THE ECCLESIAL
AND CULTURAL ROLES OF THEOLOGY

(In Grateful Memory of Bernard Lonergan)

I should explain from the beginning how I have understood the theme of our Convention: "Theology: Academic and Ecclesial," and why I further complicate matters by choosing to speak on "The Ecclesial and Cultural Roles of Theology."

I am taking "theology" to mean a disciplined and critical inquiry into the Christian faith as this has been handed down within the Catholic tradition. The "academic" dimension of theology I take to refer, not principally to its institutional location (although there would be much to learn from a history and sociology of the institutionalization of theology), but to the intellectual integrity, that is, the autonomy and critical character, of theology. "Ecclesial" I take to refer to the confessional ground and limits of theology as I have defined it, that is, the dependence of theology on the Church which mediates the faith into which theology inquires. I realize that other definitions of theology are available and defensible, but this is one that seems appropriate to the stated theme of the Convention.

Furthermore, I understand the choice of the theme to allude not only to the perennial problems and tensions that have haunted inquiry into the faith ever since it took the name "theology" and claimed scientific status, nor only to the identity-crisis caused for theology by the transformation in the notion and methods of science in the modern era, but also to the series of cases in our own Church in which in recent years especially the question of the relationship between theology and Church and, more particularly, between theology and magisterium has been raised. But I will concentrate on the first and third of these areas of tension, leaving the question of the "scientific" status of theology in comparison to other disciplines today for another discussion.

Our theme would not point to tensions or define a problem if, on the one hand, theology did not have its own contribution to make and if that distinct contribution did not imply theology's critical autonomy, or if, on the other, there were no confessional grounds or limits to theology's inquiry.[1] In other words, if theology

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[1]See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), pp. 330-33. In two addresses in Germany in 1981, Pope John Paul II gave two brief statements on the scientific and autonomous character of theology which led Max Seckler to wonder if they did not represent a major shift in the magisterial understanding of theology. In the first of these, the Pope, after describing and confirming the efforts of modern sci-

means only parroting official Church teachings or if the Church has no role in mediating both the *fides quae* and the *fides qua*, we have no Convention theme.

I have complicated things further by introducing into my title the cultural role of theology. I have done so principally because I believe that the ecclesial tensions between Church authority and theology are usually a function of the relationship between the Church and contemporary culture. The academic standards which theology attempts to meet are usually borrowed from the culture, and its effort to meet them is itself at once an ecclesial and a cultural enterprise. And I wish to use this paper to argue that both the institutional location of theology and the relationship between its ecclesial and cultural roles depend on the way in which Church and culture are related to one another, and that the internal tensions between Church and theology cannot be understood without understanding the transformation which has taken place in the Church's relationship with modern culture.

I will begin, then, with a description of the modern Roman Catholicism that was constructed in the 150 years prior to the Second Vatican Council and of the role that theology played in it. After a brief discussion of Vatican II and its theology, I will discuss the transformations of both Catholicism and of theology in the wake of the Council. I will conclude with some observations about the difficulties and challenges facing theology today.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MODERN ROMAN CATHOLICISM

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, roughly from the Congress of Vienna to the end of the reign of Pius XII, the Catholic Church constructed a new

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ence, went on to say: "I have no hesitation in viewing the science of faith within the horizon of a rationality so understood. The Church desires an autonomous theology, which is distinct from the Church's magisterium, but knows itself to be bound in a common service to the truth of faith and to the People of God. It is not to be excluded that tensions and even conflicts will arise; but neither can this ever be excluded in the relation between Church and science" (*AAS*, 73 [1981], 56-57). The Pope returned to the theme in his address to German theologians at Altötting: "Theology is a science with all the potentialities of human knowledge. In the use of its methods and analyses it is free. . . . Love for the concrete Church, which includes also fidelity to the testimony of faith and to the Church's magisterium, does not alienate the theologian from his work nor does it deprive it of its unrenounceable autonomy. Magisterium and theology have each a distinct task. For that reason neither can be reduced to the other. And yet they serve a common purpose. Precisely because of this structure they must always remain in conversation with one another" (*Ibid.*, pp. 103-104). A year later, the Pope repeated these last remarks, in Latin, to the International Theological Commission; see *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IV, 2 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), p. 361. For Seckler's comments, see "Eine Wende im lehrämtlichen Theologieverstandnis?" *Theologische Quartalschift*, 16 (1981), 131-33, largely reprinted in "Kirchliches Lehramt und theologische Wissenschaft: Geschichtliche Aspekte, Probleme und Lösungselemente," in *Die Theologie und das Lehramt*, ed. W. Kern (Quaestiones Disputatae, 91; Freiburg: Herder, 1982), pp. 54-57. It is not clear that subsequent events support Seckler's response to the objection that "eine Schwalbe mache noch keinen Sommer."

sociological form in which to give expression to its ancient Christianity.[2] While in many respects, this Roman Catholicism had deep roots in earlier periods of history, nevertheless it represented a distinct and specifically modern phenomenon. It differed from the Catholicism of the *ancien régime,* of the Counter-Reformation, and of medieval Christendom, at least as much as each of these differed from its predecessors. I am referring to the Roman Catholicism in which the older ones of us were raised and which suffered such a serious challenge after the Second Vatican Council.

The chief challenge to which the construction of Roman Catholicism was the response was the Church's loss of its previous social and cultural role, as more and more of the central spheres of public life declared their independence of religion in general and of Catholicism in particular. The Church consistently repudiated the notion that religion is a matter of indifference to the character and the coherence of society. This, in large part, was what it understood by "liberalism": the relegation of religion to a private matter on the assumption that such areas as the economy, politics, social conflict, education, and the family could quite adequately be handled without appeals to religious norms and legitimations. That this position of the Church often confused the Church's role with certain political arrangements which it had known in the past cannot be doubted, but more basic was a conviction that religion makes integral claims on people, affects all areas of their lives, and so cannot be relegated to the margins of social and political life.

Catholics traced the roots of liberalism to an individualistic repudiation of the authority of tradition and community, and they discerned family resemblances between Protestant private judgment, Enlightenment intellectual autonomy, capitalist possessive individualism, popular sovereignty in politics, and even socialism and communism, whose analysis of class conflict, they argued, presupposes the disintegration of society which the banishment of religion had made inevitable.

In the modern era, official Catholicism began to include in its self-definition a repudiation of the principles on which modern society and culture were basing themselves. To accept basic Catholic beliefs and to practice characteristic Catholic devotions meant to take a stand against liberalism, as once they had meant to take a stand against earlier heresies. Dogmas and devotions were often developed, defined and interpreted in order to stress their social and cultural relevance. What

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[2]I have developed and illustrated this thesis at some length in "The Enlightenment and the Construction of Roman Catholicism," in the 1985 *Annual* of The Catholic Commission on Intellectual and Cultural Affairs, pp. 31-59. The following works have been particularly useful: Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *Kirche Begreifen: Analysen und Thesen zur gesellschaftlichen Verfassung des Christentums* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979); *Zur Soziologie des Katholizismus,* ed. K. Gabriel and F. X. Kaufmann (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald-Verlag, 1980); Emile Poulat, *Église contre Bourgeoisie: Introduction au devenir du catholicisme actuel* (Paris: Casterman, 1977); *Une Église ébranlée: Changement, conflit et continuité de Pie XII à Jean Paul II* (Paris: Casterman, 1980); *Modernistica: Horizons, physionomies, débats* (Paris: Nouvelles Éditions Latines, 1982); *Le catholicisme sous observation: Du modernisme à aujourd'hui* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1983).

has been called "a counter-revolutionary mysticism"[3] became an important element in the development of Christological and Marian piety in the last two centuries and is also reflected in doctrinal developments with regard to the Immaculate Conception, the Sacred Heart and the reign of Christ the King. A sort of "political theology," then, lay at the heart of modern Roman Catholicism: central elements of Catholic belief and practice were articulated precisely as critiques and as corrections of contemporary social and political problems. In that respect, it is not at all accurate to speak of pre-conciliar Catholicism as privatistic and apolitical.

The loss of its cultural monopoly and of the assistance which the State had once provided it placed the Church in a very weak position at the beginning of the modern era. In order to meet these challenges, the Church organized itself into a distinct counter-society which would provide what some sociologists refer to as a plausibility-structure for Catholic meanings and values. Two major features of this reorganization should be noted. The first is the growth of a tremendous number and variety of Catholic organizations, designed to oppose the spread of liberalism, to safeguard Catholic rights, and, by multiplying opportunities for association, to support Catholic identity and solidarity. If the Church could not appeal to the State for support, it would go directly to the people and make use of liberal rights of association to defend itself against liberalism.

On a second level, the Church undertook a massive effort to centralize its authority. This would provide the Church with an international center of authority against movements which were international in their intentions and effects. Particular national and cultural forms of Catholicism became suspect, as Rome required a greater and greater adhesion to its own liturgical, devotional, theological and canonical norms. A veritable cult of the pope developed which would legitimate on the everyday level the First Vatican Council's definitions of papal sovereignty and infallibility. The Church, which throughout the nineteenth century was defining itself as a *societas perfecta*, a society as autonomous, sovereign and free as is the modern State, now had, without ambiguity, an ultimate and unappealable authority to guarantee its doctrinal and structural integrity. The centralization and bureaucratization which this movement entailed were shortly afterwards confirmed and furthered by the promulgation of the first universally applicable Code of Canon Law.[4]

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[3]Pier Giorgio Camaiani, "Il diavolo, Roma e la rivoluzione," *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 8 (1972), 487-518, at pp. 502-503.

[4]For these developments, see Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, *Unfehlbarkeit und Souveränität: Die päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit im System der ultramontanen Ekklesiologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1975); Claude Langlois, "Pouvoir et autorité dans l'Église d'hier: Le cas du XIXe siècle," in G. Defois et al., *Le Pouvoir dans l'Église* (Paris: du Cerf-Desclée, 1973), p. 103; *idem*, "L'infaillibilité, une idée neuve au XIXe," in *Église infaillibile ou intemporelle?*, *Recherches et Débats*, 79 (Paris: Desclée du Brouwer, 1973), pp. 64-78; Joseph Hoffmann, "Théologie et Magistère: Un 'modèle' issu de Vatican I," *Les théologiens et l'Église*, *Les quatre fleuves*, 12 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980), pp. 77-101; Ferdinand Elsener, "Der Codex Iuris Canonici im Rahmen der europäischen Kodifikationsgeschichte," in Alois Müller et al., *Vom Kirchenrecht zur Kirchenordnung?*

These developments resulted in the formation of a Catholic subculture. To describe it as a "*sub*culture" is already to note the changed circumstances of a Church which, it was recalled in often romantic evocations of the Middle Ages, had once enjoyed a cultural monopoly. Quite against its will, of course, Catholic culture was now simply one among many other sets of meaning and value competing in the modern cultural marketplace. The subculture was constituted by its antimodern interpretation of Christianity and by central features of its internal organization. It is this ideological and organizational distinctiveness to which such metaphors as the "Catholic ghetto" or "city under siege" refer. I do not believe that these metaphors are adequate, chiefly because they do not convey the aggressive dimensions of this modern form of Catholicism. I am inclined to think that active military metaphors are necessary, in any case metaphors that convey better that this Catholicism offered a positive alternative to the developing liberal society and culture, engaged in some very acute criticisms of modern society, and sought both to win converts to itself and to rechristianize society.

I have found the work of several European scholars helpful both to identify and to understand some of the features of this development. Emile Poulat, a French sociologist/historian, has in several works described the Church's encounter with developing modernity as a clash of cultures.[5] He offers the startling but heuristically helpful comparison of anthropological studies of the effects of western standards and patterns of rationality upon a premodern culture. The latter is not a clash between culture and savagery, nor between an "advanced" and a "primitive" culture—anthropologists have largely discarded such evaluative terms—but between two cultures, which have considerable difficulty in understanding one another and which may be incompatible with one another. The modern struggle between the Catholic Church and modern culture, Poulat argues, has many of the same features. The comparison is useful because it at least begins without the sort of value-judgments and assumptions that tend to settle key issues in advance.

While Poulat avoids grand sociological theory, F. X. Kaufmann and his colleagues have used the work of Max Weber and Niklas Luhmann to define the modern development of Roman Catholicism as structurally parallel to the differentiations and institutionalizations which characterize modern society.[6] As the spheres of the political, the economic and the domestic have been differentiated and institutionally located in the State, in capitalism and in the intimacy of the bourgeois family, so the sphere of religion has been differentiated from other

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(Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1968), pp. 27-53; Hervé Legrand, "Grâce et institution dans l'Église: Les fondements théologiques du droit canonique," in *L'Église: Institution et Foi* (Brussels: Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1979), pp. 139-72; René Metz, "Pouvoir, centralisation et droit: La codification du droit de l'Église catholique au début du XXe siècle," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 51 (1981), 49-64.

[5]This is the central argument of his *Église contre Bourgeoisie;* for briefer statements, see his *Le catholicisme sous observation*, pp. 28-32.

[6]See the works cited in footnote 2.

spheres and institutionally located in the Church.[7] Kaufmann calls this develop-
ment *die Verkirchlichung des Christentums* and sees it at work in the bureaucra-
tizing of ecclesiastical office, the sacralizing of authority, and the creation of a
carefully bounded Catholic social milieu—all three of these being specifically
nineteenth-century developments and representing the Church's considerable ad-
aptation to meet the challenge represented by the reduction of its cultural and so-
cial roles. In that respect, the antimodern Roman Catholicism I have described is
a characteristically modern phenomenon.[8]

An integral part of the construction of this Roman Catholicism was Rome's
increasing assumption of the control and direction of Catholic intellectual life. The
principle of formal authority in the Church—that is, the identification of authority
with office—became the guiding methodological criterion of Catholic apologetics
and theology. Rome intervened with increasing rapidity and frequency in philo-
sophical, theological and political controversies among Catholics. To get to the
roots of the matter, Leo XIII imposed upon Catholics a recourse to the philosophy
of St. Thomas Aquinas. To provide the regular guidance that Catholics would need,
he initiated the practice of issuing ever more frequent and ever more comprehen-
sive encyclicals on vast areas of intellectual, social, political and cultural prob-
lems. And, to bear the burden of the conversation with other groups in modern
society, the same Pope developed a theory of ''natural law'' which was to provide
a foundation in ''right reason'' as well as in revelation for the solutions the Church
offered to modern problems.

The Church did not emerge from the chaos of the revolutionary era with great
theological resources. The eighteenth century was perhaps the most barren of
theological achievements of any century since the Reformation. For most of the
nineteenth century, what passed for Catholic philosophy and theology was eclec-
tic and uncritical. Institutionally, the Church had suffered the loss of many of its
universities to the modern state. Rome stepped into this situation and began to re-
construct Catholic theology, first, by restoring and founding Roman colleges and
universities and then by insisting that particular churches finally implement Trent's
requirement of seminaries for the training of priests. Theology, at least that most
favored in Rome, was largely confined to these institutions, where it was carried
out by clerics and principally in order to train other clerics. Theology became a
discipline primarily designed to serve the self-realization of the Catholic subcul-
ture; it was, that is, almost exclusively ecclesial in nature and subject to the con-
stant and immediate oversight of the magisterium. *Die Verkirchlichung der*

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[7]''Für die christliche Tradition impliziert die These von der gesellschaftlichen Differ-
enzierung die Verkirchlichung des Christentums, wie sie gleichzeitig eine Verstaatlichung
der Herrschaft, eine Kapitalisierung der Wirtschaft und eine Intimisierung der Familie be-
deutet'' (Karl Gabriel, ''Die neuzeitliche Gesellschaftsentwicklung und der Katholizismus
als Sozialform der Christentumsgeschichte,'' in *Zur Soziologie des Katholizismus,* p. 205).

[8]See Kaufmann, *Kirche begreifen,* pp. 67-68: ''Für den Katholizismus fällt es somit
nicht schwer, die *Verkirchlichung* . . . als die Antwort, und zwar die durchaus struktur-
konforme Antwort auf die gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungstendenzen der Neuzeit zu be-
zeichnen.''

Theologie was a logical implication of *die Verkirchlichung des Christentums.*[9]

It is important to note, however, that the theology communicated in the seminaries seldom matched the wider and deeper aspirations of the Church itself. Leo XIII's appeal to the thought of St. Thomas was as much an indictment of the quality of common philosophical and theological discourse among Catholics as it was a tribute to Aquinas's genius. Apart from some approaches to apologetics and new additions to the list of *adversarii*, the theological manuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries show little trace of the ideological, political and cultural combat in which the Church believed itself to be engaged.[10] In Lonergan's phrase, theologians had long since retreated into their "dogmatic corner,"[11] and not even the appeals of a Leo XIII, a Pius XI, or a Pius XII to engage the modern ideologies and developments moved most theologians to expand their curriculum beyond what an earlier tradition had handed down. How many of the manuals in use immediately before Vatican II explored the social, political or cultural implications of their theses on nature and grace, on Christology, on soteriology? Far more than the Church itself, the theologians resided in their own dogmatic ghetto.

The tensions between Church authority and Catholic intellectuals during this period also often reflected the larger cultural challenge. The nineteenth-century disputes about faith and reason centered on the balance between the traditional principle on which the transmission of the faith had rested—authority—and the new principle on which modern society was constructing itself—autonomous reason. Leo XIII explained the restoration of Thomism as the most effective way of getting at the roots of the modern social and cultural crisis—the infiltration into society and popular culture of the mistaken views of Enlightenment philosophers.[12] The rise of historical criticism was read by Church authorities as a chal-

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[9]For this model of the relation between magisterium and theology, besides the works by Seckler, Pottmeyer, Hoffmann and Langlois already cited, see M. Seckler, "Die Theologie als kirchliche Wissenschaft nach Pius XII. und Paul VI.," *Theologische Quartalschrift*, 149 (1969), 209-34, reprinted in *Im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft und Kirche: Theologie als schöpferische Auslegung der Wirklichkeit* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), pp. 62-84; H. J. Pottmeyer, "Der wissenschaftliche Charakter der Theologie nach dem I. Vatikanum," *Catholica*, 24 (1970), 194-204; Jacques Prevotat, "Pie XI et l'enseignement supérieur ecclésiastique," in *Les théologiens et l'Église*, pp. 103-12; and Jean-Marie Mayeur, "Magistère et théologiens sous Pie XII," *ibid.*, pp. 113-19.

[10]Karl Rahner once pointed out the lack of development in the manuals of theology between 1750 and 1950, even though "no one can deny that in the last two centuries cultural and spiritual transformations have taken place which, to say the very least, are comparable in depth and extent and power to mould men's lives, with those which took place between the time of Augustine and that of the golden age of scholasticism" ("The Prospects for Dogmatic Theology," *Theological Investigations*, vol. I [Baltimore: Helicon, 1961], p. 2).

[11]"Theology in its New Context," *A Second Collection* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), p. 58.

[12]See Pierre Thibault, *Savoir et Pouvoir: Philosophie thomiste et politique cléricale au XIXe siècle* (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1972); Gerald McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977); Émile Poulat, "L'Église romaine, le savoir et le pouvoir: Une philosophie à la mesure d'une politique," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 37 (1974), 5-21.

lenge isomorphic to the general challenge of secularization: as God had been banished from politics, economics, and science, so now an effort was being made to write history—including that of the Bible and of the Church—by excluding God as a historical actor.[13] References to religious experience and to an apologetics of immanence, which would show the intrinsic relevance of Christian teaching to human needs, were suspect because they represented a threat to the primacy of the formal authority of God in revealing and of the Church in transmitting the deposit of faith. In these respects, the Modernist crisis was simply one moment in a far larger confrontation between the claims of tradition and the claims of modernity.[14]

The appeal to the example and teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas was from the beginning in great tension with this solution to the Church's intellectual challenge. Aquinas worked at a university and within a coherent and relatively stable Christian culture, both of which enabled him to undertake a work which, at the end of a century and a half of economic, social and cultural development, took on the challenge of Aristotelian and Arabic philosophy and science and did not shrink from quite transforming the language, methods and systematic ideals of Catholic theology. But the official theology of modern Roman Catholicism was constructed in seminaries, isolated from the modern intellectual challenges which were undermining traditional Catholic culture, and, for all of its invocations of Aquinas, for its language, methods and systems, it turned, not to him, but to a deductivistic theology constructed on the margins of the intellectual life of pre-revolutionary Europe. As Gerald McCool has pointed out, the tension between the proposed medieval ideal and the proposed modern solution would in time become a contradiction.

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The encounter between the Church and modern culture was at the heart of the debates at the Second Vatican Council. In 1960, the Holy Office prepared an agenda for the Council that proposed a massive reaffirmation of all the theological, moral, economic, political and cultural positions adopted by the popes of the modern era.[15]

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[13]See Poulat, ''L'histoire dans les limites de la raison,'' in *Critique et mystique: Autour de Loisy ou la conscience catholique et l'esprit moderne* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1984), pp. 181-216; or, more briefly, *Le catholicisme sous observation*, p. 79: ''The Church doesn't go in for details. Confronted by what Gabriel Seailles called 'the affirmations of modern consciousness,' it reacted in a globally and consistently negative manner: religious indifferentism, since all religions were put on the same level; social atheism, since God was no longer the foundation of society: he is chased from politics, from economics, from the laws, from schools, from courts and from hospitals, from science, from morality, from everywhere he had once been at home. Everything is as if God did not exist: Loisy would cause a scandal by writing that he is not an historical personage, and Pius X will speak of historical atheism when confronted by that profanation of sacred history represented by the new historiography, laicized in its foundations, limited to a natural view of human development.''

[14]See Poulat, *Le catholicisme sous observation*, pp. 71-74, and *Modernistica, passim.*

[15]See ''Schema pro Concilio Oecumenico,'' *Acta et Documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II Apparando. Series I (Antepraeparatoria)*, vol. III (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1960), pp. 3-17.

The *schemata* on divine revelation and on the Church prepared for the first session of the Council faithfully reflected this agenda; and it was this orientation that Pope John criticized in his opening address when he spoke of "prophets of gloom" who could find nothing in the modern world but prevarication and ruin. The repudiation of these drafts by the Council itself during the first session was a challenge to the direction which had characterized official Catholicism for two centuries. But the primarily theological debates of the first session revealed their deeper cultural and political roots in the later and often bitter debates about religious freedom and the role of the Church in the modern world.

At the time the "progressives" at the Council insisted that they were only calling for *aggiornamento* and reform. Perhaps the "conservatives" were more acute in insisting that the implications of the debate went far deeper. They recognized that the Church was being asked to undertake a reversal of its fundamentally antimodern stance—that is, of its understanding of the challenge posed by modernity, of the attitude it had adopted towards it, of the terms in which it defined itself as a counterculture, and of the strategy by which it had constructed itself as a countersociety. These were the deeper implications of the conciliar debates on liturgical reform (perhaps particularly the use of Latin), on the place of historical criticism, on the relation between Scripture and tradition, on the role of the magisterium, on the definition of the Church, on primacy and collegiality, on ecumenism, on the role of the laity, on Marian devotions, on Church-State relations, and on the Church's relationship to the modern world. The "progressives" may have been correct in insisting that the deepest and most theological nature of the Church was not affected by the Council's "reforms" except to the degree that it was "purified"; but the "conservatives" may have been more acute in noting that what theologically is only "reform" sociologically can be quite "revolutionary."

For these reasons I do not believe that the Council can be exempted from all responsibility for the transformation of Roman Catholicism that followed it. In three respects at least, the Council posed major threats to the self-articulation of modern Catholicism: by its far more positive assessment of modernity in its political and cultural features, by its call for an updating and reform of Church practice in the light of modernity, and by its appeal to particular and local churches to assume responsibility for culturally distinct realizations of Catholic Christianity. The first of these struck at the heart of the Church's antimodern suspicions. The second compromised the taken-for-granted character—that is, the authority—of the everyday process by which the Church had reproduced itself. And the third challenged by the Eurocentric and especially the Roman norm which had previously defined the meaning of Catholicism.

It is true, of course, that the Council's texts are full of compromise and often deliberate ambiguity, which has enabled people from all sides to find almost anything they want somewhere in the documents; but compromise and ambiguity are in themselves major departures from the clarity and self-confidence that marked the Church's teaching in the modern era. To that degree the Council's very moderation is in part also responsible for the deep divisions that have marked the postconciliar period and that showed themselves again most recently in the different reactions to Pope John Paul II's announcement of the coming Synod of Bishops.

It is notorious that the work of the Council owed a great deal to theologians. Its teachings reflected the considerable achievements of four decades of *ressourcement*. As Congar points out, the theologians who had most impact upon the Council were men who had worked outside of the official theological system and structures, usually outside of Rome also, and had been in far closer contact with modern culture than seminary professors or Roman officials. (Perhaps I do not need to note that many of them, in part for these reasons, had been suspect in Rome at one time or another.) The texts which they helped to produce at the Council preferred a more biblical, traditional, liturgical and symbolic language to the language of the Schools and of earlier Councils. The demands of historical criticism were respected, particularly in the interpretation of the tradition (though less so in the use of Scripture). Modern philosophical anthropologies clearly influenced several documents. In intention, language and conclusion, the Council's texts in general reflect more the work of theologians who had worked at the fringes of the system than that of those who had written the official textbooks or occupied the official posts.[16]

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM

The years immediately after the Council saw the surprisingly rapid collapse of the Roman Catholicism which had been constructed during the modern era. The common Catholic subculture, which, in George Lindbeck's words, had "provided the masses with the group and individual identity, a sense of community, the dignity of belonging someplace amidst the anonymity of post-industrial civilization,"[17] was dramatically altered. No one of the changes—English in the liturgy, the modification of laws of fast and abstinence, reform of liturgical and devotional life, etc.—was designed to have this effect, nor need they be thought to have been chiefly responsible for it; but I do not think there is any denying that in a very short time and in many places the everyday life of the Church changed remarkably.

One of the most important features of this transformation was a decline in the importance assigned to the ideological and organizational distinctiveness characteristic of modern Roman Catholicism. Many Catholics wanted to leave what they now disparagingly called "the ghetto," come out from behind the intellectual and social walls of what they called "the city under siege." "Relevance" was all the rage, relevance to modern society and culture. The critical review of our habits of thought, prayer, and activity, which the Council had undertaken, was extended to other areas by some Catholics and justified by an appeal to "the spirit of the Council." The challenge to the customary ways in which Catholics thought, lived and constituted themselves as the Church often included a radical questioning of the structures of formal authority in the Church, among them, of course, the relation between believers and the magisterium. Catholics rushed to implement the Council's call for culturally relevant realizations of the Church, a re-

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[16]"La théologie au Concile: Le 'théologiser' du Concile," in *Situation et tâches présentes de la théologie* (Paris: du Cerf, 1967), pp. 41-56.

[17]"The Catholic Crisis," *Commonweal* 103 (1976), 108.

sponsibility which often made them further suspicious of Roman directives.

Moreover, in a profound sociological paradox, to implement the Council's ecclesiology of communion, the Church's bureaucratic structures were greatly expanded on all levels of Church life, from the parish to the Roman Curia. A host of "professionals" came on the scene—theologians, liturgists, catechists, management experts, psychologists, sociologists, etc.—considerably complicating the organizational chart and introducing new tensions, affecting not only bishops who now had to deal with "experts" but also the people who now found themselves subject to *two* distinct types of authority.[18]

These organizational and ideological changes have resulted in divisions among Catholics far deeper and more severe than any seen in recent history. Many, perhaps most, of them relate directly to the relations between the Church and modern culture. They concern the degree to which the Church may legitimately accommodate itself to its standards and its structures. The range of issues covers the gamut of economics, politics, sexual morality, social relationships, democratic institutions, etc. Labels are notoriously difficult to assign. Who are the liberals and who the conservatives on war and peace, and who on abortion? Who on Nicaragua, and who on Poland? Who on the American economy, and who on party politics? Who on clerical involvement in Latin America, and who in the United States? Who on economic rights, and who on political rights? Who on dissent from Church teaching on social issues, and who on sexual matters? Sometimes the differences are known to be differences within a single community of faith; but at times they become so bitter that they are made the grounds for mutual recrimination and even the refusal of eucharistic communion. Perhaps most significant is the decline in belief that Catholicism proposes a genuine alternative to the competing capitalist and socialist solutions to contemporary problems. When this belief disappears, it becomes very difficult to commit the Church to an engagement with contemporary problems without introducing into the Church itself the bitter political schisms which divide the body politic.[19]

While this political dissolution of Catholicism represents a considerable change, certain continuities should be noted. Between the far right and the far left in the Church today, there is often a common suspicion of the world which liberalism has created. They share also a conviction that Christianity cannot be reduced to what liberalism would make of it: a purely private affair. Both often appeal directly to central Catholic doctrines and pieties to legitimate the Catholic alterna-

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[18]The problems which this increased bureaucratization are analyzed in Kaufmann, *Kirche begreifen,* pp. 82-110, 147-87; see also James Hitchcock, *Catholicism and Modernity: Confrontation or Capitulation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 96-125: "The Triumph of Bureaucracy."

[19]Many Catholics seem to have lost the ability to deal charitably or even courteously with those of differing political persuasions; it is as if political orthopraxy of various sorts has co-opted the ancient *odium theologicum* that used to plague disputes about doctrinal orthodoxy.

tives which they propose.[20] In all these respects, there are many points of continuity between the various politically oriented forms of post-conciliar Catholicism and the attitudes and strategies of modern Roman Catholicism.[21]

Inevitably, therefore, this has an effect on the interpretation of the Council itself. By those who wish to carry its reforms much further, the Council is often criticized for its compromise character. By those who identified the attitude and strategy of Roman Catholicism with the immutable essence of the Church, it is criticized for its capitulation to modernity.[22] Finally, a paradoxically similar critique of the Council comes from those who regret many of its accommodations to a liberalism which they attack from the political left. In all three critiques, although for obviously different reasons, the Council's effort at a differentiated response to modernity is a common source of complaint.

In all these respects Catholicism has become something quite different from what had been constructed in the last 150 years, to the point where many would agree with the thesis of Louis Bouyer's book, *The Decomposition of Catholicism*.[23] Modern Roman Catholicism was constituted by its distinctive world view and by the distinctive organization and patterns of association which embodied that world view. The coherence and integrity of the countercultural world view have been shattered, and the organization and associations transformed. Which came first and why either happened are nice questions, which, fortunately, I can here leave to the sociologists and historians.

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[20]Hermeneutically and theologically, there is not a great deal of difference between devotees of Fatima calling the Soviet Union the instrument of Antichrist, and Daniel Berrigan using the Beast of the Apocalypse to describe the United States' involvement in Nicaragua. Consider also the uses to which Marian piety is used by both right and left.

[21]See Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), pp. 14-48, which, however, is far more informed and self-critical than the work of many Catholics who suffer, as Poulat has pointed out, from an astounding ability to forget the struggles and achievements of the immediately preceding generations; see *Le catholicisme sous observation*, pp. 16, 19-20, 28, 125, 216-18.

[22]Émile Poulat describes accurately some of the pathos of the traditionalist critique of Archbishop Lefebvre: "He takes on the *mauvaise conscience romaine* for transformations accepted after having been long declared unacceptable, acquiesced in after having been pitilessly combatted, without any other basis in the end than a change in perspective and in majority" (*Une Église ébranlée*, p. 278).

[23]Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1969. This work is often misrepresented as an attack on post-conciliar excesses; it is that, but Bouyer is equally unsparing towards the defenders of the Roman Catholicism which has dissolved. The conclusion of his book is worth reading: "As for what is called 'Catholicism'—a word which appeared only, if I am not mistaken, in the 17th century—if by this is meant the artificial system fabricated by the Counter-Reformation and hardened by the repressive cudgeling of modernism, it may die. There is even a good chance that it is already dead, although we haven't noticed it yet. The one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, over which Peter and his successors 'preside in love,' *it* has the promise of eternal life, and its faith will not be deceived" (p. 110; translation slightly corrected after the French original: *La decomposition du catholicisme* [Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968], pp. 152-53).

In the wake of the Council, Catholic theology also was quite transformed. Historical critical method was applied with growing skill and rigor to the Scriptures and the monuments of the tradition. The anthropological turn was widely embraced in order to overcome the extrinsicism of the manuals. The unitary method of an imposed Neo-Scholasticism gave way to a plurality of methods, languages and conclusions. The habitual recourse to the latest Roman document was challenged by widely claimed rights to dissent and to theological autonomy or even by simple indifference. The primary reference to the needs of the Catholic subculture was often replaced by methods of correlation, critical or not, which conceived theology primarily as an engagement with contemporary culture.

But these earlier developments were themselves soon criticized. A political theology accused the anthropological turn of an illegitimate abstractness if it did not engage the social and political matrix of individual existence. The primary role of historical criticism was modified both by appeals to other human sciences and by a hermeneutic which restores a central role to literary criticism. The priority of theory in theology was challenged on several grounds: because it implies an ability to go beyond the immediacy of image, symbol or metaphor; because it necessarily seeks to overcome plurality in a synthetic vision; and especially because it may uncritically overlook the praxis from which it originates or to which it should give rise. A variety of liberation theologies extended political theology to argue that theology is critical reflection on a praxis designed to free people from economic, political, sexual or cultural oppression.

These changes have affected the institutional location of theology. Theology is no longer confined to seminaries and to male clerics, but, as the membership rolls of the CTSA make clear, is now well represented in secular universities and is undertaken also by laymen and laywomen. There has also been a new questioning of the academic standing of theology, either by comparison to other sciences of religion or by an insistence that theology must be constructed from below, from the grass roots.

A most dramatic change since the Council is the unwillingness of many theologians to accept a primarily or exclusively ecclesial role. Theology has even been *defined* as the mediation between a religion and a culture.[24] It involves a critical correlation between a text and a situation, between the claims of a tradition and the challenges of modernity, between the criteria of faith and the criteria of critical reason. It unites into a single interpretative moment the two goals which had formerly been kept separate: the self-constitution of the Church and the Church's engagement with the society. For these reasons, many, perhaps most, theologians regard as at least inadequate the definition of their role as simply the defense of magisterial teaching; they refuse the notion that systematic theology, if they retain it even as an ideal, can be carried out simply as a meditation on Church doctrines and without reference to the contemporary world; and they claim standards and criteria for their work which cannot be reduced simply to obedience to the magisterium. In all these respects, theologians have emerged from their intellectual ghetto.

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[24]See Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, p. xi: "A theology mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix."

Among the effects of this transformation of theology has been the quiet disappearance of a host of internal theological disputes with which theologians had once distracted themselves (the *De auxiliis* quarrel, differences between Thomists and Scotists over the reason for the Incarnation, etc.). In many cases, they have been replaced by differences in method and purpose which reflect the variety of attitudes which Catholics have adopted towards the contemporary world. Both of these changes reflect the engagement of theology with contemporary culture: the old questions, it seems, could only tempt minds for whom theology was principally or exclusively a matter of internal conversation among Catholics; but, once theology sought to address or even to base itself upon a critical response to the world, political divisions among theologians became almost inevitable.[25]

This development is the cause of tensions in at least two respects. First, it breaks with the theological criteriology and method that have guided theologians since they retreated into their dogmatic corner, far away from the intellectual, social and cultural challenges of the modern era. Secondly, it has also posed a challenge to the hierarchy's modern claim of responsibility for the Church's engagement with contemporary society. In both respects, the attempt to unite the ecclesial and cultural roles of theology has meant a challenge to the understanding and exercise of Church authority which had become customary in the modern era. And so some theologians have become suspect in recent years, because they were believed either to have challenged the authority of the biblical, traditional or magisterial mediations of the Church's constitutive faith, or to have committed the Church to unacceptable political options, or to have done both.

When post-conciliar theology attempts its simultaneous cultural and ecclesial roles, it faces other problems as well. In effect, it is attempting to be critical of liberal modernity while appropriating and making use of distinctive features of modernity. It seeks to make differentiations where these are often both difficult and unwelcome, and so it runs into opposition from elements in the Church who believe that one cannot begin with modernity's starting point without being entrapped in it,[26] and from elements in liberal society who are still surprised by de-

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[25]See Congar's interesting hypothesis: "When the Church does not keenly feel the tension between itself and the world, which leads it to take up a missionary attitude, it creates tensions within the ecclesiastical world. Christendom's 'centuries of faith,' when Church and society coincided and formed a single whole, had little missionary concern, but tensions multiplied between clergy and laity, between seculars and regulars, between monks of different robes, upholding the honor and the theses of their doctors: Thomas, Scotus, Suarez, Molina. . . . These no longer greatly interest a Church which knows that the world does not believe and turns rather towards the common and sovereign sources of Scripture" ("La théologie au Concile," p. 52). This was written before it became fully apparent that other divisions would soon take the place of the Scholastic controversies.

[26]This position is most visible among Neo-Thomists who vigorously oppose the effort of "transcendental Thomists" to work out a critical realism which presupposes the Kantian turn to the subject, and among some proponents of structuralism in biblical interpretation, who mistakenly read it as a way of avoiding some of the more serious challenges of historical critical method.

fenses of the public relevance of religion.[27] It faces further difficulties within the Church from those who do not believe that the encounter with the classics of the tradition depends on or requires the modern, critical moment in their interpretation.[28] It faces the internal problem of communicating within a Church which will never make the critical turn a condition for membership. And, finally, it encounters the existential problem of attempting all this without the support of the coherent Catholic subculture which was there when most of us set out on our theological careers.[29]

And these problems point to a final source of tensions between theologians and the Church. It is clear that the present pontificate has as one of its goals the restoration of coherence to the Catholic vision and of discipline to its life. Its motives are familiar to anyone who knows modern Roman Catholicism: to see to it that the Church is not simply absorbed into liberal culture and to prevent its being reduced to a simple religious legitimation of antiliberal revolutionary movements. Opinions will differ greatly, of course, as to how real either danger is, and especially with regard to the justice or efficacy of the means being used to avoid them. But one thing is clear, that Pope John Paul II is carrying forward the centuries-old Catholic insistence that Catholicism as a faith offers an alternative to both the liberal and the socialist articulations of human life and that this vision requires for its preservation and for its effectiveness a united and spiritually vibrant community of faith. Among the problems the Pope faces, it seems, are that there are now many Catholics who do not seem any longer to believe the first and that there are many also who disagree that the best plausibility-structure for the Catholic vision is, to use the sociological categories, a ''Church'' rather than a ''sect.'' What accommodations to either liberalism or to socialism are legitimate now divides Catholics in ways it never has before; and the divisions are no less great over the ecclesial structures in which the redemptive community is most faithfully and most effectively to be embodied.[30]

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[27]The debates on religion and politics during the 1984 presidential election revealed, among other things, how difficult it is for many secular liberals to admit that religion has a legitimate or even necessary role to play in public affairs. They clearly have not made the ''political turn''!

[28]It is worth at least considering the fact that the two theologians who seem most in favor under the present pontificate, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger, have both resisted the widespread effort to ground theology in a critical anthropology. This does not mean that either can justly be said to be uncritical; but their approach is far more in the line of a ''positive'' rather than a critically mediated exposition of the faith.

[29]This, I think, is a crucial issue. Theologians, like other Christians, owe their faith to the Church in the concrete sense of the particular communities which mediated it to them. But this Church has dramatically changed, and the effects of that transformation upon the religious self-consciousness of theologians needs attention, unless, of course, one wishes to defend the questionable hypothesis that theologians are the only people who do not need a plausibility-structure.

[30]The latter is, I think, the key issue between the position of Leonardo Boff in his *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1985) and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and its criticism (see *Origins,*

CHURCH, CULTURE AND THEOLOGY

Let me conclude with a brief statement of the fundamental issue as I see it and with some remarks on the challenges facing theologians today. The issue may perhaps be posed in terms of a question: Is there a first moment in which the Church comes to be as a distinct community of faith and grace and then a second moment in which this Church looks about at the larger world to see what it might bring to it? If these two dimensions of the Church—its nature and its mission, if you will— are not only distinct but separate, then it might be possible to separate the ecclesial role of theology and regard it simply as a *Glaubenswissenschaft,* of primary or even exclusive interest to those already within the circle of faith. The cultural role could then be left to others, who might construct an apologetic or a fundamental theology or draw out the practical implications of an already constructed theological vision.

On the other hand, if the genesis of the Church as a redemptive community is already in itself the taking of a stance over and against contemporary society and culture, then the ecclesial and cultural roles of theology are not two successive moments, but rather simultaneous and dialectically related dimensions of a single hermeneutical process, for which neither theory nor practice can claim an absolute priority.

For myself, I do not have any doubts that the second of these alternatives is the only defensible one, both on theoretical grounds and in terms of the age-old insistence of the Catholic Church that religion makes integral claims on a person and so cannot be reduced to a merely private matter. The very existence of the Church changes the options open to members of a society, whether the Church is a culturally dominant religion or only one among many competing bodies of meaning and value. In the latter case, to invite people to join the Church by believing in the message it preaches and living the life it requires is to ask them to reject other possible ways of interpreting and living a life, both individually and socially. The questions of meaning and value to which the Church's message is addressed arise out of the economic, social, political and cultural matrix within which individuals face their existential choices, whether the matrix is that of late twentieth-century liberal society or that of a Third World society. In this sense, as Johannes Metz puts it, existence is "a political problem,"[31] and existential religious choice is a profoundly political decision. This fundamental insight of political theology re-articulates the traditional Catholic position, and, I believe, is absolutely essential to a critical approach to the relationships between Church and culture.

That said, however, is not to resolve but only to identify the most difficult issues. If theology is the critical mediation between the Church and culture, there

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14 [1985], 683-87), although one can only be distressed at the quality of the Congregation's analysis of Boff's book and of its theological counter-arguments. The basic question has, of course, also been posed by others; see, for example, Robert N. Bellah, "Religion and Power in America Today," *CTSA Proceedings* 37 (1982), 15-25.

[31]*Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 111.

is nothing to mediate if they are either identified or assumed to be utterly incompatible, or, putting it differently, if the Church simply capitulates to the culture or retreats into a self-sufficient sect. All the challenges arise when those alternatives are refused. And chief among them are the preservation of the objective representations which enshrine the tradition through which the Church's distinctiveness is mediated and the sustaining of the living community in which that tradition is at once embodied and made available to challenge others. The tradition serves the role of what David Tracy calls a "classic": an expression of Christian meaning and value which initially stands over and against a person or a whole culture, with the power to evoke fundamental questions about human existence and to place a person or culture before an ineluctable choice.[32] But a similar role is also played by the Church itself, which achieves its redemptive purpose primarily when it represents in the midst of the larger society a different way of articulating, both in word and deed, what human life is all about.[33] The condition for the possibility of a critical mediation between Church and culture, then, is, first, the integrity of the tradition and, second, the life of the Church, and this may help to explain, if not always to justify, certain of the emphases of the present pontificate.

On the other hand, sects also have these concerns, and the Catholic Church has always, even during the regime of modern Roman Catholicism, refused to consider itself a sect. The ideal of a culturally redemptive presence in the world to which it clung under that regime may have been fatally tied up with political and social structures which are forever past, but the transformative ideal itself has never and, I believe, will never be surrendered by the Church. At the Second Vatican Council, as I have said, the Church abandoned both its consistently negative attitude towards modern culture and the Christendom-model in which it had dreamed of realizing its redemptive ideal. These decisions require critical differentiations both with regard to the culture and with regard to past attitudes and strategies of the Church. In a modernity that was constructed in opposition to the Church and still often defines itself as superior to ages in which religion still played a public role, the Church seeks to discern what is valuable and useful. In part by using techniques of critical inquiry developed within and by this autonomous culture, it is also seeking to discern what in its own tradition and life represents perennially necessary elements and what dispensable forms in which it had once realized itself. Such critical differentiation was long overdue by the time the Council espoused it, and perhaps it should not be surprising that its endorsement should have proven so upsetting to so many nor that it will require work so long and difficult that there will be many who will prefer the shorter and easier solution of restricting its challenge to either the Church or the culture, abandoning one or the other.

This is where the genuine challenge to theologians lies. To do theology is to attempt this critical correlation or mediation between Church and culture, to ar-

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[32]See *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

[33]From Tracy's comments on the Church as sacrament, it appears that his thesis on the evocative and transformative power of the classic can also be applied to the Church itself as a living community of faith (see pp. 442-43).

ticulate how the biblical and traditional faith which distinguishes and constitutes the Church redeems and does not simply annihilate the culture and how, on the other hand, modern culture is not the first culture to be utterly incompatible with the faith. It is a task which for some in both the Church and the culture is impossible and unwelcome. But it is a necessary task unless the Church is to be content to be simply a countercultural sect, so alienated that fidelity to its tradition means resignation and emigration. Theologians must undertake it precisely through their disciplined inquiry, an inquiry within the founding faith and yet able to make a case for itself before the bar of critical reason. The theological contribution is distinct and autonomous, and it too is likely to be long and difficult to make. If theologians cannot reasonably expect the Church to make its own life and activity wait upon the fulfillment of the theological task, theologians in turn should be able to expect, first, that the Church will not deny them the right to engage their task in its full complexity and to work out its requirements by trial and error, by mutual criticism and in accordance with strictly theological criteria, and second, that the Church will not again attempt to avoid the tensions, difficulties and dangers by an exercise of authority which denies the true nature of the challenge, discourages people from undertaking it, and so postpones even further an authentic solution. From us in turn the Church should be able to expect greater care than has sometimes been shown for the methodological foundations on which we are building and especially a greater willingness to engage in the mutual conversation and criticism that have never been more necessary to our communal theological enterprise.

The difficulties are many and the tensions are great precisely because the stakes are so high. It is easier and more comfortable to espouse short-range solutions and especially to surrender one or the other of the terms of the problem, ignoring the Church or abandoning the world. If we choose either, however, it will be something other than Catholic theology in which we are engaged, and we will have done a grave disservice not only to ourselves and to our culture but also to the Church and to the Lord whose revelation and redemption we seek to serve.

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