever is claimed in the name of supernatural revelation. If and when this is done, and if and when the mutuality between the two *loci* is clearly and conscientiously maintained, then only can I find theologically justifiable sense in Harvey Cox's claim that the secular city is, in a sense, the humanity of God for it is the place where God is active, and in his activity he is revealing himself to humanity.³⁵

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³⁵I am happy to call attention here to a speech delivered by D. S. Amalorpavadass at the All-India Consultation on Evangelisation at Patna, October 3-8, 1973. Though the primary objective of the address was to help consider the question of evangelization in the Indian context, it is also helpful to our study in view of its principal claim, namely, that theology must deal with reality and embrace a new world vision which enables man to see God as revealing himself in history (the record of the human condition). In this way theology would not be limited and restricted by a narrow sense of revelation. The following passage is particularly worth quoting here because it, too, refers to the dialogic tension between the two poles of human existence. After developing the idea that evangelization must be understood in terms of revelation, he states emphatically: "It is also from there that we learn the process by which she should fulfill it, namely building the total human community, to emerge as God's Kingdom at the end of time, and the process is one of reconciliation and relationship, liberation and humanization, development and fulfillment. Such a concept of the Church's mission is possible only if we understand revelation-faith not primarily and essentially as communication and reception of truths, but as a realization of unity and fellowship among men and between God and men. The Mission today is therefore the means and process of revelation. Evangelization is a ministry of the word by which the Church's mission is fulfilled and the ministry of God's self-communication and man's response is realized" ("Theology of Revelation-Faith, and the Mission of the Church," in *Approach, Meaning and Horizon of Evangelization*. Mission Theology for our Times. Series No. 8 [Bangalore: National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1973], p. 28). I find reading this amusing and almost embarrassing at a time when some Western theologians try to eliminate terms like "mission" and "church" from theology.