

STRUCTURE IN RELIGION AND THE NEEDS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

RICHARD BERGERON, O.F.M.

Speaking of the problem of the relationship between religion and the surrounding world has almost become a banality. It is a problem as old as christianity itself and theologians have been aware of it in every age. In general, the object of the theological reflection was the relationship between civil and religious powers: the sword and the cross. Today, however, the problem is posed in very different terms. Religion itself is put in question by modern man. This paper will attempt to explain the origin of the present problems and then show how and under what conditions religion can still play a role in the contemporary world.

I From Cosmocentrism to Anthropocentrism

1. Man in God's World (the cosmos)

God's world is that world which has come from the hands of the Creator and, after a long evolution, has arrived at its present state of development. God's world is the universe with all of its physical laws; it is that nature in which man lives. It is no secret that man has never been satisfied with simply leaving nature in its primary state; he has progressively moved through a hunting civilization to one of collecting or gathering his food to one of agriculture and animal husbandry. Man has always been an inventor. He has invented tools and has brought many projects to fulfillment. But the framework of his realizations has never exceeded that of nature itself. Until very recently man lived in close proximity to nature and it remained the immediate context of his existence. Nature had the prestige of the numinous for him and was seen as a sovereign, governing reality which provoked both admiration and fear in man. "The eternal silence of the infinite spaces fills me with fear," wrote Pascal. Man lived a role subordinate to nature. Nature was a domain that remained outside of

the control and reach of man who was at the same time, beneficiary and victim of laws he could not escape.¹

Nature was considered to be a creature whose laws required respect. There was no getting out from under those laws; there was no turning them against nature herself to escape from her hold and to reduce her to the service of man. Nature was God's sacrament, the servant of his desires, the expression of his relationship with man where his anger and his benevolence could be seen. Cosmic phenomena, earthquakes, drought, rains, sickness, were so many realities that escaped the prevision and control of men and represented many experiences of divine presence and concern. Nature was, in a very real sense, a continuing theophany of immense proportions.

Religion corresponded to man's need to establish himself in an harmonious relationship with that nature seen as the expression of a rewarding and punishing divine providence. Faced with the sacredness of nature, man was obliged to adopt an attitude of silent submission, of calm acceptance or of ardent supplication to win divine favor for himself. Religion is born of man's need to escape from the situation in which he finds himself in the universe, from the insecurity of his existence and the inevitability of death. Anthropologically, religion appears "as man's answer to the demands of his human condition which impel him to seek security and stability through identification with a reality greater, worthier and more lasting than his own. Religion represents the efforts of man to adapt himself to his human condition not only to make it bearable, but also to make certain that his life has a meaning."² Religion appeared as a system of rites, of gestures and of things destined to constantly relocate man within the world context and thus to guarantee him a certain security and to assure him of a certain protection against the insecurities of the world whose structures seemed immutable to him. Thus, religious feast days and celebrations are always closely connected to the rhythmic cycle of nature.

We can say that Christianity, considered as a religion, aims at satisfying man's need to escape from the condition he is born into, from the oppression of time and of destiny, thanks to the proclamation of the revelation of God in Christ. Religion was

lived by the great majority of christians much more as a means of re-establishing man in harmony with the universe, whose sovereignty was identified with the Lordship of God, than as the expression of a covenant expressing itself in a worship of spirit and truth.

2. The World of Man

That situation, still prevalent not so very long ago, has changed today to an unbelievable degree. We are at the end of an era and at the dawning of a new world. Our christian conscience has great difficulty in truly realizing the magnitude of the change and its profound effects upon the conscience of mankind. We are at a decisive turning point in history. A turning point "is a place where a break occurs between the past and the future, more precisely, between an actual situation inherited from the past and a whole set of new possibilities which appear abruptly thanks to important discoveries, where new horizons open up and humanity is propelled towards a few future."³

This turning-point of history has come about through science and technology. It is no longer kings, governors, conquerors or philosophers who leave their mark on the world but scientists. Science has given birth to a technology which allows man to become increasingly the master of nature. Sickness, of course, still exists but man is able to diagnose it, prevent it and fight it to the extent that he has doubled his life-expectancy. We have no control over the thermometer but we can protect ourselves from heat and cold. Man lives at a distance from nature; he transforms it, dominates it and places it at his service. "Nature becomes the matter and the instrument of the creative action of man."⁴ Consequently, it suddenly loses its numinous and sacred character; it is no longer God's servant. Man lives in a world fashioned by his own hands. Nature becomes the material that man needs to experience his own creative liberty, to make a world which is his, a world according to his own good pleasure. Man builds for himself a world in his own image. Nature is the quarry from which the world of man emerges. And this world of man is made for man; it is centered on man; it speaks of man; it reveals man and

can easily hide God. Man has passed over from cosmocentrism to anthropocentrism in a decisive manner.

Man builds his world without the God-hypothesis. In cosmocentrism, God was master in every domain; man is or aspires to be master of every domain. One has the impression that ever accomplishment and conquest of man pushes God further and further back into the world of shadows. The idea of God loses its consistency and slips away from man's understanding. God does not seem to have anything to do with this world any more; he no longer enters into the categories of man's mind. Every progress of man seems to indicate a set-back for God. After his eviction from his cosmic residence, God took refuge, so to speak, in the obscure realm of the psychic and the unconscious. Psychoanalysis is in the process of putting him out of this last refuge.⁵ Each discovery of man brings about, without any doubt, "a diminishing in the search for a *religious* protection from the insecurities of this world, a world which used to be thought of as being immutable in its structure."⁶ For this reason that religion which, on the conscious level of the christian masses, served to re-situate man in harmony with the universe, no longer corresponds to anything; it seems useless and without a function. The world of man is radically secular.

3. Man in His World

The turning-point of history that we are now living is so decisive and radical that it affects man to the depth of his being. Man is an incarnate consciousness and in a situational state: there is a mutual over-lapping between man and the world, between the manner that man experiences his existence and the manner that the world appears to him as a structured ensemble of situations and tasks. His relationship of self to himself (to his past and his personal future); his relationship to nature and to other men, and finally his relationship to the mystery of God—all these things are completely transformed. A new horizon of rational comprehension, a new sensitivity towards values goes along with this new manner of being in the world. A new man is born from a new world.⁷

This man has built a world which is a prolongation of himself.

He transforms nature into a dimension of the human body and spirit. People recognize themselves in their car, in their kitchen equipment and in their living-room furniture. Technology prolongs our senses into the social world. Marshall McLuhan has shown that the appearance of a new technology which prolongs one or several of our senses into the social world, provokes, by the very fact, new relationships between the senses in a culture.⁸ And it is this change of sensorial relationships, resulting from diverse exteriorizations of our senses, which is at the basis of cultural changes. The organization of society, economic and political imperatives, the communication media, all bring about a levelling-down among men as far as thought, needs sentiments and aspirations are concerned. Individual thought, the victim of the indoctrination of opinion-makers, is drowned in the mass media; advertisement and the general climate of society condition man and create real or fictitious needs which are common to all and stir up common longings. The men of western civilization think in the same way, have the same psychological reactions, experience the same needs and the same aspirations. H. Marcuse is right when he speaks of a uni-dimensional man.

This man is characterized by an ensemble of ideas and conceptions of man and the universe but still more by a particular sensitivity towards certain fundamental values. A value is something that the conscience sees as a response to certain existential possibilities, and therefore as something worthwhile being pursued. This is why every value is a promise, that is, a hope and a duty at the same time.

Contemporary man pursues new values with enthusiasm but with less and less utopia. Contemporary man has lost his naïveté, as Jaspers said. He experiences lucidity more and more. This experience consists, very simply, in the awakening of a conscience which was drowsy from habit and diversion. Through the experience of lucidity, man becomes conscious of the deep irrationality of the world around him. "The experience of lucidity is a torture for the intelligence and the misery of the intelligence gives birth to sentiments: anger, disgust, nausea, but above all revolt. In every case, it is a question of a reaction of hate."⁹ The lucid man sees the world in its savagery and its inhumanity; he observes that

the world of man is very often a world against man, that basic values are contradicted by the structures of society, that the deepest aspirations of men are frustrated. He observes that the world of man is a gigantic machine that man put in motion but over which he lost control: the machine keeps advancing, crushing everything in its way. Man no longer succeeds in situating himself in his world; he feels like a foreigner, unable to integrate all the elements of his world. He believes in truth but he no longer knows where he is going; he believes in freedom and justice but he feels oppressed; he longs for human brotherhood but he sees that the system divides men; he possesses material goods but he feels possessed by them. In other words, man is unable to live in harmony with the world he created.

II Religion on Trial

The question which arises, therefore, is the following: can religion still mean something for man today? Does it still have a role to play? Can it help man to situate himself in his world? Can it help to establish a harmony between man and his world?

1. Religion Forgotten

We are forced to admit that, *de facto*, religion has socially less and less place in the world of man. The process of secularization appears more and more as left-overs from a dated civilization. The cathedrals of Montreal and New York, overshadowed by the imposing sky-scrapers which surround them, are striking symbols of a religion which is crushed by the structures of the contemporary world. Man of today has not integrated religion into the structures of his world and religion has not succeeded in keeping man within its confines. From the time of the Renaissance, the various spheres of human activity such as art, philosophy, literature and politics, have gradually slipped away from the influence of the christian religion and have assumed their own autonomy. The world of man and the world of religion have become two hermetic and parallel realities. It would seem that religion has lost the revolution.

Many men think that the disappearance of religion is an excel-

lent thing. It is a question of principle for them. Since Nietzsche's great declaration on the death of God, since the appearance of Marxism and psychoanalysis, religion is considered either as an opium which puts man to sleep or as the worst alienation possible; it resembles a Moloch which devours man. For these men, religion is a murderer from the beginning. It is responsible for many murders: it stifled consciences by its laws; it assassinated intelligences by its dogmatism; it crushed freedoms by its authoritarianism. Besides these psychological murders, religion has committed many physical murders starting with the crusades, passing through the inquisition and the wars of religion, and ending with its collusion with the established order, which, in many countries, keeps man in slavery. Religion must disappear if man is to live fully.

Religion, moreover, always according to the men we are speaking of here, belongs to a past stage of humanity's evolution; it corresponds to a civilization in which man had not yet dissociated himself from the *in se* (essence) of things, a civilization in which he had not yet taken a distance in his relationship to the world of nature and in which he had not yet arrived at independence as far as his relation to cosmic forces were concerned. Vahian develops this idea in his article on the end of the religious era.¹⁰ Bonhoeffer had written before him: "The time when we could speak to men about everything with theological and pious words is past, just as the time of spirituality and conscience, that is, the time of religion in general, is past. We are advancing towards a totally unreligious age . . . All of revelation and our christian theology, nineteen hundred years old, rely on the religious *a priori* of men. 'Christianity' has always been a form of religion (perhaps the true one). If we discover some day that this *a priori* does not exist, but was rather a form of human experience dependent on history and subject to perish, if therefore men become radically unreligious—what then does this situation signify for Christianity? Once that which has been the foundation of our christianity until now is taken away, our religion can have effect only on a few remaining cavaliers or a handful of intellectually disloyal men."¹¹

For Bonhoeffer and the radical theologians, religion seems a dated form of christianity. The christian religion is a clothing of

christianity and this clothing has changed in aspect from one age to another. Religion as a cultic and social organization is not a necessary incarnational form of christianity. Christianity is called to rid itself of its religious form. For what does a liturgy, a worship, a preaching mean for an unreligious man? It is thus necessary to install an *ecclesia* which belongs fully to the world. Christianity must become a-religious, "secular." It must speak of God in a secular manner and lose its vertical dimension to live in a purely horizontal direction. To be christian is to live "for the other" in the world. Christ must become the Lord of the world, the Lord of secular men. Bultmann did not go far enough with his existential interpretation; hence forth we must interpret the Jesus-event in an unreligious or secular way. Karl Barth can lay claim to the origin of this idea of a christianity without religion. In his voluminous *Dogmatics* he sets out to show that the revelation of God is both the assumption and the abolition of religion.

More radical thinkers, wishing to bridge the gap between christianity and contemporary culture, believe that it is insufficient to speak of an religionless or secular christianity; according to them, we must speak of an atheistic christianity. In their desire to take contemporary culture seriously, these radical theologians see themselves forced to live the death of God since culture is deeply atheistic. Atheism, in fact, is accepted as a cultural phenomenon. The death of God is a saving event. It is an indication of man's accession to autonomy and independence as well as the death of religion. God and transcendence have ceded the depth of their reality to man and the world.

2. The Future of Religion

This criticism of religion certainly contains many elements of truth but it seems much too radical. It is not at all evident that the christian religion is an accidental covering-over of christianity. It is true that the prophets of the Old Testament condemned institutionalized religion; Christ himself contested the role of the Temple which was the center and the symbol of the Jewish religion; the New Testament does not use the word "religion" to describe christianity. The first christians were accused of atheism. This contesting of religion that we find in Scripture aims at the

religious system considered as a cultic, ethical and ritualistic system which pretends to save man by claiming to be the unique mediating agent between God and man. The fact remains, however, that religion seems to be an essential though secondary mode of expression of christianity. The basic reality of christianity is the initiative of God who saves us in Jesus Christ. This salvation, in its totality a gift of God, is received in faith. Faith in its turn is seen both as the gift of God and the response of man to the realities of salvation. This faith seeks to express itself in a communal and social manner, as well as in a way that is prayerful and cultic. As an individual and collective cultic expression, the christian religion seems to be an essential modality of faith and a constitutive element of christianity. Moreover, this cultic and collective expression has an inner tendency to become organized and institutionalized. It must be affirmed, therefore, that christianity is, though secondarily, a religious system, a religion understood in the sense of a system serving as a necessary mediation between men and the world of God.

I would add that religion in the anthropological sense spoken of earlier is also a dimension of christianity. For there is no religion in the sense of a system regulating the relationship between the natural and the supernatural, which does not imply a dimension of religion in the sense of a system aiming to regulate the relationship between man and the world. There is no christianity without the Church and there is no Church without religion.

This is why we must express our disagreement with those who opt for a religionless christianity, whether it be secular or atheistic, for they rob christianity of one of its essential dimensions. The God of christians is the God of the world and of history. In a cosmocentric vision of the world, religion was organized in the function of the God of the cosmos. The religious dimension of the Church was strongly marked by a certain cosmogony and by the rhythm of nature; it helped man to situate himself in relationship to the universe by situating him in relationship to God. The world of man is the world of history. Religion must be organized in the function of the God of history; the christian religion of the future must be more anthropological than cosmological. Christianity, as religion, must help man to situate himself in his own world. The

religious ethos of the Church, of christianity, must cease being cosmological and become anthropological.

The Church as a community of believers and as a religion is not something superfluous in the contemporary world. She has an important mission to accomplish on the condition that she fulfill adequately her three-fold function, that is, her kerygmatic, diaconal and religious functions.

By her kerygmatic function, the Church is called to proclaim the message of hope. Secular man in his lucidity grasps the absurdity of the world he has constructed. Man is a slave to those forces over which he was supposed to rule; he is tempted to abandon his freedom to the forces which oppress him and to allow himself to be dominated by an absurd destiny. The problem which faces him then is one of meaning because there is no longer any hope: it is a question of the meaning of life, of love, of work, etc. By her kerygmatic function, the Church aims at removing fatalism from the world of man by proclaiming on one hand that Christ has liberated us from the powers and the forces which oppress man and enclose him in an absurd circle and, on the other hand, that Christ has won for us a hope which restores meaning to man and to the world. In other words, the role of the Church is to offer a teaching which is not so much imperative as indicative: to declare that man is just as free from the destiny imposed on him by the gods of politics or economics or society as he is free from the destiny imposed on him by the gods of nature. The Church consequently tells man that he must act freely according to the pattern of Jesus who was so extraordinarily free for his neighbor.

The Church has a diaconal function as well. *Diakonia* is the humble service of tables. The Church is called to be the waiter, so to speak, of the world and of man. She must work towards curing, dressing wounds, giving health, that is, restoring all the parts of the world to their integrity. The evils to be cured are injustice, poverty, ignorance, inequality, discrimination, the powerlessness of the oppressed, etc. In the past, she fulfilled her diaconal function by creating institutions and by doing charitable works. Without rejecting this manner of serving, the Church today, to fulfill her diaconal role, must dissociate herself from those social structures which are the source of evil and commit herself with

resolution to the struggle against any system which alienates and oppresses man. She must place herself alongside the historical forces of liberation. The struggle against oppressive and alienating systems is never the affair of a mass movement but rather that of a handful of men. The Church is called to be this small remnant which has the mission to carry everywhere the sword which the Lord has given her.

By her diaconal role, the Church will thus be able to work toward the bringing together of all men just as Jesus came to unite the divided children of God. The aspirations of men for peace, unity and communion are frustrated. Discrimination, segregation, narrow and chauvinistic nationalisms reign everywhere. The structures of the world divide and isolate men instead of uniting them. The Church has an important role to play in bringing men together and she must do her best to be an agent of peace everywhere. As a community of hope, she must make concrete and visible the communal ideal that men attempt to realize in vain.

By her religious function, the Church is called to help man situate himself in the world with harmony by helping him overcome his fears, his apprehensions and his anguish. Man can attain perfect interior security only by passing from an inauthentic life based on the goods of this world to an authentic life based on faith in God. By her religious function, the Church must fight against all those substitutes (*ersatz*) which exploit man's religious sense and offer to this religious sense that nourishment which man needs to assure his deep maturity.

The Church then, by the three-fold function that she is destined to realize in the world of man, exercises society and culture—as Harvey Cox has shown. She exorcises society and culture by contesting them, criticizing them, and denouncing their false values. She denounces the neuroses of culture such as the passion for gain, the false sexual patterns that publicity proposes, the commercial exploitation of woman; she denounces the imposture of social myths, the taboos which further injustices of the worst kind; she denounces the social stereotypes which divide men and give them false security; she denounces the pseudo-values which alienate man and reduce him to slavery instead of helping him grow towards freedom.

But the Church will never fulfill the role which is hers in the world of man without a profound catharsis. The present structure of the christian religion is, in general, dated; it is a medieval structure which corresponds to a rural society and which is adapted to a cosmocentric vision of the world; it is the vehicle of left-overs from a past age. The ecclesiastical and religious system in its present form has no place in the world of man. It is seen by men as a useless accessory that society more or less rejects as a foreign body. The present system prevents the Church from adequately fulfilling her triple dimension in favor of the world and man.

A catharsis of the Church is essential. The reforms realized since the Council are too timid, too insignificant; they don't really get at the heart of the structure; they are too slow. The Church constantly seems to be lagging behind and the gap between her and the world is getting wider. This discord between religion and life within the world is not christian. This is why books have been written with titles such as "The Church in the State of Mortal Sin" and "The Church is Going to Hell." A radical conversion of the Church is necessary: this conversion is a complete turn-about from the vision she has of herself and the world; it means renouncing a system which is irreparably behind the world and which must disappear. This system is like a screen which hides and stifles the mystery of Christ's presence and prevents christians from fulfilling their mission in the world.

III The Church Re-examined

To be able to exercise her three-fold role in society, the Church must give herself a new prophetic structure, a new communal structure and a new religious structure.

1. A New Prophetic Structure

The Church is bearer of the Word of God. She is not the owner of the Word; the Word does not belong to her. She is only its servant. This Word belongs to the men to whom it is addressed; it is a Word for men. The function of the Church is double vis-à-vis the Word: on one hand she must grasp the Word, understand it, interpret it; on the other hand she must proclaim it to men.

There is therefore a double problem that the Church must face: how can she announce the Word of God to *men today?* and how can she make her voice heard in *a world* that is being built without her? The first problem concerns the Church in her role towards secular man; the second concerns the Church in her function towards the world of man, society.

How then can the Church establish a contact between contemporary man and the God who saves in Jesus Christ? The Church speaks a language which is incomprehensible to the man of today. The Word of God has been imprisoned, so to speak, in mental and philosophical categories which are foreign to the mental world of today's man . . . who remains deaf to the message of Jesus because this message is transmitted to him in a foreign tongue. There is so great a distance between the mental world of contemporary man and that in which the Word of God is expressed in the Gospel and the Church that every pastoral formule is nothing but an ineffective panacea. At the heart of the problem there is a question of hermeneutics. The Word of God comes to us in a human language which is a system of conventional signs. For the theologian, it is a question of discovering, beyond these signs, the reality hidden beneath the word, a question of "going back" from the human word to the Word of God and then from the Word of God to that which is objectively real. We are face to face here with a difficult problem of interpretation. In the light of new knowledge, the Church must proceed to a new interpretation of the Gospel.

The liberal Protestant theologians were the first to set themselves the task of seeking a solution to the problem. Bultmann opened the way by setting up a vast enterprise of demythologization by which he attempted, thanks to an existential interpretation, to arrive at a new understanding of human existence according to the Gospel. Many were the liberal theologians who accepted Bultmann's ideas and pushed them even further.

Until very recently, most Catholic theologians have been satisfied with severely criticizing this school of thought. They are intimidated by dogma, or rather by a certain static concept of dogma, or better still by a certain idolatry of dogmatic formulas. Catholic exegetes, for their part, have finally placed the new scien-

tific methods at the service of exegesis. Catholic theologians are beginning timidly to reinterpret dogma in the light of the new understanding that man has of himself and according to the methods of historical criticism. The most daring attempt in this direction has been that of Leslie Dewart who has proposed a de-hellenized interpretation of dogma in his book *The Future of Belief*. Very generally, we can say that Catholic theologians try to solve the problem of secular man in two complementary ways: that of historicity and that of anthropology.

First of all, historicity. Theology must take more and more seriously the historical character of revelation and man. Man is not in time as in a receptacle. He is historical; he is subject to time. Time is a dimension of his being. Man is a capacity of being who creates himself through existential decisions. The Word of God addressed to man is historical also; it is situated in history and is taken hold of by historical beings. And when we speak of historicity, we speak of relativity at the same time. Dogma or a dogmatic formula is an historical understanding that the Church has of the historical understanding that the Apostles had of the historical Word of Jesus. Since it is thus, it is imperative that we stop speaking of the Church's possession of "eternal truth" and that we start speaking of historical truth. What was truth for man yesterday is not necessarily truth for man today. The fact that dogma is necessarily characterized by historicity and, in consequence, by relativity, must be treated with the greatest attention. Theology has the duty of grasping revealed truth beyond historical relativity and of giving an interpretation of it which is valid for secular man.

Secondly, anthropology. The Word of God is a word *for man*. Up until now, Catholic theology was especially interested in the Word of God *in se* as Word of God. But it is paying more and more attention to the fact that this Word is addressed to man. Man's knowledge is extremely important in validly interpreting the Word of God. Theology must know man, not only in his ontological structure, but above all in his existential condition. All the positive contributions of the philosophy of existence, of personalist philosophy, of anthropology and of the other sciences of man must be integrated into our knowledge of man. This

understanding of man must preside over our understanding and our interpretation of the revealed data. Theology must commit itself to an anthropological interpretation of dogma. To respond to the needs of secular man, theology must be not so much "a theology for man as an anthropology for God" (Abraham Heschel). Rahner has successfully shown the essential link between anthropology and theology. Anthropology is the "locus" of theology. We can say nothing about God without also speaking of man, and vice-versa. Anthropology is not a section of theology but theology itself in its deepest dimension as a doctrine about the God of salvation.¹²

Secular man and his relationship with the Word of God is therefore the first pole around which revolves a whole series of problems set before the prophetic function of the Church. The second concerns the Church in her relationship to the secular city as such.

What should the attitude of the Church be towards the secular city which is there before her? Should her attitude be that of distant suspicion, massive condemnation, or even narrow integralism? This last expression, that we find in Rahner,¹³ designates in this instance a theoretical and practical attitude according to which the life of man can be projected and directed in all its details according to the universal principles proclaimed by the Church and controlled by her in their application. Since the Church has the role of proclaiming and interpreting general principles, she would also possess the right, *de jure*, of directing the world. This integralism would actually be an attitude of interference in the secular city. And it would imply the following presupposition: that the Church possesses a reserve of general principles sufficient to solve all the new moral questions which arise in the secular world. But the Church is incapable of affirming how to settle in a practical and effective way such problems as the war in Vietnam, the population explosion, world poverty or racial discrimination. The Church is not the unique and absolute guide that we must turn to for solutions of the human and moral problems of the secular city. She is not everything in the human and moral domains; she is only a part of the whole. It must be admitted therefore that the Church is vastly incompetent before the secular city. It is true that she can

set out certain limits *ratione peccati*, that she can proclaim general principles and affirm the ultimate finality of everything. But she can neither orientate nor manipulate, in a concrete way, the history of the secular city.

What then is the Church's mission towards the secular city? Since the Church cannot, in the name of her doctrine and her rights, manipulate society in its concrete decisions, her mission, according to Rahner,¹⁴ must be "prophetic." What does this mean? In a pluralistic society which functions well, each group has the right to make itself heard in the elaboration of decisions which concern society in its totality by presenting a program of action which treats of the ends to attain and the means to accomplish them. And the Church is such a group in secular society. The Church, then, must have a program of action to present if she wishes to be faithful to her mission to the Word. This "prophetic" function implies a new manner of speaking. She can express herself no longer in abstract formulas, in vague suggestions or in rigid dogmatic principles but rather in courageous hypotheses which are adapted to concrete contingencies. This could eliminate all the mystery involved in the Church's manner of exercising her prophetic function in favor of the world.¹⁵

The problem which arises immediately is the following: since the Church is so incompetent before the secular city, how will she be able to propose this kind of a program of action? How will she be able to exercise her prophetic function? She will be able to do this only when her structure is renewed and when she develops a theology of social realities. The first condition that will allow the Church to fulfill her prophetic role in the world is the development of a theology of social realities. In this line, Cox speaks of a "theology of revolution"; J. Baptist Metz calls for a "political theology" and Rahner writes of a "practical ecclesiological cosmology."

Cox is impressed by the fact that the secular city is subject to constant mobility, to abrupt and rapid changes, and to truly revolutionary mutations. Recent history shows that the Church is suspicious of rapid changes and revolution, and that she desperately hangs on to the established order. The Church is always behind; she is forever losing the revolution, precisely because she is in-

capable of exercising her prophetic function in revolutionary situations. It is therefore necessary to develop this theology of revolution as soon as possible so that the Church will be able to worthily exercise her prophetic mission in the secular world.¹⁶

Metz, for his part, starts with the fact that the christian message contains essentially a social dimension. Traditional catholic theology, as well as the liberal, dialectical and radical theologies of the Protestants, generally limits itself to the intimate sphere of the person and his individual relations with God, thus neglecting the political social aspect of revelation. Theology must rediscover this essential dimension of revelation. It is not a question of mixing-up faith and politics as is done by certain well-known reactionary movements. The hermeneutic problem here does not refer to the relationship between dogma and history spoken of earlier; it refers to the relationship between theory and practice, between faith and action in society. Political theology is a positive attempt to formulate the eschatological message by taking the conditions of contemporary secular society into consideration. There is a tension between the eschatological message of Jesus and social-political reality. The eschatological promises (liberty, peace, justice, reconciliation) cannot be envisaged in function of the isolated individual. It is obvious, of course, that these promises cannot be simply identified with some present condition of society, a condition which might be valid but which is always precarious. These promises must inspire and incite us to make them incarnate in the social-political reality of the secular city. This political theology is a prerequisite for the Church's exercise of her prophetic function.¹⁷

Rahner thinks that the theology that must be elaborated is a practical ecclesiological cosmology. The program of action that the Church must propose through her prophetic function come both from an analysis of the present situation and from the conclusions drawn from revealed principles (v.g. world aid fund). This theology would study the ever-new relationship between the Church and the world according to given situations. This relationship cannot be considered in other theological disciplines "for it evolves at the same rhythm as the transformations of the secular world which constitutes the situation of the Church."

And this situation cannot be the object of the systematic theological disciplines. A new science is therefore necessary, a science which would have a very definite object and method and which would appeal to many other theological disciplines (such as ecclesiology, christology, etc.) and to certain sciences of man (such as sociology and anthropology).¹⁸

The second condition which will allow the Church to fulfill her prophetic role in society today is the renewal of her communal structure.

2. New Communal Structures

If the Church is to truly exercise her kerygmatic or prophetic function, she must reform her social, economic and hierarchical structure, her concept and exercise of authority and her administrative, "political" and canonical system. This structure is so dated that it renders the Church almost incapable of fulfilling her kerygmatic function in contemporary society. For the present structure speaks a language which often contradicts the renewed message that the Church must proclaim.

Vatican II wished to renew the Church by beginning with the idea of "people of God." Many believed and still believe that this idea has great potential for renewal in the Church. Despite this general opinion, however, it must be recognized that this theme can fit in very well with a hierarchical preoccupation. For whoever speaks of "people of God," speaks soon afterwards of "constitution" and "universal government." The idea of the Church as the people of God seems to weigh heavily in favor of a privileged representation of the universal Church and, as a result, to stress the specific structures of her own government. We can truly ask ourselves if this notion of the Church can be an effective remedy to the danger of clericalism and if it will allow for an adequate renewal of ecclesiastical structures.¹⁹

It is not all that easy to base the idea of the Church as the people of God on a sound and extended exegesis. The primitive community did not conceive of itself primarily or fundamentally as the people of God. It is true that she did sometimes see herself in this light either to identify herself with the true Israel (Rom. 9:14-33; Gal. 6:16; 2 Cor. 6:16) or to point out both the con-

tinuity and the discontinuity between herself and Israel, the people of God. Fr. Audet affirms that this theme of the Church as the people of God did not have that great a place in the primitive Church's self-consciousness.²⁰

To define herself, the primitive christian community chose another direction. What is striking in the New Testament writings is the extraordinary abundance of a vocabulary centered around the idea of *christian fraternity*. The use of the expressions "brothers" and "sisters" by which the christians referred to each other among themselves (Rom. 12:1; 16:14; 16:23) surely goes back to Jesus himself (Lk. 22:23; Mt. 23:8; Jn. 20:17). This title "brothers" was not reserved for the members of a local community; it was used for everyone within the whole Church (Acts 28:14; 28:15-16). Wherever they were, christians recognized each other as members of one and the same fraternity which was extended everywhere that the Word was announced (1 Pet. 2:17; 5:9: *adèlphotès*). It was at the eucharistic assemblies that the first christians were able to become the most conscious of forming an original "fraternity"—a fraternity characterized by an experience of "life" received in faith and shared in love and mutual service. The fraternity was envisaged as a benefit of the christian community equally shared by all its members. It is evident that in its inner, everyday life the primitive Church viewed itself first and foremost as a *fraternity*.

This notion of the Church has numerous and far-reaching consequences. It is suggestive of a unique structure and of a very specific style of communal life. It is on the basis of this idea of the Church as a fraternity that structural renewal, so urgently demanded, must be worked out. If the Church is essentially a fraternity, the principal questions she must face will concern core-communities: these are the key to the renewal that the Church must bring about. For, by the very nature of things, these core-communities are the original and normal place where the fraternity is born, grows and lives in fulness.

One cannot have a christian fraternity without having certain conditions which are proper to it. To become the place where the christian heritage is lived in the integrity of its challenging and creative power, the christian fraternity requires certain concrete

arrangements, a particular kind of structure and an original manner of exercising authority.

To be a force which challenges the false values of the contemporary world, to respond to the urgent problems of the human community, to exercise a creative role in our world, to answer the deepest aspirations of man today, the Church—if she is to do these things—must re-form herself on the basis of the idea of fraternity. The Church must be put back on her feet: instead of having it supported by its hierarchical peak (the clerics), it must be put back on its normal foundation, that is, the fraternal community. The Church must deeply modify its social structures to allow for the development of the fraternal structures of the core-communities. Only the setting up of these core-communities as poor, unclerical, un-Roman, unpolitical brotherhoods, can make room for the mobility, flexibility and freedom the Church needs to fulfill her role in society and to have a worthwhile impact on the contemporary world. This core-community must exercise a secular ministry. "Christianity can truly be manifested only if it emerges from the secular condition of man."²¹

3. New Religious Structures

It is certain that this notion of the Church as a fraternity implies a movement of declericalization, desacramentalization and desacralization. It is just as sure that the fraternal community is destined to be more apostolic than cultic more secular than religious. But even if this is so, the necessity for this community to keep its cultic and religious dimension must be strongly affirmed. Any faith in God, even religious faith, by its very nature, tends to gradually grow into religion; and any community of faith tends to express itself communally in a prayerful and worshipful manner. It is true, according to the New Testament, that "true religion" is to come to the aid of widows and to help those who are in misery; the New Testament also says that the worship rendered to God must be "in spirit and truth." But the faith of man, an incarnate spirit, needs to be expressed in worship and religion through signs and rites.

The typical error of many so-called "evolved" christians is to think that faith can survive without religion, without religious

practice, and to believe that if humanity is to be true, real and authentic, it must become or remain profane. This is an illusion which threatens our technical civilization. Studies in the history of religions, such as those of Eliade on myth and Otto on the sacred, force us to conclude that the sacred and the religious are categories of human existence. It is interesting to note the convergence of these conclusions with the discoveries of psychologists such as Jung. The discovery of below-surface (unconscious) aspects of the human soul which survive after the most disrupting surface transformations have showed us to what extent this soul is and remains religious to its very depth. "In reality," says L. Bouyer, "natural humanity is not at all a profane humanity. Nothing in man is more superficial and less natural than the profane. The sacred is not some secondary and fictitious addition to the human as such. Nothing inhuman is at home within the sacred, at least in its roots. Humanity which is particularly and fully human—and it is such a humanity that christianity claims—could not, therefore, because of that, be desacralized. A desacralized humanity could not become christian simply because it would cease to be human. The humanity of christianity must be a humanity whose sense of the sacred is recuperated, saved and transfigured in the redemptive incarnation."²² The incarnation, restores and transforms the primitive, original form of natural sacredness within which everything was seen as the divine domain. The fully human character of the religious fact and the deeply-rooted religiosity of man must be affirmed, therefore, against certain trends of thought, presently in style, which pretend that religious sentiment is a weakness of man and a handicap to him in his growth to human maturity.

The fraternal Church community must create rites and signs and structure its worship in such a way as to recuperate what is valid in the religious sentiment of man and what is valid in the idea of sacred time, space and rite. The cultic and religious expressions of faith, such as they exist in the Church at the present time, no longer correspond adequately to new expressions of faith. It is not too surprising then that they are rejected for they are incapable of channelling the deep exigencies of the religious and the sacred which are in man. If the Church, as a fraternal

community, succeeds in recuperating the religious and the sacred, she will truly be able to help man situate himself in harmony with his world. Just as in past days the form of religion allowed man to establish his relation with the world of nature, the "new" religion will allow man to re-establish the balance of his relation with the world of man.

NOTES

¹ Many of the ideas in this section are taken from an article by K. Rahner, "L'homme moderne devant la religion," in *Est-il possible aujourd'hui de croire?* (Paris, 1966), p. 57-102.

² A. Richardson, *Le Procès de la religion* (Paris, 1967), p. 14-15.

³ A. Dondeyne, *La foi écoute le monde* (Paris, 1964), p. 21-22.

⁴ K. Rahner, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁵ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Dieu et l'homme* (Bruxelles, 1965), p. 10.

⁶ E. Schillebeeckx, "La théologie du renouveau parle de Dieu," in *La théologie du renouveau*, t. 1 (Montréal, 1968), p. 94.

⁷ Cf. A. Dondeyne, *op. cit.*, p. 20-23.

⁸ *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto, 1962).

⁹ J. Onimus, *Face au monde actuel* (Paris, 1968), p. 50.

¹⁰ G. Vahanian, "La question de la fin de l'ère religieuse dans sa signification théologique," in *Concilium*, 16(1965) 105-113.

¹¹ *Résistance et Soumission* (Genève, 1963), p. 120-121.

¹² Cf. K. Rahner, "Grundsätzliche Ueberlegungen zur Anthropologie und Protologie im Rahmen der theologie," in *Mysterium salutis*, t. 2 (Zurich, 1967) p. 415-419.

¹³ Cf. K. Rahner, "Réflexions théologiques sur le problème de la sécularisation," in *La théologie du renouveau*, t. 1, p. 258.

¹⁴ Cf. K. Rahner, *id.*, p. 265.

¹⁵ *Id.*, p. 257-279.

¹⁶ Cf. H. Cox, *The Secular City* (New York, 1966).

¹⁷ J. B. Metz, "Les rapports entre l'Église et le monde à la lumière d'une théologie politique," in *La théologie du renouveau*, t. 2, p. 47.

¹⁸ K. Rahner, "Réflexions théologiques sur le problème de la sécularisation," in *La théologie du renouveau*, t. 1, p. 270-274.

¹⁹ Many of the ideas in this section are taken from an article by Fr. Audet, "Jésus dans la communauté chrétienne primitive," in *Communauté chrétienne*, 38-39(1968) 150-176.

²⁰ *Id.*, p. 168-170.

²¹ H. Denis and J. Frisque, *L'Église à l'épreuve* (Paris, 1968), p. 31.

²² L. Bouyer, *Le rite et l'homme* (Paris, 1962), p. 25.