

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND THE WORLD CHURCH

In his book, *Catholicism Confronts Modernity*, Langdon Gilkey opined that Catholicism was the potential matrix for a vital, creative contemporary Christianity—on certain conditions, of course.¹ Only a “reconceived, reformulated, and restructured” Catholicism, thoroughly desupernaturalized (in the extrinsicist sense of that term) through the recovery of its immanentist ethos, could appropriately incarnate grace for a new era in world history.

It is the contention of this paper that Karl Rahner, the saintly sage of twentieth century Catholicism, has “reconceived, reformulated, and restructured” his religion in a way so profoundly praxiological that Catholicism is now further empowered by his work to become practically catholic for the first time as “world Church.” The theme of this convention was directly inspired by Karl Rahner whose vision of Christianity has deeply insinuated itself into practically every aspect of present Catholic life. The topic of this paper, “Systematic Theology and World Church,” is so broadly explorative in its intention that anything more than an interrogative mood in addressing it would be indeed pretentious. The topic needs a focus for fruitful exploration, and in a spirit of humble homage to the memory of our Catholic giant among theologians I will attempt to think the topic with Rahner. I will not limit myself to an historical presentation of the details of the Rahnerian vision; I seek, rather to describe the world that opens out in front of the Rahnerian text. Attempting to imitate his own creative retrieval of Aquinas, I want to retrieve his own thought as a stimulus toward a heuristic vision of salient features descriptive of a systematic theology that seeks to serve a Christian praxis orientated toward the one world of the one human race.

Contemporary theological reflection on the *kairos* and the crisis of our time seems to have reached a general consensus: a new era is dawning—and threatening. The many histories of the many peoples have become empirically one history of one people—the unity of the human race is no longer merely a matter of anticipatory consciousness. It has become fact. But this fact is *de facto* a universal crisis, because the unity of humanity evident today is “a unity of the foxhole.” We are united in universal woe, in universal distortion, in universal threat of imminent apocalyptic catastrophe in the ever accelerating process of panhistoricism. The problem of evil is now identical with the problem of history.²

¹ Langdon Gilkey, *Catholicism Confronts Modernity* (New York: Seabury, 1975), pp 1-60.

² Cf. Matthew Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 2-7.

Pellucid is the fact that we are not entering this new epoch of history with the kind of heady optimism which celebrated the Renaissance break with the medieval world. Nor do we resonate with the humanistic optimism of the first stage of the European (and American) Enlightenment. Many of us have embraced the darker tradition of the "hermeneutics of suspicion"³ from the second stage of the Enlightenment, and this critical awareness of our limits over against a situation of global evil tends to make us impotent—as too much thinking always does! The realization of a consensus on human meanings and values on a universal scale (a kind of "universal culture" within which the many cultures thrive in mutual dialogue and support) remains, indeed, a matter for the anticipatory imagination of hope or for the hopeless resignation of despair.

The perception of reality as history is a Western phenomenon. Its source is the Old Testament's testimony to the ways of its God, Yahweh, with his people. The first history was a salvation history.⁴ As Mircea Eliade tells us, it was peculiar to Israel among all ancient Near Eastern peoples to regard history as theophany.⁵ But this theophanous understanding of history did not mean that divinely engendered events were unqualified blessings from above. Whenever the people became too comfortable, and hence irresponsible, in their cultic celebrations of Yahweh's fidelity, they had to learn from their sufferings that divine fidelity entails the judgment of divine freedom. With the prophets "salvation history" continues under the sign of its opposite—history as theophany encompasses history as terror.⁶

We, too, have learned that ideologies of progress (a modern form of "salvation history") are inherently precarious. Their plausibility eventually cedes to brute fact. In a general way the modern era in the West was sustained by the notion of immanent progress in history—a progress pneumatologically guaranteed (for the believer) or anthropologically inevitable (for the unbeliever). The nineteenth century was the pretentious celebration of this notion. But the twentieth century has disabused us of any illusion of immanent progress in history. Theophany in the literal (modern) sense of progressive theologies or philosophies of history or as a euphemistic mystification of enlightened human mastery of the world has once again yielded to the terror of brute fact.⁷

³ A phrase now common in theological parlance from Paul Ricoeur; cf. his *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 32ff.

⁴ Cf. Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 77ff.

⁵ Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 102ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 139ff.

⁷ Cf. Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind* (New York: Seabury, 1976), pp. 209-16 and Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1980).

It was the West that inflicted the rest of the world with history especially during the modern period. Colonial imperialism brought history under the form of the terror of domination. In many ways the Western conviction of progress was purchased at the cost of the conquered spirit of the manipulated non-Western world. But if it is true to say that by now Western civilization is world civilization,⁸ then much is demanded of us in the effort to overcome the terror in anticipation of a new theophany. It is held by some that only Christianity can 'handle' history creatively. Perhaps this contention, too, is part of our cultural imperialism. But what is beyond cavil is the fact that if Christian faith cannot 'handle' history in this epochal moment of death and potential new life, then Christianity will fade away with this dying age.

The word, modern, in many ways describes the theological legacy of Karl Rahner. Rahner, himself, often referred to his work as an attempt to accomplish in a more nuanced style the aims of Catholic Modernism.⁹ Chided by Johannes Metz that his theology was constructed to address the modern age just when the modern age is coming to an end, Rahner admitted the truth of this criticism. However, Rahner insisted that no Catholic theology could ever hope to address the emerging issues of a postmodern world, unless it had first come to grips with modernity whence so many of our postmodern problems have arisen. I turn now to an overview of Rahner's lifelong conversation with the formative figures of the modern spirit. The purpose of this next section is to establish the praxiological nature of the Rahnerian theology of freedom.

RAHNER AND "THE MODERN HISTORY OF FREEDOM"

In broad strokes it is possible to describe Rahner's long theological career as a personal "recapitulation" of "the modern history of freedom."¹⁰ If Kant's transcendental ego was historicized by Hegel and then materialized by Marx, we may discern in Rahner's personal route of dialogue with this tradition a similar pattern of development. In his dialogue with Kant Rahner sought quite self-consciously to modernize the Catholic Thomist tradition. (This dialogue would substantiate the opinion that "there are very good grounds for regarding Immanuel Kant as one of those who prepared they way for the fragile advances of the Second Vatican Council.")¹¹ With Kant Rahner focused almost completely on "noetic" or (broadly understood) "epistemological" concerns in fidelity to

⁸ Religious ramifications of this thesis are developed in George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

⁹ Note what Rahner has to say about "the theology of the transition from a culturally and intellectually restricted milieu into the situation of the world Church" in "History of Dogma" in *Sacramentum Mundi* 2 (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), pp. 106-107.

¹⁰ Cf. Johannes Metz, "Kirchliche Autorität im Anspruch der Freiheitgeschichte" in J. B. Metz, J. Moltmann, and W. Oelmüller, *Kirche im Prozess der Aufklärung: Aspekte einer neuen "politischen Theologie"*. *Gesellschaft und Theologie. Systematische Beiträge*, Nr. 1 (München: Kaiser/Mainz: Grünewald, 1970).

¹¹ S. W. Sykes, "Theological Study: The Nineteenth Century and After" in Brian Hebblethwaite and Stewart Sutherland, eds., *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 103.

the "intellectualism" of St. Thomas. The Age of Reason had reduced the human intellect to the modern, manipulative category of "technical reason." Kant himself was wary of the dangers to the human spirit illustrated in this intellectual reductionism. While he generally concurred with the restricted range of human rational potential as formulated by Hume, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant refused to corroborate Hume's constriction of human cognition completely. He went on to write his *Critique of Practical Reason* wherein he pragmatically rescued the realm of the "noumenal" as necessary postulates for moral and religious concerns. He refused, however, to transgress the limits of the human spirit disclosed by his own critical method. Ultimately, God (and associated ideas such as freedom, soul, and immortality) remained as postulates or "regulative ideas." Kant indeed discovered the dynamism of mind but at the price of his famous dichotomies. Cognitive construction of the "known" could never really penetrate to the thing known. In accord with the Nominalist tradition at the beginning of the modern history of thought, Kant "made room for faith" with his new twist on the *sacrificium intellectus*.

From Kant Rahner got one of his favorite terms, "transcendental." In fact Rahner became one of the most famous "transcendental Thomists." Possessed of a typically Catholic concern, he sought some invariant structure in the human spirit, transcending and conditioning all the changing forms of cultural history. Despite obvious, pervasive mutability, there had to be something immutable as the basis of order (a lesson the Catholic tradition learned from Hellenism). Inspired by the realism of St. Thomas and—less directly by the mystical immanentism of St. Augustine—Rahner proffered a preconceptual grasp of the Absolute as the invariant *a priori* presupposed in all human cognition and conation. Against all modern, positivistic restrictions of reason Rahner insisted that the human being is *finitum capax infiniti*. But he had no special interest to tarry for long on philosophical issues. He had made a philosophical case for the unrestricted openness of the human spirit. As a theologian, Rahner could hardly wait to move from Athens to Jerusalem.

In his movement to Jerusalem Rahner resembles Hegel. For Hegel the Kantian dichotomies revealed a philosophical spirit that was far too timid! Decrying the loss of depth in much of the Enlightenment spirit, a loss leading to a celebration of limitation and finitude, Hegel read the "representational" language of Christianity as an invitation to a reconciliation of the finite and the infinite that would overcome the one-dimensionality of modernity. Not only is the finite capable of the infinite, but the "absolute religion" proclaims the self-elevation of the finite to the infinite. There is no finitude without infinitude, and vice versa!¹² Traditional Western religion had misinterpreted the genius of Christianity.

¹² The "infinite" is a term central to Hegel's thought. For a clear presentation of the Hegelian thesis that "the very reality of the finite is relation of the infinite to itself," cf. Quentin Lauer, *Hegel's Concept of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), pp. 162-202.

In the hands of the religious hierarchs Christianity had taken on the appearance of a "positive" religion, replete with irrational dictates from the Stranger Beyond. To make real Christianity effective again for Western civilization Hegel projected an evacuation of heaven, the death of the "Bad Infinite" (already realized on Good Friday in principle and in the movement of the Spirit through history in fact).¹³ Hegel would restore the depths and the heights to human history by clarifying philosophically the Christian interpretation of the world. To begin philosophy with the transcendental ego à la Kant is to begin with form without content. Philosophy must begin with the Beginning: the Absolute or *Geist* or God positing the Other, the world, as the concrete mediation of Himself. This "absolute transcendental" is no mere 'form'; history as such is its concrete content. *Ab initio* the finite is never merely finite, and in conscious finitude (the human spirit) this glorious fact is recognized! The traditional preeminence of the category of substance yields here to Subject whose self-formative process is history. God, the Infinite Subject becomes the condition for the possibility of history, while history becomes the self-realization of God. The *Deus solus* of Lutheranism is radically immanentized.

Hegel's historicization of the transcendental ego is quite similar to the internal development of Rahner's thought. With Hegel Rahner turns from the "ontic" category of substance to the "ontological" category of subject (or person). Again, like Hegel, Rahner historicizes his understanding of subject or person as *Selbstvollzug*: person is self-enactment, and self-enactment is freedom.¹⁴ As conscious freedom, the person must realize self in the social context of history and in the natural environment of the world. The world of other persons becomes the primary medium for this process of self-realization, while the world of things is a secondary medium for the same self-creative process.¹⁵

Rahner, however, is careful to overcome the pantheistic tendencies in Hegelian thought. For Rahner, history is *de facto* the history of God, because it is the history of humanity. God enters history, not to attain Himself, but to realize Himself as *Deus pro nobis*. God's self-othering in the Incarnation and his self-communication in the Gift of the Spirit are two 'moments' in the one process of the actualization of the divine freedom to be the beginning, the innermost activating principle, and the goal of the world process. To articulate this divine movement Rahner translates the traditional distinction between primary and secondary causality into his famous notion of divine formal causality. This notion of divine formal

¹³ Gregory Baum presents Hegel as anticipating "the radical rejection of extrinsicism in Christian Theology in the Protestant and Catholic tradition" in his *Religion and Alienation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), pp. 7-20.

¹⁴ For an excellent presentation of Rahner's anthropology with focus on personhood as process cf. Andrew Tallon, *Personal Becoming* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

causality becomes more and more central to the Rahnerian system—over the traditional way of understanding God's causal efficacy in terms of "efficient causality"—as his thought develops. Thus, Rahner resolves the problem of pantheism (always a problem whenever divine immanence is emphasized) by constructing a novel form of panentheism, not based on any "necessity" in God (*Deus in se*), but based on that "necessity" that flows intrinsically from the divine freedom really to be *Deus pro nobis*. God's free decision to be love beyond himself intrinsically entails his self-communication to the world through Christ and in the Spirit with a strict taxonomy in the interrelationship between these two 'moments.' Thus, Rahner eschews all Nominalistic positivity in his insistence that God graciously gives his very self as the entelechy and telos of the whole world process. Everything is intrinsically connected with everything else in this world which Rahner calls "God's body."¹⁶ *Selbstvollzug* is the intrinsic condition for all personal becoming—it even describes the Personal Becoming of God for us. Hegel required *Selbstvollzug* for God to be God; Rahner requires *Selbstvollzug* for God to be our God.

Can we go any further in our rehearsal of Rahner's recapitulation of the modern history of freedom? Did Rahner appropriate the materialist inversion of Hegelianism in Marx? I think I have already answered this question in the affirmative in my observations on Rahner's correction of Hegel. But this question is well worth pursuing further, because it is here that Rahner's theology becomes most explicitly *praxiological*. Rahner not only "inverts" Hegel with Marx, but his inversion becomes more fully "materialist" (in a sense yet to be clarified) than that of Marx. We turn, then, to the "materialization" of the transcendental ego in Marx.

Marx learned from Hegel that history is constituted by meaning, but, informed by the "transformational criticism" of Hegel by Feuerbach, Marx asked: whose meaning? For Hegel the ultimately effective intentionality behind the phenomena of history is *Geist* (or God).¹⁷ Divine "thought" is the reality behind the vicissitudes of history; meaning is the quasi-eschatological goal of the realization of the divine subjectivity (personality). God is *the* subject behind all events; all "others" are predicates. For Marx, Feuerbach had clearly established the "idealistic" character of this resolution to the question of meaning in history. However, Feuerbach himself finished his criticism with another idealistic abstraction: the replacement of God with "the human species." Feuerbach's redemption of humanity from the alienating God of Hegelian Christianity was merely noetic. Marx completed the critical inversion of Hegel by averring that concrete people in the concrete circumstances of their social and labor

¹⁶ Karl Rahner, "The Person in the Sacramental Event," *Theological Investigations* XIV (New York: Seabury, 1976), p. 172. For a Christological reflection on the history of God as a "divine drama of God-in-process" or God "doing himself" cf. Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 38.

¹⁷ For a cogent defense of Hegel's "concept of God" as corresponding to "the Christian concept of God" cf. Quentin Lauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-324.

relationships constitute the "subject" of history. This is the basic (and perduring) meaning and value of Marxist "materialism."¹⁸ Marx retained the Hegelian dialectic between "reality" and "appearances," but he translates "reality" into the concretely alienated relations and forces of human production, and "appearances" into the efficacy of ideology which mystifies people by leading them to identify what seems to be the case with what really is the case. Among these ideologies is religion, the "heavenly product" of alienation, which blesses mundane quietism. But the demystification of religion is only the beginning of human liberation which demands a concrete praxis that not merely reinterprets the world but changes it—curiously, in the direction of a goal which is a materialistically secularized version of the Kingdom of God.¹⁹

While there is much truth in a typically Catholic description of the recent shift in theology from the personal to the social (or from the primacy of theory to the primacy of praxis) as the movement from Rahner to Metz (envisioned as the theological rehearsal of the movement from Hegel to Marx),²⁰ I intend to claim that Rahner himself made the "materialist turn." Marx dismissed the God of Christianity, rendered Subject of history by Hegel, as an alien power. It is obvious that Hegel would have contested this interpretation by claiming that he had discovered the real God of Christianity over against the "Bad Infinite" of traditional religion. *Pace* Hegel, what about Rahner?

In his classical essays on the meaning of Mystery in Catholic theology (further elaborated throughout his work) Rahner insists that the most fundamental, altogether necessary, relationship between God and the human person is what he calls the "natural" one, wherein the divine presence is the basic, actualizing condition for the self-enactment of the human being in consciousness and freedom.²¹ The most primordial function of the immanence of the Transcendent is *practical*; the divine is given to be "used" (a peculiar twist on the Augustinian *uti!*). On this basic or "natural" level commerce with God is the tacit presupposition for *Selbstvollzug*. If God remains in some mysterious sense the ultimate Subject of history (as he does, of course, for Rahner), he remains such only by being the innermost activating principle of the self-actualization of the human person, who through this divine concurrence becomes completely responsible for all the concrete details of historical advance or decline. Like Hegel's, Rahner's theology is a long commentary on the Third Article of the Creed.²² It is a theology of Grace. But, unlike Hegel's

¹⁸ For this definition of materialism cf. Nicholas Lash, *A Matter of Hope* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), pp. 135-52.

¹⁹ For this "implicit theological *a priori* in Marx" cf. Gregory Baum, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

²⁰ For an illustration, Matthew Lamb, relating Metz to Rahner, says "We are reminded of Marx's criticism of Hegel." Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 119.

²¹ Karl Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology," *Theological Investigations IV* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), pp. 36-73.

²² For Hegel's "Christology of the third article," cf. Eugene Te Selle, *Christ in Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), pp. 86-105.

Lutheran focus on what might be called *gratia operans*, Rahner's Catholic emphasis falls on *gratia cooperans*.²³ "What God does in us with us" is to enable or to empower us to *do* ourselves in a praxis of discipleship to Christ unto the concrete realization of the ultimate realm of freedom. Here Rahner retrieves for historically conscious people the central theme of Catholic immanentism which enables us to discern "an internal, albeit dialectical, relation between the fruits of human endeavor and the Kingdom of God. . . ."²⁴ The *civitas terrena* is (not yet!) the *civitas Dei*.

The heart of the Rahnerian system is a universal Pneumatology within which, for example, his sapiential Christology is grounded. This universal Grace is consistently presented in praxiological terms. It is never an invitation to a trans-empirical, world-negating flight to the divine. While Rahner betrays his "modernism" in his focus on the human person, this personalism is *not* another illustration of "privatization." In this regard a distinction made by Charles Davis is most apposite. Davis distinguishes between the "private self" and the "interior self." "The interior self is the self-conscious subject in possession of his or her individuated being and activities and thus through self-possession is free. Such a self is the *political subject* par excellence. . . ."²⁵ When Rahner speaks of Grace in very modern terms as a "change in consciousness,"²⁶ the obvious context is the Catholic nature/grace problematic. But this description is patient of a more historical interpretation. In terms of the history of the differentiation of consciousness in the West, Rahner's understanding of Grace resonates with the wide consensus of contemporary theologians who insist that the "interior self" of consciousness and freedom (not the "private self") first emerged in prophetic Israel as a result of a deepened awareness of a Personal God who calls to responsible praxis of a socio-political nature. This "interior self" has developed into the "private self" of bourgeois modernity as a result of the reduction of the modern spirit to a frozen individualism with no reference to God.²⁷ Here is the religious root for any theological indictment of the pathos of modernity. And here is the point of departure for any Christian contribution to a postmodern world that seeks to overcome the one-dimensionality of modernity. Recovery of "God consciousness" is *the* condition for the possibility of the salvation of the West in our postmodern movement toward one world

²³ For a clear presentation of the Catholic conception of grace as "power"—making Augustine "the father of Catholicism in his doctrine of grace" cf. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man II* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), pp. 134-48.

²⁴ William Vander Marck, "Fundamental Theology: A Bibliographical and Critical Survey," *Religious Studies Review* 8, 3 (July 1982), 243. The author discusses the necessity of some form of grace immanentism or panentheism to ground the modern concept of freedom as self-determination.

²⁵ Charles Davis, *Theology and Political Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 178 (italics mine).

²⁶ Karl Rahner, "History of the World and Salvation History," *Theological Investigations V* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), p. 103.

²⁷ Cf. Charles Davis, *Body as Spirit: The Nature of Religious Feeling* (New York: Crossroad, 1976), p. 77.

for one humanity. However, everything depends on the content of the God who is to be recovered. The "Bad Infinite" or the "Alien Power" must cede to the reality of God as glimpsed on the face of the gentle Galilean. It is this human God who forbids us to make ourselves less than we are. It is this Promethean God who refers us to this world (his creation) for "working out our salvation." As Rahner affirms over and over again, human transcendence unto God is the condition for the possibility of human praxis toward God. Properly understood, Christian spirituality is Christian materialism.²⁸ There is no room for idealist abstractions focused on other-worldliness. Christian mysticism is validated only in the apologetics of prophetic praxis. As Rahner consistently insisted, Christianity is more concerned with the body than with the soul, with the earth than with heaven, with the material than with the "spiritual."²⁹

Having essayed a sympathetic interpretation of Rahner in the context of the modern history of freedom, I will attempt now to place the Rahnerian recapitulation of this tradition within the larger scope of the history of consciousness. The purpose of this next section is to delineate the type of consciousness alone appropriate for Christians in a world Church.

THE MODERN HISTORY OF FREEDOM WITHIN THE HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Recent reflection displays a passion to discover the historical roots of present consciousness. In general these attempts employ heuristic devices of a genetic kind. World history is explored in terms of epochal shifts in human consciousness under the broadly evolutionary model of a typical human life emerging from childhood through adolescence unto adulthood. Thus, John Cobb treats us to a panoramic survey of the history of the race, moving us from "primitive" through "civilized" to "axial" (the term made famous by Jaspers) consciousness.³⁰ The primitive self is the natural self with little or no sense of differentiation from the natural world. The civilized self is the socialized self with recognition of the difference between the natural and the social. The axial self is the individuated self, aware of the difference between the self and the social world. The great world religions served as the nurturing matrices whence the process of individuation emerged. In Israel the prophetic proclamation of the will of the Personal God led to that special form of human individuation known as the personal self.³¹ In all of the world religions, however, the price paid (in different degrees, to be sure) for nurturing individuation

²⁸ Rahner summarizes the principle of "Christian materialism" by insisting that "God causes the world, but not really in the world." *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978), p. 86.

²⁹ A good example of Rahnerian "materialism" can be found in his "The Body in the Order of Salvation," *Theological Investigations XVII* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp. 71-89.

³⁰ John Cobb, *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104. Cf. also Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955; Phoenix Edition, 1964), pp. 21ff.

was dualism, the refusal or rejection of this world in favor of another world of beauty, truth, and goodness.³² As Robert Bellah tells us this price of world rejection had to be paid for a clearly structured conception of the self to emerge. But in the modern period criticism of this other-worldliness has led either to the rejection of religion as essentially dualistic or to a retrieval of religion as the symbolic interpretation (in word and deed) of the ultimate conditions of existence in this world.

Religious dualism became implausible as axial consciousness became historical consciousness. Historical consciousness is a new sense of time as the content of human conation. This development is significant enough to constitute a "second axial transition," wherein people reflecting on their consciousness recognize themselves as its free and active cause.³³ To employ Rahnerian phraseology here — the cognitive is recognized as the condition of the possibility of the conative, but the conative is the concrete mediation of the cognitive. The conative is the whence and the whither of the cognitive. Intelligence is perceived as essentially practical for anyone historically conscious. Speculative intelligence cedes its traditional preeminence to practical intelligence when mind is understood as a "moment" of freedom.

The modern "turn to the subject" was a special period of explicitation in the axial development of Western consciousness. From this tradition we have learned that the configuration of consciousness at any time is a resultant of concrete conditions governing the social and labor relations of people—while at the same time those concrete circumstances are themselves the result of practical consciousness (albeit a practical consciousness basically unaware of its efficacy until recently). Now we can see that "the root of the irrationality of history is that we 'make' it without, however, having been able until now to make it consciously."³⁴

A new day dawns with a new dream: a new political and economic world order that exploits neither people nor nature. But such is the power of our global institutionalization of "original sin" that this dream seems to be merely the noetic consolation of humanistic elites decrying universal distortion or of visionary theologians during the kataphatic excesses of theological conventions!

But, despite the cosmic proportions of the structures of evil so painfully obvious today, there is reason to hope. Historical consciousness does not necessarily lead to a sterile relativism. For at least some people historical consciousness finds its fulfillment in a universalist, "planetary" consciousness.³⁵ This is the consciousness of those for whom the pronoun "we"—

³² Cf. Robert Bellah, "Religious Evolution" in *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 20-50.

³³ William Thompson, *Christ and Consciousness* (New York: Paulist, 1977), p. 114.

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (London, 1974), pp. 275-76 as quoted by Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1981), p. 11.

³⁵ William Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 128ff.

and no longer the "we/they" dichotomy—appropriately describes the self-identity of people living together in the "global village."³⁶ Planetary consciousness intends the overcoming of all narrow provincialisms which hinder the realization of a transcultural identity demanded for the adequate negotiation of human living in a pluralistic world in the process of becoming one world.

Such a planetary consciousness is the issue of a heuristic praxis appreciative of the cumulative successes of the wisdom traditions of humanity to date and anticipatory of wisdom yet to be learned by a humanity still in the making. Since particularity always means partiality, it is the intention of planetary consciousness to sublimate particularities in the "polyconsciousness" of a vital universalism.³⁷ A planetary consciousness is so differentiated that it can live empathetically in a global *coincidentia oppositorum*.³⁸

Planetary consciousness is transcultural or postconventional. The word, postconventional, recalls the work of Lawrence Kohlberg in his delineation of the stages of moral consciousness.³⁹ Ideally, in the course of moral maturation people grow toward genuine autonomy from a preconventional (childhood) through a conventional (adolescence) to a postconventional (adulthood) stage. At the postconventional stage people live and act from universal moral principles which they employ critically to test conventional moral norms received from their social context. This is the stage of personal moral freedom. But, as Charles Davis has pointed out, the full development of personal moral freedom requires a new social matrix.⁴⁰ "What is wanted is a social procedure, open in principle to all, for the testing of normative claims."⁴¹ Davis suggests that the critical social theory of Jürgen Habermas can specify such a social procedure. The cultivation of personal moral freedom needs a postconventional, universal social structure. "Only a society of freedom, justice, and equality could give the testing of its norms and values over to free and open discourse among all. It would be a truly emancipated society that succeeded in institutionalizing unconstrained communication about moral values as the basis of its social order."⁴²

Obviously, such a social structure is not yet. However, there are movements, both religious and secular, toward its realization. Rahner, for

³⁶ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Modern West in the History of Religion" (Presidential Address to the American Academy of Religion, Annual Meeting, 1983), *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52, 1 (March 1984), 5.

³⁷ Charles Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, p. 173.

³⁸ Cf. William Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp. 143ff.

³⁹ Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

⁴⁰ Charles Davis, "Our new religious identity," *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 9, 1 (Winter 1980), 25-39.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

one, envisions the present process of planetization as leading Christians to discern that "the message of Christianity is not tied to any particular stage or region of man's self-understanding. This meant that the understanding of the faith had to be detached from the mental horizons of Judaism and Hellenism, to become, as it ought to be, a dialogue with the world."⁴³ What Christian dialogue with the world might mean in regard to new social structures will be addressed in the final section of this paper.

A CHRISTIAN VISION OF HUMANITY, DIVINITY, AND COMMUNITY

In his recent book, *Religion in the Secular City*,⁴⁴ Harvey Cox specifies three conditions for the emergence of a new era: (1) a style of personal existence; (2) a theological vision; and (3) a corporate form. What follows is a Rahnerian elaboration on these conditions as a contribution to the role of systematic theology in the coming world Church.

Anthropological Vision

"Theology is anthropology" is Rahner's own summary of his systematic theology. This anthropology is biblically inspired and it resonates with the **antidualistic mood of current thought**. It is, indeed, a **modern translation** of the *imago Dei* theme, which defines the human in relation to the divine rather than viewing the human as part of the gradated hierarchy of an ordered cosmos. Its core affirmation is that the human person is, like God, a creative being of ethical responsibility.⁴⁵ If, in accord with the "pragmatic" mentality of the Semites, "being is doing," then human being is what the human being does. What is given in "human nature" is the concrete point of departure for a self-creative process of self-enactment in relation to God and world. Thus, Rahner's anthropology is thoroughly personalist, but never individualist. For Rahner a human person is a self-formative process through consciousness and freedom in a social context within a natural environment.

Selbstvollzug in freedom is the center of Rahner's anthropological vision. In this vision the function of mind is basically anamnestic. Reflection attempts ever more closely to recuperate or to approximate the fullness of lived experience. It flows from and guides practical self-enactment.

With other Christian anthropologists Rahner holds that human personhood is rooted in the experience of the divine immanence, the Holy Spirit. But he does not retain the traditional (Augustinian) spirituality of

⁴³ Karl Rahner, "History of Dogma," *Sacramentum Mundi* 2, p. 104.

⁴⁴ Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 210.

⁴⁵ Cf. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Becoming Human Together* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1977), p. 24.

the "solitary self" in worldless immediacy to God.⁴⁶ For Rahner the human person is "spirit" only to be "worldly" as conscious freedom. Gone is the perennial religious tendency to world rejection. Any divine immediacy must be mediated through involvement in the world, especially in the interhuman world. Rahner never forgets that the hermeneutical key to both Testaments is the intrinsic connection between creation and redemption.⁴⁷ Accordingly, in the words of Christ, "My Kingdom is not of this world," the crucial word is "this," i.e., the world as distorted by the history of sin. In no way does Rahner promote the "private self" of Cartesian modernity, that modern subjectivism that "represents a secularization of Christian interiority."⁴⁸ There is no real "self" prior to self-enactment in world with God. Again, Christian spirituality is Christian materialism.

Theological Vision

When it comes to talk about God Rahner is first and foremost the mystagogue, leading us into the Incomprehensible and Ineffable Mystery. In his *theology* Rahner never allowed Athens to be tutor to Jerusalem, while he in no way simply rejected the tradition of the "god of the philosophers." God is the Whence and the Whither of the whole world process. With Hegel Rahner brings God back into the world. Through Christ and in his Spirit God is revealed as immanent, as *for* his creation. From this divine decision to be *Deus pro nobis* everything flows with intrinsic order (which in no way obviates genuine novelty). All Nominalistic language about "divine decrees" disappears in light of this one divine decree which constitutes the world process as a divine becoming, a divine self-enactment, unto the realization of that "Kingdom of God" which is identical with God himself, who "will be what he wants to be."⁴⁹ Just as the "soul" immediately objectifies itself in constituting its corporality as the means of its self-enactment, so God objectifies himself in the world as the means of his self-enactment as love *ad extra*. If the essence of freedom lies not in the notion of "choice" but in that of self-determination, the divine freedom is identical with the divine self-enactment which "informs" the world process. God's freedom is God's love as revealed in Christ. In creation humanity becomes the image of what God is, and in the Incarnation God becomes the image of what humanity is to be.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ The unity of love of God and love of neighbor is a central theme in Rahner's theology. A recent exemplification is his *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, cited in footnote 16. Cf. also Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Seabury, 1980), pp. 808ff. on "the death of the (Augustinian) 'immediacy' of God."

⁴⁷ Walter Kasper, *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1980), p. 118.

⁴⁸ Charles Davis, *Body as Spirit*, p. 77.

⁴⁹ Karl Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, p. 27.

⁵⁰ Quentin Lauer so describes the paradigmatic Christology of Hegel in his *Hegel's Concept of God*, p. 317. Rahner would resonate with this anthropocentrism!

Not only has there been a progressive development of human self-consciousness; there has also been a concomitant development in human God-consciousness. As his disciples, we learn of God from Jesus Christ. We learn of a God who will not be worshiped at the expense of humanity. Rahnerian panentheism avers that God "needs" us to realize his glory, since his glory is humanity fully alive.

Ecclesiological Vision

The Christian Church is no enchanted fane.⁵¹ Inspired by the Johannine Christ who proclaimed at the well in Samaria: "neither here nor in Jerusalem," Rahner proclaims the nonexistence of the profane. A "world of grace" grounds a sacramental view of the Church as historical mediation of grace. Thus, Rahner eschews the rather typical Catholic temptation to ecclesiocentrism. He uses his "ecclesiology from above" (wherein the Church is seen in soteriological continuity with Christ) to critique the empirical Church which is more often a burden than the efficacious sacrament of salvation. In his later writings Rahner is quite bold in his criticism of the institutional Church. His calls for reform stem, however, not from a bourgeois moralism but from his conviction that the clear advances that have been made in Christian self-awareness (instigated often enough by non-Christian catalysts) must be reflected in the concrete structures of the Church.

As we have seen so far, the notion of *freedom* is the key to Rahner's anthropology and theology. It is central as well in his ecclesiology. All ecclesiastical "positivity" (doctrines and practices imposed on people by appeals to formal authority rather than to rational insight) must yield to new ecclesial structures of freedom. The hallmark of the new Christian community becomes: "Look how they live together in freedom!"⁵²

Anticipating in hope the image of the new Church to emerge after the end of the "Pian epoch," Rahner dreams ecclesial dreams wherein the "basic substance of the faith" unites Christians to fulfill their mission to the world.⁵³ In the new Church (wherein membership is by way of voluntary association) Christians will live and act from a vision of God through Christ in the Spirit, as the sustaining ground of a mystico-prophetic praxis in and for the world. Without this new community Christian freedom remains idealistic. The question of how this new community is emerging throughout the world Church will be addressed in the next section of this paper.

⁵¹ Karl Rahner, "The Person in the Sacramental Event," *Theological Investigations* XIV, p. 169.

⁵² Karl Rahner, "The Church and the Freedom of the Individual," *Theological Investigations* XX (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 63.

⁵³ Karl Rahner, "Dream of the Church," *ibid.*, pp. 133-42.

WORLD CHURCH AND WORLD RELIGIONS

A religion thrives only to the extent that it can continue to illuminate the totality of lived experience. Since human experience is ever-changing, every living religion has a history dialectically grounded in identity and adaptation. Throughout the modern period in the West the development of differentiated consciousness has accelerated, beginning with the philosophical "turn to the subject" with its subsequent modifications and later developments in psychology and sociology. Paralleling these developments, theology has moved from a broadly transcendental phase to its contemporary critical form. "As a result Christianity has become the most self-conscious faith of all the faiths."⁵⁴

A planetary or world consciousness requires a world religion and not just in the idealistic sense of a universalist intentionality. A postconventional consciousness needs a postconventional social matrix which sustains (to employ the language of Habermas) untrammelled communicative praxis unto the attainment of consensus on truly universal, postconventional, values. The national State has become anachronistic in principle.⁵⁵ It cannot nurture a postconventional self-identity. With the modern expulsion of religion from politics, the latter devolved into functional strategies for bureaucratic control of society. The contemporary repoliticization of religion rests on the wager that religion, because of its (at least intentional) universalism, can supply the necessary social matrix for the further emancipation of the human spirit from all remaining narrow provincialisms. But in order to rise to this occasion the particular religious traditions must expand their conventional horizons through interreligious dialogue and cooperation. (This would be an interreligious form of Avery Dulles's notion of "cultural reciprocity.")

As world Church Christianity must encounter in a spirit of openness the other world religions. Just as Christianity learned much from Hellenism when it turned to the Gentiles, so now Christians have much to learn from the religious traditions beyond the West. In many ways its recent history of creative confrontation with "the secular fruits of the Gospel" in the modern West (science, history, philosophy, . . .) has prepared Christian theology for the broader encounter now begun.⁵⁶ For many Christians (especially Catholics) Rahner's theological reformulation of the meaning of the gospel in response to modern criticism has provided a more differentiated articulation of the Christian vision of reality. This appreciative understanding of our own tradition is an essential condition for the possibility of bringing our Christian particularity into a universal

⁵⁴ Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1982), p. 93.

⁵⁵ Cf. Charles Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, p. 165.

⁵⁶ A well-known celebration of the secular fruits of the gospel as Christianity's legacy to the "post-religious" (as he saw it) emerging world culture is Arend Theodoor van Leeuwen's *Christianity in World History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964).

situation of dialogue with the hope of reciprocal enrichment of the different religious traditions. As historically conscious Christians anticipating a planetary consciousness, we know we have much to learn from other religious traditions. But we must maintain that we have much to give as well. Nothing will be accomplished by assuming a rapid, formless "openness" which would make us "like Don Juans courting all the gods."⁵⁷

As many have often observed, we Christians have much to learn from the East on the mystical element in religion. Our activist, pragmatic approach to the world is clearly in need of critique. Our utilitarian perception of reality must be refined by a development of our "passivities." We need a new sense of participation, of wholeness, of the interrelatedness of all things.⁵⁸ We must recover a more contemplative appreciation of nature. The Christian God is a God of nature as well as of history.⁵⁹ Indeed, a cosmological focus has traditionally been characteristic of Catholic theology (as illustrated, for instance, in the cosmological structure of the theology of Thomas Aquinas). If prophetic praxis is the most apposite response to the redeeming God of history, mysticism is the appropriate response to the God of nature. Not only the self but the world has divine depths with whose "groanings" we must resonate. The mystical way is the way to those depths. It is "other-worldly" not in a dualistic sense, but in the sense that it finds the nourishing presence of the Other in this world which is becoming his glory.

The biblical witness to the connection between creation and the history of redemption is reflected in our contemporary understanding of the relationship between mystical and prophetic spiritualities. As Rahner would tell us, mysticism is the condition that makes prophetic praxis possible, while praxis is the mediation of mysticism. In a curious twist on a common sociological understanding of religion as always playing a conservative role in society (thus exhausting its meaning in this social function), some political theologies today tend to give the impression that the meaning of religion is exhausted in its innovative, critical, and even revolutionary function for a better society. But the mystical tradition (both Eastern and Western) insists that religion transcends anthropocentric "functions." Rahner concurs with this insistence when he tells us that, while it is indeed anthropologically "useful" to love God, the higher call is "the blessed uselessness of love of God for his own sake."⁶⁰ This is the eucharistic love of adoration and acceptance, the very heart of worship

⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur, "Relation of Philosophy to Religion," in Paul Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1957), p. 639.

⁵⁸ For a thought-provoking presentation of the theme of "participation" in the history of human consciousness cf. Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, n.d.).

⁵⁹ Cf. David Tracy and Nicholas Lash, eds., *Cosmology and Theology* (Concilium 166; New York: Seabury, 1983), for a challenge to the "anthropocentric" character of much contemporary theology toward a return to cosmological issues.

⁶⁰ Karl Rahner, "God's Transcendence and Concern for the Future," *Theological Investigations* XX, p. 180.

which is the core of religion. This mysticism is not unrelated to the practical concerns of Christianity, but these practical concerns do not inform its direct intentionality. The mystical way is the way of prayer resonating with the divine depths of the world, the way of "popular religion" in Latin America, the way nourishing contemporary theologies of play and imagination. Without this mysticism there is no "interior self," and thus, no "political self." We should have learned this lesson by now. Western secularism has thoroughly disenchanting the world in order to manipulate, control, and dominate nature. But this world, thus disenchanting, is ecologically on the brink of disaster. And the disenchanting Western secularist mind now threatens a global nuclear holocaust.

The Catholic Christian christological tradition is in need of religious nourishment from the contemplative East. We may even learn how to realize self-transcendence without sacrificing "wholeness."⁶¹ After all, one of the attractive themes of traditional Christian protology was the gift of "integrity." This "integrity" must be anticipated through a rediscovered sense of participation bodily with other embodied selves in the divine body of this world. Yes, we have much to learn from Eastern mysticism.

On the other hand, as part of the religious tradition of Western monotheism, we Christians carry a special understanding of reality as history with a special evaluation of history as potentially theophanous. Now it is a well-known Western generalization of Eastern religious traditions to claim that they are antihistorical, that they overcome the painful vicissitudes of history by relegating the temporal process to the nugatory realm of illusion. Today, however, this generalization must be nuanced. There are religious traditions within Buddhism, for instance, that do not dismiss history as unreal. Perhaps because of the catalytic force of Western expansion into Asia, certain developments of a positive attitude toward history have been discerned within the religious resources of Mahayana Buddhism. For some schools within this tradition enlightenment occurs when the disciple "sees that the whole of phenomenal existence (*samsara*) is in truth ultimate reality itself (*nirvana*)."⁶² To quote George Rupp:

Interpreting the relationship of *nirvana* to *samsara* as that of actuality to potentiality rather than as that of reality to illusion does, to be sure, entail a positive valuation of development which is absent from many Mahayana metaphysical systems. But such positive valuation of change is nonetheless very congenial to Mahayana spiritual ideals.⁶³

If Buddhist soteriology moves away from an unnuanced understanding of *nirvana* as escape from *samsara* (traditionally envisioned in total

⁶¹ The anticipation of "wholeness" or "integrity" is the positive side of the contemporary negation of dualism. Cf. John Dunne, *The Way of all the Earth* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978) and Charles Davis, *Body as Spirit*.

⁶² George Rupp, *Christologies and Cultures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 240.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

contrast to *nirvana*), we should expect to see new vitality in the ancient Buddhist symbols themselves, a vitality that would enable them from their own resources to handle the now inexorable fact of history, change, process, novelty, etc. But these inner developments in Buddhism are just beginning. We Christians, who have only recently become aware of our own long tradition of antiworldly dualism, have every reason to be patient with other religious traditions for which history was never theophany. In the meantime we can raise the "crucial question of whether or not a religious system is viable in the twentieth century if it declines to interpret as religiously significant man's increasing capacity to shape his personal corporate life within the sphere of phenomenal existence."⁶⁴

It seems to me that the present situation of the emerging world Church is a *kairos* for Catholic Christianity to reappropriate the moments of truth in its own "pagan" and "Pelagian" instincts.⁶⁵ Its "paganism" will open it to the wholeness of a worldly mysticism. Its "Pelagianism" will enable it to see the continuity between its political praxis for social justice throughout the world and the ultimate realm of redemption, the Kingdom of God.

Catholic paganism is a sacramentalism which perceives the whole of creation as proclaiming the glory of God. This paganism is Christian materialism which refuses to limit the range of theologically significant experience to the so-called "religious" or "spiritual" realm. For this paganism grace is the divinization of the world, the elevation of the person, the salvation of society, the actualization of a universal potential, given only to be fulfilled. Uniting in theory and in praxis nature and history as what God has "always already joined together," it is simultaneously ecological and social in its speaking and in its doing. It needs the Wisdom tradition of the Bible to contextualize its prophetic responsibility, and to overcome its "once-born" innocence it needs to embrace a hermeneutics of suspicion from theological, philosophical and sociological traditions of criticism.

Catholic Pelagianism might describe the peculiarly Catholic form of prophetic praxis. In the book quoted at the beginning of this paper Langdon Gilkey specifies four characteristics of Catholicism that, appropriately retrieved, have "great contemporary power and relevance."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁶⁵ By "paganism" here I mean a religious attitude toward nature and the natural that celebrates life in the world. This "paganism" would describe that sense of humanity and grace found in Catholic life at its best. Cf. Jean Danielou, *God and the Ways of Knowing* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company; Meridian Books printing, 1957), pp. 16, 21; 23-24. For testimony to the strength of Catholic paganism cf. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 217. For a dialectical retrieval of Pelagianism (without moralism) in light of the new historically conscious focus on praxis cf. Karl Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, p. 36 and Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace* (New York: Paulist, 1979), pp. 41ff.

⁶⁶ Langdon Gilkey, *Catholicism Confronts Modernity*, p. 17.

Catholicism is a *historical people* living on every continent of the world with (1) a sense of the importance of tradition; (2) a sense of humanity and grace; (3) a sense of the presence of God mediated through symbols to the entire course of ordinary human life; and (4) a drive toward rationality. Now it seems to me that no other Catholic theologian has retrieved these powerful characteristics of Catholicism in a way more appropriate to our contemporary situation of a world Church than Karl Rahner. Rahner has (1) reappropriated the Catholic tradition as a tradition of freedom; (2) formulated a Christian anthropology wherein the Incarnation is paradigmatic for all humanity; (3) developed a pan-sacramental vision of all reality; and (4) shifted the focus in our tradition from speculative to practical rationality.

These Rahnerian contributions to Catholicism can now be focused on the issue of world Church. In this context many theologians have evinced significant interest in and appreciation for the work of Jürgen Habermas. In his massive critique of the dead-end of positivism (similar to Rahner's critique of ecclesiastical "positivity") Habermas reopened discussion with "the modern history of freedom," as illustrated in Kant, Hegel, and Marx (just as Rahner's work can be seen as a theological recapitulation of this tradition).⁶⁷ To address the issue of what we have called emerging planetary consciousness Habermas has outlined the basic requirements for a social structure appropriate to this stage of human history. But perhaps the major problem with the social solution proffered by Habermas is that "the structure of the argument is such that no appeal to the practical self-consciousness of any identifiable social group is made, or, it seems, need be made."⁶⁸ While Marx had his "proletariat," Habermas has no "target group," no "agent of social transformation," to whom to address his critical theory.⁶⁹

Habermas is convinced that religion, even the Christian religion which for him is the most rational, is no longer viable.⁷⁰ But Rahner, our "Catholic Pelagian," is bold enough to name the potentially messianic community! This revolutionary community is not in any direct sense the universal Christian Church, the "Great Church," inherited from the days of Christendom, and heavy with the cultural mortgages of its institutional forms. It is the Church of the future, being built now from below by the free association of mission-minded Christians everywhere.⁷¹ The future of the Church, as world Church, lies with these "basic communities" in the process of declericalized, democratic self-construction on the basis of unconstrained discourse toward consensus on the universal values of the

⁶⁷ For Habermas's resumption of dialogue with the "abandoned stages of reflection" in German thought from Kant to Marx cf. Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981), pp. 53ff.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 384.

⁷⁰ Cf. Charles Davis, *Theology and Political Society*, pp. 139ff.

⁷¹ Cf. Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York: Seabury, 1974), pp. 108ff.

Christian tradition. Rahner foresees these basic communities in time replacing parishes as they now are "spread out evenly, territorially, almost like police-stations!"⁷² These basic communities, ecumenical by their very nature, will become the local Churches of the world Church. If Christianity is to survive in the coming global epoch, if the human person is not to be sacrificed to the Moloch of a pan-bureaucratized collectivism, these basic Christian communities must be positively promoted within the universal Church.⁷³ It seems that Catholic neo-Pelagianism is spawning an ecclesial neo-Donatism, but this time graciously liberated from "moralism."⁷⁴

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The point of this paper is simply summarized: Rahner remains relevant. His theology has much to offer the emerging world Church.

If a theology is praxiological when the basis for its reflections is authentic experience (faith, work, prayer, suffering, freedom, communicative praxis, etc.) and its goal is to say what must be the case if such experience is authentic, to affirm that in reality which validates the experience—then Rahner is a praxiological theologian.

Rahner's affinity with Hegel gives the *prima facie* impression that his theology is idealist. This is the way Metz has interpreted Rahner's "always already" there of grace in the world as supportive of that "historical quietism" (waiting to see what God will do next!) which is the hallmark of Christian idealism.⁷⁵ But I contend that in Rahner's "Hegelianism" the accent falls directly not on the praxis of *Geist* or God but on the human "spirit in the world" as *Selbstvollzug*. With Robert Kress I resonate where he says that if Thomas Aquinas should be called "St. Thomas of the Creator," then Karl Rahner should be called "St. Karl of the Creature"—or equivalently, the "Defender of the Human."⁷⁶

Rahner has furthered the cause of ridding Christianity of dualism and its idealistic consequences. He is, indeed, more materialist than Marx since he takes materialism all the way without reductionism into "final validity" in the eternity of God—an eternity the *content* of which is the concrete material history of the material world.⁷⁷

In this paper I have attempted to explore the contribution of systematic theology to the emerging world Church under the inspiration of Karl Rahner. Rahner has always been concerned with the universal elements

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ For a good treatment of "morality without moralism" cf. *ibid.*, pp. 64-70.

⁷⁵ Cf. Nicholas Lash, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁷⁶ Robert Kress, "A Response to Fr. McCool," William Kelly, ed., *Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honor of Karl Rahner* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), p. 100.

⁷⁷ For a representative text cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, p. 321.

in Christianity. This is evident in his Logos Christology and in his universal Pneumatology. I have chosen the anthropological correlate of the latter—the issue of freedom—to present Rahner's contribution to our present *kairos*: Christianity becoming world Church.

In presenting Rahner's thought as a recapitulation of "the modern history of freedom" I sought to show that his theology is eminently praxiological, i.e., it flows from and formulates freedom in the context of a tradition of freedom, thereby reappropriating this Western "secular" tradition by revealing its roots in the gospel. Hence his affinity with Hegel who did the same thing—but in an idealistic way. The word "affinity" here is really too mild. It seems to me that Hegel's thought is absolutely central to Rahner's theology of freedom. While Rahner, as a praxiological theologian, was compelled to essay an overcoming of Hegel's idealism, without Hegel's universalist interpretation of Christianity Rahner's contribution is not adequately intelligible. My entire presentation of Rahner's universalist theology throughout this paper rests on the cogency of my conviction that Rahner must be read from the perspective of Hegel's massive influence on his thought. To further, however, my case that Rahner is a praxiological theologian of freedom (materialist rather than idealist) I attempted to relate his thought to Marx.

I then placed the modern history of freedom within the very general panorama of the "history of consciousness" in order to show that Rahner's theology of freedom (or *Selbstvollzug*) is not only a formulation of the universal value Christianity has to offer all people, but also to show that the history of freedom has led to the necessity of a planetary, postconventional, transcultural consciousness alone appropriate to a world civilization and to a world Church. Hegel discovered that Christianity, the "absolute religion," proclaims that "all are free." Rahner agrees that this universal freedom is identical with authentic human praxis (self-enactment). But it is insufficient merely to register the history of freedom. Freedom must be made concretely universal through new social (ecclesial) forms of living open to all. We all must learn from all how to be free, how to self-enact, how to be authentic.

I then attempted briefly to relate Christianity to the world religions, focusing on an understanding of history as the actualization of freedom as the contribution of Christianity. Subsequently, I made a few remarks on the specific contributions that might come from a renewed Catholic Christianity whose christology may creatively resonate with Eastern mysticism and whose "paganism" and "Pelagianism" could be practical contributions toward a this-worldly realization of freedom for all people.

Rahner's practical theology of freedom as authentic self-enactment in a world with others is one way of illustrating the value Christianity as world Church proclaims to all. Given our situation today, I find it superbly apposite.

I conclude this paper with a lament which in hope we Christians may take as a challenge. Almost thirty years ago Lewis Mumford wrote:

Today, at the very moment when universal man clamours as never before to be born, the axial religions are almost as great an impediment to this birth as are self-enclosed tribal and national societies. What axial religion has yet embodied, in charity and humility, the universality that its founder professed?⁷⁸

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⁷⁸ Lewis Mumford, *The Transformations of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956; Torchbook edition, 1972), p. 79.