

NORTH AMERICAN ECCLESIAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN ITS GLOBAL CONTEXT

Within the universal Church, the term local church might be applied to ecclesial bodies which acquire consciousness and self-identity within the several sociocultural, geopolitical regions of the globe. Such multinational units are increasingly called "Regional Churches," as applied of late to the Latin American Church, the African Church, and the Church of the Third World.

Comparable terms arose in the third century to denote the patriarchal churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome, then after Nicea that of Constantinople. The last two became the great twin ecclesial identities and actors of Christendom until the fifteenth century, as the Oriental Byzantine Church, and the Latin Church of the West—sometimes in communion, always in tension, for nine hundred years in separation, again on speaking terms only since Vatican II.

After World War II dramatic new societal-political factors fomented fresh expressions of national and cultural consciousness which have coalesced to some degree into multinational clusters and blocs. These regions and blocs, rather than individual nations, have now become the principal actors on the world stage. Traditional religiosity, living faith communities, and systematic atheism play major roles in this process of regionalization, often expressed alongside economic and political structures.¹

By its doctrine of collegiality Vatican Council II provided an ecclesiology which favors heightening ecclesial consciousness within these awakening regions, as well as theological reflection upon the societal reality, faith experience and pastoral needs proper to each of these multinational local churches. The restricted purpose of this paper is to introduce some elements and approaches for discussing this movement within the universal

¹Faith Communities as "transnational actors," affecting regional and global political and economic policies, has drawn scholarly attention in recent years from Harvard University's Center for International Affairs. See, "The Roman Catholic Church: A Transnational Actor," in Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, eds., *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 129-52. See, also, Joseph Gremillion, *Report and Interpretation of the Harvard Seminar on "Muslim, Jewish, Christian Faith Communities as Transnational Actors for Peace and Justice,"*; this Seminar was hosted March 1979 by the Harvard Center for International Affairs, and co-sponsored by the Harvard Divinity School and the Interreligious Peace Colloquium; co-chairmen were Stanley Hoffman, Krister Stendahl and Fazlur Rahman.

Church. These complex and changing features, societal and ecclesial, are introduced in severely skeletal form under four headings:

1. Societal-cultural, economic-political factors which have molded the world's one hundred and fifty nations toward a dozen or so supra-national regions since World War II.

2. Growing ecclesial self-consciousness within the Church itself, especially since Vatican II, and beginnings of purposeful differentiation by region, related causally to the societal-cultural regionalism noted above.

3. North America (Canada and the United States) as a societal-ecclesial region, and its comparison with the regions of Latin America, East Europe, Black Africa, and the Mideast.

4. Theological reflection on the societal-ecclesial region of North America.

In this paper, therefore, it is the societal-cultural fundaments and dynamics of ecclesial regional consciousness and what this implies for theological reflection which dominate. I am here concerned with the pastoral and human reality as matrix of theology and church. Another restriction is focus on the Roman Catholic Church, with its unique Petrine ministry and means for "communiting" local churches. However, the whole Christian Church, together with other major faith communities, also form the global religious context of my regional approach.

Finally, the latter half of this paper profiles the "Local Church of North America," as exemplar of the societal-ecclesial region, and by comparison with four others. My purpose is to surface the features and pastoral needs which might call for a "North American Theology" which awakens regional ecclesial awareness and simultaneously animates the church of the United States and Canada to its intra-regional and global roles—within the universal Church, with the other regional churches, and with all humankind.

I. SOCIETAL-CULTURAL REGIONS OF THE GLOBE SINCE WORLD WAR II

In the two decades between World War II and the mid-60's, the European world empires dissolved after having dominated Africa, Asia, and the Mideast for a century and more. Long suppressed ethnic and national self-consciousness have surged up among these three thousand-million people, often nourished again by ancient religio-cultures, to acquire political expression as a hundred new nation-states. Today's world forms fourteen regions, according to my own tentative typology:²

²The United Nations often uses a typology of only eight geographical regions, in which the term Northern America covers the United States and Canada; Europe

West Europe, the heartland of Catholic-Protestant Christianity since Charlemagne, has declined as a region, after four centuries of political, economic, military and cultural dominance of the globe. It retains, however, technical industrial power, and has acquired Common Market unity after twelve centuries of internecine and intra-Christian battles.

East Europe (ten nations, mostly Slavic, heavily Orthodox, from the Baltic to the Adriatic) is enfolded forcibly into the Marxist and Soviet bloc. Christian leadership ferments against political, cultural and religious oppression, notably in Poland.

The *Soviet Union* (a dozen ethnic republics) and *North America* (U.S. and Canada) emerge after World War II as two super-power regions, vying with each other over the two regions of Europe, and for power roles in all other regions of the globe. From their Christian origins, Orthodox and Protestant, dating back nine hundred and four hundred years respectively, the communist Soviet and capitalist American regions have evolved since World War I in opposing directions as to religio-ideology, political and economic systems, cultural values and social morality. Simultaneously since World War II they have developed unprecedented industrial-technical power and military might; for the past generation they have carried on a cold war with battlefields in other regions, and with nuclear catastrophe threatened planetwide.

China officially has repudiated its Confucian-Taoist-Buddhist religio-culture, and under Maoist Communism becomes a functioning nation-state in the 1950's. While lacking many of the industrial resources of the Soviets and Americans, China has acquired the aura of superpower status because of its aggressive religioideology and nuclear arms, its land mass and location, and principally its population of nine hundred-million humans. Perhaps four million Christians remain, about one-half of one percent of the Chinese people, of whom perhaps two and one half million are Catholics. Among many of these a Patriotic Catholic Association of China has been formed, to which a good number of Catholic bishops and priests adhere.

East Asia (Japan, Korea, Taiwan) has emerged from World War ruins into an industrial power with multinational corporations and global markets comparable to those of America and West Europe. Japan has become a parliamentary democracy and an equal in the trilateral partnership with the two Western regions; its new constitution prohibits buildup of offense military capacity and possession of nuclear weapons.

Southeast Asia (Vietnam and its bloc, plus the ASEAN group: Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines) forms a volatile mixture of new nations—a crossroads of faiths (Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian) and of political-economic ideologies (Communist and capitalist; authoritarian reality contrasting with democratic hopes); there is an exploding population growth; violent wars, internecine and international, have occurred without stop since 1945. There has been some economic advance, notably in Singapore and Malaysia.

South Asia (India, Sri Lanka, Burma) is the other population giant, with seven hundred-million humans. Economic development barely keeps up; village mores are still significant; politics are unstable but India is still democratic. This area is mostly Hindu, with some

includes East Europe; the Soviet Union counts as a separate region; Asia is divided only into East Asia, which includes China, and South Asia, which comprises the rest. See, *World Statistics in Brief*, 5th ed. (United Nations, 1981), p. 80. My own typology of fourteen regions gives key weight to religio-cultural elements.

fifty-million Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs; about fifteen-million Christians, or two percent. Some seventy-million Muslims in North India are really part of the Islamic Ummah.

Pacifica (Australia, New Zealand, island groups) has only a thirty-million population, but area dimensions of 8,000 by 4,000 miles along the ship lanes and flyways of the planet's greatest ocean impart regional status. Also, as distinctive from Asian neighbors, most are of West European ethnic origin, heavily Christian, and industrialized. Democracies are stable. Part of the British system until World War II, this region is now closely allied to North America and trilateral partnership with West Europe, America and Japan.

Southwest Asia, Mideast and North Africa compose the greater part and heartland of the Islamic Ummah, which numbers some seven hundred fifty-million faithful in forty-five nation states. It acquired political independence from the West after World War II. Most inhabitants experience fervent religious and cultural resurgence, often anti-Western and contra-modern—sometimes anti-Christian, most often anti-Jewish. These three Islamic regions possess over sixty percent of the planet's petroleum reserves; they have been shaped during the 1970's into an economic and political power through the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and through the Islamic Conference formed by heads of forty Islamic states. Internecine and intra-Islam tensions, even wars, have broken out in recent years, notably between Iraq and Iran. (Compare the wars between France, Britain and Germany in "Christian Europe" from 900 to 1945 A.D.)

Southwest Asia includes the non-Arab Muslim nations of Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, over two hundred-million people, over ninety percent Muslim. These power centers of the great civilizing empires—Persian, Mogul, Ottoman—for over two thousand years, now experience Islamic and nationalist rebirth after a long period of European and American domination, strongly reacting against many Western values and institutions.

The *Mideast* is the Arab-speaking region enclosed in the triangle formed by Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Over ninety percent Muslim, it includes the holy places of Islam, Christianity and Judaism—and the new nation of Israel, plus the Palestinian political-military response to this Jewish homeland, largely created by American support. There are less than ten million Christians in these fifteen Mideast countries, mostly Copts and Orthodox in Egypt and Lebanon. In the Holy Land (Israel-Palestine-West Bank), birthplace of Christ and his Church, there are today a mere hundred-thousand Christians, three percent of the population, split into a dozen ecclesial jurisdictions—Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant.

North Africa, from Libya to Morocco, is also Arabic in culture, and over ninety-five percent Muslim. From here Islam has penetrated across the Sahara into the Sahel peoples of Black Africa, from Senegal to Chad for the past thousand years; these six nations are about eighty percent Muslim, with similar proportions among the vigorous North Nigerians. Islam continues a strong and successful mission effort among Black Africans.

Black Africa, south of the Sahara, numbers over two hundred fifty-million people in some thirty nations, all but one created since World War II. The exception is South Africa, notorious for its apartheid system, nourished by a Christian ideology of "chosenness." About forty percent of Black Africans, some hundred-million, are Christian. The transfer of ecclesial leadership from Western missionaries to local church, and ecclesial acculturation of tribal heri-

tage, proceeding apace since Vatican II, will probably accelerate. There has been a very rapid population increase, while economic advance has been moderate; political systems are mono-party and authoritarian as a rule. Although a favored region for Soviet-Western confrontation by proxy wars, battle deaths have been very low compared with the bloody American and European experiences during their first generations of nation-building, e.g., from 1775 to the Civil War in the United States.

Latin America counts almost three hundred-million Christians, dominantly Spanish and Portuguese in ethnic origin and culture, with heavy admixtures of Indian race and culture in Mexico, Central America and along the Andes range, and of African race and culture in Brazil and the Carribean. There has been a rapid industrial development in a half-dozen major nations since World War II; low production and social injustice still result in acceptable living standard for only about twenty percent of the people. Also, only about twenty percent participate meaningfully in the political process. In wake of Vatican II and the Medellin Bishops' Conference, church leadership at all levels makes the poor and oppressed its pastoral priority, often confronting political authorities and leading to prison and martyrdom for several thousand. A regional theology of liberation grows out of this societal-religious matrix to beget and nourish this social ministry, and to animate the Christian corporate consciousness as a "ecclesial region."³

The hundred-fifty nations of the globe are grouped into regions, blocs and categories other than the fourteen roughly outlined here. As already seen, larger groups are also formed from the regional units, e.g., the Islamic Ummah is formed mainly by three regions of Southwest Asia and Africa; the trilateral association is formed by the industrial democracies of North America, West Europe and Japan (plus Pacifica), also called the *First World*; and the industrialized Communist bloc is formed by the Soviet Union and East Europe, also termed the *Second World*. Each of these multi-region blocs (Islamic Ummah, Trilateral, Soviet) is marked by its distinctive religio-cultural ethos, as well as economic and political differences, ideologies and structures.

The *Third World* refers to the one hundred nations which are less industrialized, embracing all nine regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America. These nine regions of over three and one-half billion humans are also grouped as the *South*, in contrast to the economically advanced *North*, communist and capitalist together. The *Fourth World* counts some forty nations of the South which are mostly poverty-stricken, with the grimmest future; these in-

³Philip Scharper and John Eagleson, eds., *Puebla and Beyond* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1980), gives the final document of the III General Conference of the Latin American Episcopacy, Puebla, Mexico, January 27 to February 13, 1979. This reaffirms the regional approach and liberation dynamics begun at the Medellin Conference of 1968. The document begins with historical and pastoral overviews "of the sociocultural context" and of "the ecclesial reality today in Latin America" pp. 123-39.

clude about one thousand-million humans, mostly in South Asia and Black Africa.⁴

II. GROWING CORPORATE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE CHURCH

Ecclesiology became the dominant theme of Vatican II, from the purposes for which Pope John called it: (1) to examine more deeply the Church's nature, (2) to renew and reform the Church, (3) to promote Church unity. Paul VI added (4) to encourage dialogue between the Church and the modern world. *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*, the weightiest constitutions of Vatican II, concern the Church and how it can become more conscious of its life and ministry as the Light of Christ and People of God in today's world.

The papal magisterium began emphasizing ecclesial consciousness two decades earlier in Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis*, with stress on the Church's inner being, ensouled by the Holy Spirit. This current has deepened, broadened, and become increasingly articulate since Vatican II, so as to receive major attention from Pope John Paul in *Redemptor hominis* where he speaks of ecclesial self-awareness a dozen times, and relates this constantly to the human person, personal dignity and a person's societal reality.⁵

Vatican II's documents on the liturgy, revelation, mission, ecumenism, other faiths, religious freedom, media, dialogue with philosophies and ideologies, the role of laity, all have enhanced ecclesial self-awareness by evoking reflective listening and participation in a communitarian mode, at all levels of church life, among all members, and with humankind as a whole in its multiple cultural and societal forms.

This has occurred simultaneously with, and because of, the political-economic-cultural shift from West Europe as dominant

⁴For more analysis of these regional relations, see my sections on "Formation of Multinational Blocs" and "Religio-Political Implications" in J. Gremillion, *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976).

⁵Paragraphs 3 to 21 of *Redemptor hominis* center around this theme of ecclesial consciousness and the need to grasp its meaning and consequence for ministry; for instance: "The Church's consciousness, enlightened and supported by the Holy Spirit . . . is and must remain the first source of the Church's love, as love in turn helps to strengthen and deepen her consciousness" (para. 3). "Seeking to see man as it were with 'the eyes of Christ himself,' the Church becomes more and more aware that she is the guardian of a great treasure. . . . This treasure of humanity . . . is also a powerful force unifying the Church inwardly and giving meaning to all her activity" (para. 21).

world-center-and-magnet. Some fourteen sociocultural regions, as sketched above, each have acquired self-identity and vitality of varying degrees. The nation has usually remained the functional unit, and patriotism a value, but no nation—not even one of the superpowers—can now go it alone. Absolute sovereignty has passed away; allies and mutual obligations within blocs and regions have become necessary for all nations. Even the Germans and French have begun to think of each other as Europeans; and Americans now think of themselves as Westerners.

Regional self-consciousness has arisen within the Church during and since Vatican II at an unexpected pace, with Latin America leading the way. African and Asian bishops have become pastors of their local churches, as local lay leaders have taken on political authority from European-American empires in one hundred new nations. The Council of Latin American Bishops (CELAM), Symposium of Bishops Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC), and similar regional structures of episcopal conferences have taken shape. Comparable bodies of religious institutes have been formed, and their internal governance has become more decentralized, transferring initiative and decision-making from Roman generalates to communities closer to the pastoral scene.⁶

The first generation of African and Asian theologians and bishops, assisted by mission societies, have begun to probe the societal-cultural reality of their regions. The first sparks of regional theological creativity have appeared. Orbis Books and other publishers have circulated worldwide these often fragile beginnings. However dim, the light of regional ecclesial consciousness has dawned, adding to the self-understanding, mission and ministry of the universal Church—the first purpose of Pope John is calling the Council, only twenty years ago.⁷

Karl Rahner perceives that Vatican II's greatest theological promise is movement toward such regional incarnations of the Gospel—toward a world Church which is truly universal as distinct from a church grounded mainly in Greco-Roman culture. In these "great local churches" Rahner foresees "a pluralism of proclama-

⁶ Besides ninety-two national conferences of bishops, the *Annuario Pontificio* (Vatican Polyglot Press, 1981) lists regional episcopal bodies of Asia, Europe, Latin America and Africa. There are also smaller groupings for Southern, West, Equatorial, East, and North Africa; also for the Antilles, Central America, and Arab Countries (pp. 934-53). None of these multinational ecclesial structures existed prior to Vatican II. The *Annuario* lists comparable federations and unions of religious institutes and of their superiors (pp. 1,397-421).

⁷ In a 1981 Orbis Books publication list, sixteen of its twenty titles were about non-Western regional themes. A special listing gave only "Orbis Asian Titles," twenty-one in number.

tions" and of liturgies, as well as "a significant pluralism with respect to canon law . . . and other ecclesial praxis as well."⁸

Rahner judges that the theology of Vatican II makes a clear break from that of the church implanted by the first great mission of the Apostle Paul in the Greco-Roman culture of the Mediterranean basin—a break as significant as Paul's own rupture from the Jewish theology and pastoral practice of the church of Jerusalem.

Rahner states that "doctrinally the Council did two things which are of fundamental significance for a world-wide missionary effort . . . a truly positive evaluation of the world's great world religions is initiated for the first time in the doctrinal history of the Church." Secondly, "the documents on the Church, on the Missions, and on the Church in the Modern World proclaim a universal and effective salvific will of God which is limited only by the evil decision of human conscience and nothing else."

Pope Paul VI urges the "Evangelization of Cultures" in his apostolic exhortation *On Evangelization in the Modern World*, 1975. To the extent, therefore, that indigenous cultures arise within, and indeed substantially create and define the dozen or so societal geopolitical regions, theological reflection proper to each region begins to develop within the evangelizing Church. There is needed a new depth and richness in understanding the Church as evangelizer of pluralist cultures in the world's diverse regions, these societal-cultural realities themselves, and the Kingdom of God that is being built up by Church and culture together.

In his apostolic exhortation Pope Paul sets forth this seminal teaching:⁹ "All this could be expressed in the following words: What matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these have in *Gaudium et spes* (53). . . ."

"The Gospel, and therefore evangelization," Paul VI continues, "are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them."

⁸ Karl Rahner, "Toward a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 40, 4 (Dec. 1979), 716-27.

⁹ Paragraph 20, Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI, *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (Washington: USCC, 1976).

Pope Paul concludes: "The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed."

Nor, I add, will the encounter take place if the cultures are not assimilated theologically, so as to "inform" the mind of the evangelizing Church, and thus in a measure form the ecclesial consciousness as well.

Mission-sending societies have become prime agents of this "evangelization of cultures" and of theological reflection within the local-regional churches they serve. Forty-five missionary generalates and sixty regional church leaders are jointly addressing these subjects, set forth above by Rahner and Pope Paul, through a research project on The Future of Mission, directed by SEDOS, their Rome-based center.¹⁰

In Black Africa alone, four institutes for higher theological studies and research are taking shape: in Ivory Coast and Zaire for francophone West and Central Africa; in Nigeria and Kenya for English-speaking West, East and Southern Africa. Comparable theology faculties now serve East, Southeast, and South Asia. These divinity schools are complemented in recent years by social research centers and interfaith institutes, and at the pastoral level by catechetical and liturgical centers. Increasingly the faculties and staff of these ecclesial networks are Asians and Africans, who serve pastoral needs proper to their own local and regional churches, guided by national and regional conferences of bishops, under the sometimes anxious eye of the Holy See.¹¹

¹⁰As part of this research project, SEDOS (*Servizio di Documentazioni e Studi*) of the Roman generalates sponsored a ten-day seminar at the Jesuit Villa Cavaletti, Frascati-Rome, March 1981, with 110 participants. Forty-eight study papers were prepared on eight themes, with a separate author for each theme from each of six continents. Every paper centered on "The Local Church" in its relation with a specific dimension of its society and ministry: local culture, secular society, nation state, other Christian Churches, other Faiths, religious freedom, justice and human rights, mission theology and structures. Three special papers were presented on China. These fifty-one papers, totalling over a thousand pages, will be published by SEDOS in three volumes. This fresh corpus on missiology will deeply influence regional theologies and churches in the coming formative decade. A thirty-four page report on this seminar, "Agenda for Future Planning, Study and Research in Mission," is published in *SEDOS Bulletin* 7 (May 1, 1981).

¹¹Of the 129 "Institutes of Higher Studies" listed in the *Annuario Pontificio*, pp. 1,423-446, only thirteen are located in Africa and Asia. Clearly these eight "mission" regions, with 3,000 million of the world's humans and its highest population growth, still need many more intellectual and research centers if the "evangelization of cultures" is to advance seriously into the coming generation and millennium.

III. NORTH AMERICA AS A SOCIETAL-ECCLESIAL REGION

Canada and the United States, with a population of two hundred fifty-million, form the North American region in this paper's context. The Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches of the two nations, with about one hundred eighty-million adherents have communicated and cooperated to an increasing degree since World War II. This is notable, especially among Catholics of both countries since Vatican II. Thus bishop leaders meet regularly, and co-sponsor seminars (on sexuality, February 1981) and planning sessions (to prepare the synod of 1980 and for Latin America programs). Religious orders have cooperated still more closely on convergence, and mission programs. There is but one Catholic Theological Society for Canada and the United States, and there are North America-wide associations for biblical scholarship and divinity school faculties (American Academy of Religion, and Society of Biblical Literature, which have included Protestants, Catholic, Jews and even Muslims since 1978).

North America's societal-ecclesial attributes are in many ways distinctive as compared with other regions. To exemplify this reality some of these regional marks will be briefly outlined, and comparison will be indicated with four other regions: Latin America, East Europe, the Mideast, Black Africa. These notes intend only to explore a method for conceiving and discussing societal-ecclesial regions, their patterns and interrelations.

The phrase "societal-ecclesial region" attempts to localize and incarnate the more universal "Church-in-the-world" awareness of Vatican II. Each region, I submit, increasingly becomes a conscious *locus theologicus*, as well as the womb of an *ecclesia localis* in its widest expression—within and constituent of the universal Church. Some attributes which give North America its uniqueness, as compared with other regions, are suggested in barest outline:

1. *Racial and Ethnic Stocks*

North Europeans (especially Anglo-Saxons) are dominant in North America as a whole; the French form a third of Canada with their separatist tension. There are strong South and Central European groups, as well as Black minorities in the United States; there is an influential Jewish presence; Latin-Mexicans are growing in numbers; Indians are very few. Marked ethnic awareness still lingers among first and second generation immigrants; Black awareness has been vocal and effective since World War II in the United States. Pluralism is pervasive as compared with Western

Europe, although the latter has moved toward regional community since World War II.

Compared with Latin America: Spanish and Portuguese dominance, significant Indian and African numbers; few North Europeans, Jews. Few ethnic tensions between nations; strong tensions within some countries between Indian and Spanish stocks, in Mexico, Central America, and Andean areas.

Compared with East Europe: Slavs dominant, some Germans; few Jews, about four million killed in Holocaust. Ethnic-national identity strong against Russification, Soviet force and Marxist homogenization; uprisings also nourished by faith factor in some places.

Compared with Mideast: Arabs very dominant; Jews about two percent; Europeans, others few. Tension between newly acquired national identity and Islamic universalism; also between Jews and Arabs, Israel and Palestine.

Compared with Black Africa: Africans over ninety-five percent; the rest mostly European whites. Tribal influence, extended family, patriarchal systems still strong—after 80-100 years exposure to Western individualism; however, national unity attained to marked degree in but two decades of independence from European empires.

2. Religious and Ecclesial Situation

In the United States, Reformation Protestants historically have been dominant as the original settlers, to which may be added the many in American-founded Evangelical Churches. In Canada about one-third are French Catholics, mostly in Quebec; there are another two million Catholics in Canada, mostly Irish and Italian. About half of Canada is Protestant; there are some Orthodox and few Jews. In the United States Catholics are twenty-five percent of the population, most having arrived since mid-1800's: the Irish and Germans dominated until the 1970's despite large numbers from South and East Europe. United States Catholics have been "accepted" into the national mainstream politically and culturally since World War II. One-fourth of United States Catholics are now Latin (mostly Mexican and Puerto Rican) and the number is fast growing. Black Evangelical churches have been effectively vocal since the 1950's; only four percent of blacks are Catholic. Ecumenical and interfaith movements have been strong since Vatican II. The Jewish community is only three percent of the population but very influential and vocal as a transnational actor re Israel, Soviet Jews, and the like. Oriental forms of religiosity appeared as part of the 1960's counter-culture. A species of "civil religion" permeates national feasts and public functions, derived from Calvinist "chosenness" and Jeffersonian Deism. Religious freedom and pluralism are pervasive, "made in North America" and exported worldwide. Separation of church and state is rigorous in the United States, much less so in Canada.¹²

¹²In West Europe, the region most similar to North America, separation of church and state is not nearly as rigorous as in the United States. In several

Compared with Latin America: South European Catholic dominance; pervasive "popular religiosity," often from Indian and African sources. Protestants and Jews very few. Ecumenism-interfaith improvement since Vatican II. Anticlerical and Masonic ideology dominant following French Revolution until mid-1900's, now in decline. Philosophic atheism and Marxist ideology very strong in universities and secondary school system, in economic theory and political parties, often fomenting revolutionary ideologies. Religious practice, especially social ministry, sometimes restricted. Astonishing Church awakening and "conscientization" since Vatican II for social justice and ministry, as a region; liberation theology takes form, the first theological school begotten outside the West Europe region since the innovating Greek theological acculturators of Nicea-Chalcedon.

Compared with East Europe: Marxism the official religio-ideology since World War II. Orthodox Churches prominent in several countries; some Lutheran-Reformed presence; Jewish influence nil after four million killed in Holocaust. Active Catholic presence in strategically located Poland, largest of the nations, now reenforced by Polish Pope, and in past year by organized worker and farmer movements. Religious freedom severely restricted in all its expressions.

Compared with Mideast: ninety percent are of resurgent Muslim faith, animating since World War II societal structures and movements of all categories: political, economic, educational, media, cultural, military, etc. Religious triumphalism of Mecca-Medina era and cultural creativity of Bagdad-Cairo imperial Caliphates, 600-1600 AD, recalled; their revival yearned for. For many, the Judeo-Christian West again the foreign enemy trying to penetrate the Islamic Ummah, with modernist religious-moral values, and through the intrusion of Israel into the Muslim heartland. Christians of a dozen varieties only six percent of region's people, less than one percent in most areas. Jews about two percent, almost all under seige in Israel stronghold. Violence and terrorism almost daily, six wars since World War II—among Jews-Muslims-Christians all invoking the same Yahweh-Allah-God. Religious freedom in jeopardy in most places.

Compared with Black Africa: about one hundred-million Christians (about sixty percent Catholic, forty percent Protestant); fifty-million Muslims; one hundred-million carrying on traditional tribal religions, usually animist in character. Religious freedom almost everywhere.

3. Philosophies and Ideologies

Liberal democracy, secular humanism, scientific method, pragmatism, empiricism, logical positivism are pervasive in North America. Marxism is almost totally absent, while active in Latin America, Mideast and Black Africa, and dominant officially in East Europe.

4. Political and Economic Systems

All citizens of North America have access to political participation; about eighty-five percent enjoy an acceptable standard of countries (or provinces or cantons), the clergy receive state subsidies for their services (Germany, Switzerland), or at least for religious instruction and schools (Italy, France, Britain). This still obtains in some Black African countries, a carryover from the European empires.

living through a three-power structure of management-capital, workers-farmers, and government. The business corporation, often multinational, is the main economic actor. "Democratic Capitalism" is the dominant political economic ideology, but it has been under criticism from some Catholic groups since the mid-sixties.

Comparable figures in other regions for *political* participation and acceptable *economic* living standard are approximately: Latin America: 10%, 20%; East Europe: 5%, 80%; Mideast: 10%, 20%; Black Africa: 40%, 20%.

5. Superpower Status of North America

Economic power is global, especially via technology and multinational corporations; *cultural* power operates through the media, universities and research; *political* power includes both of the above as well as military capability. These three sources of superpower status all affect East Europe, Latin America, Mideast, Black Africa, and most other regions. The last three, especially the Mideast, now have a decisive effect on American economic standing and political-military might because the United States imports forty percent of its oil needs from them. There is a growing role of the American Church as a "transnational actor" with other regional churches within the universal Church because of the superpower status of the North American region.¹³

There are other areas of United States and Canadian life that can only be mentioned, for lack of space: scientific research and technology including biosciences, genetics, space, nuclear power, electronics; the educational system including the public, private and religious; family life, sexuality, divorce, birth control, abortion, celibacy (with special norms for church marriage tribunals); women in society and church; the media, consumerism, lifestyle, alienation, drugs, and the like.

These hurriedly profiled features help to identify North America as a societal-ecclesial region, distinct in significant ways from other regions. More distinguishing marks could be added; each should be explored in depth. However, our present aim, I repeat, is "only to *explore a method* for conceiving and discussing societal-ecclesial regions, their patterns and interrelations. The phrase 'societal-ecclesial region' attempts to localize and incarnate the more universal 'Church-in-the-world' awareness of Vatican II. Each region, I submit, increasingly becomes a conscious *locus theologicus*, as well as the womb of an *ecclesia localis* in its widest expression—within and constituent of the Universal Church" (Section III, above).

¹³ Harvard Seminar on "Faith Communities as Transnational Actors," p. 29 *et passim*.

Therefore, the ecclesial region or regional church merits and calls for theological reflection proper to itself in view of its particular pastoral needs, and due to its growing self-consciousness. Further, theological reflection is required to nourish and to articulate this regional ecclesial awareness as well as its relation to other regions and as constituent of the universal Church. Such reflection is now needed within the Church of North America.

IV. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE SOCIETAL- ECCLESIAL REGION OF NORTH AMERICA

I am deeply indebted to the Latin American Church, to CELAM and its Medellin and Puebla Conferences, 1968 and 1979, for stimulating my thinking about the "ecclesial region with its own distinctive sociopolitical reality, one requiring theological reflection and pastoral action different from the Church in other regions." I again stress that: "No simple transplant of Puebla's product from Latin America to Northern soil is possible . . . , still it should be clear that the Puebla event does challenge us in the North American Roman Catholic Church to examine the 'signs of the times' in our own social reality. For the sake of the Good News of Christ we also need a more penetrating grasp and integrating overview of our society and Church. . . ."¹⁴

Theological reflection by Catholics, within the societal-ecclesial context of North America, began generations ago, with Bishop England, Archbishop Ireland, Orestes Brownson, Cardinal Gibbons and Father Hecker, to list the best-known pioneers. The brake put on this early freshet of regional ecclesial consciousness by papal condemnation of "Americanism" eighty years ago has received much comment.

Fifty years later John Courtney Murray assimilated the theory and practice of church-state relations and religious liberty in their American expression, and interpreted this unique socioecclesial creation to the Catholic mind and polity. For a decade Murray was bruised and buffeted for his daring by the papal magisterium. Nevertheless, his ground-breaking "American theology" was embraced by the pastors-bishops of Vatican II, due in part to pastoral needs recognized and pressed by Cardinals Spellman, Cushing, and Dearden, plus leaders of other regions, such as Archbishop Wojtyla of Poland.

Since Vatican II North American theologians (and canon lawyers) increasingly reflect from and within our region's socio-

¹⁴*Puebla and Beyond*, pp. 325 and 327 in the chapter by Gremillion, "The Significance of Puebla for the Catholic Church in North America," pp. 310-29.

cultural and pastoral reality. Charles Curran, Gregory Baum and David Tracy immediately come to mind. Tracy, in his presidential address to this Catholic Theological Society of America, recognized the regional roots of "diverse theologies, for example, as Latin American liberation theologies, European transcendental theologies, North American experiential theologies."¹⁵ Bernard Lonergan's *Insight* and his other teaching, via book and podium, have provided since the 1950's a rich mother lode and theological method to Tracy and many other theologians of "the American experience."

Bryan Hehir, David Hollenbach and Philip Land, inspired largely by Barbara Ward, are among a score of reflectors on the North American ecclesial region in its relationship with other religio-cultural regions, especially those of the Third World. They, with John Coleman and others, broach the possibility of a "public theology" in view of growing Catholic justice and peace movements since the 1960's, domestic, interregional and global.¹⁶

Michael Novak, resident scholar of the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, severely faults some exponents of "peace and justice" theology for their planetary vision, blinded "to the American experience and its historic originality. The bias against democratic capitalism is thick and tangible; it is, at times, irrational." Novak is much chagrined that Pope John Paul's 1979 address to the United Nations is "couched in the special jargon . . . of recent official (Church) statements on 'peace and justice,' the current euphemism for a theology of politics and economics. . . ." Novak published in May 1981 a booklet, *Toward a Theology of the Corporation*, and is directing his organization's seminar on "Recent Church Teachings on the Economy: An Appraisal," which focuses on the North American economic, political, cultural systems, as compared with those of other regions.¹⁷

These scattered samples of theological reflection on elements basic to the North American societal-ecclesial reality are but clues, best known to me, of the breadth of this post-conciliar movement. Others, obviously, concern women's role (Reuther, Fiorenza), bio-ethics (McCormick), ecclesiology (Dulles, McBrien), Black theology, family, sexuality, ecumenism, and the like. Usually, these fruitful probings proceed by individual efforts, without group

¹⁵CTSA Proceedings 34 (1979).

¹⁶See, "Theology and Philosophy in Public: A Symposium on John Courtney Murray's Unfinished Agenda," David Hollenbach, ed., *Theological Studies* 40, 4 (Dec. 1979), 700-15.

¹⁷Quotes are from "The Politics of John Paul II," *Commentary* 68, 6 (Dec. 1979). M. Novak, *Toward a Theology of the Corporation* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1981).

stimulus and critique, without purposeful perception of our overall United States-Canada experience, and without prospecting a theology and ecclesial consciousness identifiably North American—as distinct from those of other regional-local churches within the universal Church.

I know of two groups, each composed of a dozen members, which meet on a regular basis to reflect theologically on the American scene: a Chicago group which began October 1979 with focus on *pluralism*; a Woodstock-Washington group concerned since 1980 with the *methodology* of theological reflection in present-day America. Working papers prepared for the Chicago group's first ten sessions, from October 1979 to December 1980, are published for private circulation by Loyola Press.¹⁸

Thomas Clarke and James Hug of the Woodstock Theological Center preside over the Washington group, who are from Georgetown, Catholic University, Wesley Seminary, Center of Concern, and Woodstock. Its prospectus states: "The project seeks to serve the present and especially the anticipated need for a solid theological understanding of the fast-growing movement and practice of theological reflection in various contexts of Christian life and ministry, especially as these contexts touch and are touched by social reality." Among the questions addressed is the following: "What would be some of the distinctive characteristics of theological reflection as conducted in the United States, as compared with countries of the Third World?"¹⁹

This present paper, as promised at its start, has focused on "the societal-cultural fundamentals and dynamics of ecclesial regional consciousness and of local churches. . . . I am here concerned with the pastoral and human reality as matrix of theology and Church." I now respectfully ask theologians (also pastors and social scientists) for comment and critique: (1) on this regional approach and method of theological reflection within the universal Church in its planetary and humankind-wide dimensions; (2) on the pastoral need and possibility of developing a North American theology, or theologies; and (3) on the feasibility of "connecting"

¹⁸ Daniel Flaherty, ed., *Toward a North American Theology* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1981 [for private circulation]). This work contains ten 1979-80 working papers by A. Greeley, J. O'Brien, C. Shanabruch, D. Senior, J. Linnan, Mary J. Durkin, T. O'Connell, J. Nilson and J. Gremillion.

¹⁹ This nineteen-page prospectus tentatively entitles the Woodstock project: *Christian Faith, Social Reality, Theological Reflection*. Other participants are J. Bassler, A. Dulles, J. Godsey, J. Haughey, M. Hellwig, A. Hennelly, J. Holland, R. Kinast, J. Langan, W. Newell. They meet about monthly for about four hours; a conjoint book on theological reflection in the American context is projected for 1982, as part of the Woodstock Series of Paulist Press.

persons and groups so disposed or engaged, for exchange and cross-fertilization in the future.

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