PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
THE CATHOLIC ANALOGICAL IMAGINATION

It has become increasingly difficult for persons outside or even within Catholicism to describe, much less define, the uniqueness of the religious vision and common way of life distinguishing Catholic Christianity. A major part of this difficulty is that since the Second Vatican Council, we Catholics are experiencing an embarrassment of religious riches. So many creative movements have developed, so many new thinkers and new visions have emerged that sympathetic observers of this extraordinary phenomenon have wondered what shared vision holds us all together. What, if any, common vision is shared by such diverse theologies, for example, as Latin American liberation theologies, European transcendental theologies, North American experiential Catholic theologies? How do you define the heart of a religion which includes such distinct movements as the social justice apostolate, the charismatics, the ethnic revivals, the strong and vibrant mainline middle-class urban and suburban Catholics, the several forms of traditional and modern spirituality, the nationalist movements in African Catholicism, the different forms of prophetic witness of a Mother Teresa, a Dom Helder Camara, a Dorothy Day. As a historian of religions informed me recently, you Catholics are confusing us all; when Jews and Protestants find major differences within their membership they sometimes become separate churches (as in Reformed- Conservative- or Orthodox Judaism)—or as in the recent tragic events among our brothers and sisters in the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church. But Catholics!—they fight one another vigorously—sometimes politely, sometimes fiercely, yet the struggle has all the marks of a family quarrel—vigorous, occasionally bitter, sometimes jocular, always passionate. The common and too easy image of pre-Vatican II Catholicism as a monolith allowing one to predict the exact views of Catholics on a whole range of issues from politics through worship to doctrine is gone. The remaining image—of a vigorous, intense, complex, pluralistic, above all alive, mosaic of religious possibilities—remains to baffle, intrigue, sometimes startle anyone attempting to define the uniqueness of Catholicism.

Yet within this buzzing, vibrant pluralism, I have come to believe, lies an element of shared vision which can be named the Catholic analogical imagination. I do not claim that this reality defines the religious essence of Catholic Christianity; yet to con-

centrate on this initially strange name does disclose a family resemblance that, as a shared vision, somehow holds all the members of the family together.

To list the explicit beliefs shared by Catholics is an entirely worthy enterprise. And yet prior to any explicit set of beliefs or actions for any religious community, there lies some basic, fundamental vision of the whole of reality informing all the beliefs: how we work out the relationships between God and cosmos, God and humankind; how we order the relationships of one human being to another and to society; what fundamental attitudes of optimism or pessimism, hope, or fatalism, laughter or tragedy ground our hopes and fears.

Before attempting to define this Catholic analogical imagination in more strictly theological terms, allow me to ask some questions. Do you believe, with Albert Camus, that there is more to admire in human beings than to despise? Do you find with Erasmus and Francis of Assisi that in spite of all folly, stupidity, illusion, and even sin, reality at its final moment is trustworthy? Do you find in yourself a belief with Aquinas and Thomas More that reason is to be trusted for finding the order of things; that faith transforms but does not destroy reason? Is your final image of God one like John's gospel of love, not fear; of Christ as fundamentally a community of hope, not a ghetto of escape and fear? Does your image of society include a trust that it can be somehow ordered short of radical disjunction? Does your image of the cosmos itself include a trust that it too is somehow ordered by relationships established by God for all reality; and that reality itself—in spite of all serious, sometimes overwhelming evidence to the contrary—is finally benign? Then you possess, I believe, a Catholic analogical imagination.

To describe that horizon prior to our explicit beliefs of the meaning of the whole more theologically, I use the word "imagination." For when we use our imagination creatively, we do not simply report upon the reality we ordinarily see in our everyday way. Rather when we imagine, especially when we imagine the reality inspired and nourished by God's gift of faith and revelation, we redescribe the creative possibilities of all reality. We literally reimagine reality as a new series of ordered possibilities; we then choose some central clue for the whole of reality—for Catholics that central clue to the whole—to the realationships between God and humanity, the individual and society—is found in what T. S. Eliot called the half-guessed, the gift—half-understood

—incarnation as *the* secret of both God and humankind and the relationship of both church and cosmos as finally sacramental. Every great religious tradition begins in some special occasion of revelatory insight and then through the centuries expands that vision through ethical, aesthetic, philosophical and logical efforts into an ever-encompassing and finally classical vision of the whole of reality; and within that vision, some understanding of every major moment in that whole is ordered to all other moments within the whole. For Catholics that vision is neither the despair of finding an order, as that despair is expressed in an equivocal skepticism, nor the all-too-easy optimism of a univocal monism. It is a daily living of a realism for the penultimate united to a long-range optimism: a belief in the real possibilities of the small community, family, neighborhood, parish as a real clue to the larger—to polity, society, church—and at the limit of our theological imagination, even the cosmos. It is a deliberate working out of a series of analogous relationships all ordered to that one central clue of God's incarnation-crucifixion-resurrection in Jesus Christ.

Yet what might analogy here mean? In more familiar and traditional language, analogy articulates both the significant differences and similarities between human beings and the rest of life in the cosmos and, above all, between human beings and God as disclosed in Jesus Christ. In that same tradition, analogy, as all students of theology know, is distinguished from two other major candidates for a vision of the whole: equivocal language, which asserts differences to the point of no order at all (skepticism) and univocal language, which asserts sameness to the point of oneness (like pantheism or monism).

In less traditional but perhaps more helpful terms for our modern setting, an analogical imagination can be distinguished from a dialectical imagination. For the authentically analogical mind, there is always some order to be found in reality, and the key to that order will be found in some focal meaning (some prime analogate) which focuses upon the basic clue to the whole and, then, by means of that clue envisions all the ordered relationships in reality itself. For Catholics, *the* focal meaning—the clue to the whole of reality may be found in incarnation—for incarnation tells us who God is; who we are; how the cosmos itself is finally a sacrament of God's love; how ordered community really is possible; how reason, as part of the incarnate image of God in each of us, can be trusted; how the final reality is neither error, nor illusion, nor death, nor sin itself but a radical non-sentimentalized love as

radical relationality, indeed as the final key to the order and trustworthiness of all reality.

For the genuinely dialectical mind, on the other hand, there is really no such hope for order; rather the authentic person's task in this life is to unmask illusions and idolatries, to be suspicious of all claims to a vision of the whole. Whether formulated by a Kierkegaard, a Marx, a Freud, or a Nietzsche, the dialectical imagination is fundamentally one of suspicion and negation, or protest and prophetic witness. At its best, it explodes all univocal visions of reality as illusory; it exposes all equivocal visions as finally lazy; and it challenges the temptations to complacency of any analogical vision.

The analogical imagination, in the meantime, shows a remarkable resilience; it can, indeed it must, appropriate the genuine insights of the dialectical mind. As it appropriates each, its own vision of the order present in the whole becomes richer, more complex, more intense, various, pluralistic, yet still somehow ordered. Yet its final analogical vision of hope and order is not shattered by negative dialectics. It transforms them into new, more complex sets of ordered relationships. Such at least is my supposition. To test this hypothesis, I will now present some familiar examples—but helpful because familiar—on the presence of the analogical imagination in Catholic Christianity: first, its presence in the language of Catholic theology and what that language discloses about our religious vision of reality; second, its presence in Catholic themes of social justice and thereby, more familiar ways of organizing our lives as a community.

SECTION ONE

I. THE CATHOLIC MODEL FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: VATICAN I REVISITED

Analogical language can be found as the predominant language employed by Catholic theologians from Justin Martyr, Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure, to Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan. Still, before discussing those later and more contemporary expressions, it would be well to examine for a moment the too seldom noted model for theology articulated in the First Vatican Council. This curiously overlooked passage in the documents of Vatican I was, in its day, a liberating expression for Catholic theology and is, to this day, the dominant model for theology present, however unconsciously, in the major Catholic systematic theologians. The passage states: theology is the partial,

incomplete, analogous but real understanding of the mysteries of the Catholic faith. It achieves this understanding in three steps: First, by developing analogies from nature to understand that mystery; second, by developing—by means of the analogy, interconnections among the principal mysteries of the faith (Christ, Trinity, Grace); third, by relating this understanding to the final end of humanity.

The key to understanding how this model for theology was, in its time, liberating is to note that theology is clearly distanced from any attempt at deductive proof of mysteries (so favored by the Cartesian scholastics of the day). Instead, after proper tributes to Anselm and Aquinas, theology is described as consisting of analogous but real understanding (*intelligentia*) of those mysteries. Moreover, this passage is placed in the wider typological context of the document wherein two alternative types described as rationalism and semi-rationalism ("proofs" of the mystery—a univocal option) on the one hand, and fideism and traditionalism (no analogous understanding—an equivocal option) on the other are declared inadequate theological models. Faith and reason are neither enemies nor are they identical. They are analogously related.

Any historically conscious reader of contemporary Catholic theologians like Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, Edward Schillebeeckx, William Van Roo, Johann Baptist Metz, Avery Dulles, Gregory Baum, Andrew Greeley, and Hans Küng will note both significant similarities and differences between their theological language and that of Vatican I. The most significant differences can be found in the post-nineteenth century "material" understandings present in these theologians of such crucial concepts as "faith" (now first understood as fundamental attitude or orientation, then as cognitive "beliefs"); or "mystery" (now usually understood as the radical incomprehensibility of human existence and divine reality, then as specific and articulated problems or "mysteries"). The second significant difference may be described as the attempt by such theologians as Schillebeeckx, Metz, Baum and Gutierrez to incorporate more explicitly dialectical modes of reflection into the general theological model. Theologically, however, as far as I can see, these dialectical moves (largely dialectical negations of illusion, idolatry, alienation, oppression) are transformed eventually into a Catholic analogical context which considerably shifts the final or ultimate envisioned-in-hope reality by providing a new order to reality itself.

For example, the impressive use of negative dialectical methods (apocalyptic) in the political theology of Johann Baptist Metz is finally transformed into an analogical—an ordered sacramental and incarnational—vision of reality constituted by the ordered relationships disclosed in the focal meaning of the God-humankind relationship incarnate in Jesus Christ. This cannot but strike an alert reader as worlds apart from the seemingly similar political theology of Jürgen Moltmann. The latter thinker, faithful to his Reformation heritage, sees the dialectical logic of contradiction disclosed in the central symbol of the crucified one as challenging, at its root, all claims to the possibilities of an analogical vision informed by the logic of ordered relationships. For Metz, incarnation as incorporating both cross and resurrection, both negation and affirmation, both discontinuity and continuity are affirmed. Although I can only state my conclusion rather than demonstrate it here, the fact seems to be that, after those dialectical moments have been employed, an analogical model of an ordered reality and its correlative vision of radical hope, trust, overwhelming grace and the graciousness of order reemerge to provide the basic theological horizon of meaning for Catholic theologians.

There is, in short, for Catholics always some final order to the whole—there remains an order to the true, the good, the beautiful in each of us as the image of God which even sin cannot finally destroy. There remains the possibility for each of us, as social and political beings, as intrinsically ordered to one another in family, neighborhood, nations, and communities, to work out alternative plans and practices for a well-ordered just society beyond illusion, pollyanna optimism and all-too-easy despair. There remains in each of us and in all of us an ordered relationship to the rest of life, an analogical or sacramental vision of reality which can, if we focus upon it, save us from the madness of a Promethean onslaught upon one another, upon other living things, upon nature and the environment. There remains the insight that ordered relationships in the small community should be trusted to be the clue to the larger whole of social reality—or as that authentically Catholic social thinker, E. F. Schumacher comments, "Small is beautiful." There remains in each of us and in the community as a whole an intrinsic ordered relationship to the God decisively disclosed in Jesus Christ, for God's final relationship to us is not the distance of negative dialectics, nor judgment, nor chaos, nor univocity, but the order—the analogical order—of multi-relational love. Beyond

the great hermeneutics of suspicion and negative dialectics, beyond illusion, on the other side even of our idolatries, madness, and sin, there remains the great *as if* of our religious vision: you can and should in faith imagine reality *as if* the order of God, of humankind, and of the cosmos as a whole disclosed in Jesus Christ were really the secret to the order present in each of us, the ordered relationships possible for all of us and to the final, trustworthy order of the whole wherein the final word is trust because the final reality is that always ordering, because incarnate, love.

Imagine and live that, Catholic theologians at their best effectively say, and the order will be seen to be present, the hope will not be pollyanna-like, the love will become neither sentimental nor desperate, the faith will include the constant intellectual effort to render the whole intelligible in its orderliness to each authentic inquirer. The theologian will struggle to articulate some partial glimpse of those ordered relationships, some better grasp of that analogical vision, some finer appropriation of negative dialectics into the final analogical model for all reality.

II. THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE TRADITION AND THE ANALOGICAL IMAGINATION

As a community we Catholics have learned over the last ten years, I believe, both certain bankrupt and certain still promising ways to retrieve a tradition. We have learned, I think, that merely to "celebrate" a tradition—with criticism neither encouraged nor, at the limit, even allowed—is to betray that tradition's own genius. More theologically stated, we have learned, with Newman and Blondel, that a tradition must be constantly and critically reappropriated if it is to be a *traditio* (i.e., the living reality of the past in the present) and not merely a series of disparate and existentially desperate *tradita* (i.e., the handed-down conclusions of a once living tradition). Tradition, like its ethical correlates patriotism and loyalty, is too important and too enriching a reality and concept to be handed over to the sloganizers of unreflective *tradita*, those Pope John called false prophets of doom who think, with honesty, to be sure, but mistakenly that they alone represent the tradition. The true Catholic tradition as *traditio*, rather, may be found in the intellectual sphere, in a Newman, a Blondel, a John Courtney Murray, a Rahner, a Lonergan, or in the sphere of Catholic *praxis*, a Dorothy Day, a Cesar Chavez, a John Egan and countless others—men and women who have tasted the richness of the Catholic religious, ethical, aesthetic and intellectual heritage

and wish to make it live anew as a genuine *traditio*, not as a mere series of *tradita*.

Anyone who has recently studied the Catholic social justice tradition in its classical modern expressions in the papal encyclicals of Leo XIII, Pius XI, Pius XII, John XXIII, and Paul VI or in the ringing declaration of the International Synod of Bishops on Justice in 1972, or as a more recent example the pastoral letter of the Roman Catholic bishops of Appalachia, will agree with me, I believe, that in the authentic Catholic social justice tradition one may find a clear example of *traditio*, not *tradita*. For here the carefully articulated general analogical-ordered principles of Aquinas—the principle of the common good and its correlate distributive justice; the principle of subsidiarity as both implicitly and explicitly encouraging an ever more deliberate insistence upon the fundamental ethical principle of this tradition: the natural right, the freedom and dignity of every human being—are rethought and re-appropriated in an increasingly more complex social, economic and political modern context. In the recent past of the European and Latin American situations, for example, the work of Jacques Maritain helped to inspire and indeed to articulate the liberalizing principles of the Christian Democratic Parties of those countries. In the American context, a John Courtney Murray worked out the implications of the Catholic tradition of a natural law social ethics in direct relationship to the Lockean vision of individual liberty expressed in the American constitution.

To clarify my present point, I am not suggesting that the social ethics of Maritain or its institutional expression in the Christian Democratic Parties of Latin America and Europe necessarily still represents the correct route that Latin American or European Catholics committed to social justice should continue to take. Indeed, as is well known, the recent and tragic events in Chile have led many Latin American Catholics to challenge the adequacy of Maritain's Thomist vision for their present realities. Nor am I suggesting that the work of John Courtney Murray—a work which, in my opinion, is still too little appreciated by American Catholics for its masterful and creative synthesis of much of the best of both the American and the Catholic views on society—will, of and by itself, suffice for our present more complex American moment. I am suggesting, however, that the resources—both intellectual and practical—of this analogical tradition of how to order the social reality of an Aquinas, of the social encyclicals, of Maritain and Murray are ignored at the peril of handing over a genuine *traditio*

to the purveyors of mere *tradita* or at the equally damaging peril of handing over the ethical *cri de coeur* for authentic social ethical innovation to persons whose ignorance of the resources in both the Catholic and American traditions is disturbing and, at its limit, debilitating. I am also suggesting that our own lived-experience of the parish, the family, the neighborhood, the community, the nation are rich resources for reflection upon the reality of a lived-as analogical order.

There is a well-recognized set of distinctions in contemporary Christian social ethics which bears recalling here: the distinction between general (and usually fairly abstract) ethical principles (love thy neighbor); middle axioms, or ethical dictates which are still relatively general but more concrete (racism is in all circumstances wrong); and finally concrete social ethical policies (the debate on busing as a specific policy to fight against racism). My own beliefs on where the American Catholic community might turn for guidance in these matters may be listed as follows: first, there are few more deliberate or richer social ethical traditions in modernity than that analogical set of principles for justice worked out by Aquinas' attempted fidelity to both the biblical and classical Aristotilian traditions and modernized—the word is accurate here—in the social encyclicals and in such work as that of Maritain, Murray, Rahner, or Lonergan. Here we do not need a new tradition but a real retrieval of that social-ethical *traditio* appropriate for the present. Second, as such Protestant ethicians as Paul Ramsey and John Bennett have observed, the tradition of both the social encyclicals and of *Gaudium et spes* may be read as masterful developments of modern "middle axioms" which articulate Christian social ethical principles in direct relationship to such central questions as racism, sexism, peace, the just wage, the responsibility in justice of the economically-rich nations for the poor nations and the like. The historical influence of those encyclicals on the American Labor Movement, or, more recently, on the Catholic participation in the struggle for civil rights and the peace movements demands one's admiration. Third, the developments of more specific and concrete social policies against racism, for example, or against economic exploitation of the under-developed countries demands the kind of community-wide participation in the shared analogical vision of social justice.

In the meantime, each of us may attempt to make some partial contribution to the larger vision. Those of us who bear the increasingly more uneasy titles of "intellectual" and, indeed,

"theologian"—that seemingly more mysterious and at once over-praised and over-mistrusted kind of intellectual—will understand, I trust, that my present attempt is both partial and tentative. More exactly, as a theologian principally involved in the discipline of fundamental theology in a secular university setting, my principal interest and work in relationship to Catholicism has shifted to trying to delineate basic orientation—factors, or if one prefers, horizons of meaning—which may constitute Catholic Christianity. One such factor, I have become convinced, that is grounding to and pervasive of the Catholic theological vision—including its social ethics and its vision of the human future—is what I have come to name the analogical imagination.

There is, therefore, an increasingly deliberate attempt among Catholic thinkers to explicate the particular vision of reality shared by Catholic Christians. As a single contribution to that wider effort, I have proposed in this address to examine an explicitly linguistic feature of Catholic theology in order thereby to test my hypothesis that a central factor in the Catholic vision is what I have described as an analogical imagination. The assumption here is, of course, that our language discloses our purposes, our strivings and indeed our basic views on reality. The liberation of our language and our experience must go hand-in-hand. What, then, is one to make of what linguists call the "language-game" of analogy? That language—the various kinds of analogical language expressed by Catholic theologians—once analyzed, begins to disclose a Catholic form of life or, alternatively, a possible mode-of-being-in-the-world which bears more investigation than it has thus far received. The needed power and force of negative dialectics and its hermeneutics of suspicion can be found everywhere in contemporary theology. The analogical imagination and its hermeneutics of retrieval, however, may well provide the clue to the common meaning we share as Catholics. So, at least I have come to believe; for analogy—and it alone—can incorporate and transform negative dialectics without bypassing it.

The analogical imagination, once operative in Catholic theology states, in effect, that in spite of all error, all stupidity, all illusion, all suspicion and even all sin, grace in its full theological sense not only endures but finally prevails—a graced reality constituting the ordered relationships between God and cosmos, God and humanity, the individual and society, and one individual to another in justice and love as all these ordered relationships are disclosed by the focal meaning of the utterly gratuitous gift-event-

grace of Jesus Christ. Yet precisely that analogical vision of the final trustworthiness of all reality—that deep faith that in spite of all else the final reality with which we must deal really is love—is, I believe, the genius of the vision informing that extraordinarily rich and vibrant religious form of life called Catholic Christianity.

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